

CHINESE-NORTH KOREAN DISCOURSE:

PATHWAYS TO THE FUTURE

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Thesis

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Introduction

What happens when an “irrational” actor succeeds in its drive to possess nuclear weapons? In the case of North Korea this is a very distinct possibility. According to CIA projections North Korea already possesses two nuclear weapons, and may have since the early 1990s. In the most recent nuclear crisis that has erupted on the Korean peninsula the North Korean leadership has threatened to develop more nuclear weapons, possibly carry out an underground test, and to export its nuclear technology. This has aroused global concern over the North Koreans’ ambitions and over a possible response from the United States in the form of a military strike. Initially the world--as well as North Korea--called for direct negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang over the nuclear issue--with the U.S. refusing to do so.

Into this breach China came out and offered to host talks between the two adversaries in Beijing and mediate. Many pundits in the United States thought this to be a good idea and pointed out what they believed to be China’s influence over North Korea. Indeed the political leadership in Washington D.C. agreed with this estimation and called for China to take some kind of responsibility in the crisis. On the surface this belief in China’s dominance over North Korea seems to be supported by the evidence. China committed hundreds of thousands of troops to defending North Korea against the American advance during the Korean War. China also continues to supply North Korea with a large amount of its food and fuel needs. But does China have control over the behavior of the North Koreans? Do the Chinese dominate the political process in Pyongyang? How close is the friendship between the North Koreans and the Chinese?

By looking beneath the surface one will come away with a clearer picture of the complexity of the relationship between the North Koreans and the Chinese. Other events will begin to emerge, such as the Chinese turning off the flow of fuel to the North Koreans back in spring 2003--which came at the height of the most recent nuclear crisis. Another event would be the stationing of 150,000 Chinese troops close to the North Korean border. One can also look at China's arrest of Yang Bin in fall of 2002, who was slated to administer North Korea's new capitalist enclave in the northern part of the country, on corruption charges. So what do all of these contradictions mean?

Those contradictions will be the driving points behind this thesis. The thesis--to put it succinctly--will argue that the flow of events since the Korean War would seem to suggest that China and North Korea are actually growing apart and that China's influence on North Korea is quite limited. Alternative explanations will also be examined such as the belief that the foundation for DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)-PRC (People's Republic of China) relations remain solid and that China will not abandon North Korea in the long run. An investigation of this sort will help its readers gain a deeper understanding of what can be accomplished by inviting China to participate in the diplomatic process of disarming Korea.

This investigation will be broken down into five parts. The first section will touch upon the pre-Cold War interactions between China and the Korean peninsula. Within this topic there will be a brief discussion of Korea's subservient relationship with China during their respective dynastic periods followed by a short analysis of the Japanese colonial period in Korea in the first half of the twentieth century. This section

will help ground the discussion in terms of the historical links between China and the Korean peninsula.

The second section will look at the state of the relationship between North Korea and China as it existed during the Cold War. There will be a discussion of the Korean War and China's role, the evolution of the relationship through the 1980s, and the impact that the PRC's establishment of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea in 1992 had on its interactions with Pyongyang. This section will help measure the extent to which the DPRK-PRC relationship was stable or unstable during the Cold War years.

The third section will give an overview of the post-Cold War relationship between North Korea and China by looking at two principle events: the 1994 nuclear crisis and the North Korea-South Korea summit meeting in 2000. The analysis provided here will provide an insight into how the dynamics of the DPRK-PRC relationship have evolved since the end of the Cold War.

The fourth section will look at the five primary issues that are affecting the current state of relations between the PRC and the DPRK. This includes: refugees, economic assistance, nuclearization of the peninsula, and the impact that North Korea's actions have had on China's relations with South Korea and the United States. This issues-oriented analysis will look at the problem areas that affect the bilateral relationship and add depth to the historical discussion.

And finally there will be a short analysis of how the historical and issues-oriented topics reflect the nature of the relationship and what its implications are for the future.

Pre-Cold War Interactions between China and Korea

Dynastic Period

For centuries China maintained tributary relations with subservient states that were near--or bordered on--the Chinese mainland. These nations included Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and Burma. As part of their “tribute” to the Chinese emperor, official delegations from “backward” states would be sent to the Chinese capital, offer gifts, and perform the ritual kowtow. There are a number of reasons why these nations would endure this humiliating practice. One was to learn from China, their ways of government and their culture. Another reason was that sending tributary missions would also open the doors to trade with the vast Chinese empire, as well as thwart any invasion by China.

Korea was no different in this respect and was seen as the most loyal of China’s tributary states. In fact the relationship was seen as an extension of a Confucian relationship with China assuming the role of “older brother” and Korea playing the “younger brother.” Though relations would vary between the two states depending on what kind of government was in power in either land, in general there was a pattern of Korean borrowing from China in areas such as culture and politics.

Though there was much military conflict between China and Korea during Korea’s Three Kingdoms period¹ there was, on the part of the Koreans, also a large measure of cultural borrowing from the Chinese. The Korean states adopted Chinese legal and political institutions, imported Buddhism and Confucian teachings, and the Chinese written language.² When Korea was restructured under the kingdom of Silla, it established peaceful relations with China. This allowed an expansion of trade relations--

¹ It should be noted that China was also often fractured politically during this time.

² Ki Baik Lee, *A New History of Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 45.

although Silla subscribed to Tang China's tributary system. Moreover, cultural borrowing continued and Korean scholars were sent to China to learn about Buddhism and Confucianism.³ This relationship would continue under Korea's Koryo kingdom. In the 1200s and 1300s Korea would fall under the domination of the Mongol armies. During this time Korea was also used a staging area for the Mongol invasion of Japan. Korea's subservience to China would become more pronounced once Korea's Yi Dynasty came to power in 1392. At the time the Ming dynasty was in control of the Chinese empire and was beginning to establish hegemony over the Asian continent. The Yi government sent three embassies to China each year. In return, the Mings gave support and legitimacy to the Yi government and allowed trade relations and cultural exchanges to expand.⁴ With the arrival of the Manchus on the Chinese political horizon Korea's subservience was sealed by Korea's status as a buffer state for China. The Manchus invaded Korea in 1627 and 1636. In 1636 Manchu hegemony over Korea was formalized when King Injo of the Yi Dynasty signed a treaty acknowledging Manchu suzerainty over Korea. Because of this treaty Korea would send tribute missions to China until 1893.⁵ Though the Koreans were a proud people, their Confucian relationship with the Middle Kingdom enabled the Chinese to meddle in their affairs frequently. For instance, in 1882 during internal disturbances over the role of the Taewon-gun and Japanese encroachments onto Korean soil, 4,500 Chinese troops were sent to Seoul to support the ruling Min family.⁶

³ Lee, 73.

⁴ Lee, 189.

⁵ Robert R. Simmons, *The Strained Alliance* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1975), 5.

⁶ Lee, 273-274.

Korea's foreign relations during the Yi dynasty were also distinguished by its tortured relations with its neighbor across the Sea of Japan--which would have an impact on Korea's later interactions with China. Though the relationship between Korea and Japan was close for many years--Koreans had immigrated to the Japanese islands for centuries and the Japanese imperial family reputedly has Korean bloodlines--Japan was covetous of the peninsula because of its proximity to China. In 1592 and 1597 Japan launched full scale invasions on Korean soil. Though these invasions ultimately failed, the devastation that was wrought was on a wide scale. Today, visitors to Korea repeatedly encounter Buddhist temples that had been destroyed during these invasions and then rebuilt.

As a consequence of Korea's troubled relations with its two neighboring powers, Yi Korea established a policy of isolation from the 1600's to the 1800's. While it maintained relations with Japan (which by this time had come under the rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate and had shown no interest in conquering the peninsula) and China, Korea became known as the "hermit kingdom."⁷

As the Western powers began to intrude on China's sovereignty in the mid-1800s, its ability to maintain its hold over its "younger brother" began to wane. As China was pulled into the Opium Wars and signing "unequal" treaties with various Western powers, such as the Treaty of Tientsin, ships from France, Russia, the United States, and Japan began appearing in Korean waters demanding trade and diplomatic recognition. Japan would prove to be the most aggressive power in pursuing Korea's "opening" to the outside world.

⁷ Simmons, 5.

Japanese Colonialism and its Effects

The Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95 would prove to be the turning point in reversing China's domination over the Korean peninsula. However, the cutting back of Chinese influence would come at the cost of increasing Japanese influence.

In 1894 the Tonghak Rebellion broke out in Korea. This insurrection came about as a reaction to the increasing foreign presence in Korea and in time it came to threaten the Yi Dynasty.⁸ The government in Seoul requested Chinese troops. The Japanese wanting to reestablish their presence on the peninsula also sent troops. The reasons for the Japanese move were manifold. Around the time of the insurrection in Korea there was a growing sense of nationalism in Japan. Many Japanese believed that Japan was destined to bring the light of civilization to the Asian mainland. There was also a desire for additional markets for Japanese goods and for a Korea truly independent of China and neutral.⁹

Though the Korean government was ultimately responsible for suppressing the Tonghak Rebellion the event was still an opportunity for Chinese and Japanese troops to interfere in Seoul's internal affairs. It was then that the question of foreign troops withdrawal came up and the Japanese used the resulting tensions as a pretext to attack China. The result was that China suffered a humiliating defeat and Japan's dominance over Korea was recognized in the Treaty of Shimonoseki.¹⁰

Though Korea attempted to retain its independence, great power rivalry over the peninsula persisted--sans China. This was especially the case between the Japanese and

⁸ Takashi Hatada, *A History of Korea* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1969), 94.

⁹ Charles Nelson Spinks, "Origin of Japanese Interests in Manchuria," *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, May 1943. Accessed October 7, 2003. Available from Jstor.

¹⁰ Hatada, 102-104.

the Russians--which culminated in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05. After the Japanese triumphed it increased its presence in Korea to such an extent (including the establishment of a Protectorate in 1905) that by the time it was annexed in 1910, the Yi Dynasty had ceased to be a governing entity.

Japan set about consolidating its power in Korea immediately after annexation. A Governor General was appointed directly by the Japanese emperor and a military administration was created.¹¹ The military was involved in anticipation of strong Korean resistance to the annexation. Indeed, Japanese repression of Korean nationalists would become legendary. The colonial administration also set about implementing projects that would solidify its hold over the newly acquired land. Roads, railways, harbors, water transport and communication systems were created. A new currency and monetary system was also introduced. Japanese standards in weights and measures were imposed. In addition, Japan reworked the concept of land ownership in such a way that Japanese companies were able to purchase land at cheap prices while allowing them to force Korean farmers out.¹² Koreans were forced to take on Japanese names and to learn the Japanese language at the expense of the Korean language. Japan dominated trade between the two lands, exporting finished industrial goods to Korea while importing agricultural products. All of these measures served to bind the peninsula more tightly to the growing Japanese empire.

As Korea was undergoing pervasive Japanization, China continued to disintegrate. In 1911 the Republican revolution swept over China and ousted the

¹¹ Edward I-te Chen, "Japanese Colonialism in Korea and Formosa: A Comparison of the Systems of Political Control," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 1970. Accessed October 7, 2003. Available from Jstor.

¹² Hatada, 112-114.

Manchus--thereby ending the dynastic era. Though Sun Yat-sen was installed as president he soon stepped aside for Yuan Shi Kai. By 1916 China had broken apart into various fiefdoms controlled by different warlords.¹³ This would persist until 1927 when the KMT under Chiang Kai Shek and the newly formed CCP unified the country during the Northern Expedition--though he would lead a massacre against his communist partners soon after unification.

In 1919 Korean resistance took a dramatic turn when the March First Movement arose. The insurrection took place following the death of the former King of Korea, Kojong. Two days before his funeral Korean nationalists issued a proclamation calling for Korean independence. In response an estimated two million Koreans rose up to join protests in the weeks and months following the proclamation. The Japanese authorities responded harshly with over 40,000 demonstrators arrested and over 7,000 killed.¹⁴

Despite the harshness of the results, the March First Movement succeeded in instilling a stronger sense of Korean nationalism and desire for independence. Korean nationalist exiles gathered in Shanghai and chose Syngman Rhee as the president of the Provisional Republic of Korea.¹⁵ The independence movement now had some vitality with the help of Chinese patronage. The Japanese, who were now more aware of the anti-colonial sentiments that lay beneath the surface, adopted a more moderate tone to their governing. The Japanese also began to lean on Korea economically to help feed

¹³ Elizabeth Perry, *Lecture to Government 1280 class* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University), September 30, 2003.

¹⁴ Richard Devine, "Japanese Rule in Korea after the March First Uprising," *Monumenta Nipponica*, Winter, 1997. Accessed October 9, 2003. Available from Jstor.

¹⁵ David Brudnoy, "Japan's Experiment in Korea," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 1970. Accessed October 9, 2003. Available from Jstor.

their growing population and fuel their wartime economy-which began in earnest with the Japanese occupation of the Chinese region of Manchuria.

By 1937 the Japanese had launched a full scale war on China to occupy large parts of the country. The nationalist KMT headed by Chiang was ill-suited to fight the Japanese imperial army. The Japanese made full use of Korean men for their military and of Korean resources to fuel the armed aggression.

At the same time Korean independence activities continued to rise. Tenant disputes, labor struggles, the creation of student organizations and of the Communist Party, and other such events and campaigns came to symbolize the Korean nationalist movement in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁶ Armed action against the Japanese imperial army also came into being with several groups participating. This included the KMT backed United Association of Movements for the Revival of Korea and the communist Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army of Kim Il Sung.¹⁷ Because the Northeast Anti-Japanese Army was based out of Manchuria, where most Koreans outside of Korea resided, this rebel force proved to be the most effective. Many Koreans in Manchuria were forced out of Korea and therefore their anti-Japanese feelings were very intense. Consequently, this group kept up a constant stream of armed raids against imperial forces in Korea and provoked numerous disturbances.¹⁸ This would go on until Korea's liberation following the Second World War.

¹⁶ Hatada, 128.

¹⁷ Dae Sook Suh, *The Korean Communist Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 253-265.

¹⁸ Anthony Coogan, "Northeast China and the Origins of the Anti-Japanese United Front," *Modern China*, July, 1994. Accessed October 9, 2003. Available from Jstor.

The Chinese and the North Koreans during the Cold War

The Korean War

Following the defeat of the Japanese in World War II the Soviet Union and the United States agreed to jointly accept the surrender of Japanese troops that were occupying the Korean peninsula--with the Soviet Union accepting the surrender north of the 38th parallel and the United States accepting the surrender in the south. Unfortunately this would set the stage for the tragic division of the Korean peninsula that continues to this day.

It was also during this time that mainland China exploded into civil war between the nationalist KMT and the Chinese communists. While Kim Il Sung and his communist faction struggled for power in Soviet occupied North Korea, his armed force provided assistance to the CCP army. It was reported that the CCP and North Korea signed a mutual assistance pact in the summer of 1946. The Koreans supplied food and clothing to CCP elements that were forced into North Korea and in March and April of 1947 there was a large transfer of North Korean troops into China to help the CCP in the northern part of the country.¹⁹ This assistance on the part of Kim Il Sung's Korean communists was one of the many reasons that Mao would later intervene in the Korean war on the side of North Korea after Mao's ascension in 1949.

The situation on the peninsula following the occupation by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. was one of constant tension. While Kim Il Sung continued to consolidate power in the north with the Soviet Union and China providing economic and military assistance

¹⁹ Simmons, 31-32.

the south elected the Syngman Rhee as its president.²⁰ However, South Korea began to experience problems of stability that were partly exacerbated by Rhee's questionable decision making and by the Americans' questionable commitment to the survival of the regime.²¹ The south faced a number of revolts (some of which were encouraged by local communists under the control of North Korea), including a large uprising on the island of Cheju, with many of them brutally repressed by the Rhee government. Some of the revolts were caused by economic problems with South Korea suffering through endemic inflation and unemployment. There were many armed provocations across the border between the two sides with the Rhee government ordering one of the most audacious raids by attacking a North Korean naval base and destroying a number of ships.²²

While the Soviet Union carried a strong influence in Pyongyang, the Chinese, because of historical, ideological, and ethnic ties had a strong voice in North Korean affairs as well. It was the position of the CCP that the communist bloc had an obligation to support communist/socialist movements everywhere--with China placing special emphasis on Asia. As a result, the Chinese continued to lend its support to Pyongyang throughout the ratcheting up of tensions between North and South Korea.

On January 12, 1950 (less than six months after the withdrawal of the remaining U.S. soldiers) the U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson stated that the Korean peninsula was outside of the American security umbrella. This was thought, unintentionally, to embolden the North Koreans who continued to engage in border incidents with the South

²⁰ Peter Lowe, *The Korean War* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 2000), 13.

²¹ The United States began pulling out of the south in the late 1940's with some officials believing that South Korea was a strategic liability and that the South Korean army was reasonably well trained.

²² John Merrill, *The Origins of the Korean War Revisited* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, Korea Institute), October 2, 2003.

Korean military. On June 25 North Korea invaded the Republic of Korea (ROK) without warning.

The Chinese were broadly supportive of the move by the North Koreans and saw it as a means in which to further the cause of communist revolution in East Asia. However, as Chen Jian had outlined, the crisis on the peninsula threatened the national interest of China in several ways--especially after the United States intervened. To begin with, the war threatened China's territorial integrity. China had a large concentration of heavy industry in the Northeast which was threatened by the fighting that occurred just across the border. The outbreak of war in Korea also diverted Chinese resources away from the Taiwan dilemma.²³ This was an especially important consideration in Beijing's point of view as the CCP had just completed the takeover of the mainland and the existence of the KMT just across the Taiwan Straits, which was within striking distance of Fujian province, was a continuing threat to communist rule in China.

The Korean War also provided opportunities for the Chinese. Though the Sino-Soviet split had not yet occurred, this war gave the Chinese an opportunity to stake a claim to leadership in the communist world. Mao had placed repeated emphasis on restoring China's central role in international politics and intervening in Korea would allow his regime to stake a claim to this sort of centrality. On the domestic side Mao believed that assisting the North Koreans in the struggle would serve to increase his revolutionary legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese masses. This would in turn spark patriotic fervor and engender a politicized mobilization of the masses. There was also a lingering feeling that Korea was inside of China's sphere of influence and intervening in the Korean War would reestablish Chinese dominance on the peninsula.

²³ Chen Jian, *Mao's China* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 87.

Soon after the start of hostilities China began preparations for intervening in Korea. By mid-July a Northeast Border Defense Army was created and by early August, 260,000 Chinese troops were stationed on the Chinese-Korean border.²⁴ A large propaganda campaign that was dubbed “Great Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea” was begun. This campaign allowed Mao to continue his efforts at national unity as well as prepare the Chinese population for a potentially large number of casualties and diverted resources.²⁵ The CCP also headed a domestic political purge at this time. Even with all of these preparations the Chinese were hesitant about entering the conflict with some CCP officials arguing that the resources would be better spent on China’s economic development. There was uncertainty as well over how much support they could count on from Stalin’s Soviet Union.

The strategic calculus was dramatically changed after the landing of American troops at Inchon on September 15, 1950. The landing engendered a strong northward march by the American-ROK led UN forces up to the Yalu River near the Chinese border. With Chinese territorial security threatened the pressure on Mao to enter the war became more intense.²⁶ In November the Chinese emphatically entered the Korean War with several hundred thousands troops led by Peng Dehuai. Initially the military gains by the combined Chinese-North Korean forces were impressive and within a short time frame they had regained much of the lost territory.

In the early stages of the Chinese intervention some attempts were made at inducing the parties to agree to a ceasefire. One of these initiatives was headed by the

²⁴ Chen, 88.

²⁵ Michael H. Hunt, “Beijing and the Korean Crisis, June 1950-June 1951,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Autumn 1992. Accessed October 13, 2003. Available from Jstor.

²⁶ Chen Jian, *China’s Road to the Korean War* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), ch. 6.

Indians.²⁷ The Chinese, confident of victory, rejected these overtures. By contrast Peng Dehuai began to exhibit concerns about the Chinese future offensive capabilities because of logistical problems and the lack of air support.²⁸ Mao rebuffed these concerns and urged the continual Chinese/North Korean advance.

On January 11, the United Nations cease-fire group came up with a broad outline for stopping the Korean War which included: an immediate cease-fire, the gradual withdrawal of foreign troops from Korea, and a meeting between the USSR, the U.S., the U.K., and China which would address the Taiwan issue and PRC representation in the UN.²⁹ The Chinese who were taking on huge casualties at this point and had overextended their supply lines again rejected this proposal despite the favorable terms. Mao was still confident about the military position of his troops and there was also pressure on the part of the North Koreans who were insistent that the combined forces continue their southward march.

Rejecting the ceasefire would later prove to be a mistake for the Chinese. After a series of offensives and counteroffensives by both sides it became apparent by early 1951 that the Korean War would be prolonged. At this point it became apparent that Beijing would have to take the offer of negotiations much more seriously.

It would be useful now to consider why Beijing was so strident in its approach to the Korean War and dealing with the American-led United Nations forces.

To begin with, Peng Dehuai's concerns notwithstanding, Mao felt confident about the prospects for victory. The Chinese had numerically superior forces on the

²⁷ William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 140-141.

²⁸ Chen, 92.

²⁹ Stueck, 152-154.

battleground, were much more familiar with the terrain, and believed that the morale of the Chinese troops were higher. Perhaps Mao also had an overabundance of confidence in his own abilities to manage the Korean conflict, which incidentally came on the heels of his takeover of the mainland.

At the same time one should not overlook the Chinese desire for influence on the peninsula. As recounted above, Korea had traditionally been in the Chinese sphere of influence. Prior to the Korean War, Kim Il Sung consolidated his authority in North Korea with the backing of the Soviet Union. The Soviets then proceeded to provide technical and military assistance to the regime in Pyongyang. What then occurred was a tug of war between Moscow and Beijing over the allegiance of Pyongyang. When Stalin refused to provide the Chinese with specific assurances of support--especially air support--the Chinese were, as to be expected, disappointed. But this was also an opportunity for the Chinese to claim some moral authority in the communist world as well as reassert its interests on the Korean peninsula.

When the negotiations began, the Chinese again were optimistic that a resolution of the war could be obtained quickly on the bargaining table. The Chinese at this time had also come to the conclusion that a complete victory would not be possible. Though Mao was concerned at the effects that a less than total victory would have on his propaganda efforts at home, the fact that China had pushed the UN forces from the Yalu River to back over the 38th parallel would allow him to claim victory. Another consideration was that mounting Chinese casualties and the war's drain on Chinese resources was becoming a political liability. The North Koreans believed that a total military victory should remain the objective--though they gradually came to the

conclusion that an armistice obtained through negotiations was the best route after consultations with Moscow.

The negotiations immediately hit a snag over the issue of POWs. To the North Koreans and the Chinese this was not expected to be an obstacle and they believed that a simple exchange of prisoners would suffice to end this matter. But the war would continue on for another fruitless year and a half because of this issue. The United Nations had a greater number of POWs and a number of them did not want to return to their communist led homelands. The Chinese and the North Koreans continued to insist on a full repatriation of all soldiers. Eventually an exchange of sick and wounded POWs led to a full agreement on the exchange of prisoners that involved the screening of non-repatriates by the North Koreans and the Chinese.³⁰

The resolution of the POW issue allowed the North Koreans, the Chinese, and the United Nations to come to an agreement on an armistice on July 27, 1953. This agreement set the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) at the 38th parallel, allowed for an exchange of POWs and brought an end to the military operations on the peninsula. Though the North Koreans did not achieve their objective of unification, the provocations on both sides of the North-South divide declined. The Chinese meanwhile achieved very little in their initial agenda but were able to mobilize the Chinese population in support of the young CCP government and to re-exert their influence on the peninsula. Whether this new found influence allowed the Chinese to have political control over Pyongyang would be answered somewhat in the ensuing three decades.

³⁰ Steven Hugh Lee, *The Korean War* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 93-95.

Evolution of the Relationship Through the 1980s

The situation at the end of the Korean War was not good for either North Korea or China. Both economies were devastated and many men of prime working age were lost on the battlefields of the Korean peninsula. In the aftermath of the Korean War there were numerous stories in the North Korean and Chinese state controlled medias of the heroic efforts of the Chinese soldiers. Kim Il Sung wrote in the People's Daily on September 26, 1959: "Under the difficult conditions of the war they helped our farmers till and seed our land and harvest. Braving the savage air raids of the U.S. imperialists, they saved the lives and properties of countless Koreans."³¹ It was obvious to the casual observer that North Korean-Chinese relations were greatly deepened by the Chinese intervention in the Korean conflict. The bonds were deepened by the economic assistance that the Chinese gave to the North Koreans to help in economic reconstruction after the war.

However, this economic assistance was matched by the Soviet Union who was a competitor for influence on the peninsula. Though the Soviet Union had dominated North Korea in the post-World War II period up to 1950 the Chinese assistance had, by the late 1950's, established an equilibrium between Beijing's and Moscow's influence over Pyongyang. The similarity in the economic situations between North Korea and China led to North Korea imitating Chinese economic policies at the start of China's "Great Leap Forward."³² But Kim believed that maintaining cordial relations with

³¹ Byung Chul Koh, *The Foreign Policy of North Korea* (New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1969), 44.

³² Chin-Wee Chung, "North Korea's Relations with China," in *The Foreign Relations of North Korea, New Perspectives*, eds. Jae Kyu Park, Byung Chol Koh, and Tae-Hwan Kwak (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 170.

Beijing and Moscow was necessary and as a result Pyongyang played a neutral role at the outset of the Sino-Soviet split.

The Sino-Soviet split came about for a variety of reasons including disputes over nuclear assistance, the nature of de-Stalinization, and leadership in the communist world. This fracture between the two predominant communist powers offered Kim opportunities to enhance his new country's security. In addition to political support for his regime, and increased economic assistance to subsidize the economy, North Korea signed security treaties with both the Soviet Union and communist China in July 1961.³³ As the Chinese and Soviet camps continued their efforts to gain influence in the communist world in the early 1960s, the North Koreans began to lean towards the Chinese side. By the time Khrushchev was deposed in October 1964 North Korea was firmly ensconced in the Chinese camp. There were a variety of reasons for North Korea's decision to do so. Among them was the similar attitude towards revolutionary development in Beijing and Pyongyang. North Korea took a hardline stance towards both imperialism and "revisionism"--the term used by the Chinese to describe the Soviets. The North Koreans and the Chinese believed that supporting nationalist/socialist revolutions in the third world was vital to defeating imperialism, while the Soviet Union's "peaceful coexistence" strategy was defeatist in nature.³⁴ This revolutionary development also extended in the domestic sphere where both the North Koreans and the Chinese opposed the de-Stalinization campaign in Moscow.³⁵ The Chinese and Korean shared cultural heritage also played a role.

³³ Chin O. Chung, *Pyongyang Between Peking and Moscow: North Korea's Involvement in the Sino-Soviet Dispute, 1958-1975* (University, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1978), 55-60.

³⁴ William E. Griffith, *The Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1964), 191-192.

³⁵ Chin Wee Chung, 173.

With the start of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese began to focus more on internal development while recklessly attacking nations that had formally been allies. North Korea was no different. A warming of relations between Pyongyang and Moscow in the mid-1960s--which occurred around the start of the Cultural Revolution--brought on invectives from the Chinese. A China that had become destitute following the Great Leap Forward and that was still saddled with a technologically backward military that lacked nuclear weapons, was not able to provide North Korea the assurances that it needed in case it became involved in another war with the United States. The Chinese reacted to North Korea's new stance by calling Kim a "fat revisionist" and in the volatile summer of 1967 a number of CCP and Red Guard officials called for the ouster of the North Korean regime.³⁶ North Korea responded with criticisms of China's foreign policy. At the same time it worked hard to maintain a semblance of cordial relations.

With the most intense phase of the Cultural Revolution having ended by 1969 the North Koreans began to shift once more to Mao's side. The Soviet Union's economy was in decline while the United States shifted the international strategic balance in favor of China by beginning a process of rapprochement between Beijing and Washington. Though North Korea more or less kept balanced relations with the two communist powers it kept a slight tilt in favor of Beijing. This tilt was deepened by the energy shortage crisis of the 1970's when Beijing sent one million tons of oil while the Soviet Union demanded a higher price for its petroleum exports.³⁷ This period of warm relations would continue through the end of the Maoist era in 1978 though North Korea maintained relations with the Soviets.

³⁶ Chin Wee Chung, 178.

³⁷ David Rees, "North Korea: Undermining the Truce," *Conflict Studies*, no. 69 (March 1976): 12.

As an observer of North Korean international strategy can see, Pyongyang was able to skillfully dart from Moscow to Beijing and back again for the better part of three decades. This resulted in the maximum security that was possible for the regime while providing an infusion of socialist subsidization of North Korean industrialization. For China the gains were less dramatic. However, by reacquiring influence on the Korean peninsula, China was able to stake a claim to great power status.

The ascension of Deng Xiaoping created a new dynamic in North Korean-Chinese relations. Coming out of the disastrous Maoist era, mainland China was destitute. Deng turned his attention to the economic restructuring of China. To do this, he employed capitalist style reforms. Deng also propagated a less belligerent foreign policy and dramatically improved relations with North Korea's arch enemies, the United States and Japan. This policy turnaround during Deng's early years as China's leader displeased the Kim regime immensely, who believed that China's rapprochement with the West and the abandonment of Maoist style economic policy would hurt Pyongyang's influence in Beijing.³⁸ North Korea, with its Juche principles and its continued insistence on ideological struggle, was now seen by the Deng clique as out of step with China's needs. The continuing Chinese aid in the form of economic assistance and military hardware to North Korea ensured that North Korea did not go out of its way to offend Beijing at the outset of the Deng era though. With economic difficulties in the Soviet Union becoming readily apparent, Kim Il Sung knew that Moscow could only go so far in funding the maintenance of his regime. With that said, the Sino-Soviet split ensured that Kim was able to continue to play Beijing and Moscow off of each other.

³⁸ Norman D. Levin, "Evolving Chinese and Soviet Policies Toward the Korean Peninsula," in *Chinese Defense and Foreign Policy*, eds. June Teufel Dreyer and Ilpyong J. Kim (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1988), 190.

As the decade wore on, differences between the two partners started to become more apparent. In some cases, the North Koreans became more of a nuisance and a drag on China's surging ambitions in the region.

The Chinese need to maintain a stable regional atmosphere to enhance its economic development was jeopardized by the actions of North Korea. For instance, North Korean terrorism in the form of the Rangoon bombing incident in 1983 and the bombing of a South Korean airliner in 1987 (both of which were apparently orchestrated by the present North Korean leader Kim Jong Il) contributed to a heightening of tensions on the peninsula and in the region more generally. This threatened the Chinese national interest and as such they were displeased with these incidents.

It was also apparent by this time that North Korea's rival-South Korea-had surpassed them in the economic competition. North Korea's introverted economic policy was of little use to Beijing's economic development. In fact, the faltering North Korean economy became more a drag on Chinese finances, as the Chinese continued to provide financial aid, so as to ward off Soviet influence and keep its ally afloat. Increasingly, the capital rich South Korean market economy and its ability to produce inexpensive consumer goods looked attractive to the Chinese leadership when compared with North Korean theatrics.³⁹

There was also an increase in official South Korean-Chinese contacts which unnerved the DPRK as well. Beginning in 1981 Chinese diplomats were allowed to interact with South Korean diplomats at international gatherings in other countries.⁴⁰

³⁹ "A Shrimp among Whales, Kim Keeps a Fine Balance," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 26, 1986, 43.

⁴⁰ *Korea Herald*, June 11, 1983.

There was also a corresponding increase in athletic participation in major sporting events that took place in both South Korea and China.

So as the 1980s progressed the strategic influence of North Korea began to lessen in Beijing while there was a corresponding increase in the influence of Seoul. The South Korean capital market looked increasingly attractive to an investment hungry Chinese mainland. North Korea still maintained some relevance to the Chinese as Pyongyang remained China's main conduit for influence on the peninsula. That said there was a growing sense that the North Koreans needed the Chinese more than the Chinese needed the North Koreans. In addition, in 1989 there was a Sino-Soviet rapprochement which lessened the need for competition between the two powers for Pyongyang's allegiance.

Turning Point: Establishment of Relations Between the PRC and the ROK

For much of the twentieth century there were no relations between South Korea and mainland China. During the period of Japanese colonization of Korea, Beijing and Tokyo were at odds while the Koreans were isolated from their Chinese cultural brethren. When the communists took power in China and South Korea came under the influence of the Americans, it was impossible for the two to establish relations as Mao became increasingly close to his ideological counterpart Kim Il Sung.

As a result, as the two nations became closer during the 1980s there was a genuine excitement at the possibility of cooperation between the ROK and the PRC. Though this concerned Pyongyang--especially in the wake of the Soviet Union's own recognition of the ROK in September 1990 and the Russian withdrawal of economic assistance after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991--North Korea endeavored to enter into a limited dialogue with South Korea as it realized that the communist powers

were choosing a dual track approach to peninsula tensions. This dialogue culminated in the December 1991 Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula which committed both nations to keep nuclear weapons out of Korea.⁴¹ For a while it seemed as if real progress would be made toward reducing tensions between North and South Korea. The North was forced into this dialogue in a sense because of its declining security situation with the collapse of the communist world and China's modernization campaign increasingly calling into question the relevance of the North's existence.⁴² The North in spite of the sea changes that were taking place all around it, still held firm to its policy of extreme self-reliance despite the lack of aid that was now coming in to support this system and evidence that the system was imploding.

In 1991 a key event in Chinese-South Korean relations came in the chambers of the United Nations when China, as a permanent member of the Security Council, refused to veto Seoul's application to join the General Assembly despite Pyongyang's vehement opposition. This was the strongest hint yet that China was willing to engage in a two Koreas policy. The North for its part applied to the UN the same year. In November 1991 China sent a foreign minister to Seoul for an Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting.

Throughout the normalization negotiations in 1992 between Seoul and Beijing, CCP leaders kept their North Korean counterparts informed so as not to offend their political/military ally.⁴³ However, the Chinese probably concluded that even if Pyongyang became offended, that the benefits of possible future ROK-PRC economic

⁴¹ Jia Hao and Zhuang Qubing, "China's Policy Toward North Korea," *Asian Survey*, December 1992. Accessed October 23, 2003. Available from Jstor.

⁴² Ilpyong J. Kim, "China in North Korean Foreign Policy," in *North Korean Foreign Relations*, ed. Samuel S. Kim (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1998), 100.

⁴³ Russell Ong, *China's Security Interests in the Post-Cold War Era* (London: Curzon Press, 2002) 61.

cooperation agreements and the chance to further check U.S. and Japanese influence on the peninsula offset the risks of North Korean anger.

The normalization process was also a key component to China's efforts to stabilize the Korean peninsula so as to allow Beijing to concentrate more fully on economic development and international trade. China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was growing at around ten percent a year with many foreign investors coming in to take advantage of its cheap labor and potentially large consumer market. With that in mind, North Korea's provocations and continued denunciations of its rival across the DMZ caused many experts to worry about the inherent stability or instability of the region. Such a negative forecast did not bode well for China's economic development, especially since it had a large industrial capacity near its border in North Korea, and a conflagration between the two Koreas threatened that base. In many ways North Korea was outliving its usefulness to the Chinese.

On August 24, 1992 Seoul and Beijing concluded the agreement on the normalization of diplomatic relations. As part of this accord the ROK agreed to withdraw diplomatic recognition of China's main enemy, the Nationalist led island of Taiwan. North Korea, though it could see the writing on the wall, was nonetheless disappointed with the developments. Within the space of less than half a decade it saw its influence dramatically decline. South Korea meanwhile was excited about the prospects for renewed cooperation with their former "big brother." The South Korean economy was expanding rapidly and along with this dynamic economy came power and the ability to influence the geopolitical events of the region. The normalization of relations with Beijing was the starkest example of this new found influence.

Post-Cold War Overview of North Korea/China Relationship

The 1990's and the First Nuclear Crisis

One should note that even though North Korea had become a nuisance in some ways, it was still relevant to the Chinese. But much of this relevance came in a negative form. For instance, it was through North Korea's erratic behavior and China's claims that it could modify this unpredictability that China could claim influence in the region.⁴⁴ North Korea's collapsing economy and its potential to cause a huge outflow of Korean refugees across the country's porous northern border with China meant that China stayed engaged in its neighbor's economy with aid and trade to keep it afloat. In the area of trade, we see that from 1990 to 1992 there was an increase in the value of the trade volume from \$483 million to \$696 million reflecting the fact that the negative event of ROK-PRC normalization did not prevent a positive turn in trade relations.⁴⁵ According to reports China promised North Korea in November 1990 to deliver \$150 million dollars in aid over the next five years-mostly in the form of food and oil.⁴⁶ This was a reflection of the fact that the North needed more basic items to continue to have a functioning economy. North Korea's industrial production was declining, Soviet assistance had disappeared, and its international trade was shrinking. According to the Korea Trade and Investment Protection Agency, North Korea's economy contracted by an average of 4.4% between 1990 and 1992.⁴⁷ Without any funds to sustain its economy, the misery of the

⁴⁴ Ong, 71-72.

⁴⁵ Chae-jin Lee, *China and Korea: Dynamic Relations* (Stanford: Hoover Press, 1996), 140 & 146.

⁴⁶ Library of Congress, Country Studies, *North Korea, Economic Assistance* (accessed November 18, 2003); available from <http://countrystudies.us/north-korea/54.htm>.

⁴⁷ Korea Trade and Investment Protection Agency, *North Korean Economy* (accessed March 15, 2004); available from <http://www.kotra.co.kr>.

North Korean people expanded exponentially at the outset of the 1990s. This all added up to more instability on the Korean peninsula.

However, China's ability to influence North Korea after August 1992 came under question. In the aftermath of China's decision to normalize relations with South Korea, North Korea decided to limit political and cultural contacts with the Chinese. The North Koreans even came up with a "black list" of Chinese officials who were considered pro-Seoul.⁴⁸ But, relations did start a turnaround in 1993 because of North Korea's continuing dependence on Chinese benevolence and China's skillful diplomacy. In July 1993, China sent Hu Jintao, the designated leader of the CCP's "Fourth Generation" of leaders, and Defense Minister Chi Haotian to Pyongyang to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Korean Armistice Agreement. Hu, in a speech commemorating the occasion, stated that the Korean War was a "great and just war against the aggressors."⁴⁹ Later on, Hu and Chi met with Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il.

As we can see, despite the temporary downslide in North Korean-Chinese relations at the outset of the 1990's--partly because of the PRC-ROK normalization--there was a recovery of goodwill between the two parties. This was in large measure due to North Korea's continuing dependence on China. By this time, there had also been a fundamental reorienting of the relationship. In the midst of the Cold War, North Korea held the advantage in the partnership because of Soviet-Chinese competition. Since the "opening" of China in 1978, however, the advantage had swung in the direction of China--which presumably has hurt North Korean pride. By this point, one can say that there was a general downward trajectory in North Korean-Chinese relations. This was

⁴⁸ Chae-Jin Lee, "China and North Korea: An Uncertain Relationship," in *North Korea After Kim Il Sung*, eds. Dae-Sook Suh and Chae-Jin Lee (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 194.

⁴⁹ Lee, 195.

reflected in trade figures between the two nations. While Chinese-South Korean trade rose to \$16.5 billion a year by 1995, trade with North Korea decreased to \$550 million. At the same time the North Korean dependency was reflected by the fact that the above trade figure represented one third of their total foreign trade.⁵⁰

North Korea underwent an uncertain period of change following Kim Il Sung's death. Very little was known about his son and successor, Kim Jong Il. It did not help matters much that the younger Kim had largely stayed out of the spotlight during his father's rule. As Chae-Jin Lee states in his essay, "China and North Korea: An Uncertain Relationship," Kim's death provided the Chinese with an opportunity to construct a more normalized relationship.⁵¹ During the elder Kim's reign, the Chinese had been inhibited from more fully taking their national interests into account vis-à-vis the North Koreans, because of the deep personal ties that Kim had cultivated with the CCP. It was also hoped that the North Koreans under the younger Kim would show more moderation in its economic policy and foreign affairs, especially with respect to China's new economic ally, South Korea.

Those hopes were dashed in March of 1993 when North Korea announced its intentions to withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Though this was in violation of North Korea's earlier North-South Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula with South Korea, North Korea claimed that it was unfair for superpower states such as the United States and Russia to claim a monopoly on nuclear weapons. Prior to North Korea's decision, it had repeatedly rebuffed efforts by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to conduct

⁵⁰ Chong-Sik Lee, *The Political Economy of North Korea* (Seattle, Wash.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 1994).

⁵¹ Chae-Jin Lee, 196.

inspections in North Korea-especially at its nuclear plant in Yongbyon. Predictably North Korea's decision provoked a crisis with the United States. For many American policymakers North Korea's actions provided a quandary. There was a segment within this community that did not want to provide North Korea with any kind of reward for their actions. To do so they believed would embolden North Korea to take further actions in the direction of nuclear weapons development so as to extort more concessions from the international community. Another camp maintained that given the lack of better alternatives accommodating some of North Korea's needs was preferable to the dangerous alternatives that awaited. The United Nations threatened economic sanctions if North Korea did not allow in IAEA inspectors.

The Clinton administration had made the decision, in cooperation with the South Koreans, to talk with the North Koreans to induce them to abandon their nuclear armament plans. The South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sung Joo met with three U.S. cabinet officials on March 29, 1993: Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, and National Security Advisor Anthony Lake. The parties agreed on a carrot and stick approach to North Korea. Han said, "The threat of sanctions plus certain face-saving inducements will help them comply."⁵² On April 1, the IAEA declared the DPRK in violation of its safeguards agreement. One of the five countries that voted against this act was China. In order for the United States to get UN Security Council cooperation to impose sanctions on North Korea it would need the support of China, one of the five veto bearing members of the body. In a column in the *Washington Post*, Jim Hoagland reported that on March 22, a Clinton administration official had

⁵² Douglas Jehl, "Seoul Eases Stand on Nuclear Inspections of North," *New York Times*, March 30, 1993. Accessed October 29, 2003. Available from LexisNexis.

heard from Japanese officials that China was interested in helping the U.S. solve the dispute.⁵³ For the Chinese this crisis provided an opportunity for it to more clearly demonstrate to the outside world its desire to be a responsible and respected actor in the international community.

The Chinese had a variety of reasons for wanting to intervene in the nuclear crisis. The CCP, mindful of Japanese insecurity over North Korea's military ambitions and Japan's own past military adventures, wanted to keep Pyongyang from provoking Tokyo into making its own nuclear weapons. China wanted to persuade the United States to renew its favorable trading privileges (most favored nation or "MFN") through its assistance in the North Korean matter.⁵⁴ However, China differed on the carrots and sticks approach--favoring more carrots than sticks. The reason for this was that China was concerned about destabilizing its neighbor and did not want to cut off its economic assistance, which came in the form of oil, food, and medicines. A North Korea that suddenly started to collapse would send hundreds of thousands of refugees across the border into northern China. This was something that the still developing PRC could ill afford. China also wanted to demonstrate to their North Korean communist brethren that it still valued them as allies.

The result was a Chinese strategy that reflected a balance between forcing North Korea to abandon its nuclear plans while still maintaining amicable relations with its old ally. On May 11, 1993 China abstained from a Security Council resolution that urged North Korea to comply with its NPT and IAEA agreements. China blocked another U.S.

⁵³ Jim Hoagland, "China Policy: Back to Bush?" *Washington Post*, April 1, 1993. Accessed October 29, 2003. Available from LexisNexis.

⁵⁴ Leon V. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers, Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 57.

sponsored resolution on March 31, 1994 in the UN Security Council that urged Pyongyang to allow IAEA inspections and renew discussions with South Korea on implementing their denuclearization agreement.⁵⁵ While consulting with the United States, Japan, and South Korea, and protecting North Korea's interests in the UN and the IAEA, Chinese diplomats were urging the North Koreans to cooperate with the IAEA. The Chinese were also trying to facilitate dialogue between the North Koreans and the Americans in New York and Geneva.

In May and June of 1994 the nuclear crisis reached a breaking point. The Clinton administration was pushing the UN to implement a series of sanctions against Pyongyang and there was even talk of a military strike on Yongbyon. This forced the Chinese into a more active diplomatic role.⁵⁶ When Marshall Ch'oe Kwang, chief of the general staff of the Korean People's Army (KPA), went to Beijing on an official visit in June 1994, Chinese government officials attempted to persuade Marshall Ch'oe to moderate his government's position. In the UN the Chinese changed their position from "opposing economic sanctions" against North Korea to "not favoring economic sanctions," which indicated that the Chinese would not veto a UN sanctions resolution.⁵⁷ This move was important to getting the North Koreans to seriously negotiate and compromise on its hardline positions and helped lead to a breakthrough when former President Jimmy Carter met with Kim Il Sung in June 1994 in Pyongyang. Despite Kim's death in July, on October 21, 1994 the United States and North Korea reached an agreement on nuclear development and inspections in Geneva.

⁵⁵ David E. Sanger, "North Korea Rejects U.N.'s Call For Full Inspection of A-Plants," *New York Times*, April 5, 1994. Accessed October 30, 2003. Available from LexisNexis.

⁵⁶ Chae-Jin Lee, 202.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

Though the Chinese played a minor role in the 1994 North Korean nuclear crisis, it was a pivotal player nonetheless. Despite the fact that Chinese influence had declined relatively, compared with relations at the height of the Cold War, the fact that North Korea continued to rely on China for economic assistance and as a connection to the outside world meant that Beijing could still exert its influence on the peninsula in these areas. One can say that China's continued contact with the North Korean government at this point served dual purposes. One was that with the North Korean economy faltering Chinese assistance prevented complete mass starvation and millions of refugees from flowing across the border. Another was that keeping in contact with North Korea increased China's usefulness to the international community, as China--through its diplomatic contacts and economic assistance--was able to modify Pyongyang's behavior to the benefit of the international community.

North Korean dependence on Chinese benevolence was only heightened in the latter half of the 1990's as the country went through a massive famine. According to a study by Daniel Goodkind and Loraine West at the International Center of U.S. Census Bureau, 600,000-1,000,000 North Koreans died from 1995-2000 due to starvation and malnourishment.⁵⁸ China allowed food shipments to decline and rise depending on its views of North Korean actions. Because of this, according to some sources, China partly brought on the famine.⁵⁹

The other signature event of North Korean-Chinese relations in the 1990s was the attempt to create a permanent peace treaty between North and South Korea. The talks,

⁵⁸ Daniel Goodkind and Loraine West, "The North Korean Famine and Its Demographic Impact," *Population and Development Review* 27, no. 2 (2001): 219-238.

⁵⁹ Melinda Liu, MSNBC, Newsweek International Edition, *A Bitter Friendship*, August 25-September 1 (accessed October 30, 2003); available from: <http://stacks.msnbc.com/news/953559.asp?cp1=1#BODY>.

which were proposed by Washington and Seoul in April 1996 and began in December 1997, included China in deference to its historical partnership with the North Koreans.⁶⁰ The talks however, eventually fizzled out without much being accomplished.

Economic Reforms, the Summit, and the Second Nuclear Crisis

As has been established there was a downward trend in the level of positive and negative interactions between North Korea and China. Much of North Korea's continued relevance to China had to do with negative factors. This included: North Korean hunger and the faltering economy, North Korean refugees, and North Korean unpredictability and China's ability to modify this unpredictability. In spite of the downward trend in positive interactions between the two countries, China still had influence over North Korea because of the negative factors stated above.

Indeed, China began to encourage North Korea to take efforts to reform and revive its economy. Though the Kim Il Sung regime inaugurated the Rajin-Sonbong free trade zone in 1991, this supposedly capitalist enclave did not have a transforming effect on the Stalinist economy. In a visit to China in late May of 2000 Kim Jong Il was able to meet with Chinese leader Jiang Zemin and view Chinese economic progress first hand. Beijing Radio reported that Kim viewed the Chinese economic reforms as a success and as a model for development. The North Korean leader also toured an information technology complex, dubbed Silicon Valley China⁶¹ By July of 2002 North Korea China's prodding began to pay off with Kim lifting some price controls and allowing

⁶⁰ "Prospect of four-party talks bleak," *United Press International*, August 9, 1999. Accessed October 30, 2003. Available from Infotrac.

⁶¹ "Will Kim Jong-il Become 'Deng Xiaoping?'" *Korea Times*, June 5, 2000. Accessed October 31, 2003. Available from LexisNexis.

private business activities.⁶² In addition, the North Korean government began leasing state-run businesses, including stores, restaurants and hotels, to individuals. The North Korean government was said to have transferred a large extent of the state's pricing power to private businesses and individuals except for rice and other basic farm products

However, Pyongyang's economic reforms were halted to some extent when China arrested millionaire businessman Yang Bin in October 2002 for tax evasion. Yang was slated to govern North Korea's new capitalist enclave on the Chinese border. He was to be Chief Executive of a free-trade zone with its own laws and elections. The project was meant to lure modern industry to the communist country. It was believed that China was showing its displeasure with the North over the lack of consultation between the two sides on this venture.⁶³ Despite the setback that the arrest of Yang Bin might have had on North Korea's efforts at economic reform, one must also consider the fact that Yang owed the Chinese government millions of dollars in back taxes. North Korea's efforts at economic reforms must also be seen in a broader picture with respect to North Korean/Chinese relations at this time. A good example of this is the North-South summit meeting in 2000.

When Kim Dae Jung of South Korea was elected president he began the "Sunshine Policy" with North Korea--which involved engagement with Pyongyang and a series of exchanges. This led to President Kim being granted an audience with Kim Jong Il in mid-June of 2000. The North-South summit meeting was a momentous occasion in

⁶² "North Korea Eases State Control, Allows Private Businesses – Diplomatic Sources," *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, September 3, 2003. Accessed October 31, 2003. Available from LexisNexis.

⁶³ Michael Schuman, "Nice Hiring, Dear Leader," *Time International*, October 14, 2002. Accessed October 31, 2003. Available from Infotrac.

peninsular relations but it could not have happened without the tacit approval of the Chinese.

When the proposed summit meeting between the two leaders was announced in April 2000, the Chinese foreign ministry immediately made clear its support. When the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Sun Yuxi, was asked to comment on the summit announcement he stated that China welcomed the initiative as a positive step toward unification.⁶⁴ When Kim Jong Il made a secretive visit to Beijing two weeks prior to the North-South summit this was seen as an indication that before any major initiatives were to be undertaken between the ROK and the DPRK that China's acquiescence would be needed. One analyst said: "Most probably, chiefly discussed were sensitive issues such as the establishment of a permanent peace mechanism on the Korean peninsula and Pyongyang's moves toward reforms and openness."⁶⁵ Kim's visit to private Chinese companies was seen as a positive response on the part of North Korea to Seoul's suggestion for economic cooperation. There was also an agreement on a reciprocal visit by Jiang in 2001.

During the North-South summit meeting an agreement was reached that touched upon family reunion visits, economic cooperation, and the easing of tensions between the two sides.

The North Korean attempts at economic reforms and China's encouragement of the North-South summit reflected two new realities. The first new reality was that by

⁶⁴ "FM Spokesman on Korean Peninsula Summit," *Xinhua News Agency*, April 11, 2000. Accessed October 31, 2003. Available on Infotrac. For the Chinese Foreign Minister's reaction see: "Chinese FM Hopes DPRK-ROK Summit A Success," *Xinhua News Agency*, April 27, 2000. Accessed October 31, 2003. Available on Infotrac.

⁶⁵ "N.Korean leader's China visit raises hopes of successful summit," United Press International, June 1, 2000. Accessed October 31, 2003. Available from Infotrac.

normalizing relations with South Korea in 1992 China was able to increase its influence over the whole of the Korean peninsula. With China now having the ability to conduct trade and strike cooperation agreements with the South, the North, isolated by the crumbling of the socialist bloc, became ever more dependent on an ever more reticent China. The second new reality was that China, through its efforts to promote the success of the North-South summit, was attempting to push North Korea away from its dependency on China. In order to effectively maintain its hostile stance against South Korea, North Korea needed China's continuing acquiescence in both political and economic terms. China, by encouraging the North's effort at economic reforms and reconciliation with the South, was attempting to lessen Pyongyang's dependence on the Chinese.

Despite the North's efforts at reducing tensions with the ROK and introducing economic reforms it continued to show its erratic nature through a second nuclear crisis. During a visit by the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly in October of 2002, the Americans confronted their North Korean counterparts with evidence that they had been conspiring to secretly continue a clandestine nuclear weapons program. The North Korean government officials who were present at the talks admitted to this and threatened their American counterparts. The response from the United States was immediate and they abandoned the 1994 Agreed Framework. Initially the North Koreans demanded a bilateral dialogue with the United States over the issue. At first the United States refused to engage in face to face talks with the North Koreans. To do so they argued would be to reward dishonesty in breaking agreements. The Americans also feared that giving in to North Korean demands might embolden future proliferation violators. However, by the

late winter of 2003 criticism against U.S. intransigence began to rise both domestically and abroad. The U.S. then began asking that additional parties had to be brought into any dialogue. The United States requested that one of these parties include a reluctant China.

The Chinese reluctance was understandable. CCP officials believed that they possessed only so much influence over the North Koreans. Chinese foreign ministry officials also believed that by giving in to American requests to participate in talks over the North Korean nuclear program they would be forced into the uncomfortable position of confronting the North over its erratic behavior. Nonetheless, the Chinese eventually gave in to American pressure--with the Americans emphasizing the possibility that a nuclear North Korea could force Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan on the same path. For the Chinese this was another opportunity to demonstrate to the outside world that it was ready to be a responsible player by restraining the North Koreans.

The Chinese agreed to host talks in Beijing in April of 2003 after North Korea indicated that it was ready to give up its insistence on a bilateral format to the talks. At the same time that this was occurring the Chinese were hiking up the pressure on the North Koreans. In March of 2003 the Chinese cut off the supply of oil to North Korea for three days. The Chinese claimed that the shutdown was for technical reasons.⁶⁶ Given the poor state of infrastructure in the region this is entirely possible. However, the analysis given by many observers was that this was a signal from the Chinese that North Korea needed to curb its brinkmanship.

Additional pressure was exerted on the North Koreans when the Chinese moved 150,000 troops to their shared border. These troops replaced the police that were

⁶⁶ Jonathan Watts, "China pressures North Korea by halting vital oil supply," *The Guardian*, April 1, 2003. Accessed November 1, 2003. Available from Jstor.

originally stationed in the area. Though the most plausible reason for the deployment was to stem the flow of refugees across the border, this action sent an unmistakable signal to North Korea about Chinese impatience with their actions. “I think this shows that China is getting more concerned about the overall state of affairs in North Korea and the refugee problem in particular,” said Ma Dingsheng, a Chinese military analyst in Hong Kong. Ma went on to say that the type of troops deployed are similar to the ones that are deployed in restive regions such as Xinjiang.⁶⁷ The units do not have tanks or artillery.

This exertion of pressure on the part of the Chinese was not limited to the North Koreans. The Chinese also exerted pressure on the Americans in defense of the North Korean bargaining position. The talks had grown to include six nations by late summer: China, the U.S., the DPRK, the ROK, Russia, and Japan. The first six nation talks took place in late August. When asked about problems that had arisen during the talks, Wang Yi, China’s chief delegate to the negotiations said, “America’s policy toward the DPRK-- that is the main problem we are facing.”⁶⁸ The belief was that Wang’s remarks reflected Chinese desires to see American negotiating rigidity relaxed. The Chinese wanted a more explicit commitment on the part of the United States to offer the North Koreans a tangible benefit (most likely in the form of some sort of security guarantee) in exchange for Pyongyang’s nuclear disarmament.

⁶⁷ Joseph Kahn, “China Moves Troops to Area Bordering North Korea,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2003.

⁶⁸ Joseph Kahn, “Chinese Aide Says U.S. Is Obstacle in Korean Talks,” *New York Times*, September 1, 2003.

Issues Affecting Relationship between China & North Korea

Refugee Flow

It can be argued that China's main problem issue with North Korea is the flow of North Korean refugees across its porous northern border. This has been at the root of China's efforts to get North Korea to reform its crumbling "Juche" centered economy on more market oriented lines. The refugee problem was also probably at the root of China's deployment of 150,000 troops on its border with North Korea last summer. The flow of refugees into China has been a potential source of instability. Northern China is populated by a large population of ethnic Koreans who abet this refugee flow by providing sanctuary, housing, food, and employment. These Korean-Chinese also assist their ethnic brethren in escaping detection by the Chinese authorities and in securing their departure from China.

For the Chinese, the refugee flow presents a number of problems. The refugee flow represents the threat of demographic problems in the region as mentioned earlier, and by adding North Korean refugees to the mix it could create concerns for Han Chinese officials in the area. The refugees, most of whom are hungry and are coming to China to seek food and employment, add to the social service burdens in the region. Many of the refugees stay with Korean churches and/or Korean service organizations. However, these organizations cannot accommodate all of the Korean refugees and risk state persecution if their activities become known to the authorities.

For the North Koreans the outflow of refugees is both an opportunity and a problem. It is an opportunity for the desperately poor North Korean government since one less refugee equals one less mouth to feed. The refugee flow however, embarrasses

the North Koreans by providing evidence that the “workers paradise” is more myth than reality. The refugees also place a strain on diplomatic ties between the governments-- especially as China has been pressured into allowing some groups of North Koreans to continue on to their desired destination, South Korea.

It is estimated that up to 300,000 North Korean refugees have fled their homeland for China. Some of these refugees have used high profile tactics to escape North Korea through mainland China, embarrassing the authorities in Beijing in the process. In March of 2002, twenty-five North Koreans, posing as tourists, stormed the Spanish embassy in Beijing and demanded asylum. Eventually they were allowed to pass onto South Korea. Many similar embassy stormings occurred throughout 2002 and 2003, causing awkwardness, not only for China and North Korea, but for South Korea as well, which was seeking to reduce tension with their northern neighbor.

Despite China allowing some North Koreans to pass onto South Korea, generally there has been cooperation between Pyongyang and Beijing on this matter. The Chinese have declared the North Koreans to be economic refugees and as such, not eligible for protection normally accorded to asylum seekers. This has meant having the Chinese authorities go around the northern regions to round up Korean refugees for repatriation to the homeland. Though the North Koreans recognize the burden of taking these refugees back, the embarrassment caused by these defections is far greater. The success rate for Korean refugees in escaping this morass is unclear.

The reception for North Korean forced returnees is not pleasant. It is not uncommon for returnees to be executed or forced into prison labor camps as punishment. The labor camps are often described as “gulags.” Soon Ok Lee, a North Korean who

escaped through China following her release from a labor camp, testified before the House Subcommittee on East Asia and the Pacific in May of 2002 on her experiences: “Eighty to ninety prisoners sleep in a flea-infested chamber about six meters long by five meters wide (about nineteen feet by sixteen feet). I had been through all kinds of torture, such as whippings, beatings with rubber bands or hard sticks, and hand twisting with wooden sticks between my ten fingers...”⁶⁹

It was through these unpleasant experiences that pressure has mounted on China to refrain from these forced repatriations. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees declared North Koreans to be refugees in 1999, and therefore eligible for protections normally accorded to refugees. Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas has also pointed out that China was a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention and has not abided by that agreement.⁷⁰ One would expect that these pressures would increase the strain between North Korea and China. This has also caused the Chinese authorities some consternation as they seek to be portrayed as a responsible player on the Korean peninsula and at the same time to preserve their relationship with Pyongyang.

Though there has been some cooperation between Pyongyang and Beijing over the refugee problem, this issue has contributed to negative interactions between the two “allies.” The refugee flow has motivated China into pressuring North Korea to reform its economy. Refugee pressures also caused Beijing to deploy troops onto its border with North Korea. All in all, this changing dynamic does not bode well for North Korean-Chinese relations.

⁶⁹ “Made in North Korea,” *Harper’s Magazine*, November 2002. Accessed November 8, 2003. Available from Infotrac.

⁷⁰ Sam Brownback, U.S. Committee for Refugees, Worldwide Refugee Information, *Mercy in Short Supply* (accessed November 8, 2003); available from http://www.refugees.org/world/articles/mercy_wrs03.htm.

Economic Assistance

Another area where the relationship is evolving is in the amount and kinds of economic assistance that the Chinese offer to North Korea. During the most heated moments of the Cold War and competition between the Soviet Union and China, North Korea received copious amounts of economic assistance to prop up its Juche system and the government. Often this economic assistance was directed to agricultural collectivization, the building up of industry, and the creation of a military industrial complex. Initially much of the assistance came in the form of grants to Pyongyang though later on, loans would predominate the aid packages.

The ability of North Korea to manipulate the struggle between the Soviet Union and China is reflected in the amount of economic assistance that it was able to extract from both powers. As reflected in statistics put together by Jung Mo Kang and the Republic of Korea National Unification Board, from 1950-1960 China gave over 330 million dollars in grants, while providing over 170 million dollars in loans. The Soviet Union exceeded this by providing over 500 million dollars in grants, while providing nearly 200 million dollars in loans during the same timeframe. It was also during this time that the competition over North Korea's allegiance was greatest with the Korean War being fought and terminated and the Sino-Soviet rift beginning. Starting in 1961 the amount of grants being disbursed would decrease to zero while the amounts of loans being provided would also decrease.⁷¹ The amount of loans provided by the USSR and the PRC was each just over 100 million dollars from 1961-1969. There are any number of reasons why there was a decrease in the amount of aid provided. One reason is that

⁷¹ Based on information from Jung Mo Kang, "North Korea's Trade and Economic Cooperation," Seoul, January 1992; and Republic of Korea National Unification Board, *Statistics of North Korean Economy*, Seoul, 1986, various pages.

the Chinese encountered economic difficulties during this time, having just ended the Great Leap Forward and then starting the Cultural Revolution in 1966. In the 1970's this trend continued with no grants and a small amount of loans from both communist powers. This trend was reversed in the 1978-1984 timeframe when the Chinese provided nearly 300 million dollars in grants.⁷² In November 1990 China reportedly promised 150 million dollars in aid.⁷³ As the Soviet Union's economic performance was declining so was the amount of aid that it sent to its North Korean allies.

For the Chinese, this decline, and, eventual cessation in Soviet aid to the North Koreans, was a key turning point in the PRC/DPRK relationship. No longer could the North Koreans gain leverage over the Chinese by playing Moscow off of Beijing. This meant that the Chinese would now have the leverage in the relationship since the North Koreans would come to rely on Chinese aid and benevolence. This situation does not necessarily facilitate a close relationship or as much influence in Pyongyang as one would think. Much as the French had come to resent their American liberators following World War II the prideful North Koreans became resentful of their more successful Chinese counterparts. For Pyongyang the economic assistance became a form of humiliation.

With the Juche economy collapsing at the outset of the 1990s more of the aid came in the form of fuel shipments and food supplies. As the North Korean famine worsened in the mid 1990's the Chinese increased their shipments of food supplies and fuel oil. For the Chinese, while propping up North Korea with additional aid shipments came at great expense to Beijing's budget, this allowed them to retain and increase their

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Library of Congress, Country Studies, *North Korea, Economic Assistance* (accessed November 9, 2003); available from [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kp0093\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kp0093)).

influence on the peninsula. The Chinese also were not interested in having North Korea absorbed by the American backed regime in Seoul, preferring to keep a socialist North Korea as a military buffer state.

Chinese economic assistance in the absence of significant additional forms of aid from other sources, save for South Korea can also be wielded as a weapon. Today it is estimated that the Chinese provide the North Koreans with ninety percent of its energy supplies and thirty percent of its total outside aid.⁷⁴ The most recent example of aid being used as a weapon involved, as I mentioned earlier, the shutting off of fuel oil supplies to the North Koreans in March 2003. There were also reports that the Chinese withheld significant amounts of aid during the North Korean famine to register their displeasure with the authorities in Pyongyang.

Though one might believe that continuing Chinese economic assistance to the North Korean government would be a sign of positive interaction, the truth is that this assistance has become a source of tension. The Chinese, frustrated at North Korea's halting efforts at economic reform continue to provide assistance to stave off a collapse. The North Koreans have become resentful of Chinese benevolence, as the aid provides evidence that the Juche system is failing. In other words, while the provision of aid in the form of food supplies and oil might look like evidence of positive interaction on a surface level, this aid is actually emblematic of a larger problem in the relationship. Continuing South Korean-North Korean rapprochement might alleviate the North Korean quandary in the future.

⁷⁴ Ted Galen Carpenter, "Overestimating China's Willingness to Pressure North Korea," *Cato Institute*, August 15, 2003.

Nuclearization of the Peninsula

The possibility of North Korea obtaining nuclear weaponry is a very sensitive issue for the Chinese. Their official position has always been that a nuclear weapons free Korean peninsula is the optimal situation for stability in the region. During a visit by U.S. Under Secretary of State John Bolton to Beijing in October of 2002, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue stated that it was “China's consistent stance to support the non-nuclearization of the Korean Peninsula to safeguard its peace and stability.”⁷⁵ As has been alluded to several times, the Chinese see the DPRK as a military buffer state that will protect them from hostile enemy action. However, North Korea's actions in trying to obtain nuclear weapons jeopardizes this strategic stability for a variety of reasons.

Being that North Korea has threatened to attack Japan in the event of war breaking out on the Korean peninsula, the prospect of a nuclear North Korea could force the Japanese into developing nuclear weapons on their own. Recently there has been talk in Japan of revising the constitution to allow greater leeway in deploying its “Self-Defense” forces overseas and the military launched a spy satellite intended specifically for North Korea on March 28, 2003. There have also been calls from a number of Japanese scholars and government officials for Japan to look into developing a nuclear deterrent. Liberal Party leader Ichiro Ozawa once said, “It would be so easy for us to produce nuclear warheads. We have plutonium at nuclear power plants in Japan, enough to make several thousand such warheads.”⁷⁶ Because Japan has historically been a rival

⁷⁵ “Chinese FM spokeswoman on visit by US officials,” *Xinhua General News Service*, October 18, 2002. Accessed November 10, 2003. Available from LexisNexis.

⁷⁶ Stephen Lunn, “Japan Libs shake nukes at China,” *The Australian*, April 9, 2002. Accessed November 11, 2003. Available from LexisNexis.

to China, the prospect of Japan's nuclearization and remilitarization is a potential threat to Chinese security interests. However, in the absence of a concerted effort to stop North Korea's efforts at obtaining nuclear weapons Japan might be left with no other option. Nuclearization may also take place in South Korea and Taiwan in response to Japan's and North Korea's actions creating a domino affect that will threaten regional stability and impact not only China's security but also its economic development.

North Korea's potential nuclearization may also threaten its status as a military buffer state for China by provoking the United States into taking preemptive military action on North Korean nuclear facilities. It is now widely known that during the first North Korean nuclear crisis in 1994 the Clinton administration considered launching an air strike on the DPRK's nuclear facility at Yongbyon. During the most recent nuclear crisis the Bush administration, while maintaining that it seeks a diplomatic solution to the crisis, has sought to keep "all options on the table."⁷⁷ The potential for U.S. military action on the peninsula may bring U.S. armed forces to the Chinese border.

Despite the potential negative consequences of a nuclear North Korea, there is some historical linkage between the North Korean nuclear program and military and the PRC's technology and military assistance. During much of the 1970's the Chinese delivered missile technology and blueprints to the North Koreans. This included joint development of the DF-61, a nuclear capable missile with a range of 1,000km.⁷⁸ Though the project was never completed this still represented a large technology transfer to the North Koreans. In 1994, development of the Taepodong-2 started to resemble the

⁷⁷ "Bush Warns that all Options are on the Table for Dealing with North Korea," *The Independent*, February 8, 2003. Accessed November 11, 2003. Available from LexisNexis.

⁷⁸ Thomas Woodrow, "China Opens Pandora's Nuclear Box," *The Jamestown Foundation*, Volume 2, Issue 24, December 10, 2002.

Chinese CSS-2 intermediate range ballistic missile. In 1995 there were press allegations that China was training some two hundred North Korean missile engineers and helping to develop a family of long range missiles for Pyongyang.⁷⁹ There also has apparently been acquiescence on the part of the Chinese as the North Koreans have worked with the Pakistanis and the Iranians on nuclear and missile development and technology transfer.

In addition, China's own stance on the existence of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula is contradicted by CIA reports that the North Koreans have already developed two nuclear weapons-though it has not tested those devices.⁸⁰ The North Koreans have also continued with the development of a more advanced version of their Taepodong missile.

So what do these contradictory actions and statements mean for the Chinese-North Korean relationship? Despite publicly stated Chinese desires for a stable and nuclear free Korean peninsula does the PRC really want a militarized and dangerous buffer state? What it more likely means is that despite Chinese desires for nuclear weapons to stay out of North Korea, Beijing has only a limited influence over North Korean decision making on this matter. Though the Chinese have moved away from historic support for North Korea's military modernization, the technology transfers that have occurred have already furthered the DPRK's nuclear program enough that they can handle weapons development on their own account. This will in the long run negatively affect the North Korean-Chinese relationship as the Chinese seek a more stable regional environment.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ David Sanger, "CIA Said to Find Nuclear Advances by North Koreans," *New York Times*, July 1, 2003. Accessed November 11, 2003. Available from LexisNexis.

Impact of DPRK Actions on U.S.-China Relationship

Since 1969, when the first messages were exchanged between Mao Zedong and Henry Kissinger through an intermediary, the United States and the PRC have sought to improve relations on a bilateral level. Though the relationship has gone through ebbs and flows, it has served the needs of both powers in terms of strategic necessity (i.e. opposition to the Soviet Union) and in terms of economic necessity. With that said, the actions of North Korea have affected the U.S.-PRC relationship in both negative and positive ways. One can argue that the positive effects have outweighed the negative ones in recent years. But this must be contrasted with the negative affects that have been introduced into the PRC-DPRK relationship resulting from improvements in PRC-U.S. relations.

The U.S.-PRC relationship at the outset was negatively impacted by the DPRK's invasion of the ROK and the subsequent Chinese intervention against the advancing U.S. led UN forces. The Chinese, who had originally hoped to strengthen relations with the United States during World War II and in the years preceding the demise of the KMT in mainland China, had decided on a strategic course of opposing the U.S. and its "imperialist allies." This was in concord with its new alliance with the Soviet Union. Because of the new PRC-USSR alliance and the expectations that China would support the communist movement in East Asia, attacking the United States on the Korean peninsula became a necessity. For the Chinese, the North Korean actions became a vehicle for it to assert their newfound role on the Asian continent as a liberator and as a pole of opposition to the U.S. This also allowed the Chinese to strengthen their bond

with the North Koreans. This was especially important in light of Soviet-Chinese competition over Pyongyang's allegiance.

The style of these relationships would continue on through the Sino-Soviet rift, until the beginning of the process of rapprochement between the PRC and the U.S. When this process began the North Koreans felt some anxiety. After the historic Nixon visit to Beijing in 1971 this anxiety led the North Koreans to begin negotiations with the South Koreans, which in turn led to a joint communiqué in July of 1972.⁸¹ Despite periodic provocations on the part of the North Koreans on the DMZ, China continued to restrain the North Koreans as the Chinese continued to improve relations with the U.S. The relationship with the North Koreans had declined in importance to the Chinese, vis-à-vis the United States.

When the Soviet Union normalized relations with the ROK and stopped its aid flow to North Korea in the early 1990s, the DPRK came to rely on the Chinese for their economic assistance. This dramatically increased the leverage that the Chinese held over the North Koreans, which in turn increased the usefulness of the Chinese to the Americans, who were apprehensive about the DPRK's intentions in the region.

This, however, created a duality in the trilateral relationship between Washington, Beijing, and Pyongyang. In order for the Chinese to show their credibility as a responsible international power and their usefulness to Washington, it needed the North Koreans to act in ever more provocative ways. When this occurred the Americans would need to turn to the Chinese to help modify Pyongyang's behavior.

⁸¹ Ilpyong Kim, 96.

This would cause the Chinese to exert ever increasing pressure on the North Koreans to behave responsibly. As a result the DPRK would express resentment for the pressure that was being applied.

When the first nuclear crisis in 1994 erupted, China tried to balance its interests with both the United States and North Korea. The PRC at the time, under Jiang Zemin, was trying to improve relations with the United States. At the same time, in order to maintain its influence in North Korea the PRC had to ensure that the pressure that was exerted was not too intense. This is a partial explanation as to why the Chinese for many months blocked U.S. initiatives in the United Nations when it came to imposing sanctions on the DPRK. However, this is also why the Chinese, when the Americans began to ratchet up the stakes in late spring of 1994, pushed the North Koreans in the direction of compromise by indicating a willingness to allow the UN to take punitive actions against the North.

This careful balancing by the Chinese indicated a desire on the part of Beijing to keep negative interactions with the DPRK, which would result from undue pressure on their part, to a minimum. In order to do this, the Chinese decided to keep the positive interactions on a high by protecting DPRK interests in the UN, while at the same time trying to accommodate the needs of the Americans by inducing the North Koreans to compromise.

With that said, the influence of the Chinese in keeping the North Koreans to follow the agreement and to fall in line with Chinese desires to keep the peninsula nuclear free was seriously questioned when the United States confronted the North with evidence of nuclear production in October of 2002. This revelation would inevitably

increase the amount of negative interactions between the North Koreans and the Chinese. The Chinese had sought to bring the United States into a closer relationship after the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington DC.

At the same time, the North's provocations was causing the Chinese to reassess their relationship. As mentioned above the Chinese took steps to cut the flow of fuel oil and had in the past shown a willingness to curtail the flow of food aid. More importantly, Shen Jiru, a prominent Chinese international relations scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences who has many connections within the central government, came out in August 2003 as an advocate for ending the security arrangement between the PRC and the DPRK. "It is unrealistic to hold on to a Cold War-era treaty under new international conditions," said Shen.⁸² This is significant because as Alastair Iain Johnston says, a prominent mainland Chinese scholar will not come out with such an assertion unless there was already some type of consensus on the matter within the central government.⁸³ This is a marked turn from previous Chinese statements that maintained the PRC's commitment to the security of the North Korean regime. There were also reports that were derived from CCP sources that indicated that Chinese leader Hu Jintao had told the North Koreans to stop their "constant war preparation" and to halt its nuclear weapons program.⁸⁴ If confirmed this would be a significant turnabout with the Chinese becoming blunter with respect to having the North Koreans stop weapons production.

Impact of DPRK Actions on South Korea-China Relationship

⁸² Willy Wo-Lap Lam, CNN, World News, *Time to act, China tells North Korea*, August 25, 2003 (accessed November 13, 2003); available from <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/asiapcf/east/08/24/willy.column/>.

⁸³ Alastair Iain Johnston, Lecture to Government 1982 class, "Chinese Foreign Policy," November 3, 2003.

⁸⁴ Wo-Lap Lam.

As China's global priorities has shifted from engaging in ideological battles with "imperialist" and "revisionist" nations to one that is more centered on trade and China's internal development there has been a change in how it interacts with the ROK and the DPRK. In the aftermath of normalization there was a surge in bilateral trade relations and the exchange of important government officials between Seoul and Beijing. To some extent this new closeness came at the expense of PRC-DPRK ties. With the exception of a few delegations of minor government officials, the DPRK refused to send any important visitors to the PRC in 1993. Likewise, the only important Chinese visitor of note to Pyongyang in 1993 was the most junior PBSC member, Hu Jintao and Defense Minister Chi Haotian, who came on the fortieth anniversary of the "victory" in the Korean War.⁸⁵ In 1994, Kim Il Sung, who had cultivated a close relationship with many PRC leaders, died. This had the effect of slowing down even further the exchange of officials. At the same time with this decrease in the exchange of official delegations the PRC was increasing the frequency and importance of officials that were exchanged with the ROK. There was also a burst of trade between the PRC and the ROK from just over \$9 billion to over \$11 billion between 1993 and 1994 while there was a decrease in bilateral DPRK-ROC trade from just under \$900 million to just over \$600 in the same time frame.⁸⁶ As Samuel Kim and Tai Hwan Lee has pointed out: "Sino-DPRK trade seems closely keyed to and determined by turbulent political trajectories."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ "Chinese party, government mission arrives in Pyongyang," *Xinhua General Overseas News Service*, July 26, 1993. Accessed on November 20, 2003. Available on LexisNexis.

⁸⁶ Chae-jin Lee, *China and Korea: Dynamic Relations* (Stanford: Hoover Press, 1996), 140 & 146.

⁸⁷ Samuel S. Kim and Tai Hwan Lee, "Chinese-North Korea Relations: Managing Asymmetrical Interdependence," in *North Korea and Northeast Asia*, eds. Samuel S. Kim and Tai Hwan Lee (Oxford, UK: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 125.

This increase in the level of official exchanges and bilateral trade between the ROK and the PRC and the corresponding decreases in the same categories between the DRPK and the PRC could have partly come about as a result of the DPRK's actions with respect to the nuclear issue as well as the death of Kim Il Sung. In other words, at least initially, it is plausible that the DPRK's actions might have in fact resulted in a closer relationship between the ROK and the PRC--thereby furthering the estrangement of Beijing and Pyongyang in that timeframe.

Some of this has changed since the dramatic improvement in DPRK-ROK relations following the North-South summit meeting in June of 2000. Many ROK citizens desire closer relations with their ethnic kin in the North and do not begrudge the Chinese for their historical alliance with Pyongyang. This improvement in relations also means that the South Koreans could desire less interference on the part of the Chinese in peninsular affairs--much as many South Koreans are demanding a more equitable relationship with the United States. For the time being Seoul has shown its appreciation for Chinese efforts at modifying the North's behavior by promoting Korean investment in China and extending high level contact between the two nations.

The North's continued provocations on the other hand could create a backlash in the ROK putting China into a corner, forced to choose between Seoul and Pyongyang. Given the preponderance of South Korean money in the Chinese economy, the PRC will likely choose Seoul.

Pathway to Future North Korean-Chinese Relations

China in its contemporary history has alternated between focusing on the international political situation and concentrating on its internal development. At the

beginning of the communist era in mainland China, the CCP moved to reestablish China's importance on the world stage by supporting nationalist and communist movements in the Third World--especially in East Asia. As a consequence, when the North Koreans attempted to reunify the Korean peninsula the Chinese--mindful of the ideological as well as the historical legacy of Korean subservience to Beijing--made the decision to intervene on behalf of Pyongyang. It was perhaps fortuitous for the North Koreans that the Soviets had already established a sphere of influence in the region when this event occurred, for these circumstances would lead in the aftermath of the Korean War to a competition between the PRC and the USSR for the DPRK's allegiance for over thirty years. This meant that Kim Il Sung's North Korea carried a disproportionate amount of influence in Beijing relative to its material power. The combination of China's need to reassert its influence in world politics and North Korea's need to secure aid to help develop its economy, military, and society meant that positive interactions between these two nations was maximized. Except for a short blip during the Cultural Revolution, when China turned from its focus on international politics to its internal situation, relations between the DPRK and the PRC were at a highly positive level.

This pattern would start to shift slightly when China began to turn once again to its internal development in the late 1970s. The changing of North Korea's advantage in securing China's favor started to accelerate in the post-Cold War and has resulted today in what some would say a strained relationship. It can also be said that the advantage in the relationship lies in China's favor--a change from the situation that existed during the Cold War.

So what are the implications for this turnaround in DPRK-PRC relations and what does it mean for international actors who might want to use Chinese “influence” to modify the North’s behavior? How much influence does China have? Does China actually want to use this influence to get North Korea to change its behavior to conform to international norms of conduct? And, finally, does China have anymore of a use for North Korea?

Judging by the recent actions that the Chinese have taken with respect to the current nuclear crisis there appears to be an increasing willingness on the part of the Chinese to use their material power and material influence over the DPRK to modify its behavior. And there has even been talk in Beijing and among academic circles about adjusting the treaty of alliance to take away the Chinese security guarantee to the North Koreans--an astounding change of attitude. Whether this Chinese pressure has been, or could be, translated into influence in the North Korean regime is questionable. To wit, despite Chinese pressure (as well as pressure from South Korea, Russia, Japan, and the United States) the North Koreans have thrown out international inspectors at Yongbyon, started reprocessing its spent fuel rods, and announced its intention to develop a nuclear deterrent.

However, it is also true to some extent that the Chinese were the ones who forced the North Koreans into agreeing to hold multiparty talks in the first place. Prior to holding the multiparty talks the DPRK had demanded bilateral negotiations with the United States--which the Bush administration had refused to engage in. The decision on the part of the Chinese to withhold fuel oil shipments to the North Koreans in March 2003 might have played a part in getting a more flexible attitude.

I believe the key question that has to be answered here is how far are the Chinese willing to go in forcing the North Koreans to comply with international norms? As has been established earlier the North Koreans are dependent on the Chinese for a good portion of their food and fuel needs. If the Chinese chose to do so, it could force the North Korean state to crumble to its knees by shutting off the aid and trade flow. The amount of influence that the Chinese could have is enormous, based on just material measurements of interaction with the DPRK. Why would Donald Rumsfeld have called for a team effort between the United States and China to work toward regime change in North Korea? Why has the Chinese not gone further in forcing the North Koreans to comply with U.S. demands when according to many observers they obviously could do so if they wished? I believe the answer lies in two overlapping but important reasons that bear on future Chinese security and political goals.

This first one is that despite the decline in North Korea's importance as a military buffer state for the PRC, Beijing still values North Korean partnership on select international issues. For instance, though the DPRK-PRC relationship was in decline following the ROK-PRC normalization, there was an upsurge in positive interactions following the U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the NATO campaign to free Kosovo. Despite the fact that there were no exchange of high profile delegations from 1994-1998, relations were "renormalized" in 1999 in terms of rhetorical closeness and exchanges.⁸⁸ Kim Jong Il made his first state visit to Beijing May 29-May 31, 2000--a matter of weeks before the historic North-South summit meeting in June. Kim followed his Beijing visit with a stay in Shanghai in January 2001. Jiang Zemin responded in September 2001 with his first visit to Pyongyang in eleven years. There

⁸⁸ Kim and Lee, 114.

were also visits by: Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan in April 1999, Supreme People's Assembly President Kim Yong Nam in June 1999, and Defense Minister Chi Haotian in October 2000. Concurrent with the increase in official visits China continued its aid flow. During Kim Yong Nam's visit in June 1999, China made a commitment to deliver 150,000 tons of grain and 400,000 tons of coal.⁸⁹ Following Jiang's visit the Chinese again promised a large "grant-in-aid" package of 30,000 tons of diesel fuel and 200,000 thousand tons of food. There was a spike in the value of the trade volume from a ten year low of \$371 million in 1999 to \$488 million in 2000.⁹⁰

What explains this upsurge and what explains the new chill in relations? When the Kosovo campaign took place the Chinese became concerned that they would be next on NATO's hit list. Given the perception of potential Western hostility the Chinese found the North Koreans to be convenient partners. For Pyongyang, which was pursuing its policy of engagement with South Korea, it needed a strengthened Chinese partnership to give it weight in its dialogue with Seoul. A renewed DPRK-PRC relationship gave each country the strength to face their respective challenges. So why the change in tone since the advent of the nuclear crisis?

One possible explanation is that with the threat to China having subsided since the end of the Kosovo conflict, China no longer feels the need to maintain a close relationship with North Korea. North Korea in turn, with its new rapprochement with South Korea, feels the same way about the relationship. For both nations, the relationship has devolved into one that is now based on hard political calculations with

⁸⁹ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: South Korea, North Korea*, 3rd Quarter, 1999, 42-43.

⁹⁰ Chae-Jin Lee, *China and Korea: Dynamic Relations*, 140 & 146.

respect to the regional and global environment than one that is based on historical memories of tributary relations or ideological cohesion.

This also would provide an explanation as to why China does not intend to cooperate on a venture that seeks to squeeze the life out of the DPRK. North Korea is a valuable resource and ally in troubled times for the Chinese-and vice versa. Despite the fact that relations and interactions have had a negative bent in the past twenty years, North Korea and China will still see each other as potential allies because of a similarity in political outlook and a shared loathing of American hegemony. If inter-Korean relations sour, or if American hostility towards China increases, then it would be wise for these two nations to keep some cordiality in the here and now. In essence, these two nations will not allow today's tensions to get in the way of a long term partnership.

The significance of this for the outside world is that the international community cannot expect China to put undue pressure on the North Koreans to modify their behavior. Neither China nor North Korea does not want to alienate an ally that could potentially provide useful assistance in times of need. Relations between the two nations should remain relatively stable. Though China will occasionally provide assistance to the international community to modify the North's behavior in keeping with its need to project itself as a "responsible international actor," no one should expect wholesale abandonment.

Conclusion

My original hypothesis was that the relationship between North Korea and China was not as close as many observers have made it out to be. This was true-for specific periods of time. During the first part of the Cultural Revolution in China the Red Guards

assailed Kim Il Sung for his close relationship with the Soviet Union and advocated his overthrow. Predictably this aroused some rancor in the relationship. This tension though melted away as China grew closer to the United States and North Korea began to lose confidence in the Soviet Union. Similarly China and North Korea had some difficulties when Pyongyang orchestrated terrorist attacks against South Korean interests in the 1980s. This was soon forgotten when the North Koreans offered their political support to the Chinese following the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. In the most recent iteration of this back and forth interaction, the PRC and the DPRK have grown apart during the most recent nuclear crisis after having drawn closer to each other after NATO's operation in Kosovo.

There has been one constant in all of the periods in which the relationship worsened--a clear breakup has never occurred. The foundation of the relationship has always been preserved despite the pressures exerted and the slights that have been handed out. The most recent expectations of a continuing divergence between the two nations toward an irreconcilable fracture will not come to pass. My original hypothesis might be incorrect in that my assumption that the relationship has been moving in a historical downward trend is not true. In actuality it appears to be moving in a cyclical direction with relations marked by high degree of positive interaction followed by a period of increasing negative interactions.

What is interesting to note however, is that these cycles appear to be getting shorter as time goes on. From 1950 to about 1966 there were little negative interactions in DPRK-PRC relations. From 1966 to around 1969 relations hit a downward trend as China was convulsed by the Cultural Revolution and North Korea drew closer to the

Soviet Union. Relations again hit an upward trend in 1969 as China pulled out of its foreign policy morass. Positive interactions would continue--albeit with occasional tensions--until the early to mid-1980s when North Korea engaged in high profile terrorism against South Korea. This would turn around after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 with the DPRK voicing its support for the PRC. Another turnabout would occur with ROK-PRC normalization in 1992, which then turned to the NATO bombing over Kosovo, and has finally run into the current stalemate over the nuclear situation on the peninsula. So as we can see, the cycles are becoming dominated by the periods of negative interactions, with the periods of positive interactions becoming marked by ever shorter timeframes. This would suggest that DPRK-PRC relations have worsened over the past fifty years and that a return to a high level of positive interaction looks increasingly unlikely, save for an event like the NATO action in Kosovo in which China feels that its future security could be threatened.

One should not assume though that the PRC and the DPRK are going to break completely away from each other anytime soon for a number of reasons. China needs to maintain its influence in North Korea in order to have any opportunity to modify its behavior and thereby prove its utility to the outside world. If China was to have a complete break with North Korea, the United States and South Korea could very well lavish less attention on Beijing. Seoul and Washington are two important capitals in the strategic calculus of the PRC for they provide markets, technological resources, and international legitimacy for Chinese aspirations to power. Thus Beijing must play a delicate balancing act between pressuring the DPRK to modify its behavior and making

sure the pressure is not so great as to produce an angry Pyongyang that will lash out at the world.

A complete break between Beijing and Pyongyang, involving the cessation of economic assistance, could also result in the collapse of the North Korean regime, sending thousands of refugees across the Chinese border. This motivates Beijing to continue to prop up Pyongyang, since in the absence of doing so northern China would be inundated with a demographic, economic, and humanitarian disaster.

Finally, on the issue of nuclear proliferation on the peninsula, it is vital that the international community encourage a close DPRK-PRC relationship. It is revealing that as the negative interactions between the two nations have increased North Korea's nuclear belligerence has gone up. This is because the North's pursuit of nuclear weapons is partly caused by a paranoia surrounding its external security. To Pyongyang, the threats to its national survival exist all around its borders. To the South, the ROK continues to grow economically at a very quick pace while maintaining a very vibrant democracy. South Korean businessmen are even beginning to make inroads into the closed North Korean economy with industrial, infrastructure, and tourism investments. In addition, it can be said that the South Korean army is now a better fighting force than the North Korean military forces. In other words, the North would appear to be at risk of being absorbed by the South. To the east and south in Japan and South Korea tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers stand ready to fight North Korea should the need arise. There is also the ever present "danger" of a Japan bent on remilitarization. To the North thousands of refugees are flooding China's borderland, risking the alienation of a long time ally. A PRC that is able to firmly guarantee North Korea's security would go a long

way toward alleviating the DPRK's paranoia surrounding its own insecurity. An abundance of negative DPRK-PRC interactions will leave North Korea no choice but to continue its nuclear weapons development so as to provide for its own security as well as garner attention from an outside world that has left it behind. And no amount of aid, threats, or "Sunshine" will ever be able to overcome this dilemma. This would be detrimental to Chinese interests which desire a stable and peaceful Korean peninsula for its economic development.