

The role of identity in South Korea's policies towards Japan

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Abstract This paper asks why South Korea's relations with Japan is so vulnerable to disputes over history in the post-Cold War period. It argues that South Korea's identities vis-à-vis Japan and North Korea respectively conflict with each other and leads to inconsistent policy towards Japan that hovers between cooperation and discord. By analyzing South Korea's relations with Japan as well as its policies and behavior in the post-Cold War period, this paper aims to show how identity factor affects a state's foreign policy and behavior towards other states. In doing so, it questions the rationality assumption of state behavior in IR and offers alternative explanations on how to better understand "emotional" foreign policies.

Keywords Identity · Foreign policy · Ontological security · Constructivism

Introduction

This paper asks why South Korea's relation with Japan is so vulnerable to disputes over history in the post-Cold War period. In particular, it questions the rationality behind South Korea's constant bringing up of historical problems with Japan despite the diplomatic costs of constantly causing tensions and disputes with its closest neighbor. It also attempts to explain how we can better understand historical disputes in the context of international relations (IR), where the conventional theoretical mechanisms are premised on sovereign states pursuing survival, security, and self-help as their primary interests. Using historical dispute between South Korea and Japan as a case study, this paper also addresses rationality in IR to suggest that instability caused by inter-state conflicts is not only limited

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to the use of force but also to the protracted but managed political tensions caused by unresolved conflicts in the past.

Using the constructivist approach to state interests and foreign policy-making to explain South Korea–Japan relations, this paper supplements the prevalent discourse that domestic political factors such as accountability and leadership in either country are the key culprits behind the repeated fallout between the two over historical issues even as they continue to cooperate in other matters like the economy. The central argument of this paper is that South Korea’s multiple identities conflict with each other, leading to frequent changes in South Korea’s policy and behavior towards Japan and subsequently frequent changes in bilateral mood that bring costs to South Korea’s interests. South Korea’s conflicting identities hence result in its confounding behavior towards Japan that consists of frequent and marked fluctuation between cooperation and conflict. In particular, this paper argues that South Korea’s identities vis-à-vis Japan and North Korea conflict with each other, leading to South Korea’s foreign policy swinging between cooperation and discord with Japan. Such fickleness is demonstrated when South Korea faces historical disputes with Japan and North Korean threats at the same time, as the former requires prioritization of South Korea’s ontological security interests while the latter prioritizes traditional or physical security concerns. In the South Korean case, its traditional and ontological securities deal with two different “others”—North Korea and Japan—as based on the foundation of the Republic of Korea state. By analyzing South Korea’s foreign policy and strategy towards Japan in the post-Cold War period, this paper aims to show how identity factor affects a state’s foreign policy and attitude towards other states. While it does not aim to draw a causal link between a state’s identity and its foreign policy, it attempts to show the connection between the state’s identity and its behavior.

This paper examines South Korea’s policy towards Japan in the post-Cold War period especially from 1998 when the new fishery agreement was signed between South Korea and Japan following Japan’s unilateral withdrawal from the 1965 agreement. Although anti-Japanese sentiments existed during the Cold War, they were suppressed especially during the Park Chung-hee era. With the end of the Cold War and the advent of globalization, nationalist sentiments were unleashed as democratization and growing affluence allowed Koreans’ anti-Japanese sentiments to become more explicit, holding the bilateral ties as a regular hostage to perennial historical problems that escalate mainly due to South Korea’s heated reaction to Japan’s action.

This article aims to contribute to the current scholarship on identity and IR by showing how a state’s self-perceived identity as well as the dilemma it faces when determining what its identity and interest is, affects its foreign policy towards Japan. While not discounting the role of domestic political factors, it proposes that the identity factor should be given greater credit in affecting Korea–Japan bilateral ties. It also adds to the existing literature on cooperation and rivalry between Korea and Japan by suggesting that in addition to domestic variables, external ones especially those related to North Korea play a significant role in affecting bilateral dynamics through identity.

The outline of the paper is as follows. First, it goes over existing literature on the cause of bilateral discord between Korea and Japan and points out the limitations of attributing to domestic variables by arguing that Korea–Japan relations are much more complex and hence should be analyzed in a broader context by adding in the North Korean factor. This is followed by a discussion on the concept of identity and interests in IR. The next section analyzes Korea–Japan bilateral relations to see how South Korea’s national identity—its perception of self and others—has influenced South Korea’s policy towards Japan throughout the post-Cold War years. It concludes with implications for the U.S. policy in

East Asia as well as for IR scholarship on explaining phenomena less well-understood in conventional IR theories.

Literature review

Cooperation and discord between South Korea and Japan

Majority of the literature attribute the escalation of Korea–Japan tensions to domestic variables especially politics and leadership in either country. Ohtsu (2014) explains that it is usually the Japanese leaders that provoke emotional and aggressive South Korean response. Similarly, Horowitz (2016) attributes the ups and downs in Korea–Japan relations to domestic variables such as regime and leadership change which brings ideological changes. Thus, changes in the pattern of military power or threats do not play a significant role in influencing bilateral ties. In contrast, Kimura (2011) argues that in the process of addressing historical disputes, the situation was relatively stable until the 1970s but as South Korean government began raising its voice regarding the past, bilateral relations surrounding history became unstable. He looks at two case studies, the first case is the Murayama government from 1994 to 1996, and the second one is the Roh Moo-Hyun government from 2003 to 2008. Similarly, Hosup Kim also blames domestic political leadership plays an important role in turning historical conflicts into diplomatic tensions. (Kim 2011)

While he does not literally blame Japan for aggravating the diplomatic relations because of historical conflicts, Won-deog Lee attributes the emergence of historical dispute as a source of diplomatic friction since mid-1980s to Japanese political circle as it started treating history as a domestic political agenda over which the conservatives and progressives contested. This domestic political struggle then spilled over to Japan's diplomatic relations with South Korea. (Lee 2006, 2015)

Also emerging in the literature on Korea–Japan relations is the identity-based approach. Kim (2014) uses the symbolic politics approach to explain how identities clash between Japanese elites and the South Korean public, thus leading to diplomatic disputes. Similarly, Glosserman and Snyder (2015) also argue that identity clash between South Korea and Japan overshadows their similarities, and hence inhibits deeper cooperation. The identity clash in their argument differs from that of Kim as they focus on the identity perceived at the general public level only by referring to the public opinion polls of both countries. In contrast, Singh (2015) discounts the role of identity and domestic politics in affecting the bilateral relations and instead gives a more optimistic outlook. He argues that from a structural perspective, increased uncertainty caused by North Korea and China's strategic rise as well as the growing strain on the American military presence in South Korea and Japan would lead the two countries to improve relations. Park (2009) also sounds some cautious optimism for bilateral relations in the long term especially in socio-economic aspects.

Besides identity, other Constructivist concept and related methodology have been employed to explain Korea–Japan tensions. Yang (2008) conducts a comparative analysis of 61 cases of historical disputes by content analysis of major Korean newspapers and an in-depth case study on Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's remarks of 2007 concerning the comfort women issue. He concluded that the South Korean reaction to remarks by Japanese leaders was the result of interactions between the agent's speech acts and is a language

game co-constituted through language. The dispute over the comfort women issue in 2007 between the two showed that their interaction regarding blunders from Japan makes Korea and Japan as agents create rules of engagement, change each other's perceptions, and transform themselves through speech acts.

Other explanations for the dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima also include the action–reaction process approach which shows that the dispute has not been able to simmer down because the two countries have been acting and reacting to each other's action relentlessly especially since early 2000s (Park 2008). Bong (2004) looks at the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute more comprehensively and attributes it to both domestic and external variables. He argues that the resilience of the territorial dispute is due to four factors: the failure to produce an agreement on the issue in the 1965 diplomatic normalization treaty, the simultaneity with Japan's other island disputes with China and Russia, the ineffectiveness of international institutions in resolving the dispute, and finally, the domestic institutions in both countries make the issue an easy hostage of domestic elites.

Another interesting approach in explaining the escalation of Dokdo/Takeshima dispute involves using structural factors like power symmetry between Korea and Japan. Based on Gilpin's hegemonic stability theory, Yang and Cho (2013) explain that the conflictual relationship between Korea and Japan is due to power symmetry. They combine this structural factor with ideational factor (nationalism in either country) to account for the different levels (low, medium, high) of conflict escalation. By looking at Dokdo/Takeshima dispute since Rhee Syngman administration to Lee Myung-bak administration, they concluded that when there is power symmetry and nationalism in either country, escalation of the dispute is the greatest.

Identity in Korea–Japan relations

This paper agrees that while the existing literature is useful in helping us understand the factors causing South Korea to raise historical disputes now and then with Japan, they seem to assume that foreign policy-making in South Korea especially vis-à-vis Japan reflects public opinion effectively. Moreover, the existing literature on identity in Korea–Japan relations locates anti-Japanese identity only at the public level that is transposed to the state level through policy-making processes, implying that individual-level identity is transposed to policy level. (Pollmann 2015; Rozman 2013; Glosserman and Snyder 2015) The regular public opinion polls on Korea–Japan relations such as those conducted by Genron NPO and East Asia Institute and Koreans newspaper outlets imply that state or governmental policies towards Japan are ahistorical and therefore raising historical disputes with Japan do not form the backbone of its Japan policies. South Korea's policy towards Japan, however, naturally has been gravitating towards raising historical disputes every few years, disrupting cooperative ties, and preventing existing cooperation from expanding or deepening. The general discourse on Korea–Japan historical disputes and their “identity clash” leaves out discussion on whether South Korean “state” identity exists and if it does, what it is. This paper therefore traces the South Korean state identity to its Constitution of 1987, which stipulates that the founding of today's South Korean state is based on both anti-Japanese and anti-communist identities which at times lead to confounding foreign policies especially towards Japan.

In doing so, this paper explores the relationship between South Korea's identity and its foreign policy. Despite the wide recognition that “identity” plays a pivotal role in influencing Korea–Japan relations today, there is surprising little literature (Flamm 2015; Ryu 2011) on how Korean identity affects its policy towards Japan while there is some

literature on Korea's relations with other countries like the U.S., Australia, and North Korea. (Shin 2012; Campbell 2011; Choi 2010; Shin 2013) It fills the gap in existing literature on Korean identity and Korea–Japan relations by going beyond the public-level sentiments to locate the South Korean “state” identity in its foundation and analyze how this has affected South Korea's relations with Japan that appear to be inconsistent at times.

Hence, by adding the security factor related to North Korean threats into South Korea's interests and policy considerations in its relations with Japan and using the identity-based approach, it attempts to explain how South Korea's multi-faceted national identity influences its foreign policy towards Japan. In particular, it aims to explore South Korea's perception of its identity whenever its relations with Japan chill over historical animosities and show that its self-identification affects its policy choice and behavior. Adding the North Korean factor in this paper only serves as a comparison of South Korea's behaviors towards different actors. By no means, this paper aims to look at the actual interactions among the three states as suggested by Lowell Dittmer's “strategic triangle.” (Dittmer 1981)

Theoretical overview

This paper questions the IR assumption on state actors that they seek utility maximization as according to rational choice theory by showing that state interests and identities are not given but vary according to other actors and situations. Using the case of Korea's foreign policy towards Japan which has been commonly described as being “emotional” or “immature” as it has been affected by historical issues that involves emotions like outrage and anger, it suggests that such apparent “irrationality” could ultimately be an outcome of a rational choice. (Robertson 2016; Ku 2015; Lee 1985)

Under the two mainstream IR perspectives of Realism and Liberalism, South Korea's policies and actions towards Japan are considered irrational. Under Neo-Realism, Korea's cooperation with Japan would enable it to enhance both its military and economic power state interests are dictated by “rationality”—a concept that follows the neo-classical economic definition of maximizing utility. From the viewpoint of Neo-Liberal perspective, the forgone economic benefits from better bilateral relations are considered irrational choices of a state. However, the assumption that state actors behave in a rational manner has started to be questioned with the emergence of Constructivist approach in the late 1980s. The broad global change and subsequent phenomena in world politics such as globalization and nationalism also meant that there were greater opportunities to test “rationality” in state behavior. For example, nationalism has become common in areas like the Middle East, East Asia, and Eastern Europe. The commonly known “irrational” behavior in the Western perspective of IR especially is exhibited by states known to have undergone some form of a tragedy in history mainly in the form of loss of independence or territory and have grown in power to demand reparation or seek revenge. These states include Israel, China, and Korea. (Schilling 2015; Ku 2015; Brown 2013; Lowenheim and Heimann 2008) In particular, the usage of “emotion” in IR has been used in opposition to “pragmatism.” South Korea's foreign policy especially has been swinging between emotions and pragmatism, and scholarly literature has attributed not just “emotionalism” but also the frequently fluctuating South Korea's foreign policy “emotion” to domestic political reasons. Although this paper does not cast light on emotions in IR, it employs social psychological research on identity and emotions to suggest that identity influences

the “mood” of inter-state relations. By doing so, it argues for greater credit to state identity in affecting the “mood” of inter-state relations.

Identity

Identity has become a popular analytical concept in IR scholarship recently. The discussion of whether identity is a useful concept in the field has been discussed by many scholars and hence, allows us to skip the discussion here. This paper employs the constructivist approach to identity especially that by Alexander Wendt who sees identity as affecting interests and that it is intersubjective with not only the structure but also other actors. (Wendt 1999) In particular, it takes a closer look at role and type identities as introduced by Wendt and attempt to show that an actor could exhibit different categories of identities at the same time. Wendt argues that an actor has multiple identities but fails to explain how different identities are incorporated in an actor and how the four categories of identities—corporate, type, role, and collective—exist in an actor. (Wendt 1999, pp. 224–229) This paper extends on that argument to show that an actor can have multiple categories of identities that surface according to different “others” and situations. It discusses role and type identities because corporate identity is difficult to analyze as it is about the unique identity, and thus requires looking at the entity in its original form. Also, collective identity is excluded because it requires looking at more than two actors.

In addition, this paper views identity as being extremely fluid and constantly changing. It also focuses on “national” identity which is a collective identity with features of an historic territory, common myths, and historical memories, a common public culture, common legal rights, and duties for all members and a common economy. (Smith 1991) National identity or a nation can also be ethnic-based, and therefore national identity could mean identity of members in a community of a common descent. (Smith 1991) Besides being constructed manually by the state, identity is also shaped by historical memory which affects foreign policy-making by influencing identity. This field, however, according to scholars, remains under-researched (Becker 2014).

The constructivist approach in IR links identity with interests to which this article adds the concept of identity verification from social psychology, and it involves actors seeking to verify or confirm their self-views which aid in making their surrounding and the world more predictable and certain. Hence, people then form social situations and relationships in which their identities are verified. (Burke and Stets 2009) Thus, this paper proposes that identity not only affects policy-making but also how the “other” responds to this identification made by an actor feeds back into the actor’s perception of the “other” and subsequently, the policy. In other words, if an actor perceives that its identity is not verified or acknowledged by the particular “other” then it behaves and interacts in a way with that “other” to achieve verification. Verification or non-verification of identity by the other will therefore result in different types of reactions by one, instigating in either positive or negative emotions that lead to either a positive or negative interaction.

According to social psychology, the identity theory is one of three broad sources emotions; exchange and justice theories being the remaining two. Individuals or groups seek to have their identity verified in different situations. Identity verification is an important process in relationships as it will determine if the relationship will be positive or negative as emotion emerges from it along with the expectation that a particular identity is verified. Identify verification happens when one perceives that the other also perceives one in the same way as one does. In other words, both self and the other hold the same view of one’s identity. (Stets 2012) Positive emotions result when identity is verified while

negative ones emerge when verification fails. Research has shown that specific emotions emerge in the process of verification. For example, anger is felt when an external source that influences and shapes the nature of identity fails to verify an identity. (Stets and Burke 2005)

Thus, the idea of identity verification allows us to draw a dynamic picture of the action–reaction process that is prevalent in IR. It aids in understanding why certain conflicts and disputes between groups remain trapped in a vicious cycle of escalation and de-escalation and protracted over a long time. Moreover, this linkage between identity verification and emotions becomes more useful in IR analysis when it concerns role identity, or identity that is relational, and hence is formed as a result of interaction with other actors.

Interest

According to the conventional understanding of “interest” in IR theories like Neo-Realism and Neo-Liberalism, states pursue uniform material interests in the form of military and economic power to ensure security and survival. In contrast, constructivists employ a more flexible approach to state interests by drawing a connection between interests, or desire and belief, or identity. This belief or identity also varies temporally and contextually.

For example, Ruggie (1993) argues that identities affect preferences and Mercer (1995) also reflects Wendt's view on identity and interests by arguing that interests change according to identities. Therefore, identity affects how an actor views not only the world but also of itself which maneuvers its behavior and attitude. More importantly, identities are subjective and are born out of interactions. Hence to explore how identity affects foreign policy, this paper identifies South Korea's self-identity (or perception of own identity and others') and its subsequent interests which in turn affects policy-making. It takes the premise that identity and interests are reflected in policies as argued by many scholars.

State, or national, security is the most important state interest in IR. In traditional sense, state security involves protecting the state physically in terms of its territory, population, and the ability to govern from threats like war. This paper widens the scope of state interest and security to include ensuring ontological security, which is security of a state's being or identity, as state interest. In the IR context, the concept of ontological security has been used to explain “irrational” behavior of states like intervention in conflicts as well as tendency to be involved in protracted conflicts. (Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008) Thus, states' pursuit for ontological security seems to help complete or supplement the picture of apparent irrational behavior that cannot be explained by existing IR assumptions of rationality. This paper thus borrows this idea to test how the concept of ontological security is able to supplement existing explanation on the tendency of states to raise or escalate historical disputes that are not relevant to traditional or physical security. Hence, this paper suggests that the identity of a state can be tied to not only its interest of assuring physical security but also ontological security which could result in inconsistent policies.

Analytical framework

This paper proposes that South Korea faces an “identity dilemma” in the post-Cold War period and this becomes apparent when it faces diplomatic tensions with Japan and traditional security threats from North Korea at the same time. This causes South Korea's

behavior and policy towards Japan especially to be confounding, erratic, and even irrational from the perspective of conventional IR theories that are premised on rational choice as the basic principle of state behavior. The fundamentals of South Korean state as stipulated in its constitution and the reality of Cold War structure of regional security poses a dilemma as its national identity hovers between having to “other” North Korea and “other” Japan when it faces challenges to both its traditional and ontological securities. When this dilemma combined with the security architecture in East Asia led by the U.S., South Korea has to carefully manage its policies to maximize its interest of both protecting its physical security from North Korea by cooperating with Japan and also upholding its Korean identity by highlighting its historical grievances against Japan.

South Korea’s identity

By treating Japan and North Korea as South Korea’s “other,” this paper aims to create a framework of identity perception by a state vis-à-vis other states to explain Seoul’s policy towards Japan. It takes the role and type identity of actors to see how it affects South Korea’s Japan policy, respectively. Alexander Wendt defines role identity as existing in relation to others and is thus formed only as a result of interaction with others. In contrast, type identity is exogenously given and not affected by social interaction. Instead, type identity concerns categorization based on certain characteristics like appearance or values. (Wendt 1999, pp. 225–227) He however, stops short of discussing or exploring further the concept of type identity.

This paper hypothesizes that South Korea has been facing identity dilemma since the end of the Cold War due to both structural and ideational factors. First, according to Shin (2006), even though South Korea reflected the trend of, and accepted globalization as its new national strategy in the early 1990s during Kim Young Sam’s administration, doing so did not lead to the fading of national identity based on ethnic nationalism. This was because globalization was to be “localized” with Korean national identity molding globalization and not vice versa. Moreover, instead of weakening ethnic national identity, it strengthened it. Hence, an ethnic-based national identity co-existed with a more cosmopolitan Korean identity since the 1990s. Second, a heavily ethnic-based identity led to the emergence of an anti-communist national identity in the early days of South Korean state which remains up to this day as the mainstream Korean identity in which the communist North Korean *regime* and not the North Korean population as South Korea’s “other.” This “othering” is reflected in the Article 3 of South Korea’s constitutional law which defines the Republic of Korea’s territory as consisting of the “Korean Peninsula and its adjacent islands.” (Constitution of the Republic of Korea 1987) The South Korean defense and security policy also reflects this ethnic-based national identity as South Korea’s primary security concern has been North Korea after the truce of Korean War in 1953, and subsequently South Korea’s security became heavily influenced by the regional security architecture led by the U.S. through their bilateral security alliance.

At the same time, however, this ethnic-based state identity of South Korea also “others” Japan. The preamble of the South Korean constitution spells out that the Republic of Korea upholds the “cause of the Provisional Republic of Korea Government born of the March First Independence Movement of 1919 [...],” implying that the Republic of Korea as a state has its foundations from the attempt to gain independence from Japanese colonization. (Constitution of the Republic of Korea 1987) Therefore, from the constitution alone we can imply that there are two sub-branches of South Korean ethnic-based national identity—one “othering” North Korean regime and another “othering” Japan. As such,

South Korean identity is not one but multiple, which is not a problem theoretically since identity theorists recognize that identities are not single but many. The multiple-identity issue, however, creates a problem in practice for South Korea as it causes conflicts among South Korea's interests.

As constructivists argue, identity defines interests. For South Korea, the North Korean regime as the "other" defines its traditional security as North Korean threat looms at large with occasional skirmishes as well as missile and nuclear tests. Due to North Korea posing threats in the region, structural factors like the U.S.-led regional security architecture in Asia-Pacific as well as South Korea's relatively weaker military power as compared to Japan and the U.S. have forced South Korea to cooperate with Japan despite their unresolved historical issues. At the same time, Japan as the "other" threatens South Korea's national identity that is rooted in pre-colonial and colonial days. Hence, there is the notion of ontological (in)security perceived by South Korea vis-à-vis Japan even today which manifests in the form of historical disputes like Dokdo/Takeshima dispute, Japanese textbooks controversy, and the "comfort women" issue. The "othering" of Japan by South Korea and the importance of Korea's ontological security in its relations with Japan are still apparent today as shown by opinion polls and South Korean public's frequent criticisms and protests against Japan's rightist or nationalist moves.

Hence, South Korea appears to have two types of interests as shown by its two sub-identities. First, anti-communist identity defines South Korea's traditional security interests, that is, to defend its territory and population to ensure its survival and also to increase military and economic power. Second, South Korea's anti-Japanese identity defines its ontological security interest which is to protect the Korean identity demonstrated in the form of criticizing any signs of Japan's imperialist desires including visit to Yasukuni shrine, asserting ownership over Dokdo/Takeshima, and refusal to apologize to the surviving comfort women. These two identities of South Korea may not appear to be contradictory or posing a dilemma for South Korea. They, however, would emerge as a key security and diplomatic challenge in the post-Cold War period for South Korea especially when it faces both historical disputes with Japan and security threats from North Korea simultaneously as they require it to juggle traditional security interests, ontological security interests, as well as domestic accountability.

South Korea's type identity

This paper argues that the role and type identities of South Korea vis-à-vis Japan conflict with each other. South Korea's type identity refers to South Korea's perception of itself as a modern, sovereign state that is conventional in IR and is devoid of history. In particular, South Korea's type identity is based on characteristics such as affluence, democracy, and liberalism. This type identity is fundamentally about being a sovereign state in the context of the modern international system but it may vary according to the broader global trend temporally and given different labels. Hence, during the Cold War, South Korea's type identity is based on categorization such as industrializing, "tiger" economy, U.S. ally, and anti-communist. In the immediate years immediately after the Cold War, its categorization would be related to globalization, openness, and prosperity. Subsequently, this type identity would take on other names including regional hub and more recently, middle power. The most important point about type identity is that it exists regardless of who the "other" is. Hence, this identity exists whether or not there is the "other." It also means that it exists vis-à-vis all "others." For example, South Korea is democratic when compared with either North Korea or Australia.

When this type identity is put relative to Japan, both South Korea and Japan are very similar—both are Asian countries and with the help from the United States, grew rapidly in the post-war years through industrialization and achieved democratization that shares similar values with the West. Both countries not only lead the East Asian economy but also share similar global concerns like terrorism, climate change, development, and of course, nuclear proliferation specifically that is related to North Korea. By putting history aside under this type identity, South Korea therefore prioritizes its identity as one of the leading democratic Asian economies in the world and perceives similar states like Japan as one of its partners in pursuing global initiatives. Under such perception, it takes a more conventional Western view of IR which functions as neo-realists argue—a state’s main and foremost interest lies with its “survival” or physical security. History and ontological security based on historical relations take a back seat. Thus, it follows that South Korea would pursue a more cooperative relationship with Japan in diverse areas including traditional security. Words like “partners” and phrases that suggest both countries sharing similar values and goals in international community would be frequently used to describe bilateral relations.

When type identity is more influential than role identity, South Korea’s traditional security vis-à-vis Japan is assured and ontological concerns also becomes less important. Instead, South Korea’s traditional security vis-à-vis North Korea is emphasized, and structural factors in the form of alliance with the U.S., trilateral cooperation with the U.S. and Japan, as well as South Korea’s relative weaker military power vis-à-vis Japan directs South Korea’s policies towards Japan to be more cooperative. Thus, North Korean threat would call for closer Korea–Japan ties and greater cooperation. Thereby, North Korea is regarded as a “glue” for Korea–Japan relations bilateral cooperation or at least some form of cooperation between the two in multilateral settings like Korea–U.S.–Japan or Korea–Japan–China groupings that share common interests of stabilizing regional security threatened by North Korea’s nuclear ambitions and armament. For example, North Korean nuclear development has led to the emergence of a semi-institutionalized Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) among Korea, Japan, and the U.S. in 1999 to share and coordinate policies on North Korea. Through such frameworks, despite ongoing and escalating historical disputes, Korea and Japan have more or less maintained a minimal level of security cooperation even in the post-Cold War years. Even as the relations between these two were hindered by the regular occurrence of bickering over history through the years, the North Korean factor has pushed them back together even for a brief moment and to put aside discord caused by historical problems.

South Korea’s role identity

On the other hand, South Korea’s role identity varies according to the “other” and therefore is relational and contextual. For instance, unlike its role identity vis-à-vis Japan, South Korea’s role identity vis-à-vis Australia is simpler—one of a cooperative partner. This is because its relations with Australia not only have a shorter history but also because their relations so far have been less negative than positive or neutral. In contrast, South Korea’s role identity vis-à-vis Japan is much more complex because first, both entities have been interacting and have been entangled with each other for thousands of years, and second, their relationship has been mainly negative or conflictual—in the form of invasions—and not cooperative. The most negative and recent interaction that influences the bilateral relations today is Japan’s colonization of Korea from 1910 to 1945. Thus, any analysis of South Korea’s identity with regards to Japan has to take into consideration their

bilateral history. Their poor bilateral relations even today ultimately stems from their perceptions of their relative positions in the international order.

In particular, South Korea's role identity vis-à-vis Japan has to do with the change in the regional order from one the Sino-centric "tianxia" order with China at the top of the hierarchy, to the modern international system based on the Westphalian concept of states. Under the thousand-year-old Sino-centric order which determined the status according to the degree of adoption of Chinese culture and values, Korea was considered a model tributary while Japan was considered almost like an outsider of the system. The tide of regional order change in 19th century in East Asia led to the change in their hierarchical status in 1894 when China was defeated by Japan and had to hand over its territory as well as severe its suzerainty-vessel relationship with Korea, effectively ending the Sino-centric order. The change in East Asian order then naturally led to Japan's annexation and colonization of Korea in 1910 which until today, remains fresh in the memory and narratives of the South Korean society so much that it continues to disturb bilateral relations today. This change in the order coupled with Japan's gradual encroachment upon Korea's internal affairs since 1876 overturned Korea's position vis-à-vis Japan which had already begun modernization using Western technology and adopting Western values. Japan thus viewed Korea as being 'backward' and as an entity that had to be "liberated" from a crumbling China and a threatening Russia.

Such negative view and Korea's resentment of Japanese "looking down" on it has a history of thousands of years and dates back to the fourth century BC when the Japanese state of Yamato was established. The debate over the issue of which state emerged first concerns the "superiority" of either state. This differing interpretations of antiquity have not been limited to academia but have affected the history of the bilateral relations as Japanese historians who argue that the Yamato state was established first followed by it establishing Korea later, also argue that since Koreans and Japanese share a common ancestry, Japan's several attempts to either invade or colonize Korea throughout centuries are justified. (Lee 1985) Moreover, Japan has been consistently insisting that Korea has had no unique identity of its own but it has always been influenced by, and has been part of Japan since antiquity times. Korea, however, refutes it by insisting that it has its unique history, culture, language which influenced Japan and not vice versa. Some Japanese scholars have also supported this claim by arguing that the ancient Japanese state was influenced by continental population as seen from the similarities in the characteristics of ancient tombs found in Japan and Korea. (Lee 1985) As for language, Koreans have used Wani or Wang In, a Korean scholar during Baekje period, as a symbol of ancient Korea's "cultural superiority" over Japan as he spread Chinese characters to Japan when he brought Confucian texts from Korea to Japan between third to fifth century A.D. For example, since the 1980s, Korean nationals in Japan have held events commemorating Wani's arrival at Japan. Famous Korean political figures like former president Kim Dae-jung and Prime Minister Kim Jong-pil sent a letter to a ceremony at Wani's tomb in 1998 and visited it in 1999, respectively. (Kazuyo 2004) Korea's perception of its cultural "superiority" over Japan and Japan's later attempts to "Japanize" Korea during the colonial period thus has scarred not only Korean history but also Korea's pride of its unique identity and culture.

Korea's grievances of Japan's negative perception of Korea since historical times are neither unilateral nor completely unfounded. According to Tamaki (2010), Japanese collective identity through which Japanese policy elites view the world also affects how the Japanese government interacts with South Korea. He analyzes how this collective identity plays a role in Japanese foreign policy through the "language" it uses with South Korea

and how this reifies bilateral relations. He proposes that the Japanese narratives of self and Korea as the other are divided into three themes of the Past, the Future, and Backwardness. The Past concerns omnipresence of history and its role as a constant basis of Korea–Japan relations, usually illustrated by the constant accusations and counteraccusations over Japan’s past deeds to Korea. The Future is related to the Past—it is a response to the persistence of the Past. For Tamaki, the persistence of Past and Future perceives Korea as being characterized by “Backwardness” which causes Korea to criticize Japan constantly for colonialism. In addition, he argues that Japanese collective as a historical construct originates from the Meiji era during which *kokutai*, or polity, is politicized in the Meiji Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890 indicates the emergence of hierarchy as the principle which Japan kept until August 1945. This hierarchy, however, was maintained in the post-war years. He argues that the *heiwa kokka* (a peaceful state) identity has been reborn in the article 9 of Japan’s constitution. This identity has taken the form of Japan’s economic initiatives such as leading the regional economic order and Official Development Assistance (ODA). Because of this *heiwa* and *shonin kokka* (a merchant state) identities, Japan does not view Asia as an equal but as being lower in the hierarchy. In its relations with Korea, Japanese policy elites view Korea through the view that the world is hierarchic and enables them to reproduce Korean other as a backward entity. (Tamaki 2010)

By borrowing this argument on Japanese hierarchical world view as well as its perception of Korea, this paper provides the other half of the picture by analyzing the South Korean perspective to show how South Korea’s perception affects its external relations today.

When South Korea is heavily influenced by this role identity vis-à-vis Japan, it perceives Japan as being “imperialist” or “militarist” and being remorseful about the past and also for looking down on South Korea (and Korea in the past) for being “backward.”

Under this perspective, any attempt or sign of Japan to militarize, or “normalize” its self-defense force (SDF), is perceived negatively as South Koreans are reminded of Japan’s past militarism that led Korea to lose its sovereignty. As already explained, this identity emphasizes Japan’s past aggression towards Korea. However, it plays out differently from the conventional threat theory as South Korea perceives Japan to be a threat to its identity rather than physical being. This is because offensive strike is forbidden for Japan under its Peace Constitution Article 9 which permits the use of force only for defensive purposes. Therefore, although the memory and historical narrative in South Korea perceives Japan as a threat to physical security, “abnormal” Japanese military force as well as the U.S. alliance acting as a “bottle cap” over Japanese power allows South Korea to focus on the ontological threat. South Korea’s ontological insecurity posed by Japan’s attempts to militarize, Japan’s failure to apologize for past colonization and comfort women, or its territorial claims over Dokdo/Takeshima is justifiable since South Korea perceives these actions as Japan not verifying South Korea’s “victim” identity. To deny verifying South Korea’s past victimization is equivalent, in South Korea’s perspective, to Japan perceiving Korea as “inferior” or “backward” as compared to Japan.

In the context of Korea–Japan relations today, this means that Japan has to recognize its wrongdoing in the past and apologize for colonization because this would mean that Japan has acknowledged Korea as an entity of equal status. It naturally follows that South Korea rejects cooperation with Japan which viewed the 19th-century Korea or Joseon, as a “lower” status entity. Although the history of their relations exerting influence on their present-day relations seems irrational, ultra-nationalists and right-wing politicians today in Japan who still glorify Japan’s past militarism and imperialism not only remind Koreans of

Table 1 South Korea's self-identification and interest vis-à-vis Japan

Self-identification	Role identity	Type identity
Perception of Japan	Militarist, imperialist, aggressor	Partner
Interest	Ontological security	Traditional security
Policy	Not cooperative	Cooperative

that past but are considered as indicating a lack of remorse or regret on the part of Japan. Moreover, the collective memory of Korea–Japan relations is being passed down from generation to generation through collective narratives such as history textbooks, memorial halls, and museums. Hence, the South Korean view of itself as equal entity that is to be acknowledged and respected by Japan today culminates in its repeated demands for official Japanese apology as well as permanent suspension of any behavior that exhibits signs of glorification of Japanese imperialism in the past. Under such circumstances, it is difficult for many Koreans to accept cooperation with Japan especially in security aspects. Cooperation remains limited to less traditional areas like economic and socio-cultural ones. Nevertheless, even non-traditional security cooperation like negotiations for bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) has been hindered due to historical reasons.

Therefore, South Korea's self-identification, its national interests, its perception of Japan, and finally its policy towards Japan are summarized in Table 1.

The above categorization does not mean that South Korea pursues either one line of policy only at any one time. Rather, it suggests the simultaneous presence of multiple identities that lead to conflicting interests and policies in South Korea's relations with Japan that appear inconsistent. At any one time, however, depending on the government's big picture of national strategy, South Korea's identity vis-à-vis Japan may reflect more heavily either one identity—type or role- which is reflected in its policy. At the same time, it is important to remember that while this paper attempts to draw a link between a state's perception of the identities of self and others, it does not determine the causal relationship between identity and foreign policy.

South Korea's identity and its relations with Japan, 1998–2012

By arguing that South Korea's capricious policies of cooperation and discord towards Japan is a result of its confounding identity that “others” both North Korea and Japan, this paper aims to show how South Korea's identity dilemma is reflected in its interaction with Japan from 1998 to 2012. It looks into how their bilateral tensions and discord caused by historical issues including comfort women, textbook controversy, and Dokdo/Takeshima dispute affected, or was affected by North Korea's security threat to South Korea. The frequency as well as the severity of disputes over these issues have heightened in the post-Cold War years regardless of which political party or leader was in power in both countries. In particular, this paper hypothesizes that South Korea's “identity dilemma” is reflected in its seemingly inconsistent stance and policy towards Japan regarding the past and its cooperation with Japan. To discern South Korea's foreign policy, presidential and governmental statements both official and unofficial will be analyzed, as South Korea's foreign policy-making process is dominated by the executive, or the president. (Jo 2010)

The three South Korean administrations between 1998 and 2012 have all undergone a similar pattern of Korea–Japan relations during each five-year administration term: each

administration kicked off its term emphasizing and promising a future-oriented relationship, followed by a chill in the relationship caused by a history-related issue which escalates and dies down near the end of the term. Because of this repeated ups and downs in the bilateral relations, it has been subjected mainly to explanations based on domestic politics.

Of the three administrations, South Korean identity under Kim Dae-jung's administration (1998–2002) exhibited type identity more heavily than role identity. This was for two reasons. First, Korea–Japan relations was at its lowest point since the end of Cold War when Kim entered office because of a series of blunders made by Japanese leaders which prompted Kim's predecessor, Kim Young-sam to declare that "Japan needs to be taught manners." (Yonhap News 2015) Second, the Kim Dae-jung's administration emphasized the importance of its new approach to relations with North Korea by introducing the Sunshine Policy which required the support from both the U.S. and Japan. Thus, South Korea had to seek a softer approach towards Japan.

However, the South Korean public's perception of South Korea's identity and that of Japan diverged from that of the government. Even with greater promise for cooperation and the opening of South Korea to Japanese culture, the Korean public nevertheless reacted with rage in 1998, 2000, and 2001, over the new fishery agreement covering East Sea and Japanese history textbooks, respectively. Although the new fishery agreement of 1998 was strictly limited to delimitation of waters and fishing, the Korean public protested and demanded for renegotiation as they claimed that it not only threatened the livelihood of Korean fishermen but also infringed upon Korea's right of ownership over Dokdo/Takeshima. Although this demand was quelled, anti-Japanese sentiments among the Korean public again heated up in 2000 when Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party key figures interfered by adding Japanese colonization and comfort women issues to the textbook. Unrest again surged in Korea–Japan relations when the new Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited the controversial Yasu Shrine in 2001.

Despite the many "lows" in bilateral relations, President Kim Dae-jung insisted that cooperation with Japan was important for the sake of North–South relations. By recognizing that both countries share similarities such as culture, he accepted Japan's apology for the past deeds, and called for both countries to be forward-looking and welcome a new era of relations. (Yonhap News 2000) Moreover, Kim Dae-jung also envisioned an East Asian community that was previously envisioned by Japan in the early 1990s. Thus, by pursuing similar regional policies, South Korea perceived itself and Japan as being the potential leaders of the region. In addition, Kim also sought to strengthen ties with Japan not only bilaterally but also multilaterally. It was since Kim's administration when bilateral military cooperation became regularized for the first time and Korea and Japan also cooperated in minilateral frameworks of U.S.–Korea–Japan security dialogues and China–Japan–Korea trilateral summits. Hence, President Kim Dae-jung's amicable policies towards Japan reflect the type identity that perceives South Korea as a modern, sovereign state that ought to "socialize" North Korea into the international community. In this way, it perceives Japan as a partner that shares similarities like democratic and liberal values.

The Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003–2007) perhaps reflected most heavily South Korea's role identity vis-à-vis Japan out of the three administrations. When President Roh Moo-hyun first entered the office in 2003, he inherited Kim Dae-jung's softer approach towards North Korea as well as towards Japan. He expanded the scope of Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy by placing South Korea in a regional context that popularized South Korea's identity as a "hub" of Northeast Asia in terms of economy as well as being a "balancer" politically. Hence, it perceived South Korea as a developed country that would

not be held back by its past. During a bilateral summit with Japan in July 2004, President Roh even said that he would separate history issues from politics and diplomacy and sought further cooperation with Japan by proposing a free trade agreement. By envisioning South Korea as playing a pivotal role in Northeast Asian politics and economy, the Roh administration was in effect prioritizing South Korea's traditional security interests against North Korea. That its northern neighbor was withdrawing from the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) that was forcing South Korea to pursue type identity more as it viewed its situation in a realistic way such that the conventional rational choice theory of IR could explain South Korea's pursuit of its basic security or survival. South Korea's perception of Japan as sharing similarities such as opposition against North Korea's nuclear ambition was apparent when President Roh Moo-hyun proposed that Japan join the Six-Party Talks.

This attitude, however, would soon be overturned because of Dokdo/Takeshima dispute that escalated throughout 2005 and 2006 and was triggered by Shimane prefecture's decision to designate February 22 as "Takeshima Day" in 2005. As diplomatic tension continued to escalate, on March 23, President Roh reversed his earlier policy of separating history from diplomatic relations by announcing that he would even wage a "diplomatic war" with Japan if necessary. In April 2006, he also made it explicit and official for the first time that Dokdo/Takeshima represented the consolidation of South Korean sovereignty. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006) South Korea's befuddling identity issue finally surfaces in the summer of 2006 when President Roh ordered the use of force against Japanese surveyors if they came near the islets, prompting scholars to question the popular democratic peace argument. (Midford 2011) Even when North Korea fired missiles, South Korea was initially hesitant to criticize North Korea and instead accused Japan's North Korean threat theory as well as possible militarization as exhibiting Japan's past militarism. (Yonhap News 2006) Hence, traditional security interest for South Korea no longer was limited to North Korean threat. In this case, South Korea had both traditional and ontological security interests against Japan as it perceived Japan as threatening South Korean territory and identity by claiming ownership of the islets. This instance showcases South Korea's identity reflecting its role identity which leads it to perceive Japan as being militarist or imperialist, and thus prioritize protecting South Korea's identity, hindering any form of cooperation amid North Korean military provocations. Towards the end of Roh's term in office, relations continued to remain chill as bilateral and China–Japan–Korea trilateral summits were called off. Therefore, South Korean identity vis-à-vis Japan gradually reflected role identity more towards the end of Roh's term.

The succeeding administration under President Lee Myung-bak (2008–2012) initially grounded South Korea's identity on type identity which espoused a more global role for the country and subsequently expanded the arena for South Korea's role which was previously limited to East Asia. In his inauguration speech, President Lee called for South Korea to "move from the age of ideology into the age of pragmatism," indicating that his foreign policy with Japan would also emphasize "pragmatism" and move beyond impractical feud over history. (Hankyoreh 2008) The administration's national security strategy under the title of "Global Korea" defined national interests broadly by including human security which goes beyond state boundaries. Under this strategy, he prioritized relations with Japan over that with China and sought a "mature partnership" based on common interests like socio-economic exchanges as well as strategic issues regarding North Korea and Northeast Asian stability. In addition, his favorability towards Japan was also apparent from the strategy that called for cooperation among Korea, the U.S., and Japan as the three share similarities such as democracy and free market values. (Presidential Blue House 2009) Hence, South Korean national identity under Lee's administration was one based on type

identity—not only did South Korea perceive Japan as being similar to South Korea in terms of political and economic systems, but it also skewed further away from the role identity which viewed the present Korea–Japan relations against their thousand-year-old history of interactions.

Despite the government’s pursue of a type-based identity for South Korea, the elements of a role-based identity remained influential in Korea–Japan relations as the Korean public continued to view Japan as an aggressor. The textbook controversy in July 2008, the South Korean Constitutional Court’s ruling that the government’s inaction over comfort women issue was unconstitutional in 2011, as well as President Lee’s personal visit to the disputed Dokdo/Takeshima in August 2012 overwhelmed and reversed the administration’s initial foreign policy strategy. The occurrence of these bilateral “downs” between Korea and Japan was rather undisturbed by North Korean provocations—first in March and then in November 2010 when North Korea sunk a South Korean vessel killing all onboard and bombed the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong, killing two civilians, respectively. Even when Japan was briefly led by the Democratic Party of Japan Yukio Hatoyama who pushed for better ties with Korea, a significant proportion of Koreans responded that they still do not trust Japan, indicating that domestic leadership did not play critical a role in affecting South Koreans’ perception towards Japan. (Hankook Ilbo 2010a) Instead, role identity or South Korea’s identity vis-à-vis Japan that has formed over hundreds of years continued to shape the Korean public’s perception in the current era, as the same poll showed that 80.1 percent of respondents answered that Japan’s colonization continued to hinder bilateral ties today.

Moreover, even if the Korean government emphasized that Korea and Japan share mutual interests of deterring North Korean threat, the divergent views between the Korean and Japanese public in resolving the North Korean problem implied the weakness of type identity in South Korea’s identity vis-à-vis Japan. (Hankook Ilbo 2010b) This also suggests that threat perception between Korea and Japan diverges as South Korea perceives North Korea based on ethnicity and as compared to Japan, North Korea is a closer “other.” Hence, the identity gap between South Korea and Japan remained wider than the South Korean administrators had expected, and this gap was epitomized in the summer of 2012 when the South Korean public accused the South Korean government of trying to conclude the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Japan in secrecy. This agreement allows both countries to share military intelligence especially regarding North Korea, and thus is beneficial for South Korea’s traditional security interests. The conclusion of the agreement was ultimately postponed, and it continues to be a sensitive issue in the South Korean society as the public has been less welcoming to sign a military deal with its former colonizer. Thus, bilateral historical relations still overpower present relations even if cooperation with Japan is necessary for South Korea’s traditional or physical security interests against North Korean provocations and attacks.

Therefore, while it is true that domestic variables do play a role in affecting South Korea’s Japan policies, ultimately it is South Korea’s conflicting identities stemming from the very foundation of South Korean state as stipulated in its constitution that has required South Korean policy makers to balance its identity, and hence interests whenever diplomatic disputes over history with Japan arises and it faces physical traditional security challenges from North Korea. South Korea’s identity dilemma vis-à-vis Japan is by no means limited to security cooperation against North Korea but also includes cooperation in other areas like FTA negotiations and cooperation at local government level. Scholars have attributed stalled FTA negotiations which began as early as 2004 to political problems caused by history. (Kim 2015) Although surveys have found that a majority of Korean

cities maintain sister-city partnership with Japan despite poor diplomatic relations at the state government level, severe diplomatic tensions such as the one caused by Shimane Prefecture's ordinance on "Takeshima Day" in 2005 led to Gyeongsang Province suspending its sister-city ties with Shimane Prefecture. (Onishi 2015; Herald Economy 2005) Hence, South Korea's adversarial behavior towards Japan in non-traditional security aspects also questions the general assumption in Neo-Liberalism that states cooperate for greater material benefits in terms of economy because South Korea in the post-Cold War era has demonstrated its willingness to forgo socio-economic benefits derived from cooperating with Japan by prioritizing its ontological security.

Implications for East Asia

The importance of a healthy Korea–Japan relations cannot be overlooked in the context of East Asian regional order. By adding the North Korean factor to South Korea's calculations of security interests, the analysis has at the very least provided a feasible explanation on why non-traditional security such as ontological security could sufficiently important to overtake traditional security as a state's main interest. It is in the interest of the U.S. to promote cooperative relationship between its two allies. According to Victor Cha, the U.S. plays an important role in pushing the two countries to rapprochement as declining the U.S. role in the regional security forces the two to cooperate. (Cha 1999) In practice, the U.S. has also on several occasions, brought its two bickering allies together to cooperate against North Korea. However, the analysis in this paper suggests that the role of the U.S. as a mediator or playing a pivotal role in their reconciliation is much more limited than expected. American efforts may work, but only temporarily as Korea–Japan relations since post-war years has exhibited its natural tendency to "gravitate" towards discord caused by different understandings of the past even after decades of security or military cooperation. Underlying South Korea's seemingly inability to pursue a consistent policy of cooperating with Japan in security and military is its foundational state identity that perceives both North Korean regime *and* Japan as the "other."

Conclusion

The above analysis on South Korea's relations with Japan as well as with North Korea shows how multiple identities of an actor could lead to inconsistent or erratic foreign policy and behavior. South Korea's capricious behavior towards Japan in the post-Cold War years reflects South Korea's conflicting security interests due to its multiple identities. Despite North Korea posing immediate security threats to the Korean Peninsula, South Korea's tendency to minimize security cooperation with Japan because of history in the post-Cold War period shows that role identity remains a stronger source of influence than type identity on South Korea's self-identity. This is not surprising and is a rational outcome considering that South Korea's interactions with Japan under the non-Westphalian system took place for hundreds and even thousands of years, whereas its interactions with Japan as a modern, sovereign state in the Westphalian concept only has a 70-year history. Hence, based on Constructivist approach to IR, socialization between the two countries has been insufficient, which results in the "clash" of their identities.

The focus on South Korea's security and foreign policy also suggests the divergence of South Korea's self-identity between the government and the public at times. While the

government pursues a type-based identity that views Japan as an equal and a partner, the public still upholds role-based South Korean identity that views Japan based on collective memory and history narratives that results in less-friendly South Korean posture in the foreign policy arena. The argument that South Korea's multiple identities play a role in South Korea's foreign policy is not limited to its relations with Japan only. It also affects South Korea's relations especially with the U.S. and China. By proposing that South Korea faces an identity dilemma especially when having to deal historical issues and traditional security issues, this paper has suggested identity in East Asian context should not be assumed as being monolith and singular, but that it is subjective, variant, and dynamic enough to influence foreign policy and state behavior in world politics, thereby feeding greater importance to the necessity of more active research on foreign policy analysis in IR.

As with the majority of literature on identity, this paper is weak empirically as it relies on interpretation of events and narratives. Further research especially on the relationship between state identity and foreign policy needs to be done by explicating how perceptions of state identity influence foreign policy-making process in detail. To do so, surveys on threat perception could be conducted among state officials as well as the public.

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