

CHAPTER III

INFLUENCING FACTORS ON CHINA'S REJECTION ON GRANTING REFUGEE STATUS TO THE NORTH KOREAN DEFECTOR

China has already assigned the 1951 Convention and followed by the 1967 Protocol which obliged China to give protection towards any refugee who seeks asylum in China. China did receive and granting refugee status to some refugee from conflicting countries, such as Lao, Cambodia, and Iraq (The People's Republic of China : Fact Sheet, 2015). However, China has shown a different approach towards North Korean defectors, China even labeled them as an illegal immigrant and be able to repatriate them at any time. North Korean defector internationally is recognized as a *refugee sur place* who deserve protection because of the risk they will face if they returned home. The pressure from the international community did not budge China at all. Chapter IV covers the reason behind China's decision on rejecting the North Korean defector as a refugee despite their commitment under the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. In this chapter, China's decision will be analyzed by using the Foreign Policy Decision Making Process by William D. Coplin.

A. Domestic Politics Factor: Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a Ruling Political Party

The first determinant in the Foreign Policy Decision Making Process by William D. Coplin is the domestic politics factor. It is divided into three; bureaucratic influencer, partisan influencer, and interest influencer. In this case of North Korean defector in China, the most dominant one is the partisan influencer. According to Coplin, partisan influencer refers to the political party that contributes to the decision making process. They try to take part in the decision-making process through the political members seated in the government (Coplin, 2003). In China, the CCP or Chinese Communist Party

take a significant role in the government; it is the founding and ruling political party in China. Thus, this case would be on the partisan influencer. This subchapter would analyze the correlations between the communist party of China with its ideology and how it manifests itself in the relations with North Korea and why it matters in political behavior.

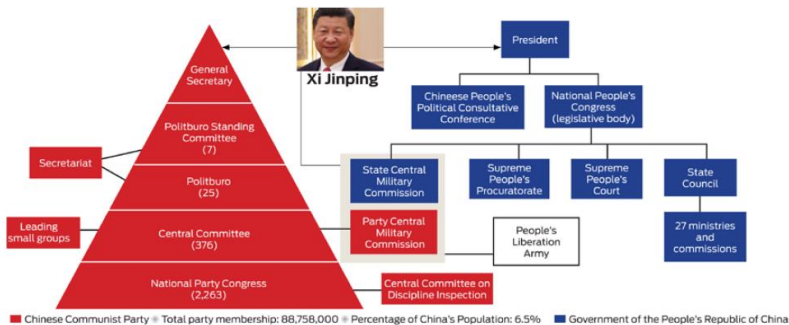
Chinese Communist Party or CCP was established in 1949 as the founding and ruling political party in China. Ever since CCP has put many efforts in sculpting its ideological message. According to Brown, ideology operates in two directions,

"as a means of control and direction over key vocabularies, linking them with power systems in order to achieve political ends; and as something linked to practice institutions and organization, legitimizing and operationalizing their key objectives" (Brown, 2012, p. 52).

CCP indeed has maintained its objectives in China by undertaking their political monopoly. CCP exercised the absolute control over the whole Chinese national policy, both directly and indirectly through impersonates one of participant elements of a "people's" government (Steiner, 1951).

China's political system is divided into three major institutions. They are CCP, the government, and the military. The government and the military are subordinate to the CCP. In other words, CCP is the leading political body that dictates the national policy agenda (China's 2017 Communist Party Leadership Structure & Transition, 2017). Here is the figure below :

Figure 3.1. Leadership Organizations within the CCP in Relation to the Government of the People's Republic of China



Source : China's 2017 Communist Party Leadership Structure & Transition, 2017

According to the figure above, as Xi Jinping being both the General Secretary of CCP and the President of the PRC, the Communist party's domination and primacy over the government is clear. Several crucial decisions of both foreign and domestic issue came from Politburo and its Standing Committee (Barnett, 1985).

North Korea and China were well known for their nickname of "blood brothers" because of their common socialist ideological ground. Communist from China and North Korea have together fought side by side against the Japanese colonialism in the 1920s. This bond was still going strong once they gained their independence, North Korea was supported the CCP in the Chinese Civil War. On the other hand, China also supplied troops in order to support North Korea in the Korean War. China and North Korea common ideology certainly took part in their historical bilateral relations, this so-called "blood-bound alliance" (Yoon & Lee, 2013). However, it needs to be pointed out that any crucial decision regarding China's policy

towards North Korea is subject to judgment and selection at the highest level. The policy regarding their relations has always revolved between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee (CCPCC). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is focused on the relations within the international community including the West, yet, CCPCC focuses on North Korea and China relations, and even can be called pro-Pyongyang. CCPCC has advocated the cooperation with North Korea and strongly calling for solidified the political parties partnership between China and North Korea within the idea of "political trust" towards Pyongyang (Feng, 2009).

CCP as the biggest communist party in the world might felt that having an ally is essential for striving their left-wing solidarity. North Korea has always been one of China coalition since the Japanese colonization era. CCP was developed in the Korean war era as China, North Korea, and the Soviet Union whose ideology was communist get together on fighting the dominance of the United States. Therefore, one of China's way to maintain good relations with North Korea was through its ideological ally. By directly refused the North Korean defector as a refugee, China indirectly supported the Kim regime so it could be preserved and keep existing.

B. Economic and Military Factor: China's Efforts on Maintaining its Domestic Stability

An economic and military factor was the second determinant proposed by Coplin. Economic and military factor reflect the material power of the state and explicitly shows how stable the state is (Coplin, 2003). Nevertheless, this subchapter would talk about China's desire for stability in terms of economic and military and how it leads to China's behavior towards the North Korean defector.

China experienced impressive growth in the last few decades that led them into granting the status of the world's second-largest economy. China was started its program of economic reforms in 1978 with a GDP of USD 214 billion and ranked ninth, while in 2013, China jumped to second place with a GDP of USD 9.2 trillion. This immense growth was mainly because of China's increase integration to the global economic sphere and the government's strives on supporting the economic activity (China Economic Outlook, 2019).

Figure 3.2 People's Republic of China's Quick Profile

<p>POPULATION: 1.4 billion</p> <p>GDP (PPP): \$23.2 trillion 6.9% growth in 2017 5-year compound annual growth 7.1% \$16,660 per capita</p>	<p>UNEMPLOYMENT: 4.7%</p> <p>INFLATION (CPI): 1.6%</p> <p>FDI INFLOW: \$136.3 billion</p> <p>PUBLIC DEBT: 47.8% of GDP</p>
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Source : China : 2019 Index of Economic Freedom, 2018

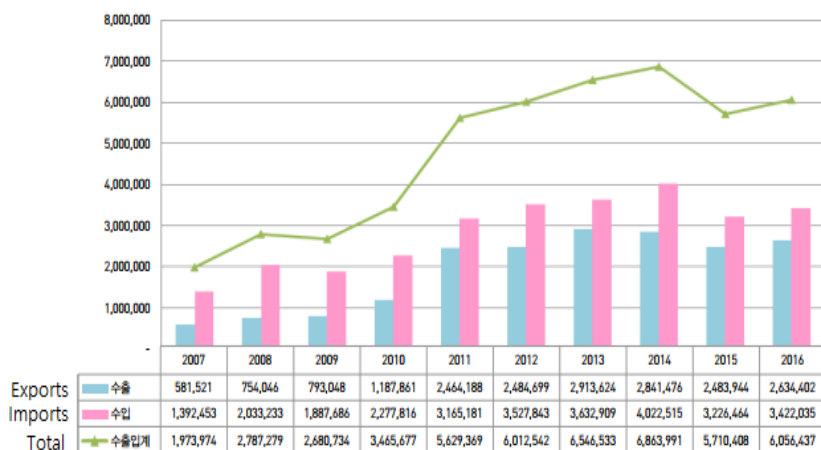
Regardless of the significant acceleration in 35 years in terms of economy, in recent years, China dealt with a slowdown in economic growth. China might be the second world's largest economy, but its per capita income is still below the global average. In 2015 there was 55 million poor in rural areas (The World Bank In China, 2018). According to Focus Economics, the economy growing in China was 6.2% in 2019 which is down 0.1 percent from last month. At this point, it might be still manageable, but the risks keep rising (China Economic Outlook, 2019).

Furthermore, rapid economic power followed by a significant number of the population has brought many

challenges as well, includes high economic inequality, environmental issue sustainability, an aging population, and also the internal migration of labor (The World Bank In China, 2018). These are some challenges and obstacles that need to be overcome by President Xi Jinping's administration in order to secure China's sustainability.

Despite all the hardships China faced in their domestic condition, they have been providing North Korea with much food and energy. After the Soviet Union collapsed at the end of the Cold War, China has become North Korea's biggest trading partner. Even though the political and economic condition also took part in the fluctuation of the trade's scale, since 2000 it has steadily increased. In January 2006, Kim Jong-il was visited the Chinese Industrial Zone for nine-days, and it was the evidence that China still and continues to have friendly relations with North Korea, and showing that China's intention to carry on its engagement policy, which China will or might not take a coercive stance towards North Korea in the near future (Kang, 2007). The table below shows how China has increased its trade with North Korea.

Figure 3.3 North Korea's Foreign Trade (in 1000USD)



Source : Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), 2019

The table above shows that North Korea has a high-level dependence on China economically. As in 2005, Piao Jianyi from the Institute of Asia Pacific Studies in Beijing stated regarding the China economic influence towards the North, *“although many of our friends see it as a failing state, potentially one with nuclear weapons, China has a different view. North Korea has a reforming economy that is very weak, but every year is getting better, and the regime is taking measures to reform its economy”* (French, 2005). However, it is not merely about China's generosity towards North Korea. China also has its interest and motives. Economically, North Korea appeared as an appealing resource base for China due to their geographical proximity as well as the abundance of its natural resources, as revealed below,

Table 3.1 North Korea's Major Mineral Resources

Mineral	Grade	Reserve
Gold	Metal, tons	2,000
Iron	Fe 50%, million tons	5,000
Copper	Metal	2,900
Zn	Metal	21,100
Tungsten	WO ₃ 65%	246
Molybdenite	MoS ₂ 90%	54
Nickel	Metal	36
Manganese	Mn 40%	300
Graphite	FC 100%	2,000
Limestone	Ore grade, million tons	100,000
Barite	Ore grade	2,100
Apatite	Ore grade, million tons	150
Magnesite	MgO 45%, million tons	6,000
Anthracite	Coal grade, million tons	4,500

Source: Korea Resources Cooperation, 2009

China has always been a good partner of North Korea. However, those actions done by China did have a deeper intention. Political instabilities in North Korea including nuclear disputes, succession issue, and the massive flood of defectors will affect the pace of trans-border territorial between China and North Korea. Above all, China wants to maintain North Korea as its buffer zone. Thus, China did anything that will profitable to both, China and the Kim regime. One of the issues that might be the trigger for the collapse of the Kim regime is the flood of defectors.

Once China opens its door for North Korea defector, China will be the one who will bear the burden. It was all about stability. If China accepted the defectors, there would be a massive exodus of defectors into China. In one side, China has to assist them, financially and socially. It would become a significant economic problem if China were also accepting the North Korean refugee. The national unemployment number is already high, and China was dealing with the environmental issue and also an aging population. All these will only burden

China even more. The Kim regime will collapse, and the one who bears the consequences is none other than China, the closest neighboring country.

China already has a domestic issue regarding economic and sustainability. It is not an easy task to overcome their lackluster economic growth. Therefore, China chose to be realistic in this issue. In order to avoid to face another big problem, China decides to assist the North Korean government rather than accepting the defectors. It will improve the relations of China and North Korea, lessen the possibility of the regime to collapse, and the most important thing is to maintain the stability within China.

C. International Context: China and the International Human Rights' Perception

The third and last determinant was the International context. It refers to the situation that happened in the international sphere. It will influence how the decision maker decides its action and decisions. According to Coplin, it includes a geographical, economic, and political condition in the past, present, and future that might be or be anticipated (Coplin, 2003). On this subchapter would be contextualized in China's perspective towards the definition of refugee that might be different from the approach used in the international community.

In the case with North Korean defectors, China has been pressured by the international community to uphold its obligation to protect the defectors. China remains still and moving forward to what they are believed in. China has engaged in the international human rights system for over three decades. However, the practices of its role have been limited (Sceats & Breslin, 2012).

A human rights issue is becoming the Western countries priorities as a result of their bad experienced in the World War.

The other way around, human rights still a secondary foreign policy concern for China. That is due to China as a socialist state is asserting the Marxist human rights and *"our style of human rights."* Karl Marx considered human rights as a group matter, not a personal one. Which a group's interests take the prime concern over the individual's inherent. (Report on Human Rights in North Korea, 2014). China expressed its opposition with the universal understanding of human rights, particularly the Western concept. As China believes international human rights are not a standalone foreign policy issue. Human rights are intertwined with many other national interests, according to the report by Chatam House, it includes

"making sure a beneficial international condition for the economic growth, preservation of its political system, and social stability, and also a defense of its territorial integrity" (Sceats & Breslin, 2012).

Thus, conclude that the Chinese government prioritizes its national interest and national profit over human rights. China sees human right is not absolute and putting the socioeconomic policy over people's guarantee of political rights. It is about "survival" of human rights. Rather than seek for individual safety, China thought the bigger picture is the economic development. Thus, the government will sometimes fail to notice the individual's right for the greater good (Sceats & Breslin, 2012).

China considers that the concept of human rights diverse based on each country's cultural, historical, sociological, and economic background. Thus, China also emphasized that forcing them to follow the Western concept is an intervention of internal affairs. However at the other hand, the Western still firmly committed to the international system of human right as their moral legitimacy in the post second World War (Lee J. H., 2016). The UN has continuously criticized and condemned China for their non-cooperation and rejection of UN's careful investigation regarding its human rights condition. China kept

avoiding the investigation by obscuring information and hindering access. China claimed that the UN's action might violate its sovereignty. China chose to resist their responsibility within the international community in terms of human rights and stated that the UN concerns on human rights within China could be a form of intervention in internal affairs. (Lee J. H., 2016).

Table 3.2. Motivation for Defection

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Political repression	13	9.6
Family reunion	16	11.9
Economic hardship	26	19.3
Doubt about regime	15	11.1
Yearning for freedom	32	23.7
Going to South Korea	30	22.2
Other	3	2.2
Total	135	100

Source : Report on Human Rights in North Korea, 2014

The international community might see the defectors as a refugee that needs immediate help and asylum. However, as the writer mentioned earlier, China has a different approach towards human rights including the defector with the Western's perception. China sees those defectors as a temporary illegal migrant who does not need any assistance since there is no "real war" that happened in their homeland. In fact, the family reunion is one of the motivations for the defectors who came to China, which has nothing to do with China and its human rights concerns. Thus, China still strongly upholds the belief that the defectors are in reality just a bunch of people who got away from their country for their personal reasons, which have no correlation with the understanding of China's human rights. Human rights indeed should be applied universally; however, the perception of what human rights is might differ with each nation. China used its sovereignty and different interpretation to

justify their action towards the North Korean defector. Thus, a profound understanding and finding the middle ground between China and the International Community might be the way to rescue the North Korean defectors for any hardships that they already faced in their home country.

To summarize all the determinants of the influencing factor, below is the diagram application of the Coplin's theory regarding China's reason on refuse to grant the North Korean defector as a refugee.

Figure 3.4 Diagram of Application of Coplin's Theory

