



COVID-19, the Changing Geopolitics in East Asia, and the Peace Process on the Korean Peninsula: Focusing on the Role of South Korea

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Introduction

This study analyzes the changing geopolitics in East Asia after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also discusses the prospect of a peace process on the Korean Peninsula and South Korea's role against the backdrop of an intensifying rivalry between the US and China. The COVID-19 pandemic has functioned as a catalyst and medium for ongoing change in the international order, and many of these processes existed well before the breakout of the coronavirus. Causing transformation at the domestic and international levels, the proliferation of COVID-19 pushes many governments to select infectious disease control measures such as border lockdowns, workplace closures, and social distancing policies, throwing countries into economic crisis with a simultaneous reduction in total demand and supply. The Great Disruption is now underway, and its resulting impact will be comparable to the Great Depression, a period of unprecedented economic decline in the 1930s. Also, just as during the Great Depression, the US and China have failed to demonstrate international leadership against the pandemic crisis. The "post-COVID" era may signify an entry into the G-0 era in the absence of a hegemonic state that provides global public goods.

In the East Asian context of an asymmetrical bipolar rivalry in the G-0 era, in which the US maintains a preponderance of power over China, South Korea is seeking various ways to slow down or avoid the pressure of choosing between the two powers, which is a distinct possibility arising from the intensifying strategic competition between them. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, South Korea has built on the success of "*K-Bangyeok* (Korea's response to COVID-19)," sought to support and strengthen the multilateral approach within the post-COVID-19 global order while pursuing inter-Korean cooperation and coexistence measures aimed at peace, life safety, and sustainable environmental protection on the Korean Peninsula in the face of the worldwide health crisis. The resumption of the Korean Peninsula peace process, which went into a stalemate before the pandemic, requires analysis, evaluation, and

application of the existing peace process from a traditional security perspective, along with a change in the perception of security that the novel virus pandemic initiated and triggered.

The domestic political goal of South Korea in the post-COVID-19 era includes ensuring the life safety of its people concerning coronavirus protective measures as well as socio-economic recovery after their implementation. Moreover, South Korea faces the challenge of continuing the Korean Peninsula peace process in a regional security environment where the US-China rivalry is in full swing. This study looks into the COVID-19 era and the changing geopolitics in East Asia and South Korea's Korean Peninsula peace discourse for the post-COVID-19 period. Also examined are human security and the concept of an "inter-Korean community of life" related to its foreign policy. Next, the authors propose a new direction as an alternative to resume the denuclearization and peace regime process for the Korean Peninsula, which is currently in a deadlock phase. In conclusion, the authors offer a summary of the text along with implications for the future.

Geopolitics and East Asia

Geopolitics and East Asia

Geopolitics is a method of studying foreign policy to understand, explain, and predict international political behavior through geographical variables. These include location, scope, climate, topography, demography, natural resources, and technological advancements (Evans and Newnham 1998, 197-199). If simplified, the essence of geopolitics would be that geography determines political identity and behavior. However, a conceptual historical perspective would expand geopolitics further from merely converting international political phenomena into geographical variables for their explanation. The term geopolitics, first conceived by a Swedish political scientist in the late 19th century, was used by Germany after World

War I to promote conservative nationalism. Then Hitler came to power and used the concept to justify the Nazi's expansionist foreign policy, which was a form of aggression to expand Germany's "living space" into the Eurasian region.¹ In the 1970s, during the Cold War era, Secretary of State H. Kissinger used geopolitics as a term synonymous with the concept of "balance-of-power politics." The term geopolitics, a taboo in Western society, was revived during this time (Ó Tuathail 1998, 1).

Following German usage and subsequent application, geopolitics has gained a new definition as "a discourse about world politics with particular emphasis on state competition and the geographical dimensions of power" (Ó Tuathail 1998, 1). Therefore, looking at the US-China rivalry in the COVID-19 era, we are reminded of the concept of geopolitics here in Korea, where we need to design a course for a foreign policy that takes into account the two influences. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes the indirect effects of climate change on the proliferation of human coronaviruses and the emergence of COVID-19, although there is no evidence that they are directly related (World Health Organization 2020).² However, evidence suggests that most emerging infectious diseases originate in wildlife species and that increasing human pressure on the natural environment drives the emergence of infectious diseases. In other words, economic and social crises caused by COVID-19 at the global, regional, and domestic levels show that COVID-19 serves as an independent or intervening variable that causes geopolitical, more precisely, "geopolitical-economic" fluctuations.

The impact of COVID-19 on the "region," which emerged as a venue for cooperation and conflict in the post-Cold War era, can be seen through the "regional security-economic complex (RSEC) theory," an extension of the regional security complex (RSC) theory in which autonomous regions where security interdependence

occurs are geographically given and socially constructed.³ The basic structure of an RSC is composed of four variables: the "boundary" which distinguishes the RSC from the complex of its neighbors, the "anarchic" structure that should consist of two or more autonomous units, the "polarity" that encompasses power distribution among units, and the "social construct" that encompasses both amity and enmity. To the relationship of these four variables, along with the economic element, the "value chains," which are production networks of two or more states in the region, can be added to constitute the RSEC theory. In East Asia, the competition between superpowers, the US and China, projects into the region. Considering the spatial effect of the Korean peninsula problem, East Asia can be further divided into Northeast Asia, home of the Korean Peninsula problem, and neighboring Southeast Asia. Among the five variables of the RSEC, the impact of COVID-19 on the anarchic structure (meaning power distribution), polarity, amity and enmity, and value chains will be examined from the perspective of Korea's foreign policy direction.

COVID-19 and US-China rivalry

It may be an exaggeration to speak of East Asian geopolitics before and after corona (Friedman 2020). Still, the issue of life safety, as well as the economic and social crises derived from the globalization of COVID-19, compare to the Great Depression of the 1930s. From an economic historical perspective, the lesson of the Great Depression is that the international political economy (IPE) becomes unstable in the absence of the declining hegemon's ability and the emerging hegemon's willingness to solve problems in a situation where states fight for leadership (Charles Kindleberger 2018). The world might reach an ideal state of stable international political economy when the hegemon transfers its substantive sovereignty to an international organization.

¹ For interpretation and evaluation of Germany's usage of geopolitics in the 1940s, see Kiss (1942, 632-645).

² The first coronavirus of human origin was described in 1965. SARS and MERS are also species of coronavirus.

³ Major contents of the 1965 regional security complex theory come from Buzan and Weaver (2003).

However, the emergence of a world state, *Leviathan*, might be impossible in the international state of nature, where the distribution of power is significantly unbalanced compared to that of the domestic state of nature.⁴

After COVID-19 became a global health emergency, the “asymmetric rivalry” between the US and China, the regional powers of Northeast Asia, has been a focus of attention in IPE studies. The reason for the asymmetry is that China’s nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2019 is at 66 percent of the US, while the US defense budget for 2021 is 740.5 billion USD, about three times that of China.⁵ Nevertheless, the US National Defense Authorization Act appropriated 2.2 billion USD for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative to confront China in fiscal year 2021 (Lee Tae-kyu 2020). The question is whether the US and China are indeed competing for hegemony. For example, the US and China are not competing to provide a vaccine that prevents COVID-19 infection. In other words, the US-China competition is not a hegemony competition in that they are not competing to make the COVID-19 vaccine a global public good. As we enter the COVID-19 era, we may be witnessing the dawn of a period of “interregnum” in which hegemony is absent.

Of the two components of hegemony, coercion and consent, the latter is not found in the ongoing US-China rivalry. The competition is proceeding in three forms: First, there is a dispute over who is responsible for the spread of the novel coronavirus. On September 22nd, 2020, President Trump called COVID-19 the “Chinese virus” at the U.N. General Assembly. He argued that China caused the global pandemic by not closing its borders in the early days of the COVID-19 spread. Trump further claimed that China is in control of the WHO, an organization that otherwise could have become a producer of the global, universal norms in the COVID-19 era. In July, President

Trump announced his intention to withdraw from the WHO. At the same U.N. General Assembly, Chinese President Xi Jinping opposed politicizing COVID-19 and mentioned the WHO’s leadership role without pointing fingers at the United States. He also added that China would seek neither hegemony nor power expansion (Hwang Joon-beom 2020). The US blamed China for the spread of COVID-19 to keep the rising hegemon in check, but China responded that it would not pursue hegemony. The incoming Biden administration has stated that the US will return to the WHO and restore US leadership on the international stage, *i.e.*, hegemony, after it comes to power.

Second, from a military perspective, the US-China confrontation has been intensifying through COVID-19. Before the spread of COVID-19, the US withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), signed with Russia as a precursor to the dismantling of the Cold War in 1987. The breakdown of a nuclear arms control regime will inevitably lead to capability competition among the nuclear states, including the US, Russia, and China. Such is the reason why the metaphor of entering the New Cold War era is appearing. In August 2020, the US began imposing sanctions on Chinese businesses and individuals who participated in the Chinese military base construction in the South China Sea. China is confronting the US’s declaration that China’s claim to territorial rights in the South China Sea is unlawful. Thus, the possibility of a military conflict in China’s South China Sea region is also increasing. There is a vicious cycle in the China-claimed territorial waters over which the US dispatches destroyers and reconnaissance aircraft, and China launches anti-ship ballistic missiles. The US-China conflict in the South China Sea is an example of the absence of an institutional mechanism to coordinate international political disputes. Rather than seeking US-China cooperation, the US is trying to form an East Asian version of NATO through the so-called “QUAD,” a security dialogue forum between the US, Japan, Australia, and India. If this initiative materializes, the US-China rivalry will take on distinctive aspects of the ideological confrontation that existed during the Cold War.

⁴ For the emergence of a world state in the Hobbesian “international state of nature,” see Beitz (1999).

⁵ At the National People’s Congress held in May 2020, China was expected to make a 9% increase in consideration of the US-China conflict but decided at 6.6%, which is lower than the 7.5% increase from the previous year.

Third, the US and China are engaged in a discourse demarcating a geopolitical imagination that produces amity and enmity in justifying their strategy for their preponderance of power (Ó Tuathail 1998, 7-9). Amid the COVID-19 spread in May 2020, the US administration submitted the “United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China” report to Congress.⁶ The report draws upon the reflection of having engaged China since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1979 but underestimating the Chinese Communist Party’s resolve to restrict China’s political and economic reforms. The report summarized that China poses three challenges to the United States: “Economic Challenges”; “Challenges to Our Values”; and “Security Challenges.” This report, in effect, declared an ideological war with China in defense of American values. In October 2017, the CPC National Congress declared to develop into a “great modern socialist country” by 2050. It is a pre-emptive declaration of war to emerge as a hegemon, with leadership in the overall state power and international influence (Sungkyun Institute of China Studies, Sungkyunkwan University 2018). In December 2017, shortly after the CPC National Congress, the US described China and Russia as “revisionists” that challenged the liberal international order, not as “partners” as indicated during the Obama administration (White House 2017).⁷ The Chinese response to the strategy report was the revival of “a new model of major-country relations,” which Beijing proposed to back in 2014 to counter the Obama administration’s rebalancing policy. The CPC National Congress lowered the tone to “a new type of international relations” in 2017, but after the China Strategy Report prompted China to present US-China bilateral relations based on non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation. China’s position indicated a return to the new model of major-country relations.

⁶ For the full report, see White House (2020). For Korean translation and commentary by Korea Institute for Defense Analysis, see Korea Institute for Defense Analysis (2020).

⁷ In June 2019, against China’s regional initiative “One Belt and One Road,” the US Department of Defense published the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report that defines the Chinese Communist Party as a threat to the US (Department of Defense 2019).

Fourth, the United States and China have been warring over trade, technology, and currency concerns since before the COVID-19 outbreak. China is challenging the hegemony of the US dollar through the internationalization of the Chinese Yuan. The US is pushing for the restructuring of global value chains to deter China from challenging its technological hegemony (Bae Young-ja 2020; Lee Yong-wook 2020). The US Department of Commerce imposed sanctions prohibiting China’s leading I.T. company, Huawei, from trading with virtually all the world’s semiconductor companies. It was a measure to prevent the supply of semiconductor chips produced with US technology to Huawei. Under the National Defense Authorization Act for F.Y. 2021, the US has to review its weapons and troops deployment related to countries that use communications equipment from Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE (Lee Tae-kyu 2020). Although the competitive protectionism of both countries partly intensified the Great Depression of the 1930s, the US and China continue to pursue competitive protectionism even in the COVID-19 era. In preparation for the formation of a new global value chain, the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee held in October 2020 adopted the idea of “dual circulation” in its 14th five-year plan, starting in 2021, with a heavy emphasis on technological independence and self-reliance, the main role of the domestic market and supporting role of the international market (Lee Sang-man 2020). The deepening decoupling of the US and China in the wake of COVID-19 will lead to a war between two camps over the global value chain. An example would be the Economic Prosperity Network (EPN), an anti-China economic alliance put forth by the Trump administration.⁸

⁸ COVID-19 is causing economic crisis unevenly. The International Monetary Fund warns emerging markets and developing countries of a possible debt crisis due to COVID-19 (IMF 2020). For the possibility of a debt crisis in low- to mid-income countries amid the US-China rivalry, see Haggard (2020).

Geopolitical changes and South Korea's position

It remains to be seen whether the asymmetrical US-China rivalry unfolding in the COVID-19 era will lead to catastrophe, as when WWII broke out after the Great Depression of the 1930s. It would not be reasonable for the US and China to wage a mutually destructive war between nuclear states. In particular, China has been the biggest beneficiary of the international capitalist order in the post-WWII period and the less powerful of the two. Thus, it would seem impossible for China to choose to deny that order (Park Hong-seo 2020, 54-71). Probably it is why China has proposed "co-opetition" (cooperation and competition) and the United States "competition without catastrophe," respectively (Ying 2020; Campbell and Sullivan 2019). Under the international order in the post-COVID-19 era, the "status quo" is predicted to feature the US-China conflict intensifying in all directions.⁹

For Korea, the problem is that the US-China conflict will be limited broadly to the Indo-Pacific (Campbell and Sullivan 2019) and narrowly to East Asia. Another problem lies with the new Biden administration's policy toward China. With East Asia emerging as a key place for geopolitical competition, the Biden administration will differ in form and method from the Trump administration in restoring American leadership, but not on the "China threat" theory (Lee Hye-jung 2020, 9-11). The new administration's return to multilateralism can provide South Korea with opportunity. However, Biden's value diplomacy that promotes political, military, and economic links with existing alliances will still become a burden to South Korea. In particular, Washington's "alliance of values" policy is likely to strengthen China's checks against South Korea, which will come to mediate the Korean Peninsula peace process. Korea could take lessons from Australia, which faces China's pressures by participating in the QUAD despite its high economic dependence on China. In terms of the value chain, the dependence of Korean exports on China is decreasing.

⁹ Other alternatives include "Fortress City and New Middle Ages," "Pax Americana II," "Pax Sinica," and "Pax Universalis" (Moon 2020).

Against this backdrop, Korea signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP), which consists of Korea, China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the ASEAN in November 2020. South Korea is also participating in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), to which the Biden administration will be returning. Both the RCEP and CPTPP will likely widen South Korea's choice in the new competition for value chains.

In the context of the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent strengthening of geopolitical competition, South Korea could choose from the following: bandwagoning with the US; balancing through cooperation with China; keeping equidistance between the US and China; maintaining the status quo; or seeking an autonomous space through inter-Korean cooperation. There are two issues to be considered regarding the future direction of South Korea's foreign policy in the COVID-19 era. One is whether security and peace, the components of geopolitics, will overlap with the economic sphere when it comes to the Korean Peninsula situation. The other is whether South Korea can create alternative international norms to induce US-China cooperation as a middle-power.

Post-COVID-19 human security and sustainable peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula

In this chapter, we will review the regional security-economic complex (RSEC) at the post-COVID-19 level in East Asia by adding the concept of "value chain" to the Copenhagen school's RSC theory to examine expansion and change in the security concepts of the post-Cold War era, giving rise to the "human security" perspective. Approaching geopolitical changes in East Asia under the concept of human security, which has recently attracted attention against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate crisis, and food crisis will have two important implications. One is to look at the attempts to socially construct the security-related, political, and economic realities of the Korean Peninsula and East Asia with the

human security discourses of South Korea that reflect the current pandemic situation. The purpose is to see the influence of the US-China rivalry centering around East Asia in these discourses, including the regional countries' response to these powers, and their "socialization" process. The other is to prepare for the reactivation of the Korean peninsula peace process, an unsolved challenge from the traditional security perspective that strongly influences the reality of the East Asian context despite the rise of the human security approach. Tensions and issues that arise from applying the human security and traditional security approaches will be identified to clarify the characteristics of the RSEC.

Next, we will briefly outline the human security approach that emerged in the post-Cold War era and explain the concept of the "inter-Korean community of life," the Korean government's discourse for peace and coexistence during the COVID-19 Pandemic era. This study examines the comprehensive security, cooperative security, and human security approaches raised under the East Asian context, and reviews these security concepts under the changing security environment of the pandemic for the Korean Peninsula's resumption of the peace process.

The rise of the human security approach after the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a global supply chain crisis, nationalist responses to the global health crisis, and an absence of international leadership in public goods provision. Subsequently, the pandemic fueled regression in the movement toward globalization, a regression that began before the pandemic. It has also intensified inequality in an already polarized world, which is also in contradiction to globalization. The debt crisis and humanitarian crises, including food security and health security, hit underdeveloped countries particularly hard. After the pandemic breakout, the world faced an unprecedented cross-border threat to essential needs, such as life quality, safety, health, and socio-economic

stability, which individuals should be entitled to at the minimum level. The world is seeking new ideas, approaches, and action plans for key concepts and values related to security, peace, everyday life, and the ecological environment.

With the COVID-19 crisis underway, it is difficult to accurately gauge the breadth and depth of the pandemic's impact on the operation of existing domestic politics and the international order as well as changes in the norms, systems, and ideas that enable such operation. Nevertheless, a new pandemic or climate crisis could be our "new normal" in the future. It will change the way people think about and act regarding the state, security, peace, development, and other issues. People will also change how they perceive and approach international society, inter-state relations, individuals and communities, government-level security, and politico-economic situations, which will cause the social construct of the existing "region" to change.¹⁰ As the pandemic is creating a direct change to regions around the world, likewise, East Asia and the Korean Peninsula are experiencing a transition to a "Quarantine State" that puts prevention efforts at the top of national policy to build social resilience against pandemic shock and secure a sustainable development model. Even if being a "Quarantine State" is only a temporary status, such a transition could expand the security concept from traditional security to non-traditional security and human security. Moreover, it could lead to changes in the concept, road map, and sequence of peacebuilding in considering new approaches suitable to the new normal.

The "global" character of international politics has expanded and deepened through historical changes and geographical, cultural expansions of the international political realities. In the process, researchers of the

¹⁰ For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has made all the countries change their policy priorities to infectious disease control first, and to social, economic, and cultural recovery thereafter. The concept of "Quarantine State" is presented in relation to the change in the form of national strategy and policy change. As for the two Koreas' transition into such states, see Koo Gab-woo et al. (2020a)

international political order and international relations (IR) have raised questions since the 1990s based on experiences in various historical and cultural contexts that are not limited to Western Europe's history, political ideas, and theoretical traditions. The researchers drew from pluralistic theoretical traditions of the non-Western regions and countries to explore the phenomena, concepts, theories, and cases in international relations (Acharya and Buzan 2019). The "global" IR recognizes the complex and diverse foundations of IR studies, utilizes world history in pursuing pluralistic universalism as a theoretical base, and redefines existing IR theories and methods. Moreover, the global IR builds new theories and methods from societies previously not included in the IR knowledge production process. In rejection of all ethnocentrism and exceptionalism, and encompassing materialistic elements and ideological elements, the global IR seeks to broadly recognize agentivity by identifying new agendas and expanding research scope (Acharya and Buzan 2010; Acharya 2014; Eun Yong-soo 2016; 2020). In terms of methodology, "global" IR combines interdisciplinary research and regional research approaches, paying close attention to "regions," "regionalism," and "regional order" in the history, conceptualization, and theorization of world politics.

Such interest in the "region" is primarily related to the specific application of universal theories in explaining the international political order and international politics, particularly in the non-Western region, such as Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. By exploring history, cultural contexts, international political patterns, expansion of ideas and norms, complex and multi-layered cross-sections among civilizations of the region that were considered secondary or "residual" in understanding the overall world politics, the interest in "region" provides an understanding of regionalism and regional order that are not reducible to the existing European-centered model (Acharya 2014). The RSEC perspective is applied to explore geopolitical changes in post-COVID-19 East Asia. Such a comprehensive view of world politics is used as a baseline to track down the anarchic structure, polarity, social relationships, economic structures, and interactions

according to the distribution of power among various actors within and outside the "boundaries" of the region. The concept of security here is in line with the Copenhagen school's concept of "securitization" that emphasizes the political process of the social formation of security issues. The "securitization" concept is concerned with how a society selects an issue from the competing social agendas as a theme of "threat" and makes resource allocation decisions (Buzan et al. 1998, 23-25; Min Byeong-Won 2012, 217). The viewpoint of exploring the construction process of what areas and issues are "securitized" as the main agendas of a given society or region also explains the changes in social and historical contexts of the post-Cold War era in which the human security approach has emerged.

The constructivist approach is applied to study the security concept. The global IR approach is applied to deepen the IR studies' "inclusivity" in terms of history, theory, and analysis under a global context. As a whole, the concept of human security is meaningful in that it is the most recent attempt at changing the object of security from the state (in the sense of traditional security) to human beings and individuals and expanding its scope to non-traditional and non-military aspects. Most notably, Amitav Acharya provides a critically important analysis in understanding human security, especially from the Asian context, by presenting historical contexts and points of debate in the formation and proliferation of norms in the non-Western context (Acharya 2001). Regarding the Asian context, Acharya pointed out the influence of the traditional understanding of security, the emphasis on cultural particularity, and a relatively large number of "non-liberal politics." He further analyzed the prospects of the human security concept in the Asian context based on how they respond to ideas related to the existing security concepts and their implementations (Acharya 2001, 443). After pointing out that the human security concept is compatible in the Asian context by demonstrating the Asian "roots" of human security, Acharya analyzed the tolerance of existing security discourses and human security concepts within the region, such as comprehensive security and cooperation security.

Acharya highlighted how the discussions that happened before the 1994 report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) included non-military threats for the sake of “security for the people” within the concept of human security. The discussions sought to move away from the traditional security perspective of approaching the state as a single entity by looking at the peace and security of individual lives within the state, and include the following: the debate on the disarmament-development nexus of the late 1980s; the “gun or butter” debate; South Asian development economist Mahbub ul Haq’s seven components of human security, which are economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, political security. (Acharya 2001, 444-445). On the other hand, Acharya pointed to the difference between a needs-oriented approach in Asia shared by Japan and Thailand and a right-oriented approach in the West led by Canada and Norway. Asian countries were concerned about human security and human rights issues being raised together and linked with humanitarian intervention. Acharya noted that the 1990’s economic crisis created severe humanitarian needs and led Asia to view human security in terms of good governance, environmentally sustainable development, and social safety net building. (Acharya 2001, 448). Acharya highlighted the complementary and evolutionary process of the two aspects with regards to Amartya Sen’s argument for the essential linkage of the two components of human security, which are “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want” (Acharya 2001, 450).

Acharya effectively explains human security through a comparative analysis of Asia’s existing security discourses: individual security, comprehensive security, cooperative security, and traditional national security. The difference in the concepts is primarily determined by whether the interest as the object of security lies in the state or individual and whether the threat includes physical violence and non-military issues beyond it. It also depends on the degree of deterrence against threats and the degree of emphasis on civil society’s roles. Human security shares the extensive aspects of comprehensive security to

include non-military threats (“attention to threat”). Still, it differs in viewing individuals or states as the object of security (“attention to unit”) (Acharya 2001, 453, 455). Moreover, human security has common ground with cooperative security or common security in mitigating the usage of deterrence against threats and emphasizing civil society’s roles. On the other hand, human security differs in that it does not necessarily opt for multilateralism.

In the “new normal” situation of the pandemic crisis, Acharya addresses possible tension and contradiction between cooperative security and human security in the Asian context to explain cooperative security and its European predecessor, common security (Acharya 2001, 456). As such, Acharya’s analysis is meaningful in understanding and forecasting how the human security concept will expand as a norm in the region. In discussing the implications of the concept of human security for the promotion of cooperative security in the Asia-Pacific region, Acharya points out that the multilateral principle of “inclusiveness” that cooperative security emphasizes contradicts the vision of “value-sharing (of like-mindedness)” (Acharya 2001, 456). According to Acharya, human security, which emphasizes universal solidarity of the same value, can be a “potentially divisive ideological tool.” In contrast, cooperative security, which forms a broad coalition with various security areas (including non-traditional security agendas such as environmental, ecological, and demographic phenomena), is inherently non-ideological. More specifically, Asia’s regional cooperative mechanisms, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), did not include multilateral security commitments on human rights of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (Acharya 2001, 456-457).

The concept of human security raises a dilemma in its actual implementation because it implies a head-to-head confrontation with state sovereignty by placing all human beings and individuals as the object of security. Acharya sums up the 1990’s debate related to human security

concepts in the Asian context (Acharya 2001, 458). He further linked the issue of maintaining a balance in the antagonistic effect of the “comprehensiveness” principle of cooperation security and the homogeneous “value-sharing” of human security with an outlook for expansion as a regional norm along with institutionalization. The concept has evolved in the way that Acharya has described it since the 2000s. Lee Hye-jeong and Park Ji-beom (2013) trace the changes in the human security concept in the reports submitted by the UNDP (1994), Commission on Human Security (2003), UNESCO (2008), and the UN Secretary-General (2010, 2012). Lee and Park also review the object of security and the scope of issue areas. They examine how state sovereignty was recognized in reality in terms of its role as the security provider and how the state coordinated and prioritized the policy execution process for the vast number of objects of security. The human security norm justified restricting humanitarian intervention and state sovereignty in the 1990s. It continued to spread and further transform in the 2000s, evolving into a direction of being compatible and compromising the concept of state sovereignty.

Regarding this study’s focus, we examined the transformation and acceptance of the human security concept in the regional context of Europe, Africa, America, and Asia. We found the regional differences in the sub-components of human security to be complementing each other, but tensions arise in the actual implementation process. They include the following: “freedom from physical violence and military threats”; “freedom from poverty and hunger”; political security and economic security; humanitarian intervention and non-interference in domestic affairs; aid and effectiveness (Lee Hye-jung, Park Ji-beom 2013, 30). In particular, Asia is noted for being home to both donor and recipient countries, having the interests of both northern and southern hemispheres, and having no single understanding of the concept of human security compared to other regions (Lee Hye-jeong and Park Ji-beom 2013, 25). When it comes to opposing non-interference in domestic affairs and the infringement of national sovereignty, Asia maintains the same position

as other regions, which can be a part of the Asian characteristics of the human security concept.

The international community is yet to agree upon the human security concept in terms of theory and practice. The future challenges to be addressed include the following: the responsibility of national sovereignty and non-interference principles; consideration for objective and material elements under traditional security; reconciliation tension between new subjects and objects of security, and expansion and deepening of the scope. Despite the change in the concept of security in the post-Cold War era, traditional elements and approaches of the security concept still exist. The reality requires the answering of various questions: How should the traditional and non-traditional elements of the new security concept be balanced? How should the dilemma between coherence and applicability of the concept be resolved in the expansion process? (Min Byeong-won, 228-232). Moreover, the Westphalian model of the West features modern sovereign states and anarchy as their organizing principle. In Asia, the presence of polities that lack mutual recognition of sovereignty and a complex state of anarchy raise a threat at the “existential dilemma” level surrounding the issue of diplomatic recognition. Given Asia’s regional context, it is highly likely that Asia will continue to show a regional preference for norms such as the non-interference principle.

Next, based on this regional understanding of the human security approach, we will review the characteristics and issues of response to the changing geopolitical changes in East Asia, centered on the concept of the “inter-Korean community of life” within the South Korean government’s peaceful coexistence principle for the post-COVID-19 era.

Pandemic prevention, recovery, and sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula: “the inter-Korean community of life”

The implications of COVID-19 on the Korean Peninsula peace process include urgency and persuasiveness in the new security approaches that the pandemic requires and new demands and attempts for a new peace discourse and response. The Korean Peninsula peace process may be promoted through new logic, approaches, and alternative solutions, including the following efforts: defining new concepts of security in the pandemic era; and pursuing sustainable development through health security, food security, and overcoming poverty and inequality, which are the issues that the traditional security perspective has failed to address. Since the pandemic set in, the South Korean government has placed much emphasis on framing the concept of the Korean peninsula, such as the “inter-Korean community of life,” “community of peace,” “health community,” and “Northeast Asia cooperation initiative for infectious disease control and public health.” These concepts are new policy proposals for a phased implementation to realize stable peace on the Korean Peninsula as well as alternatives to restarting the deadlocked inter-Korean relations and peace process reflecting the changed geopolitical situation in the post-COVID-19 era.¹¹ Meanwhile, in the process of reconstructing solutions to difficulties relating to the Korean Peninsula peace process, it is also necessary to consider issues relating to the approaches of non-traditional security and human security that the COVID-19 pandemic deepens, which exist in tension with the alternatives that the existing traditional security approach proposed.

The year 2020 could be regarded as a starting point of global change that divides time into “Before Corona” and “After Corona.” Inter-Korean relations in the COVID-19 era have faced the urgent need to resolve the crisis from the traditional security perspective, and new issues have

arisen that need to be approached from non-traditional security and human security perspectives. First of all, both South and North Korea, like other countries around the world, faced a transition into a “Quarantine State” that placed top policy priorities in controlling coronavirus and seeking a new sustainable recovery from the pandemic shock. Next, the two Koreas, which share borders, each took infectious disease control measures to fight the novel coronavirus’s influx and spread. They faced a threat from the border-transcending infectious disease as well as a challenge to the universal values of human life and humanitarianism. Furthermore, East Asia, a key battleground for the US-China rivalry, underwent geopolitical changes, against a backdrop in which the two Koreas faced the dilemma of pursuing post-Cold War, post-divisional, and post-hegemonic peaceful co-existence and sustainable development at the same time.

What implications will the new security concept have in constructing peace and cooperation on the Korean Peninsula and East Asia against these multi-layered and overlapping challenges? We will review the “inter-Korean community of life” initiative proposed to reconstruct inter-Korean relations and the Korean peninsula peace process. We will then discuss the meaning of and issues related to the inter-Korean community of life, which is a concept developed from the human security concept, concerning a phased plan for peaceful coexistence on the Korean Peninsula.

In a video keynote speech at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2020, President Moon Jae-in proposed launching a Northeast Asia cooperation initiative for infectious disease control and public health, linked to infectious disease control and public health cooperation efforts on the Korean peninsula (Cheong Wa Dae 2020a). Since the beginning of the year, the South Korean government has presented the concept of human security and the “inter-Korean community of life” as keywords for advancing relations and cooperation between the two Koreas (Cheong Wa Dae 2020b). The concepts of human security and the “inter-Korean community of life” were introduced from above. This introduction came as a

¹¹ For the health community and health security community on the Korean Peninsula, see Shin Young-jeon (2020a); Cho Han-beom (2020); and Cheon Woo-taek (2018).

“Korean version” of peace discourse in response to the global emergency, instead of being based on the well-established existing debate at the academic and policy levels.¹² Nevertheless, the concept of the inter-Korean community of life provided a vague but future-oriented vision as a view of continuing the peace process while responding to changes in the security environment of Korean society, which has been hit hard by the pandemic. Apart from the inter-Korean community of life being a form of peace-seeking rhetoric in the face of the real-life challenges of the pandemic, it can be said that the two Koreas dealt with the already deadlocked inter-Korean relations by opening discussions on the conditions, issues, and policy alternatives for realizing the concepts of human security and a community of life.

First of all, the most meaningful discussion regarding the inter-Korean community of life includes the domestic and foreign concerns about the food security and energy security situations of North Korea during the pandemic, the necessity for the international community and South Korea to cooperate on humanitarian assistance matters, and raising the issue of easing the UN sanctions regime on North Korea. Kee B. Park, a Korean American physician who has engaged in exchange and cooperation with North Korean counterparts through visits to North Korea since the 2000s, advocates for the international support of health security and food security issues through humanitarian assistance to and public health cooperation within North Korea (Park and Kim 2020). Park recently suggested that President-elect Biden’s first move to express humanitarian “goodwill” for the prevention of the pandemic through “COVID diplomacy” would catalyze the resumption of stalled nuclear negotiations between the US and North Korea (Park 2020). Based on his experience in medical assistance and networking activities in North Korea, Park pointed out that the humanitarian programs

of UN specialized agencies and international NGOs can hardly function under the pandemic and the current UN sanctions regime. Pointing out this reality, the worst cases of which resulted in a few organizations choosing to withdraw from North Korea, Park strongly called for revising the sanctions regime (Park and Kim 2020).

From 2016 to 2017, the UN adopted the new sanctions regime to counter North Korea’s series of nuclear and missile tests. The UN sanctions regime created a synergy with the country sanctions of the United States, Japan, China, and South Korea in causing severe obstacles to the livelihood of North Korean peoples. North Korea’s challenges were most pronounced in agricultural production, and the prospects of DPRK humanitarian projects turned dim (Smith 2020a; 2020b; Zadeh-Cummings and Harris 2020; White 2020). COVID-19 has caused a sharp decrease to a near-discontinuation of trade between North Korea and China, which has been on the decline since 2018 due to the strengthening of the sanctions regime (Choi Jang-ho 2020; Hong Je-hwan 2020; Lee Je-hoon 2020; Hahm Ji-ha 2020). “Water-tight infectious disease control” may be a rational choice for North Korea, which lacks health care and medical supplies. However, there are concerns about human security, including health security and food security, incurred by the adverse effects of a prolonged blockade that would lead to an economic slowdown, particularly in the economies of underdeveloped countries in the southern hemisphere (World Economic Forum 2020; Park 2020). The robust sanctions regime created a negative spiral with North Korea’s control system to block all forms of humanitarian assistance and cooperation that could otherwise have provided health security and food security, directly linked to people’s freedom to lead a life with dignity. North Korea’s situation sheds further light on and provides a fundamental reflection on the importance of reigniting the humanitarian responsibility of South Korea and international society.¹³

¹² For a review of the official rhetoric of the Moon Jae-in government’s peace policy, such as the new Korean Peninsula regime, the Korean Peninsula peace community, and the living community, and analysis of theoretical and academic approaches on the main concepts, see Cho Han-beom et al. (2020) and Lee Nam-ju and Lee Jeong-cheol (2020).

¹³ As many international NGOs and UN professional organizations report, the UN Security Council’s “humanitarian exemption” process was shortened to 2-3 weeks for approval

Hazel Smith, in particular, criticized the ethics, effectiveness, and proportionality of UN sanctions on North Korea under the pandemic, calling for international NGOs and humanitarian assistance groups to demonstrate a community-wide interest in abolishing them (Smith 2020a; 2020b). The sanctions regime turned out to be anti-humanitarian and harmful. Strong reflection and criticisms were raised regarding the irreversible effects upon the regime, which was established before but imposed during the pandemic. The severe anti-humanistic consequences were also revealed in the long-term sanction regimes of the US against countries such as Iraq and Iran. Joy Gordon shed light on 13 years of US-led sanctions on Iraq, which resulted in human sacrifices that would not have happened were it not for the UNSC sanctions committee (Gordon 2010). Gordon presents a shocking estimate of 660,000 to 880,000 deaths of infants under the age of five and under, which took place during the sanctions regime (Democracy Now 2010). Kee B. Park pointed out that the tragedy caused by Gordon's sanctions on Iraq is being repeated in North Korea now, raising concerns about the impact of sanctions under the pandemic to vulnerable populations, including women and children and different genders.

In South Korea, proposals for infectious disease control and health cooperation at the peninsula level continued in the context of the pandemic situation, based on the agenda of cooperation between the two Koreas in health care, forests, and disaster preparedness agreed upon in

the 2018 Panmunjom Declaration (Shin Young-jeon 2020a; Shin Young-jeon 2020b; Cho Han-beom 2020; Cheon Woo-taek 2018). In particular, Seoul linked the agenda for inter-Korean infectious disease control and health care cooperation with its proposal of a cooperative body covering the Korean Peninsula and neighboring East Asia. The proposal was also made in conjunction with its public diplomacy efforts through "*K-Bangyeok* (Korea's response to COVID-19)," which achieved positive results in the initial response to the spread of the pandemic (Cheong Wa Dae 2020b; Lee Jung-geun 2020). The South Korean government led the launch of the Group of Friends of Solidarity for Global Health Security on May 12th, emphasizing the principle of multilateral cooperation in fighting the pandemic. At the July ambassadorial video conference, South Korea also coordinated the group's joint remarks made at the UN Security Council's high-level open debate on "Pandemics and Security" held on July 2nd and organized a side event during the high-level session of the UN General Assembly in September (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020a; 2020b). The United Nations Group of Friends of Solidarity for Global Health Security is a platform that promotes multilateral responses to the health and security threats, along with the Support Group for Global Infectious Disease Response (G4IDR) and the Group of Friends for Solidarity and Inclusion with Global Citizenship Education (GCED). Based on its internal achievements, the South Korean government has emphasized its leadership role in forming global multilateral solidarity on infectious disease control efforts (Park Se-yeon 2020; Lee Dong-hwan 2020).

In this context, the South Korean government's concept of the "inter-Korean community of life," in conjunction with the concept of human security, poses two major issues to the discussion on a new peace process that reflects geopolitical changes in East Asia. As seen in the review of the human security concept in the Asian context, one is a possible clash between existing discourse and human security-based proposals on analysis and solution of denuclearization on the Korean peninsula and establishing a peace regime. Previously, North Korea (and China) and the US (and South Korea) engaged in hostile competition

after applications in the pandemic situation. However, international organizations' humanitarian projects such as COVID-19 aid and other medical, hygienic, and nutritional support are experiencing long-term delays due to the overlapping bureaucracy in the presence of UN sanctions as well as unilateral sanctions by the United States. Above all, the sanctions regime does not allow cash remittance to North Korea. Therefore even if an organization obtained exemption approval on its project, it did not withdraw funds due to fear that the bank where the accounts are held will be sanctioned by the US State Department when money is remitted to an account in North Korea (Park 2020, White 2020, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2020). In addition, the COVID-19 assistance project in North Korea was delayed considerably due to an early breakdown in the supply chain and difficulties in long-distance transportation.

based on the Korean Armistice Agreement and ROK-US Mutual Defense Treaty. When Pyongyang developed its nuclear program, the two sides began negotiations for denuclearization in return for the establishment of a peace regime. As such, the Korean Peninsula peace process has a characteristic of aiming for common security and interdependence, fundamentally going beyond all hostile and friendly relationships. The Korean Peninsula peace process is closely related to interdependence inside the Korean Peninsula and the security system at the East Asian level. It will lead to changes in regional security amid the US-China competition for hegemony, which is comparable to the transition to the post-war San Francisco system. In other words, the peace process on the Korean Peninsula reaches out to both friends and enemies. It is a process of institutionalizing multilateral security guarantees as well as a system of interdependence that includes various security agendas. It is worth noting that the “value sharing” and homogeneity implied in the concept of human security may conflict with the “comprehensiveness” for multilateralism and cooperative security.

The other is the possibility of tensions between various security areas within the broad conceptualization of human security. Formulated through the 1994 UN Development Program report, the concept of human security questions the state’s threat to individual security and encompasses a wide range of issues in various aspects that constitute personal security. It emphasizes the international community and non-governmental actors’ role in safeguarding individual security while also revealing its limitations of overlooking the state’s role in reality as an essential security provider in various fields. Suppose one would review human security within the “inter-Korean community of life” discourse during the pandemic era, then multiple policy alternatives from various perspectives, some even contradictory, such as economic security, political security, “freedom from want,” and “freedom from fear,” could be presented. In the context of the Korean Peninsula, the application of human security perspectives can be ultimately linked to the strong issue-raising of North Korean human rights, especially freedom and political rights, in terms of encompassing freedom

from want (overcoming poverty, addressing inequality, and promoting socio-economic development), along with freedom from fear (ensuring political freedom). If human security, a more universal perspective, is used in approaching the North Korean problem, it will provide a meaningful internal and external justification in restarting a peace process. On the other hand, there is also the possibility that the human security approach may clash with a North Korea that traditionally prioritizes sovereignty over human rights and other conflicts, showing the socialist system’s peculiarities in the discourse and practice of human rights.¹⁴

In particular, domestic and international disputes over the amendment of the Development of Inter-Korean Relations Act (which bans the launching of propaganda leaflets into North Korea) at the end of 2020 demonstrate the dilemma of applying the human security concept, which closely linked to values such as human rights, humanitarianism, and democracy (Lee Jae-ho 2020; Noh Seok-jo 2020). On the one hand, the concept of human security appeals to the international community's interest, responsibility, and cooperation against health security and food security threats and argues for “freedom from want.” On the other hand, the concept is used to criticize the infringement of political rights and democratic freedom in North Korea by emphasizing the “freedom from fear” inside North Korea, in the course of opposing the amendment of the act that regulates civil society organizations from creating a safety threat to residents in the border zone and elevates the tension in inter-Korean relations by sending out anti-DPRK leaflets to the North. In particular, emphasizing only certain aspects of the human security concept could only aggravate antagonistic conflict and distrust. It is due to the essential nature of the Korean Peninsula peace process, which recognizes differences in the region and between countries on human security, institutionalizes interdependence through common security and cooperative security with adversarial counterparts.

¹⁴ On the duality of the application of the human security concept in North Korea, see Cha Doo-hyun (2020).

Nevertheless, as the June 2020 statement of the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner indicated, the sanctions and pandemic raise a severe threat to economic rights and social rights in North Korea, especially in vulnerable groups such as women and children. The human security concern, which currently exists in its fullest reality in the North, brings out the fundamental question of when a response to the social and economic needs of human security should be made, if not now, and this is where the significant implications of the non-traditional security approach and the inter-Korean community of life initiative can be found. Also, the human security approach contributes to strengthening good governance in the DPRK assistance and cooperation projects in that it supports and facilitates the role of non-governmental organizations and international actors in presenting ideas and policy proposals for building a health community and life community on the Korean Peninsula.

In the final chapter, we will discuss the future direction of the peace process on the Korean Peninsula within the RSEC, based on geopolitical changes in East Asia in the post-COVID-19 era.

Peace on the Korean Peninsula and the role of South Korea in the Post-COVID-19 era

In 2018, the Moon Jae-in government resumed the Korean peninsula peace process, emphasizing the peace of “ordinary people” and “peace in daily life” as essential driving forces and directions of peace on the Korean peninsula (Cheong Wa Dae 2019a, 2019b). South Korea presented a “new Korean Peninsula regime” to end the past 100 years of modernization and embark on a new ideal of 100 years of peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula. In terms of methodology, Seoul presented “Peace Economy,” “Northeast Asia Plus Community of Responsibility (NAPCR),” and “New Southern Policy” to create an environment conducive to peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula as a mediator in the US-DPRK denuclearization talks, and as a party for peace on the

Korean Peninsula. However, the Korean Peninsula denuclearization peace process broke down at the 2019 Hanoi US-DPRK summit, failing to narrow the gap between the two sides on the phase, scope, and exchange methods for denuclearization and building a peace regime. As a mediator, the South Korean government failed to bring changes and compromise between the two sides and showed its limitation in substantively securing an autonomous space for inter-Korean relations. After the peace process deadlock of 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic created the New Normal in the global political and economic order of 2020. The Korean Peninsula came to face the challenge of institutionalizing peaceful coexistence with “friends” and “enemies” to overcome the long division of the Cold War in the face of the accelerated US-China rivalry.

Given the geopolitical structure where the mid- to long-term continuation of the US-China hegemony is anticipated, the East Asian order as a regional security-economic complex will have a meaningful impact on the future resumption of the Korean Peninsula peace process and South Korea’s strategy. At the same time, the US-China rivalry is not a fixed condition and is likely to change. The flexible situation will be impacted by the level of contribution by South Korea as a constituent of the RSEC in the region, or by how the two Koreas engage in cooperative relations, and by how they participate in the “social construction” for setting priorities for agendas and contribute to the formation and expansion of norms at the regional level. In other words, a regional country that plays an active role in the formation or dissemination of agendas in the specific issue areas related to regional security and economy may exercise a certain level of autonomy in impacting the structure of hegemony competition of the powers if the agentivity of a regional country that may not be a regional power is recognized, depending on its resistance to power politics in the region or its socialization responses (Acharya 2007), and such agentivity is secured not only based on material elements but also ideational and cultural aspects. To secure alternative capabilities for rebooting the currently stalled peace process on the Korean Peninsula, South Korea

should make efforts to work on the lessons of the existing peace process to develop a new security concept for the post-pandemic “New Normal” to apply them to the Korean Peninsula and East Asia.

There are three points to consider in restarting the post-COVID-19 peace process on the Korean peninsula. First, based on the reality of upgraded nuclear capability in North Korea since the end of 2017, South Korea needs to establish a cooperative interdependence relationship for the Korean Peninsula peace process between the two Koreas and East Asia. In other words, based on the rational judgment of the reality of North Korea's nuclear possession, South Korea should establish a perspective for building a mutual security guarantee between the two Koreas and develop “cooperative security” in the context of the Korean Peninsula, to overcome the existing national security paradigm and consider the security of one another (Lee Soo-hyeong 2014; Hong Min et al. 2020). Regarding the deadlocked US-DPRK process for denuclearization and a peace regime, South Korea needs first to advance the inter-Korean relations and create an environment for resolving nuclear problems in the mid- to long-term, to create an environment for simultaneously pursuing denuclearization and a peace regime in parallel.

Furthermore, Seoul needs to consider the establishment of an autonomous space through the development of inter-Korean relations as a driving force to a change for a breakthrough in the stalled peace process, and strategically opt for moderation management that does not heighten unnecessary military tensions in its deterrence response (Lee Soo-hyeong 2014, 113). In this regard, South Korea must emphasize arms control by exchanging mutual trust-building measures for the development of more stable and sustainable inter-Korean relations. Considering the difference in military power between the two Koreas,¹⁵ symmetrical or asymmetrical

disarmament or structural arms control is not likely to materialize. Therefore, the key point is to establish an arms control perspective to minimize the threat effect of political and military tensions on inter-Korean relations as a whole. Meanwhile, for arms control measures through trust-building measures to advance into disarmament and structural arms control between the two Koreas, they should be linked to disarmament or structural armament control measures at the Northeast Asian level (Lee Soo-hyeong 2017, 41). As a sub-regime of the East Asian security regime, the security reality on the Korean Peninsula requires South Korea to give strategic consideration to the structural linkage between the peace process on the Korean Peninsula and the security order in the region, especially in the context of geopolitical changes in the US-China hegemony competition. Ultimately, South Korea needs to form a mid- to long-term vision and roadmap that can contribute to the formation of “cooperative security” in the region.

Second, in response to the geopolitical change of the intensifying US-China rivalry, South Korea needs to develop multi-layered and complex security cooperation based on a comprehensive agenda to form “cooperative security” in East Asia from a mid- to long-term perspective. As mentioned above, instead of being buried within the task of resolving the North Korean nuclear issue and being bound by the stalemated denuclearization and peace process, South Korea needs to make efforts to capture and develop various opportunities for multilateral cooperation with the countries in the region, under the premise that the stability of inter-Korean relations will be promoted through arms control based on confidence-building measures that are developed on the realistic judgment of North Korea's nuclear capability. These multilateral cooperation efforts at the regional level will help secure an autonomous space in South Korea and the

¹⁵ In the military power index, which includes regular, reserve, and available forces, fighter planes, armored vehicles, submarines, destroyers, and purchasing power, South Korea ranks sixth in the world (fifth in Asia) and North Korea 25th in the world (14th in Asia), respectively (Global Fire Power 2020;

Hong Min et al. 2020, 21-22). Considering the qualitative aspects of North Korea's nuclear power and disarmament, South Korea could reject conventional weapons disarmament symmetrical to inter-Korean military forces or structural arms control, wherein North Korea could refuse asymmetric disarmament or structural armament control measures.

Korean Peninsula as one of the regional countries against the backdrop of power politics and hegemony competition in East Asia. In particular, in the pandemic situation, interest in global security and political economy increases in non-traditional security areas such as health crisis, food crisis, and climate crisis. In these areas, measures to materialize regional cross-border cooperation will help construct a regional security order through the participation of regional countries by managing military tensions in traditional security areas and concurrently conducting multilateralism in multi-layered security agendas.

Third, given the geopolitical changes and the change in the security perception triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, South Korea needs to promote humanitarian assistance and a development cooperation approach to promote peace and development concurrently from the human security perspective. As already confirmed, the characteristic of the regional “roots” of the human security concept related to congruence in the Asian context is the “freedom from want” with a focus on economic security.¹⁶ As a basis for an adequate living condition to secure dignity, human beings engage in activities to fight hunger and secure food security, water hygiene, health security, clean energy, and the environment. These activities are embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed upon by the United Nations in 2015 and are specified by country and region through the process of achieving the goals. The human security concept is implemented and reconstructed when the global norms of the UN SDGs are carried out in each country and region. As a member of the United Nations, the two Koreas are obliged to submit a voluntary national report (VNR) on the performance of sustainable development goals. Not only South Korea but also North Korea agreed to the UN Strategic Framework

2017-2021, which was developed according to the SDG norms. As such, North Korea is noted for its change of having constructed an internal development strategy in line with the SDG goals (Kim Ki-seop et al. 2020; Kim Tae-gyun 2019a). Against this backdrop, South Korea could consider a development cooperation approach for the mid- to long-term, implementing sustainable development objectives across the two Koreas to embrace global norms in the Korean Peninsula context (Moon Kyung-yeon 2019; Kim Tae-gyun 2019b; 2020). As a way of ensuring sustainability in the Korean Peninsula peace process, instead of advancing and retreating in the traditional security area, South Korea may consider an alternative, which is to advance in parallel multi-layered cooperation from the human security perspective that is not trapped in traditional security issues. Such an alternative may contribute to institutionalizing peace at the RSEC level. If the two Koreas develop joint efforts to realize universal global norms, considering their respective peculiar needs in terms of “Korean peninsula-specific SDGs,” they will contribute to building peace in connection with a “cooperation security” that constructs the regional security order from the perspective of cooperative interdependence with the others (Kim Tae-gyun 2020). From the perspective of the peace-development nexus, such initiatives can serve as a channel for regional agentivity in responding to geopolitical changes in the US-China rivalry by connecting the Korean peninsula, global and national strategy levels, and by converging and fusing traditional security with human security.

Conclusion

The two Koreas, like other countries around the world, are facing the following challenges: preventing the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak; preparing against and preventing a breakout of new infectious diseases after the current pandemic; recovering from the socio-economic shocks of COVID-19; and designing and implementing fundamental measures to improve the current mode of industrial development and distribution structure that has resulted in

¹⁶ Acharya emphasized the concept of congruence with the existing ideas, norms, and practices of the region, analyzing the reason for Europe’s success in the “cooperative security” adaptation of the “common security” concept and the failure of “constructive engagement” adaptation in “non-interference policy” (Acharya 2004).

the outbreak of an unpredictable pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic incurred and expedited the world's retreat from globalization, a flow that had already been underway before the pandemic, including a crisis of the global supply chain, a nationalistic response to the unprecedented global crisis of public health, and the lack of international leadership. It has also further aggravated polarized inequality, which is a result of globalization, and created pressure for debt repayment and the addressing of serious humanitarian crises such as food security and health security in underdeveloped countries. After the pandemic and its subsequent crises, the world will face common threats to basic life security, health and safety, and economic stability that human beings should be able to enjoy. Against this backdrop, the global community will have to seek new ideas, approaches, and practices to evaluate and find solutions for issues such as security, peace, socio-economic systems, the quality of daily life, the ecological environment, and essential human values.

North Korea is notably one of the most isolated countries in the world. Yet, North Korea participates in the global transition into a "Quarantine State." Such a phenomenon proves that the world faces a common security and peace agenda to protect the world from the novel coronavirus disease, irrespective of the systemic, regional, or socio-economic positions, or even cultural differences. After the pandemic, the concept of security could expand beyond traditional security to non-traditional security and human security. Such a new concept and approach to security can be applied on the Korean peninsula to coordinate and revamp a sustainable peace-building process. In particular, regarding the peace process of the Korean Peninsula's new activation, South Korea's challenges are not confined to prevention and socio-economic recovery measures at the domestic level. South Korea needs to reach out further at the Korean peninsula level to prepare and seek a consensus for peaceful co-existence, joint infectious disease control efforts, and economic recovery. Both Koreas will see a change in their systems at the national level, and it will depend on their infectious disease control responses. Regarding the inter-Korean relations in the post-COVID-19 era, the South and the North need to

consider the impact of such change at the inter-Korean cooperation level and the Korean peninsula level, which is a higher identity level compared to the government level. COVID-19 and its economic and social impacts may incur long-term responses, which in turn could deteriorate the pace of globalization and accelerate de-coupling, which are perhaps already underway. The transition in economic and social welfare policies will also bring changes to the national system. Therefore, South Korea should ask what changes will be required within the context of the existing goals, methods, priorities, and modes of the Korean Peninsula process for peace and prosperity.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the peace process on the Korean Peninsula in many ways. "Social distancing" in every space and area of Korean society deepened the contradictions accumulated in the stalled peace process. North Korea closed its borders for infectious disease control and refused foreign aid for flood recovery. Instead, the North responded to the deadlock situation vis-à-vis the US by pursuing a breakthrough based on self-reliance. Such a position is not likely to change without a fundamental improvement in the US-DPRK relations or confidence-building measures from the perspective of arms control. North Korea's "trilateral hardships" situation urgently requires humanitarian assistance and cooperation. However, the situation cannot initiate a re-evaluation of the causes and re-adjustment of policy, which are essential to restarting the Korean Peninsula peace process. Ultimately, the resumption of the post-COVID-19 peace process on the Korean peninsula is only possible by going back to the breakdown of the 2019 DPRK summit in Hanoi, reexamining the conditions required for stable progress in peace on the Korean Peninsula, but not fulfilling or reorganizing the alternatives.

Moreover, we find the implications of the pandemic on the Korean Peninsula peace process in the urgency and persuasiveness for a new approach to security caused by the pandemic as well as in changes such as the increase of efforts for a different peace discourse and response. New security approaches, represented by the concept of human security, can provide new catalytic contributions for

advancing a phased process for institutionalizing peace on the Korean Peninsula. The regional application of human security due to the changing perception of security could contribute to the formation of security-economic cooperation on the Korean Peninsula and in the region, keeping in mind the possibility of some contradictions with traditional security and tensions in setting the priorities inherent to the concept of human security itself. In the context of post-COVID-19 geopolitical changes in East Asia, South Korea will be able to contribute to constructing peace on the peninsula and the region through the following efforts: building cooperative and interdependent relations, and cooperation security between the Korean Peninsula and East Asia by taking the arms control perspective to manage politico-military tensions; developing multi-layered and complex security cooperation that encompasses various security agendas; and promoting mid- to long-term development cooperation that links peace and development through the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at the Korean Peninsula level.

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