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CHINA- KOREA RELATIONS

CHINA-KOREA RELATIONS POISED FOR RECOVERY DESPITE INTENSIFIED CONFLICT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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China's relations with North and South Korea gained momentum in the first four months of 2021. China-North Korea relations were propelled by an exchange of messages between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Chinese President Xi Jinping around North Korea's successful convening of the Worker's Party of Korea's (WPK) Eighth Party Congress, the appointment of former North Korean Trade Minister Ri Ryong Nam as North Korea's new ambassador to China, and another round of messages in March that emphasized the importance of close relations. In a Jan. 21 Cabinet meeting, South Korean President Moon Jae-in pledged to develop relations with China to new heights, and in a Jan. 26 telephone call with Moon, Xi expressed support for Korean denuclearization and joint development of China-South Korea relations. China and South Korea held consultations on maritime enforcement cooperation, defense lines of communication, health security, and free trade negotiations.

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On April 3 Chinese and South Korean Foreign Ministers Wang Yi and Chung Eui-young held consultations in Xiamen, China, which coincided with a trilateral meeting of Japanese, South Korean, and US national security advisors in Annapolis, Maryland. South Korea's cautious handling of questions about whether it will join the Quad and of official statements toward China during a 2+2 meeting of South Korean and US foreign and defense ministers in March drew praise from Chinese analysts. Hyundai Motors announced plans to launch electric vehicle sales and build fuel cells in China, while Samsung was called to a White House meeting to talk about semiconductor supplies as part of discussions on supply chain resiliency that could limit the availability of advanced semiconductors to the Chinese market. Despite the official signaling of improvements in relations between China and South Korea, Chinese and South Korean public conflicts intensified on social media, with a series of spats over cultural appropriation, online attacks from both sides, and Korean public objections to Chinese ad placement in Korean TV dramas.

Kim Jong Un's New Bestie: Xi Jinping

The January 2021 WPK Eighth Party Congress provided an [effusive evaluation](#) of North Korea's relations with China, claiming the opening of a "new chapter" in the relationship with socialism at its core. The WPK asserted that the two nations "strengthened strategic communication, promoted mutual understanding and deepened comradesly trust" through five summit meetings during 2018 and 2019. Xi congratulated Kim on his election as party general secretary and exchanged messages with Kim on the occasion of the Eighth Party Congress, with the *Rodong Sinmun* [reporting](#) Xi's comment that "it is a steadfast policy of the Chinese Party and government to successfully protect, consolidate, and develop China-DPRK relations" and the WPK Eighth Congress [emphasizing](#) the "development of long-standing special relations" between both the parties and their leaders. In a March 23 exchange of messages between Kim and Xi, Kim [reported](#) on the results of the Eighth Party Congress and Xi [reaffirmed](#) his intent to strengthen cooperation and his belief that "friendly relations between the two countries would grow stronger," noting the 100th founding anniversary of the Communist Party of China and the 60th anniversary of the Sino-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation,

and Mutual Assistance. Chinese and North Korean Foreign Ministers Wang Yi and Ri Son Gwon [exchanged greetings](#) on the occasion of the Lunar New Year. South Korea's National Security Advisor Suh Hoon [reportedly](#) told US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in March that preparations are underway for a sixth Kim-Xi summit meeting as a "precursor" to renewed North Korean diplomatic engagement with the United States.



Figure 1 North Korean leader Kim Jong Un pictured at the Worker's Party of Korea's (WPK) Eighth Party Congress in Pyongyang. Photo: KCNA/Kyodo

Hints of Recovery in China-North Korea Trade Relations

In a clearly-telegraphed hint regarding areas of the bilateral relationship that North Korea hopes will be strengthened, North Korea [appointed](#) former trade minister Ri Ryong Nam as its new envoy to China, replacing long-time China hand Ji Jae Ryong. Ri's selection as an envoy to Beijing over a Foreign Ministry representative with extensive China experience suggests that North Korea hopes to revive its trade relationship with China following the debilitating effects of the COVID-19 quarantine on official China-North Korea trade in 2020. China's [appointment](#) of Liu Xiaoming as its special representative for the Korean Peninsula sends a more complicated message about China's expectations for diplomacy with and about North Korea. Known primarily as an America hand prior to his appointment as ambassador to Pyongyang from 2006-2010, Liu [reportedly](#) discouraged Chinese investment in North Korea at that time. It remains to be seen whether Liu will devote more time to public messaging regarding US policy toward North Korea or diplomatic coordination in support of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

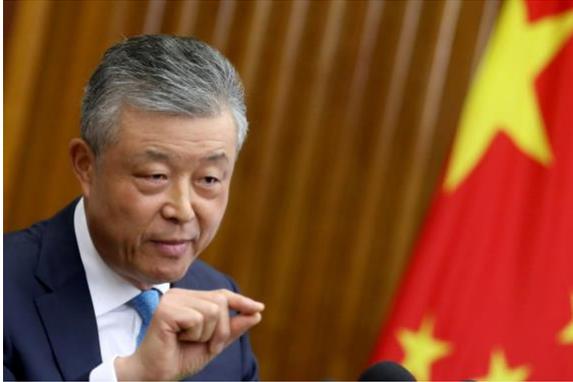


Figure 2 Liu Xiaoming, China's newly appointed special representative on Korean peninsula affairs. Photo: Reuters

The unprecedented closure of trade flows from China to North Korea in 2020 due to North Korean quarantine measures followed years of sanctions on official North Korean exports to China and brought the official bilateral trade relationship to a virtual halt. [Chinese exports to North Korea](#) in January and February totaled around \$33,000, but began to recover with \$12.98 million in trade in March, according to Chinese customs data. While evidence has accumulated that China has allowed North Korea to continue exports of [coal](#) and [sand](#) to China alongside [illicit ship-to-ship petroleum transfers](#) in Chinese waters, mysteries regarding these exchanges persist—what North Korea have brought back to China, how financial arrangements connected to the shipments have been handled, and whether the Chinese government has secretly supplied unrecorded assistance to the North Korean leadership during the North Korean border closure in response to COVID-19. By late April, [reports began to surface](#) that the extended border closure might ease with the resumption of regular cargo train service between the two countries, despite North Korea's continued wait for shipments of vaccines from COVAX, the World Health Organization's multilateral vaccine distribution mechanism. But the easing of border restrictions might be more effective in saving lives than continued enforcement of the quarantine, given reports of North Korean food shortages and Kim Jong Un's own [references](#) to another possible "Arduous March," similar to the period North Korea experienced during the famine of the 1990s.

Moon Jae-in's Efforts to Recharge China-South Korea Relations

North Korean reports from the Kim-Xi exchanges did not mention China's support for denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, but Xi [expressed](#) his "active support for Seoul's initiative to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula" in line with the common interests of both countries in a Jan. 26 telephone conversation with Moon. That conversation came days after Moon's [pledge](#) at a Cabinet meeting to "establish a foundation upon which bilateral [China-South Korea] relations will be elevated to a new height." During the telephone talks held days prior to Moon's first call with US President Joe Biden, Moon and Xi pledged cooperation on pandemic response, regional and bilateral economic coordination, and climate change, and an "early visit" to South Korea once favorable conditions are created. The Moon administration is still anticipating the chance to host Xi following a year's delay due to the pandemic.

Following the Moon-Xi conversation, Chinese and South Korean foreign ministers Wang Yi and Chung Eui-young spoke on the telephone on Feb. 16 and held an in-person meeting in Xiamen, China on April 3. The Chung-Wang meeting coincided with a meeting among the Japanese, South Korean, and US national security advisors in Annapolis, Maryland and [drew praise](#) from the Beijing-based *Global Times* as "a true reflection of South Korea's attitude of not choosing between China and the US."

"In this way," the paper went on, "it is unrealistic for the US to transform its post-Cold War alliance system directly into an anti-China alliance." Prior to his meeting with Wang, Chung further described South Korea's strategy as seeking to "harmoniously" develop relations with China based on a firm US-South Korea alliance and has pledged to promote cooperation between the United States and China, stating that "The US and China are by no means a subject of choice."

The foreign ministers [agreed](#) in their February phone conversation to promote cultural exchanges on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of normalization of relations in 2022 and promote a stronger China-South Korea strategic cooperative partnership. In Xiamen, Wang [praised](#) anti-pandemic cooperation with South Korea to sustain personnel exchanges and

economic cooperation. Wang [pledged](#) China's commitment to close communication and strategic dialogue with South Korea, including to accelerate "synergizing of development strategies and third-party market cooperation, and to complete the second-phase negotiation on the China-ROK free trade agreement at an early date." China proposed bilateral cooperation on 5G, big data, green economy, artificial intelligence, integrated circuits, development of a new energy and health industry, and climate change. Chung [acknowledged](#) China's importance as South Korea's "largest trading partner and an important strategic partner," and said that South Korea "appreciates and expects China to continue playing an important role in the affairs of the peninsula."



Figure 3 Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi shake hands before their talks at a hotel in Xiamen. Photo: Yonhap

The Chinese and South Korean governments have pursued a long list of efforts to strengthen their cooperation. The Chinese Commerce Ministry and South Korean Trade Ministry moved forward in February with negotiations for the second phase of free trade negotiations. The Chinese and South Korean defense ministries updated a [memorandum of understanding](#) on the establishment of direct communication lines between their air forces and navies. Bilateral meetings on the delimitation of maritime boundaries between China and South Korea [took place](#) in March. Their foreign ministries [held the first meeting](#) of a dialogue on coordination of maritime affairs in April. China participated in the [second virtual meeting](#) on "Northeast Asia Cooperation for Health Security" hosted by the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and China and South Korea established a "[green channel](#)" for

essential business travel. They also announced that they would establish a mechanism for mutual recognition of their health codes and support the inclusion of each other's citizens in national COVID-19 vaccination programs.



Figure 4 U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin inspects an honor guard with South Korean Defense Minister Suh Wook during a welcome ceremony at the Defense Ministry in March 2021. Photo: AP

China-South Korea Economic Prospects

China's Commerce Ministry [identified](#) early implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), acceleration of talks for a China-Japan-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and consideration of joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) as priorities for 2021. All these agenda items envision closer China-South Korea economic cooperation, with Moon also [identifying](#) the China-South Korea FTA as a priority in his New Year's press conference. Lee Seong-hyun, director of the Center for Chinese Studies at South Korea's Sejong Institute think tank, [suggested](#) that China's motive is "to distance Korea from the US by strengthening economic cooperation."

China Central Television and Korean Broadcasting System [signed](#) a strategic partnership for joint content production and China's Tencent Music Entertainment [announced](#) a new partnership with South Korea's JYP Entertainment, signaling the warming of official ties between the two governments.

Semiconductor industry [outlooks](#) for 2021 predicted an overall uptick in demand for semiconductors and viewed Samsung and SK memory chip production as benefiting from the US blacklisting of Chinese tech firms including Huawei and SMIC, China's largest chip maker. Against this backdrop, SK Hynix, the world's

second-largest memory chip maker, is [betting](#) that a \$9 billion acquisition from Intel will enable the company to benefit from expansion of NAND-flash memory chips and upgrading to three-dimensional (3D) NAND wafer technology production. Samsung's [participation](#) in a March 2021 White House meeting on supply chain resilience highlights the company's critical position in the global supply network that simultaneously bridges and competes for market share in the United States and China.

Hyundai Motors continues to expand its exposure to the Chinese market with a January [announcement](#) of an investment contract with Guangdong Province to establish an offshore fuel cell system production factory in Guangzhou and an April [announcement](#) that it would sell electric cars in China starting in 2022. SK Innovation has [expanded its investment stake](#) in the Blue Park Smart Energy Technology subsidiary of the Beijing Automotive Group that sells recharged batteries for electric vehicles.

Moon, China, and the Quad

Moon Jae-in's optimistic signaling about prospects for improved relations with China has focused primarily on expanding opportunities for economic growth and encouraging China to play a constructive role on the Korean Peninsula. Peking University Professor Kim Dong-gil [notes](#) that "China's role in preventing North Korean provocations is vital," expressing a rationale that supports Moon's emphasis on engagement with China. But Kim warned of US attempts to expand the scope of the alliance and mobilize it as an instrument for countering China at a time when the Biden administration has framed China as the central focus of its Asia policy and is emphasizing cooperation with allies to that end.

Renmin University Professor Cheng Xiaohe [wrote](#) in *Global Times* in March in the run-up to the US-South Korea 2+2 meetings in Seoul that South Korea should maintain a policy of "strategic ambiguity" regarding the Quad. While Cheng noted that South Korea's conditions for joining the Quad is that the organization be "transparent, open and inclusive," he claimed that South Korea's initial evaluation of the Quad may be under pressure to change. He signaled that a South Korean decision to join the Quad would destroy mutual trust between China and South Korea and set back efforts to establish a China-South Korea

"2+2 dialogue on diplomacy and security." *Global Times* [editorialized](#) that given South Korea's trade dependence on China, "to ask South Korea to decouple from China would be like trading an apple for a crabapple, which is much smaller than the former one."

The omission of direct references to China in the US-South Korea 2+2 statement as compared to the statement from Japan was taken by Chinese analysts as evidence of South Korea as a "[weak link](#)" in US efforts to contain China. Chinese analysts [noted the omission](#) of China from the joint statement and credited it to "Seoul's rationality in dealing with Washington." Meanwhile, pressure has grown within South Korea for the Moon administration to positively consider close cooperation with the Quad. In response, ROK Foreign Minister Chung stated that the Korean government "maintains the position that it is possible for us to cooperate with any consultative body if it conforms to our principles of inclusiveness, openness, transparency, and cooperation, and if it is in our national interests and contributes to regional global peace and prosperity."

The Moon administration continued to walk a tightrope between Washington and Beijing as the United States and China both swing the rope in efforts to bring South Korea onto their side. In virtual remarks at the 2021 Boao Forum for Asia hosted by China, Moon [urged](#) cooperation to address the COVID-19 pandemic, especially between China, Japan, and South Korea, and called for "multilateral cooperation with inclusiveness enhanced." South Korea's center-right newspaper *JoongAng Ilbo* [criticized](#) Moon's choice avoidance efforts, exhorting him to "get off his diplomatic tightrope and stick with alliance-based policies."

Social Media Outrage and Conflict Between Netizens

Social media controversies between South Korean and Chinese netizens intensified in 2021 over accusations of cultural appropriation and nationalist outrage over placement ads for Chinese products in Korean TV dramas, highlighting high emotions and sensitivities between the two communities. An [uproar ensued](#) in South Korea over the TV drama *True Beauty* and its use of Chinese product advertisements, including for a Chinese instant hot pot brand and a Chinese e-commerce platform in the Korean drama, drawing strong

criticisms from South Korean bloggers and an equally strong reaction from Chinese bloggers. South Korean bloggers subsequently [targeted product placement](#) in a scene from the tvN series *Vincenzo* in which the two lead characters sit down for instant bibimbap from Zihaiguo, a Chinese brand unfamiliar to Korean viewers. Then, the Korean historical drama *Joseon Exorcist* was [cancelled](#) after only two episodes following domestic criticism that the producers were distorting Korean history by using Chinese aesthetics.

Chinese netizens [retaliated](#) by accusing makers of the Goguryeo-era Korean TV drama *River Where the Moon Rises* of copying Chinese costumes. Then, Chinese netizens [criticized](#) Big Hit Entertainment, the management company for BTS, for using maps that showed South Tibet as Indian rather than Chinese territory in a financial report.

An even bigger controversy ensued after Li Ziqi, a Chinese blogger with 14 million YouTube followers, reposted her 2017 [video](#) on the making of pickled vegetables known as *paocai* in Chinese, using processes similar to those used in making the Korean dish *kimchi*. The dispute escalated because of a Chinese drive to register *paocai* at the International Organization for Standardization, leading Korean netizens to accuse China of “cultural theft.” The dispute drew comment from China’s Ambassador to South Korea Xing Haoming, who [argued](#) that such disputes do not represent mainstream public opinion and argued for increasing mutual recognition, understanding, and friendship.

Criticism between Seoul and Beijing have also taken to the wind. Sensitivity to yellow dust has extended beyond scratchy throats to include Chinese netizens’ blame-shifting [objections](#) to South Korean media attributions of the dust to China rather than Mongolia. In the meantime, everyday South Koreans see yellow dust pollution as another undesirable and unstoppable export blowing in from China.

Perhaps most worrisome for the future of the China-South Korea relationship is the intensification of South Korean criticism of China that is reflected in public opinion polling. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs [found](#) that South Korean’s unfavorable views of China are equivalent to negative views of Japan and North Korea and that a majority of South Koreans believe China seeks to replace the United States

as the world’s most dominant power in the Asia-Pacific and the world. Among South Korean respondents, 60% viewed China as an economic threat while 37% saw it as an economic partner. Also, 83% of respondents viewed China as a security threat with only 12% viewing China as a security partner. The contrast between negative South Korean public sentiment toward China and the Moon administration’s courting of China increases the likelihood that policy toward China could become a [critical issue of political difference](#) in South Korea’s next presidential election, set for March 2022.

There is a single countervailing flashpoint still capable of bringing Chinese and South Korean netizens together: dislike for Japan. Chinese netizens [supported](#) the South Korean release of games like *Wednesday*, which contains themes related to victims of Japanese wartime sexual slavery, and *Assassinate Ito Hirobumi*, the protectorate-era Japanese resident-general of Korea who met that fate in 1909. Likewise, [the announcement of a new display](#) at South Korea’s Independence Hall featuring Chinese and Korean cooperation in opposition to Japanese colonial aggression gained Chinese approval and may draw Chinese tourists visiting South Korea. In addition, the Chinese, North Korean, and South Korean governments made common cause in [expressing concerns](#) about contamination of fish while voicing objections to the Japanese government’s decision to release contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear reactor into the Pacific Ocean.

Conclusion

China will likely redouble efforts to bring pressure to bear on South Korea to limit its trilateral alignments with Japan and the United States. Beijing already put down a marker by eliciting assurances from the Moon administration in October 2017 that it would abide by the three no’s: no trilateral US-Japan-South Korea alliance, no cooperation with regional missile defense, and no additional deployments of the Terminal High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) system in South Korean territory. The Moon administration argued that the three no’s were an expression of immediate realities; Beijing attempted to portray them as binding and enduring South Korean commitments, generating additional mistrust between Seoul and Beijing. But South Korea may

increasingly be tempted to challenge those markers

To tame South Korea while consolidating its own strategic interests, China may maximize its geopolitical leverage by carefully calibrating its cooperation with and support to North Korea to neutralize further alignment of the US-South Korea alliance in a broader mini-lateral or multilateral security context. Xi Jinping's verbal expressions of support for North Korea in late March appeared alongside Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to Beijing to demonstrate China's options and leverage vis-à-vis the United States. China will use its strategic leverage with North Korea more as an instrument to counter US influence and strategies in the Indo-Pacific than as an issue for China-US cooperation.

Biden administration efforts to enhance extended deterrence to address progress in North Korean missile development made during the Trump administration or broader efforts to extend the scope of US-South Korea maritime cooperation southward could rekindle China's sensitivities and its economic retaliation campaign toward South Korea. These developments will be designed to test the strength of the US-South Korea alliance as a potential weak link in the US alliance architecture in Northeast Asia. Despite its desire to continue to pursue choice avoidance, South Korea will need to devise more effective strategies to neutralize the threat of Chinese economic retaliation in the context of pressures deriving from South Korea's security alliance with the United States and rising China-US rivalry.

Meanwhile, North Korea's deepening dependency on China for economic and political support may sharpen Kim Jong Un's desire for the United States to treat North Korea as a strategic counterpart, even as it retains the nuclear project as both its main leverage and its main impediment in pressing its demands. In this respect, Xi has proven to be more effective in his use of summitry than either Kim or Trump, having effectively strengthened China's strategic position while North Korea and the United States live with the consequences of diplomatic failure of the 2019 Hanoi summit.

CHRONOLOGY OF CHINA-KOREA RELATIONS

JANUARY – APRIL 2021

Jan. 6, 2021: Central Committee of the Communist Party of China [sends](#) a congratulatory message to the Workers' Party of Korea on its Eighth Party Congress.

Jan. 8, 2021: China's Commerce Ministry [introduces](#) its 2021 work focus, which includes promotion of early implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), acceleration of talks for a China-Japan-South Korea Free Trade Agreement, and active consideration of joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2021.

Jan. 9, 2021: In remarks at the Eighth Party Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [asserts](#) importance of prioritizing special China-North Korea relations.

Jan. 11, 2021: In his New Year's Address South Korean President Moon Jae-in [expresses](#) his intent to expedite free trade agreement negotiations with China.

Jan. 12, 2021: Eighth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea [expresses](#) gratitude to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China for its congratulatory message.

Jan. 12, 2021: Chinese President Xi Jinping [congratulates](#) North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on his election as general secretary of the ruling party and calls for strong relations between the two countries.

Jan. 13, 2021: Kim Jong Un [expresses](#) gratitude to Xi and his intention to consolidate the China-North Korea friendship.

Jan. 15, 2021: Hyundai Motor Group [announces](#) that it has signed an investment contract with the government of Guangdong Province to establish an offshore fuel cell system production factory in Guangzhou, China.

Jan. 21, 2021: ROK President Moon Jae-in [asserts](#) the need to establish a foundation upon which bilateral China-South Korea relations will be elevated to a new height in opening remarks at a Plenary Meeting of the South Korean National Security Council.

Jan. 21, 2021: South Korea's trade commission [decides](#) to uphold anti-dumping tariffs on imported Chinese H-shaped beams.

Jan. 26, 2021: Independence Hall of Korea, a history museum in Cheonan, South Korea, [announces](#) plans to set up a memorial hall dedicated to China and South Korea's joint fight against Japanese aggression prior to and during World War II.

Jan. 27, 2021: Xi [expresses](#) support for Korean denuclearization in a call with Moon and both agree to jointly develop China-South Korea relations.

Jan. 29, 2021: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Son Gwon [exchange](#) New Year's congratulatory messages.

Feb. 2, 2021: Chinese Ambassador to South Korea Xing Haiming [calls on](#) South Korea to support China's position on Taiwan and Hong Kong in a meeting with Kwon Ki-sik, head of the Korea-China City Friendship Association.

Feb. 16, 2021: South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong and Wang [agree](#) to push for high-level exchanges to further deepen bilateral relations.

Feb. 19, 2021: North Korea [appoints](#) its former trade minister, Ri Ryong Nam, as ambassador to China.

Feb. 24, 2021: China's CCTV and South Korea's KBS [sign an agreement](#) to cooperate in various aspects of the cultural industry.

Feb. 27, 2021: Chinese Ministry of Commerce and South Korean Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy [hold](#) meeting of chief negotiators for the second phase of free trade agreement negotiations.

March 2, 2021: South Korea and China [sign](#) a revised memorandum of understanding on the establishment of direct communication lines between their air forces and navies.

March 4, 2021: Eighth director-general-level meeting on the delimitation of maritime boundaries between China and South Korea [takes place](#) in video format.

March 5, 2021: Chinese Premier Li Keqiang [delivers](#) government work report that calls for acceleration of free trade negotiations with South Korea to China's top legislature.

March 9, 2021: Chinese government officially [ratifies](#) RCEP.

March 16, 2021: Chinese Foreign Ministry [denies](#) South Korean media reports blaming China for "yellow dust" sandstorm.

March 22, 2021: North Korean leader Kim and President Xi [pledge](#) to develop bilateral ties.

March 23, 2021: Kim [sends](#) a verbal message to Xi to notify him of the events of the Eighth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea. Xi [responds](#) with gratitude and stresses the importance of the China-North Korea relationship.

March 23, 2021: Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying [asserts](#) that it is China's policy to maintain, consolidate, and develop China-North Korea relations and that China has repeatedly called on the UN Security Council to modify sanctions on North Korea to improve the humanitarian situation.

March 25, 2021: In response to reports about North Korea firing two unidentified projectiles, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua [asserts](#) that China seeks a political settlement of the Korean Peninsula issue.

March 25, 2021: China's Tencent Music Entertainment enters a [partnership](#) with South Korea's JYP Entertainment.

March 26, 2021: Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Wu Jianghao [meets](#) North Korean Ambassador to China Ri Ryong Nam.

March 30, 2021: South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs [hosts](#) the second virtual meeting on "Northeast Asia Cooperation for Health Security," which brings together director-level officials and ambassadors from South Korea, the United States, China, Japan, Russia, and Mongolia.

April 3, 2021: Foreign ministers Wang and Chung [hold talks](#) in the southeastern Chinese city of Xiamen.

April 6, 2021: China and South Korea [announce](#) that they will coordinate and establish a mechanism for mutual recognition of their health codes and that they will support the inclusion of each other's citizens in their COVID-19 vaccination programs.

April 8, 2021: Representatives from China and South Korea [participate](#) in ASEAN Defense Senior Officials' Meeting Plus (ADSOM-Plus) conference.

April 12, 2021: Liu Xiaoming [is appointed](#) Special Representative of the Chinese Government on Korea Peninsula Affairs.

April 14, 2021: *Radio Free Asia* announces that North Korea has [completed](#) construction of a new rail route to its border with China designed to isolate freight to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

April 14, 2021: China and South Korea [hold](#) first meeting on exchanges and cooperation on maritime affairs.

April 14, 2021: North Korea [joins](#) China and South Korea in condemning Japan's decision to release contaminated wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the ocean.

April 15, 2021: China [opens](#) the 129th Canton Fair online, with companies from South Korea and other countries in attendance at the virtual trade exhibition.

April 15, 2021: Hyundai Motor Group [announces](#) plans to launch electric vehicles in China every year starting in 2022.

April 16, 2021: North Korea's Ambassador to China Ri Ryong Nam [presents](#) credentials to Xi.

April 17-18: South Korean Director of National Security Suh Hoon [reportedly tells](#) US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during his visit to Seoul that China and North Korea are preparing to hold a summit.

April 20, 2021: Moon [takes part](#) in 2021 Boao Forum for Asia held in the Chinese province of Hainan, along with Xi and leaders of several other Asian nations.

April 20, 2021: South Korea's Oceans Ministry [announces](#) plans to conduct a joint operation with its Chinese counterpart to curb illegal fishing in the Yellow Sea.

April 22-23, 2021: Xi and Moon [take part](#) in a virtual Leaders Summit on Climate at the invitation of US President Joe Biden.

April 26-29, 2021: China and South Korea [participate](#) in the 77th session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

April 27, 2021: South Korea [hosts](#) 10th annual China-Japan-South Korea International Forum for Trilateral Cooperation.

April 29, 2021: North Korea [announces](#) plans to build an "export processing zone" near its border with China.

Chronology compiled by Ellen Swicord of the Council on Foreign Relations