

China-ROK Relations: Overcoming Differences, Rebuilding Trust



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— **KIM Sung-hwan** Unprecedented progress in Korean diplomatic history has widely been assessed to Korea-China relations since the two countries formed ties in 1992, 25 years ago. After four decades of hostility, both countries saw exponential growth in people-to-people exchanges as well as in trade volume. Trade volume has increased 35-fold, from six billion dollars 25 years ago to more than 210 billion dollars last year. Additionally, the annual number of travelers between the two countries reached 13 million last year, denoting the significance of the relationship further. However, the relations experienced a sudden setback when the Korean government decided to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system last July. This incident could arguably be perceived as a watershed for the bilateral relations. With the new South Korean government now in office, what measures can be taken to help restore trust and cooperation between the two countries?

— **YU Hong-jun** South Korea and China share the same destiny and are indispensable to each other. As a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Confer-

ence (CPPCC), I am deeply invested in the peace of Northeast Asia. South Korea is China's coextensive neighbor, sharing roots in history, economy, politics and security, and thus has a myriad of vital reasons for cooperation. Looking back at Northeast Asia in the Cold War era, military confrontation became prolonged as China and the Soviet Union supported North Korea while the U.S. backed South Korea. This led to devastating outcomes for both sides. But then came the turn of the tide when South Korea and China forged diplomatic ties in August 1992. In the subsequent 25 years, we have witnessed remarkable development in numerous fields of achievement, including education, economy as well as society. On top of these, the two countries have worked towards a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and both leaderships have expressed optimism for greater progress in the bilateral relations. The decision by the South Korean government in July 2016 to deploy THAAD on its soil, however, caused a major breakdown in the relationship. The 25 years of shared, cumulative assets came to the verge of collapse. Personally, I look forward to a revival of the relations with the new South Korean government led by President Moon now in

office. This is a critical juncture and an opportunity that must not be lost if we are to maintain the progress achieved to this point. While substantial call for THAAD deployment is expected in some quarters of South Korea, the government must overcome its obstacles by taking a broader, long-term perspective of the issue and upholding dialogue and cooperation.

In terms of building on the current level of exchange and cooperation, we should keep government and civil society separate in mind. Either sector should talk with its counterparts, based on the principle of mutual respect. Both sides should respect not only each one's own, but also its neighbors' interests in the spirit of mutual understanding, respect and accommodation. In particular, the inauguration of the President Moon in South Korea could be a turning point for the recently strained bilateral relations. The more complicated the problems, the more dialogue we need to have. I hope this kind of constructive mindset will guide us in the upcoming summit talks.

South Korea and China should explore exchange and cooperation on a broader spectrum. As countries experience an increasing degree of interconnectivity and interdependence, they all come to share the same fate. While some advanced countries, including the U.S., demonstrate anti-globalization leanings, strengthening cooperation on various fronts between Korea and China could serve as an antidote to this trend. A closer cooperation on security matters as well as on economic ties is very much warranted. Equally important is broadening exchanges in diverse areas such as the environment, new and renewable energy sources, humanities, etc.

— **SHIM Jae-Kwon** China should build a good partnership with South Korea for the sake of the stability, peace and prosperity of Northeast Asia in the globalized world. The THAAD deployment is straining the ties of South Korea and China, but dialogue and honest mutual consideration will resolve the issue. For its part, South Korea should take a cautious approach while pursuing its own national interests, so as not to harm that of its neighbors. Also, I want both countries to have more pertinent, meaningful

conversations to dissolve the hardships the two countries are facing.

At the moment, it is not appropriate to link the urgent security issue of the THAAD and that of the North Korean nuclear weapons. Trying to solve two problems at once will only complicate both. The purpose of the UN resolution against the ill-conceived provocation by North Korea is not just a sanction per se, but also paving the way to a dialogue. The North Korean nuclear issue should return immediately to the diplomatic forefront while sanctions should be maintained at the same time. While South Korea is expected to play its part, China also has a responsibility as a chair of the Six-Party Talks to induce North Korea to the negotiation table. In sum, it is imperative to follow the path of sanctions coupled with dialogue in untangling the North Korean nuclear conundrum.

— **YI Peng** The current state of affairs between South Korea and China is summarized in three points: First, the bilateral ties reached its nadir in that trust in general as well as economic aspects are coming apart. Previously, TV shows starring a number of Korean stars enjoyed high viewership and a lot of Chinese citizens aspired and admired Korea. In an abrupt change of situation, campaigns against South Korean products are today underway. Second, the media are thought to play a negative role of agitating the public sentiment. The Chinese, in particular, hold 'saving face' dear and deem it very important to act and behave according to this principle. Third, the role of the private, civil sector is critical in improving the bilateral relations. Engaging diverse channels like 1.5 or 2.0 track other than the government-level exchange will serve as a solid basis of mutual trust and dialogue in times of crisis as today.

There is a fair chance of cooperation between Korea and China. With the U.S. withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, the two countries have an even bigger need and possibility to work together. Just as Korea and China have a common ground on the environmental issues, Northeast Asia is a region where all global agenda, except for the THAAD issue, can

be dealt with. Particularly at this moment, the two states stress greater emphasis on the climate pact and play a leading role on the global stage. When it comes to industries, the door to the Chinese market will be open wider to South Korea's service sector as well as the culture and manufacturing companies, while more investment from China will flow into South Korea.

— **WON Heeryong** While the bilateral relations saw impressive achievements over the last 25 years since its establishment, the rapid strain on the relationship over THAAD goes to show that the fundamentals of joint problem-solving are still vulnerable in comparison with the huge potential for improvement. In case of THAAD, intergovernmental dialogue and consequent trust-building is the key. As both governments defer making a clear public announcement on their stances, efforts for exchange and mutual understanding on the civilian level are all the more necessary. Ironically, the two nations have been rather negligent in understanding each other in depth, believing that they know each other well enough already. This should change and we must move on to the next stage of better understanding and coordination.

Jeju Island witnessed the most dramatic changes resulting from the establishment of Korea-China relations. Part of the evidence is a rise in investment from China into the island as well as the large number of Chinese tourists here. However, I should say this is not always a positive development. Due to the giveaway pricing and the poor quality of tourist-package deals offered to Chinese visitors, the image of Jeju Island is suffering. Also, tourists from China have few, if any, chances to meet the local population directly, including merchants and restaurant owners. This means the booming tourism does not translate into a boon for the local economy. We need to break this vicious circle while refining tourism culture among the Chinese. Another issue is Chinese investment in Jeju Island. Most investors prefer indiscriminate development and a sizable tourist zone, but preserving the natural environment

takes precedence among the local population. Thus, investment should be made in such ways that go hand in hand with the local culture as well as with a view to long-term interests. Moreover, government exchanges on the local level and the central level should be separated. While THAAD is a matter for Seoul and Beijing, exchange and cooperation among local governments and the civilian organizations must continue. A sincere dialogue between the two countries will solve discord and possibly boost the relationship to a higher level.

In addition, cooperation is necessary in resolving environmental issues. In the 2015 UN Climate Change Convention Conference, I presented the carbon-free island project to replace all vehicles on Jeju Island with electric cars and to use 100 percent new and renewable energy for electricity by 2030. While advancements in technology are still in progress for tackling climate change, global consensus is also imperative. With the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, China has a bigger role to play on this score. On top of that, Asia is expected to be a leading region regarding environmental issues. Particulate Matters(PM) ten or fine dust is a case in point. It is already a serious environmental hazard in South Korea. While the government is striving to solve the problem, an active cooperation on China's part is strongly warranted.

● ● ● Policy Implications

- Civilian exchange through diverse channels and in various forms should substitute as well as support inter-governmental exchange.
- The deteriorating bilateral relations stand at a crossroads as the new president takes office. Both parties should make exhaustive preparations for the upcoming summit in order to make substantial improvements in the relationship.

Will the U.S. Pivot to Asia Continue under the Trump Administration?



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— **Bonnie GLASER** Obama's Pivot to Asia started as a strategy to balance against the deep entanglement in the Middle East and obsession with democracy and terrorism throughout the Bush administration. The policy was first raised as a topic as the Asia-Pacific region was emerging as an economic powerhouse as well as a focal point of security matters. In effect, the pivot aroused the U.S. interest in the East Asian region and prompted the country's participation in regional multilateral fora, including the East Asia Summit(EAS). As a response to the growing fear of diminishing U.S. interest in regional security and the increase of Chinese influence in the region, the U.S. has redeployed 60 percent of its naval and air-force assets in the Asia-Pacific region.

However, the Pivot to Asia faltered largely because President Obama failed to convince the domestic constituency and earn its support. President Obama belatedly advocated the Trans-Pacific Partnership(TPP) and again failed to garner enough votes for its ratification in Congress. As for the Trump administration, it has yet to come up with a clear approach towards the Asia-Pacific region. For

example, President Trump has not been emphasizing the importance of multilateral consultation. While he said he would take part in the EAS this fall, the comprehensive U.S. policy on these organizations is not clear. Unlike the Obama administration, the Trump administration has little to talk about values or human rights. Lastly, the U.S. seems poised to engage in foreign policy in a completely different manner from the past. With the advent of "America First," a tectonic shift in the entire world as well as in the Asia-Pacific region is likely.

— **Yoshihide SOEYA** President Trump will not employ the Pivot to Asia strategy for two reasons: First, the Anything but Obama principle also holds true for the Pivot. Second, Trump does not look at the U.S. security policy within the context of international or regional order. Thus, China will less likely be the focal point of Trump's Asia-Pacific policy. President Trump will not follow the Pivot policy, but bases his foreign policy on two pillars: one is to restore "fair trade" vis-a-vis China and Japan in terms of "America first," and the other is the question over North Korea. An unexpected and unlikely cooperation might