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RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA AND THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA: CONTEMPORARY STATE AND DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS

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Abstract. *This article is about current state of bilateral relations between the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China and about prospects of their cooperation. The People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea are two countries of Northeast Asia that are closely related to each other both in historical retrospective and in contemporary period. Sino-South Korean relations in the second half of the 20th century began to take shape only in the 1980s. Deepening into the general historical situation of that time allows us to understand the reasons for the absence of any contacts since the 1950s, and to explain the current confrontation between the countries, and then to identify the prerequisites for the formation of the first bilateral contacts between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea. However, in political terms, they are today on opposite sides of the "barricades". There are also problem areas in economic cooperation between them. However, the potential for interaction between the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China is enormous. Since 2015, Sino-South Korean security exchanges have shown steady improvement. There is a successful experience of cooperation in the military sphere as well. Free trade agreements were concluded between them. These and many other facts which suggest that there are certain prerequisites for China and South Korea to become strategic partners at the regional level. Despite some difficulties in bilateral relations between China and South Korea, it can be assumed that these relations are most likely to develop in a positive way and are unlikely to turn into confrontation.*

Keywords: *China, Republic of Korea, Mutual Cooperation, Bilateral Relations, Asia-Pacific Region, Leadership, 21st Century, Development.*

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1. Bilateral contacts between China and the Republic of Korea since the 2000s

As since the 2000s mutual state visits are becoming more frequent, we can observe the desire of the parties to develop their bilateral relations. In November 2005, Hu Jintao put forward four proposals to develop cooperation with the Republic of Korea: to build mutual political confidence, to expand economic cooperation, to learn from each other's experience in the humanitarian field and to conduct consultations on international issues.

In 2007, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China Wen Jiabao 温家宝 proposed to start cooperation between parties and also to continue the dialogue on the problem of security in Northeast Asia and Asia-Pacific Region. However, President of the Republic of Korea Lee Myung-bak did not bring proposals to the conclusion of the agreements, as he completely changed the emphasis in foreign policy, he began to advocate strengthening relations with the United States. Thus, "the strategic partnership of South Korea with the United States complicates the development of political dialogue between the PRC and the Republic of Korea" [1].

Cooperation between the US and the Republic of Korea prevents China from taking a leading position in the region. However, in 2007, China became one of South Korea's main trading partners. Despite the factors that hinder the building of perfect bilateral relations between the countries, the leaders of Korea and China in 2008 identified for themselves the main vectors for the development of these relations based on friendship and mutual trust. Telecommunications, energy, cargo transportation and environmental protection have now become the main directions in trade and economic cooperation. Korea and China are ready to make joint efforts to combat the problem of nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula, terrorism and drug trafficking. The Republic of Korea's adherence to the one-China policy remains a positive notion for the PRC.

At the present time many agreements on trade and investment have been signed between the countries which allowed Korean firms to enter the Chinese market and bring technological and managerial experience with them. In the 90s there was a common belief that Korea and China would exercise joint development, using the resources of the PRC and scientific and technical developments of the Republic of Korea. The active cooperation would be also ensured by a shared uneasy experience of relations with Japan and a desire to strengthen Seoul in order to weaken Tokyo in the region.

"By the end of 2010, China's trade with South Korea exceeded \$ 100 billion. In 2010, China ranked first in exports (23.2 percent of total exports) and imports (16.8 percent of total imports) for South Korea" [1]. South Korean firms were also involved in the development of the territories of Western China. China, in turn, strived to establish joint work with Korean partners in the petrochemical, coal and steel industries. The economies of South Korea and China could be called mutually beneficial in terms of usage of natural and human resources. Large Korean companies were relatively rooted in the Chinese market and even competed with the national manufacturers of the PRC, for example, such corporations as LG Electronics, Samsung, Hyundai, Kia and others. Since 2007, China has been the largest country in the world regarding attraction of South Korean investment. South Korea was also seeking to penetrate high-tech areas of Chinese production, but this endeavor were complicated by the high cost of South Korean labor compared to Chinese which led to the forced obligation of Korean firms to employ the Chinese population. It is important to note that Sino-South Korean trade had declined slightly since 2005 due to parallel antidumping measures, food security concerns, declining South Korean investment, and the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis [2].

It must be said that the PRC and the Republic of Korea wanted to go beyond the framework of their bilateral relations and unite their economies with the economy of Japan, despite the historical legacy poisoning their relationship. Since 2008, trilateral summits had been held, in which a proposal for the creation of a free trade zone for these three states and the creation of a single currency had been submitted for discussion. In 2011, Korea, Japan and China agreed to strengthen mutual cooperation in nuclear safety and emergency response. "The development of trilateral relations contributes to the solution of many other issues. So, in December 2010 in Hangzhou 杭州 representatives of competent departments for logistics of the three countries signed a memorandum of cooperation on the network of informational services for logistics operations in Northeast Asia, which was a "breakthrough in the history of the development of logistics activities" of China, South Korea and Japan" [1]. However, the complete economic unification of these countries was hampered by a great difference in national interests and other political obstacles. As for the bilateral relations between the PRC and the Republic of Korea, they depended on the state of the Sino-American and Korean-American relations. The United States were holding back relations between South Korea and China and were trying to prevent the PRC from strengthening in the region.

But more generally it can be argued that China considers the Republic of Korea to be one of the most important regional partners and is doing everything to maintain and improve the contacts that have developed between them, starting from the 80s of the twentieth century.

2. Problems of Sino-Korean Relations

China, as a great power seeking to expand its influence in the Asia-Pacific region, faces a number of territorial challenges related to disputes in the South China Sea. A number of countries in the region fear the growing economic and military power of the PRC, and some countries also claim leadership, for example Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia and South Korea, therefore these disputes complicate relations between these states. Moreover, in order to resist a strong China, the countries of the region are looking for political and military support from the United States, and the U.S., in turn, willingly help, as they seek to nullify all attempts by the PRC to extend its influence in the Asia-Pacific region. As is known, America has its military bases in Japan and South Korea, which greatly affects China's plans. However, the PRC does not change its attitude towards the disputed territories, at the same time, the Chinese leaders are solving these problems peacefully, since China is interested in the policy of good-neighborly relations with the countries of the region, including the Republic of Korea.

Another challenge of the 21st century for Sino-Korean relations is the participation of various states in the Arctic race. China is one of the most active participants in this race, which promotes a whole series of economic, political and scientific initiatives to realize its interests in Arctic. This area has become especially attractive for many countries due to its wide range of minerals and the shortest sea and air routes connecting North America and Europe, the eastern and western parts of the Eurasian region.

South Korea is also striving to secure some position in the Arctic. The Republic of Korea has even drawn up a «Plan for the Implementation of a Comprehensive Policy on the Arctic» (2013), in accordance with which Korea seeks to strengthen cooperation relations with the Arctic countries, develop research activities and form a new business model in the Arctic, as well as improve legal and institutional infrastructure in this area. The leadership of South Korea is aware of the problematic nature of competition from China, therefore, it resorts to cooperation with the Russian Federation in the development of the Arctic, which leaves a stain on relations with China.

In addition to the clash of political and economic interests between the PRC and the Republic of Korea, there is a cultural problem between the

countries related to the conflict between the Korean and Chinese characters. Within the framework of one eastern system of values, the conflict of mentalities is still manifested, especially during the period of globalization. Partly the national character of Koreans is similar to the Chinese, citizens are committed to maintaining harmony and balance throughout the world. Pragmatism and attachment to their roots also make the Korean national character similar to that of the Chinese. However, there are also significant differences in the national characters of these countries, which determine their attitude to emerging conflicts. For example, the Chinese are solving conflicts in the external sphere with the utmost care. The Chinese will go to an obvious lie or to concealing the truth to preserve their image, but in domestic relations there is no procedure for resolving the conflict, since everything and everyone obeys the hierarchy.

The Korean mentality in conflict situations also manifests itself quite specifically. First, the Koreans see the conflict as a prerequisite for change and development, and prefer to resolve conflicts through dialogue. Thus, it can be concluded that in Korea and China there is a completely different attitude to conflicts and ways to resolve them. This slight difference in mentality or national character can complicate cooperation between the two countries or the search for compromises in a number of controversial situations.

3. Prospects for cooperation

China and South Korea remain important regional partners for each other, despite disputes and difficulties in some political, economic and cultural spheres. So, for example, in the Arctic race today there are no serious conflicts between China and the Republic of Korea. This is due to the smoothing out of the situation in the Arctic issue through the creation of cooperation between Japan, South Korea and China in the development of the Arctic. In 2013, these countries joined the Arctic Council as observers, and in November 2015, in the "Joint Declaration for Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia", they consolidated their desire to conduct trilateral cooperation in the Arctic. "At the sixth the Republic of Korea-Japan-China summit talks in November 2015, the Republic of Korea government made a proposal to hold the trilateral dialogue on Arctic cooperation, and as the Japanese and Chinese governments accepted it, it was reflected in the «Joint Declaration for Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia" [3].

The PRC and the Republic of Korea are interested in maintaining security in the Asia-Pacific region, therefore they continue their anti-nuclear policy towards North Korea, the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and

other threats. This strategic cooperation strengthens the bilateral relationship between China and South Korea. Culturally, China and Korea successfully cooperate in many areas, such as education, humanitarian and youth exchanges, internships, tourism, sports and so on. For example, in 2016, at a meeting of the foreign ministers of China and the Republic of Korea, it was decided to hold the "Korean Year of Tourism. "In addition, the two Ministers agreed to conduct in 2016 the 69 humanities exchange projects as announced on the occasion of the bilateral summit talks on March 31; and to work together to further increase people-to-people exchanges between the two countries in 2016, the "Korea Tourism Year" [4].

Sometimes the relationship between Korea and China is spoiled by provocative actions of the United States of America, such as the deployment of NATO military weapons on the territory of South Korea, which is in close proximity to China. But despite this, China does not even think to repulse the United States by armed means, since America is one of the most important trading partners for China, as well as the Republic of Korea, with which it will be to its own detriment to start a military confrontation.

In the future, China and South Korea will participate or conduct more and more joint projects in all areas of activity on the basis of mutually beneficial cooperation. For example, integration in the field of joint development of fuel and energy resources, as in the project for the export of natural gas with the participation of Russia "Kovykta–China–South Korea". It is not ruled out that Japan will be attracted to create closer trilateral relations and form a kind of triangle to spread its influence in the region. It is also possible in the future that trade and economic ties between the PRC and the Republic of Korea will be strengthened. Of course, China's Belt and Road Initiative cannot bypass the involvement of Korea in such a large-scale project in the future. In conclusion, it can be concluded that all foreign trade and political contacts between the PRC and the Republic of Korea are mostly positive, which tells us that these countries have favorable soil for building even more effective and profitable ties, increasing the influence of these countries in the East Asian region. Despite some difficulties in bilateral relations between China and South Korea, it can be assumed that these relations are most likely to develop in a positive way and are unlikely to turn into confrontation with each other.

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