

**THE CROSS-STRAIT AND INTER-KOREAN RELATIONSHIPS IN A
COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: LESSONS FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION
AND MANAGEMENT**

Taeho Kim

Professor and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Director, Center for Contemporary China Studies

Hallym Institute of Advanced International Studies (HIAIS)

South Korea

Abstract:

It is trite yet true to note that the two sets of the dyadic relationship—one between mainland China (PRC) and Taiwan (ROC) and the other North Korea (DPRK) and South Korea (ROK)—differ from each other in great many respects. Included in this category are their formation, their political systems, their social values, and their international recognition. In the case of the cross-strait ties, moreover, the PRC adamantly insists that it is an “internal affair,” not an interstate relationship. The above differences, among others, virtually guarantee that their future paths also would diverge from each other, making exceedingly difficult any genuine comparison of the two cases.

At the same time, both cases have witnessed a long period of system competition, a *de facto* recognition of the other side, a growing importance of the economic factor, and the continuing influence of the U.S. and other external factors. While there are differing degrees of progress across the issue-areas, both cross-strait and inter-Korean relations can be said to have reached a new *modus vivendi* in living with each other. Additionally, the rising influence of the domestic factors as well as of China—especially in the post-Cold War era—has had an enduring effect on both cases.

It is this complex set of major domestic and external challenges, upon which any practical measures of conflict prevention and management should be based. With this in mind, this essay attempts to compare and contrast both cases in terms of the preconditions, processes, and prospects of conflict prevention and management. Potentially rewarding yet understudied aspect of this study is the exploration of any possibility for establishing military confidence-building measures (MCBMs) *prior to* political settlement or an eventual reunification. Now that all sides under examination have a domestic consensus among the elite and the public alike on economic primacy as well as on the necessity of conflict prevention and management, it stands to reason that

a particular set of MCBMs should guide their respective future relationships as well as the unfolding strategic configuration in the wider regional context. In brief, this essay seeks to explore the changing domestic, bilateral, and external contexts of the two cases in a way and to the extent that our theoretical and practical understanding of conflict prevention and management could be enhanced.