

Mitigating a Culture of Antagonism:
Democratic Peace and Nationalism
in South Korea and Japan

by

Sherry Cho
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I Introduction

Nationalism, the attitude that individuals adopt in their alignment with a national in-group, remains one of the strongest political emotions in the modern world. Subject to factors unique to the particular time and place in which it manifests, national consciousness has been pressed into serving a range of purposes that span national unification of fragmented states to economic expansion. Though not always at odds with negotiation and compromise, nationalism in all its forms and purposes continues to promote conflict; consequently, a search for solutions to the problem of conflicting nationalisms remains a never-ending pursuit.

Although consistently condemned as anachronistic, nationalism remains the foremost manifestation of the search for security. Nationalism is based on an egoistic foundation: members of a nation constitute an in-group which assures security and highlights the disparate qualities of out-groups. Thus it is arguable that nationalism has generated excessive emphasis on more or less arbitrary categorizations that lead to an exclusive denigration of out-groups.

Nationalism is in constant flux, subject to constant changes in its usage as a vehicle for a spectrum of motives. The intermingling of varied purpose and falsehoods result in nationalisms constituted partly of actuality and partly of myth; national myths often operate in a perpetual cycle, adapting themselves to changing circumstances and affirming the legitimacy of nation-states. These myths are often utilized to strengthen nationalism through the assertion of common origin and essentialist distinctiveness from out-groups.

The Korean manifestation of such national myths include the belief in the ancient development of a pure Korean race that created a unified civilization rivaling that of China while the Japanese national myth emphasizes an essentialist “Japaneseness” that defines a culturally and socially homogeneous racial entity, the essence of which is virtually unchanged from prehistoric times.

The advent of the post-colonial world signaled a shift in many of the customary ways in which nation-states utilized nationalism. This was most apparent in post-Cold War Asia as older forms of nationalism ceased to have the appeal or clout that they once possessed, mostly because the two great endeavors which nationalism served—post-colonial emergence and Cold War struggle—have little relevance today in East Asia. The emergence of a democratic Japan and South Korea altered the way in which nation-states utilized nationalism. While it could be argued that the Cold War has yet to be ended in East Asia—as the unresolved legacies of divided Korea and divided China attest—the processes of decolonization and democratization served as catalysts for the underlying socio-cultural transformation in the Japanese-South Korean relationship.

Due to the distinct environment in which Japanese and Korean nationalism were born, modern South Korean and Japanese nationalisms often work in opposition to one another. Japanese nationalism was born in the struggle for modernization and the means to defend Japan in a Western-dominated world order. In turn, Korean nationalism emerged in the Korean resistance of Japanese colonialism. Thus it is hardly astonishing that

difficulties in the Japan-South Korea relationship remain prevalent today. However, their shared democratic nature has improved the relationship between the two East Asian nations by tempering elite ambitions and providing another outlet for popular sentiment. To better understand the contemporary relationship between South Korea and Japan, it is necessary to account for the different historical and regional factors which have directed the evolution of Korean and Japanese nationalism.

Nationalism

The varying definitions of nationalism reflect the myriad ways in which individuals relate to the social group that is considered a “nation.” Individuals attach themselves to groups in an attempt to advance their self interest—security being the foremost of those interests—and to fulfill an innate human need for social categorization. The tendency toward group differentiation facilitates the attempt to categorize the world into digestible units for efficient human reaction. However, the human need for group formation results in both positive and negative outcomes; such outcomes are due to the ingrained reactions provoked by perceptions of groups. While nationalism may manifest positively as beneficent patriotism, it may also negatively manifest as a belligerent prejudice that fosters national conceit to the detriment of out-groups. The manner in which national sentiment erupts in modern political relationships is reliant on the relationship between elites and the people they govern and influence. To better understand the ways in which nationalism governs the actions of the elite and the masses, it is

necessary to explicate the concept of “nation” and the differing sentiments it engenders.

Nations

From a political perspective, a “nation” is commonly understood to stand for a large community of people of mainly common descent, language, history, etc., usually inhabiting a particular territory and under one government. This definition and its many thematic variations all emphasize the existence of a community with a resultant understatement of the role of political structures. This accentuation on an awareness of commonality is mirrored by psychological terms and understandings of group identity, which imply that individuals naturally form social communities through a connection between individual self-interest and the advancement of the in-group. This basic sense of solidarity is essential to the concept of “nations” and forms the foundation of both constructive and bellicose forms of nationalism.

Characteristics of Nationalism

Nationalism is only one of the facets of national sentiment that permeate the international system of nation-states; however, it remains relevant due to encompassing the majority of bellicose national sentiment. Nationalism is loosely perceived as identification with the nation and the subsequent desire to advance the interests of the nation. To be more exact,

nationalism can be more acutely defined as an ideological belief that one's own nation should be superior in comparison to other nations.¹

Most research emphasizes Western examples of nationalism due to the accepted convention of the West as the birthplace of modern nationalism and the surfeit of Western researchers. It is therefore hardly astonishing that the study of national attitudes has been approached from a universalist viewpoint. Such approaches generally conceive of nationalism as a feature of group interaction that is contingent on processes of in-group favoritism.² According to this paradigm of nationalism, ethnocentrism is most likely engendered by general characteristics common to all group interactions, such as the proclivity for distinctive and positive in-group identity,³ competition for limited resources,⁴ and cognitive stereotypes founded on ingrained biases.⁵

Despite the argument for the existence of a set of common characteristics that underlie all manifestations of nationalism, the evolution of South Korean and Japanese nationalism demonstrates the importance of external factors like historical and regional settings. The universalist interpretation of ethnocentrism and nationalism ignores the influence of the anti-colonial experience in the formation of Japanese and Korean nationalism. It is arguable that the virulent growth of ethnocentrism in

¹ Karasawa, "Patriotism, Nationalism, and Internationalism among Japanese Citizens: An Etic-Emic Approach."

² Silverstein, "Enemy Images: The Psychology of U.S. Attitudes and Cognitions Regarding the Soviet Union."

³ Tajfel and Turner, "The social identity theory of intergroup behavior."

⁴ Sherif et al., *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation*.

⁵ Hamilton and Troler, "Stereotypes and stereotyping: An overview of the cognitive approach."

Japanese and South Korean nationalism was a direct result of security concerns. Erica Benner argues that nationalism “is rooted in security concerns specific to the modern, pluralistic system of sovereign states.”⁶ A fitting example of the effect of security concerns is evident in the tenor of pre-war Japanese nationalism; much of Meiji discourse on the creation of a “Japanese” identity emphasized the need to defend against Western encroachment.⁷ Modern Korean nationalism was irrevocably shaped by the awareness of imperialist encroachment from the West and closer neighbors; in fact, essentialist ethnic and racial elements became incorporated into Korean nationalist discourse to defend against Japanese imperialism.⁸

However, this argument fails to adequately account for the wariness in which Japan and South Korea still regard one another in the face of the potentially serious threats of a rising China and nuclear North Korea. The argument for a security based nationalism also cannot wholly account for growing non-governmental and governmental cooperation between the two countries in spite of historical difficulties. It is clear that other factors beyond realist perceptions of security and ethnocentric nationalism influence the relationship between South Korea and Japan.

The importance of the historical and regional setting is unmistakable in the development of nationalism in Japan and Korea. Older forms of nationalism have predictably lost their appeal as the endeavors of anti-colonialism and post-Cold War emergence lose their relevance. As

⁶ Benner, “Is there a core national doctrine?,” 163.

⁷ Saaler and Koschmann, *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History*, 2.

circumstances shift, Japanese and Korean nationalism have evolved to reflect more relevant concerns. New forms of nationalism for this century are emerging in a region that still has few multilateral institutions, and the relatively slow movement toward an ideal of democratic cooperation is intertwined with the lack of success in resolving a lingering historical animosity that has evolved into an ingrained culture of antagonism.

Structural Factors

The animosity between Japan and South Korea is rooted in a series of unfortunate interactions that culminated in the brutal Japanese colonial occupation of Korea. Hostility and shame thus came to characterize the Japanese-South Korean relationship but the entrenchment of this relationship was possible due to elite mobilization of popular hostility for instrumental purposes and the more dispersed development of a collective sentiment of anger and shame among the masses. Although elites often attempt to manipulate collective sentiment for their own purposes, elites repeatedly find it difficult to reign in the hostility generated by their machinations. However, the development of democratic norms has mitigated some of the effects of this elite-mass cycle in the perpetuation of the antagonistic South Korean –Japanese relationship.

Historical and Regional Setting

Japan and Korea have an often troubled relationship in the contemporary world. As Meiji Japan developed into a Great Power in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it sought to catch up with the Great

⁸ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 22.

Western Powers by carving out an imperial sphere of its own.⁹ According to the worldview of Meiji Japan, the national humiliation wrought by Western intrusion into Japan required aggressive rallying of the population in order to move beyond petty regional differences toward a strong and cohesive nation. The restoration of national prestige and the quest for national cohesion thus heavily guided early Japanese policy regarding Korea. As an early target of Japanese expansionism, Korea was formally annexed by Japan in 1910.¹⁰ Opposition to Japanese rule was quickly suppressed and the economic and strategic needs of Japan, rather than the interests of the Korean population, dictated the course of Korean economic and social development for the next 35 years.¹¹

The political and economic exploitation of Korea was intensified by the pervasive Japanese attitudes of superiority in regards to Koreans and other Asians. The fact that Japan, alone in Asia, had industrialized and managed to compete with Western powers clearly illustrated the superiority of the Japan nation. In comparison, Koreans, Chinese, and other Asian peoples were viewed as embarrassingly backward and inept at modernization. This attitude of superiority translated into omnipresent discrimination against Koreans and others in the education and labor markets. While Asian citizens of the

⁹ Explanations for Japanese imperialism encompass a broad and widely disputed body of work. Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism, 1894-1945*. is a consummate and succinct overview of Japanese imperialism. See Young, *Japan's Total Empire*. for a cultural/ideological emphasis. For a discussion of the economic facets of Japanese imperialism, see Duus, "Economic Dimensions of Meiji Imperialism: the Case of Korea."

¹⁰ After the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, Japan obtained Taiwan from China.

Japanese empire living on the main islands were granted more extensive rights, Korean immigrants to Japan were typically relegated to menial tasks and hard manual labor and generally occupied the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy.¹²

As resistance to Japanese rule grew in its colonial territories, the Japanese mindset of superiority came to be intermingled with feelings of suspicion and apprehension. Anti-colonial protests in occupied Korea were viewed as further proof of the immaturity of the subject peoples. The increase in politically radical elements in the Korean community within Japan provoked anxiety of a subversive Fifth Column within Japan and a consequent threat to Japanese social and political order. Such fears led to progressively stringent supervision of Koreans in Korea and in Japan. Anti-Korean violence was fueled by such apprehensions: the most infamous example took place in the wake of the great Kanto earthquake of 1923, when thousands of resident Koreans were hunted down and killed by Japanese mobs and rioters in Tokyo and Yokohama.¹³

The Japanese oppression of the Korean population intensified during the 1930s and 1940s militarist era. Mandatory assimilation policies were enforced and enormous effort expended in eradicating Korean culture.

¹¹ The debate over the extent of the benefits brought on by Japanese rule is still a sore point in Japanese-ROK interaction. For a balanced overview, see Myers and Peattie, *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*.

¹² Weiner, *Race and Migration in Imperial Japan*, 118.

¹³ The confusion generated by the earthquake led to a large number of sensationalist rumors, the most pernicious reporting that Koreans were taking advantage of the disaster by committing arson, robbery, and poisoning wells. Some newspapers reported such rumors as true fact and thus instigated large-massacres in the hectic aftermath of the earthquake.

Hundreds of thousands of Koreans were forcibly conscripted into the Japanese military and used as slave labor in Japan and abroad in Japanese colonial possessions.¹⁴ As many as 200,000 women were coerced or kidnapped to serve as captive prostitutes for the Japanese army (the so-called comfort women).¹⁵

At the end of WWII, the Japanese occupation of Korea disintegrated and the majority of Koreans living in Japan were repatriated. However, a considerable number— as many as 800,000— remained in Japan. Discriminatory sentiment against Koreans that had originated in Japanese colonial perceptions of Koreans perpetuated itself in the postwar period. The fear of a Korean Fifth Column reemerged when Korean workers joined in the Communist workers movement or formed criminal gangs.¹⁶ Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru memorably compared resident Koreans to ants residing within the belly of a lion, which could potentially kill the lion from within. Such apprehensions motivated Yoshida and other influential Japanese elites to lobby General MacArthur for an increase in the powers of the police so that control could be exerted on the so-called Three People's Problem: the resident Korean, Chinese, and Taiwanese populations in Japan. The materialization of a Communist North Korea— which could potentially usurp the loyalty of a substantial portion of the resident Korean population—and the outbreak of the Korean War eventually persuaded the American occupation authorities to

¹⁴ Although Koreans had been actively recruited and voluntarily enlisted in the Japanese military since 1938, mandatory conscription did not occur until 1944.

¹⁵ Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution*, 28.

acquiesce to these requests. Resident Koreans, including those who had served in the Japanese military or had been victims of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were stripped of their Japanese citizenship and its associated rights and benefits.¹⁷

Although superficially aligned with Japan through its security relationship with the United States, powerful anti-Japanese sentiment saturated South Korean elite and popular opinion and perceptions. In many ways, modern Korean nationalism had been forged in the crucible of Japanese colonial domination of Korea; consequently, many of the new ROK's most revered figures were former leaders of the anti-colonial movement. Japan's continued mistreatment of its resident Korean population, as well as patronizing remarks by senior Japanese government officials, did little to change popular and elite level anti-Japanese animosity in South Korea.¹⁸

The Republic of Korea vigorously drew on anti-Japanese symbols to solidify the legitimacy of the government. For example, a multitude of national monuments were erected in honor of Korean independence activists and war dead.¹⁹ Japanese cultural products, including music and theater,

¹⁶ David Kaplan and Alec Dubro, *Yakuza: The Expanded Edition* (New York: Macmillan, 2003).

¹⁷ (Sept 26, 2000).

¹⁸ For a more detailed analysis of the development of anti-Japanese sentiments in Korea in the early Cold War period, see Cheong Sung-Hwa, *The Politics of Anti-Japanese Sentiment in Korea: Japanese-South Korean Relations under American Occupation, 1945– 1952* (Westport: Greenwood, 1991).

¹⁹ Hong Kal, "The Aesthetic Construction of Ethnic Nationalism."

were banned under the caption of “unhealthy products.”²⁰ Such distaste for Japan was also more than apparent in the political realm.

Japanese–ROK diplomatic relations were hampered by deeply rooted feelings of mutual antipathy and bitter recriminations. The extreme personal dislike Rhee Syngman and Yoshida Shigeru harbored for each other readily encapsulates the political climate between their two respective nations; the normalization of Japan-ROK relations remained impossible while Rhee and Yoshida remained in power. Despite American machinations to generate productive dialogue between the two leaders, formal normalization was not affirmed until Park Chung Hee and Sato Eisaku came into power.²¹

The distant relationship between the ROK and Japan was facilitated by the strategic realities of the 1950s. The nature of American involvement in the East Asian region and their preoccupation with Cold War security concerns resulted in a dearth of horizontal networking between the ROK and Japan. Possibilities for reconciliation and multilateral institutions also suffered from a reluctance to address historical sources of animosity and the American reluctance to lose influence over its Asian allies during the Cold War. The involvement of an external hegemon subsequently resulted in a closer alignment and dependence on the US. For Japan, a closer strategic relationship with South Korea signified a very real risk of entanglement in an Asian land war. Indeed, Yoshida Shigeru deliberately delayed Japanese rearmament so that the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) did not formally come into

²⁰ “South Korea to ease ban on Japan cultural goods.”

²¹ Cha, “Hate, Power, and Identity in Japan–Korea Security,” 314.

existence until 1955, well after the armistice of 1953 had ended military operations on the Korean peninsula.²²

With the ostensible conclusion of the Korean War in 1953, Japan-ROK relations increased in quantity if not quality. In the 1960s, pressures for closer relations between the two countries intensified. Faced with a rapidly deteriorating situation in South Vietnam, the U.S. State Department stepped up its efforts to encourage a regional dialogue between its two chief Asian allies. At this point, postwar reconstruction efforts had appreciably consolidated Japan and more consideration could be given to external matters; this willingness to engage manifested itself in several Japan-led regional collaborative efforts in the 1960s. Simultaneously, President Park Chung Hee was able to suppress public criticism of engagement with Japan in order to gain valuable Japanese aid and investment.

Public criticism and opposition to a closer relationship was widespread and vehement in both Japan and the ROK. South Korean protestors accused the Korean government of betraying the Korean nation to the enemy. In Japan, leftist students and protestors cautioned that closer engagement would further advance Japanese dependence on American regional domination. Despite these factors, Japanese and Korean leaders persevered and signed a treaty normalizing their diplomatic relations in 1965 after fourteen years of bitter and often turbulent negotiations.

²² Green, *Japan's Reluctant Realism*, 113-114.

The treaty was able to establish a framework for increased economic trade and investment while providing a foundation for discussion of topics like fishing rights and the return of Korean art treasures and valuable cultural objects which had been stolen during the Japanese occupation of Korea. The treaty produced a considerable improvement in the legal status of ethnic Koreans residing in Japan who claimed South Korean citizenship. However, the treaty also established the basis for future avoidance of the issue of historical injustices and future acrimony.

Japan supplied \$500 million in aid to the Korean government and arranged for the resolution of outstanding property claims in accordance with the Agreement on Economic Cooperation and Property Rights. The Japanese government was adamant that these payments were not to be construed as reparations or compensation for past injustices; however, this interpretation conflicted with Korean elite and domestic perceptions. The Japanese government insisted that demands for recompense by Korean comfort women and other Korean individuals had been resolved and that the Japan was under no legal obligation to recognize such claims. Unsurprisingly, the Korean government strongly resented the Japanese refusal to recognize the claims of individual Korean citizens; Japan emphasized that the treaty was not applicable to Comfort Women, Korean A-bomb survivors, and other casualties of Japanese imperial rule.²³

Japan and the ROK also possessed sharply divergent interpretations of Article 2 of the 1965 Basic Relations Treaty, which stated that “all applicable

treaties and agreements, including the Treaty of Annexation of August 22, 1910, and all previously signed treaties between the Korean Empire and the Empire of Japan, are considered to be already null and void.”²⁴ The Korean government interpreted the phrase “null and void” to mean that Japan now recognized that the Treaty of Annexation was invalid; according to this explanation, all previous treaties were considered illegal and void. The Japanese Diet ruled that “null and void” indicated the legal validity of any signed treaties lasted until the establishment of the ROK in 1948. According to this historical interpretation, no apology or compensation was owed for Japanese atrocities as the Japanese takeover of Korea had been mutually agreed upon.²⁵

These divergent interpretations entrenched the history issue as a continuous source of tension. Japan-ROK interactions thus took on the appearance of a perpetual cycle, wherein Japanese elites—including even quite liberal members of such as Socialist Prime Minister Murayama Tomoichi—would claim that the colonial guilt issue had been adequately resolved by the 1965 treaty and advocate a sanitized version of modern Japanese history that ignored or downplayed the suffering inflicted on the Korean people. This discounting of the costs of Japanese imperialism would provoke mass outrage in Korea and outbursts of anti-Japanese sentiment.

²³ Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 320-21.

²⁴ Totsuka, “Postwar responsibilities of Japan: “Comfort Women”, military sexual slavery.” Karasawa, “Patriotism, Nationalism, and Internationalism Among Japanese Citizens: An Etic-Emic Approach.”

²⁵ Berger, “The Construction of Antagonism: The History Problem in Japan's Foreign Relations,” 73-4.

The Japanese government would then be pressured to resist Korean demands for apology and justice by conservative elements.²⁶ To placate both sides, the Japanese government would find some face-saving mechanism to placate Korean protestors; typically officials responsible for making provocative statements would be forced to resign. At the same time, Japanese officials would retreat behind opaque legalistic arguments based on the 1965 treaty in order to avoid admitting that Japan bore any legal or moral obligation for its past actions, thus laying the groundwork for the next cycle of bilateral acrimony and recrimination.

The majority of Japanese proposals for regional cooperation were unsuccessful in the 1960s. Because most of the initiatives were nongovernmental, the greater collaboration generated in business circles were “merely associational, and not involving government in any significant way.”²⁷ A great deal of animosity also stood in the way of great regional cooperation, especially on the part of historical colonies of Japan. The lack of American enthusiasm in Asian regionalism also inhibited the growth of Asian regionalism.

Over the course of the Cold War, Japan and the ROK were inevitably led to increase their ties with one another. Common geopolitical and economic interests, buttressed by active U.S. encouragement of dialogue between the two, made the case for greater cooperation strong and

²⁶ Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945-2005*. For an analysis focusing on the role of Japanese intellectuals and cultural figures in shaping Japanese views, see Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War and Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945– 1970* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

compelling.²⁸ However, the depth of the historically rooted animosity between the two sides, and the strength of the perverse political mechanisms that sustained such hostile sentiments, helped ensure that the two sides never managed to get beyond a thin, U.S.-mediated alignment against the backdrop of bitter antagonism.

On the surface, Japan and South Korea appear to be the most natural allies in the region with their similar capitalist systems, adoption of Western culture, and alliances with America. Both nations are democratic; the democratic peace theory posits that both nations would perceive the other as less of a threat than the non-democratic regimes of Northeast Asia. Thus, democratic norms and the threat represented by North Korea and a rising China might act as sufficient motivation for the two nations to move beyond the past. As the two nations appear to be ripe for a closer alliance, mutual need might generate reconciliation in spite of contentious Japanese and South Korean nationalisms.

²⁷ Crone, "Does Hegemony Matter?," 524.

²⁸ Paradoxically, while the United States worked hard to encourage cooperation between its two chief regional allies, the existence of each country's bilateral security relationship may have allowed the two sides to keep their distance. It is arguable that the absence of American involvement would have led to greater cooperation between Japan and South Korea.

II Origins of Korean Nationalism

It is generally accepted that Korean nationalism was born in the 35 years between the fall of the Chosŏn Dynasty in 1910 and the conclusion of Japanese rule in 1945.¹ Prior to the Japanese annexation of Korea, several factors and circumstances worked together to stifle the emergence of nationalism in Korea. The strong tradition of Confucian reverence of China and the large distance between the *yangban* elite and peasantry majority ensured that pre-colonial Korea did not conceive of nation as a categorical identity.

Korea, during the reign of the Chosŏn state, identified itself as a “small China” (*sochunghwa*, 小中華) located within a China-centric regional order.² For Chosŏn Koreans, China fulfilled the role of a “big country” capable of rendering protection and security in return for tribute. According to this worldview, other neighboring countries – such as Japan – were regarded as barbarians; this relationship was clearly hierarchical and rigidly defined.³ The Chosŏn monarchs chose to abide by this Sino-centric order of the universe for a variety of motives: the chief among them being the negation of Chinese

¹ The Chosŏn state, also known as the Yi dynasty, was founded after the overthrow of the kingdom of Goryeo in 1392 and lasted until the Japanese deposition of Emperor Sunjong in 1910.

² Kimura, “Why Did the Chosun Dynasty Fail to Modernize? Another Experience of “Modernization from Above” in Korea,” 128.

³ The Yi monarchs officially subordinated themselves to the Chinese emperors who legitimized every monarch of the Chosŏn Dynasty. Their relationship was structured by the ritual Ming tributary system that required regular visits by envoys. The Chosŏn Dynasty felt secure in its position as civilized second-ranking people or *sochungwha*.

military threat and legitimation of Chosŏn rule.⁴ Although outwardly content with their status as *sochungwha*, Chosŏn elites were also often chagrined by the military weakness implicit in the Chosŏn Korea's subordination to China.

The *yangban* elite were deeply invested in the Confucian orthodoxy which perpetuated Chosŏn subordination to China as they maintained their own legitimacy through the entrenchment of Confucian ideals.⁵ Knowledge of the Confucian classics, along with other aspects of Chinese culture— like poetry and political philosophy—effectively separated the elite from the masses; this buffer was inherent in the civil service examinations which nominally promoted a meritocratic system but in actuality only secured the advancement of candidates with the resources to study the Confucian classics. Confident in the strength of the “learning of the Confucian Way” (*tohak*), the Chosŏn elite chose to align themselves with a Confucian system of moral values and virtue that superseded state and local beliefs and practices.⁶ This pervasive foreign culture bound the elites of the Sino-centric world together and circulated an “East Asian cosmopolitanism” that actively separated the Chosŏn elite from the rest of the population.⁷ This historical fact supports the

⁴ Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925*, 16.

⁵ The *yangban* elite were part of the traditional ruling class or nobles of dynastic Korea during the Joseon Dynasty. Either landed or unlanded aristocracy who comprised the Confucian idea of a "scholarly official," most fulfilled administrative and petty bureaucratic roles in Korea's traditional agrarian bureaucracy. The *yangban* title was conferred to those individuals who passed state-sponsored civil service exams. Upon passing such exams ("과거"), which tested one's knowledge of Chinese characters and the Confucian classics, a person was usually assigned to a government position.

⁶ Palais, “Nationalism: Good or Bad?,” 217.

⁷ Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925*, 18.

idea of a nonexistent or minimally articulated sense of Korean national identity during the Chosŏn Dynasty.

Chosŏn Korea was characterized by its primarily agrarian society administered by *yangban* bureaucrats. A predominantly rural society facilitated a distant relationship between the elite and masses: “the Korean masses...were neither linked closely to the central government nor were they a source of legitimacy for government authority.”⁸ This distance from the elite did not preclude the common perception of an ethnic solidarity that had crystallized through decades of secure borders and minimal immigration into a homogenization of culture and ethnicity. As the rigid formality of Confucian norms failed to offer viable solutions for the rapidly changing world order, the Chosŏn elite and masses interacted in novel ways not dictated by strict Confucian etiquette in an effort to defend the sovereignty of a nation yet to cohere.

Chosŏn’s Decline

The Sino-centric view adopted by Chosŏn Koreans also legitimated Chosŏn superiority over Japan as Japan was both geographically and philosophically distant from the center of Sinic Confucianism. This worldview was further validated by Korea’s traditional role as mediator between Chinese culture and Japan.⁹ The Japanese invasions in 1592-1593 and 1597-1598 were thus a shock to Korean complacency.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹ Chung, “Changing Korean Perceptions of Japan on the Eve of Modern Transformation: The Case of Neo-Confucian Yangban Intellectuals,” 40.

The Japanese and Manchu invasions of Chosŏn Korea at the end of the sixteenth and middle of the seventeenth century hastened the decline of the Chosŏn dynasty while also facilitating a national consciousness. The territorial consolidation of Japan under Hideyoshi Toyotomi allowed the Japanese to invade Chosŏn Korea in an attempt to subdue and conquer Ming China. Although the Chosŏn Koreans were able to repel the Japanese invasions, the Korean accomplishment remained a pyrrhic victory; the peninsula had been ravaged by the struggle and famine and disease found easy victims in the multitude of refugees without homes.¹¹ The scorched earth policy by which the Japanese invading forces had abided by had ensured that Korea's agricultural economy was left in tatters. By comparison, Japan obviously endured far less in terms of collateral damage. The two Japanese invasions of Korea cemented "a lasting antipathy toward the Japanese, now commonly referred to as island "dwarfs."¹²

The Manchu invasions of 1627 and 1637 were a consequence of the Manchu attempt to oust the Ming dynasty. While tributary relations were established between Chosŏn Korea and the new Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1911), Chosŏn Koreans were dismayed at the evidence of a shifting world order. The weakness of the traditional protector revealed the limitations of the Chosŏn

¹⁰ The two Japanese invasions of Chosŏn Korea are also known as Hideyoshi's invasions of Korea, the Seven Year War and the Imjin War (임진왜란 - lit. Japanese Invasion of the Imjin Year), in reference to the "Imjin (壬辰)" year of the sexagenary cycle in Korean.

¹¹ Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 77.

¹² Both Chinese and Korean sources frequently referred to the Japanese as "dwarfs" in a play on the Chinese logograph traditionally used to designate Japan. Hawley, *The Imjin War*, 55.

state's ability to manage a rapidly changing world; many elites were motivated to agitate for reform in hopes of maintaining Korean security.

Elite dissatisfaction with the Chosŏn government was a palpable force that had been growing in reaction to less than competent leadership during both the Japanese and Manchu invasions of Korea. This dissatisfaction culminated in the Chosŏn monarch's forced kowtow to the Manchu emperor, Taizong, in acknowledgement of a tributary relationship in 1637. Yu Songnyong, a *yangban* elite who had been prime minister at the beginning of the first Japanese invasion in 1592, chronicled the war from his unique position in *The Book of Corrections*. What is particularly striking is the temperate way in which Yu describes Japanese atrocities and the Japanese themselves. In describing the aftermath of the pillage of Seoul, Yu writes:

The corpses of both men and horses, scattered here and there, gave out such a strong stench that people passed by hurriedly, covering their noses. All the houses and buildings, private or public, were completely gone. Only a few that were used as the quarters of the enemy soldiers were still standing at the bottom of Mt. Namsam in the east side of Sungnyemun Gate. The buildings including the Ancestral Shrine of the Royal Lineage, the three palaces, the belfry, and all the government offices and schools, which used to in the north above the main street, were burned to ashes.¹³

Despite the brutality of such images, Yu describes the destruction of Seoul in an understated manner; Yu rarely explicitly blames the Japanese for committing wrongs, opting rather to detail what happened.

¹³ Yu, *The Book of Corrections: Reflections on the National Crisis during the Japanese Invasion of Korea, 1592-1598*, 185-186.

The majority of his disdain is reserved for the Chosŏn government and the lack of leadership that was sorely needed at the beginning of Hideyoshi's invasion. In describing how the general incompetence of the military leadership led to a weak Korea, Yu acerbically describes the Vice Minister of War, Sin Ip, as the vain idiot directly responsible for the hideous Korean defeat at Tangeumdae.¹⁴ However, Yu's focus on Korean weakness was not merely a chastisement of the Chosŏn government but also an attempt to salvage Korean pride and belief in their natural superiority over the Japanese. According to Yu, the Korean acknowledgment of selfish weakness could negate the confirmation of Japanese military strength and Korean overreliance on China.

In contrast, the Korean people aimed their animosity at the invaders instead of the weak ruling class that had failed to protect them. The xenophobic tendencies of the masses were provoked by the two invasions from the neighboring barbarians and provided a foundation for a fledgling national consciousness.¹⁵ However, the years after the Japanese and Manchu invasions were relatively peaceful and free of any overt foreign encroachment that could arouse nationalist sentiment on a mass scale.

Imperialism and Korea

The concept of the nation-state in its Western form was imported to Korea in the late nineteenth century. Its initial introduction was founded on imperialist encroachment, which came from the West and Korea's neighbors.

¹⁴ Hawley, *The Imjin War*, 154-157.

¹⁵ Kim, *The History of Korea*, 86.

The Korean Peninsula was attractive for both Japan and Russia. The former wanted to expand their power toward the Eurasian continent, and the latter had always been longing to secure more southern seaports. China also wanted to maintain their traditional hold over Korea. Therefore, Korea faced involvement in several power struggles; including the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05.

During this time, Koreans witnessed the increasing fragility of the long-standing Chinese regional order. In response to the increasingly hostile international environment, Korean nationalists realized that they should redefine Korean identity not as a part of a diminishing China but as a new and separate nation of their own. Therefore, questions of identity and national security gained a prominence that had not been seen in Korea before. However, these were relatively new questions for Korean people who had been more or less satisfied with their traditional order for almost five hundred years. While most Koreans were numbed by fear and uncertainty, Japan—long regarded as the country of uncivilized barbarians — annexed Korea as a colonial territory in 1910. The Korean world view and their idea of the traditional chain of order collapsed.

Colonial Korea

The pervasive fear of external threats accelerated the formation of a coherent Korean nation; the tenor of rising nationalist discourse explains the clear collectivist nature of modern Korean nationalism. The endeavor to search for authentic individuality in colonial Korea was neglected or suppressed, given the historical condition which stressed internal solidarity

and submission to collectivist goals. Korean nationalist leaders in the colonial period downplayed individual freedom and rights in favor of national survival. In 1932, Yi Kwangsu— one of the most prolific writers and influential intellectuals of the colonial period—championed collectivism over individualism in “Three Basic Tasks for Korean National Movements.” He defined a nation as an “eternal being,” something that would remain immortal and immutable in the face of external pressure.¹⁶ Therefore, mortal individuals should be willing to sacrifice themselves for the Korean nation. The famous historian Shin Chaeho’s view of the nation as “an organic body” was also favored by many nationalists. He defines Korean *minjok* as “a people of spirit... descended through a single pure blood line.”¹⁷ The dominance of the idea of organic nationalism constrained the ideological space available for individualism or liberalism in the public sphere. Korean nationalist leaders were eager to transform the masses of the Chosŏn Dynasty into a Korean nation in order to counteract Japanese assimilation policies.

In the hasty construction of a modern nation for the sake of survival, the “other” was utilized as a convenient scapegoat in its capacity as the enemy. Deprived of the circumstances necessary to perceive the “other” as anything other than the enemy, Korean identity became defined as a simple opposition of “other.” In short, “we” was more identified in the rejection of others rather than by recognizing who “we” are. A good example is the way in which

¹⁶ Yi Kwangsu, “Three Basic Tasks for Korean National Movements,” in *Collection of Yi Kwangsu’s Writings*, vol. 17 (Seoul: Samjungdang, 1962), Quoted in Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism*, p. 48.

contemporary Koreans continue to define “Koreanness” in an essentialist way that divides the world into a simplistic dichotomy of “us” and “them” while gaining legitimacy from this exclusive definition.

It is commonly believed that Korea is an ethnically homogeneous society where national and ethnic boundaries are indistinguishable. The myth of a common ethnic/national origin and the idea of a shared “pure blood” reinforce the belief that Korea has been, is and should be one large kinship group which shares language, history, culture, life style, tradition, institution, customs as well as political institutions. From this perspective, the division of Korea between North and South is an extreme deviation that defies the natural order. As Korea is composed of Koreans (an ethnically and racially homogeneous group) and partly/non-Korean (Korean citizens of partly different ethnic descent or naturalized citizens, or ethnic Koreans with different nationality), the emphasis on ethnic purity is often a source of discord in nationalist dialogue.

Nationalism is a continuously evolving discourse that is utilized by both the masses and elites in order to accomplish changing goals and adapt to shifting external circumstances. In this next chapter, the way in which ‘Koreanness’ is perceived and how it is (re)defined and who ‘Koreans’ are in terms of ethnicity and nationalism will be utilized to analyze the ethnic and national boundaries of Korea.¹⁸ The historical trajectories of the changing

¹⁷ Sin Ch’aeho, *Collected Works of Sin Ch’aeho* (Seoul: Tanjae Sin Ch’aeho sŏnsaeng kinyŏm saŏphoe, 1982), p. 160.

¹⁸ Koreans regard themselves as a homogeneous group racially as well as ethnically and thus distinguish themselves from Japanese or Chinese in those terms. Although the idea of

boundaries of ethnicity and nation since the colonial period, the origin of ethnic nationalism in colonial times, and how the division of Korea, the Korean War and immigration have changed structural conditions and affected people's conception of the Korean nation will also be discussed.

Nationalism and Colonialism

There are many theories of nationalism, but among them, Benedict Anderson's theory persuasively argues that nationalism first emerged in Europe and diffused to the colonial world. To Anderson, the key mechanism in the process of diffusion of nationalism is imitation by native elites, which is made possible by print capitalism.¹⁹ However, Anderson does not account for the difference between colonizer and colonized. Chatterjee's criticism focuses on Anderson's failure to clarify how anticolonial nationalism is formed on the basis of disparity with colonial culture. According to Chatterjee, Anderson only sees a strategy of imitation, and ignores the important dimension of rejection.²⁰ Additionally, Calhoun also criticizes the simplistic view of national formation and highlights the double-sided characteristic of colonial nationalism, saying that "colonial struggle drives forward even while it resisted it."²¹

Chae explains specifically how Japan appropriated ethnic nationalism from the West, and how it is diffused within Korea. He makes the distinction

significant racial differentiation between East Asians is popularly ascribed to in Korea and Japan, actual genetic differentiation is minimal enough to negate the idea of two separate unique racial groups.

Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 31.

¹⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 61.

²⁰ Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 38.

between hegemonic inscription and ideological contestation, and argues that the abstract form of nation—nationhood—is hegemonically inscribed from the West to Japan, and from Japan to Korea.²² And this hegemonically inscribed sense of nation is represented as an ideological contestation which takes the form of a nationalism that originated domestically. This domestic nationalism is based on the historical, geographical, cultural difference between the colonizer and colonized—which is ethnicity. By this process, the growth of ethnic nationalism was nurtured in colonial Korea: ethnicity became the basis for a unifying national consciousness.²³

It is true that Korean nationalism in this period was full of positive and serious efforts for finding the national essence of Korea. In this respect, Korean nationalism arose primarily as a response to imperialism. Against brutal Japanese assimilation policies like the mandatory usage of the Japanese language and the changing of family names to Japanese surnames, Korean nationalists appreciated the value of their own history and language.²⁴ Increased literacy and education after the turn of the twentieth century spread

²¹ Calhoun, *Nationalism*, 108.

²² Chae, “Non-Western colonial rule and its aftermath: Postcolonial state formation in south Korea.”

²³ It is very hard to define and distinguish the two concepts. Generally ethnicity refers to a group of people who share a common decent and culture such as customs, language, history, and so on. Nation is distinguished from ethnicity in that it involves political community. (Calhoun 1997; Smith 1991).

²⁴ The most prominent Korean historians are from this period, including Sin Ch’aeho, Pak Ŭnsik, Paek Namun, Ch’oe Hyōnbae, and Chŭng Inbo. For example, Sin Ch’aeho proclaimed “Without the nation, there is no history; without history, the nation cannot have a clear perception of the state.” Chu Sigyōng was the foremost proponent of the Korean alphabet *han’gŭl*. He thought Korean language contained the essential spirit of Korean nation. For more historical details, see Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism*, pp. 46-54.

nationalism to wider circles of Korean society, and was a mass phenomenon by 1920.²⁵ The efforts to strive against Japanese assimilation were strengthened by Japanese opposition. Korean people wanted to be Korean, not Japanese.

At this time, Western ideas and thoughts about civilization, enlightenment, Social Darwinism, and liberalism were introduced to Korea. Under the widespread atmosphere of fear, Social Darwinism gained an influential role in this period. When it was introduced to East Asia, it “not only offered a conceptual framework to explain current national inequalities but also worked to guide East Asian responses to the “civilizing” West.”²⁶ The power and wealth of the Western nation-states became the model to be emulated for survival.

Desperation drove Westernization attempts as self-preservation became the utmost goal. However, Koreans desired Westernization in order to gain a foundation for fighting against Japanization. Moreover, in order to achieve this end, nationalism became more aggressive and antagonistic. In short, nationalism arose primarily in opposition to imperialism, but gradually shifted to adopt imperialist qualities. In this context, Partha Chatterjee argues that nationalism is also equally guilty of imitating the imperialistic oppressors in the very act of resisting them.²⁷ For example, in Ch’oe Namsŏn’s “Korea-centered view,” Korea was depicted as “a central nation in

²⁵ Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925*, 13.

²⁶ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 29.

²⁷ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

world history, placed higher than Japan or China.”²⁸ Identification is presented as not a matter of mutual recognition but as something intrinsically tied to the denigration of others. The link between denigration of out-groups and nationalism illustrates the essential similarity of imperialism and nationalism. Ko Misook argues that “in the Korean case, nationalism was born in the womb of imperialism, and it perfected itself by copying imperialism.”²⁹ If nationalism is merely the desire for self-determination, the Korean desire for Westernization is inimical to the establishment of a pure Korean nationalism. The troubled relationship between Korean nationalism and imperialist control is evident in the contested nationalisms that characterized post-WWII Korean mass-elite relations.

The relationship between Korean nationalism and imperialism is best represented in March First movement. On March 1 1919, hundreds of thousands of Koreans demonstrated for Korea’s natural right for independence. Inspired by Wilsonian principles of national autonomy and self-determination, leading intellectuals declared independence, asserting Korea’s liberty and equality within the world of nations. Begun in Seoul and P’yŏngyang, Korea’s two largest cities, the movement quickly spread throughout the country, mobilizing more than one million people.³⁰ Although the demonstration was nonviolent and peaceful, it was aggressively suppressed by the Japanese military. This movement provoked a significant

²⁸ Allen Chizuko, “Northeast Asia Centered around Korea,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 49, 1990, 803.

²⁹ Ko Misook, *Searching for the origin of Korean Modernity* (Seoul: Ch’aek sesang, 2001), 39.

change in Japanese colonial policies. For the first nine years of annexation, Japan had ruled Korea harshly with unremitting repression. The *budan seiji*, or military government, was replaced by a new colonial policy of cultural rule, *bunka seiji*, after the March First movement. Although many scholars argue that this was a sly policy that brought about invisible but much stronger surveillance and controls, the March First movement gave a vivid impression of national solidarity in response to harsh Japanese rule.

³⁰ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 43.

III Modern Korean Nationalism

The March First movement of 1919 marked an important catalyst in the development of Korean nationalism; Korean nationalism had become an experience of the masses, united against the rule of Japanese colonialism. The decade of brutal Japanese rule had succeeded in galvanizing a pervasive Korean national consciousness eager to declare Korea independent from the iniquities of Japanese authority. Thus, it is puzzling that a national consciousness, founded in such adversarial conditions, has allowed for general improvement in relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea (hereafter, ROK or South Korea).

Why has the relationship between Japan and the ROK— two countries with a long antagonistic history – significantly improved since the mid-1990s? The relationship between the government and the masses in both countries provides an interesting answer. In the case of South Korea, democratization following the late 1980s has exerted significant influence on the improvement of Japan-ROK relations.¹

The democratization process of South Korea has brought about two different versions of a democratic peace. One is an active democratic peace where decentralization and the growth of civil society, stemming from South Korean democratization, have served as a means of improving the

¹ Alternative perspectives based on security, economic imperatives, and political leadership can partially explain the improved relationship between Japan and South Korea, but they are not sufficient to address the overall enhanced relationship between the two countries. North Korean nuclear /missile threats, the 1997 Korean economic crisis, and the roles of South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo are independent

relationship between Japan and South Korea.² Decentralization in South Korea has facilitated an increase in the number of partnerships between local governments within Japan and the ROK, providing both people with more opportunities to understand the other. The growth of civil society in South Korea has also encouraged an exchange of ideas as well as an increase in cooperative studies. All of the above has contributed to the mitigation of the antagonistic relationship between Japan and South Korea.

The other version of democratic peace is a passive one; democratic norms and institutions, arising from the democratic transition and consolidation of South Korea, have played a pivotal role in easing conflicts engendered by the historical tension that exists between the two neighboring countries. The emergence of democratic norms in the ROK, such as political compromise, nonviolence, and peaceful conflict resolution, has played an affirmative role in the constraint of Korea's acrimonious attitude regarding Japan. Democratic institutions, including a system of checks and balances and the division of power, have also functioned as a regulating mechanism by preventing the unnecessary escalation of disputes.

The general dynamics of contemporary Japan-South Korea relations will first be examined in order to establish an independent context; the improved relationship between the past enemies will function as the

variables in each hypothesis. The detailed critical assessments of those hypotheses are given in a later section.

² The two adjectives 'active and passive' are differentiated in the sense that the impacts of decentralization and civil society on Japan-ROK relations are more progressive in improving the relationship than ones of democratic norms and institutions.

dependent variable. After exploring the processes of democratic transition and consolidation in South Korea, the causal mechanisms of South Korea's democratization and the improvement of Japan-ROK relations will be analyzed. Three alternative perspectives, which emphasize security, economic imperatives, and political leadership, will then be evaluated.

Dynamics of Japan-South Korea Relations

Deeply rooted antagonisms of the past can make it difficult to achieve a successful reconciliation between regional actors.³ Although almost sixty years have passed since the dissolution of Japanese colonial rule over Korea in 1945, Japan-ROK relations are still very much affected by a variety of historical disputes. Among them are Japanese history textbooks, territorial disputes over an islet called Dokdo/Takeshima, Japanese official visits to Yasukuni Shrine, comfort women, and forced laborers.⁴

The fervor generated by the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute, official visits to Yasukuni Shrine, and the issue of the comfort women have particularly aggravated Korean sentiment regarding Japan; much of the general Korean

³ Crocker, "Reckoning with Past Wrongs: A Normative Framework," 60-61.; First, in the most minimal account, reconciliation is regarded as simple coexistence in the sense that instead of fighting each other, previous opponents comply with the law. Second, while former enemies may continue to disagree and even to be adversaries, they must not only live together without violence, but also respect each other as fellow citizens. Third, the most robust concept of reconciliation is to entail forgiveness, mercy, shared comprehensive vision, mutual healing, or harmony. A successful reconciliation in this paper means the third concept of reconciliation.

⁴ Comfort women are defined as women drafted for military sexual slavery by Japan during the Japanese colonial period. The Japanese government frequently approved distorted Japanese history textbooks published by right wing groups, which asserts Japanese sovereignty over Dokdo and glosses over past wrongs such as comfort women and forced laborers. Official visits to Yasukuni Shrine, where Japan's Class A World War II criminals are enshrined, also provoke protests from China and Korea.

protests regarding Japan address the outrage over these issues.⁵ On Feb 23, 2005, a Japanese prefectural assembly decided to enact a bill designating February 22 as “Takeshima Day.”⁶ On the same day, the Japanese ambassador to South Korea stated Japan’s sovereignty over Dokdo at a press conference for the foreign media held in Seoul. On April 6, 2005, the Japanese government announced the approval of new history textbooks that assert Japanese sovereignty over Dokdo and markedly exclude accounts of wartime wrongs such as comfort women and forced laborers.⁷

The origin of the historical antagonism between Japan and South Korea is found in the 1905 Japanese establishment of a protectorate over Korea.⁸ This event dramatically altered the relationship that the two neighbors had long maintained. Japan went on to violate Korea’s sovereignty, then finally annexed Korea in 1910. For the next thirty six years, Koreans suffered under relentless Japanese political repression, economic exploitation, cultural suppression, and the widespread violation of human rights.⁹

The expression, “a close but distant country,” has become a particularly apt description of the relationship between Japan and South Korea since the

⁵ The xenophobic fervor exhibited in Korean opinion of Japan is most evident in the frequent protests regarding the Takeshima/Dokdo dispute; for examples of the extremes that Korean protestors reach in their protest of Yasukuni Shrine visits, see “In pictures.”; “Korean farmer's 'hara-kiri' protest.”

⁶ ChungAng Daily, February 24, 2005.

⁷ Donga Daily, Apr. 06, 2005.

For more about the South Korean protests in reaction to the Japanese revision of history textbooks, see Faiola, “Japanese Schoolbooks Anger S. Korea, China (washingtonpost.com).”

⁸ Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 141-142.

⁹ Lee, *Japan and Korea*, 1-3..

liberation of Korea in 1945. The expression originates from the geographically close but psychologically distant nature of the two countries. From the Korean perspective, the bitter memories and the legacy of Japanese colonial rule have facilitated the perception of Japan as an object of distrust and anger. From the Japanese point of view, South Korea was a disdainful counterpart prone to authoritarian political practices insistent on using Japanese past wrongs as leverage in economic and political relations.¹⁰

Prior to the democratization of the ROK, two countervailing dynamics dominated the Japan-ROK relationship. One was a historical antagonism that prevented Japan and South Korea from achieving genuine improvements in bilateral relations. In contradiction to this antagonism, *realpolitik* concerns related to security and the economy also became important to the Japan-ROK relationship; such concerns often compelled pragmatic cooperation between the two countries. Although this cooperation has been substantive at times, antagonistic disputes frequently impeded the expansion of a meaningful cooperative relationship.

While mutual fears of U.S. abandonment compelled Japan and South Korea to promote bilateral cooperation, the level of American commitment to the security of both nations also complicated Japan-ROK relations. From 1969-71 and 1975-79, U.S. disengagement generated greater cooperation in Japan-ROK relations, while U.S. engagement during the early 1970s and the

¹⁰ Victor D. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The US-Korea-Japan Security Triangle*, (Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 10-11.

1980s coincided with frictions between Japan and South Korea.¹¹ Although American involvement in East Asia—due to its bilateral structure—has heavily affected the relationship dynamics between the two countries during the Cold War, Cha mistakenly equates the transitory cooperation generated by fears of American abandonment with true reconciliation. The uneasy and fleeting engagement generated by American disengagement is not equivalent to the genuine improvement of Japan-South Korea relations. Hence, Japan-ROK relations have ranged from intensive confrontation to reluctant cooperation in the post-war period.

The ROK democratization in the late 1980s introduced another dynamic with significant influence on the relationship between Japan and South Korea. The rise of decentralization and the consolidation of civil society in South Korea have played a positive role in relations between the former adversaries. The cultivation of democratic norms and institutions in the ROK has also reduced the intensity of historical antagonism and prevented the escalation of disputes. Prior to expanding these arguments, the transformation of Japan-ROK relations since the late 1980s, particularly in the mid-1990s, will be described.

Transformation of Japan-ROK Relations

The democratic transition and consolidation in South Korea laid the groundwork for change in Japan-ROK relations. In comparison to previous authoritarian periods, the period following the mid-1990s has notably showed

¹¹ Ibid., 204-205.

the changed pattern of the relationship between Japan and South Korea. The two past adversaries have made headway toward an improved relationship, although the thick reconciliation achieved between Germany and France has not yet been reached between Japan and South Korea.¹²

Four indicators are useful in deconstructing the promotion of Japan-ROK relations. The first notable change in the relationship is the increase of governmental and nongovernmental dialogue channels between Japan and South Korea. From 1965 to 1985, the annual Joint Ministerial Conference was the only regularly held forum for official government exchanges. Imitating the mode of interaction between liberal democracies, Japan and South Korea expanded the frequency and the diversity of governmental and non-governmental dialogue channels. The scope of these channels has ranged from summit meetings to academic forums such as the Japan-Korea forum.¹³

Particularly striking are the institutionalization of bilateral discussions on security from the working level to the ministry level, and an increasing array of military exchanges and joint exercises. The origin of security

¹² Horvat, "Overcoming the Negative Legacy of the Past."; Germany and France achieved a reconciliation to be aspired to. Unlike the case of Japan and South Korea, there were various advantageous conditions for the thick reconciliation between Germany and France. First, following World War II, Germany effectively apologized to France for its atrocious wrongs during the war. Second, the principle of multilateralism applied to Europe by US foreign policy gave birth to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and enabled it to function as a key mechanism of promoting the cooperation between Germany and France. Third, postwar Germany and France made real efforts to develop a regional integration represented in organizations like European Economic Community (EEC), as both countries desperately needed mutual cooperation for their postwar reconstruction.

¹³ Although cooperation between the two governments and non-government organizations between the two countries has increased at a steady rate, articles like Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia."

cooperation between the two countries can be traced to the director-general-level security consultations which took place in 1997. In 1999, Japan and South Korea established communication hot-lines between the Korean Ministry of National Defense and the Japanese Defense Agency, as well as between their respective air and naval components. Korean and Japanese air force chiefs also held meetings in Seoul designed to increase bilateral exchanges and strengthen cooperation.¹⁴ In the same year, the navies of both countries conducted unprecedented joint exercises and good-will port calls. The U.S., South Korea, and Japan also created the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) for quarterly meetings to manage policy regarding North Korea in April 1999.¹⁵

Secondly, both Korean and Japanese perceptions of the other group have moved in a generally favorable direction, although some fluctuations in public opinion poll results can be attributed to certain external factors. Public opinion polls from 1996 to 2003, conducted by Donga Daily and Asahi Shimbun in South Korea and Japan respectively, indicated that Korean and Japanese belief in prospective positive relations increased from 42% and 47% in 1996 to 59% and 65% in 2003. The issue of Japan's history textbooks aggravated Korean sentiment regarding Japan in 2001, but this surge in negativity did not last long.¹⁶ The drop-off in perceptions of positive

¹⁴ Manosevitz, "Japan and South Korea: Security Relations Reach Adolescence," 816.

¹⁵ Shin, "South Korea, US, Japan to Establish Trilateral Group on North Korea Policy."

¹⁶ It could be argued that the strength of the reaction more than makes up for the brevity of negative sentiment within Korea. Not only was the ROK ambassador to Japan recalled, mass protests broke out in Seoul and the ROK government also decided to maintain the import restrictions on Japanese cultural products like pop songs, TV programs, movies and

prospects between 2002 and 2003 also stemmed mainly from overly high expectations of co-hosting the 2002 World Cup.

Other evidence supports the notion of changing perceptions of the other in Japan and South Korea. The one is the popularity of Korean celebrities in Japan. Korean actors and singers are generating an unprecedented Korean boom in Japan called “*Hallyu*” or “the Korean Wave.” This extraordinary boom in popularity was driven by the surge in Japanese interest in a Korean television drama titled “Winter Sonata.”¹⁷ Bae Yong-jun, the main actor in the drama, known as “Yon-sama” in Japan, has become an idol to Japanese women. His popularity is such that whenever he publicly appears in Japan, crowds of Japanese women gather to see him.¹⁸ Even despite the current Japan-ROK diplomatic flare-up over textbooks and the disputed island, Japanese fans continue visiting Korea to see him act.¹⁹

Another indication of improvement in the Japan-ROK relationship is that it is no longer surprising to hear that many young students in South Korea are learning Japanese or going abroad in Japan. 37.2% of Koreans polled by Gallup in 2007—aged 20-29—are primarily interested in Japanese trends and fashions while 40.6% of that same age group are predominantly interested in Japanese films, television dramas, and video games.²⁰ The

animation. See “S Korea strikes back in history row.” “Seoul recalling ambassador in Japan over history textbook.”

¹⁷ Maliangkay, “When the Korean Wave Ripples,” 15.

¹⁸ Onishi, “What's Korean for 'Real Man?'”

¹⁹ *Chosun Daily*, March 18, 2005.

²⁰ The interest in Japanese culture drops sharply by increasing age-group, with only 11.4% and 18% of 30-39 year olds polled evincing interest in Japanese fashion and films, television dramas, and video games respectively. Unsurprisingly, only 1.9% and 1.1% of persons

popularity of the Japanese language has also greatly increased; the percentage of Korean high school students studying Japanese as their second foreign language dramatically increased from 29.3% in 1991 to 61.2% in 2005.²¹ These figures surpass the percentage of Korean students learning other languages such as German and Chinese.

A third indicator of change is the explosive upsurge of visitors between Japan and South Korea since the mid-1980s. The number of Korean visitors to Japan drastically increased from 144,424 in 1982 to 1,569,176 in 2004.²² The number of Japanese visitors to South Korea, compared with the period in the late 1970s, doubled during the 1980s and quadrupled during the 1990s.²³ This trend reflects the upgraded relationship between Japan and South Korea with both peoples having more opportunities for enhanced communication.²⁴

Cultural exchanges have been enormously expanded by the ROK abolishment of the import ban of Japanese popular culture in 1998; the 2002 World Cup co-hosted by Japan and South Korea is arguably the most prominent instance of cultural cooperation between the two countries. Japan and South Korea signed a criminal extradition treaty also in 2002, and the Korea-Japan Investment Agreement was concluded by a series of

polled over 60 years of age evinced interest in the respective categories of Japanese fashion/trends and films and television dramas. See "Findings of Joint Public Opinion Poll on Relations between Japan and the ROK (2007)."

²¹ Ku, "International Reconciliation in the Postwar Era, 1945-2005: A Comparative Study of Japan-ROK and Franco-German Relations," 32.

²² "Number of Korean and Japanese Visitors in Japan and South Korea."

²³ Reitman, "S. Korea Upgraded on Japan Travel List."

²⁴ Other motives such as the rapid economic growth of South Korea might have affected the dramatic expansion of visitors between Japan and South Korea.

consultations on a possible free trade agreement in the same year.²⁵ As can be seen, the scope of improved Japan-ROK relations is broad, covering the security, economic, cultural, and social areas.

Democratic Transition and Consolidation in South Korea

South Korean democratization was a long and arduous process during which a number of individuals and groups were subjected to imprisonment, torture, and even massacres; deaths by torture and government troops during the June Democracy movement in 1987 illustrate some of the particular atrocities the Chun Doo-hwan government perpetrated on Korean citizens.²⁶ While strongly protesting against the undemocratic practices of authoritarian rulers, democratic actors—particularly students, laborers, and clergies—underwent enormous effort to achieve successful democratic transition in South Korea. Among the most significant events were the April Uprising of 1960 and the Kwangju Uprising of 1980. The former, resulting in the deaths of many students, was a revolt against the repression and corruption of Rhee Syng-man’s authoritarian regime, and contributed to the breakdown of his regime.²⁷ The Kwangju Uprising, and the many people killed in that movement, were a reaction to the Chun Doo-hwan regime’s violent suppression of the growing pro-democracy movement.²⁸

²⁵ Kim, Tae-hyo and Glosserman, Brad, *The Future of U.S.-Korea-Japan Relations*, (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004), 10.

²⁶ Kim, *The History of Korea*, 1.

²⁷ Sunhyuk Kim, *The Politics of Democratization in Korea: The Role of Civil Society*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 137-138.

²⁸ Jeong-ho Roh, “Crafting and Consolidating Constitutional Democracy in Korea,” in *Korea’s Democratization*, ed. Samuel S. Kim, (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 185-186.

These struggles were unsuccessful in advancing Korean democracy until the 1987 June Uprising, which is regarded as the defining moment of South Korean democratization. At the time, student groups, labor unions, church organizations, and millions of middle-class citizens participated in public gatherings, street demonstrations, and signature-collection campaigns against President Chun Doo-hwan's authoritarian regime.²⁹ As a result of these pro-democracy protest campaigns, a procedural democracy was established through an amendment of the Korean constitution, including the set-up of direct presidential elections to be held every five years from December 1987. South Korea has since then undergone a gradual democratic consolidation in various areas such as the guarantee of civil liberties and the deconstruction of entrenched business, military and bureaucratic power.³⁰

Civil liberties have been considerably enlarged due to the abolishment of various laws such as the Basic Press Law and a number of labor laws. The former was enacted in 1980 to systemically censor the press, and the latter served as a means of restricting the exercise of labor rights.³¹ The influence of the military on Korean politics and society decreased following the drastic

²⁹ Sunhyuk Kim, "The Politics of Democratization in Korea: The Role of Civil Society," (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 4.

³⁰ There exists a general agreement that South Korea achieved an electoral democracy. That is, electoral politics has become the only possible game in town. However, controversial debates over the level of democratic consolidation in South Korea are ongoing. The quality of political parties and civil society, the degree of rule of law, and decentralization, and etc are often a source of dispute. For detailed arguments, see Larry Diamond and Doh-chull Shin, ed. *Institutional Reform and Democratic Consolidation in Korea.*" (Hoover Institution Press, 2000) and Larry Diamond and Byung-kook Kim, ed. *Consolidating Democracy in South Korea,* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2000).

³¹ Sunhyuk Kim, *The Politics of Democratization in Korea: The Role of Civil Society,*" (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 2-3; 13.

reforms enacted by Kim Young-sam; the first civilian president since 1961, Kim young-sam held office from 1993-1997. The peaceful transition of power to an opposition party led by longtime dissident Kim Dae-jung occurred in 1998. The institutionalization of democratic values also accelerated decentralization and the growth of civil society. All of this contributed toward the reform of large conglomerates, financial laws, election laws, and political parties.

The democratization of South Korea has contributed to the improvement seen since the mid-1990s in South Korea's relationship with Japan. Security, economic imperatives, and political leadership are examined as alternative explanations for the amelioration of the mutually antagonistic relationship between the two countries. The two causal pathways—an active and democratic peace—will structure the analytical framework.

Active Democratic Peace: Decentralization and Civil Society

The successful democratization of South Korea notably enhanced Japan-ROK relations in an approximation of an active democratic peace. The democratic transition and consolidation of South Korea enhanced the appeal of pragmatic cooperation, as well as lowering the intensity of historically-rooted antagonism between the two countries. The democratization of South Korea has also augmented the role two independent variables – decentralization and the growth of civil society –play in the amelioration of the relationship between Japan and South Korea.

Decentralization, an outcome of the ROK democratization, facilitated the promotion of Japan-South Korea relations. South Korea boosted its local

autonomy following its successful democratic transition in the late 1980s.³² The origin of decentralization within Korea can be traced to the popular election in 1991 which established local assemblies. In 1995, the decentralization process was expanded through the elections of both local governments and local assemblies.³³ Since then, South Korea has gradually expanded its local autonomy, as citizens are granted opportunities for participation, civic education, and leadership training in their localities.

With local autonomy enhanced, local governments in South Korea began to expand their cultural and economic activities to the international arena. Subsequently, they emerged as one of the main actors in international society by increasing interaction with foreign counterparts. When South Korea began to decentralize the powers of its central government, local governments accelerated the process of making partnerships with other local governments in foreign countries. The number of partnerships between Korean local governments and foreign local governments has rapidly grown since the successful democratic transition of the late 1980s. Prior to 1985, only 66 local governments had partnered with their counterparts in foreign

³² There is a counterargument over the quality of Korean decentralization due to the existence of a strong tradition of statism and centralism, which has impeded the power transfer from the central government to local governments particularly in terms of major administrative and fiscal powers. For detailed arguments, see Kyoung-Ryung Seong, "Delayed Decentralized and Incomplete Democratic Consolidation," in *Institutional Reform and Democratic Consolidation in Korea*, ed. Larry Diamond and Doh Chul Shin (Hoover Institution Press, 2000), pp. 128-130.

³³ Kyoung-Ryung Seong, "Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation in South Korea: Great Achievements and Remaining Problems," in *Consolidating Democracy in South Korea*, ed. Larry Diamond and Byung-Kook Kim (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc 2000), 102.

countries; however, the number expanded dramatically to 385 partnerships in 2004.³⁴

The local governments of Japan and South Korea, in particular, achieved a striking upsurge in the number of partnerships with one another. Prior to the democratic transition of South Korea, the total number of partnerships between Japanese and Korean local governments was 22.³⁵ By 2001, the number of partnerships had increased to 96. Hence, the ROK democratization brought about this drastic proliferation in the number of partnerships between local governments in Japan and South Korea.

In this context, the expansion of partnerships between local governments in Japan and South Korea provided a nurturing environment in which both people shared ideas, culture, and pragmatic concerns, thereby improving Japan-ROK relations. For instance, Namhae—on the southern coast of the Korean peninsula—established a sister partnership in 1991 with Oguchi—about 300 km west of Tokyo—which blossomed into a high school student exchange program in 1994. To elevate mutual economic cooperation, the two cities also set up special sales areas in markets for each other's products.³⁶

Cultural exchanges have also been pursued between the cities of Anyang and Dokorojawa since 1996. Many traditional art experts from these cities have visited their counterpart city and taught local residents, contributing to the promotion of mutual understanding. These cities have

³⁴ Menju, "International Politics of Local Governments," 93.

³⁵ Ibid.

also dispatched local officials to each other to share information to develop better policies concerning the environment, construction, and overall well-being.³⁷

At the province and prefecture level, South Kyungsang province and Yamaguchi prefecture have consistently pursued special exchange programs for college students to experience Korean and Japanese culture through seminars and home-stays. In the realm of economic cooperation, a trade office was established by the South Kyungsang province in the international economic center of the Yamaguchi prefecture. Also, the Yamaguchi prefecture has consistently participated in the annual International Machine Exhibition held by the South Kyungsang province.³⁸ These are examples of decentralization—accelerated by the ROK democratization—bringing about an upsurge in partnerships between local governments in Japan and South Korea.

The ROK democratization also strengthened the role of civil society in South Korea. As noted earlier, even during authoritarian rule, Korean civil society was sufficiently dynamic that pro-democratic actors—particularly students, laborers, and clergies—served as a primary driving force for the breakdown of past authoritarian regimes. Beyond these established “people’s movement groups,” new social movements groups known as “citizens’ movement groups” have proliferated since the successful democratic

³⁶ <http://www.klafir.or.kr> (Korea Local Authorities Foundation for International Relations).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

transition in 1987.³⁹ As Korean society democratized, freedom of association made it possible for citizens to create a variety of civic organizations with a variety of purposes such as supporting public concerns over the environment, women's issues, and human rights. The number of civic organizations in South Korea has considerably expanded and reached just over 4,000 in number by the early 2000s.⁴⁰

Given the significant impact of ROK decentralization on Japan-ROK relations, the strengthening of civil society in South Korea was another critical factor that played a positive role in improved Japan-ROK relations. The rise of South Korean civil society has been conducive to the promotion of mutual cooperation with Japanese civic organizations to dealing with various issues. In particular, the maturation of civil society in South Korea gave birth to various organizations dealing directly with current issues in Japan-ROK relations. Among these groups are: the Japan-Korea Forum; the Korea-Japan Committee for History Research; and the Korea-Japan History Forum. These civic organizations have played vital roles in furthering the exchange of ideas and cooperative studies, as well as enhancing mutual understanding.

In particular, the Japan-Korea forum has been held twelve times since 1993. Participants in the forum come from a variety of fields, including the respective legislatures, business, the media, cultural figure, and the academic

³⁹ Sunhyuk Kim, "Civil Society in Democratizing Korea," in *Korea's Democratization*, ed. Samuel S Kim (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 84-85

⁴⁰ <http://www.kngo.net> (Civic Movement Communication Center); 4,000 indicates the number of civic groups that have registered as a member in Civic Movement Communication Center.

sectors from the two countries. These representatives have views on diverse topics that range from economic, security, and cultural cooperation to the socio-political impact of population movements and generational change in Japan and South Korea.⁴¹

Passive Democratic Peace: Democratic Norms and Institutions

Compared with the salience of an active democratic peace, a passive democratic peace has exerted less influence on the improved relationship between Japan and South Korea. However, the emergence of democratic norms and institutions, stemming from the ROK democratization, has still played substantial roles in preventing historical/territorial disputes between Japan and South Korea from becoming unmanageable. Following the successful democratization of the ROK, Japan and South Korea have peacefully dealt with serious conflicts caused by historical and territorial disputes. Democratic norms such as compromise, nonviolence, and peaceful conflict resolution have contributed to preventing disputes over issues arising from historically rooted antagonism from spinning out of control.

Although not completely ignoring the moderating influence of the common ally, the United States, it is posited that democratic norms in South Korea have substantially helped avoid violent conflicts. Based on domestic experiences and values, decision-makers in both countries have not violated the norm of peaceful conflict resolution. Since these two democracies did not

⁴¹ <http://www.kofo.or.kr>

prefer the violent resolution of domestic disputes, they sought to resolve international disputes peacefully.

As mentioned earlier, Koreans had long experienced violent conflicts between authoritarian regimes and civic sectors prior to the establishment of a procedural democracy in 1987. Under the rule of authoritarian regimes, no room for the cultivation of democratic norms existed. Yet, the consolidation of democracy in South Korea provided decision-makers with opportunities to learn and practice these norms. Instead of resorting to militant repression, democratic decision-makers have sought to peacefully compromise various political, economic, and social problems with civic sectors. On the mass level, civic organizations and individuals have preferred peaceful means rather than the violent demonstrations that were previously resorted to. This was evident in 2000 when a number of civil organizations launched a peaceful campaign by which they sought to defeat corrupt and dysfunctional politicians in the national assembly elections.⁴²

The growth of democratic norms in South Korea positively affected Korean attitudes toward Japan. In other words, these norms played a key role in the constraint of Korea's emotional attitudes in dealings with Japan. This argument is upheld by the patterns of dispute in 2001 and 2005. At the elite level, Korean decision-makers attempted to resolve historical/territorial disputes in peaceful ways. Although the Korean government strongly protested against Japan's attempts to distort its past history, it did not violate the norm of peaceful conflict resolution. Political elites of both countries tried

to peacefully resolve the confrontation by dispatching special representatives to the other government.

On the mass level, although some nationalist organizations strongly protested Japan's provocative actions, the intensity and longevity of street demonstrations gradually decreased in comparison to previous authoritarian eras. Demonstrations did not expand into further conflict. Nor did disputes cloud realpolitik concerns such as economic and security cooperation. As a consequence, the rise of democratic norms in South Korea exerted a positive impact on the moderation of the tension generated by historical/territorial disputes between Japan and South Korea.

Democratic norms such as compromise, nonviolence, and peaceful conflict resolution also contributed to shaping transparent dialogue channels between Japan and South Korea. Under the rule of authoritarian regimes in South Korea, the primary interactions between the two neighbors consisted of backroom deals between elites in late-night parlors in Seoul and Tokyo.⁴³ With the cultivation of democratic norms, back-channel politics was largely replaced by more transparent governmental and non-governmental dialogue channels befitting liberal democracies.

The emergence of democratic institutions —such as checks and balances, and division of power—has also prevented disputes from escalating into diplomatic nightmares. During the period of authoritarian rule, Korean decision-makers often used Japan as a convenient scapegoat in their mission

⁴² Kim, "Civil Society in Democratizing Korea," 90-95.

⁴³ Cha, "Rooting the Pragmatic in Japan-ROK Security Relations:," 36.

to strengthen the support of their constituency. For instance, while accepting Nakasone's initiatives for improved bilateral relations, the Chun Doo-hwan regime (1980-87) also made the effort to elevate anti-Japanese sentiment in order to distract people's attention away from the regime's military origins and gain domestic legitimacy.⁴⁴

Even in the early stage of democratization, President Kim Young-sam utilized the territorial dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima as a ploy to gain votes prior to legislative elections in Korea. With the increasing consolidation of democratic institutions, South Korean decision-makers have not resorted to those rally-'round-the-flag dynamics due to checks and balances from other domestic actors such as legislative and civic organizations.⁴⁵ Therefore, democratic institutions have served as a regulatory mechanism for prohibiting disputes from unnecessarily expanding.

There is a diverse array of causal pathways that have contributed to improved Japan-ROK relations. In the context of a passive democratic peace, South Korean democratization has brought about the rise of democratic norms and institutions, such as compromise, nonviolence, peaceful conflict resolution, and checks and balances. These democratic norms and institutions have discouraged historical/territorial disputes between Japan and South Korea from becoming unmanageable. At the same time, the mechanism of an active democratic peace sheds light on the dynamic relationship between the two countries. Decentralization and the growth of civil society—accelerated

⁴⁴ Cha, "Hypotheses on History and Hate in Asia: Japan and the Korean Peninsula," 50.

⁴⁵ Mansfield and Snyder, "Democratization and the Danger of War," 21.

by ROK democratization—have enabled citizens in South Korea and Japan to share ideas, culture and pragmatic concerns while contributing to the promotion of mutual understanding in the bilateral relationship. The two dynamics have concurrently facilitated the enhanced relationship between the two neighbors since the mid-1990s.

Alternative Explanations

Thus far, the extent to which an expanded democratic peace proposition is applied to Japan-ROK relations has been analyzed. Based on this analysis, a useful methodical framework has been produced through which to explain the significant improvement in relations between Japan and South Korea since the mid-1990s. However, skeptics might argue that alternative hypotheses are better suited to explaining the changed Japan-ROK relationship.

One alternative hypothesis might be that a security imperative has led to the enhanced relationship between the former adversaries. Since the early 1990s, North Korea has sought to develop ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons, posing serious threats to the security of both Japan and South Korea. As a consequence, this hypothesis would point to the North Korean threat as a source for the advancement in bilateral relations between the two neighbors.

There is no denying that the North Korean threat has compelled Japan and South Korea to establish bilateral security consultations and military exercises such as Search and Rescue (SAR) operations. However, this hypothesis only partially explains the transformation of Japan-ROK relations.

It is insufficient to explain the overall enhanced Japan-ROK relationship, which range from the transformation of both people's perceptions of each other to the elevated level of cooperation in the cultural, social and economic fields.

Moreover, during the Cold War period, the security threat was arguably greater given the threat posed by the Soviet Union, North Korea, and China. Using a threat-based logic for cooperation, the Cold War in the early 1980s against the Soviet "evil empire" would have provided strong imperatives for cooperation and close bilateral relations between Japan and South Korea. Yet, such a situation failed to materialize. During the period, both cooperation and substantial friction flourished between Japan and South Korea.⁴⁶

A second hypothesis might be that the 1997 Asian financial crisis served as a driving force behind growing rapport, as South Korea found itself in need of Japan's economic support in the recovery of South Korea's devastated economy. Amidst the crisis in 1998, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung in conjunction with Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo, declared a new ROK-Japan Partnership for the 21st century. In that declaration, President Kim highlighted the importance of the future-oriented

⁴⁶ Apart from cooperative actions such as summit meetings and loan contracts for ROK economic development, numerous events, including resurrection of the Kim Dae-jung case, the textbook dispute, and friction over North Korea, posed serious threats to Japan-ROK relations. For detailed explanations, see Victor D. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The US-Korea-Japan Security Triangle*, (Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 169-198.

Japan-ROK relationship, rather than one driven by the past.⁴⁷ Thus, one might contend that the main reason for the unprecedented action taken by President Kim was to restore the demolished South Korean economy by obtaining economic aid from Japan.

Although not rejecting this hypothesis completely, this chapter posits that the financial crisis of 1997 is by itself, is insufficient to account for the changed relationship between Japan and South Korea. Can the economic aid-based logic of this hypothesis explain the broad institutionalization of consulting channels between the two neighbors as well as the changed perceptions at the popular level? The economic crisis might have served as a means of furthering provisional cooperation between Japanese and Koreans, but it was not an enduring factor undergirding the transformation of the relationship. According to this economic aid-based logic, Japan and South Korea should have started experiencing a considerable alleviation in tensions in 1965 when South Korea and Japan signed an official treaty that included a substantial economic aid package from Japan.

A final alternate hypothesis might be that the leadership of South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo was essential to the unprecedented improvement in Japan-ROK relations. Unlike previous leaders, President Kim and Prime Minister Obuchi worked continuously to establish a new relationship capable of surmounting historical

⁴⁷ “MOFA: Japan-Republic of Korea Joint Declaration A New Japan-Republic of Korea Partnership towards the Twenty-first Century.”

antagonisms. As noted earlier, the most notable aspect of these efforts was the 1998 declaration of a new ROK-Japan Partnership for the 21st Century.

The political leadership involved in moving Japan-ROK relations forward is obviously a central variable in the continuing improvement of the Japan-ROK relationship. Yet, the transformation of the relationship between the two countries is not adequately addressed by an elite leadership-based hypothesis. While cooperation existed during the leadership of President Kim, substantial friction remained in between the two countries. In 2001, the South Korean government recalled the Korean Ambassador to Japan due to a controversy over Japanese history textbooks. During the 1980s, Japanese Prime Ministers Nakasone and Kaifu, and South Korean Presidents Chun and Roh also made efforts to improve bilateral relations; however, these personal initiatives did not last. Leadership itself, without the extensive support of the mass public, played a limited role in promoting the relationship between the former adversaries.

IV Origins of Japanese Nationalism

Pre-Meiji Japan was not a centralized, unified national state in the way that statehood is qualified today; although nominally unified under a singular government, a sense of national union had failed to emerge by this point. The feudal system, headed by the Tokugawa Shogun, consisted of domains (*han*) administered by feudal lords (*daimyo*).¹ The Tokugawa elite focused on national seclusion (*sakoku*) and the maintenance of a buffer between elites and the masses. The mindset of the Edo period among the Tokugawa elite was effectively expressed by the idiom, “evil subjects and crafty foreigners” (*kanmin koi*).²

Elite and Popular Perceptions of Nationalism

The unification of all classes under a collective nationalism was unthinkable in the period of Tokugawa influence. More localized interests commanded the attention of both the common people and their feudal lords; although the concept of “public interest” (*kogi*)—which required the sacrifice of private interest—was pervasive among the Tokugawa elite, such sacrifice was not for the sake of a public body of collective citizenry as such a concept simply did not exist. The subjects of the Tokugawa shogunate would have considered the idea of an all encompassing Japanese nation as irrevocably foreign.

While the masses of pre-Meiji Japan were bereft of meaningful nationalist sentiment, the inklings of nationalism existed among the

¹ Suganami, “Japan's Entry into International Society,” 185.

² Morris-Suzuki, *Re-Inventing Japan*, 83.

Tokugawa elite. Proponents of Nativist Studies (Kokugaku)—such as Motoori Norinaga and Hirata Atsutane—advocated the movement away from Sinocentric influence in favor of investigating the uniqueness of Japan. Nativist scholars held that the Japanese national character was naturally pure, and would be revealed by the elimination of foreign (Chinese) influences.³

The Mito School (*Mitogaku*) was essential in promoting the need for reform and defense against the Western power.⁴ The isolationism, nativism, and reverence of the emperor advocated by the Mito School nurtured xenophobia. Aizawa Seishisai, a scholar of the Mito School, was the first to promote the Anti-Western sentiment inherent in Mito thought; the Mito embrace of the slogan “revere the emperor, expel the barbarians” (*sonno joi*) was also echoed in the populist usage of “exterminate the foreigners” (*ijin taiji*), which was an obvious amplification of the sentiment behind *sonno joi*.⁵

Aizawa wrote *New Proposals* (*Shinron*) in 1825, which introduced his ideas about the necessity of protecting Japan from the Western 'barbarians'. In opposition to Western ideology, military and economic power, he promoted nativism and Shintoism. He likewise advocated support of the emperor as a means of counteracting the Western threat. In *New Proposals*, the idea of “national essence” (kokutai)—a combination of Confucian morals, Shinto myths, and other philosophies—was introduced to national discourse. According to Aizawa, the Japanese imperial family was directly descended from Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, so Japan enjoyed divine favor of its

³ Earl, *Emperor and Nation in Japan*, 66-67.

⁴ McVeigh, *Nationalisms of Japan*, 42.

imperial leadership.⁶ Thus, *New Proposals* served as an inspiration for Japanese nationalists throughout the 19th century and precipitated the Meiji Restoration in 1868.⁷

The End of the Tokugawa Shogunate

The grudging move toward modernization had only been possible with the threat implicit in Western intrusion; the “black ships” of Commodore Perry in 1853 and the subsequent American coercion of Japan’s entrance into international society after an era of isolation provoked an abrupt awakening to the dangers of Western imperialism.⁸ Although sections of the Tokugawa elite had started to campaign for the end of the policy of national seclusion (*sakoku*) in an effort to avoid the abuse China had suffered due to Western encroachment, internal turmoil threatened the power of the Tokugawa regime. In its effort to modernize and ward off foreign powers, the Tokugawa government was incautious about the political currents provoked by its apparent weakness in the face of Western encroachment.

The capitulation of Japan to American demands represented by the Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1854—which opened the three ports of Nagasaki, Shimoda, Hakodate to American trade, expanded the travel privileges of Americans within Japan, and allowed a United States consul to take up residence in Shimoda—acted as leverage for further intrusion by other foreign powers. Such encroachments into Tokugawa power escalated into the

⁵ Hane and Perez, *Modern Japan*, 66.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Suganami, “Japan's Entry into International Society.”

gradual erosion of Japanese isolationism.⁹ Public censure of the Tokugawa reaction to foreign intrusion undermined the power of the government and deprived the Tokugawa shogun of the valuable support of influential *daimyo*. The nativism and xenophobic fervor provoked by Western intrusion generated effective momentum for the Meiji Restoration.

The growing dissatisfaction of sections of the *daimyo* elite were supported and mirrored by a festering discontent among the masses. An almost mystic belief in an imminent, collective salvation gained a foothold among the masses and affected the power balance between the Tokugawa bakufu and recalcitrant *daimyo*.

Pressure from 'lower' status groups may have emboldened unhappy elements within the samurai elite and diminished the effectiveness of the gradualist reforms pursued by the Tokugawa bakufu [shogunate] and its allies.¹⁰

A year before the Meiji Restoration in 1868, rioting mobs chased foreigners while shouting "exterminate the foreigners."¹¹ More radical denunciations of foreign intrusion also existed in violent attacks on foreigners; Violence was directed against the foreigners and Japanese collaborators. Murders of foreigners and collaborative Japanese were too common to be isolated occurrences with the surfeit of xenophobic fervor also manifesting in numerous riots.¹²

⁹ Totman, *A History of Japan*, 282.

¹⁰ Wilson, "Pursuing the Millennium in the Meiji Restoration," 180.

¹¹ McVeigh, *Nationalisms of Japan*, 42.

¹² Satow, *A Diplomat in Japan*, 34.

Two influential rivals of the Tokugawa shogunate, Choshu and Satsuma, utilized xenophobic resentment to resist Western influence. Although the loathing of foreign intrusion was immutable, a series of military defeats impressed upon the Choshu and Satsuma the importance of learning from the Western invaders.¹³ The proven hostility of the Tokugawa bakufu engendered a Choshu-Satsuma alliance capable of toppling the Tokugawa shogunate in 1868 with imperial support.¹⁴ The deposition of the Tokugawa regime enabled the realization of the power inherent in cohesiveness and nurtured the future Meiji emphasis on the development of a unified nation.

Modernization under Duress

19th century East Asia was heavily pressured by the “informal imperialism” of the West. Western countries extended their domination not by directly governing the local population with force, but by pressuring weak East Asian states to trade with them under unequal treaties.¹⁵ All of these treaties exclusively favored the demands and interests of Western imperialists; Western countries set an unfair trading tax in their best interests and justified their extraterritoriality on the grounds that the laws of Japan were too uncivilized for Westerners to submit themselves to. These unfair treaties with Western nations were considered a national humiliation among the leaders of Meiji Japan as these unfair treaties placed Japan in a subordinate position to external powers.

¹³ Stronach, *Beyond the Rising Sun*, 37-38.

¹⁴ Totman, *A History of Japan*, 291-292.

¹⁵ Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword*, 8-9.

Western dominance was not only a menacing threat but also a model for the modernization of 19th century Japan undertaken by politicians, bureaucrats, military generals, jurists, and intellectuals.¹⁶ Given the ostensible benefit garnered through the colonial domination exhibited by Western nations, Meiji Japan policy makers logically concluded that the acquisition of overseas colonies and the building of a modern army and navy were essential steps toward revising unfair treaties and entering international society. In pursuit of national strength, Meiji elites also found it essential to foster a strong nationalist sentiment capable of supporting the Japanese state in a ruthless international system.

The strength of the *daimyo* was a vital test of the Meiji government's commitment to building a strong modern Japanese nationalism. The expansion of a formal and unified central government was considered essential to Japan gaining Great Power status and the Meiji oligarchs—composed mostly of former samurai—impatiently acted to neutralize the threat to Meiji nationalism implicit in the continuance of *daimyo* power. The Meiji government, backed by the imperial guard, formally abolished all *daimyo* authority, buying *daimyo* compliance with substantial pensions and substituting domains with districts and prefectures.¹⁷ The power of the samurai elite was also abolished in order to consolidate the power of the Meiji government.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ohara, *Democratization and Expansionism*, 38.

¹⁷ Totman, *A History of Japan*, 292.

¹⁸ Sims, *Japanese Political History Since the Meiji Renovation 1868-2000*, 19.

The diminishment of the samurai elite served two main purposes within the broader Meiji pursuit of a unified nationalism. The 1876 prohibition of the public wearing of swords removed that distinction between samurai and commoners while the institution of nationwide conscription in 1873—mandating that every male would serve in the armed forces upon turning 21 for four years, followed by three more years in the reserves—dissolved another primary difference between the samurai and peasant class: the ancient privilege of the ability to bear arms was extended to every male in the nation.¹⁹ The Meiji attempt to create a strong centralized state was thus mirrored by its persistent pursuit of a national identity through drastic deconstruction of a socially stratified structure.

Changing Perceptions

As a latecomer to industrial revolution and modernization, Japan actively sent delegations to the West in order to learn about a variety of political, military, legal, and educational systems and cultures. Some Meiji elite toured Western countries in the interest of gaining valuable insight.²⁰ Fukuzawa Yukichi—a frequent participant in these delegations to the West—was one of the most influential figures in conceptualizing and instructing Japan's Westernization through his role as an educator and philosopher. He visited Europe and the United States for a total of three times. He introduced a very Western-centered racial ideology which recognized white Westerners as the most developed and advanced race. Fukuzawa's *Seiyojijyo* (*Conditions in*

¹⁹ Totman, *A History of Japan*, 292.

²⁰ Sims, *Japanese Political History Since the Meiji Renovation 1868-2000*, 31.

the West) was completed in 1870 just after his return to Japan from a trip to Europe. Duus notes its importance as “the first volume sold more than 150,000 copies. Even officials in the new imperial government used it as a basic handbook about the West.”²¹

The introduction of the idea of distinct white, yellow, red, brown, and black races in the world influenced the development of Japanese nationalism. Fukuzawa also noted a hierarchy among these races. He placed “civilized white Westerners” and “half-civilized Asians” at the top, followed by the three other undeveloped and uncivilized non-white races.²² The equal placement of Asians with whites is crucial to understanding why this hierarchical racial ideology was a localized one for Japan; this racial hierarchy was not an identical replication of the Western ideology, which would not necessarily have treated Asians any differently than other non-white races.

Fukuzawa argued that Asians, particularly Japanese, were a “half-civilized” race, while the other non-white races were totally uncivilized. Asians were in the process of pursuing a civilization status that white Westerners had already reached. Fukuzawa titled an entire chapter, “Western Civilization as Our Goal” in another influential work, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*.²³ In this work, he argued that Asians were inherently capable of civilizing in a way similar to what white Westerners underwent.²⁴ Other non-white races had not even started the civilization process, and an inherent

²¹ Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword*, 185-186.

²² *Ibid.*, 186.

²³ Fukuzawa, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, 13-33.

²⁴ Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword*, 186-190.

potential for civilization might not even exist in these races. In this regard, race was a fluid category that was not merely a matter of phenotype, but also a matter of the degree and potential of civilization. This ideology was very succinctly expressed by his phrase “Out of Asia and into the West” (*datsua nyuou*), which became a fundamental national policy of Japan during the Meiji Restoration.

The Japanese elites who visited Western nations in the late-1800s, played an influential role which could be considered distinct from elites in other nations. Visiting Europe from Japan was perhaps one of the longest and most expensive trips across the globe simply because of Japan’s location. Likewise, visiting the United States from Japan involved a long and costly transoceanic journey. Thus, only a very limited number of elites could visit Europe and the United States, and normally they traveled as governmental delegations. Such delegations had a clear purpose of learning about the West and bringing what they learned back to Japan to realize the “national policy” of modernization. Their experiences were not private matters, and as such were expected to instruct the masses in their collective duty to the Japanese nation-state.

The “top-down” introduction of the West is crucial to understanding the development of Japanese nationalism as it established a foundation of elite leadership in the construction of national identity. Japanese elites and intellectuals had a particular role at that time, as opening the nation meant having radical contacts with different cultures, which were much more developed than Japanese. Cultural contacts could take place any moment and

place, but this particular cultural contact which took place in Japan was a very radical and completely one-way importation. It was akin to a floodgate being abruptly opened, and Western culture inundated the nation. In this context, these intellectuals' mission was to play the roles of interpreter, transmitter, and propagator of the Western culture.²⁵

In this particular ideology, there was not much room for critical or opposing viewpoints to exist about the West and white Westerners. Meiji Japan, in its eagerness to derive insight from the powerful West, would not send critical people to the West. Thus, the elites who had visited the West were almost evangelical in their positive views of the West.

Japan's unique circumstance as a non-Western nation free of major colonial oppression by the West influenced Japanese interaction with other countries. The Japanese relationship with the West was obviously complex. Although suspicion and antagonism did not dominate Japanese opinion of Westerners, the ambivalence characteristic of the relationship between colonizer and colony was also evident. The experience of the colonized is linked with certain perceptions, such as associating the West with oppression; although the society may simultaneously envy and introduce Western culture and products, a foundational enmity still remains.²⁶

The emphasis on Westernization was linked with the drive for Great Power status. The adoption of modes of Western national practices involved the implementation of Japanese colonialism. This logic eventually led to

²⁵ Maruyama, *Bunmeiron no gairyaku wo yomu (Reading An Outline of a Theory of Civilization)*, 39-40.

Japan's forceful colonial expansion encompassing an extensive area of Asia as it became incorporated into Japanese nationalist ideology; Japan definitively began its modernization through "...escaping aggressors by becoming an aggressor itself."²⁷ Japan's total adoption of the West had two benefits: it first modernized Japan; then, it provided a rationale to conquer other non-white people.

The Subjugation of the "Other"

Japan started competing with China for influence over Korea and leadership in the region, which functioned as another sign of Japan's concern with external status.²⁸ The Treaty of Kanghwa signed in 1876 symbolized Japan's status as a "Western" nation-state and brought prestige to the Meiji rulers.²⁹ It also acted as a formal challenge of Chinese power, fueling their rivalry over Korea until it was forcefully resolved in 1894-1895.³⁰ Following its victory over China in the war of 1894-95, Japanese leaders distanced themselves from the traditional Sinocentric order to achieve greater "civilization"—above and beyond China and Korea—among the Western powers. The desire for Great Power status continued through the experience of the Triple Intervention in 1895, when Britain, France, and Russia "took away" some of Japan's gains in China, until recognition was received in the 1902 alliance with Britain.³¹

²⁶ Askew, "Oguma Eiji and the Construction of the Modern Japanese National Identity," 113.

²⁷ Young, *Japan's Total Empire*, 23.

²⁸ Iriye, "Japan's Drive to Great Power Status," 734-735.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 746.

³⁰ Oh, *The Chinese and the Japanese*, 37.

³¹ Iriye, "Japan's Drive to Great Power Status," 773.

Victories over China (1894-95) and over Russia (1904-05) affirmed the eventual success of Meiji Japan's modernization efforts. Victories in two wars with these conventionally powerful countries provided Japan with an affirmation of Japanese superiority; the acquisition of new territories—Taiwan and Korea—both of which became critical for Japan's national defense as well as economic resources gained a central role in an ethnically centered nationalism.³² The expansion into Taiwan and Korea also confronted Japanese policy makers with a new dilemma: they sought to distinguish themselves from the people whom they were about to govern, while also distinguishing themselves from the Western colonial powers with whom they were competing for regional dominance. This project was made more difficult because Japan had yet to fully establish itself as an advanced industrial society. In terms of fiscal and military power, Japan was relatively closer to those whom they were about to colonize, than to the European colonial powers. Furthermore, without obvious differences in culture, economy, military power and level of civilization between themselves and the colonized population, Japan struggled to justify their dominance and faced defiant resistance from the colonized population.

Modernization and Ultrnationalism

After Japan had succeeded in modernization and obtained national might by the early 1900s, Japanese nationalism was utilized in an effort to cohere Japan and its colonial possessions into a unified whole. To rationalize

³² Young, *Japan's Total Empire*, 14-17; Myers and Peattie, *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, 173.

and advance its imperialistic expansion, a variety of racial discourses were fabricated and utilized. Although national pride from winning the Sino-Japanese war and Russo-Japanese war validated the Meiji government's power among the general population, the people of colonized Taiwan and Korea obviously did not share in that sentiment to the same degree.

In defining the Japanese nation as a collective personality—characterized by uniformity and homogeneity—the Meiji government offered the Japanese people an easily accessible explanation of their social, political, and economic position in the international context. The family state (*kazoku kokka*) reflected the inherited qualities and capacities of its people.³³ The existence of a Yamato *minzoku*, or ethnic group, sharing a common ancestry, history and culture had become a canon of Japanese nationalism. The immutability of this Yamato *minzoku* created a historical foundation from which the nation could gain legitimacy.

The articulation of an ideology in which the categories of race and nation so clearly overlapped was not unique to Japan. Given that Japan had consciously modeled its behavior in other spheres of activity on Western contemporaries, it is not surprising that Japanese national identity drew much of its inspiration from the most advanced Western nations and developed in reaction to it.

Popular Nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s

The death of the Meiji Emperor and the Taisho Emperor's ascension to the throne in 1912 furthered the growth of popular nationalism. Although

popular nationalism had its roots in the Meiji pursuit of a consolidating modernization, only during the reign of the Taisho emperor did it begin to flourish; “nationalism, especially the popular and ethnic version, was a central, perhaps even the defining ingredient in...Taisho democracy.”³⁴ In opposition to state centralization and partially formulated in response to pervasive emphasis on modernization, advocates of popular nationalists expressed a commonerism focused around an immutable ethnic nation.

The idea of common ethno-racial ties which bound Japan together quickly became ingrained in the popular nationalism which also popularized the imperial institution as a symbolic link to a mythical Japanese past. The growth of Japanism (*Nippon-shugi*), the opposition to Western ideological imports—such as democracy, individualism, and rule of law—coalesced with a renewed interest in the Japanese traditions, *kokutai*, and veneration of the emperor.³⁵ The reverence of the emperor was coupled with antipathy toward the political elites regarded as responsible for the threatening onslaught of Western culture.

Multiethnic “Japaneseness”

The increasingly xenophobic tone of pre-WWII nationalism had been shaped by growing distaste of Western culture, several wars—such as the Sino-Japanese War, Russo-Japanese War and WWI—and influxes of foreign workers into Japan’s urban secondary labor market.³⁶ Such resentment of

³³ Irokawa, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, 283.

³⁴ Doak, “Culture, Ethnicity, and the State in Early Twentieth-Century,” 181.

³⁵ McVeigh, *Nationalisms of Japan*, 153.

³⁶ Lie, *Multiethnic Japan*, 121.

foreign influence was exacerbated by the ultranationalist character of early twentieth century Japanese polity. Despite the predilection toward ethno-racial distinctions of nationalism, the simple fact of Japanese imperialism disqualified the legitimacy of a monoethnic Japan. The colonization of Taiwan and Korea encouraged ideas of an innate Japanese superiority; however, colonial rule necessitated at least the outward justification of domination beyond the apparent desire for power.

The prominence of an imperialist multiethnic ideology is explained by the aspiration for the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The inclusion of Koreans and Taiwanese as nominal members obliged the usage of a multiethnic ideology. However, belief in innate Japanese superiority was not mutually exclusive from the perception of Japan as a multiethnic polity; by utilizing the policy of assimilation, an array of “incomplete Japanese” could be incorporated into Japan.³⁷

The announcement of a “New Order in East Asia” in 1938 by Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro instigated further promotion of ethnic nationalism in East Asia.³⁸ Representative of the many organizations based on an encompassing East Asian ethnic ideology, the East Asia League (*Toa renmei*)—formed in 1939—advocated the unification of all East Asian ethnic nations around a Japanese core. An incredible number of books, articles, and

³⁷ Morris-Suzuki, “Becoming Japanese: Imperial Expansion and Identity Crises in the Early Twentieth Century,” 175.

³⁸ Doak, “Narrating China, Ordering East Asia: the Discourse on Nation and Ethnicity in Imperial Japan,” 101.

pamphlets on the subject of ethnic nations and East Asia were generated between 1938 and 1945.³⁹

The Korean position in Japanese imperial ideology illustrates way in which beliefs of Japanese superiority and a multiethnic ideology meshed. Japanese imperial ideology asserted the shared origins of Japanese and Koreans and thus the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910 was portrayed as a “restoration” of a natural order.⁴⁰ The attempt to establish a common ethnic nation also manifested in efforts to homogenize Korea and Japan through the encouragement of interethnic marriage.⁴¹ Other Japanese colonial policies, such as the repression of Korean culture and the mandatory usage of Japanese names, also support the predominance of a multiethnic ideology in Japanese imperial perceptions.

Monoethnic Japan

The collapse of Japanese imperialism acted as a catalyst in Japanese nationalism. The loss of Japanese colonial possessions drastically reduced the ethnic diversity of Japan, eliminating the need for a legitimating ideology for a multiethnic Japan. Post-war despair most significantly manifested as an anti-state nationalism which fostered a victim mentality among the general Japanese populace; angered at the perceived abandonment of the Japanese state, the Japanese masses generally blamed the state for the destruction suffered by the country.⁴² This victim mentality allowed the general Japanese

³⁹ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁰ Oguma, *A Genealogy of 'Japanese' Self-Images*, 88-90.

⁴¹ Lie, *Multiethnic Japan*, 123.

⁴² McVeigh, *Nationalisms of Japan*, 77.

people to evade any war guilt regarding the brutality of Japanese imperialism.

Thus, militant ultranationalism was severely weakened by Japan's WWII

defeat and the abrupt extinction of military power.

V Japanese Neo-Nationalism

This chapter will trace the course of post-WWII Japanese nationalism by focusing on the development of Nihonjinron discourse into its contemporary interpretation.¹ By critically examining the interaction between the popular ethnic nationalism of Nihonjinron and the growth of Japanese democracy, the contentious relationship between Japan and South Korea may ultimately be better understood. The increasing support for more assertive foreign policy, state-centered patriotism, and militant aggression are all indicative of a shift away from the pacifist and cultural nationalism that arose after the dissolution of imperial Japan.

The ideas, events, and institutions of post-imperial Japan were fundamental to the promotion of the ethnically-centric and essentialist form of nationalism that characterized modern Japan. The specific contemporary issues around which Nihonjinron centers, such as racial/ethnic essentialism and belief in an inherent collectivism, illustrate much of what is vilified about modern Japanese nationalism; Korea's position in the discourse of Japanese nationalism in particular demonstrates the remarkable way in which nationalism pervades Japanese perception and action.

During the Cold War period, Tokyo avoided taking major international political initiatives, limited its defense buildup, and relied on the established American security structure. Since the end of the Cold War, however, there

¹ *Nihonjinron* (日本人論) can be translated as “theories of Japanese” and consists of a discourse of popular nationalism. Much of the discourse is ethnocentric and is founded on an essentialist conception of a homogenous Japanese culture. See Lie, *Multiethnic Japan*, 52.

have been notable changes to Japan's foreign policy, reflecting a more proactive security stance by Tokyo. For example, for the first time since World War II, Japan has deployed its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) outside its borders, first to Cambodia in 1993 as part of UN peacekeeping operations and more recently to Iraq from 2003 to 2006 in support of the U.S.-led mission.² Changes in Japan's security outlook and behavior have invigorated a debate about the nature of Japanese society. This chapter will examine the evolution of Tokyo's security policy and the relationship of this evolution to Japanese national attitudes since the end of Cold War. In doing so, this section will draw on and seek to illustrate how the evolution of Japanese nationalism has affected the Japanese relationship with South Korea.

The gradual development away from post-imperial Japanese nationalism—which focused on the dissolute and illegal nature of Japanese acts of antagonism in the first half of the 20th century—appears to be the end goal of Nihonjinron discourse. Within this nationalist dialogue, state-making, nation-building, and even democratization are arrayed against a perceived “other.” While xenophobic animosity often manifests at a mass societal level—often in ostensibly abrupt outbreaks of hatred—elites have frequently utilized existing sources of contention for their instrumental purposes.

The classic perception of the acceptability of the “punishment” that followed Japanese defeat in WWII is gradually losing popularity. By disassociating themselves from the imperial state, the Japanese masses were

² Midford, “Japan's Response to Terror,” 339; Katzenstein, *Rethinking Japanese Security: Internal and External Dimensions*, 19.

able to sidestep the issue of war guilt.³ The conceit of victim status was even promoted in the aftermath of WWII, as the Japanese imperial state disintegrated. The history of modern Japan nevertheless suggests that the increasing tolerance and incorporation of this cultural change into the discourse of Japanese nationalism signifies a marked break with the past. By utilizing a historical framework, the changing nature of Japanese nationalism can be examined through its interaction with political development in post-war Japan.

Many proponents of *Nihonjinron* believe that the postwar remodeling of the nation is responsible for negatively affecting the Japanese sense of national pride. It is argued that the pacifism of postwar Japan is accountable for the restriction of Japanese power and world influence.⁴ Central to this argument is the idea that the restoration of a national identity is contingent on eradicating any lingering feelings of defeat.

In order to gain the influence to steer Japanese nationalism, self-proclaimed nationalists have utilized a selective arrangement of ideas, events, and institutions of historical significance to construct an idealized Japan; this construction is used within *Nihonjinron* discourse to frame the major political and foreign policy issues of modern Japan. The array of issues which are used to develop this nationalist discourse are reflective of how perceptions of the

³ McVeigh, *Nationalisms of Japan*, 77.

⁴ Togo, "Japan's Historical Memory: Overcoming Polarization toward Synthesis," 75.

“other” can shape endogenous nationalism.⁵ Within the nationalist discourse, Korea is given a prominent and antagonistic role.

Contemporary Japan and “Nationalism”

Nationalism has been classified into many categories in the pursuit of an authoritative definition. Examples from the multitude of categorical distinctions include civic nationalism, ethnic nationalism, state-centric nationalism, popular nationalism, and cultural nationalism. It is possible to conceptually discriminate between these manifestations of nationalism, and nationalism in contemporary Japan is no exception.⁶

In contemporary Japan, nationalism manifests itself in certain characteristic ways. For most modern Japanese, "nationalism" is synonymous with "patriotism".⁷ Such conflation is largely due to the saliency of the heightened nationalism of the modernization movement instigated by the Meiji Restoration.⁸

In Japan, a superpatriotic elite, relying on a nativist and “ancient tradition” tinted with mysticism, set out to define the “Japanese nation” in order to expand their power, quell domestic dissension, and deal with foreign

⁵ Gladney, *Making majorities*.

⁶ Shulman, “Challenging the Civic/Ethnic and West/East Dichotomies in the Study of Nationalism.”

⁷ There is a growing body of research that posits that nationalism can be distinguished from patriotism both theoretically and empirically. In this framework, patriotism denotes a strong affection toward their home country while nationalism is the belief that the country should surpass other nations.

See Karasawa, “Patriotism, Nationalism, and Internationalism among Japanese Citizens,” 659. Mummendey, Klink, and Brown, “Nationalism and patriotism.”

⁸ Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan*, 91.

threats.⁹ This period of acute nationalist sentiment—lasting through the period of imperialism and militarism dominated by the militarily-controlled state—culminated in Japan’s WWII defeat. The state became the definitive factor of the Japanese nation during this period; the state came to signify the identity of the Japanese people.

The modern discourse of *Nihonjinron* is thus centered on the state and its role in defining Japan as a nation. Modern Japanese nationalists regard the state as essential to the development of Japanese nationalism. From their perspective, postwar Japanese national identity is an intrinsic rejection of what wartime Japan had represented.¹⁰ Patriotism is essential for the abrogation of defeatist nationalism and the further advance of Japanese nationalism.

The popularity of the homogeneity myth—wherein Japan is regarded as a holistic group, unified in shared ethnicity and culture—ensures that “ethnicity” and “nation” are conflated terms.¹¹ The notion of “nation” or “nationality” as a culturally rooted and ethnically defined reality is firmly held by most Japanese people, despite the various recent arguments debunking the myth of Japanese homogeneity.¹² The idea of Japanese as a people is a social construct defined in ethno-cultural terms. Cultural nationalism in Japan assumes the existence of an essential culture, one that is composed of a set of

⁹ McVeigh, *Nationalisms of Japan*, 85.

¹⁰ Oh and Ishizawa-Grbic, “Forgiving the Culprits: Japanese Historical Revisionism in a Post-Cold War Context,” 53.

¹¹ Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan*, 68.

¹² See Burgess, “Multicultural Japan? Discourse and the ‘Myth’ of Homogeneity.”; Lie, *Multicultural Japan*.; Weiner, *Japan's Minorities*.

shared fundamental values, norms, and beliefs.¹³ The concept of an innate “Japaneseness” is essential to the continuing appeal of Nihonjinron. Certain expectations about what it is to be a “excellent” Japanese, as a member of the Japanese state (*kokumin*) and a member of the Japanese nation (*Nihonjin*) make up the heart of Nihonjinron.

Idealized Japanese characteristics consist of characteristics such as Japanese citizenship (*kokuseki*), proper Japanese language, and the observance of certain conventions and social norms that have stood the test of time; variations on this theme—such as preference for harmonious societal relations, filial piety, and the acceptance of institutions that uphold a hierarchical view of the society—all form the essential elements of cultural nationalism in modern Japan.¹⁴ The dominant view within Nihonjinron places cultural homogeneity as an indispensable quality for a strong and unified Japan. Within this paradigm, Japan is perceived as an organic, natural community rather than an artificially created structure that was consciously manufactured by elites.

Nihonjinron disregards the reality of the social construction of the Japanese nation, preferring to advocate a national consciousness that can be traced back in time to the geological formation of the Japanese archipelago.”¹⁵ To the extent that the general public shares these assumptions and views, the nationalists can readily take advantage of these premises in appealing to the

¹³ Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan*..

¹⁴ Lie, *Multiethnic Japan*, 131.

¹⁵ Fujitani, “Inventing, Forgetting, Remembering: Toward a Historical Ethnography of the Nation-State,” 82.

natural, inborn sense of identity of the Japanese people as a nation and pursue their political campaign to remake Japan in their image.¹⁶ This ability to appeal to the Japanese public's desire for a positive connection to their in-group has proven fundamental in infusing Nihonjinron thought into popular conceptions of Japanese nationalism.¹⁷ A particularly apt example of Nihonjinron influence is the homogeneity myth, a belief so pervasive that it informs everyday discourse, media, journalism, and academic writings about Japan. Thus it is hardly surprising that many Japanese people today believe that "the vast majority of Japanese are ethnically and racially homogenous."¹⁸ This effort is arguably so successful that there has been a noted upswing in ethnocentric sentiment that is critical of Koreans living in Japan, Japanese-Brazilians, and Ainu among other examples.¹⁹

A multitude of Japanese words exist that denote different types of "nationalism". They include statism (*kokkashugi*), ultra-nationalism (*kokusuishugi*), racialism/ethnocentrism (*minzokushugi*), and simply nationalism. In the liberal (and largely anti-nationalist) discourse on contemporary Japan, nationalism carries the negative connotations of statism, ultra-nationalism, and ethnocentrism that are linked with Japanese

¹⁶ In contrast, the anti-nationalists, most of whom are essentially "constructivists", prefer to see Japan, normatively or descriptively, as a more diversified Japan that is open to non-Japanese ethnicities and cultures.

¹⁷ Karasawa, "Patriotism, Nationalism, and Internationalism among Japanese Citizens," 647.

¹⁸ Stronach, *Beyond the Rising Sun*, 164.

¹⁹ Ryang, *Koreans in Japan*. Tsuda, *Strangers in the ethnic homeland*.

wartime atrocities.²⁰ Nihonjinron proponents deny or reject this unflattering view and attempt to remove the negative connotations from the discussion of nationalism in contemporary Japan.

Shinzo Abe is the most prominent political elite who advocates the Nihonjinron view of modern Japan. In his book "Utsukushii kuni e" (For a Beautiful Country), Abe describes an ideal Japan -- a "beautiful" Japan -- and this ideal practically matches the nationalist view of the country embodied in Nihonjinron. Abe asserts that the national pride of Japan must recover from the defeat of the Second World War by discarding the negative view of Japan that dominated the postwar intellectual community and the media. Under the influence of "progressive" (*shinpoha*) and "liberals" who opposed the Liberal Democratic Party and its policies, respect for traditional Japan has waned. The decreasing power of Japan is also attributed to the limitations inherent in Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution; Abe has claimed that he would "like to draft a new constitution with [his] own hands," in his effort to negate Japan's post-war legacy. Along with his pledge to revise Japan's "peace constitution," Abe reveals a preoccupation with historical revisionism in his support of a "basic law on education" that would cultivate national awareness.²¹ Both goals expose the nurturing of a repudiation of the foundations of postwar Japanese democracy.

²⁰ For liberal views on nationalism in Japan and elsewhere, see Kang Sang-jung, *Nashonarizumu (Nationalism)*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2001 and Kang Sang-jung, *Han-nashonarizumu (Anti-nationalism)*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 2005.

²¹ Abe, *Towards a Beautiful Country*.

Abe also places great importance on the role of the state within Japanese nationalism; the state should be the source of Japanese identity. Patriotism (*aikokushin*) is an expansion of people's love of their native place (*kyodoai*). The state should reciprocate the respect of its citizens by protecting lives and livelihood against foreign intrusion. The type of nationalism advocated by Abe is a blending of statist, ethnic, and cultural nationalism. Other proponents of Nihonjinron harmonize this type of nationalist sentiment with racist overtones and xenophobic attitudes toward the outside world, particularly toward China and Korea.

Defeat in WWII and Japanese Nationalism

The conception of Japan—founded and sustained by the hegemonic state in the prewar period—as a modern state with sufficient intellectual, spiritual, and material power to defend itself, suffered in the aftermath of WWII.²² The age of imperialism had allegedly seen the birth of a unified Japan with a common history, identity, and destiny but the end of the Japanese empire marked the start of a new approach. The International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) would supposedly punish those responsible for plunging Japan into military aggression against its neighbors.²³ It was generally believed that the demilitarization of the country, the adoption of a new constitution, and the dismantling of the old imperial hierarchy would succeed in establishing a democratic Japan; the eventual rehabilitation of the nation into the community of civilized nations was the

²² Pyle, *Japan Rising*, 176.

²³ Totani, *The Tokyo War Crimes Trial*..

putative end goal of the extensive American involvement in postwar Japan. In 1951, Japan began its rehabilitation by regaining its independence through the San Francisco Peace Treaty.²⁴ The subsequent formation of an alliance with the United States, Japan's entry into the United Nations, World Bank, IMF, and the GATT all evidenced Japan's rehabilitation.

However, the question of Japanese wartime history constituted an ominous foundation for both domestic and international relations. Wartime atrocities and the issue of general wartime policy irrevocably marred the discourse of nationalism within Japan. The outcome of the IMTFE was not able to provide indisputable answers for the question of blame. Nationalists have in fact dismissed and continue to argue against the legitimacy of the judgments rendered by the IMTFE.²⁵ For proponents of Nihonjinron-influenced nationalism, the re-establishment of diplomatic interaction with neighboring countries—namely the normalization of relations with Korea (in 1965)—was sufficient to fully account for Japanese wartime actions.²⁶ In this view, only the advent of the Cold War and Japan's incorporation into the U.S. hub and spokes security structure of East Asia prevented full reconciliation with Japan's neighbors.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, it became clear that the American security structure in the Asia-Pacific had hindered the development of true reconciliation; this deficit was evident in the ostensibly disproportionate Korean protests of Japanese visits to Yasukuni Shrine, statements regarding

²⁴ Totman, *A History of Japan*. 441.

²⁵ Togo, "Japan's Historical Memory: Overcoming Polarization toward Synthesis," 75.

the ownership of Dokdo/Takeshima, and the unfair treatment of comfort women. The increasing popularity of Nihonjinron can thus be explained as a defense against the failure to satisfactorily address wartime issues and what is viewed as attempts to weaken Japan. External developments and domestic criticisms also molded the nationalist discourse. Visits to the Yasukuni Shrine by political leaders and the “comfort women” controversy have indelibly shaped the discussion of Japanese nationalism.

The Saga of Yasukuni Shrine

The issue of Japanese political leaders’ visits to Yasukuni Shrine remains a source of controversy within nationalist discourse.²⁷ The Tokyo Shokonsha was originally dedicated in 1869 to assuaging the spirits of those who had sacrificed themselves for the Meiji Restoration; the shrine was part of the new regime’s campaign to “reinforce imperial authority and counter the doctrinal appeal of Christianity,” which was perceived as a fundamental underpinning of European power.²⁸ Tokyo Shokonsha was formally renamed as Yasukuni in 1879 in an effort to reaffirm loyalty to the state by incentivizing devoted service to the Japanese government.²⁹

From the perspective of Nihonjinron advocates, Japan's defeat in the Second World War and subsequent weakness allowed for “foreign values” to be imposed on postwar Japan; these foreign impositions focused on the disassembling of the political-military regime. Post-WWII occupation policy

²⁶ Van Dyke, “Reconciliation between Korea and Japan,” 217.

²⁷ Bridges, *Japan and Korea in the 1990s*, 164.

²⁸ Totman, *A History of Japan*, 292.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

endangered the survival of Yasukuni Shrine; even without adequate historical knowledge of the significance of Yasukuni, postwar occupation officials “understood that the cult of the war dead as it was practiced at its wartime height rested on a network of political and institutional links controlled by the state and culminating in the emperor.”³⁰ Eventually a compromise was reached in 1945 when the Japanese government proposed and the U.S. government accepted an application for the continued existence of the shrine as a private religious establishment.³¹ The establishment of the postwar constitution in 1947 confirmed the legal status of Yasukuni Shrine as a private, religious institution and at least nominally satisfied the postwar occupation government’s desire for adequate separation of state and religion. Emperor Hirohito visited Yasukuni seven times with the last time being in 1975, but Emperor Akihito has yet to visit the shrine. 16 of the 29 Japanese prime ministers who have taken office after WWII have visited Yasukuni during their tenure in office.³²

Visits to Yasukuni by Japanese officials have generated serious controversy since Prime Minister Nakasone paid an official visit to the shrine on August 15, 1985. In response to reports of Nakasone's impending visit to the shrine, a general outcry arose from neighboring Asian countries.³³ The Shinto facility’s enshrinement of Hideki Tojo among other Class-A war

³⁰ Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945-2005*, 235.

³¹ Totman, *A History of Japan*, 490.

³² Sturgeon, *Japan's Yasukuni Shrine*, 101.

³³ Tamamoto, “A Land without Patriots,” 34.

criminals was the basis for much of the controversy surrounding official visits to the shrine.

The Yasukuni enshrinement of war criminals was initially a contentious proposal. Class-B and Class-C war criminals were enshrined at Yasukuni in 1959. The Japanese government permitted the secret enshrinement of fourteen Class-A war criminals, including Prime Minister and General Hideki Tojo along with five other generals and three other prime ministers.³⁴ While the issue of prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni are commonly seen as a symbol for Japan's lack of atonement for the war and the absence of reconciliation with the Asian victims of the Japanese empire, Chinese and Korean objections are not really the root of the controversy. On the whole, it is the Japanese who do not want anything to do with what Yasukuni is meant to represent- war and patriotism, and the supremacy of the state over the sanctity of individual life. For nationalists, such developments obviously did much to relieve irritation garnered from the IMTFE; however, the actual enshrinement of Class-A war criminals was not made public until 1979.³⁵

The relatively recent visits to Yasukuni by ex-Prime Minister Koizumi supplied incentive for vehement anti-Japanese demonstrations and diplomatic protests in South Korea.³⁶ Such fervor over these visits is a continuation of a pattern that originated from Prime Minister Nakasone's official visit to the shrine on August 15, 1985. After Koizumi's visit in October

³⁴ Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945-2005*, 79.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

2005, the Korean government refused to hold a bilateral summit meeting with Japan.³⁷ Korean protestors asserted that official visits to Yasukuni were synonymous with the honoring of the multitude of war criminals enshrined there. Official Japanese responses highlight the disparity between Korean and Japanese perceptions of the Yasukuni Shrine and its role in nationalist sentiment.

The visits to Yasukuni Shrine by high-ranking officials are perceived as signs of unrepentant militarism by foreign observers and give rise to fears of a possible rise of militarism in Japan once again. However, there is a stark contrast between Japanese public opinion and foreign perceptions. While most Japanese observers see the potential for a new militarist Japan as farfetched (52% of Japanese oppose the Shrine visits while only 36% supported them according to one *Asahi Shimbun* poll conducted in 2005), given Korea's history with Japan, renewed militarism can be seen as a real and legitimate fear.³⁸

Further antagonism of the relationship between Japan and Korea can be attributed to the controversy surrounding the Yasukuni Shrine. Japanese nationalists support the visits of Japanese prime ministers by construing them as standard gestures of respect in honor of those who sacrificed their lives for Japan. The dynamic between ideas of civic involvement and ethnic nationalism reassert themselves in the Yasukuni Shrine discourse. "The democratization, as it were, of the Yasukuni Shrine issue and the resulting

³⁶ Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945-2005*, 282-3.

³⁷ Togo, "Japan's Historical Memory: Overcoming Polarization toward Synthesis," 119-20.

broader public interest in matters of war memory” supplemented Nihonjinron and influenced its modern development.³⁹

Japanese nationalists indulge in myriad interpretations and explanations regarding the Yasukuni Shrine and the controversial enshrinement of Japanese war criminals. While nationalists question the authority of the IMTFE to try Japanese citizens, the emphasis on the absence of any existing domestic law that expressly forbid Japanese wartime actions facilitates accusations of victor’s justice.⁴⁰ From the nationalist perspective, the motive for the Japanese signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty—and for the acceptance of the IMTFE outcome—has little to do with the image of the Japanese state advanced by postwar occupation officials.

Proponents of Nihonjinron perceive the IMTFE as a deception designed to impose political judgment upon the vanquished; thus, the trial holds little to no authority or legitimacy for those who perceive the IMTFE in this manner. The retroactive application of charges such as "crime against peace," or "crime against humanity" regarding Japan, represent an attempt to fortify a kind of victor’s justice.⁴¹ Some Japanese scholars and intellectuals concurred, accepted, and supported the idea of a “crime against peace.” Despite the retroactive nature of the IMTFE judgment, well-known elites like Yasuyuki Onuma have found a way to justify the IMTFE judgment.⁴²

³⁸ Kim, “Korean relations under the Roh Moo-hyun Government 2003-2007,” 473.

³⁹ Ibid., 250.

⁴⁰ Dower, *Embracing defeat*, 475; 563.

⁴¹ Ibid., 475.

⁴² Togo, “Japan's Historical Memory: Overcoming Polarization toward Synthesis,” 74.

The strength of fervent Japanese nationalism correlates with the force of external outrage and protest. The proposal by several elites of several possible compromises—varying from a total end to state official visits to Yasukuni to the removal of the names of Class A war criminals from the shrine—have proved untenable. The controversy continues and has also gathered unfavorable side-arguments.

A multitude of other issues tied up with the Yasukuni Shrine issue have become eclipsed by the latest round of diplomatic quarrelling over prime minister visits; many Japanese perceive international criticism of Yasukuni Shrine visits as an effort to obscure more serious domestic problems.⁴³ Other issues involved with Yasukuni include the involvement of the state in nationalist culture and the moral responsibility of Yasukuni's role in the growth of militarist nationalism. Yasukuni Shrine has served as a rallying symbol for the consolidation of nationalist forces in modern Japan.⁴⁴

The issue of Yasukuni Shrine visitation illustrates a significant point about the legacy of imperial Japan and its importance to Japanese interaction with Korea and other neighboring Asian countries. As long as the Japanese state fails to address the underlying issues that generate such fervor over official visits to Yasukuni, nationalists will continue to exploit the issue to augment anti-foreign sentiments among otherwise disinterested members of the Japanese public.⁴⁵ Were it not for the diplomatic controversy engendered

⁴³ Ryu, "The Yasukuni Controversy: Divergent Perspectives from the Japanese Political Elite," 707.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan*..

by previous prime ministers' visits to Yasukuni, Prime Minister Abe would not have hesitated to visit Yasukuni Shrine.

At the beginning of Abe's term as prime minister, he proclaimed an ambiguous strategy—declaring that he would not say whether he would or would not visit Yasukuni Shrine. While this action appeared to calm Korean-Japanese relations, further developments have exposed Abe's statement as an insufficient palliative for deeper issues that have yet to be resolved.⁴⁶ With or without elite manipulation of existing animosity, sources of unresolved antagonism still threaten to upset the balance of the Japan-ROK relationship.

Comfort Women

The comfort women tragedy has become an important element of Japanese nationalist discourse and consequently, of Japanese-Korean international interaction. The comfort women controversy consists of allegations that the Japanese military forced women into a form of sexual slavery during WWII. While young women from all Japanese controlled areas were abducted or recruited by the Japanese military, the majority were taken from the Korean populace.⁴⁷

Estimates of the number of women pressed into this form of military prostitution typically vary. Ranging anywhere from 20,000 to 400,000, the estimations reveal much about the increasingly ethnocentric nature of Japanese nationalist discourse.⁴⁸ The wide disparity in estimates correlates with the degree of association with the Japanese nationalist cause.

⁴⁶ Togo, "Japan's Historical Memory: Overcoming Polarization toward Synthesis," 120.

⁴⁷ Yoshimi, *Comfort Women*, 100-1.

Documentation that the Japanese military recruited women by force is linked with statements such as that issued by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono in 1993, which attributed responsibility of the comfort women issue to the Japanese military state.

In August 1993, Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama made a personal apology to the comfort women, saying "On the issue of the treatment of the many comfort women, and the damage done to their honor and dignity, I would like to take this opportunity once again to express my profound and sincere remorse and apologies."⁴⁹ Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono issued a statement in 1993 that stated that "the Government of Japan extends its sincere apologies and feelings of remorse to all those who suffered much pain and incurable physical and psychological damage as so-called wartime comfort women."⁵⁰ Kono's statement continued on to pledge that the Japanese would not close their eyes to this historical truth, would remember the problem for a long time through history studies and history education, and would never repeat the same mistake.⁵¹

An Asian Women's Fund (AWF) was formed in 1995 and was nominally headed by Prime Minister Murayama. In recompense, each comfort women was to receive a compensation of 2 million yen along with a letter of apology signed by the prime minister; women from the Philippines, South Korea,

⁴⁸ Rose, *Sino-Japanese Relations*, 88.

⁴⁹ Shellie K. Park, Note, Broken Silence: Redressing the Mass Rape and Sexual Enslavement of Asian Women by the Japanese Government in an Appropriate Forum, 3 *Asian-Pacific Law and Policy Journal*, 23, 44 (2002).

⁵⁰ "Asian Women's Fund."

Taiwan, the Netherlands, and Indonesia received benefits from the fund.⁵² Despite the ostensible attempt at apology and compensation implicit in the Asian Women's Fund, the creation of the AWF has garnered criticism both domestically and internationally. While Japanese nationalists have disparaged such efforts like the AWF as "self-flagellating (jigyaku) exercises that [have] eroded Japanese national pride and self-confidence," some comfort women have refused monetary compensation because the AWF is viewed as a way for the Japanese state to avoid confirming the role of the state in the comfort women issue.⁵³

The Kono and the Maruyama statements have continually been a source of ire for Japanese nationalists, who claim that the government too easily approved the Kono statement in its eagerness to ease relations with South Korea.⁵⁴ By asserting that the government was too hasty in its statement of apology, in the process overlooking biased documentation and insubstantial evidence, Japanese nationalists have made the case for withdrawing both statements.⁵⁵

The comfort women controversy garnered international and domestic scrutiny in March 2007 with then Prime Minister Abe's statement that no

⁵¹ "MOFA: Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the result of the study on the issue of "comfort women"."

⁵² Togo, "Japan's Historical Memory: Overcoming Polarization toward Synthesis," 64.

⁵³ Togo, "Japan's Historical Memory: Overcoming Polarization toward Synthesis," 32; Tabuchi, "Japan's Abe."

The rejection of monetary recompense is a conscious manifestation of the desire for more holistic resolution. Such a desire is often expressed in feminist scholarship that addresses the importance in the reclamation of agency and the rejection of victim status.

See Kimura, "Narrative as a site of subject construction."

⁵⁴ Grossman and Nolan, *Crimes of War*.

evidence of coercion existed in the matter of comfort women recruitment.⁵⁶ Abe's statement incensed both Asian and Western countries. In direct disagreement with earlier official statements regarding the comfort women issue, Abe's statement provoked a diplomatic conflagration that only increased as Abe prepared to attend a US-Japan summit. Prime Minister Abe quickly amended his rash statement and expressed his regrets for the violations of human rights with regard to comfort women. In regards to the comfort women issue, Abe stated "As both an individual and as prime minister, I sympathize with those women who were forced to taste life's bitterness. I also am full of a feeling of a need to apologize over the fact that they were placed in such a painful situation."⁵⁷ This statement was offered in response to the imminent U.S. House resolution demanding an official Japanese apology to comfort women; Abe's step back and subsequent announcement of support for Yohei Kono's 1993 statement was also allegedly provoked by U.S. ambassador Thomas Schieffer's strict censure of Abe's negation of Japan's role in the comfort women controversy.⁵⁸ President Bush replied in response that he appreciated the sincere and frank words by Prime Minister Abe on this issue and considered the issue resolved.⁵⁹

Japanese nationalists were palpably incensed at Abe's statement as it implied that the Japanese state had been in any way responsible for the comfort women issue. A representative example of Japanese nationalist

⁵⁵ Togo, "Japan's Historical Memory: Overcoming Polarization toward Synthesis," 31.

⁵⁶ Tabuchi, "Prime Minister Denies Women Were Forced Into WWII Brothels."

⁵⁷ "MOFA: Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting (Summary) (April 27, 2007)."

⁵⁸ "U.S. got Abe to drop denial over sex slaves."

thought regarding the comfort women issue is Kobayashi Yoshinori's assertion that Japan should cease attempts at appeasing neighboring Asian countries and the US. Within this argument, Kobayashi implies that imperial Japanese action was justified in spite of its defeat in WWII.⁶⁰ The way in which the Allies defeated imperial Japan merely uncovered structural racism and wartime Japan acquitted itself in a courageous manner; in his perspective, victimized women in Asia should be proud of being comfort women in that their occupation was able to provide a certain measure of respite and comfort for Japanese soldiers. Kobayashi also emphasizes that the IMTFE's categorization of Japan as a "cruel and aggressive nation" and a "warlike militarist nation" is a "fraud on history" that the Japanese should not take seriously.⁶¹

Disputed Ownership of Dokdo/Takeshima Island

Nationalist criticisms are abundant in the territorial dispute over the Takeshima/Dokdo Island that lies in the Sea of Japan/East Sea; the classification of the "other" is quite clearly used in an attempt to build up nationalist sentiment in Japan. The islets in question are occupied by Korea but claimed by both countries. While these islets possess little to no resource or tactical advantage, the continuing nationalist fervor over the issue of their ownership obviously denotes underlying unresolved issues.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Clifford, "Cleansing History, Cleansing Japan: Kobayashi Yoshinori's Analects of War and Japan's Revisionist Revival," 1.

⁶¹ Kobayashi Yoshinori, "Rekisho wo mamoru kigai wo imakoso torimodose" (Now Is the Time to Regain the Courage to Protect History), Seiron, September 2007, p. 46. Kobayashi Yoshinori is a bestselling Japanese conservative author and mangaka/comic artist.

The Takeshima/Dokdo issue was the subject of an in-depth Japanese study which submitted a final report in May 2007 to the Governor of Shimane Prefecture, the regional administrative district that possessed nominal jurisdiction over the disputed islets. Several Japanese nationalists claim that this study and its subsequent report are the most comprehensive and unbiased study of the ownership dispute generated by Takeshima/Dokdo. This report unsurprisingly ruled in favor of Japanese ownership of the islets.⁶²

Since the end of Japan's colonial occupation of Korea in 1945, Japan and South Korea have disputed ownership of Dokdo/Takeshima in a variety of ways that range from closed door negotiations to widespread public demonstrations. Both sides of the dispute have not hesitated to go to extremes: In 1995, one of South Korea's major television networks sent a camera crew to the islets for a whole year to document in excruciating detail the wonders of a "Korean" islet. The shift in the dispute came in 2004, when members of an obscure right-wing in Japan's Shimane Prefecture set sail to definitively claim the islets for Japan. The South Korean government promised full military retaliation if the Japanese group made landfall; while Tokyo made proclamations of Japanese sovereignty, the Japanese Coast Guard herded the group back to Japan.⁶³

The efforts of this obscure right-wing group served as a catalyst for growing tensions between the two countries. As the centennial of the beginning of the Japanese Empire approached in 2005, Shimane regional

⁶² Fern, "Tokdo or Takeshima? The International Law of Territorial Acquisition in the Japan-Korea Island Dispute."

politicians voted to institute a Takeshima Day. Unlike the actions of the previous summer, Tokyo made no attempt to stop the regional politicians' movement to declare the islets as Japanese; this was construed by some as tacit approval but Tokyo defined the affair as a purely local matter. Anti-Japanese sentiment exploded across Korea with the declaration of Takeshima Day. Seoul effectively announced that the holiday was an "effective withdrawal of the apologies that Japanese leaders and politicians have made for Japan's past aggressions and imperialist record."⁶⁴ The continuing dispute over Takeshima/Dokdo are indicative of growing entrenchment of more radical nationalist views in Japan.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to trace the growing radicalization of Japanese nationalist discourse by highlighting certain issues that are a form of contention between Japan and South Korea. The analysis of Japanese nationalist discourse has outlined the major goals of the nationalists and the arguments centering on issues such as the comfort women controversy and the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute. The foregoing analysis has outlined the major goals of the nationalists and their arguments. Their overriding goal is to free the nation from the memory of its humiliating defeat in the last war and to give the masses a renewed sense of purpose. They want to bury the defeatist view of Japan that they attribute to the results of postwar liberalism and pacifism. They want to revamp the education system and foster patriotism in

⁶³ Dudden, *Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States*..

⁶⁴ *Korea Herald*, February 23, 2005.

the younger generations who they believe are not yet infected by the liberalism of the left. These nationalists also want to remove from their constitution the vestiges of the defeat in the last war and the Allied occupation. The selective revival of ideas, events, and institutions from Japan's past has allowed the creation of a new framework for discourse. In attempting to remove the scars of Japan's defeat in the last war by putting forth a revisionist interpretation of the war, Japan's war responsibility is avoided and the domestic and international criticisms of Japanese wartime atrocities are deflected. The prewar role of Yasukuni Shrine has been recast into a war memorial where Japanese can visit without a guilty conscience. Japanese nationalist discourse is preoccupied with overcoming the national humiliation suffered with Japan's defeat in WWII. To move beyond the defeatist attitude that Japanese nationalists perceive as negatively affecting Japan, elements of pacifism and appeasement should be banished from Japan.

By selectively using unresolved issues from Japan's past to highlight the perceived failures of a modern Japan, Japanese nationalists are attempting to construct an ideal of Japan that is markedly more militaristic, belligerent, and ethnocentric. The creation of a revisionist interpretation of the war—which incorporates a rejection of responsibility for Japanese wartime atrocities—is useful in turning international criticisms into tools for nurturing xenophobia among a otherwise disinterested Japanese public.

VI Conclusion

The relationship between Japan and South Korea is anything but straightforward, despite the oft-given explanation of historically rooted animosity. From this perspective, the source of Korean resentment is obviously rooted in the wartime atrocities committed by imperial Japan. Japanese anger often manifests itself in a discomfort and frustration at perpetual Korean attempts to hold Japan responsible for its wartime brutalities and in feelings of superiority implicit in the mindsets of former colonizers. Due to the biases originating from this shared history on the part of the public and government of both countries, it is hardly astonishing that the relationship between the two countries is marked by distrust and derision.

Japan is always in the best position to offend Korean nationalistic sensibilities because of the sheer amount of history between the two countries, and because Japan generally remains either ignorant or insensitive to the crimes of its past. The negative historical has become intrinsic in both countries through a variety of informal and formal institutions. Memories of Japanese atrocities are passed down through family folklore and popular media stereotypes reinforce ethnocentric histories taught in both countries. Korean nationalism is especially vitriolic in regards to Japan because significant parts of the Korean national identity were constructed in opposition to Japan.

Notwithstanding the relevant atmosphere of animosity in the Japan-South Korea relationship, realist predictions of the relationship between the

two East Asian nations appear to be inaccurate. Many scholars have noted that South Korea and Japan are natural regional allies due to their mutual capitalistic economic systems, embrace of Western culture, and shared alliances with the reigning American hegemon. According to the democratic peace theory, the democratic nature of South Korea and Japan would make national alignment more likely because the two countries would perceive the other as less of a threat than the non-democratic regimes of Northeast Asia; the common security threat—represented by both North Korea and a rising China—is yet another reason in support of a strong and close relationship between the two countries. Yet in spite of this mutual need and in many ways contrary to classical realist thought, Japan and South Korea have found it complicated to work in their mutual best interest.

It is in dealing with its history in Asia that Japan seems to be its own worst enemy. The cycle is tiresomely predictable as Japanese leaders do something insensitive and their potential South Korean allies then distance themselves from Japan. Much of the general public of Korea perceives Japan as an unacceptable ally.¹ History dictates that South Korea view Japan as a threat even if it is not one in reality. Neither nation fully considers the other as a potential ally; however the foreign and security policy elites in each nation see the potential benefit in allying the two nations. For South Korea it is a much greater risk to ally with Japan than for Japan to ally with South Korea given their shared history.

South Korea also has substantial economic investments in both China

and Japan; however, the economic costs of reunification with the North are a cause for worry if reunification occurs. The economic conditions in the North are dire enough that reunification could lead to South Korean financial collapse without significant economic aid from its major trading partners; thus South Korea must keep in the good graces of all of its wealthy trading partners including Japan. On the other hand, South Korean leaders also have to worry about the opinion of a public that is very hostile to Japan. A 2005 poll stated that 89% of South Koreans expressed that they “cannot trust Japan.”²

Japan and South Korea clearly have a long way to travel before a thick reconciliation can be reached. While the long and varied history between these two nations has contributed much to the antagonism that characterizes their relationship, other factors such as the ingrained culture of animosity and the increasing prevalence of democratic norms complicates the relationship further. The conclusion will investigate the viability of reconciliation between the two East Asian nations. The history between these two nations have undeniably affected the tenability of a productive relationship but current economic realities, and the common threat posed to both nations in the form of North Korea might provide a foundation for true reconciliation of the two democracies.

Economic Relations

The economic relationship between South Korea and Japan over the

¹ Midford, “Challenging the Democratic Peace?,” 17.

² Ibid., 25.

past twenty years stands in direct contrast to the hostile political relations between the two nations. The industry and pop culture of the new worldwide globalized market place triggers no memory of the historic hostility between Japan and Korea. For example, nearly one-third of all foreign tourists visiting Japan were South Korean in 2009, the single largest group to visit Japan.³ More than 3 million Japanese visited South Korea in 2009, making it the second most popular destination for Japanese behind only China.⁴

Evidence of Japan's economic and cultural influence is apparent everywhere in South Korea, from karaoke bars to Korean translations of Japanese comic books (*manga*) to even semi-government banned (in the 1990s) Japanese satellite programs broadcasted by Japan's public television network. Korean officials have been intentionally cautious of Japanese investments, limiting the commercial activity of Japanese banks and securities in Korea; however, the Korean Ministry of Finance permitted the first Japanese security firm to open a full branch office in Seoul in 1992. The economic relationship between Japan and South Korea has noticeably advanced in the past two decades.

Further evidence of growing Japanese-South Korean bilateral economic and trade relations include the discussion of a Japan-Korea free trade area (FTA) which enjoys widespread support in the business communities of both countries; Prime Minister Hatoyama has pledged his

³ "Statistics of Visitors to Japan from Overseas."

⁴ "Statistics of Japanese Tourists Travelling Abroad."

support to the creation of a Japan-Korea FTA.⁵ Recent developments have both sides recognizing the mutual economic benefit of an FTA and their joint responsibility in ensuring the primacy of the FTA issue within the domestic politics of each nation.

In spite of the mounting political realization that economic ties are mutually beneficial, many veteran Korean executives remain lukewarm about economic ties with Japan. Many South Korean executives and members of the general public feel that Korea should try to foster as much independence as possible, due to the nature of Korea's history with Japan; however, they seem resigned to the reality that the two nations will continue to have close economic and business ties. At the same time, however, many veteran businesspeople with a forward looking view understand that the close relationship of economic ties with Japan is responsible for much of Korea's economic success.

In 2000, travel between the two nations grew exponentially to a rate of more than two million private visits a year. It appears that the continued interaction between the two countries has helped to break down previous misconceptions between their cultures. Howard French of *The New York Times* explains,

Where diplomacy has often come up short in the past, growing contacts like these between South Korea and Japan seem to be changing the ways—often deeply stereotyped—the two people think

⁵ Funabashi, "Tokyo-Seoul FTA Cornerstone of E. Asia Community."

about each other.⁶

For example, Japanese people who visit South Korea often find it to be a much more developed of a nation than they had been led to believe. Koreans are very sensitive to portrayals of their country, especially portrayals of it as underdeveloped.

Koreans have begun to notice this Japanese willingness to acknowledge them as peers rather than as historic Japanese subjects. As a result, South Korea has lifted many of the restrictions put in place in 1988 on “cultural imports” from Japan, such as Japanese films and television programming. It is also not uncommon for many Korean and Japanese teenagers to be well-versed in the other nation’s youth-culture.⁷

In an attempt to overcome the historic hostility between the two nations, Korean and Japanese academics began collaborative efforts to create a truthful depiction of the shared history between the two nations. Professor Koji Saeki—of Kyushu University in Fukuoka—argues that the days of Japanese attitudes of cultural superiority to Korea are fast fading. Along with the increase of academic exchanges, mutual respect of scholarly work in both countries is also growing.⁸ Academic exchanges combined with the cultural exchange brought about by frequent travel between the two nations seem to be the solution to resolving the historical animosity between the two nations. For example, many Japanese remain mostly unaware of the atrocities committed in South Korea during the Japanese occupation. Yet despite the

⁶ French, “Travel Boom Pulls Japan and South Korea Closer.”

⁷ “Findings of Joint Public Opinion Poll on Relations between Japan and the ROK (2007),” 8.

neglect of the Japanese media and academic disregard, the truth of the matter is still being told on a smaller scale; South Korean tour guides intentionally bring Japanese tourists to sites that commemorate the cultural and physical destruction of Korea by generations of Japanese invaders. Many Japanese tourists express shock and grief at never having learned about Japanese actions during the occupation of Korea through public school.⁹

In spite of political and historically rooted hostilities between Korea and Japan, the logical partnership of the two nations in the economic arena has broken through the barrier of a tumultuous history. What remains to be seen, however, is whether political maneuvering and/or economic partnerships will change the public South Korean and Japanese opinion. In combination with the incentive provided by economic cooperation, the mutual threat of North Korea may be able to circumvent the deeply ingrained anti-Japanese and anti-Korean sentiment of the general populace.

North Korea as Security Threat

From the realist perspective, the totalitarian communist dictatorship of Kim Jong Il in North Korea is the natural enemy of South Korea's democratic government. Simultaneously, North Korea represents the greatest and most dangerous threat to Japan. Japan and South Korea are thus the most logical allies in the region because they possess a mutual enemy. However, because both South Korea and North Korea were

⁸ French, "Travel Boom Pulls Japan and South Korea Closer."

⁹ Ibid.

occupied and colonized as a single country by the Japanese, both nations share the same historical animosity toward Japan. This situation is further complicated by South Korea's reconciliatory policy toward the North, which is aimed at drawing the two Koreas together.

The United States plays a huge role in South Korean security, economic, and foreign affairs. One of the defining differences between Japan and South Korea is their respective North Korean policies. The American relationship with Japan and South Korea—as well as its continued military presence in South Korea for the past half-century—has led to American pressure on Japan to assume a greater role in maintaining stability in the Korean peninsula. With the war on terror distracting the United States, America desires a closer relationship between Japan and South Korea to maintain the security of the Korean peninsula.

American pressure has come in spite of Japan's historically strained relation with South Korea. The fact that Japan historically has had vested security interests in Korea, which resulted in two wars with Russia and China, does not sit well with the contemporary Korean public. The historical effort by Japan to secure control over the Korean peninsula makes contemporary efforts to help with South Korean security challenging at best and downright inflammatory at worst. Although relations between the two nations have improved dramatically over the past twenty years, Japan and South Korea still remain uneasy associates rather than true allies.

South Korean policy toward the North could be described as one of vigilance and timidity. It recognizes the benefit implicit in a unified Korea;

the knowledge of the opportunities represented by unification has led South Korea to develop a reserved and cautious stance that is moderated depending on the ideological bent of the political leader governing South Korea. Japan, on the other hand, has adopted a much more aggressive stance toward North Korea than South Korea can, due to its great power status and less precarious geographic position. While Japan benefits from its geographical separation from the Korea Peninsula, South Korea enjoys no such buffer. Thus, unless North Korea develops into a more formidable threat and/or American pressure increases, Japanese desire for a cooperative relationship might be insufficient to surmount the mutual antagonism between the two countries.

Recent Relations

In spite of efforts on both sides, recent relations between Japan and Korea have been more focused on the past with one side wanting to forget it and the other refusing to let it go. The unstable political relationship experienced between South Korea and Japan is clearly exposed through the specific events of the last decade. South Korean oversensitivity and the frequently insensitive actions of Japanese leaders have led to political relations that range from cautious closeness to open hostility.

It is obvious that despite the great progress South Korea and Japan have made in reconciliation over the half century since the Japanese colonial occupation, relations still remain strained at best. Moreover, even though economic interactions between both nations have begun to change the public opinion of citizens of both nations, hostilities remain. Although great potential exists for political, diplomatic, and economic cooperation

between South Korea and Japan, the question remains as to whether the mutual animosity between these two nations can be put aside.

Potential Allies

Since the end of the Korean War, Japan and South Korea have cooperated best when they had mutual needs or mutual fears of abandonment by the United States came to the fore. Japan's careful distancing of itself from the United States (and President George W. Bush) and South Korea's problems with maintaining a close relationship with American may provide each nation with the incentive and opportunity to cooperate with each other. The leadership changes in both nations to leaders that are pragmatically trying to work with each other (and President Obama) facilitate the chances of building a better future relationship.

For these efforts to succeed beyond the near future, Japan and South Korea must begin to deal with the history issue in a evocative way. However, the generation in each country that lived through the time of Japanese colonial atrocities is fast disappearing. Chances for national healing will be more significant and useful if the Japanese generation responsible for the crimes apologizes to the generation in Korea that suffered.

This second area that could facilitate Japanese-Korean cooperation is political leadership. The current leadership of President Lee Myung Bak and Prime Minister Hatoyama appears to be generating a congenial relationship; in moving towards a more Asia-centered foreign policy, Hatoyama welcomed South Korea's prime minister, calling for "future-oriented ties, as opposed to

recalling the past.”¹⁰ As both nations are democracies, domestic political support is critical for policies. Domestic opinion can sometimes shape policy ahead of the leadership; the question is whether the current leadership can build on the cooperation that is already evident and institutionalize it in such a way as to immunize it from changes in public opinion that may occur in one or both nations. There seems to be an overall recognition on the part of the foreign policy elite of both countries that political cooperation between the two nations needs to match the current level of prospering economic cooperation. The security threat of North Korea shows the greatest potential to be the main source of unification; however, both South Korea and Japan need to meaningfully address historical sources of antagonism if true reconciliation is ever to be reached.

¹⁰ “In milestone year, Hatoyama seeks 'future-oriented' ties with South Korea.”

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