

East Asian Order in Flux

Sukhee Han
(Yonsei University)

I. The Rise of China vis-à-vis the US

- China's rise in terms of economy, military, and diplomacy is a Historical Phenomenon
- China Records No. 2 Economy next to the US: China may surpass the US in terms of GDP in the foreseeable future
- China increases its shareholding in IMF and World Bank
- China pursues to make Renminbi as an international currency
- Growth of China's military budget → China's military modernization more conspicuous
- Narrowing the military power gaps between the US and China
- Pew Research Data
 - 1) More than half responses that China has already been grown as a great power (2010)
 - 2) More than half responses that China would replace the US in the future (2012)
- Given the US policy of rebalancing in East Asia and China's suggestion of New Type of Great Power Relations, the US and China may pose both cooperation and competition in the region

II. Japan's Two Track Diplomacy

- Sino-Japanese Relations: territorial disputes; unprecedentedly antagonistic; rhetoric of military confrontation; hope of détente disappearing
- Korea-Japan Relations: face-off between governments; public opinion matters in Korea; with Japanese initiative, potential for reconciliation
- Despite its sour relationship with Japan, Korea would not make joint response in corporation with China against Japan
- US-Japan Relations: consolidating tight alliance; loyal assistant of US' rebalancing; tacit request of moral, diplomatic, and military support of Japan

- While remaining contentious with neighboring states (Korea and China), Abe pushes strong US-Japan alliance and attempts to form friendly ties with ASEAN and Europe

III. Korea's Hedge between the US and China

- Amicable Korea-China Relations since the beginning of Park and Xi's inaugurations
- Beijing's contrasting attitude toward Pyongyang and Seoul: strained Beijing-Pyongyang vs. friendly Seoul-Beijing
- Beijing seems to expand its sphere of influence from the northern half to the peninsula as a whole → China may intensify its challenge against the US-Korea alliance
- Robust US-Korean Alliance: President Park's visit to the US; despite several disputes in shifts of wartime operational command and nuclear preprocessing, overall bilateral relationship seems sound and healthy
- But the discord between Korea and Japan may influence over the US-Korean relations: the US prefers harmonious Korea-Japan relations but difficult to make it; Japan tilts toward the US, antagonizing China; Korea attempts to hedge China with the US but Japan understands that Korea economically and diplomatically moves toward China side
- No change witnessed in Korea's policy between the US and China
- For overcoming current Asia Paradox, President Park suggest the Northeast Asian Peace and Cooperation Initiative: promoting trust and cultivating habits of cooperation
- Also, Park actively promotes Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy by supporting MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey, and Australia)

IV. Future Prospects

- Cooperation and Competition between the US and China remained in East Asia and majority of Asian states, including Korea and ASEAN states, may pose little change in their attitude between the US and China
- Alliance transition is too premature to take place in East Asia
- Given territorial disputes, it is difficult for both China and Japan to reconcile their bilateral relations, but Korea-Japan relations are not impossible to resume cooperative ties, just in case any one party shows sense of giving in

- Korea-China relations continue to intensify their cooperation, but Korea will always be aware of the security importance of the US-Korea alliance
- Korea-China security cooperation depends in part on how China deals with North Korea
- Consequentially East Asian regional order is changing but is far from the structural changes