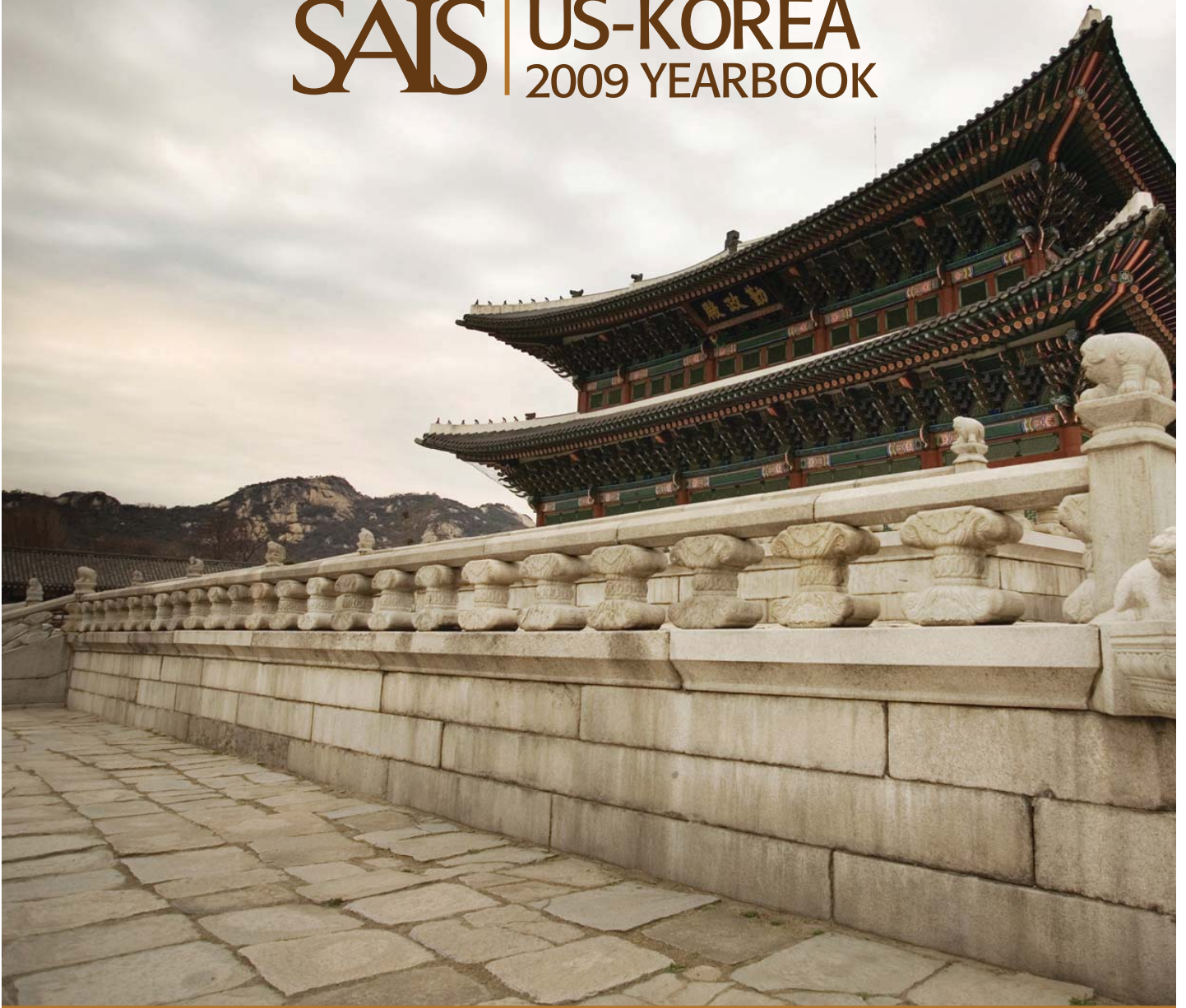


# SAIS | US-KOREA 2009 YEARBOOK



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## **SOUTH KOREA-CHINA MUTUAL PERCEPTIONS: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

China’s and South Korea’s bilateral political and economic relations have developed dramatically since the normalization of diplomatic ties in 1992. China’s and South Korea’s leaders had effective political cooperation in bilateral and multilateral settings, such as ASEAN 10+3 and China-Japan-South Korea trilateral conferences; China and South Korea share a confluence of interests in regional security, such as the Six-Party Talks on the North Korean nuclear issue. Indeed, China and South Korea have shared a consensus engagement of North Korea compared to other parties such as the United States and Japan, especially on the need to supply aid to DPRK and the aversion to apply sanctions. Since 1992, trade and economic ties have mushroomed and formed the firm foundation for bilateral relations. In view of this strong political and economic relationship, China and South Korea have developed extensive people-to-people exchanges, with tourism, education, and culture flourishing since then. However, irritants and friction reflected in disputes over trade relations, historical issues, territorial sovereignty, and cultural ownership, emerged over this period as well, at both the official and people-to-people levels. This resulted in heightened anxieties and insecurities, as demonstrated by rising negative sentiment on both sides. Such negative emotions at the public level could affect political and economic decisions by political elites and policymakers in the future, or at least constrain their room to maneuver, despite the consensus and commitment by leaders of both sides to maintain good bilateral relations.

Unraveling this tangled web of complex political, economic, cultural, and historical issues became even more challenging, however, since most Chinese and South Korean public opinion regarding each other was expressed mainly in the unbridled medium of cyberspace. Most scholars have examined Chinese-South Korean relations from political, economic, strategic, and security angles, and many research papers have highlighted the Goguryeo history issue as an

important bilateral issue. However, few papers have examined bilateral issues from the perspective of mutual perceptions at the people-to-people level. This paper aims to provide a preliminary examination of Chinese and South Korean mutual perceptions and to highlight key issues and views.

## **II. POLITICAL EXCHANGES: STILL ON HONEYMOON**

The high-level relationship between China and South Korea has been good since normalization of relations. One must take special note of President Lee Myung-bak's efforts to strengthen South Korea-China bilateral relations following his inauguration. The four ROK presidents since normalization with China who preceded Lee (Roh Tae-woo, Kim Young-sam, Kim Dae-jung, and Roh Moo-hyun) each made only one visit to China during their terms. Within his first year in office, President Lee Myung-bak visited Beijing three times, including making his first state visit to China in May 2008, attending the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games in August 2008, and attending the ASEM Summit in Beijing in October 2008. During Lee's first state visit to Beijing in May 2008, both sides significantly upgraded bilateral relations from a "comprehensive cooperative partnership" to a "strategic cooperative partnership." To that end, South Korea and China pledged to heighten cooperation in all areas, including foreign affairs, security, economy, society, and culture. Both foreign ministries would hold an in-depth strategic dialogue on a regular basis to give concrete shape and provide substance to the development of bilateral relations.

On the Chinese side, President Hu Jintao visited Seoul from August 25-26, 2008, immediately after the Beijing Olympic Games. Hu emphasized that trade and economic cooperation was an important element of Sino-South Korean relations and played a significant role in bilateral ties. He cited bilateral trade volume, which had reached nearly \$160 billion the previous year, a 32-fold increase compared to the early days when both countries established diplomatic relations. Hu added that the two-way investment has exceeded \$41 billion, an almost 90-fold increase so far. On the basis of the joint statement when President Lee visited Beijing in May 2008, Hu offered the continuous development of a China-South Korea "strategic cooperative partnership." Most recently, Vice President Xi Jinping visited Seoul from December 17-19, 2009, and met with President Lee Myung-bak, Prime Minister Chung Un-chan, and National Assembly Speaker Kim Hyong-o. This visit is significant since Xi is the front-runner widely expected to succeed Hu Jintao in 2012 as China's fifth-generation leader.

However, this “great leap forward” in bilateral relations was preceded by some initial concerns from China regarding President Lee Myung-bak. Following Lee Myung-bak’s presidential election victory, Chinese academics raised concerns about Lee’s prospective China policy, based on Chinese perceptions of Lee as being pro-United States and the likelihood of the U.S.-ROK alliance being strengthened under the Lee administration, in a departure from Roh Moo-hyun’s relatively ambivalent U.S. policy. When Lee sought to distance himself from Roh’s policies, it raised Chinese concerns that Lee would not adopt Roh’s warm and positive policy towards China. However, Beijing was reassured after the swift exchange of special envoys from both sides to pass messages from the respective leaderships. For instance, GNP leader Park Geun-hye visited Beijing on January 16, 2008, and conveyed a personal letter from President-elect Lee Myung-bak to President Hu Jintao, while Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Seoul from January 13, 2008, to confer with President-elect Lee Myung-bak. This shuttle diplomacy culminated in Special Envoy Tang Jiaxuan attending President Lee Myung-bak’s inauguration ceremony on February 25, 2008, as President Hu Jintao’s personal representative; both Tang and President Lee affirmed the need to strengthen bilateral relations.

### *Sichuan Earthquake*

Even though the Sichuan earthquake on May 12, 2008, was a serious natural disaster, it offered South Korea a good opportunity to enhance relations with China during the early days of the Lee Myung-bak administration. The South Korean government and people, as well as various groups, expressed sympathy and concern immediately after. The ROK government actively offered assistance to the Chinese government, including \$5 million in humanitarian aid along with rescue and medical teams and civilian volunteers. President Lee, Prime Minister Han Seung-soo, cabinet ministers, leaders of political parties, parliamentarians, and members of the public visited the Chinese embassy to offer condolences. President Lee made a special goodwill gesture to visit the Sichuan earthquake-hit areas. Lee was the first foreign head of state to visit the disaster area. He made the follow-up effort to invite a delegation of Chinese children from quake-affected areas to Seoul in May 2009. South Korea provided substantive assistance to China amidst this natural calamity as well as considerable “face” to China as a friendly neighbor. South Korea’s friendly gestures were well received by the Chinese government and the public.

### III. ECONOMIC AND TRADE FIGURES: PLEASANT BEDFELLOWS

China-South Korea bilateral economic relations skyrocketed after normalization, from a base of about \$6 billion in 1992 to \$168 billion in 2008. China has emerged as South Korea's largest trade partner and the largest destination for South Korean investments; in turn, South Korea is China's third-largest trading partner, after the United States and Japan, and South Korean cumulative investments in China had reached \$37.6 billion by 2008. During President Hu Jintao's visit to Seoul in August 2008, both sides agreed to set an even more ambitious target of \$200 billion by 2010, two years earlier than initially planned. This was superseded by a higher target set in October 2009: Chinese Minister of Commerce Chen Deming and his ROK counterpart Kim Jong-hoon expected bilateral trade to reach \$300 billion by 2013. Even at current trade volume, Chinese-South Korean trade was equivalent to the combined total of South Korea-United States and South Korea-Japan trade. While these positive economic developments reflected the high-level commitment from both sides towards economic cooperation, there remained concerns in South Korea about economic overdependence on China. Scott Snyder, in his 2009 book *China's Rise and the Two Koreas*, pointed to concerns in Seoul derived from China's increasing competitiveness and the possibility that China could overtake South Korea as a key competitor and supplier in international markets.

On the proposed South Korea-China free trade agreement (FTA), the issue was raised when leaders from both sides met in May 2008; Presidents Hu and Lee agreed to continue the FTA negotiations. To that end, the fifth round of the Joint Study Meeting for ROK-China FTA was conducted in June 2008. At the same time, China and South Korea, together with Japan, were embarking on a broader Northeast Asia FTA between the three countries, as well as an East Asia FTA with ASEAN. These wide-ranging trade-liberalization frameworks that would eventually link the Chinese and South Korean economies even closer together with the region were discussed during the China-South Korea-Japan trilateral summit on October 10, 2009, and during the ASEAN 10+3 Summit in Thailand on October 24, 2009.

Various economic indicators pointed to the vibrant economic and people-to-people exchanges between China and South Korea. For instance, 837 passenger flights on 47 routes operated in 2008 between 33 cities in China and seven cities in South Korea, as well as 47 flights on 10 freight routes. Koreans account for the largest single group of foreign students in China (65,000), as do Chinese (25,000) in South Korea. According to MOFAT statistics for 2008,

4.0 million Korean tourists visited China, while 1.2 million Chinese tourists visited South Korea: this meant that almost 10 percent of South Koreans visited China in 2008. There were 700,000 Korean long-term residents in China and 530,000 Chinese long-term residents in South Korea. In 2007, Chinese formed the biggest group of foreigners in South Korea, at 44 percent of the total, with 441,334, including 266,764 ethnic Koreans of PRC nationality. In China, South Koreans formed the largest group of foreign students, ahead of Japanese students. During President Hu's visit to South Korea in August 2008, Presidents Lee and Hu designated 2010 as the Visit China Year and 2012 as the Visit Korea Year in order to expand tourism and people-to-people exchanges, especially among the young people from both countries.

Despite the close economic relations between the two countries, periodic trade disputes such as the "Garlic War" between 2000 and 2001 and the "Kimchi War" between 2004 and 2005 happened from time to time. The "Garlic War" happened when Chinese garlic imports sky-rocketed tenfold in just one year to claim 35 percent of the South Korean garlic market and resulted in tit-for-tat tariffs on Chinese garlic and the banning of South Korean mobile phone equipment. The "Kimchi War" was triggered when the South Korean authorities found parasite eggs in shipments of kimchi exported to South Korea from China. More recently, in 2007 and early 2008, there was acrimony from both sides when many Korean small and medium enterprises (SME) investing in China closed down. This was due to a combination of factors, including the rising business and labor costs in China. At that time, Chinese authorities viewed the business closures by Korean SMEs as unsupportive at the minimum, given that China was grappling with the downturn in export demand due to the financial crisis and was under pressure to reduce unemployment numbers. There were accusations from China that many Korean SMEs had illegally shut down their business and that the Korean owners fled from China, leaving thousands of Chinese workers stranded without a job or fair compensation. According to the *South China Morning Post* in February 2008, 103 of the 119 businesses in Jiaozhou, Shandong, that suddenly closed without paying workers were South Korean. According to the survey of 350 South Korean companies in China taken by the Korea Chamber of Commerce Industry (KCCI) in mid-January 2008, 25 percent of the companies polled were seriously considering leaving China, while 3.1 percent were preparing for withdrawal from the country. KCCI also said the ratio of Korean companies in China expecting a deterioration of the business environment in the country rose to 85.8 percent in 2008 from 33.1 percent in 2007. This illegal flight of Korean business was brought to the attention of the South Korean government. According to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry,

and Energy, in February 2008, the government came up with a package of measures to support companies that operate in China and those that plan to withdraw from the country.

However, with China's stimulus package taking effect and optimism of a swift economic recovery in China, business prospects in China appear to be quickly improving. According to a *Chosun Ilbo* report on July 7, 2009, 50 percent of Korean companies in China reported plans for further expansion of their China operations in August 2009. Even as early as the middle of 2008, Korean companies' confidence in China appeared to be recovering. According to a survey in mid-2008 by the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency, almost 49 percent of 636 companies surveyed said they would increase their business activities in China; about 42 percent answered that they would maintain their current level of business, while only 6 percent said they would reduce operations.

South Korean media coined the term "Chaiwan" (China + Taiwan), and warned against the threat of the combined economies of China and Taiwan in the climate of improved cross-strait relations against South Korea. The *Seoul Economic Daily* published a series of articles under the banner "The Chaiwan Storm Is Coming!" in July 2009, warning that "the combination of China's capital and Taiwan's high technology warns us of a powerful fusion of forces that cannot but present a threat to Korean industries." *Chosun Ilbo* cautioned that the "rise of 'Chaiwan' threatens Korea's tech industries" on August 1, 2007. Highlighting the case of Apple's iPod, the article related that Korean companies turned Apple down when Apple approached them to manufacture it, claiming that the unit price was too low. In contrast, Taiwanese companies could make a profit by working with their manufacturing partners in China. In the end, Taiwan's Hon Hai clinched the Apple deal and assembled iPods in their China factories. "Chaiwanese" production lines turn out a wide range of electronic consumer products, from Apple's iPod to Sony's PlayStation 3 to Intel chips.

Not surprisingly, the Chinese side took exception to the "Chaiwan" characterization and its negative connotations. Zhang Guanhua, deputy director of the China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Institute of Taiwan Studies, argued that it was natural for the mainland to buy more of Taiwan's high-quality and comparatively cheap products with cross-strait economic relations warming since 2008. While the closer relationship between mainland China and Taiwan has led to more orders for Taiwan's products from countries including South Korea and Japan. Referring to the term "Chaiwan," Zhang criticized

it as wrongly putting China and Taiwan side by side, when Taiwan is part of China. Li Jiaquan, a former director of the CASS Institute of Taiwan Studies, said the term “Chaiwan” is also improper because the mainland and Taiwan have not been integrated as a single economic body. Li argued that it would be better to call it a closer economic partnership. Even Taiwan economic officials reassured South Korea and downplayed the negative connotations of the term. Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA) Chairman Wang Chih-kang explained during the 34<sup>th</sup> joint meeting between the Taipei-based Chinese International Economic Cooperation Association (CIECA) and the Federation of Korea Industries (FKI) in Seoul on September 29, 2009, that Taiwan and South Korea have long been important trade partners and the so-called “Chaiwan” phenomenon would not pose a threat to South Korea’s economy.

#### **IV. MUTUAL PERCEPTIONS: DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE**

After the euphoria in the 1990s after normalization, there has been a negative trend of mutual feelings, especially after the Goguryeo history dispute in 2005. With trade frictions in the form of the Garlic and Kimchi Wars, feelings between the peoples appeared to have been worsened by South Korean apprehension of growing Chinese international clout and its rising economic power, as well as by Chinese displeasure over the Olympics Torch Relay incidents in Seoul in 2008. All these negative feelings, which were labeled as “anti-Korean” and “anti-Chinese” by the respective publics, were in stark contrast to the booming bilateral trade and strong political relationships. This suggests a deeper and more visceral mismatch of perceptions than expected; evidently a raw nerve has been exposed and is being frequently poked.

President Lee Myung-bak appears to be very much aware of the negative sentiments between the Chinese and Korean people. In his speech at the JoongAng Global Forum in September 2008, Lee shared that he was “very concerned” about the growing animosity between people in the two countries. He added that both sides must resolve the problem with wisdom. Then during the 44<sup>th</sup> Cabinet meeting held at the Blue House on October 13, 2009, President Lee pointed out that there was much room for enhancement of ties between the people of the two countries even though diplomatic relations between Korea and China have continuously improved. Referring to his summit meeting with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao just the previous week, President Lee instructed his cabinet ministers to find ways to enhance friendly ties between the Korean and Chinese people.



**Table 1. Pew Global Attitudes Project: South Korean Opinion of China**

	South Korean views of China		Chinese views of self	
	favorable	unfavorable	favorable	unfavorable
2009	41	54	95	6
2008	48	49	95	2
2007	52	42	93	6
2006	-	-	94	5
2005	-	-	88	9
2002	66	31	-	-

Various recent studies indicate the extent of negative sentiment between the Chinese and Korean people. According to the Pew Global Attitude Project, negative feelings towards China have been on the rise in Korea since 2002 (see table 1). For instance, data from the study pointed out favorable views of China steadily declined from 66 percent in 2002 to 41 percent in 2009, while unfavorable views of China rose from 31 percent in 2002 to 54 percent in 2009. In addition, in polls by the East Asia Institute in South Korea, positive views of China's influence declined from 48.6 percent in 2005 to 38 percent in 2009, while negative views of China's influence rose from 46.7 percent in 2005 to 50 percent in 2008.

According to the "Soft Power in Asia" opinion poll conducted by the Chicago Council of Global Affairs in conjunction with the East Asia Institute, published in April 2009 (conducted in 2008), South Korea's ranking of China's soft power was placed third, behind the United States (first) and Japan (second), across the board on categories of political, diplomatic, cultural, economic, and human capital soft power. Other interesting data point to South Korea's reservations regarding China's rise in international status: 78 percent of South Koreans believed that China would be the "leader of Asia" in the future, but only 21 percent were comfortable with the prospect.

The study on "Strategic Views on Asian Regionalism" conducted by CSIS (published February 2009) provided useful insights on South Korean views towards the relative national power of the United States and China. When asked about the most powerful country in Asia in ten years, South Korean politically elite respondents bucked the trend, together with Australia, in judging that the United States would continue to be stronger than China. This was in contrast to the regional shift in thinking that China would be the strongest in overall national power in the future; 59 percent of South Koreans supported the United States, while only 35 percent favored China.

On the question of which would be the country most important to their nation in the next ten years, Koreans saw China as more important than the United States (53% versus 41% for the United States). However, the level of trust was much higher for the United States than for China, as seen in the next question, regarding the “greatest force for peace and stability in the region in 10 years.” An overwhelming 94 percent of South Koreans saw the United States in that role, which was much higher than the weighted average of 40 percent. Responding to the question of which would pose the “greatest threat to peace and stability in the region in 10 years,” South Koreans indicated 56 percent for China and 38 percent for North Korea. This reflected South Koreans’ deep concerns about the future implications of China’s rise for South Korea. To date, it appears that the South Korean leader was the only one who publicly mentioned the downswing of people-to-people feelings; no senior Chinese leader has directly or indirectly acknowledged the situation apart from the usual affirmations to improve bilateral relations, including youth and cultural exchanges.

Apart from international and South Korean opinion polls and studies on public perceptions, similar opinion polls and studies from the Chinese side are limited. As such, it is difficult to gain an objective picture of Chinese sentiments towards South Korea, other than views from the Chinese internet, which might be more virulent, or official views, which might tend to downplay the situation. A widely publicized opinion poll in 2007 was conducted by the *International Herald Leader*, a popular newspaper published by the state media *Xinhua*, in conjunction with major internet portals in China. This poll gathered Chinese internet users’ views (from a sample size of 12,000) on 20 neighboring countries, and yielded interesting results on Chinese views of South Korea. Of the 20 neighbors, the best-liked ones were Pakistan (28%), Russia (15.1%), and Japan (13.2%), while South Korea topped the list of least-liked neighbors at 40.1 percent. Japan surprisingly came in second with 30.2 percent, and Indonesia was third with 18.8 percent. It is interesting to note that when asked about their source of information about neighboring countries, respondents revealed that 65.3 percent depended on the internet, while only 26 percent chose newspapers, television, and radio. More than one-third of respondents had not visited any of the 20 neighboring countries, while only 10.4 percent had visited Malaysia and 7.3 percent had visited Japan. This suggested that the majority of internet users were basing their views of neighboring countries on internet and mass media without actually visiting neighbors such as South Korea. Although it might be easy to dismiss internet-based public opinion as extreme or biased, the power of the internet and other new media to disseminate information about South Korea to the Chinese public should not be underestimated.

It seems that government-linked Chinese academics tend to downplay the negative Chinese views of South Korea. For instance, Wang Xiaoling, researcher from the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at CASS, talked about her ongoing study of Chinese views on South Korea during a panel discussion on China-South Korea people-to-people relations, published in the April 2009 issue of *World Affairs*, a publication by the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to Wang, this study covered five major Chinese cities—Dalian, Beijing, Qingdao, Shanghai, and Guangzhou—and included 3,200 Chinese youth from ages 20-40 with university education and above. The respondents had prior contacts with South Korean nationals in China, whether as classmates, colleagues, friends, or business partners. Wang's conclusion was that anti-Korean sentiment was not as serious as assumed by the South Korean media. For instance, Wang pointed out that about 60 percent highlighted the *Hallyu*-related Korean soap operas when asked about their first images when South Korea was mentioned; only 10 percent thought about negative issues such as the dispute over the Gangneung Danoje Festival. Wang added that more than 70 percent of respondents gave a score of above 50 when asked if their affinity for Japan was 50 points, what would be their affinity for South Korea (between 0 and 100). Wang concluded that the Chinese public's perception of South Korea was fundamentally positive.

Although Wang's sample was biased towards better-educated Chinese professionals who might have a better understanding of South Korea and its people, Wang had to concede that negative sentiment was also reflected in her survey. Wang found that 50 percent of respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement that "Sino-ROK relations were good." However, only 30 percent responded "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement that "Sino-ROK people-to-people relation was good." She suggested that this discrepancy reflected the Chinese public's awareness that there were differences that affected the feelings between the two peoples despite the overall positive official bilateral relations.

When asked about anti-Korea sentiments in China at the J-Global Forum 2008 in Seoul, Professor Wang Jisi, president of the International Studies Institute of Peking University, said that, "the sentiment against Korea is extremely small in comparison to the Chinese people's feelings towards Japan and the United States." He explained that disillusionment set in when the countries learned more about each other. He urged that the media should act responsibly in reporting about such sentiment. It must not become a government-to-government issue.

Sharing a consensus with their Chinese counterparts, South Korean academics appeared keen to downplay the public disputes. Being cited in a *China Daily* commentary on July 2, 2009, Shin Sang-jin, professor of Chinese studies at Kwangwoon University, suggested that Chinese netizens should not overreact to rows over cultural and historical issues since the disputes were triggered by individuals, not endorsed or supported by the ROK government. He added that Seoul's determination to push forward relations with Beijing is out of strategic consideration, not expediency. Shin said that negative sentiments towards China were pervasive, prevalent among the common people as well as elites. He explained that earlier in the relationship, prior to 1992, the South Korean people had little knowledge about China; most only understood that China was big and mysterious. Now with extensive civilian and economic interactions, Shin assessed that it was natural that more frictions and tensions would surface. In the same *China Daily* report, Ko Sung-bin, professor in Eastern Asia studies at Jeju National University, suggested that both sides refrain from looking at historical and cultural disputes from a national and political perspective.

Professor Woo Ju-jae, Kyung Hee University Chinese Department, explained in a February 2009 issue of *Donga Monthly* that a philosophical approach to the bilateral changes in perception of the people is necessary, in conjunction with the values of the people from the two countries. Values, culture, history, traditions, customs, and various other complicating factors influence the formation of public opinions. Woo added that media influence, especially on the awareness of younger generation, had become even more significant.

## V. INCIDENTS AND FRICTION

There have been many incidents in recent years that have helped to sour Chinese and South Korean people-to-people sentiments. While an exhaustive list of incidents and disputes will not be provided for the sake of brevity, this paper will highlight representative incidents from recent years, with more emphasis on 2008 and 2009.

### *Olympic Torch Relay in Seoul*

Scenes of Chinese students clashing with pro-Tibetan protesters and South Korean civil society groups protesting against Chinese treatment of North Korean refugees during the Olympic Torch Relay in Seoul on April 27, 2008,

were widely broadcast by media on both sides. A South Korean protester, 45-year-old Son Jong-hoon, doused his body with gasoline and tried to set himself on fire, before police stopped him. One Chinese student was arrested for allegedly throwing rocks at Korean protesters. South Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Lee Yong-joon sent a message to Chinese Ambassador Ning Fukui on April 28, expressing his government's "strong regret" over the acts of some of the Chinese students. Ambassador Ning later assured reporters in Seoul that the Chinese people have good feelings for South Koreans and urged both governments to work together and not to allow the friendly relationship between the Chinese and South Korean peoples to be affected under any circumstances. Ning expressed regrets about the "extreme behavior" of some young Chinese students and extended his sympathies to the South Korean policeman and a journalist who were injured. On April 29, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Jiang Yu also expressed the Chinese government's sympathies and concerns for the South Korean policeman and journalist injured during the incident. South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade spokesman announced on April 30 that it would toughen entry visa rules for Chinese students following the violent protests during the Olympic torch relay.

This incident in Seoul rankled both the Chinese and the South Korean public. Even before the torch relay in Seoul, there had been an upsurge of nationalism and patriotic pride among the Chinese for the Beijing Olympic Games, which fermented Chinese indignation against the earlier protests in London, Paris, and San Francisco during the Olympic Torch Relay and the biased Western media reporting against China and the Olympics. As such, the Chinese internet community was incensed that South Korean protesters had attempted to disrupt the torch relay; this was probably seen by the Chinese as South Korea's aligning with the West against China. Meanwhile, many South Koreans were indignant that Seoul was swamped with reportedly 10,000 Chinese students carrying red PRC flags, and South Korean media widely reported the violent scuffles between Chinese students and Korean protesters, which in some cases spilled over into hotel lobbies in downtown Seoul. Interestingly, at the seminar "South Korea Views the Rise of China" at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars on March 9, 2009, Victor Cha shared that the Seoul torch relay incident had upset senior South Korean policymakers and legislators. This was a wake-up call to South Korean elites.

Another Olympics-related incident that received widespread coverage and condemnation in China was when the Korean television station SBS leaked footage of a dress rehearsal of the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony on July

31, 2008. An opinion poll by the Sina internet portal in China showed that 41 percent (268,956 responses) strongly condemned the incident, while 31 percent (202,894 responses) felt that the incident violated media professionalism, and another 24 percent (156,724 responses) argued for legal proceedings. A Beijing Olympic Games Organizing Committee (BOCOG) media official expressed his disappointment over the leaked footage. Many Chinese netizens were infuriated and offended by the leak and felt that the Korean TV station had dampened the August 8 Olympic Opening Ceremony extravaganza, choreographed by renowned director Zhang Yimou, which was eagerly awaited by the Chinese people, and indeed, the world.

### *Name-Calling*

A closer analysis of derogatory terms used by Chinese netizens towards the Korean people reflects misunderstanding and perhaps a link to the deeper and more intense anti-Japanese sentiments held by the Chinese. In Chinese cyberspace and nationalistic internet forums, the derogatory term frequently used against ethnic Koreans is *gao li bang zi* (高丽棒子). *Gao li* (高丽) refers to the historical Chinese name for ancient Korea, while *bang zi* (棒子) could mean “club” literally or “corn cob” in northeast Chinese slang. A widely circulated post on Chinese internet forums accounting for the origin of the *gao li bang zi* reference explained that the “club” was attributed to ethnic Koreans who served as policemen under the Japanese military authority administering occupied Chinese territory during the Sino-Japanese War and the Second World War. This version explained that the Korean policemen would beat up the Chinese in Japanese-occupied areas using wooden clubs, leading to the derogatory term being used as a sly reference to the hated Korean police. The undertone was that the derogatory term was justified since the Koreans had collaborated with the Japanese to oppress the Chinese people during the war.

### *History, Culture, and Territory: Claims and Counter-claims*

From the Chinese point of view, the North East Project was purely a history research project to examine the history of three ancient kingdoms along China’s northeastern borders, undertaken by CASS and the three northeast provinces of Liaoning, Heilongjiang, and Jilin from 2002. However, since the South Korean people regard these kingdoms: Gojoseon, Goguryeo, and Balhae, as an integral part of Korean history, this issue quickly degenerated into an emotional and controversial dispute. Initially between South Korean and Chinese academic circles, it subsequently spilled over into the public domain after the South

Korean media widely publicized the issue in 2004. South Koreans took offense to what they saw as China's attempt to distort history and "hijack" Goguryeo, one of the Three Kingdoms of ancient Korea. This issue became even more complex when intertwined with territorial claims involving Mount Baekdu (or 长白山 *Changbai Shan* in Chinese). Inevitably, the Goguryeo history issue drew rabid responses from Chinese and Korean netizens.

It was in this sensitive context that an incident occurred during the 2007 Asian Winter Games in Changchun, northeast China, when a group of South Korean short-track athletes held out placards that proclaimed "Mount Baekdu is our land" during the medal ceremony. Mount Baekdu (known as Changbai Mountain in China), along the border of North Korea and China, was regarded by Koreans as a sacred mountain, revered as the ancestral origin of the Korean people. Chinese sports officials were reported in a *Chosun Ilbo* article on February 2, 2007, to have protested that this was a "politically-motivated banner that undermines China's territorial sovereignty," and delivered a letter of protest stating that political activities violated the spirit of the Olympics and were prohibited by the charter of the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA). The head of the Korea Olympic Committee responded by stating that the incident was unplanned and held no political meaning. According to OCA, the South Korean official apologized to the OCA, the organizing committee of the 6<sup>th</sup> Asian Winter Games, and the Chinese Olympic Committee for the incident. This dispute became a lightning rod for massive reprisals from the Chinese media and Chinese internet forums. This episode sparked Chinese accusations about Koreans infringing on Chinese territorial sovereignty.

Even before South Korea's Gangneung Danoje Festival was listed as an intangible cultural heritage on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on November 25, 2005, it created a furor within the Chinese public and internet community. The controversy was partly due to China's intention to jointly register the Gangneung Danoje Festival and the Chinese Dragon Boat Festival (celebrated on the same date on the lunar calendar), which was rejected by the South Korean side. Upon South Korea's successful registration, the Chinese media and netizens accused South Korea of stealing Chinese culture. While criticizing South Korea, Chinese netizens also blamed the Chinese government for the humiliation of losing the "Chinese" Dragon Boat Festival to South Korea.

### ***Hallyu* and Korean Drama**

*Hallyu*, or “Korean wave,” referring to contemporary Korean pop culture that includes songs, films, and television dramas, has been widespread in China in recent years. Korean dramas have been so popular that it was sarcastically suggested in Chinese cyberspace that CCTV8 (CCTV is China’s state broadcaster, and CCTV8 is the drama channel) should be changed to the “Korean Drama Channel.” The extent of the popularity of Korean dramas in China could be gauged when President Hu Jintao told Moon Hee-sang, the leader of the Uri Party, during their meeting on September 25, 2005, in Beijing, that it was a shame his busy schedule kept him from watching every episode of *Dae Jang Geum* together with his wife. As a thoughtful gesture in view of President Hu Jintao’s professed enjoyment of the popular Korean drama series, President Lee Myung-bak invited South Korean actress Lee Young-Ae, lead actress in *Dae Jang Geum* to be a guest to the state dinner in honor of President Hu at the Blue House on August 25, 2008. Wu Bangguo, chairman of the National People’s Congress, reportedly said in a private conversation that he enjoys watching *Dae Jang Geum* because his wife loves Korean TV soap operas. When *Dae Jang Geum* was first broadcast on Hunan Cable TV in September 2005, the soap opera broke the ratings record at 14 points, and garnered an estimated 180 million viewers in China. The series is still being shown in China via reruns on various provincial cable stations.

Despite the popularity of Korean dramas in China, the China-South Korean history tussle spilled over into the realm of Korean soap opera. China’s broadcasting regulator, the State Administration for Film, Radio and Television (SAFRT), blacklisted Korean drama serials such as *Jumong* in 2006 and *Tae Wang Sa Shin Gi*, with Bae Yong-joon as lead actor playing King Gwanggaeto, in 2007; both were Korean period dramas with the Goguryeo dynasty as background; blacklisting meant that the dramas could not be shown on Chinese television stations. Referring to the backlash against Korean dramas in China, Joseph M. Chan in “Towards Television Regionalization in Greater China and Beyond” in 2009 pointed out that Chinese contracts to import Korean dramas dropped by 30 percent during the Shanghai Television Festival trade show in 2006. On the Chinese internet, accusations were rife that many Korean period dramas distort history and cast Chinese emperors and dynasties in a negative light regarding Chinese historical relations with Korea.



## VII. CONCLUSION

In examining China-South Korea mutual perceptions, one must remember that both sides have been viewing each other through ideological lenses for long periods of recent history, before normalization of ties. South Koreans referred to China as “Red China” or “Communist China” (中共), while Chinese referred to “South Chosun” (南朝鮮) instead of “South Korea” or “ROK,” largely due to the traumatic historical episode of the Korean War and China’s continued alliance with the DPRK. While it would be difficult to isolate a causal factor to account for the downward spiral of mutual public sentiments in recent years, it seems that dormant historical baggage, while papered over during the years following normalization, has been reawakened and worsened by economic and cultural frictions after 2000, together with significant recent events such as the Goguryeo history dispute from 2004 and the Olympic Torch Relay incident in Seoul in 2008. All these developments must be taken into consideration along with the overall strategic shift with China’s rise in international status and economic power, in conjunction with South Korean insecurities over economic dependency on China and anxieties of being marginalized by China and Taiwan in the economic sphere. This has created a complex situation of negative mutual perceptions and public sentiments from both China and South Korea despite ongoing strengthening of bilateral political and economic relations.

Although the open display of hostility between the two people has remained largely confined to cyberspace, its impact should not be underestimated, because of the wide reach and huge impact of the internet. To put the situation into perspective, official estimates of China’s internet users reached 338 million by the second quarter of 2009, with an internet penetration rate of 25.3 percent, while South Korean internet users numbered 37.5 million out of a population of 48 million, with an internet penetration rate of 77.3 percent. A point of concern is the difficulty of calming hostile feelings, despite the best efforts of rational leaders in China and South Korea, especially if such negative perceptions became deeply entrenched among the public on both sides or accepted as conventional wisdom. Thankfully, at the moment, the leadership of both countries understands the seriousness of the situation and the importance of strengthening people-to-people exchanges, especially among the younger generation, in order to dispel misunderstandings and build mutual confidence.

China is emerging as an increasingly heterogeneous society, with a rapidly expanding middle class and over 500 million cell phone and 300 million internet users. As China becomes a more pluralized society, SAIS Professor

David Lampton points out in his book *Same Bed Different Dreams: Managing U.S.-China Relations, 1989-2000*, “it is becoming ‘more normal’ as a polity inasmuch as its decisions increasingly reflect the pulling and hauling among increasingly institutionalized bureaucracies...and even public opinion.” Despite China’s being a nondemocratic society, Chinese authorities increasingly have to consider public opinion in policy making. For instance, the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs is flooded with phone calls and emails over the handling of Sino-Japan relations whenever disputes crop up with Japan, such as those over the East China Sea and Diaoyu Islands/Senkakus issues. The decision by China to dispatch a Chinese naval mission to the Gulf of Aden earlier this year on antipiracy patrol probably took into consideration Chinese public reactions to media reports of Chinese vessels being hijacked by Somali pirates. In addition, the riots in Urumqi in July 2009 apparently were sparked by a seemingly minor factory brawl between ethnic Uyghurs and Han Chinese workers in Shaoguan, Guangdong Province, thousands of miles away from Xinjiang itself. Wild and unsubstantiated rumors of Uyghurs attacking Han Chinese and vice versa were spread among the two ethnic groups via internet and text messages, leading to riots and retaliatory vendettas in Urumqi. While this is admittedly an extreme case of how ethnic and public sentiments in China could be inflamed by irresponsible individuals over the internet or via cell phones, it is not inconceivable that public sentiments regarding relations with South Korea might be excessively played up by negative Chinese public opinion. Another factor that the Chinese government must consider is its own ethnic Korean minority (estimated 2.3 million in 2009) along the northeast China border with the DPRK.



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