



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on September 25, 2023

Seoul Hopes South Korea-Japan-China Summit Will Enhance Trilateral Ties

SINGAPORE — South Korea’s ambassador to Japan declared that “high-level” discussions were ongoing prior to a three-nation summit with China scheduled to take place this year, and that such talks would not affect relations with the United States.

Those talks were going well, Yun Duk-min, Seoul’s envoy to Japan, revealed in an interview.

South Korea has been attempting to revitalize three-way summits with Japan and China that have been put on the back burner since 2019, owing at first to the outbreak of Covid-19.



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Also, there may be a “Camp David effect” that compelled China to approach its neighbors for talks, Yun added, assuring the United States that a summit with Beijing would not undermine relations with Washington.

Senior officials from the three Asian nations are poised to convene in Seoul on September 26.

However, Beijing has been recently incensed by U.S. President Joe Biden’s high-profile summit with the leaders of South Korea and Japan at the Camp David presidential retreat in August this year, accusing the United States of intentionally trying to jeopardize ties among the Asian countries.

“The relationship between Japan and South Korea has progressed so rapidly that it’s become an environment that China hasn’t experienced in the last 10 years or so,” Yun said on September 20.

“It would be better for the stability of the region if the neighboring countries cooperate and get along well, rather than confronting each other like this.”

Nominated as his country’s envoy to Japan around two months after [President Yoon Suk-yeol assumed power in May 2022](#), Yun said bilateral ties between South Korea and Japan were dramatically different from when he began. Both countries had tense relations that could be attributed to a dispute over compensation for South Korean workers during Japan’s 1910 to 1945 colonial rule of the peninsula. In March, Seoul removed its demand that Japanese companies compensate South Koreans conscripted to work at Japanese mines and factories, and would set up its own fund for them.

Yoon’s effort to diffuse tensions with Japan earned plaudits from Biden, who has been trying to persuade the two East Asian countries and U.S. allies to adopt a more united stance against China and North Korea.

Moreover, Biden has sought the backing of allies to restrict Beijing’s access to advanced semiconductors, after which Japan likewise limited exports of some chip-making tools. Nonetheless, South Korea has been more reluctant, as key firms such as Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix rely on China as a market and manufacturing destination for their memory chips.



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Besides, Yun said it may be just a matter of time before semiconductor makers in China progress up the value chain and ultimately exceed what is made by South Korean conglomerates in the country. He elaborated that South Korean cellphone makers, department store operators, and vehicle companies have had their market share fall in China amid the advancement of Chinese domestic firms.

“We’re still very much dependent on China, but a surprising number of companies have moved out of China,” Yun said.

“We can’t completely abandon the Chinese market but, overall, the Chinese market is not going to stay open continuously. So in that sense, these next few years are a very important time for Korea’s semiconductor companies.”

Meanwhile, ties with Japan have improved more quickly, thus resulting in a major alteration in the regional strategic landscape, Yun added. “When I first arrived here last year, the whole Japanese society was very, very cold towards Korea, to the point where I wondered if it was possible for them to be so cold.”

Yun is also hoping to establish another declaration with Japan as they did around 25 years ago to reinforce enhanced ties, which could keep trade flows stable in the face of political tensions.

South Korean firms are starting to invest in Japan again, he disclosed. These companies include small and medium-sized enterprises as well as giants such as Samsung, which is thinking of a research and development center in the greater Tokyo region.

Yun said security cooperation with Japan and the United States was poised to accelerate as all countries plan to combat nuclear provocations from North Korea.

Biden has maintained that the U.S. nuclear policy known as extended deterrence remains unchanged. This policy alludes to showcasing a force strong enough to persuade an adversary it cannot use aggression to attain its military and political aims.

In the past few years, Pyongyang ramped up its missile tests, including missiles crafted to target South Korea and Japan, as well as intercontinental ballistic missiles able to target the U.S. mainland.

“There’s this question of whether or not the US would retaliate against Pyongyang at the expense of New York if Tokyo or Seoul were attacked,” Yun said, referring to Pyongyang’s nuclear provocation.

Additionally, regarding Japan’s wastewater release from the Fukushima nuclear site, Yun said, “The Japanese Prime Minister also said in his meeting with our President that he would never interfere in any way that would compromise the safety of the Korean people.”

Regarding North Korean authoritarian leader Kim Jong-un’s recent visit to Russia and meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Yun said, “We’ll have to wait and see if it’s just a show or something substantial, and I think it’s very politically motivated to take pictures and do things this way when, in fact, it’s something that can be done covertly without making a big deal about it.”

Notwithstanding the South Korean government’s move to beef up ties with Japan, South Korean residents still harbor reservations over the government’s move on March 6 this year to have a Seoul-backed foundation to compensate victims of Japanese wartime forced labor.

Some have opined that Yoon should have taken into account his countrymen’s national sentiments toward Japan, as many still insist on a proper apology for Japan’s wartime atrocities.

“I don’t understand why the Korean government is taking such a low profile in this process with Japan,”



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said a 40-year-old restaurant owner in Seoul. “The government should not ignore the victims and the nation’s feelings,” she said.

Kim Ga-hui, 19, posited that the Korean government appeared to be setting aside unresolved historic disagreements, adding that such agreements made without apologies from Japan would only cause further frayed ties in the future.

“Even if the Korea-Japan talks were successful, it can only be viewed critically because it is considered a wrong meeting from the start,” she said.

Others, on the other hand, regarded Yoon’s decision as a breakthrough in improving strained relations.



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