

## For the “Chinese Dream” to Become a Dream for All

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With the public announcement of “the New Model of Great Power Relations with the United States,” China claims itself as a “great power.” In the history of world, a great power does not simply imply the size of a country’s territory, but rather whether it possesses qualities that other nations seek to emulate and is capable of shaping the international order. For example, to become a more civilized country, Russia, under Peter the Great, tried to import the art, culture and technologies of the advanced European countries such as France and the Netherlands. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, China tried to modernize itself by learning advanced European science and technologies from Germany and Great Britain (*Zhong Ti Xi Yong*, 中體西用: Chinese essence and Western utility). Japan, who aspired to become a major power, transplanted European legal and political systems from Great Britain, Germany, France, and the Netherlands. In particular, the French Revolution and its underlying values, such as liberty, equality, and fraternity, greatly influenced many countries in the world. In a word, European countries such as Great Britain, France, and Germany, were not physically big but had the advanced civilizations that inspired many countries to follow.

China’s ambition to become a great power is clearly demonstrated by President Xi Jinping’s 2012 declaration that “achieving rejuvenation is the dream of the Chinese people,” signaling the pursuit of the “Chinese Dream.” However, a 2022 public opinion survey of 26 countries by the University of Cambridge and the British pollster YouGov found that the negative perceptions of China ranged from 60 percent to 70 percent across 16 countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, and Australia.

Even before the diplomatic tensions sparked by Chinese ambassador Xing Haiming’s recent remarks about Seoul’s diplomatic options, South Korea has already been subject to Chinese economic and cultural coercion over the deployment of the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system, which was introduced to counter North Korea’s nuclear threats. In international relations, the perspectives and opinions of many countries cannot be the same, and it is natural that there are differences in their perspectives, especially between Korea and China, which have different political and economic systems. Premier Zhou Enlai well explained the nature of international relations during the 1955 Bandung Conference by advocating *Qiu Tong Cun Yi* (求同存異: seeking common ground while shelving

differences). Unfortunately, such a consideration cannot be found in recent South Korea-China relations. These days China has made two mistakes.

The first is great power unilateralism. During the Korean War, that claimed the lives of over one million South Korean civilians, China intervened in the war by sending 2.9 million soldiers, consequently blocking the reunification of Korea. China claims that its participation in the war was to “aid North Korea against U.S. aggression (抗美援朝).”

The U.S. involvement in the Korean War was the response to North Korea’s invasion. In accordance with the UN Security Council resolution, 16 countries, including the United States, Britain, France, Turkey, and Australia, sent combat troops, and six countries, including Sweden, India, and Italy, provided medical units to form the UN forces. They fought against North Korea, the aggressor, under the UN flag. The Korean War was not started by the United States.

In 1947, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution with the intention of implementing a “General Election Plan” under the supervision of the United Nations throughout the Korean Peninsula. North Korea refused to comply, then the United Nations passed a resolution calling for elections to be held where possible, namely in South Korea. Subsequently, in May 1948, elections were conducted in South Korea, leading to the establishment of the Republic of Korea, which was recognized by the United Nations as the sole legitimate authority on the Korean Peninsula. It is important to note that the Korean War broke out as a result of North Korea’s invasion against the Republic of Korea, the only lawful government recognized by the United Nations.

Although Article 33 of the Chinese Constitution stipulates that “the state shall respect and protect human rights,” China has faced suspicion as a country where human rights abuses and political oppression are widespread. According to the 2023 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, China ranked 179th out of 180 surveyed countries, with North Korea occupying the last spot. China’s treatment of North Korean defectors has been criticized for its inhumane nature. Presently, a substantial number of defectors, up to 2,000 individuals, are being held in detention facilities in China, with most facing the imminent risk of repatriation to North Korea. In response, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives pointed out China’s complicity in endorsing brutal acts of violence, stating that defectors are being “thrown straight back into that meat grinder by the Chinese government.”

Secondly, China is making the situation on the Korean Peninsula unstable by condoning North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs. North Korea conducted 63 missile launches in 2022 in violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions. Meanwhile, China and Russia neglected their responsibilities as permanent members of the Security Council to take further

measures, instead calling on all parties to “address the DPRK’s legitimate concerns.” North Korea claims that its nuclear and missile program is to defend against U.S. aggression. But its true objective is to fabricate the imaginary external threats in order to justify its three-generation hereditary regime. It is noteworthy that the UN Security Council Panel of Experts Overseeing Sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea frequently mentions China as the most suspected violator of sanctions.

North Korea reportedly allocated around \$500 million exclusively for ballistic missile launches last year, which is more than enough to make up for North Korea's annual food shortage. If China truly cares about North Korea, it should persuade North Korea to divert the cost of developing nuclear weapons and missiles to improving the living conditions of its people and accept humanitarian aid from the international community and South Korea.

Since China is our close neighbor and the largest trading partner, it is crucial to foster mutually beneficial cooperation. In order to move beyond the current tensions and establish a “strategic cooperative partnership,” it is necessary to uphold the principles of “mutual respect” and “*Qiu Tong Cun Yi* (求同存異).” For the “Chinese Dream” to become a dream for all rather than a selfish dream only for the Chinese people, China must reflect on itself.

\* The view expressed herein was published on July 5 in the *Dong-a Ilbo* and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.