SINO-SOUTH KOREAN NORMALIZATION AND RELATIONS AFTER 1992

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ABSTRACT

On 24 August 1992, China and South Korea ended their four decades of hostile relations caused by the Korean War, and at last established diplomatic normalization. Rapprochement between Seoul and Beijing was established with caution, due to their consideration of Taiwan and North Korea. Despite many concerns regarding differences in ideology, political structures, and economic systems, however, China and South Korea have entered a new era of economic cooperation. With successful economic cooperation now firmly established, today relations between China and South Korea have developed into a so-called “mutual strategic cooperative relationship.” And yet security experts agree that the question of North Korea still threatens security between China and the Korean peninsula. The existence of strong bond between the United States and South Korea further complicates Sino-South Korean relations. Due to China’s equidistance policy toward two Koreas, China has kept strong political friendship with North Korea, and economic cooperation with South Korea. During the two decades since rapprochement, Sino-South Korean relations have not always been cordial, alternating between conflicts and cooperation. By looking back the twenty years from Sino-South Korean normalization, this thesis proposes that China has accomplished its original political and economic expectations, but on the other hand, South Korea only gained economic advantages.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

China and Korea have been involved in cultural, political, and social exchange since the two established their ancient nations. By the end of China’s Qing period (19th century), a strong bond of Confucianism had developed between them. In recent history, both countries have gone through similar experiences. From the late 18th century to the mid-20th century, both resisted Western powers and Japanese invasions. By the mid-20th century, relations between China and South Korea had disappeared. It is often said that ideological differences have since put a wall between them. However, this consideration alone is illogical, because such countries as Japan and the United States established diplomatic relations with China much earlier than South Korea. Sino-Japanese diplomatic normalization was established in 1972, twenty years earlier than that of South Korea, and Sino-American rapprochement was achieved in 1978. The lateness of Sino-Korean normalization was due to the existence of North Korea, one of China’s strongest ideological allies. Yet aside from the North Korea factor, what led to Sino-Korean normalization in the 43-year absence of diplomatic relations since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949?

While China pursued its economic growth from Sino-South Korean normalization, the South Korean government’s framework for normalization was the unification of the Korean peninsula. Many South Koreans expected that improved economic relations between China and South Korea would ease unification, but ironically, it seems that prospects for reunification have only gotten worse. The late 1980s and early 1990s were regarded as the ideal time to develop the new relations with South Korea, and many other nations wanted to move forward. South Korea
was in a position where it had to respond to China, and it had very little leverage against China at this point.

This paper explores the development of South Korea’s response, and tries to provide an insight into possible future directions of Sino-Korean relations by exploring the background, factors, processes, and results of Sino-Korean normalization. The evaluation of Sino-South Korean normalization presently is different from 20 years ago. Thus, the main focus of this research is to draw the most current interpretations of Sino-South Korean normalization based on an analysis of secondary literature and academic research, as well as media reports released by both the Chinese and Korean governments. Particularly, I will draw important perspectives on the process of Sino-South Korean rapprochement from two recently published memoirs by diplomats Lee Sang Ok and Qian Qichen.

In the first chapter, I examine both the international circumstances and domestic situations in China and South Korea in 1992, the year of Sino-Korean normalization. By looking at their surrounding contexts, I will suggest what key factors in Sino-Korean normalization were. The year of 1992 was a crucial moment for both China and South Korea. Not only were their leaderships changed, but they also pursued significant policy changes. This was because social stability was strongly needed at the time, and both leaderships thought that economic prosperity would be the key to achieving a stable society. China suffered through the Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989, and South Korea faced many democratization movements throughout the 1980s. The two countries recognized that economic growth could heal their unfavorable domestic conditions, and assumed that expansion of foreign trade would accelerate their economic growth. As a result, both countries started to establish diplomatic relations with many others. However, ideological differences between China and South Korea made both cautious about establishing
diplomatic relations, and the existence of North Korea and Taiwan only made the situation more difficult. Despite these obstacles, Sino-South Korean normalization was established in 1992. I present the following as main factors of this normalization:

1. The end of the Cold War, Sino-American/Soviet-Korean normalization
2. China’s domestic status and policy change (modernization)
3. South Korea’s Nordpolitik
4. China’s international status (competitive status with Taiwan)

In the second chapter, by examining Sino-Korean normalization from both sides, I will analyze each country’s gains and losses. Chinese leaders’ expectations of normalization in regard to South Korea were obvious. Often referred to as the “yishi siniao policy,”¹ they were comprised of four main expectations: achieving Taiwan’s isolation in international society, reinforcing economic cooperation with South Korea, halting North Korean demands for military and economic assistance, and relaxation of relations with the United States. On the other hand, South Korea pushed for diplomatic normalization with China as a step toward so-called “Nordpolitik,”² a form of foreign policy strongly promoted by former South Korean president Tae Woo Roh. President Roh’s Nordpolitik was aimed at the unification of the Korean peninsula. South Korea regarded three steps as being necessary for Nordpolitik to be truly successful. First was the creation of a more favorable international situation by normalizing diplomatic relations with Communist countries. Second was the unification of the Korean peninsula. Lastly, Roh envisioned that for the unification of South and North Korea, it would be necessary to allow Koreans to settle in the Gando (间岛, Ch. Jiandao) area, which had been taken by Qing China in accordance with the Gando Convention of 1909. In a sense, China and South Korea’s aims

¹ Scott Snyder translates yishi siniao (一石四鳥) as “downing four birds with one stone” in his book China’s Rise and the Two Koreas (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), 37.
² A German term meaning “northern policy.”
toward diplomatic normalization were identical, for both China and South Korea sought the unification of their own countries, with Taiwan and North Korea.

However, the degrees of achieving their sought-after goals differed between the two nations. China eventually accomplished its four initial expectations, but South Korea became estranged from unification of the Korean peninsula when it ended up accommodating China’s “Two Koreas” policy. In addition, South Korea failed to maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan, unlike the United States and Japan. When China and South Korea began to consider diplomatic relations with one another in 1992, China was well aware of what to negotiate, having already had experiences with the United States and Japan. On the other hand, regardless of its experience of normalization with Eastern European countries such as Hungary, Korea’s leaders did not understand the situation as well as China did. In this chapter, I will attempt to show why South Korea could never have maintained a good relationship with its old friend, Taiwan.

In the third chapter, I explore changes in China’s policy toward the Korean peninsula since Sino-South Korean normalization. One effective way to analyze Sino-South Korean relations after 1992 is to see how changes in China’s leadership—from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao in 2002—affect its foreign policy toward both Koreas. Due to normalization, the time under Jiang Zemin was a “cooling off” period of sorts between China and North Korea, and may be considered the tensest between two since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). China’s Korean peninsula diplomacy in this period was close to Seoul but far from Pyongyang although outwardly showed equidistant stance. In contrast, Hu Jintao’s China showed stronger equidistant diplomacy. By the time Hu started his presidency, the DPRK’s nuclear issues were already becoming clear. Through his promotion of the six-party talks, Hu began to balance the two Koreas. Subsequently,
Hu tried to strengthen economic cooperation with South Korea, while at the same time pursuing a good political relationship with North Korea.

Another way we might look at Sino-South Korean relations after 1992 is to study cases of diplomatic conflicts between China and South Korea. After their successful diplomatic normalization, relations between the two countries were not always smooth. For twenty years, China and South Korea experienced trade friction, environmental conflicts, textbook disputes, and a rising social phenomenon of mutual cultural hostility. Rather than explore cultural or economic conflicts, however, I examine three significant security conflicts: North Korea’s nuclear issue, the Cheonan Ship Incident, and the Yeonpyong Bombing. These cases triggered China’s policy change toward the Korean peninsula, and made China’s position obvious. By examining reactions from both sides, I will show how Sino-South Korean relations changed.

The year of 2012 marks the 20th anniversary of Sino-South Korean normalization. For the past two decades, Korea and China have tried to communicate and cooperate with each other economically, culturally, diplomatically, and politically. Their achievements during this time are surprising. The amount of China’s yearly trade with South Korea is higher than that with the United States and Japan combined. China is truly South Korea’s most influential economic and trade partner, and South Korea is one of China’s best investors for market growth. Today, they define their connection as a “mutual strategic cooperative relationship,” which is often regarded as the highest level of foreign relations. I predict that the future of Sino-Korean relations will be more developed than they have been over the past twenty years. This will be of global interest, because Sino-Korean relations are intimately connected to the United States, North Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. My goal for this paper is to promote an understanding of, and interest in, Sino-South Korean relations.
CHAPTER II
CONDITIONS OF SINO-SOUTH KOREAN DIPLOMATIC NORMALIZATION, 1992

International factors: the end of the Cold War

From the 1980s, international tensions began to rapidly change shape. After the Second World War, the world order—once polarized by the Soviet Union and the United States—was becoming multi-polar. With the emergence of this multi-polarized world order, the characteristics of the United States’ foreign policy also changed in pursuit of practical interests. Non-military competition between the two powers increased. As a result of its interest in economic development, the Soviet Union finally gave up socialism, effectively ending the Cold War era. Moreover, the United States’ interest in establishing peace and stability increased, and economic development was now considered a priority. At the same time, Asian countries were emerging as new powers in international society.

China’s domestic status and policy change

Since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, China’s foreign policy has changed with the times. By getting involved in the Korean War as North Korea’s ally after its establishment as a socialist state, China firmed up the spirit of its national foundations. With a strong slogan of “Resist America, Assist Korea,” Beijing defined the United States as the biggest threat to socialism. At the same time, in order to prevent potential attack on Chinese territory by the United States, China’s leaders made the strategic choice of entering the Korean War. However, this choice brought about China’s isolation not only by the United States but by many other states. In order to break free from this isolation, China turned its eyes to the Third
World, as shown in its principles of peace with India. By the mid-1950s, China’s “Soviet-friendly” socialism encountered conflict because Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin was not welcome by Mao Zedong and his comrades. Mao openly criticized Khrushchev by calling him a revisionist. The two nations’ uncomfortable relationship became especially clear during their territorial disputes in the early 1960s. After suffering a number of armed clashes with the U.S.S.R., Mao strongly denounced the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union became a new threat to China.

Meanwhile, in the late 1960s, the United States considered a policy of détente with China due to economic burdens from the escalating Vietnam War, defense costs of allied nations, and military competition with the U.S.S.R. The United States’ and China’s need to contain the Soviet Union resulted in the Shanghai Communiqué of 1972, in which both the United States and China pledged to work toward normalization. Through the Shanghai Communiqué, the United States and China reached an agreement that neither they nor any other power should seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region. Starting with Canada and Japan, China had normalized with 85 countries by the 1970s. In 1973, Mao revealed his strategic plan to the world. He divided the world in three: the First World, the Second World, and the Third World: “In my view, the United States and the Soviet Union belong to the first world. The in-between Japan, Europe and Canada belong to the second world. The third world is very populous. Except Japan, Asia belongs to the third world. So does the whole of Africa and Latin America.” In a speech given at the 6th Special Session of the UN General Assembly in April 1974, Deng Xiaoping expounded upon Mao’s strategic thinking. According to Deng, the Third and the Second Worlds should stand together against the hegemony of the First. China, he said, as a leader of the Third World, would never be

By the 1980s, China had begun to stray away from extreme anti-Sovietism in its foreign policy. In this period, China aim instead for diplomatic independence. In other words, China would neither support nor oppose either the United States or the Soviet Union. By not allying itself with either the U.S. or the U.S.S.R, China was strengthening its international status, building peace and security in the world, and securing international cooperation. And in 1987, a “primary stage of socialism” was introduced and explained by Zhao Ziyang in the Communist Party Congress. According to Zhao, China was still in an early stage of socialism. More experimentation with economic reform was needed to stimulate production. Chinese citizens all around the nation welcomed his concept of dividing the roles of Party and State. Within this nationwide democratic atmosphere, Hu Yaobang’s death in 1989 triggered rage and animosity from Chinese youth. The Tiananmen Square Incident in June 1989 aroused CCP leaders’ attention to the dangers of Party collapse. Eventually, Deng used force to suppress the Tiananmen Square protests. This inhumane and bloody suppression was harshly criticized by the United States, and led to China’s isolation from international society.

In order to overcome its isolation, China sought partners outside of the United States. In 1991, Li Peng and Yang Shangkun made tours to Asian countries, and throughout his southern tour in 1992 Deng Xiaoping stressed China’s interest in reform and open policy. Thus, China established or reestablished relations with a number of Southeast Asian countries. In line with this trend, Sino-South Korean diplomatic normalization was achieved in 1992.
South Korea's Nordpolitik

After the Second World War and Korean War, South Korea saw the PRC as a blood ally of North Korea, and therefore no longer a potential friend. However, this perception began to shift after a mood of reconciliation was established between China and the United States. The Shanghai Communiqué of 1972 was the most unexpected and shocking news to South Korea since the division of its peninsula. Moreover, as Nixon presented his plan of American troops’ phased withdrawal from Asia, the South Korean government began to worry about the risk of war with North Korea. In a 23 June 1973 declaration, President Park Junghee announced that South Korea would allow North Korea to join the UN. 3 He also declared that South Korea would open up to countries with different ideologies. However, the time was not yet ripe for this open-door policy. In 1980, the next President Chun Doohwan, during his official visit to the United States, announced that “China is a friend of the United States, and a friend of friend is not our enemy.” Chun asked China to approve South Korea’s joining the UN, but the Chinese government refused this proposal.

However, there was one event that forced China and South Korea to communicate in 1983. This occurred when an airplane of the Chinese Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) made an emergency landing at the Camp Page U.S. Army Aircraft Base Maintenance Unit (USAABMU) in Chuncheon, South Korea. The airplane was heading to Shanghai from Shenyang, when it was taken over by six armed hijackers. The hijackers ordered the pilot to land in South Korea, where they demanded political asylum. The South Korean government made it known that it was willing to meet their demands. Eventually, the hijackers relented. In order to solve this conflict, the Chinese government could not help but change its passive attitude toward

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South Korea. Initially, the Chinese government tried indirect negotiation, but three days after the incident China sent the president of the CAAC and 33 diplomats to Seoul to bargain with South Korea’s foreign ministry. An agreement of nine clauses was made, marking the first time that both China and South Korea had used the names People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in an official document. In this agreement, both the PRC and the ROK consented that the judiciary of South Korea would take on further hostage cases, and that in the instance of similar situations, both countries would cooperate closely with one another.  

However, the CAAC’s emergency landing in South Korea came too early to encourage Sino-South Korean diplomatic normalization. As a divided country, China maintained its “One China” policy. Therefore, Chinese leaders had to be careful about normalization with South Korea. If China were to accept “Two Koreas,” it could fall into a trap of “Two Chinas.” South Korea had its own woes. On the one hand, if South Korea accepted the PRC as “One China,” then its relationship with longtime ally Taiwan could become strained. On the other hand, keeping a hostile relationship with mainland China was not advantageous for either economic or security reasons. Like Japan and the United States, who had normalized their relations with China in the 1970s, the regimes under Chun Doohwan and Roh Taewoo tried to reconcile with the PRC. With this effort, South Korea successfully invited Chinese national players to participate in the 1986 Asian Game, as well as in the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Furthermore, South Korea’s successful management of these international competitions influenced China’s consideration of South Korea in positive ways.

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4 Ch'ang-hun, Han'guk oegyo ôje wa onûl (Han'guk Haksul Chôngbo), 242.
After the success of the Asian Games and the Olympics, the Roh Taewoo regime concentrated all of its energy on Nordpolitik. Roh defined the propulsive strategy with three steps in his July 7 Declaration. First, in order to pave the way, normalization with socialist countries like China was to be carried out as a necessary condition. Second, the inter-Korean summit and free travel between South and North would be achieved along with fulfillment of the first condition. Finally, Nordpolitik would be aimed at the unification of the Korean peninsula. Chun Jaesung classified the purpose of Nordpolitik as: (1) creating a peaceful atmosphere in the Korean peninsula for unification, (2) expanding the base of international support by mending ties with socialist countries such as the Soviet Union, China, and Eastern European countries, and (3) pursuing national interests through economic cooperation and the securing of resource supply. Chun also claimed that the most important purpose of Nordpolitik was to pursue unification of the Korean peninsula by making a detour north.\(^5\)

In line with Nordpolitik, in September 1990, rapprochement between South Korea and the Soviet Union was achieved. Although South Korea’s Nordpolitik had begun in early 1980s, relations between the two countries had not been very good since an incident involving Korean Air Flight 007 on 1 September 1983.\(^6\) Flight 007, which was heading to New York City, was shot down by the Soviet Union’s interceptor over Sakhalin, killing all 269 passengers and flight crew on board. This incident quickly made Soviet-South Korean relations frigid.\(^7\) However, by the 1988 Seoul Olympics, animosity between the two countries had begun to thaw. Through a

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\(^6\) Sŏng-gon Yi, *Han’guk oegyo ū chaebalgvŏn* (Kip’arang, 2009), 218.

\(^7\) Sung-jun Park, *Han’guk kwa Chungguk 100-yŏn: kyŏktong ū oegyo pirok* (Kip’arang, 2010), 260.
verbal agreement, the Soviet Union decided to send a large team of 788 players to Seoul, by which the two countries seized an opportunity to release tension.  

In April 1989, the Soviet Union’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry established an area office in Seoul, and in July of that same year, the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) established a branch in Moscow. And in November, South Korea and the Soviet Union reached an agreement to establish respective Consular Departments. In other words, the two countries normalized their official diplomatic relations after 86 years of hostility. As a result of the June 1990 Soviet-South Korean Summit Conference, Eduard Shevardenadze and Choi Hojung, foreign ministers of the Soviet Union and South Korea, signed a joint statement of normalization at the UN headquarters in September. This was the first official diplomatic normalization after the establishment of the ROK. 

The Soviet-South Korea rapprochement was a result of Gorbachev’s perestroika and Roh’s active Nordpolitik. Shin Bumshik points out that the expectations of the two countries were different. On the one hand, the Soviet Union expected that mending relations with South Korea would bring development toward economic reform, and further, that a peaceful atmosphere in the Korean peninsula would stabilize frontier security. On the other hand, what South Korea sought from the rapprochement was more political than economic. South Korean leaders sought stability and peace in the Korean peninsula in hopes of decreasing risk of war with the North. In the matter of unification, South Korea wanted to have the upper hand. The expectations of South Korea were clearly of security and unification.

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8 Ibid. 260.
9 Sùng-gon Yi, Han’guk oegyo üi chaebalgvón (Kip’arang, 2009), 220.
With Sino-South Korean rapprochement, Soviet-South Korean normalization brought about positive results, such as the cross-recognition of South and North Korea from North Korea’s strong allied nations, South-North joining the UN, and nuclear inspection in North Korea. However, the South Korean government’s decision to loan out three billion dollars to the Soviet Union and the vague terms of repayment were regarded as impractical diplomacy.

China’s international status vis-à-vis Taiwan’s

In the late 1980s, in addition to the Tiananmen Square Incident was another factor that weakened China’s international position: Taiwan. Unlike the PRC’s isolated global position, the rapid economic growth of the Republic of China (ROC) allow it to expand its influence by establishing diplomatic relations with many countries. In 1988, Taiwanese president Li Denghui, after his inauguration, attempted to change Taiwan’s foreign policy. Li sought practical diplomacy, which was often called *tanxing waijiao* (弹性外交, lit. flexible diplomacy). The ROC started to normalize relations with many countries that had cut ties with Taiwan by normalizing relations with mainland China.

The ROC’s aggressive and active diplomacy aroused the concerns of PRC leaders. For them, establishing diplomatic relations with South Korea seemed very attractive in this context. They assumed that if South Korea, one of Taiwan’s most important allies, discarded the ROC, it might lead other allies to change their attitudes toward the PRC.
CHAPTER III
SINO-SOUTH KOREAN NORMALIZATION:
ONE CHINA VERSUS TWO KOREAS

Yishi siniao and the success of the “One China” policy

In 1992, the Cold War had just ended, and among East Asian countries, economic interdependence took precedence over ideological divisions. Mao’s China, which had put forth a thoroughly pro-North Korea policy after the Korean War, had reached its end in 1976 with Mao’s death. Since then, Deng Xiaoping had veered toward a pragmatic policy that prioritized economic development since 1978. However, after ten years of reform and open-door policy, ideological conflicts appeared in the form of the Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989. The international community denounced the central government’s use of force, and China had to face economic and political sanctions. In order to get out of this situation, as Scott Snyder describes, in my opinion, Deng chose to normalize with one of the newly industrializing countries (NICs), South Korea.¹¹ In fact, diplomatic normalization between China and South Korea was possible only because of fundamental structural changes in the international community. Sino-American rapprochement played a key role in collapsing a polarized system. This shift in international systems provided a springboard for Sino-South Korean diplomatic normalization.

On 24 August 1992, Sino-South Korean rapprochement was achieved based on President Roh’s Nordpolitik and Deng’s pragmatic diplomacy. The entire process of Sino-South Korean rapprochement and both countries’ stance on the normalization are well described in memoirs of their respective diplomats, Lee Sang Ock¹² and Qian Qichen.¹³ According to Lee, from 1984 to

¹¹ Snyder, China’s Rise, 37.
¹² Sang Ock Lee, Chŏnhwan’gi ūi Han’guk oegyo: Yi Sang-ok chŏn Oemu Changgwan oegyo hoegorok (Sam kwa Kum, 2002).
1985, the South Korean government tried to push ahead with a phased plan which stated that South and North Korea establish diplomatic normalization with four powers: the United States, Japan, the Soviet Union, and China. In other words, the two Koreas were to enhance relations with China and Japan on the way to mending relations with the Soviet Union and the United States. However, the South Korean government anticipated the possibility that North Korea might influence China to allow diplomatic relations with South Korea. Therefore, before promoting the plan of normalization, the South Korean government suggested that Chinese leaders establish trade representatives in both countries. China’s indifference, however, made South Korea abandon this idea.

Unlike Lee, Qian Qichen states that Beijing leaders were already working on the process of easing tensions in the Korean peninsula by mid-1980s. As noted by Qian in his memoir, since the mid-1970s, with pragmatic consideration of diplomatic policy, the Chinese government was aware of both Koreas and started to think about setting up diplomatic relations with them. Economic development was regarded as the most urgent matter for China in the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Congress in 1978, and reform and open-door policies were initiated. In this atmosphere, for China’s modernization drive, Beijing leaders faced the issue of how to create a favorable environment. As a result, the promotion of peaceful negotiations between two Koreas was on China’s agenda. China set a new standard on the ROK issue in line with the diplomatic change: if the ROK hosted an international event by an international organization to which China belonged, China would participate as a member of the organization. In return, China would permit the ROK’s visitors for an international event hosted by China. As

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a result, China was able to take part in Tenth Asian Games in 1986, hosted by South Korea, and the ROK was able to participate in the 1990 Eleventh Asian Games in China.\(^\text{14}\)

Qian believes that all of this was made possible by Deng’s plan regarding Sino-ROK relations. According to Qian, Deng said in April 1985 regarding Sino-ROK relations that enhancement of the two countries’ relationship would be advantageous for China economically and politically, meaning that China would get economic benefits from one of the NICs. At the same time, this would lead to the end of relations between the ROK and Taiwan. In addition, during the period from May to September 1988, Deng talked with dignitaries several times about Sino-South Korean relations, saying that they had nothing to lose in promoting relations with the ROK. As Deng stated in 1985, he pointed out two benefits for China. First was that it would be economically profitable for both countries. Second was that it would be helpful for China’s reunification. He also mentioned that China had to accelerate economic and cultural exchanges with the ROK as strategically significant ways of improving unofficial relations with the ROK, because this would maintain peace and stability on the Korean peninsula, while simultaneously enhancing China’s relations with Taiwan, Japan, the United States, and Southeast Asia. However, promoting relations with the ROK had to be carefully dealt with, and it would be necessary to obtain the understanding of the DPRK before beginning this process.\(^\text{15}\)

Qian described Deng’s plan for Sino-ROK diplomatic normalization as \textit{yishi siniao}, meaning that China could get four advantages at once. According to Qian, China had four expectations regarding the normalization. First, it would put China in a favorable light on economic development. Second, Sino-ROK rapprochement would result in isolation of Taiwan

\(^{14}\) Qian, \textit{Ten Episodes}, 114-116.
\(^{15}\) Ibid.
from the international community, thereby helping China’s reunification. Third, normalization of diplomatic relations with the ROK would ease international pressure on China, especially from the United States and Japan. Lastly, Sino-ROK diplomatic normalization would enable China to have equidistant diplomacy toward North and South Korea, and peace and stability in the Korean peninsula would be beneficial for China’s economy and security. China’s decision to establish diplomatic normalization with South Korea was therefore an important strategy for its national economic and political interests. As Samuel Kim notes in his evaluation of China’s diplomatic approach toward the Korean peninsula in the post-Cold War period, China’s decision to have “geostrategic ties” with the DPRK and “geoeconomic ties” with the ROK was a “realist strategy of maximizing its interests while at the same time freeriding on global arms control, human rights, and environmental issues.”

According to Scott Snyder’s interpretation of Qian’s thoughts on Sino-ROK diplomatic normalization, Deng expected that normalization with Seoul would “(1) increase Taiwan’s diplomatic isolation, (2) strengthen Peking’s growing economic cooperation with Seoul, (3) diminish Pyongyang’s seemingly endless requests for more military and economic aid, and (4) give more leverage to defuse the mounting ‘Super 301’ pressure,” which contained provisions requiring the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to levy sanctions on offending countries if the USTR found that the offending country was engaged in unfair trade practices. Snyder points out that all four points effectively demonstrated Beijing’s primary interest in the “Two Koreas” policy, despite the fact that the first and the fourth did not particularly address China’s strategic objectives on the Korean peninsula. More specifically, economic benefits and the diminishing

dependence of the DPRK on China were key drivers for Beijing leaders to normalize diplomatic relations with the ROK.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{South Korea’s misjudgment of the “Two Koreas” policy}

If it was Deng who enabled China to make the strategic decision of Sino-ROK diplomatic normalization, for South Korea it was president Roh who eagerly pushed for Beijing-Seoul rapprochement based on his Nordpolitik policy. As described in Chapter 2, president Roh set up three steps to accomplish the Nordpolitik policy: (1) creating favorable conditions by normalizing diplomatic relations with Socialist countries, (2) reunification of the two Koreas, and (3) pursuing national interests based on reunification. In his address at the 43rd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in October 1988, Roh stated:

\begin{quote}
In parallel with such efforts, we are also taking positive steps to improve our relations with various countries, including the People’s Republic of China, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and many East European nations with which we have in the past had only remote relationships because of our ideological differences. By conducting normal relations with each other under the principles of equality and mutual respect, all the nations of the world will contribute to mutual prosperity. This also serves the cause of world peace, since through dialogue and mutual understanding, nations can work to eliminate sources of conflict while cementing friendship and partnership. It is from this perspective that I welcome as an encouraging development the fact that socialist countries such as China and the Soviet Union are showing a forward-looking attitude in recent months concerning mutual exchanges and co-operation with the Republic of Korea in a number of fields.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

With his eagerness for Nordpolitik, Roh achieved gradual diplomatic normalizations with Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union. The most important countries for South Korea from the perspective of Nordpolitik were the Soviet Union and the PRC. Normalizing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union could bring enormous economic, political, and security

\textsuperscript{17} Snyder, \textit{China’s Rise}, 37-38.
advantages to the ROK. With the Soviet Union’s diplomatic approval of South Korea, South Korea could more easily join the UN, and would also have a greater say in international society. On 30 September 1990 in San Francisco, Gorbachev’s perestroika and glasnost policy, along with Roh’s Nordpolitik, at last achieved Soviet-ROK diplomatic normalization. Consequently, on 17 September 1991, both South and North Korea joined the United Nations as, having been rejected since 1949 due to the veto of the Soviet Union as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

Therefore, for Roh’s regime, normalization with Beijing was regarded as the “holy grail” of Nordpolitik policy after successful normalization with the Soviet Union. Since Roh’s term in office would reach its end in 1992, Roh and his regime hurried to achieve Sino-ROK rapprochement. Directly after the ROK joined the United Nations, on 2 October 1991, both countries’ foreign ministers, Lee Sang Ock and Qian Qichen, held their first conference during the session of the UN General Assembly so as to explore each other’s intentions of diplomatic normalization. In November of the same year, Qian and Lee held a second conference during the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) meeting in Seoul. Finally, on 13 April 1992, in their third conference during the ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific) meeting in Beijing, both foreign ministers reached an agreement on holding working-level talks about normalizing diplomatic relations between the PRC and the ROK. Both countries’ proceedings on diplomatic normalization were conducted in profound secrecy.

During the three negotiations held between May 13 to June 21 of 1992, both countries intensively discussed what to include in their joint statement. The South Korean government

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19 Sung-jun Park, Han’guk kwa Chungguk 100-yŏn: kyŏktong úi oegyo pirok (Kip’arang, 2010), 259.
20 Ch’ang-hun, Han’guk oegyo ôje wa onul (Han’guk Haksul Ch’ongbo), 230.
21 Snyder, China’s Rise, 38.
22 Ch’ang-hun Kim Han’guk oegyo ôje wa onul (Han’guk Haksul Ch’ongbo, 2008), 242-243.
mainly wanted the PRC to express its regret over entering the Korean War (1950-1953). However, in contrast to South Korea’s tender appeal, in accordance with the “One China” policy the PRC strongly asked the ROK to sever diplomatic relations with Taiwan and return all property belonging to Taiwan, including the ROC embassy located in South Korea. Following Roh’s eagerness for Sino-ROK rapprochement, the South Korean government took the PRC’s “One China” policy to heart and sought to cut ties with the ROC.

Foreign minister Lee Sang Ock implied the impending Beijing-Seoul rapprochement whenever he met the ROC’s diplomats since the South Korean government had begun negotiations with the PRC. On 18 August 1992, Lee noted to Jin Shuji, the Taiwanese ambassador to South Korea, that there were practical negotiations between the PRC and the ROK, and then asked him to keep this out of the official announcement of the Sino-ROK diplomatic normalization agreement. However, before the official diplomatic normalization, this information was disclosed by Taiwanese media. According to Jin, Lee added that Seoul would maintain economic and cultural ties with Taiwan, but that the ROC had been enraged and stuck to its guns by saying, “We cannot accept it.” Snyder again points out that in contrast to Beijing’s effort to maintain a relationship with Pyongyang, Seoul failed to manage the consequences of severing relations with Taipei.

In sharp contrast to Seoul, Beijing endeavored to maintain ties with the DPRK. Before the actual talks with the ROK on normalizing diplomatic relations, President Yang Shangkun visited Pyongyang in April 1992 to celebrate the 80th birthday of Kim Il Sung. Yang explained

23 Ibid.
24 Snyder, China’s Rise, 38-39.
25 Ch’ang-hun Kim, Han’guk oegyo, 244.
27 Snyder, China’s Rise, 39.
to Kim his consideration of establishing diplomatic relations with South Korea. On 18 August 1992, the PRC sent foreign minister Qian to Pyongyang in order to appease the DPRK. According to Qian, unlike his previous visits to the DPRK, there was no one at the airport to give him a warm welcome. Only the foreign minister Kim Yong Nam of the DPRK was present. Qian’s meeting with President Kim was their shortest ever, and there was no banquet for the Chinese delegation after the meeting. Although North Korea’s attitude had changed, when Qian explained China’s situation and promised that China would make all efforts to fortify a traditional friendship with the DPRK, President Kim respected China’s decision to begin relations with the ROK. Kim said, “We understand China’s independent foreign policy. We will continue with our efforts to promote our friendly relations with China. We can overcome all difficulties and persevere in maintaining and building socialism.”

After Qian’s trip to Pyongyang, Jiang and Chinese leaders were satisfied that Kim understood and respected China’s decision. Kim Hajoong, former South Korean ambassador to the PRC, assesses that the PRC thought having “two friends and no enemy (二友无敌)” would be strategically much more advantageous for China’s security and national interests than having “a friend and an enemy (一友一敌).”

Finally, after a few secret negotiations, on 24 August 1992 both countries’ foreign ministers issued a joint statement, which stipulated the following:

(1) Both the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Korea normalize diplomatic relations for the interests of each other’s people and to meet the expectations of the whole nation.
(2) Both the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Korea respect the Charter of the United Nations, each other’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, principle of nonintervention, equal and mutual benefit, and good-neighbor policy.

28 Qian, Ten Episodes, 122-125.
29 Ha-jung Kim, Tŏorimun yong Chungguk (Pijŏn kwa Lidŏsip, 2006), 285.
(3) The Republic of Korea approves the People’s Republic of China as the only legitimate government of China.
(4) The diplomatic normalization between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Korea contributes to solidifying peace and stability not only in the Korean peninsula, but also in Asia.
(5) The People’s Republic of China supports the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula.\textsuperscript{30}

Although the South Korean government did not want to cut off economic and cultural ties with Taiwan, Sino-ROK normalization resulted in the severance of any kind of relations between the ROK and the ROC due to extreme indignation from the Taiwanese government and public. In addition, due to the PRC’s “One China” policy, the ROK had to cede to the PRC government the Embassy of the ROC at no cost, despite the fact that South Korea had to purchase a site for its new embassy in mainland China. Moreover, the PRC avoided the issue of the Korean War by explaining that it was an inevitable choice for defending China’s northeast territory. The PRC had successfully “downed four birds with one stone.” Politically, the PRC had put itself in an advantageous position in its security by maintaining equal distance from its “Two Koreas” policy. The PRC also made Taiwan lose one of its strongest and closest allies. Economically, Beijing was now less reliant on the DPRK. Not only did trade between the PRC and the ROK increase dramatically, but the investment of many South Korean companies also accelerated development in China’s various industries.

\textsuperscript{30} Sŏng-gon Yi, Han’gyŏk oegyo ŭi chaebalgyŏn (Kip’arang, 2009), 225.
CHAPTER IV
AFTER SINO-SOUTH KOREAN NORMALIZATION

China's policy toward the Korean peninsula after 1992: from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao

Amid the rapid international changes of the post-Cold War era, Jiang Zemin appeared as a new leader of the People’s Republic of China. In June 1989, in the middle of the Tiananmen Square protest, Jiang Zemin was appointed as General Secretary of the Communist Party of China by Deng Xiaoping. Jiang also served as Chairman of the Central Military Commission from 1989 to 2005 and as President of the People's Republic of China from 1993 to 2002. In order to overcome the frozen stare from the United States and the West regarding the PRC’s reaction to the Tiananmen crisis, Jiang tried to focus on China’s economic growth and the expansion of diplomacy with other countries. As Deng Xiaoping saw nothing but advantages in normalizing diplomatic relations with the ROK, Jiang carried forward Sino-ROK rapprochement while also trying to persuade the DPRK. The DPRK was the first country that Jiang visited in his first official trips abroad in 1989.\(^{31}\)

When Jiang met Kim Il Sung that same year, Jiang discussed with Kim the issue of establishing trade offices in both China and South Korea. Of course, Kim was dissatisfied with this proposal, but assented to Sino-ROK economic relations. In 1991, the PRC also relented its denial of both Koreas joining the UN and informed North Korea of its “Two Koreas” policy. Finally, in 1992, the PRC sent Qian Qichen to North Korea in order to relate Beijing and Seoul’s decision to normalize diplomatic relations only a week before the official normalization.\(^{32}\) Qian claims that Kim Il Sung understood and respected China’s decision on Sino-ROK rapprochement, but relations between the PRC and the DPRK cooled off for the first time since the Korean War.

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\(^{31}\) Park, *Han'guk kwa Chungguk*, 271.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., 271-273.
After the end of the Korean War in 1953, every year DPRK leaders visited China. However, because of Sino-ROK rapprochement, until 1999 no Pyongyang leaders had made official visits to China since Kim Il Sung’s visit in October 1991. From China’s side, there were only two official trips to Pyongyang by Hu Jintao (1993) and Luo Gan (1996). In media reports of diplomatic developments between the PRC and the two Koreas, the Chinese government meticulously maintained an even-handed position during Jiang’s appointment. Whenever South Korean leaders visited China, or whenever Beijing leaders made official trips to Seoul, the domestic media of the PRC made great efforts to portray equal development in its relations with the DPRK. The increasingly strained Beijing-Pyongyang relationship was masked by these gestures, such as “China was being asked to play an active role as diplomatic liaison for messages from Seoul and Washington related to North Korea’s nuclear program.”

In addition, during Jiang’s time, the strained Sino-North Korean relationship was also shown in the DPRK’s request for China’s withdrawal of the Military Armistice Commission in 1994. North Korea pursued a dismantling of infrastructure related to the Military Armistice Commission. For China, the withdrawal of the Military Armistice Commission meant a decrease of China’s influence on the Korean peninsula, the stability of which had been regarded as a significant factor in China’s security. Eventually, however, China accepted North Korea’s request. Moreover, after the death of Kim Il Sung, Sino-North Korean relations were even more strained. According to You Ji’s interviews with Chinese diplomats, Kim Jong Il’s attitudes

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35 Snyder, *China’s Rise*, 117.
36 Ibid., 117-118.
toward the PRC were aloof at best since Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping had hesitated to accept Kim Jong Il’s succession.  

Meanwhile, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, China was the only country to support North Korea economically. Due to a loss of assistance from Moscow, the DPRK’s gross national product (GNP) has steeply decreased since 1990. Under the political influence of Sino-ROK diplomatic normalization and China’s move from a barter- to market-based system, trade between the PRC and the DPRK has also diminished despite the fact that trade between China and South Korea has precipitously increased in this same period. To make matters worse, from 1995, flood and famine heavily damaged the North Korean economy. Therefore, the time of Jiang Zemin was the worst in Beijing-Pyongyang relations since the establishment of both countries because of Sino-ROK rapprochement.

As for the PRC’s foreign policy toward South Korea in the 1990s, Lee Yeong Joo claims that China pursued bilateral development through strategic cooperation based on their principles of peaceful coexistence. In other words, since China was politically well aware of North Korea’s possible hostility toward China, China’s diplomacy toward South Korea intentionally leaned toward economic cooperation. Hence, relations between the PRC and the ROK have developed and promoted bilateral business exchanges after normalization. When Premier Li Peng visited South Korea in November 1994, he expressed and emphasized four principles of China’s foreign diplomacy toward South Korea: (1) pursuing peaceful coexistence and maintenance of long-standing neighborly relations for smooth trading relations, (2) complementary cooperation for mutual economic benefits by seeking collaborations with small and medium enterprises as well

38 Snyder, China’s Rise, 110-111.
as large enterprises, (3) strengthening economic cooperation based on equal and mutual benefits, and (4) seeking bilateral development. In Li Peng’s speech, it was obvious that building strategic economic partnership was essential to China’s diplomacy toward South Korea.  

In the 2000s, there have been significant regime changes in the PRC. Hu Jintao became President of the People’s Republic of China in 2003 after serving as a Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission and as General Secretary of the Communist Party of China. The fourth generation of PRC leadership, of which Hu was chief, consisted mostly of technocrats, and this characteristic proves China’s tendency to emphasize its practical national interests. Within this trend and with the appearance of Hu, strained Sino-DPRK relationships have begun to relax. Hu has focused on moving ahead with equidistant diplomacy on the two Koreas more than ever, believing that maintenance of the status quo is best for China’s national interests. Also, since Hu’s inauguration, the concept of a “peaceful rise” has come to be regarded as the PRC’s most representative foreign policy.

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the PRC’s strategic principles and goals became more distinct. Bates Gill outlines three fundamental goals in China’s new security diplomacy: maintaining a stable international environment and domestic situation, pursuing China’s wealth and influence in good relations with neighbors, and seeking peaceful balance with the United States. In order to achieve these goals, Beijing’s policies and practices have changed in the role of alliance, in proliferation and arms control, and in the changing norms of sovereignty and intervention.  

On the point of China’s Korean peninsula security, Gill points out:

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39 Yeong Joo Lee, Chungguk üi sin oegyo chוכלlyak kwa Hanjung kwangye: Tulong So-p’yông üi p’yônghwâ wa palchŏnnon (Nanam Ch’ulp’an, 1998), 136-139.
Until other Chinese security concerns in the region are fully resolved to its liking—such as the future of the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-South Korea alliances and the role of the United States on the Korean peninsula—Beijing’s relationship with Pyongyang, if carefully managed, can be a useful buffer and leverage point to help ensure outcomes favorable to Chinese interests.\footnote{Gill, \textit{Rising Star}, 53.}

To ensure China’s regional security, Hu’s regime believed that China should balance between maintaining a stable situation on the Korean peninsula and China’s remaining support for the DPRK in order to contain the constructive relationship between the ROK and the United States.\footnote{Ibid., 53-54.} Because North Korea’s nuclear development could increase U.S. military influence on Japan and South Korea, China also desired the denuclearization of North Korea for a stable and peaceful Korean peninsula. At the same time, the PRC desired “the emergence of a friendly, reunified peninsula that falls within China’s geostrategic orbit.”\footnote{Ibid., 147.} Beijing preferred neither political nor economic collapse in Pyongyang. Therefore, because North Korea had heavily depended on the PRC for its economy while causing tension through its nuclear weapons program, China tried to keep equidistant from the two Koreas.\footnote{Ibid., 147-149.}

Relations between the PRC and the ROK, as during Jiang Zemin’s period, have been continuously important for both countries’ economy under Hu’s regime. China became the No. 2 trading partner for South Korea in 2001, and replaced the United States as its No. 1 in 2004.\footnote{Chae-ho Chŏng, \textit{Between Ally and Partner: Korea-China Relations and the United States} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 78.} South Korea’s investment in China exceeded its investment in the United States in 2002, and in the following year South Korea became the third largest investor in China.\footnote{Ibid., 81-82.} When President Lee Myongbak visited China on May 2008, even though Sino-South Korean relations had been upgraded to a “mutual strategic cooperative relationship,” this was no more than a declaration.
China and the North Korean nuclear issue

Although Sino-South Korean rapprochement and reform policy caused exacerbated relations between China and North Korea in the 1990s, China attempted to support the stability of North Korea’s regime. The reason for this was that collapse of the North Korean regime would mean uncertainty for China’s socialistic identity. In addition, China’s “new security concept” was directly aimed at economic and strategic interests in order to maintain regional stability.\footnote{Snyder, \textit{China’s Rise}, 142-143.} For China’s maintenance of regional stability, peace on the Korean peninsula was vital. Hence, China has pursued its equidistant diplomacy, while at the same time prioritizing the prevention of nuclear proliferation.

Despite the fact that China has essentially insisted on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, North Korean nuclear development has been a puzzle for the PRC because “not only can China not provide nuclear protection for the DPRK, but also it cannot support North Korea in developing nuclear capability of its own.”\footnote{Ji, “China and North Korea,” 394.} In other words, North Korea’s possession of nuclear weapons is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, for China and its regional stability, North Korean stability is more important than nuclear weapons themselves. If North Korean nuclear development can be used as a card to negotiate with the United States, then the DPRK’s nuclear possession will prove beneficial for the PRC. On the other hand, if North Korea’s intention is to actually use its nuclear weapons in war, this increases the possibilities that South Korea and Japan will increase its nuclear armaments and that the United States will increase its military presence on the Korean peninsula. Moreover, China’s neighboring countries, such as
Russia, India, and Pakistan, own nuclear weapons. If South Korea and Japan come to own nuclear weapon because of North Korea’s provocations, China would be surrounded by six nuclear-armed neighbors, thereby jeopardizing China’s security.

However, Beijing’s fundamental regional security policy toward the Korean peninsula has been denuclearization since the practice of China’s “new security concept.” 49 The PRC has insisted that the North Korean nuclear issue be solved by peaceful means. In the first North Korean nuclear crisis in 1993, China played a crucial role, but preferred to sit on the fence, and let other countries such as the United States, Japan, and South Korea engage the DPRK. As a result, in May 1993, China abstained when the UN Security Council wanted to pass the resolution on the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, which sought to bring an end to North Korea’s nuclear ambitions. 50

In 1997, urged by Washington and Seoul, the PRC participated in the short-lived four-party talks with the DPRK, the ROK, and the Unites States. In the talks, however, China’s stance was not very different from what it was in 1993. China continued to sit on the sidelines. 51 In the early 2000s, with the atmosphere of reconciliation between South and North Korea and the DPRK’s preference of two-party talks between the United States and North Korea, China’s influence in the Korean peninsula was decreasing. However, in 2002, North Korea’s announcement of its withdrawal from the Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula prompted China into action. Beijing insisted that North Korea’s claim on the nonaggression treaty should be discussed between the United States and the DPRK. China also claimed that if North Korea’s neighboring countries conceded to the demands of North Korea’s diplomatic and economic relations with other countries, the DPRK would accept

49 Snyder, China’s Rise, 143.
50 Gill, Rising Star, 54.
51 Ibid.

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denuclearization. Thus, China stressed that the United States needed to guarantee North Korea’s safety first. However, the United States insisted that only after North Korea’s renunciation of nuclear development were they willing to talk with the DPRK on these issues.\textsuperscript{52}

In 2005, due to North Korea’s self-declaration as a nuclear weapons state, China became more apparently and actively engaged in Pyongyang, leaning toward the United States’ emphasis on denuclearization. After the DPRK’s missile and nuclear tests in July and October 2006, China expressed anger: “The nuclear test unleashed active debate over the extent to which China should cooperate with the United States in response to North Korea’s escalation.”\textsuperscript{53} China’s criticism and debate on North Korean nuclear issues gave the impression to South Korea that China was a responsible and credible ally for the security of the Korean peninsula. The responsible action of the PRC on North Korean Nuclear issues helped Sino-South Korean relations move forward as expressed in the 1992 joint statement, which was committed to solidifying peace and stability in the Korean peninsula and beyond.

China’s position on the Cheonan Ship Incident and the Yeonpyeong Island Bombing, 2010

Since Sino-ROK rapprochement, except for North Korea’s nuclear development there have been no major security conflicts between China and South Korea. However, two recent instances of North Korean provocation have escalated the tension between the Sino-DPRK and U.S.-ROK alliances. One is the Cheonan Ship Incident, during which the South Korean warship exploded and sank close to a disputed North Korean sea border on 26 March 2010, killing 46 of

\textsuperscript{52} Snyder, \textit{China’s Rise}, 149-152.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 155.

The other is the Yeonpyeong Island Bombing. Yeonpyeong Island, one of the islands nearest North Korea, was fired upon by the North Korean military on 23 November 2010, killing two marines and two civilians.

In the wake of Cheonan Ship Incident, controversy surrounded the cause of the incident. The South Korean government, through a joint civil military investigation, confirmed that the cause of the explosion was a North Korean torpedo detected inside the ship. However, Beijing’s attitude on the North Korean torpedo was incredulous. After the Incident, China was strongly urged to play an “active role” in persuading the DPRK to acknowledge its wrongdoing. Kim Jong Il’s exclusive visit to Beijing was also criticized by Seoul, Tokyo, and U.S. leaders. However, although Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao expressed his deep condolences for the victims of the Incident, he told South Korean President Lee Myongbak that “China will defend no one.”\footnote{“Chinese Premier urges Koreas to avoid conflict,” \textit{The Monterey County Herald} (California, 30 May 2010).}

The U.S.-South Korean large-scale joint military drill in July 2010 also incited strong complaints from China.\footnote{“South Korea, U.S. begin day two of joint military drills,” BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific – Political (26 July 2010).} Thus, after the Cheonan Ship Incident, Sino-South Korean relations faced the biggest challenge for the Sino-DPRK and U.S.-ROK alliances since Sino-ROK rapprochement.

However, when Yeonpyeong Island was fired upon, Beijing leaders’ position was different from that of the Cheonan Ship Incident. Even though Pyongyang leaders insisted that the preemptive provocations were from South Korea, “China has maintained the same sort of even-handed, blame-both-sides attitude that characterized its response to last spring's torpedoing of the corvette.”\footnote{“U.S. treads warily, but sends a big ship: Barack Obama dispatches an aircraft carrier to Korean waters, as his officials play down the gravity of the shelling of Yeonpyeong,” \textit{The Globe and Mail} (Canada, 25 November 2010).} Beijing also proposed six-party emergency talks on the Korean crisis, but
Seoul was disappointed by saying that six-Party talks were meant for a nuclear crisis, not for the current crisis on the peninsula.58

From its reactions to these recent events, China’s new foreign diplomacy on the Korean peninsula has never been clearer. Hu Jintao’s China strongly pursues a policy of equidistance between two Koreas for its practical national interests. Peace in the Korean peninsula enables China to maximize its interests in security and economy. With South Korea, China can maintain better economic ties in the future, but in security questions caused by North Korea, like the Cheonan Ship and Yeonpyeong Incidents, it seems China will always lean toward North Korea against the U.S-South Korean alliance.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Normalizing diplomatic relations between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Korea was the outcome of China’s new diplomatic strategy and South Korea’s Nordpolitik. China’s four goals for Sino-South Korean diplomatic normalization were successfully achieved: economic development, isolation of Taiwan, lessening of international pressure, and regional security based on equidistance in the Korean peninsula. While maintaining good relations with North and South Korea, the “Two Korea” policy has been carried out successfully.⁵⁹ South Korea’s economic goals were also achieved, but the goal of reunification of the Korean peninsula drifted farther and farther away due to China’s preference of maintaining the peninsula’s present division.

However, since Sino-South Korean diplomatic normalization was achieved in 1992, the fact that relations between two countries have transformed has to be regarded positively. The prime ministers of both countries have held reciprocal summits every year, and interactions between military-level officials have become more frequent. More remarkably, both countries have developed strong economic bonds. Through strenuous efforts for mutual economic benefits, today, China has become South Korea’s No. 1 trading partner, the largest exports nation, and the top country for travel. South Korea has also become China’s largest foreign direct investor.⁶⁰

In light of China’s unprecedented economic growth, many China scholars have discussed whether or not this rise might constitute a threat. Also, as a neighboring country, South Korea is keeping its eye on the future of relations between China and the two Koreas. At an 7 October 2011 conference under the topic of “Korea Questions: Balancing Theory and Practice,” Stephen

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⁵⁹ Gill, Rising Star, 154.
⁶⁰ Ch'ang-hun Kim, Han'guk oegyo, 465-467.
Walt predicted that China will maintain a close relationship with North Korea for regional security in order to extend its influence in the Asian region. Walt also added that Sino-American relations are likely to degenerate in the future, and that South Korea will inevitably choose either the United States or the PRC as a regional security ally. This choice will decide the destiny of South Korea’s national security.\(^6^1\) John Mearsheimer further argued that the Korean peninsula will revert to its Cold War status because China will pursue regional hegemony in the interest of national security and in recapturing Taiwan, and that the United States will strengthen the alliance in Asia in response to China’s hegemony. In such circumstances, strong economic interdependence will be useless.\(^6^2\)

Yan Xuetong had a different view, which was that Sino-American security competition would not escalate in this way because globalization did not exist during the Cold War, and that China has no intention of withdrawing the U.S. military from the Asian region.\(^6^3\) In another paper, Yan also claims: “South Korea’s peaceful reunification policy aimed to prevent wars, not to win wars.” Without South Korea’s strong willingness to wage battle in the Korean peninsula, tension will not escalate to that level, which means that tensions between South and North Korea will never result from security competition between China and the United States.\(^6^4\)

The Korean peninsula is a strategic buffer zone for China’s security in the northeast region, and tensions on the Korean peninsula would damage peace and stability East Asia. This would also become an obstacle to China’s modernization. In other words, China’s modernization


could not be truly achieved without peace between the two Koreas. In order to maximize its interests, China will pursue denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, prevention of war on the peninsula, economic aid to North Korea to stabilize the its regime and for rejoining international society, and the strengthening of economic cooperation with South Korea. China would avoid siding with the United States, South Korea, or North Korea, while continuing to support denuclearization of the Korean peninsula as much as possible. South Korea would also make great efforts to avoid another war on the peninsula because South Korea has experienced how a war damages the entire nation and how difficult it is to restore the nation’s economy. For peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula, the roles of China and the United States are very important, and steady economic development is also significant for South Korean-led reunification. Thus, South Korea will keep developing economic interdependence with China, and try to use the influence of both the United States and China in order to denuclearize North Korea.

Because the PRC and the ROK continue to strengthen their economic interdependence in order to maximize each other’s interests, China and South Korea will be very cautious to avoid conflicts. Although China has shown weakness in its otherwise strong alliance in two instances, the political intentions of China do not seem aimed at raising tension or bringing about war, but at pursuing national strategic interests by maintaining equidistance between the two Koreas. Therefore, relations between China and South Korea will not be in danger in near future. Rather, their political and economic cooperation will only increase.
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