

Stability and Nukes:China's Domestic Concerns over North Korea's Nuclear Program

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Global and International Studies and the
Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Defended: April 7, 2014

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North Korea's Nuclear Program

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Date approved: April 7, 2014

Abstract

While the bilateral friendship between China and North Korea was solidified and endured during the Korean war, Beijing's ties to Pyongyang have weakened considerably during the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula, which emerged in October 2002. Although China is leading the six-party talks, China is still trading with North Korea. What explains this puzzle? Is China more concerned with domestic stability than a nuclearized North Korea? Realist theory suggests that all states are unitary and have the same foreign policy goals, which are self-preservation and national security without considering regime type or domestic politics. While liberal theory suggests that domestic politics and domestic concerns influence foreign policy. If China follows a realist foreign policy, then trade policy towards North Korea and goals of the six-party talks would be the same. If China follows a liberal theory, then we may observe a contradiction between trade and the goals of the six-party talks. Through analyzing the data of China's export trade to North Korea and China's statements about North Korea's nuclear program, I hypothesize that China is more concerned with domestic stability than the denuclearization of North Korea. From the liberal perspective, domestic social stability is more important concern for China than international anarchy in realist terms.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to show my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Kennedy, a respectable, responsible and resourceful scholar, who has provided me with valuable guidance in every stage of the writing of this thesis. Without his enlightening instruction, impressive kindness and patience, I could not have completed my thesis. His keen and vigorous academic observation enlightens me not only in this thesis, but also in my future study.

My sincere appreciation also goes to my committee members Dr. Wuthrich and Dr. Joslyn, who participated this study with great cooperation. Meanwhile, I shall extend my thanks to Prof. Adamson for all her kindness and help in revising my thesis. I would also like to thank all my teachers at the University of Kansas who have helped me to develop the fundamental and essential academic competence.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all my friends, especially Mrs. Fu and my two lovely roommates, for their encouragement and support.

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Introduction

During the Korean War era, relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) were as close as 'lips and teeth', according to former People's Liberation Army Marshall Zhu De. Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China has embraced free market and also tried to encourage its neighbor across the Yalu River to open North Korea on business or diplomatic missions (Savage, 2003). However, in the 21st century, due to the continuous nuclear tests of North Korea, the relations between the two countries finally changed, which has made China a crucial member in the international community to restrain North Korea's nuclear programs.

Under the control of Kim Jong Il's regime, North Korea tested a nuclear device on October 9, 2006. Official statements from the government of one of the permanent five members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) claimed that the North Korea ignored the universal opposition of the international community and flagrantly conducted the nuclear test (Moore, 2008). Moreover, Pyongyang tested another nuclear test in 2009, and a third in 2013, complicating Pyongyang's relationship with Beijing. Therefore, China began to take a more active international role in seeking a solution to North Korean dilemma, moves which culminated in the six-party talks, comprising North Korea, South Korea, China, the United States, Japan, and Russia (Chou, 2005). Because of the growing sensitivity of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula to China's economic and political interests, 'China very directly exerted its energy to kick off multilateral talks concerning the North Korean nuclear crisis' (Chou,

2005). According to the scholar, six-party talks not only show China's official position towards North Korea's nuclear tests shifted, but also China's relationship with North Korea soured (Moore, 2008).

In the case of North Korean nuclear crisis, some scholars assert that China's policy behavior in the last five years reveals hypocrisy in North Korea's nuclear tests. This is because, on the one hand, China participated with Security Council members on October 14, 2006 to condemn North Korea's October 9 nuclear tests; while Pan (2006) shows that China accounted for almost US\$1.5 billion in the bilateral trade with North Korea in 2005, which made China the number one source of both aid and trade with North Korea at that time. Bajoria (2013) agrees and claims that China has been North Korea's most important ally, biggest trading partner and main source of food, arms and fuel. Moreover, Nanto and Manyin (2010) also find that China has implemented some aspects of the sanctions towards North Korea's provocations, but Beijing has been less strict on controlling exports to the North in order to avoid North Korea's economic collapse and maintain China's regional stability.

The question of whether China is more concerned with domestic stability than a nuclearized North Korea is important, because it can explain the reasons why China is still trading with North Korea as a leading member of the six-party talks, which support economic sanctions towards North Korea and ending its nuclear weapons program. In this thesis, I address the question by presenting China's shared goals with the international community to open up nuclear facilities for international inspections and stop North Korea's nuclear ambitions. Meanwhile, I will analyze what are the

main factors that give rise to China's unwillingness to punish North Korea and China's continuous trade with North Korea.

North Korea's defiant behavior has undoubtedly resulted in China's belief that its influence over the country reached a dangerously low level, which aroused China's attempt to recover its influence over the North Korea through intensive diplomatic pressure (Sukhee, 2013). The scholar Sukhee (2013) asserts that China is undoubtedly playing an important role in preventing North Korea from threatening regional peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. In addition, Scobell (2004) points out in his monograph, China has a major stake in ensuring the continued survival of North Korean regime and may be willing to keep guaranteeing this. Moreover, North Korea seems destined to remain heavily dependent on China for morale support and material assistance. In spite of this type of relationship between Pyongyang and Beijing, there are significant limits to China's influence on North Korea - in part due to China's unwillingness to apply hard pressure and in part because, even if China did apply such pressure, North Korea might not respond in the desired manner (Scobell, 2004). This is pertinent for China's foreign policy towards North Korea.

According to the research, realist theory suggests that all states are unitary and have the same foreign policy goals. They maintain that all states should concern more about self-preservation and national security instead of considering regime type or domestic politics. While liberal theory claims that domestic politics and domestic concerns influence foreign policy. For some nations, domestic social stability is more important concern than international anarchy. If China follows realist foreign policy,

then trade policy towards North Korea and goals of the six-party talks would be the same. If China follows liberal theory, then we may observe a contradiction between trade and the goals of the six-party talks. The purpose of this study is to explain the puzzle: although China is leading the six-party talks and the international attempt to end the nuclear weapons program, China is still trading with North Korea. Through analyzing the data of China's export trade to North Korea and China's statements about North Korea's nuclear program, I hypothesize that China is more concerned with domestic stability than a nuclearized North Korea. After obtaining the results from the data, I will try to explore whether the data supports the realist or the liberal assumption.

The thesis is divided into six parts. After the introduction part, Part II contains both realist and liberal theories about nation's foreign policy, North Korea's dependence on China's economic and diplomatic assistance, and China's domestic concerns towards North Korea's nuclear weapons program in order to maintain internal stability and economic prosperity (Sutter, 2003). Then, I introduce my research method in detail in Part III. Part IV examines data on China's exports to North Korea and China's statements about North Korea nuclear program and analyses the correlation between China and North Korea trade and six-party talks and the correlation between China's trade with North Korea and North Korea's nuclear tests. After that, the discussion chapter Part V explains the reasons for China's inconsistency towards North Korea's nuclear weapons program and relates the inconsistency to theoretical approach in order to address the hypothesis. Finally, in Part VI, the thesis concludes with the

analysis gained from the data and answers the research question, finding that China is more concerned about the stability of North Korea because of the threat to China's North East Border and possible instability in China.

Literature Review

1. Theoretical Literature:

(1) Realist Theory:

Although China is leading the six-party talks and the international attempts to open up nuclear facilities for international inspections and end the nuclear weapons program, China is still trading with North Korea, which indicates the hypocrisy of China's response to North Korea. Therefore, the question of whether China is more concerned with maintaining domestic stability than a nuclearized North Korea becomes important. In this thesis, I will use realist and liberal international relations theories to address the research question.

According to the previous studies, classical realist explanations of international politics are based on the assumption that states are unitary actors and have the same foreign policy goals (Ogilvie-White, 1996). The main tenets of realism theory have been identified as statism, survival and self-help. On the basis of classical realist, the "neorealist" theory advanced by Waltz (1979) emphasizes that the international system is anarchy and the distribution of capabilities across units. For Waltz (1979), since the international system is anarchic (i.e., there is no central authority to protect states from one another), each state has to survive on its own. Furthermore, international order, defined as 'a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of a society of states, or international society' is not lacking in international relations (Bull, 1977). Thus, when analyzing what causes China and the international community attempts to stop North Korea's nuclear ambitions, realist

theories might explain China and the international community attempts to stop North Korea's nuclear ambitions as acts of self-preservation and a defense of national stability. Neither regime type or domestic politics can influence a nation's foreign policy in the international system as anarchy.

However, there are many critiques of the assumption that international politics is anarchic. Ruggie (1982) has argued Waltz's neo-realist theory of the anarchic international system cannot explain change and that an explanation must incorporate other variables such as 'dynamic density,' which emphasizes that the density of interaction is the decisive factor for transition to occur. Ashley (1984) has charged that Waltz's structural model based on anarchy but loses sight of politics, arguing that the substantive content of the Chinese conception of national interests is not monolithic or static, but dynamic and contested. Previous scholars have criticized the positivist epistemology on state-level used by neo-realists rather than the "post-positivist" incorporating expanded meanings of security ranging from class, to gender, to post colonial security.

An important refinement of realism was the addition of offense-defense theory, according to Walt (1998). Some scholars argued that war was more likely when states could conquer each other easily. However, when defense was easier than offense, security was more plentiful, incentives to expand declined, and cooperation could blossom (Walt, 1998). Thus, if defense had the advantage, then states could acquire the means to defend themselves without threatening others, dampening the effects of anarchy at the same time. According to this, it is evident to see that the six-party talks

and the international community's economic sanctions towards North Korea's nuclear tests can be regarded a means of defending these six nations (North Korea, South Korea, China, the United States, Japan, and Russia) from regional instability. If China's foreign policy is motivated by realist intentions, then China's trade policy towards North Korea and the goals of the six-party talks would be the same, since North Korea with nuclear weapons is an international security risk for China and all the other nations aim at ending nuclear proliferation at the same time.

(2) Liberal Theory:

In contrast to the realists, traditional liberal theory holds that domestic concerns are important factors for national security and the international anarchy can be mitigated. How exactly is domestic politics important in determining states' foreign policies? Domestic politics can matter either by causing states to pursue suboptimal foreign policies, or when differences in states' political institutions, cultures, economic structures, or leadership goals unrelated to relative power are causally relevant to explaining different foreign policy choices according to Fearon (1998). In addition, Rogowski (1998) also summarized propositions and evidence on how variation in domestic-political institutions influences five dimensions of states' foreign policies: the bias of foreign policy (e.g. toward war or peace, toward free trade or protection); the credibility of foreign policy commitments; the stability and coherence of a state's foreign policy; the ability to mobilize and project power; and domestic actors' strategies for influencing foreign policy. In the light of the previous studies, we might

find that some nations are concerned more about domestic social stability than international anarchy or the balance of power from liberal perspective. In this article, regional stability and economic prosperity are China's main domestic concerns, which can best explain China's contradiction towards North Korea's nuclear tests.

Other liberal theories argue that economic interdependence would discourage states from using force against each other because warfare would threaten each side's prosperity (Keohane & Nye, 2000). The economic strand of liberal theory is still influential as well. In particular, a number of scholars have recently suggested that the "globalization" of world markets, the rise of transnational networks and nongovernmental organizations, and the rapid spread of global communications technology are undermining the power of states and shifting attention away from military security toward economics and social welfare. Since societies around the globe become enmeshed in a web of economic and social connections, the costs of disrupting these ties will effectively preclude unilateral state actions, especially the use of force according to Keohane and Nye (2000). This perspective implies that China's economic sanctions towards North Korea will remain a remote possibility, since Chinese leaders adopted low-risk approach to most international issues in order to maintain China's internal stability and economic prosperity (Sutter, 2003). Thus, if a country does not follow the liberal theory about economic interdependence, the powerful denuclearization talks held by the international community might adopt a perspective that guides the talks, avoiding the use of force and maintaining the "globalization" of world market.

In the liberal conception of domestic politics, the state is not an actor but a representative institution and practices alter “state preferences,” which designates an ordering among underlying substantive outcomes that may result from international political interaction (Moravcsik, 1997). Domestic decision making may be structured so as to generate state preferences that satisfy a strong rationality condition according to Moravcsik (1997). In addition, Ruggie (1982) and other scholars have observed, the nature and intensity of national support for any state purpose - even apparently fundamental concerns like the defense of political and legal sovereignty, territorial integrity, national security, or economic welfare- varies decisively with the social context. In this article, China’s domestic concerns for a stable North Korea and China’s continuing trade with North Korea manifest China’s state preference: national security.

Liberal theories identify the instruments that states can use to achieve shared interests, highlight the powerful economic forces with which states and societies must now contend, and help us understand why states may differ in their basic preferences. In this article, I will try to find whether China is more concerned with domestic stability than a nuclearized North Korea through analyzing China’s statements about North Korea’s nuclear program and the statistics of China’s export trade to North Korea.

2. Contextual Literature:

(1) Six-party talks and China's Response:

The six-party talks play an important role in stopping North Korea's nuclear ambitions. In 1994, China did not take the lead in bringing North Korea to the negotiating table, as it viewed that chiefly as America's responsibility (Moore, 2008). Subsequently, it became apparent that the Agreed Framework in 1994 had broken down. While North Korea was proceeding with its weapons programs by the early 2000s, China began to take a more active international role in seeking a solution to the North Korean dilemma. The moves culminated in the six-party talks, comprising North Korea, South Korea, China, the United States, Japan, and Russia (Moore, 2008). Because of the nuclear proliferation of North Korea, 'China very directly exerted its energy to kick off multilateral talks concerning the North Korean nuclear crisis' in order to maintain China's economic and political interests (Chou, 2005). China began by hosting talks between the United States and the North Korea in 2003 and took the lead in arranging and again hosting several rounds of six-party talks since 2003, aiming at ending North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

Even though China is reluctant to interfere in the internal affairs of a neighboring state, Chinese leaders officially state their support for maintaining a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. The six-party talks can just reveal China's change and its official position towards North Korea's nuclear tests. When North Korea's nuclear test came on October 9, 2006, it is apparent to see that China's response was swift. Officially, China condemned 'The DPRK ignored the universal opposition of the international

community and flagrantly conducted the nuclear test on October 9. The Chinese government is resolutely opposed to it' (People's Daily, 2006). The word 'flagrantly' here is 'hanran' in Chinese, and is normally reserved in its use in the official Chinese lexicon for China's enemies or rivals, historical examples being when the Japanese prime minister visited the Yasukuni Shrine, or the when the United States bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade (Kahn, 2006). According to the research, simply the use of word "flagrantly" alone could manifest the change of "lips and teeth" relationships between China and North Korea. In addition, on October 14, 2006, China displayed its displeasure by standing with the other members of the UNSC in passing a resolution to denounce North Korea's nuclear test. China's ambassador to the UN even calls for 'punitive actions' against the North Korea (Savage, 2006), which also suggest the change of China's response towards North Korea indeed.

Moreover, after the nuclear test, China was reported to have been searching trucks crossing the North Korea - China borders, but China has not been keen on searching ships at sea, for fear that such searches could provoke armed conflicts with North Korea (Lee, 2006). It was also reported that China has instructed its four largest banks to halt all financial transactions with North Korea after the nuclear test. 'All transactions are blocked, whether it is company-to-company or person-to-person', said a Bank of China employee in Northeast China (Fairclough and King, 2006). Although China's military response to nuclear tests in North Korea would require further discussion and votes at the Security Council, and that inspections of North Korean cargo ships or vehicles were voluntary, its seriousness about its opposition to

the North Korea's moves cannot be doubted. Beijing's anger was sufficiently aroused by Pyongyang's anti-Chinese behavior for China to change its mind and become an active participant.

(2) International Community's Response:

Due to North Korea's continuous nuclear provocations, international communities take action to punish North Korea's nuclear weapons program. The most plausible explanation for the motivation of North Korea nuclear tests is that North Korea concluded that ownership of nuclear weapons was necessary to ensure its political-economic survival as a bargaining chip in dealing with the United States (Kwak, 2003). From the view of North Korea, the nuclear tests can not only be regarded as a warning to the United States against a preemptive attack on North Korea, but also an attempt by North Korea to extract additional economic aid from the United States and other countries, according to Kwak (2003). In order to stop North Korea's nuclear ambitions, international communities condemn and punish North Korea through different methods.

North Korea's admission of an enriched uranium program in early October 2002 was the beginning of a nuclear crisis surrounding the Korean peninsula (Kwak, 2003). Initially, the Bush administration sought to resolve the issue through a peaceful means. The U.S. condemned North Korea's nuclear program, demanding that North Korea must completely dismantle its nuclear weapons program; North Korea must also allow International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) weapons inspectors' complete

access to all nuclear facilities so that disarmament can be monitored and verified; and North Korea must promise not to export or transfer weapons of mass destruction, delivery system, or related technologies and materials to any country, group, or individual (Olsen, 2003). Meanwhile, the Bush Administration had three policy options towards North Korea's nuclear tests: (1) dialogue and negotiations with North Korea, (2) diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions of North Korea, and (3) the use of military force against North Korea, according to Olsen (2003). According to the study, the United States' hard-line policy turned into a major problem for the peace process of North Korea. Thus, North Korea keeps developing nuclear weapons, missiles and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) for its own security guarantee.

In addition, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) on November 14, 2002, announced the suspension of heavy fuel oil delivery beginning in December to punish North Korea's new nuclear weapons program. The U.S., South Korea, Japan and the European Union voted unanimously to cut off oil shipments to North Korea until it takes action to dismantle its nuclear program. It is estimated that KEDO-supplied fuel oil accounts for about 10 percent of North Korea's total energy needs. The decision of halting fuel oil shipments causes a huge impact on North Korea, which is already in an acute energy crisis (Kwak, 2003).

In order to force North Korea to abandon its nuclear development program, the UN Security Council adopts a containment strategy and recommends economic sanctions towards North Korea as well. The economic sanctions included bans on the sale to or export from North Korea of military goods and nuclear or any missile-related items, a

ban on the sale to North Korea of luxury goods, a financial freeze and travel ban on anyone related to North Korea's missile or nuclear programs, and inspections of cargo coming from or going to North Korea (Savage, 2006). However, China, Russia and others are unlikely to support the economic sanctions that would be needed to wreck the North Korean economy. According to Kwak (2003), the economic sanctions may compel North Korean military leaders to speed up its nuclear armament for its security guarantee. The sanctions could be also wrong to assume that trilateral cooperation among the U.S., Japan and South Korea will endure if political isolation and containment will result in confrontation with North Korea finally. For Japan and South Korea, they do not want to increase a military crisis on the Korean peninsula as well. President Kim Dae-jung On December 30, 2002 expressed his objection to the containment against North Korea and president-elect Roh Moo-hyun shared Kim's view about political isolation and economic sanctions of North Korea (Olsen, 2003).

In spite of China's diplomatic influence on North Korea and cooperation with international community in the six-party talks to diamante the country, China still continues the trade with North Korea. China's hypocrisy in dealing with the North Korean nuclear proliferation thoroughly manifests its foreign policy towards many international affairs.

(3) China's Foreign Policy towards North Korea:

The six-party talks on North Korean nuclear issues have been ongoing since August 2003, which actually have not prevented North Korea from having nuclear weapons at

all. Nevertheless, the goal of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula has been agreed by all six countries, including North Korea. Whether these talks will reach that goal is unclear and uncertain. However, the talks have brought the six countries, or at least the United States, China, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and Russia, closer in terms of regional security. All of these six nations have agreed to an official dialogue on a multilateral security cooperation mechanism in Northeast Asia, which to a large extent is useful and encouraging (Chu & Lin, 2008).

Beijing has emphasized the importance of the six-party talks, but remains deeply concerned by the North Korean nuclear program and by the threats posed by massive refugees' immigration from North Korea to North East region of China. Also, Beijing regards its relationship with the U.S. as a crucial consideration in decision-making about the nuclear proliferation of North Korea, according to Kim (2003). Savage (2003) agrees with Kim's (2003) statement, supporting that North Korea's belligerence provides a convenient excuse for U.S. troops deployments in the region, as well as American pursuit of missile defense for itself and its allies. From China's standpoint, U.S. military policies ostensibly designed to deter North Korea aggression are really aimed at containing China and preventing it from realizing its goal of reunification with Taiwan (Savage, 2003). For China, the greatest challenge to smooth management of the new Beijing-Pyongyang relationship. China's diplomacy in the six-party talks and economic leverage over North Korea also reflect some of China's foreign policy such as mutual non-aggression, mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

In addition, Kim (2003) and Savage (2003) argue that North Korea can provoke and threaten some of the most fundamental interests of China. According to Kim and Lee (2002), Moore (2008), and Snyder (2009), they conclude three main ways, through which North Korea's weapons programs will threaten China's interests. First, North Korea's continuous nuclear weapons program could provoke a military intervention from the United States and/or other powers, which prevents China from gaining a peaceful regional environment for its own continued development. Secondly, North Korea's relative isolation and international military action or comprehensive sanctions against North Korea challenge China's version for multilateral economic and security cooperation based on "mutual interest and common prosperity." Thirdly, a collapse of North Korea could create massive immigration of North Korean refugees, which might be a potential threat to the security of China's borders.

Above all, North Korean nuclear actions could cause major economic disruption in Chinese markets and social instability in East Asia because of war or comprehensive sanctions against North Korea (Kim and Lee 2002; Moore 2008; Snyder 2009). Consequently, these threats to a large extent can be considered as the main reasons why it is highly unlikely that China will support any sanctions policy that the United States brings to the UN Security Council. Since China has the largest border with North Korea, without China's support, any sanctions policy is doomed to fail. Moreover, the threats to China's national interests can explain the puzzle why China is still trading with North Korea as a leading member in the six-party talks. China attempts to avoid the collapse of North Korea for the purpose of maintaining China's

own national interests: internal security and territorial integrity.

Since China has been the dominant provider of aid and partner in trade with North Korea, China's own economic development gave it the ability to harness new economic instruments to gain political leverage in its relationship with North Korea (Snyder, 2009). As long as North Korea was receiving external economic subsidies, it would participate in the six-party talks, but North Korea's participation rarely resulted in concrete progress towards the objective of denuclearization. China is reported to have provided economic aid and energy assistance worth as much as US\$50 million to secure North Korean in February 2004 (Kim, 2006).

China also increased investment in infrastructure projects along the Sino-North Border beginning in 2005. The bridge from Helong, in China, to Musan, where North Korea's iron mines are located, was reported to have been upgraded to support Chinese investment estimated at about US\$500 million. In addition, China is reported to have invested in the Hyesan copper mine, the Manp'o zinc mine, and the Hoeryo'ng gold mine (Gomi, 2005). The highest-profile evidence of China's efforts to use politically directed investment as a form of assistance was China's financing and construction of the Tae'an glass factory, through which to enhance China's political leverage and influence on leaders in Pyongyang (Snyder, 2009). This type of investment may be useful as a means of providing assistance to North Korea, and has been used to promote China's economic and political stability according to Snyder (2009). Thus, the findings of these scholars may suggest that China attempts to bolster its economic leverage over North Korea, which manifests that China's domestic

concerns indeed influence its foreign policy.

(4) China's Domestic Stability Concerns:

War or serious conflict involving North Korea could cause a disruption of trade and investment in the region, which could be devastating to Chinese economic development and ultimately shake China's domestic political stability. If the disruption prolonged, it could even threaten the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), because the CCP's legitimacy today rests primarily on successful economic development (Moore, 2008).

If there is no domestic stability, then there is no CCP. Currently, China's domestic economy is in a very sensitive period of development. A Chinese scholar Yu (2005) has said, 'China is in a phase where instability from domestic contradictions is a frequent occurrence' because of 'the transition from a centrally planned to a market economy'. Therefore, 'if it is not handled well, it can bring about social unrest' (Yu, 2005). Actually the CCP fears social instability very much and aims at achieving both regional and national economic growth. In this regard, domestic stability for China means to maintain security and peace, and avoid mass unrest such as strikes, protests and anti-government activities. Therefore, the CCP is watching North Korea's situation closely. If China's economy is battered and/or stalls due to the disruption of North Korea, the CCP will face a huge breakdown in the economy, which could bring those unemployed populations and the poor out into the streets (Yu, 2005). Meanwhile, the pursuit of national interests is the legitimate goal of a state's foreign policy

according to Deng (1998). During the 1990s, China's conception of national interests was closely related to sovereignty, territorial integrity, trading behavior, human rights and regional security multilateralism (Deng, 1998).

China has its own interests in promotion of domestic and regional stability. In order to achieve those objectives, China would be willing to consider the economic instruments for domestic concerns, which were closely linked to the politics of managing the Sino-North Korean relationship (Snyder, 2009). The late 1990s marked a transition to a new stage in China's conceptualization of its foreign policy priorities. China's "new security concept" and "peaceful rise" were increasingly premised on the idea that continued economic development, external orientation, and integration with the outside world gave it greater responsibility to secure the regional stability necessary to perpetuate economic growth (Snyder, 2009). These foreign policy priorities also revealed contradictions between the premises underlying China's grand strategy and its fundamental interests in North Korea.

In Beijing's view, the greatest danger of maximizing its leverage on North Korea is from two alternative possibilities: conflict and collapse. China's junior socialist ally in the strategic buffer zone could feel so cornered that it fights back, thus triggering an armed conflict. Alternatively, economic sanctions could produce another collapsing socialist regime on China's borders, with huge political, economic, and social consequences for Chinese domestic politics (Kim and Lee, 2002). Thus, according to the study, China will be more committed to the immediate challenge of maintaining stability than its long-term objective of nuclear disarmament on the Korean Peninsula.

In addition, a more recent elaboration of the new foreign policy is the idea of the “harmonious world” elaborated by Hu Jintao in September 15, 2005 (Yuan, 2007). Hu proposed “respecting the right of all countries to choose their own social system and development road, strengthening dialogue and exchanges between different civilizations, upholding the diversity of civilizations, promoting democratization of international relations, and making concerted efforts to build a harmonious world incorporating civilizations of a diverse nature.” Yuan (2007) claims that the “harmonious world” idea emphasizes the replacement of “struggle” with “harmony” in management of China’s international relations and China still focuses on major national interests rather than ideology as core principle underlying China’s diplomacy.

Method

This study utilized a series of official documents, newspaper articles and data on Chinese exports and trade with North Korea to measure the extent to which China shared goals with the international community. I also examined trade data to analyze how China characterized concerns about North Korea's nuclear programs.

At the very beginning, I collected media reports from 2007 to 2011 about the six-party talks from BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific - Political, which is supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring¹. I chose BBC Monitoring database because it not only gets the latest Asian news, but also selects and translates information from radio, television, press, news agencies and the Internet from 150 countries in more than 70 languages. The data is official governmental statements from China and other countries. The BBC Monitoring's reports about six-party talks provide different nations' statements released by South Korea's *Yonhap News Agency*, Russia's RIA, Japan's *Kyodo News Agency*, China's *Xinhua News Agency*, Hong Kong - based *News Agency Zhongguo Tongxun She*, and the China edition of CCTV-4's program "Today's Focus." Moreover, the BBC also reports many bilateral talks between the U.S. and Japan, and Japan and South Korea about North Korea's nuclear weapons program. The statements of each nation about the six-party talks can reveal not only each nation's attitude towards North Korea's nuclear issue distinctly, but also China's shared goals with the international community.

In addition, I collected transcripts from the six-party talks to look for statements by

¹ I got the information through the University of Kansas library databases.

China and the international community. I also searched the dates of all the six-party talks, dates of all the North Korean nuclear tests, and what kind of sanctions the countries involved in the talks suggest to North Korea. These sources come from China's *Xinhua Net*, which is the Communist Party and Chinese central government's official channel for the distribution of news. After that, I translated all the reports and Chinese official statements from Chinese into English.

Combined with the media reports I found from BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific - Political, I collected 14 documents containing direct statements from China and the international community in the six-party talks regarding North Korea's nuclear program. On the basis of these 14 documents, I created a table and categorized all of China and the international community's statements concerning the denuclearization of North Korea into three main types: supportive statements, neutral statements, and non-supportive statements to the denuclearization. I utilized each category to examine political rhetoric. For example, the U.S. claimed "North Korea must primarily give up its nuclear weapons program²" at the end of the first round, showing its supportive response towards the denuclearization of North Korea. China asserted "the six-party talks should end with peace³" at the end of the first round instead of focusing on denuclearizing North Korea, revealing its neutral attitude towards the issue. However, a non-supportive statement is one in which the country claims no problem exists or no action is needed. Although there is no non-supportive response found from the transcript of the six-party talks, I still used it to show the so-called shared goals of all

² Source: *China's Xinhua Net*

³ Ibid

the six-party members to dismantle North Korea. Subsequently, I calculated the number of supportive, neutral, and non-supportive statements that appeared in these 14 documents and compared the findings from the political rhetoric research with China's actual trade data. Finally, I examined China's consistency, change, or contradiction over the North Korea issue according to the totals.

To obtain official data on Chinese exports and trade with North Korea, I searched the website *China Data Online* and found China and North Korea's trade data among thousands of China's national statistics. I downloaded China's official documents from the website and set up two figures to examine the correlation between China's export trade to North Korea and China's stance on North Korea at the six-party talks from 2003 to 2007, and the correlation between China's export trade to North Korea and North Korea's nuclear tests in 2006, 2009, and 2013, respectively. I selected *China Data Online* for the research because it is the primary data source for China studies and the largest source of longitudinal trade data released by the government.

Finally, I searched the University of Kansas library databases and found some other resources from *The New York Times*, *The States News Service*, and *The USA Today* for the information about Chinese leaders' concern over North Korea's domestic stability. *The New York Times* has been regarded as a national "newspaper of record" with high credibility and authority, which is also the representative of newspaper with seriousness in the United States. Meanwhile, both *The States News Service* and *The USA Today* are well-known newspapers and provide objective reports from different perspectives. Different nations' newspaper articles in different periods may provide

views from different perspectives towards the issue of North Korea's nuclear tests. I collected 6 articles from these newspapers. Some of these articles support that China is concerned more about its regional peace and security. Others maintain that the reason why China focuses on domestic stability is because China wants to limit the power of U.S. as a kind of diplomatic strategy. Even though there are some differences among these arguments, all of them emphasize the importance of domestic stability in China. Therefore, these resources can help explain why China is leading the six-party talks, yet still trading with North Korea.

Results & Analysis

This chapter contains the results and data analysis of China and the international community's statements in the six-party talks and China's exports to North Korea from 1995 to 2010. The findings might help us determine whether China is more concerned with its own national interests than North Korean nuclear proliferation.

North Korea's admission of an enriched uranium program in 2002 represented the beginning of a nuclear crisis surrounding the Korean peninsula. North Korea attempted to utilize nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip to ensure its political-economic survival. Thus, the six-party talks were held in order to stop North Korea's nuclear ambitions. Although China and the international community aimed at ending the nuclear weapons program in North Korea, some of their stances were inconsistent due to the complicated political and economic situations. The following part will analyze the inconsistency in detail.

As shown in Table 1, China made 8 supportive statements and 5 neutral statements about the denuclearization of North Korea in total. Meanwhile, the international community made 47 supportive statements and 5 neutral statements regarding the denuclearization issue in all. According to the available materials, it is evident to see that both China and the international community have never made any non-supportive statements about the denuclearization of North Korea in the talks. Moreover, we can find from the table that the neutral response of China and the international community in the fifth and sixth rounds appeared more frequently than before.

Table 1: China and the International Community's Response to North Korean

Denuclearization in the Six-party Talks

| Six-party Talks | | Response | Supportive | Neutral | Non-supportive |
|---|-------------------------|----------|------------|---------|----------------|
| First Round (2003. 8.) | China | | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| | International Community | | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Second Round (2004. 2.) | China | | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | International Community | | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Third Round (2004. 6.) | China | | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| | International Community | | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Fourth Round (2005. 7. & 9.) | China | | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | International Community | | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Fifth Round (2005. 11. & 2006. 12. & 2007. 2.) | China | | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| | International Community | | 18 | 1 | 0 |
| Sixth Round (2007. 3. & 9.) | China | | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| | International Community | | 15 | 2 | 0 |

Source: China's Xinhua Net

This data on China and the international community's response to North Korean denuclearization in the six-party talks suggests that China's leaders did have shared goals with the international community to stop North Korea's nuclear ambitions and end North Korea's nuclear weapons program. For example, the U.S. officially insisted "North Korea must give up its nuclear weapons program⁴" in the first round of the six-party talks. In the second round of the talks, South Korea also asserted "North Korea should completely abandon its nuclear weapons program and the U.S. must guarantee its security.⁵" Moreover, during the fourth round of the talks, the six parties unanimously reaffirmed "the goal of the six-party talks is the verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula in a peaceful manner⁶." According to these statements from the talks, the use of words such as "must," "completely," "unanimously," and "verifiable" reveals China and the international community's firm resolution of the denuclearization in North Korea.

Even though the six-party talks have stalled since 2007, bilateral and /or multilateral consultations similar to the six-party talks have still continued. After the last round of the six-party talks, US President Barack Obama agreed to cooperate closely with Japan towards North Korea's denuclearization through the six-party talks on Jan. 29, 2009. The third phase of the bilateral talks between the U.S. and Japan calls for North Korea to dismantle its nuclear facilities and programs in exchange for massive economic aid and diplomatic recognition by Washington and Tokyo. Obama and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have said that they will continue the

⁴ Source: *China's Xinhua Net*

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

six-party talks while seeking more direct engagement with the reclusive, nuclear-armed communist state⁷.

Based on the available data, China and the international community's supportive stances on denuclearizing North Korea can be shown through their condemnation towards North Korea's conducting its third nuclear test on Feb. 12, 2013. The test elicited condemnation and indignation from several countries and leaders, including United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the U.S. and China. The secretary-general of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, condemned the underground nuclear weapon test conducted by North Korea and claimed that it was deplorable that Pyongyang defied the strong and unequivocal call from the international community to refrain from any further provocative measures. US President Barack Obama asserted the danger posed by North Korea's threatening activities warrants further swift and credible action by the international community. As shown through this political rhetoric, the results reveal China and the international community's firm determination of dismantling North Korea's nuclear facilities and programs.

However, we can find that China still maintained neutral four times during the six-party talks towards North Korea's nuclear issues. For instance, China said "the six-party talks should end with peace⁸" at the end of the first round. In the third round, China said "the six-party talks should consider North Korea's nuclear weapons program's impact on China's national security."⁹ In the fifth round of the talks, China made two neutral statements towards the denuclearization of North Korea. This is

⁷ Source: *Yonhap News Agency*

⁸ Source: *China's Xinhua Net*

⁹ Ibid

mainly because United Nations Security Council had imposed economic sanctions on North Korea, which might lead to collapse of the region and threaten China's domestic security. Since North Korea announced a successful nuclear test on October 9, 2006, the United Nations Security Council, in response, passed Resolution 1718, unanimously condemning North Korea. The sanctions ranged from the economic to the trade of military units, weapons of mass destruction (WMD)-related parts and technology transfer, and a ban on certain luxury goods¹⁰. However, both China and Russia were quick to stress that these were not military-enforceable sanctions. Then China blocked the United Nations Security Council from condemning North Korea's dangerous behavior, and China's foreign minister vowed that China intended to remain neutral¹¹. In sum, these analyses suggest China's inconsistency and contradiction on the denuclearization of North Korea, emphasizing China's domestic concerns at the same time.



Source: China Data Online

¹⁰ Source: *The New York Times*

¹¹ Ibid

With China's huge economy and rapid rate of growth, China has become the key to North Korea's economic relations with the outside world. China's major exports to North Korea include food aids, oil, machinery, electrical machinery, vehicles, plastic, iron and steel. China's major imports from North Korea include mineral fuels, ores, woven apparel, iron and steel, fish and seafood.

Not only is China the main trading partner of North Korea, but China has become a critical player in the implementation of economic sanctions on North Korea. For example, in 2009, China provided about half of all North Korean imports and received a quarter of its exports (Nanto & Manyin, 2010). As shown in Figure 1, China's export trade with North Korea has been rising steadily. Although North Korea and China's foreign trade in 1998 decreased by 33.8 percent over the previous year, since 2001 it has recovered up the level of 1995. According to the data, China's export trade with North Korea in 2010 was US\$2,277 million in total, an increase of 368.5 percent of the trade since 1995. The dramatic rise in exports demonstrates an overall increase in China's trade with North Korea.

However, the UN Security Council condemned North Korea due to the third nuclear test through passing economic sanctions resolution on October 9, 2006. China not only remained neutral towards the sanctions but also continued trading with North Korea since then. Figure 1 shows that China's export trade to North Korea in 2007 amounted to US\$1,392 million, an increase of nearly 13 percent of the trade in 2006 and an increase of 121.7 percent of the trade in 2003. However, heedless of the international community's resolutions and China's continuing trade assistance, North

Korea still conducted its first nuclear test in 2006 during the fifth round of the talks.

This test manifests that the six-party talks indeed failed to stop North Korea's nuclear ambitions.



Source: China Data Online

According to Figure 2, we can find that China not only fails to impose the economic sanctions on North Korea, but continues trading with North Korea even after its first and second nuclear tests. As China sought to enhance its political influence on North Korea beginning in 2003, its share of North Korea's overall trade reached 33 percent that year, and has continued to rise since then, to over 43 percent in 2005. China has become North Korea's external lifeline and major source of economic exchange.

In addition to the economic cooperation, Chinese scholars reported that China has adopted a three-point policy for economic cooperation with North Korea based on the

principle of “mutual benefit.”¹² These principles were discussed during Hu’s visit to Pyongyang in October 2005, and again when Kim visited China in January 2006¹³.

The first principle is strengthened government-to-government exchanges and cooperation. The second is expanded reliance on market mechanisms. And the third is a leading role for enterprises in economic cooperation between the two countries. Therefore, China’s economic engagement with North Korea might be utilized in various ways to achieve various political objectives.

According to China’s trade with North Korea, we can find that China attempted to denuclearize North Korea in exchange for a massive foreign aid through trade rather than economic sanctions. However, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test on Oct. 9, 2006 and second on May 25, 2009. The data also shows that Sino-North Korean trade increased by almost 13 percent during 2007 compared to 2006, and 20.7 percent during 2010 compared to 2009, coinciding with China’s increased diplomatic mediation efforts. The overall upward trend of China and North Korea’s trade appears to serve as a barometer for the relative health of political relations between the two countries. In sum, the results suggest that there existed inconsistency between China’s firm opposition towards the nuclear proliferation of North Korea and China’s actual trade assistance to North Korea.

The inconsistency of China’s response towards North Korea’s nuclear tests also gave rise to many debates about whether they initiated sanctions. South Korean Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan said “We are expecting China to explain the details

¹² Author conversations and interviews with Chinese North Korea specialists in Beijing, February 2006.

¹³ Ibid

of its economic cooperation programs with North Korea and whether they violated the Security Council resolutions (Choe, 2009).” Mr. Yu described Beijing’s diplomacy as a combination of sanctions and engagement arising out of a concern that isolation and pressure alone would drive North Korea to strengthen its nuclear weapons programs. In contrast, even though China’s trade and aid have become more crucial to North Korea’s survival, some analysts say that China’s influence over North Korea may be overstated according to Choe (2009). Bruce Klingner, senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, said “China has long sought to parlay economic engagement into political influence over North Korea,” and “Beijing’s efforts, however, have been for naught. Despite extensive Chinese government’s business engagement, the Chinese leadership was unable to persuade North Korea to abandon either nuclear weapons program nor prevent long-range missile launches and nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009.¹⁴” China has long made it clear that it is concerned with the stability on its border and within its territory.

Based on the available data, there seems to be a close relationship between China’s trade with North Korea and Chinese leaders’ concern over North Korea’s domestic stability. After the bilateral talks between China and North Korea in Oct. 2009, the article *China Aims to Steady North Korea* reported by *The New York Times* claimed “North Korea’s reversal of returning to the six-party talks came after China signed a series of agreements that promised aid for North Korea and an expansion in economic exchanges, including the construction of another bridge across their tightly controlled

¹⁴ Source: *The New York Times*

river border.¹⁵” Although China has always regarded North Korea as a buffer against American influence in the region, China acknowledges that avoiding an implosion by North Korea is more important. Otherwise, it would endanger the stability of its own border area¹⁶. Han Suk-hee, an expert on Chinese-North Korean relations at the Graduate School of International Studies at Yonsei University in Seoul, asserted that the response of China in the bilateral talks shows that China’s foremost concern is to secure stability in North Korea¹⁷. Han said “The deals they signed are aimed at ensuring stability in North Korea even after Kim Jong-il is gone. China effectively announced that it did not agree with the United States and South Korea on sanctions against North Korea.¹⁸” In addition, the article *China Aims to Steady North Korea* also claimed that the joint announcement gave China something on the nuclear front to show the world - if only a vaguely worded promise to possibly return to the talks - that might ease international pressure on it to do more on North Korea¹⁹. Thus, China’s continuing trade with North Korea reveals its domestic concerns for a stable North Korea and the social stability.

On January 8, 2012, Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin conducted an exclusive interview with the *Xinhua News Agency*, and introduced the Asian situation and China's diplomatic work with neighboring countries in 2011 and described the direction of Chinese diplomacy with Asian countries in 2012. Liu claimed that China has actively communicated with all the related parties, including North Korea, and

¹⁵ Source: *The New York Times*

¹⁶ Source: *The New York Times*

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

clearly elaborated China's concerns of supporting North Korea's stable development and maintaining peace and stability of the Peninsula and Northeast Asia. He said "China always pays close attention to the situation on the Korean Peninsula and consistently upholds that the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue be solved through dialogue and consultations and in peaceful ways.²⁰" It is the consistent principle of both the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese government to consolidate and develop the cooperative relations with North Korea²¹. Liu also said "Holding presidency of the six-party talks, China will continue to promote peace talks and work with all the related parties to play a constructive role of advancing the six-part talks process and build lasting peace and tranquility on the Peninsula and in Northeast Asia.²²" In addition, China is planning to carry forward the spirit of "tradition inheritance, future orientation, good-neighborly friendship and strengthening cooperation" to pass on and develop Sino-North Korean relations,²³ which manifests that China will not sanction North Korea economically and even continue the trade with North Korea due to domestic stability concerns. According to these newspaper sources, we can find that Chinese leaders concern more over a stable North Korea and China's domestic stability than a nuclearized North Korea.

²⁰ Source: *Xinhua News Agency*

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

Discussion

According to previous data analysis, I find inconsistency in China's response towards North Korean nuclear actions. That is, China undermined the international community's attempt to enforce sanctions. For instance, China blocked the United Nations Security Council from condemning North Korea's dangerous behavior and China's foreign minister vowed that China intended to remain neutral.

Since CCP fears China's social instability both regionally and nationally, China always puts its domestic stability in the first place. However, China has consistently taken a stand against North Korean nuclear tests. Even though China believes that North Korea's stability is one of the most significant preconditions of China's domestic security, the results of the research shows that both the six-party talks and China's trade assistance towards North Korea failed to achieve the denuclearization goals when North Korea conducted its nuclear tests in 2006, 2009, and 2013.

In contrast to the realist which supports that states are unitary actors and all of them have the same foreign policy goals (Ogilvie-White, 1996), the current study finds that domestic politics can influence a nation's foreign policy in the international system. Such economic sanctions may compel North Korean military leaders to speed up the country's nuclear armament for its security guarantee, according to Kwak (2003). Moreover, the reason why China is unlikely to support the economic sanctions on North Korea is that the sanctions would wreck the North Korean economy and threaten China's own national interests. Therefore, domestic politics can influence a nation's foreign policy.

Instead, the results of this study are consistent with liberal theory, which proposes that domestic politics can matter by causing states to pursue suboptimal foreign policies (Fearon, 1998). Even though the Chinese government expressed its firm opposition to North Korea's third nuclear test and showed its firm stance to realize the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and prevent nuclear proliferation, China blocked the United Nations Security Council from condemning and sanctioning North Korea's dangerous behavior, and China's foreign minister vowed that China intended to remain neutral towards the issue. China's neutral response reveals that China's real objective of participating in the six-party talks actually differs from the international community.

Instead of denuclearizing North Korea, China's main objective is to maintain domestic stability. For China, North Korean nuclear actions could cause major economic disruption in Chinese markets and social insecurity in China because of war or comprehensive sanctions against North Korea (Kim and Lee 2002; Moore 2008; Snyder 2009). There are many reasons for China to hold neutral response towards the sanctions over North Korea. While China supports the goal of denuclearization of North Korea, it is not prepared to cooperate with the U.S. in pushing for regime change in Pyongyang. This is because "regime change" conjures up several associations in Beijing, none of which are pleasant. The economic sanctions policy is likely to increase the flow of North Korean refugees into China, complicating an already difficult situation. According to Savage (2003), setting up refugee camps, as some activists have called on China to do, might lead to risks encouraging greater

in-migration and a large number of ethnic Koreans residing in the area, and it would be difficult for Chinese authorities to control the movements of the refugees. According to Chinese academics, only putting the refugee count at less than 1,000, a number that the ethnic Korean community in China might be able to absorb. Otherwise, the flows of refugees will put stress on the local Korean-Chinese community to provide food to help starving relatives in North Korea (Snyder, 1997). Even after coming to Chinese territory, North Korea's refugees have few options available to ensure their survival. According to Snyder (1997), those North Korean refugees usually cannot speak Chinese and are easily distinguished from local populations. Moreover, Northeastern China has its own problems with unemployment and the "floating population" of unemployed Chinese, which further limits survival options for the North Korean refugee population. If the refugee immigration really comes true, the situation will undoubtedly prevent China from gaining a peaceful regional environment for its own continued development. In sum, China's response is also consistent with the liberal assumption that China adopted a low-risk approach to most international issues in order to maintain China's internal stability and economic prosperity (Sutter, 2003).

According to the research, I find that China's political rhetoric and the neutral response in and about the talks show its strong domestic stability concern as well. This kind of concern is proposed and emphasized by many scholars as well. For instance, Snyder (2009) claims that China's "new security concept" and "peaceful rise" were increasingly premised on the idea that continued economic development,

external orientation, and integration with the outside world, which underline the significance of internal stability in China. In Beijing's view, the greatest danger of maximizing its leverage on North Korea is from two alternative possibilities: conflict and collapse. China's junior socialist ally in the strategic buffer zone could feel so cornered that it fights back, thus triggering an armed conflict. Kim and Lee (2002) support that economic sanctions could produce another collapsing socialist regime on China's borders, with huge political, economic, and social consequences for Chinese domestic politics. Considering these alternative possibilities, Yuan (2007) also claims that China sticks to the "harmonious world" idea, focusing on the replacement of "struggle" with "harmony" in management of China's international relations and China's major national interests rather than ideology as core principle underlying China's diplomacy. All of these arguments manifest China's domestic concerns rather than international and regional concerns.

I also find that China attempts to utilize trade cooperation with North Korea for its own political stability and economic prosperity. The finding just fits in with Walt's (1998) study, which asserts that economic interdependence would discourage states from using force against each other, because warfare would threaten each side's prosperity. Different types of investment and foreign aid may be useful as a means of providing assistance to North Korea, and have been used to promote China's economic and political stability, according to Snyder (2009). The results of this study are also in accordance with Wang's (1999) findings of China's development interest and need is serving the goal of domestic economic construction and seeking a

relatively stable external environment conducive to reform and development. In this regard, China's participation in the six-party talks can be regarded as a method for China to seek a relatively stable external environment, in which China ostensibly shares the goals with the international community to denuclearize North Korea. However, China actually aims at maintaining domestic stability. Both China's refusal to sanction North Korea economically and China's continuing trade with North Korea reveal China's domestic politics and its domestic concerns at the same time, which always influence China's foreign policies. According to China's foreign policy, we can find that China emphasizes the sovereignty interest and need is to protect the territory, borders, and basic sovereignty from encroachment. This is the reason why Beijing has highlighted the significance of dialogue in resolving the standoff of North Korean nuclear issue, but remains deeply concerned by the threats posed by refugees from North Korea to the stability of its own Communist political system. Furthermore, Beijing considers relations with the United States as a paramount consideration in decision-making about the crisis. However, China fails to exercise positive influence in the Asia Pacific region because of China's inconsistency between its political rhetoric and actual trade data with North Korea.

Unlike the study of Snyder (2009), who believes that China's own economy gave it the ability to harness new economic instruments to gain political leverage in its relationship with North Korea, the results of the current research suggest that China's economic instruments fail to end North Korean nuclear tests. North Korea ignored the universal opposition its nuclear weapons program and flagrantly conducted nuclear

tests in 2006, 2009, and 2013. China's trade assistance to North Korea does not stop North Korean nuclear ambitions. The most plausible explanation for the motivation of North Korea nuclear tests is that North Korea concluded that ownership of nuclear weapons was necessary to ensure its political-economic survival as a bargaining chip in dealing with the United States. Moreover, from North Korea's perspective, the nuclear tests can not only be regarded as a warning to the United States against a preemptive attack on North Korea, but also an attempt by North Korea to extract additional economic aid from the United States and other countries, according to Kwak (2003). To a certain extent, North Korea does not believe that China's trade assistance can prevent the international community's economic sanctions or the United States' military attack. In order to guarantee the survival and security of North Korea, North Korea chose to extract foreign aid from the international community and continue its nuclear tests at the same time.

Finally, we come to the research question of this thesis. Is China more concerned with domestic stability than a nuclearized North Korea? We find that China follows the liberal theory and we also observe a contradiction between China's trade with North Korea and the goals of the six-party talks. China is more concerned about the stability of North Korea because of the threat to China's North East border and possible instability in China. The findings of the study also support the hypothesis that China concerns more over a stable North Korea and China's domestic stability than a nuclearized North Korea.

Conclusion

According to the results and analysis of this study, we can conclude that the long-term goal of China's foreign policy is to become a responsible superpower, while the current and short-term goals are to focus on domestic concerns such as resolving political and economic problems and establishing a relatively stable external environment, in which to advance its own national development.

The study reveals that China's foreign policy toward North Korea is aimed at maintaining the stability of the region as a part of creating this stable environment. Even though China's ties with North Korea might not be as close as before, North Korea will continue to be one of the most significant considerations in China's decision-making of foreign policy. China's leading role in the six-party talks, objecting to economic sanctions on North Korea, and continuing trade with the region clearly indicate China's intentions concerning the North Korean nuclear issue.

According to the research, we observe a contradiction between China's trade with North Korea and the goals of the six-party talks, which reveals that China's domestic politics and domestic concerns influence its foreign policy in liberal terms. However, the results of the study also show that the Sino-North Korean relationship is increasingly based on the principles of reciprocity and national interest, which is leading to a decline in North Korea's political dependence on China. North Korea's continuous nuclear tests in 2006, 2009, and 2013 just show the limitation of China's influence in the six-party talks and trade assistance towards North Korea.

All in all, it is evident that although China has more influence over North Korea

than the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Russia, China is still more concerned with domestic stability than a nuclearized North Korea. If China were to use all the instruments it has at its disposal to bring pressure to bear on North Korea, it would endanger its larger strategic objectives for the region due to the complexity of the political and security situation in Northeast Asia. Even if China condemns North Korea's nuclear tests, it does not mean that China will cease its trade with North Korea. China's pragmatic approach reflects its own interest in stability and in the promotion of economic development. Moreover, after the third nuclear test in 2013, North Korea declared that it would never join talks on giving up its nuclear weapons until the entire world became weapons-free. Therefore, China's influence over North Korea is limited, and China will not take any action to escalate the situation in North Korea in order to prevent instability or even the collapse of North Korea.

In this regard, the careful examination of findings address the hypothesis and answer the research question. China's national strategy focusing on maintaining domestic stability can be applied in analyzing some other international issues. In addition, there are still some limitations of the study that may affect the validity or the generalizability of the results. Thus, more data analysis and official documents should be collected and examined for the further research.

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