

Analysis of Chinese Response Patterns to Diplomatic Friction and Its Influencing Factors

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I. Introduction

As China grows into a global power, it is forming a closer relationship with the international community. In the process, the nation is experiencing increasing levels of diplomatic friction, such as confrontation and conflict with other countries, as well as cooperation. Accordingly, this study analyzes China's response to various forms of diplomatic friction, as Korea seeks an effective response to possible friction with China in the future. More specifically, China's response to diplomatic friction was examined through various cases, with the aim of categorizing China's response measures based on these examples. In addition, this study aims to prepare for possible friction with China in the future by identifying factors that differ in China's response to diplomatic friction.

II. Different Responses Depending on the National Power of the Other Country

The results of our analysis show that China has taken very aggressive and drastic diplomatic response measures against countries with relatively weak national power when diplomatic friction surfaces, such as summoning the country's ambassador or closing diplomatic missions, while on the other hand, for countries with economic superpower status, it was found that the response was limited to either a strong diplomatic protest statement or, at most, summoning the ambassador of the country. In addition, it called for negotiations with countries with relatively strong national power to prevent the situation from worsening.

When it comes to issues of diplomatic friction that involve territory and territorial waters, China has actively responded by using military means, defining these as critical issues directly related to the core interests of the country. In particular, the card of deploying military reinforcement has been frequently used, and this

trend appeared more frequently during the Xi Jinping period.

III. Strict Response to National Sovereignty and Territorial Issue

Next, the results of our process analysis on China's response patterns to diplomatic friction show that, during the initial stages of diplomatic friction, the Chinese government tends to express its official position with relatively low-level expressions, such as “calling for negotiations” or “closely observing,” to induce changes in the behavior of the other country. Then, if the conflict is not resolved despite these diplomatic warnings, the level of warnings escalates into stronger expressions or a gradual raising in the status of speakers expressing official positions. However, in some instances of diplomatic friction the Chinese government expressed its position using relatively high-level expressions from the beginning, all of which were related to China's core interests.

If there was no change in the policies of the other country despite these political and diplomatic pressures, China tended to take economic measures. These economic countermeasures were continued until the diplomatic friction was resolved, with the level gradually elevated to pressure the other country.

Meanwhile, when analyzing the factors affecting China's response, focusing on the Xi

Jinping period, it was found that there were differences in China's response depending on the area of friction, the severity of the matter, and the national power of the other country. As expected, China has responded actively and resolutely to issues related to its core interests, and in particular to issues of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, it has taken a hard line, including military means. And, as mentioned above, China has appeared to adjust the level of its response according to the national power of the other country it is experiencing diplomatic friction with.

IV. Prospects and Implications

In the future, regardless of whether the issue is economic or non-economic in nature, China is expected to use economic statecraft as a means of responding to diplomatic friction as its economic power grows larger. In addition, considering China's unprecedented strong response to criticism against its country under the U.S.-China strategic competition, China is expected to take a more active and aggressive response to issues considered an infringement of its core interests in the future. However, in the event of diplomatic friction with a country of a status higher than a regional power, it is expected to adjust the level of its reaction accordingly. At the same time, as the U.S.-China strategic competition intensifies, China may invest more diplomatic capabilities into negotiations with other countries prior to sanctions or retaliatory measures to avoid diplomatic isolation.

Based on the results of this analysis, the following implications can be considered in relation to Korea-China relations and Korea's foreign policy.

First, it is very important to ensure the THAAD problem does not recur between Korea and China. In Korea-China relations, friction with China over the deployment of THAAD escalated to nearly unprecedented levels. At the same time, when looking at cases of China's response to diplomatic friction over the past 30 years, China's response to the THAAD deployment issue can be seen as unusual. As this study shows that China considers the issue of THAAD deployment a very important diplomatic issue, preventing the issue of THAAD deployment from rising again in the future will be very important for maintaining and developing Korea-China relations.

Second, a cautious approach to the Taiwan issue is required. The area in which China has taken the most decisive and tough countermeasures in its response to diplomatic friction, throughout the past 30 years, can be said to be issues related to Taiwan. Meanwhile, in the wake of the 2021 Korea-U.S. summit, the Korean government appears to be taking a more active stance on the Taiwan issue, breaking away from its strategy of taking a relatively ambiguous position. If South Korea involves itself more deeply in the Taiwan issue, unlike before, the Taiwan issue could very likely pose a major obstacle for the development of Korea-China relations, as experienced with the THAAD issue.

Third, as China's response to diplomatic friction is expected to become more institutionalized, legislative, and systematic in the future, an in-depth analysis of related laws, regulations, and organizations should be conducted. When comprehensively looking at China's response to diplomatic friction over the past 30 years, the level of response remained relatively calm and low-key during the Jiang Zemin period, but this stance noticeably changed coming into the Hu Jintao period. China began to respond with countermeasures at a similar level to the other party in similar areas. And in the Xi Jinping period, a pattern is being seen in China's response to friction incidents, where it leverages its growing economic power to respond with economic response measures even in issues of a non-economic nature. As China's economic influence is expected to increase further in the future, China is expected to employ economic means more frequently as a means of responding to diplomatic friction, thus requiring more systematic preparation. In particular, in the second phase of the Xi Jinping regime, China is responding to diplomatic friction comprehensively through a more legislated and institutionalized system, in regard to which more in-depth analyses of related laws, regulations, and organizations should be conducted.

Fourth, in order to properly respond to possible diplomatic friction with China, it is necessary to reliably maintain the comparative advantages and competitiveness of Korea's industries over China. As the analyses of this study show, China in the Xi Jinping era has been employing economic means to deal with

diplomatic friction, but at the same time, it has opted for different responses depending on the other country's national power or the type of product involved. In the end, strengthening our

industrial competitiveness will deter China from employing economic response measures against Korea to resolve diplomatic friction.



References

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