



An analysis of China's relations with North Korea

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The presentation was broadly divided into four parts: the first part dealt with political, economic, security and cultural difference between North Korea and China; the second part was on the territorial and historical disputes between the two countries. The third part dealt with China and South Korea's relations and finally the fourth part was on the Chinese leadership and its policy towards North Korea. Since 1992, China has replaced North Korea as its trading partner. However, the visit of Kim Jong-il to Shanghai in 2001 resulted in the creation of several special economic zones in North Korea.

After recurring famine and USA's sanctions on North Korea, its dependence on China especially with regard to food and energy has increased. In 2007, 41% of North Korea trade happened with China, which kept on increasing till 2011 up to 70%. Currently 70 to 80% of trade exchange takes place between North Korea and China. Most of the investor in North Korea is Chinese but recently most of them are moving out of special economic zones in North Korea.

Territorial dispute between China and North Korea is the lesser known fact. China shares about 14,000 Km borders with North Korea with three disputed regions in between. One is Mount Paektu, island of Yalung and Tubman River and the issue of access to East Sea or Sea of Japan. In 1962, China and North Korea negotiated the demarcation of their borders. Tubman River was agreed upon as the territorial boundary. The real bone of contention was

the area around Mount Paektu. Mount Paektu is one of the most sacred places for the Koreans and is very close to their identity. Both claim Mount Paektu, with China claiming 60% of the land. China in recent years has reasserted its claim on the regions surrounding Mount Paektu. Despite the resistance from North Korea China applied to UNESCO for declaring it a world heritage site. The border dispute between China and North Korea may not appear serious at present but one cannot rule out possibilities of conflict between these two countries over this issue. We all know there are two Koreas but there is third Korea which is inside China; that is Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture. There are two million Koreans who live in China. China fears if the two Korea unify, they might claim the third Korea. This may become a territorial dispute in the future. There are also maritime disputes between North Korea and China. In 2012, North Korea captured around twenty nine Chinese fishermen. North Korea demanded ransom of 1.2 million Yuan.

There is also a historical dispute between North Korea and China. Korean peninsula is part of the Sino-centric world order. Korean kings used to have tributary relations with Chinese rulers. So, according to the Chinese interpretation; Korea was Chinese vassal state and pay tributes to Chinese monarchs. Korean dynasty called Silla dynasty which is presently in South Korea has made alliance with Tang dynasty of China to defeat other Korean kingdoms. With South Korea and China against North Korea at present, the repetition of a similar pattern can be observed. The historical narrative remains a matter of great concern to both the countries.

There are also cultural differences between North Korea and China. North Korean regimes have put a lot of effort to abolish Chinese influence on the Korean culture. The usage of Chinese characters such as 'Huncha'; is prevalent in South Korea but not in North Korea. This shows that North Koreans want complete cultural independence from China. Another difference between Koreans and China is over the 'Arirang'. Arirang is national folk song of the Koreans which China claims to be theirs. Illegal migration from North Korea is a major issue of concern for China. It would not only push large number of refugees in China but the northeastern province which is of great importance to China would also come under serious threat.

Another issue of difference between China and North Korea is that of security. Unlike South Korea which maintains US troops on their soil, North Korea doesn't allow any foreign troops after 1958. North Korea has tried to be self-reliant in terms of military. Sino - North Korean

security pact of 1961 is still in force. Security of China is directly linked with security of the Korean peninsula. China fought Japanese in 1894 and later the US in 1950, to protect its interest in Korean peninsula. China needs North Korea as a buffer. With regard to Chinese foreign policy to North Korea, there are five “NOs”, such as: no instability, no collapse, no nukes, no refugees and no conflict escalations.

A proliferation of missile and nuclear weapon is of concern to China. China has played a role in denuclearization dialogues, particularly the ‘six party talks’. China criticized North Korea’s rock and nuclear test and gave full support to the UN Security Council’s resolutions. North Koreans do not tolerate China’s pressures and position on their nuclear programs. North Korea has built its nuclear weapons away from US surveillance, but near China and North Korea border. North Korea has tested five nuclear tests till date and they are prepared for the sixth nuclear test. They have claimed success in miniaturization of nuclear weapons. There are several protests in China against the North Korea’s nuclearization programs. .

Relations between China and South Korea have increased manifold. Many South Korean students go to china for educational purposes. Military defense between China and South Korea have also been increasing. Sino-South Korean relation has been elevated as strategic cooperative partnership. As a reaction, North Korea has tried to improve economic and cultural relations with Taiwan.

Chinese trade with North Korea is not that significant as compare to trade with South Korea. None of the Chinese senior leaders have made a visit to North Korea. But in 2014, Xi Jinping visited South Korea without making prior visit to North Korea. This is the significant departure from the past experience. Although Sino-North Korean relation is contentious but North Korea shall remain unnecessary evil for China. Reunified Korea is not of interest to any of the big power.

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About the Speaker

Dr. Ranjit Kumar Dhawan is Assistant Professor of Korean Studies at the Department of East Asian Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Delhi, India. He has received his PhD degree from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. He was awarded Gold Prize by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, South Korea in an international essay

contest on “Korea’s National Image” in 2012 and received Research Grant from the Graduate School of Korean Studies, The Academy of Korean Studies, South Korea during 2013-14. He has published articles in The Korea Times, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Area Studies Journal, World Affairs Journal and Tamkang Journal of International Affairs. He has recently published a book titled The Politics of the Welfare State in South Korea (Manak Publications, 2017). Dr. Dhawan can be reached at rkdhawan13@hotmail.com

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