



*Asan Public Opinion Report*

## South Korean Attitudes on China

Kim Jiyeon  
Karl Friedhoff  
Kang Chungku  
Lee Euicheol



## About

**The Asan Institute for Policy Studies** is an independent, non-partisan think tank that undertakes policy-relevant research to foster domestic, regional, and international environments that promote peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula, East Asia, and the world-at-large.

**The Public Opinion Studies Program** at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies conducts some of the most widely cited public opinion surveys in international relations and political science. Its regular polls produce reliable data for political leaders and the general public, creating more informed policy debates and decisions. The Program also publishes survey reports dealing with both international and domestic issues in Korea.

## Authors

### **KIM Jiyeon**

Kim Jiyeon is a research fellow and the director of the Center for Public Opinion and Quantitative Research at the Asan Institute for Policies Studies. Dr. Kim received her B.A. in Political Science and Diplomacy from Yonsei University, M.P.P. in Public Policy from the University of California, Berkeley, and Ph.D. in Political Science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Prior to joining the Asan Institute, she was a postdoctoral research fellow at Université de Montréal. Her research interests include elections and voting behavior, American politics and political methodology. Recent publications include “Political judgment, perceptions of facts, and partisan effects” (*Electoral Studies*, 2010), and “Public spending, public deficits, and government coalition” (*Political Studies*, 2010).

### **Karl FRIEDHOFF**

Karl Friedhoff is a program officer in the Public Opinion Studies Program at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies and a Korea Foundation-Mansfield Foundation U.S.-Korea Nexus Scholar. His writing has appeared in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* and his analysis has appeared in leading international and domestic media. Mr. Friedhoff earned his B.A. in political science at Wittenberg University and an M.A. in international commerce at Seoul National University.

### **KANG Chungku**

Kang Chungku is a program officer in the Public Opinion Studies Program at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies. Prior to joining the Asan Institute, he was a research assistant at the Korea Dialogue Academy in Seoul. He earned both an M.A. in Sociology and a B.A. in English at Korea University. His research interests include quantitative research methods, survey design, and statistical data analysis.

**LEE Euicheol**

Lee Euicheol is a program officer in the Public Opinion Studies Program at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies. His main responsibilities are practicing and analyzing ‘Asan Daily Poll’ and ‘Asan Annual Survey’. His research interests include opinion polls, Korean politics, and elections. He received his B.A. in Business Administration from Yonsei University.

\*Special thanks to Ms. LEE Hyun Sun and Mr. CHOO Jeong Yeon for their dedicated research and contributions to this report.

**Disclaimer**

The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors and do not reflect those of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.



## Table of Contents

### Executive Summary

### Introduction

### China Rising

*Country & Leader Favorability*  
*Relations with China Moving Forward*  
*Competitor or Partner?*

### Wariness of China

*Military Threat Perceptions*  
*China, North Korea, and Trust*  
*Economic Threat Perceptions*  
*Attitudes on the Korea-China FTA*

### China Goes Soft

*Soft Power and Leadership*  
*Cultural Content*

### Summit Agenda

*Cooperation on North Korea*

### Conclusion

## List of Tables

**Table 1: Soft Power and Perceived Military and Economic Threat**

**Table 2: China's Cultural Influence and Leadership in Asia**

## List of Figures

**Figure 1: Country Favorability**

**Figure 2: Leader Favorability**

**Figure 3: Perspectives on Relations with China**

**Figure 4: China as a Competitor or Partner**

**Figure 5: China as a Military Threat**

**Figure 6: Reasons for Perceived China Military Threat**

**Figure 7: China Aiding North Korea in Case of War**

**Figure 8: Expectations for the United States and China during War**

**Figure 9: Role in Denuclearizing North Korea**

**Figure 10: China as an Economic Threat**

**Figure 11: Support for FTAs**

**Figure 12: Attitudes on a Korea-China FTA**

**Figure 13: Who Benefits from a Korea-China FTA?**



**Figure 14: Country of Origin Effect**

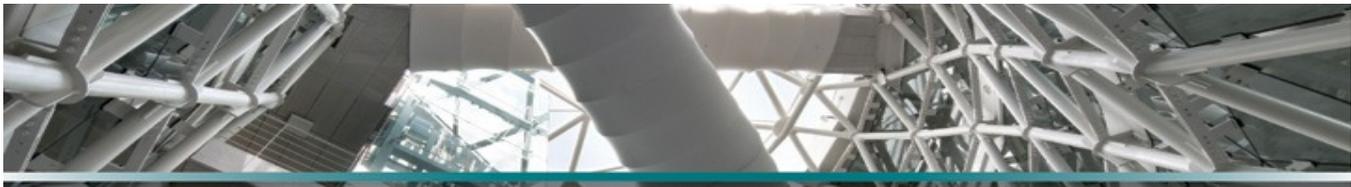
**Figure 15: China as the Leader in Asia**

**Figure 16: Increasing Cultural Influence**

**Figure 17: When Thinking of China**

**Figure 18: Similarity in Values with China**

**Figure 19: Most Important Bilateral Issues for the Summit**



## Executive Summary

Under the presidency of Park Geun-hye, Korea-China relations have improved significantly. Following a very successful 2013 summit, the two leaders are scheduled to hold their second summit in July 2014, and cooperation on a range of issues is increasing. As China continues to take on a larger role in the region, what that will mean for Korea in terms of security, economics, and soft power is the subject of increasing focus. Thus far, the public reaction to this warming relationship has been largely positive.

The Korean public now views China more positively than at any time since Asan began tracking this across a range of metrics. The favorability of China is currently at its highest point, and the 2014 summit will drive that number higher. Perceptions of China as a cooperative partner have also steadily increased through the first half of 2014, and will climb higher following the summit. But as this report will show, wariness of China lingers just below the surface.

First, the increase in China's hard power unsettles much of the Korean public with a clear majority stating that it perceives this increase as a threat. While it is not perceived to be a direct threat to South Korea, it is seen as making the region a more dangerous place. Second, China's economic rise is not seen as one of unquestionable good for the Korean economy. There are growing worries that Korea has become too dependent on China, and that an economic slowdown there will have serious consequences for the Korean economy. At the same time, Chinese firms are moving up the value chain and are already beginning to challenge Korean firms both within China and abroad.

Another significant problem that South Korea expects China to deal with is North Korea. A majority stated that addressing a nuclear North Korea is the single most important issue for the leaders to discuss during their second summit. A similar point highlights the underlying wariness the Korean public holds of China—more than two-thirds believe that China does not support the reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

Clearly, the Korean public supports recent moves to improve relations with China. But that support is not unwavering. As this report illustrates, worries about China and its rise abound, and if those are not clearly addressed they may limit the future of Korea-China relations.



## **Introduction**

The Park Geun-hye administration has made it a clear point to improve Korea-China relations. This relationship was neglected under President Park's predecessor, Lee Myung-bak, but after a successful 2013 summit with China's Xi Jinping—and what seems to be a good personal relationship—the relationship is strengthening quickly. Favorability ratings are at, or near, all-time highs, trade between the two countries continues to thrive, and cooperation on a range of issues is increasing.

The Korean public is largely supportive of President Park's diplomatic efforts with China. Its neighbor is vital to its own economy, and pursuing a positive relationship with its biggest trade partner is seen as natural. Moreover, since Xi came to power, there is speculation that China's North Korea policy has changed its tone. President Xi's upcoming visit to South Korea marks the first time a Chinese head of state will visit South Korea before North Korea. In addition, China is relentlessly courting South Korea in hopes of close cooperation in dealing with Japan on history issues.

Nonetheless, the Korean public still holds reservations about China. As the data illustrates, the prevailing positive attitudes towards China hide significant wariness about what China's rise—in both military and economic terms—means for Korea and the region. But how this wariness will trend into the future is unclear. It could be swayed favorably by growing ease with China's increasing power, or it could be swayed negatively by Chinese assertiveness.

Taken together the data in this report presents a Korean public still coming to terms with just how deeply involved it wants to become with China.

## **China Rising**

### ***Country & Leader Favorability***

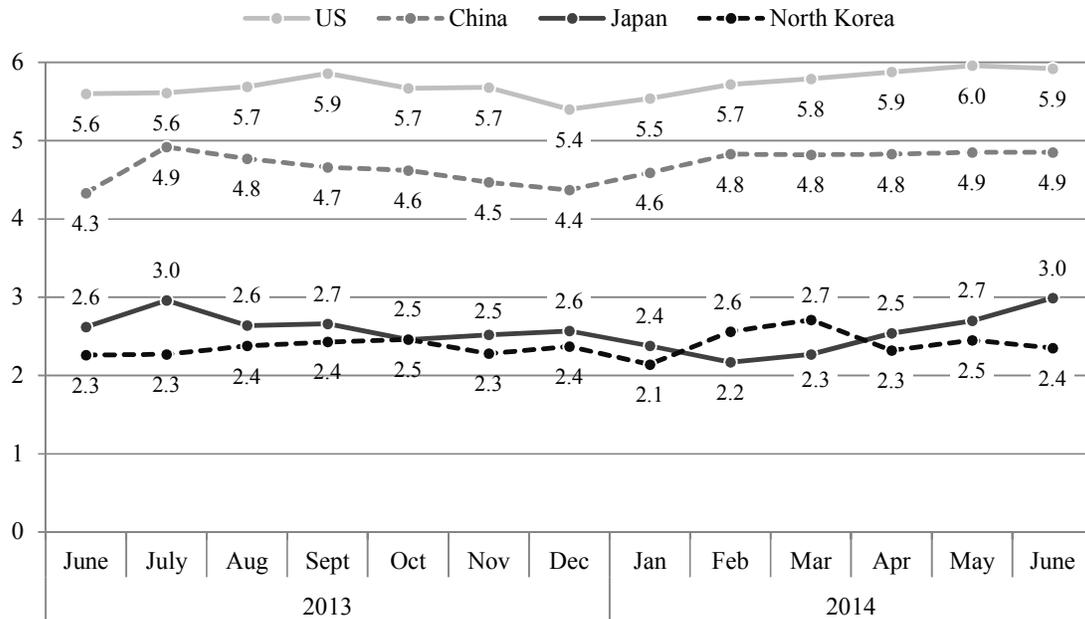
One of the most obvious signs of the public's warming to China can be seen in the country's favorability ratings. While China still trails the favorability numbers for the United States—the only country to carry a mean favorability of 5.0 or higher—China's favorability seems to have reached a new plateau in 2014.

The 2014 numbers are particularly interesting for their stability, and may suggest that the favorability of China among the Korean public has established a new normal. From February forward there is virtually no change, with favorability at 4.9 in June (Figure 1). During this time there were no major events involving China covered by the Korean media. This stability contrasts with the numbers for 2013.

In June 2013, prior to the first Park-Xi summit, favorability was 4.3 on the zero to ten scale. Following the summit, favorability spiked to 4.9 and then began a long and steady decline. This was a time when China was largely out of the news, and the favorability score appears to be returning to the mean. This raises the question as to why such a decline was not recorded in 2014 under similar circumstances, suggesting that favorability ratings of 4.8 or 4.9 for China are the new mean—a significant increase from 2013.



**Figure 1: Country Favorability<sup>1</sup>**



The media, of course, plays an important role in shaping views of China. The first Park-Xi summit in June 2013 was met with much fanfare by media outlets, and thus the public, creating a large jump from June to July. This contrasts sharply with the coverage that was granted China's surprise expansion of its air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in late November. The media downplayed the expansion, counseling caution from both the government and the public. As a result, the impact of that expansion on public opinion was muted. While there was a decline from November to December 2013, it was minor.

Given the positive coverage of the 2013 summit, the same is expected to follow the July 2014 edition. This should create a one-time increase in the favorability rating of China. However, it is important to note that the data does not suggest that the Korean public holds favorable views of the United States and favorable views of China to be in opposition. Thus far, views of both appear to act independently of one another.

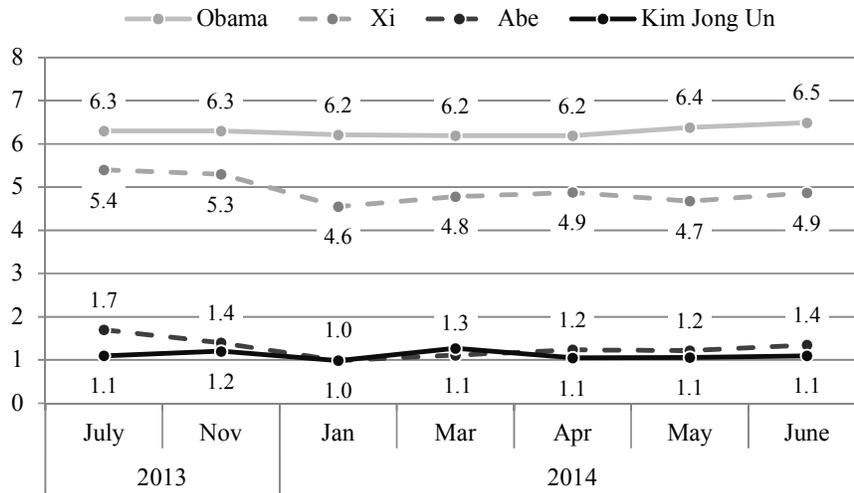
Closely matching the scores for country favorability are the favorability scores for the respective leaders. President Xi is seen as the second most favored leader of countries active in the region, trailing only President Obama.

While there was a decline from November 2013 to January 2014, the best reading of the data is that this decline is a return to the mean. First, the measurements for March through June 2014 are largely consistent. Second, the first measurement taken was in July 2013, just after the Park-Xi summit. Given the success of that summit, and the bump in country favorability, it is safe to assume that the 5.4 President Xi received that month was inflated.

<sup>1</sup> Each country's favorability score is its mean score on a scale from zero to ten, with zero representing "zero favorability".



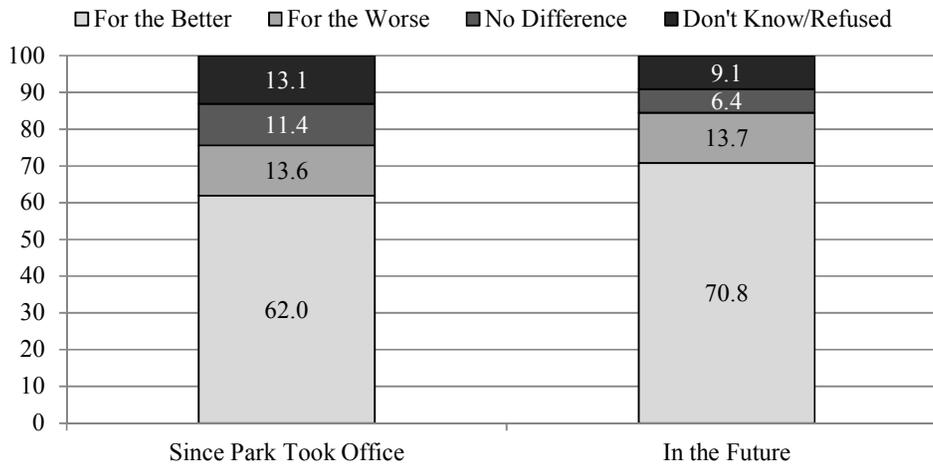
**Figure 2: Leader Favorability<sup>2</sup>**



**Relations with China Moving Forward**

The public widely believes that President Park has achieved her aim for Korea-China relations—62.0 percent state that relations have indeed improved (Figure 3)<sup>3</sup>. However, there is significant variation by age cohort. While those in their 60s (81.0%) were the most likely to see Korea-China ties as having been bettered, those in their 20s (41.7%) were the least likely. These views appear to be based on views of President Park herself rather than on an objective assessment of Korea-China ties.

**Figure 3: Perspectives on Relations with China**



<sup>2</sup> Each leader’s favorability score is his mean score on a scale from zero to ten, with zero representing “zero favorability”.

<sup>3</sup> Survey conducted May 4-6, 2014

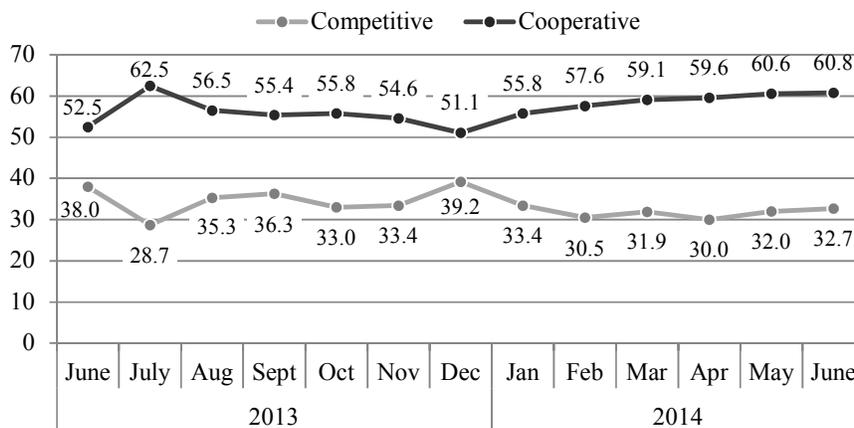


More importantly, a strong majority (70.8%)—and a majority of all age cohorts—expect Korea-China relations to continue to improve into the future. This is not a direct measurement of the *desire* that those relations improve, but it will provide President Park ample leeway to pursue warmer ties.

***Competitor or Partner?***

A majority of the Korean public consistently sees China as a cooperative partner. However, when compared to the United States, there has been more volatility in those views. In June 2013, just before the first Korea-China summit under the current administrations, 52.5 percent viewed China as a cooperative partner (Figure 4). Following the summit, that number increased sharply to 62.5 percent. But like country favorability, that number began to regress to the mean in the months that followed, reaching a new low following the expansion of China’s air defense identification zone. This did not last long.

**Figure 4: China as a Competitor or Partner?**



Throughout the first half of 2014, views of China as a cooperative partner steadily increased. Following the second summit in early July 2014, views of China as a cooperative partner are expected to increase sharply once again. The increase will likely fall short of the 10pp gain following the first summit, but should be enough to set a new high for the number.

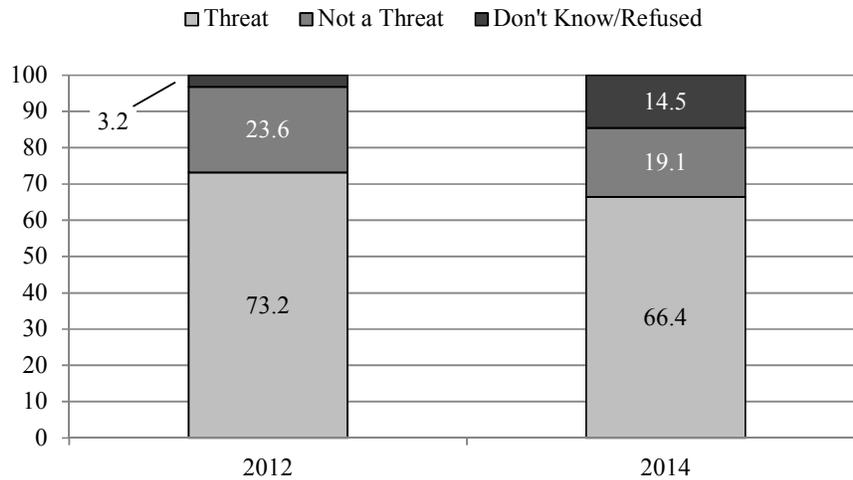
**Wariness of China**

***Military Threat Perceptions***

Despite a majority consistently citing China as a cooperative partner, a strong majority also continue to cite China’s military rise as a threat to South Korea. China’s increasing hard power does not receive nearly the attention given to Japan’s ongoing rethink of the role of its own military, but China’s increasing defense budgets and ADIZ expansion were well-covered in the media. As Figure 5 illustrates, 66.4 percent stated that China posed a significant military threat to South Korea. Although this was a 6.8pp drop from when the question was previously asked in 2012, it remains high.

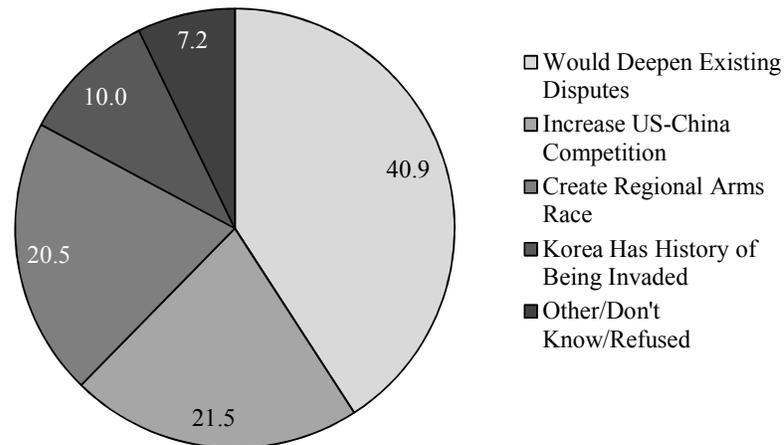


**Figure 5: China as a Military Threat**



However, perceptions of China as a military threat were not based on China being a direct threat to South Korea. Instead, China's military rise was primarily expected to complicate an already complicated region. A plurality (40.9%) stated that China's military rise would deepen existing territorial disputes and other conflicts (Figure 6). While 21.5 percent expected it to increase tensions between the United States and China, 20.5 percent thought China's military rise would kick off an arms race in the region.

**Figure 6: Reasons for Perceived China Military Threat**



The most important reason for not seeing China's military rise as a threat was that it does not pose a direct threat to the Korean Peninsula (51.0%). Also, 24.8 percent responded that China's military rise was not a threat because South Korea is not yet involved in any territorial disputes with China. Another 13.9 percent of respondents believed that the Korea-US alliance would check China's military expansion in the region.

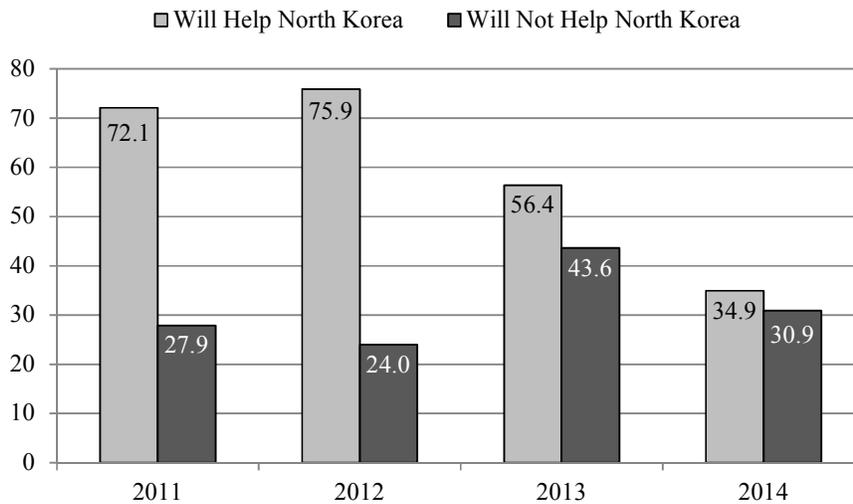


### *China, North Korea, and Trust*

The underlying variable of the public's security threat perceptions of China is North Korea. China has long prioritized North Korea when it comes to its policy toward the Korean Peninsula. China's reaction—or lack thereof—to the sinking of the *Cheonan* and the shelling of *Yeonpyong* Island epitomizes China's long-time Korea policy.

Since President Xi came into power, however, China has assumed a tougher attitude toward North Korea, particularly its nuclear weapons program. This, coupled with improving South Korea-China relations under Park and Xi, has begun to change the South Korean public's view. Although still ambivalent on what role China would assume if there is a resumption of the Korean War, the number of South Koreans that thought China would offer assistance to North Korea has fallen. In 2014, a plurality (34.9%)<sup>4</sup> stated that if war were to break out on the Korean Peninsula, China would offer assistance to North Korea (Figure 7). While 30.9 percent stated China would not enter the conflict, 26.2 percent were unsure. When this same question was asked in 2011, 72.1 percent thought China would enter the war on behalf of North Korea, and in 2012 that number peaked at 75.9 percent.<sup>5</sup>

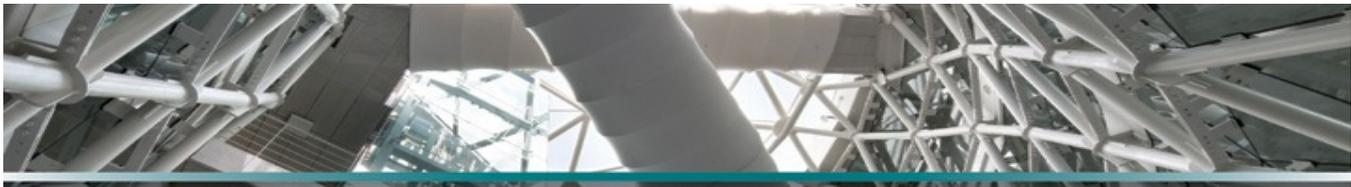
**Figure 7: China Aiding North Korea in Case of War**



The belief that China is unquestionably on North Korea's side has certainly weakened over the past year. However, it is too early to say that the South Korean public trusts China under all contingencies. In contrast, when the same question was asked about the United States,

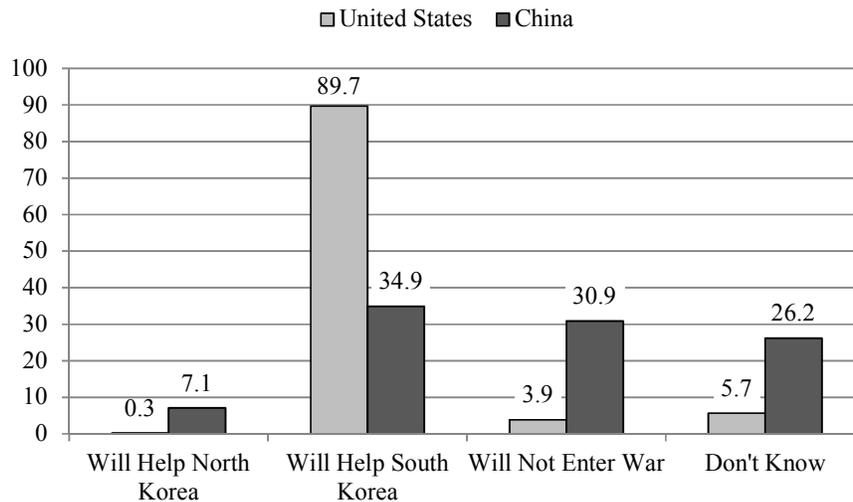
<sup>4</sup> Survey conducted May 4-6, 2014

<sup>5</sup> Part of this change may be due to differences in methodologies and changes to question wording and response options. The questions from 2011-2013 were part of the Asan Annual Survey while the 2014 survey was part of the Asan Daily Poll. See Appendix B for the methodologies of each. There was also a change in question wording and response options. From 2011-2013 the question asked if China would "enter" the war on the side of North Korea, and response options ranged from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". There was no "Don't Know" response option. The 2014 question asked how the respondent expected China to react in the case of war. The response options were "Help South Korea", "Help North Korea", or "Not Enter the Conflict."



89.7% stated that the United States would help South Korea (Figure 8). Despite the ups and downs of the Korea-US alliance, South Koreans have a deep-seated trust in the United States when it comes to national security.

**Figure 8: Expectations of the United States and China during War**

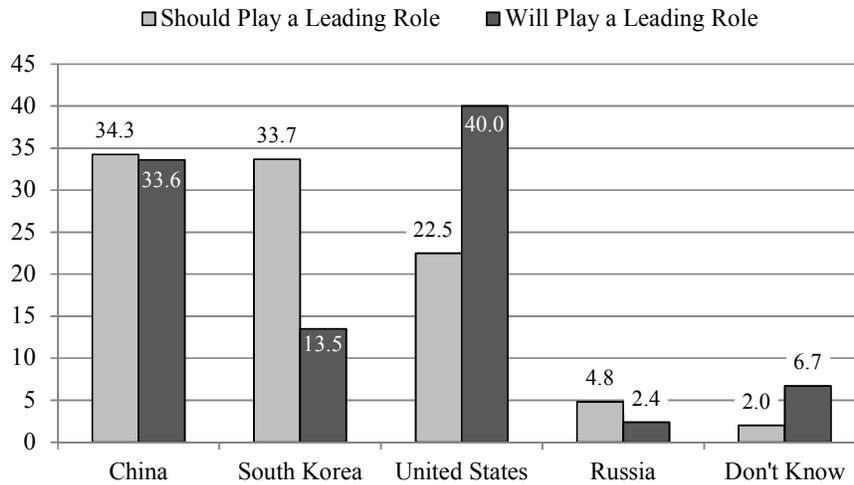


A similar tendency on trust in China is found when it comes to reunification. While 82.4 percent stated that China's cooperation is necessary for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula, only 18.0 percent believe that China wants to see the two Koreas reunify. Roughly two-thirds thought China did not want reunification. This appears to stem from a long-time belief that China wishes North Korea to exist as a buffer state. This mistrust of China stands in the way to further cooperation between South Korea and China.

The percentage of South Koreans who view China as a security threat has decreased, and in order to maintain this decline China should continue to show efforts in reining in North Korea's nuclear program. A plurality (34.3%) of South Koreans thought China *should* play a leading role in resolving North Korea's nuclear weapons program, slightly higher than the 33.7 percent that stated the same about South Korea (Figure 9). Just 22.5 percent identified the United States.



**Figure 9: Role in Denuclearizing North Korea**



Interestingly, 40.0 percent thought it would be the United States that would play a leading role in resolving the North Korean nuclear weapons issue. One-third cited China as an actual key player. Clearly, the South Korean public has high expectations for China in resolving the North's nuclear problem.

### ***Economic Threat Perceptions***

It was not long ago that the rise of China's economy, and Korea's proximity to it, was seen as one of Korea's great opportunities. It has no doubt been beneficial overall up to this point, but there is concern emerging both in private from government officials and from the media<sup>6</sup> that Korea is now over-dependent on China with a decreasing technological gap. The public seem to perceive this already, but it hasn't always been the case.

In 2006, South Koreans viewed the economic rise of China as more of an opportunity. According to a survey conducted by the East Asia Institute and JoongAng Daily, 58.5 percent stated that the economic rise of China would bring a positive effect to South Korea. Approximately 41 percent saw it negatively. A change in attitudes was detected in the 2012 Asan Annual survey. This survey found that 52.7 percent regarded China's economic rise as a threat, with 43.5 percent stating it was an opportunity for Korean business. A dramatically changed attitude was found in 2014.

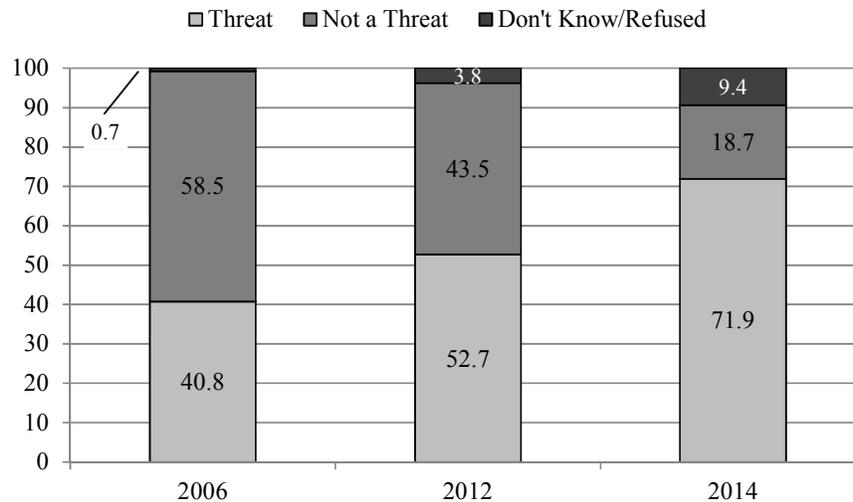
When it comes to the economic rise of China, 71.9 percent now cite it as posing a significant threat to Korea (Figure 10).<sup>7</sup> Not only was this a 19.2 pp increase from 2012, when 52.7 percent stated the same, but it was significantly higher than the perceived threat of China's military rise.

<sup>6</sup> "Korea Must Switch Strategies in Exports to China." *The Chosun Ilbo*. June 3, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Survey conducted May 7-9, 2014



**Figure 10: China as an Economic Threat**



This elevated threat perception was primarily based on two concerns, one more forward-looking than the other. First, among those who perceived China’s economic rise as a threat, 43.6 percent stated that as the technology gap between the two countries decreases, Korea and China will become economic competitors rather than partners. This is a well-founded worry.<sup>8</sup> China has begun to move up the value-added chain, and is beginning to challenge Korea abroad.

But it is not only competing in the international market that will be a concern. Korean firms have changed their investment strategy in China from one that was labor-seeking to one that is now market-seeking. Given the potential of China’s domestic market this is understandable. But as China becomes more capable of producing domestically designed and sourced goods, it will become increasingly difficult for Korean firms to gain market share.

The second aspect of public concern about China’s economic rise is perhaps less well-grounded, with 32.9 percent stating cheap labor in China would take jobs away from Korean workers. With wages in China on the rise<sup>9</sup>, and the investment of Koreans firms now shifting towards market-seeking, the potential loss of jobs through outsourcing to China should decrease.

#### ***Attitudes on the Korea-China FTA***

Despite the wariness of China’s economic rise, it should not obstruct economic cooperation between Korea and China. In 2012, the Korean public was ambivalent about a possible FTA with China. In a poll conducted in May 2012, there was less support for a Korea-China FTA

<sup>8</sup> For a complete discussion see: Yang, Pyeong Seob, 2012. “An Assessment of Korea-China Economic Cooperation.” *China, World Economy and Korea-China Economic Cooperation*. Eds. Wook Chae & Pyeong Seob Yang. Seoul: Korea Institute for International Economic Policy

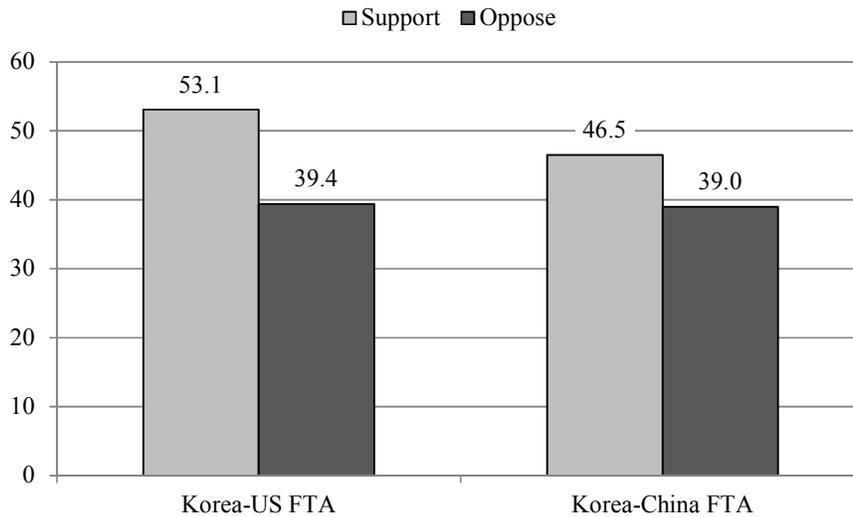
<sup>9</sup> “The end of cheap China.” *The Economist*. March 10, 2012.





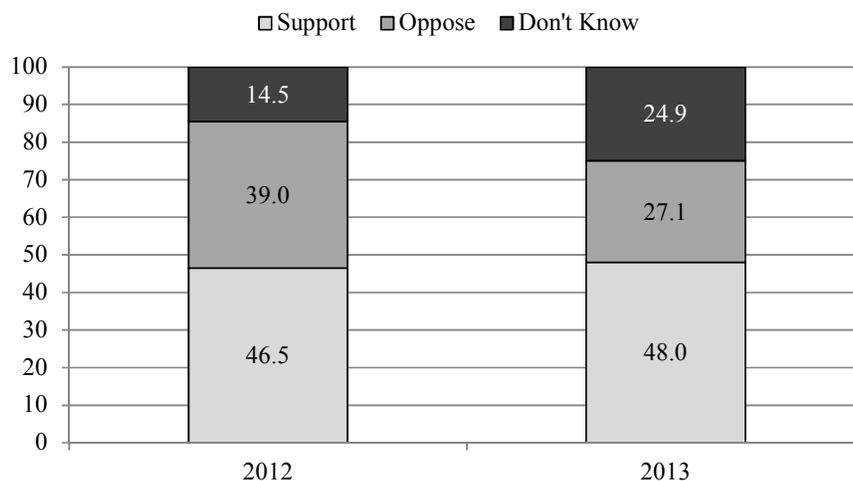
than there was for the highly controversial Korea-US FTA (Figure 11). While 53.1 percent reported support for the Korea-US FTA, 46.5 percent stated the same for a possible FTA with China. Nearly identical percentages opposed both agreements.

**Figure 11: Support for FTAs**



The ambivalence shown on the Korea-China FTA likely stemmed from the public's overall unease with FTAs in general at that time. In the time that has passed, however, the once-controversial Korea-US FTA has become well-accepted. By 2013, there was already declining opposition to an FTA with China. As shown in Figure 12, opposition decreased from 39.0 percent in 2012 to 27.1 percent in 2013. Those who were unsure increased from 14.5 percent to 24.9 percent in 2013.

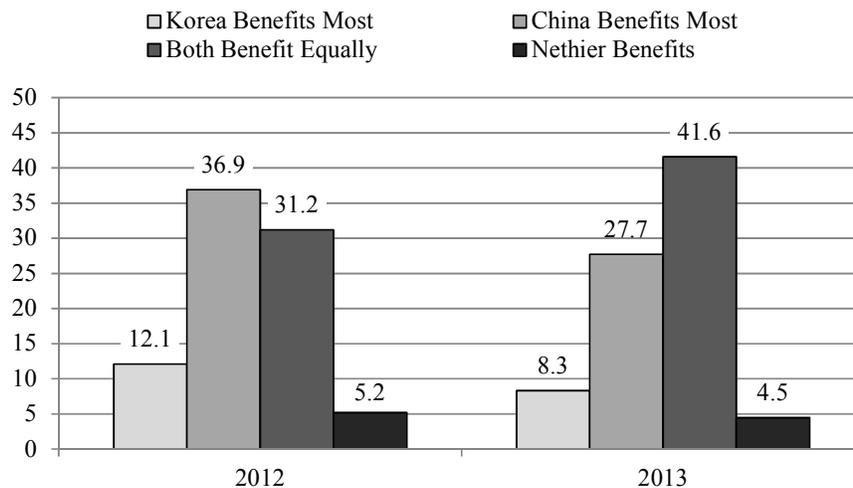
**Figure 12: Attitudes on a Korea-China FTA**





Another number that will be important to watch moving forward is how the Korean public expects benefits of the FTA to accrue. As shown in Figure 13, the perception of who benefits from the Korea-China FTA has also changed. In 2012, 36.9 percent thought China would benefit most from the FTA. However, that proportion declined to 27.7 percent in 2013. At the same time there was a 10.4pp increase in the number that thought both countries would benefit equally. Although the number of people who thought that Korea would benefit most declined, a consensus is forming that both countries will benefit from an agreement.

**Figure 13: Who Benefits from a Korea-China FTA?**

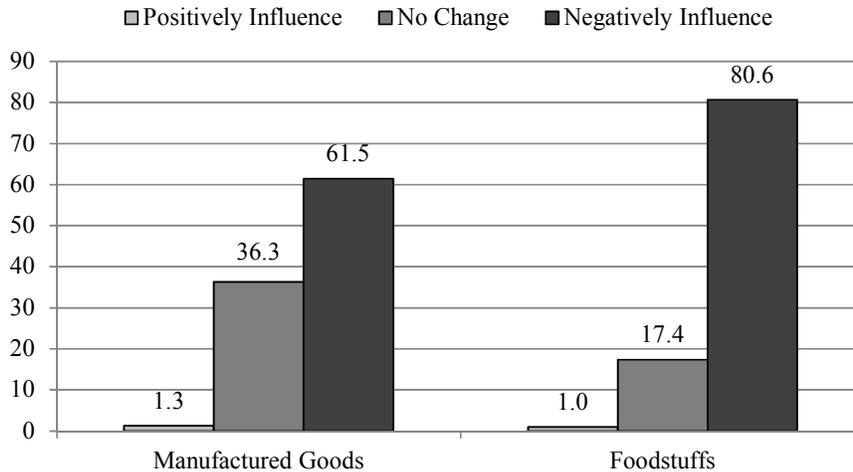


The Korea-China FTA is an important issue to the public. According to last year's opinion poll, 20.1 percent stated that an FTA between the two countries was the most salient issue. Two other prominent issues were North Korea's nuclear program and the reunification of Korea. Similar results were also found in more recent surveys. The Korea-China FTA was identified as the second most important issue to be discussed at the July 2014 summit between President Park and President Xi.

Even though the FTA between Korea and China is receiving relatively warm support from the Korean public, there are several aspects over which the two countries should be concerned. One significant challenge that China faces in South Korea—but not only in South Korea—is shedding the “Made in China” stigma. The data reveals this country of origin effect is strong in South Korea. When asked about manufactured goods, 61.5 percent stated that if a good were made in China it would negatively affect their intention to purchase a product (Figure 14). Only 1.3 percent stated it would have a positive influence, with the remaining 36.3 percent saying it would have no impact.



**Figure 14: Country of Origin Effect**



This country of origin effect was even stronger when it came to foodstuffs. The two countries have recently bickered about the safety of their respective production of *kim-chi*, and China has been hit by a series of scares revolving around food safety. This has likely bled over to influence Korean public opinion. While 17.4 percent stated food being made in China made no difference to their intent to purchase, 80.6 percent said they would not buy food with the Made in China label.

In the Korea-China FTA negotiations, China is seeking greater access to the Korean market for food and agricultural goods—a sensitive issue for Korea. With the experience of what unfolded related to US beef imports, the Korean government would be wise to exercise caution in negotiations with China in these areas so as to not to arouse public resistance.

## **China Goes Soft**

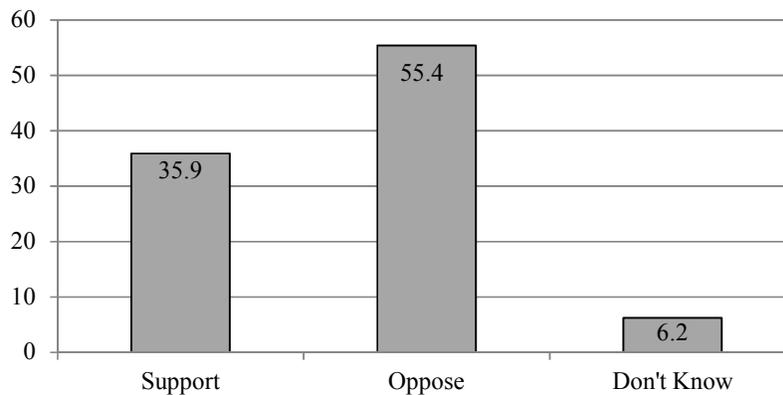
### ***Soft Power and Leadership***

A slim majority (55.4%) opposed China becoming the regional leader (Figure 15), with just 35.9 percent in support.<sup>10</sup> Those in their 20s and 30s were the most opposed to this idea, with 63.2 percent and 66.4 percent in opposition, respectively.

<sup>10</sup> Survey conducted May 7-9, 2014



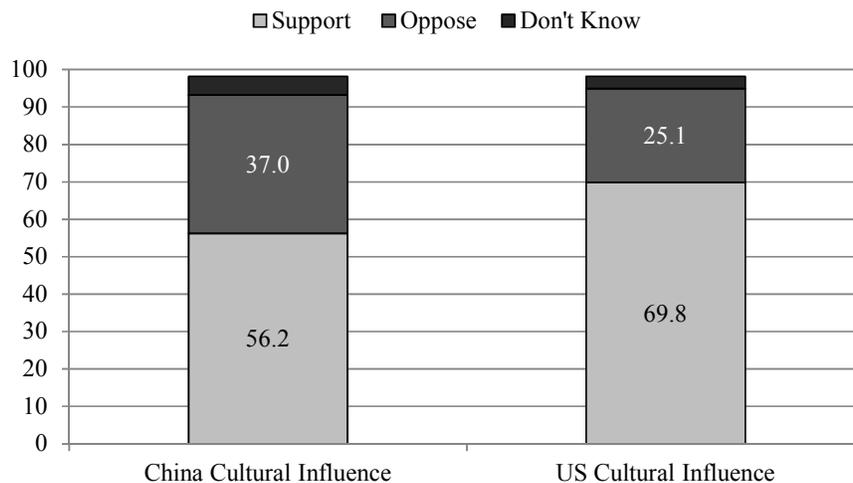
**Figure 15: China as the Leader in Asia**



One way China is expected to increase its influence in the region is by expanding the reach of its cultural content. From the Korean perspective, cultural exchanges are expected to have two important consequences. First, cultural exchanges and cooperation are less complicated. In the intricate security situation in North East Asia, cultural cooperation would be a safe choice for both countries. Second, the trust level of the Korean public in China is relatively low despite its much improved image. Active cultural exchanges should play an important role in trust building for both countries.

As Figure 16 shows, an increase in the influence of China’s culture would be welcomed by the Korean public—56.2 percent approved of China’s culture becoming more influential and 37.0 percent opposed.<sup>11</sup> But these numbers require some context. It is becoming more prevalent to see the preferences of the South Korean public as choosing between the United States and China. However, this is not the case. When it came to the cultural content of the United States, 69.8 percent supported an increase in its influence while 25.1 percent opposed.

**Figure 16: Increasing Cultural Influence**

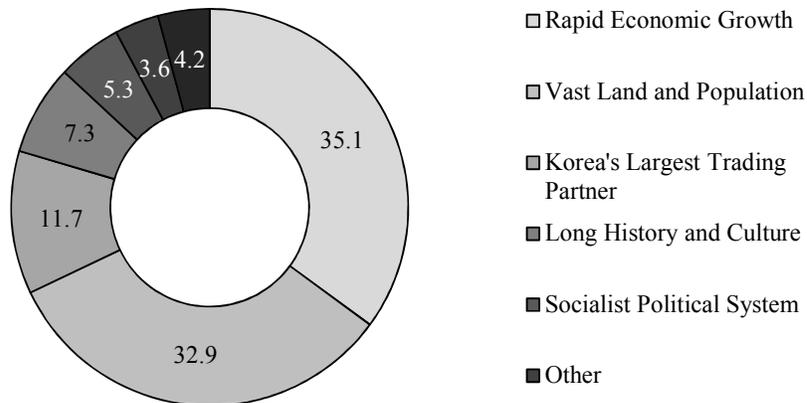


<sup>11</sup> Survey conducted May 7-9, 2014



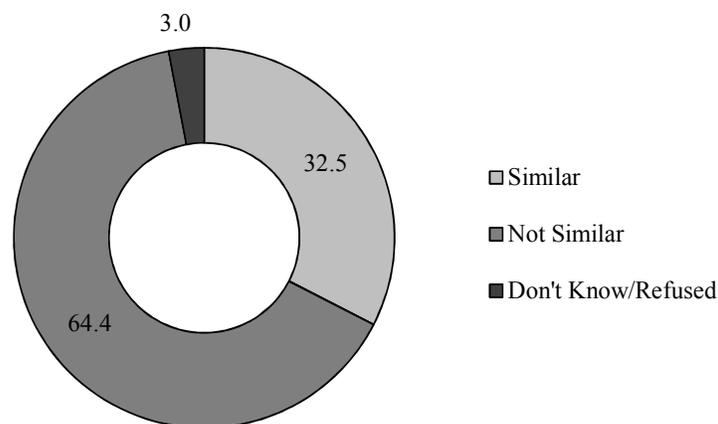
But China’s cultural influence in Korea is relatively weak. As the data illustrates, when thinking of China just 7.3 percent thought of China’s long history and culture (Figure 17).<sup>12</sup> A plurality (35.1%) cited rapid economic growth, and 32.9 percent cited China’s vast territory and population. This result helps to demonstrate the weakness of China’s soft power in Korea.

**Figure 17: When Thinking of China**



Furthermore, only 32.5 percent answered that Korea and China share values, while 64.4 percent stated that the values of Korea and China were not similar (Figure 18).<sup>13</sup> Considering the heavy influence of Confucianism in both countries, the result is surprising. It also strengthens the observation that China’s soft power policy has had limited effect in Korea.

**Figure 18: Similarity in Values with China**



What is to be noted regarding soft power is its potential impact, as it has the ability to shape one’s attitude toward security and economic issues. As Table 1 illustrates, the more

<sup>12</sup> Survey conducted May 7-9, 2014

<sup>13</sup> Survey conducted May 7-9, 2014



appreciative a respondent was of Chinese culture, the lower level of perceived economic and military threat.

**Table 1: Soft Power and Perceived Military and Economic Threat**

		Expansion of Chinese Cultural Influence	
		Approve	Disapprove
Military rise	Threat	72.8	<b>84.1</b>
	Not a threat	<b>27.2</b>	15.9
Economic rise	Threat	74.0	<b>87.6</b>
	Not a threat	<b>26.0</b>	12.4

Among those that disapproved of the expansion of China’s cultural influence, 84.1 percent perceived the military rise of China to be a threat to South Korea. But for those that approved of the expansion of China’s culture, that perception was somewhat reduced. While 72.8 percent still perceived China’s military rise as a threat, there was an 11.3pp increase in those who did not see China’s military rise as a threat. Similar numbers were found for the perceived economic threat of China. While 26.0 percent of those that approved of a more culturally influential China did not see China as an economic threat, just 12.4 percent of those that disapproved of China’s increasing cultural influence stated the same.

Another interesting finding is the relationship between attitudes on cultural influence and opinions on China’s role as a leader in Asia. As mentioned previously, 55.6 percent opposed China becoming the regional leader. It was expected that those who were more favorable to the increasing influence of China’s cultural content would be more favorable toward China becoming the leader in the region. While a slim majority (54.7%) of this group did favor China becoming a regional leader, 45.3 percent opposed (Table 2).

**Table 2: China’s Cultural Influence and Leadership in Asia**

		Increased Influence of China’s Culture	
		Approve	Disapprove
China as Leader in Asia	Approve (35.9%)	<b>54.7</b>	17.9
	Disapprove (55.4%)	<b>45.3</b>	<b>82.1</b>

This is a significantly narrower gap than was expected, and it calls into question the ability of China to pursue its objectives in Korea through soft power. What the bivariate analysis also makes clear is that those who are negatively disposed to an increase in China’s cultural influence were strongly opposed to China becoming the regional leader. Among this group, 82.1 percent opposed China becoming the regional leader while just 17.9 percent were in support. If the expansion of China’s culture begins to negatively affect Korea’s soft power, the public could begin to more strongly oppose an expansion of China’s soft power.



## Summit Agenda

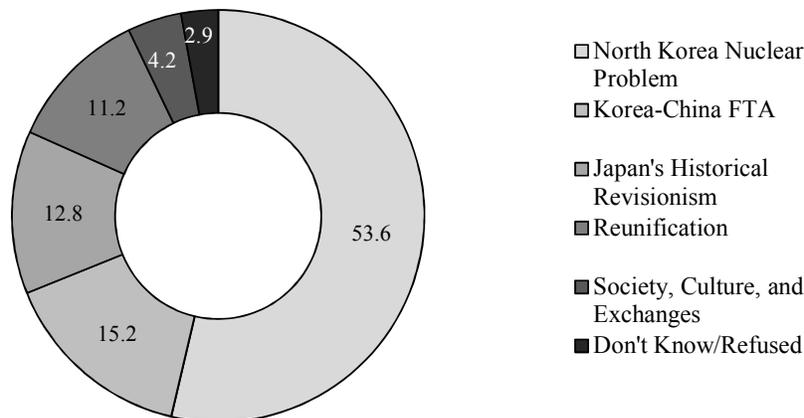
In the lead up to the July 2014 summit, no clear deliverable has emerged. It has been suggested that the visit of President Xi would be the deliverable in and of itself. But as the date of the summit grew nearer rumors emerged that the deliverable would be an official upgrade to Korea-China relations. It was even suggested that China would support the denuclearization of North Korea—a major shift from its support of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. Regardless of what the deliverable is, the discussions during the summit will cover a range of topics, with the most important for the public being the denuclearization of North Korea.

### *Cooperation on North Korea*

One of the biggest sticking points in the South Korea-China relationship is North Korea. China continues to support South Korea's biggest security threat, although there is speculation that China is in the process of changing its position on the North. This partly informs Park Geun-hye's China policy, as her administration seeks better relations with China in hopes of encouraging it to place further pressure on North Korea to denuclearize and reform its economy. The potential effectiveness of this is highly debated.

Even so, the Korean public expects the denuclearization of North Korea to be the most important order of business when the two leaders meet for their July 2014 summit. While 53.6 percent cited the North Korean nuclear problem as the most important for the leaders to discuss, 15.2 percent stated that a potential Korea-China FTA should top the bill (Figure 19). Just 12.8 percent said addressing Japan's historical revisionism should be discussed, and only 11.2 percent cited Korean unification as the most important issue to discuss. Considering the fact that Japan's history distortion issue is prevalent in Korea, and China is aggressively wooing Korea to cooperate on the problem this is lower than expected. This suggests that many Koreans—like the Korean government—prefer to collaborate with the international community as a whole in dealing with issues of history.

**Figure 19: Most Important Bilateral Issues for the Summit**





One reason that Korean unification was likely not highly cited is the fact that 68.1 percent stated that China did not support Korean reunification in the first place. This sentiment was especially strong among those aged 40 and younger with more than three-quarters of each cohort stating China would not support Korean unification. When this same question was asked about the United States, 51.1 percent stated that the United States did not want the two Koreas to reunify.

However, if reunification is to take place, 82.4 percent stated that help from China would be necessary, and 87.3 percent stated that the help of the United States would be required.

## **Conclusion**

The image of China has improved markedly among the Korean public over the past year. This will give President Park ample leeway to continue to pursue broader cooperation across a range of issues. But even though public sentiment on general measures has clearly improved, China remains a country on which Koreans are of two minds.

There is perhaps no better example than that of China's economy. It offers a huge opportunity for Korean businesses of all sizes, and trade between the two has boomed. But there is increasing worry that Korea is already over-dependent on China and a move to diversify may be in the offing.

But much of how the public views China moving forward will depend on one thing: North Korea. Despite the high favorability of China among the Korean public, a plurality believes China will aid North Korea should war break out on the peninsula. There is also a feeling that China will not be as proactive as the United States in addressing North Korea's nuclear program. Perhaps more importantly, the public does not think that China wants to see a reunification of Korea.

President Xi has called for more aggressive action on these issues, but repetition of political rhetoric regarding North Korea's nuclear program and cooperation could easily disappoint the Korean public and hinder further improvement in South Korea-China relations. Some have already warned that if President Xi's proposed solution is a return to the Six-Party Talks this would turn off the Korean public. A joint statement affirming the importance of the bilateral relationship will likely have little effect.

The summit should also be used to discuss economic cooperation and expedite FTA negotiations. Regardless of the perceived threat of China's economic rise, the Korean public is largely positive on an FTA with China. Yet, the Korean government needs to be cautious when it comes to food and agricultural products due to safety concerns that could rile the public. This is especially important due to the current social discussion of public safety in Korea.

In order to strengthen Korea-China relations, cultural exchanges provide a good beginning. The data presented here indicates that as a person becomes more positive towards Chinese cultural influence, he or she is more supportive of China assuming leadership in the region. Considering that only a small percentage of the public cited China's long history and rich



culture as what best identifies China, China's soft power has a long way to go. Just as the Korean wave became a social phenomenon in China, cultural exchanges should offer an opportunity for the two countries to become better acquainted. Daniel Barenboim stated that knowledge is the beginning when he created the West-East Divan Orchestra. That aphorism applies here as well.



## **Appendix A**

### **Major Issues in Korea-China Relations (March 2013 - April 2014)**

#### **2013**

- March 26 Inauguration of the 19<sup>th</sup> Korea-China Parliamentary Council
- April 9 Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials and the Communist Party Central Committee visit South Korea to discuss Korea-China relations, North Korea's third nuclear test, and the possibility of North Korea launching a medium-range missile.
- June 4~5 General Jeong Seung-jo, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of the Republic of Korea Armed Forces, and Pang Hui, a chief of the Chinese General Staff, hold military talks. They discuss reinforcing strategic cooperation in military and security situations including North Korea's denuclearization.
- June 14 President Park meets Tang Jiaxuan, the former Chinese State Councilor, to assure that China will not acknowledge the North as a nuclear power.
- June 27-30 President Park visits China.
- June 27 The Korea-China summit implements the Korea-China Joint Statement for Future Vision.
- September 5 The first joint announcement of the National Assembly of Korea and Chinese National People's Congress (NPC) expressing concern over falsifications in Japanese history textbooks and discussing the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, resumption of the Six-Party Talks, and the Korea-China FTA.
- September 25 Agreement on the consular relations between Korea and China; reached the agreement at the 15<sup>th</sup> Korea-China Consular Affairs Convention in Seoul.
- October 7 President Park meets with Chinese President Xi Jinping at APEC
- November 18 Chinese State Councilor Yang Jechi visits Korea and meets Chief of National Security Kim Jang-soo to discuss diplomatic security after meeting with President Park
- November 23 China expands its ADIZ and it covers Jeodo.
- November 28 Third Korea-China Strategic Conversation on National Defense; China refused Korea's request to reconsider its newly-declared ADIZ
- December 8 Korea announces expanded ADIZ covering Jeodo, Marado, and Hongdo.



## 2014

- January 19      China opens a memorial hall in Harbin to honor the Korean independence fighter Ahn Jung-geun.
- March 23      President Park meets Xi Jinping at the Nuclear Security Summit Conference in The Hague.
- March 28      The remains of 437 Chinese soldiers killed in the Korean War returned to China
- April 11      Representatives of Korea and China to the Six-Party Talks meet in Beijing to discuss the situation on Korean Peninsula as well as the resumption of Six-Party Talks.

## Korea-China FTA Negotiations

### 2012

- February 24      Public Hearing on the Korea-China FTA
- March 1-2      Prior consultation of the Korea-China FTA negotiations in Seoul, Korea
- March 22-23; April 5      Prior consultation of the Korea-China FTA negotiations in Beijing, China
- May 2      Launch of Korea-China FTA negotiations in Beijing
- May 14      First round of negotiations in Beijing, China
- July 3-5      Second round of negotiations on Jeju Island, Korea
- August 22-24      Third round of negotiations in Weihai, China
- October 30-November 1      Fourth round of negotiations in Gyeongju, Korea

### 2013

- April 26-28      Fifth round of negotiations in Harbin, China
- July 2-4      Sixth round of negotiations in Busan, Korea
- September 3-5      Seventh round of negotiations in Weifang, China



November 18-22

Eighth round of negotiations in Incheon, Korea

### **2014**

January 6-10

Ninth round of negotiations in Xian, China

March 17-21

Tenth round of negotiations in Ilsan, Korea

## **Appendix B**

### **Survey Methodology**

#### **Asan Annual Surveys**

2011

Sample size: 2,000 respondents over the age of 19

Margin of error:  $\pm 2.19\%$  at the 95% confidence level

Survey method: RDD for mobile phones and online survey

Period: August 26 - October 4, 2011

Organization: M Brain

2012

Sample size: 1,500 respondents over the age of 19

Margin of error:  $\pm 2.5\%$  at the 95% confidence level

Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones and online survey

Period: September 24 - November 1, 2014

Organization: Millward Brown Media Research

2013

Sample size: 1,500 respondents over the age of 19

Margin of error:  $\pm 2.5\%$  at the 95% confidence level

Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones and online survey

Period: September 4 - September 27, 2013

Organization: Millward Brown Media Research

#### **Asan Daily Poll**

Sample size: 1,000 respondents over the age of 19

Margin of error:  $\pm 3.1\%$  at the 95% confidence level

Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones

Period: See report for specific dates of surveys cited.

Organization: Research & Research