HISTORICAL MEMORY AND DOMESTIC CIVIC TRUST IN JAPAN-SOUTH KOREA SECURITY RELATIONS

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Asian Studies

By

Melanie C. Berry, B.A.

Washington, D.C.
October 2, 2017
HISTORICAL MEMORY AND DOMESTIC CIVIC TRUST IN JAPAN-SOUTH KOREA SECURITY RELATIONS

Melanie C. Berry, B.A.

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

ABSTRACT

South Korea and Japan were unable to implement the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) or pursue an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) in 2012 despite recent violent provocations from North Korea, efforts by Japanese officials to push for historical reconciliation, and U.S. encouragement for further trilateral cooperation and integration. Japanese and South Korean officials did not sign GSOMIA until late 2016, finally enabling in-depth information sharing between the two U.S. allies. This paper examines the role of domestic political opposition from South Korean civic society groups in inhibiting the success of GSOMIA in 2012 and finds that civic distrust of government decision-making in foreign policy has constrained security cooperation with Japan. Such distrust is likely to limit security cooperation in the future and should be taken into consideration during any attempt to forge closer ties between South Korea and Japan.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................1

Previous Explanations for the Collapse of GSOMIA .................................................................6

Confluence and Cooperation Between South Korea and Japan ..................................................9

The Role of Historical Memory and National Identity in Cooperation .......................................12

Korean Civic Society, Distrust of Government, and Its Impact on Foreign Policy ....................15

The Persistence of Anti-Japan Public Sentiment and Its Role in Civic Distrust .........................21

Conclusion and Areas for Future Research ...............................................................................23

Bibliography ...............................................................................................................................25
Introduction

On December 6, 2010, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Seiji Maehara, and Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Kim Sung-hwan met in Washington, D.C. to discuss the state of the relationship between their countries. Two provocations from North Korea over the course of 2010 imbued this meeting with urgency to show a united front against further violence. First, on March 26, a South Korean Navy corvette, the Cheonan, sank off the cost of Baengnyeong Island in the Yellow Sea, killing at least forty sailors.1 By May, an ROK government investigative team announced that torpedo parts were recovered from the site of the sinking and that North Korea was most likely responsible.2 Then, on November 23, North Korean forces fired at least fifty shells onto Yeonpyeong Island, again just south of the Northern Limit Line, forcing around 1,600 residents to evacuate and move to shelters.3 Four South Koreans – two marines and two civilians, construction workers on the base – were killed, and eighteen were wounded in the shelling.4 The DPRK defended their military’s actions by accusing the South of provoking violence by firing shells into their maritime territory.5

5 “North Korean Artillery Hits South Korean Island.”
This incident still reverberated in the public consciousness as Clinton, Kim, and Maehara met in Washington, D.C. on December 6. Their three governments issued an official trilateral statement outlining their commitments to the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK bilateral defense treaties, “[expressing] concerns about the DPRK’s November 23 artillery attack on Yeonpyeong Island,” and “[pledging] to maintain and enhance coordination and consultation on DPRK related issues.” The three countries seemed to be on a path to enhanced trilateral security cooperation, and negotiations over potential intelligence sharing and military cross-servicing pacts quietly began. The ROK government announced on June 28, 2012 that it would sign the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with the government of Japan, which would “[provide] a legal framework for South Korea and Japan to share and protect classified and other confidential data.”

Within a day, though, this agreement and plans for a future Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) had completely fallen through. According to The Wall Street Journal, on June 29, “less than an hour before diplomats were scheduled to sign the agreement in Tokyo, officials in Seoul asked the Japanese government to suspend the ceremony so they could take more time to explain it to Korean lawmakers and the public.” Japanese and South Korean leaders traded barbs for the rest of 2012. GSOMIA remained dead in the water until being

---

revived during Park Geun-hye’s administration; it was successfully signed on November 23, 2016, despite enduring opposition from the public and opposition parties.\textsuperscript{10} The fate of the ACSA has yet to be resolved, and after President Park’s impeachment and removal from office in March 2017, the fate of GSOMIA will depend on her successor, Moon Jae-in, and the public’s perception of the legitimacy of GSOMIA’s signing.

In 2012, commentators immediately recognized the role historical memory and public opinion played in the suspension of the deal. Evan Ramstad and Yuka Hayashi, in \textit{The Wall Street Journal}, pointed to “a swath of South Korean media, professors and other consultants,” who “routinely express resentment of Japan's occupation despite the close economic, diplomatic and cultural ties South Korea and Japan have built over the last five decades.”\textsuperscript{11} Ralph A. Cossa blamed the willingness of opposition politicians to “pander to citizens with lingering anti-Japanese feelings” and “exploit” the announcement of the agreement for immediate political gain, as well as the lack of resolve shown by President Lee Myung-bak and other officials in advocating for the agreement.\textsuperscript{12} Others linked the backroom nature of the negotiation to worries on Lee’s part about the effects of a negative domestic reaction on the upcoming election season in South Korea, which in turn further alienated potential supporters in the public and in the media.\textsuperscript{13} Looking back on the failure of the agreement, scholars have suggested that a mismatch in South Korea and Japan’s foreign policy goals and strategies, including their divergent views of possible threats from North Korea and China and of the commitment of the U.S. to their


\textsuperscript{11} Ramstad and Hayashi, “Tensions Derail Japan-Korea Pact.”

\textsuperscript{12} Cossa, “Japan-South Korea Relations: Time to Open Both Eyes.”

defense, led to differences in how the two countries prioritized the deal. Others have more broadly pointed at an “identity conflict” between the people of the two countries that manifests in an inability to reach political agreement.

These are all reasonable explanations for the collapse of GSOMIA after the hope for an improvement in relations beginning in 2010 and through 2011, when Kim Jong-il died and North Korea’s trajectory seemed even more uncertain. However, it is necessary to more deeply investigate the specific mechanisms that led to this deal’s collapse, particularly on the Korean side. This paper will address the specific reason why Japanese and South Korean leaders were unable to implement GSOMIA and pursue the ACSA in 2012, despite recent violent provocations from North Korea, recent efforts by Japanese officials to apologize for wartime atrocities and to push for historical reconciliation, and U.S. encouragement for further trilateral cooperation and integration. The comprehensive reason for this inability, reached through a qualitative examination of South Korea’s domestic political history and its relationship with the formation of foreign policy, is that the civic relationship between the South Korean people and the government is so characterized by distrust and historical memory has become so politicized that officials are often incapable of overriding public opinion and exerting leadership in an effective way. The success of a policy or security deal between South Korea and Japan hinges on the perceived trustworthiness of a leader. In addition, the issue of cooperation with Japan by the

South Korean government is particularly contentious, as memories of not only Japanese colonization but also the willingness of the more recent post-war authoritarian government to submit to pressure from the U.S. and to normalize relations with Japan continue to be passed down in the public consciousness. As long as this historically grounded civic distrust toward government officials dealing in foreign policy remains among the South Korean population, effective trilateral security cooperation with the United States and Japan will not be politically sustainable. Both the Korean government and Japan will need to gain the trust of the Korean public in order to advocate for consistent enhanced security cooperation.

In the most practical sense, this examination of the relations between public opinion, civic trust, and historical memory in South Korea can shed light on how both Japan and South Korea can bolster their relationship, maintain the current information-sharing agreement after President Park’s removal from office, and prevent such a collapse in relations in the future. More generally, this can explain when and why domestic political dynamics can overwhelm foreign policy priorities and countries, despite having common interests, goals, and allies, fail to overcome contentious issues and fail to compromise despite pressing security issues. This can help to address the specific mechanism through which some historical issues remain thorns in relations between countries, which I assert is trust in government and leaders’ integrity and reliability. This could assist in determining what sort of domestic and foreign policies can create a stronger basis for consistent cooperation, dialogue, and compromise on regional and global security issues.
Previous Explanations for the Collapse of GSOMIA

Most scholars who attempt to explain the messy relationship among historical tensions, incentives for cooperation, and incentives for resistance within Japan-South Korea relations recognize that there are multiple explanations for how politicians and the public view these issues, and that these explanations are not mutually exclusive. Within the context of the GSOMIA and ACSA collapse in 2012, these explanations range from the specific electoral constraints of politicians, to immediate foreign policy goals, and to recent missteps on historical memory by officials in Japan. Commentators sometimes give more structural explanations for the larger pattern of non-cooperation beyond 2012, which also contribute to a thorough understanding of the decision by Korean officials to pull out of the agreement.

In the immediate aftermath of GSOMIA’s 2012 failure, commentators and scholars attributed it to some combination of the previously mentioned factors: domestic electoral constraints, differing foreign policy goals, and missteps by Japanese officials that encouraged opposition among the Korean people. Yoshito Sengoku, the Vice President of the Democratic Party of Japan, suggested that it was simply nationalism among the public in response to increased cooperation that scuttled the signing of the deal. At the third Tokyo-Seoul forum in July 2012, he asserted that “anti-Japanese nationalism burgeons in the wake of this growing cooperation” and that “slightly distorted nationalistic Internet speech and actions on both sides, even if it is a minority of the population” could “drive public opinion in both countries, and there is the concern that this could lead to a vicious cycle.” Moon Young Jun, writing for the Stimson Center, stated, “When it came time to sign the accord, emotional scars from the past

created an impasse for the Korean government.” After civic groups and the opposition party strongly voicing their willingness to obstruct the agreement and after the public’s displeasure over the secretive preparations and negotiations over the agreement became clear, the agreement was put on hold, the senior external policy secretary resigned, and numerous apologies were made. Moon credits this opposition simply to “Korean antagonism towards the Japanese military,” with domestic distrust of Korean officials as circumstantial. Brendan Taylor, writing for the journal *Survival*, pointed to the improper behavior of Korean officials in finalizing the agreement, especially Lee, as what undermined the necessity of GSOMIA in the eyes of the public; he asserted in October 2012 that “while some South Korean politicians objected to the intelligence-sharing pact on procedural and legislative grounds… a more common refrain from both sides of the Korean political spectrum was that Lee was improperly ‘joining hands’ with a former colonial power that had behaved so brutally.”

These writings in 2012 correspond with various longer-term structural reasons scholars have suggested for why cooperation has been so difficult. First, many have suggested that there is a structural mismatch in foreign policy goals and views of regional threats that undermines the value of cooperating, especially for South Korea. Sheryn Lee points out how the relationship between South Korea and Japan contradicts realist expectations of cooperation due to this mismatch. Despite the incentive to balance together against Pyongyang and Beijing, she argues, “The impetus for security cooperation between South Korea and Japan has failed to find a

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
focused objective that would make the initiative inherent to both states’ survival.”\textsuperscript{21} She writes that in this case, the two countries “are driven apart by the possible scenario of the reconciliation between the DPRK and the ROK, as well as divergent perspectives on the immediacy of the threat of the ‘rise of China.’”\textsuperscript{22}

In his examination of the security relationship between Japan and South Korea, Narushige Michishita focuses more heavily on China, pinpointing it as the key factor in determining the willingness to cooperate. He assesses South Korea’s current political situation in the following way:

Essentially, South Korea has two choices: balancing—in which it would team up with Japan and the United States so that Chinese influence does not grow too powerful—and bandwagoning—in which South Korea would implement a strategy of betting on the winning horse that is China, hoping to benefit from China’s greater economic and military might. Of these two strategies, it would appear that South Korea is essentially moving in the direction of bandwagoning. It is also a reality that South Korea has no choice but to proceed with closer cooperation with China because of the latter’s influence on North Korea.\textsuperscript{23}

Michishita sees evidence for this in greater rates of cultural exchange and language learning between South Korea and China and its economic dependency on China, which contribute to greater interest in and motivation for solving diplomatic issues with China that Japan.\textsuperscript{24} This political situation will contribute to a weakening of the importance of trilateral security cooperation between the United States, South Korea, and Japan out of South Korea’s fears that it could alienate China.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{21} Lee, “Burying the Hatchet?”: 105.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 30.
\end{flushleft}
Taylor, moving to the larger structural causes for tensions in “Japan and South Korea: The Limits of Alliance,” also cites South Korea’s view of its relationship with China as a strategic opportunity as the factor that undermines incentives for working with Japan more closely, while Japan’s view of China as a threat drives it to seek out cooperation with South Korea. He writes that while Japan’s greater wariness of China derives from historical conflicts, South Korea sees a greater historical threat from North Korea, and “tends, therefore, to view cooperation with Japan through the lens of this existential challenge and will often display sensitivity to how that collaboration is perceived in Beijing,” which manifested in worry over how the signing of GSOMIA would be received.26 Other scholars have stated that South Korea actually has a different level of threat perception of North Korea than Japan does, which affects their motivation for cooperation. Taylor himself points out that Japan tends to perceive a greater threat from North Korea’s missile and nuclear development programs than South Korea, which tends to focus on conventional violence, as displayed in the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incidents.27 This, however, still has the same effect: Japan has a greater incentive for cooperation with South Korea than the reverse.

Confluence and Cooperation Between South Korea and Japan

Despite the divergent perspectives indicated in this literature, Japan and South Korea actually behave very similarly in much of their foreign policy behavior. Wonjae Hwang concludes in a study of the effects of economic integration on vote congruence that Japan and South Korea’s growing economic ties have coincided with increasing similarity in voting

26 Taylor, “Japan and South Korea: The Limits of Alliance,” 96.
27 Ibid., 98.
behavior in the United Nations. Upon examining the two variables from 1992 to 2012 in Japan and South Korea’s voting behavior in the United Nations General Assembly, he determines that “bilateral trade promotes Korea-Japan vote congruence rates, even when controlling for historical disputes.” However, this study does not delve into different voting preferences based on issue or by region, so it remains to be seen if there is a similar split between support for economic cooperation and distrust in military cooperation as appears in the Asan Institute’s polling on views of Japan amongst the South Korean public.

In addition, many have pointed to domestic incentives in South Korea and, to a lesser extent, Japan to cater to public opinion by pursuing and displaying resistance to security cooperation, but the public’s views on this issue are more evenly split than is often indicated. As of 2015, the Korean public was divided over security cooperation with Japan; the Asan Institute found that 40.6 percent supported it and 40.1 percent found it unnecessary. Perhaps there was a similar split in 2012. In addition, other domestic constraints not involving cooperation with Japan could have influenced Korean officials to drop GSOMIA at the last moment. The United States-Korea Free Trade Agreement, or KORUS FTA, had just come into force in March 2012; President Barack Obama signed it on the U.S. side in October 2011, and the Korean National Assembly approved it in November 2011. Korean officials, including President Lee Myung-bak, had to spend significant political capital to get this agreement approved, as is the case with

30 Ibid., 34.
many free trade agreements, due to domestic opposition from specific industries. It is possible that Lee was doubtful that he could push the Korean public to accept an even more controversial deal after the implementation of the FTA, especially as its effects were just being felt domestically.

There are also domestic disincentives in Japan for politicians to apologize and incentives for them to undermine their apologies to appeal to more conservative elements in society. Generally, according to Jennifer Lind, public contrition can actually galvanize reactionary elements in society to a greater extent than they would be otherwise. She notes in *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics*, “In general, contrition is likely to cause political outcry because of the domestic political climate after wars and the incentives politicians face to denounce such gestures.”

When continuing demands for apologies are being made, “activists, commentators, scholars, and political leaders are urging countries to apologize for past crimes without considering the potential for triggering counterproductive backlash and for damaging the very relations they intend to repair.” While Japanese leaders could have refrained from taking certain steps to cause extreme tension in relations with South Korea, including not visiting Yasukuni Shrine, the only way they can truly prevent “outrage” among parts of the Japanese public that would undermine apologies is by not apologizing in the first place. Similarly, on the Korean side, it would not be domestically popular for a politician to recognize this; they tend to gain more from pointing out simply the refusal to apologize rather than exploring and directly confronting the deeper reasons Japanese politicians might not do so.

---

33 Ibid.
The Role of Historical Memory and National Identity in Cooperation

Many scholars have argued that there is a larger “identity conflict” between the two states, their political systems, and their peoples. In The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States, Brad Glosserman and Scott Snyder argue that the persistence of historical tensions in the domestic politics of both countries is due to conflicts between the two countries’ “national identities,” in addition to varying views of China and worries over whether the United States can continue its regional role.34 Glosserman and Snyder define “national identity” as formed by “nation ally inculcated values, historical experiences, and narratives,” which “come together to create a sense of national communal life around which a sense of identity is forged.”35 This identity in turn helps to shape a state’s behavior by defining its purpose and core interests.36 Glosserman and Snyder focus on how identity and its communication through public opinion shape foreign policy but do not look into how it shapes domestic views of the government and its reliability in making foreign policy decisions with a potentially threatening state, which is the key missing piece in this discussion.

Ji Young Kim also argues that these identity factors are what continue to hinder any improvement in relations between South Korea and Japan. In “Escaping the Vicious Cycle: Symbolic Politics and History Disputes Between South Korea and Japan,” she argues that the gap between the nature of politics in South Korea, where it is mass-led, and Japan, where it is led by conservative elites, has led to an identity gap that makes any breakthrough in the relationship difficult. She writes:

34 Glosserman and Snyder, The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States.
36 Ibid.
While the South Koreans by and large have a unified narrative regarding the issues that constitute the history problem, Japanese narratives vary among progressives, the general public, and mainstream political leaders. Among the Japanese narratives, those of the conservative political elites in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) have dominated the official Japanese government line (Seaton 2007). As a result, the clash between the South Korean public narrative and the Japanese conservative elite narrative has been the major cause of diplomatic conflict.37

Viewing this concept through the lens of “symbolic politics,” Kim argues that three preconditions for likely ethnic conflict – “the existence of group myths that justify hostilities, fear of group extinction, and symbolic-political chauvinist mobilization” – exist between South Korea and Japan.38 Both sides possess these “group myths,” while the “fear of group extinction” falls more on the Korean side.39 While both sides utilize “symbolic-political chauvinist mobilization,” the Japanese conservative elite does so particularly strongly to mobilize their constituents into political support.40 As a solution, Kim suggests that Japanese leaders could attempt to soften their views in recognition of the need to collaborate on larger regional issues and that the “fear of group extinction” on the Korean side could be reduced through increased people-to-people exchanges and wider reporting of varying views on historical issues within Japanese society.41 However, the South Korean public does, to some extent, already perceive this gap in perspectives between the Japanese conservative elite and the wider population. According to the Asan Institute, in 2015, 11.6 percent of Koreans stated that there are more Japanese politicians than not who were remorseful for their country’s past actions and history, whereas 30

38 Ibid., 35.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 54.
percent said this about the general public in Japan.\textsuperscript{42} While this number does indicate that the perception remains that the majority of the Japanese public is not remorseful – 61.5 percent of respondents said that fewer in the public were remorseful than those who were – this does indicate that the South Korean public makes a distinction between Japanese politicians’ views and those of the general public and that they choose to focus on Japanese politicians as those they want to apologize.

Sheryn Lee contradicts these arguments, stating that South Korea and Japan are culturally and ideationally similar and geographically so close that, according to Constructivist theory, they should be able to cooperate more closely.\textsuperscript{43} “Yet,” she writes, “their very closeness has only served to deepen their mutual antipathy; their bilateral relationship is plagued by the legacy of Japan’s colonization, the structural failings of Japanese statecraft, as well as South Korean resistance to Japanese approaches to rapprochement.” This legacy has contributed to the larger atmosphere of strategic distrust, which overwhelms incentives for consistent cooperation. However, this argument does not address how “mutual antipathy” concretely translates into South Korean resistance to rapprochement and security cooperation.

These works on the historical tensions between South Korea and Japan are helpful in understanding the overall dynamics in the two nations’ diplomacy. However, historical memory is not immediately and spontaneously translated into domestic pressure on a government to shape foreign policy. There must necessarily be some mechanism that transforms them into concrete actions: citizen protest against the government, the strongly oppositional role of civic groups and the media, and the presence of solidly confrontational opposition parties. I argue that


\textsuperscript{43} Lee, “Burying the Hatchet?”: 105.
the identity factors and disjointed memories of World War II and the Cold War, emphasized by Glosserman, Snyder, and Kim, are the most determinant factor in Japanese-Korean relations, but these factors filter through domestic politics and therefore also involve public’s memory of the actors in the Korean government and their past failure to properly represent the interests of the Korean people, which translates into suspicion of and frequent opposition to attempts to pursue security cooperation with Japan.

**Korean Civic Society, Distrust of Government, and Its Impact on Foreign Policy**

Historical memory is not limited to that of interference and abuses by outside forces. Korean civic society’s most recent developments, prior to 1987, were in opposition to an authoritarian government, and it has taken on this confrontational role into the present in light of this history. It has fully expanded its role after democratization while remaining confrontational toward the government and its policies. Nationalism and representation of “the people” rather than the elite was a particularly important part of the ideology of many developing civic groups pre-democratization, and I assert that this has remained the case in the present.

In *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*, Namhee Lee examines the development of the minjung movement and its legacy. This movement was driven by workers, who were protesting factory conditions across South Korea, and by university student activists and intellectuals, or undongkwon. In particular, among the undongkwon, the minjung, or “common people,” movement, focused on the necessity of
centering the historical subjectivity of the Korean nation on the *minjung* rather than the elite.\(^{44}\) They attributed historical failure of the Korean nation to failures by the elite in the government to truly represent the *minjung* and their interests.\(^{45}\) According to Lee, “history was central in the discursive construction of minjung in the minjung movement, as well as the hubris of the students and intellectuals of the 1980s who claimed to be the rightful interpreters of history.”\(^{46}\) In particular, the origins of this movement centered around a response to Park Chung Hee’s Yusin regime from 1963 to 1979.\(^{47}\) This rule, “combined with the rising human and ecological costs of rapid industrialization,” as well as perhaps the normalization of relations with Japan, “deepened the existing sense among intellectuals and university students that modern Korean history was a ‘failure.’”\(^{48}\) This sense of failure led them to try to reposition the core of the Korean state around a group other than the elite that had failed the nation: the people. According to Lee, “for the minjung practitioners, the issue of not being an ‘autonomous subject’ meant that Koreans were not the subjects of their own history and that their failure stemmed from South Korea’s geopolitical location in the cold-war order governed by the United States,” which elites had navigated unsuccessfully.\(^{49}\) Thereafter, collaboration and organization with factory workers to protest became a way to reposition historical subjectivity in a way that would reframe the Korean nation’s trajectory away from failure and subordination.

By the 1990s, as South Korea democratized, this movement seemed to have faded. Lee argues that activists turned their attention to criticizing South Korea’s culture rather than its

---


\(^{45}\) Ibid.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 37.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 37-38.
politics: “In place of the political activism of the 1980s, popular culture came to be regarded as the key domain of resistance, with the emerging category of ‘cultural critic’ elevated to the position of ‘culture guerilla.’” However, is the present domestic political environment in South Korea truly “not only postauthoritarian but also post-minjung, with all that entails,” and are current domestic protest movements totally disconnected from the minjung movement and its ethos? Lee even points out that although it is difficult to summarize the post-authoritarian trajectory of undongkwon and activists beginning in the 1990s, many “presently occupy important positions in all aspects of public life, from politics to academia to the film industry.”

It is likely that they have had more cultural and political power in shaping the current popular narrative on historical issues than Lee explicitly recognizes.

Furthermore, Woonjae Hwang asserts that in the post-democratization period in South Korea, foreign policy has been determined by interaction between a weakened central government and the increasingly powerful civic society. Hwang states that “democratization brought changes to Korea’s foreign policies by reviving its civil society,” defined as “the third sector along with government and business in a society… comprised of various civil non-governmental organizations and institutions such as labor unions, religious associations, social activity groups, and political parties that represent interests and preferences of citizens,” which would include the successors of the minjung movement mentioned above by Lee. Along with this revival, civic society has become much more fragmented and guided by nationalism – and the necessity of representing the Korean people rather than the government – more than any

---

50 Ibid., 300.
51 Ibid., 301.
52 Ibid.
53 Hwang, South Korea’s Changing Foreign Policy, 11.
other ideology.  

Hwang explains that on one hand, civil society groups began to advocate for their members’ interests and compete with each other much more, which led to groups split around factors like region, age, and social status. This fragmentation and competition also led these groups to assert their interests in a more wide-ranging way, eventually reaching into foreign policy. On the other hand, nationalism has begun to play more of a role in many groups’ views of South Korea’s foreign policy. Hwang asserts that recent economic success and democratization “promoted South Koreans’ national pride and self-confidence in their ability to control their destiny.” Furthermore, the growing concentration of population in cities like Seoul and increased information flow to citizens creates an environment in which “citizens are easily mobilized for direct political participation in the democratized Korean society.” All of this results in “a growing number of citizens motivated and encouraged by democratization and nationalism [who] demand their government make more independent foreign policy decisions based on national interests rather than geopolitical and strategic consideration.” While Hwang locates the beginning of this role for civil society in democratization, it could be attributed further back to the minjung and other social movements’ work to push for political reform during the conflict-filled previous two decades.

There have also been reduced “rally-round-the-flag” effects after democratization, lessening South Korean leaders’ ability to galvanize public support for a policy in the aftermath of a crisis like the Cheonan sinking and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island. The “rally-round-the-flag effect theory” asserts that “external crises, especially territorial disputes with other

---

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 15.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 20.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
states, can easily increase internal solidarity around leaders, and hence positively affect the
popularity of political leaders among citizens.” However, as citizens become more active
participants in influencing their nation’s foreign policy, this effect is reduced. This
phenomenon increases when the media and opinion leaders are confrontational toward the
government, which tends to be the case in South Korea after democratization. Therefore,
despite a recent security crisis, leaders like Lee Myung-bak can have particular trouble
galvanizing public support for a policy change due to a past history of restriction of opposition
by the government. In fact, even before the outcry over negotiations with Japan over security
collaboration, Lee Myung-bak had decreasing political capital. After the shelling of Yeonpyeong
Island in November 2010, his popularity decreased from 46.6 percent to 42.7 percent. Prior to
that, after an exchange of gunfire between South Korean and North Korean ships after a North
Korean patrol boat crossed south past the Northern Limit Line, Lee’s approval numbers
decreased from 50 to 39 percent in one week, before he had taken any concrete action in
response. This immediate distrust limits the amount of political capital South Korean leaders
have to advocate for unpopular policies, even in response to a crisis.

In Advocacy and Policymaking in South Korea, Jiso Yoon finds that non-governmental
organizations are active in policymaking and have specific political preferences for which they
advocate. Similarly to Hwang, she argues that based on “a stable pattern of interactions

---

60 Ibid., 24.
61 Ibid., 25.
62 Ibid., 26-27.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 27.
65 Ibid.
developing between prominent civil society groups and political parties – close alignment with left-leaning opposition parties and conflictual relations with the GNP,” Korean civil society and its preferences were shaped by the confrontational period of the 1980s, during which “the Korean civil society dramatically expanded… in initiating oppositional struggles against the authoritarian state.”\textsuperscript{67} Furthermore, as non-governmental organizations become more closely aligned with the government, public trust in them decreases.\textsuperscript{68} Yoon recognizes more than Hwang that the narratives of opposition, framed by the idea of relocating historical subjectivity to the common people, created by Korean civic society prior to democratization continues to affect its positioning toward historical issues, especially through the media and activists’ necessarily confrontational role.

Furthermore, this may influence South Koreans across the board to assume such a confrontational role, as shown in the deep levels of distrust they show toward their government. In 2015, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found in their “Government at a Glance” survey that nearly 70 percent of South Koreans report that they distrust the government.\textsuperscript{69} Only around 34 percent answered affirmatively that they had confidence in their national government, as compared to the average of 41.8 percent across all OECD countries.\textsuperscript{70} Some have suggested that this is due to overly high expectations of the government after democratization, but I argue that it is more linked to the era of confrontation

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
between civil society groups, who said that they represented the *minjung*, and the governmental elite.\textsuperscript{71}

**The Persistence of Anti-Japan Public Sentiment and Its Role in Civic Distrust**

Memories of unilateral capitulation and compromise by the Korean government during the Park Chung Hee area strongly influence current responses to any diplomacy with Japan, along with memories of Japanese colonization and abuses. Namhee Lee points out that citizen activism during the 1960s fell into a lull until it was galvanized by normalization talks in March 1964, when “negotiations on the treaty to normalize relations between South Korea and Japan, known as the Normalization Treaty, pulled students and intellectuals out of their brief coexistence and cooperation with the military regime.”\textsuperscript{72} Activism and protest culminated in “the declaration of martial law in the Seoul area and the occupation of universities and streets by the military,” along with the dismissals of activist student leaders from schools, arrests, and firing of involved professors.\textsuperscript{73}

Korean public opinion toward Japan recently has been consistently and often increasingly negative. Hwang states that over the past decade, the South Korean and Japanese publics’ view of each other has grown increasingly negative despite general congruence in foreign policy preferences, around 48.5 percent, which is higher than that of either country with the United States.\textsuperscript{74} According to the Asan Institute’s 2015 poll of South Koreans on their views of Japan,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{72} Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 30.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, 31.
\textsuperscript{74} Hwang, *South Korea’s Changing Foreign Policy*, 87.
\end{flushleft}
when asked to rate their friendliness toward the Japanese people on a scale of 0-10, respondents rated their levels of friendliness at an average of 3.74, compared to the 5.82 felt toward Americans and 5.06 toward Chinese.\footnote{Kim, Lee, and Kang, “In Troubled Waters: Truths and Misunderstandings about Korea-Japan Relations,” 15.} However, as a sign of hope for an improvement in relations, young Koreans rated their feelings toward the Japanese people much more highly than older Koreans. South Koreans in their 20s ranked the Japanese above the Chinese and just below Americans at 5.10.\footnote{Ibid., 16.} In addition, the Korean public tends to separate their perceptions of Japanese politicians from that of the Japanese public. When asked whether more Japanese politicians are “remorseful for Japan’s past” than not, 80.7 percent of respondents said no.\footnote{Ibid., 26.} However, when asked the same question about the Japanese public, 61.5 percent replied in the negative.\footnote{Ibid.} The Asan Institute’s experts write:

> The fact that Koreans believe fewer Japanese politicians are remorseful for history issues suggests an interesting role that politics has played in the current situation. The likely explanation is that provocative actions by Japanese politicians and their portrayal by the Korean media have influenced the way Koreans view Japanese politicians. This emphasizes the important role that Japanese politicians have in addressing history issues in the future.

The Asan Institute also showed that many Koreans hold pragmatic views of their relationship with Japan and believe that historical issues should be separated. In June 2015, “56.3% of Koreans agreed that a Korea-Japan summit meeting should take place even if Prime Minister Abe’s speech commemorating the end of World War II in August does not include a sincere apology on history issues,” with 50.9 percent stating that such summits would be necessary to come to an eventual consensus on historical issues.\footnote{Ibid., 28-29.} Historical tensions, therefore, do not
overwhelm their opinion on practical cooperation with Japan. This is perhaps a positive sign for Korean acceptance of collaboration with Japan, but it also signals that there is another element in the process of cooperation that they distrust. This element is made up of the politicians and officials on both sides.

Conclusion and Areas for Future Research

Many commentators on Japan-South Korea relations and the difficulties between the two nations tend to fall back on “history problems” as the general cause. It is true that historical memory is the greatest challenge to overcome within this relationship. However, it is necessary to break down these history problems further and to expand the definition of “historical memory” beyond the memory of what people of one nation did to those of another to the domestic historical perception of a government’s failure to prioritize and protect their people during that time. The 2012 collapse of GSOMIA and ACSA after two crises – the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island and the sinking of the Cheonan in 2010 – is an example of this. Despite a recent serious crisis, South Korean leaders, namely Lee Myung-bak, lacked the ability and political capital to rally citizens behind an unpopular agreement with Japan, and civil society groups and opposition parties fell into their confrontational roles against the party leading government. This failure and confrontation was not due to an automatic stance against cooperation with Japan, however; it can be attributed to civic distrust that the government will act with integrity and truly represent the South Korean people’s best interests when cooperating with a historical enemy.

South Korean leaders cannot galvanize support for consistent cooperation with Japan until either the Korean public exhibits enough trust in them to pursue such a path or Japanese
politicians represent so little of a threat to the Korean public that this no longer becomes a contentious issue. The second option is more likely than the first, given the greater friendliness shown by Korean youth toward Japan than toward their own government. In the future, it would be useful to more directly measure South Korean citizens’ trust and confidence in their government and leaders’ ability to handle difficult foreign policy scenarios and the particular reason for their trust or distrust. More research on nationalism’s influence on the policy preferences of civil society groups in South Korea would also shed light on the role of nationalism in opposition to the government, and further studies are needed on why public confidence in the South Korean government is so low. Explicating the exact mechanisms of distrust and fear within the dialogue shaping security cooperation would help to tear down stereotypes of South Koreans as uniformly resentful of Japan, and it could improve the formulation of security agreements in the future.
Bibliography


