

The Impact of pandemic on Korean Peninsula and East Asia

2020.10.12.~13.

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Table of Contents

Phenomena Emerging Due to the Pandemic

Impact on North Korea (1, 2)

Impact on the Situation in the Korean Peninsula

Impact on East Asia (1, 2, 3)

Phenomena Emerging Due to the Pandemic

- Phenomena that changed
 - (1) Non-face-to-face: proliferation of IT and AI
 - (2) Changes in the global value chain (GVC): switch from a global market to regional markets
 - (3) Strengthening of central government functions: dispersed individual freedom and market economy-centric to strengthening the roles of national functions, government budgets, etc.
- These phenomena are expected to be the trend even after the development of a vaccine and curative drugs.

Impact on North Korea (1)

- Pre-pandemic North Korea

- Before the collapse of the February 2019 Hanoi summit: promotion of changes with improved relations with the United States in mind
 - 2012–2017: Severed foreign relations and focused on the development of nuclear weapons (warheads and missiles); since the declaration of the completion of its nuclear program in November 2017, declared the improvement of relations with South Korea and the United States
 - Reform: socialist corporate responsibility management system—stipulated as the operation policy for the North Korean economy through a revision of the constitution in April 2019
 - Opening: designated four central special economic zones and 23 regional economic development zones
 - Advanced the 2016 five-year economic development strategy
- After the collapse of the Hanoi summit
 - After the adoption of a new way, a “frontal breakthrough strategy with the might of self-reliance” on December 31, 2019, started the switch to a path of self-reliance within North Korea
 - Severed relations with the United States and South Korea, strengthened relations with China and Russia (declared the enhancement of socialist solidarity)
 - Advocated for the sophistication of nuclear weapons and stated that nuclear weapons were no longer on the table for negotiations

Impact on North Korea (2)

- North Korea after the pandemic
 - Non-face-to-face
 - Closed all borders since January 2020
 - Voluntary ban on assemblies
 - Mandatory wearing of masks
 - Strengthening of epidemic prevention activities: emphasis on zero COVID-19 patients, Kim Jong Un's Personal Message stating "hardships President Moon Jae-in is facing..."
 - Changes in the GVC
 - Acceleration of the frontal breakthrough strategy with the might of self-reliance
 - Acknowledgment of the failure of the five-year economic development plan, declaration of the implementation of a new five-year economic development plan in 2021
 - Self-reliance to solve the energy problem—development of the C1 chemical industry
 - Self-reliance to solve the food problem—expansion of fertilizer factories and swift recovery from natural disasters
 - Strengthening of central government functions
 - Strengthening of border control—incident of a South Korean government officer being shot and killed in the Yellow Sea occurs
 - Control of the movement of residents—resurrection of the Party's administrative branch (jurisdiction of the State Security Department, Ministry of Social Security, prosecution, and judicial department)
 - Weakening of market functions, release of Head of State Special Funds

Impact on the Situation in the Korean Peninsula

- Efforts by the Moon Administration to encourage North Korea to come to the table
 - Explored reopening dialog such as a proposal for joint epidemic prevention repeatedly but North Korea has consistently not responded
 - Started from small trade and actively approved support for North Korea
 - Explored leads for the declaration of the end of the war
 - A statement by Kim Yo Jong (June 2020) served as a catalyst to heighten the mood for reconciliation once more: demands the abandoning of hostile policies toward North Korea and requests US-North Korea talks
 - UN speech by President Moon Jae In: proposal of a declaration of the end of the war on the Korean Peninsula
 - Occurrence of a sudden changing element: slowdown of the movement for reconciliation due to the occurrence of a South Korean government officer being shot and killed in the Yellow Sea
 - North Korea's pandemic response method (complete shut-down) had almost no effect
- Demands by the United States and China and Response by South Korea
 - Concern in South Korea of it's alienation due to changes in East Asian order through aggressive policies between both US and China
 - Too much confidence in South Korea's epidemic prevention results
 - Stubborn attachment to the pre-Hanoi summit methodology in spite of the changed environment after the collapse of the Hanoi summit

Impact on East Asia (1)

- Pre-pandemic world and East Asia
 - 15th century: change to a Euro-centric society
 - The Age of Discovery: attempts to connect Europe and East Asia (China)
 - China's challenges and setbacks (eight overseas expeditions by Admiral Zheng He of the Ming Dynasty)
 - Challenges of Europe and discovery of a new continent
 - 16th century onwards
 - Exchanges between the East and the West that connected Europe—the Pacific—East Asia
 - Establishment of a Euro-centric world order
 - Due to the presence of the Ottoman Empire, going around the Pacific was unavoidable for Europe's advancement into East Asia
 - 20th century: switch to a US-centric world after the Second World War and the Cold War
 - 21st century: rise of China and conflicts between the United States and China
 - China: reattempt to connect the continent (Belt and Road Initiative) and advancement into the Pacific (expansion of the second island chain)
 - United States: curbing Chinese strategy of connecting the continent and advancement into the Pacific

Impact on East Asia (2)

- Post-pandemic East Asia: acceleration of conflicts between the United States and China
 - (1) Non-face-to-face: closing of borders and respectively aiming for survival
 - China: acceleration of conquering the global market based on self-production capacity, market, IT, and AI technologies
 - Survival strategies of totalitarian states in East Asia and strengthening of solidarity with China
 - Roles and response of totalitarian states in the Middle East
 - (2) Changes in the GVC
 - United States
 - Composition of the development of an Indo-Pacific strategy and a new strategic solidarity
 - Relocation of production bases and blockade of China
 - China
 - Strengthening of movements for a continental solidarity that connects Europe—the Middle East—China
 - New approach for the Belt and Road Initiative (expansion of production bases to East Asian countries)

Impact on East Asia (3)

(3) Strengthening of the central government

- Results of COVID-19 measures of Western countries vs results of totalitarian-leaning East Asian countries

<Number of Deaths by COVID-19 per Million Population>

Many	Intermediate	Few
Belgium 861 England 690 Spain 609 Italy 581 Sweden 560 France 450 United States 456 Brazil 423	Germany 110 Denmark 106 Russia 93 Finland 60 Norway 48	China 3 (Hong Kong 1) Singapore 5 Vietnam 0.06 South Korea 6 Japan 8

*As of July 29, 2020 (statista)

<Respective Governments' Method of Response to COVID-19>

	Authoritarian	Interventionist	Libertarian
Pro-active response (Controllable)	China Vietnam	South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan	
Lax response (Minimum control)		Germany, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Japan	England, Sweden, Netherlands
Insufficient response (Uncontrollable)		France	United States, Brazil, Spain, Italy, Mexico

*Compiled by the author by referring to mass media reports, etc.

Will the US-China conflict develop into a new geopolitical East-West Cold War after the pandemic in East Asia?