



A Forum for All Scholars

IEKAS

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To Inform, Enlighten and Empower



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1. OBITUARY: DR. VINCENT HOFFMAN



Dr. Vincent Joseph Hoffman passed away January 31, 2012 at the age of 85. Dr. Hoffman served in the U.S. Navy during World War II and was a missionary in South Korea for 15 years. He retired from Michigan State University after 35 years as a faculty of the Asian Study Center.

Under the leadership of the late Professor Gill-Chin Lim, Dr. Hoffman helped found the Council on Korean Studies at the Michigan State University in 1995 and served as the first president of the Council, the organization that established and administers the annual Global Korea Award program (www.globalkorea.org).

Dr. Hoffman served as a Special Adviser to SKAS from day one. We will all greatly miss his wisdom and dedicated love of Korea. His teaching interests included North and South Korea and East Asia, especially Korean culture and its relationship to social science issues and history.

Vincent is survived by his wife of 40 years, Mary (a Korean) and daughter M. Elizabeth ("Eli") Hoffman.



Dr. Hoffman giving the Opening Remarks at the 2011 Global Korea Award ceremony, October 2011

2. LUNAR, NOT CHINESE, NEW YEAR

Star-Ledger (New Jersey), January 27, 2012

It's Lunar New Year, not Chinese New Year

Dr. Yeomin Yoon
Professor of Finance and International Business
Seton Hall University



As an educator, I am deeply concerned that a glaring misnomer used Monday in a story about the Lunar New Year — the story begins with the words “Happy Chinese New Year” — inadvertently fans cultural chauvinism.

The correct translation of the name of the holiday that has been celebrated for thousands of years in various eastern and southeastern Asian countries, in addition to China, is “Lunar New Year.”

For thousands of years, the Chinese called, and still call, Lunar New Year’s Day chunjie (“spring festival”). In the Chinese language, there is no such expression as “Chinese New Year” or “Chinese New Year’s Day.”

The origin of the lunar calendar can be traced back to a time when there was no such entity as what is now called China or the Chinese. People in Asian regions celebrated the Lunar New Year as one of many festivals based on the lunar calendar.

I ascribe some Americans’ tendency to use this phrase mainly to the preponderance of the Chinese and vociferousness in their celebration. Only the Chinese appear to celebrate Lunar New Year wildly and for a longer period than any other Asian people. The dragon dance festival contrasts with the modest way of celebrating Lunar New Year in other Asian countries — by paying respect to ancestors and elders, and having joyous but subdued family gatherings.

Traditionally, the dragon was the symbol of the power of the emperor in China.

Notwithstanding The Star-Ledger’s headline on this story, “Don’t fear the dragon,” China’s small neighbors are afraid of the soaring Chinese dragon. They are deeply concerned about the direction of China’s rise and apprehensively wonder as to how a triumphant, authoritarian China will treat them.

Is it beyond the pale to suggest that The Star-Ledger should use the correct expression, “Lunar New Year,” rather than “Chinese New Year”?

The former expression is more inclusive, smacks less of domination by a majority ethnic group in East and Southeast Asia, and is consistent with the grounds of neutrality. This, then, will be welcomed by millions of Asians, other than Chinese, for whom the English language is increasingly becoming lingua franca.

3. NORTH KOREA: A SECOND TIBET?

Korea Herald, January 31, 2012

Concerns mount over China's grip on N.K. economy

Many North Korea watchers here worry that Pyongyang could depend too much on Beijing both politically and economically while struggling to ensure the survival of its failing regime.

Even raising the possibility of North Korea virtually becoming a "fourth province in northeastern China," an area that encompasses Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning provinces, a growing number of experts question the wisdom of the South continuing to freeze economic cooperation with the North in the post-Kim Jong-il era.

"It cannot be ruled out that the North Korean economy will be subordinate to China's on a permanent basis," said Hong Ihk-pyo, senior research fellow at the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, a think tank based in Seoul.



Cargo trucks cross a rail bridge over the Yalu River into North Korea from China's border city of Dandong on Dec. 22. (Yonhap News)

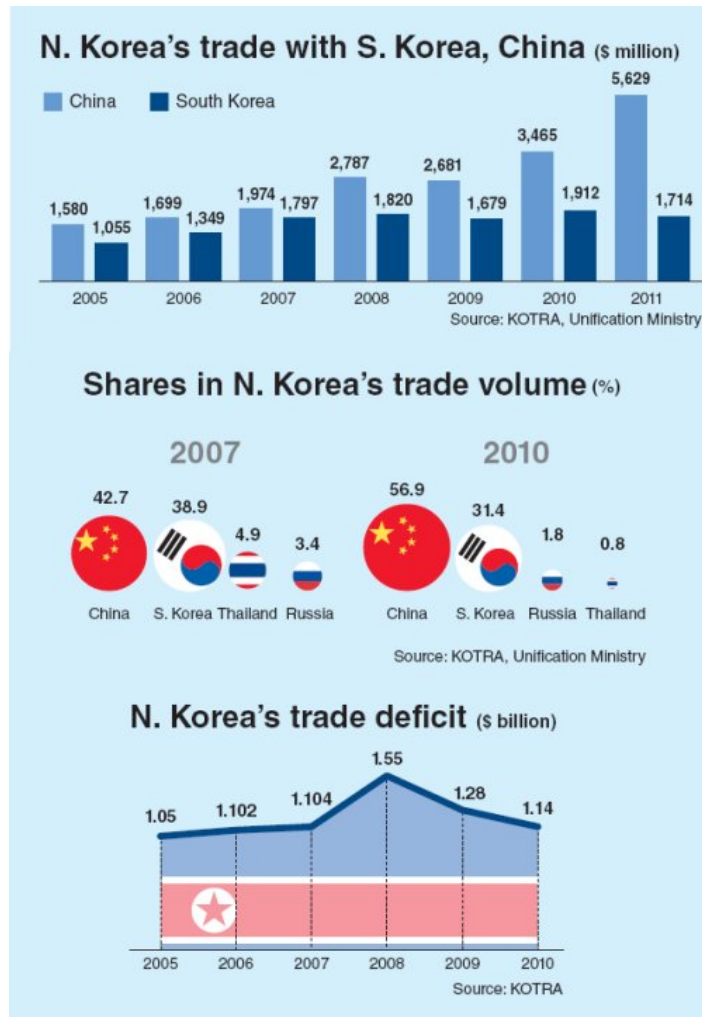
North Korea's dire state is in stark contrast to the prospering economy of its southern neighbor. According to figures from the Bank of Korea, the gross domestic product of North Korea remained at \$26.5 billion in 2010, nearly one-fortieth of South Korea's, with its population of 24.1 million being about half the size of the South's.

The North Korean economy contracted for two consecutive years in 2009 and 2010, when it recorded growth rates of minus 0.9 percent and minus 0.5 percent, respectively.

With South Korea and its allies having frozen trade and aid to North Korea in connection with its nuclear ambitions and other provocative acts, the North has increasingly relied on China for assistance to keep its moribund economy afloat.

Some experts here express concerns China will hold a monopolistic grip on the North's economy if inter-Korean economic projects continue to remain stalled for the coming years.

China's proportion of North Korea's trade and investment has increased sharply in recent years while South Korea's share has dwindled amid tense inter-Korean relations.



The trade volume between China and North Korea jumped from \$1.97 billion in 2007 to \$5.62 billion in 2011 with the North suffering a deficit of about \$700 million, according to figures compiled by the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency. In contrast, the volume of South-North commerce showed a slight decrease from \$1.79 billion to \$1.71 billion over the cited period, with the North recording a surplus of about \$114 million.

China's share in North Korea's total trade rose from 42.7 percent in 2007 to 56.9 percent in 2010, while South Korea's proportion declined to 31.4 percent from 38.9 percent.

Excluding inter-Korean commerce, China accounted for a whopping 83 percent of North Korea's external trade in 2010, up from 67.1 percent in 2007. China's investment in the North rose from a mere \$1.1 million in 2003 to \$41 million, or 94.1 percent of the total foreign investment, in 2008 before decreasing to \$12.1 million in 2010, according to figures from the Chinese Commerce Ministry.

Experts here are concerned that the North Korean economy will be further absorbed into the circle of China's economic influence to the point of making it difficult for the South to expand its economic presence in the North after shifting its policy toward inter-Korean businesses.

Observers say it goes too far to say North Korea will become a Chinese province, but China has been pushing the North toward reform and openness as part of a larger scheme to develop its three northeastern provinces, which lag behind the east coastal zones.

China has been the main developer of the Raseon special economic zone, the combined towns of Rajin and Seonbong, in the northeastern coast of North Korea, which also provides it with access to an ice-free port for shipping abroad manufactured goods and other products from its northeastern provinces.

China also agreed with North Korea to jointly develop another special economic zone on the border islands across the Yalu River from the city of Dandong, its main gate into the North.

From the Editor's desk:

Throughout the history of the northern part of Korea, China clashed with Korea continuously, eventually annexing the vast area of southern Manchuria. During the peak days of the kingdom of Koguryo (37 BC – 668 AD), what is now Manchuria had been the territory of Koguryo and later Balhae kingdom (699 AD – 926 AD).



As Koguryo and Balhae fell, the southern Manchuria above the present-day border between China and North Korea (in blue) permanently became provinces of China.

The powerful grip by China on the economy, and survival, of North Korea may result in the future a total disappearance of North Korea as we know it, absorbed completely into China, first economically and then politically.