

PACIFIC  FORUM

# COMPARATIVE

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## C O N N E C T I O N S

A TRIANNUAL E-JOURNAL OF BILATERAL  
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CHINA- KOREA RELATIONS

## NUCLEAR WEAPONS CLOUD 70 YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP

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North Korea conducted five rounds of missile launches in this period as prospects for resuming dialogue with Washington dwindled. Although People's Republic of China State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi praised Pyongyang's diplomatic efforts during his September visit to the North, US-DPRK talks in October made no progress. The nuclear impasse loomed over 70th anniversary celebrations of China-DPRK diplomatic ties, highlighting the expanding friendship Chinese President Xi Jinping and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un envisioned last June. Amid concerns over escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula, Beijing and Moscow proposed a draft UN resolution in December calling for the partial lifting of sanctions.

For their part, Beijing and Seoul advanced their strategic partnership through talks between Xi and South Korean President Moon Jae-in, the China-ROK-Japan summit in December, Wang's visit to Seoul earlier that month, and the resumption of defense talks in October. But Moon's latest China visit drew much domestic criticism for failing to secure Beijing's cooperation on bilateral and regional priorities. Wang's December visit to Seoul, meanwhile, was most remembered for his attacks on US "unilateralism" and "bullying." US-China trade tensions and public clashes over Hong Kong present new challenges for the China-ROK partnership.

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## China's Regional Diplomacy vs. "Unilateralism" and "Bullying"

Moon met Xi and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on Dec. 23–24 before joining Li and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo for the 8<sup>th</sup> China–ROK–Japan summit in Chengdu. Moon invited Xi to Seoul in 2020, an event that would [signify](#) the full normalization of bilateral ties since the THAAD dispute, according to some Korean analysts. The trilateral summit produced an ambitious joint [vision](#) for cooperation over the next decade. While global attention centered on the North Korean nuclear issue, Moon's visit ignited a domestic uproar in South Korea over Seoul's perceived accommodation of Beijing. Urging Seoul to protect its national interests in dealing with Beijing and Tokyo, a *Korea Times* editorial [noted](#) two "embarrassing" highlights.

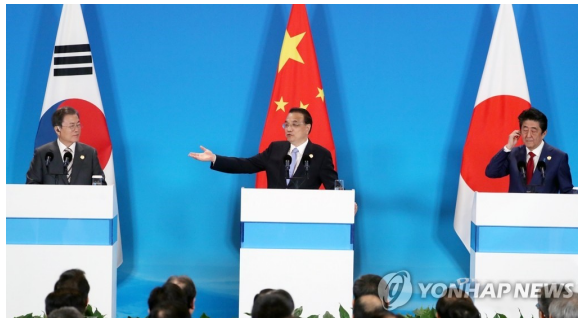


Figure 1 Moon, Li, and Abe discuss the results of the 8<sup>th</sup> China–ROK–Japan summit in Chengdu. Photo: Yonhap

First, a Japanese official angrily interrupted Moon's opening remarks with Abe to confront the press, demonstrating recent strain in Seoul's ties with Tokyo. Second, the PRC Foreign Ministry [quoted](#) Moon's position to Xi that "Hong Kong affairs and issues concerning Xinjiang are China's internal affairs," a statement that Seoul's [briefing](#) did not include. While the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson [confirmed](#) Moon's remarks, the ROK Presidential Office scrambled to pacify the South Korean public. A *JoongAng Daily* editorial [concluded](#) that the Xi–Moon summit "fell far short of our expectations" on producing consensus on restraining Pyongyang and lifting Chinese tourism and other restrictions since the THAAD fallout. China's *Global Times* soon joined the debate by arguing that "South Korean media must restrain their sensitive nerves" and criticizing the conservative media for calling China a "fake friend."

Wang's Dec. 4–5 visit to Seoul, three months after visiting Pyongyang, ended with a similar

disappointment. Wang met his ROK counterpart Kang Kyung-wha for the second time after meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York on Sept. 25. He also met Moon, leader of the ruling Democratic Party and former Prime Minister Lee Hae-chan, and former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. In addition to reaffirming their commitment to denuclearization and peace, Wang and ROK counterparts agreed to coordinate Xi's Belt and Road Initiative and Seoul's development strategies, and advance trade via the China–ROK FTA, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and proposed trilateral FTA with Japan. For Lu Chao of Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences, Wang's visit [signaled](#) a mutual willingness to restore ties amid strain in Beijing and Seoul's respective relations with Washington and Tokyo.



Figure 2 Foreign Ministers Wang and Kang meet in Seoul. Photo: Yonhap

But rather than elevating the China–ROK "strategic cooperative partnership," Wang's visit left its biggest mark through what appeared to be attacks on Washington. During his meeting with Kang, he [identified](#) "unilateralism" and "bullying acts" as the biggest global threats. He made the same claims to Moon, [calling](#) for cooperation "to safeguard multilateralism, free trade and adhere to basic principles of international relations." As [reported](#) by Chinese state media, Wang warned Ban Ki-moon that "the superpower" has become a "troublemaker" by "violating international rules, ignoring its own international obligations and adopting unilateral and bullying behaviors." Wang's visit also reminded Seoul of Beijing's continued opposition to the US–ROK military alliance. As Lee Chang-hyung of the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses [indicated](#) to the *Global Times*, the visit was intended to ensure "South Korea doesn't totally tilt toward the US" as Moon faces

pressure from Washington and conservatives at home to join the Indo-Pacific strategy. Beijing's regional diplomacy also drew comparisons with the Trump administration's frictions with its Korean ally over burden-sharing. As the *Global Times* asked, "is the 66-year-old alliance in deep trouble?"

Chinese multilateral engagements in Asia further showcased Beijing's active diplomacy toward neighbors. In a *Global Times* [interview](#) in September, Moon Chung-in, President Moon Jae-in's special advisor for foreign affairs and national security, identified China as an important mediator between Seoul and Tokyo. The three neighbors joined ASEAN, Australia, and New Zealand for the 3<sup>rd</sup> RCEP summit in Bangkok on Nov. 4, which produced what Li Keqiang called a "[breakthrough](#)" in advancing the trade deal, despite India's decision to opt out. To be formally signed at the 2020 summit, the "China-led RCEP," according to the South Korean media, [remains](#) widely perceived as a threat to Donald Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy. PRC Commerce Minister Zhong Shan, South Korea's Trade, Industry and Energy Minister Sung Yun-mo, and Japan's Economy and Trade Minister Kajiya Hiroshi pledged their support for both the trilateral FTA and RCEP during the 12<sup>th</sup> round of trade talks in Beijing on Dec. 22. Despite the consolidation of the China-ROK economic partnership, Chinese analysts [cautioned](#) that Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy may still lure Seoul into regional security networks designed to counter China's rising influence.



Figure 3 Li attends the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Summit in Bangkok. Photo: Xinhua

### China and North Korea's Anniversary Celebrations

In talks with DPRK Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho and Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) Vice Chairman Ri Su-yong in early September, Wang reiterated China's willingness to cooperate in the multiple areas the Xi-Kim summit outlined

in June. Wang's three-day trip was expected to revive regional dialogue as Pyongyang grew increasingly frustrated over stalled nuclear talks with Washington. He last visited Pyongyang in May 2018 before Kim's second summits with Xi and Trump. But while Wang praised Pyongyang's efforts to resume dialogue, working-level talks with Washington in Stockholm on Oct. 5 produced no results. Later that month in Pyongyang, Miao Hua, director of the Chinese Central Military Commission (CMC)'s political affairs department, and Kim Su-gil, director of the DPRK army's general political bureau, reaffirmed China and North Korea's strategic alignment. China's Defense Minister Wei Fenghe and DPRK Vice Defense Minister Kim Hyong-ryong also met on the sidelines of the Oct. 20-22 Xiangshan Forum in Beijing, where Kim criticized Washington and Seoul for impeding the Korean peace process.

The lack of progress on denuclearization loomed over China and North Korea's joint celebrations of national events. In his message on Sept. 9 marking North Korea's 71<sup>st</sup> founding anniversary, Xi noted his five meetings with Kim so far as a clear indication of their "common understanding." Kim recognized the PRC's 70<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary on Oct. 1 by promising to support China's "struggle to defend the stability and the core interests of the country," in response to which Xi praised Kim's policy focus on development. The two leaders [exchanged](#) letters on Oct. 6 commemorating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic ties. Xi not only reassured Kim of the "high priority" given to the relationship, but also appreciated their personal "mutual trust and friendship." Nov. 23 marked the 66<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the China-DPRK agreement on economic and cultural cooperation, which according to North Korean state media outlet *Rodong Sinmun*, [consolidated](#) the relationship based on their "common struggle for anti-imperialist independence."

For China's Korea experts like Wang Sheng of Jilin University, Beijing and Pyongyang's landmark October anniversary affirmed that "China's role is unique, irreplaceable, and essential" as a third-party mediator in the nuclear impasse. As Wang [indicates](#), regional differences over the definition of denuclearization and how to achieve it are the key obstacle. Pyongyang envisions a phased process coordinated with a peace mechanism, while Washington emphasizes complete and verifiable denuclearization first. Wang Fudong

of China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations argues the reconsolidation of ties under Xi and Kim presents an opportunity for advancing wider regional cooperation. The long-term success of China-DPRK relations most importantly [requires](#) sharing the same historical and strategic goals as “emerging socialist countries...even though they are not always on the same development path.” While the nuclear issue has long impeded Northeast Asian cooperation, Kim’s current focus on development aligns with Xi’s reform drive, raising the prospects for bilateral and regional engagement.

### **Finding Space for a Diplomatic Solution on the Korean Peninsula**

Pyongyang’s military threats, however, present an immediate challenge to the envisioned friendship with China. A series of missile tests throughout this reporting period accompanied North Korean proposals for the resumption of denuclearization talks with Washington. China’s Foreign Ministry again urged Pyongyang and Washington to “meet each other halfway” after the two sides offered conflicting assessments of bilateral talks in October. According to Zhang Liangui, formerly at the Central Party School, Kim’s multiple visits to China are merely moves to “[play](#) the Beijing card when dealing with the American president.” But given Washington and Beijing’s “common interest” in denuclearization, “China won’t support everything the North wants.”

As South Korea’s *Yonhap News* reported on Nov. 15, a US State Department official [told](#) Chinese counterparts that “space for a diplomatic solution is quickly closing.” After a month of anticipation, cancelation of the North Korean Moranbong Band’s China tour to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic ties at the end of the year suggested similar strains with Beijing. The band’s last planned performance in 2015 was also canceled, apparently due to differences over a performance featuring North Korea’s nuclear and missile development. Still, at a UN Security Council (UNSC) meeting on Dec. 11, China’s Permanent Representative to the UN Zhang Jun made [clear](#) that maintaining global consensus on a political solution remains the top priority.

China-ROK security exchanges focused on advancing US-DPRK denuclearization talks. In

September, South Korea’s nuclear envoy Lee Do-hoon met his PRC counterpart Luo Zhaohui, who accompanied Wang to North Korea that month. Defense ministers Wei Fenghe and Jeong Kyeong-doo met on Nov. 17 on the sidelines of the 6<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) in Bangkok, where they discussed regional security issues and bilateral priorities including the expansion of military hotlines. Those priorities were raised during the 5<sup>th</sup> China-ROK vice-ministerial strategic defense dialogue in Beijing on Oct. 21. Deputy Chief of the Central Military Commission Joint Staff Department Lt. Gen. Shao Yuanming and ROK Vice Defense Minister Park Jae-min led the dialogue, which last took place in 2014 before tensions over THAAD led to a four-year suspension. Park also met Wei Fenghe on Oct. 20 and attended the 9<sup>th</sup> Xiangshan Forum, China’s version of the Shangri-La Dialogue.

### **The China-ROK Strategic Partnership**

China’s illegal fishing in South Korea’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and incursions into the Korean Air Defense Identification Zone (KADIZ) are two major points of friction in the bilateral relationship. China’s ambassador for Yellow Sea Affairs Wang Xiaodu and Director-General of the ROK Foreign Ministry International Legal Affairs Bureau You Ki-jun led working-level talks on EEZ demarcation in Seoul on Oct. 24. South Korea’s Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries and Coast Guard reported multiple seizures of Chinese fishing boats in the Yellow Sea in October-November. The Joint Chiefs of Staff reported two PRC incursions in KADIZ during the same period, although China sent prior notification in the first case in October. At ASEAN’s ADMM-Plus in November, ROK Defense Minister Jeong Kyeong-doo called for regional compliance with regulations on unplanned encounters involving military aircraft and vessels, a problem Seoul also faces with Japan and Russia.

Developments since Beijing and Seoul’s 2014 agreement on the return of the remains of Chinese soldiers killed in the Korean War is indicative of progress in other areas. For the first time since 2014, China in September [confirmed](#) the identities of six soldiers using DNA technology developed by a research team of the People’s Liberation Army’s Academy of Military Sciences. A DNA database was launched in October at the Cemetery of Korean War

Martyrs in Shenyang, where the remains of the 599 returned soldiers are buried. China's Ministry of Veteran Affairs, established last year, began an online program in April to find the soldiers' relatives.

China-ROK environmental cooperation is another area of progress, especially since the recent fallout over fine dust pollution. At a Nov. 4 meeting in Seoul, environment ministers Li Ganjie and Cho Myung-rae agreed to implement a joint project on technology and personnel exchange. The PRC Ministry of Ecology and Environment's Director-General for Climate Change Li Gao and ROK Foreign Ministry's Climate Change Ambassador Yoo Yeon-chul also took part in talks in Haikou on Oct. 30-31. South Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon [expressed](#) support for trilateral cooperation with Japan at an environmental forum in November in Seoul, where PRC Environment Minister Li Ganjie outlined China's measures against air pollution. The two environment ministers joined their Japanese counterpart Koizumi Shinjiro for the 21<sup>st</sup> Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting in Kitakyushu on Nov. 23-24, specifying eight focus areas of cooperation over the next five years. The 4<sup>th</sup> China-ROK-Japan Science and Technology Ministerial Meeting took place in Seoul on Dec. 26 after a six-year gap in talks. Supporting the plans for cooperation laid out at the trilateral leaders' summit, science officials Wang Zhigang, Choi Ki-young, and Haguida Koichi agreed to resume joint research on common transnational challenges like pollution, infectious disease, and natural disasters.

While South Korea's National Institute of Environmental Research identifies China as the source of up to 70% of ultrafine dust in the country, a recent trilateral study found that an average of 51% comes from domestic sources and 32% from China. According to the Chinese Research Academy of Environmental Sciences' head scientist on atmospheric environment, such findings suggest an "[exaggeration](#)" in China's environmental impact in the region. In addition to fine dust, regional concerns [emerged](#) over Tokyo's proposals on Dec. 23 for disposing of contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant hit by the 2011 tsunami.

## The China-DPRK Economic and Cultural Partnership

China's share of North Korea's external trade reached 91.8% last year, based on Korea International Trade Association data. In contrast, inter-Korean trade amounted to almost zero in 2017-2018, following the 2016 shutdown of the Kaesong Industrial Complex and tightened international sanctions. Despite ongoing sanctions, North Korea's imports from China increased by almost an annual 20% in October. According to Chinese customs data, China provided more than \$35 million in aid to North Korea in January-August, most of which was spent on fertilizer. That figure was still 38% less than the amount China provided last year. Stalled US-DPRK talks in October underscored Pyongyang's continued quest for sanctions relief and security guarantees in exchange for dismantling its nuclear weapons program. The Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering reported in October that Taiwan's implementation of targeted financial sanctions on North Korea resulted in the freezing of assets worth more than \$3.96 million. On the other hand, the UNSC granted sanctions exemptions worth \$5,442 to support an International Red Cross project on clean water and sanitation in North Korea in October-April. Amid indications of US flexibility, Ambassador Zhang Jun at a December UNSC session on Korea called for adjusting sanctions measures for humanitarian concerns.

China's Foreign Ministry on Dec. 17 [confirmed](#) Beijing and Moscow's draft UN resolution on the Korean Peninsula calling for (1) continued commitment to denuclearization, (2) US-DPRK dialogue and the resumption of six-party talks, and (3) the partial lifting of sanctions. Aimed to promote dialogue amid escalating DPRK threats, the draft resolution is a step toward [breaking](#) the US-DPRK deadlock according to Zhang. *China Daily* [suggested](#) that it prompted Washington to rethink its position of "all take, no give" on the denuclearization issue, as indicated by US Special Representative for DPRK Affairs Stephen Biegun's subsequent visit to Beijing. Biegun met PRC Vice Foreign Minister Luo Zhaohui on Dec. 19, a day after a bipartisan group of US senators warned Pyongyang of additional sanctions in the case of further provocations. Regional attention on Beijing's cooperation in implementing sanctions heightened ahead of a UNSC resolution's Dec. 22 deadline for repatriating North Korean workers,

a major source of funding for the Pyongyang regime. While Russia accounted for the biggest share of the reported 23,000 repatriated workers, China did not disclose any corresponding data. South Korean media [claimed](#) that DPRK restaurants continued to operate in China after the repatriation deadline, with many workers using alternative permits.

Da Zhigang of the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences called provincial-level exchanges are a “[new highlight](#)” in China-DPRK relations advancing economic and cultural cooperation. Liaoning Party Secretary Chen Qiufa’s four-day visit in November promoted such cooperation with the WPK’s North Pyongan provincial committee, especially in agriculture, healthcare, and tourism. Chen also met WPK Vice Chairman Ri Su-yong and Minister of External Economic Relations Kim Yong-jae, and oversaw an agreement between Dandong and Sinuiju on fighting infectious disease. Local scholars like Da Zhigang welcomed the visit for reviving China’s northeast rustbelt, supporting North Korea’s growth, and opening opportunities for cooperation in sectors outside the scope of sanctions. Pyongyang [hosted](#) the China-DPRK Sci-Tech Exhibition in Health and Sports Field on Oct. 28-Nov. 1, engaging more than 70 organizations, according to North Korean state media. Bilateral cultural exchanges point to the comprehensive development of China-DPRK ties. The Confucius Institute [opened](#) North Korea’s first Chinese center at Pyongyang University of Foreign Studies on Sept. 27, with Chinese partners Eastern Liaoning University and University of International Business and Economics in Beijing. According to Northeast China’s local travel operators, the number of Chinese visiting North Korea almost [tripled](#) in April-October.

### **Challenges for South Korean Trade and Investment**

Citing prolonged US-China trade tensions and a weak memory-chip sector, official estimates projected the weakest annual growth in a decade for South Korea in 2019. Exports to China, representing 27% of South Korea’s overall exports last year, declined by an annual 12% in November. Exports to Hong Kong dropped by 33% in January-October, led by a decline in semiconductor exports, which make up more than 70% of ROK exports to there. The Woori Finance Research Institute identifies

South Korea among the countries worst affected by the trade dispute between the US and China, the biggest importers of Korean products. The dispute could slow South Korea’s economic growth by 0.3% according to the Korea Development Institute. At a G20 meeting in Washington in October, Bank of Korea (BOK) chief Lee Ju-yeol [indicated](#) that it may have already lowered growth by up to 0.4%. In a BOK survey in December, 74% of respondents identified the US-China trade war as the biggest risk facing the South Korean economy. On the other hand, the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy [projects](#) that tariff reductions under RCEP will boost South Korea’s growth by up to 0.62% over a 10-year period, translating into \$6.8 billion in benefits to consumers. South Korean finance officials at the end of the year pointed to a preliminary US-China trade deal as a reassuring sign for economic conditions in 2020.

According to China’s Ministry of Commerce, South Korea still [ranked](#) second among China’s top foreign investors in January-October 2019 (behind Singapore), with a total investment of \$5.04 billion, a 20% increase from the same period last year. South Korea continues to promote outward investment in China, where expenditures on chip-making facilities drove a 123% increase in direct investment there in April-June 2019 according to the ROK Ministry of Economy and Finance. Selected Korean companies were promised new tax benefits under an advance pricing deal reached between Chinese and ROK tax authorities in September. The Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) opened two new offices in China’s northeast capital cities that same month, targeting business opportunities in Harbin’s food and renewable energy industries, and Changchun’s auto and healthcare sectors. KOTRA’s expansion supports the Moon administration’s New Northern Policy aimed to deepen economic integration with Northeast Asian neighbors. As head of the Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation, Kwon Goo-hoon claimed at a December forum in Seoul that multilateral cooperation with Russia, China’s northeast, and Central Asia would “create new growth engines and establish the foundation of unification.” Moon outlined his envisioned Northeast Asian economic community at the 7<sup>th</sup> China-ROK-Japan business summit in Chengdu, where he also secured Chinese support for the East Asia Railway Community Initiative reconnecting

inter-Korean roads and railways as part of Eurasian transport networks.

Beijing's policy support, meanwhile, is focused on facilitating China's industrial shift to central and western regions. As part of an inspection tour in October, Premier Li visited Samsung Semiconductor's Xi'an plant, where he affirmed China's commitment to intellectual property rights protection and nondiscrimination against foreign businesses. At the China-ROK-Japan Business Summit in Chengdu in December, Li similarly reassured his counterparts on China's commitment to creating a favorable business environment for foreign companies. South Korean heavyweights like Samsung, however, still face the major challenge of declining Chinese market share. With rising competition from Chinese rivals like Huawei and Xiaomi, Samsung Electronics ended smartphone production in its remaining Guangdong-based factory in September. Hyundai Motor Co. also closed down its main Beijing plant, and reported a 16% decline in combined China sales with its affiliate Kia Motors Corp. in January-August.

### Hong Kong Clashes Undermine Post-THAAD Cultural Exchanges

Xi and Wang's latest visits to Seoul did not offer South Koreans much reassurance on future cultural interactions with Chinese counterparts. Current concerns have shifted to clashes between pro-Hong Kong demonstrators and mainland Chinese students on university campuses in Korea. Student clashes required the foreign ministries to step in as protests spread across major universities from November. The ROK Foreign Ministry expressed concerns over Hong Kong's escalating situation and raised its travel warning that same month. After two Chinese students were caught taking down "liberate Hong Kong" banners at Yonsei University on Nov. 12, the PRC Foreign Ministry insisted such actions were "[reasonable](#)" while also calling for compliance with local laws. According to the PRC Embassy in Seoul, the students were "expressing their opposition to words and actions that harm Chinese sovereignty." As Hong Kong protests quickly spread to other campuses, Chinese students accused their Korean counterparts of interfering in China's affairs. Even on social media, K-pop star Choi Si-won apologized to Chinese fans after "liking" a Hong Kong news post prompted a Chinese fan club to [threaten](#) to close down.



Figure 4 "Liberate Hong Kong banners" hung at Yonsei University, where two Chinese students were caught attempting to take down the banners. Photo: Korea JoongAng Daily

The long-term cultural effects of the THAAD dispute remain uncertain. According to the Korea Tourism Organization, the number of Chinese tourists to South Korea increased by 26% to 5.51 million in January-November 2019 from the same period last year. Chinese language study remains popular in South Korea, where the number of Chinese Proficiency Test (*hanyu shuiping kaoshi*) takers last year was the world's highest, [according](#) to a Chinese Embassy official. In addition, almost half the 1.3 million immigrants in South Korea as of May 2019 are Chinese nationals, while 69% of the F-4 multiple-entry visas Seoul issued last year went to ethnic Koreans in China. Chinese-Korean marriages became a major trending topic on Chinese social [media](#) in November after the Korea Broadcast System reported that Chinese grooms were the most favored among foreign grooms in South Korea last year. On the other hand, as *The South China Morning Post* [reported](#) in December, children of Chinese and North Korean parents seeking refuge in the South continue to face significant problems assimilating.

## **Conclusion: China and Korea's Regional Position**

Inspired by a recent lecture by South Korea's former Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan at Peking University, a *Global Times* [article](#) argued that the US-China relationship is most important to the development of a Northeast Asian security architecture. But as the nuclear impasse dragged on, Moon's interactions with Chinese and US counterparts incited criticism from Pyongyang on Seoul's failure to act independently. Regional exchanges continue to draw attention to the repercussions of US-China competition for Seoul. ROK Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha sought to dispel such perceptions during Wang Yi's December visit, making [clear](#) that "our role is to be a force for cooperation rather than competition between the US and China." At Seoul's Strategic Coordination Meeting on Foreign Affairs on Dec. 30, a meeting launched in July amid US-China tensions, Kang [presented](#) a diplomatic strategy of securing "maneuvering space" by strengthening cooperation with all neighbors.

In his yearend [interview](#) with CGTN, Wang attributed current tensions on the peninsula to the failure to implement the US-DPRK Singapore summit's Joint Statement and address Pyongyang's "legitimate concerns." Wang admitted that "the window of opportunity for peace is again shifting, and the chances for dialogue quickly fading," while calling 2019 a "milestone" in China-DPRK relations. Since Pyongyang never sent the "Christmas gift" it promised to Washington at the end of the year, South Korean analysts anticipate that Pyongyang will continue to seek Chinese and Russian support rather than risk escalating military threats in 2020.

*Research assistance and chronology compilation provided by Chenglong Lin.*

# CHRONOLOGY OF CHINA-KOREA RELATIONS

## SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2019

**Sept. 2-4, 2019:** People's Republic of China State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi visits North Korea, where he meets his DPRK counterpart Ri Yong-ho and WPK Vice Chairman Ri Su-yong, and visits a cemetery of the Chinese People's Volunteers.

**Sept. 4, 2019:** South Korea's National Tax Service Commissioner Kim Hyun-jun and PRC counterpart Wang Jun sign a deal in Beijing easing tax audit burdens for select South Korean companies.

**Sept. 5, 2019:** DPRK Ambassador to China Ji Jae-ryong hosts a banquet in Beijing marking the 71<sup>st</sup> anniversary of North Korea's founding.

**Sept. 9, 2019:** President Xi Jinping sends a congratulatory message to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un on North Korea's founding anniversary.

**Sept. 9, 2019:** DPRK Ambassador Ji Jae-ryong addresses "DPRK Day" on the sidelines of the Beijing International Horticultural Exhibition, attended by officials of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**Sept. 10, 2019:** North Korea launches two short-range projectiles.

**Sept. 11, 2019:** The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and the China-Korea Friendship Association host a reception in Beijing marking North Korea's founding anniversary, attended by DPRK Ambassador to China Ji Jae Ryong and Chinese officials.

**Sept. 12, 2019:** Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Luo Zhaohui and special representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security affairs Lee Do-hoon meet in Beijing.

**Sept. 12, 2019:** At a news conference with Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah, Wang expresses Chinese support for DPRK efforts to resume talks with Washington.

**Sept. 19, 2019:** China's General Administration of Customs says China will ban pig imports from South Korea given reported cases of African swine fever.

**Sept. 19, 2019:** Choe Sang Gon, president of Kim Il Sung University and minister of Higher Education, leads a university delegation to China to attend Yanbian University's 70th founding anniversary celebrations.

**Sept. 21, 2019:** Chairman of the Architects Union of Korea's Central Committee Sim Yong Hak leads a DPRK delegation to the 10th Weihai international ecological environment festival in China.

**Sept. 24, 2019:** The Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency says it will open two new offices in Harbin and Changchun, capitals of Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces.

**Sept. 25, 2019:** FM Wang and ROK Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha hold talks on the sidelines of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly.

**Sept. 26, 2019:** PRC Ambassador to North Korea Li Jinjun addresses a reception in Pyongyang marking China's 70<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary, attended by Pak Pong-ju, Vice Chairman of North Korea's State Affairs Commission.

**Sept. 27, 2019:** Confucius Institute opens North Korea's first Chinese center at Pyongyang University of Foreign Studies.

**Sept. 29, 2019:** China identifies six Chinese soldiers killed in the Korean War, whose remains were reburied in the cemetery of Korean War martyrs in Shenyang after being returned from South Korea.

**Oct. 1, 2019:** Kim sends a congratulatory message to Xi on the PRC's 70<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary.

**Oct. 2, 2019:** North Korea test-fires a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) which the ROK military calls an intermediate-range ballistic missile.

**Oct. 3, 2019:** PRC Foreign Ministry says China welcomes US-DPRK efforts to resume dialogue.

**Oct. 5, 2019:** South Korean media reports that North Korea sent a group of working-level officials to Dandong, Liaoning province, ahead of planned US-DPRK nuclear talks in Sweden.

**Oct. 5-12, 2019:** Koreans in China and Chinese guests visit North Korea for a meeting of the Kim Il Sung-Kim Jong Il Foundation.

**Oct. 6-27, 2019:** Cultural events in China mark the WPK's 74<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary and the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China-DPRK diplomatic relations.

**Oct. 6, 2019:** Xi and Kim exchange congratulatory messages on the 70th anniversary of China-DPRK diplomatic ties.

**Oct. 6, 2019:** *Rodong Sinmun* dedicates an article to the 70th anniversary of China-DPRK diplomatic relations.

**Oct. 8, 2019:** China's Foreign Ministry expresses hopes for US-DPRK dialogue.

**Oct. 8, 2019:** DPRK State Stamp Bureau issues a new stamp to commemorate the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations with China.

**Oct. 10, 2019:** ROK Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries reports that it has seized four Chinese boats for illegal fishing in South Korea's EEZ in the Yellow Sea.

**Oct. 11, 2019:** South Korea's Coast Guard seizes two Chinese fishing boats for illegal fishing in its EEZ in the Yellow Sea.

**Oct. 11, 2019:** Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and China-Korea Friendship Association hold a reception in Beijing to mark the 70th anniversary of China-DPRK relations, attended by DPRK Ambassador Ji Jae Ryong.

**Oct. 12, 2019:** A delegation of North Korea's Academy of Social Sciences, led by its President Ri Hye Jong, leaves Pyongyang to visit China.

**Oct. 12, 2019:** A friendship delegation led by Kim Yong Chol, chairman of the South Hwanghae Provincial People's Committee, leaves Pyongyang to visit China.

**Oct. 14, 2019:** The first album of K-pop group SuperM, which includes a Chinese member, tops the US Billboard 200 albums chart for the week of October 19.

**Oct. 14-17, 2019:** Director of China's CMC political affairs department Senior Vice Adm. Miao Hua visits North Korea and meets Kim Sungil, director of the DPRK army's general political bureau.

**Oct. 14-18, 2019:** A 19-member delegation of Chinese regional government officials visit South Korea as part of a Foreign Ministry exchange program launched in 1999.

**Oct. 16, 2019:** During his inspection tour of Xian, PRC Premier Li Keqiang visits Samsung Semiconductor Co.'s chip foundries.

**Oct. 18-21, 2019:** Xinhua News Agency delegation led by Vice President Zhang Sutang arrives in Pyongyang.

**Oct. 20-22, 2019:** ROK Vice Defense Minister Park Jae-min visits Beijing. He meets Lt. Gen. Shao Yuanming, deputy chief of the CMC Joint Staff Department, for the 5<sup>th</sup> China-ROK vice ministerial strategic defense dialogue.

**Oct. 20-22, 2019:** The Xiangshan Forum takes place in Beijing. PRC Defense Minister Wei Fenghe holds separate meetings with ROK and DPRK vice defense ministers Park Jae-min and Kim Hyong-ryong on the sidelines.

**Oct. 21-25, 2019:** Delegation of the China-DPRK Friendship Parliamentary Group led by Chairman Choe Sang Gon, president of Kim Il Sung University and minister of Higher Education, visits China.

**Oct. 24, 2019:** You Ki-jun, director-general of the ROK Foreign Ministry's International Legal Affairs Bureau, and Wang Xiaodu, China's ambassador for Yellow Sea Affairs, meet in Seoul for working-level talks on EEZs.

**Oct. 28-Nov. 1, 2019:** China-DPRK Sci-Tech Exhibition in Health and Sports Field takes place in Pyongyang.

**Oct. 29, 2019:** A PRC military plane enters the Korean Air Defense Identification Zone (KADIZ) after sending prior notification, according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

**Oct. 30, 2019:** Korean Central News Agency publishes Xi's reply to Kim's congratulatory message on China's 70<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary.

**Oct. 30-31, 2019:** ROK Ambassador for Climate Change Yoo Yeon-chul and PRC Ministry of Ecology and Environment's director-general for climate change Li Gao lead climate change talks in Haikou.

**Oct. 31, 2019:** North Korea test-fires two short-range projectiles.

**Nov. 3, 2019:** Students hold a rally in Seoul supporting anti-government protests in Hong Kong.

**Nov. 4, 2019:** The 22<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Plus Three summit takes place in Bangkok.

**Nov. 4, 2019:** PRC and ROK environment ministers Li Ganjie and Cho Myung-rae hold talks in Seoul.

**Nov. 5, 2019:** A delegation of the Education Commission led by Chairman Kim Sung Du leaves Pyongyang to visit China.

**Nov. 7, 2019:** South Korea's Yonhap News Agency and China's Xinhua News Agency sign an agreement to expand media cooperation.

**Nov. 10, 2019:** Liaoning Daily reports a four-day visit to North Korea by a Chinese delegation led by Liaoning provincial party secretary Chen Qiufa, at the invitation of the WPK's North Pyongan provincial committee. The Chinese delegation met Vice Chairman of the WPK Central Committee Ri Su-yong and Minister of External Economic Relations Kim Yong-jae.

**Nov. 11-12, 2019:** Students at Seoul National University and Korea University hold protests supporting the antigovernment protest movement in Hong Kong.

**Nov. 13-21, 2019:** ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting-Plus members, including China and South Korea, hold counter-terrorism drills.

**Nov. 14, 2019:** China's Foreign Ministry calls for dialogue on the Korean Peninsula after Pyongyang expresses opposition to US-ROK military drills in mid-November.

**Nov. 14, 2019:** ROK Foreign Ministry expresses concern over intensifying protests in Hong Kong.

**Nov. 14, 2019:** PRC Embassy in Seoul states that the mainland Chinese students who removed "liberate Hong Kong" banners at Yonsei University on Nov. 12 were "expressing their indignation and opposition to words and actions that harm Chinese sovereignty and distort the facts."

**Nov. 15, 2019:** Seoul raises its travel warning level for Hong Kong.

**Nov. 17, 2019:** PRC and ROK defense ministers Wei Fenghe and Jeong Kyeong-doo hold bilateral talks in Bangkok.

**Nov. 18, 2019:** The PRC Foreign Ministry says that overseas Chinese student opposition to separatist activities in Hong Kong are "understandable" but calls for compliance with local laws.

**Nov. 18, 2019:** Students at Yonsei University hold a silent march against the crackdown on Hong Kong protestors. Posters carrying the same message emerge on other campuses including Korea University of Foreign Studies and Pusan National University.

**Nov. 18, 2019:** South Korea's Oceans Ministry reports it has seized three Chinese fishing boats for illegal fishing in its EEZ in the Yellow Sea.

**Nov. 19, 2019:** Students hold rally near the PRC Embassy in Seoul supporting Hong Kong protests.

**Nov. 21, 2019:** South Korea's Foreign Ministry spokesperson state that China and South Korea are communicating on issues concerning student clashes over Hong Kong.

**Nov. 23, 2019:** *Rodong Sinmun* reports on the 66<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the conclusion of the China-DPRK agreement on economic and cultural cooperation.

**Nov. 23-24, 2019:** The 21<sup>st</sup> China-ROK-Japan Environment Ministers' Meeting takes place in Kitakyushu.

**Nov. 27, 2019:** A planned China tour by North Korea's Moranbong band is suspended according to ROK media.

**Nov. 27-29, 2019:** The 16<sup>th</sup> round of China-ROK-Japan FTA negotiations take place in Seoul.

**Nov. 28, 2019:** North Korea test-fires two short-range projectiles.

**Nov. 29, 2019:** Duan Jining, director of international cooperation at the Chinese Banking Insurance Regulatory Commission, Sohn Byung-doo, ROK Financial Services Commission Vice Chairman, and Himino Ryoza, vice minister for international affairs at the Japanese Financial Services Agency, hold trilateral talks in Tokyo.

**Nov. 29, 2019:** A PRC military plane violates KADIZ, according to Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

**Nov. 30-Dec. 1, 2019:** The symphony orchestra of the State Grand Theatre of China performs in North Korea's Samjiyon Orchestra Theatre.

**Dec. 1-4, 2019:** Shandong Party Secretary Liu Jiayi visits South Korea for events on local government cooperation and meetings with Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon, Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha, and First Vice Foreign Minister Cho Sei-young.

**Dec. 3, 2019:** The 13<sup>th</sup> round of consular consultations takes place in Beijing between PRC Director-General of the Department of Consular Affairs Cui Aimin and DPRK counterpart, who also meets China's Vice Foreign Minister Luo Zhaohui.

**Dec. 4, 2019:** The 5<sup>th</sup> ROK-China Peace Diplomacy Forum takes place in Seoul.

**Dec. 4-5, 2019:** FM Wang visits South Korea, where he meets Moon, Kang, ruling Democratic Party leader Lee Hae-chan, and former UN Secretary-General and Boao Forum for Asia Chairman Ban Ki-moon.

**Dec. 5, 2019:** South Korean media reports that DPRK External Economic Affairs Minister Kim Yong-jae arrives in Beijing from Pyongyang.

**Dec. 8, 2019:** South Korean university students hold rally outside the Chinese Embassy in Seoul supporting Hong Kong protests.

**Dec. 9, 2019:** A delegation of the All-China Journalists Association led by Hu Xiaohan, executive secretary and executive vice president of the association, arrives in Pyongyang.

**Dec. 11, 2019:** China's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Zhang Jun presents China's position at a Security Council meeting on the Korean peninsula.

**Dec 12, 2019:** PRC Foreign Ministry's Director-General of the Policy Planning Department Liu Jinsong and ROK Foreign Ministry's Director-General for Strategy Lee Jun-ho meet in Seoul.

**Dec. 12-13, 2019:** Vice Finance ministers and central bank representatives hold ASEAN Plus Three talks in Xiamen.

**Dec. 13, 2019:** China's Vice Foreign Minister Luo Zhaohui, ROK Deputy FM Kim Gunn, and Japan's Senior Deputy FM Mori Takeo meet in Chengdu in preparation for the trilateral leaders' summit.

**Dec. 14, 2019:** North Korea confirms it has conducted a "crucial test" at a satellite launch site.

**Dec. 15, 2019:** People's Daily organizes an ASEAN Plus Three media forum in Chengdu.

**Dec. 15, 2019:** China's National Health Commission chief Ma Xiaowei, ROK health minister Park Neung-hoo, and Japan's Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare Kato Katsunobu hold the Tripartite Health Ministers' Meeting in Seoul.

**Dec. 16, 2019:** 2019 China-ROK-Japan Media Dialogue takes place in Chengdu, Sichuan province.

**Dec. 18-24, 2019:** An exhibition celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China-DPRK diplomatic relations, organized by China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the DPRK Embassy in China, opens at the National Library of China.

**Dec. 19, 2019:** China's Foreign Ministry calls for restraint on the Korean peninsula.

**Dec. 22, 2019:** The 12<sup>th</sup> round of China-ROK-Japan trade talks take place in Beijing.

**Dec. 23-24, 2019:** Moon travels to China, where he meets Xi in Beijing and Premier Li Keqiang in Chengdu before the 8<sup>th</sup> China-ROK-Japan leaders' summit.

**Dec. 26, 2019:** 4<sup>th</sup> China-ROK-Japan Science and Technology Ministerial Meeting takes place in Seoul.

