

New Thoughts and Prospects on the Role of City Diplomacy in China-Korea Relations under the Unprecedented Changes of the Past Century

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ABSTRACT

Today's world is accelerating in the unprecedented changes of the century, China's emergence in the field of science and technology, the United States to Japan and South Korea to set up a chip alliance to limit China's scientific and technological development, which is a layer of complex geopolitical relations of the Northeast Asian region of the country's diplomatic outlook fog. China and South Korea, the two countries have a long history of interaction, especially since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries rapid development of economic and trade exchanges, to the development of the two countries have brought significant benefits. With the evolution of the world pattern, especially the two major powers of China and the United States in the Asia-Pacific region of the strategic game, South Korea is faced with the dilemma of choosing sides, to the interaction between China and South Korea has brought great instability, to the humanities exchanges, economic and trade exchanges between the two countries also caused great inconvenience, affecting the two countries of the political, economic and diplomatic relations interaction. In the face of many dilemmas, the role of city diplomacy has become an effective way to maintain and promote normal exchanges between China and South Korea, and city diplomacy will make great contributions to the stability of China-South Korea relations.

KEYWORDS

Century of Change; China-Korea Relations; City Diplomacy; New Thinking; Prospects

1. INTRODUCTION

The world's general trend is a vast one; if we go along with it, we will prosper; if we go against it, we will perish. In today's world, peace and development are the mainstream, and extensive country-to-country, country-to-region and region-to-region exchanges are the world's general trend. However, the United States is biased against the current, and it has extensively drawn together partners and allies in Europe, the United States and the Asia-Pacific region to launch a strategic game against China. From Trump to the current Biden administration, the United States has been in the Asia-Pacific region, especially in Northeast Asia, to bring together South Korea and Japan to form a China-Japan-South Korea security alliance, accelerating the strengthening of restrictions and suppression of China. From actively promoting the deployment of the SAD anti-missile system, to planning the establishment of a "four-party chip alliance" to name and block China, and finally to force partners and allies to take a stand. In the face of a hundred years of great changes in the background, the Chinese and South Korean governments are limited in their interactions with each other, the country must enrich the way of interaction between the international communities. In addition to the

interactions between the private sector, universities and cultural institutions, the active promotion of city diplomacy is particularly important for the solid development of China-Korea relations.

2. I.CONNOTATION OF CITY DIPLOMACY

"The emergence of the academic term "city diplomacy" is not a long time ago, and can be traced back to a report published in 2003 by the Glocal Forum on the internationalisation of places. The first report on "Local Internationalisation" can be traced back to a report published by the Glocal Forum in 2003. (Shen Chuanxin, 2022). Currently, what is generally recognised in the academic community is "city diplomacy" as defined by Dutch scholars Jane Mellison and Rogier van der Plaijm, who in 2007 published a paper on "City Diplomacy": "The Expanding Role of Cities in International Relations". For the first time, they elaborated on the meaning of city diplomacy, which is "city diplomacy is the system and process by which a city or local government develops relationships with other actors in the international political arena in order to represent the interests of the city or region". (Wu Zhen, 2020). From the elaborated connotation, urban diplomacy is both an institution with constraints and norms, and a process of continuous development and evolution, with normative and extensional characteristics. Therefore, city diplomacy is literally the behaviour of two cities, but it should be clear that it is an integral part of the country's overall diplomacy, which plays a pivotal role in complementing the country's overall diplomacy, promoting national and regional exchanges, and fostering the development of the local economy. Although the definitions of "city diplomacy" are generally the same, the actual implementation of "city diplomacy" differs between China and Western countries. Due to the historical and political factors, the real main body of international communication is still the state, and city diplomacy is an important part of the state's overall communication, while other forms of communication are supplementary to the state's foreign communication. In contrast, in Western countries, due to the historical legacy of the city-state system and the granting of laws, cities, i.e., local governments, can make decisions independently for the benefit of the development of their regions. Therefore, China and Korea, two countries with different forms of political systems, can carry out China-Korea city diplomacy through the advantages of geographic location and historical interactions, and also provide convenience for China and Korea to continue to carry out exchanges and cooperation.

3. OVERVIEW OF CITY DIPLOMACY BETWEEN CHINA AND SOUTH KOREA UNDER A CENTURY OF CHANGE

Against the background of a century of change, city diplomacy has undoubtedly become the hub of economic and trade exchanges and cultural exchanges between China and South Korea. It has played a key role in maintaining the diplomatic relations between China and South Korea, and to a certain extent alleviated the situation of China-South Korea economic, trade and cultural exchanges and cooperation hindered by the geopolitics of Northeast Asia.

3.1. The Development Of City Diplomacy In China And Korea

Throughout history, China and Korea can be described as geographical neighbours, culturally close and emotionally connected, with a long history of friendship. But the relationship between China and South Korea can be described as bumpy and tortuous, especially in the modern era of the world war. The two countries became the Republic of Korea on the Korean Peninsula in 1948 and the People's Republic of China in 1949, respectively. Influenced by the world situation, history and ideology, direct diplomatic relations between China and Korea have not been established. As a result, there were no economic and trade exchanges and humanistic exchanges between the governments and the people of China and South Korea for nearly forty years. It was only in the late 1980s that Qingdao, a city in China's Shandong province with an excellent deep-water harbour, began to engage in direct

trade with South Korea by virtue of its proximity to the country, which led to some cooperation and exchange between the two countries, and it was only in 1992 that the two countries formally established diplomatic relations, through the formation of international friendship cities (also known as "sister cities"), bilateral or multilateral exchanges between cities, and the establishment of the "Sister Cities" programme, which is the first of its kind in the world. In 1992, China and South Korea formally established diplomatic relations, and through the formation of international friendship cities (also known as "sister cities"), bilateral or multilateral exchange mechanisms between cities, and direct exchanges between cities, city-to-city exchanges between the two countries have developed by leaps and bounds. As of December 2020, Korea had concluded 1,743 pairs of sister or friendship cities with foreign countries, of which 668 pairs were concluded between China and Korea, accounting for the highest proportion and the largest number. (**Website of the National Council of City Governors of Korea, 2020**). These city-to-city exchanges have strongly set off a wave of in-depth exchanges between China and Korea.

China's rapid development over the past few decades has changed the pattern of the world economy, the United States itself has undergone great changes, and the disintegration of the world's colonial empire system and the formation of the system of national independent states in Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as the development of socialism, the twists and turns and changes have profoundly highlighted the great changes that have not been seen in the world for a hundred years. Therefore, against this background, the United States felt a certain threat, and it began to provoke a strategic game against China, which led to the Northeast Asian region also showed great changes. Together with the Russia-Ukraine war, the relationship between China, Russia, Japan, South Korea and North Korea in Northeast Asia has become tenser. As a major economy in Northeast Asia, China and South Korea, the two countries, could have taken advantage of the solid foundation of economic and trade exchanges and the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations good opportunity to further accelerate the promotion of friendly exchanges between the two countries, the Sino-South Korean relations to a higher and newer stage of history. Forced by the military alliance between the United States and South Korea and the pressure exerted by the United States on South Korea, the new South Korean government has distanced itself from China-South Korea relations to a certain extent.

Against this backdrop of a hundred years of change, China and the Republic of Korea are bound to be more affected by the game played by the great powers of China and the United States in Northeast Asia. As Article 117 of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea stipulates, "Local governments shall be responsible for handling the welfare affairs and property management of local residents and will make local autonomy ordinances within the scope of national laws and regulations." Local governments in Korea have greater autonomy in conducting foreign urban relations. In addition, South Korea's geographic location with several cities bordering China provides a natural advantage for cities to conduct trade and humanistic exchanges with each other. Even under the influence of the strategic game between China and the United States and the impact of cooperation at the governmental level, inter-city exchanges will not be interrupted, which is an effective means to continue to promote friendly economic and trade exchanges between China and South Korea.

3.2. Progress of China-Korea City Diplomacy under the Century of Change

On 1 May 2020, China and South Korea took the lead in the world to open a "fast track" to facilitate the exchange of important and urgently needed personnel. After the establishment of this "fast track", important and urgently needed personnel of China and South Korea in business, logistics, production and technical services can apply for visas after fulfilling the necessary administrative approval procedures of the other country. After the establishment of this "fast channel", important business, logistics, production and technical service personnel from China and South Korea can apply for visas after fulfilling the necessary administrative approval procedures of the other country. (**China Youth Daily, 2020**). China and South Korea's joint efforts to combat the epidemic will surely translate into

a strong impetus to push the two countries' relationship even further. As President Xi Jinping said, "After overcoming the epidemic, the friendly feelings between the people of China and South Korea will deepen, and the exchanges and cooperation between the two sides in various fields will become more active."

As city diplomacy shows great potential, China and South Korea have accelerated the resumption of work and production. In May 2020, South Korea sent more than 300 additional technicians from Samsung Group to Samsung's Xi'an semiconductor factory to China through a "fast track". Together with the first batch of more than 200 technicians sent by Samsung Electronics to Xi'an since April, Samsung sent a total of 500 staff to Xi'an within a month to accelerate the expansion of its production base in China. 2022 May 2022 The construction site of the Opto-electronics and Information Industry Park project in the China-Korea (Changchun) International Co-operation Demonstration Zone is a busy scene everywhere. According to China News, the total trade volume between China and South Korea in 2021 was \$362.4 billion, up 26.9 per cent year-on-year and 72 times higher than when China and South Korea established diplomatic relations in 1992. (**China News, 2022**). 2022 In June, LG Magna Electric Drivetrain, a joint venture between LG Electronics and Canada's Magna, decided to invest 101.6 billion won in its Nanjing plant in China to expand its facilities. Hyundai Kia Group has announced to increase its capital to Hyundai Kia and Beijing Hyundai by about 900 million US dollars and 471 million US dollars respectively to further enhance the sales of Korean cars in the auto market. Influenced by geopolitical conflicts and other factors, the global industrial chain supply chain is accelerating reconstruction, and it is increasingly urgent for China and South Korea to further strengthen industrial chain cooperation, and it can be said that city diplomacy has shown amazing potential for China-South Korea economic and trade cooperation.

4. NEW THOUGHTS AND FORESIGHT ON THE ROLE OF CITY DIPLOMACY IN CHINA-KOREA RELATIONS UNDER THE CENTURY OF CHANGES

In the context of a hundred years of great changes, the author takes into account the unpredictability of the strategic game between China and the United States, South Korea may be trapped by national security factors and choose to continue or even strengthen the military alliance relationship between South Korea and the United States, which is also likely to lead to the extreme situation faced by China and South Korea. In this scenario, China in order to be able to continue to carry out economic and trade cooperation and humanistic exchanges in a stable manner. City diplomacy will not only be a complementary form of national diplomacy, but may also play a major or more important role as the conflict changes.

4.1. New Thoughts on the Role of City Diplomacy in China-Korea Relations

First, it is the hub of China-Korea economic and trade relations. Despite the current changes in Northeast Asia, China-Korea relations still have normal exchanges. However, in the face of the extreme situation of the US-China game, especially the competition and restrictions in the field of science and technology, the exchanges between China and South Korea have been greatly restricted and have been subjected to enormous adjustments. Under such circumstances, the past economic and trade exchanges between China and Korea could only be replaced by this "semi-official" way of communication. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, the Qing government still allowed the Thirteen Houses in Guangzhou to conduct trade and economic relations with the outside world even though the Qing government had imposed the "closed-door policy". It is impossible for the US government to restrict all city contacts in Korea and restrict every field of contacts, so that to a certain extent it can still play the role of city diplomacy between China and South Korea and maintain the cooperation between China and South Korea.

Secondly, it is a window for cultural exchanges between China and Korea. When the cultural exchange between the governments of China and South Korea is blocked, the Chinese and South Korean folk, cultural institutions and universities can continue to realise the mutual visit activities between China and South Korea in the form of city diplomacy. At this time, city diplomacy becomes a window for national exchanges and facilitates normal exchanges between China and Korea from top to bottom. Cities can understand the political, economic, cultural and diplomatic trends of the two countries in their mutual interactions. Normal exchanges between the two countries continue through the organisation of sports events, cultural years, and cultural months between the cities.

Thirdly, it is a bridge for technological cooperation between China and Korea. China and South Korea cannot carry out direct cooperation, but also cannot do exchanges between the government on the cooperation of technology, which will inevitably affect South Korea's semiconductor and other high-tech cannot carry out cooperation with China. In this context, can only be concluded through the two cities of friendship cities, regional Northeast Asia Local Government Conference, Northeast Asia Local Government Association, the Yellow Sea Free Trade Zone and other mechanisms and platforms to carry out technological co-operation and exchanges.

4.2. Prospects for City Diplomacy in China-Korea Relations

First, an effective way to avoid geopolitical risks in Northeast Asia. Against the backdrop of the 100-year general situation, normally China-South Korea economic and trade relations would have suffered a huge impact. But in 2021, the total trade volume between China and South Korea still hit a record high and still showed growth momentum. This is due to the fact that China and South Korea's city-to-city exchanges due to friendship cities, regional exchanges and geographic location have played a crucial role, which shows that city diplomacy can largely hedge or circumvent the impact of geopolitics. This can also be fully seen in the future of the Northeast Asian region of the contradictions and conflicts, can be resolved through the city diplomacy way to promote the harmonious development of the region.

Second, accelerate the creation of a community of destiny of friendly cities between China and South Korea. The great potential of city diplomacy, China and South Korea between the cities of China and South Korea to actively carry out the resumption of production and construction of China-South Korea industrial parks. Similar to Incheon and Weihai, Shanghai and Pusan, Shanxi and Daegu City, Lianyungang and Mokpo City, etc., these cities can be in-depth two local governments in the economy, culture and tourism exchanges and co-operation, to promote mutual learning and common development between the cities, and actively accelerate the creation of the community of destiny of China-Korea friendship and mutual assistance cities, which is based on economic and cultural exchanges.

Thirdly, actively plan the construction of China-Korea multi-city economic circle. Relying on the friendly cities and regional exchange mechanisms already established by China and South Korea and the city exchange foundation established by the coastal location, screen and analyse the homogeneous development of industries and cities, divide the city economic circle, and create a distinctive China-South Korea city economic circle that drives the common development of cities. Local governments in the vicinity of China and South Korea will form a broader governmental exchange mechanism, break through the bottleneck of science and technology, break the limitations of time and space, broaden the field, explore in depth, and build a wider "circle of friends" for China-South Korea city economic diplomacy.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The world's unprecedented changes are accelerating, and the characteristics of the changing world, changing times and changing history are becoming more evident. Looking at the future trend of China

and South Korea from the perspective of materialistic dialectics, it could be smooth sailing or thorny. The wheel of history is always rolling forward, and changes in the international landscape may lead to a game between China and the U.S., causing the world's oldest countries to make trouble, hindering China's development, and in turn affecting the stability of the relationship between China and South Korea. If we look at the issue from the perspective of development, we will know that opportunities are also hidden in crises. The Northeast Asian region has complex geopolitical and historical reasons. China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, North Korea and Mongolia are geographically close to each other, and there are territorial disputes, economic interests, ethnic issues, etc. Even if the U.S. intervenes, it will not be a one-sided situation, which will certainly bring opportunities for the development of China-South Korea relations.

Considering the possible future changes in the world, the cruelty and complexity of geopolitics, and the breadth, feasibility and convenience of city diplomacy, it is better to circumvent the pressure exerted by geopolitics. We should not hesitate to promote city diplomacy in all aspects, at multiple levels and in a wide range of fields. China and South Korea should not only integrate city diplomacy into the overall national diplomacy, but also push it to a more important position through the form of law, so as to play a pivotal role in the future national relations, and to build a community of urban destiny and a political and economic "circle of friends" of cities in China and South Korea as soon as possible.

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