

The Characteristics of China-South Korea Relations from the Perspective of Complex Interdependence

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Abstract. In the context of economic globalization, the links between countries and different state actors are deepening day by day. Since countries are in such an interrelated and mutually influencing environment, it is of great value to study the relations and development characteristics of countries from the perspective of complex interdependence. In the context of changes in the current economic, political, social and cultural fields between China and South Korea, it is very necessary to analyze these issues from the perspective of complex interdependence. Based on the literature, this paper will analyze the current development characteristics of China and South Korea in various fields, and use PRISMA to screen the relevant literature. To identify the path for the future growth of China and South Korea, which should work together to forge a future-focused China-South Korea relationship as a community with a shared future that depends on and supports one another, as well as to analyze these issues between the two nations, the complex interdependence theory will also be applied.

Keywords: Complex interdependence, China-South Korea relations, Characteristics of development.

1. Introduction

The year 2023 celebrates the 31st anniversary of China and South Korea's formal diplomatic relations. Bilateral relations have been developing smoothly and exchanges and cooperation in various fields have achieved remarkable results over the years. However, the two countries also face many challenges in the process of enriching their strategic cooperative partnership. In the past 30 years, as their economies have developed more closely together, China and South Korea have steadily established a partnership based on interdependence, mutual benefit, and shared advancement. South Korea is not only an ally of the United States, but also an important partner of China. In the context of the increasingly intensified strategic game between China and the United States, South Korea is facing increasing pressure to "choose sides". In March 2022, the South Korean government implemented a political party transition, and the foreign policy of the Yoon Seok-yue government is very different from that of its predecessor. On the issue of the DPRK, its possession of nuclear weapons and its continuous military buildup have pushed the situation on the Korean Peninsula and even Northeast Asia to a more complex situation. There have been many exchanges and strong cultural commonality between China and South Korea. However, due to various reasons, in recent years, the cognition and understanding of each other at the social level of China and South Korea have declined significantly. Therefore, some important changes have taken place in the economic, political, social and cultural fields of the two countries. Since globalization, countries have become increasingly dependent on each other. In the course of development, neither country is nor can be independent of each other. Moreover, in the study of China-South Korea relations, most academic circles conduct research based on the interdependence between China and South Korea, but few studies combine the complex interdependence theory with various aspects of the development characteristics of China and South Korea. Therefore, understanding China and South Korea's development characteristics from the perspective of complex interdependence theory is extremely important.

2. Literature Review

Since August 24, 1992, the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea formally established diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level. After ended the long history of non-recognition and isolation between the two countries, scholars have analyzed the development of China-South Korea relations from different perspectives.

In terms of the economic development of China and South Korea, since the idea of "East Asia Economic circle" was put forward by relevant Japanese institutions in 1987, multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia is of great significance. As China-South Korea cooperation plays a particularly important role in the cooperation in Northeast Asia, the cooperation and exchange between China and South Korea is one of the cornerstones of the cooperation in Northeast Asia. After the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and South Korea, in 1993, Wu Mingyu started to analyze the relationship between China and South Korea in Northeast Asia and believed that the prospect of China-South Korea cooperation was bright [1]. Entering the new century, China has ushered in a new period of leap forward. China's entry into the WTO, the successful bid for the Olympic Games and the great development of the west are the three focal points of China's economic development in the 21st century [2]. Under such rapid development, crises and opportunities coexist. From this perspective, Hyun Dong-ri analyzes the economic changes after China's accession to the WTO and the current situation of China-Korean economic cooperation, putting forward suggestions to promote the construction of China-Korean economic ties in the future, and speculates on the development direction of China-Korean economic power in the future, which is of great practical significance [2]. After the official establishment of China-South Korea comprehensive cooperative partnership in July 2003, the two countries launched non-governmental research and government-industry-academic joint research on China-South Korea free trade areas at the end of 2004 and 2006 respectively. After two years of non-governmental research and five vice-ministerial, industry-academic joint studies, China-South Korea FTA negotiations were officially launched in May 2012. On June 1, 2015, the leaders of China and the Republic of Korea officially signed the Free Trade Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Korea in Seoul, South Korea [3]. Based on this, Zhou Yudong, Xiao Xiao and Yang Jun analyzed the impact of the implementation of the China-South Korea Free Trade Agreement on various industries of the two countries according to the tariff reduction table of the China-South Korea Free trade Agreement negotiation. At the same time, they studied the development of China-South Korea trade under the background of RCEP and the China-South Korea free trade Agreement, and believed that it played an important role in promoting China-South Korea trade. At the end of 2019, the global spread of COVID-19 led to a significant increase in the uncertainty of international economic cooperation. The impact of COVID-19, the weight of global value chains, and the strategic game between China and the United States exerted an overlapping influence on each other, posing challenges to China-South Korea economic cooperation [4]. Academics began to pay attention to the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. Based on this, Jin Xiangdan set out to study the strategic significance of deepening bilateral cooperation in the post-COVID-19 era.

At the level of political development between China and South Korea, during the visit of President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea to China in May 2008, he and Chinese President Hu Jintao jointly announced that the relationship between the two countries would be upgraded to a strategic partnership of cooperation, which made the two countries focus again on the weakest military cooperation [5]. Hwang Jae-ho discussed how to develop military ties between China and South Korea under the strategic cooperative partnership, and the deepening of military relations between the two countries will also contribute to peace and stability in Northeast Asia. On July 8, 2016, the US and South Korea jointly announced the deployment of the THAAD anti-missile system in South Korea. On July 13, the site where the THAAD system will be deployed was announced as Seongcheon County, North Gyeongsang Province, southeast of the Korean Peninsula. The US and South Korea's action will gravely undermine the regional strategic balance, seriously jeopardize the strategic interests and security of regional nations, particularly China, and undermine efforts to uphold peace

and security on the Korean Peninsula. The THAAD issue directly causes an unprecedented impact on China-South Korea relations [6]. The academic community is concerned about China-South Korea relations under the background of THAAD. Chen Xiangyang made a study of this and believed that the deployment of THAAD in South Korea by the United States and South Korea would intensify the strategic game between major powers, promote the differentiation and reorganization of the regional pattern, worsen the tension on the Peninsula, and cause the relevant countries in the region to suffer deeply [6]. At the same time, Sun Ru also analyzed China's reaction and attitude towards the THAAD issue, and drew the conclusion that China should continue to insist on selective and precise countermeasures and be prepared for the long term when the US and South Korea did not alleviate China's security concerns [7]. 2023 is the 31st year of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and South Korea. However, under the new situation where the strategic competition between the United States and China intensifies and the new government of South Korea elevates the South Korea-US alliance to the "global comprehensive strategic alliance", the development of the relations between China and South Korea faces new challenges and choices [8]. The academic community began to pay attention to China-South Korea relations under this background, and Zhang Yunling analyzed the development status of China-South Korea relations and the new challenges.

In the process of cultural communication between China and South Korea, scholars from China and South Korea held four international academic conferences on Korean traditional culture held by Peking University, Hangzhou University and Shandong University respectively in 1995, 1997, 1999 and 2001 [9]. Shi Yuanhua analyzed the historical development of the traditional culture of China and South Korea, reviewed and explored the huge and far-reaching influence of the traditional culture concerning the ties between the two nations, which is crucial for fostering the growth of the present China-South Korea relations. This is also the purpose of many international academic conferences on Korean traditional Culture [9]. At the same time, the academic circle focuses on the cultural analysis of Chinese and Korean TV plays, movies, variety shows, traditional festival culture, traditional costume culture, language culture and other aspects. The relationship between China and South Korea has achieved rapid development in many aspects since the establishment of diplomatic ties. However, in recent years, the relationship between the two countries has changed from "warm" to "cold" due to various reasons. Among them, the negative cognition of South Korean people towards China has a great negative impact, so the academic circle began to analyze this phenomenon [10]. Park Jong-jin made a brief analysis and discussion on South Korean people's negative cognition of China's image and its negative impact on China-South Korea relations as well as countermeasures. Yu Wanying studied the main reasons for the rise of South Korean youth's negative cognition of China, and believed that it is of great significance to enhance the furtherance of pragmatic long-term development of China-South Korea friendly and cooperative relations to take targeted measures to enhance the country's cultural soft power, broaden the path of cross-cultural communication in the digital age, and innovate the communication mode of China-South Korea youth. It is meaningful to promote the pragmatic and long-term development of China-South Korea friendly and cooperative relations [11].

3. Theoretical Foundation

This essay examines the state of China-South Korea ties today from the perspective of complex interdependence, drawing on earlier research. In the 1970s, with the relative decline of American hegemony, realism theory was constantly challenged and impacted, and whether material power could play a role in maintaining world stability was questioned by many parties. At the same time, a group of liberal international relations theorists began to pay attention to the role and significance of non-material power factors. In 1977, Robert.O.Keohane collaborated with Joseph Nye to publish "Power and Interdependence", which marked the rise of neoliberalism, and they created the theory of complex interdependence [12]. Specifically, complex interdependence has the following three characteristics. First, there are multiple channels of communication between societies. These channels can be

summarized as inter-state contact, inter-government contact and transnational contact; The bureaucrats or unofficial elites of various countries can communicate directly through face-to-face or telecommunication exchanges. The active multinational corporations and multinational banks have become a formal part of foreign relations. Second, the issues between States consist of a variety of problems without a clear or fixed hierarchy; The range of issues related to foreign policy has become more diversified and complicated. Military issues are no longer always the primary issue in international relations. Each branch of the government undertakes a wide range of international tasks, and domestic and foreign affairs overlap. Third, when complex interdependence prevails, military force plays a secondary role, and the use of military force is no longer a policy tool of a government in the local area or on certain issues, or military force as a policy tool has become insignificant. However, military power is still important in dealing with hostile blocs outside the alliance.

In recent years, there have been a series of differences between China and South Korea in the fields of economy, politics, society and culture, and the traditional realist theory centering on national security and power has been difficult to explain the new changes in the current China-South Korea relations. Moreover, due to globalization, the whole world has gradually formed a whole, and the relationship between them is more complex and closely connected. The use of complex interdependence will enable a better understanding of the new changes and challenges in various aspects between the two countries. The actions of multinational corporations, global and regional organizations and transnational social movements have brought China and South Korea into a new era, a century of complex interdependence [13].

Although the theory of complex interdependence is not perfect and cannot fully reflect the world political reality and accurately predict the future development trend, it is still an effective tool to understand and grasp the current world politics, and some of its conclusions have been constantly confirmed by the international political reality with the development of globalization [14]. The current relationship between China and South Korea can be used as a good example of complex interdependence theory.

4. Method

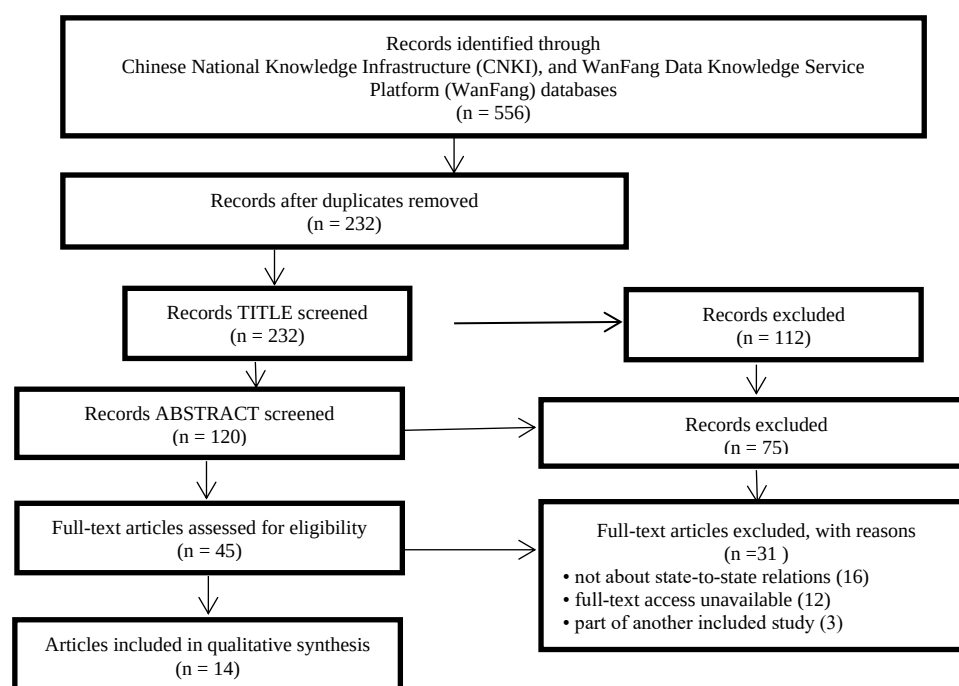


Figure 1. Flow diagram of study selection

The following study will be based on the keywords of China-South Korea relations, Sino-South Korea economy and trade, Sino-South Korea interdependence, South Korea's perception of China,

and complex interdependence, and the relevant literature will be selected by PRISMA for further analysis. The specific process is shown in Fig. 1.

5. The Characteristics of China-South Korea Relations

5.1. Multi-channel of Communication between China and South Korea

Multi-channel relations can be summarized as inter-state relations, inter-governmental relations and transnational relations. First of all, economic and trade relations between China and South Korea are strong. Throughout the past 30 years, there has been a tremendous increase in the volume of bilateral trade between China and South Korea. Bilateral commerce has multiplied more than 70 times during the previous 30 years. For the past 18 years, China has been South Korea's biggest trading partner, while South Korea has grown to be China's biggest importer, third-largest export market, and trading partner behind the US and Japan [8]. Secondly, there has been a notable improvement in the political ties between the two nations. In 1998, 2000 and 2003, bilateral relations went to a new level, going through several stages such as "China-ROK cooperative partnership oriented towards the 21st Century", "the two sides pushed the cooperative partnership to a new stage of comprehensive cooperation", and "China-ROK comprehensive cooperative partnership" until it was upgraded to "strategic cooperative partnership" in 2008 [15]. At the same time, the social and cultural exchanges between the two countries are close. China and South Korea are geographically close and culturally interlinked. They both belong to the Confucian cultural circle, sharing a number of common languages in cultural exchanges, and have a long history of cultural exchanges. In addition, Korean TV plays, movies and songs are popular in China, making the "hallyu" surging, and Chinese culture is also widely spread in South Korea, setting off the "Chinese Wind" hot flow [8].

5.2. The Issues between China and South Korea Consist of A Variety of Problems Which Are All Important without A Clear or Fixed Hierarchy

Problems among States are of great importance to relations among States. Military security has not always been at the top of the agenda for state-to-state relations. The distinction between domestic and external problems has also become blurred. These issues are also considered by government departments at different levels. Since the two countries' diplomatic ties were established thirty years ago, their relationship has been advancing through constant communication and collaboration, but China and South Korea still have conflicts on some issues. First, with the deepening of economic and trade cooperation, there are new changes in the economic and trade field between China and South Korea. Second, since Yoon Seok-yueh became president, his policy towards North Korea has changed. Third, China and South Korea still have differences in the social and cultural fields.

Due to the rise of Chinese local brands, the market share of South Korean products in China has declined, and the phenomenon of "internal and external attack" of South Korean products in the Chinese market is indeed obvious. South Korean products really need to upgrade to higher quality and better service, otherwise it will lose the Chinese market sooner or later. Although South Korea's exports to China are depressed, it is undeniable that China is still the most dependent country for South Korea's exports so far. In addition, the trade structure has changed significantly. Korea's imports of fibers, semiconductors, general machinery, computers, and car batteries from China, which has been South Korea's superior industries for a long time. It can be seen that the complementarity of the two countries is reduced based on the differences in industrial structure and competitiveness, and the industrial isomorphism and competitiveness are enhanced, and the complementary structure characterized by vertical division of labor is transformed to the competition and cooperation structure characterized by horizontal division of labor (competition and cooperation coexist) [8].

Since the inauguration of the Yoon Seok-yoon administration, its North Korea policy has been quite passive in improving inter-Korean relations, which is different from that of the previous administration. The Yoon administration once again designated North Korea as the "main enemy," and was keen to introduce a large number of U.S. nuclear strategic assets to South Korea and its

neighboring countries and purchase U.S. weapons and equipment. In particular, the Yoon administration conducted war drills with foreign forces to invade North Korea, which reflected the fact that Yoon was keen on confrontation. These moves have undoubtedly increased tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

In recent years, the overall favorable rating of South Korean society towards China has been declining year by year, with deepening negative cognition, and the favorable rating of China is at a lower level than that of other countries. Meanwhile, due to the conflicts between China and Korea in the historical, cultural and political fields, the majority of the Korean people tend to have a negative social recognition and favorable rating of China, and even regard China as a threat. For the long-term development of both China and South Korea, actions should be taken to timely stop the deterioration of folk feelings between two countries and avoid some unnecessary conflicts.

These issues between two nations are sensitive and very complicated. These issues are interrelated and interlinked. Failure to properly resolve any one of them may trigger a chain reaction and affect the overall situation of the healthy development of China-South Korea relations. Therefore, many of these issues are so important that it is difficult to rank them. There is no hierarchy among them.

5.3. Military Force Plays A Secondary Role

In situations where complex interdependence predominates, governments refrain from using military force in their own regions or against other governments on certain issues [16]. Since South Korea is highly dependent on the United States not only economically and politically, but also on national security issues, including the Korea-U.S. alliance, it is inevitable that South Korea will abide by the rules set by the United States. Moreover, as China is the most important geopolitical challenge and the only global competitor of the United States, a severe challenge for the strategic cooperation between China and South Korea is that the United States pushes forward the comprehensive strategic competition with China. However, the United States no longer takes the enhancement of military strength as the most important goal, but is committed to containing and suppressing China in multiple fields. In the economic field, the United States has imposed sanctions against China in key industries such as 5G and core components, weakening the stability of China-South Korea cooperation and undermining the interests of both countries. Many Korean companies have key technologies and high technologies that may no longer be able to build supply chains with China, resulting in segmentation and decoupling from China. On the international level, Biden emphasized the alliance and partnership, committed to marginalizing China in the process of reshaping the global economic rules, weakened the possibility of cooperation between China and South Korea, and made it more difficult for South Korea to formulate relevant policies. So military power is no longer the most important factor in analyzing the status characteristics of the two countries.

6. Discussion

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that the development characteristics of China and South Korea in the fields of economy, politics, society and culture are consistent with the three assumptions of complex interdependence theory. Under the international background of diversification and interdependence, the interdependence between China and South Korea determines that China and South Korea need to enhance new consensus and promote new cooperation in the future development. The two countries should adopt an inclusive and receptive attitude to promote win-win cooperation. Even though the two countries will deal with various challenges in the future cooperation and development, China and South Korea have the same or similar positions on many major issues, especially in promoting denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, promoting cooperation in Northeast Asia, promoting the reform of the United Nations, opposing trade protectionism, promoting the reform of the international financial system, tackling global climate change and safeguarding regional peace [15]. At the same time, the two countries share common interests in many aspects. For example, the two countries are jointly committed to maintaining peace

and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia. Therefore, to promote China-South Korea relations and deepen China-South Korea cooperation not only serves the development interests of China, but also serves the development interests of South Korea. The common points and common interests between the two countries have laid the foundation for bilateral cooperation.

According to the existing research results, most predecessors analyzed the relationship between China and South Korea from a specific field, but there were few articles that analyzed the development characteristics of the relationship from various aspects. In addition, this paper chooses the complex interdependence theory to analyze the development characteristics of China-South Korea relations, which is more in line with the current background of globalization. Therefore, it is of great significance and value to analyze the development characteristics of China-South Korea relations from the perspective of complex interdependence.

7. Conclusion

In the context of globalization, interdependence occurs not only within countries, but also between countries. The increasingly intensified global interdependence shows that the relationship between countries must be closely connected and cannot be isolated. In the path of national development, it is indispensable to pay attention to the communication and cooperation between countries. Although China and South Korea have experienced ups and downs in the 30 years of establishing diplomatic relations, but generally speaking, they have achieved better development and progress in the interaction and cooperation between the two sides. It is more conducive to the future development of the two countries to view the China-South Korea relationship from the perspective of complex interdependence. Although there have been some changes in the economic and trade development between China and South Korea, at the current stage, South Korea is more sensitive and dependent than China in the economic and trade field, so it is more important to strengthen the cooperation between the two sides and jointly cope with challenges. At the same time, China and South Korea have common interests in maintaining the stability of the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia. The close economic and political ties make the interests of the two countries intertwined, and the two countries have inseparable internal operating mechanism and common interests in the future cooperation and development. Therefore, China and South Korea should devote themselves to eliminating differences and misunderstandings between the two peoples and make joint efforts to adjust and improve negative perceptions. As a community with a shared future that relies on and supports each other, China and South Korea should jointly build a future-oriented China-South Korea relationship. This essay makes a comprehensive analysis of a large number of literatures and latest papers, and analyzes the characteristics of China-South Korea relations in economic, political, social and cultural fields from the perspective of complex interdependence. In the future academic research, data can be used to conduct quantitative research, and conduct scientific and concrete understanding research on the characteristics of the development of China-South Korea relations.

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