

Vision and Policy Direction of the Park Geun-hye Administration and its East Asia Diplomacy

Nae-Young Lee

Korea University

On February 25, 2013, the new President Park Geun-hye was appointed as the first female leader of South Korea amid high expectations of the people and daunting national and international challenges. This paper has two main purposes. First, it looks at the overall vision and policy direction of the newly launched Park administration. Second, more specifically, it analyzes the major direction of the Park administration's foreign and security policy, and discusses the major issues of South Korean foreign policy toward East Asian countries. The first part of this paper analyzes the characteristics of the Park administration and the main direction of its government and foreign and security policy, by focusing on the following three factors: President Park's personal philosophy and leadership style, the ruling party's ideological orientation and policy preferences, and the president's inaugural speech and Transition Committee's key policy report. The second part of the paper discusses the major issues or dilemmas of the Park administration's East Asia diplomacy. The first issue is how to deal with North Korea's nuclear threats and to establish a trust-building process. Secondly, this paper examines South Korea's dilemma due to the pivot to Asia policy of the U.S. and the U.S. -China confrontation. Thirdly, as a key issue of South Korea-China relations, this paper examines whether China can cooperate with South Korea in inducing North Korea's denuclearization and policy change. Finally, this paper discusses conflicts surrounding territory and history, and the conservative shift under the Abe administration as issues of South Korea-Japan relations.

1 Introduction

Saenuri Party candidate Park Geun-hye was elected the president of South Korea with 51.6% of the vote in the 18th presidential election on December 19, 2012. It was a very close match between Park and Moon Jae-in, the Democratic Party candidate, until the day of the election, but the result was Park's victory by a relatively wide margin of more than 1 million votes. Park was successful in her second attempt at a presidential election, after losing the 2007 presidential candidate election to her rival, Lee Myung-bak, who became South Korea's

17th president. On February 25, 2013, Park was appointed president, and launched her new government amid high expectations of the South Korean people and, perhaps more importantly, difficult national and international challenges, such as recovery from the economic downturn caused by the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, persuasive calls for a resolution of economic polarization in the country, expansion of South Korea's welfare system, a nuclear deterrent to North Korea, improvement of inter-Korean relations, and normalization of the long-standing political conflict with the North. What kind of leadership President Park will show and which governmental vision and policies she will adopt to solve these challenges have been drawing a lot of attention in the Korean media and among citizens and international observers.

The current Park administration is expected to show a significant difference in policy line from the former Lee administration. President Park proposed a progressive pledge of welfare expansion and so-called economic democratization¹ during the election campaign, which was uncharacteristic of a conservative candidate. She also has presented policies different from the former Lee administration's so-called "North Korea policy in principle," such as a policy to improve inter-Korean relations through "the Korean Peninsula Trust Process."² Whether the Park administration's breakthrough policy commitments, promised during her presidential election campaign, will actually be executed as policy is still a question. Furthermore, in the case of the Park administration's revised policies on North Korea, whether the intended results of these policies will be fulfilled is a matter of great interest and speculation among experts and non-experts alike.

Against this backdrop, this paper has two purposes. First, it will look at the overall vision and policy direction of the newly launched Park administration. Second, more specifically, it will analyze the major direction of the Park administration's foreign and security policy, and discuss the major issues of South Korean foreign policy toward East Asian countries. In order to accurately and fairly analyze the characteristics of the Park administration and the main direction of its government and foreign and security policy, this paper will focus on the following three factors.

First, this paper will examine President Park's personal philosophy and leadership style. In South Korea, a country that has adopted a centralized presidential system, the characteristics and state administration of a particular government are considerably affected by the philosophy and leadership style of the leader. Therefore, this paper will examine Park's personality and leadership style as well as her family history.

Second, in order to understand the governing philosophy and policy direction of the new government, it is necessary to understand the ruling party's ideological orientation and policy

1 The term "economic democratization" was popularized in South Korea in particular during the 2012 presidential candidates' elections; however, the term itself has no clear definition. The legal basis for the concept was stipulated in the Constitution upon its revision in 1987. "The state must regulate and coordinate economic affairs in order to maintain the balanced growth and stability of the national economy, to ensure proper distribution of income, to prevent the domination of the market and the abuse of economic power and to democratize the economy through harmony among the economic agents," reads item 2 of Article 119 of the Constitution. However, there have been controversies on exact meaning of "economic democratization."

2 Despite negative public opinion regarding the former Lee Myung-bak administration, candidate Park Geun-hye from the same political party was elected president. It is mainly because President Park succeeded in differentiating herself from and keeping a distance from the Lee administration during the election campaign.

preferences. Although the individual quality and image of a presidential candidate play a considerable role during an election campaign, it is clear that the policy direction and main policy contents of the party with which a candidate is affiliated, as well as the approval ratings of the candidate's party, have a significant influence on the result. In addition, since the process of presidential policy implementation require the cooperation and support of the ruling party, the policy line and policy preferences of the ruling party have a significant impact on statecraft.³

Third, probably the most crucial task in identifying the governing philosophy and major policies of a new administration is to review the president's inaugural speech and key policy documents. In particular, I will analyze the vision and core policy goals by reviewing a document named "Park Geun-hye Administration's National Issues," which was a collection of presidential policy pledges and was produced by Park's Presidential Transition Committee.

2 Park Geun-hye Administration's Characteristics, Vision, and Goals

2.1 President Park Geun-hye's Personal Background and Leadership Style

In addition to being the first female president in the constitutional history of South Korea, President Park Geun-hye is a leader with a unique family history. She is the eldest daughter of former South Korean President Park Chung-hee, and she lived a life full of ups and downs.⁴ In 1952, Park Geun-hye was born in Daegu as the first daughter of three children (a son and two daughters) of former President Park Chung-hee. She was raised at the presidential Blue House since former President Park Chung-hee took office in 1963. In 1970, she enrolled at Sogang University and majored in electrical engineering. She played the role of First Lady on behalf of her deceased mother, Yook Young-soo, who was assassinated at the National Liberation Day ceremony in 1974. After another tragedy in which her father, former President Park Chung-hee, was murdered by his aide, CIA director Kim Jae-gyu, on October 26, 1979, she left the Blue House and served as the chairman of the Chungsoo Scholarship Committee and the Yookyoung Foundation, which was founded for youth education by her deceased mother in 1969. In 1998, she entered the political arena and was elected a member of the National Assembly in the by-election in April. Since then she has been elected member of the National Assembly five times in a row. After serving as the vice-president and chief representative of the Hannara Party, which preceded the currently-ruling Saenuri Party, she ran for the position of ruling candidate for the presidential election of South Korea in 2007; however, she lost that primary election to former South Korean President Lee Myung-bak. Five years later, Park was elected the Saenuri Party's presidential candidate and then earned a victory in the 18th presidential election. She became the first female president of South Korea.

3 Lee Sook-jong and Kang Won-taek, eds. *2013 Daetongryung'sSungkongJokeon [2013 The Condition of President's Success]* (East Asia Institute, 2013).

4 For the personal history and political life of President Park Geun-hye, refer to the following: Park Geun-hye, *Despair Trains Me and Hope Moves Me* (Wisdom House, 2007) (in Korean) ; Kim Byung-wan, *Park Geun-hye's Life* (Moonhak Sketch, 2012) (in Korean).

President Park Geun-hye's political vision and leadership style seem to be considerably affected by her father. In her inaugural speech, for example, President Park announced her ambition to begin a new era on the basis of the modernization achieved by her father. One of the reasons that President Park Geun-hye has been able to maintain high public popularity since she entered politics in 1988 and returned to the Blue House after 34 years was that nostalgia for the former President Park Chung-hee and his policies remains strong among the South Korean people. According to many opinion surveys, Park Chung-hee is regarded as the most respected President by the Korean public. This nostalgia likely acted as an important political asset to President Park Geun-hye. At the same time, however, her father is also a political burden to overcome for President Park Geun-hye. Since the evaluation of former President Park Chung-hee is clearly divided in South Korea, it would be difficult for President Park Geun-hye to impress people as a leader of a new era if she fails to escape from the shadow of former President Park Chung-hee.

Although President Park Geun-hye has maintained an ideologically conservative stance since she entered politics, she has most recently proposed liberal economic and welfare policies, and moderate foreign and security policies. Furthermore, President Park has shown a distinctive leadership style. She has played an active role as a leader of the ruling party, which maintains high popularity and a solid base of support; however, she has been very influential behind the scenes without always being in the limelight. While Park has engendered a positive political image of emphasizing principles and keeping promises, her stubbornness and lack of flexibility have been criticized in the media and among the public. In addition, she has been criticized as clumsy in communications with other politicians as well as with the general public, and she has been accused of lacking a democratic leadership style. In particular, concern has been raised often that her attitude downplays communication and negotiation with her opposition.

2.2 Policy Line and Policy Preferences of the Ruling Party

The policy line and policy preferences of the ruling party have a significant impact on the new administration because cooperation and support of the ruling party are required for successful presidential leadership. In fact, many lawmakers of the Saenuri Party have been appointed to the ministries, Chief Presidential Secretary office, and other key offices of the Park administration. When President Park entered politics as a lawmaker of the Hannara Party, the predecessor of the Saenuri Party, she established the foundation of popularity that led to her being elected first as leader of the Saenuri Party and then as national president under the Saenuri Party's organization and policy line. The Saenuri Party has its roots in the Gongwha Party, established long ago by Park's father, former President Park Chung-hee, and in the later Minja Party, which was backed by authoritarian military force. The decades-old Park regime and its conservative ideology have been maintained in the Saenuri Party.⁵

5 The name change from Hanara to Saenuri has been considered part of an effort to reform the negative image of the previous Hanara Party. But there obviously has been an attempt, as well, to change the party's policy line and direction, with many experts suggesting that the Saenuri Party's policies are much more middle-of-road than those of its predecessor parties. Nonetheless, in the ideological spectrum of Korean political parties, likely no one will deny that the Saenuri Party still has a conservative orientation.

According to a survey on the ideologies of the members of the 19th National Assembly conducted by the Korean Association of Party Studies and JoongAng Daily newspaper, as shown in **Table 1**, the mean value of the Saenuri Party lawmakers' subjective ideology was 6.21, which clearly showed their conservative orientation compared to the Democratic United Party (2.91) and United Progressive Party (1.62). In addition, as shown in **Table 2**, this ideological difference consistently has appeared to influence economic, national security, social welfare, and post-materialism values and policies.⁶ Furthermore, the Saenuri Party holds regional supremacy in the southwestern Yeongnam region, in which its stable base of support has been maintained, and the party has received overwhelming support from voters in their 50's and 60's in recent elections. It also has a solid base of support from large companies and members of the upper-middle and upper classes.

Table 1 Mean Ideological Score of the 19th National Assembly Members by Party

Party Affiliation	Mean Ideology	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Saenuri	6.21	1.31	3	10
Democratic United	2.91	0.92	1	5
United Progressive	1.62	0.96	0	3

0 = Most Progressive, 5 = Moderate, 10 = Most Conservative

Reference: Kang Won-taek, "Ideological tendencies and policy attitudes of the members of the 19th National Assembly," Conference Proceedings of the Korean Association of Party Studies—Election Ratings, May 4, 2012.

Table 2 Mean Ideological Score of the 19th National Assembly Members by Policy Areas

Party Affiliation	Foreign & Security/ Anti-Communism	Economy	Social Welfare	Post-materialism Values
Saenuri	6.11 (1.06)	4.41 (1.34)	6.49 (1.42)	4.80 (0.92)
Democratic United	2.21 (0.79)	2.13 (0.89)	1.74 (1.30)	3.46 (0.71)
United Progressive	0.41 (0.51)	0.92 (0.88)	0.15 (0.29)	2.31 (0.97)
Analysis of Variance	F=576.0 p<0.01	F=132.3 p<0.01	F=397.3 p<0.01	F=97.9 p<0.01

() Standard Deviation

0-Most Progressive, 5-Moderate, 10-Most Conservative

Reference: Kang Won-taek, "Ideological tendencies and policy attitudes of the members of the 19th National Assembly," Conference Proceedings of the Korean Association of Party Studies, May 4, 2012.

6 Kang Won-taek, "Ideological tendencies and policy attitudes of the members of the 19th National Assembly," Conference Proceedings of the Korean Association of Party Studies, May 4, 2012.

2.3 Governmental Vision and Five Goals of the Park Geun-hye Administration

2.3.1 Governmental Vision

According to her inauguration speech and the report by Presidential Transition Committee, the Park Geun-hye administration's governmental vision is "a new era of people's happiness and hope."⁷ In her inauguration speech on February 21 last year, President Park suggested that "the size of each person's happiness will become the size of national power, and all people will enjoy the national power" as a new era of hope for South Korea.⁸ This governmental vision has been evaluated by various experts as a new governmental paradigm. A lot of average Koreans have voiced pessimism and even complaints about their livelihood and future. Also, many citizens hold a clear distrust of the government and its leaders. In fact, almost no experts would deny that there is growing anxiety among the public regarding their future and that of their children, regardless of the fact that South Korea's international status has risen and South Korea has reached the threshold of developed countries in terms of economic prosperity. The Park administration's governmental vision seems to show Park's desire to overcome the pessimism expressed by the majority, as well as her administration's intention to create policies that increase people's happiness and inspire their hope for a brighter future.

2.3.2 Five Governmental Goals

In order to achieve its proposed governmental vision, the Park administration has suggested the following five key governmental goals.⁹ They seem to be closely related to the economic, social, and security challenges that South Korea is facing.

2.3.2.1 Creative Economy Centered on Job Growth

The Park administration aims for an economic revival through the rise of creative industries that fuse technology and manufacturing, as well as culture and manufacturing, and that break down the walls between industries. Park described the goal of the economy as a creative one, one that creates new markets and jobs through the fusion of more traditional industries, instead of simply expanding existing industries and markets. In her speech, President Park clarified her understanding of "economic democratization," saying that such a reality should be achieved in order to make the so-called "creative economy" flourish. President Park expressed a hope that her policies may achieve a new "Miracle on the Han River," a catchphrase popularized during her father's era. She explained that her vision of a new era begins with the establishment of fair markets and the promotion of small business development.

2.3.2.2 Tailored Employment and Welfare

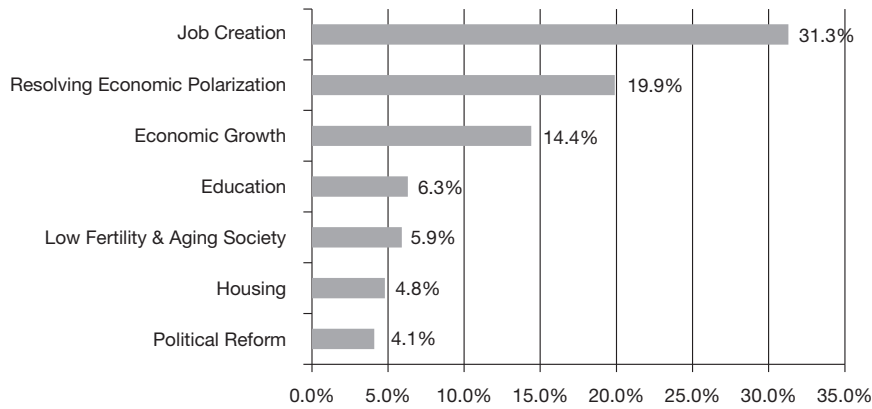
President Park expressed many of her initiatives for job creation and tailored welfare dur-

7 The 18th Presidential Transition Committee, "Park Geun-hye Jeongbuwi Gukjung Gwaje," [The Park Geun-hye Administration's National Issues], February 2013. www.region.co.kr/news.

8 "Inaugural Speech of President Park Geun-hye," *Korea Herald*, February 25, 2013.

9 The 18th Presidential Transition Committee, "Park Geun-hye Jeongbuwi Gukjung Gwaje," [The Park Geun-hye Administration's National Issues], February 2013. www.region.co.kr/news.

Figure 1 Top Priority of Government Policies



Reference: East Asia Institute, *Panel Survey on 2012 18th Presidential Election*, December 23, 2012.

ing her presidential campaign. With a lowered national growth rate and an increased unemployment rate, job creation was found to be the most critical policy challenge that people anticipated for the new government, according to various polls.¹⁰ In addition, with the fast-paced economic polarization of South Korean society, the gap between the rich and the poor has gotten significantly bigger, and the demand for economic welfare has increased. **Figure 1** summarizes the results of a public opinion poll on governmental policy conducted by the East Asia Institute on January 5, 2013. Job creation (31.3%), resolving polarization (19.9%), and economic growth (14.4%) were found to be the top priority policies. Early in its term, the Park administration suggested a goal of creating a society to advance people’s happiness and hope by promoting a tailored new employment and welfare paradigm.

2.3.2.3 Creative Education and Life Rich in Culture

In her inauguration speech, President Park emphasized the need for a new educational system, saying that fulfilling one’s dreams and beginning a new era of national hope begins with proper education, and that active educational support develops the potential of individuals, thus further developing a nation based on its citizens’ enhanced abilities. Park also showed her desire to instill the value of culture throughout society, and emphasized that the economy is vitalized and new jobs are created when creative activities in various genres are supported. In particular, she drew attention to creative content industries, which, she said, are a fusion of culture and high technology, and which would be promoted by her government.¹¹

10 Job creation is considered the top priority policy that people expect from the new government, according to a variety of polls. Refer to East Asia Institute, *Panel Survey on 2012 18th Presidential Election*, December 23, 2012. Refer to <http://www.eai.or.kr>.

11 “Inaugural Speech of President Park Geun-hye,” *Korea Herald*, February 25, 2013.

2.3.2.4 Safe and Cohesive Society

President Park declared in her inaugural speech that the government would stay focused on creating a safe society, recognizing safety as an essential requirement of people's happiness. In addition, she promised to create a society where fairness and justice of the law is realized and in which fairness and justice of the law becomes a righteous shield of protection for the underprivileged. She further stated that the government would have a major goal of alleviating social conflicts and integrating South Korean society, which had been fractured by conflict and confrontation due to regional, generational, and ideological differences.

2.3.2.5 Laying the Foundation for National Reunification

President Park presented her administration's goal for foreign and security affairs. President Park's will, she said, was to lay a foundation for national reunification, which would be an historical achievement. She said she would accomplish this by improving inter-Korean relations and achieving peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. In addition, she suggested an expansion of "trust diplomacy" for neighboring countries, explaining that she would strengthen Korea's relationship with countries in the Asia and Oceania regions, in particular the U.S., China, Japan, and Russia, in order to mitigate tension and conflicts, and to spread peace and cooperation throughout Asia. In a closely-related note, Park highlighted the importance of global diplomacy.

3 The Park Geun-hye Administration's Foreign and Security Policies

As discussed earlier, the Park administration's goal for its foreign and security affairs has been to lay a foundation for national reunification. In order to achieve this goal, the Korean Peninsula Trust Process was outlined as a main policy for improving inter-Korean relations and for accomplishing peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. However, the Park administration clearly recognized that the foundation of peace on the Korean peninsula and the possibility of reunification of the two Koreas require not only an improvement of inter-Korean relations but also the stability of Northeast Asia and the cooperation and support of major countries in the region. For many years prior to her election as president, President Park emphasized linkage among North Korean issues, peace on the Korean peninsula, and Northeast Asian security. Thus, it was not surprising that the Park administration presented its goal of achieving peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia, especially through an expansion of "trust diplomacy" for neighboring countries. In order to accomplish this goal, the Presidential Transition Committee suggested the following three specific goals.¹²

3.1 Strong Security and Sustainable Peace

The international community has intensified sanctions on North Korea in recent years because North Korea has conducted nuclear tests and missile development despite the interna-

¹² 18th Presidential Transition Committee, "The Park Geun-hye administration's national issues."

tional community's repeated warnings. North Korea's resistance to these sanctions and policies increased instability and threatened security on the Korean peninsula. Considering that a third nuclear test was conducted around the launch of the new government, the Park administration was almost forced to set its first foreign and security goal of achieving sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula based on strong security. In order to achieve this goal, four major tasks were suggested.

The first task is to strengthen defense capabilities and ensure that South Korea can effectively deter and actively respond to North Korean provocations. More specifically, the plan has included securing a strong defense capability through an active deterrence strategy, enhancing anti-terrorism capability, and strengthening reaction capabilities to cyber warfare. The second task is to fortify future-oriented defense capabilities that correspond to changes in the security environment. For this purpose, defense reform, such as development of new military strategy and wartime operation control (OPCON) transfer, will be promoted urgently. It includes a plan to develop the South Korean missile defense system for effective defense against the North Korean missile threat and to strengthen the tailored and extended deterrence capacity for effective reaction to the North Korean nuclear threat.

The third task is to enhance defense cooperation with neighboring countries and continuously develop the Korea-U.S. military alliance. This involves the development of the Korea-U.S. Alliance Defense Vision 2030 and the expansion of the Korea-U.S. regular consultative body into a new "2+2" system. The fourth task is to take a leading role in a multilateral security framework in the region. The Park administration has made it clear that denuclearization of North Korea will be sought through policy coordination with the countries of the "six-party talks," that were created under the former Roh Moo-hyun administration in response to North Korea's withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. An effective sanction on North Korea would be achieved by working closely with the international community, according to Park. In particular, it is believed that by progressively operating three-party strategic talks among Korea, the U.S., and China, and by building three-party trust, the North Korean nuclear issue can be resolved.

3.2 Implementing Reunification on the Korean Peninsula

The Park administration's second set of foreign policy goals are aimed at realizing a new Korean peninsula on which reunification may be achieved in a "happy" way. The core policy for this goal is the normalization of inter-Korean relations through the Korean Peninsula Trust Process, as previously mentioned in this paper. The Korean Peninsula Trust Process is a set of North Korea policies and initiatives that President Park and her national security staff have contemplated for a long time. In fact, President Park published her account of the Korean Peninsula Trust Process in the autumn 2011 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, a global professional journal in the field of foreign affairs.¹³ The Korean Peninsula Trust Process policy emerged mostly because of the evaluation that distrust between the two Koreas had deepened during

13 Park Geun-hye, "A new kind of Korea: Building trust between Seoul and Pyongyang," *Foreign Affairs*, Sep/Oct 2011.

the Lee administration due to discontinued communication and breached agreements. Although the Lee administration's North Korean policy linked large-scale economic assistance to the denuclearization of North Korea, the denuclearization of North Korea did not occur and South-North relations became strained. The Korean Peninsula Trust Process is a prospective North Korea policy based on the logic that humanitarian assistance and economic exchange result in increased trust, and that such trust can lead to the denuclearization of North Korea.¹⁴

However, President Park has made it clear that the Korean Peninsula Trust Process is not a simple appeasement policy but a North Korea policy based on strong deterrence. In other words, it is a strategy to reinforce deterrence of North Korean provocations and threats, which were heightened with North Korea's third nuclear test, which occurred on February 12, 2013. Just as important, it is a strategy to realize sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula through the formation of South-North trust and the normalization of inter-Korean relations in the long-term. To do this, considering the international circumstances and North Korea's attitude, the inter-Korean communication channel that became deadlocked under the Lee administration would be reactivated under Park's rule, and the principles inherent in the existing inter-Korean agreements would be adhered to.

In addition, President Park expressed her willingness to carry forward pure humanitarian support for North Korea, separately from the political and security situation, after consulting with international organizations. The Vision Korea Project was created by the Park administration to build an economic community between the two Koreas based on the inter-Korean trust-building process previously explained and the denuclearization progress. The Vision Korea Project is meant to achieve an economic community gradually by installing industrial infrastructure, such as railways, roads, power lines, and communications systems, in both South and North Korea. In addition, it includes joint research on environmental issues, including economic cooperation to ensure environmental sustainability, border area environmental management, and a plan to construct a South-North environmental community, such as a new renewable energy zone within the Gaeseong Industrial Complex, an industrial park just north of the Demilitarized Zone in North Korea in which South Korean companies employ North Korean workers to manufacture goods.

Finally, a strategy to reinforce practical capability and favorable public opinion regarding reunification has been proposed by the Park administration. Its specific goal is to build national consensus by mitigating conflict and confrontation related to reunification and South Korea's North Korea policy, and by securing the support of the international community for reunification.

3.3 Developing Trust Diplomacy along with the People

The third specific goal of the Park administration's foreign and security policy is to implement the administration's "trust diplomacy" along with the people, as it is a core value of

14 Park In-hui, "Candidate Park Geun-hye's foreign and security policy: The spread of the Korean Peninsula Trust Process and Trust Diplomacy," *HanbandoFocus* [The Korean Peninsula Focus], Nov/Dec, 2012.

Park's the foreign and security policy. When President Park suggested the Korean Peninsula Trust Process for improving inter-Korean relations, she also announced her government's initiative to promote trust among nations in East Asia, as well as a global diplomacy built on trust. President Park presented a plan to build trust and create new order in East Asia through a new diplomatic program, namely Initiative for Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia. Through this program, she intends to seek the institutionalization of peace and cooperation in Northeast Asia by promoting security in non-traditional fields in which cooperation is easy, such as anti-terrorism, the environment, and disaster response.

Park's "trust diplomacy" promotes multi-level diplomatic relations with the U.S., China, and Japan. In East Asia, instability has increased due to power transitions caused by the growing influence of China. In addition, U.S.-China competition and conflict are being aggravated since the U.S. adopted its "pivot to Asia" and "rebalancing strategies" in order to control the expansion of China.¹⁵ To deal with North Korea's nuclear development and security threats, cooperation and strategic coordination with the U.S. and China are critical to South Korea. The South Korean national security strategy is to expand the country's strategic partnership with China, which is the largest trading partner and which has leverage on North Korean issues. Meanwhile, South Korea seeks to consolidate its relationship with the U.S., its traditional ally. The Park administration has proposed a goal of deepening the South Korea-U.S. alliance and reinforcing cooperative partnership with China at the same time. The Park administration recognizes that the national interest of South Korea can be guaranteed not by choosing between the U.S. and China but by enhancing a multi-level diplomatic network in which the South Korea-U.S. alliance and the South Korea-China relationship coexist. With an aim of enhancing the South Korea-U.S. alliance as a hub for security and peace in the region, the Park administration has expressed a desire to develop the South Korea-U.S. alliance into a comprehensive strategic alliance with a global dimension and beyond a simple military relationship. At the same time, the Park administration has proposed a goal of promoting political and security cooperation that corresponds to the deepened economic relationship between South Korea and China.

The South Korea-Japan relationship will likely be strengthened under Park's rule. To this end, her administration has expressed its desire to resolve historical and territorial issues with the combined power of the governments and civil societies of South Korea, China, and Japan. Furthermore, the Park administration has declared a plan to continue previous efforts aimed at deepening the mutual cooperation between South Korea and Japan.

The Park government clearly aims to expand its roles and responsibilities as a middle power in the international community. The Park government is willing to actively contribute to resolving global economic issues, reinforcing the UN Security Council members' activities, promoting exemplary developmental cooperation that can be of practical help to developing countries, and continually expanding the scale of South Korea's Official Development Assistance (ODA). In the specific field of economic diplomacy, the Park government has proposed a policy that leads to the integration of East Asia by promoting free trade agreements with

15 Mark Manyin, "Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama administration's rebalancing toward Asia," *CRS Report for Congress*, March 28, 2012.

East Asian countries and even some new market countries. To do this, the government has presented a plan to carry forward the South Korea-China FTA and the South Korea-China-Japan FTA, to actively participate in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and to enhance economic and resource cooperation with new countries including the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Central and South America.

4 Major Issues of the Park Geun-hye Administration's East Asia Diplomacy

4.1 North Korea Policy

4.1.1 How to Establish a New Trust-Building Process

The core of the Park administration's North Korea policy is the Korean Peninsula Trust Process, as has been explained in this paper. It is an initiative to construct a Korean peninsula economic community and to build a foundation for peaceful reunification through a variety of economic cooperation projects. However, these will be implemented only if trust between South and North Korea is accumulated and only if North Korea's denuclearization progresses by fulfilling existing agreements and developing the communication channel between the two Koreas. Compared to the former Lee administration's hard-line policies on North Korea policy, President Park's policy base aims for an improvement of inter-Korean relations.¹⁶ Unlike the former Lee administration's principle of reciprocity by which support for and cooperative exchange with North Korea was carried forward only as a reward for North Korea's denuclearization, the Park government attempts to separately pursue denuclearization of and cooperative exchange with North Korea.

In spite of the Park administration's desire for improving inter-Korean relations, the Korean Peninsula Trust Process can be pushed ahead only when North Korea stops nuclear tests and provocation threats, and only when it agrees to the inter-Korean communication. Considering that the international community has put strong sanctions on North Korea, due to its third nuclear test in 2013, and that since Park's election, North Korea has issued several provocative threats and launched cyber-attacks, the Park administration's Korean Peninsula Trust Process is facing a large obstacle even before being implemented. In a situation in which the international community is imposing tough sanctions on North Korea, and North Korea is responding with more nuclear tests and provocative threats, it is difficult for the South Korean government to improve inter-Korean relations. How to shift from heightened conflict caused by sanctions on North Korea and tough responses to a phase of active and productive communication, in which the trust process works, is a great dilemma that the Park administration is currently facing.¹⁷

16 Recently, the new Unification Minister, Ryu Gil-jae, suggested a flexible North Korea policy that makes the Korean Peninsula Trust Process actually works by promoting humanitarian aid to or economic exchange with North Korea, without imposing the condition of North Korea's denuclearization.

17 Kim Yong-Ho, "Coevolution Strategy and Epistemic Community: New Approaches to Change in North Korea, South Korea's Unification Diplomacy and New Order in Northeast Asia," presented at the seminar on "the Future of the Korean Peninsula: Unification or Perpetual Division," organized by Hansun Foundation and Heritage Foundation.

4.1.2 How to Respond to North Korea's Nuclear Threat

The international community has imposed strict restrictions on North Korea in response to its third nuclear test on February 12, 2013 in Poongsu-ri, Huamkyungbook-do. Ever since, insecurity on the Korean Peninsula has been growing. The destructive power of the third nuclear test was 6-7kt, which was evaluated to be much stronger than the first and second ones. Thus it is clear that North Korea's nuclear technology has improved. It is not known exactly how much nuclear weapon development has been achieved by North Korea, especially in terms of size and weight, but any further development surely will become a worrisome threat to South Korea and even to other nations if indeed North Korea's development skill has already reached a level to mount nuclear weapons on delivery systems such as medium-range or even long-range missiles. Of additional and pressing note is whether enriched uranium was used in North Korea's third nuclear test. Experts consistently state that uranium is a greater threat than plutonium. Since plutonium, which was used in previous nuclear tests, had to be extracted from nuclear power generation, the international community's monitoring of North Korea's nuclear capability was relatively easy. However, international surveillance has become difficult and mass production of nuclear weapons has become easier because uranium can be taken from North Korea's own uranium mine and extracted in its centrifuge.¹⁸

North Korea's third nuclear test confirmed that the international community's pressure and deterrence has not been sufficient to stop North Korea's nuclear ambition, and that North Korea has become an effective or nearly-effective nuclear power. South Korea is facing a difficult choice of whether to officially accept North Korea's nuclear capability or to seek North Korea's denuclearization through a new strategy. In addition, given North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons and the difficulty of deterrence, South Korea is facing a difficult challenge to secure deterrence against North Korea's nuclear weapons. Thus, the South Korean government should establish effective ways to deter North Korea and utilize the currently-available U.S. nuclear umbrella, including relocating U.S. tactical nuclear resources but excluding of the option of South Korea's nuclear possession.

4.2 Major Issues in South Korea-U.S. Relations

4.2.1 South Korea's Dilemma Due to Pivot to Asia-Pacific Policy of the U.S. and U.S.-China Confrontation

The second Obama administration announced its "pivot to Asia-Pacific" policy as part of its U.S. foreign policy, and the U.S. is expected to pursue an active Asia policy diplomatically, militarily, and economically.¹⁹ This active Asia policy of the U.S. is clearly presented in *New Defense Strategic Guidance*, published by the Obama administration in January 2012. According to the publication, under the judgment that the threat of terrorism has been reduced, the U.S. is shifting the emphasis of its defense strategy from the current warfare to future challenges, in other words, to military preparation against a potentially hostile country. In this

18 "In Focus: North Korea's Nuclear Threats, *The New York Times*, April 12, 2013. www.nytimes.com/interactive.

19 Hilary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy*, November 2011.

context, the U.S. considers China to be the biggest challenge it may face in the future.²⁰ In addition, the U.S. is envisioning a strategy to increase its role in Asia by actively participating in multilateral consultative bodies such as the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). Likely the U.S. presented its intention to prevent China's regional hegemony by strengthening its cooperation with friendly and allied nations in the Asia-Pacific region. Taking into account the importance of the Asia-Pacific region as a main export market and economic powerhouse, the Obama administration obviously attempts to maintain the economic status of the U.S. in the region. More specifically, the U.S. government has been promoting the Trans-Pacific Economic Partnership (TPP), almost certainly in order to check the ASEAN+3 led by China, the South Korea-China-Japan FTA, and the Asia-centric Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).²¹

The Chinese leadership is sensitively responding to America's "pivot to Asia-Pacific" policy and its checks on China. Suggesting U.S.-China relations as a "new power relations," the Xi Jin-ping government of China announced that future U.S.-China relations should be two powerful nations' relations based on cooperation. Since the "new power relations" suggested by the Xi government implies that China pursues an equal relationship with the U.S., and that China will not yield in a conflict, it is obvious that U.S.-China confrontation in East Asia will become even more intense.²²

If the U.S.-China confrontation becomes fierce because of the pivot to Asia policy of the U.S., South Korea will be in a difficult situation in which it is forced to choose between its relations with the U.S. and China. As the U.S.-China competition becomes more intense, the U.S. may attempt to use South Korea to check China by seeking to strengthen the South Korea-U.S. alliance. Considering U.S. defense budget cuts and the restitution of wartime operational control of South Korea scheduled for December 2015, it is also expected that the U.S. will request an expanded role for South Korea's military, perhaps even a regional presence, if the South Korea-U.S. alliance and U.S. military presence in South Korea is maintained at the present level or a similar level. In particular, if North Korea refuses to give up its nuclear development and continues its military threats on South Korea, South Korea's dependence on the U.S. will be increased in order to deter North Korean provocations, and then South Korea's cooperation with China very likely will be constrained.²³ In addition, if the U.S.-China confrontation intensifies, getting the cooperation of China, which in recent history has had the greatest leverage over North Korea, may become more difficult in the resolution of North Korea issues.²⁴

20 Department of Defense, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century Defense," January, 2012.

21 Im Kyung-soo, "Discussion of Economic Integration in the Asia-Pacific Region and Implications," *KIEP Regional Economic Focus*, September, 10, 2012.

22 Lee Tae-hwan, "China's foreign policy under Xi Jin-ping and the Korean Peninsula," *Jungsewajengchak [Situation and Policy]*, Sejong Institute, December 2012.

23 Specifically, the U.S. can ask for the use of South Korean military base to check China, expansion of the participation in the U.S. led-joint military training, participation in the East Asia Missile Defense (MD) system of the U.S., and the expansion of the South Korea-US-Japan military cooperation.

24 Kim Yong-ho, "The Obama administration's Korean Peninsula policy-Evaluation and prospects," a paper presented at Korea International Political Science Association Conference, January 2013.

4.2.2 North Korea Policy Coordination between South Korea and the U.S.

The resolution of North Korea's nuclear development has been the top interest of South Korea and the U.S. since North Korea became recognized as a nuclear power through its third nuclear test. The South Korea-U.S. cooperation and the coordination of North Korea policy has become important in order to respond to North Korea's new security threats. However, as was introduced in the previous section of this paper, there are some factors that can make the coordination of North Korea policy between the two countries difficult.

Specifically, dissonance may occur over the North Korea policy between South Korea and the U.S. While South Korea cannot give up the denuclearization of North Korea, the U.S. may admit North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons after North Korea's third nuclear test and put a policy priority on nuclear nonproliferation. In particular, some South Korean experts are concerned that the U.S. may attempt to negotiate with North Korea in order to stop nuclear proliferation, excluding South Korea. However, recognizing South Korea's concern, the Obama administration recently stated that it will create a Korean peninsula policy focused on South Korea's North Korea policy, and will not communicate with North Korea without South Korea's participation or consent.²⁵

4.2.3 Deepened South Korea-U.S. Alliance and Major Issues

The relationship between the first Obama administration and the former Lee administration has been evaluated as the best one that the two countries have forged since relations were first established. The two countries agreed to develop the South Korea-U.S. alliance into a comprehensive global strategic alliance beyond a simple military relationship. However, the specific timing and direction of planning have not been set. The second Obama administration has a goal of maintaining its influence in Asia through its "pivot to Asia-Pacific policy." Yet the Obama administration is facing a dilemma since it needs to cut down on its defense budget to reduce its national deficit. Thus, the Obama administration may request an increase in the contribution and role of Korea, including costs to maintain the alliance.²⁶

Currently, there are major policy issues for South Korea and the U.S. that are requiring attention, such as preparation for the transition of wartime operational control in 2015; renegotiation of the U.S. Forces Korea defense cost sharing agreement, which expires in 2013; establishment of missile defense (MD) to cope with North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles; and negotiation on the revision of the South Korea-U.S. nuclear agreement. Notably, in the renegotiation on the U.S. Forces Korea defense costs sharing agreement, a fierce political battle between South Korea and the U.S. is expected because the U.S. is likely to strongly request increased cost-sharing with South Korea.²⁷

Due to the difference of opinion between South Korea and the U.S. on the amendment of the South Korea-U.S. nuclear agreement, which expires in March 2014, conflict between the

25 "No US-North Korea Discussion without South Korea," The Transition of the Korean Peninsula Policy, *Korea Times*, March 27, 2013.

26 Yoon Deok-min, "South Korea-US Alliance at a Turning Point: How to Build Strategic Alliances?" a working paper, Institute of Foreign Affairs and Security, September 27, 2012.

27 Won Gon Park, "A challenge for the ROK-U.S. Alliance: Defense Cost-Sharing System," *EAI Working Paper*, July, 2013.

two countries is expected. The key issue in the amendment of the South Korea-U.S. nuclear agreement is whether the U.S. will admit South Korea's rights to spent fuel reprocessing and uranium enrichment. The reason that South Korea is requesting this reprocessing right is because there is almost no space left to store spent fuel. South Korea also has been requesting the self-enrichment right because it spends massive amounts of money every year on overseas nuclear fuel enrichment despite the fact that South Korea is the world's fifth largest nuclear power plant country, and because its power operation can be stopped if any disruption in fuel supply occurs. President Park declared during her election campaign that she would amend the "unreasonable" South Korea-U.S. nuclear agreement. However, the U.S. government has maintained a negative stance about it because it is afraid that Korea may easily choose to develop nuclear weapons if the fuel reprocessing right of South Korea is allowed. Korean newspapers reported that the U.S. government is hoping that the South Korean government would permanently give up the rights to uranium enrichment and spent fuel reprocessing when revising the South Korea-US nuclear agreement.²⁸ If this happens, the South Korean government, which is seeking to acquire the right to produce low-enriched uranium and the right to reprocess spent fuel for the peaceful use of nuclear energy, will encounter difficulties because it will be a step back from the current South Korea-U.S. nuclear agreement.

4.3 Issues of South Korea-China Relations: Can China Cooperate with South Korea in inducing North Korea's Denuclearization and Policy Change?

As China's national power is rising rapidly and the economic interdependence between South Korea and China is being deepened, economic and social cooperation with China has become an essential task for the survival of South Korea. Recognizing this reality, the South Korean government has put efforts into developing a strategic partnership with China in all areas. In fact, South Korea-China cooperation has been remarkably enhanced as a result of recent economic, social, and cultural exchanges. As North Korea has increased its dependence on China, South Korea's cooperation with China is becoming more important for resolving North Korea nuclear issues, achieving peace on the Korean peninsula, responding to the sudden changes in North Korea, and achieving reunification.²⁹

In recent history, South Korea-China relations have suffered because of the role of China in the nuclear development of North Korea and the transition of its leadership. In spite of warnings from the international community, North Korea has continued to develop nuclear weapons and missiles. When the international community, including the UN, imposed sanctions on North Korea, China showed a lukewarm attitude and then took a North Korea-sided stance at the last minute. This has aggravated South Korea-China relations and China-U.S. relations. The Chinese government's response to North Korea's first and second nuclear tests,

28 "U.S. Nuclear Agreement, Super Strong Action," Chosun Daily newspaper, March 29, 2013.

29 Chang-hoon Cha, "China's Korean Peninsula policy-responsible power and Xi's North Korea policy dilemma," a paper presented at Korea International Political Science Association Conference, January 2013; Xiaohe Cheng, "From Jiang Zimin to Hu Jintao: The Evolution of China's Policies toward the Korean Peninsula," *Korea Observer*, Vol. 43, No. 4, 2012.

as well as to North Korean attacks on the South Korean ship “Cheonan” and on South Korea’s Yeonpyeong Island proved that China was not prepared to wholeheartedly condemn North Korea or support South Korea, even though the international community largely did. While China has promoted a goal of North Korean denuclearization and a policy transition aimed at reforming and opening North Korea, its policy priority clearly has been on maintaining leverage over North Korea and preventing the collapse of the North Korean regime.

Without the active cooperation and participation of China, the effect of sanctions on North Korea would have to be limited. As for South Korea and the U.S., it is an essential task to persuade China to actively participate in tough sanctions of the international community on North Korea’s nuclear tests in order to deter North Korea’s nuclear development. In February 2013, it was widely reported that negative public opinion on North Korea was spreading in China after North Korea’s third nuclear test, and that the Chinese government was actively participating in sanctions on North Korea, unlike in the past. Whether this recent behavior of China represents changes in China’s North Korea policy or simply temporary pressure on North Korea will have a significant impact on the process of resolving North Korea issues in the future.³⁰

4.4 Issues of South Korea-Japan Relations: Conflicts Surrounding Territory and History, and the Conservative Shift in Japan

The recent conflict and confrontation surrounding territory and history in Northeast Asia is an important factor bringing instability to the regional order. The dispute between China and Japan over the sovereignty of Senkaku (Diaoyu) Island has been heated since 2010.³¹ As for South Korea-Japan relations, conflict over Dokdo, an island between Korea and Japan, became intensified recently, and past historical issues like Japan’s enslavement of Korean women for sexual servitude—also known as the “comfort women” issue—is deterring the two countries’ advanced relationship.³²

Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, from the Liberal Democratic Party, succeeded in replacing the ruling regime by achieving an overwhelming victory over the ruling party, the Democratic Party, in the House of Representatives General Election in December, 2012. Since Abe promised conservative and nationalistic foreign policy during his election period, the international community and South Korea have become greatly concerned about his leadership and ensuing changes in Japanese policies.³³ During the election period, Prime Minister Abe expressed his desire to strengthen the security system of Japan through the revision of the Peace Constitution. In addition, he declared his will to transform the existing Self-De-

30 In this respect, the Park administration suggested three-party talks of South Korea, U.S. and China, to coordinate on and cooperate over North Korea policy as well as to seek the denuclearization North Korea and the transition of its political system. However, the Chinese government has not yet responded clearly.

31 Koichiro Genba, “Japan-China relations at a cross roads,” *International Herald Tribune*, November 21, 2012.

32 Mori Kazuko, “Territorial Disputes and Historical Consciousness in Northeast Asia,” A paper presented for the 3rd East Asian Community Forum organized by the Center for Contemporary Korean Studies, Tokyo University, September 28, 2013.

33 “Japan’s new cabinet: Back to the future,” *The Economist*, January 5, 2013; “Japanese foreign policy: Down-turn Abe,” *The Economist*, January 5, 2013.

fense Forces in Japan to Defense Forces, and seek support, domestically and internationally, on Japan's right to collective self-defense. In addition, he denied the Kono Discourse of 1993, which admitted the Imperial Japanese Army's use of "comfort women," which has resulted in the intense conflict between South Korea and Japan.³⁴

Right after taking office, the Abe administration started pushing ahead radically new policies, such as cutting the currency exchange rate and stimulating Japan's economy through significant government intervention. Clearly, Abe's priority was economic recovery. In response, the Japanese economy has been showing clear signs of recovery. Meanwhile, the Abe administration has begun actively promoting augmented defense capability and an enhanced alliance between the U.S. and Japan. The overall conservative shift in Japan, and in particular the nationalistic policies on territorial and past history issues, is likely to aggravate conflict and confrontation between South Korea and Japan as well as affect regional order in North-east Asia. In particular, the visits to Yasukuni Shrine by Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso and other lawmakers in April sparked an outcry in South Korea and China. In addition, Abe's remarks on wartime history have thrown cold water on efforts by South Korea to improve bilateral ties. Abe questioned whether Tokyo's World War II occupation of nations could be defined as aggression. The South Korean government and the public have responded to the Abe administration's scandalous perception and remarks on wartime history with anger and harsh criticism.³⁵

The Liberal Democratic Party is expected to take up a lot of seats in the upcoming Upper House Election in July, 2013, and there are concerns that the Abe administration would more actively promote nationalistic foreign policy, such as the proposed amendment of Japan's Constitution and empowerment of its military, based on the strong domestic political support the Abe administration has had. South Korea and Japan should cooperate closely in order to deter North Korea's nuclear development and to check the rise of China. Yet the Abe administration's conservative shift and territorial conflicts have cooled the relationship between the two countries and make cooperation between South Korea and Japan more difficult.

5 Conclusion

Looking at the experiences of the former presidents who have been elected since democratization in South Korea, high approval ratings have been maintained at the beginning of a term of office, but the ratings steadily decreased in the second half of the term until the leaders finally lost their leadership position and administration became a lame duck. This high expectation-disappointment cycle has been repeated without exception and has been extensively studied by experts.³⁶ The repeating situation, in which all presidents elected after

34 Park Young-joon, "The Liberal Democratic Party Abe administration's re-launch and the forecast of the Korean peninsula policy of Japan," Korea International Political Science Association Conference, January 2013.

35 Lee Nae Young, "Abe's remarks have thrown cold water on efforts by South Korea," *Asahi Shimbun Asia & Japan Watch*, May 24, 2013.

36 For an analysis of failure of South Korea's former presidents, refer to Lee Sook-jong and Kang Won-taek, eds. *2013 The Condition of President's Success* (East Asia Institute, 2013).

democratization left the Blue House in disgrace as failed presidents, was a personal misfortune for each individual president, and shook the faith of the people who had chosen that president. Over time, South Koreans lost their confidence in the future of the country and politicians' ability to lead. The reasons for the repeated failure of South Korean presidents are complex. One reason is the fatal limit of the single-term system for the presidency, which causes a dramatic weakening of support in the second half of a term; another is lack of institutional devices to check any excessive concentration of power; a third important reason is that South Korean presidents have invested a lot of effort to be elected, but begin their term without enough preparation and planning, leading to immediate problems, unprofessionalism, lack of the public's trust, and failure.³⁷

Can President Park finish her term as a successful president, unlike former presidents? The reality of South Korean politics is not so simple. The Park administration has been launched facing a serious crisis from the beginning, and has already encountered numerous difficulties such as appointing cabinet ministers and vice-ministers and conflict with the political opposition. As a result, President Park's approval rating fell to 41% in a poll conducted by Gallup Korea on March 26, one month after her inauguration.³⁸ It was the lowest rating compared to former administrations. Externally, in addition, security threats have become a bigger concern, due to the possibility of North Korea's further provocations and nuclear tests in response to international sanctions. In order to build a political base for a successful five-year term, the Park administration will have to cope with the national and international crises wisely.

³⁷ The political culture and practices of South Korea that highlight only the negative points of former presidents, without consideration of their contributions and external circumstances, very likely exaggerate the failure of South Korean presidents.

³⁸ Gallup Korea, "Weekly Approval Ratings of President's Performance," March 29, 2013.