

The Relationship between China and North Korea after Trump-Kim Summit: A Realist's Perspective

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Abstract

This year, the United States talked with North Korea in Singapore. In the first summit between the leaders of the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), they signed a joint statement, agreeing to security guarantees for North Korea, new peaceful relations, reaffirmation of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, recovery of soldiers' remains, and follow-up negotiations between high-level officials.

I argue that the most important factor influencing the China-North Korea relationship in the future is the US-North Korea relationship development after the Trump-Kim summit. China's influence over North Korea may decline following the improvement in the US-North Korea relationship. In order to avoid being marginalized, China will seek a diplomatic solution that would preserve China's influence and interests in stability on the peninsula. Therefore, China is bound to improve the relationship with Kim Jong-un. The most feasible way is to have China and North Korea work together to promote reform and opening up that is restricted within a small scale that will

not challenge the legitimacy of North Korea's leader or its regime.

Keywords: Trump-Kim Summit, North Korea, China-North Korea Relationship, Korean Peninsula Affairs, Northeast Asia Security

I. The Origin of Trump-Kim Summit

The Korean Peninsula is a flashpoint in East Asia. In 1985, North Korea ratified the *Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty* (NPT) but did not include the required safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) until 1992. Since then, North Korea's involvement in nuclear arms control has been largely a reluctant response to international political pressure. Currently, North Korea is known to have the industrial capability to manufacture nuclear weapons. According to news reports, North Korea's claims of possessing nuclear weapons are highly credible. Undoubtedly, a North Korean nuclear program could pose serious threats for international relations and the balance of power. In addition, North Korea successfully tested its first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), named Hwasong-14, in July 2017.

Bilateral relations between North Korea and the United States have improved since 2018. Since Donald Trump was elected US President in 2016, he expressed openness to dialogue with North Korea. This year, the United States talked with North Korea in Singapore. North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un made a broad commitment in Singapore to "work toward denuclearization" but did not give details on how or when he would dismantle North Korea's nuclear program. US President Trump offered security guarantees to Pyongyang and pledged to suspend the large-scale military drills with South Korea.¹ As a result, the Northeast Asian security environment may

have been dramatically altered.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) plays a key role in US policy toward North Korea. China is North Korea's closest ally. Beijing has been not just the largest, but also the dominant provider of aid and partner in trade with North Korea. Nevertheless, the most important factor influencing the China-North Korea relationship is the US-North Korea relationship development after the Trump-Kim summit.

In the first of the paper's three sections, I introduce the implications of the Trump-Kim summit this June, and show how it impacts the regional situation. In the second section, I examine the history of China-North Korea relations and China's interest in the current Korean Peninsula. The final section shows possible transition of China-North Korea relations by the implications of the Trump-Kim summit.

II. The Implication of Trump-Kim Summit

After a series of preparatory talks, Trump and Kim signed a joint statement, titled "*Joint Statement of President Donald J. Trump of the United States of America and Chairman Kim Jong-un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the Singapore Summit*," which Trump described as a "very important" and "comprehensive" agreement on June 12, 2018.

1. David Brunnstrom, Tim Kelly, & Patricia Zengerle, "After Pyongyang put-down, Pompeo stands by 'difficult' denuclearization talks," *Reuters*, July 9, 2018, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-pompeo/pompeo-sees-hard-road-ahead-but-pursues-north-korean-denuclearisation-talks-idUSKBN1JY029?feedType=RSS&feedName=newsOne>>.

1. The United States and the DPRK commit to establish new US-DPRK relations in accordance with the desire of the peoples of the two countries for peace and prosperity.

2. The United States and the DPRK will join their efforts to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

3. Reaffirming the April 27, 2018 *Panmunjom Declaration*, the DPRK commits to work towards the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

4. The United States and the DPRK commit to recovering POW/MIA remains including the immediate repatriation of those already identified.

If the deals between Trump and Kim come true, the Northeast Asian strategic environment will change drastically.

First, the relationship between the US and North Korea will be improved. The feeling of threat in North Korea from the United States is not only because it isolated North Korea and imposed sanctions, but also because the subsequent effort at resuming constructive engagement carried the risk of “peaceful evolution” that might precipitate pressure for political change. Given its isolation, North Korea has sought legitimacy and respect on the world stage, in part by assembling a nuclear arsenal and demanding the US recognize it.² North Korea also long has sought a meeting with the American president to end isolation. In the summit, the North Korean leader promised complete

2. Conor Finnegan, “ANALYSIS: How President Trump and Kim Jong Un went from insults to talks,” *ABC NEWS*, March 10, 2018, <<https://abcnews.go.com/International/analysis-president-trump-kim-jong-insults-talks/story?id=53654338>>.

denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in exchange for security guarantees by the US. If the United States and the DPRK can establish new relations, it will reduce the risk of war on the Korean Peninsula.

On the other hand, Trump wishes to resolve the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula to win more political assets for his re-election campaign and surpass any potential counterpart. Moreover, Trump can become a great leader in Asia. The United States' alliances with South Korea and Japan are designed to provide a "nuclear umbrella" against attack from any nuclear armed countries.³ Pyongyang has been threatening to keep firing missiles in Japan's direction for decades, and those missiles could soon be much more destructive. The denuclearization of North Korea will form a new security era for Japan and South Korea. They will appreciate the United States. Furthermore, Tokyo can transit its defense resources from North Korea to China.

Third, it is very helpful for the US to face China's challenge. The United States may get a new ally in the future against China through the new relationship with North Korea. Vietnam is a good precedent for Kim. Currently, Vietnam has a very good relationship with the United States in trade and economic affairs. North Korea could replicate the path taken by Vietnam. In fact, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has urged North Korea to follow the example of Vietnam, saying President Donald Trump believed Pyongyang could replicate Hanoi's path to normal relations with Washington and to prosperity.⁴ According to Michael O'Hanlon, "...That former U.S.

3. Joel S. Wit & Jenny Town, "7 Reasons to Worry About North Korea's Weapons," *The Atlantic*, April 16, 2013, <<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/04/7-reasons-to-worry-about-north-koreas-weapons/275020/>>.

4. David Brunnstrom, "Pompeo urges North Korea's Kim to follow Vietnam's

enemy has restructured its economy and begun to open its society and politics while retaining communism as official dogma. The process started in the 1980s and accelerated thereafter, culminating in normalization of ties in the Clinton era. Vietnam's annual economic growth averaged just 2.6% in the '70s, but 3.6% in the '80s and more than 7% since then."⁵

Fourth, China would not use its influence on DPRK as a weapon to impact the US in other affairs. Traditionally, unable to achieve progress by any other route, the US has tactfully put pressure on China by talking about trade sanctions. The US needs Chinese cooperation on North Korea to stop its development of nuclear weapons that can reach the United States. The worst scenario for China is that the summit has marginalized China's role toward North Korea.

III. China's Interest in Korean Peninsula

1. As a Buffer of Security

International relations theories indicate that a state is rational and seeks to maximize its chance of survival in an anarchic international system. North Korea still has been treated by the Chinese government as a buffer state to the US presence in the region and its allies—Japan and South Korea.⁶ “Division on the peninsula is especially important

example,” *Reuters*, July 8, 2018, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-vietnam/pompeo-urges-north-koreas-kim-to-follow-vietnams-example-idUSKBN1JY0DS>>.

5. Michael O'Hanlon, “Vietnam's Model for North Korea,” July 17, 2008, *Brookings*, <<https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/vietnams-model-for-north-korea/>>.

6. Justyna Szczudlik, “China's Position on the North Korea Crisis,” November 29, 2017, *The Polish Institute of International Affairs*, <<https://www.pism.pl/publications/bulletin/no-118-1058>>.

for China because it helps counter the impression that the U.S. could contain China's rise."⁷

The historical memory of the Korean War still has played an important role in China's decision-making process for Korean Peninsula affairs. After US involvement in the Korean War, China's leaders have considered that, even if Washington did not attack China directly, it could establish a hostile regime on the Korean Peninsula and deploy its troops along the China-Korean border to insert military pressure, which would constitute a very grave threat to northeastern China, the industrial heartland of the country. Currently, the United States still has lots of military bases in South Korea. The US military presence is regarded as the primary threat by North Korea.

North Korea has officially viewed the US and its allies in Northeast Asia as the biggest threat because they have the capabilities and clear intention to threaten the survival of the North Korean regime. The United States also promoted security cooperation between Japan and South Korea with mixed success, including a proposal to create a US-Japan-South Korea trilateral secretariat in Seoul, which South Korea rejected.⁸ As the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are ending,

7. Elizabeth Dias, "Why the Fight With North Korea Is Really About China," *Time*, October 12, 2017, <<http://time.com/4979613/north-korea-donald-trump-china/>>.

8. David J. Berteau & Michael J. Green, "U.S. Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region: An Independent Assessment," August 2012, p. 30, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, <https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/120814_FINAL_PACOM_optimized.pdf>; On the efforts by the United States to encourage trilateral cooperation, see "U.S. Eyes 'Trilateral' Military Cooperation," *Japan Times*, March 9, 2006, <<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2006/03/09/national/u-s-eyes-trilateral-military-cooperation/#.W5n XrM4zaM8>>.

the United States would “accelerate efforts” to “pivot” its focus toward Asia.⁹ The United States implemented major revisions to its force posture in Asia to increase the overall capabilities of the United States and its allies and partners in the region.¹⁰

China’s strategic interests in the region are different from the US objectives. With its involvement in the Korean War of 1950-53, China displayed an interest in defending North Korea and has since played an important role in meeting North Korea’s security needs.¹¹ Against “the American threat” has remained a strong reason for North Korea to ally with China.

2. Stability

China has regarded stability on the Korean peninsula as its primary interest. In addition, Beijing’s first priority on the Korean Peninsula appears to be stability both in the Kim regime and in the country as a whole. A second Korean War or collapse of Kim regime would create hundreds of thousands of North Korean refugees; their flooding into China has been a worry for Beijing. “Instability generated on the peninsula could cascade into China, making China’s challenge of providing for its own people that much more difficult,” says Mike Mullen, former chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.¹²

9. Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century,” *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2011, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century>.

10. Nina Silove, “The Pivot before the Pivot: U.S. Strategy to Preserve the Power Balance in Asia,” *International Security*, Vol. 40, Issue 4, Spring 2016, p. 88.

11. Kang Choi & Joon-Sung Park, “South Korea: Fears of Abandonment and Entrapment,” in Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *The Long Shadow: Nuclear Weapons and Security in 21st Century Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 384-403.

12. Eleanor Albert, “The China-North Korea Relationship,” March 18, 2018, *Council on Foreign Relations*, <<https://www.cfr.org/background/china-north-korea-relationship>>.

From a Chinese perspective, assuring the “*status quo*” on the Korean peninsula is a top priority. The economic relationship with China accounts for the largest share of North Korea’s dealings with the outside world and provides a lifeline to many of the necessities Pyongyang relies on to keep its nation fed and its economy from breaking down. Trade with China is crucial to North Korea’s survival. Due to other international aid having shrunk significantly since the collapse of the Six Party Talks in 2009, China plays the most important role for North Korean economy. “...In recent years, despite Beijing’s displeasure at Kim Jong-un’s unwavering nuclear ambition, connectivity between China and North Korea has grown. China provides North Korea with most of its food and energy supplies and accounts for more than 90 percent of North Korea’s total trade volume.”¹³

Although the North Korean economy needs reform and opening up, China believes that too rapid reform in North Korea could seriously destabilize the Pyongyang regime. Therefore, Beijing views its long-lasting support for the Kim regime as the best strategic choice.

3. Historical Factor-Ideological Ally

North Korea is a traditional ally for the PRC. For China, the Korean War represents a remarkable victory over imperialism. It is a very important resource for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Mao Zedong’s reputation.

Aside from China, North Korea is the only communist regime in Northeast Asia. Kim’s father and grandfather maintained ties with the Chinese Communists, specifically those formed during the guerrilla campaigns, and established a political relationship based on personality

¹³. Eleanor Albert, “The China-North Korea Relationship.”

rather than pragmatic criterion.¹⁴ In 1961, the two countries signed the *Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty*, whereby China pledged to immediately render military and other assistance by all means to its ally against any outside attack. This treaty has been prolonged twice, in 1981 and 2001, with a validity until 2021.

The memory of the Korean War still is felt strongly and has sustained a continuing alliance and emotional bond between Beijing and Pyongyang. Meanwhile, Beijing has attempted to persuade other countries not to push Pyongyang too hard, in order to avoid collapse of the regime and more provocative military actions.

4. Regional Moderator

China's economic assistance has formed an image of moderator for China in Korean Peninsula affairs. After the first Korean nuclear crisis of 1993 to 1994, China announced its two grand strategic objectives on the Korean Peninsula: first, to resolutely realize the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and, second, to resolutely safeguard peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. Both objectives gave China an image of being a big regional responsible actor. Since then, China has adhered to these strategic objectives, which also constitute its guidelines in initiating and promoting the Six Party Talks.¹⁵

In recent years, the close China-North Korea relationship has

14. Eric C. Anderson, "Understanding China's Approach to North Korea," *HUFFPOST*, June 29, 2009, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/eric-c-anderson/understanding-chinas-appr_b_209115.html>.

15. Yang Xiyu, "China's Role and Its Dilemmas in the Six-Party Talks," in Carla P. Freeman, ed., *China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Perspectives from a Changing China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 179-188.

allowed the United States to hope China would play a pivotal role in halting North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile program and backing a series of United Nations sanctions against Pyongyang.¹⁶ "...In fact, trade tensions were subdued when China was cooperating on North Korea, and China stopped implementing 'maximum pressure' before Sino-American trade relations subsequently deteriorated. China — for geopolitical reasons that supersede the threat of tariffs — will constantly look for ways to keep North Korea well away from Washington."¹⁷

A nuclear-armed North Korea presents an existential threat to its Asian neighbors and a growing danger to the United States. With few foreign policy options, world powers have continued to rely on economic and financial sanctions to isolate the Kim regime and draw it back into denuclearization discussions.¹⁸ Western sanctions have forced North Korea to be nearly totally dependent on Beijing. Currently, China is the most important supplier of resources, food, and industries for North Korea. International sanctions led by the United States for North Korea undoubtedly strengthen the real and psychological impact of Chinese limited economic aid. Eleanor Albert states, "...Beijing, which accounts for 90 percent of North Korea's trade, may have little or no political motivation to enforce certain sanctions."¹⁹

16. Dick K. Nanto & Mark E. Manyin, "China-North Korea Relations," December 28, 2010, p. 1, *FAS.org*, <<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41043.pdf>>.

17. Willis L. Krumholz, "China Is Standing in the Way of North Korea Negotiations," *The Diplomat*, July 13, 2018, <<https://thediplomat.com/2018/07/china-is-standing-in-the-way-of-north-korea-negotiations/>>.

18. Eleanor Albert, "What to Know About the Sanctions on North Korea," January 3, 2018, *Council on Foreign Relations*, <<https://www.cfr.org/background/what-know-about-sanctions-north-korea>>.

19. Eleanor Albert, "The China-North Korea Relationship."

To sum up, China uses North Korea as a diplomatic chip against the United States. After the Singapore summit took place, China signaled it would ease back “maximum pressure” on North Korea.

IV. The Obstacle between China-North Korean Relations

In order to improve the economy, Kim intends to seek outside economic involvement from all these sources and reduce his country’s dependence on China. He hopes to curb Beijing’s aspiration to control the future of the Korean Peninsula. “...a more fundamental driver is being overlooked: China’s growing ambition to dominate East Asia. Mr. Kim’s apparent move to reconcile with his South Korean counterpart, President Moon Jae-in, is above all a gambit to get closer to America to keep China in check.”²⁰

In fact, Kim Jong-un’s a series of provocations not only undermine security in the region but also show how little influence China has on North Korea. The situation thus undermines China’s position as a global power—Chinese President Xi’s main goal. Xi has started his second term as China’s most powerful leader, the robust strategy of enhancing Chinese influence and protecting Chinese interests in North Korea will be in the offing.²¹

Since Kim Jong-un came to power in December 2011, China’s diplomatic influence over North Korea has been practically non-existent. Between 2012 and 2017, Kim failed to meet with Chinese Presi-

20. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, “What Is Kim Jong-un’s Game?” *The New York Times*, May 8, 2018, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/opinion/china-korea-america-kim.html>>.

21. Feng Zhang, ANU, & NISCS, “Is China changing its strategy towards North Korea?” April 4, 2018, *EASTASIAFORUM*, <<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/04/04/is-china-changing-its-strategy-towards-north-korea/>>.

dent Xi Jinping or his diplomats.²²

Xi's overture has been repaid with increasingly brazen actions by Pyongyang, which many observers believe are timed for maximum embarrassment to Beijing. For example, a nuclear test took place as China hosted a BRICS summit in September 2017, while in May 2017, the North launched long-range missile just hours before the Belt and Road Forum, dedicated to Xi's signature foreign policy initiative.²³

The reduction of economic aid from China is likely to damage the North Korean economy. It will threaten the authority and stability of Kim's regime, so the reduction certainly strengthens Pyongyang's disgust. This consequence is likely to push Kim to compromise with South Korea and America to seek possible assistance to avoid economic collapse. The PRC does not want the North Korean regime to collapse or the Korean states to reunify too fast, but fears an escalation or outbreak of a heated conflict. China does not want a unified Korea that is aligned with the United States.

For this reason, and for its own economic interests, China has been implementing the UN sanctions within a very limited scope. Nevertheless, China's limited activities have resulted in US condem-

22. Xi sent high-ranking Communist Party official Liu Yunshan to attend the North's October 2015 military parade marking the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Workers' Party of Korea. Liu hand-delivered a letter from Xi praising Kim's leadership and including congratulations not just from the Chinese Communist Party but Xi's personal "cordial wishes" in a powerful show of respect. Feng Zhang, "Is China changing its strategy towards North Korea?"

23. "China's Diplomatic Ties With Ally North Korea Are Fraying," *NBCNEWS*, September 8, 2017, <<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/north-korea/china-s-diplomatic-ties-ally-north-korea-are-fraying-n799736>>.

nation, forcing the United States to negotiate with North Korea directly.

V. Conclusion: China-DPRK Relations in the Future

One of the most important international security issues facing China still is North Korea's nuclear weapons. Only normalization of diplomatic relations with the United States will make Kim abandon his nuclear arsenal. China's influence toward North Korea may be declining following the improvement of the US-North Korean relationship. Beijing has traditionally played down its own role in the possible conflict in the Korean peninsula. In the future, China needs to face a new strategic environment in the Northeast Asia.

For Washington, its *détente* with Pyongyang significantly depreciates the strategic value of Beijing. North Korea's isolation left the United States lacking a reliable channel to negotiate with its leader in the past. China was viewed by the international community as the only country that could persuade and impact North Korean leaders' behavior. Kim Jong-un's provocations, however, have changed this image. Superficially, sustained aid gives Beijing tremendous bargaining chips, though for political and national security reasons it has been reluctant to exert too much pressure on Pyongyang. In fact, China lacks a true tool to punish North Korea. China has put increasingly heavier pressure on North Korea, but its pressure has had little impact on the latter's behavior.²⁴

The potential agreement between US and North Korea is likely

24. Weiqi Zhang, "Neither friend nor big brother: China's role in North Korean foreign policy strategy," *Palgrave Communications*, Vol. 4, No. 16, February 13, 2018, p. 2, *Springer Nature*, <<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-018-0071-2>>.

to weaken the US-South Korean alliance and limit the threat of refugees at China borders.²⁵ The Trump-Kim summit has a chance to push for the reduction of the US military presence in South Korea. In fact, the United States and South Korea cancelled a major military exercise scheduled for August 2018. This is beneficial for China. China's new policy toward North Korea has proposed what it calls "double suspension," which assumes a halt to the US-South Korean joint military exercises to convince Kim to put on hold the nuclear or missile tests, and could lead to talks.

I argue that China will seek a diplomatic solution that would preserve China's influence and interests in stability on the peninsula. After the Trump-Kim summit, the real impact will be measured by the progress made towards the difficult and complex goal of CVID: "Complete, Verifiable and Irreversible Denuclearization" of the Korean Peninsula. If CVID is guaranteed, the current economic sanctions against North Korea will not continue. North Korea's dependence on China will be reduced.

North Korea's current agreements and statements indicate Kim wants normalized relations with the United States. In the 1990s, the United States offered to arrange energy assistance from petroleum producers, build two light-water nuclear reactors that would be difficult to use for producing weapons, provide food assistance and lift sanctions. The US influence on North Korea may rise in the future. The biggest risk for such development for Beijing is that it results in a significant weakening of the China-North Korea Asian alliance.

²⁵ Nyshka Chandran, "What China wants — and doesn't want — from a Trump-Kim summit," *CNBC*, May 21, 2018, <<https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/21/chinas-agenda-for-donald-trump-kim-jong-un-summit.html>>.

China is well aware that improvement in US-North Korea relations could act to diminish China's role as a facilitator or mediator in Korea Peninsula. Previously, the young Kim Jong-un had been a largely unknown, untested, and inexperienced new leader in China's eyes. If Kim Jong-un truly abandons nuclear tests, the US-North Korean relationship will develop rapidly. Even if North Korea does not start its total reform and opening up, releasing economic difficulty in North Korea with help from the US and South Korea is predictable.

The key to the US-North Korean relationship lies in a few military problems. After removing nuclear power, what kind of security guarantee will North Korea request from the US? What will the US military stationing become within South Korea? If the US and North Korea can reach an agreement about these problems acceptable to both parties, the US-North Korean relationship will develop swiftly. Kim Jong-un will own more bargaining chips and higher confidence in advancing his relationship with China. Unless the US-China relationship later worsens to the degree that Kim must give the cold shoulder in treating China to avoid negative reactions on the part of the US, Kim Jong-un will go on maintaining a normal relationship with China to balance power from South Korea. As Moon Jae-in, the President of South Korea, will not be re-elected, Kim Jong-un cannot guarantee that the future president of South Korea will maintain the current policy of Moon Jae-in.

China will attempt to maintain its influence on the Korean Peninsula; therefore China is bound to improve the relationship with Kim Jong-un. In terms of economics, China will go on supporting North Korea due to the continuing weakness in North Korean economics. Supposing China does not support North Korea, the North Korean economy may collapse, which would jeopardize stability of the peninsula as well as the interests of China. On the other hand, it

will increase the speed of Kim Jong-un inclining towards the US in order to avoid economic collapse, which will not please China, either.

Now that North Korea and the United States are changing bilateral relations, it is also time for China to reset its policy toward Pyongyang and Seoul. China may also guide or assist North Korea towards reform and opening up. In the past, China was not leaning towards it because China was concerned by the power collapse of North Korea and its negative impact on the stability of the peninsula. Nevertheless, Kim Jong-un's style of governance differs from his father, who was interested in reaping economic concessions through international negotiations. On the condition that the US-North Korean relationship is rapidly improving, China will lose its initiative and future voice unless they take immediate action. The premise for Chinese reform and opening up lies in the total improvement in the relationship with the US. Besides, Deng Xiaoping decided on operating market economics, loosening government control of economics, and approving both private estate and free market. All of these are factors leading to success in reform and opening up. If China can play the role of the US and the Occidental countries in the Chinese reform and opening up by rewarding domestic entrepreneurs for investing in North Korea and by hiring workers from North Korea, the benefit will be more than pure support. It really depends on the attitude of Kim Jong-un. Kim cannot know better that, after the Chinese reform and opening up, Mao Zedong's family lost their political power.

If North Korea opens up its economy, entrance on the part of the US and other countries certainly will be hard to avoid. Consequently, the influence from China will be hard to maintain continuously. Currently, the United States may use the trade dispute as a bargaining chip to force China to cooperate in US policies for North Korea. Just like the present Vietnam, China does not have the power to determine

economic development in Vietnam, even though China is adjacent to Vietnam and is the second largest economic entity in the world. After the economic opening of Vietnam, it turns into natural and vast improvement in the relationship with the US, which is a concerned of China in promoting reform and opening in North Korea.

If China decides to help North Korea in operating the Chinese style reform and opening up, it will first decrease the opposing ideology on the part of the US towards North Korea. Second, the North Korean people may very well be treating China better after economic improvement. It will establish true “sharp power” of China in the North Korean society. Third, development of the North Korean economy may offset pressure from South Korea towards unification. North Korea will hold a more favorable position in its interaction with South Korea.

In the final analysis, the most feasible way is to have China and North Korea work together to promote reform and opening up that is restricted within a small scale that will not challenge the legitimacy of North Korea’s leader or its regime. It requires consensus and co-operation from China and North Korea.

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