



**CARNEGIE-TSINGHUA**  
CENTER FOR GLOBAL POLICY

---

Transcript

---

## CHINA IN THE WORLD PODCAST

Host: **Paul Haenle**

Guest: **Wang Dong**

Episode 18: Debunking the Myths of China's  
Perspective on North Korea (Part II)

March 25, 2014

**Haenle:** You're listening to the Carnegie-Tsinghua "China in the World" podcast, a series of conversations with Chinese and international experts on China's Foreign Policy, international role and China's relations with the world, brought to you from the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center in Beijing. I'm Paul Haenle, the Director of the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center and I'll be your host.

I'm talking with you today from the School of International Studies at Peking University, and I'm joined by my friend Doctor Wang Dong, Associate Professor at the School of International Studies and Director of the Center for Northeast Asian Strategic Studies. Wang Dong, thank you very much for joining us today.

**Wang:** Thank you, Paul, for inviting me.

**Haenle:** We would like to talk to you today to get your insights on recent developments on North Korea and what you think they might mean for China. Well, let's talk a little bit about China's diplomatic efforts. Currently, China's diplomatic relations with North Korea, at least in the recent past, we understand, have been handled by the International Department of the Party. But there has been some speculation in the press and in discussions that I've had with Chinese experts that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may be playing a greater role now, that there may have been a shift in terms of who is handling that issue. What do you think the possibility that this has taken place is? What would be the implications for that?

**Wang:** Well, I've heard about people, sort of, speculating that is happening, but to be very honest with you, I don't know what is really going on. But, from a scholarly point of view, as a scholar when I look at this I would say that to some extent, if you want to make sense of this perceived change, I would say it's because I think the Chinese leaders want to, I think, search for better coordination and have just have a more effective management of the policy issues. Because, the International Department...it's a party organization so it's not qualified to deal with other governments at the official level. So, that of course naturally limits to what extent in terms of internal policy their role. Their voices and opinions play a very important role but what about dealings with you know the United States, South Korea, Japan, Russia, and all other members of the international community? Because of the nature of the International Department, they cannot play or be as effective as the Foreign Ministry in dealing with other kind of powers. From that point of view, I would see this as a very natural process. If you were, you know, top leaders you naturally want to say, 'Ok, now I want the Foreign Ministry to now take up more responsibility in dealing with this issues.' But, I'm not suggesting this in terms of performance. I don't think we should read too much into that.

**Haenle:** Got it. Let's look a little bit at recent developments and events. While the annual U.S.-South Korea Joint Military drills were taking place, North Korea launched a series of short range ballistic missiles off its eastern coast, and they did this twice in the space of one week to express their discontent at the U.S.-South Korea exercises. One of these missiles barely missed, it was reported, a Chinese passenger jet flying its normal route from Tokyo to Shenyang. Is this a concern to China and the Chinese people? What was the reaction as you understand it in China to that particular incident?

**Wang:** Well, absolutely... Personally, I believe that this is really very irresponsible behavior by North Korea, and I think that the Chinese government has made it very clear that it's of great

concern to the Chinese government and people that this thing happened. I think that North Korea really owes the Chinese government and people an explanation of why this happened. I'm not sure if you have noted, but I think that just two days ago, I think, the *Global Times* just ran an op-ed piece by a former deputy commander of the Nanjing Military Command, Lieutenant General Wang Hunguang. He talks specifically about the dangers from a military point of view of North Korea's behavior, and I think he made it very clear in this piece that North Korea's behavior is unacceptable. It's extremely dangerous, and China should make it very clear to North Korea and ask them to promise things like that will not happen again. I would say I fully agree with General Wang's points. Personally, I would also tend to resist a pure conjunctive course. I would tend to think that this perhaps happened not as a result of a deliberate North Korea trying to send any kind of message to China but rather, simply, because they are messing up, and they did not handle this very well. But still, I think that because it's a matter of life for I think 200 plus Chinese passengers, this is serious business. That is why I strongly believe that the Chinese government and people really have to make this clear to North Korea that they should better be careful [when] doing things like that.

**Haenle:** So, from that standpoint, there are some that believe we are moving into another provocative period, that the North Koreans may engage in a series of provocative actions here in the near future, including possibly a 4th nuclear test. I've talked to some Chinese experts that believe this could have a significant impact on the way the Chinese leadership is looking at this issue. What kind of impact do you think a 4th nuclear test would have in terms of China's perspective of this problem?

**Wang:** Well, I think the first worry, you know, as you just indicated—I think China is also extremely concerned about the possibility of a 4th nuclear test. I think it would be a really big, big thing. I think it's going to, again, bring the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia to cycles of confrontation, escalation of crisis, and basically just make it a lot more unstable and dangerous in the region. Certainly, we would strongly oppose any such kind of moves by North Korea. But now the question is that how are we going to [deal with] it? I am always of the view that deterrence—you know, from a scholarly point of view I have studied deterrence—but yes, deterrence has some utility in terms of a tool kit, so to speak, when put into a foreign policy. But, again, deterrence also has a limit. You can only deter your adversary or enemy from doing something, what you perceive as a change of status quo, but you cannot force it to, for instance, to be more cooperative. In order to do that, you have to put on the table more positive engagement, so to speak. So I think really to manage the change we are facing now, I think the international community, including China, the United States, South Korea, Japan, Russia, and all other stakeholders, really have to stand united on these issues instead of, sort of, pointing fingers at each other or accusing the other party of doing something that falls short of expectations. Standing united is very important.

[On the topic of improved] understanding... I emphasize [it] again because oftentimes people tend to forget that we do have shared interests on this issue, fundamental shared interests. There are some differences in terms of approach, but that is so natural, even among best friends. You know, we are very good partners, and you can call us friends in sort of dealing with this common challenge. But, don't exaggerate the differences so to suggest that now we have fundamental differences or it's a matter [of] 'either you are with us or you are with them.' I think that is not really a helpful mentality when it comes to those issues. I think we have to stand united and have to send a unified message on those issues. I think my own interpretation of this

relationship is that we are trying very hard to narrow the gap between the positions of the DPRK and the positions of the United States and, by extension, South Korea. We do understand that now there is a very big gap now between our positions but also, I think...

**Haenle:** Between whose positions?

**Wang:** I think between the American position and the North Korean position in terms of what are the conditions to come back to the Six Party Talks. But I think we also have to remember that we do agree that also on a fundamental level, that a diplomatic solution is the only feasible way to deal with the issue because military options are simply unthinkable at the moment. So, I think we have been doing this very hard. Of course, sometimes we get some criticism from, you know, the American side. To be very honest, I think a lot of this criticism is simply unfair and misplaced.

**Haenle:** I think, as you know, I was the White House Representative for the Six Party Talks between 2007 and 2008 and this was, actually, I would argue, a period of good U.S.-China cooperation. We've gotten to a point in my own view where, I think, it is very difficult to see sincerity from North Korea that they are willing to enter negotiations. I think my sense is this is the biggest concern for the United States that coming back to the table simply for the sake of talking or meeting would not be constructive. There would need to be some genuine sincerity from the North Koreans that they are willing to rectify some of the steps they have taken to date. But, in the United States there is a general weariness over the diplomatic efforts. As you know, during the administration of President Clinton, the United States was involved in a framework, and that did not work. We found out that the North Koreans were cheating. President Bush engaged a lot of his own political capital in the Six Party Talks, and in December of 2008, the North Koreans walked out and they have said now that they are no longer part of the Six Party Talks. So there is a feeling that it has been tried, and that the North Koreans aren't serious. So, why move forward on diplomacy if the North Koreans aren't sincere. There is a feeling in the United States that this is really a growing problem for China, more in fact than for the United States. For many years, people in China said this was a U.S.-North Korea problem. Many people in the United States now say this is a China-North Korea problem and the United States is willing to help China solve its growing North Korea problem. How do you see that issue?

**Wang:** Ok. You know, again, I think this really gets back to what I previously noted. Frankly, I really believe this is a shared problem. It's not just your problem or my problem. That's why I strongly believe that kind of mentality is not helpful. Pointing fingers and saying, 'ok, that's your problem. If you do not fix it, you are the one to blame for that.' Sometimes I hear from my American colleagues who would argue that China's policy toward North Korea really is a failure. Then, I will say, 'Sir, if this is a failure, it's a shared failure, a collective failure.' So, I think to try to single out China or point a finger at the United States is not helpful. I think that is point number one I want to emphasize. Secondly, I agree that this is an extremely difficult issue because North Korea is very difficult to deal with. They also have a very strong determination as well when it comes to this issue. So that's why international politics, particularly the denuclearizing or proliferation issues are really difficult to manage and deal with. But again, I think my understanding is that many in China do believe, including Chinese leaders, that at least part of the very important motives or reasons why North Korea wanted to develop nuclear weapons to begin with is this very strong, deep rooted insecurity about its regime survival. Where does it come

from? Of course it comes from the United States. And, I'm not saying I completely subscribe to that argument or to push that argument to the extreme to say it's all American responsibility, and it's all your mistake. But, again, like I said, it's a collective challenge we are facing now and we just have to do that in sort of a very cooperative manner in good faith and also in the spirit and manifestation of what we call the "new type of great power relationship" between China and the United States. I recognize that it's a very difficult issue but I also very much agree with you that this is also an issue area where really a lot of cooperation has been forced with China and the United States. I would argue that we would like to see more cooperation coming from them.

**Haenle:** I appreciate the perspective that it's a shared problem, and I think that it may be healthy to get away from pointing the finger saying it's a U.S.-North Korea problem or a China-North Korea problem. If we can find ourselves to agree that it's a shared problem and we can deal with it in the context of this, trying to operationalize the new type of great power relations. If that's the case, then give me a sense of how can we align more closely our efforts, because we sometimes don't agree on the tactics. Where are the opportunities for the United States and China to align closer on our joint efforts? The United States would say we need to have a collection of both carrots and sticks. We need to be both willing to apply together pressure or additional sanctions that would require the North Koreans to change their behavior. Where do you see the opportunities for greater U.S.-China cooperation?

**Wang:** You know, I think in principle, I really don't see a fundamental disagreement between China and the United States when you talk about the combination of pressure and inducement. I think that holds true for many other cases in international relations as well. When it comes to this particular North Korean nuclear challenge, I would argue that China really does have a sort of [strategy]... Sometimes, as you probably know very well, I think American strategies tend to argue that, including Henry Kissinger, that China is really a nation that has a long perspective that can look decades, hundreds of years from now and really has a strategic vision. I would argue that, in this case, China really does have a strategic vision which really goes beyond the single nuclear issue. I'm not saying that China is not trying very hard to resolve that issue; I think China is working very hard along with the United States and other members of the international community. But, it's just that we have this idea of "peaceful development." It's really about how we get out of this hook. Of course, we have to manage this issue and prevent it from further deterioration, including the military tensions on the Korean Peninsula. We have to contain them, in a way. But then, we have to gradually, I think, agree on a fundamental level about the future of the Korean Peninsula. That is extremely important. When it comes to that question, I think the discussion could become much looser, much more loose in the sense that we introduce more uncertainties into our discussion. But, that again is very important. If we can develop a shared understanding of—which I personally believe is in the shared interests of China, the United States, and the Korean people on the Korean Peninsula as well—a peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula. But, I think that's just sort of years or even decades down the road. In order to achieve that, we have to work together to bring this hope to jump start this diplomatic process, the Six Party Talks. I think that is very important.

I've heard so many Western observers arguing that the Six Party Talks are useless. I think I wouldn't be that pessimistic. I think diplomatic means and platforms like the Six Party Talks are still very important, and if we can take one step or a few steps back and try to have a longer perspective—China has a strategic vision, you know—then we can see how we can help the North

Korean government and its people really come back to the international community and really give them a chance to develop their economy and bring prosperity to their own people. Just over that process, it's natural, if we assume that one day if the North Korean people live a prosperous and decent life, why do they have to stick to a hold on nuclear weapons? That's a long evolution from point A to that point B but I think we have to work in good spirit of cooperation within this new type of great power relationship. If we can make that happen, I think that will really be something quite extraordinary, quite historical.

**Haenle:** Well, on that positive note, thank you very much for spending time with us today. I appreciate you sharing your insights which are always extremely valuable and important so thank you very much. That's it for this edition of the Carnegie–Tsinghua edition of the “China in the World” podcast. I encourage you to explore our website at [www.carnegietsinghua.org](http://www.carnegietsinghua.org) and see the work of all our scholars at the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center. Thanks for listening and be sure to tune in next time. Thank you.