



**Rising Powers Initiative- Sigur Center for Asian Studies
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Asian Powers Expect South Korea's New President to Improve Bilateral Relations

Last month, voters in South Korea elected Park Geun-Hye as their next president. Today's Policy Alert summarizes commentary in the South Korean press, as well as Japanese and Chinese expectations of how the new president will shape future bilateral relations.

SOUTH KOREA

In South Korea, editorials urged President-elect Park Geun-Hye to focus on a variety of issues, reflecting conflicting interests on what direction the ROK should move towards.

- "It is the wish for the country's [economic revival](#) that gave Park a mandate" in the election, said *Yonhap* News Agency. "One of the important tasks now is to raise the country's growth potential, which experts worry could dip below the 2 percent line in the coming 10 years."
- Another *Yonhap* editorial emphasized that "[National unity should be the name of the game](#) as we mark the new year. It would be no exaggeration that the country's fate depends on whether it can overcome conflicts along ideological, regional, and generational lines and advance its national unity and harmony."
- Commentary was mixed on the direction of South Korea's foreign policy. "[Take charge of US-Korea relations](#)," urged an op-ed in the *JoongAng Daily*. While Korea has made great strides on the global stage, the essay argued that Korea's ability to elevate its standing with the US has been hampered by a lack of understanding of Washington's subculture; an insufficient lobbying presence; and a persistent subservient attitude. Yet another column in the paper cautioned Park to "[walk a fine line with North \[Korea\]](#)" and move discreetly in order not to ruin any renewed mood between the two Koreas.

JAPAN

In Japan, editorials expressed hope that Park will work towards improving relations between Japan and South Korea.

- The *Asahi Shimbun* declared, "We cannot be too optimistic. Park has also taken a tough stance against Japan regarding territorial and history issues...but the people of both countries know the importance of cooperation through a history of hardships. [The two countries must refrain from provocative acts.](#)"
- "As a national leader, [what kind of East Asian future can she hand down to successive generations?](#)" asked the *Mainichi*. "We hope that the incoming president, looking at the big picture, will work to mend relations between Japan and South Korea."

CHINA

Chinese commentary also outlined anticipation of improved relations between China and South Korea.

- Park Geun-Hye is expected to take "[a moderate stance](#)," said the *Global Times*, contrasting Park's campaign platform with the hardline stance of Lee Myung-bak's administration. "If Seoul is serious about its strategic partnership with Beijing, it should show that goodwill with actions rather than mere lip service."
- Similarly, Zheng Jiyong of Fudan University told the *Global Times* that "During the Lee administration, because of the very close relationship with the US, South Korea's attitude toward North Korea was too hostile and tough. [Park will adjust the current inflexible policy and find a balance between the two relationships](#)."

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