

Changing South Korea's China Policy

To-hai Liou

Professor, Department of Diplomacy

National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan

Abstract

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, Sino-South Korean relations have grown in a rapid way, upgraded from a *cooperative partnership* oriented towards the 21st century in 1998 to a *comprehensive cooperative partnership* in 2003, then further up to a *comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership* in 2008. Meanwhile, South Korean politics has completed a full circle transforming from a conservative government under Kim Young-sam to Liberal governments under Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo-hyun then back to the current conservative Lee Myung-bak Government. During the period, South Korea's China policy has undergone qualitative transformation due to both swiftly changing domestic and external environment. This article explores South Korea's China policy since Kim Dae Jung came to power in 1998 from three angles, namely political, economic and security interactions. The author finds that Sino-South Korea relations were increasingly intimate during the ten years under liberal governments owing to converging interests, their North Korea policies in particular. However, the bilateral relationship under Lee Myung-bak has gone into trouble due largely to South Korea's changing foreign policy priorities, though kept in harmony on surface.

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