

ANTI-JAPANESE SENTIMENT IN SOUTH KOREA AND ITS IMPACT ON FOREIGN  
POLICYMAKING

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

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Washington, D.C.  
October 25, 2020

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# ANTI-JAPANESE SENTIMENT IN SOUTH KOREA AND ITS IMPACT ON FOREIGN POLICYMAKING

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## ABSTRACT

The article investigates the influence of South Korean public opinion on the aggravating relationship between the two democratic countries, Japan and South Korea, by using the Stata program. The article challenges the common wisdom that the South Korean president's hostile foreign policy toward Japan shapes the public's opinion on leaders. To examine the question, the author analyzes a survey data set that measures the South Korean public's view of neighboring countries: Japan, the United States, and North Korea. Based on the statistical analysis, the paper criticizes the overestimation of the power of public opinion in South Korea's relationship with Japan. Since the South Korean public holds high expectations of Japan's diplomatic relations and does not recognize the strategic value of Japan, the public does not judge their presidents' leadership based on the country's relationship with Japan. Therefore, the author argues that Korean political leaders form hostile foreign policy toward Japan, expecting to gain popularity by creating patriotic images. However, they do not gain any political pay-off from it. On the contrary, leaders can impress the public with their relationship with the U.S and North Korea due to the public's low expectations of diplomatic relations toward those two countries.

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## Introduction

The political relationship with Japan has been a dilemma for South Korea. On the one hand, the South Korean government must take into account the history of Japanese colonialism, which is an essential component of South Korea's national identity. On the other hand, the government has to cooperate with Japan for its national security due to continuous threats from North Korea. From a realist perspective, South Korea's dilemma is a conundrum. Considering that North Korea is a common threat for both Japan and South Korea, the most logical decision for South Korea would be forming a military alliance with Japan to secure the state.<sup>1</sup>

Yet contrary to that expectation, Japan and South Korea have repeatedly failed to overcome territorial and historical disagreements. The two countries continuously fight over the comfort women issue, Dokdo/Takeshima island, and descriptions of colonial history in textbooks.<sup>2</sup> President Roh Moo-hyun stated, "Dokdo was the first territory of Korea to be seized in the course of Japan's usurpation of the Korean Peninsula" in his special message on Korea-Japan Relations in 2005.<sup>3</sup> Japanese Prime Ministers, Koizumi and Abe, have visited Yasukuni Shrine although South Korea has strongly expressed its concerns of worshiping war criminals. The two countries' accumulated animosity finally exploded in 2019. Japan removed South Korea from the list of countries with preferred trade status. South Korea responded to the removal by canceling the General Security of Military Information Agreement.<sup>4</sup>

What prevents South Korea from moving toward a more cooperative relationship with Japan? Considering that South Korea is a mature democratic country, it is worthwhile to

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<sup>1</sup> Cha 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Dudden 1969-2008. The term, comfort women, refers to wartime sex slaves for Japanese soldiers during World War II.

<sup>3</sup> Roh 2005.

<sup>4</sup> The U.S, Japan, and South Korea agreed on General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2016 for the three countries' trilateral defense cooperation regarding the North Korea activities.

approach this conundrum by looking at the public's role in foreign policymaking. Scholars who analyze the relationship between public opinion and foreign policymaking present two different arguments. One school of thought is pessimistic about the role of public opinion in shaping foreign policy. Thomas Bailey, Hans Morgenthau, Gabriel Almond, and Walter Lippmann argue that the general public does not contribute valuable opinions in foreign policymaking because average citizens are indifferent about their countries' foreign relations.<sup>5</sup> Jiyoon Kim shares a similar view to this line of thinking. She argues that the South Korean public either fails to understand or is unaware of the direction of foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> Ho Sup Kim (김호섭) also discredits the South Korean public by stating South Korean presidents have been executively directing most of the country's foreign policies throughout history.<sup>7</sup>

The other school of thought argues that public opinion influences foreign policymaking. John Mueller, Benjamin Page, and Robert Shapiro argue that the public tends to make rational decisions on foreign policymaking during major national crises, such as a war.<sup>8</sup> Ji Young Kim argues that conflicts between South Korea and Japan are the result of clashes between Japanese conservative elites and the South Korean public.<sup>9</sup> Scott Snyder also argues that politicians in both Japan and South Korea formulate foreign policy to meet their public's expectations to gain more political support.<sup>10</sup> This argument suggests that public opinion is a factor for the tense relationship between Japan and South Korea.

Glosserman and Snyder invite the two countries' domestic public opinions into the conversation of why the relationship between Japan and South Korea has been unsuccessful.

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<sup>5</sup> Bailey Morgenthau Almond, and Lippmann, 1964 2014 1978, and 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Kim 2018, 40.

<sup>7</sup> Kim (김) 2009, 71.

<sup>8</sup> Mueller Page and Shapiro, 1985 1988.

<sup>9</sup> Kim 2014, 32.

<sup>10</sup> Glosserman and Snyder 2015, 14.

They imply that the South Korean public judges their presidents' performance based on how they handle the relationship with Japan. However, to what extent does public opinion shape South Korean leaders' decisions on the relationship with Japan and other countries? Do South Koreans value their country's foreign relationship as one of the crucial factors to judge their political leaders' competency? This study analyzes survey data sets that measure South Koreans' view of Japan, the United States, and North Korea. Although public opinion plays an important role in South Korea's relationship with the United States and North Korea, public opinion is inconsequential in the case of relationship with Japan. This paper provides statistical analysis to avoid overestimating the influence of public opinion on South Korea's foreign policymaking regarding Japan.

### **Design of the Research and Hypotheses**

This research uses the Stata program to analyze cumulative data sets of the Korean General Social Survey (KGSS) from 2003 to 2016.<sup>11</sup> The survey asks respondents' opinions about Korean society, economic conditions, government performance, and politics. The survey randomly selected South Korean residents and collected their demographic information including age, sex, education, income, region, and political orientation. Using the data sets from the KGSS, this paper runs a regression to examine the extent to which the South Korean president's behavior shapes the South Korean public's view of Japan. The paper also runs regressions for the U.S and North Korea with the same variables to compare the results of Japan with other countries.

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<sup>11</sup> Korean General Social Survey 2019.

The paper presents hypotheses for regressions of each country. Hypotheses of each country evaluate three main concepts: whether the president's actions affect the public's view of another country, whether there is a correlation between people's level of trust in their president and their view of another country, and whether the public is aware of the need of strategic partnership with a country. This paper first presents three hypotheses for the regression of Japan. President Lee Myung-bak's attempt to shape the public's opinion toward Japan is an independent variable and perception toward Japan is a dependent variable:

1. *President Lee's visit to Dokdo/Takeshima reduced the public's feeling of closeness to Japan.* The paper expects to see a negative correlation between President Lee's visit to Dokdo/Takeshima and the public's view of Japan. His visit provoked the South Korean public regarding the territorial issue of Dokdo/Takeshima and resulted in a decrease in South Koreans' favorability toward Japan.<sup>12</sup>
2. *The public's trust in the president influences the public's feeling of closeness to Japan.* Based on Kim's argument that people's favorability of president is the determining factor of foreign policymaking, the paper expects to see a significant correlation between people's trust level in the president and their view of Japan. This hypothesis tests Snyder's argument about the public shaping the direction of foreign policy by pressuring the president with the approval rate. The paper expects to see the public's view of their president accounting for a certain degree of the public's perception toward Japan.
3. *People who perceive North Korea as a country to contest will feel close to Japan.* The hypothesis follows the conventional wisdom that South Koreans who see North Korea as an enemy country tend to seek cooperation with Japan.<sup>13</sup> The argument suggests that the

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<sup>12</sup> Snyder 2018, 154.

<sup>13</sup> Zhang (장) 2017, 66-67.

public is aware of the importance of Japan as a strategic partner when South Korea faces military conflict with North Korea. The paper expects to see a positive correlation between the public's view of North Korea as an enemy country and their feeling of closeness toward Japan.

### **Main Findings and Arguments**

The results of Japan's regression model demonstrate three main findings. First, the president's actions influence the public's perception of Japan. Second, the public's view of their political leaders, however, does not correlate with the public's view of Japan. Third, the public's threat perception of North Korea does not correlate with the public's view of Japan. Based on these findings, this paper argues a president's behavior regarding territorial and historical conflicts with Japan worsen people's perception toward Japan; however, a changed perspective of Japan does not affect the public's assessment of political leaders' competency. In short, Korean political leaders may pursue a hostile foreign policy toward Japan to gain political support, but there is, in fact, no significant political payoff from doing so. South Koreans hold an inflexibly unfavorable view of Japan due to constant diplomatic failures and disinterest in the strategic importance of Japan. Unlike the regression results of Japan, regression results of the U.S and North Korea indicate that a president's actions regarding political conflicts, the public's opinion of political leaders, and the need of strategic partnership with a country shape people's perception of those two countries.

## Regression Model of Japan as a Dependent Variable

The regression model of Japan uses the KGSS data set from 2009 to 2014. The independent variable is *post\_Japan*, which indicates years after 2012. The paper picks 2012 as a year to divide the period from 2009 to 2014 because President Lee Myung-bak visited Dokdo/Takeshima island in 2012. Since South Korea and Japan were already having a territorial disagreement over Dokdo/Takeshima island, Lee's visit aggravated the relationship between South Korea and Japan. Thus, the year 2012 is an appropriate marker to compare people's perceptions toward Japan pre-2012 and post-2012. The dependent variable is *Japan*, which indicates how close respondents feel to Japan.

Intervening variables include *trust\_presid*, *polorient*, *NKthreat*, *polorient*, *national\_pride*, *Sex*, *Class*, *Education*, and *Age*.<sup>14</sup> The regression model includes *trust\_presid* to investigate how people's view of the president shapes their view on Japan. Respondents' view on North Korea is to explore if people's opinion to either support or fight against North Korea affects their view on Japan. The model also includes respondents' political orientation and their national pride to see how those variables shape people's perspective of Japan.

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<sup>14</sup> All variables of this paper are dummy variables; they are coded either as 1 or 0. If a respondent trusts the president, *trust\_presid* is 1, and if a respondent does not trust the president, *trust\_presid* is 0. If a respondent has progressive political orientation, *polorient* is 1, and if a respondent has conservative political orientation, *polorient* is 0. If a respondent thinks South Korea needs to support North Korea, *NKthreat* is 1, and if a respondent thinks South Korea needs to fight against North Korea, *NKthreat* is 0. Thus, *trust\_presid* indicates respondents who trust the president; *polorient* indicates respondents who have progressive political orientation; *viewonNK* indicates respondents who think South Korea needs to support North Korea.

**Table 1: Regression – Japan**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
VARIABLES	Japan								
post_Japan	- 0.031*** (0.006)	- 0.032*** (0.006)	- 0.032*** (0.006)	- 0.032*** (0.006)	- 0.032*** (0.006)	- 0.032*** (0.006)	- 0.036*** (0.006)	- 0.035*** (0.006)	- 0.034*** (0.006)
trust_presid		0.009 (0.009)	0.008 (0.009)	0.007 (0.009)	0.007 (0.009)	0.006 (0.009)	0.007 (0.010)	0.003 (0.010)	-0.001 (0.010)
polorient			0.005 (0.006)	0.005 (0.006)	0.004 (0.006)	0.004 (0.006)	0.004 (0.006)	0.005 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.006)
NKthreat				0.005 (0.006)	0.005 (0.006)	0.005 (0.006)	0.004 (0.006)	0.002 (0.006)	0.005 (0.006)
national_pride					-0.008 (0.008)	-0.009 (0.008)	-0.008 (0.009)	-0.008 (0.009)	-0.005 (0.009)
Male						0.019*** (0.006)	0.018*** (0.006)	0.020*** (0.006)	0.018*** (0.006)
middleclass							0.005 (0.007)	-0.000 (0.007)	0.002 (0.007)
highclass							0.008 (0.009)	0.004 (0.010)	0.010 (0.010)
secondary								0.028*** (0.008)	0.006 (0.008)
post_secondary								0.019** (0.008)	-0.016* (0.010)
age30s									0.043*** (0.011)
age40s									0.064*** (0.011)
age50plus									0.076*** (0.011)
Observations	8,434	8,214	7,965	7,892	7,850	7,850	7,524	7,513	7,510
Adjusted R-squared	0.003	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.005	0.005	0.007	0.015

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

The negative correlation between people's view of Japan (*Japan*) and years after 2012 (*post\_Japan*) matches with the prediction; President Lee's action of visiting the Dokdo/Takeshima islands to claim South Korea's sovereignty over the islands aggravated the South Korean public's opinion toward Japan. Intervening variables that have significant correlations with view on Japan are *Education* and *Age*. The table shows that people who received secondary and post-secondary education have a closer feeling toward Japan compared to people who received up to primary education. People with a higher level of education probably understand the necessity of a strategic partnership with Japan and feel closer to Japan. The table also indicates that people who are in their 30s or older do not perceive Japan as a close neighboring country compared to people who are in their 20s. The older people are, the stronger they feel the anti-Japanese sentiment. This correlation is expected, considering that older groups are more familiar with the history of suffering under Japanese colonialism, territorial disputes over the Dokdo/ Takeshima islands, and the comfort women issue. In short, two main observations can be made based on this regression. First, people who attained a high level of education generally feel closer to Japan. Second, people who are in their 30s or older seem to have stronger anti-Japanese sentiments than people in their 20s.

Although other intervening variables in this regression table were statistically insignificant, they nevertheless present surprising findings. One of unanticipated results is the correlation between people's trust level of their president (*trust\_presid*) and the public's view of Japan (*Japan*) is insignificant. To depict themselves as fearless leaders who advocate for the nation, South Korean politicians often attack Japan using Japan's reputation as an evil country due to its colonial history. President Lee Myung-bak's visit to Dokdo/Takeshima in 2012 is one example that explicitly shows how politicians attempt to increase support by creating a patriotic

image. However, the public's unfavorable perception of Japan and the public's trust level of their president do not correlate. In other words, unlike President Lee's intention to increase his political support by creating a patriotic image, his visit resulted in nothing more than the increase of hostility toward Japan. This lack of relationship between *trust\_presid* and *Japan* challenges the existing argument that South Korea's public opinion on Japan encourages the president to create a hostile foreign policy to Japan. According to the regression, it is more likely that South Korean politicians intentionally make hostile gestures to Japan to emphasize their patriotism, but those behaviors do not translate into greater public support.

Another unexpected result is that people's threat perception of North Korea (*NKthreat*) and political orientation (*polorient*) do not correlate with their view of Japan (*Japan*). This finding challenges the idea that South Koreans, who view North Korea as an enemy country, tend to seek a cooperative relationship with Japan. Among political elites, the South Korean progressive political parties have utilized the narrative of irredentism to initiate conversations with North Korea.<sup>15</sup> This type of approach created a dogma that progressive parties are pro-unification with North Korea, whereas conservative parties are anti-unification with North Korea.<sup>16</sup> This political polarization is closely related to security issues of the region. Progressive parties believe security cooperation with Japan would hamper maintenance of a cogent relationship with North Korea, whereas conservative parties believe security cooperation with Japan would deter missile threats from North Korea. Thus, progressive parties and conservative parties have attacked each other using this dogma to frame each other as supporters of the Kim regime or supporters of the colonial power, respectively.

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<sup>15</sup> Irredentism in this paper's context is an idea of reunification of North Korea and South Korea to complete the Korean ethnic identity.

<sup>16</sup> Jo (조) 2016, 297.

However, the insignificant correlation between *NKthreat* and *Japan* indicates that the public does not recognize the strategic importance of partnership with Japan to secure South Korea from North Korea's threats. The lack of correlation between *polorient* and *Japan* also points out that the political orientation of the general public does not affect their perceptions of North Korea. Hence, a disparity exists between the political elite's view of Japan and the public's view of Japan. Based on the results of the regression with the South Korean public, the paper infers that the political polarization regarding security cooperation with Japan is ideological conflict within the political elite, not within the public.<sup>17</sup> The public adopts an aloof attitude toward strategic importance of Japan to address North Korea's threats.

In sum, the paper only fails to reject the first hypothesis, *President Lee's visit to Dokdo/Takeshima reduced the public's feeling of closeness to Japan*. Based on the insignificant correlations, the paper rejects other two hypotheses. The paper rejects that the public's trust in the president does not influence the public's feeling of closeness to Japan. And the paper rejects that the public's view of North Korea has no relationship with the feeling of closeness to Japan. Despite showing insignificant correlations, the results of the regression of Japan is still surprising because the regression outcomes of the U.S and North Korea display the South Korean public's different attitude toward those two countries. This difference indicates that the South Korean public holds a unique view of their country's relationship with Japan compared to other foreign countries.

The paper runs regressions based on the following guidelines to conduct a fair comparison between Japan and the other two countries. First, since the paper is measuring the impact of the president's actions regarding the public's opinion on foreign policy, the

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<sup>17</sup> Lee (◉) 2011, 280.

independent variable of the U.S. and North Korea also needs to be a specific year that represents the president's action that affected South Korea's relationship with those countries. Second, the intervening variables remain the same as Japan's regression: *trust\_presid*, *polorient*, *NKthreat*, *polorient*, *national\_pride*, *Sex*, *Class*, *Education*, and *Age*.<sup>18</sup> Finally, the paper tests previously stated hypotheses. Those hypotheses evaluate the relation between the president's action and the public's view of a country, the relationship between people's trust level of their president and their view of another country, and the public's awareness of the strategic partnership with other countries.

### **Regression Model of United States as a Dependent Variable**

The regression model of the U.S. uses the KGSS data set from 2005 to 2010. The independent variable is *post\_USA*, which indicates years after 2008. The paper picks 2008 as a year to divide the period from 2005 to 2010 because President Lee Myung-bak entered the Blue House in 2008 with a pledge to restore the loss of trust in the U.S-South Korea alliance.<sup>19</sup> One of the policies pursued by President Lee was the Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The agreement included South Korea's imports of beef from the U.S. A few days after the agreement on April 18 in 2008, an investigative journalism program named MBC PD Note broadcasted the danger of getting Mad Cow Disease and expressed grave concerns about importing beef from the U.S. President Lee, nevertheless, enforced the FTA to strengthen the country's tie with the U.S.<sup>20</sup> Thus, since President Lee endeavored to strengthen country's alliance with the U.S. in 2008, it is an applicable mark to observe people's perceptions toward the U.S pre-2008 and post-2008.

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<sup>18</sup> Coding methods and definitions of these variables are the same as the previous variables – refer to footnote 13.

<sup>19</sup> Snyder 2018, 143.

<sup>20</sup> Jeon (전) 2011, 52.

With the independent variable, *post\_USA*, and the dependent variable, the public's perception toward the U.S (*USA*), the paper runs a regression to test these hypotheses:

1. *President Lee's effort to restore the U.S.-South Korea alliance increased the public's feeling of closeness to the U.S.* President Lee's favorable action toward the U.S – signing on the FTA – should increase the public's favorability of the U.S.
2. *The public's trust in the president influences the public's feeling of closeness to the U.S.*  
As the existing literature suggests, favorability of the president is a determining factor for foreign policymaking. This paper expects to see a significant correlation between people's trust level in the president and their view of the U.S.
3. *People who perceive North Korea as a country to fight against will feel close to the U.S.*  
The hypothesis is based on the idea that South Koreans who see North Korea as a security threat prefer to form a strong relationship with the U.S.<sup>21</sup> The argument suggests that the public knows that the U.S plays an essential role in protecting South Korea from North Korea's military threats. The paper expects to see a negative correlation between the public's threat perception of North Korea (*NKthreat*) and their feeling of closeness toward the U.S.

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<sup>21</sup> Namkung 2010, 233.

**Table 2: Regression – USA**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
VARIABLES	USA								
post_USA	0.127*** (0.010)	0.128*** (0.011)	0.132*** (0.011)	0.100*** (0.011)	0.098*** (0.011)	0.098*** (0.011)	0.094*** (0.011)	0.097*** (0.011)	0.092*** (0.011)
trust_presid		0.092*** (0.018)	0.086*** (0.019)	0.064*** (0.018)	0.058*** (0.018)	0.057*** (0.018)	0.055*** (0.019)	-0.038** (0.019)	-0.021 (0.019)
polorient			0.071*** (0.011)	0.038*** (0.011)	0.039*** (0.011)	0.038*** (0.011)	0.039*** (0.011)	0.042*** (0.011)	-0.026** (0.011)
NKthreat				0.248*** (0.011)	0.251*** (0.011)	0.252*** (0.011)	0.252*** (0.011)	0.240*** (0.011)	0.224*** (0.011)
national_pride					0.070*** (0.014)	0.070*** (0.014)	0.071*** (0.014)	0.064*** (0.014)	0.053*** (0.014)
Male						0.031*** (0.010)	0.033*** (0.011)	0.039*** (0.011)	0.021** (0.011)
middleclass							-0.009 (0.012)	0.015 (0.012)	0.019 (0.012)
highclass							0.023 (0.019)	0.044** (0.020)	0.033* (0.019)
secondary								0.139*** (0.015)	-0.013 (0.017)
post_secondary								0.106*** (0.016)	0.041** (0.018)
age30s									0.001 (0.016)
age40s									0.054*** (0.017)
age50plus									0.223*** (0.018)
Observations	8,860	8,593	8,346	8,240	8,214	8,214	7,911	7,898	7,894
Adjusted R-squared	0.017	0.020	0.025	0.085	0.088	0.089	0.089	0.098	0.122

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

The regression table indicates almost all chosen variables result in significant relations with people's perception of the U.S. This outcome contradicts with Japan's regression table, which does not contain many significant relations among variables. The correlation between *post\_USA* and *USA* remains positive even with intervening variables. The continuously positive correlations demonstrate that President Lee's effort to strengthen the U.S-South Korea alliance enhanced the public's positive feelings toward the U.S.

The chart then presents a negative correlation between *trust\_presid* and *USA*, seemingly contradicting the previous point. If the Lee administration's pro-U.S. foreign policy developed people's favorable view of the U.S., why do people who trust the president not feel close to the U.S.? When the South Korean government decided to resume U.S. beef imports as a part of the FTA in 2008, South Koreans, apprehensive about the U.S. beef imports due to concerns over Mad Cow Disease, gathered at Gwanghwamun square and held the candlelight vigil.<sup>22</sup> The negative coefficient of *trust\_presid*, however, demonstrates that these disgruntled Koreans still trust President Lee's leadership despite their adverse view of the U.S. beef imports. This bizarre phenomenon emanates from the public, which blames the U.S for the beef exports rather than questioning President Lee's decision to pursue the FTA. Consequently, although the considerable backlash to the U.S. beef imports influenced the public's view of the U.S., since the public still trust their president, the overall public's feeling of closeness to the U.S stays favorably due to the president's pro-U.S. foreign policy.

People's threat perception of North Korea (*NKthreat*) and their political orientation (*polorient*) are also significantly correlated with their view of the U.S. The negative coefficient of *NKthreat* demonstrates that people who view North Korea as a country to support, do not feel

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<sup>22</sup> Jeon (권) 2011, 60.

close to the U.S. The negative coefficient of *polorient* shows that South Koreans with progressive political orientation do not want to pursue a friendly relationship with the U.S. . Statistical significance of *NKthreat* and *polorient* reveals how these two variables are closely related. When *NKthreat* is inserted into the regression, column 4 of the table indicates that the coefficient of *polorient* increases from -0.071 to - 0.038. The change of coefficient denotes that people's political orientation has strong explanatory power for the public's view of the U.S. These results confirm the argument that South Koreans who are pro-North Korea perceive the U.S as an obstacle to the inter-Korean relations. Members of the public with a progressive political orientation often blame the U.S for the Korean War and the dictatorship after the military government.<sup>23</sup> In consequence, the progressive parties in South Korea emphasize the state's complete sovereignty and criticize the U.S for projecting its power in inter-Korean issues.

After running the regression of the U.S, the paper fails to reject all three hypotheses. President Lee's policy to improve the U.S.-South Korea alliance increased the public's feeling of closeness to the U.S. The public's trust in the president also influenced the public's feeling of closeness to the U.S. Finally, people view North Korea as a country to support do not feel close to the U.S. These findings are very different from the results of Japan's regression, which only indicated significant correlation between president's action toward Japan and people's view of Japan. The paper runs one more regression with North Korea to complete the comparison.

### **Regression Model of North Korea as a Dependent Variable**

The regression for North Korea uses data sets from 2005 to 2010. The independent variable is *post\_North\_korea*, which indicates years after 2008. The paper picked 2008 as a year to divide

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<sup>23</sup> Lee (ㅇ) 2011.

the period because President Lee drastically changed the direction of South Korea's policy toward North Korea in 2008. Unlike the previous administrations, which pursued the Sunshine Policy and Peace and Prosperity Policy, the Lee administration announced a Denuclearization and Opening 3000 policy. President Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy and President Roh Moo-hyun's Peace and Prosperity Policy provided North Korea economic assistance and requested denuclearization at the same time. However, President Lee's Denuclearization and Opening 3000 policy demanded North Korea to halt their nuclear program first before providing the economic assistance.<sup>24</sup> This policy is derived from President Lee's effort to restore the U.S-South Korea alliance. The Lee presidency embraced the Bush administration's North Korea policy by pointing out North Korea's nuclear development as a major issue of inter-Korean relations. North Korea responded to the Lee administration's policy with abandoning Six-Party Talks in 2009 and continuing the nuclear missile development.<sup>25</sup> Considering President Lee's major shift in policy toward North Korea, the years after 2008 is an appropriate independent variable to observe the public's view of North Korea. Similar to the two previous regressions, the dependent variable is respondents' feeling of closeness to North Korea (*North\_Korea*). Hypotheses for the outcomes of North Korea's regression are:

1. *President Lee's policy shift regarding North Korea reduced the public's feeling of closeness to North Korea.* The paper expects to see a negative correlation between President Lee's Denuclearization and Opening 3000 policy and the public's view of North Korea. North Korea's aggressive response to President Lee's policy worsened the South Korea public's view of North Korea.

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<sup>24</sup> Park 2008, 41.

<sup>25</sup> Snyder 2018, 163.

2. *The public's trust in the president influences the public's feeling of closeness to North Korea.* Based on the existing literature claiming that the public's view on leaders affects the direction of foreign policymaking, the paper expects to see a significant correlation between people's trust level in the president and their view of North Korea.
3. *People who perceive North Korea as a country to support will feel close to North Korea.* This hypothesis tests if people's threat perception of North Korea correlates with their feeling of closeness to North Korea. The paper predicts to see a strong significant correlation between these two variables.

**Table 3: Regression – North Korea**

VARIABLES	(1) North Korea	(2) North Korea	(3) North Korea	(4) North Korea	(5) North Korea	(6) North Korea	(7) North Korea	(8) North Korea	(9) North Korea
post_North Korea	-0.112*** (0.010)	-0.111*** (0.010)	-0.113*** (0.010)	-0.085*** (0.010)	-0.085*** (0.010)	-0.085*** (0.010)	-0.084*** (0.010)	-0.083*** (0.010)	-0.081*** (0.010)
trust_presid		0.056*** (0.016)	0.046*** (0.016)	0.018 (0.015)	0.016 (0.015)	0.016 (0.015)	0.019 (0.016)	0.010 (0.016)	-0.000 (0.016)
polorient			0.071*** (0.010)	0.037*** (0.010)	0.037*** (0.010)	0.037*** (0.010)	0.039*** (0.010)	0.039*** (0.010)	0.034*** (0.010)
NKthreat				0.243*** (0.009)	0.244*** (0.010)	0.244*** (0.010)	0.246*** (0.010)	0.240*** (0.010)	0.230*** (0.010)
national_pride					-0.024* (0.013)	-0.024* (0.013)	-0.025* (0.013)	-0.022* (0.013)	-0.015 (0.013)
Male						0.000 (0.010)	-0.002 (0.010)	-0.007 (0.010)	0.003 (0.010)
middleclass							-0.016 (0.011)	-0.030*** (0.011)	-0.035*** (0.011)
highclass							-0.026 (0.017)	-0.040** (0.018)	-0.040** (0.018)
secondary								0.064*** (0.013)	0.005 (0.015)
post_secondary								0.060*** (0.014)	-0.004 (0.017)
age30s									0.042*** (0.016)
age40s									0.026 (0.016)
age50plus									-0.073*** (0.016)
Observations	7,366	7,180	6,994	6,916	6,898	6,898	6,622	6,610	6,606
Adjusted R- squared	0.017	0.018	0.025	0.107	0.107	0.107	0.107	0.109	0.117

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

The regression of North Korea produces contradicting outcomes with Japan's regression. The negative correlation between *post\_North\_Korea* and *North\_Korea* indicates that the South Korean public's perception of North Korea worsened after President Lee applied a stricter policy to North Korea for denuclearization. The variable, *trust\_presid*, has a significant correlation with *North\_Korea* as well. The positive coefficient seems to indicate that people who trust their president feel closer to North Korea. However, the correlation loses its statistical significance when the *NKthreat* is added to the regression. This change points out that *NKthreat* has a stronger explanatory power for the public's feeling of closeness to North Korea than *trust\_presid*. In short, people's pre-existing threat perception of North Korea is an important factor when the public decides their feelings of closeness to North Korea. Still, the significant correlation between *trust\_presid* and *North\_Korea* lasts until column 4, and it shows a relation between people's trust level of the president and their view of North Korea.

The positive coefficient of *polorient* supports the argument that South Koreans with a progressive political orientation want to pursue a friendly relationship with North Korea.<sup>26</sup> As previously mentioned in the section discussing Japan's regression results, people with progressive political orientations seek unification and express more empathy toward North Korea. Finally, *NKthreat* and *North\_Korea* have a strong, positive significant correlation. This finding is self-explanatory because people probably feel closer to North Korea if they perceive North Korea as a country to support.

According to the regression table of North Korea, the paper fails to reject all three hypotheses. President Lee's policy focusing on North Korea's denuclearization reduced the public's feeling of closeness to North Korea. The public's trust in the president increases the

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<sup>26</sup> Lee (ㅇ) 2011.

public's feeling of closeness to North Korea. Finally, people who perceive North Korea as a country to support feel close to North Korea. Similar to the U.S' regression, North Korea's regression demonstrates many other factors that influence people's view of North Korea. This outcome contradicts with Japan's regression model, in which the president's action was the only factor influencing the public's view of Japan.

### **Comparisons among Japan, U.S., and North Korea**

The overall finding after running regressions for Japan, the U.S, and North Korea suggests that South Korean public holds a unique view of Japan. The lack of correlation between people's trust level of the president and their feeling of closeness to Japan suggests that people do not care much about the president when they evaluate their country's relationship with Japan. Thus, leaders do not receive any political payoff from pursuing a hard line on Japan.

This observation presents another possibility of leaders' hostile behavior toward Japan: although there is no political payoff, the political cost from compromising with Japan may be high. However, the public does not blindly censure leaders' actions to improve the relationship with Japan. President Kim Dae-jung needed to cooperate with Japan to overcome the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and to hold the 2002 FIFA World Cup.<sup>27</sup> Subsequently, president Kim and prime minister Obuchi announced a joint declaration on the ROK-Japan partnership toward the 21<sup>st</sup> century in 1998. This joint declaration addressed Japan's reflections on colonial history, South Korea's effort to build a future-oriented relationship with Japan, and the two countries' partnership for the peace and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>28</sup> President Kim's apparent effort to collaborate with Japan did not bring down the public's support for him. Gallup Korea

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<sup>27</sup> Shin 2015, 148.

<sup>28</sup> Kim, 1998.

indicates that 70.7 percent expressed a favorable view of the Kim administration.<sup>29</sup> President Kim's case demonstrates a cogent relationship with Japan does not decrease the public's support.

Unlike Japan's case, the regressions of the U.S. and North Korea both show significant correlations between the trust level of the president and their view of the two countries. Additionally, people's threat perception of North Korea has significant correlations in the regression of the U.S and North Korea, but Japan's regression does not show a significant correlation. Japan is the only neighboring country that the public's view of the president and North Korea does not matter when they determine their country's relationship.

Still, there are some commonalities among the three regressions. One is how each generation in Korean society perceives the country's foreign relations differently. For Japan's case, the older people are, the stronger they show anti-Japanese sentiment, because the older generation experienced the Japanese colonial period or grew up witnessing consequences of colonialism. The regression of the U.S. suggests that people who are in the 40s or older feel closer to the U.S. Since the old generation experienced the Korean War and witnessed the U.S military saving South Korea from North Korea, the paper can infer that their feeling of closeness to the U.S comes from that experience. The regression of North Korea also shows that people who are in the 50s or older do not feel close to North Korea. This negative coefficient indicates the old generation's trauma of North Korea's invasion. The other commonality is the impact of the president's actions in the public's view of foreign relations. President Lee's visit to Dokdo/Takeshima, his decision to pursue the FTA with the U.S, and his announcement of the Denuclearization and Opening 3000 policy all resulted in significant correlations with the public's feeling closeness toward Japan, the U.S, and North Korea, respectively.

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<sup>29</sup> Gallup Report (갤럽 리포트) 2003.

Despite those commonalities of the three countries, the South Korean public holds a distinctive perspective toward Japan. For the U.S and North Korea, other variables such as trust level of the president, political orientation, threat perception of North Korea, affect South Koreans' view of the two countries. However, almost no other variables except president's action affect the South Korean public's view of Japan, which translates into the public's inflexible view toward Japan compared to other two countries.

### **The South Korean Public's Inflexible View of Japan**

The paper states two main reasons for the South Korean public's inflexible view of Japan. First, the president cannot impress the public with the outcomes of a diplomatic relationship with Japan. The public considers successful diplomatic outcomes as receiving a proper apology regarding colonial history and gaining complete sovereignty over the Dokdo/Takeshima islands. Unfortunately, the Korean government can never meet the public's expectations. From Japan's perspective, South Korea's demand for more apologies is absurd because apologies were delivered multiple times.<sup>30</sup> One of the examples that delineate Japan's sincere apology is Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama's speech in 1995 on August 15.

During a certain period in the not too distant past, Japan, following a mistaken national policy, advanced along the road to war ... Allow me also to express my feelings of profound mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, of that history.<sup>31</sup>

Prime Minister Murayama explicitly address Japan's past action as a "war" and further apologized for those "victims" of the war in his public speech. Nevertheless, the South Korea public still expresses their dissatisfaction with the apology due to its perceived lack of sincerity,

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<sup>30</sup> Chun ( 昀 ) 2014, 134.

<sup>31</sup> Murayama 1995.

pointing out how Japanese textbooks do not adequately address Japan's wartime crimes during the colonial period.<sup>32</sup>

The sovereignty issue over Dokdo/Takeshima is challenging to resolve as well, because the territorial dispute is deeply intertwined with the two countries' economic, political, and historical issues. The two countries started fighting over the islands to gain more Economic Exclusive Zones for their fishery industries in the 1990s.<sup>33</sup> The tension was exacerbated when Japan's Shimane prefecture appointed February 22 as "Takeshima Day" in 2005, and South Korea criticized Japan for its unapologetic action of repeating its colonial history. Now, the territorial dispute has become a political tool to create a political leader's patriotic public image. As a result, receiving Japan's apologies for the colonial history and the territorial dispute is an extremely challenging diplomatic goal for the South Korean government. People know their presidents will not meet their expectations anytime soon, and so do not determine their president's competency based on the country's relationship with Japan. Thus, the regression of Japan shows a lack of correlation between the public's trust level in the president and feeling of closeness toward Japan.

Unlike Japan, the South Korean government can impress the public with diplomatic outcomes with the U.S and North Korea. Since the South Korean public knows the U.S is a powerful country and South Korea relies on the U.S for its economic, security supports, the public understands the South Korean government's struggles dealing with the U.S. The public does not bring concerns about the president's competency as long as the government maintains the alliance as it has been. The relationship status with North Korea is capricious, but frequent fluctuations also mean frequent signs of progress in the inter-Korean relation. Even with small

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<sup>32</sup> Kim, Lee, and Kang 2015, 26.

<sup>33</sup> Woo (우) 2019, 92.

agreements between the two countries, the government can easily deliver hope for unification to the public. In short, presidents can impress the public due to relatively low expectations in relationship with the U.S and diplomatic circumstances with North Korea, which produces more outcomes. As a result, the public's view of the president's competency significantly correlates with the view of the country for the U.S and North Korea.

The public's lack of awareness of the importance of military cooperation with Japan is another explanation for South Koreans' inflexible view of Japan. According to Gallup Korea's survey conducted in 2019, 62% of respondents chose the U.S as the most important country for peace in the Korean Peninsula, whereas only 6% chose Japan.<sup>34</sup> Regarding GSOMIA, 51% of respondents expressed support for the government's decision to cancel the agreement. Noting that the survey conducted in 2016 also showed 59% of respondents not supporting the GSOMIA, it is reasonable to say that the South Korean public is generally not in favor of military cooperation with Japan.<sup>35</sup> The unsupportive attitude toward military cooperation with Japan comes from the public's ignorance of the strategic necessity of Japan. The most rational decision for South Korea is developing closer ties with Japan to promote the U.S, Japan, and South Korea's trilateral security cooperation, which is critical to protect the peninsula from North Korea's threats.<sup>36</sup> However, experience during the Japanese colonial era created the public's fear toward Japanese militarization, which blinds the public from recognizing Japan as a militarily necessary partner.

This is not to say that the South Korean public lacks political wisdom. As Japan's regression table indicates, South Koreans who have obtained secondary education are in favor of

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<sup>34</sup>Gallup Report (갤럽리포트) 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Gallup Report (갤럽리포트) 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Wiegand 2013.

Japan. People with higher education levels probably know the role Japan could play for peace in the Korean peninsula. However, this finding also can be interpreted that the Korean government does not educate the general public about the strategic importance of Japan. The government limits itself from informing the public about Japan's essential role as a military partner by perpetuating Japan's reputation as an evil colonial power to form South Korea's national identity.<sup>37</sup> With the Korean government's continuous emphasis on the national trauma of Japanese colonialism, the public faces difficulty in advocating for the two countries' military cooperation. This pattern is already portrayed in the regression, which shows an insignificant correlation between people's threat perception of North Korea and their feeling of closeness to Japan.

In conclusion, the public does not relate the president's competency to the country's relationship with Japan, and does not know about Japan's strategic role in the region. This finding supports the previously addressed body of literature, which argues political leaders play a major role in determining the direction of foreign policy because the general public lacks knowledge about the political and security dynamics of foreign relations. Generalization of this finding, however, needs to be cautious, considering the South Korean public's inflexible view is only confined to Japan. For the U.S and North Korea, the public's trust level in the president and their threat perception of North Korea play significant roles in determining their views of those two countries.

## **Conclusion**

The paper challenges the existing notion that the South Korean public judges their presidents' political performance based on the country's relationship with Japan. The paper finds

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<sup>37</sup> Nam 2017, 413.

that South Koreans' trust level in their president and their threat perception of North Korea do not influence their view of Japan. The only factor that shapes the public's view of Japan is a president's action toward Japan. These findings are unique outcomes compared to other countries, such as the U.S and North Korea. For those countries, people's trust level in the president and their threat perception of North Korea are highly correlated to the public's favorability of those countries. South Koreans' inflexible view of Japan seems to be a result of low expectation to diplomatic outcomes as well as unawareness of the strategic importance of Japan.

The paper investigates the relationship between public opinion and foreign policymaking in South Korea by relying on statistical analysis. However, despite the effort to mitigate any biases, the paper still faces two main limitations. First, the dependent variables, *Japan*, *USA*, and *North Korea*, are isolated from a variable called *SEDISTAN*. The *SEDISTAN* variable asks people to rank Japan, the U.S, North Korea, China, and Russia in the order of their feelings of closeness. Thus, the dependent variable of this paper, the public's feeling of closeness to a specific country, is based on a relative measurement instead of a definite measurement. Since the variables, *Japan*, *USA*, and *North Korea*, are indicating to what extent people feel close to those countries compared to other countries, the paper's dependent variables may contain bias. Secondly, the paper mainly navigates the period of the Lee administration because his administration showed the most drastic changes in foreign policy. In addition, since the data set only provides the surveys conducted from 2003 to 2016, the Lee administration was the most appropriate time to observe public opinion changes over the eight years. This limit suggests that the findings of this paper may not be applicable to analyze the relationship between public

opinion and the direction of foreign policymaking during other presidents' administrations. The paper will be able to expand the research when there are more collected data.

Despite existing limitations in the study, the findings in this paper still contribute to the Japan-South Korea relationship by pointing out a president's hostile actions as a factor that aggravates the two countries' relationship. This result suggests possible methods to mitigate the tension between Japan and South Korea. Since the president plays an important role in shaping the public's impression of neighboring countries, the president needs to actively take friendly gestures toward Japan to improve the relationship. The study also denotes that the president will not lose political support by doing so, because South Koreans do not judge their political leaders based on diplomatic progress with Japan. Therefore, instead of attacking Japan to gain domestic support, South Korean leaders can initiate some cultural exchange or economic cooperation as the first step to resolve the conflicts between the two countries. Moreover, the public's lack of awareness of Japan's importance as a strategic partner appears to be another obstacle to the two countries' relationship. Since South Korea has vilified Japan as its colonial power for decades, publicizing Japan's necessity as a military partner can be difficult. However, active education about Japan's essential role for South Korea's defense power will eventually shift people's perception of Japan from an enemy country to a cooperative partner.

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