

# Korea-China Relations

Hánguó hé Zhōngguó de wàijiāo guānxi

韩国和中国的外交关系

China and Korea have shared their cultures, languages, and history for millennia. Although China was long the dominant power in East Asia, the disruption of Chinese power in the nineteenth century by European colonial activities, as well as the growth of Japanese power, encouraged greater Korean independence. But that was cut short by Japan's annexation of Korea, and the subsequent partition of the Korean peninsula after 1945.

The Korean Peninsula extends from China's north-eastern coast toward Japan. To Korea's east is the Sea of Japan (on Korean maps, Dong Hae or East Sea), and to Korea's west is the Yellow Sea (also known as the East China Sea). The land border between China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) is defined by two rivers that flow from a dormant volcano known to Koreans as "Paektusan" (White Head Mountain) and to Chinese as "Baitoushan." The border between China and Korea is marked by the Tumen River (Tumen-gang in Korean), which flows east from the volcano, and the Yalu River (Amnok-gang in Korean), which flows south from the volcano before changing course to the southwest and the Yellow Sea.

Early records, including the Kwanggaet'o stele (a stone slab or pillar used for commemorative purposes) in China, indicate that areas north of the Yalu River were

under control of Koreans during the time of the Koguryo kingdom (37 BCE–668 CE) in the fourth century CE.

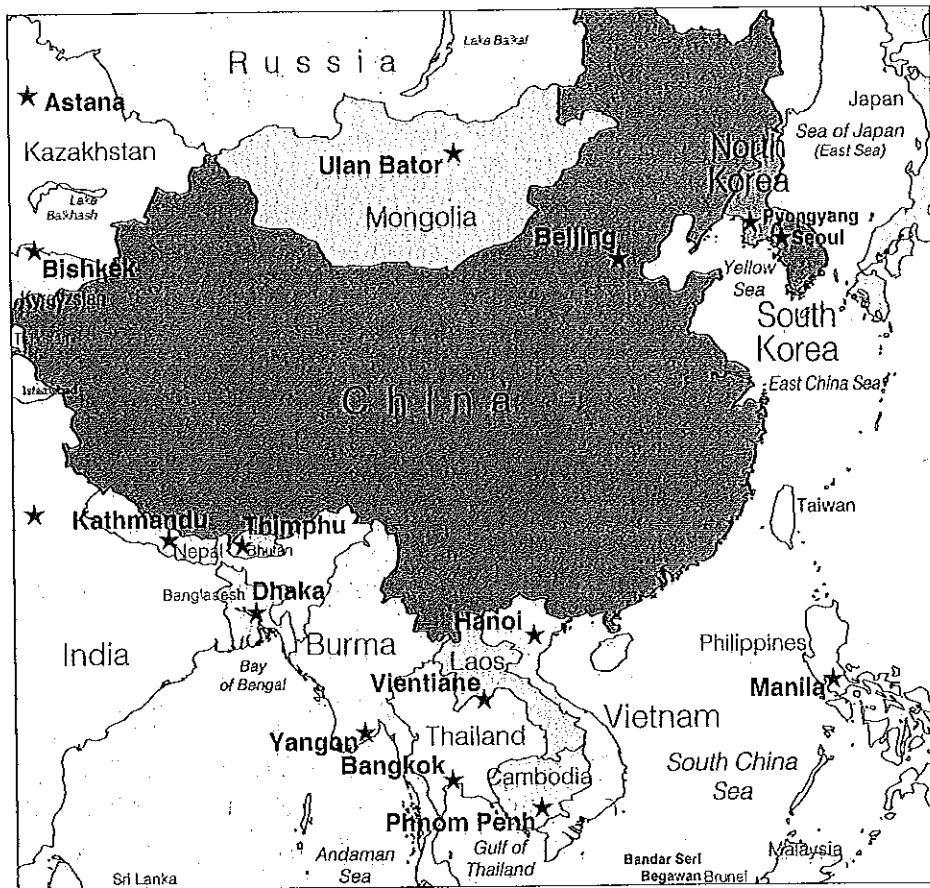
## Ethnology

The Korean people are physically more like northern Chinese and Mongolians, and their language is related to the Altaic languages of that region. Chinese cultural influences and technology, such as the use of bronze and iron, were introduced into Korea during the first millennium BCE. By the third and second century BCE the northern Chinese state of Yen controlled southern Manchuria and the northern part of the Korean peninsula.

The Han Chinese established a colonial capital at Lo-lang, the location of modern Pyongyang, in the late second century BCE. This capital was maintained until 313 BCE. Of note, the Han character that is used to express the name of the river that flows through the city of Seoul and that is used in the Korean name of the country is a different Chinese character from the one used to describe Han Chinese.

## Language

Early Koreans had no system of writing, so Chinese characters were used to express ideas. However, these characters did not express the Korean vocabulary well. The use of Chinese pictographs, with the addition of phonetic characters, was called *idu*. The Korean phonetic alphabet,



Hangul, was not created until the fifteenth century and is attributed to King Sejong the Great (1397–1450), who ruled from 1418 to 1450.

## Historical Relationships

During the last century BCE and most of the first millennium CE the Korean Peninsula was divided among three kingdoms. During this time, the peninsula was ruled by the Koguryo kingdom (37 BCE–668 CE), which extended from the northern portion of the Korean Peninsula into present China, the Shilla kingdom (57 BCE–935 CE) in the southeastern part of the peninsula, and the Paekche kingdom (18 BCE–663 CE) in the southwest. Under pressure from China's Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) the Koguryo kingdom was defeated in the seventh century CE. The Shilla kingdom joined with Paekche kingdom to create Unified Shilla (668–935 CE) in opposition to the Chinese conquest of northern Korea, but this northern region gained control of most of the Korean Peninsula (except the regions

south of the Tumen and Yalu Rivers) by 935 CE. This unified area became known as "Koryo," which is the root of the word *Korea*.

The Koryo kingdom (918–1392) had to accept the tributary state system by force when the Chinese Liao dynasty (contemporary of the Song dynasty 960–1279, but controlled only the border) invaded at the end of the tenth century CE. In the twelfth century, with the founding of the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), Koryo became a tributary state to the Southern Song.

In the thirteenth century CE Mongols invaded Manchuria, and Manchurians fled into Korea. Koreans resisted the intrusion, and Korea came to be known as a "hermit kingdom." Nevertheless, Emperor Ch'ien-Lung (1736–1795) again extended Chinese suzerainty (dominion) over vast regions, including Korea, during his reign.

Over the next few centuries, as European explorers began their intrusion into east Asia, Chinese relations with European countries and even many east Asian countries were handled through the Ministry of Rituals; this arrangement was suitable for countries such as Korea,

which had some cultural and linguistic commonalities with China.

In 1875 the Chinese foreign ministry (Tsunqli Yamen) encouraged Korea to open itself to relations with the Japanese, thus sacrificing its own suzerainty over Korea. Insurrections in Korea in the early 1880s prompted China to attempt to reassert its influence in Korea, even as Japanese influence was growing there.

In the twentieth century, after the Japanese surrender in World War II, many Koreans who had fled their homeland remained in Manchuria and joined the People's Self-Defense Army in support of the Communists. During the Korean War the People's Republic of China viewed U.S. involvement in the Korean War as a resurgence of Western imperialism; many of General Douglas MacArthur's statements and actions contributed to this view.

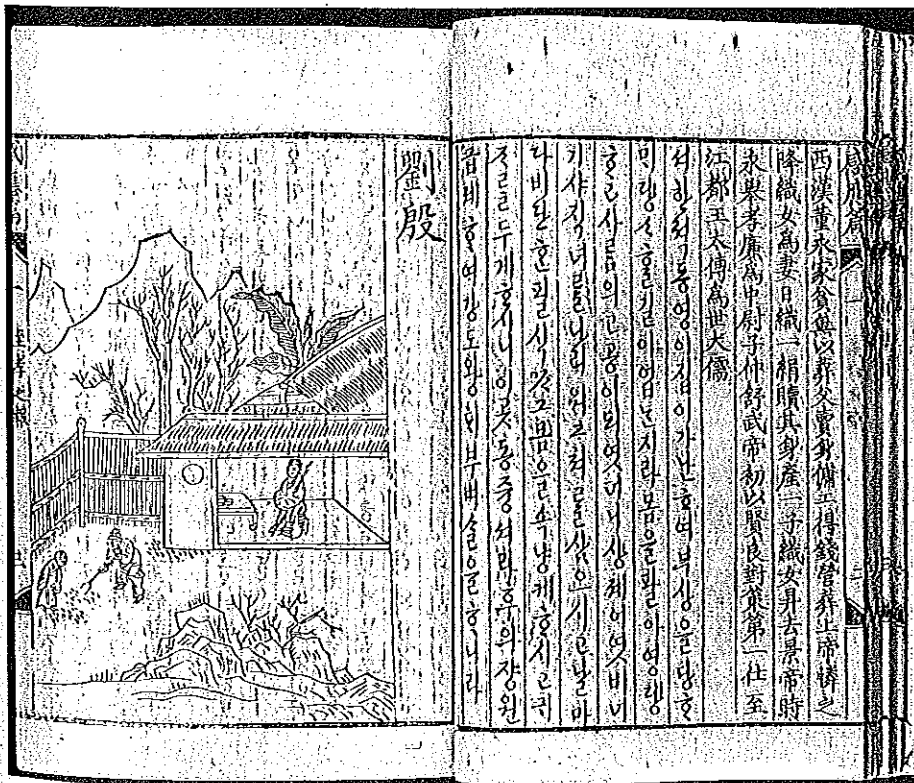
The division of the Korean peninsula after World War II, which resulted in the establishment of the Republic of Korea in the south and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north, has benefited China. Northeast China benefited from economic relations with South Korea, and South Korea became one of China's major trading partners in Asia. Although China has gained

little from its trade with North Korea, China has provided nearly one-fourth of all international trade with that country, and has been a major provider of food and fuel to it.

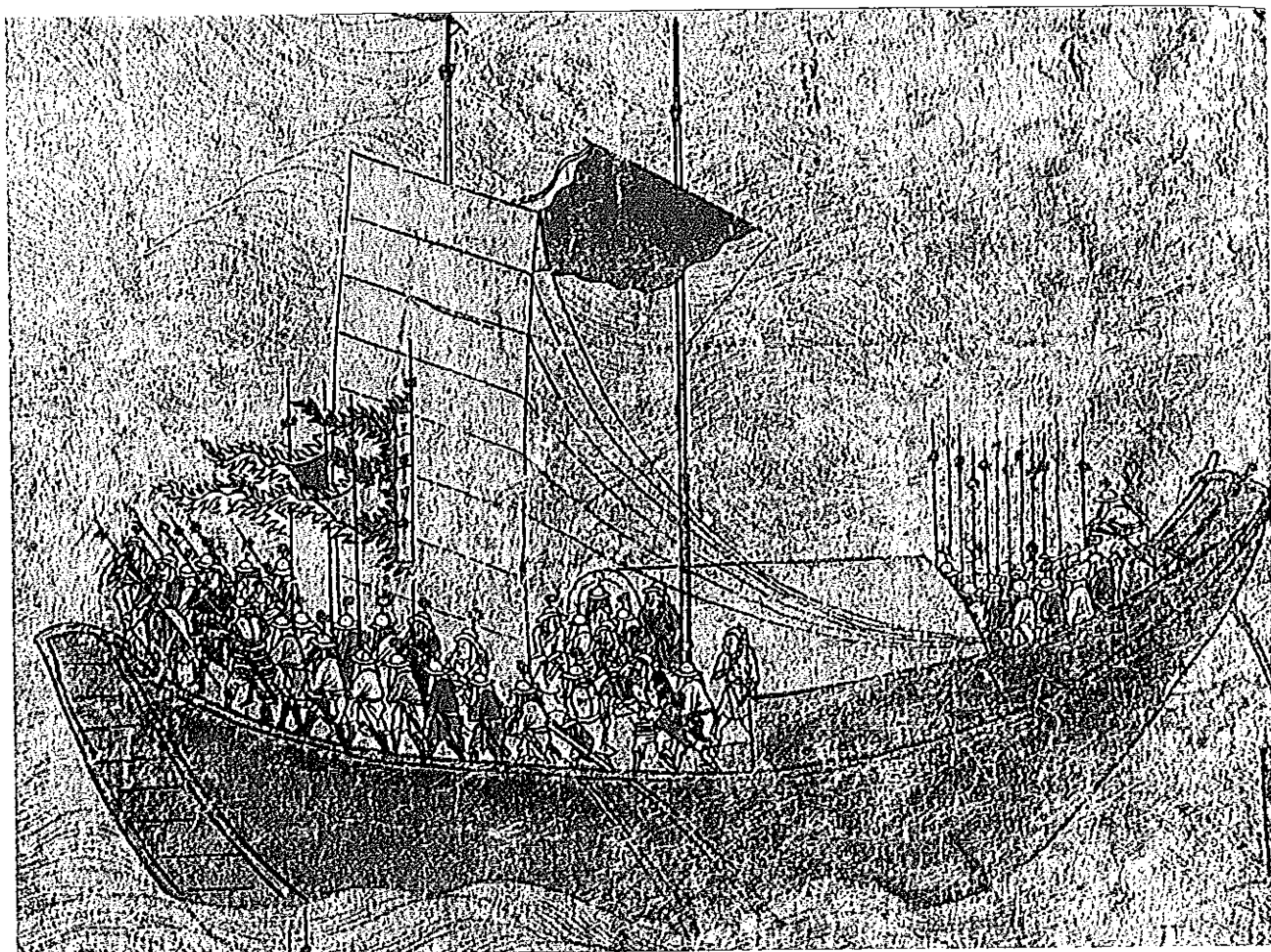
In 2001, the year when China was admitted to the World Trade Organization, South Korea replaced the United States as China's greatest source of foreign direct investment (FDI). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, South Korea's post-Cold War international relations have been based less on reliance on the United States and more on diversification in its relations; China is a player in this diversification.

North Korea benefited from the political competition between the Soviet Union and China during the Cold War, playing one against the other in acquiring support. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and economic liberalization in China have left North Korea without its biggest benefactors, even as it has remained located between one of east Asia's most successful market-oriented economies (South Korea) and what has become one of the world's greatest export-oriented economies (China).

Thomas DOLAN



A Chinese text on the subject of divine reward and punishment, translated into Korean.



The "Commander of Three Armies," the general of a Ming dynasty force sent to help Korea resist Japanese invasion.

## Further Reading

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