

THE COMFORT WOMEN AGREEMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MOTIVATIONS THAT
LED TO PARK GEUN-HYE'S ACQUIESCENCE

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By

Kangkyu Lee, A.B.

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Kangkyu Lee, A.B.

Thesis Advisor: Victor D. Cha, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Since normalization in 1965, bilateral relations between Japan and South Korea have been perennially mired in historical acrimony. However, in December 2015, the South Korean and Japanese Foreign Ministries consummated an unforeseen and sudden accord that sought to irreversibly resolve the comfort women issue. Why did President Park Geun-hye agree to finalize and pursue implementation of an agreement on comfort women with Japan, despite the longstanding discord between the two countries and widespread public opposition in South Korea to the resolution? I offer two complementary, alternative explanations in the form of security and economic prospects and deduce that case studies exhibiting strong external threats or economic opportunities have been insufficient in a vacuum to explain South Korean behavior vis-à-vis Japan. I argue that the absence of any 'final' reconciliation on historical issues in the past, despite these alternative explanations, demonstrates that the agreement was a manifestation of Park Geun-hye's unique leadership. I posit that the 'shadow' of Park Chung-hee has made a lasting impression on her leadership because of her father's strong and bold leadership style and the consequent role he played during Japanese-ROK normalization. Asian leaders affected by traumatic or otherwise substantial historical experiences will subsequently shape their political landscape and leadership styles in a way responsive to those experiences. Empirically, South Korean leadership has been influenced by the context of Japanese and Chinese leadership styles, codifying a permutation of both the purposefulness of the Japanese approach and the empty

sense of virtue of the Chinese approach. This has produced a high-risk, high-reward style of leadership in South Korea. This observation is primarily corroborated by Park Chung-hee's decision to strengthen South Korea, but under the recognition that Japan was a partner and model, not an enemy or dangerous rival. In this article, I contend that Park Geun-hye's attitude and policies are a byproduct of the environs created and left by Park Chung-hee, making the comfort women agreement an outcome that could only have resulted from the unique experiences and mindset of Park Geun-hye.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	1
1A. Lead-up to the Agreement.....	3
2. Alternative Explanations: Security	5
2A. Role of the United States	7
2B. Security vs. History	10
3. Alternative Explanations: Economic Prospects	14
4. Primary Explanatory Variable: Park Geun-hye’s Leadership	19
4A. The Agreement is Telling	19
4B. The Legacy of Park Chung-hee.....	21
4C. Translation to Policy	26
5. Conclusion	31
6. Bibliography	34

1. INTRODUCTION

The politicization of history has impeded progress in bilateral cooperation between the Japanese and South Korean governments ever since the normalization of relations. Efforts to upgrade the trilateral security cooperation between the U.S., South Korea, and Japan have failed to overcome sentiments of concern entrenched in domestic oppositions and outcry. Starting in the 1990s, the convergence of political interests transfused with nationalism has resulted in the sporadic falling-out of relations between Japan and South Korea, exemplifying in historical conflict between government agencies, and emotional outbursts within traditional/social media and the general public.¹ One of many of these infertile discourses stem from the sexual exploitation of South Korean women during the colonial and World War II period by the Japanese.²

Conflict and friction over the comfort women issue is undergirded by the legacy of Japanese wartime aggression and may have been eternal sticking points to policy makers in Seoul and Tokyo.³ However, in December 2015, the South Korean and Japanese government reached a surprising and sudden accord that sought to irreversibly and finally resolve the comfort

¹ Jonsson, Gabriel. 2015. "Can the Japan-Korea Dispute on "Comfort Women" be Resolved?" *Korea Observer* 46 (3), p 512.

² Like many historical controversies between Japan and South Korea, the bedrock of tensions on the comfort women issue began during Japan's Imperial Era. In the years of 1932-1945 during the Korean colonial period, Japan took an estimated 70,000 – 200,000 women from its occupied territories, among which about 80 percent were Korean.² These women were used as "comfort" by the Japanese at military brothels. The policy was implemented through coercion, was a crime against humanity, and violated international law that Japan had originally pledged to observe. The Japanese government claims that the 1965 Japan-Korea Normalization Treaty is the legal authority to support its argument that the comfort women do not have a claim in international law since they were not even mentioned in its statutes. Since 1965 a cooperative relationship between Japan and South Korea has developed, but emotional discord continues to exist over this and many other issues. The historical back-and-forth on the comfort women issue is fraught with disagreement and contention, with many within their respective nations disagreeing on the intent and meaning of certain apologies or statements.

³ Kim, Ji Young. "Escaping the Vicious Cycle: Symbolic Politics and History Disputes between South Korea and Japan." *Asian Perspective* 38.1 (2014): P. 31

women issue altogether. This sudden and rhetorically large-scale agreement has many implications for the future of bilateral relations. President Park, who was once dedicated to securing justice for the comfort women, suddenly reversed her position and has become the first South Korean leader to ever attempt providing eternal closure on the comfort women issue on a government-to-government level. What was once a race against time for Park that concerned human rights, moral responsibility, and human dignity has transformed into a battle of accommodating the acrimony spewing from her domestic audience with her own personal goals and the far-reaching security or economic ramifications of the deal.

Why did President Park Geun-hye agree to finalize and continue to pursue implementation of an agreement on comfort women with Japan, despite the longstanding historical discord between the two countries and widespread public opposition in South Korea to the resolution? It is difficult to present evidence that concretely and directly establishes a causal link between the creation of the comfort women agreement and some clear strategic decision or plan. Nevertheless, I argue that the *absence* of any ‘final’ historical reconciliation on the comfort women issue in periods past, despite the existence of external security threats posed to both South Korea and Japan, and despite the great economic benefits historical reconciliation would have granted, demonstrate that the agreement was a manifestation of Park Geun-hye’s unique leadership.⁴ Deriving the intent behind Park’s decision will help diagnose the future trend of

⁴ Regarding the use of ‘final,’ the Japanese government has issued apologies in the past that have been unsatisfactory to the South Koreans. The *Kono Statement* was a public statement made by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono in 1993 in which he announced that a government study concluded that the Japanese Imperial Army had indeed exploited comfort women. This was significant because it was the first time the Japanese government had ever acknowledged its role in coercing comfort women. Next, after the Liberal Democratic Party lost power for the first time at the advent of Japan’s ‘lost decade’, Tomiichi Murayama became Prime Minister on June 30, 1994. During his administration, the Asian Women’s Fund was established for the express purpose of providing monetary compensation to comfort women of many Asian countries including Taiwan, the Philippines, the Netherlands, Indonesia, and South Korea. However, the South Korean government did not accept the AWF as a

South Korean-Japanese relations and determine what makes the era of leadership of President Park Geun-hye so unique, and perhaps a possible turning point for bilateral relations.

1A. LEAD-UP TO THE AGREEMENT

Since inauguration, President Park Geun-hye had very meaningfully and openly distanced herself from Japan. In an interview with BBC, she had stipulated that she would not engage in summits with Japan until the issue of comfort women was properly acknowledged.⁵ This was a position she made in direct reference to Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's 2007 denial that Japan played a role in the exploitation of comfort women.⁶ However, Park suddenly became very forward and open to Japan. During the Q&A session of President Park's keynote address at CSIS, she stated that she would hold a bilateral summit with Abe, dropping the comfort women prerequisite she herself had established.⁷ During the summit itself, both Abe and Park had agreed that the issue of comfort women demanded immediate resolution as time was running out for victims.⁸ Following this series of events, South Korea and Japan agreed to 'irreversibly

symbol of genuine Japanese reconciliation and penance. The biggest reason was that the AWF was set up as a private fund and ergo, all \$5 million of its compensation was donated by the Japanese people. South Korea desired state redress and compensation stemming directly from the Japanese government. Only 7 Korean survivors ended up accepting the AWF offer, largely deeming the AWF a failure; as interest waned and the South Korean position persisted, the AWF was dissolved in March 31, 2007. A few months after the establishment of AWF, in August 1995 PM Murayama made a statement apologizing for all the damage and suffering caused by Japan during World War II. Although the statement did not explicitly mention comfort women, his role in the AWF during and after his administration implies he felt a genuine obligation to apologize to comfort women. While many Koreans quote the *Murayama Statement* as the official position of the Japanese Government as a state apology, the aforementioned lack of specificity has created an inconclusive debate over what the statement did and did not address. The cloudy and ambiguous nature on the question of Japanese repentance endured for many administrations, until President Park Geun-hye took up the mantle.

⁵ Panda, Ankit. "Park Geun-hye: Japan Summit 'Pointless' Without Apology." *The Diplomat*. 5 Nov. 2013.

⁶ Tabuchi, Hiroko. "Japan's Abe: No Proof of WWII Sex Slaves." *Washington Post*. March 01, 2007.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/01/AR2007030100578.html>.

⁷ *Statesmen's Forum: The Honorable Park Geun-hye President of the Republic of Korea*. Center for Strategic and International Studies, 15 Oct. 2015.

⁸ Snyder, Scott A. "Assessing the First Park-Abe Summit." *Council on Foreign Relations*. 04 Nov. 2015.

resolve' the issue by having the Japanese government provide 1 billion yen (\$8.3 million) to a South Korean fund that would be newly established to aid victims.⁹ In addition, the two governments agreed to refrain from criticizing and blaming each other in the international society and stop bringing up the matter altogether in their domestic audiences – a provision that has laughably already been broken in both countries. How do we explain Park's sudden change in behavior? What was the primary impetus that convinced her to compromise on her initial prerequisite and finalize an agreement that politicians and victims in South Korea characterize as shoddy and unsatisfying? Foremost, I will discuss the possibility of security and economy-based motivations as independent variables that may explain Park's decision to finalize a deal with Japan. I will then proceed to argue that Park's identity as a leader and her leadership style is the primary explanatory variable behind the formation of the comfort women agreement. The implications of my argument roughly translates into: if Park Geun-hye was not serving during the 18th Presidential term of South Korea, it is unlikely we would have seen a final deal on comfort women.¹⁰

⁹ Yan, Holly et al. "South Korea, Japan Reach Agreement on 'Comfort Women'" CNN. December 29, 2015. <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/28/asia/south-korea-japan-comfort-women/>.

¹⁰ I recognize there is a great deal of discussion over the concept and the use of the term "comfort woman." Korean, Japanese, and foreign scholars alike have written extensively on objectively detailing to what extent the Japanese government and military played a role with the sexual exploitation of Korean women during colonization and World War II. While I do not attempt to settle this debate, this paper proceeds under the assumption that the Japanese were involved, in some degree, with the exploitation of Korean women during this period with some examples being provided. Consequently, throughout this paper I will continue to use the euphemism "comfort women" to refer to the victims of said exploitation alongside the phrase "comfort women agreement" to refer to the landmark accord reached between South Korea and Japan late December of 2015. To that end and purview, this paper focuses exclusively on the motivations behind what led Park to pursue the comfort women agreement instead of delving into the discourse and controversy surrounding the comfort women and what they did or did not suffer.

2. ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS: SECURITY

There are numerous scholars who have analyzed the Japanese and South Korean relationship in a security-based context. Most discussions dive into the matter of weighing historical enmity vis-à-vis an external security threat. These theories package the South Korean and Japanese diplomatic tensions ‘psychohistorically’, that is targeting cases of contention between the two countries such as the Yasukuni Shrine issue, to encapsulate the uniqueness of their bilateral relations.¹¹ The realist approach contends that the degree of cooperation between South Korea and Japan correlates with the level of external threat. Victor Cha’s *quasi-alliance model* utilizes the fear of entrapment and abandonment as the primary variables that explains South Korean and Japanese behavior within the U.S. hub-and-spokes alliance.¹² The theory predicts that whenever America shows a lack of commitment or resolve in East Asia (the Soviet threat and North Korean aggression are labeled as examples), Japan and South Korea undergo a period of cooperation.¹³ Mutual coordination crops up because Japanese and South Korean leaders perceive that their collaboration lowers the possible costs of US involvement. On the other hand, whenever the US is clearly committed to the region, frictions caused by the aforementioned asymmetrical entrapment and abandonment fears materialize.¹⁴ Being pitted against communist major powers and the volatile North Korea, South Korea and Japan had very considerable incentive to work together to externally balance against threatening neighbors and ergo, increase the likelihood of their own survival. Yoon Tae-ryong presents another perspective

¹¹ Chun, Ja-Hyun. "Have Korea and Japan Reconciled? A Focus on the Three Stages of Reconciliation." *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 03 (2015): p. 317.

¹² Cha, Victor D. *Alignment despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999. P. 36.

¹³ *Ibid* 38.

¹⁴ *Ibid* 42.

to Cha's. Yoon believes that the any cooperation between South Korea and Japan stems from calculation based on the *net threat* theory.¹⁵ *Net threat theory* explains that either cooperation or discord between Seoul and Tokyo happens depending on “the balance between a common threat and the resources that are mustered against it.”¹⁶ Yoon argues that in the context of the South Korea-Japan-U.S. security triangle, the net threat is actually determined by what the U.S. perceives as common threats alongside the credibility of its own commitment from the onset.

These theories are helpful and make a compelling case that may explain periods of Japanese-South Korean cooperation despite threads of tension caused by history. However, this paper does not seek to answer the degree of cooperation that may result from the threat that Japan, South Korea, or the U.S. may perceive. I do not refute either Cha or Yoon's theories because they both hold significant merit in context; however, in the absence of any Japan-ROK precedents of deep reconciliation over the comfort women issue, or on any historical reconciliation for that matter, they are not as relevant to diagnosing the catalyst behind the comfort women agreement. Because the focus of my argument lies on isolating Park's primary motivation for finalizing the comfort women issue, some existing theories that regard bilateral cooperation in the security domain are not helpful. In other words, while these theories are useful in proving that historical issues are not enough to deter Japanese and South Korean cooperation in a threat-riddled environment, they do not prove that security threats are enough to *push* Japan and South Korea into reconciliation over historical issues. Security threats simply give way to a period where South Korea and Japan briefly *put aside* their historical disputes in favor of amicable discourse and security-based cooperation, if any. Once the need for that cooperation

¹⁵ Yoon, Tae Ryong (2006), 'Searching for a New Paradigm for Korea-Japan Relations', *KukjeKwankyeYonku*, 12 (2): P. 183.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

subsidies, nationalism returns – this is how it has always been since the 1980s.¹⁷ Any examples of security based-cooperation must come about after a major historical reconciliation in the absence of a major security threat – evidence that is difficult to scrounge up at a level that matches a ‘final, landmark deal’ on the comfort women issue.

2A. ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES

However, bouncing off of the implications of *net theory*, as a subset of a security-based explanation, we can attempt to find out what role the United States could have played in the creation of the comfort women agreement. When the agreement was first announced, the U.S. was unsurprisingly very pleased, with John Kerry citing the agreement as a way for Japan and South Korea to move forward and work together on “regional and global issues, including advancing...economic ties and security cooperation.”¹⁸ The Congressional Research Service reports that U.S. officials have played a role in encouraging the agreement from a mediating stance.¹⁹ Indeed, just a few hours after Kerry’s remarks at a background briefing, a State Department spokesperson said: “The U.S. has played an appropriate and constructive role. The Obama Administration strongly supported all gestures of reconciliation. We have shared our best advice; we've underscored the benefits to us and to everybody in reaching an agreement; and we've worked quietly to, where possible, prevent or to resolve misunderstandings between the

¹⁷ Togo, Kazuhiko. *Japanese Foreign Policy: Japanese and Korean Politics: Alone and Apart from Each Other*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. P. 208

¹⁸“Resolution of the Comfort Women Issue.” U.S. Department of State. December 28, 2015. Accessed May 13, 2016. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/12/250874.htm>.

¹⁹ Manyin, Mark E. et al. "U.S.-South Korea Relations. South Korea-Japan Relations: A Breakthrough?" Congressional Research Service. April 26, 2016. P. 6. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41481.pdf>.

two.”²⁰ However, the problem is that this pressure was rolled out in protracted periods in an timeframe of 4 years that had started unremarkably during the Noda and Lee administrations – it is difficult to label pressure from the US as the primary reason Park pursued the deal.²¹

The U.S. decision to pressure for reconciliation did extend from a security or strategic fear. They feared that a debilitated relationship between South Korea and Japan would erode American strategic interests.²² It is easy to imagine that tension between America’s most important allies in Northeast Asia would not bode well for the defense of the Korean peninsula against a volatile North Korea or a sudden Chinese advance for regional dominance. For example, the Chinese establishment of the Air Defense Identification Zone pressed Joe Biden to visit Tokyo and Seoul in 2013.²³ After going to Japan, Biden thought that he had guaranteed a promise from Abe saying that he would not be provocative with historical issues.²⁴ As a result, Biden pushed Park to meet with Abe and to drop the initial preconditions she had set on resolving the comfort women issue. According to Daniel Sneider, who had the opportunity to meet Park during her visit at a Stanford group, Park was very unhappy with U.S. pressure and suggested that Abe shouldn’t be trusted.²⁵ Park’s predictions came true when Abe visited Yasukuni Shrine a few days later, embarrassing Biden and the efforts of other U.S officials.²⁶ U.S. pressure also does not explain why President Park suddenly changed her attitude towards

²⁰ "Background Briefing - Developments on the Relationship between Japan and the Republic of Korea." U.S. Department of State. December 28, 2015. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/12/250881.htm>.

²¹ Daniel Sneider, "Behind the Comfort Women Agreement," Toyo Keizai Online, January 10, 2016. <http://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/99891>

²² Manyin, Mark E. et al. "U.S.-South Korea Relations. South Korea-Japan Relations: A Breakthrough?" Congressional Research Service. April 26, 2016. P. 6. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41481.pdf>.

²³ *Ibid* 26.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

²⁶ McCurry, Justin. "Japan's Shinzo Abe Angers Neighbors and US by Visiting War Dead Shrine." The Guardian. December 26, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/26/japan-shinzo-abe-tension-neighbours-shrine>.

the Japanese. Even with Obama's efforts in organizing a trilateral summit with Park and Abe in 2014, 1.5 years of American pressure resulted only in 12 meetings with little progress to speak of.²⁷

At best, the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea, or the Normalization Treaty, stands as the closest metric in which the security motivations for its inception can be compared and analyzed to the possible security motivations behind the comfort women agreement. While the Normalization Treaty was not created with the intent of settling or compensating for war crime or crimes against humanity (during negotiations, many U.S., South Korean, and later U.N. documents were presented with great care to exclude claims for personal injuries due to such violations), the U.S. played a tremendous role in securing this agreement.²⁸ The U.S. feared the growing communist threat as Vietnam began to fall and many strategic thinkers in Washington wanted to prepare to pull American troops out of Korea.²⁹ The economic and political pressure advanced by the U.S. during this period is incomparable to the pressure that was imposed by Washington to push a resolution to the comfort women issue.³⁰ The circumstances are also vastly different – there is no longer a world-dividing ideological conflict as powerful and serious as the one presented during the Cold War.

²⁷ Daniel Sneider, "Behind the Comfort Women Agreement," Toyo Keizai Online, January 10, 2016. <http://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/99891>

²⁸ Lee, Sue R. "Comforting the Comfort Women: Who Can Make Japan Pay". *Journal of International Law* 24 (2). 2014. P. 537.

²⁹ Victor Cha, "Bridging the Gap: The Strategic Context of the 1965 Korea-Japan Normalization Treaty," *Korean Studies* 20 (1996), pp. 123-160

³⁰ *Ibid.*

2B. SECURITY VS HISTORY

It is certainly true that Seoul and Tokyo have not always been hostile to one another. They have cooperated numerous times in various fields – the deep-rooted trilateral discussion and cooperation during the current North Korean crisis is a great example.³¹ However, the explanatory power of security does not demonstrate that threat played a role in motivating Park to greenlight the comfort women agreement. Consequently, we cannot determine that security issues motivated Park into finalizing the comfort women issue unless we find an external threat in the autumn of 2015 that far surpasses the magnitude of previous, modern external threats posed to Japan and South Korea.

As mentioned previously, the primary security threats in Northeast tend to stem from Chinese aggression and from North Korea. Starting with the financial recession, China began to heavily assert itself in the South China Sea and blatantly disregard ASEAN, EAS, and ARF normative standards from 2009 onward.³² The 2013 establishment of the ADIZ should also have been disconcerting since its zones overlapped both Japanese and South Korean territory. As for North Korea, the 2010 sinking of Cheonan and the Yeonpyeong Island shellings were dangerous instigations that brought North and South Korea the closest to war in the modern period.³³ Furthermore, North Korea conducted its third nuclear test just days before Park's inauguration.³⁴ The aggressive nature of China and North Korea should have merited lasting security cooperation between Japan and South Korea – but it didn't. While the South Korean and

³¹ Landler, Mark. "As Obama Hosts Nuclear Security Summit, the Focus Is on China." *The New York Times*. March 31, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/01/world/nuclear-security-summit-obama.html?_r=0.

³² Bader, Jeffrey A. *Obama and China's Rise: An Insider's Account of America's Asia Strategy*. Chapter 3. Brookings Institution Press, 2012.

³³ Snyder, Scott, and See-Won Byun. "Cheonan and Yeonpyeong." *The RUSI Journal* 156, no. 2 (April/May 2011): P. 74-81.

³⁴ "Profile: South Korean President Park Geun-hye." *BBC News*. November 01, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-20787271>.

Japanese governments did grow closer, historical tensions eventually tore them apart again. Cheonan did lead President Lee Myung-bak to talk with Prime Minister Naoto Kan for the first time.³⁵ And Kan was very supportive of South Korea in the wake of the Yeonpyeong shellings, even pledging closer security cooperation and vigilance.³⁶ However, controversy over Japanese textbooks and heated nationalism over the Liancourt Rocks ruined chances for agreement on the General Security of Military Information (GSOMIA) and the Military Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). On June 29, 2012, the South Korean Foreign Ministry called off the signing one hour before the official time due to strong public outcry against closer military ties with Japan.³⁷

In comparison, the external security threats of autumn 2015 were comparatively minimal at worst. The only noteworthy event of interest was the August landmine crisis between North and South Korea.³⁸ There was largely a lull in Chinese aggression in the South China Sea, with only minimal developments and the surge of legal drama as ASEAN nations pushed for Chinese restraint.³⁹ Neither of these threats are particularly useful in diagnosing the comfort women agreement as a product of security calculations by Park. Empirics tell us that security considerations simply don't matter when it comes to analyzing the relations between these two nations. After the history textbook crisis of 2000-2001, South Korea cancelled a joint military

³⁵ Kim, Hee-sung. "Japan Reconfirms Support for Stance on Cheonan Sinking." Korea Net. June 28, 2010. <http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Policies/view?articleId=81764>.

³⁶ LaFraniere, Sharon with reporting by Martin Fackler and Su Hyun Lee, "South Korea Cancels Confrontational Island Drills", The New York Times, 29 November 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/30/world/asia/30seoul.html?hp>

³⁷ *Glosserman, Brad, and Scott A. Snyder. The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States.* Columbia University Press, 2015. P. 105

³⁸ Lankov, Andrei. "The Hidden Meaning of August's Inter-Korean 'crisis.'" North Korea News. August 04, 2015. <https://www.nknews.org/2015/10/the-hidden-meaning-of-augusts-inter-korean-crisis/>.

³⁹ "Malaysia lodges diplomatic protest against intrusion at Beting Patinggi Ali". *Bernama*. The Rakyat Post. 15 August 2015. <http://www.pccases.com/web/sendAttach/1524>

exercise with Japan and even temporarily banned the import of Japanese pop-culture products.⁴⁰ The Japanese also declined the American proposal to have the Self Defense Force join US-ROK naval exercises conducted in the Yellow Sea after Yeonpyong.⁴¹

Historical tensions are almost always the prime culprit for the uncooperative behavior of both countries. The threat posed by China and North Korea after the financial recession was not enough of an impetus for the South Koreans to sign onto GSOMIA and ACSA, meaning traditional security theories have to borrow from elsewhere to offer a compelling reason why states in such an unsafe environment would allow historical disputes to deleteriously impact relations.

However, the security domain is a complementary explanation to my main argument. My argument does not outright deny the existing theories; it adjusts their relevance. The benefits the U.S. gains from closer ties after the comfort women agreement are still benefits to South Korea's overall security environment. As Berkshire Miller puts it, "The removal of a long-standing bilateral irritant should help Japan and South Korea work toward security agreements on military information sharing and equipment acquisition and cross-servicing."⁴² The comfort women agreement may in fact enable greater trilateral security cooperation, reopening possibilities of signing GSOMIA and ACSA once again down the road. Park may have signed on to politically finalize an issue that had once prevented effective cooperation between Japan and South Korea on key security threats. Perhaps Park is attempting to change the national attitude towards Japan

⁴⁰ Kirk, Don. "South Korea Cancels Joint Military Exercise in Dispute over Textbooks: Seoul Demands Tokyo Rewrite History." *New York Times*. May 9, 2001. http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/09/news/09iht-a4_23.html.

⁴¹ Youngshik D. Bong. 2013. "In Search of the Perfect Apology: Korea's Responses to the Murayama Statement." *Japan and Reconciliation in Post-war Asia: The Murayama Statement and its Implications*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. P. 47

⁴² Miller, Berkshire. "No Grand Bargain." *Foreign Affairs*. January 12, 2016. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/northeast-asia/2016-01-12/no-grand-bargain>.

so that relations are smoothed enough that a robust U.S.-Japan-Korea alliance develops. The 4th North Korean nuclear crisis is an immediate example of pressing security challenges that can and are being more productively tackled with fortified relations.⁴³

Nevertheless, because Korean public opinion is largely critical of Japanese power and identity, bilateral trust and the existence of a common identity are still clearly absent.⁴⁴ In other words, a threatening security environment is not enough to overcome the normative dynamics that remain stuck around historical sensitivities. In conclusion, the comfort women agreement wasn't pursued strictly due to American pressures nor the threat of the external security environment, but the resulting security benefits of the deal may still have been attached to Park's calculation to pursue the deal.

⁴³ Landler, Mark. "As Obama Hosts Nuclear Security Summit, the Focus Is on China." *The New York Times*. March 31, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/01/world/nuclear-security-summit-obama.html?_r=0.

⁴⁴ Hemmer, Christopher, and Peter J. Katzenstein. "Why is there no NATO in Asia? Collective identity, regionalism, and the origins of Multilateralism." *International Organizations* 56, No. 03 (2002): 575-607.

3. ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS: ECONOMIC PROSPECTS

With growing domestic consumption, energy demands, and determinable growth, there is a growing need for Northeast Asian countries to band together for mutual benefit. Kent Calder has noted that deeper connections and networks between nations in Northeast Asia would help them tackle serious developmental challenges – that is, closer regional integration is key to sustaining or even increasing economic growth.⁴⁵ For South Korea and Japan, the comfort women agreement presents an avenue that facilitates stronger economic cooperation. It is possible that President Park Geun-hye pursued the agreement based on the economic implications of historical resolution. This is because improved historical ties reduces the transaction costs for negotiations (initial disagreements and bureaucratic shortcomings) and public opposition to deeper economic integration.⁴⁶

Such calculations make empirical sense: since 2010, Japan and South Korea have been each other's third-largest trading partners.⁴⁷ South Korean exports to Japan consistently make up 4% of Japan's total import and 6% of South Korea's total exports.⁴⁸ With similar economic growth histories, strategies, and types, the removal of a historical issue makes it easier for both countries to implement and pursue the Trans-Pacific Partnership once Seoul gets on board.⁴⁹ Indeed, Park had always shown grandstanding ambition typed for this transcontinental mindset with projects such as the Eurasia Initiative and the Silk Road Express, designed to provide a vast

⁴⁵ Calder, Kent, and Min Ye. "The Making of Northeast Asia." *Political Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2013): P. 13-14.

⁴⁶ Miller, Berkshire. "No Grand Bargain." *Foreign Affairs*. January 12, 2016.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/northeast-asia/2016-01-12/no-grand-bargain>.

⁴⁷ Korea International Trade Association. 2010. "Exports and Imports by Country." *Ministry of Knowledge Economy: Knowledge Economy Statistics Portal*.

⁴⁸ Japan External Trade Organization. 2010. "Japan's Governance Crisis." *Asan Institute for Policy Studies*.

⁴⁹ Miller, Berkshire. "No Grand Bargain." *Foreign Affairs*. January 12, 2016.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/northeast-asia/2016-01-12/no-grand-bargain>.

trade and resource framework for South Korea.⁵⁰

Looking further back, in spite of historical issues, the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis had positively altered South Korean perceptions of Japan. The increase in their inter-regional economic interdependence (to combat the crisis) had compelled South Korea to pursue bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements because it had objectively the most to gain in a sub-regional FTA with Japan.⁵¹ Over the past decade, Japan and South Korea have indeed become increasingly integrated in the regional economy. We can see that since Japan has imported more from East Asian countries than North America since 1979 and has exported more to East Asia than to any other region since 1990.⁵²

There is also empirical evidence that suggests that historical reconciliation between South Korea and Japan leads to positive economic developments. President Kim Dae-jung's state visit to Japan in October 1998 was productive and profitable to both Japanese and Korean businesses, and simultaneously proved to be an emblematic gateway to friendlier, warmer ties.⁵³ The summit meeting between Kim and Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi became the centerpiece for an action-oriented re-evaluation of bilateral relations. The 'Japan-Republic of Korea Joint Declaration: Partnership towards the 21st Century' was the first time both countries had publically committed to "close, friendly and cooperative relations" and elevating their partnership to "a higher plane".⁵⁴ As a result, Kim opened up Korean industries to Japanese

⁵⁰ Campi, Alicia. "South Korean-Mongolian Energy Cooperation and the Eurasia Initiative." *On Korea* 8 (2015), Korea Economics Institute Academic Paper Series. P. 118.

⁵¹ Moon, Chung-in and Taehwan Kim. 2004. "South Korea's International Relations: Challenges to Developmental Realism?" *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, p 269. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

⁵² Grimes, Williams W. 2004. "Japan's International Relations: The Economic Dimension." *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, p 184-185

⁵³ Glosserman, Brad, and Scott A. Snyder. *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States*. Columbia University Press, 2015. P. 394

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, P. 65

investors – there was no longer a limit to the amount of Korean real estate, financial products, and businesses Japanese buyers could purchase.⁵⁵ The Joint Declaration also resulted in bilateral investment agreements, the expansion of youth exchange, and cultural forums to discuss joint projects such as the 2002 World Cup.⁵⁶ The impressive amount of economic progress eventuated positive media attention in both nations. *The Japan Times* called Kim a “‘visionary’ and a man who [understood] the Japanese better than any other Korean leader,” and the *Japanese Daily* declared that Kim had “already inaugurated a new era in relations with Japan.”⁵⁷ Public opinion consequently improved and student exchanges increased significantly both ways as Kim removed South Korean restrictions on the imports of Japanese pop culture: Japanese films, music, manga, anime, etc.⁵⁸

However, as an independent variable to explain Park’s decision to pursue the comfort women deal, economic prospects are simply too inconsistent to be useful. Referencing the same examples provided in the security section, it’s very puzzling that South Korea and Japan let historical tensions affect their trade relations and partnerships in modern times. For example, the lack of progress on a Korea-Japan free trade agreement does not make sense when the KORUS FTA was successfully negotiated in 2010.⁵⁹ Furthermore, on paper, there are more economic negotiations between Seoul and Beijing than with Tokyo, despite the fact that Japan is Korea’s most theoretically well-aligned security and economic partner.⁶⁰ Therefore the problem lies in the same root cause that influences the security argument: in the same way realists struggle with

⁵⁵ Glosserman, Brad, and Scott A. Snyder. *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States*. Columbia University Press, 2015. P. 392

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, P. 403.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, P. 401

⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

⁵⁹ Grimes, Williams W. 2004. “Japan’s International Relations: The Economic Dimension.” *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, p 184-185

⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

answering why South Korea backed out of GSOMIA in 2012, neoliberalists would have trouble explaining for example, why South Korea again banned the import of Japanese pop-culture in 2001, despite the success of the 1998 summit and the increase in their overall economic interdependence.⁶¹

Nevertheless, while South Korea's trade relationship with China is nearly double in magnitude and importance than its trade relations with Japan, both Japan and South Korea have no interest in completely sacrificing their economic ties due to historical tensions. As the fishing trawler incident between China and Japan demonstrated in September 2010, historical disputes impede economic growth and closer economic integration.⁶² It is possible that Park sought the deal in order to dissolve existing cultural barriers to promote economic exchange, similar to how Kim and Keizo had done in 1998. While the comfort women agreement isn't expected to resolve the historical nightmares voiced by either country's citizenry, it is symbolic of stepping forward and placing a referential threshold basically demonstrating: "South Korea and Japan resolved the comfort woman issue." Essentially, while the \$8.3 million provided by the deal itself is a drop in the bucket (which isn't the focus of the argument anyways), the concept of finalizing a historical dispute that plagued ties since normalization is significant. Consequently, as years go by, social, cultural, and economic exchanges between the two countries will slowly increase, keeping bilateral relations healthy. While the pursuit of economic prospects is inconsistent as an explanatory variable, the argument is complementary to my main argument because the comfort women agreement is both a demonstration that Park has an effective hedge against an economic

⁶¹ Baker, Michael. "Japanese Culture, Not Hollywood, May Swamp Korean Society." *The Christian Science Monitor*. 5 Nov. 1998.

⁶² "High-seas collisions trigger Japan-China diplomatic spat". *The Times of India*. Agence France-Presse. 30 October 2010. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com:80/world/china/High-seas-collisions-trigger-Japan-China-diplomatic-spat/articleshow/6515037.cms>

downturn in the same way she may have hedged against security issues, and that she possesses an understanding of the implications of deeper economic integration with Japan.

4. PRIMARY EXPLANATORY VARIABLE: PARK GEUN-HYE'S LEADERSHIP

4A. THE AGREEMENT IS TELLING

As the first female President of South Korea, there is a unique significance to Park Geun-hye's leadership. Park is in fact the first female President of any Northeast Asian nation and ironically, the only South Korean president to have been born as a South Korean citizen. In trying to analyze the motivations behind Park's decision to finalize the comfort women issue, I have attempted to establish that there are no empirical precedents or determinants that can effectively demonstrate that Park made her decision strictly based on security or economic calculations. However, the security and economic benefits offered by the comfort women agreement are still quite clear, which is why the alternative explanations offered do not detract from the primary argument. This is because regardless of what empirics have demonstrated, Park is the first South Korean leader to have finalized the comfort women issue in a period where the economic and threat-based circumstances surrounding Japan and South Korea were comparatively quail to the circumstances in 1965, 1998, or 2008 – 2012.

As a result, I argue that the decision to finalize the comfort women issue can only be explained exclusively by Park's identity and style as a leader and the historical implications surrounding her leadership. Whether the agreement came about as an urgent, last-minute decision to put the issue to rest, or from her desire to leave a lasting mark on her presidency, or even perhaps for the security and economic benefits discussed earlier, nobody currently knows. What is 'factually known' is that President Park Geun-hye is the first South Korean leader to decide on finalizing this specific historical issue, and that alone merits analysis. There are no conclusive pieces of literature or scholarship that can piece together why Park suddenly decided

to pursue this deal. However, the primary argument reveals in the absence of this evidence: because there are no precedents that can provide context or theory to her decision, the possibility that the deal was pursued simply because she is the current leader makes the variable more persuasive and likely.

There are very few scholars and media outlets that believe that the comfort women agreement will actually ‘work’. Foremost, the South Korean comfort women themselves are outright disgusted by the deal and the way their thoughts and emotions were treated. The South Korean government did not even consult with comfort women prior to the conception of this deal.⁶³ This is directly antithetical to Park’s previous commitments to defend the dignity of the victims and urging wholesome resolution over the matter years prior to the agreement.⁶⁴ It is difficult to imagine that the Park of 2013 would have ever perceived the current agreement as acceptable or successful. As a result, it is also likely that Park negotiated this agreement without the express intention of bringing genuine closure to the comfort women.

In the past, Japan has expressed regret and provided material compensation for its exploitation of comfort women in various ways. However, these gestures have never satisfied the Koreans.⁶⁵ With the recognition that it would be cumbersome to reach a genuine, ideational apology from the Japanese government, it is likely that Park concluded that this agreement was the best way to provide a resolution before the Korean comfort women all passed away.⁶⁶ That is, some semblance of closure was better than none at all. As previous attempts have

⁶³ McCurry, Justin. "Former Sex Slaves Reject Japan and South Korea's 'Comfort Women' Accord." *The Guardian*. January 26, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/26/former-sex-slaves-reject-japan-south-koreas-comfort-women-accord>.

⁶⁴ "Park Geun-hye: Japan Summit 'Pointless' Without Apology." *The Diplomat*. November 05, 2013. <http://thediplomat.com/2013/11/park-geun-hye-japan-summit-pointless-without-apology/>.

⁶⁵ Chun, Ja-Hyun. "Have Korea and Japan Reconciled? A Focus on the Three Stages of Reconciliation." *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 03 (2015): p. 329.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

demonstrated, the closed minds of South Koreans render ideational reconciliation an arduous task. As Katherine Moon puts it: “What is the ultimate action or gesture the Japanese could do in order to satisfy the Korean sense of being wronged, being victimized, and having that wrong righted?”⁶⁷

This also may suggest that Park agreed to the comfort women accord out of security or economic calculation. Since the beginning of her inauguration, Park had worked meticulously trying to attain legitimate justice and reconciliation on behalf of these women; now, she faces tremendous political opposition and public unpopularity for her insensitivities. From her many years working to resolve this issue, Park certainly had some idea of the negative consequences for compromising on this agreement.⁶⁸ Only her mindset and decision-making could explain the flip-flop and her motivations to pursue the accord. That decision-making calculus is not mutually exclusive with the possibility that she desired the discussed security and economic bonuses that come intrinsically tied to signing the accord.

4B. THE LEGACY OF PARK CHUNG-HEE

The lynchpin of my argument is that the unique leadership of Park Geun-hye by most accounts and measures truly gave way to the comfort woman agreement. The head of state operates as the actor with the most influence on a country’s affairs regardless of the structural or security environment. Park’s leadership is uniquely interesting because the circumstances surrounding the agreement stands against logical expectations that had previously defined South

⁶⁷ Moon, Katherine H.S., and Sheila A. Smith. "Korea-Japan Relations: An Interview with Katharine Moon and Sheila Smith." The Brookings Institution. August 13, 2015. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/interviews/2015/08/13-rok-japan-moon>.

⁶⁸ Miller, Berkshire J. "Election Defeat Complicates Park's Plans in South Korea." World Politics Review. April 27, 2016. <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/18622/election-defeat-complicates-park-s-plans-in-south-korea>.

Korean-Japanese relations on the nature of historical disputes and the domestic-political fervor they entail. However, the backbone of her leadership style may in fact have originated from her father. Utilizing leader-based scholarship, I will attempt to establish that Park Geun-hye's presidency is inextricably tied to the legacy of her father Park Chung-hee. Doing so aids in explaining the driving behavior of her foreign and domestic policies and ultimately answering what led her to finalize the comfort women agreement.

Empirically, South Korean leaders have always been syllogistically bound to the affairs of the public and their responses to historical disputes – this meant their actions as leaders would inevitably affect Japan-ROK relations for better or worse.⁶⁹ Richard Samuels operationalizes the concept of leadership as “political actors who have a greater range of assets than others in the community for ‘stretching’ the constraints on geography and natural resources, institutional legacies and international location.”⁷⁰ Machiavelli has explored this concept and has posited that leaders must remain in the ‘shadows’ of past customs and institutions – “this he must do because men in general are as much affected by what a thing appears to be as by what it is.”⁷¹ For Park Geun-hye, I argue that the ‘shadow’ of her father has made a lasting impression on her leadership because of Park Chung-hee's own strong and bold leadership style and the consequent role he played during Japanese-ROK normalization. Since Park Chung-hee, South Korean leaders were constrained by the notion of ‘history.’ And due to the public's refusal to let ‘history’ go, future leaders found no seeming alternative or identity to talking about ‘history’

⁶⁹ Kim, Ji Young. "Escaping the Vicious Cycle: Symbolic Politics and History Disputes between South Korea and Japan." *Asian Perspective* 38.1 (2014): P. 31

⁷⁰ Samuels, Richard J. *Machiavelli's Children: Leaders and Their Legacies in Italy and Japan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003. P. 3

⁷¹ Machiavelli, Niccolò, and David Wootton. 1995 *The Prince*. “Chapter XVIII - Concerning the Way in Which Princes Should Keep Faith.” Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co.

when it came to bilateral relations.⁷² In other words, this tradition that started with Park Chung-hee has reached all the way to Park Geun-hye's leadership.

Historically, South Korean presidents have had their work cut out in procuring international attention and prestige. Scholars like Lucian Pye have found that since the end of World War II, South Korean leaders were forced into a position that required determined, bold, and adamant action.⁷³ This is because through history, they were geographically and politically bullied as the 'shrimp amongst whales.' The inherent nature of South Korean leadership borrows from both Japanese and Chinese leadership styles because of their geographic proximities and influences. The end result is a permutation of both the purposefulness of the Japanese approach and the empyreal sense of virtue of the Chinese approach.⁷⁴ This has produced a high-risk, high-reward style of leadership in South Korea.

One only need to look to the shame and dehumanizing impact that started with Japanese colonial rule for confirmation. Following what should have been independence instead gave way to the ordeals of the Korean War and consequently nation-wide division. Park Chung-hee's decision to establish the *Yushin* Constitution and conduct draconian military rule was conceived as a byproduct of these traumas and the desire for an economic miracle, striving to become a 'whale amongst whales'.⁷⁵ According to Lee Chong-sik, the nuance here lies in the fact that Park Chung-hee sought to strengthen South Korea, but under the recognition that Japan was a partner and model, not an enemy or dangerous rival.⁷⁶ The 1965 creation of the Normalization

⁷² Glosserman, Brad, and Scott A. Snyder. *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States*. Columbia University Press, 2015. P. 95

⁷³ Pye, Lucian W., and Mary W. Pye. *Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority*. Chapter 3 - East Asia: Varieties of Confucian Authority Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1985. P. 58

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Lee Chong-sik. 2012. *Park Chung-hee: From Poverty to Power*. Palos Verdes, CA: The KHU Press.

⁷⁶ *Ibid* p. 59.

Treaty was the ultimate success story of his goals in both an economic and security sense. His desire and perspective was more likely than not influenced by his time in the Japanese military: his formative years. Borrowing from sociologist Karl Mannheim's *generational theory*, Asian leaders affected by traumatic or otherwise substantial historical experiences will subsequently shape their political landscape and leadership styles in a way responsive to those experiences.⁷⁷ Indeed, even within Park Chung-hee's manifesto, he alluded that his time serving in the Japanese Imperial Army led him to fully understand that he needed to prevent further great powers from "swallow[ing] Korea."⁷⁸ Park Chung-hee went so far as to suppress anti-Japanese sentiment that manifested in student rebellions in 1960 and 1961 just so initial negotiations on normalization would proceed smoothly.⁷⁹

But what conclusions can we draw from this diagnosis about Park Geun-hye's leadership style? Park Chung-hee's influence on South Korea's economic and political development is incontrovertible – as his daughter, Park Geun-hye adopted a superstar status that boosted her road to Presidency, doubling as a reputation she felt the need to uphold. In other words, the high-risk and bold leadership style of Park Chung-hee has translated to her own beliefs. Within *generation theory*, *interaction theory* postulates that a younger generation of leaders acts in response to the preceding generations of leaders.⁸⁰ Mannheim's *experiential theory* further argues that each generation of leaders is stamped by a unique experience that permanently alters

⁷⁷ Steele, Brent J., and Jonathan M. Acuff. *Theory and Application of the "Generation" in International Relations and Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

⁷⁸ Park Chung Hee. 1969. *Our Nation's Path: Ideology of Social Reconstruction*. Seoul: Dong-a Publishing. P. 102

⁷⁹ Ogawa, Akira. "Normalizing the Relationship Between Japan and The ROK: Etsusaburo Shiina and Park Chung Hee." *The Miracle in 1965*. The Okazaki Institute. <http://www.okazaki-inst.jp/miracle65.html>

⁸⁰ Ogawa, Akira. "Normalizing the Relationship Between Japan and The ROK: Etsusaburo Shiina and Park Chung Hee." *The Miracle in 1965*. The Okazaki Institute. <http://www.okazaki-inst.jp/miracle65.html>

their new world view.⁸¹

Park Geun-hye's individual perceptions and actions are affected by belief systems based on the images of her past.⁸² Her belief systems become the very lenses through which her strategic calculations concerning the physical and social environment is received. In this sense, Park's attitude and policies are a byproduct of the environs created and left by Park Chung-hee, making the comfort women agreement an outcome that could only have resulted from the unique experiences and mindset of Park Geun-hye. How Park Geun-hye carries herself provides ample evidence to suggest that this is in fact the case.

In Park Geun-hye's bibliography, she devotes one entire chapter to what she titles "my father's lessons in politics." She has written that whenever she faces an obstacle, she without fail thinks about what her father has taught her in order to resolve it.⁸³ Park Geun-hye also very clearly values the legacy left by her father: during her 2012 presidential campaign, she was put on the spot regarding her father's rule more than a few times. She coolly held a single press conference apologizing for her father's actions whilst cleverly appealing to the inherent Confucian traditions of Korean culture by stating: "I do not think that the people of Korea really want me, a daughter, to spit on her father's grave."⁸⁴ Park Geun-hye also spoke of her father's 'sacrifice' to the country during the anniversary of his assassination. She has never clarified what was sacrificed, but she asserted that Park Chung-hee had to be a strong leader for what was at the

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Inoguchi, Takashi. *Japanese and Korean Politics: Alone and Apart from Each Other*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. P. 75

⁸³ Park, Geun-hye. *Despair Tests Me, Hope Moves Me*. Goyang: Wisdom House, 2007. P 114-115.

⁸⁴ Seong, Yeon-cheol. "Park Geun-hye Apologizes for Abuses by Her Father's Regime." *The Hankyoreh*. September 25, 2012. http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/553264.html.

time a very weak country.⁸⁵ Park Geun-hye made clear that she also intended to make sacrifices like her father in order to make her country great.⁸⁶ Utilizing rhetoric analogous to the rhetoric of her father, Park Geun-hye pledged to build a Korea that was “prosperous and powerful” during her inauguration. Instead of promising compromise, Park flew into office with a ‘wealth and power’ mindset, dedicating her leadership to making all Koreans happy, just like her father strived for.⁸⁷ Her recognition of the need for further ‘sacrifice’ in order to attain the next stage of wealth and power is a direct piggy-back off of Park Chung-hee’s leadership style and historical legacy. Her promise to “correct mistakes so as to transform the country and allow it to enter a new path” is an outright demonstration of her commitment to make the same, bold strategic decisions her father had with a similar irreverence to political constraint or audience.⁸⁸

4C. TRANSLATION TO POLICY

This inherited pedigree has clearly influenced both her tactics and her public image; her image as Park Chung-hee’s daughter shapes her public perception as a strong leader. Again, the lives of her parents taught her many things about leadership, and their deaths cemented the confident, adamant figure Park is today. Indeed, many perceive her as a stalwart figure with a great deal of contextual intelligence. These characteristics have manifested into adventurous policies and ambitious goals exemplified by her Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative

⁸⁵ "S. Korean Presidential Hopeful Apologizes for Father's Actions" Xinhua News. September 24, 2012. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-09/24/c_131869009.htm.

⁸⁶ Delury, John. The Kishi Effect: A Political Genealogy of Japan-ROK Relations. *Asian Perspective*, 39(3), 2015. P. 441-460.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

and her purported *daebak* unification with North Korea – key elements of *trustpolitik*.⁸⁹ From the beginning, it was clear that she was dedicated to reinvigorating the image of South Korea and changing the security and economic landscape of her country – the comfort women agreement just seems like a consistent addition to the laundry list under such a framework.

Bouncing off of her strong image, many scholars find that Park is also a powerful bully. Rather, her bullying provides her the easy authority and grounds for many of her buying tactics. Park does not give off a very effeminate image and she is intimidating to those who work under her. This portrayal is further amplified by the fact that she remains unmarried. Park is very stubborn with her domestic politics, cracking down on press that criticizes her administration and making public protest very difficult.⁹⁰ She also went forward with the decision to institute a national textbook and unilaterally kick out members of the *Saenuri Party* before the National Assembly elections in April.⁹¹ Indeed, many feared Park Geun-hye would cause the second coming of authoritarianism in South Korea.⁹² Arguably, her ‘Park Chung-hee style’ bullying and stubborn refusal to listen to her dissidents is what led the *Saenuri Party* to lose the elections so disastrously.

Her bold style in foreign policy is also very notable. Her attitude towards North Korea in four instances demonstrates that she would not hesitate to become hardline towards Kim Jong-un despite her *daebak* rhetoric: first, the 3rd nuclear test, second, the North Korean withdrawal from

⁸⁹ *Statesmen's Forum: The Honorable Park Geun-hye President of the Republic of Korea*. Center for Strategic and International Studies, 15 Oct. 2015.

⁹⁰ Fifield, Anna. "In South Korea, Journalists Fear a Government Clampdown on the Press." *Washington Post*. December 11, 2014. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-south-korea-journalists-fear-a-government-clampdown-on-the-press/2014/12/09/ff13603e-7a2f-11e4-8241-8cc0a3670239_story.html

⁹¹ Kim, Hyo-jin. "Anti-Park Lawmaker Kicked out of Ruling Party." *Korea Times*. March 23, 2016. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/03/116_201033.html.

⁹² Do, Je-hae. "How Will State Textbooks Describe Park Chung-hee?" *Korea Times*. November 06, 2015. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2015/11/116_190417.html.

Kaesong, third, the August landmine crisis, and fourth, the 2016 round of nuclear tensions.⁹³

Park utilizes a strategy Victor Cha calls *Diplomacy 2.0* – a flexible pursuit of alignment with any nation that suits the national interest at that very moment.⁹⁴ Her presence at the Chinese Victory Parade and support for the Chinese AIIB is an example of this foreign policy; Park aggressively ventures to better relations with nations in a strategy that may appear initially counterintuitive.

As the successor to Park Chung-hee's beliefs, image, and leadership style, it is possible that her sudden change in attitude towards Abe Shinzo and Japan is another striking example of *Diplomacy 2.0*. With her inauguration, she vowed to never meet Abe in a summit without reconciliation over the comfort woman issue. In 2015, she suddenly changed her stance and met with Abe to improve relations, later finalizing an agreement in December at the cost of massive domestic opposition and uproar. Today, after the 4th nuclear test, Park again seems to have forgotten about her romance with China, again aligning with Japan and the US, pushing for greater security cooperation and THAAD deployment.⁹⁵ All in all, these examples demonstrate that Park is very tactical and flexibly willing to hedge against anything and everything – of course, whether or not she can be considered a successful leader is an entirely different matter.

I would like to conclude with a quote from Michael Green who supplements the analysis done by Lucian Pye: "Korea has long been on the receiving end of other decisive leaders and the object of international relations, so Korean leadership style today reflects an archetype of leadership in which leaders who roll the dice and seize decisive moments are rewarded. So, all of

⁹³ "North Korea Profile - Timeline." BBC News. May 06, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15278612>.

⁹⁴ Cha, Victor. "A Path Less Chosun." *Foreign Affairs*. October 08, 2015. Accessed May 13, 2016. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-10-08/path-less-chosun>.

⁹⁵ "THAAD Talks to Pursue Feasibility of Deployment at 'earliest Possible Date'" *Korea Times*. April 13, 2016. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/04/120_202553.html.

these residual or historic archetypes are still very powerful.”⁹⁶ The historic archetypes shaped by Park Chung-hee’s forceful leadership style are conveniently molded for ‘seizing decisive moments’ and subsequently became the defining attributes of Park Geun-hye’s own leadership.

Coming full circle, the primary argument utilizes indirect evidence to suggest that the unique characteristics of Park Geun-hye’s leadership is what ultimately motivated her decision to compromise on the comfort women agreement. In the face of great political opposition, public outcry, and perhaps even an undermining of her own values, Park compromised and agreed on the final resolution because of the legacy she has adopted from her father – i.e. the need to sacrifice for an ambition of greatening her country – and the resulting world view she equipped, shaped by her experiences during her formative years.

There is also a great deal of circumstantial evidence that demonstrates her policies are in line with her leadership style, and therefore explains the motivations behind the comfort women agreement. The sudden change in her attitude and behavior towards Abe sheds some light on her internal behaviors and attitudes that may have caused the compromise. As covered in the alternative explanations, the absence of any grand historical reconciliation during both times of great security-based stress and great economic bonanza demonstrates the agreement was a function of an extraordinary choice made by Park. She has demonstrated herself as a leader willing to take domestic flare in order to progress her open, multilateral approach to Diplomacy 2.0.⁹⁷ The backlash she received after the agreement from domestic institutions (political parties,

⁹⁶ Green, Michael. "Makers of Modern Asia." *Georgetown Journal of Asian Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Winter 2016). p. 84 https://asianstudies.georgetown.edu/sites/asianstudies/files/files/upload/gjaa._2.2_green.pdf

⁹⁷ Cha, Victor. "A Path less Chosun." *Foreign Affairs*. 08 Oct. 2015.

the media, social media) was immediate and unsurprising.⁹⁸ Furthermore, the compromise was unlikely to have been a calculation made for genuine closure on the comfort women issue: the agreement was not at perceived as an apology, neither to the public nor to the victims. The best and most concise explanation for her motivations in pursuing this deal lies in the uniqueness of her ideals, agenda, and leadership style.

⁹⁸ Panneerselvam, Prakash, and Sandhya Puthanveedu. "6 Months Later: The 'Comfort Women' Agreement." *The Diplomat*. May 11, 2016. Accessed May 13, 2016. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/05/6-months-later-the-comfort-women-agreement/>.

5. CONCLUSION

Compounding off of the security and economic benefits that stem from a resolution of the comfort women issue, the final agreement is genuinely a product of the individual leadership traits of Park. Whether the agreement derived itself from Park's desire for progress or not, she changed her adamant position from 2013 while recognizing the criticism and backlash she would receive. Her behavior is best explained by the particular traits of her leadership style and goals. Her presidency is a manifestation of her father's legacy and her bold decision-making calculations are often a reflection of her desire to better her country. While it is unknown why Park suddenly pursued the compromise at the expense of her own domestic credibility and political capital, the alternative explanations exhibit that there was great possible benefit in securing the deal. Nevertheless, while the political and economic benefits cannot be understated, they are only calculable factors because Park was the only leader whom seriously considered finalizing the comfort women issue during administration.

I have laid out two complementary alternative explanations in the form of security and economic prospects. However, the power of my main argument is the co-opting power of its implications. That is, even if Park pursued the deal because of U.S. pressure, or because of a desire for closer economic integration, the comfort women agreement was finalized *because* the current leader is Park. Furthermore, regardless of Park's true motivations, the deal still captures all of the security and economic benefits that have been presented. Any case studies of strong external threats or economic opportunities in a vacuum cannot sufficiently explain South Korean behavior vis-à-vis Japan. While empirically, historical disputes have impeded closer security cooperation and deeper economic integration, the modern leaderships of Park and Abe – that is,

their strong, unique leadership styles, open up avenues of cooperation in security and economic domains. Indeed, we see this is already the case with Park's burning desire to adopt the TPP and the close round of security dialogue between the US, Japan, and South Korea in the recent round of North Korean nuclear tensions at the Nuclear Security Summit. It is not out of the question to see GSOMIA and ACSA successfully negotiated and consequently create a lasting improvement of relations that will affect future administrations.

Park's recent loss in the National Assembly Elections throws the possible implementation of the comfort woman agreement up in the air.⁹⁹ And while complete resolution and absolute historical reconciliation continues to appear distant, President Park's leadership and policies have sufficiently demonstrated a willingness to leave a lasting mark like her father.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, the domestic outcry against the comfort woman agreement stems from a genuine, visceral anger against the way the agreement was artlessly signed away, more so than a fear of say, Japanese military-based aspirations. Moving forward, both governments must take care in aiming for further ideational reconciliation. With implementation of the deal still on the drawing board, the issue may yet drag on. It is imperative that Park and Abe endeavor to briskly implement the agreement to prevent domestic discontent from fermenting to safeguard bilateral relations.

Nevertheless, following in the footsteps of her father, Park has made great commitments to economic progress and imaginative stances on regional issues through initiatives like NAPCI. The question of whether she is a successful leader is a toss-up, and it is impossible to predict whether the positive atmosphere will continue. Park's attitude and Abe's responsiveness (not personally visiting Yasukuni) leaves room for hope and expectation. Indeed, we can see tangible

⁹⁹ Miller, J. Berkshire. "Election Defeat Complicates Park's Plans in South Korea." *World Politics Review*. April 28, 2016. <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/18622/election-defeat-complicates-park-s-plans-in-south-korea>.

¹⁰⁰ Cha, Victor. "A Path less Chosun." *Foreign Affairs*. 08 Oct. 2015.

positives to Park's bold leadership style: the U.S., South Korean, and Japanese governments conducted a historic meeting that sought to find policy and value-based consensus on tackling North Korean human rights violations.¹⁰¹ This meeting is yet another first that goes beyond the realms of security or economy-based cooperation. And while it is difficult to qualify that the decision to hold this meeting correlated with Park's decision to finalize the comfort women issue, considering that Park and Abe have refused to meet with each other less than a year ago, I feel it is fair to suggest that any increase in the number of trilateral interactions are conspicuous enough to suggest there are diplomatic benefits to the agreement.

Regardless of whether or not Park and Abe's operations will result in a 'new era for bilateral relations,' they remain adamant and resilient to domestic pressures and are seeking new outlets for cooperation. Weak leadership will only sway to the interests of the right-wing and the overwhelming nationalist nature of the public, leaving behind little room for novel ideas and resolution. But just as Park Chung-hee's leadership sculpted Park Geun-hye, Park Geun-hye's strong leadership will leave behind precedents of diplomacy that future presidents can appropriate, shape, and utilize to match current political conditions. "In short, it seems that neither large opportunity nor abundant resources is more important than the imagination of the leaders who mobilize them."¹⁰² In the end, Park's decision to bring closure to the comfort women issue can be traced all the way back from her father's legacy, and it is clear that she intends to continue it.

¹⁰¹ Corrado, Johnathon. "Issue Reviews Historic Meeting Aims at Consensus on Human Rights." Daily North Korea. May 10, 2016. <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?num=13891&catald=nk02501>.

¹⁰² Samuels, Richard J. *Machiavelli's Children: Leaders and Their Legacies in Italy and Japan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003. P. 5

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