

# China and the Korean Peninsula-30 Years After the Normalization of ROK-PRC Relations

**Kim Sung-Min**  
Editor-in-Chief



The September 2022 issue (Vol. 8, No. 2) of *S/N Korean Humanities* highlights recent scholarly discussions on China's relations with the two Koreas. The first article by Seong-Hyon Lee (Harvard Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies) dwells on the uncertainty that lies in the future of South Korea-China relations. The deep economic complementarity that previously characterized the close South Korea-China relations is no longer there. Accusations of cultural and historical appropriation have significantly undermined confidence between civil societies. The anti-China sentiment among South Koreans has been unprecedentedly high since the THAAD dispute. Especially among young South Koreans, a sense of incompatibility with China's political system is widening. In the security realm, South Korea's high hopes for China to render a constructive role in containing North Korea's nuclear and missile belligerence are becoming less tenable, as China regards the United States, not North Korea, as a bigger existential threat. The pull and push of the intensifying U.S.–China rivalry is set to severely constrain South Korea's choices, including semiconductor supply chains, while posing fresh challenges such as the tension building in the Taiwan Strait. South Korea's political leadership has been traditionally primed for domestic turf fights and is not well equipped to deal with the outside geopolitical shift, precipitated by the “rise of China.” The year 2022 marks the 30th diplomatic anniversary of Seoul-Beijing relations. At age 30, the Seoul and Beijing's earlier infatuation is over. Their future is uncertain.

The second article by Piao Guobin (Yanbian University) examines the historical wounds of ethnic Koreans in China. For ethnic Koreans in China, the deterioration of relations with the people in places where they reside following such historical wounds is a matter that must not be ignored, as such relations may be a strategy intimately tied to future survival. In this vein, this article focuses on the historical wounds that are the source of deterioration of relationships and historical trauma as the origin of said deterioration. The ethnic Koreans, called Cháoxiānzú in China, are a minority group in the People's Republic of China, and Koreans who lived in Manchuria

historically share much common history with these ethnic Koreans. Therefore, to track the origin of the historical trauma of the Koreans in China, or the Korean-Chinese, it is necessary to understand first the Koreans in Manchuria. The modern Manchurian space where the Korean people resided was not just a geographical space, but also a political one wherein social, cultural, and political relations were concentrated. The Qing, Russia, and Japan ushered Manchuria into the modern era through a direct process of power building. Historical events that occurred in complex spatial changes left different memories and wounds depending on each ethnic group living in Manchuria. The problem is that these memories and wounds could not be properly healed, only rendered invisible in the “sealing” in a new space of liberation and the process of establishing a nation state, and this “sealing” became an opportunity to create yet another trail of memory distortion and historical scars.

The special feature articles are followed by an article by Lee Punghe (Korea University of Japan) whose study revisits the organizational processes and activities of the General Union of Korean Workers in Japan, which was formed vis-à-vis the unification of the various labor organizations by Koreans in Japan throughout different regions, to examine the lives of Korean residents in Japan and the struggle for national liberation after 1922. It is imperative that light be shone upon the interrelationship between the Korean-Japanese intellectuals and “the people” who faced ethnic and class contradictions within the structure of Japanese colonial governance. This means analyzing the tensions and anxieties borne of how the movements unfolded amid conflicts surrounding the discourses toward national liberation and contradictions inherent in the lower ranks. Only through such an analysis can movement history be reconstructed into that which reflects the demands forwarded by “the people.” The articles examines the organization and activities of the General Union, which played a significant part in the Korean national liberation movements in Japan and fought to defend the lives of Korean residents in Japan. The General Union was a federation of Korean labor unions established in various regions of Japan. As such, simply

analyzing the processes of the organization and activities of the General Union does not diverge in any meaningful way from the framework innate in previous studies; in fact, what must be clarified is the Union's relationship with the struggles of local unions or workers.

The fourth article by Marianne Jung (Comenius University) examines how church networks facilitates entrepreneurship among North Korean Defectors in South Korea. North and South Koreans share the same historic and ethno-cultural background. However, North Korean defectors in South Korea are made into a socially marginalized group “other” to South Koreans. A growing number of defectors who settled in South Korea have therefore turned to self-employment to seek economic independence. Literature of sociology explains that immigrant entrepreneurship is facilitated through co-ethnic networks and communities. This article argues that this theoretical concept cannot be used as an explanatory factor in the case of North Korean entrepreneurship in South Korea. Both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that North Korean defectors are highly versatile in recognizing and implementing business opportunities. Based on a mixed-method approach, this article shows that there is no strong North-Korean community used as a strategic resource for self-employment. One resource that stands out is that church communities become centers for comprehensive support of North Korean defectors. North Korean defectors seem to form new social networks among the Protestant church community as source of business opportunities and support. This article thereby contributes to the theorization and the state of art on North Korean defector entrepreneurship.

Yi Jae-bong (formerly of Wongwang University) contributed a book review of *P'yŏnghwa-e mich'ida* [“Crazy About about Peace”], an autobiography of Pak Han-shik (Han S. Park). The September 2022 issue is concluded by an interview with Pak Mun-il by Xu Mingzhe (Yanbian University) in which both Chinese Korean scholars discuss a diaspora intellectual's thoughts about Korea's division and the contributions of Chinese-Korean society to overcoming division and the

expansion of unification studies-related research, among other issues. The interview section was launched in March 2020. These interviews are translated from the Institute of Humanities for Unification (IHU)'s 2018 publication of *Han'guk chisönggwaüi t'ongil taedam* [Unification Discussions with Korea's Erudite Scholars], which contains our conversations with some of the most influential thinkers, researchers, and policy-makers committed to the study and/or management of inter-Korean relations based on the humanities. So far, luminaries such as Kang Man-gil, Paik Nak-chung, Han S. Park, and Jeong Se-hyun have graced the pages of our interview section.

Since the inception in March 2015, *S/N Korean Humanities* has played a unique bridge-building role between the worlds of *Han'gukhak* and *Chosönhak* in the promotion of "Integrated Korean Studies." Despite the fluctuations in Korea-China relations, the way forward for scholars is to look for a sustainable foundation for mutual recognition and dialogue. In our commitment to this mission, *S/N Korean Humanities* will continue to reinvent itself as a forum of debate for a humanities-based approach to unification and Korean studies.

Kim Sung-Min  
Editor-in-Chief  
*S/N Korean Humanities*