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THE INFLUENCE OF HISTORICAL-CIVILIZATIONAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS ON THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The article examines the influence of a number of historical, civilizational, and geographical factors on the peculiarities of the implementation of the Republic of Korea's foreign policy. A significant role is given to highlighting the projection of historical problems of cultural heritage, toponyms, belonging of territories, and the desire to receive compensation for historical humiliations on the current state of South Korea's relations with the neighboring countries – the People's Republic of China and Japan. Currently, the growth of nationalism in South Korea is a significant driver which has remarkably increased due to significant economic success. Seoul reacts extremely sharply to any situation affecting the historical dimension of relations with Beijing and Tokyo, which can even spill over into economic conflicts. The author emphasizes the decisive role of the historical moment of demarcation of the Korean Peninsula during the Cold War in the implementation of the current directions of Seoul's foreign policy regarding relations with the USA, North Korea and positioning in the global arms market. Attention is paid to the study of the influence of geographical position in combination with security and economic factors on the peculiarities of South Korea's international behavior in the context of the intensifying rivalry between the United States and China in the East Asian region. The one of key points is the geographical location within the "First Islands Chain" that forces Seoul to implement the "balancing strategy" in terms of the influence of the two most powerful geopolitical actors. In addition, the author analyzes the influence of Confucian principles in the form of building a harmonious international environment and solving the problem of "raising a face" in the eyes of the world community on Seoul's foreign policy initiatives.

Keywords: foreign policy of the Republic of Korea, geographical location of South Korea, historical problems, Confucianism, historical and civilizational factors, rivalry between the United States and China, relations between the Republic of Korea and Japan, relations between the Republic of Korea and China.

Introduction. The development and implementation of the foreign policy of any country is carried out under the influence of many factors and within that framework a specific political leadership implements certain steps to ensure national interests, using the approach based on its own vision of tools for their achievement and priority of foreign policy's goals. Among the factors that permanently influence on the foreign policy course, regardless of the ruling elite, it should be mentioned geographical determinants, features of historical and cultural-civilizational development. Moreover, these factors are quite often closely

interlaced with each other and meanwhile with other determinants. As a result this ultimately produces unique effects on the international positioning of a specific state. From this point of view, one of the interesting case studies is the Republic of Korea (ROK).

The purpose of research is to analyze the influence of historical, civilizational and geographical factors on the foreign policy of the Republic of Korea.

Analysis of the latest publications. Noticeably, the problems of the Korean Peninsula and the foreign policy of South Korea (SK) are permanently in the focus of scientific discussion by both domestic and foreign researchers. In particular, it could be noted the works of Ukrainian scientists study various international problems of the Korean Peninsula and, less often, the peculiarities of Seoul's foreign policy: Rubel V.A. (the problem of belonging to the Liancourt Islands), Kang Den Sik (inter-Korean dialogue), Pogorelova I.S. (peculiarities of the US policy regarding the Korean Peninsula), Lossovsky I.E., Golovan O.O. (the issue of the nuclear program of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), L. Matlai (pragmatism in the foreign policy of the ROK). Obviously, the spectrum of problems investigating by foreign analysts is wider. A characteristic point is a detailed analysis of the actual features of South Korean foreign policy. In particular, Nilsson-Wright J. and Yu Jie study the policy of the ROK in the context of the balance between the influence of the PRC and the USA, Botto K. analyzes Seoul's "New South Policy" towards the countries of Southeast Asia and India. The situation described above dictates the need to promote domestic research related to the foreign policy of SK.

Main results of the research. The historical legacy causes a significant number of problems in the Republic of Korea's relations with neighboring countries, which from time to time appear on Seoul's foreign policy agenda. A characteristic phenomenon is that quite often aggravation in relations with neighboring countries, which arise under various pretexts, in reality have their origins in issues of many years ago.

The diplomatic conflict between the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China (PRC) over the right to be the first in the production of sauerkraut – kimchi, a dish that is considered one of the labels of Korean gastronomy. The conflict erupted in 2020 when Beijing received international certification for a dish of spicy pickled vegetables – pao cai, which is traditionally made in Sichuan province¹.

This situation became an illustration of the growing level of nationalism in both countries in relation to each other, which is caused by the common history and the specifics of the economic development of the sides. On the one hand, the "battle for kimchi" showed China's desire for cultural superiority over Korea, based on Korea's long period of vassalage to the Celestial Empire. On the other hand, the historical position of the vassal began to radically differ from the reality of the peculiarities of economic development in the second half of the 20th century, when SK was ahead of the former suzerain in terms of the level of technical development and the social-economical conditions of the population. This led to the formation in the collective consciousness of South Koreans even a somewhat contemptuous attitude toward the PRC, especially regarding the fact that in the 1990s Chinese guest workers came to the ROK to earn money while China was seen mostly as a market for Korean products².

In addition, this was simultaneously combined with the rooting in the public consciousness of SK a negative view of Beijing, given the participation of 1 million Chinese volunteers on the side of the DPRK during the Korean War and the support of the totalitarian regime there up to this day.

It should also be noted that the economic success of the ROK has significantly strengthened nationalistic sentiments among the population and the establishment, which increasingly harshly perceives any attempts, including by China, to interpret history.

¹ BBC News Україна (2021). *Битва за кімчі та п'ять інших суперечок навколо їжі* <<https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-55616020>>. (2023, February, 12).

² Ланьков, А. (2021). *Война за кимчи. Как история и национализм сталкивают Китай и Южную Корею. Московский центр Карнеги* <<https://carnegie-moscow.org/commentary/84599>>. (2023, February, 12).

It should also be underlined that the economic success of the ROK has significantly strengthened nationalistic sentiments among the population and the establishment. Therefore Seoul harshly perceives any attempts, including by China, to interpret history.

The next vivid example is the negative legacy of historical relations with another neighbor – Japan. Interestingly, that previously mentioned period of vassalage in relation to the Celestial Empire ended thanks precisely to the militaristic activity of the Land of the Rising Sun in the second half of the 19th century. Moreover, this point became an impetus for the national self-identification of Koreans in relation to Chinese influence.

Nevertheless, the period of Japanese occupation of the Korean Peninsula (1910-1945) is considered an incomparably negative moment in history than relations with imperial China, because it was accompanied by socio-economic exploitation and national-cultural humiliation of the Korean people. Insults and crimes committed by the Japanese remain a determining factor in the conflict potential of bilateral relations.

A key sticking point is the widespread perception among South Koreans that Japanese officials are trying to reduce the level of Tokyo's crimes during the occupation, and the lack of a real apology from the Japanese side. A special place is played by the problem of "comfort women", that concerns Korean women who were forced to provide sexual services to Japanese soldiers during the years of occupation. Notably, after several decades of discussions, an agreement was reached between the sides in 2015, according to what Tokyo pledged to pay approximately \$8.3 million to the South Korean fund for victims of sexual slavery¹.

However, actually, this problem has not disappeared from the agenda. The reason is the already mentioned factor of the growth of nationalism in the ROK. A trigger for the aggravation of relations was the resolution of the Supreme Court of South Korea in 2018 that Japanese firms must compensate South Koreans for forced labor during the Japanese occupation which de facto offset the agreement of 2015². The legal conflict spilled over into the economic sphere, where Japan responded by imposing restrictions on the export of extremely important materials needed for the production of electronic chips. In the future, the sides managed to exclude each other from the so-called "white lists" of partners, which give the ability to freely buy high-tech products, used mutual boycott of goods and even nationalization of enterprises. What's more, the conflict even threatened the Intelligence Sharing Agreement, prompting the US to intervene into the controversy³.

Thus, the historical heritage remains an important determinant of relations between the ROK and Japan. Moreover, this largely determines the fact that, despite each side has a military alliance with the United States, as well as common security threats from the PRC and North Korea, are members of the broad format of the "collective West", the trilateral format of the military alliance has not been established. At the same time, relations with Washington play the role of a mitigating factor in Korean-Japanese controversies.

Another example of contradictions based on the period of Japanese occupation concerns the name of the water area that washes the eastern coast of the Korean Peninsula and is surrounded on the other sides by the Japanese islands, Sakhalin Island. All countries of the world call the water area the "Sea of Japan",

¹ BBC News Україна (2015). *Японія вибачилась перед Південною Кореєю через "жінок для втіхи"* <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/society/2015/12/151228_japan_south_korea_comfort_women_she>. (2023, February, 12).

² Голубов, О. (2019). Попри конфлікт, Токіо і Сеул погодилися підтримувати діалог. *Deutsche Welle Україна*. <<https://www.dw.com/uk/попри-конфлікт-токіо-і-сеул-погодилися-підтримувати-діалог/a-50966422>>. (2023, February, 12).

³ Manyin, M.E. (2022). U.S.-South Korea Relations / Mark E. Manyin, Caitlin Campbell, Emma Chanlett-Avery, Mary Beth D. Nikitin, Brock R. Williams. *Congressional Research Service* <<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R41481.pdf>>. (2023, February, 12).

but both Korea names it – the “East Sea”¹. The explanation that the world uses the Japanese version is that Tokyo managed to gain international recognition due to the geographical limitation of the oceans and seas, which was implemented by the League of Nations in 1928².

Moreover, there is a territorial dispute between the sides over the Liancourt Islands (the western version of the name), which Tokyo declared its territory in 1905, but amid postwar restrictions on Japan, Seoul declared sovereignty over the islands in 1952³. Such step even led to force actions between the sides in the following years in the form of damaging Japanese ships and detaining fishermen. The issue remains unresolved and has provoked occasional aggravation between the sides at the level of diplomatic protests over demarches, such as the depiction of islands next to the Korean peninsula on dessert at the meeting between the South Korean President Moon Jae-in with the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in 2018 or the inclusion of the Liankur Islands to the status of “disputed territories” in the “White Paper” of Japan in 2021⁴⁵.

However, it should be emphasized that a significant role in a motivation of the Japanese aggression, as well as in a number of other historical examples, was played by the uniqueness of the transitional – from the continental to the island part of East Asia – geographical position of the Korean Peninsula, which was considered, for example, by the Japanese as a springboard for advancing on Manchuria and Northeast China. The factor of geographical position significantly influenced the formation of the geopolitical worldview of the South Korean establishment in the aspect of a need to create and implement an effective “survival strategy” under the conditions of the geopolitical environment determined by an influence more powerful actors.

The geographical position of the connecting link between the main Far Eastern massif of land and sea water areas in the 20th century was again manifested in the conditions of geopolitical and ideological confrontation between the USA, the leader of the democratic camp and representative of the “sea power” countries, and the USSR – the leader of the socialist camp and a “land power” type state. The projection of the confrontation of these two powers manifested itself in the appearance of two on the peninsula – the ROK and the DPRK, based on opposite political and economic principles. Currently, this is shaped in an extremely important vector of Seoul’s foreign policy – relations with Pyongyang, where the issue of the DPRK’s nuclear missile program and the problem of unifying the Korean people are on the agenda.

The North Korean vector caused, for example, the announcement and implementation of initiatives aimed at reducing tension on the peninsula through diplomatic means such as holding inter-Korean summits, participation in the Six-Party Mechanism for the Regulation of North Korea’s Nuclear Program, which includes the USA, the PRC, Japan and the Russian Federation.

In this context, the Sunshine Policy that was in effect in 1998-2007 deserves attention. As part of this initiative, the DPRK received a variety of humanitarian aid, tourist tours from the ROK to the Kamsangan Mountains were organized, and the Kaesong Industrial Region was established where South Korean companies employed tens of thousands of northerners. It is clear that this created foreign currency flows to Pyongyang which were used to continue nuclear missile build-up, leading to Seoul’s frustration and curtailment of the initiative.

¹ Офіційний сайт Посольства Японії в Україні (2017). *Питання назви «Японське море»* <https://www.ua.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtor_uk/00_000843.html>. (2023, February, 12).

² Рубель, В.А.(2009). Територіальна приналежність архіпелагу Токто: корейський погляд на проблему. *Східний світ*, 1, 63-71.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Reuters (2018). *Unjust dessert? Japan demands Koreans wipe map off summit dinner mousse* <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-southkorea-japan-dessert/unjust-dessert-japan-demands-koreans-wipe-map-off-summit-dinner-mousse-idUSKBN1HW0J2>> (2023, March, 25).

⁵ Укрінформ (2023). *Сеул висловив протест Токіо з приводу зазіхань на острови Токто* <<https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-world/3279855-seul-visloviv-protest-tokio-z-privodu-zazihan-na-ostrovi-tokto.html>>. (2023, February, 12).

However, in addition to diplomatic initiatives, the threat from Pyongyang means that the military alliance with the United States is an indispensable point of Seoul's foreign policy strategy, especially taking into account the strengthening of the "Chinese factor". Seoul continues to actively support military cooperation with Washington, which is realized in the coordination of interstate military dialogue in various aspects, the holding of joint military exercises and the purchase of American weapons.

At the same time, security challenges cause Seoul to systematically take care of defense capability issues and as a result the ROK is among the top 10 world countries in terms of military expenditures¹. Moreover, such appropriations require additional revenues. Thus, an interesting consequence of this point was that SK is also among the top 10 world arms exporters according to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates². The logic is lying in the point that in the context of the military modernization the export of weapons is an important source of finance for the implementation of this task, including a contribution to the continuation of the technological improvement of weapons.

However, the mentioned problems are the object of interest not only of the South Korean leadership, but also as a tool in the game of the most powerful global actors – the USA and China. Nevertheless, the logic of the geopolitical dichotomy of confrontation between "land and sea" powers can also be seen in their rivalry, where the role of a continental power that seeks to prevent the blocking of its potential in the coastal sea area, on which the USA is actively concentrating its efforts, is already played by China.

The territory of the ROK is adjacent from the mainland to the "First Islands Chain" (Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, the island of Borneo, the Strait of Malacca) – the front line of the military and strategic containment of China's ambitions from the American side. The PRC is purposefully building up its naval and air forces in order to weaken Washington's operational military capabilities, which consist in maintaining military infrastructure in this area. Moreover, the value of control over the East Asian region is increasing for both superpowers, given the fact that economic powers of a global nature are located in it. In this context, the importance of the position of the Korean Peninsula increases even more.

Concerning the problem of the unification of the Korean people, none of the superpowers is interested in this, because it leads to the possible emergence of a new geopolitical player in the form of a united Korea. Moreover, it will lead to the loss of many points of influence on the situation on the Korean Peninsula, which Beijing and Washington use to strengthen their positions in the regional situation. It should be taken into account that Beijing is a "lifeline" from an economic point of view for the North Korean regime and, accordingly, has the greatest opportunities to influence on Pyongyang's policy. This allows China to use North Korea's "nuclear-missile blackmail" to create additional problems for the US and its regional allies in East Asia. Beijing's current approach to the DPRK's nuclear missile program is based on an emphasizing of the preservation of the status quo, i.e. the situation when the North's nuclear capabilities nullify Seoul's advantage in conventional weapons³.

Meanwhile, Washington is using this threat to increase its value for both South Korea and Japan, and to argue for the deployment of additional military infrastructure in the region in the form of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense battery⁴. However, despite official declarations, the primary goal is to create additional military leverage to contain China near its borders. From this point

¹ Manyin, M.E. and others (2022). U.S.-South Korea Relations. Williams. *Congressional Research Service*. <<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R41481.pdf>>. (2023, February, 12).

² Wezeman, P.D., Kuimova, A., Wezeman, S.T. (2022). Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2021. SIPRI Fact Sheet. *SIPRI*. <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/fs_2203_at_2021.pdf>. (2023, February, 12).

³ Гриценко, А. (2022). З прицілом на Японію та США. Чим небезпечне відновлення ядерних випробувань у Північній Кореї. *Focus.ua* <<https://focus.ua/uk/opinions/516729-chem-opasno-vozobnovlenie-yadernyh-ispytaniy-v-severnoy-koree>>. (2023, February, 12).

⁴ Лівий берег (2017). У Південній Кореї запрацювала американська система ПРО <https://lb.ua/world/2017/05/02/365349_yuzhnoy_koree_zarabotala.html>. (2023, February, 12).

of view, once again, the geographical position of the ROK plays a role, but in terms of military strategy, namely its proximity to the capital of China – Beijing. Accordingly, the placement of the American anti-missile system allows to significantly influence the strategically important region of the PRC. Continuing the military logic, it should be added that SK represents a significant value for the United States in view as the location of the deployment of a fairly large American contingent of 28,500¹, and at the same time it is the only opportunity for Washington to deploy its troops on the continental part of East Asia. The Chinese leadership, in turn, managed to put economic pressure on the ROK, which had a significant effect in the form of the refusal of the Korean leadership to place additional batteries of the THAAD system. This is explained by the high level of dependence on economic cooperation with China, which is the largest trading partner for Seoul.

The above-mentioned points outline some frameworks of the “survival strategy” of the ROK in the conditions of the influence and growing confrontation of geopolitical heavyweights, the essence of which is balancing between their interests: Seoul avoids critics on China in matters that do not affect directly SK – human rights violations, Taiwan, territorial disputes in the South China Sea². Also, Seoul did not join the anti-Chinese QUAD format, also in order do not irritate Beijing. While, the strengthening of cooperation with the USA, including in the military sphere, continues, but without special emphasis, because do not provoke a reaction from Beijing.

It is interesting that this kind of balancing strategy corresponds to the principles of Confucian ethics, where a significant role is given to the search for stability and harmony and the active use of the principle of consensus – the principles of social behavior that are deeply rooted in Korean society.

Moreover, the historical logic of survival in the form of balancing show itself in the delineation of new priorities in foreign policy. Thus, during the presidency of Moon Jae-in in 2017, a new vector for realizing Seoul’s foreign interests was officially announced – the “New Southern Policy” (NSP), the essence of which is to deepen economic, political, socio-cultural cooperation with the ASEAN countries and India to the level of relations with the four great powers – the USA, China, Japan and Russia³. But it is quite obvious that the strategic intention of the NSP is to find factors of economic and strategic leverage in conditions of increasing uncertainty due to the growth of competition between the largest economic partner and the military-political ally of the ROK.

In addition to the trend of searching for harmonious ways of development, Confucian ethics shows itself in the high value in East Asian culture of the role of preserving the person’s face in the eyes of the surrounding society. Nevertheless, this value is actively projected on the conceptual and practical dimension of the foreign policy of SK. The problem of the need to “save face” is appeared in the dissonance of the ROK international positioning, where the concept of “middle power” plays a leading role. It should be noted that this term is quite flexible in use, which allows the leadership of South Korea to maneuver in terms of international positioning. This is due to the fact that the ROK is one of the world’s powerful economies, but its political weight remains small.

The problem of an insignificant political status arises from the already mentioned factor of cross-influence of the military-strategic alliance with the USA and the economic dependence and neighborhood with China. In order to raise “your face” in the eyes of the world community, during the presidency

¹ Manyin, M.E. and others (2022). U.S.-South Korea Relations. Williams. *Congressional Research Service*. <<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R41481.pdf>>. (2023, February, 12).

² Nilsson-Wright, J., Yu Jie. (2022). South Korean foreign policy innovation amid Sino-US rivalry. *Chatham House* <<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/07/south-korean-foreign-policy-innovation-amid-sino-us-rivalry>>. (2023, February, 12).

³ Botto, K. (2021). South Korea Beyond Northeast Asia: How Seoul Is Deepening Ties With India and ASEAN. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* <<https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/10/19/south-korea-beyond-northeast-asia-how-seoul-is-deepening-ties-with-india-and-asean-pub-85572>>. (2023, February, 12).

of Lee Myung-bak, the concept of “Global Korea” was put forward, the purpose of which, according to researchers, is to translate Korea’s economic clout into political¹. The South Korean leadership sought to realize this intention by activating a number of activities that would have a global scale: G20, participation in UN peacekeeping operations, providing foreign development aid, promoting the model of “Green Growth”. However, at the same time, the strengthening of relations with the great powers remained among the priorities. As a result, the outlined combination of activities became the basis for the “New Asia Initiative”, within the framework of which the ROK positioned its role as a bridge that connects world powers and Asian countries.

However, it cannot be ignored that Seoul’s current international economic positions and state development were a key historical turning point due the cooperation with the USA and entering the democratic camp, and at the same time the influence of Confucianism. It must be taken into consideration that Seoul received various types of support from the US² in the context of the so-called confrontation of “two showcases”, the essence of which is the desire of the democratic and socialist camps to demonstrate the success of their socio-economic models, especially in the context of divided nations, especially, on the examples of the Korean and German peoples. Along with this, one of the important roles was played by the factor of influence of the virtues of the Chinese Confucian traditions – conscientious performance of duties, striving for perfectionism and the Confucian vision that a person who is unsuccessful in social and economic terms does not have a blessing from above, which is strongly reflected in the current economic activity of Korean citizens. Of course, these moments were reflected in the role of human capital, which apparently became one of the main resources of the Korean economic miracle, considering the fact that the ROK is extremely poor in natural resources. However, the geographical factor of resource poverty determined that the Korean economy is oriented towards manufacturing and high-tech industries, the products of which are exported and at the same time are characterized by high quality.

However, the problem of dependence on the import of raw materials, especially oil and gas, leaves its mark on some aspects of the SK foreign policy. It should be taken into account that Seoul is too dependent, first of all, on supplies from the Middle East region³. Accordingly, the problem of diversification of suppliers arises, in the context of which imports also come from the USA, Kazakhstan and Russia. At the same time, the Russian energetic resources account for about 9 percent of all South Korea’s fossil fuels import⁴.

Of course, the factor of entering the broad format of the collective West influenced the fact that the ROK joined the sanctions against the Kremlin against the background of full-scale war against Ukraine, in particular, in the sphere of banking operations and investments. However, the problem of ensuring energy security caused Seoul, along with Tokyo, despite supporting the sanctions, continues to purchase Russian energy resources. The explanation of the South Korean side is that despite alternative partners in the form of Saudi Arabia, the USA and Qatar, these countries cannot quickly increase supplies to close the gap in Russian imports. In addition, it should be taken into account that in 2022 the economy felt the negative impact of rising electricity prices and inflation, which pushes South Korean companies to continue cooperating with the Kremlin⁵.

¹ John, J.V. (2015). Globalization, National Identity and Foreign Policy: Understanding “Global Korea”. *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, 33 (2), 38-57.

² Zholud, O. (2017). Korea: Causes of the Tremendous Growth. *Vox Ukraine* <<https://voxukraine.org/en/korea-causes-of-the-tremendous-growth/>>. (2023, February, 12).

³ Official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea (2023). *Energy* <https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpge/m_5657/contents.do>. (2023, February, 12).

⁴ Stangarone, T. (2022). How South Korea Can Wean Itself off Russian Fossil Fuels. *The Diplomat* <<https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/how-south-korea-can-wean-itself-off-russian-fossil-fuels/>>. (2023, February, 12).

⁵ Бутирська, Н. (2023). Як російський фактор впливає на постачання зброї Україні. *Дзеркало тижня* <<https://zn.ua/ukr/international/jak-rosijskij-faktor-vplivaje-na-postachannja-zbroji-ukrajini.html>>. (2023, February, 12).

Moreover, Seoul continues to refuse to supply lethal weapons to Ukraine. And only under the pressure of the growing value of cooperation with Washington, Seoul agreed to the US artillery shells in order to send them to Ukraine¹. In such position plays a role that Seoul believes that Moscow remains an important player in the North Korean problem. Another important factor is the position of Beijing, whose experts warned of negative consequences for the SK in the event of a significant shift towards Washington's initiatives². Nevertheless, along with the challenges, Russia's war against Ukraine can become a favorable moment for Seoul to realize the goal of increasing its status in the eyes of the international community.

Conclusions. The role of the historical component is determined largely by the geographical location what means the influence of the neighborhood with certain countries. For the ROK, an important role is played by the historical heritage in relations with the PRC and Japan, which is marked by the predominance of negative moments and images from Seoul. Currently, the growth of nationalism in SK is a significant driver which has remarkably increased due to significant economic success. In practice, Seoul reacts extremely sharply to any situation affecting the historical dimension of relations with Beijing and Tokyo, which can even spill over into economic conflicts. The most striking point is the issue of "comfort women" in Korean-Japanese relations, which has led to a trade war between the sides.

The historical moment of the division of the Korean Peninsula became the starting point for the establishment and development of the modern Republic of Korea. Now this point continues to determine not only the SK's role in the global economy, but also the existence of a military alliance with the United States, which shows a tendency to strengthen in view, firstly, of the threat from Pyongyang, and the actual problem of relations with the DPRK, which appears itself in the implementation of initiatives for a diplomatic settlement, for example, the Sunshine Policy, and meanwhile building up the military potential of the ROK, the result of which was the transformation of Seoul into one of the world's largest arms exporters.

The geographical factor in the form of dependence on the supply of energy resources continues to determine foreign policy, in particular, this has currently influenced the refusal of Seoul to provide Ukraine with lethal weapons and the continuation of purchasing Russian hydrocarbons, despite the official accession to sanctions against the Kremlin.

Nevertheless, along with the ideological moment of joining the collective West, the transitional geographical position of the ROK at the junction of the Eurasian massif and at the same time the neighborhood with the continental power of the PRC, which seeks to avoid "blocking from the sea" by the naval power of the United States in the "first islands chain", lead to a situation when Seoul has to implement "balancing strategy" between the influence of more powerful geopolitical players, whose interest in strengthening influence on the South is growing more and more. In practice, this shows itself in the fact that, despite increasing cooperation with the USA, Seoul avoids sharp attacks on Beijing, for example, in matters of claims to Taiwan or the waters of the South China Sea.

At the same time, the ROK experienced a significant historical and civilizational influence from the Celestial Empire, in particular, in the form of the spread of Confucian values, which deeply penetrated the political culture. This concerns the principles of seeking harmony and the desire to "save face", which has shown in the Republic of Korea's desire to balance the influence of the US and the PRC through the implementation of the "Global Korea" and NPP initiatives, which aim to strengthen the international positioning of SK as a "middle power".

¹ Gordon, M.R., Gordon, L. (2022). South Korea to Sell Arms to U.S. for Ukrainian Forces Fighting Russia. *The Wall Street Journal* <https://www.wsj.com/articles/south-korea-to-sell-arms-to-u-s-for-ukraine-11668116294?mod=hp_lead_pos7>. (2023, February, 12).

² Yeo, A. (2022). How Will South Korea's New President Approach Russia's Ukraine Invasion? *The Diplomat* <<https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/how-will-south-koreas-new-president-approach-russias-ukraine-invasion/>>. (2023, February, 12).

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