

## **Analysis of the Implementation of South Korea's Nordpolitik in 1970s-1990s**

### **Focusing on the Interaction between Environment and Foreign Policy Decision-Making\***

*Jung-Mi Cha\*\**

This paper aims to analyze and assess South Korea's Nordpolitik, which has been considered a starting point of the grand strategy in the history of Korean diplomacy, appraised as a milestone of autonomous diplomacy, and is continuously being reproduced through discourse of peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula. The origin of Roh Tae-woo administration's Nordpolitik, made official through 7.7 Declaration in 1988, is Park Chung-hee's 6.23 Statement in 1973. In Roh's memoir, Roh also clearly declared that Park's 6.23 Statement was the historical root for his Nordpolitik. Although many studies share the conviction that Roh's Nordpolitik has its roots in 1970's open-door policy, they have failed to analyze the establishment and implementation of the Nordpolitik from the 1970s to 1990s comprehensively. This paper principally examines South Korea's Nordpolitik from its genesis in Park Chung-hee's 8.15 Declaration in 1970 to its successful implementation via the establishment of diplomatic relationships with communist countries in the 1990s. This study then analyzes the implementation of South Korean Nordpolitik through examining the relationship between *environment* and *foreign policy decision making* and concludes by suggesting policy implications of historical implementation of the Nordpolitik to the Korean Peninsula Peace Settlement Initiative and New Northern Policy of South Korea's current administration.

**Key Words:** South Korean Nordpolitik, Implementation, Decision Making, Environment

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\*\* Research Professor, Yonsei Institute for North Korean Studies; E-mail: newgeneration21@daum.net

## I. Introduction

### A. *Research Background and Purpose*

The Korean Peninsula got the new momentum for the peace progress after the successful 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. After the event, the first-ever bilateral summit between North Korea and the United States and the trilateral summit between North Korea, the United States, and South Korea occurred. With this momentum, the South Korean Government's New Northern Policy came into the spotlight and was recognized as important in establishing peace on the peninsula.<sup>1</sup> The New Northern Policy has been lauded for its revival of Roh Tae-woo's Nordpolitik, which prompted a turning point in Korean diplomatic history vis-a-vis the establishment of diplomatic ties with communist countries through an active open-door policy. Nordpolitik has been recognized in Korean history for its initiation of a grand diplomatic strategy (Chun 2012, 203), and for being an autonomous diplomatic strategy (Lee 2012, 195; Im 2008, 248). Nordpolitik aptly responded to the shift in the international order, which led to newly improved relations with the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, the Eastern European bloc, and North Korea. The achievements of this revolutionary policy left a substantial impact on South Korea's international relations and commercial environment (Kang 2012, 6). Due to the achievements and diplomatic significance of the Nordpolitik, the following administrations' foreign policies have often been evaluated through the framework of Nordpolitik. Ha (2003, 7) evaluated Kim Dae-jung administration's Sunshine Policy as a continuation of the Nordpolitik policy. President Roh Moo-hyun also emphasized the importance of a "Northward Economic Period" via expanding inter-Korean economic cooperation (Oh 2007). Additionally, the Park Geun-hye government stressed the revival of Nordpolitik through the declaration of a "New Northern Policy" for the sake of peace on the peninsula and multilateral development in the far east (Cho & Seo 2013). It is clear Nordpolitik holds significance in the history of Korean diplomacy as successive administrations' foreign policies have been gauged within the framework of Nordpolitik policy (Park 2003; Hong 2012; Lee 2013). This occurrence further demonstrates the lasting influence of Nordpolitik in South Korea's foreign policy today. Furthermore, this indicates the task left behind by the Nordpolitik. Even though the policy led to historic achievement of establishing diplomatic ties with communist

<sup>1</sup> Since the inauguration of Moon Jae-in in 2017, New Northern Policy was announced, alongside the launch of Northern Economic Cooperation Committee.

states and heightening South Korea's international status, the missions of settling peace and unification on the Korean Peninsula and extending further into the Northern economic and cultural sphere remain.

Research on Nordpolitik policy was most heavily conducted from the late 1980s to early 1990s, when the Roh administration expanded upon the historical policy (Kim 1990; Ko 1991; Yu 1990). After this period, research on the topic was carried out intermittently, mostly through general reviews of the Nordpolitik as a turning point of Korea's diplomatic history (Kang 2012; Lim 2008; Ha 2003; Kim 2000; Jeon 2010). However, there are few studies on the genesis and evolution of the policy. Although many studies share the conviction that Roh's Nordpolitik started with Park Chung-hee's 6.23 Statement in 1973, they failed to analyze the establishment and implementation of Nordpolitik from the 1970s to 1990s in an integrated manner. Roh Tae-woo clearly declared the origin of Nordpolitik was the 6.23 Statement of 1973,<sup>2</sup> and Chun Doo-hwan also stated Chun's main foreign policy was the Nordpolitik which succeeded the Park's 6.23 Statement (Chun 2012, 440). Former Minister of Foreign Policy Affairs Lee Beom-seok officially used the term 'Nordpolitik' in 1983. Within this historical context, the Nordpolitik policy can be regarded as not just of Roh's foreign policy but a foreign policy of South Korea implemented since the 1970s. Therefore, this paper comprehensively examines South Korea's Nordpolitik from its genesis in Park Chung-hee's 8.15 Declaration in 1970 to its implementation via the successful establishment of diplomatic relationships with communist countries in the 1990s. The main research questions include examining why Nordpolitik was not implemented at the beginning of 1970s if it had the potential to move into the process of marginal implementation in the 1980s, and finally how it evolved into successful implementation after the 1988 7.7. declaration. The process of Nordpolitik's "implementation" from its beginning in the 1970s to the realization of its goals in the 1990s, using the framework of foreign policy implementation, that is, Nordpolitik's goal attainment with respect to the interaction between internal-external environment and policy decision-making is analyzed. Considering that the Nordpolitik's final goals - the settlement of permanent peace and unification on the Korean Peninsula and expansion into the Northern economic and living sphere - are yet to be achieved, this paper concludes by suggesting the significance and policy implications to the New Northern Policy.

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2 In Roh's memoir, it is stated that "My Northward Policy traces its roots back to the 1970s. In 1973, president Park Chung-hee gave the 6.23 Statement" (Roh, 2011: 134). Diplomats who were involved in Nordpolitik and related research have noted that the 6.23 Statement marks the start of Nordpolitik (Gong, 2019; Lim, 2008; Cha, 2018).

## ***B. Theoretical Framework: Interaction between Policy Decision-making and Environment for the Implementation of the Foreign Policy***

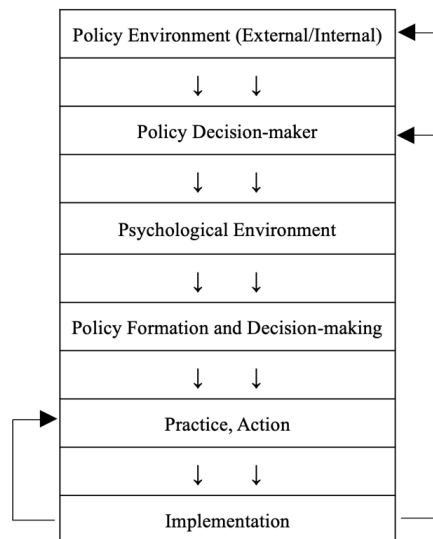
The dynamic nature of international relations has a direct effect on the formation of foreign policy. The strategy and purpose of foreign policy can be changed with its internal and external environmental changes. Rosenau (1970, 367) argued any foreign policy behavior undertaken by the government is conceived to be adaptive when it copes with or simulates changes in the external environment of the society. Mintz and DeRouen (2010, 121) also emphasized the international factors on foreign policy decisions. Mintz said that the behavior of adversaries and allies affects foreign policy decisions in an interactive sequential setting. In addition to selecting goals and choosing among alternatives under the conditions of different distributions of power and interests in the international system, leaders also confront constraints and interests defined by societal distributions of power and interests inside the state (Walker 2010, 23). In foreign policy decision-making, the external environment is regarded as the main factor to take into consideration. The internal environment (e.g. the economic, political and societal capacity) should also be considered important factors for the implementation of the foreign policy.

In analyzing and assessing Nordpolitik, this paper takes on the perspective of foreign policy implementation. Implementation is hereby defined as a phase in which the actor meets the environment and the environment faces the actor. This is the phase of the interactive strategic process, an essential procedure in which the objective of a foreign policy is turned into practice and that practice is followed by the desired outcome (Brighi & Hill 2016, 147). If the implementation is about reaching out into the environment to transform one's objectives into outcomes, one should not think of this process as exclusively directed to, let alone from, the outside (Brighi & Hill 2016, 155).

Based on the analysis of Brighi and Hill (2016), the factors of foreign policy implementation can be articulated into two categories, external environment and internal environment (i.e. resources and capabilities). The attainment of diplomatic objectives lies in how effectively these actors interpret the given context and form a strategy; The more effective they are, the more relatively successful they will be at implementing their formulated strategies. Taking into consideration change in diplomatic resources and capacity are chief factors in decision and implementation of foreign policy, foreign policy decision-makers must clarify the objective of a policy and effectively use diplomatic resources so that intentions and objectives can lead to the desired outcome (Brighi & Hill 2016, 162-163). Thus, this paper shows the external and internal

environments (i.e. diplomatic implementation capacity) as the factors for the implementation of the Nordpolitik. Regarding the condition of the internal environment, key changes to diplomatic implementation capacity such as economic development, hosting of the Olympics, and South Korea's global status are also studied in this paper. Applying interactions between policy decision-makers and context, and foreign policy implementation of the Nordpolitik, it is clear the change in external context beginning in the late 1960s gave birth to South Korea's Communist bloc open-door policy and the policy of peaceful coexistence with North Korea during the 1970s. South Korea's Nordpolitik emerged in the midst of a changing external environment, with occasions such as West Germany declaring Ostpolitik and the rise of the Nixon Doctrine in 1969 alongside Park Chung-hee's 8.15 Declaration of 1970. However, the implementation phase of the Nordpolitik policy, in which actual exchanges with the Communist bloc increased and diplomatic ties were established, began about ten years later as a result of the failure of the Park's Communist bloc open-door policy to satisfy the correct external and internal environments in order to be effectively implemented. This research thusly examines how South Korea's Nordpolitik, originating due to the shift in the external environment during the end of 1969 and 1970s, interacted with the internal-external environment, evolved through implementation, and eventually obtained a policy outcome through the 1970s to 1990s. The implementation process of the Nordpolitik is illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Accumulative and Continuous Cycle of Policy Decision-making and Implementation.*<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> This table is adapted from Brighi and Hill (2016: 151).

The shift in the external environment during the late 1960s caused a change in the Park Chung-hee administration's perception of security threats and enemy states, a development that prompted the decision to proceed with Communist bloc open-door policy and the policy of mutual recognition between the two Koreas. Although these sorts of exchanges with communist countries such as China and the Soviet Union failed to reach their desired progress, in part due to the lack of appropriate internal and external environments for implementation, unofficial interpersonal networks were set in motion. Due to a series of events in the 1980s, i.e. China's reform and open policy, the reform of the Soviet Union, and the East European countries' market-based economy, an environment ripe for the implementation of Nordpolitik blossomed. At the end of the 1980s and through the 1990s, alongside the reform of the socialist systems among communist countries and the end of Cold War, the Roh Tae-woo administration's Nordpolitik came to fruition, as most policies during this time was conceived with the goal of inter-Korean reconciliation and establishment of diplomatic ties with Communist bloc countries. Hence, various achievements of the Nordpolitik around the 1990s can be attributed to all that was amassed from the 1970s, which comprised of interactions between foreign policy decision-making and the internal-external environment as well as mutual feedback of implementation and policy decision-making. Even though the Nordpolitik in the 1970s had no actual implementation, with its interaction with external context, thereby affecting the Nordpolitik of the 1980s and 1990s. The historic implementation of the Nordpolitik from the 1970s to 1990s clearly demonstrates how the internal and external environment affect foreign policy and its implementation, and that foreign policy decisions affect the foreign policy decision-makers as well as the environment in a cyclical causal relationship. With this relationship in mind, this paper studies the Nordpolitik from the 1970s to the early 1990s within the boundaries of decision making, the interaction between the internal and external environment, and the policy's implementation.

Implementation of the Nordpolitik is analyzed and evaluated in three parts-Nordpolitik during the 1970s, during the 1980s, and after 7.7 Declaration in 1988-from three different aspects: policy objectives, internal-external environment, and achievements and limitations. The success of implementation can only be assessed once the true intents and aims of the policy are analyzed, as implementation begins at the decision-makers' intentions and aims. Clarke (1979, 117) stresses that foreign policy decisions "make different patterns of demands for implementation," meaning that a policy decision must clarify the form and the degree of implementation it demands. In short, the issue of implementation is deeply connected with the intention and objective of policy decision-making.

Consequently, this paper investigates what the decision-makers' objective was in judging the implementation of the Nordpolitik. By looking at the discourse and perception of the top decision-maker and the strategic understanding of policy implementers, the aim of the Nordpolitik from the 1970s to the early 1990s is scrutinized. To do this, memoirs, speeches, and interviews of policy decision-makers including presidents as well as diplomatic documents of South Korea<sup>4</sup> are studied, in order to analyze the policy's goal and strategy. Second, this paper examines the internal-external environment facing the Nordpolitik from the 1970s to the 1990s and how foreign policy was implemented through policy decision-making and environmental conditions.

## **II. Birth of South Korea's Nordpolitik and Limits of its Implementation in 1970s**

### ***A. Change in External Environment and the Birth of South Korea's Nordpolitik***

Historically speaking, the 6.23 Statement came about as South Korea saw the need for a shift in diplomatic strategy amid changes in the external environment, such as the 1969 Nixon Doctrine, improving Sino-U.S. relations, and West Germany's Ostpolitik. By 1970, South Korea's foreign policy had already begun shifting in accordance with changing external environment, before the Communist bloc open-doors policy became official with the 6.23 Statement of 1973. In the early days of Park administration, anticommunism was the core of its foreign policy. The Military Revolution Committee's six-point "Revolutionary Pledges," released after the May 16 coup, states in its first clause, "Taking anticommunism as the nation's chief principle, the government will reorganize and strengthen the anticommunist stance, which has been a mere perfunctory gesture until now," presenting anti-communism as the nation's top priority ("Revolutionary Pledges" 1962, 128). The Revolutionary Pledges called for solidifying ties with the U.S.-led liberalist allies and fostering skills to fight against communism for unification. However, varying changes in external environment and security situation from the late 1960s to the early 1970s demanded a critical shift in South Korea's anticommunist diplomacy and U.S.-reliant security. Anticommunist policies and the Hallstein Doctrine had to be reconsidered in the face of a transitioning external environment, e.g. changing security threats and East-West reconciliation. In April 1970, Foreign Minister Choi

4 In accordance with the Information Disclosure Act, 1988 diplomatic documents were released as of 2019.

Kyu-hah requested a revision to the Trade Act, which prohibited all trade with the Communist bloc, in the name of "1) adapting to the global current of coexistence and trade expansion of the democratic and the communist world, 2) dismantling communist North Korea's diplomacy by striking them from the rear, 3) expanding Korea's export region" (Kee 2015, 83). Then, on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1970, through the "Declaration for Formulating Peaceful Unification (8.15 Declaration)," President Park put forth a unprecedented proposal to "abandon the use of military force, carry on a competition between democratic and communist regime in good faith, and eliminate artificial barriers between the two Koreas in a phased manner" (Kim 1970, 72-73). Later, Park announced his intent to improve relations with the communist countries in the two press conferences held in January 1971, and in August of the same year. Foreign Minister Kim Yong-shik officially expressed the willingness to improve relations with communist countries. In September, a South Korean civilian economic delegation visited Yugoslavia to conduct market research and initiate indirect trade (Lim 2008, 73). The 6.23 statement of 1973 officialized the South Korean government's shift in international and North Korean policy which had been initiated in 1970.

### ***B. The Concept and Policy Objective of South Korea's Nordpolitik***

The Nordpolitik could be better understood as a politico-geographic concept, applied, instead, collectively to communist countries (Kim 1990, 42). When Park's 8.15 Declaration was announced in 1970, domestic media dubbed it "Nordpolitik," joining the likes of West Germany's 1969 Ostpolitik and the Soviet Union's Westpolitik (Kim 1970, 73). In line with Ostpolitik and Westpolitik, Nordpolitik policy is characterized by its regional direction of relations with the ideologically different countries.

The Park administration was in critical need to reshape the existing anticommunist security policy with the beginning of U.S. troop withdrawal from the peninsula, and positive Sino-U.S. relations surfacing. In the 8.15 Declaration of 1970, the administration put forth a new goal of peaceful unification by the late 1970s based on its confidence from the economic growth of the 1960s. Within the 8.15 Declaration, North Korea was challenged to a competition of good faith, a competition of development, construction, and creation that demonstrates which political system, between democracy and communist dictatorship, can provide a better life for the people. The goal of the Nordpolitik of the time was to prevent war and establish the upper hand in regime development.

The 8.15 Declaration's call to ease inter-Korean tension soon led to the proposal of inter-Korean Red Cross Talks in August 1971 and consequently the adoption of



the 7.4 North-South Joint Statement in 1972. Amid rapid external changes caused by incidents such as the withdrawal of U.S. force's 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in 1971, the U.S-China Summit, as well as Japan-China diplomatic normalization in 1972, the 6.23 Statement in 1973 developed further after a more active shift in perception based on the implementation of the 8.15 Declaration, as a statement for the Communist bloc open-door policy and peaceful coexistence of the two Koreas. The statement described the international order in 1973 as "aspiring to maintain peaceful coexistence through the balance of power among Great Powers in post-cold war," and added that "peaceful unification seems unlikely to be achieved in a short period of time." It further stressed that South Korea's biggest concern is how the goal of peaceful unification can be pursued with respect to changed global political dynamic (SNU Institute of Studies 1997, 178). With this declaration, South Korea presented new policy measures, detailing peaceful coexistence as a short-term goal and peaceful unification as a long-term goal; It suggested the two Korea's non-intervention and simultaneous joining of the UN, while proclaiming that it will open doors to all countries, even those with different ideologies and regimes.

### ***C. Environment of 1970s Nordpolitik and Limits of Implementation***

Park's 6.23 Statement was intended to improve relations with communist countries, otherwise known as 'Communist bloc open-door diplomacy.' However, despite the genesis of South Korea's Nordpolitik strategy of the time, the external environment at this time posed serious limitations to the implementation and success of the policy. There was no strong initial response by the neighboring communist countries to the newly formed South Korean Nordpolitik. China did not officially respond to South Korea's 6.23 Statement and even returned the 6.23 Statement brochure to the South Korean government (Cha 2019, 60). Though some unofficial interpersonal networks and indirect trade with the Soviet Union and the Eastern European bloc were in place, progress was remarkably slow and minimal.<sup>5</sup> In fact, due to the lack of positive response from communist countries alongside political restraints from the North Korea factor, South Korea's Communist bloc open-door diplomacy could not be implemented fully. Even though East-West reconciliation was occurring in the 1970s, North Korea's

5 The number of South Korean visitors to the Eastern European bloc and Eastern European visitors to South Korea was, respectively, 126 and 55 in 1973, 61 and 9 in 1974, 31 and 15 in 1975, and 34 and 12 in 1976; simply put, personnel exchange between the two parties was extremely limited (MOFA 1987a, 31, 94).

strategic value among communist countries remained. Moreover, the solidarity of communist countries further strengthened with COMECON integrating the economies of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, these factors provided a constrained environment for the implementation of South Korean Nordpolitik in 1970s.

The Nordpolitik of the 1970s was aimed at gaining the upper hand in diplomatic war and regime competition against North Korea, with South Korea placing emphasis on omnidirectional diplomacy.<sup>6</sup> The 8.15 Declaration in 1970 led to the 7.4 Joint Statement in 1972, the first joint statement by the two Koreas. However, after the 6.23 Statement in 1973, inter-Korean talks halted, and the relationship became strained. North Korea responded to the 6.23 Statement by describing it as an attempt to permanently divide the peninsula and proclaimed it would cut off conversation with the South. During his statement at the 6.23 Statement's first anniversary, President Park criticized North Korea, saying that whereas the South launched 6.23 Statement in order to "ease tension and promote peaceful unification," the North had only been focusing on its ambition of a forceful, communist unification (Bae, 2016: 156). North Korea's attitude towards inhibiting the South's implementation of the Nordpolitik continued throughout the 1970s, demonstrated by the attempted assassination of President Park in 1974 and the axe murder incident of 1976. Despite the 7.4 Joint Statement, the external environment for implementing the Nordpolitik was not in place. The Communist bloc open door policy and the policy of peaceful coexistence with North Korea during the 1970s did not meet the necessary external environment for reaching substantial implementation and outcome.

### III. Change in Internal-External Environment and Implementation of Nordpolitik in 1980s

#### A. Continuation of Nordpolitik and its Policy Objectives in 1980s

Even after the South Korean Fifth Republic Government, ushered in by the Chun

6 During the 1971 Parliamentary Inspection, committee member Kang Byung-kyu commented "North Korean regime spends 7 billion for overseas promotion, which is around 30 times more than what we are spending... Looking at the first half of the '70s, especially during this time of diplomatic struggle against North Korea, I am concerned as to whether we can develop our public relations skills and destroy what North Korea has by the time diplomatic war occurs after China enters the UN" (National Assembly Secretariat, 1971, as cited in Yang 2015, 113).

Doo-hwan in 1981, the basic strategy of Communist bloc open-door diplomacy continued. In his memoir, President Chun stated, "When I first took office, I set the basis of the Fifth Republic's foreign policy at opening doors; I pushed to establish and develop relations of friendly cooperation with all countries under the principle of reciprocity, no matter the difference in regime type and ideology. My Northward Policy was an upgrade from what President Park's 6.23 Statement aimed at in 1973," highlighting the connection to the 6.23 Statement (Chun 2012, 440).<sup>7</sup> Thus, the Chun administration emphasized improving relations with the Soviet Union and China; Due to their geographical proximity to the peninsula, involvement in the Korean War, and status as permanent members of the UN Security Council, improving relations with these communist countries was seen as a strategic move to progress towards peace and peaceful reunification on the Korean peninsula. When President Chun visited the U.S. in 1980, he said, "China is a friend of the U.S., and a friend's friend is not an enemy," thereby asking the U.S. to urge China to establish trade relations with South Korea and encourage South Korea's entrance into the UN (Kim 1999, 144). The Fifth Republic's Nordpolitik was officialized when Foreign Minister Lee Beom-seok used the term "Nordpolitik" at Korea National Defense University on June 29th, 1983, during his speech made in honor of the 6.23 Statement's tenth anniversary. There, Minister Lee openly declared, "A key task for Korean diplomacy moving forward is the use of Nordpolitik in the normalization with the Soviet Union and China" (Gong 2019, 184-185). This was the first official mention of the Nordpolitik by a South Korean diplomatic official, indicating that the Chun administration was evolving upon the contents of the 6.23 Statement and had set the Soviet Union and China at the core of its strategy. The diplomatic document "1987 Plan for Improvement of Relations in the Eastern Bloc Region," displayed the South Korean government's diplomatic strategy to implement the Nordpolitik. Within this document, the government urged the strategically located South Korean embassy to establish contact with diplomats of the Eastern European bloc, thereby encouraging trade and economic exchanges, increasing sports and cultural exchanges (MOFA 1987c, 8). Starting with its successful bid to host the 1988 Olympic Games in 1981, the Fifth Republic's Nordpolitik witnessed a potential environment for policy implementation.

<sup>7</sup> Although some studies (Lim, 2008: 97) argue that political instability during the early days of the Fifth Republic raised questions about the continuation of an open-door policy and that the open-door principle was selected by the Fifth Republic in 1983, when Foreign Minister Lee Beom-seok officialized Nordpolitik, South Korea's diplomatic documents reveal that the government's principle of open-door and relations improvement with the Communist bloc had maintained throughout the early 1980s.

Much like the 1970s, the Fifth Republic's Nordpolitik primary goal was the peaceful coexistence of the two Koreas. In President Chun's State of the Union address of January 1981, a mutual visit of the two Korea's chief officials was proposed; In January 1982, "the plan for national reconciliation and democratic unification" was suggested. From this point in time, through October 1986, there was hope for improvement in inter-Korean relations, hope characterized by the North's aid to flood victims of the South, cross-border family reunions, and secret inter-Korean meetings held with high-level officials (Chun 2012, 466-483). However, these meetings neither led to substantive inter-Korean agreements nor to discussions of peaceful unification. According to Chun's memoir, the infiltration of a North Korean armed spy ship off the coast of Busan changed the South Korean President and policy-making groups' perception of the inter-Korean summit (Chun 2012, 483-484). North Korea eventually announced an indefinite postponement of all inter-Korean (Chun 2012, 488). Such attributes of inter-Korean exchanges and correspondence demonstrate the limits of the Nordpolitik from an implementation point of view.

### ***B. Change in Internal-External Environment and Implementation of Nordpolitik in 1980s***

In the 1980s, South Korea's Nordpolitik encountered the internal-external environment that allowed it to make significant progress towards the implementation phase. Internal and external environmental factors - i.e. communist countries opening and reforming as well as an increase in South Korea's diplomatic resources through the Seoul Olympics and economic growth - became a driving force for implementing Nordpolitik. In March 1985, the Soviet Union adopted the line of reform and opening with the advent of Gorbachev, installing domestic reforms and shifting national relations within the socialist camp. China, after declaring to reform and open, expanded its unofficial exchanges with South Korea. Furthermore, economic and human exchanges between South Korea and Eastern European countries rapidly expanded in the mid-1980s as Eastern European countries faced serious economic trouble, thus pushing for the introduction of Western capital investment and technology, including Yugoslavia's economic liberalization policy and Poland's enactment of joint investment law.<sup>8</sup>

During the 1980s, Nordpolitik encountered a period of successful implementation due to the diplomatic resources and factors of the time: the buildup of South Korea's

<sup>8</sup> South Korea's diplomatic document from early 1987 describes in detail South Korea's perception on Eastern European bloc's economic liberalization and how Nordpolitik came to pick up its steam (MOFA, 1987c).

internal diplomatic capacity and economic growth, hosting the Olympics, full complete democratization in 1987 and the transformative external environment. Eastern European countries such as East Germany, the Czech Republic, and Hungary started to warm to the idea of participating in the Seoul Olympics (MOFA 1987n, 85-86). During the mid-1980s, Eastern European countries were increasing trade with South Korea; From 1986 to 1987, South Korea's economic interchange with Eastern Europe enlarged by 45 percent, with direct trade increasing to reach 20 percent of the total turnover alongside the increase in direct, economy-related exchanges (MOFA 1987q, 105). China, who began to prioritize economic development after declaring openness and reform in 1978, also showed a growing interest in South Korea's economic development.<sup>9</sup> Vietnam also warmed to the outside world and economic exchanges as it opted for the Doi Moi policy, which pushed for reform and openness in 1986. At that time, Vietnam had requested South Korean assistance in economic development through South Korean businesses (MOFA 1987l, 23). Diplomatic documents from 1987 reveal that businesses were actively used as diplomatic resources for the South Korean government's outreach to the communist bloc in the 1980s.<sup>10</sup>

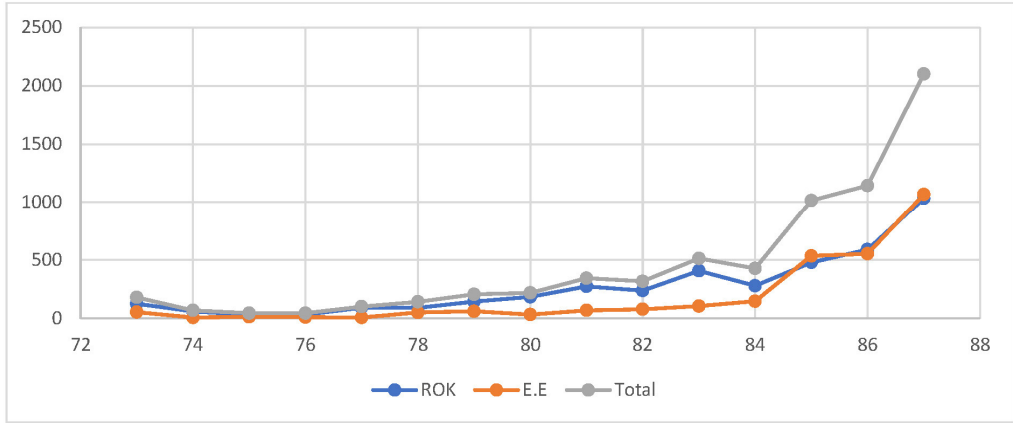
Under such internal-external circumstances, Communist bloc open-door diplomacy produced some notable results, including the construction of a foundation for diplomatic normalization. According to the Foreign Ministry's assessment from late 1987, personnel exchange with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in areas of academics, sports, culture, and economic counsel increased by 54 percent compared to the previous year. These non-governmental exchanges accompanied flexibility in inter-governmental relations. Direct contact between diplomats surged by 40 percent during the year 1987 and the Soviet Union even invited ROK ambassador to the reception marking the revolution's anniversary, demonstrating flexibility (MOFA 1987q, 104-105).

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9 For more detail on the birth and development of South Korea-China relations through economy and sports exchanges during the 1980s, refer to Cha (2018).

10 Diplomatic documents by Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency such as "Beteunam Ipguk Gyeolgwabogo" [Vietnam Entry Report] and "Teuksujiyeok Ipguk Gyeolgwa Bogoseo" [Special Region Entry Report] reveal that exchanges of Korean businesses, e.g. Samsung C&T Corporation and Kolon Corporation, with Vietnam were reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in detail (MOFA, 1987j; MOFA, 1987k).

**Graph 1. Yearly Personnel Exchange with the Eastern European bloc: 1973-1987**  
(MOFA, 1987a: 31, 94, 121-122)



\* ROK: Number of S. Korean visitors to the Eastern European / E.E.: Number of Eastern European visitors to S. Korea

Graph 1 displays exchanges with Eastern Europe made modest progress after the 6.23 Statement in 1973, and then experienced an explosive upsurge by the mid-1980s. Relations with Hungary progressed the fastest with respect to the Communist bloc open-door diplomacy, with KOTRA office at Budapest opening in December 11th, 1987 and the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce opening in January 1989, which in turn led to Yugoslavia and East Germany agreeing to open commercial offices in South Korea (MOFA 1987q, 105). This provided the first breakthrough for the implementation of Communist bloc open-door policy since the 6.23 Statement, the first fruit of the Nordpolitik. As such, the Communist bloc open-door diplomacy encountered a favorable and supportive environment for policy implementation during the mid-1980s, and this process of implementation became a catalyst for upgrading the full-scale Nordpolitik and the establishment of diplomatic relations of the late 1980s. The 1980s can thus be understood as the decade of the Nordpolitik's implementation phase through the interplay and enduring cycle of decisions on the Nordpolitik and internal-external environment. Nonetheless, due to the importance of their relationship with North Korea, no official move towards building a diplomatic relationship with South Korea was yet made by communist countries. Still, unofficial economic and interpersonal relations soared, building up the grounds to bear fruit.

### ***C. Marginal Implementation of 1980s Nordpolitik with Stagnant Inter-Korean Relations***

Even though the Nordpolitik of the 1980s reached the implementation phase, it can only be regarded as 'marginal implementation' as there were no official diplomatic relationships with the communist bloc and no measurable progress in South-North Korea relations. Rather, the Nordpolitik of the 1980s proceeded alongside South Korea's continued policy of peaceful coexistence with North Korea. Additionally, improving relations and maintaining talks with North Korea were regarded as necessary factors for implementing South Korea's Communist bloc open door policy. Chun (2008, 95) argues that the Fifth Republic's unification policy had basic objectives of ensuring national well-being and securing its superior legitimacy over North Korea. However, the policy for peaceful coexistence as well as exchange and cooperation with North Korea made little progress whereas the Communist open-door policy entered the phase of implementation.

Incidents such as Aung San terrorist attacks in October 1983, North Korea's sabotage diplomacy against the Seoul Olympics, and the Korean Airline bombing in November 1987 challenged the progress of the North Korean policy. Under the Chun administration, the dynamic of regime and diplomacy competition between the South and North continued. North Korea perceived the implementation of the 1980s Nordpolitik as a threat to the advancement of their regime and diplomacy goals. Oh (2004, 371) interprets the Aung San terrorist attack, which occurred after Foreign Minister Lee's declaration of "Nordpolitik," as the North sending a strong message that it will not tolerate South Korea's approach to China and the Soviet Union. Thus, South Korea's Nordpolitik was a threat to North Korea, and the environment for developing the inter-Korean relations could not form.

With Communist countries' increasing interaction with South Korea and their participation in the Seoul Olympics, North Korea felt inferior in the regime and diplomacy competition, and therefore actively unfolded its diplomatic scheme of disturbing the Seoul Olympics, insisting to co-host the event and subsequently blocking economic exchanges. In 1981, after Seoul was confirmed as the next Olympics host, North Korea's Pyongyang Broadcasting Station denounced the Olympic bid, calling it "an attempt to permanently divide and lengthen political control over the Korean Peninsula," and soon launched their diplomatic efforts to oppose the Seoul Olympics. In 1984, Kim Yu Sun, a North Korean International Olympic Committee member, sent a letter to IOC President Samaranch, saying, "Seoul is an area where war risks and political instability exists,

so the athletes' safety cannot be guaranteed. There is a need to seek urgent measures such as a host change," urging the withdrawal of the decision. At the "International Conference for Non-nuclear Peace and Anti-Imperialism in the Asia-Pacific Region" hosted by the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO)<sup>11</sup> in Pyongyang on September 24, 1987, North Korea included a resolution which called for the firm rejection of the South's plan to perpetuate the division of the Korean Peninsula, including the entry and cross-approval into the UN and the exclusive hosting of the Seoul Olympics (MOFA 1987p, 128-130). However, the decision of communist countries' regarding participation in the Olympics led to North Korea's stepping down and eventual acknowledgment of its inferiority in the regime competition and its diplomatic failure (MOFA 1987b). In the late 1980s, North Korea also tried to impede economic exchange between South Korea and Communist countries. For instance, in 1987, with South Korean companies fully entering the Vietnamese market, North Korea made five direct visits to the Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce which responded by saying, "The Chamber of Commerce has a duty to promote trade and this is an issue between Vietnamese buyers and South Korea. Vietnam wishes to trade with all countries" (MOFA 1987i, 76). Thus, North Korea perceived South Korea's growing exchanges with the Communist countries as indicators of North Korean inferiority in the regime competition and as a threat to its diplomacy and security.

During the mid-1980s, South Korea remained cautious of North Korea's diplomatic endeavors to improve ties with Western countries.<sup>12</sup> A report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1987 affirms that with the relations between South Korea and Eastern European countries thriving, South Korea's national strength and international standing was elevated, putting South Korea in absolute superiority above North Korea, assuming the position of an "older brother" (MOFA 1987q, 107). Amid changes in the internal and external environment, Communist bloc open-door policy progressed successfully, while the execution of peaceful unification policy was delayed.

11 Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) was founded in 1957 under the mission of encouraging Asian and African people's united struggle against imperialism and colonialism, promoting liberation, and devising economic, social and cultural development. In 1987, the organization had 78 member countries (MOFA, 1987o: 126).

12 "1984 Analysis and Present State of North Korean Scheme for Infiltrating the West" paints a general picture North Korea's exchange with the West and "North Korean Infiltration into the West and Countermeasures" seeks for its countermeasures (MOFA 1984; MOFA 1985: 71-79).



## **IV. The Pivotal Fruition Phase of South Korea's Nordpolitik around the 1990s**

After the genesis of Nordpolitik through the 6.23 statement, the unofficial exchanges between South Korea and the external environment of the 1970s via sports and economic transactions set the stage for full-scale implementation of Nordpolitik in the 1990s. The development of non-official and non-political exchanges became the foundation for the full-scale implementation of the Nordpolitik in the 1990s.

### ***A. Roh Tae-woo Administration's Nordpolitik: Objectives and Implementation***

As soon as the Roh administration began, the announcement of the "Special 7.7 Declaration for National Self-Esteem, Unification and Prosperity (7.7 Declaration)" was made on July 7th, 1988. This declaration pledged to "open a new era of national self-esteem, unification, and prosperity based on the principles of independence, peace, democracy, and welfare by building a social, cultural, economic and political community that the whole nation can partake in" and proposed a six-point implementation policy.<sup>13</sup> Here, South Korea defined its pursuit of improved relations with communist countries, including the Soviet Union and China (Roh 2011, 144-145). The Roh administration's Nordpolitik sought normalization as the ultimate outcome of Communist bloc open-door diplomacy, which had been in place since the 6.23 Statement of 1973. If we consider pre-1988 Nordpolitik as the period of expanding exchange and cooperation, Roh's Nordpolitik concentrated its efforts on the establishment of diplomatic relations, that is "diplomatic ties first, cooperation after" (Gong 2019, 195). Roh's Nordpolitik also emphasized inter-Korean relations improvement and peaceful unification, stressing co-prosperity and coexistence that went beyond the past scenario of regime competition and diplomatic war. Regarding North Korean relations, this period saw proposals of more inclusive and active exchanges and cooperation based on the South's predominance over the regime and diplomatic competition by the administration.

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13 The six-point policy goes as follows: "1) actively promote inter-Korean exchanges and open doors for overseas Koreans to freely travel between the two Koreas, 2) actively arrange and support life-and-death confirmation, address verification, correspondences and mutual visits of separated families, 3) open doors for inter-Korean trade and regard inter-Korean trade as domestic trade, 4) not oppose our allies' trade with North Korea on non-military supplies, 5) have the representatives from North and South meet freely on the international stage and cooperate with each other for the common good of the people, 6) be willing to help North Korea improve relations with our allies, e.g. U.S. and Japan, and seek to improve ties with communist countries, including the Soviet Union and China" (Roh, 2011: 144-145)

The objective of Roh's Nordpolitik, as revealed in his memoir, was divided into impending and ultimate objectives. The impending objective was unification, and the ultimate objective was to expand its living and cultural sphere Northward (Roh 2011, 141). In his memoir, Roh further explains that the Nordpolitik would be strategically implemented in three stages. The first stage was to establish diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union, China, and Eastern Europe, thereby "completely besieging North Korea." The second stage was Korean unification, of which the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement could be seen as a product. The third stage was reaching the Nordpolitik's ultimate objective, that is, extending South Korea's living and cultural sphere to Yanbian and Yeonhae (Primorsky) regions (Roh 2011, 141-142). As he successfully accomplished the first stage, Roh's Nordpolitik left a significant mark on the twenty years of Nordpolitik implementation.

In Roh's Nordpolitik, peace settlement on the Korean Peninsula and unification increased in priority. In his memoir, President Roh wrote, "I was thinking about what to do to resolve the confrontational state of the two Koreas, but I recalled the 'Wongyogeu-gong'<sup>14</sup> strategy used by Qin Shi Huang to unify China, the strategy here is to first gain strength by establishing close relations with distant countries and then attack nearby enemies and crush them. [...] I decided to refer to this strategy for inter-Korean relations," detailing improved relations with China and the Soviet Union as the major strategy for peaceful unification (Roh 2011, 140). Thus, the Nordpolitik could be a strategy to construct an external environment that could positively impact the status quo with North Korea. The Nordpolitik of the Roh administration attempted to move beyond the past competitions on regime and diplomacy, institutionalize peace settlement and exchange-cooperation headed by the two Koreas, with the hope of creating permanent peace for the sake of peaceful unification. The 7.7 Declaration emphasized "putting an end to exhausting competition and confrontational diplomacy between the two Koreas," and stated that South Korea would not only engage in trade with North Korea, but would also not object to North Korea trading with the South's allies and that it would be willing to help the North improve relations with its allies. Diplomatic documents after the 7.7 Declaration illustrate South Korean government's commitment resolve the issue of "North Korea's recognition as a country" and that of "signing a peace treaty," referring to the 1972 Basic Agreement between East and West Germany, and looking into a variety of legal and institutional issues such as

<sup>14</sup> A principle from China's period of Warring States, meaning "to make friends with a distant state and attack a nearby state."

those concerning the U.S. Forces in South Korea and the wartime operational control h e.<sup>15</sup> President Roh further hopes in his memoir, "I believed that unification would happen naturally if we could open up North Korea without a war. Any communist country is bound to change when they open. 'Opening up = Unification' was the basic principle of my North Korean policy" (Roh 2011, 140). This shows that Roh's Nordpolitik had set their eyes on peaceful unification as their top priority.

### ***B. The End of Cold War and the Nordpolitik's Fruition on the Communist Bloc Open Door Policy***

With the upgraded version of Roh's policy, Nordpolitik reached full scale implementation and fruition when it achieved diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, China, and other Communist countries, and led to the adoption of the 1991 Inter-Korean Basic Agreement. The Inter-Korean Basic Agreement can be regarded as building the foundation for implementing the objective of the Nordpolitik, even though settlement of permanent peace and peaceful unification did not occur. In the wake of the Olympics, South Korea's Communist bloc open-door diplomacy achieved substantial success through the expansion of cultural and economic exchanges. However, these relationships and exchanges remained at the unofficial level. The Communist bloc writ large refused to adjust their Koran Peninsula Policy, despite these unofficial exchanges, in favor of maintaining their historic alliance with North Korea (MOFA 1987q, 104). While these unofficial economic and cultural exchanges were expanding, the Communist bloc's internal-external environment was failing to develop the conditions for improving political relations with South Korea (MOFA 1987d).

Nevertheless, Roh's Nordpolitik eventually encountered the internal and external environment conducive to full scaled implementation and reaching the official level. The period between the late 1980s to early 1990s was the time of enormous shift in the international order as the Cold War came to an end. The Berlin Wall broke down, East and West Germany unified, and the Soviet Union was demolished. Domestically, the democratization of South Korea brought about through peaceful regime change, the successful Seoul Olympics, and growth in international recognition improved the Communist bloc's relations with South Korea. In order to build ambassador-level diplomatic relations, trade offices were established in order to stimulate official economic

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<sup>15</sup> South Korean government at the time had set four medium-term goals, including inter-Korean non-aggression declaration, inter-Korean peace agreement, stages towards discussing arms reduction, and long-term goals of arms reduction and unification (MOFA, 1988b: 126-151).

exchanges. The premiere establishment of ambassador-level diplomatic relations was with Hungary in the February of 1989. Following this development, official diplomatic relations with communist countries followed, Poland and Yugoslavia in the winter of 1989, Algeria in January and Romania, Czech Republic, and Mongolia the following March, the Soviet Union in September of 1990, Albania in 1991, and finally China and Vietnam in 1992. With these official diplomatic relations established, the Nordpolitik policy, which had been proposed/theorized/in place since the 1970s, finally came into fruition. Hence, the first stage of President Roh's Nordpolitik was accomplished.

### ***C. Marginal Implementation and Stagnation of Nordpolitik in Inter-Korean Relations***

Roh's Nordpolitik related to the North Korean policy achieved only marginal implementation in the 1990s with no actual and sustainable improvement of South-North Korean relations, even with its official fruition, i.e. the adoption of the 1991 Inter-Korean Basic Agreement. Immediately after the 7.7 Declaration was publicized in 1988, North Korea denounced the South for suggesting making the division of the peninsula permanent. President Roh discusses this particular denouncement in his memoir: "the North Korean regime could not help but turn towards inter-Korean dialogue and joint entry into the UN as the Nordpolitik came in full force and isolated the North. The North essentially submitted to the 7.7 Declaration. This is a piece of evidence that only dialogue based on strength can change North Korea" (Roh, 2011: 146). What waited on the other side of inter-Korean communication, with future goals of developing inter-Korean relations and unification, was a sense of confidence over the regime competition.

The results of the South's Nordpolitik prompted North Korea to restructure their conception of the true external environment, compelling the North to pursue inter-Korean talks and cooperation. When the Nordpolitik was on the verge of fruition, North Korea resisted and opposed due to its weakening position in the regime competition and the subsequent threat. At a meeting between the foreign ministers of South Korea and Hungary on September 28th, 1988, the Hungarian foreign minister relayed that North Korea was enraged about Hungary's decision (MOFA, 1988a). When South Korea-Hungary diplomatic relations were established, North Korea severely criticized Hungary (Roh, 2011: 153). When the Soviet Union informed North Korea of its decision to normalize the relations with South Korea, the representatives received threats from North Korean officials (Roh, 2011: 209-210). It is clear North Korea deemed the implementation process of the Nordpolitik as a significant loss in the regime competition and furthermore,

a perceived crisis of diplomatic isolation.

South Korea's Nordpolitik actively utilized the trend of improving relations with the Communist bloc to formulate an environment for reopening inter-Korean dialogue and peaceful unification. With China and the Soviet Union urging North Korea to resume inter-Korean dialogue and participate in the Seoul Olympics, including an invitation to Kim Il-sung, show changes in the external environment were suggesting inter-Korean communication and peace.<sup>16</sup> Under these circumstances and pressure, South and North eventually signed the "Agreement on Inter-Korean Reconciliation, Nonaggression, Exchange and Cooperation" in December 1991. However, as the ninth round of talks scheduled for December 1992 fell through, the agreement failed to be put into effect, and thus the objectives of settling permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula and attaining peaceful unification stalled at the phase of institutional agreement.

Looking at the strategic goal of the then-policy decisionmaker, President Roh, it is clear his perceived Nordpolitik had not fully achieved its proposed goals. The first stage of establishing diplomatic ties with Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and China was accomplished. However, the second stage of unification, though it was initiated via did the two Korea's joint entry into the UN and the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement, it did not lead to actual implementation. This stage stopped before achieving exchange-cooperation and peaceful unification, achieving about half the success.

## V. Conclusion

Through reviewing the history of the Nordpolitik policy, this paper examines the implementation of the policy from the 1970s to early 1990s in order to argue the Nordpolitik is a policy neither limited to the Roh Tae-woo administration nor broken off by each administration, but rather, a continued, phased, accumulated, and modern foreign policy. Furthermore, by looking into the Nordpolitik from the 1970s to the early 1990s, the paper determined the policy's objectives and contents have evolved and developed amid "the interaction between internal-external environment and policy decision-making" and "the cycle of policy decision-making and implementation." The table below shows the implementation process of South Korean Nordpolitik since the 1970s.

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16 In early 1987, North Korea demanded contact with the U.S. through China and the Soviet Union, using the Soviet Union and China as intermediaries. China and the Soviet Union also intended to support North Korea's efforts to refine external relations that in parallel with stabilization of the Korean Peninsula and the improvement of relations with South Korea (MOFA, 1987f: 25-35; MOFA, 1982: 164-167).

**Table 2.** *The developmental phase of implementation of South Korean Nordpolitik 1970-1990s*

	External Environment	Internal Environment	Implementation
1970s: the Birth Phase	-Ostpolitik of West German -Nixon Doctrine -US-China Summit -Soviet-China conflict	low economic capacity low reputation on human right	No visible implementation
1980s: the marginal implementation phase	-China's open-door policy -US-China Diplomatic relations -Socialist States' transition -USSR's Reform policy	Rapid Growth of GDP "Four Asian Dragon" Asian Game (1986) Seoul Olympic (1988)	The development of unofficial relations with Communists states -rapid growth of economic exchanges -the growth of non-political exchanges
1990s: implementation and fruition phase	-Fall of Berlin Wall -Soviet Union Collapse -The End of Cold war	Democratization (1987) Seoul Olympic (1988) High Growth rate of GDP (around 10%)	-Official diplomatic relations with the Communist states -South-North Basic agreement (1991)

As Table 2 shows, the time of the Park Chung-hee administration can be categorized as the Nordpolitik's "birth phase." The policy itself was born but could not be executed due to the limitations of the external environment. The period of Chun Doo-hwan's administration in the 1980s can be characterized as the Nordpolitik's "marginal implementation phase," as externally, communist countries faced an economic crisis and began to open up and reform, while internally, hosting the Seoul Olympics alongside economic growth opened an opportunity to implement the Nordpolitik. The period of Roh Tae-woo's administration in the late 1980s and early 1990s can be characterized as the Nordpolitik's "implementation and fruition phase," as the post-Cold War external environment engendered diplomatic normalization with communist countries.

According to the Roh administration's strategic stages and objectives of Nordpolitik policy, South Korea failed to achieve all of the targeted goal conceptualized by the Roh administration's strategic stages and objectives of the Nordpolitik. Despite the Nordpolitik's failure to establish the basis of peaceful unification since its genesis in 1970, the subsequent decades were the period of developing institutional consensus for the improvement inter-Korean relations and peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula, from the 7.4 Joint Communique in 1972 to the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement in 1992.<sup>17</sup> The implementation and fruition of Nordpolitik did not occur simply within the short period of time after the 7.7 Declaration in 1988. Rather, they are a result of what was amassed during the twenty years of repetition/continuation/perseverance of policymakers - making policy decisions based on internal-external environment,

17 Regarding inter-Korean relations, Kim (2011: 23) defines the period between the partition of the Korean Peninsula and the 7.4 Joint Communique of 1972 as "the period of absence" and the period between 1972 and 1992 Inter-Korean Basic Agreement as "the period of institutional consensus-building."

followed by implementation, and then a policy decision, and another implementation, and so on and so forth.

History shows foreign policy decision-making is a dialogue and an interplay of the times and the environment. In this context, for South Korea's New Northward Policy to be implemented it should reflect upon and apply the history of Nordpolitik implementation. Therefore, the second stage of Roh administration's Nordpolitik - setting the permanent peace and unification of the Korean Peninsula, and the final stage - expanding the living and cultural sphere Northward can be implemented and get the results with the strategical decision and diplomacy based on the good understanding of the environment surrounding its policy decision and its capacity.

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