

China's Northeast Project: Defensive or Offensive Strategy?

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INTRODUCTION

Since the implementation of economic reforms and the open-door policy, China has been experiencing great difficulty in maintaining domestic economic balance and governing its ethnic minorities. With advances in the economy, the Southeast Coast region has advanced, while the inland areas with a high concentration of ethnic minorities¹⁾ has remained underdeveloped.

1) According to the Fifth Census conducted in November 2000, the population of ethnic minorities in China is 106,430,000 (8.41%) of the entire population of 1,265,830,000 (excluding 6.78 million in Hong Kong and 440,000 in Macao). In the case of Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture, the population of ethnic Koreans is 854,000 (39.7%) of the 2.2 million total population in the prefecture. The area inhabited by ethnic minorities accounts for 63.72% of the entire national territory (6,117,300 km²). Kim Tae-Kyung, "Perish like Soviet Union...Extreme 'Phobia about Dissolution" (in Korean), *Chinese Hegemony Part 4: Why is Beijing Susceptible to Ethnic Minority Issues?* OhMyNews, October 13, 2004, [<http://www.ohmynews.com>]; The autonomous prefectures, where the ethnic minorities constitute more than half of the population of the area, are the Xinjiang

Religious differences and economic deprivation in the inland areas have given rise to separatist independence movements among ethnic minorities, particularly the people of Xinjiang Uighur and Tibet.²⁾

In the meantime, since the normalization of relations between China and South Korea, a greater emotional empathy has developed between the ethnic Koreans in China and South Koreans with increased human and material contact. Both Koreas have been teaching its citizens the ancient history of the Korean peninsula and Northeast China (*Old Chosun, Koguryeo, and Balhae*) as Korean history. Moreover, there is a movement in both Koreas for "Korean irredentism to recover Manchuria" that calls for invalidation of the 1909 Gando Convention between Imperial Japan and the *Qing* dynasty.

Internally, the Chinese government has felt an urgency to achieve complete national and territorial integration by reinforcing its control over ethnic minorities and to promote their identity as Chinese nationals. Externally, the government has recognized the need to refute the argument to reclaim lost territory advanced by some in both South and North Korea. On the one hand, China has denied the historical correlation between its northeast region and the Korean peninsula; on the other, it has tried to deter South Korea's influence in the ethnic Korean communities in China.

As part of its effort to integrate ethnic minorities, the Chinese government launched a preferential economic development policy called West Development for the residents of its northwestern region, including the people of Xinjiang Uighur and Tibet, who have launched separatist independence movements. In the northeast

Uighur Autonomous Region (59.6%) and Tibet (95.1%). Fei Xiaotong, "The pattern of Pluralistic Unity of the Chinese Nation" (in Chinese), *Qunyan*, Vol. 3 (1989), pp. 11-12.

2) Colin Mackerras, *China's Minorities: Integration and Modernisation in the Twentieth Century* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1995); David Deal, "National Minority Policy in Southwest China, 1911-1965," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1971; Jun Nishikawa, "Chinese Ethnic Minority Policy in Transition" (in Japanese), *Sekai*, No. 466 (September 1984).

region where a majority of ethnic Koreans live, the government has introduced the Northeast Project (*Dongbei Gongcheng*)³⁾ and the Northeast Development Strategy.⁴⁾

China's Northeast Project is a target of much criticism in South Korea for its distortion of ancient history. The project is not simply a historical debate but also an indicator for China's ethnic minority policy and its view on history, nationality, territory, and state as well as a window to its Northeast Asian strategy, including the Korean peninsula and Manchuria. In this paper, China's historical consciousness will be examined from a Korean scholar's perspective,

3) Its original name, "Northeast Borderland History and the Chain of Events Research Project," spells out its research subject. For information about the correlation between Chinese borderland ethnic minority policy and the Northeast Project, and the content of its key objectives or organizational structure, see Yoon Hwytak, "Contemporary Chinese Attitude towards Borderland and Ethnicity and the Northeast Project" (in Korean), *Yeoksa Bipyong* (History Critics), (Winter 2003), pp. 184-205; Lee Hee-ok, "Current Activities of China's Northeast Project and Participant Organizations," presented at a conference, *The Northeast Project: Its True Nature and Falsehood*, Koguryo Research Foundation, October 26, 2004, pp. 64-72.

4) The objectives of the Northeast Development Strategy are: (1) upgrade and rebuild outdated industries that were built during the Japanese colonial period (machinery, electric power, shipping, automobile, petroleum and chemical, metallurgical, etc.); (2) agricultural development, raise food production, manufacturing, agricultural product processing; (3) improve environment of mining areas; (4) develop third service industries, modernization of finance, advancement of private economy, establishment of social welfare system; (5) enhance investments; (6) build basic infrastructures such as transportation, resources, and irrigation; and (7) transform Dalian into an international harbor in Northeast Asia. "Six Key Policy Tasks in Comprehensive Boost in Implementation of the Northeast Development Strategy" (in Chinese), *Great Wall Online* (<http://www.hebei.com.cn>), September 27, 2004; Feng Jie, "Promoting the Northeast: Three Northeastern Provinces Should Undergo Image Revamp" (in Chinese), *Jinri Zongguo* (China Today), No. 3, 2004; "Comprehensive Boost in Implementation of the Northeast Development Strategy," *Northeast Promotion-Northeast Asia International Conference*, [<http://www.nova.gov.cn/showdoc/>].

assessing whether the Northeast Asian Project is a defensive or offensive strategy, or both. This issue is significant in that it provides a basis on which we can discern whether China is an emerging hegemonic state or simply a peacefully rising great power.

CHINA'S NATIONALIST HISTORICAL VIEW AND THE NORTHEAST PROJECT

With the introduction of the market economy and the arrival of the post-Cold-War era, the former Chinese historical view that centered on class struggle has lost its force. Instead, the emphasis has shifted to educating and promoting solidarity among ethnic minorities and pan-national Chinese patriotism, with emphasis on building a "united multiethnic state." Moreover, a neo-Chinese nationalist historical view with the intent to heighten the pride of Chinese people by flaunting the greatness of Chinese civilization and Chinese people is gaining momentum.

This tendency is clearly visible in education. In the history textbooks for Chinese middle and high schools,⁵⁾ Chinese modern history is presented in dichotomies: aggression versus resistance and patriotism versus treachery. In this good-versus-evil historical view, there is no room for moderate thinking or individuality. Independent history education for ethnic minorities or shared historical consciousness regarding ethnicity is prohibited.

The united multiethnic state theory is becoming a core and universal historical understanding. The theory can be summarized as follows: Although China is largely divided between two distinct

5) People's Education Press History Department, *Chinese History, Vol. 3* (Junior High School Textbook, in Chinese), (Shenyang: People's Education Press, 1997); People's Education Press History Department, ed., *Chinese Modern and Contemporary History, Vol. 1* (Senior High School Textbook, in Chinese), (Beijing: People's Education Press, 1999).

groups, *Han* Chinese and non-*Han* Chinese (referred to as ethnic minorities in China), its basic framework has been a unified state. Ethnic minorities have made a significant contribution to building the historical community called China. Accordingly, all ethnic groups that are or have been in the current territory of the People's Republic of China are Chinese, and all their historical activities (i.e., dynastic founding) fall under Chinese history. Moreover, the historic national boundaries (territories) of China are the sum of the individual sphere of jurisdiction of the kingdoms and dynasties that were founded by these various ethnic groups.⁶⁾

Applying the united multiethnic state theory to China's

6) In the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, established in 1954, it clearly defines China as a "united multiethnic state." For the concept, scope, and formation of "China" and "Chinese territory" presented in the united multiethnic state theory, the formation and characteristics of "Chinese nationals" who constitute the united multiethnic state and its criteria, and the limits of the united multiethnic state, see Yoon Hwytak, "Understanding of Territory, Race, and Nation in Chinese Academia: 'The United Multiethnic State Theory' and its Limitations" (in Korean), *Hankook Sa Ron* (Issues in Korean History), Vol. 41, the National History Compilation Committee ed., (Seoul: National Institute of Korean History, 2004); Ron Jiurong, *The Formation of the Chinese United Multiethnic State* (in Chinese), (Shengyang: Liaoning National Publishing, 1992); Fei Xiaotong, ed., *The Diversified Origins but One Core Pattern of Chinese Identity* (in Chinese), (Beijing: Central University for Nationalities Press, 1999); Wang Ke, ed., *Nationality and State: the Ideological Genealogy of the Chinese Multiethnic State Theory* (in Chinese), (Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2001); Peng Yingming, ed., *Theories of Nationality and Educating Nationality Issues, New Edition* (in Chinese), (Beijing: Central University for Nationalities Press, 2001), pp. 124-130. The current Chinese academy is dominated by the opinion to designate the Chinese territory from the height of the *Qing* dynasty in 1750 to the Opium War in 1840 as the historical Chinese border. Tan Qixiang, "A History of China's Border" (in Chinese), *Journal of Chinese Borderland History*, No. 1 (1999); Zou Yilin, "The Background of the Formation of China's Multiethnic Unified State and Its Regional Characteristics" (in Chinese), *Ilshi Jiaoyu Wenti* (Issues in History Education), No. 1, 2000, p. 38; Chao Yongchun, "Historical Understandings on Chinese Borderland" (in Chinese), *Chinese Historical Borderland Studies*, No. 3

northeastern region, all the people that lived in the region throughout the history, including the people of *Koguryo* and *Balhae*, should be considered Chinese. Moreover, their histories would become part of Chinese history and the areas of their dynastic rule part of Chinese territory. In terms of policy, the Chinese government has been placing much emphasis on approaching Chinese history from the united multiethnic state theory perspective. For example, *Guangming Ribao*, a Chinese Communist party organ that views China as a united multiethnic state, stresses the importance of harmony and solidarity in the historic process of each ethnic group within China. Moreover, it asserts that the united multiethnic state is a product of the national cohesiveness that formed through a long historical process in which each ethnic groups assimilated cultural traditions of other ethnic groups and collaborated against common foreign aggression. Accordingly, it makes a special call for historians to focus their studies on the historic processes of the mutual learning, mutual absorption, mutual dependency, co-creation and development of each ethnic group, and on how the ethnic minorities contributed to expanding the borders of China and enriching its culture.⁷⁾

Recently in China, phrases such as “Chinese nation (*Zhonghua Minzu*)” and “Chinese civilization (*Zhonghua wenming*)” frequently appear in domestic policies. The motive for the phenomenon rests in the government’s attempt to raise China’s status and pride by flaunting the permanence and greatness of ethnic Chinese and of the civilization they have built. The main projects recently promoted by the government, in part to raise nationalist pride, include “Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization,” the *Xia-Shang-Zhou*

(2002), pp. 1-2; Zhang Bibo, “The Chinese Concept of Borderland and a History of China’s Borderland Policies” (in Chinese), *Chinese Historical Borderland Studies*, No. 6 (2004), p. 15.

7) *Guangming Ribao*, January 7, 2000, C3; Chen Li, “A Historical Research of United Multiethnic States” (in Chinese), *Guangming Ribao*, January 7, 2000.

Dynasties Project, and the Ancient Chinese Civilization Exploration Project.

With the formulation of “The Resolution on the Guideline for Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization”⁸⁾ by the Party’s Central Committee in September 1986, the slogan of the “Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization” was given a historical mandate, implication, and direction. The Chinese government is reviving the values and virtues “critically inherited” from the Confucian culture, which was heavily criticized during the Cultural Revolution amid anti-traditionalism and the revolutionary social climate, as important elements of socialist spiritual civilization. The government seems to fear that criticizing or denying Confucian culture, which is part of Chinese spiritual heritage, may lead to abasement of Chinese civilization (or culture) or to loss of confidence in national culture. The *Xia-Shang-Zhou* Dynasties Project, a nationalist history project led by the government from May 1996 until September 2000, officially aimed to explore the origin of Chinese civilization through systematic division of the *Xia-Shang-Zhou* dynasties by studying the obscure histories of the *Shang* and *Zhou* dynasties.⁹⁾ Through the project, the government sought to

8) “Party Center’s Resolution on Building a Socialist Spiritual Civilization, September 28, 1986” (in Chinese), You Lin, *et al.*, ed., *Guoshi Tongjian*, Vol. 4: 1976-1995, (Beijing: Contemporary Chinese Press, 1996), pp. 857-861. For events leading up to the appearance of Communist Party’s official document, see *Renmin Ribao*, June 29, 1981; Deng Xiaoping, “Opening Address at the 12th National People’s Congress, September 1, 1982” (in Chinese), *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol. 3 (Beijing: People’s Press, 1994), pp. 2-3; Chinese Constitution, Articles 19-24.

9) The facts mentioned are based on the content of the following website, [<http://www.china5000.cn/wenming/statics/duandai/>]. The Project is virtually set to go with the participation of some 30 organizations related to history, archeology, astronomy, and technology for determining chronology and 200 participants, 9 major subjects and 44 specialized tasks already selected. For details, see, [<http://www.sylib.net/sub/magazine/010425c.htm>].

publicize the permanence and greatness of Chinese civilization both at home and outside and to boost national pride.¹⁰⁾

Another state-led history project is the Exploration Project for the Origins of the Ancient Chinese Civilization which became official in 2002. Before making the project official, the government established in August 2000 the Ancient Civilization Research Center under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). The purported objective for the Ancient Civilization Research Center is to research and organize the culture, society, and social system of the Chinese mythic era called the era of “the Five Mythical Emperors” (*Wudi*), the origin and formation of the Chinese nation and its relation to ancient civilization, and all the myths from *Yan-Huang* to *Yao-Shun-Yu* era. Further, it aimed to conduct historical research on the origin of the *Huaxia* tribe and the formation of ethnic Chinese, and a comparative study on Chinese ancient civilization and ancient world civilizations.¹¹⁾ However, the project is mainly a manifestation of the government’s intention to achieve national solidarity by instilling pride and passion for everything Chinese by turning the myths of Chinese civilization into history, i.e., transformation of the mythic era to the historical era.

The object of the above-mentioned nationalist historical perspective or project is to achieve solidarity among all ethnic minorities in China, and to instill patriotism and pride in the people by presenting the glory of Chinese civilization and the harmony and solidarity of Chinese people in history. The united multiethnic state theory, which gained strength amidst this political and social climate, appeared in government policies on the Northeast

10) Without clear historical evidence of the chronology for the *Xia* and *Shang* dynasties, it is impossible to estimate the beginning and the end of the dynasties. For this reason, the Project is being criticized as a mere attempt to extend Chinese history, [<http://www.sylib.net/sub/magazine/010425c.htm>].

11) The facts mentioned are based on the contents of the following website: [<http://www.chinesetop.net/Article-Show.asp?ArticleID=235>].

Boderland around the latter half of the 1980s, and finally materialized in the Northeast Project in 2002.

THE NORTHEAST PROJECT: BACKGROUND AND INTENTION

In the 1950s and 1960s, authors of Chinese world history textbooks and eminent Chinese historians recorded the history of *Koguryo* as part of the Three Kingdom period, along with Silla and Baekje on the Korean peninsula. This trend continued until the early 1980s. However, since the mid-1980s, with the emergence of the “one history, dual application” theory¹²⁾ the previous opinion that considered *Koguryo* as part of Korean history has changed. Now, China claims the history of *Koguryo* as part of its own, which emerged as China’s official view in 2002 with the Northeast Project.¹³⁾

What is the intention of the Chinese government in launching the

12) Regarding “one history, dual application,” there are two assertions related to this view. (1) Since *Koguryo*’s political center was in today’s China, *Koguryo*’s history before the transfer of its capital to Pyongyang falls under Chinese history, and since the northern region of the Korean peninsula became the political center after the transfer of the capital city, that part of the history should fall under Korean history. Sun Yixue, ed., *World Medieval History* (in Chinese), (Beijing: People’s Education Publishing, 1985); Tan Qixiang, “A History of Chinese Borderland” (in Chinese), *Studies on Borderland History*, Vol. 1, 1991; Zhang Ying, 2004, “A Chinese Scholar’s View on the Issue of Claiming *Koguryo* History” (in Korean), *The Identity of Koguryo*, collection of papers for a *Koguryo* Research Association’s international conference, June 2004, p. 205; (2) Since three-fourths of the *Koguryo* people and three-fourths of its territory fell into China’s hands, with the remaining going to Korea, the history of *Koguryo* fundamentally belongs under Chinese history and partly under Korean history. Sun Jinji, “Northeast Asian States vs. *Koguryo*’s Territory, People, and Cultural Heritage” (in Chinese), *The Status of Koguryo in Korean History*, collection of papers for an international conference hosted by *Koguryo* Research Foundation, September 2004, pp. 31-41.

Northeast Project and officially claiming *Koguryo* as part of its history, when previously it recognized *Koguryo* as part of Korean history and recorded it as such in its world history textbooks? What are the fundamentals and the aim of the Northeast Project that gave rise to the view that claims *Koguryo*'s history as Chinese history?

The website for the Chinese Borderland Research Center,¹⁴⁾ an organ under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the center of the Northeast Project, cites several reasons for promoting the project: (1) changed international relations in the northeast (Manchuria) borderland since China undertook reform and opened its market; (2) the new status of the northeast region as an important strategic area; (3) distortion of facts in the process of historical research by some research organs and scholars of some nations (referring to North and South Korea) with a particular motive; and (4) the confusion created by some politicians whose opinions were based on flawed logic.

Such a perspective is clearly revealed in the following writing of Wang Luolin,¹⁵⁾ head of the Leading Squad for Northeast Project:

To demonstrate that the vassal states of Koguryo and Balhae in the northeast region of ancient China were independent states of ancient Korean tribes, some people in South and North Korea are raising a clamor that the present Chinese northeast borderland was historically part of the territory of *Old Chosun*. They have turned what is merely the Gando issue, concerning the migration of ethnic Koreans in the Yanbian Prefecture in Jilin Province, into a border issue, demanding territory,¹⁶⁾ and recklessly spreading outrageous logic using the new textbook and the media. Moreover, some

13) For details see Yoon Hwytak, "Modern and Contemporary China's View of Koguryo and Balhae" (in Korean), in *Studies in the History of Korea Independence Movement*, Vol. 23 (Cheonan: The Institute of Korea Independence Movement Studies, Independence Hall, December 2004).

14) www.chinaborderland.com

15) The Deputy-Director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and member of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee.

Russian scholars and local officials are negatively impacting the steady development in the northeast border, Russian Siberia, and the Far East region by distorting the history of China-Russia relations and fostering public opinion damaging to the friendly relations between China and Russia, such as the theory of the Chinese menace.¹⁷⁾ Some Japanese scholars as well as Western scholars are advancing a similar argument.¹⁸⁾

An exhaustive account of the scholarly background for the Northeast Project includes the following, by Quan Zhezhu, who is involved in the Project as deputy-governor of Jilin Province:

Recently, there are some hostile forces working internationally to infiltrate and divide China, and some, in the name of scholarly research, have been writing prolifically on historical issues, distorting facts, arbitrarily rewriting history, and demanding territory from China. Some hostile organizations systematically infiltrate China to cajole, divide, and lure Chinese people using ethnic and religious issues in efforts to destroy the integrity of Chinese territory, social stability, and national solidarity by arbitrarily inciting trouble. For these reasons, the Northeast Project, succeeding the Xia-Shang-Zhou Dynasties Project, has forged ahead under the commission of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the three northeastern provinces, with the full support and guidance of the central government and much interest from the Party Center leaders.¹⁹⁾

16) The same view is also found in Jiao Ruming, "Legal Principles to Resolve Borderland Disputes" (in Chinese), in Ma Dazheng, ed., *Studies on Chinese Northeast Borderland* (Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2003), pp. 29-30.

17) In reference to comments by Russian officials on rising concern about the flood of Chinese products, Chinese dominance in commerce, and a surge of Chinese residents in the Siberia and Primorsky areas.

18) Wang Luolin, "Consolidating Northeast Borderland Studies and Promoting Establishment of the Department" (in Chinese), in Ma Dazheng, ed., *Studies on Chinese Northeast Borderland* (Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2003), pp. 4-5.

19) Quan Zhezhu, "Several Problems in the Northeast Borderland Studies" (in Chinese), Ma Dazheng, ed., *Studies on Chinese Northeast Borderland*, (Beijing:

According to Quan Zhezhu, the Project was undertaken to counter and safeguard China from changes in the region. The same logic can be found in the direct motive for undertaking the Project. An internal document, titled "The Impact of Changes on the Korean peninsula on the Stability of the Northeast Region," drafted in September 1998 by a research team for contemporary Chinese border-related issues of the Research Center for Chinese Borderland Studies, under the CASS, expressed concerns about the impact that changes on the Korean peninsula would have on the stability of China's northeast region, especially on the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture of Jilin Province and the Dandong area of Liaoning Province. This document gave rise to the issue of the changing political climate on the Korean peninsula as an important research subject for the second and third projects of "Contemporary Chinese Borderland Studies." This issue is cited as the direct cause for the undertaking of the Northeast Project.

In sum, the Northeast Project is understood not merely as a scholarly issue but as a vital political issue linked to China's territorial rights and sovereignty. As stated by Quan Zhezhu and Wang Luolin, the key figures of the Northeast Project, the Project is, at once, a scholarly issue and a political issue undertaken to elevate the tradition of patriotism and to maintain unity and stability of Chinese state, the integrity of territorial rights, stability of ethnic minority communities, and national solidarity.²⁰ Moreover, the foremost task of the Northeast Project is to make provisions for the effect and impact that changes on the Korean peninsula would have on China's northeast region. In other words, the historical argument may have been marshaled as a means to resolve this political issue.

Taking into account all the facts mentioned so far, the motive of the Northeast Project can be summarized as follows: First, it is a way of preparing for the effect or impact that the changing political

Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2003), pp. 8-9.

20) *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9; Wang Luolin, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

climate in the Korean peninsula will have on the social stability of China's northeast region as well as changes in the international order of Northeast Asia, in the event of unification of the Korean peninsula. As part of this effort, Beijing, through the Northeast Project, has placed the primary focus on preventing the ever-increasing problem of North Korean refugees from becoming an international refugee issue in the northeast region, and on blocking the northeast region from turning into a "stronghold for ethnic Koreans." It is supposed that Beijing's secondary objective is to take proactive measures against changes in the political climate on the Korean peninsula per se, particularly within the North Korean regime.

Second, China wants to integrate its historical identity of a united multiethnic state with the application of nationalist historical perspective on the northeast region, especially that of the "united multiethnic state theory." At the same time, it wants to fortify the Chinese identity of ethnic Koreans in China to prevent their unpredictability or alienation. Any aggravation of ethnic minority issues in the northeast region could obstruct national political stability by provoking ethnic minority issues in other regions in China.

Third, by generalizing the argument that claims the histories of *Old Chosun*, *Koguryo*, and *Balhae* as part of Chinese history, Beijing is trying to block the Korean peninsula from exerting any influence on China's ethnic Korean communities and the northeast region by negating at the root any historical relation between the Korean peninsula and China's northeast region. In addition, it is part of finding a counterargument for the Gando issue raised in South Korea.

Fourth, should the argument that claims part of Korean history in current Chinese territory as Korean history remains unchallenged, countries would begin claiming as their own the history of other countries. For example, Mongolia would use a similar argument to claim the history of the Yuan Dynasty as its own, Xinjiang Uighur

and some countries in Central Asia would claim the history of West Asia, Vietnam that of *Baiyue* and *Nanyue* during the *Qin-Han* period, and so on. Chinese history would thus be fragmented and scattered, and it would be impossible to establish a common Chinese history. The Chinese government felt the need to actively seek a countermeasure for the historical argument of neighboring countries to establish an identity for Chinese history.

Fifth, China wants to stop North Korea from independently registering cultural relics of *Koguryo* as UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage and rather, to register those relics in China proper, publicizing both at home and to the world that the history of *Koguryo* is Chinese history. If cultural relics of *Koguryo* in North Korea are registered independently as World Cultural Heritage, it would only strengthen the South and North Korea's argument that *Koguryo* belongs to Korean history.

THE NORTHEAST PROJECT AND CHINA'S NORTHEAST ASIAN STRATEGY

Fundamentally, the Northeast Project has a defensive or responsive characteristic. However, depending on how far Beijing is willing to intervene in changes in the political climate on the Korean peninsula from now on, the project may take the offensive. Between the two main tasks of the Northeast Project, only the content of the "primary studies" has been publicized, but because the information on "applied studies"—the key item of the studies—has been classified, China's countermeasure to changes in the political climate on the Korean peninsula, is unknown.²¹⁾ Accordingly, without knowing that

21) In 2002, the Northeast Project earmarked eight subjects for studies on "Forecast and Preparations for Future Political Changes on the Korean Peninsula" and several subjects in 2003. The Project, however, has not publicized year 2004 subjects.

aspect of the Northeast Project, whether it is defensive or offensive cannot be determined. Nevertheless, reasonable predictions can be made based on the experts' analyses and assessments of the information that is available.

Considering the current political climate of Northeast Asia, a peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula would be difficult to achieve without agreement from both Washington and Beijing. Setting aside a possible countermove by Washington and predicting Beijing's countermove in light of the Northeast Project, the following two hypotheses are possible: one is no direct intervention from Beijing in changes of political climate on the Korean peninsula that are brought on by the structural dissolution of North Korea (not the collapse of the North Korean regime)²²⁾ and the other, direct intervention from Beijing.

In the former scenario, the structural collapse of North Korea and unification through South Korea's absorption of the North is a distinct possibility. In such a case, with a surge in the North Korean refugee population caused by civil strife within North Korea or sudden social unrest during the unification process, the northeast region at China could become an international refugee zone and a stronghold of ethnic Koreans.²³⁾ The North Korean defectors are highly likely to depend on ethnic Korean Chinese relatives or the ethnic Korean communities in China that speak the same language.

22) Even if the Kim Jong-il regime collapses, there are other powers that would emerge to prevent the collapse of North Korea. Accordingly, the collapse of the regime and the collapse of North Korea as a state are two different issues.

23) Since August 2003, the police security force along China's border with North Korea has been replaced by the military force as Beijing's measure against the influx of North Korean defectors in case of North Korea's collapse. (*The New York Times*, September 16, 2003; *Joong-ang Ilbo*, September 17, 2003); Kim "Chapter 8: Who Will Rule When North Korea Collapses—Focusing on the Role and Limits of the South Korean Military" (in Korean), in Shim Ji-yeon and Kim Il-young, eds., *50 Years Anniversary of ROK-U.S. Alliance: Legal Controversies and Outlook* (Seoul: Baeksan Seodang, 2004), pp. 317-318.

In this process, ethnic Korean Chinese may undergo an identity crisis as Chinese nationals if they begin to identify with the North Korean defectors through frequent contacts. On the other hand, there is a possibility that ethnic Korean Chinese and former North Korean defectors with “the Korean dream” could flow in huge numbers to the Korean peninsula in the midst of unification. In sum, the unification of the Korean peninsula could lead to a situation in which South Koreans, North Koreans, ethnic Korean Chinese, and North Korean defectors will commingle on the Korean peninsula and in the northeast region of China. Such a human network among ethnic Koreans would obliterate the borders between the Korean peninsula and the northeast region of China, transforming the northeast region into a base for ethnic Koreans. Coupled with the idea of Manchuria as part of Korean territory, it would drastically increase the influence of a unified Korea on China’s northeast region as well as on ethnic Korean Chinese.

However, if, together with the sudden change in the political climate on the Korean peninsula, the U.S. decides to use its initiative in the unification process, reorganizing the Northeast Asian order for its own interests, building American military bases around the Aprok (Yalu) and Tuman (Tumen) Rivers, for example, Chinese influence over the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia will inevitably wane, leading to a scenario in which China and the U.S. confront each other militarily along the Korea-China borders.

This scenario depends on the premise that the unification of the Korean peninsula is achieved “smoothly” led by South Korea. If Beijing has undertaken the Northeast Project to redefine its relations with the future unified Korea, accepting unification and taking into account unified Korea’s attitude and position on China and whether it can maintain influence over the Korean peninsula to prevent increased foreign influence on unified Korea, then the Northeast Project can be defined wholly as Beijing’s defensive Northeast Asian strategy. The question, nevertheless, remains whether China will accept without resistance the unification of Korea by South Korea’s

absorption of the North and/or the reorganization of the Northeast Asian order led by the U.S.

The accuracy of any assessment depends inevitably on the condition of the North Korean regime's fall.²⁴⁾ Predictions of North Korea's regime change by experts can be roughly divided into two scenarios: *coup d'etat* or attempt at regime change led by reform-minded elites within the governing political force, or a collapse of the regime led by a popular uprising.²⁵⁾ In the former case, Beijing is likely to mobilize indirect means rather than attempting direct political or military intervention. Its goal would be to obtain political concessions from North Korea that it would not suddenly break away from China's sphere of influence. However, Beijing is likely to intervene politically and militarily in the latter case. In other words, Beijing can take preemptive measures by stepping up security along the Korean-China borders to block the influx of North Korean refugees and take political measures to restore political order in North Korea to prevent its collapse. Despite such efforts, if regime collapse led by popular revolt becomes a fact and the ROK-U.S. alliance forces march northward, Beijing is likely to make attempts at direct military intervention, using as its excuse the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance signed by China and North Korea in July 1961 as well as their close cooperative bilateral relations.²⁶⁾

In sum, according to the predictable scenarios that may occur

24) On possible scenarios for the collapse of North Korea that were studied in the mid-1990s, see, Kim Il-young and Baek Seung-ju, *op. cit.*, pp. 334-352.

25) Kim Tae-ho, "U.S.-China's North Korea Intervention: How Far Will It Go?" (in Korean), *The Korean Peninsula in Transition: Tasks and Solutions* (A collection of works for a closed workshop on unification economic policy sponsored by Research Association for Unified Economy), August 2004, p. 11.

26) *Ibid.*, p. 12. While accepting the possibility of China's military intervention regarding the issue, some scholars argue that Beijing is more likely to employ a policy that would maximize its influence indirectly than to make direct intervention based on the fact that its military intervention would be

amidst the changing political climate on the Korean peninsula and possible forms of Beijing's countermeasures, Beijing's intervention in the fate of the Korean peninsula, whether direct or indirect, seems inevitable. Considering this fact, Beijing's Northeast Project, its Manchuria strategy²⁷⁾ as well as Northeast Asian strategy, are feasible indications of the possible countermeasures Beijing is likely to undertake in the event of political changes on the Korean peninsula.

In terms of the defensive, the Project contains the following evidence: (1) Beijing's attempt to establish the counter logic that *Koguryo* and *Balhae* belong to Chinese history, using the Northeast Project to counter the argument in South Korea that equates *Koguryo* and *Balhae* as Korean history by denying the historical correlation between the northeast region and the Korean peninsula; (2) application of the united multiethnic state theory to the northeast region, which had previously been exempt from the application out of consideration of inter-Korean relations; (3) that Beijing has taken steps to deny the historical correlation between the Korean peninsula and the northeast region and to reinforce Chinese identity among ethnic Koreans in China by blocking Korea's influence on the ethnic Korean communities at a time when the argument that Manchuria was once Korean territory has provoked a sense of ethnic solidarity and caused ethnic Koreans to reconsider their ethnic identity; (4) that Beijing is taking preemptive measures to prevent issues in ethnic Korean communities in China from triggering the same issues among other ethnic minorities in other areas; and (5) that Beijing is proposing as part of the Northeast Project to analyze the past negotiation processes regarding border and territorial issues between Korea and China, and to find a counterargument at a time when there is a movement in South Korea to invalidate the Gando

accompanied by intervention from other neighboring countries as well the U.S. (Kim Il-young and Baek Seung-ju, *op. cit.*, p. 338).

27) Yoon Hwytak, "Rethinking Manchuria and Ethnic Koreans: China's Manchuria Strategy" (in Korean), *Hankyoreh* 21, No. 486 (December 4, 2003), pp. 32-34.

Convention and to reclaim territorial rights.

However, it is also possible to conclude that the Northeast Project goes beyond the defensive as Beijing's Northeast Asian strategy. The following arguments advanced by the Northeast Project can be cited as evidence: (1) it claims some part of North Korean territory as Chinese territory based on the argument that it was under the jurisdiction of Four *Han* Commanderies; (2) Beijing is making a historical connection between its territory and Korean territory based on the argument that the area around the Cheongcheon River in present North Korea was taken from China under the *Chosun* dynasty's northward policy; and (3) it makes an argument that goes as far as distorting the origin of the Korean people, claiming that there is almost no link between the people of the Korean peninsula and the people of *Old Chosun*, *Koguryo*, and *Balhae* and that the Three *Han* states in the southern region of the Korean peninsula constitute the cradle of the Korean civilization. Such arguments advanced by China have caused concern among some Korean specialists that it may be part of Beijing's attempt to establish moral justification, both internally and externally, with gaining preemptive rights and territorial rights to North Korean territory in mind.²⁸⁾

On the question of whether the Northeast Project represents Beijing's offensive strategy for Northeast Asia, some scholars see it as a scheme, rather than a scholarly issue, and that it explicitly reveals Beijing's intention to intervene militarily or politically based on the possibility of unification of the Korean peninsula after the dissolution of North Korea. According to these scholars, Beijing is trying to publicize both at home and abroad China's preemptive rights on the northern Korean peninsula (present North Korea)

28) Yoon Hwytak, "China's Hidden Agenda in 'Appropriating the History of Koguryo': Building Justification for China's Preemptive Rights over North Korea in Case of Emergency in the Korean peninsula?" (in Korean), *Shin Dong-a* (September 2004), pp. 360-375.

through its Northeast Project by insisting that the area had been once under the control of the Four *Han* Commanderies.²⁹⁾

Regarding the unification issue, many South Koreans assume that should the North Korean regime suddenly collapse, South Korea will exercise sovereignty over North Korea and achieve unification through absorption. But most political scientists say that such a view is an illusion. According to Cho Min of the Korea Institute for National Unification, China has ambitious designs over the Korean peninsula just as it did in the nineteenth century when China persistently claimed suzerainty over the *Chosun* dynasty. Moreover, Beijing has a plan to govern North Korea through pro-Chinese military authorities within North Korea in case of its collapse, and this requires an important prerequisite of international law to justify Beijing's preemptive rights over North Korea, which is expressed through the Northeast Project.

Regarding China's ambitious designs on North Korea, Cho Min speculates that a majority of the Northeast Project's 20 billion yuan budget (some 3 trillion in Korean won) comes from the military budget,³⁰⁾ and he reports that since August 2003 Beijing has replaced border patrol units and police forces with 150,000 armed soldiers as the principal border security force along China's border with North Korea,³¹⁾ that the armed forces have almost completed war games on

29) Broadcasted conversation by Cho Min, research fellow at the Korea Institute for National Unification, on a CBS Radio program, *Today and Tomorrow*, August 19, 2004.

30) His speculation that the majority of the budget for the Northeast Project comes out of the military budget may not be true. A substantial sum from the budget is likely to have been spent on preservation of the cultural relics of Koguryo and Balhae, and on improvements at the sites. Of the Northeast Project's budget for 2002, the expenses for solely scholarly purposes totaled 2.7 billion in Korean won. Considering that prices in China are one-fifth that of Korea and that the average salary for Chinese college professors is one-tenth that of Korean professors, the actual value of the sum is about 50 billion won.

31) *New York Times*, September 16, 2003; *Joong-ang Ilbo*, September 17, 2003.

river-crossing in case of an emergency in North Korea, and that officers of the People's Liberation Army are learning Korean language. Moreover, he is concerned that should Washington lose confidence in Seoul, given the recent chill in South Korea-U.S. relations, it is possible for Washington and Beijing to strike a secret deal regarding the Korean peninsula question.³²⁾ In other words, it is possible that the collapse of the North Korean regime may not lead to unification of the Korean peninsula.

In conclusion, the Northeast Project can be summarized as a Northeast Asian strategy with fundamentally defensive characteristics but with the possibility of being an offensive one in case of sudden changes in the political climate in the Korean peninsula.

CONCLUSION

As discussed above, Beijing is in pursuit of a comprehensive national strategy to maintain the status quo and stability through national and social integration. To this end it is reinforcing the pan-national Chinese identity using a large-scale project called the Northeast Project. This "convenient" historical view claims that all the histories of individual ethnic groups in China proper are Chinese history. It is also the nationalist view that all ethnic groups that have lived in present Chinese territory are Chinese.

Moreover, the logic of the Northeast Project that reclaims the dynasties or states of the relevant ethnic groups as China's tributary states, based on the system of tributary relations that characterized the East Asian order in the past, may be signaling a rebirth of neo-

32) Similarly, there are some scholars who predict that the U.S. would provoke the collapse of North Korean regime, and would jointly control North Korea with China and Russia. Yoshiki Hidaka, *The U.S. Will Drop Nuclear Bomb on North Korea* (in Japanese), (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 2003).

Sinocentrism. This derives not from historical facts or logical reasoning, but from the practical issue of developing a historical argument to achieve political goals. In this respect, the Northeast Project represents Chinese Statism that is a product of the government's ambition combined with its historical perspective.

The Northeast Project, besides its scholarly issues, contains not only a preemptive measure to block the influence of political changes on the Korean peninsula around China's northeast region, but also a Korean peninsula strategy, or Northeast Asian strategy, in anticipation of the collapse of the North Korean regime or system. Given this, scholarly counterarguments against the Project alone cannot be the solution. Instead, it requires a solution that dynamically responds to the political, diplomatic, and international relations between Korea and China.

Europe shared the culture of Greece and Rome in ancient times, Christian culture in the middle ages, and then divided into individual nation-states in modern times. As a result, Europeans have a strong shared consciousness that they come from common roots. The people of East Asia, on the other hand, have existed as individual ethnic groups—Korean, Chinese, and Japanese—with relatively independent histories. Moreover, the political and social heterogeneity of the three countries is relatively distinct. Considering the difficulty of sharing a common historical understanding of East Asia, the logic of the Northeast Project would only invite cultural and political conflict in Northeast Asia, particularly between China and Korea.

From the long-term perspective, considering the current reality in China where neither civil society nor the press can adequately keep the national policy or the national ideology of the Communist party in check, it is necessary for democracy to grow stronger so that Sino-nationalism does not transform itself into expansionism. Democracy can be a check on the expansionist tendency of nationalism.³⁴⁾ However, in the international order where the logic of power operates as hegemony, democracy cannot properly use its

restraining powers. Accordingly, democracy inevitably has its limits in restraining the expansionist nationalism of a particular nation.³⁵⁾ Furthermore, should the patriotism that is rapidly becoming the governing ideology of China transform into expansionism of the Greater Chinese, the historical dispute galvanized by the Northeast Project could threaten the peace in Northeast Asia.

34) George Lakoff, "Democracy," in Alexander J. Motyl ed., *Encyclopedia of Nationalism, Vol. 1: Fundamental Themes* (New York: Academic Press, 2001), p. 117.

35) Choi Kap-su, "Northeast Asian History Controversy and Nationalism" (in Korean), *The Northeast Project, Nationalism, and the Future of Northeast Asia* (A collection of papers presented at the academic forum sponsored by the Seoul National University Professors for Democracy), November 11, 2004, p. 7.