

# The Trend of China-ROK Strategic Cooperation and China's Response under the Competition Pattern between China and the US

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## Abstract

Since the Biden administration came to power, the United States has pursued the policy of alliance first, and the alliance between the US and South Korea has been further strengthened. Under the competition pattern between China and the United States, South Korea is facing increasing pressure to choose sides, and there are challenges in the strategic cooperation between China and South Korea. However, based on the close economic ties between China and South Korea, the advantages of the progressive camp in the National Assembly and the long-held pragmatic diplomatic tradition of South Korea, the impetus and possibility of maintaining the stable development of China-ROK strategic cooperation still exist. China should do its best to ease the asymmetric dilemma between the US-South Korea alliance and China-South Korea relations, promote the establishment of a security mechanism in Northeast Asia, and maintain regional security and stability.

## Keywords

Sino-US Competition; China-South Korea Relations; China-South Korea Strategic Cooperation.

## 1. Introduction

The competitive pattern between China and the United States has had a significant impact on the global political economy, among which China and South Korea, as important countries in Asia, play an important role in this competitive pattern. Based on the competition pattern between China and the United States, this paper studies the trend of the strategic cooperation between China and South Korea and China's response in this cooperation. The paper first discusses the characteristics of the competitive pattern between China and the United States and its influence on the strategic cooperation, analyzes the dynamic changes of strategic cooperation, including cooperation in economy, security and culture, and discusses the coping strategies of China in strategic cooperation, including strengthening bilateral cooperation, broadening multilateral cooperation and active participation in regional cooperation. Through the study of these issues, we can better understand the trend of China-South Korea strategic cooperation under the competition pattern between China and the United States and China's coping strategies, and provide useful reference for future research and practice.

## 2. Research Background

Since the Biden administration took office, the United States has vigorously deepened its military cooperation with South Korea, and tried to manipulate Taiwan-related issues and increase the pressure on China. China has had to make the necessary reactions. Us tried to military intervention in the Taiwan strait and the increasingly fierce, between the game against intervention due to the increased to South Korea, in China to establish "the economic framework" surrounding "chip quartet alliance", accelerate the nature of Chinese industrial

chain supply chain restructuring and a series of behavior, greatly affected the Korean confidence in the cooperation in China. In recent years, China has increased its output, both at home and abroad, Finance: The establishment of the AIIB, Promote bilateral local currency settlement in countries along the Belt and Road route, Set up an offshore RMB clearing centre in London, And to vigorously develop blockchain technology, These are clearly driving the internationalization of the renminbi; Military aspects: the continuous launch of aircraft carriers, Vigorously build warships, We will vigorously promote the construction of the islands and reefs in the South China Sea, With the existing macro considerations of strategic deterrence, There is also a realistic need to ensure the safety of future investment and traffic arteries; Science and technology industry: Scientific research investment increases year by year, Second only to the United States, At the same time, China has achieved 24 leading positions in the forefront of science and technology, The new generation of information technology industry, 5G, robotics and aerospace technology are targeting the world manufacturing power. China's rapid development makes the United States as the biggest stakeholder position at this stage. The policy of the United States is not only the attitude of Biden and his government, but also the US Congress. It can be said to be the will and attitude of the entire ruling authorities of the United States -- "desinification" in the process of global governance, so it focuses on increasing the efforts to contain China and contain the Chinese alliance.

Now the world is looking forward to china-us cooperation to contribute to the global crisis. Therefore, judging the future direction of China-US relations and seeing the root causes of the changes in our relationship will provide great help to discover the opportunities contained in bilateral cooperation.

China and the ROK have achieved good achievements in economic, trade and cultural exchanges, ushering in a new era of bilateral cooperation and development. South Korea is not only an ally of the United States, but also an important partner of China. Under the background of the increasing strategic game between China and the United States, South Korea is facing increasing pressure to "choose sides". At the beginning of President Moon jae-in administration, based on the perception of both China and the United States, South Korea maintained strategic ambiguity and avoided taking sides between the two powers. However, in the later stage of the administration, influenced by a series of internal and external factors, the Moon administration strengthened its tendency to follow the balance between China and the United States. From conservative camp Yin Xiyue as President, by the uncertainty of the policy, South Korea internal conservative tendency to strengthen and the influence of the conflict, South Korea to the United States may be more obvious, but based on the close economic ties between China and South Korea, progressive camp in congress and South Korea long-term pragmatic diplomatic tradition, maintain the stable development of China-South Korea relations power and the possibility still exists. The strategic game between China and the United States has triggered a widespread sense of crisis and a fierce debate over the competition between the two powers.

### **3. The Characteristics of the Competitive Pattern between China and the United States and the Influence of the Strategic Cooperation between China and South Korea**

#### **3.1. Characteristics of the Competitive Pattern between China and the United States**

With the inauguration of the Trump administration, the United States adheres to isolationism. In order to maximize its national interests, it has adopted the "America First" policy politically. -- It is not only unfriendly to American Allies, but also focuses on defining China as a competitor. Such an approach expands the contradiction and friction between China and the United States, forming a pattern of competition between China and the United States. Since the United States

to the strategic adjustment of the asia-pacific region, the United States in the scope of the region, hope that through the way of "return to the asia-pacific", the strategy of the asia-pacific rebalancing, its essential purpose is to consolidate the international status of the United States this series of ideas will establish rivals -- the target as the world's second largest economy, as fast as possible the earth in various fields, including but not limited to, economic, diplomatic, military aspects of China's rise. Compared with the Obama administration, the containment policy on China presents more strict state, by the original cooperation, gradually to competition beyond the cooperation relationship, such as the trade war, the United States to through the change of the economic environment, the manipulation of the economic relations -- the United States in maintaining their world's first hegemony.

The reelection of the US government is not only Trump's revision of his China policy during the Obama period, but also has continuity. Both the Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy and the Indo-Pacific strategy still come from the "zero-sum game" thinking of the United States, and only the United States can have the priority of power and status in everything.

In this environment, the game between China in Asia and the US, which regards China as a competitor, is long-term and uncertain. This long-term confrontation is different from the ideological confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The influence of the competition between China and the United States is more reflected in the geopolitical field, and the competition between China and the United States is a geopolitical competition. First of all, the United States see China as the essence of the competition is that China's rise to the United States' world dominance threat to a certain extent, the United States will not accept in Asia across the Pacific there is such a regional power, even its sphere of influence with the rise of economic power and increasing. Second, at the institutional level, the Obama administration and the administration want to use the liberal democratic free market to change China, if not successful, is exclude or accept China is a regional power, so obviously, the strategy is through China in the international economy, forcing China's political pattern change.

### **3.2. The Competition Pattern between China and the United States has an Impact on China-ROK Strategic Cooperation**

#### **3.2.1. Establishment of China-ROK Strategic Cooperative Partnership**

In China's foreign bilateral relations, the strategic cooperative partnership is the highest level of cooperation positioning. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and the ROK, China and the ROK have established good-neighborly and friendly cooperative relations, cooperative partnership, comprehensive cooperative partnership and strategic cooperative partnership. On May 27,2008, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak officially visited China. Taking President Lee Myung-bak's visit to China as an opportunity and symbol, the relationship between China and the ROK has been upgraded from a comprehensive cooperative partnership to a strategic cooperative partnership. In August of the same year, President Hu Jintao paid a return visit to South Korea, which further enriched the connotation of China-ROK strategic cooperative partnership. The improvement of bilateral diplomatic relations between the two countries not only represents a new stage of the development of bilateral relations, but also has a certain impact on the relations between China and South Korea and the countries related to the Korean Peninsula.

First, it is the impact on China-ROK relations. The establishment of china-ROK strategic partnership is the result of the changes in the situation in Northeast Asia and the strategic pattern of the Korean Peninsula. Although there is the South Korea-US alliance, but the strategic partnership between China and South Korea can exist simultaneously with it. For national own security concerns, China for the us alliance to maintain the security of the Korean peninsula foreign policy is understanding, this can increase the strategic trust between the two countries

-- South Korea promoted peripheral diplomacy centered in China, China eliminated for South Korea lee government pro-American China.

Second, the impact on South Korea-US relations. The establishment of china-ROK strategic partnership of cooperative cooperation has played a role in checking the Korea-US alliance to some extent. The core of the South Korea-US alliance is the security of the Korean Peninsula and the core of South Korea's security policy, which is irreplaceable by any cooperative relationship. However, the escalation of bilateral diplomatic relations between China and South Korea can balance the relationship between the United States and Japan. Therefore, from the perspective of South Korea, the strengthening of the South Korea-US alliance has the most priority, but at the same time, the strategic partnership with China does not conflict with it, but is one of the important foreign policies conducive to South Korea's international status and development.

Third, the impact on sino-DPRK relations. China has always advocated the building of a harmonious and stable Korean Peninsula, and the establishment of a strategic cooperative partnership with the ROK is conducive to further actively promoting the process of the DPRK nuclear issue, which also represents the common interests of China, North Korea and the ROK. In addition, the bilateral diplomatic relations between China and the DPRK also have a mutual aid alliance, and the escalation of diplomatic relations with South Korea will not harm the interests of the DPRK.

### **3.2.2. China-South Korea Relations and Their Influence**

After Yoon took office, South Korea's foreign policy towards China changed. Yin Xiyue took office, on the strategic choice to the United States and tilt, but under the background of competition between China and the United States, the United States is not only not friendly to China, for other Allies, such as South Korea, nor with South Korea's close and strengthen cooperation, but in order to achieve the purpose of contain China and ignore the interests of other Allies. The US government's crackdown on China's economy has also increased the economic burden on South Korea, which has long been highly dependent on China. In addition, the US sanctions on China's semiconductor and chip industries have also helped the key South Korean companies, such as Samsung Electronics, to inevitably reduce their production capacity at their production base in China. The above case means that South Korea will encounter various difficulties in the process of economic development, which is not conducive to its economic development.

In addition to the economic field, at the political level, since the government took office, due to the influence of public opinion and economic losses in South Korea, Yoon has changed his tough attitude towards China. -- chose to maintain a certain distance from China on the basis of not affecting China-ROK relations. The reasons are as follows. First of all, South Korea relies heavily on China for economic and trade cooperation. China is the largest trading partner of South Korea and the most important economic cooperation partner. The strengthening of the South Korea-US alliance cannot be equated with the China-ROK relations. Second, although various countries have put forward the "strategy", but South Korea for the interests of the "strategy" consistency concern, so put forward the Korean version of the strategy -- which specifically stated that "China is regional prosperity and peace cooperation countries, South Korea will be based on international rules, on the basis of mutual respect and mutual benefit, reach a more healthy and mature relationship between China and South Korea".

### **3.2.3. Analysis Affecting the Future Development of China-ROK Relations**

The competition between China and the United States is a long-term process, and South Korea will take national interests. In fact, not only the economic cooperation between China and South Korea is very important, but also the cooperation between China and the United States in many fields. So the competition between China and the United States is likely not coming to a stage

where the winner must be decided. This means that South Korea does not have to be in a hurry, which will adversely affect both the situation and the economic situation in Northeast Asia. In addition, South Korea and the United States directly have unavoidable structural contradictions. When the government first took office, the government not only failed to improve the status of the international status, but also was affected by domestic public opinion and its political influence. So it is not enough to make South Korea a great power with international influence by strengthening the US-South Korea alliance. After all, the attitude of America towards the alliance system is essentially a hegemonic system, and the Allies usually play the role of followers. Even Japan, a more influential country than South Korea and also an ally of the United States, has no American choice in its Indo-Pacific strategy. It is not surprising that South Korea encounters frequent cold encounters in its interactions with the United States.

To sum up, under this changing international situation, the South Korean government will maintain a good relationship with China and try its best to avoid stimulating China because of the relationship between the United States and Japan. South Korea's China policy needs to be adjusted and revised at any time, but on the whole, it maintains strategic ambiguity.

#### **4. China's Coping Strategy in China-South Korea Strategic Cooperation**

By strengthening bilateral exchanges and cooperation with the ROK, China has strengthened cooperation in the political, economic, security and cultural fields. In the political field, the political exchanges and cooperation between China and the ROK should be strengthened through high-level mutual visits and inter-governmental dialogue and consultation mechanisms. This includes meetings between leaders, regular consultations by the diplomatic sector, and policy synergy to enhance political mutual trust and coordinate international and regional issues of common concern. In the economic field, the two sides can further promote trade liberalization and investment facilitation, and promote the continuous expansion of bilateral trade scale. We will strengthen production capacity cooperation, complement each other's strengths, promote two-way investment and technology transfer, and jointly explore third-party markets. In addition, closer economic and trade cooperation should be promoted under multilateral and regional frameworks such as free trade agreements (FTA) to provide a better development environment for enterprises. In the field of security, under the multilateral framework of East Asia, we should strengthen China-ROK cooperation to jointly address major challenges such as regional security, climate change and sustainable development. Deepen cooperation with other countries through participating in regional security dialogue, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and other mechanisms to achieve regional peace and prosperity. In the field of culture, China and the ROK should strengthen exchanges and cooperation in cultural fields such as education, culture and tourism. We will encourage mutual visits and exchanges among academia, culture, youth and other fields, and hold cultural exhibitions, art performances and sports events to enhance mutual understanding and friendship between the people of the two countries. The above strategies aim to deepen the strategic cooperation between China and South Korea and build a more stable and mutually beneficial bilateral relationship. These cooperation efforts will help to expand economic ties, promote regional stability, and bring more development opportunities and well-being to the two countries and the region as a whole.

China will strengthen multilateral cooperation with the Republic of Korea in Asia and actively participate in regional multilateral mechanisms such as East Asia cooperation, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Through these platforms, consultations and cooperation on issues such as regional economic integration, trade liberalization and security cooperation will be conducted to promote regional peace, stability and common development in the region. In addition, China should continue to support

and promote the construction of the multilateral trading system, and actively participate in the reform and improvement of the World Trade Organization (WTO). We should adhere to the principles of multilateralism, oppose protectionism, promote the development of free trade, and provide a fair, transparent and stable market environment for enterprises from both China, the ROK and other countries. In addition, China and the ROK can strengthen cooperation in the field of sustainable development and jointly address global challenges such as climate change, environmental protection and energy transformation. We will strengthen cooperation and exchanges in clean energy, renewable energy, and carbon markets, promote green and low-carbon development, and jointly promote sustainable economic growth. Through these multilateral cooperation, China can work with South Korea to address the competition landscape between China and the United States and promote regional security, stability and economic prosperity. In addition, China is committed to expanding multilateral cooperation between China and the ROK, strengthening coordination and cooperation with other countries, and jointly addressing global issues and challenges. Such cooperation efforts will contribute to regional and global prosperity and stability and achieve win-win results.

China will continue to resolve the Korean Peninsula issue through dialogue and consultation and maintain peace and stability on the Peninsula. China is committed to encouraging relevant parties to sit down and have a dialogue and find common solutions through political solutions. In addition, China should actively play its role as an important stakeholders in the Korean Peninsula, promote peace talks and encourage all parties concerned to restart the dialogue mechanism. China will provide a platform and a bridge to promote direct dialogue and consultation between the major parties on the Korean Peninsula. China supports the realization of the denuclearization goal of the Korean Peninsula and pushes for substantial progress in the denuclearization process. China will actively fulfill its international obligations, push for the implementation of security Council resolutions, strengthen economic sanctions and pressure on the DPRK, and advocate resolving the issue through dialogue and reciprocal negotiations. China also needs to strengthen regional security cooperation with the ROK and other relevant parties, and jointly address the issues and challenges on the Korean Peninsula through multilateral mechanisms such as the Six-Party talks. China will take an active part in regional security dialogue, summits and other multilateral mechanisms, and promote regional peace and stability through exchanges and coordination. Through the above strategies, China will actively participate in the process of handling the Korean Peninsula issue in China-ROK strategic cooperation, devote itself to promoting the peaceful settlement of the Korean Peninsula issue, and make positive contributions to regional peace and stability.

China has strengthened people-to-people and cultural exchanges with the ROK to enhance the understanding and friendship between the two peoples. China can strengthen cooperation and exchanges with South Korea in the field of education. Promote the exchange of visits and cooperation between academic institutions, universities and research institutions, and promote the sharing and exchange of educational resources. To enhance the mutual understanding and friendship between the students of the two countries through student exchange programs and scholarship programs. In addition, China can strengthen cultural exchanges and cooperation with South Korea to showcase the traditional culture and contemporary art of the two countries through art exhibitions, cultural festivals and performances. We will encourage the connection and cooperation between the cultural industries of the two countries, promote exchanges and cooperation in the fields of film, music, dance and drama, and cultivate more cultural exchange ambassadors. In addition, China can deepen cooperation and exchanges in the tourism industry. Promote the cooperation between tourism bureaus, industry associations and other organizations of the two sides, carry out tourism promotion activities, and attract more Chinese and ROK tourists to visit and communicate with each other. We will establish tourism cooperation areas to promote cultural

heritage protection and the sustainable development of tourism. China also needs to strengthen youth exchanges and cooperation with South Korea. To promote exchanges and cooperation between youth from China and South Korea by holding youth exchange activities and platforms for youth innovation and entrepreneurship. Young people of the two countries are encouraged to participate in volunteer activities and internship exchanges to enhance mutual understanding and friendship and cultivate young talents. Through the above strategies, China will actively strengthen people-to-people exchanges between China and the ROK and promote mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples. Such exchanges and cooperation will help deepen bilateral relations, push china-ROK strategic cooperation to a new level, and bring more cooperation opportunities and mutual benefit in culture, education, art and tourism to the two peoples.

These aspects echo each other and together constitute an important part of China-ROK strategic cooperation. By strengthening cooperation at bilateral, multilateral and regional levels and promoting people-to-people exchanges, China and the ROK can jointly enhance their interests, safeguard security and deepen mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the direction of China-South Korea strategic cooperation under the Sino-US competition pattern is poised to play a crucial role in shaping the regional dynamics of East Asia. As the competition between China and the United States intensifies, it has become imperative for China and South Korea to strengthen their bilateral ties and collaborate strategically. Both nations have a long history of cultural, economic, and diplomatic exchanges, providing a robust foundation for cooperation.

Given South Korea's unique position as a reliable ally of the United States and a significant trading partner with China, it has the potential to act as a bridge between the two competing powers. The strategic cooperation between China and South Korea can result in increased economic integration, technological exchanges, and joint initiatives in key sectors such as trade, investment, innovation, and infrastructure development.

Furthermore, the growing importance of the Korean Peninsula in regional security dynamics, particularly with regard to North Korea's nuclear issue, necessitates closer coordination between China and South Korea. This cooperation can facilitate peaceful negotiations, denuclearization efforts, and long-term stability in the region.

However, in navigating the Sino-US competition pattern, China and South Korea must maintain a delicate balance. South Korea should carefully manage its relationships with both China and the United States, avoiding any perception of being overly reliant on one power over the other. Ensuring transparency, open dialogue, and mutual understanding will be critical for maintaining trust and credibility with both nations.

Moreover, as China and South Korea deepen their strategic cooperation, they should also actively engage in multilateral platforms within East Asia. Strengthening regional mechanisms such as ASEAN+3, East Asia Summit, and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) can provide opportunities for broader cooperation, enhance diplomatic ties, and promote a stable and prosperous East Asia.

In conclusion, the direction of China-South Korea strategic cooperation under the Sino-US competition pattern holds immense significance for the region. By leveraging their historical ties, economic complementarity, and shared interests, China and South Korea can foster mutually beneficial collaboration, contribute to peace and stability, and shape the East Asian regional landscape. With careful diplomacy, strategic planning, and commitment to the principles of mutual respect and equality, China and South Korea can forge a path of

cooperation that not only addresses the challenges of the Sino-US competition pattern but also enhances their shared aspirations for a peaceful and prosperous future.

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