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## **Factors in China-Korea Relations: A Survey of College Students in China and Korea**

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### **Abstract**

*This research looks at the international relationship between China and South Korea in the context of cultural, economic, and historical factors based on a survey of college students in South Korea and China. According to the results, the respondents reported economic factors as the most important factor influencing China-Korea relations. Korean students reported economic factors as the most important factor, whereas Chinese students reported cultural factors. The respondents reported long cultural exchange as the most important cultural factor influencing China-Korea relations. Korean students reported long cultural exchange as the most important cultural factor, and Chinese students also reported long cultural exchange. The respondents reported political alliance/conflict as the most important historical factor influencing China-Korea relations. Korean students reported long history of China-Korea relations, whereas Chinese students reported political alliance/conflict. The respondents reported China-Korea trade as the most important economic factor. Korean students reported China-Korea trade, and Chinese students also reported China-Korea trade.*

***Keywords: International Relations, China, South Korea, Cultural, Economic, and Historical Factors, Perception***

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### **I. Introduction**

Studies have found that international relationships generally stem from multiple dimensions in the context of neighboring countries. The relationship between South Korea and China also depends on various factors, and considering the last seven decades, only last two appear relatively peaceful and healthy for these two major countries of East Asia [1]. Nonetheless, the relationship between China and South Korea is expected to remain volatile

and unpredictable due to North Korea, China's close relationship with North Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan as well as a host of cultural, economic, and political factors [2]. This paper sheds additional light on the relationship between China and South Korea and discusses the core cultural, economic, and historical factors that may influence that relationship.

## **II. Overview of International Relations between China and South Korea**

The relationship between China and South Korea has been volatile in the past seven decades, starting from the Korean War (1950-53) [3], partly because of they cannot ignore each other as major players in East Asia [4]. Some other factors that influence the relationship between the two countries include Russia, Taiwan, Japan, and North Korea [5]. As of 2014, China became the top trade partner of South Korea [6], including a diverse range of products such as electronics, automobile parts, industrial machinery, oil, and steel, among others [7].

Various issues influence the relationship between China and South Korea [8]. For example, tariff disputes over the garlic market in 2000 and the killing of a Korean coast guard and Chinese fishermen's fishing in South Korean waters in 2011 are some barriers to a stronger relationship between China and South Korea [9]. China's close relationship with North Korea has also been a crucial factor influencing China's relationship with South Korea [10]. In addition, China's military strength has made South Korea weary in terms of its market, cultural, and political security. Hence, South Korea has traditionally reached out to the U.S., further straining China-South Korea relations [10].

Historically, China has been an ally of North Korea. In addition, China's unprecedented economic, political, and cultural rise in the world has been a source of threat for South Korea [11]. According to a survey, 46% of all Koreans view China as an ally, while 17% consider it as a threat. Since 2010, South Korea's attitudes toward China has warmed. Similarly, China has recognized the importance of South Korea [12]. As per some studies, South Korea has become one of the most important countries in the world for China [13].

In terms of cultural factors, although South Korea has a distinct culture, many of its cultural values appear to stem from or are consistent with Chinese culture [14], including Confucianism [15]. That is, aside from differences in the political system (China's Communist state and Korea's democratic state), the two countries differ in terms of various economics, historical, and cultural factors [15]. Geographically, South Korea is much smaller than China, and therefore, economically, China far exceeds South Korea when it comes to economic power [16]. Nevertheless, there has been some tension over South Korea's strong relationship with the U.S., and South Korea has expressed some concern over its growing economic dependence on China as a dominant market power [17]. Nonetheless such negative perceptions appear somewhat tempered by the similarity of the two cultures [18] and thus cultural values [19].

Given this background and the importance of the future relationship between China and South Korea, especially in terms of economic and political relations [20], there is a need for a deeper understanding of how people view the relationship between China and South Korea, including the view of future generations of decision makers. For this reason, this study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What is the most important factor influencing China-Korea relations as viewed by Chinese and South Korean students? Is there any difference between Chinese and South Korean students in terms of this perception?
- 2) What is the most important cultural factor influencing China-Korea relations as viewed by Chinese and South Korean students? Is there any difference between Chinese and South Korean students in terms of this perception?
- 3) What is the most important historical factor influencing China-Korea relations as viewed by Chinese and South Korean students? Is there any difference between Chinese and South Korean students in terms of this perception?
- 4) What is the most important economic factor influencing China-Korea relations as viewed by Chinese and South Korean students? Is there any difference between Chinese and South Korean students in terms of this perception?

### **III. Methods**

#### **Participants & Instrumentation**

A total of 100 Korean college students and 68 Chinese college students participated in this survey. The Korean survey was conducted at a large college in Korea, and the Chinese survey was conducted at one of the largest shopping malls in Liaoning Province, China. A total of 220 students were approached for the 168 responses (a 76% response rate). The questionnaire took about four minutes to complete. The survey was conducted between February to June 2016.

For respondents' perception of the most important factor, the following three factors were given as options in the survey: cultural factors, historical factors, and economic factors. For respondents' perception of the most important cultural factor, the following three factors were given as options in the survey: cultural similarity, ethnic similarity, and long cultural exchange. For respondents' perception of the most important historical factor, the following three factors were given as options in the survey: long history of China-Korea relations, political alliance/conflict, and close physical proximity. For respondents' perception of the most important economic factor, the following three factors were given as options in the survey: China-Korea trade, mutual economic dependence, and long economic exchange.

**Analysis:** For all research questions, the chi-square test was conducted using the three factors influencing China-Korea relations.

**IV. Results**

**Question 1**

As shown in Table-1, the respondents reported economic factors (57.7%) as the most important factor influencing China-Korea relations, followed by historical factors (32.1%) and cultural factors (10.1%).

**Table-1:** Most important factor influencing China-Korea relations

			Factor			Total
			Cultural	Historical	Economic	
Country	Korea	Count % within Country	20 20.0%	13 13.0%	67 67.0%	100 100.0%
	China	Count % within Country	34 50.0%	4 5.9%	30 44.1%	68 100.0%
Total		Count % within Country	54 32.1%	17 10.1%	97 57.7%	168 100.0%

As shown in Table-1, for the most important factor influencing China-South Korea relations as perceived by the respondents, Korean students reported economic factors (67.0%), followed by cultural factors (20.0%) and historical factors (13.0%). Chinese students reported cultural factors (50.0%) as the most important factor, followed by economic factors (44.1%) and historical factors (5.9%). The results of the chi-square test for the relationship between country of origin and the response show a significant relationship ( $\chi^2(2) = 17.030, p=.000$ ).

**Question 2**

As shown in Table 2, the respondents reported long cultural exchange (64.3%) as the most important cultural factor influencing China-Korea relations, followed by cultural similarity (22.6%) and ethnic similarity (13.1%).

**Table-2:** Most important cultural factor influencing China-Korea relations

			Factor			Total
			Cultural similarity	Ethnic similarity	Long cultural exchange	
Country	Korea	Count % within Country	28 28.0%	15 15.0%	57 57.0%	100 100.0%
	China	Count % within Country	10 14.7%	7 10.3%	51 75.0%	68 100.0%
Total		Count % within Country	38 22.6%	22 13.1%	108 64.3%	168 100.0%

As shown in Table-2, for the most important cultural factor influencing China-South Korea relations as perceived by the respondents, Korean students reported long cultural exchange (57.0%), followed by cultural similarity (28.0%) and ethnic similarity (15.0%). Chinese students reported long cultural exchange (75.0%) as the most important factor, followed by cultural similarity (14.7%) and ethnic similarity (10.3%). The results of the chi-square test for the relationship between country of origin and the response show a significant relationship ( $\chi^2(2) = 5.887, p = .053$ ).

### Question 3

As shown in Table-3, the respondents reported political alliance/conflict (49.4%) as the most important historical factor influencing China-Korea relations, followed by long history of China-Korea relations (32.1%) and political alliance/conflict (18.5%).

**Table-3:** Most important historical factor influencing China-Korea relations

			Factor			Total
			Long history of China-Korea relations	Political alliance/conflict	Close physical proximity	
Country	Korea	Count % within Country	43 43.0%	32 32.0%	25 25.0%	100 100.0%
	China	Count % within Country	11 16.2%	51 75.0%	6 8.8%	68 100.0%
Total		Count % within Country	54 32.1%	83 49.4%	31 18.5%	168 100.0%

As shown in Table-3, for the most important historical factor influencing China-South Korea relations as perceived by the respondents, Korean students reported long history of China-Korea relations (43.0%), followed by political alliance/conflict (32.0%) and close physical proximity (25.0%). Chinese students reported political alliance/conflict (75.0%) as the most important factor, followed by long history of China-Korea relations (16.2%) and close physical proximity (8.8%). The results of the chi-square test for the relationship between country of origin and the response show a non-significant relationship ( $\chi^2(2) = 29.949, p=.000$ ).

**Question-4**

As shown in Table 4, the respondents reported China-Korea trade (66.7%) as the most important economic factor influencing China-Korea relations, followed by mutual economic dependence (28.0%) and long economic exchange (5.4%).

**Table-4:** Most important economic factor influencing China-Korea relations

			Factor			Total
			China-Korea trade	Mutual economic dependence	Long economic exchange	
Country	Korea	Count % within Country	57 57.0%	37 37.0%	6 6.0%	100 100.0%
	China	Count % within Country	55 80.9%	10 14.7%	3 4.4%	68 100.0%
Total		Count % within Country	112 66.7%	47 28.0%	9 5.4%	168 100.0%

As shown in Table-4, for the most important economic factor influencing China-South Korea relations as perceived by the respondents, Korean students reported China-Korea trade (57.0%), followed by mutual economic dependence (37.0%) and long economic exchange (6.0%). Chinese students reported China-Korea trade (80.9%) as the most important factor, followed by mutual economic dependence (14.7%) and long economic exchange (4.4%). The results of the chi-square test for the relationship between country of origin and the response show a significant relationship ( $\chi^2(2) = 10.845, p=.004$ ).

## V. Conclusions

The relationship between South Korea and China also depends on various factors, and it is expected to remain volatile and unpredictable due to North Korea, China's close relationship with North Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan as well as a host of cultural, economic, and political factors, among others. Accordingly, this paper sheds some additional light on the relationship between China and South Korea and discusses the core cultural, economic, and historical factors that may influence that relationship through a survey of college students in South Korea and China.

According to the results, the respondents reported economic factors as the most important factor influencing China-Korea relations, followed by historical factors and cultural factors. Korean students reported economic factors as the most important factor, followed by cultural factors and historical factors. Chinese students reported cultural factors, followed by economic factors and historical factors. The difference was significant. The respondents reported long cultural exchange as the most important cultural factor influencing China-Korea relations, followed by cultural similarity and ethnic similarity.

Korean students reported long cultural exchange as the most important cultural factor, followed by cultural similarity and ethnic similarity. Chinese students reported long cultural exchange, followed by cultural similarity and ethnic similarity. The difference was significant. The respondents reported political alliance/conflict as the most important historical factor influencing China-Korea relations, followed by long history of China-Korea relations and political alliance/conflict. Korean students reported long history of China-Korea relations, followed by political alliance/conflict and close physical proximity. Chinese students reported political alliance/conflict the most important factor, followed by long history of China-Korea relations and close physical proximity. The difference was significant. The respondents reported China-Korea trade as the most important economic factor influencing China-Korea relations, followed by mutual economic dependence and long economic exchange. Korean students reported China-Korea trade, followed by mutual economic dependence and long economic exchange. Chinese students reported China-Korea trade as the most important factor, followed by mutual economic dependence and long economic exchange. The difference was significant. Korean students reported economic factors as the most important factor in China-Korea relations, whereas Chinese students reported cultural factors.

This suggests that Koreans may consider Korea's economic relationship with China to be the most important factor, whereas China may view Korea as a culturally similar neighbor. Korean students reported long cultural exchange as the most important cultural factor, and Chinese students also reported the same, which indicates that the long cultural relationship between the two countries is considered an important asset for both countries. Korean students reported long history of China-Korea relations as the most important historical factor, whereas Chinese students reported political alliance/conflict. This indicates that Korea may focus on the historical relationship, whereas China may focus more on the current relationship. Korean students reported China-Korea trade as the most important economic factor, and Chinese students also reported the same. This suggests that both consider trade as the most important factor in terms of their economic relationship.

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