

CHINA'S NORTH KOREAN DEFECTOR POLICY AND NORTHEAST ASIAN POLITICS: A NEOREALIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The sudden collapse of the Soviet Union has had a significant impact on North Korea. Its economic system, which used to depend heavily on its “big brother”, has crumbled. As a result, an estimated of 10,000 to 300,000 (according to different resources) North Korean defectors flee their country across the borders to China mostly because of economic hardship. The Chinese authority’s hard-line policy imposed on North Korean defectors on the one hand causes humanitarian crisis, and on the other hand, has great impact on the stability and unification of the Korean Peninsula. Why does China adopt such a hard-line policy vis-à-vis the North Korean defectors in addition to its underperforming human rights record? What is the rationale behind this policy? Will there be a policy change and proper solution to the problem so that to maintain the stability in the Korean Peninsula? In this paper, I will apply the neorealist framework to answer the questions. Why China adopt the policy is related to its self-perception of national security, its interest in maintaining the stability of the Korean Peninsula and the balance of power considerations against the US-Japan coalition.

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Introduction

From the Korean War in the 1950s till 1991, the Korean Peninsula was the frontline of the Cold War, with the Soviet Union supporting Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the US supporting the Republic of Korea (South Korea). The sudden collapse of the Soviet Union has had a significant impact on North Korea. Its economic system, which used to depend heavily on its “big brother”, has crumbled. As a result, an estimated of 10,000 to 300,000 (according to different resources) North Korean defectors flee their country across the borders to China mostly because of economic hardship. These people have been recognized as refugees by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and national governments including South Korea and the US. However, the Chinese government refuses to give refugee status to those defectors, insisting that they are illegal economic migrants. As a result, borders with North Korea are tightly controlled and defectors are repatriated to their country of origin where they may face persecution. Although the North Korea nuclear issue attracts most of the attention paid to this region, the defector issue is becoming a growing concern to the international community. The large outflow of the defectors and improper treatment imposed on them on the one hand causes humanitarian crisis, and on the other hand, has great impact on the stability and unification of the Korean Peninsula.

The Chinese authority’s hard-line policy toward the North Korean defectors is one of the major factors that cause humanitarian crisis and it also put China under international pressure and criticism of violating the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (referred to as Geneva Convention in after) and the 1967 Protocol to that Convention which

China is party of. As the outcome of the hard-line policy, some high-profile actions have been taken by the defectors: e.g. storming foreign embassies in China, protesting against the Chinese authorities during the 2008 Beijing Olympics torch relay in Seoul. As a major rising power in the world, China has been trying its best to adapt to the world, acting as a responsible country. Undoubtedly, this hard-line policy and the policy outcomes make China lose face internationally. In this situation, why does China adopt such a hard-line policy vis-à-vis the North Korean defectors in addition to its underperforming human rights record? What is the rationale behind this policy? Will there be a policy change and proper solution to the problem so that to maintain the stability in the Korean Peninsula? Finding answers to these questions is crucial in addressing the North Korean defector issue properly for humanitarian purposes and in the broader picture of the Korean unification issue.

Various authors have given more or less similar answers to that. According to Ko et al., Chang et al., an immediate reason for the refoulement of North Korean defectors is the bilateral agreement signed by Beijing and Pyongyang in the 1986 in which each of the sides' obligations of repatriating defectors is written.¹ As some authors, such as Margesson and Scobell correctly point out, a more important and deep-seated explanation lies in China's interest in maintaining the current North Korean regime. It wants to "avoid the massive outflow of refugees, which they believe could trigger the instability or collapse of North Korea".² In this sense, the North Korean defector issue is not a single human rights issue, but a politicized one which is embedded in the complicated and nuanced international politics in Northeast Asia. Scobell identifies China's three major stakes in maintaining the North Korean

¹ Ko Sung Ho, Chung, Kiseon, Oh Yoo-seok, "North Korean defectors: their life and well-being after defection", Ford Foundation (June 2002):6; US Committed for Human Rights (2006), The North Korean Refugee Crisis: Human Rights and International Response: 40

² Rhoda Margesson, et al, "North Korean Refugees in China and Human Rights Issues: International Response and U.S. Policy Options", CRS Report for Congress (2007)

regime: firstly, the buffer mentality, meaning that North Korea provides buffer zone against external invasion, it is also an important ally to balance the US, South Korea and Japan coalition in this region; secondly, conservative and risk averse mindset, avoiding the collapse of North Korea and subsequent instability in Northeast Asia, which may be detrimental to the economic development and prosperity of China; and thirdly, to scapegoat the United States.³

Although the above authors have touched upon the key points in answering the question of why China adopts a hard-line policy to North Korean defectors at the expense of human rights and its international standing, no systematic and theoretical approach has been adopted. As noted above, Beijing's policy considerations are linked to its perception of national security and interests in the Korean Peninsula, thus, IR theories are effective instruments in explaining the considerations. Another advantage of theoretical explanation is that it can also provide reasonable predictions to the potential evolution of the policy in the future. Thus, in this paper, I will fill the gap of lacking systematic explanations to the question of why China adopts a hard-line policy to North Koreans defectors from the perspective of IR.

In fact, the refugee question is one of the most contentious human rights issues. Although there are various efforts on the part of the international community to depoliticize the refugee problem, it can not be solved outside the political context. They should not only be treated as a human rights issue, but also a political one. Various international relations theories are applied to the explanation and analysis of refugee issues in the world, each of which provide a distinct, sometimes even contradicting perspective on refugee problems and suggests corresponding solutions to them.

In the study of refugees in field of IR, there is a dichotomy between the state-centric and

³ Andrew Scobell, "China and North Korea: From Comrades-in-Arms to Allies at Arms Length", Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army College. Available online at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB373.pdf>: 17-25

non-state-centric approaches, with the former emphasizing the role of the state and the latter the role of non-state actors such as civil society and international community. Neorealism is representative of the former one. In neorealism, according to Nadig, “state” and “self-interest” are central concepts. Refugees matter to the state in terms of “national security” and “foreign policy concerns”.⁴ Loescher is a pioneer in emphasizing the “high politics dimension”, relating the refugees issue with national security, treating ethic or morality as secondary concerns. Together with Milner, he argues that forced migration has always had security implications.⁵ Traditionally, states are determined to raise barriers to immigration to defend their sovereignty, even if the immigrants are in danger of persecution by their states of nationality and have to seek protection abroad.⁶ And in the post 9/11 discourse, refugee problems are emphasized for their potential links with transnational crime, terrorism and other phenomenon which may cause social instability in host countries,⁷ which results in even tighter restrictions on asylum seeking policies. Refugee issue also matters in regard of foreign policy considerations. State may behave in certain way toward refugees in relation with other states in order to pursue a better standing in international relations. For example, during the Cold War, the US set up a Western refugee regime to accept refugees from the Communist block to embarrass the Soviet Union. Scobell identifies a most important rational behind China’s rigid stance toward North Korean refugees: the interest of maintaining its good relations with and influence on North Korea. Hence, the self-interest of Chinese government

⁴ Gil Loescher, Chapter 2: “The Origin of the International Refugee Regime”: 52 in “Beyond Charity: International Co-operation and the Global Refugee Crisis”, OUP (1993)

⁵ Gil Loescher; James Milner, “Protracted Refugee Situations and State and Regional Insecurity”, Conflict, Security & Development (April, 2004): 5

⁶ Aninia Nadig, “Human Smuggling, National Security, and Refugee Protection”, Journal of Refugee Studies, Vol.15 No.1 (2002): 2

⁷ Joanne van Selms, “Refugee Protection in Europe and the US after 9/11” (2003) in Gil Loescher; James Milner, “Protracted Refugee Situations and State and Regional Insecurity”, Conflict, Security & Development (April, 2004): 8

overwhelms the human rights concerns.⁸ According to this theory, there is little possibility that Beijing will change its current policy because of the perceived threat posed by large flow of the defectors.

Outside realism, there is also a growing emphasis on the pluralist approach in the study of refugees. According to this approach, non-state actors play a major role. Barnett argues that in the era of globalization, the state boundaries are blurring and population mobilizes in a global scale. There is a need to revise the overly state-centric refugee regime to a more internationalized one.⁹ Nadig also suggests an alternative “pluralist” approach to the solutions of refugee problem, meaning states are more than a single layer like in a realist view; rather they are integrations of sub- and supranational forces. At the supranational level, NGOs and multinational corporations are included; at the national level, the state is composed of individuals, interest groups, and bureaucracies.¹⁰ The pluralist approach draws us a more positive picture in which there is the possibility that Beijing will change its over-rigid North Korean defector policy either because of its changing perception of national security or involvement of sub- and supranational actors in shaping fluid national interest.

Although there is increasing attention paying to the pluralist view in the international refugee regime, in examining the North Korean refugee issue, it is important to put it in the context of China-North Korean relations in which there is little civil society and states play a dominant role. It is the ruling Communist Party in both countries that determine the direction to which the bilateral relations go. Hao argues that unlike Chinese domestic politics, the study of Chinese foreign policy mostly refers to the state-centric approach in which it is “treated as

⁸ Scobell (2003)a:17-25

⁹ Laura Barnett, “Global Governance and the Evolution of the International Refugee Regime”, *International Journal of Refugee Law*, Vol.12 (2002):238

¹⁰ Nadig: 18

the product of a rational, unitary state pursuing and maximizing its national interests under the constraints imposed by the external environment” and the process of which is in a black-box.¹¹ What is more, In post-Mao era, Chinese foreign policy has undergone significant changes from highly personal, radical, and ideological to pragmatic and sophisticated one. It is not only the “beloved leader”, but also other actors such as various factions within the Communist Party, think tanks, domestic and foreign investors and so on are involved in policy making. “China’s national interests are more specifically defined, and the pursuit of those interests has become more realistic and flexible.”¹² The two observations are in accordance with the realist assumptions of fixed state interest, and unified and rational actor. Consequently, I argue that neorealism is most effective in explaining China’s policy considerations and behavior toward North Korean defectors. Civil society, which is common in the Western world, is still marginal in China. Thus, the pluralist approach is less relevant in this case. On the other hand, the neorealist framework focus too much on material interest and views state interest as exogenous given. To overcome this weakness, ideology and liberalism should be supplement to neorealism in answering the question.

A subsequent question of the study is whether there will be a change in China’s North Korean defector policy to a positive direction. In regard of this, I argue that the possibility lies in China’s changing foreign policy making process in which non-state domestic and international actors are playing an increasing role. Although till now, China’s foreign policy is still made by the communist party autonomous from the public, the trend is moving toward a plural direction. Having taken a closer look at China’s American policy making, Hao and Su

¹¹ Yufan Hao, “Influence of Societal Factors: A Case of China’s American Policy Making”, in Yufan Hao, Lin Su, *China’s Foreign Policy Making: Societal Force and Chinese American Policy*, Ashgate Publishing Company (2005):2-3

¹² Ibid

argues that globalization, the internet and think tanks all contribute to the policy making. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that pluralism can change China's North Korean defector policy as well.

This main body of the thesis will be divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, a general introduction to the North Korean defectors will be given. The number of defectors, their routes of flight, life in China, debate on their status and China's policies will be included. In the second chapter, I will give explanations to China's policies through the lens of neorealism. In the third part, I will take a closer look at the dynamics within China-North Korean relations and see if there is a possibility of policy change in terms of neorealism and liberalism.

CHAPTER 1: CHINA'S POLICY TOWARDS NK DEFECTORS

Since the mid-1990s, because of the lasting famine and the collapse of the central distribution system in North Korea, an increasing number of North Koreans have fled their own country and sought asylum in neighboring countries.¹³ Notably, these defectors consist one of the world's most desperate refugee groups. They have been recognized as refugees by the UNHCR, but considered illegal economic migrants or even traitors by both their country of origin and country of asylum. Risks of being caught and sent back accompany them all their way to China and even the rest of their lives if they cannot find refuge in a safe third country. Assistance from the international community, which is essential in other refugee cases, is absent here. The Chinese government does not allow the UNHCR or other organizations to contact the defectors freely. Thus, it is difficult to make assess the full scope of the refugee problem. In this chapter, I will first take a look at the number of North Korean defectors, their flight route and life in China; then, the causes of their flights will be identified. In the third part, I will examine the status of the defectors and China's responsibility towards them from a legal perspective; in the last part, China's North Korean defectors policy will be studied specifically, so will be the consequences.

2.1. The Number, Flight Route and Life of the Defectors

Since neither Beijing nor Pyongyang recognizes the legal status of the North Korean defectors, they have to hide in China after arrival, which makes the assessment of the accurate number of the defectors impractical. According to Chinese official statistics, the number of

¹³ Lee Keum-soon, "Cross-border Movement of North Korean Citizens", East Asian Review, (2004): 37

North Korean defectors in China is around 10,000. However, this official number is widely believed to have been seriously underestimated. Reports from NGOs and media set the number to around 100,000 to 300,000.¹⁴ In 2006, the US State Department estimated the number to be between 30,000 and 50,000. UNHCR, without fully access to the defectors and overall investigation, also uses the 2006 range (30,000 - 50,000) as a working figure.¹⁵ The number of North Korea defectors fluctuates over time. They move back and forth seasonally to bring food and hard currency back to North Korea. Some, around 10% by Amnesty International, are forcibly repatriated by the Chinese police. A much smaller percentage of defectors find their way to a safe third country such as Mongolia, Russia or countries in Southeast Asia where they can be recognized as refugees and receive sufficient protection.¹⁶

The three northeastern provinces of China, Liaoning, Jilin and Heilong Jiang, are the main destinations of the defectors. One of the reasons is geographical. North Korea shares 90% of its land border with the three provinces in the north (with the rest 10% with Russia). The border line mainly consists of Yalu River and Tumen River. In some parts of the rivers, the depth of the water is shallow enough for them to cross by swimming or walking, especially in winter.¹⁷ The Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture of Liaoning Province is home to an estimated one million Chinese of Korean descent.¹⁸ Many of these ethnic Koreans have assisted the newly arrived defectors for motivations such as economic interests, family connections, sense of altruism and a desire to reciprocate the help that North Koreans gave to them during the Great Leap Forward in 1958 to 1961 and the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, "The Invisible Exodus: North Koreans in the People's Republic of China", Human Rights Watch (2002):2

¹⁵ Margesson:4

¹⁶ ibid

¹⁷ Ko, Sung Ho, et al, "North Korean Defectors: Their Life and Well-being after Defection", A Ford Foundation funded project (2002):6

¹⁸ Margesson:5

and 1970s.¹⁹

Concerning their life in China, a survey conducted by US Committee for Human Rights in 2005 indicated that only 22% of the interviewed North Korean defectors were holding a job. The low employment level is caused by several factors including fear of detection, low skills, and lacking residence permit and ID card to access legal labor market. In China, the defectors face constant danger of being repatriated by the Chinese authorities back to North Korea where they may face persecution. These conditions “place the defectors at the mercy of employers’ willing... invite the exploitation of the North Korean refugees in China and have pushed them into low wage dirty, difficult and dangerous work”,²⁰ such as helping farmers in cornfields, rice paddies and orchards. For some defectors, they are working full-time just for food and shelter with no payment, or the employers will threaten to report them for “illegal residence”.²¹

As for child defectors, they are unable to receive education without legal status. Human Rights Watch points out that there is a growing problem of North Korean street children in China. These children aged ten or above, are unaccompanied by adults, or their parents are unable to afford to feed them. In the late 1990s, they could easily be found as beggars in local markets, train stations, airports, and sometimes karaoke bars and restaurants. They are also the most mobile of migrants, crossing the border frequently to conduct small trade or bring their families their earnings.

The survey by US Committee of Human Rights also points out that for many defectors China is not their final destination. Among the 1248 interviewees, around 64% prefer to go to

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ US Committed for Human Rights, “The North Korean Refugee Crisis: Human Rights and International Response” (2006):21

²¹ Ko:12

South Korea, 19% to the US, and 14% prefer to stay in China. In most cases, the defectors travel all way down from northeast China to the South, and later cross the border to Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand where they can be transferred to South Korea by the authority without being repatriated.²² There are fewer cases in which the defectors are transferred through Russia and Mongolia. Although not party of the Refugee Convention, Mongolia maintains a policy of not repatriating North Koreans. Some advocates have even been pushing Ulan Bator to set up refugee camp there, but has been rejected.

The way to South Korea is not easy for defectors either. Human trafficking and smuggling are common in theses circumstances as well. For very few lucky children who are able to find asylum in a safe third country, their integration into local community is difficult because of their previous experiences of wandering in the street without receiving education.²³

2.2. The Causes of the Flight

For North Korean defectors, the causes of their cross-border movements are mixed. For the majority, economic hardship caused by famine is the main driving force of their departure. Political factors such as persecution, human rights abuses also generate political refugees.

The CRS report for the US Congress identifies two main push factors that cause the flight of North Korean defectors: food shortage and human rights abuses. A research by the Ford Foundation analyzing the motives for their defection finds that the main reason for crossing the border is economic. The dramatic increase of exodus of North Koreans is a direct result of the famine began in 1995.²⁴ Seymour argues that the economic hardship North

²² Lintner

²³ Human Rights Watch (2002):15

²⁴ James D Seymour, "China: Background Paper on the Situation of North Koreans in China", Writenet Report (2005):7

Korea has been experiencing has its roots back in the Cold War. Indeed, North Korea's economic system is highly centralized, heavy industry driven and heavily depended on the Soviet Union. After 1991, the sudden withdraw of the Soviet support, the cessation of the perpetuating Stalinist economic policies, the breakdown in the food storage and rationing systems, and natural calamities such as flooding and drought all lead to the collapse of the North Korean economy. A large number of the population ceased to be served by the national food distribution system, and they cannot buy food from the "market" which is not allowed in a "socialist" country,²⁵ while the price of food in black markets is too high for the ordinary people. According to statistics from Johns Hopkins University, the death rate during the famine was severe times higher than normal years. "Depending on the methodology used and assumptions made, the number of famine-related deaths in the mid to late 1990s has been estimated at between 2 and 3.5 million."²⁶ The provinces in the north which serve as the heavy industry bases in Soviet time have suffered most in the economic degrading and famine, and they are the major source of defectors in China.

Human rights violation is the second reason for the defection. Reports from various sources indicate same patterns of totalitarian rules and human rights violations in North Korea. Firstly, there is "a total denial of political, civil and religious liberties" and tight media control. No criticism of Kim Jong Il is allowed.²⁷ Political dissenters have well-founded fear of persecution. Secondly, according to a 2003 report from the US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, severe physical abuse are meted out to citizens who violate extensive laws and restrictions. Punishments include laboring in concentration camps where the conditions

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ The US Committee for Human Rights:7

are extremely harsh.²⁸ A third exemplification of human rights abuse in North Korea is the degrading treatment to defectors after their return. In fact, many defectors first emigrate for strictly economic reasons. But once they flee North Korea, they are considered as traitors by the authority. Human Rights Watch asserts that “North Korea appears to be punishing its citizens with longer sentences in abusive prisons if they are caught crossing the border to China or have been forcibly repatriated by Beijing.”²⁹ However, there is evidence showing that the punishment is becoming less harsh than previous years depending on different motives.³⁰

2.3. The Status of the NK Defectors and China’s Responsibility from a Legal Perspective

Although the UNHCR or national authorities process the application for refugee status on a case by case basis, the North Korean defectors who succeed in seeking asylum in countries like South Korea and the US all have been recognized as refugees. The US Committee for Human Rights has even concluded that North Korean defectors as a whole group shall well be recognized as refugees.

Being party of the Geneva Convention, China has been denying the refugee status of North Korean defectors. Instead, Beijing considers them as illegal economic migrants and sends them back to North Korea when discovered. This hard-line policy has been criticized for violating the international law. Whether this criticism is well-founded or not, further examination of the refugee law is needed.

Definition of Refugee

²⁸ The US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, *The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea’s Prison Camps* (2003)

²⁹ Human Rights Watch, *North Korea: Border-Crossers Harshly Punished on Return* (2007)

³⁰ The US Committee for Human Rights:8

According to the 1951 Geneva Convention, a refugee is a person who

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.³¹

Persecution imposed before flight and possible persecution in the future should both be taken into consideration. Human Rights Watch claims that there is collective punishment and discrimination within the North Korean society. Not only may the person who commits crimes be punished, but also his or her family members and relatives, “regardless of their individual innocence or guilt”.³² People who do not have a innocent background, e.g. relatives of people who collaborated with Japanese during the Japanese occupation, landlords, and those who went to South Korea during the Korean War, are marginalized in the society, being assigned to schools and jobs with worst conditions.³³

The decision of whether someone has “well-founded fear of being persecuted” is also forward-looking. The persecution need not have been imposed before flight. Refugee status can be recognized if the asylum seeker can prove the possibility of persecution upon return. In the case of North Korean defectors, most of them escape for economic reasons which are not included in the definition. But once they leave their country, they will face the danger of persecution because of their departure.

Article 117 of the North Korean Criminal Code provides:

One who crosses the border without permission shall be punished by a sentence of three years or less labor re-education.³⁴

³¹ Geneva Convention

³² Human Rights Watch (2002):19

³³ Ibid:19-20

³⁴ Human Rights Watch (2002):20

Article 47 of the Code provides:

One who escapes to another country or to the enemy in betrayal of his motherland and people, or who commits treacherous acts towards the motherland such as espionage or treason, shall be punished by at least seven years of more labor-re-educate. If it is a serious violation, he shall be punished by execution and forfeiture of all property.³⁵

It is reported that at the early stage of the mass exodus of defectors, Pyongyang regarded escapees as political criminals and traitors, sending them to labor camps and forcing their families to move to controlled areas.³⁶ But as escapes have increased, punishments have been meted out depending on the amount of time that has lapsed since the escape and the motives. People who cross border in search of food are treated with lenience, being detained a few days and then released. As for those who engage in

- repeated crossings,
- contacting with South Koreans or foreign missionaries or aid workers,
- contacting with journalists,
- “marriage”, pregnancy or other evidence of sexual liaison in China,
- prolonged residence in China,
- efforts to gain asylum in South Korea or other third countries,
- or having committed a crime in North Korea before departure for China,³⁷

punishments tend to be more strict.

China’s responsibility according to 1951 Geneva Convention

To the Chinese authority, the principle of “non-refoulement” applies. According to this principle,

No contracting State shall expel or return (“refouler”) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

A broader application of the principle is that any person whose life and freedom may

³⁵ Ibid:21

³⁶ Lee:47

³⁷ Human Rights Watch (2002):21-22

face danger when sent back shall not be repatriated, no matter he/her is a refugee or not.

Ideally, Chinese government shall not repatriate any North Korean defectors who have well-founded fear of being persecuted when they return to North Korea.

2.4. China's North Korean refugee policy and its consequences

During the early stage of the North Korean exodus in the 1990s, Chinese authorities largely turned a blind eye to these defectors, with very few repatriation cases. Beijing also reached a modus vivendi with NGOs which kept a low profile and worked quietly to help the refugees and, in several cases, to help them find asylum in other countries. “enforcement efforts seem to have been most consistent against persons specifically requested by North Korean officials rather than the general migrant population” (Democratic People's, 2000) In March 2002, twenty-five North Koreans, pretending as tourists, stormed the Spanish embassy in Beijing and demanded asylum. Their behavior attracted international attention and put Beijing under international pressure. Eventually, they were allowed to pass onto South Korea. Many similar high profile cases of embassy stormings occurred thereafter as an effective instrument against the authority and seek asylum in South Korea.³⁸ But after some high-profile escape attempts in the early 2000s, China were forced to shut down this underground railroad.³⁹ The security around foreign embassies and consulates has thus been increased. More importantly, Beijing has adopted a hard-line policy since then. Border control has been strengthened. Border guards have been replaced by armed forces in many cases. Local police has intensified their searches in public places or even house-to-house searches

³⁸ John C. Sweda, “Chinese - North Korean Discourse: Pathways to the Future”, Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Thesis, The Fletcher School (2004):40

³⁹ China's DPRK Refugee Policy, available <http://www.dprkstudies.org/documents/asia007.html>

for the defectors. The authority also encourages Chinese citizens to turn in the defectors for some amount of money. Correspondingly, the number of crackdowns has increased.⁴⁰ A direct result of the hard-line policy is human rights violation which puts North Koreans defectors in the front territories where their life and freedom may face danger. Secondly, since the defectors cannot find protection in China, they tend to use extreme means to find a way out, e.g. stealing and robbing to make a living.

⁴⁰ Invisible Exodus (2002)

CHAPTER 2: CHINA'S POLICY CONSIDERATIONS THROUGH THE LENS OF NEOREALISM

China's hard-line policy toward the North Korean defectors both causes the instability of the defectors and put itself under international pressure. Despite the cost, why China still adopts and insists the policy till now? I argue that this policy is a result of China's interest in Korean Peninsula and self-perception of national security. Neorealism is the best instrument to explain the policy considerations. In the first part of the chapter, I will lay down the theoretical framework for further analysis. Neorealism will be studied in relations with refugee issue. In the second part, three propositions will be raised within the neorealist framework to answer the question of why China adopts the current defectors policy. In the third part, there will be an examination of the propositions from the perspective of national interest and China-North Korean relations. In the last part, liberalism and ideology will serve to be supplement framework in answering the question.

3.1. Neorealism and Refugee Issue

As a well-established modern IR theory, realism first appeared in Morgenthau's Policy among Nations in 1948, and has been one of the most influential theories in the contemporary field of IR.⁴¹ It is regarded as a useful framework to investigate the world politics because it deals with the key questions in international relations, meaning war and peace.

Neorealism, as a major branch of realism or structural realism which was first introduced by Kenneth Waltz, shuns classic realism's use of evil individual as starting point to explain

⁴¹ Grieco (1997): 163

international politics. Instead, it mainly focuses on structural constraints in shaping international relations. There are three assumptions essential in neorealism. The fundamental assumption is concerned with actors in international relations, namely that states are the central actors. Grieco argues that: “for realists, the fundamental unit of political organization for the past several centuries has been, and at present it is, the nation-state.”⁴² This does not mean that states are the only actors in international arena. Supra-governmental, intergovernmental organizations, and nongovernmental organizations are also involved. However, states are the most important.

The second core assumption is that international systems are anarchic. By this, neorealists mean that the international system lacks a central authority to provide protection for each state. In order to survive in an anarchic system, states are self-help and compete with each other. Although war occurs relatively rare, there is always the danger of war.⁴³ In short, power politics and self-help system are the inevitable result of anarchy. More importantly, as anarchy is exogenous given, there is no hope to change the pessimistic system.

The third assumption is that states are rational, autonomous, and unitary actors. In a sense they act the same as each other. By rational, realists mean that states are always goal-oriented, and their goals are consistent. States also devise strategies to achieve these goals. Besides rational choice, according to realists, states also pursue their interest in international system autonomously without taking domestic politics into considerations. In this sense, the concepts of civil society, democracy and so on are irrelevant in foreign policy decision making.

⁴² Ibid:164

⁴³ Hyde-Price (2006):218

Realism consists part of an explanatory tradition.⁴⁴ The study of refugees from the perspective of international relations started from the early 1990s with the publishing of Myron Weiner's edited volume *International Migration and Security* and Gil Loescher's *Refugee Movements and International Security*. Both authors emphasize the "high politics" dimension of refugee issue, studying it through the lens of national security and foreign policy making. They both argue that it was "essential to recognize that refugee problems are in fact intensely political" and political solutions were as important as humanitarian solutions.⁴⁵ National security and foreign policy concerns have thus become the two most frequently studied dimensions of explaining state behavior.

Realism prioritizes security as the highest goal of national interest.⁴⁶ As Waever argues, an issue is "securitized"-presented and addressed as a security issue-when it is phrased as existential, and extraordinary measures should be taken to protect it accordingly. By claiming "security", a state representative claims a special right to use any means necessary to protect it. Security is what takes politics beyond the established rules of the game.⁴⁷

Regarding the refugee issue more specifically, it has been connected with national security since early 20th Century. Generally, states view refugees as threat to national security in the sense that they "steal" employment opportunities, cause social instability and become fiscal burdens to the host countries. It first became international political concern after the World War I when large number of refugees from Russia and the Balkan states escaped to Western Europe and caused instability.⁴⁸ Throughout the Cold War, the refugee issue and the security problems raised were "addressed as part of a broader and wider set of geopolitical

⁴⁴ Nadig:10

⁴⁵ Loescher:6-7

⁴⁶ Nadig:13

⁴⁷ Waever (1995):405

⁴⁸ Loescher:5

considerations and a specific understanding of security.” However, in the Cold War logic, the military aspect of the concept of security was emphasized, thus refugee issue was not central to both Camps.⁴⁹ In the 1990s, refugee issue became salient again in connection with security. The large flow of refugees in Africa, the Caucasus, Balkans and other regions demonstrated that refugees not only were consequences of regional instability but also could be a cause of turmoil for both home and host states.⁵⁰ In their analysis of the causes of civil war, Salehyan and Gleditsch argue that the movement of refugees and displaced persons are important mechanism by which conflict spreads across regions, especially in the developing world.⁵¹ In the “post-9/11” era, refugees are often connected with terrorism. Loescher claims that protracted refugee situation in the developing world may cause serious consequence of instability, insecurity and armed conflict and the refugees can be targets of recruitment into terrorist groups.⁵²

As a result of the security problems the refugees cause, states have always made efforts to raise barriers of refugee acceptance. Nadig gives a number of examples in the Western European asylum regime to illustrate the argument. For example, in 1997, Swiss sent armies to strengthen its border with Italy against Kosovo Albanians during the troubles in Albania.⁵³ The common EU asylum policy in formation actually raises the standard of refugee recognition. The items of “safe country of origin” and “safe third country” which regulate that asylum seekers who come from “safe countries” or could have sought asylum in safe countries prior to their entrance to the EU will not be granted refugee status in EU Member States. Within the EU, each sovereign country also tries to shift the burden of refugee

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid:6

⁵¹ Idean Salehyan, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch: Refugees and the Spread of Civil War, *International Organizations* (2006):336

⁵² Loescher:4

⁵³ Nadig:13

protection to other states, such as shifting the burden from West European states, notably Switzerland, Germany, Sweden and Netherland to new Member States in East Europe.

In terms of the second dimension of the state-centric approach to refugee issue- the foreign policy concerns, realists tend to have a negative position toward democracy in foreign policy making and the role of civil society is marginalized. Given the “authoritarian” nature in the process, realism, with a focus on state behavior, becomes an effective instrument in answering the “why” question of certain governmental policies. Refugee issue is often manipulated by national government to implement their foreign policies and extract corresponding benefits. The general practice of connecting refugees with foreign policies was prominent during the Cold War when refugees were seen as “part of the struggle between East and West”.⁵⁴ The West Camp set up a burden shifting and sharing refugee regime to accept asylum seekers from the communist countries as a way of embarrassing the East Camp and exploiting ideological benefits.

The realist approach in the study of refugee issue has been criticized in recent years for an overemphasis on “high politics” and “state” dimensions. Loescher himself in his later works claims that “the domestic, ‘low politics’, or indirect security concerns, have proven to be far more pervasive and preoccupying for host-states than previously thought.”⁵⁵ Secondly, the trend of globalization requires a perspective beyond sovereignty. Having compared the “state-centric” and “pluralist” approaches in the resolution of refugee issue, Nadig argues that it is necessary for the European countries to rethink their refugee policies. Immigrants, whether forced or voluntary, legal or illegal, are not threat to national security by definition,

⁵⁴ Loescher:5

⁵⁵ Ibid:7

rather are “made to be one”.⁵⁶ In order to solve refugee problems properly, not only the state, but also the entire receiving society should play a role in bypassing sovereignty and fortress mentality to integrate migrants into the society instead of raising barriers against immigration.

Although the pluralist perspective is prevailing, it is by nature constitutive and answers the question of “how” rather than “why”. In explaining state policies and behavior, neorealism is still a more effective instrument. Moreover, in the study of China’s North Korean defector policy, it is important to take the politics of the Northeast Asia into account. The prevailing pluralist perspective of refugee issue is mostly based on realities of the developed world. But in an undemocratic society like China, the state machine still dominates both foreign and domestic agenda and civil society is underdeveloped. Thus, in analyzing the rational of China’s North Korean defector policy, I will adopt neorealism as the framework. In the following part, three proposition derived from neorealism will be given to answer the question of why Chinese government adopts a hard-line policy toward North Korean defectors. The proposition will be tested thereafter.

3.2. Propositions

Based on the three core assumptions of neorealism mentioned above, three propositions are brought forward correspondingly to the understanding of China’s North Korean defector policy considerations. According to neorealism, the reasons why Chinese authority adopts such a hard-line policy are:

P1. the large influx of North Korean defectors threatens the economic development and domestic social stability in China;

⁵⁶ Nadig:21

According to neorealism, states are primarily concerned with self interest which is defined as “power”.⁵⁷ At this point, neorealists fall into two schools: defensive and offensive realism. The former, represented by Waltz, argues that states act in restraint in power maximization as long as it is enough for balancing, while the latter, represented by Mearsheimer, asserts that the search for power and security is insatiable.⁵⁸ But fundamentally, both schools agree that security of the state is the first and foremost interest. It is defined in material rather than moral or normative terms. Thus, military and economic power is what state mainly cares about. Any measure detrimental to the material interest of the state will be avoided. Consequently, the realist proposition indicates that the reason why the North Korean defectors are rejected by the Chinese authority is that they can cause social instability and become fiscal burdens to China.

P2. China has interests in maintaining the stability in neighboring countries;

Hyde-Price argues that states, especially great powers, have an interest in the stability of their external environment. He refers to Arnold Wolfers’s term of “milieu goals” to define the task of shaping the external environment.⁵⁹ In an anarchic international system, great powers are most likely to implement regional governance because they have greater stakes in the stability of their region and the capabilities to achieve and maintain it. A stable and friendly milieu is beneficial to the development of the regional super power. To the contrary, if turmoil occurs in neighboring countries, not only the national security, but also other interests such as economic growth and social order of the state will be threatened.

⁵⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, “Politics among Nations: the Struggle for power and Peace”, 6th ed. (1985):10

⁵⁸ Glenn H.Snyder, “Mearcheimer’s World-Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security: A Review Essay”, International Security (2002):151

⁵⁹ Adrian Hyde-Price, “Normative Power Europe: A Realist Critique”, Journal of European Public Policy, (2006):222

In this case, if China adopts a soft policy to the defectors or grants refugee status to them, a large outflow of North Koreans is foreseeable. The large outflow will possibly cause the instability in Korean Peninsula or even the collapse of the current North Korean regime, which is detrimental to the stability and security of China.

P3. there is the need to balance the US and Japan coalition in Northeast Asia;

Balance of power is the most classical proposition in the tradition of realism. Strictly, it belongs to defensive realism. According to this proposition, the primary interest of states is to survive, so they may take a minimalist view toward power. Once they perceive the threat posed by other states, they may seek to balance them through either internal balancing, meaning accumulating own capabilities sufficient to match those of the challenger, or external balancing, that is establishing informal or formal alliances with other states against existed or emerging threat.⁶⁰ Consequently, it is Beijing's interest to ensure the survival of Kim Jong Il regime to balance the US-Japan coalition in the region. If the regime collapses, the relative power of China in Northeast Asia will be weakened.

3.3. Testing the Propositions

In this part, the three propositions raised above will be tested in terms of China's perception of national security and China-North Korean relations.

3.3.1. China's domestic stability and the Test of P1

P1. The large influx of North Korean defectors threatens the economic development and

⁶⁰ Grieco (1997):170

domestic social stability in China;

The death of the first generation of leadership and Deng Xiaoping's coming to power marked a watershed in China's strategic considerations. The dynamic of the change came from the Communist Party of China itself. Chinese society underwent the process of "derevolutionization" after ten years of the Great Cultural Revolution. Modernization has replaced class struggle as the most important task ahead. From then on, all Beijing's policies have to be accordance with the goal of economic development. Kim concludes that there are three levels of Beijing's strategic considerations in the new era: "domestic stability and legitimacy", "promotion of a peaceful and secure external environment free of threats to China's sovereignty and territory integrity", and "cultivation of its status as a responsible great power in global politics".⁶¹ Among them, domestic stability is considered by the Communist party as a prerequisite for economic development and modernization.⁶² Beijing has a risk-averse mentality after years of economic success with an overemphasis on social stability.⁶³

During the early stage of the exodus of North Korean defectors, the Chinese government mainly turned a blind eye to them with few repatriation cases and acquiesced in the human rights assistance from NGOs until some high profile actions were taken by the defectors to storm foreign embassies and consulates in Beijing and several other cities. Although the defectors involved were transferred to a safe third country successful, after their actions, Beijing's policy toward the North Korean defectors underwent a sudden change to the negative direction. The border control with North Korea has been strengthened. In some

⁶¹ Kim:12

⁶² Jiang Zemin, "Jia Kuai Gai Ge Kai Fang He Xian Dai Hua Jian She Bu Fa, Duo Qu You Zhong Guo Te Se She Hui Zhu Yi De Geng Da Sheng Li, Jiang Ze Min Zai Di Shi Si Ci Quan Guo Dai Biao Da Hui Shang De Bao Gao", (1992) available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/20/content_697148.htm

⁶³ Scobell (2003)a

occasions, even the army was deployed the border against the influx of defectors. In regions where a large number of defectors reside, local police search in public places for the defectors and send them back to North Korea once discovered. As a result, repatriation cases has increased dramatically and led to decrease of defections.

These storming actions changed Beijing's perceptions of North Korean defectors. It views the defectors and activists supporting them as a potential threat to the stability of Chinese society. This can be inferred from the official response to the stormings. In a Foreign Ministry's news conference in January 2005, the spokesman stated that China had made a great endeavor in bettering the lives of the defectors who came because of economic hardship, but they should not have been incited by others and stormed foreign embassies and consulates, and their behavior had violated the law and threatened the social stability of China.⁶⁴ The same attitude has been expressed repeatedly in other foreign ministry's news conferences when the defector issue was raised by the media.

Besides the high profile stormings, crimes committed by the defectors are another security concern for the Chinese authority. As a result of deteriorating living conditions, many defectors have to engage in unlawful acts such as human trafficking, sexual services, stealing, robbery, forgery of official documents and organized crime, which cause serious social problems in these regions.⁶⁵ Among the illegal actions, human smuggling and trafficking at the border are thought to be growing concerns and the major way of making a living for the defectors. According sources from the State Department of the US, 80% to 90% of the defectors in China have been victims of human trafficking.⁶⁶ Many of them have to sell their

⁶⁴ Foreign Ministry of People's Republic of China, "2005 Nian 1 Yue 13 Ri Wai Jiao Bu Fa Yan Ren Kong Quan Zai Li Xing Ji Zhe Hui Shang Da Ji Zhe Wen", (2005) available <http://ipc.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/fyrth/t179590.htm>

⁶⁵ Margesson:6

⁶⁶ Todd Bullock, "State's Miller cites rampant trafficking from North Korea into China", United States Department of State,

house to pay the traffickers and bribe the officers at the border. Women and children are especially vulnerable in this situation. Either on their own initiatives or being forced by traffickers, a growing number of women defectors are sold to local Chinese peasants who are too poor to find a Chinese wife or sell sexual services for money to send back to their families in North Korea.⁶⁷ These kinds of marriage arrangements are sometimes part of their contracts with traffickers and brokers. In fact, marriage and sexual industrial turn out to be the most effective way in making themselves a living. These actions are strictly forbidden by the Chinese law. The defectors' behavior not only increases the danger of being discovered by the Chinese security police, but also convinces Beijing the necessity of adopting a hard-line policy on the defectors.

The actions of non-governmental are also sources that cause instability for Beijing. Media sources indicate that the network of South Korean church workers and activists has been helping the defectors to flee North Korea and even transfer them from China to a third country.⁶⁸ Asian Times Online reports that

some Korean organizations including religious groups have secretly conducted missionary activities and protected escapees. They were able to expand their activities thanks to the help of ethnic Koreans. Some of them established local business to promote social welfare of Korean Chinese and protect North Korean escapees.⁶⁹

As a matter of fact, the Chinese authority is quite sensitive and suspicious of religious activities, especially those related to underground and foreign influence. The communist ideology still considers religion as distorted perception of the world. In practice, Beijing has not established formal diplomatic relations with the Vatican, and foreign missionary activities

(2005)available <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/EGUA-6EHKVX?OpenDocument>

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch (2002):12-13

⁶⁸ Bertil Lintner, "North Korea's underground railroad to Thailand", Asian Times Online (2006), available <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/HK09Dg01.html>

⁶⁹ Lee:46

are still forbidden by Chinese law and policies. It is written in the State Religious Affairs Regulations that religious activities shall be independent without being controlled by foreign influence, any attempts by using religion in countering the Communist Party leadership and socialism and breaching the state unity and national solidarity are strictly forbidden.⁷⁰ Some of the church workers engaging in helping the North Korean defectors have been arrested for convictions of counter-China activities.

3.3.2. A Review of China-North Korean Relations and the Test of P2 and P3

According to the realist Propositions, despite the domestic security concerns, the reasons why China adopts the current hard-line policy towards the North Korean defectors are also results of its perception of national security and interest in Korean Peninsula in the context of international politics in Northeast Asia. To test the second and third Propositions, I will first make a historical review of China-North Korean relations to build up the background of the analysis.

The Korean Peninsula has been one of the most contentious and attention-getting regions in the world since the Korean War since the early 1950s. The confrontation of socialism and capitalism, though outdated after the Cold War, still exists on the two sides of the 38th Parallel. On the one part, there are the US-Japan and US-South Korea coalitions; on the other part, there is alliance between China and North Korea.

The collapse of the Soviet Union has had huge impact on the formation of the current international politics in Northeast Asia. Throughout the Cold War, North Korea relied heavily on the Soviet Union militarily and economically. Kim Il Sung imitated the Soviet political and

⁷⁰ The State Council of P.R.C., “Zong Jiao Shi Wu Tiao Li” (2005) available at <http://www.sara.gov.cn/GB//zcfg/xzfg/116b855c-0581-11da-adc6-93180af1bb1a.html>

economic system and built up a highly centralized and heavy-industry oriented society. During that period, the relationship between China and North Korea underwent ups and downs, but the alliance remained.⁷¹

The disintegration of the Soviet Union left North Korea in trouble. The Soviet aid withdrew suddenly and national economy and industry were trapped in stagnancy. The long-lasting famine since the mid-1990s has led to the collapse of the highly centralized and planned economic system. Without the Soviet Union, Pyongyang finds that China has become its sole ideological ally in the region that can provide it with substantial material support. As a matter of fact, since 1991, China has taken up the “responsibility” of the Soviet Union, aiding South Korea with weapons oil and food. Beijing’s emergency food aid across the 1990s probably saved North Korean society from a disastrous collapse.⁷²

Since 1991, China is considered to be the only country that has influence over Kim Jong Il. Chen argues that “the crisis situation on the Korean peninsula will develop, be controlled and, with any hope, resolved, is closely related to what Beijing will and can do.”⁷³ The Chinese authority has been active in the Six Party Talk of North Korean nuclear issue and playing the role of initiator and host of the talk as well as the mediator between Pyongyang and Washington. However, many authors assert that China’s influence is irreplaceable but limited. The relationship between the two countries is both close and nuanced. Chen, after a historical review of China-North Korean relations, agrees that the bilateral relationship is not without problem. There are now substantial differences in perception and practice between the

⁷¹ Chen Jian, “Limits of the “Lips and Teeth” Alliance: An Historical Review of Chinese-North Korean Relations”, in *Uneasy Allies: Fifty Years of China-North Korea Relations*, Asian Program Special Report (2003):4

⁷² Chen:9

⁷³ Ibid

two communist allies,⁷⁴ especially after China's Reform and Opening-Up. The bilateral relations sunk into a cold period when Beijing normalized its diplomatic relations with Seoul in the 1990s.⁷⁵ The North Korean leader has criticized Beijing of revisionism and embracing capitalism, and played "Taiwan card" to punish Beijing's growing affinity with Seoul. Moreover, after the death of old generation of leadership, the personal ties between leaders ceased. China's new leadership neither understands nor is able to exert influence over Pyongyang's behavior. Schobell holds a similar view. In his policy paper, he advises Washington should not expect too much from Beijing in addressing North Korea nuclear crisis.⁷⁶

From the perspective of China, North Korean regime has been a growing burden. Kim argues that the interdependence between Beijing and Pyongyang is highly asymmetric.⁷⁷ China is contributing much more than it gets from the bilateral relations. Moreover, with China's Reform and Opening-Up and efforts to adapt itself into the international community, the "moody" North Korean regime has become embarrassment to its communist ally. The North Korean defector issue, as one consequence of Kim Jong Il's rule, is also quite troublesome for Beijing. Under these circumstances, the question of why China adopts a hard-line North Korean defector policy can be transformed into the question of why China still wants to retain the current Pyongyang regime. The last two propositions aim at providing the answers to the question.

P2. China has interests in maintaining the stability in neighboring countries;

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Scobell (2003)a:30

⁷⁷ Samuel S.Kim, "China and North Korea in a Changing World", in *Uneasy Allies: Fifty Years of China-North Korea Relations*, Asian Program Special Report (2003):12

As noted above, stability in the neighborhood is the second level of Beijing's strategic considerations in the new era according to Kim. Three neighboring regions are crucial to Beijing, Southeast Asia, Central Asia and Northeast Asia. In its relations with countries in the south, Beijing has mainly strengthened its ties with ASEAN for regional trade economic cooperation as well as addressing territorial disputes in a cooperative manner. In Central Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) serves to be an effective instrument for creating and maintaining a favorable external environment for its development in its backyard. Northeast Asia somehow turns out to be different from the above two regions in that the international politics there is more confrontational and involves mainly global and regional super powers, the US, China, Russia and Japan. It is much more difficult to align interests among the parties concerned than elsewhere. Arguably, Northeast Asia actually holds the key to China's "peaceful rise" as a global power.⁷⁸ No matter from a historical, geopolitical or ideological perspective, China has been deeply involved in the "intricate dynamics of Northeast Asia". With its enhanced capabilities and influence, it has now become a "stakeholder" in key issues in this region.⁷⁹ In Chinese official discourse, North Korea is especially important to the security and even survival of China. The Communist party compares China's relationship with North Korea to "lips and teeth", which means that if the lips die, the teeth will go cold. This kind of "buffer zone" mentality has dominated Beijing's evaluation of the importance of its relations with North Korea and justified its interest in the stability and security in the Korean Peninsula for the past decades. Imperial Japan's invasion of China in the early 20th Century and World War II were both waged through North Korea. Having learned a lesson from history, Mao Zedong decided to send troops to the battlefield in

⁷⁸ Chung:158

⁷⁹ Jae Ho Chung, "China and Northeast Asia: A Complex Equation for "Peaceful Rise"", Politics (2007):156

the Korean War after the US's intervention. For new generations of Chinese leadership, this buffer zone mentality still prevails. During his visit to North Korea in 2001, Jiang Zemin, the president of the time, repeatedly told hosts that because China is "close to the Korean Peninsula, [it] is always concerned about the development of the situation on the peninsula and has consistently worked to maintain peace and stability on the peninsula."⁸⁰ And in Hu Jintao's presidency, the existing North Korean policies do not seem to change radically.

Besides this, under the guidance of giving priority to modernization and after years of economic growth, Beijing also has the "risk-averse" mentality, afraid of any turmoil both inside and near the country. It would maintain a troubling and authoritarian North Korea rather than a sudden collapse of the Kim Jong Il regime. Thirdly, a stable North Korea also guarantees the stability of its Korean minority in the Yanbian Autonomous Region bordering North Korea. Although there is no evidence indicating the possible of secession of the minority group if there is turmoil in North Korea, it is brought forward by some authors as one of China's North Korean defector policy considerations. In a word, China knows that conflict on the Korean peninsula "could well put an end to its economic growth", thus, it desperately wants to maintain stability in North Korea.⁸¹

In order to achieve this goal, Beijing has been playing a much more proactive role in key issues in the peninsula, notably the nuclear issue. It changed its long-standing policy of not interfering in the domestic affairs of the two Koreas, and actively initiated, hosted and participated in all six rounds of the later Six-Party Talks on North Korean nuclear issue. It is important to considering the timing of the first round of the Six-Party Talk which took place in the same of the Iraqi War in 2003. Before that, China appeared to have no interest in taking

⁸⁰ Scobell (2003)a:3

⁸¹ Kim:2

an activist and leading role in the nuclear issue.⁸² Washington's unilateral military actions in Iraq not only led to the warming of China-North Korean relations to balance the US in Northeast Asia, but also made China aware of the immediate danger of the collapse of North Korea, another "rogue state" in White House's name list. There is serious possibility that a nuclearized North Korea will result in American military intervention and the end of Kim Jong Il's rule. Thus, it is justifiable to say that the most important rationale behind China's initiative in the Six-Party Talk comes from its endeavor to ensure the survival of North Korea.

Besides its effort in solving the nuclear crisis, Beijing has also been persuading Pyongyang to carry out Chinese style economic reform because cultivating a "kinder, gentler and more reform-minded" North Korea is thought to be the fundamental way to maintain the Pyongyang regime.⁸³ Essentially, China would like to see a demilitarized and stable North Korea with sustainable economic development and become more open to the world, a way that China underwent in the past decades. Pyongyang is also aware of China's success, and shows interest in adopting such a reform. It is reported that in his visit to China in 2000, Kim Jong Il viewed the Chinese economic reforms as a success and as a model for development. Measures for taking such kind of reform came subsequently. It was observed that

by July of 2002 China's prodding began to pay off with Kim lifting some price controls and allowing private business activities. In addition, the North Korean government began leasing state-run businesses, including stores, restaurants and hotels, to individuals.⁸⁴

At the end of 2006, it was reported by Chinese journalists that Kim Jong Il had paid a secret visit to Guangdong Province in the South of China to learn the experience of opening-up.

⁸² Scobell (2003)a:12

⁸³ Scobell (2003)b:278

⁸⁴ Sweda:33

Question arises, if China considers it in its own interest to address the nuclear issue in a cooperative manner, why can it not be applied to the refugee issue? I argue that the peaceful solution of the nuclear crisis is beneficial for the maintenance of the survival and stability of the North Korean regime, but an ideal solution of defector crisis could well be recognition of the defectors as refugees, thus results in a large outflow of North Korean citizens to China and accelerates the collapse of the North Korean regime. This is a scenario Beijing does not want to see.

P3. there is the need to balance the US and Japan coalition in Northeast Asia.

As noted above, international politics in Northeast Asia is quite confrontational and involves mainly great powers. The recent emergence of China as a regional great power and aspiring superpower has been the central development in the East Asian security picture.⁸⁵

The legacy of the Cold War shapes two combating forces in the region. On the one hand, there are US-Japan and US-South Korea allies; on the other hand, there is the China and North Korea partnership. To a lesser extent, Moscow also plays a role in the power politics in the region, aligning with Beijing and Pyongyang.

Although the close ties between the US and Japan are based on shared values of democracy, human rights and rule of law according to official discourse of two sides, and to a lesser extent, the US's means to constrain Japan's aggressive traits after the WWII, Beijing, on the contrary, thinks that the "constraining" function of the US-Japan alliance is weakening, and is increasingly rooted in the mutual security and economic interests of the two rivalry

⁸⁵ Marvin C. Ott, "East Asia: Security and Complexity", *Current History* (2001):147

states.⁸⁶ In its perception of geopolitics in this region, the aim of the US-Japan coalition is to counter China: in the past, it was to kill the communist regime; and in the post-Cold War period, it is to contain China's strategic space and "peaceful rise".

The competition between China and the US is taken at both global and regional level. With its rising state capacity, there is an increasing presence of China in regions beyond its neighborhood, e.g. Africa, the Middle East and South America, in fields of energy cooperation and trade. China's growing economic involvement leads to its strengthening political influence. Consequently, China is perceived by the US as its biggest rival and challenger to its hegemony status in the near future. According to a latest Gallup opinion poll in February 2008, 14% of Americans view China as the US's greatest enemy for its economic growth.⁸⁷ At the regional level, "as always, the USA is seen to be seeking military dominance and superiority in Asia-Pacific and elsewhere".⁸⁸ Pessimists such as Mearsheimer thus argue that China's rise can not be peaceful.

If China continues its impressive economic growth over the next few decades, the United States and China are likely to engage in an intense security competition with considerable potential for war. Most of China's neighbors—including India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Russia, and Vietnam—will join with the United States to contain China's power.⁸⁹

In Asian-Pacific where China has immediate strategic concern, the Chinese "continue to see the USA's 'hegemony', military presence and alliances with others as major stumbling blocks for China's attempts to maintain its sovereignty and territorial integrity".⁹⁰ In Beijing's worldview, the US represents a major strategic challenge to China. "Only the US has the

⁸⁶ Chung:159

⁸⁷ Lydia Saad, "North Korea Drops Out of Top Three U.S. 'Enemies'" (2008), available <http://www.gallup.com/poll/105835/North-Korea-Drops-Top-Three-US-Enemies.aspx>

⁸⁸ Lee Lai To, "China, the USA and the South China Sea Conflicts", *Security Dialogue* (2003):27

⁸⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise", *Current History* (2006):160

⁹⁰ Lee:27

military might to inflict considerable damage on China.”⁹¹

The intervention of the US has made the situation more complicated and subtle. Beijing thinks that Washington is playing the Taiwan card as its major stake in Asia to limit and counter China’s influence. Moving a little to the south, in the South China Sea where China has territorial disputes with several Southeast Asian countries, Beijing is quite aware of the US relations with those countries concerned. The US maintains its naval operations in this area. Beijing has stated that “encroachments on China’s sovereignty and interests in the South China Sea are not infrequent, and some extra-regional countries are attempting to interfere in this issue”.⁹² Although the powers here referred to are not specified, “it is not difficult to see that the most ‘meddlesome’ extra-regional power in the South China Sea, as far as China is concerned, is the USA.”⁹³

Regarding China-Japan relations, the hostility between two countries persists as a result of historical and territorial disputes: the Yasukuni Shrine issue, and the disputes on the sovereignty of Diaoyu Island and East China Sea. At the peak of the hostility, anti-Japan demonstration even broke out in major cities in China. After Koizumi stepped down in 2006 and the short presidency of Abe Shinzo, Yasuo Fukuda seems to have brought a more favorable environment for the development of bilateral relations. The dense high-profile official visits during Fukuda’s presidency have warmed up bilateral relations. But Chung argues that short-term policy changes will not make the fundamental geopolitical dilemma go away. Although Beijing expects and wishes for improved relations with Japan, in the long run,

⁹¹ Jonathan Lemco, and Scott B. Macdonald, “Sino-Japanese Relations: Competition and Cooperation”, *Current History* (2002): 292

⁹² Information Office of the State Council, People’s Republic of China, “China’s National Defense in 2000, Part I” (2000), available at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/features/NDpaper/nd1.html>

⁹³ Lee: 27

a rising China in Asian-Pacific could “exacerbate, rather than improve, its ties with Japan”.⁹⁴

Consequently, due to actual or perceived rivalry, it is in China’s interest to ally with Russia and North Korea to balance the influence of the US. In the Six-Party Talks and any other key issues, balance of power considerations are always concern to China. Although Beijing finds it beneficial to solve the nuclear crisis in Korean peninsula peacefully, it “has never given up its geo-strategic interests – utilizing North Korea as an effective buffer against the US.”⁹⁵ The bifurcation between US-Japan and China-Russia-North Korea coalition can be found in almost every nuclear crisis in the region when the former insists imposing sanctions on Pyongyang and the latter against these punitive actions

For this purpose of balancing the US-Japan coalition, China needs to ensure not only the survival of the current Pyongyang regime, but also its influence on its communist ally. Beijing’s possible leverage to Pyongyang includes: material aid, military commitment, and ideological affinity. But the latter three aspects of leverage turn out to be ineffective. The military commitment in the 1961 treaty stipulates that once North Korea engages in war with the US or other countries, China has the responsibility to intervene. However, this commitment is more an empty than actual promise. And the risk-averse mentality indicates that Beijing will do everything to stop North Korea from going war even at the expense of deteriorating bilateral relations. For instance, after Pyongyang’s nuclear weapon test in 2006, China approved imposing sanctions on North Korea in the United Nations resolution if Pyongyang refused to resume diplomatic talks.⁹⁶ In regard of ideological affinity, Pyongyang has several times criticized Beijing as traitors of communism after Deng Xiaoping induced

⁹⁴ Chung:159

⁹⁵ Ibid:161-162

⁹⁶ BBC, “UN slaps sanctions on North Korea: (2006) available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6051704.stm>

market economy and normalized China's relations with South Korea.

North Korea's relationship with China is more pragmatic than ideological. Beijing's real leverage is North Korea's economic dependence on China.⁹⁷ China's food and energy aid has saved North Korean society from disintegration in the 1990s and continues to save it from the ongoing crisis. Although no statistics are available indicating the exact amount of China's aid, generally its support for North Korea is estimated at 1/4 to 1/3 of its overall foreign aid. By mid 1994, China accounted for around 3/4 of North Korea's food and oil imports. More recently, 70% to 90% of North Korea's oil and 1/3 of its imports and food aid were provided by China after the US withdrawing its aid.⁹⁸

However, aid is a double-edge sword for Beijing. On the one hand, it is the most effective instrument in influencing Pyongyang's behavior. Withdrawing material support or imposing sanctions can be disastrous to North Korea and forces Pyongyang to join the Six-Party Talk or behave in certain ways expected by Beijing. On the other hand, Kim argues that this kind of over dependency on China also causes resentment from Pyongyang.

Paradoxically, Pyongyang's growing dependence on Beijing for economic and political survival has led to mutual distrust and resentment. Just as Mao demanded and resented Soviet aid for China's nuclear development, first Kim Il Sung and now Kim Jong Il have demanded but also resented Chinese aid.⁹⁹

In this regard, the Chinese leadership is now facing a dilemma: as economic means are the most effective, probably the only effective way, to impose influence on Pyongyang; if Beijing does not use this means, it is quite likely that its voice will go unheard; but if it uses this means, e.g. withdrawing economic aid or imposing sanctions, it may cause North Korea's economic and societal collapse, a scenario that Beijing does not want to see. A second

⁹⁷ Chen:10

⁹⁸ Kim:13

⁹⁹ Ibid

scenario resulting from economic sanctions can be North Korea's nuclear blackmail or even retaliation, a possibility raised by some Chinese analysts.¹⁰⁰

In short, despite the fact that China has more influence on the orientation of North Korea's behavior than any other country, this influence is rather limited than one would expect.¹⁰¹ Currently, it is unlikely that Beijing will push Pyongyang too hard on nuclear or other issues such as North Korean defector issue, and "can only be exerted through suggestions or encouragement from behind the scenes instead of through blunt and direct admonishments in public view."¹⁰²

In the defector's case specifically, China's current policy can, on the one hand, ensure the survival of North Korean regime, on the other hand, serves to be a form of leverage from which China maintains its limited influence over North Korea. With this hard-line policy, Beijing is able to bind the interests of the two countries together so as to make its voice heard in North Korea and serve the purpose of balancing the US-Japan in Northeast Asia.

3.4. Outside Neorealism: Ideology, Liberalism and China's North Korean Defector Policy

Although neorealism provides an important and effective framework to the understanding of China's North Korean defector policy considerations, it still has limitations. Firstly, it takes China's foreign policy analysis as exogenous given while ignoring the reality that foreign policy making is actually a two-level game according to which it is also necessary to take the domestic politics into consideration. Secondly, it focuses too much on material interest and ignores non-material factors that can influence state's policies. Security is one

¹⁰⁰ Scobell (2003)a:12

¹⁰¹ Chen:10

¹⁰² Scobell (2003)b: 277

aspect, meaning the collapse of North Korea may cause turmoil on China's eastern border and harm its economic development. It is also obvious that the Cold War mentality and ideology play a crucial role. In this part, I will adopt the two theories of ideology and liberalism to the explanation of China's policy considerations towards the defectors. This is necessary to overcome the weakness of neorealism and gives a more completed picture of how each factors influence China's policy making and the dynamics within them

There is no universally accepted definition of ideology, but according to North, generally it means the subjective perceptions (models, theories) all people possess to explain the world around them. "Whether at the micro level of individual relationships or at the macro level of organized ideologies providing integrated explanations of the past and the present, such as communism or religions, the theories individuals construct are colored by normative views of how the world should be organized."¹⁰³ More narrowly, it is defined as a unified system of meanings for which political actors claim exclusive authority.¹⁰⁴ Regarding the measurement of the influence of ideology in foreign policy making, most studies refer to official discourse, their claimed goals and meanings to achieve the goals. For example, in examining the influence of ideology in shaping the post-9/11 American foreign policy, Ryn mainly refer to discourse and ideas of the US president, major think tanks and media to demonstrate its salience.¹⁰⁵ In China-North Korean relations, although the communist affinity is no longer emphasized in official discourse, various efforts from the Communist Party of China to strengthen the communist ideology domestically and its goal and means to shape a Chinese-style Pyongyang regime all provide evidence to its influence.

¹⁰³ Douglass North in Holbig, Heike, "Ideological Reform and Political Legitimacy in China: Challenges in the Post-Jiang Era", GIGA Working Papers (2006):7

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Claes G. Ryn, "The Ideology of American Empire", RYN (2003)

Ideology had played a central role in China's policy making in that period of time. In Mao Zedong's era, revolutionary and anti-capitalist mindset dominated the official discourse, and shaped its foreign policy. But ideology mentioned here is not only "ideology" per se, meaning that China's support for North Korea is because of comrade in arms relations and a common communist goal, but also a term used to define "we" and "they" and domestic legitimacy. In this sense, the realist framework is not sufficient enough for the explanation. The major problem is that it focuses too much on the state-level. This top-down approach views China's state interest as fixed and unified. As a matter of fact, domestic and international political consideration is also an important reason why China adopts a hard-line policy to the defectors. In this regard, liberalism can be a supplement framework in answering this question.

Traditionally, liberalism is a theory with normative and ideological color. Liberalists believe in human progress, international cooperation, democratic peace, individual rights and so on.¹⁰⁶ Based on this tradition, Moravcsik in 1997 "reformulates the liberal international relations theory in a non-ideological and non-utopian form appropriate to empirical social science."¹⁰⁷ In his *Taking Preferences Seriously: a Liberal Theory of International Politics*, Moravcsik codifies classical liberal insight into three core theoretical assumptions:

1. The fundamental actors in international politics are individuals and private groups, who are on the average rational risk-averse and who organize exchange and collective action to promote differentiated interests under constraints imposed by material scarcity, conflicting values, and variations in societal influence.
2. States represent some subset of domestic society, on the basis of whose interests state officials define state preferences and act purposively in world politics.
3. The configuration of interdependent state preferences determines state behavior.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Mark W. Zacher, and Richard A. Matthew, "Liberal International Theory: Common Trends, Divergent Strands", in Charles W. Kegley (ed.): *Controversies in International Relations Theory: Realism and the Liberal Challenge*, (1995):117-118

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics", *International Organization* 51 (4) (1997):513

¹⁰⁸ Moravcsik: 516-521.

The liberal theory, unlike neorealism, holds that the state is the representation of domestic interest groups. In this sense, the state interest is not exogenous given, as realism states. Rather, it is defined by the domestic politics and varies from time to time. In analyzing foreign policy making process, the two-level game should be applied. Domestic and international factors are interdependent and mutual-determine each other. For the Communist Party of China, although it enjoys a larger degree of autonomy in policy making than democratic governments, it also faces challenges from civil society. Thus, legitimacy is a first concern for the ruling party. According to this argument, even if the survival of the North Korean regime is not beneficial materially to China, the Chinese authority will still make policies and take actions to save it.

Although the ideological affinity between China and North Korea has been decreasing after China's reform, it still exists and plays a role in bilateral relations. This is not ideology per se, but matters to the rule of the communist party. Scobell argues that for each of the two remaining socialist-party states, the survival of the other is crucial for its own legitimacy.¹⁰⁹ When Beijing first took the Soviet responsibility for aiding North Korea, it was facing a legitimacy crisis inside the country. The big transformation in post-Communist sphere left Chinese society unstable and voices were growing for a democratic change, represented by the Tiananmen Incident which was suppressed by the Communist Party by force. In the 21st Century, despite the fact that the economic miracle China has achieved since Reform and Opening-Up has given more legitimacy to the Communist Party, with the development of market economy, it is now facing great challenges from liberal norms. Civil society is growing, so are the oppositional voices.

¹⁰⁹ Scobell (2003)a:2

If Leninist regimes continue to be toppled, it will be much more difficult for the shrinking remainder to shore up their own legitimacy. Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought are crucial to the formal justification of the Chinese Communist Party's continued right to rule, and Party leaders cannot renounce this mantle.¹¹⁰

It has been asked to what extent ideology matters in bilateral relations these days. It seems a conventional wisdom that after economic reform, ideology is playing a more and more marginalized role in the legitimacy of the Communist Party of China. But after applying Douglass North's theory of institutional change and David Beetham's theory of political legitimation to the case study of Chinese communist party's production, reproduction and reform of the "Three Representatives" discourse, Holbig counters this wisdom and argues "instead that in present-day China ideology – understood as a unified system of meanings for which political actors claim exclusive authority– does indeed matter as an important factor for the ruling party to uphold its regime legitimacy."¹¹¹

Consequently, the survival of North Korean regime not only matters to China's national security and balancing the US-Japan alliance, but also important to the legitimacy of the Communist Party of China in domestic politics.

¹¹⁰ ibid

¹¹¹ Holbig:7

CHAPTER 3: THE DYNAMICS OF CHINA-NORTH KOREAN RELATIONS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF POLICY CHANGE

The above analysis has answered the question of why China adopts such a hard-line policy toward North Korean defectors in the framework of neorealism: China's national security and its strategic interests in the Korean Peninsular are the two dimensions. However, from the analysis, it is also noticeable that the politics between Beijing and Pyongyang is undergoing a change in the sense that Beijing sees Pyongyang as a growing burden rather than benefit. Question arises: do the dynamics of China-North Korean bilateral relations forecast a possible change in China's North Korean defector policy? I suggest they do.

From both neorealist and liberal view mentioned above, there is apparent dynamics within the China-North Korean relations. For neorealists, the cost-effect calculations indicates that retaining the current North Korean regime is beneficial to Beijing now, but the cost is increasing and will some day exceeds the benefits. Scobell argues that the North Korean regime has changed from "lips" to "lipsticks" to Beijing, meaning it still looks good at the first glance for geopolitical benefits but is simultaneously becoming a liability for China.¹¹² Especially when the relationship between China and South Korea is getting closer and more prosperous, China sees less and less benefit in maintaining two Koreas in the peninsula. Moreover, Pyongyang's continuing provocative behavior, e.g. the nuclear test, threat of war and the defector issue, has caused Beijing frustration and embarrassment.

However, the neorealist view does not precisely imply a "policy change" in the sense

¹¹² Andrew Scobell, "China and North Korea, the Limits of Influence", *Current History*(2003):276

that it allows more defectors to settle down in Chinese territory without being repatriated, rather it implies a change to a new Pyongyang regime that is easy to deal with which solve the defector problem fundamentally, meaning restructuring North Korea's economy and producing less and less refugees. Thus, to answer the question whether there will be a policy change regarding the defectors, it is necessary to look at the dynamics within China's foreign policy making process.

For liberalists it is demonstrated that China's foreign policy making is undergoing a significant change to a pluralist approach. In their book, Hao and Su examines a specific case of China's policy toward the US, they identify three factors that had impact on state policies: the media, public opinion in the internet, intellectuals and think-tanks. They argue that the anti-Americanism sentiment in the Chinese society during the Iraqi War in 2003 and intellectuals' opinions to some extent shaped the communist party's American policy publicly or behind the scenes.¹¹³ In the age of globalization, international pressure proves to be effective in changing China's policies as well.

In regard of domestic pressure, there is an increasing voice within Chinese society and the Communist Party itself to change the Kim Jong Il regime. It should also be noted that China's initiation and participation in the Six Party Talks coincided with heated internal debates on whether Beijing should readjust its North Korean policy.

In 2003, a well-known scholar called for deleting the automatic involvement clause in the Sino–North Korean Friendship Treaty. In 2004, a prestigious journal *Strategy and Management* was terminated for carrying an article that criticized the Kim Jong-Il regime. Since then, in semi-open seminars and workshops in China, it has not been rare to witness debates waged among Chinese scholars as to what should be done to resolve the North Korean problem. Some take a nuclear North Korea for granted, while others actively call for the de-nuclearisation of North Korea even at

¹¹³ Hao and Su

the expense of worsened ties with Pyongyang.¹¹⁴

Although there is also evidence showing that the Chinese authorities have the risk-averse mindset as noted in the previous part, and prefers a stable North Korea without nukes than a regime change, there is also evidence indicating that the debate on the possibility of the change has impact on Beijing's agenda. For instance, after North Korea's nuclear test in 2006, the possibility of changing the loyal Kim Jong Il regime was open to discussion both within the communist party and in internet.

The balance of risk between reform and chaos dominated arguments within China's ruling elite. The Chinese have also permitted an astonishing range of vituperative internet comment about an ally with which Beijing maintains a treaty of friendship and co-operation...Hinting at the options, Chinese online military commentators have exposed plots and purges inside North Korea that were previously unknown or unconfirmed.¹¹⁵

The second pressure comes from the international community. With its fast growing capability, during Hu Jintao's presidency, China is gradually abandoning its strategy of Tao Guang Yang Hui (concealing one's true intentions to create a favorable environment for development) and engaging in the so called "peaceful rise". It is China's interest to become a responsible great power in international affairs. However, in general practice, China has been criticized of ignoring human rights in its relations with the third world countries, notably its policy and practices in Darfur. China has long based its foreign policy on the *Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence* according to which China establishes its relations with other countries without intervening in their domestic affairs. Consequently, its involvement in Africa, the Middle East, South America and Central Asia is exclusively economic. It does business with not only democratic but also authoritarian governments and dictators. This kind

¹¹⁴ Scobell (2003)a:13

¹¹⁵ Michael Sheridan, "China may back coup against Kim", The Sunday Times(2006), available at <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,20587473-2703,00.html>

of foreign policy has been criticized of neo-colonialism by former imperialist Western countries. In the case of Darfur, China's economic cooperation with the Sudan authority has been blamed of supporting the authoritarian government against minorities in Darfur and causes humanitarian crisis. Under tremendous pressure from the international community, Beijing has changed its long-established policy of "non-intervention" and uses economic and political means to press the Sudanese authorities to hold peace talks with the opposition. In the case of the North Korean defectors, despite the fact that the nuclear issue still dominates the political agenda of countries involved, more and more attention is now paid to the defector issue. There is increasing pressure from international community. This kind of pressure proves to be effective in influencing Beijing's behavior. Those defectors who successfully caught international attention have been approved to be transferred to a safe third country and finally settled in South Korea.

Although a change in China's North Korean defector policy has not taken place, nor there is evidence showing the possibility in the near future because of the nontransparent decision making process of the Chinese authority, through the framework of neorealism and liberalism, the dynamics within China-North Korean relations and Beijing's calculations in Korean Peninsula as well as the involvement of civil society and international community in this issue indicate a possible policy change to a positive direction.

Conclusion

The Korean Peninsula has been one of the most contentious regions in the world. While the North Korean nuclear issue has attracted most of the attention, the North Korean defector issue is becoming a growing concern as a humanitarian crisis. Partly, the desperate conditions of the defectors are a result of China's hard-line policy toward them. Those defectors who are caught by Chinese policy will be sent back to North Korea immediately where they may face serious persecution or other degrading punishments. An estimated of 10,000 to 300,000 defectors reside in China according to different sources. In most cases, the defectors defect for the economic hardship in their home country. Since China does not recognize their status, their stay in China is illegal and they face repatriation once being caught. Generally, their life in China is desperate. In order to make a living, many of them are involved in human trafficking, crimes such as stealing and sexual services. And they also have to work in poor conditions and being exploited by their employers. Theoretically, these defectors shall be recognized as refugees. But in reality, they can neither be granted the status and corresponding benefits in China, nor find they way out to a safe third country in most cases.

In this paper, I have answered the question of why China adopts this policy without regarding the human rights costs through the lens of neorealism. In fact, there are two competing approaches in the study of refugee issue from the perspective of IR: the state-centric and pluralist approach. Neorealism is a most widely used state-centric theory. The reason for using the neorealist approach is that the foreign policy making procedure in China is mostly state driven and civil society plays a marginal role. Three assumptions are

fundamental to neorealism: states are the major actors; the international society is anarchic; and states are rational, autonomous, and unitary actors in pursuit of national interests. With a focus on state level, neorealism explains the refugee related issues mainly with high-profile politics: national security and policy foreign considerations. Host state authorities often view refugees as sources of instability and fiscal burden to them. Thus, they raise entry barrier to avoid large flow of refugees or illegal immigrations. In regard of foreign policy, states often manipulate refugee issue for policy benefits. According to neorealism, state perception of national security is material and it describes us a pessimistic picture of a favorable refugee regime. The pluralist approach attracts an increasing attention in refugee issue recently. It differs from the state-centric approach in saying that not only state, but also sub- and supranational factors are involved in shaping national interest. National security and other related state interests are not fixed as neorealists insist. And refugees are not threat to national security by nature; they can also be treasures to the hosting state by providing labor force, etc. Thus, the pluralist approach is optimistic in any change of hard-line state refugee policy.

Despite the popularity of the pluralist approach, it was argued that neorealism was the most proper theory to explain China's policy toward the defectors due to the political system and policy making procedure. Within the neorealist framework, three Propositions are given to the understanding of China's North Korean defector policy considerations: 1, North Korean defectors may cause domestic social stability; 2, the large flow of defectors may cause the collapse of the North Korean and turmoil in China's neighborhood which is detrimental to China's economic modernization; and 3, maintaining the current Pyongyang regime is in Beijing's interest to balance the influence of the US in Asian-Pacific. After testing the Propositions, it is found that in Beijing's perception, North Korean refugees do cause

instability in China, e.g. storming foreign embassies, engaging in illegal activities such as human trafficking, sexual services, stealing and forgery of documents. More importantly, the current policy of rejecting defectors is aimed at avoiding a sudden collapse of the Pyongyang regime. Although North Korea is becoming a liability to China, the Chinese authority still sees interest in its survival for reasons of a stable external environment for its own development and the need to balance the US-Japan alliance in Northeast Asia. Thus, it is beneficial for China to adopt the current defector policy and neorealism proves to be an effective theory to explain China's behavior. In addition to neorealism, ideology and liberalism give answer to this question by saying that ideology still plays an important role in the Communist Party's legitimacy.

However, despite the fact that China still sees the interest in the survival of the Current North Korean regime, the cost is gradually exceeding the benefit it brings. On the other hand, the growing domestic and international pressure has proved effective in changing the Chinese authority's behavior in previous cases as liberalists indicate. Consequently, there are reasons to believe that the dynamics of the China-North Korean relations predict a change of the hard-line North Korean defector policy to a positive direction.

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