Good afternoon. Thank you for coming. I'm honored to give my talk here thanks to APARC (Asia-Pacific Research Center in FSI), especially Director Prof. Gi-Wook Shin and Associate Director David Straub who inspired and helped me a lot. Today, I'm going to talk about how the media have covered the Six-Party Talks and what reporters should do to improve their coverage of the Talks in the future. As you know, the Six-Party Talks are the multilateral nuclear negotiation that 6 countries (China, the US, Japan, Russia, and South and North Korea) joined to solve the North Korean nuclear problem since 2003.

I am a Korean reporter who has covered the Talks for the past 4 years and I have been to Beijing to cover the Talks 7 times. I want to share my experiences and thoughts, based on the research I have done on this issue since I arrived at Stanford as a Knight Journalism Fellow. And, I guess you are wondering what's going on in the Korean Peninsula now regarding the sinking accident of South Korean warship 'Cheonan', and how the situation will affect the Six-Party Talks in the future. What good timing to have my talk today but since that is not my main topic, I want to invite you to discuss it in the Q&A session.

Here are the important moments related to the Six-Party Talks in the past and now. In the left-hand picture, I was grabbing one of North Korean delegation members to ask questions in the 2nd session of the 5th round of the Talks in 2006. I was squeezing him tightly for an hour and kept asking questions. Finally, he only answered my question about economic sanctions by the US, so I pooled it to all the reporters from other countries. And in the right-hand picture, I joined the simulation of the Six-Party Talks in a winter class called 'US policy toward Northeast Asia', with 4 prestigious experts on the issue at Stanford. I was sitting somewhere here. I believe these two different experiences allowed me to understand the Talks from diverse points of view. Through interviews with other reporters and experts on the issue, I researched how South Korean, American and Japanese media covered the Talks with many opportunities and obstacles, and how their reports interacted with their governments. I also went over their perspectives for the future of the Talks and their roles and responsibilities in terms of Northeast Asian peace and security issues. I chose these 3 countries because they played an important role in the Talks and have open press. The other 3 countries severely controlled their press, so I think there is no reason to go over them.

I set the date range of my research to go over the media coverage on the Six-Party Talks from December 1st of 2006 to December 31st of 2009 when I mostly covered the Talks. During this period some critical agreements were made, and after that the talks came to a deadlock. I looked at 3 important South Korean newspapers (Chosun Ilbo, Seoul Shinmun and Hankyoreh shinmun), 3 US newspapers (New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal) and 3 Japanese newspapers (Asahi Shinmun, Tokyo Shinmun and Yomiuri Shinmun). These papers covered the talks more than other media and were thought to have influenced governments and readers. With Korean and Japanese newspapers, I also considered their points of view, so I picked 1 conservative paper, 1 moderate paper and 1 liberal paper.

Let me begin with the number of articles on the talks in these newspapers.
Editorials represented more than 25% of total articles in Korean newspapers, while they accounted for less than 10% in US and Japanese newspapers. I think this demonstrates that Korean newspapers took the Talks more seriously and covered them in more diverse forms than the US and Japanese newspapers. In terms of straight and feature articles, in Korean newspapers 60% were straight news and 40% were features but in American and Japanese newspapers about 80% of the articles were straight news.

I think the reason the WSJ reported more articles than the NYT or the WP is that the WSJ has its own bureau in Seoul and also has more than 10 reporters in China who can cover the issue when the Talks take place in Beijing. However, the NYT has only one stringer in Seoul and the WP has no one there so the Japan bureau covers all the Korean stories including the Six Party Talks. The NYT and WP also have very few correspondents in China compared to WSJ or AP. In terms of the total number of the reporters from 3 countries who covered the Talks in Beijing, there were about 60 to 80 reporters from Korea who organized the press corps from about 25 media companies and about 150 to 200 reporters with 35 media companies from Japan. The Japanese media sent most of their relevant reporters from Japan as well as from their bureaus in Korea and China to cover the Talks. The US papers sent reporters from their China bureaus and a few American correspondents and stringers -- around 20 to 30 from about 10 media companies, which is not comparable with the Korean and Japanese reporters.

Then how did these newspapers cover the Talks in detail and interact with their governments? I chose some important events and agreements from this period of the Talks, and went over how these 9 newspapers covered them and impacted the Talks’ strategy and policy.

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2005 – Sept.19th Joint Statement
2006 – resumed in Dec. after long-range missile launch (July 5th) and 1st nuclear test (Oct. 9th) = critical view + persuasive view
2007 – Feb. 13th Joint Statement = mixed view (ambiguity etc.)
- BDA (~June) connection with Syria = mostly critical view
- Oct. 3rd Joint Statement = positive view (if implemented)
I started with the time of resuming the Talks in Dec. in 13 months in 2006. Until then, all the newspapers were very critical and skeptical about North Korea's long-range missile launch and 1st nuclear test so most of them pushed the Talks to resume as soon as possible. Some American and Korean newspapers especially asked the Bush administration to do something, so this resulted in the 1st official bilateral talks in Oct. 2006. In 2007, there were 2 important joint agreements in Feb. and Oct. Korean newspapers reported them in different ways. Chosun criticized that these agreements were not concrete, since they didn't discuss how to deal with nuclear weapons, and also hard to implement. Seoul and Hankyoreh felt they were important steps toward solving the problem in the initial stages.

Meanwhile, US newspapers such as the NYT had a scoop on the suspicious connections between North Korea and Syria in the transfer of nuclear facilities and programs. This report delayed the Talks awhile but when it resumed in Sept, the joint statement was able to include the sentence 'The DPRK reaffirmed its commitment not to transfer nuclear materials, technology or know-how.' At that time, US newspapers focused on nonproliferation. After the Oct. 3rd joint agreement, the NYT even commented that the Bush Administration did a good job negotiating with North Korea, as long as North Korea didn't ruin the agreement. The Japanese newspapers focused on the relationship between North Korea and Japan regarding Japanese abducted by North Korea. Japanese conservative Yomiuri also pushed North Korea to declare its nuclear program completely, alleging North Korea's PU to be as high as 60kg.

The newspaper reports were quite positive and supportive until July 2008, when they became more negative and skeptical due to the conflict between the US and North Korea on nuclear verification protocol. Although North Korea submitted its nuclear declaration paper to China and blew off a cooling tower in Yongbyon, the Bush Administration postponed taking it off the terrorist state list and asked to expand the verification of the nuclear program. This resulted in North Korea's threat to recover its nuclear facility. Most newspapers blamed North Korea for their brinkmanship strategy but Korean progressive Hankyoreh said it was the United States' fault that the Talks were held up. I reported the 1st Six-Party foreign ministers' meeting would be held in Singapore in June as a scoop, but it didn't change this negative atmosphere. Verification negotiation was delayed and didn't progress even after the US removed North Korea from the terrorist state list.

The last Six-Party Talks, in Dec. 2008, broke down without any results. The New York Times and Washington Post blamed both sides, saying failure was expected since North Korea didn't want to do their duty and the US approached the Talks in a rosy way. There was also some criticism from the media that Christopher Hill, the head of the US delegation, failed in his negotiations but tried to cover it up. The Korean newspaper Chosun criticized North Korea for not agreeing to the verification protocol, and said the US should be more aggressive in the Talks until North Korea gave up its nuclear programs. Hankyoreh criticized the US for its inconsistent strategy against North Korea so blamed the failure of the Talks on the US government. These polarized reports were influenced by South Korean new conservative government which didn't want to help North Korea so pushed it very hard.

In 2009, North Korea fired a long-range missile and conducted its 2nd nuclear test, so the United Nations Security Council decided to impose sanctions on North Korea. Most of the newspapers covered the story negatively, saying that North Korea restarted its brinksmanship and it would make the Talks stop awhile. Some newspapers even argued that the Six-Party Talks were threatened after North Korea's 2nd nuclear test. Only Hankyoreh said the Talks should reopen as soon as possible to persuade North Korea to negotiate again. Although Stephen Bosworth, US special representative to North Korea first visited North Korea to have bilateral talks, the US press was cautious about resuming the Talks in the near future.
So far, I showed you how various papers covered the Talks, depending on their viewpoints and their governments' stance. To recap, I would say Korean newspapers reported all viewpoints, ranging from conservative to liberal, in dealing with the US and North Korea. Their editorials especially seemed to polarize and sometimes go to extremes to mislead readers. Hankyoreh's editorials mostly criticized South Korea and the US, supporting North Korea's stance. Chosun's editorials blamed North Korea for its brinkmanship and asked South Korea and the US to push North Korea more. Their reporting seemed unbalanced since they tried to connect the Talks to their domestic political issues. Japanese newspapers only focused on the issue of Japanese abductees and competed with each other to report the possibility of a meeting between North Korea and Japan only. Their reporting seemed unbalanced since they tried to connect the Talks to their domestic political issues. American newspapers didn't seem passionate about reporting the Talks in terms of number and style of articles. NYT and WP editorials generally focused on the relationship between the US and North Korea with inconsistent views, as the US government changed its policy against North Korea quite often. They seemed arbitrary and without a strong viewpoint. In contrast, the WSJ's editorials strongly criticized North Korea, so they sometimes went in the opposite direction from their Beijing press-room.

So why did they continue these patterns in covering the Talks? I think the biggest reason is that each country's media coverage on the Talks was so limited, mostly interviewing each country's delegation members in the official press conferences and door-step interviews and relying on official statements after the Talks finished. Although the reporters got access to the delegation members, they usually repeated official remarks so the reporters tended to write their articles based on their fixed background and the viewpoint of the newspaper company. Some reporters focused on domestic politics because of the lack of information on the Talks. Whenever I went to Beijing, I tried to interview foreign delegation members, but they refused to speak about the Talks so I often asked experts and other ministry officials in Korea. When I joined the press interview with the US envoy in his hotel lobby, I saw other delegation members, so I chased them across the lobby, but they refused to answer my questions.

It's fair to say the reporters in Beijing only waited for the envoy's statements on the progress of the Talks. Some reporters even said they didn't want to cover the Talks since they were tired of reporting the envoy's same comments and boring statements without any tangible results. Of course, there was some strength in covering the Talks in Beijing directly. The reporters were able to deliver breaking news based on the press conferences and they collaborated to cover different envoys, using the pool system. The Korean pressroom was located in a different hotel from where the other country's delegations stayed. So the press corps took turns working as poolers, going to each hotel and sharing the results. But in this process, I think the reporters mostly focused on the 'trees', like the results of each round of Talks or the conflicts between countries, rather than the 'forest', meaning the whole picture of the Talks and its long-term future. The scoops on the Six-Party Talks were only the date of the Talks, the size of North Korea's nuclear program, and its connection with other countries which were not verified properly. I assume these reports were based on delegation members' secret information but not a big deal. If reporters keep depending on official statements and press conferences, the media will continue to deliver simple facts and criticism only depending on each paper's viewpoint and its country's interest.

Then how can this problem be solved? First of all, government officials, delegation members should be more frank and open and show some vision at the Talks. Sometimes they tried to hide something important, causing confusion and conflict between the delegation and the press of each country. If they don't provide accurate and complete information, the press might mislead the readers with bad information. As you can guess, no one would be interested in the Six-Party Talks and Northeast Asian problem if press wouldn't cover it. Also, innovative ways of collecting information, as well as fact-finding and
sharing should be done between government officials and the press corps. Reporters should expand their sources in order to get more information, and try to see the 'forest' based on the value and the future of the Talks, not based on their fixed viewpoints and national interests. I believe reporters can pay more attention to the Talks if they don't underestimate the meaning and potential of the Talks. Especially, they should try to carefully analyze the Talks in the context of building a Northeast Asia multilateral mechanism for peace and security. Also, the press should be more responsible in covering the Talks because it will influence Northeast Asian future and 6 countries' relationships. I strongly believe the future of the Talks will determine the future of the Korean peninsular and Northeast Asian regional prosperity so reporters should be more responsible about it.

Finally, let me introduce a small attempt which has been made by some Korean journalists in Seoul. In late 2008, about 10 foreign affairs reporters, including me, who have covered the Six-Party Talks for a long time, organized a study and discussion group to share ideas of the Talks and write in-depth articles. We invited several diplomats such as Min Soon Song, the former foreign minister and some distinguished experts on the issues and talked with them about the future of the Talks in terms of Northeast Asian peace and security.

*Ask delegation members to be more open and frank
*Look at the forest, not the trees
*Discuss and study North Korea and future of Northeast Asia
*Share ideas and view among international reporters – Korean foreign affairs reporters’ study group launched in late 2008

We also studied North Korea because if we know more about North Korea, it will help solve the problem in the future. Just before I left for Stanford, we invited American and Japanese correspondents and stringers in Seoul who have covered the Talks to discuss and share their ideas. It could be a trilateral talk among journalists. When we got together with American and Japanese correspondents and their stringers, we had a very constructive talk and discussed the role of the media to move the Talks forward in the future. When I go back to Korea, I think I can continue to promote this activity. I’m also planning to set up an open online website forum and invite more reporters and experts on the Six-Party Talks and Northeast Asian security issues so I started to discuss it with some of my close colleague reporters in Seoul. You are more than welcome to my website when it's open. I believe reporters and experts meeting online and offline will help figure out how to cover the Talks in more balanced and in-depth ways. I want to focus on how to convey the meaning and importance of the Talks until its mission is completed. As a Korean journalist, I feel responsible for building peace and security not only in the Korean Peninsula, but also across Northeast Asia. My ultimate dream and goal is to invite North Korean journalists as well as some foreign correspondents based in Pyeongyang to our offline and online meetings to deliver a message for peace and security together. Thank you very much. Please feel free to ask questions.