

CHINA-JAPAN-SOUTH KOREA TRILATERAL SUMMIT: SEEKING REGIONAL COOPERATION AMID TRUMP'S TARIFFS

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EAI Background Brief No. 1837

In response to US President Donald Trump's disruptive "Liberation Day" tariffs, the export-driven economies of China, Japan and South Korea revived stalled trilateral initiatives, including efforts towards a Free Trade Agreement.

All three, heavily reliance on global trade, were exposed to the tariffs, with South Korea suffering the most due to direct exports losses and the targeting of its offshore production in countries like Vietnam. For Japan, the tariffs undermined confidence in its status as the largest US investor, while China faced the broadest range of penalties, spanning reciprocal, fentanyl-related and sector-specific tariffs.

However, deepening cooperation remains constrained by territorial disputes, divergent US alliances and historical animosities. Progress requires prioritising pragmatic, low-politics areas like digital cooperation, cultural exchange and joint efforts against missile proliferation. Strengthening the trilateral framework through holding regular summits, even amid bilateral frictions, will be essential for building resilience in an increasingly fragmented global trading system.

(Click on the link to read the above in [Chinese](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#))

Chinese:

中日韩三国峰会：在特朗普关税下寻求区域合作

为应对美国总统唐纳德·特朗普颠覆性的“解放日”关税，以出口为导向的中国、日本和韩国已重启此前停滞的三边合作倡议，包括推动自由贸易协定的努力。

三国高度依赖全球贸易，因此都受到了关税的影响。韩国因直接出口损失及其在越南等国的海外生产被针对而受创最重。对于日本而言，关税削弱了其作为美国最大投资者的信心。而中国则面临范围最广的惩罚措施，包括对等关税、芬太尼相关以及特定行业的关税。

然而，领土争端、对美同盟分歧及历史积怨仍制约着三国合作的深化。要取得进展，需要优先考虑数字合作、文化交流和共同遏制导弹扩散等务实、政治敏感度较低的领域。即便在双边关系紧张的情况下，坚持定期举行三边峰会，强化三边合作框架，对于在日益碎片化的全球贸易体系中提升韧性至关重要。

French:

SOMMET TRILATÉRAL CHINE-JAPON-CORÉE DU SUD: LA COOPÉRATION RÉGIONALE POUR FAIRE FACE AUX TARIFS DE TRUMP

En réponse à la déstabilisation provoquée par les tarifs du “Jour de la Libération” imposés par le président américain Donald Trump, les économies orientées vers l’exportation que sont la Chine, le Japon et la Corée du Sud ont relancé des initiatives trilatérales, y compris les précédents efforts menés en vue d’un accord de libre-échange.

Ces trois économies, fortement dépendantes du commerce mondial, ont été exposées à ces tarifs ; la Corée du Sud a été la plus affectée en raison des pertes directes à l’exportation et de la mise en cause de sa production à l’étranger dans des pays comme le Vietnam. Pour le Japon, les tarifs ont sapé la confiance dans son statut de premier investisseur aux États-Unis, tandis que la Chine a été confrontée à la gamme la plus large de sanctions, couvrant des tarifs réciproques, liés au fentanyl mais aussi ceux spécifiques à certains secteurs.

Cependant, l’approfondissement de la coopération reste limité par des différends territoriaux, des alliances divergentes avec les États-Unis et des animosités historiques. Les progrès nécessitent de privilégier des domaines pragmatiques et peu politisés, tels que la coopération numérique, les échanges culturels et les efforts communs contre la prolifération balistique. Le renforcement du cadre trilatéral par la tenue régulière de sommets, même en cas de frictions bilatérales, sera essentiel pour aller vers plus de résilience face à un système commercial international de plus en plus fragmenté.

Spanish:

CUMBRE TRILATERAL CHINA-JAPÓN-COREA DEL SUR: BUSCANDO COOPERACIÓN REGIONAL ANTE LOS ARANCELES DE TRUMP

En respuesta a los disruptivos aranceles del “Día de la Liberación” impuestos por el presidente estadounidense Donald Trump, las economías orientadas a la exportación de China, Japón y Corea del Sur reactivaron iniciativas trilaterales estancadas, incluyendo los esfuerzos hacia un Acuerdo de Libre Comercio.

Las tres economías, con una fuerte dependencia del comercio global, se vieron expuestas a los aranceles, siendo Corea del Sur la más afectada debido a las pérdidas directas en sus exportaciones y a la imposición sobre su producción en el extranjero en países como Vietnam. Para Japón, los aranceles minaron la confianza en su condición de mayor inversionista en Estados Unidos, mientras que China enfrentó la gama más amplia de sanciones, que incluyeron aranceles recíprocos, relacionados con el fentanilo y específicos por sectores.

Sin embargo, la profundización de la cooperación sigue estando limitada por disputas territoriales, alianzas divergentes con EE.UU. y animosidades históricas. El progreso requiere priorizar áreas pragmáticas y de baja política, como la cooperación digital, el intercambio cultural y los esfuerzos conjuntos contra la proliferación de misiles. Fortalecer el marco trilateral mediante cumbres regulares, incluso en medio de fricciones bilaterales, será esencial para construir resiliencia en un sistema comercial global cada vez más fragmentado.

Executive Summary

1. Trilateral free trade agreement (FTA) talks between China, Japan and South Korea (CJK) had stalled since 2012 stymied by geopolitical frictions, territorial disputes and the “burden of history”. Despite 16 rounds of talks in more than 10 years, progress remains elusive.
2. Observers in South Korea noted that an alignment between China and the United States’ closest allies like South Korea could send a message to Trump and work as leverage during tariff talks.
3. Japan (and other close US allies) found itself slotted into the same category as China on “Liberation Day’s” new trade measures/tariffs and was even accused by President Trump of being “one of the worst offenders for conducting unfair trade practices against the US”.
4. Seoul observers said President Trump’s “Liberation Day” tariffs were more devastating than anticipated and it hit third countries as well like the large tariffs on Vietnam where chaebols (Korean conglomerates) like Samsung Electronics and LG Electronics operated manufacturing bases.
5. CJK are also global leaders in AI, semi-conductors (China leads in legacy chips; South Korea and Japan rank second and third, respectively in advanced chips), hybrid cars (Japan is world’s No. 1), EVs (China is No. 1) and other advanced technologies, and thus should wield greater influence over tech development in East Asia.
6. Another trilateral complementarity lies in visa-free travels in tourism, established since January 2025. China has attracted Japanese panda fans and South Korean visitors keen on “Shanghai weekend getaways” through its visa-free policy.

7. Politically, the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat acts as a facilitator and lobby group for better political-economic ties amongst the three countries' stakeholders, including business leaders and retired politicians.
8. In the cultural sphere, the three countries seek to deepen ties by promoting cultural activities that highlight their shared heritage and traditional culture.
9. Any economic solidarity between China, South Korea and Japan may be delicate and can swiftly unravel should Japan and Korea, as US allies, decide to strengthen their security arrangements with the United States.
10. Trilateral CJSK cooperation is likely to remain limited to low-risk sectors like light economic cooperation and cultural exchanges. Even modest progress may require regular summits or Senior Officials' Meetings to sustain dialogue.