

China's Northeast Project and South Korean-Chinese Relations

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Abstract

The issue of China's Northeast Project (NEP) is minor when juxtaposed against other important problems in Northeast Asia. However, this issue is more than a simple matter of historical interpretation. The NEP dispute between Korea and China involves many factors, including that of national sovereignty and the balance of power in Northeast Asia.

Many Korean scholars insist that the NEP was just an effort to promote "historical hegemony" in a systematic and organized manner by the Chinese government. They believe that China is distorting the history of Goguryeo (Koguryo) in order to secure preemptive rights in the region in preparation for the collapse of North Korea. But, in order for this analysis to be justified, a comprehensive study should be undertaken to determine the role and intent of the Chinese central government regarding the NEP, and China's policy towards Northeast Asia and the Korean peninsula.

Through this analysis, we found sensitive differences between the historical distortions and the political and territorial intent of the NEP. Though the political implications of the NEP have been amplified beyond objective facts, it is hard to deny that China has begun adjusting to the existing realities in the Korean peninsula through the NEP.

Therefore, if the two countries do not enter into a conflict, they will be able to seek a rational solution to the issues that have arisen and an amicable relationship can be developed between them. First of all, it is necessary to establish a scholarly basis for a foreign policy that separates historical sovereignty from territorial sovereignty. Another solution is to spread and deepen the Korean-Chinese historical discourse. If handled well, the relationship will develop in a positive way. If the relationship is handled poorly, there will be unpleasant political and strategic ramifications.

Keywords: Northeast project, South Korean-Chinese relations, Goguryeo history, Gando problem, historical sovereignty

Introduction

Since the normalization of relations between South Korea and China in 1992, the pro-China sentiment of Koreans was continuously greater than that of pro-U.S. sentiment. However, China's Northeast Project (NEP), a political scheme to portray Goguryeo (Koguryo) as a part of China, has grown into a controversy serious enough to draw the unfavorable notice of Koreans.¹ North Korea also confirmed its opposition to China's controversial NEP, denouncing it as a politically-based attempt at distorting the historical legacy of the Korean Peninsula (*Rodong Shinmun*, November 27, 2004).

This issue has caused Koreans to reconsider their amicable feelings towards China and has raised concern over whether China seeks Sinocentric hegemony over Korea. Regarding this point, President Roh Moo-hyun also insisted that Korea should lead the quest for cooperation in Northeast Asia, having had no history of invading or acting aggressively towards another country.²

With anti-Chinese sentiment growing daily and a strong protest by the Korean government, China wants to resolve the Goguryeo problem as soon as possible in order to minimize damage to its political and economic leverage on the Korean peninsula. As a result, South Korea has obtained some results in the sense that it has moved a rock that was not likely to budge at all.³

However, Goguryeo seems destined to join Taiwan, Tibet, and Mongolia on a long list of disputes involving territories on China's periphery. So the disputed point over Goguryeo's history that is occurring between Korea and twenty-first century China warrants our careful attention.⁴

Although the nature of the NEP has been interpreted in various ways, it is being promoted as a means whereby China will exert long-term governance over the Northeast borderland area (Park 2004, 136). In this sense, the NEP is not a pure

¹According to a joint survey of public opinion by KBS and Media Research (September 8, 2004), the proportion of Koreans harboring unfavorable sentiment (60%) toward China has surpassed the percentage of Koreans who have a favorable impression.

² During its age of imperialism, Japan launched numerous wars of invasion against its neighbors, and has been unable to overcome a deep feeling of distrust amongst them. If China attempts to play a domineering role in the international order of Northeast Asia, neighboring countries may become apprehensive. The fact is, neighboring countries are worried about the possibility of China's ethnocentrism turning into a pursuit of hegemony. "The Integration of Europe and the Age of Northeast Asia," *Address at the University of Paris IV, the Sorbonne Paris, France*, December 6, 2004.

³ Seoul and Beijing reached a five-point "verbal understanding" to address a bilateral dispute over the Kingdom of Goguryeo (37 B.C.-A.D. 668). The contents of the agreement can be summarized in two points. The first is that China promised that there would be no more government-level, whether central or provincial, attempts to distort the history of Goguryeo, and the second is that China will make efforts to offer academic exchanges (*Hankyoreh*, August 25, 2004).

⁴ In order to solve this problem, Korea has established the Koguryo (Goguryeo) Research Foundation in 2004 as a countermeasure to Chinese research initiatives. See the Web site of this foundation <http://www.koguryo.re.kr>.

academic endeavor but a politically motivated undertaking. Nonetheless, it is hard to generalize the NEP as a historical reinterpretation project that the Chinese Party-State has elaborately planned in order to claim territorial jurisdiction over the northern part of the Korean peninsula.

This paper examines the characteristics of the relationship between the NEP and China's policy towards the Korean peninsula, and the reason for the discord between the intent and the unintended results of the NEP. This paper seeks to find a way to normalize the relationship between South Korea and China, because the issues raised by the NEP have already grown from academic to political and diplomatic ones.

From this point of view, the process of resolving the diplomatic argument between Korea and China that has been fostered by the NEP is a touchstone for controlling the features of the new relationship between them. If a diplomatic solution cannot be reached, not only will the current political conflict between Korea and China be prolonged, but the Korean peninsula will also be negatively affected by competitive nationalism and the expansion of political conflict in Northeast Asia.

The Scope and Controversial Points of the NEP

The project is being overseen by the Center for the Study of Borderland History and Geography (CBHG). Since 1983, the Center has been researching mainly borderland-related issues, and is affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Following detailed preparations in 2000, the NEP was launched in February 2002 under the title, "Studies of the History and Geography of the Northeast Borderland and a Series of Phenomena." The NEP, a five-year (2002-2006) government project, is intended to collect data and conduct research on ancient Chinese territories and societies, mostly in Manchuria (Lee 2004c, 45-98). The Chinese government has earmarked 15 million *yuan* (about US\$2 million) to finance the NEP.

The NEP has been divided into areas of basic studies, applied studies, data compilation, and translation activities. The five main themes of the project's research efforts include comprehensive studies of the history of China's ancient borderland, Northeastern provincial areas, Northeastern tribes, Korean-Chinese relations, and the political and economic relations between China's Northeast borderland and the Russian Far East.⁵

⁵ Regarding the research program after 2002, see Yoon (2005, 142-171).

Of the twenty-seven research projects selected during the project's first stage in 2002, twelve were directly or indirectly related to issues associated with the Korea-China borderland area (Gando, Jiandao in Chinese). Moreover, of the fifteen projects selected during the second stage in 2003, seven had to do with Gando-related subjects, and two were related to the China-Russia borderland area. Six projects were selected during the fourth specialist archives in 2004, of which three were related to borderland subjects. The six projects include Northeastern provincial history, Goguryeo-Balhae Studies, and Korea-Chinese relations. Under the translation project, translated materials have included Korea-China borderland-related materials and studies on the current state of economic and social conditions on the Korean peninsula.

The differences between Korea and China over the NEP are clear. They center around issues of recognition and political interpretation.

First of all, China has been emphasizing that the history of Goguryeo was only an academic research project, to progress in the research areas of the NEP defined as "national, racial unification and reorient stabilization." Actually, the Chinese government agreed to refrain from referring to Goguryeo as Chinese in its government publications and middle and high school history textbooks (Staines 2004). This is because doing so would not only diminish Chinese political leverage on the Korean peninsula, but it also would make it difficult to gain cooperation from Korea regarding the historical distortions of Japan. To be sure, the Chinese academic field has been supported with funds from the Chinese government. However it was insisted that the central government would only accommodate the NEP and support it academically, rather than allow the project to speak for the government's political intentions. Accordingly, the Chinese government has notified local governments of its policy; the Chinese government does not wish to magnify a conflict over the historical problem of Goguryeo.⁶

On the other hand, Korea considers the NEP to be an important political issue. The reasons are as follows: First, Koreans are aware that this project was to be systematically executed with the permission of the Chinese government.⁷ Second, according to the NEP result report, the project was to be started with a high level of interest and support by local governments and the central government. Third, as clearly expressed in the "Guiding Principles of the Projects," the themes of the research studies being undertaken as part of the NEP have been described as: "having substantial

⁶ Interview with an NEP advisor in Changchun, Jilin province, China (February 5, 2004).

⁷ According to the first news report, this has been termed a "tremendous national project" to be expanded to the capital scale of about US\$2.9 billion involving construction businesses, including the maintenance of historic sites (*JoongAng Ilbo*, July 14, 2003).

meaning for the stability and development of the Northeast borderland area; being able to serve as a positive impetus for the creation and development of a borderland studies department; being intended to develop a theoretical basis or scientific foundation for party and government policies.” Fourth, Koreans believe that the NEP is a theoretical intermediation that can be used to insist on preemptive rights for ancient Goguryeo’s territory after the future collapse of the North Korea regime, specifically in the northern area of Silla (Song 2003, 159-183).

In fact, these interpretations each have some validity, but the phenomenon and substance of the NEP has been confused. For example, the interpretation of the term “political” is different. The NEP is sanctioned through organized permission by the central government, but that fact has dual implications. One is that the work can be treated systematically through ratification from the central government. Another is that the central government will not systematically interfere in the process, in spite of its formal ratification. On this point, Hu Jintao, who controls Chinese Communist Party (CCP) theory and propaganda, is simply one who ratifies, rather than positively supports, the NEP. Also, the expression “under the interest and support of each local government and the central leadership” is a *pro forma* statement among academics, indicating that the government and the CCP supplied funds for the project. If this project were to be a highly politicized project constituted in case of an emergency in the Korean peninsula, there is a large possibility that it would be promoted by the CCP or the Central Communist Party School and not consigned to local specialists.

One of the disputes between the two countries is the Gando problem. The Gando agreement was signed by China and Japan in 1909 (*Korea Times*, September 9, 2004; *Hankyoreh*, September 4, 2004). Under this agreement, Japan ceded territory to Gando, which belonged to the Joseon kingdom before it was colonized by Japan, to the Qing dynasty of China for exclusive rights to build and control a railway in the area. After the issue of Goguryeo history became a point of contention between Korea and Japan, Koreans raised the new claim that the Gando agreement in itself was invalid. Fifty-nine lawmakers from the ruling and opposite parties submitted a resolution to nullify the agreement. This move by politicians is understood as a multi-purpose strategic card designed to pressure China politically and diplomatically, which may be useful when the two Koreas are united. However, raising the issue of regaining territory lost under the Gando agreement means that it is no longer an historical problem but a real-world issue. In consideration of the dynamism of Chinese politics, China may take an uncompromising attitude, as it does concerning the Taiwan issue. Furthermore, by raising the issue of Gando, South Korea may not only stimulate North Korean

arrogance,⁸ but it may have the effect of increasing instability over the existing boundary between China and North Korea, and make future changes in the boundary impossible (Yoon 2004).

The Background of the NEP

The issue of the borderland in the Northeastern area was included in the research project, “CBHG’s 9th Five-Year Organization Plan,” for the first time in December 1995. According to this project, the relationship between China and North Korea is connected directly to the stable sovereignty of Chinese national security, as well as Tibetan separatism, narcotics problems in the area of Yunnan-Guangxi (Southern China) and the Gulf of Tonkin. Interestingly, this occurred at the same time as the present North Korean nuclear crisis.⁹ This is a change from the traditional domain of Chinese international relationship studies, which were focused on Russia (Li and Li 2002, 53). Therefore, it is clear that China has undertaken **preemptive** research of the Northeast borderland issue because of possible instability that may occur due to a North Korean regime crisis.

Until the NEP became a formal reality, CBGH made three policy reports based on the issue of what the Korean peninsula’s influence was over the Northeastern area: “The Impact That a Change in the Situation on the Korean Peninsula Would Have on the Stability of the Northeast Borderland” in 1998, “Change in the Korean Peninsula and the Stability of the Northeast Borderland” in 1999, “The Impact that Developments in the Situation on the Korean Peninsula Would Have on the Stability of the Northeast Borderland Area” in 2000 etc.¹⁰

Moreover, the scope of the eight undisclosed applied research projects of the NEP, whose detailed contents have not been made public, can also be ascertained to some extent. In all likelihood, these projects are focused on conducting strategic policy studies as part of a broader initiative for undertaking a comprehensive study of changes in the situation on the Korean peninsula in an effort to promote stability in China’s “Northeast” region (Park 2004, 126). Specifically these undisclosed projects include “A

⁸ In 1962, an agreement between Kim Il Sung, the leader of North Korea, and Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Premier, was reached regarding the North Korea-China border and territorial rights. This was finalized between Bak Seong-cheol of North Korea and Chen Yi of China by an exchange of formal protocols in 1964. The Borderland agreement and the full text of the protocol were translated by Lee J. (2002, 318-343).

⁹ In regards to China’s view of North Korea’s crisis, see China Institute of Contemporary Internal Relations (2004, 42-60); Chen (2004, 262-265).

¹⁰ In particular, the report from 1999 was noted in *Dangdai zhongguo bianjiang wenti diaoyan* (Contemporary Chinese Borderland Survey) 26 (2000), an irregular periodical addressing secret data. In consideration of this, it is very possible that these reports caused the Chinese Central Party to acknowledge the need for research on the Northeastern area.

study on the North Korean Nuclear Problem,” “The Impact that Change in the Political and Economic Situation Would Have on China in 2004-2005.”¹¹

China's Interest in the Northeastern Area

The NEP, which is in part an attempt to settle the borderland issue, has raised the northeast borderland issue as a central problem. Since the “northeast” is situated at the center of Northeast Asia, this area’s strategic significance has naturally increased as a result of the project. From the Chinese point of view, the research purpose of the NEP is as follows:

“As the political and economic state of Northeast Asia rose, the Northeastern area gained a strategically significant position as the central region of Northeast Asia. Against this backdrop, as various research institutes and researchers in some countries distorted historical facts and politicians propagated wrong theories for their political purposes, this has caused confusion, and the study of the history of the borderland and various phenomena in the Northeastern area has been faced with considerable challenges.”¹²

In that respect, the history of the Northeastern area began to be reinterpreted from a political perspective (Quan 2003, 9). Also, a study of Goguryeo history by CBHG in 1996, the foundation of the Center for Ancient Korea by the Jilin Academy of Social Science in 1997, and the establishment of the Northeast Operation Agency (Dongbei Gongzuozhan) by CBHG and the Northeast Normal University in 1999 are examples of this. This means that research working at the provincial level began to receive systematic support from the Chinese government.

China’s interest in the study of the history and phenomena of the Northeastern area has also resulted in economic development in the Northeastern area. The Northeastern area, called “the last fortress of a planned economy” has fallen behind and has been a sensitive, unstable region throughout its war-torn history (Ye 2003, 100). The Northeastern area has failed to draw attention from the central government, since it was relatively stable compared with the Western and Southeastern areas. As a result, studies of the Northeastern area have been conducted as studies focusing on northeastern

¹¹ Interview with a person in charge of this project in Changchun, Jilin province (March 24-35, 2005).

¹² <http://www.chinaborderland.com/cn/company/create/page024.htm?siteid=1&lmid> (accessed September 20, 2004).

provincial history rather than on the borderland from the political perspective.¹³ Although studies on immigration patterns of Koreans in the nineteenth century, changes in borderlines, Goguryeo history, and Balhae history were being conducted, few disputes arose with the external world since they were carried out at the provincial level.

However, while the problems of borderland issues with Russia and Inner Mongolia have been solved, the borderland with North Korea, where mainly ethnic Koreans live, has emerged as a new sensitive area. In this point, China fears that one day two million ethnic Koreans in northeastern China will support a “Greater Korea” that will spill over the modern borders (Brooke 2004).

In order to address this “Northeast phenomenon,” the Chinese government designated special measures. One is to conduct **preemptive** research on phenomena in the Northeast Borderland, and the other is to revitalize the economy in this area through the “Revitalizing Northeast China” project (*zhenxing dongbei*). The two phenomena are connected with each other. In other words, as the “Grand Project of Western Development” and studies on the Northwestern Borderland were conducted at the same time during Jiang Zhemín’s reign, the process of promoting the “Revitalizing Northeast China” project was accompanied by research on its history as a prior step. The National Development and Reform Commission contributed approximately 61 billion *yuan* to around 100 development projects in the Northeastern area and set up the “Office of the Leading Group for Northeast Region Development” during the State Council in 2003 (Ning and Dong 2004).

Before the Hu Jintao regime, there was no Chinese policy towards Northeast Asia. However, Northeast Asia was recently designated as another focus area, and is now regarded as a strategic base (Shanghai Forecast Institute 2004, 218-229; Pang 2004, 146-182). During this process, it **will be** a very significant task to secure stability in the Northeastern area, and to maintain the Chinese identity of ethnic Koreans residing in China. To this end, the Chinese government attempted to promote the immigration of ethnic Han Chinese into the three Northeast provinces through the “**mixed residence**” (*zaju*) policy.

As a result, ethnic Koreans in the Northeastern area are rapidly moving to the southeast coastal region. Qingdao city and Yantai city in Shandong province are emerging as new strongholds of ethnic Koreans. At the same time, the Chinese government has made every effort to address the identity crisis of ethnic Koreans living

¹³ The term “borderland” is used as a political and geographical concept in China. “Borderland” refers to areas inside both land and sea borders with other nations. In China, the land borderland includes Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning, Gansu, Yunnan, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang-Uigur, Tibet and Guangxi. Studies on the borderland are not limited to studies wholly on borderland-related problems, but can be related to overseas relations or inner political problems to some extent.

in the Northeast area by conducting a “Three Perspectives” (*san'guan*) policy since August 2002. This policy promotes the historical viewpoint that ethnic Korean history is that of a minority group in China (*lishiguan*), that ethnic Koreans live surrounded by various nations (*minzuguan*), and that the ethnic Korean homeland is China (*zuguoguan*).¹⁴

China's traditional ethnic policies took aim at granting autonomy to minority groups in the short term, and at drawing them into the ethnic Han culture on a long-term basis. In fact, the ethnic Manchurians that ruled Qing were assimilated into the ethnic Han culture after losing their own culture and language (Sun 1992).

In this respect, security-related incidents are highly likely to occur in the region, threatening the identity of the Chinese regime and regional stability. An uneven national development strategy, centered on the southeast coastal region, has failed to address poverty problems in the borderlands. Consequently, social unrest has increased.

The Northeastern area, with its vestiges of a traditional planned economy, has been no exception to this. Especially as Korea's investment in China increases and the economic strongholds of the three Northeast provinces become stronger, ethnic Koreans, who are mainly concentrated in the Northeastern area, will be faced with an identity crisis. This will not only weaken the fortified borderlines in the Northeastern area, but will also give rise to territorial disputes.¹⁵ In this way, the stability in ethnic Korean areas is a considerable challenge to China's Northeast policy.

Circumstantial Factors

China asserts that studies on the “history and phenomena of the Northeastern area” have been promoted by circumstantial factors. Such factors might include Korea's present nationalistic sentiment over regaining native land and the registration of Goguryeo's relics with UNESCO by North Korea as examples.

First, after Koreans were able to travel around China freely following the Korea-China diplomatic agreement of 1992, they have publicly raised the issue of regaining native land while traveling in the Northeast area and near Baekdusan mountain (Mt. Changbai in Chinese). This has prompted the Chinese attitude that “sovereignty comes before human rights.” A case in point was the attempt in 2001 of a Korean nationalistic

¹⁴ *YonhapNews*, September 19, 2003. This also infers that ethnic Koreans may demand former Goguryeo territory as a part of current Korean territory while attempting to break away from China in the case of the reunification of South and North Korea. (*Time*, August 17, 2004).

¹⁵ As for Jian city in Jilin province 155 checkpoints were recently set up along the 200km-long borderlines with North Korea in order to fortify borderline management procedures to prevent escapees. Interview with a Sino-North Korean expert in Changchun, Jilin province (August 27, 2004).

civil group (for example Dhamul) to regain Manchuria, asserting it was Korea's traditional territory. In response to this, the Chinese government insisted that "several politicians publicly propagate all sorts of wrong theories for political intentions, creating huge confusion."¹⁶

Second, the Chinese government was highly shocked by the fact that North Korea had applied for registration of complex of Goguryeo's tombs as a World Cultural Heritage in 2001. Consequently, China made a systemic international lobbying effort to prevent North Korea's Goguryeo relics from being exclusively registered as a WCH site. Afterwards, it applied for registration of Goguryeo relics within Chinese territory as a WCH site in 2002, and succeeded in having both Goguryeo relics held by North Korea and China registered as World Cultural Heritage sites at the same time as the 28th session of Unesco World Heritage Committee Meeting, held in Suzhou on July 1, 2004.

Third, as more ethnic Koreans are being employed in Korea, they have become accustomed to Korean culture, and the fever for learning Korean language is spreading in China, influenced by the "Korean Wave" (*hallyu*). This trend has kept ethnic Koreans born in China from being assimilated into Chinese culture. China saw this phenomenon as weakening the existing concept that "Ethnic Koreans are Chinese citizens." In particular, it carefully monitored the movement to restore ethnic Koreans' nationality in Korea, and whether ethnic Koreans wished to regain their legal Korean nationality after the Ethnic Korean Act was instituted.

Fourth, there are problems within the academic research community in China. There was a tendency to begin long-avoided studies on ancient Northeastern history in earnest, *in light of* the state of relations between China and North Korea. (Ma 2003, 155-157). In particular, the attempt to study Goguryeo history was also meaningful in that it made public the historic achievements accumulated since the 1980s.¹⁷

As a final point, the CBHG and scholars studying Goguryeo history intended to gain economic benefits through the carrying out of their research projects. In particular, researchers in the borderland area, having been neglected by the Northeastern area, excessively exaggerated the significance of their studies on the Northeast area for political purposes and for their private ambitions. Exaggerating the research problems of the NEP could result in partial benefits to CASS, to CBHG, and to research institutes in the Northeast area. In particular, some historical issues were intentionally politicized, taking advantage of the fact that international political agendas were able to garner further financial support for them. In this respect, China's concentrated studies of

¹⁶ www.chinaborderland.com.cn (accessed September 20, 2004).

¹⁷ China has attempted to incorporate Goguryeo history into its history on a sustainable basis since 1980. (Sin 2003, 1-3)

Korean ancient history were conducted through the central government's confirmation of research projects proposed by provincial governments and scholars.

China's Policy towards the Korean Peninsula: Continuity or Change

Korean scholars and civic groups feel that China believes that a fundamental change will occur between the two Koreas in the foreseeable future. In fact, China is concerned that when South and North Korea are reunified, the influence of a unified Korea might extend to the Northeast Asian order, which could cause historical disputes relating to the area to come to the fore. Consequently, China's preparations for such an eventuality appear to include efforts to level the playing field in advance.

Therefore, most Koreans insist that the NEP was just "historical hegemony" promoted in a systematic and organized manner by the Chinese government. They believe that China is distorting Goguryeo and Balhae history in order to secure preemptive rights in the region in preparation for the collapse of North Korea. Furthermore, most Koreans believe that China even wants to make the Silla area (the southern part of present-day Korea) historically subordinate to China by persisting in asserting preemptive rights in that area. They interpret the intention of the NEP as part of a 21st century version of China's expansionist strategy or a Chinese version of ethnocentrism. Yet, in order for this analysis to be justified, objective circumstantial analysis of China's mid- and long-term national strategy, the political state of the Northeastern area, and the need for a reestablishment of positive South Korean-Chinese relations should take precedence.

Dimension of China's Grand Strategy

Since Hu Jintao took office, China has embraced the national will to open "the Chinese Century" (Shenker 2005). This is promoted by the policies of a "peaceful rise" of China and "Responsible Great Power" in its foreign strategy. The "peaceful rise of China" is in line with its existing diplomatic behavior, China's will for common economic development, and its desire for more stable and peaceful mutual relations with its neighbors. In this respect, that can be realized as long as the rise of China does not affect the existing international order, and develops in a way that assures economic benefits to all neighboring nations.¹⁸

¹⁸ For this point, see Klingner (2004); Jiang and Xia (2004, 365-366); Suettinger (2004, 1-10).

The concept of “Responsible Great Power” requires China to make every effort to create cooperative security and security institutions in the Northeast Asian order.¹⁹ This new foreign strategy originated from the perception that it is a prerequisite to perceive the limits of China’s national power and that China must be recognized as one of the great powers in Northeast Asia.²⁰ In fact, China clearly perceives that it still has a long way to go before becoming a superpower due to several problems it presently has, such as high unemployment, poverty, social unrest, a shortage of natural resources, overpopulation, the Taiwan issue, the fragility of the financial system, and the periodic occurrence of epidemic diseases.²¹

This perception is also revealed through its strategy towards Northeast Asia and the Korean peninsula. In this respect, it would be safe to say that China's “Great Power Strategy” accepts the behavioral norms of the international community that follows the geographical map formed after World War II, and complies with reactive realism, rather than containing expansionist and hegemonic intentions (Zacher 2001, 215-250). This means that as China, along with other nations, imposes controls on the behavior of the U.S., its behavior should also be restrained by other nations. Recently, China has stressed “peace and balance” in its 21st century international relations. That has a different meaning from the existing “cooperation and conflict” (Li E. 2004, 4).

The core of China’s Grand Strategy is to try to maintain stable relations with the United States, though it has yet to discard suspicions against it.²² Beijing believes that the United States has been pursuing a unilateral foreign policy after the September 11 terrorist attack. Beijing’s worries are that Washington’s new conservative line, as demonstrated by its strategies regarding Afghanistan and Iraq, may also be applied in the case of North Korea (Wen 2004). China believes that if the United States takes military action against North Korea, it will bring about a change in the classic balance of power in the East Asian region (Heymann 2002, 51-52). Despite the possibility of these changes, China has been compelled to recognize the differences in national capabilities between it and the U.S. and to acknowledge the U.S. role (Zweig 2001, 246-247). This means that China and the United States may confront each other over specific issues, but should fundamentally seek cooperation for the protection of their mutual interests.

In the twenty-first century, the United States will be center of a unilateral system of

¹⁹ For the implications of China's Responsible Great Power, see Zhang, and Greg (2001); Evan and Fravel (2003, 22-35).

²⁰ For an in-depth analysis of China's Grand Strategy, see Swaine and Tellis (2003); Goldstein (2003,57-86); Zhang and Greg (2001,48-68).

²¹ Regarding the fault line in China’s developmental terrain, see Wolf and Yeh (2003).

²² For a recent analysis of the U.S-Sino relationship, see Chu (2003).

a global politics; however, in Northeast Asia, such politics will be bilateral, one based on the United States responding to **Chinese behavior**. This regional system will reestablish a global balance of power. (Ross 103). Beijing's East Asia policy since President Jiang Zemin assumed office has been designed to realize three concepts: creating a basic hegemony designed to restore sovereignty over Taiwan and the South China Sea; a regional hegemony designed to expand its territory to the status it enjoyed during the Qing dynasty; and a global hegemony designed to replace the current Pan-Americanism prevailing over the international community with a Pan-Chinese structure (Mosher 2000, 99).

To this end, China has been a member of regional security institutions, and has been an active participant in various regional security organizations. Here China can benefit from being able to express itself more forcefully through regional institutions. Also, China's diplomatic emphasis has shifted to one of "good neighbor diplomacy" (*zhoubian waijiao*), with contingent states to maintain stable borders, since the Major-Power Strategy has temporarily lost favor. The reason for re-emphasizing "good neighbor diplomacy" was to make sure that surrounding countries did not join an American-led containment and encirclement of China. In particular, President Hu Jintao visited Moscow in May 2003 and concluded an agreement with Russia, which stated that the two countries would mutually support each other in an emergency. This was virtually a military pact. (*Renmin Ribao*, May 29, 2003) At the same time, China and India agreed to resolve the decades-old border dispute regarding several locations along the 2,200-mile border between the two countries in April 2005. (*New York Times*, April 12, 2005)

On the other hand, Beijing has been making concerted efforts to strengthen ties with North Korea by siding with it during the six-party talks in Beijing and over the question of replacing the current Armistice agreement with a new peace pact between the United States and North Korea. It has also been giving economic support to the North in order to help stabilize the North Korean regime and the situation on the border (Lee 2004b).

China's Policy towards the Korean Peninsula: Its Basis and Change

The establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and China in 1992 has brought about **comprehensive** change for the two countries. But the most impressive development in the South Korea-Chinese relations has been in the economic sphere. South Korea recorded a trade surplus of US\$33.2 billion in 2004 with China, making

China South Korea's largest trading partner. These changes have greatly contributed to China's new understanding of South Korea. As a result, after November 1998, a "cooperative partnership" was established between the two countries. This was upgraded to the level of a "comprehensive partnership" in October 2000, and again upgraded to a "comprehensive and cooperative partnership" in July 2003.

Nevertheless, for China, the Korean peninsula is still a region where it should seek favorable relations with both South and North Korea. This is true because instability in North Korea not only affects China's political stability but also makes it difficult to utilize "the North Korean card" in arbitrating South Korea-Chinese or US-Chinese relations. Therefore, Beijing prefers for the two Koreas to remain in a state of neutrality or as "peacefully divided" nations, rather than have a unified Korea on the peninsula (Tang 2003, 114).

Current Chinese policy regarding the Korean peninsula is being adjusted in accordance with Chinese economic development, US-Chinese relations, the possibility of advances in inter-Korean relations, the possibility of changes in North Korea, and measures to handle North Korea's nuclear issue.

Regarding the question of unification, China maintains a vague or two-sided attitude. Beijing officially and clearly states that the Korean peninsula must be unified through peaceful means, but has taken no practical action to help realize such an eventuality. China appears to prefer the profits it can enjoy from the status quo of division to that of ending it, and therefore has shown neither a vigorous, nor a cold attitude, to possible unification (Chang 2001, 17; Tang 1999, 464-483). The reasons for this vagueness in policy are as follows: First, if China shares a common border with a unified Korea, it will lose the traditional "North Korea card" that it has used to exploit when dealing with Japan and the United States; Second, unification, if it is to take place at this time, will be a South Korean-led initiative and the peninsula will possibly fall under U.S. influence; Third, China wants to see the surrounding situation remain stable because this will help it achieve greater economic development; Fourth, in economic terms, China does not favor a unified Korean peninsula, because this could greatly reduce South Korean investment in China's economic development; Fifth, a unified Korea may reinforce nationalism in the Korean peninsula, and this will encourage ethnic Koreans residing in China to raise the "native land" issue, which would negatively influence China's official policy regarding its minority groups (Shim 2001). To this end, it would be unlikely that China would create conditions for the Korean question to emerge as a matter of argument or conflict with the United States (Scobell 2001, 282-283).

There is another view that, among the powers surrounding the Korean peninsula, the one that may harbor a comparatively favorable opinion regarding Korean unification may be China. This is because China borders the Korean peninsula, and both South and North Korea are regarded as maintaining a friendly attitude towards China. Now that China's economic development has progressed to a high degree and it no longer worries about the effects of South Korea's market economy and capitalism, if the peninsula is unified, China will not be burdened with a future problem of North Korean escapees.²³ It may attempt to play the role of inducing a unified Korea to join the Chinese-led Northeast Asian order. In this case, the collapse of the North Korean regime would not necessarily be regarded as damaging to China (Dong 2001, 344-348).

In regards to the North Korean nuclear issue, China officially says that the confrontation between the United States and North Korea should be attributed to the former, because it was the United States that has been mobilizing various means to press the North into discontinuing its nuclear program. However, the official position of the Chinese government is that the Korean peninsula must be denuclearized and that the nuclear issue must be solved peacefully through bilateral negotiations between the United States and North Korea, as follows below.

First, if the North comes to possess nuclear weapons, it may create the pretext for the United States to justify its Missile Defense Program, as well as a Territorial Missile Defense Program in Northeast Asia. It can also create the pretext for the Taiwanese government's intent to develop nuclear weapons and for the Japanese government to expedite its rearmament. In this case, China would become surrounded by potential military threats. Second, in regards to ways of realizing this denuclearization of the North, China is against any move designed to lead to the replacement of the current leadership in the North and says the nuclear issue can be solved if the United States guarantees the safety of the North's regime. China takes this position because the collapse of the North's socialist regime may create conditions threatening the prolongation of the socialist system in China, which would also result in increasing the number of escapees and the birth of a pro-U.S. regime in the North, which China would be reluctant to see occur. Third, China has so far supported the North's allegation that the nuclear issue must be solved through U.S.-North Korea bilateral negotiations, but recently hinted that it will be able to play some role if necessary. This is why Beijing took the initiative to organize six-party talks in Beijing.

However, regardless of China's wishes, the North Korean regime has maintained a relatively independent foreign policy. The major source of the North's recalcitrant

²³ For an analysis of this topic, see Hwang (2004, 63-66).

behavior was its clear understanding of China's rationale for giving aid to North Korea. In this sense, it would be safe to say that Chinese influence on North Korea is gradually being reduced (Becker 2003). However, since the forth leadership led by Hu Jintao took office, China has sought stronger Korea-Chinese relations and Sino-North Korean relations at the same time. In particular, as high-ranking officials from North Korea and China visit each other and North Korea begins to learn about China's open economic policy, partial changes can begin to be seen in North Korea now.

China will strive to both expand economic ties with South Korea and keep North Korea in line by providing political support and modest economic assistance. Therefore, it is a hasty generalization to say that China unconditionally accepts changes in North Korea's politics including a regime change, and that it is beginning to prepare to settle the issue on the basis of the NEP. Rather, in the light of present Chinese policy regarding the Korean peninsula, the NEP is considerably based upon a reaction to circumstantial changes in North Korea.

Conclusion

The NEP is being promoted as a means of reinforcing China's long-term governance over the Northeast borderland area. Through this process, China has re-interpreted ancient Korean history and Goguryeo history from the viewpoint of today's national sovereignty. This has brought on both historical and diplomatic disputes between Korea and China.

Therefore, the NEP is not only a re-interpretation of Korean history based on the effort to achieve a unified, multi-ethnic nation. It also has a political intent. In fact, the northeast area already appears to have become an extremely sensitive border to Kim Jong Il's emerging regime crisis. Major issues include the North Korean nuclear issue, ethnic Koreans in the northeast area, and refugees from North Korea.

Nevertheless, it is hard to generalize the NEP as just an elaborate Chinese effort to distort history in order to claim territorial jurisdiction in the northern area of the Korean peninsula in preparation for a future North Korean collapse. On the contrary, China regards stability in its surrounding environment as the most important factor needed to maintain economic development. Therefore there is little to encourage China to change the status quo in the northeast area. In particular, it is hard to offer the explanation that China will begin **to change its constructive role** on the Korean peninsula issue through

the NEP.²⁴ Thus, if the two countries do not escalate the disagreement between them to a state of conflict, we can expect a rational solution and a resultant amicable relationship between them.

First of all, the solution is to be found in a separation of historical sovereignty from territorial sovereignty. For instance, if Korea does not raise problems related to Gando in order to regain native lands, China is likely to take steps to prevent the Goguryeo issue from becoming a bigger problem than it already has. China is thus taking a two-sided attitude by maintaining a non-negotiable attitude towards the Gando issue, while leaving room for discussion regarding the Goguryeo issue.

Another solution is to spread and deepen the Korean-Chinese historical discourse at the Northeast Asian level. To that end, the two countries should make an effort to minimize nationalism within Northeast Asia, since it has the potential to threaten peace. It would be wise to share opinions on Northeast Asian history, while expanding the “Northeast Asian Common History Reader” project, jointly agreed on by Northeast Asian academic circles and NGOs (Wu 2004, 3-8). We are now living in the era of a global village, in which we can enjoy the benefits of peace and harmonious coexistence by resolving historical disputes in an objective and rational manner.

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²⁴ For China's current policy towards the Korean peninsula, see Lee (2004b).

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GLOSSARY

Changchun (Ch.)	長春
Gando	間島
<i>hallyu</i>	韓流
Jiando -> Gando	
Jilin (Ch.)	吉林
<i>Lishiguan</i> (Ch.)	歷史觀
<i>Minzuguan</i> (Ch.)	民族觀
Qingdao (Ch.)	青島
<i>sanguan</i> (Ch.)	三觀
Shandong (Ch.)	山東
Yantai (Ch.)	烟臺
<i>zaju</i> (Ch.)	雜居
<i>zhenxing dongbei</i> (Ch.)	振興東北
<i>zhoubianwaijiao</i> (Ch.)	周邊外交
<i>Zuguoguan</i> (Ch.)	祖國觀