The Remembering Self

Relational identity surrounding the 2015 Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement

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Abstract

This thesis explores the potential gains of a dialogical perspective on relational identity in International Relations, contrasting identity formation in Japan vis-à-vis South Korea with identity formation in South Korea vis-à-vis Japan. Building on the constructivist methodology of Guillaume, it analyzes identity formation surrounding the 2015 Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement through narratives in editorials of four major Japanese and South Korean newspapers. The findings of the thesis suggest that there are more identities at play than has been proposed by previous scholarship, and that there is a domestic dimension to identity that is often overlooked.

Keywords

International Relations; constructivism; relational identity; Japan-South Korea; comfort women.

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A note on language

This thesis uses the Hepburn system for transliteration of Japanese names and terms. It uses macrons to indicate long vowels, i.e. “ā”, “ī”, “ū”, “ē”, and “ō” to mark the elongated versions of “a”, “i”, “u”, “e”, and “o” respectively. For Korean, the thesis uses the Revised Romanization system, with the exception of certain highly conventional transliterations of Korean names such as Park Geun-hye, Moon Jae-in, and Roh Moo-hyun, and the names of the newspapers Chosun Ilbo and Hankyoreh. All Japanese and Korean names are written according to the East Asian convention, with the family name first, followed by the given name. Japanese and Korean terms that are not frequently used in English are written in italics. Names of authors cited are referred to by last name only, with the exception of Korean names which are written in full in order to ensure clarity. All translations from Japanese and Korean to English are made by the author unless otherwise indicated.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and research question

Traditional perspectives within International Relations, such as realism and liberalism, have trouble accounting for the often hostile nature of Japan-South Korea relations, necessitating an alternative approach, such as constructivism. Within constructivism, considerable research has focused on relational identity and its consequences for foreign policy. However, with regard to Japan-South Korea relations, it has focused almost exclusively on Japan. The purpose of this thesis is to explore what insights may be gleaned from a dialogical perspective on relational identity in International Relations in general, and on Japan-South Korea relations in particular. It does so by analyzing in tandem identity formation in Japan vis-à-vis South Korea and in South Korea vis-à-vis Japan as it pertains to the issue of the 2015 Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement. The thesis uses the constructivist methodology of Guillaume as a theoretical basis, and statements made in editorials from four major Japanese and South Korean newspapers as its subject of analysis. As such, the research question of the thesis may be formulated in the following way:

“By studying from a dialogical perspective statements made about the 2015 Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement in editorials of four major Japanese and South Korean newspapers, what insights may be gleaned with regard to relational identity in International Relations in general and Japan-South Korea relations in particular?”

1.2 Historical background

In order to understand how the comfort women issue came to assume such a prominent role in Japan-South Korea relations, it has to be viewed in relation to the history of the two countries. This section provides a recapitulation of the comfort women issue within the larger context of Japan-South Korea relations.

The era defining how modern Japan-Korea relations would come to be viewed in the 20th century and beyond started in 1910, when Japan officially annexed the Korean peninsula as its colonial possession. The events that led up to this period and the events that would take place on Korean soil as a result have been interpreted in a myriad of ways. Some see it as Japan inevitably

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1 For details on Guillaume and the newspapers included in this study see sections 2.2.1 and 3.1 respectively.
adapting to a Western standard of colonizing or becoming colonized.\(^3\) Others see it as a natural development of the Japanese chauvinism advocated by adherents of the *Kokugaku* school of thought during the Edo period.\(^4\) Others yet see it less as a product of ideas, and more as an outcome of particular geopolitical circumstances.\(^5\) However, no matter what interpretation one deems most accurate, one would be hard pressed not to view the following 35 years as a period of paramount importance for the development of bilateral relations in the post-war era.

Japanese colonization of the Korean peninsula ended in 1945, and was followed by the outbreak of the Korean War between North and South Korea 5 years later, ending with an armistice in 1953. From there on, one can no longer effectively talk about Japan-Korea relations, but instead Japan-North Korea relations and Japan-South Korea relations, the latter being the subject of this thesis. Japan-South Korea relations can be divided into three time periods: first there is the period before normalization of diplomatic relations from 1953 to 1965; then there is the period of normalized relations with a democratic Japan and an autocratic South Korea which lasted from 1965 to the democratization of South Korea in 1987; from there on is the third period, which is the one in which we presently find ourselves.

Due to an absence of official diplomatic ties, the relations of the first period can be said to have been bad almost by definition. Various issues acted as an impediment to the eventual normalization treaty, which was the result of seven rounds of talks from 1951-1965.\(^6\) Among these issues were disputes over fishing grounds caused by the unilateral imposition of the “Rhee line” on behalf of South Korea, a maritime border which Japan perceived to be an infringement on its territory.\(^7\)

During the second period, relations improved dramatically. As a result of the 1965 treaty on normalization of diplomatic relations, Japan gave substantial financial aid and loans to South Korea.\(^8\) Many scholars attribute the successful enactment of the treaty and the friendly relations that followed to the pro-Japanese stance of South Korean autocrat Park Chung-hee, who took over the reins of the country following a military coup in 1961, and who would remain its president until his assassination in 1979.\(^9\)

During the third era, relations have grown increasingly tense over the emergence of a handful of issues: among these are the territorial dispute over the islets of Dokdo/Takeshima, differing views on how to depict the shared past of the two countries in school textbooks, and visits on behalf of Japanese

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7 Ibid., pp. 101, 115.
8 Ibid., pp. 102-104, 162-163.
government officials to the Yasukuni shrine.\textsuperscript{10} However, the currently single most important issue, and the currently single largest impediment to the continued development of bilateral relations, has been described by former South Korean President Park Geun-hye and others to be that of the so called “comfort women”.\textsuperscript{11}

Comfort women is a translation of a euphemistic term referring to prostitutes of various Asian origins and was used by the army of the Empire of Japan before and during World War II.\textsuperscript{12} The nature of the recruitment and activities of these women is a hotly contested subject, with some contending that the Japanese army forcibly abducted the women and used them as sex slaves, and others claiming that the women entered into mutually consensual contracts without coercion.\textsuperscript{13} Opinions on the total number of comfort women recruited vary as well, with estimates ranging between 20,000 and 400,000.\textsuperscript{14} Most of them are believed to have been Korean.\textsuperscript{15}

The issue first came to light in the 1990s, when several South Korean former comfort women, starting with Kim Hak-sun, came forward publically and provided testimony of their experiences. This led to the formation of various NGO’s and support groups associated with the women demanding reparations and an official apology from the Japanese government. After having first denied the existence of any such issue, in 1993 the Japanese government eventually acknowledged the imperial government’s role in the forcible recruitment of comfort women on the Korean Peninsula and elsewhere in Asia in the so-called Kōno Statement.\textsuperscript{16} Then, in 1995, it established the Asian Women’s Fund, which provided monetary compensation\textsuperscript{17} to the former comfort women along with a signed

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\textsuperscript{12} Japanese: ianfu (慰安婦); Korean: wianbu (위안부).


\textsuperscript{14} Soh (2008), pp. 23-24.

\textsuperscript{15} There were also substantial numbers of Chinese women as well as women from South East Asia and the Pacific Islands, see Soh (2008), p. xii.


\textsuperscript{17} The word used in Japanese is “tsugunaikin (償い金)”, at times translated into English as “atonement money”. The use of this word has been interpreted by some as an attempt by the Japanese government to avoid paying formal reparations and evade legal responsibility, see Asia-Pacific Journal Feature. (2015-05-11) “Fact Sheet on
letter of apology from the Japanese Prime Minister. Some women accepted the monetary compensation, while others refused it on the grounds that it does not constitute formal reparations, and as such obfuscates Japanese state responsibility. Reactions in Japan were, and have continued to be, mixed as well, especially in conservative circles, and in 2014, the Abe Shinzō administration published a review questioning the veracity of the Kōno Statement. There are numerous previous examples of similar friction between Japan and South Korea over the comfort women as well, such as shuttle diplomacy between the two countries breaking down in 2011 as a result of differing views on the issue.

However, in December 2015, after the first Japan-South Korea summit meeting in over three years, the governments of the two countries announced that they had finally reached a settlement on the issue. The agreement they produced stipulated that the two governments would establish a support fund for the former comfort women, to which Japan would donate one billion Yen. It was also decided that Prime Minister Abe would issue a formal apology, and that South Korea would make efforts to relocate a statute symbolizing the comfort women that had been installed by a South Korean NGO in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. The agreement was described by both sides as being a “final and irreversible solution” to the issue. The agreement was welcomed internationally, especially by the US. Almost immediately, however, it came under fierce criticism in both Japan and, particularly, in South Korea. Over the year and a half that followed the agreement, relations between the two countries have grown increasingly tense, and newly elected South Korean President Moon Jae-in has promised to scrap the agreement and demand renegotiations. Before that, Japan had recalled its ambassador and consul-general from South Korea over the South Korean government’s inability to relocate the statue in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul, and another statue that had since been installed in front of the Japanese consulate-general in Busan. As of December 2016, support for the agreement in South Korea stood at 26%.

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18 Ibid., p. 3.
20 Asahi Shimbun (朝日新聞). (2017-05-19) “Nikkan kankei Shunō kōryūno sōki hukkatsuwo 首脳交流の早期復活を 日韓関係 首脳交流の早期復活を” [Japan-South Korea relations Early leadership interaction].
22 The nature of this criticism is detailed in section 4.
23 Chosun Ilbo (2016-12-17).
24 The Diplomat (2017-02-08).
2. Theory and previous research

2.1 International Relations

The reason for choosing constructivism as a theoretical and methodological basis for this thesis can be understood as a consequence of other theories within International Relations being unable to provide a satisfying account of the current state of Japan-South Korea relations. This section provides a brief historical recapitulation of these theories in order to further elucidate this.

Over the course of its history, International Relations has seen the emergence of three major strands of theory development. First to make its appearance was realism, a renowned early proponent of which was Waltz, according to whom the subject of analysis for International Relations should be states, and states’ actions within the international system can be understood as a result of the anarchic nature of that system.26 Since there are no binding international laws compelling states to act in a certain way, they will be inherently distrustful of one another and rely on self-help in order to safeguard their own survival in an ultimately unpredictable environment. Waltz’s initial insights and ideas would later be expanded and modified by other realist thinkers, some of which came to be dubbed neo-realists.27 Much like their predecessors, neo-realists emphasize the anarchic nature of the international system, and contend that the survival of a given state within such a system ultimately depends on the power of that state. Neo-realists understand power as something that can be reliably measured and quantified in terms of material capabilities, a concept which includes among other things military and economic prowess.28 Neo-realists understand states to be rational actors, whose behavior in essence can be understood as a function of striving toward making their own power greater relative to that of other states. Neo-realists do not deny the existence of other factors such as institutions, domestic values, and identities, but contend that the actual effect that such things have on state behavior is so insignificant as to be rendered uninteresting.29 A well-known representative of neo-realism is Mearsheimer, whose particular brand of neo-realism has been called “offensive realism”.30 Unlike Waltz, whose contention is that states are ultimately preoccupied with maximizing their security and thus their chances of survival, Mearsheimer holds that states strive to maximize power relative to other states.31 In so doing, they not only increase their chances of survival today, but

27 However, according to some, Waltz should be considered a neo-realist as well, see Baylis, Smith and Owens (2011), p. 116.
28 Ibid., p. 117.
30 In contrast, Waltz’s brand of realism has retrospectively been dubbed “defensive realism”, see Baylis, Smith and Owens (2011), pp. 92, 116, 119-120.
31 Ibid., pp. 92, 95, 119-120.
also create conditions for being able to survive in the future. Mearsheimer views states as having a particular interest in growing powerful relative to states that are perceived to be more of a threat, usually by being in close proximity geographically. He therefore predicts state to form alliances in order to balance power against any state actor who appears to be headed toward domination in the local region, something which is known as regional hegemony. As such, he, like other realists, view power as the independent variable that determines states’ interests (and subsequently behavior), which constitutes the dependent variable.

The second strand of theory development within International Relations to make its voice heard was liberalism. Drawing from institutionalist, interdependence, and transnational studies, liberalism shares realism’s view of the international system as inherently anarchic. However, whereas realists view non-capability factors as insignificant, liberals contend that international institutions, interdependence and cooperation can mitigate and perhaps even overcome the adverse effects of anarchy. Parallel to the development of neo-realism, International Relations saw the emergence of a neo-liberalist school of thought, and the debate between the two fields that ensued would become emblematic of mainstream International Relations in the decade that followed the end of the Cold War. Unlike neo-realists, neo-liberals hold that states are more concerned with absolute gains than relative gains, and thus view them as much more likely to engage in cooperation that benefit both parties broadly. Neo-liberals have strong faith in institutions such as democracy and liberal values, and believe that the proliferation of these will pave the way for an increasingly peaceful, prosperous, and cooperative world. As evidence for this, they point to the scarcity of warfare between liberal democracies, something which is called the democratic peace theory. An influential proponent of this idea is Owen, who delineates arguments as for why relations between liberal democracies have been, and should be expected to continue to be, friendly.

The final and third major strand of theory development to emerge within International Relations is called constructivism. It can be considered an umbrella term which holds within it a variety of sub-fields such as post-structuralism and post-colonialism. Common to all of these is an ontology that views the world as being socially constructed and constituted by human language and behavior to one degree or another. Constructivists do not argue against the view held by realists and liberals that there are de facto no binding laws on the books in the international system. However, they contend

34 Baylis, Smith and Owens (2011), pp. 102-103, 121-122.
36 Ibid., pp. 104-105, 110, 116.
38 Though some scholars would categorize these as distinct fields in their own right, see Baylis, Smith and Owens (2011), pp. 168-169, 184.
39 Ibid., pp. 154-159.
that state behavior is nevertheless constrained and enabled by the norms and unspoken rules that inevitably arise as states interact with one another. A highly influential popularizer of this idea has been Wendt, in whose view none of the features of the international system are to be taken as perennial or immutable. Rather, even seemingly foundational features of the system such as nation states and their respective identities are socially constructed, and the interests, and thus behaviors, of states are informed by and predicated upon the constitution of such identities. Wendt therefore proposes introducing identity as a dependent variable to be analyzed in addition to or along with interests, the traditional concern of realism and liberalism.

The development of constructivism in International Relations was seen as necessary in part because of the failure of both realism and liberalism to account for certain empirical phenomena occurring in the international system. Japan-South Korea relations constitute a prime example of this. From the perspective of realism, Japan and South Korea have every incentive to unite against the emerging regional hegemon that is China. Considering that the power gap between China and other states in the region has grown increasingly wider over the last couple of decades, a realist would expect Japan and South Korea to put their own power struggle aside temporarily in order to avoid a future East Asia dominated by China. Indeed, the case of Japan and South Korea’s mutual animosity has puzzled International Relations scholars and policy researchers in the US for quite some time. While it is true that Japan and South Korea are both allied with the US, whose interest in balancing against China has grown stronger over the past decade, the two countries show no sign of wanting to cooperate the two of them on this issue, providing a stark contrast to the predictions of realism. Similarly, liberalism would have us predict relations between Japan and South Korea improving in the wake of South Korean democratization in the late 1980s. However, not only have we not been witnessing an improvement in bilateral relations, on the contrary they appear to be getting gradually worse. This underscores the need for an alternative theory in order to understand the current state of affairs in Japan-South Korea relations.

2.2 Relational identity

The previous section provided an overview of theoretical development within International Relations. This section provides an overview of previous research within the field that uses the concept of relational identity in relation to East Asia.

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46 Glosserman and Snyder (2015), pp. 3-5.
Several significant contributions to the field of International Relations have been made with regard to the role identity plays in the foreign policy of Japan, both as it applies to South Korea and other countries. For example, much work has been done to elucidate the complex relationship Japan has with China in terms of its identity and self-perception.\(^{47}\) Research has also been conducted with regard to Japan’s relational identity vis-à-vis North Korea.\(^{48}\) Moreover, researchers such as Guillaume have provided crucial insights into the effects of Japanese identity as it is constructed vis-à-vis the United States and the Western World.\(^{49}\)

As far as the relation between Japanese identity and South Korea goes, significant work has been conducted there as well. Bukh has concluded that the emergence of Dokdo/Takeshima as a point of contention in bilateral relations was less a result of material or nationalist concerns, and more the product of the internal Japanese identity dynamics between Tokyo and Shimane prefecture.\(^{50}\) Furthermore, a contribution of great value has been made by Tamaki, who delineates the development of Japanese narratives on South Korea and their implications for Japanese identity and foreign policy from the colonial era to the present day.\(^{51}\)

When it comes the relational identity of South Korea vis-à-vis Japan, however, there appears to be little to no research conducted within the framework of International Relations. While there are some contributions to be found in other fields of the social sciences, I have only been able to find a single piece of International Relations research that deals with Japan-South Korea relations from a constructivist perspective taking the viewpoint of South Korea.\(^{52}\) As such, my aspiration for this thesis is to attempt to take a first step toward trying to make a contribution to the field in this regard.

This thesis uses the constructivist methodology of Guillaume as a basis for its analysis.\(^{53}\) Though I essentially agree with Guillaume in his approach to analyzing identity within International Relations, I depart from his method on a handful of points, and incorporate into his method insights from


\(^{50}\) Bukh (2014).

\(^{51}\) Tamaki (2010).

\(^{52}\) For an example of research on South Korean identity vis-à-vis Japan in relation to historical monuments and exhibitions, see Podoler, G. (2011) Monuments, Memory, and Identity: Constructing the Colonial Past in South Korea. Bern: Peter Lang. For constructivist research from a South Korean perspective, see Yang Ki-won 양기웅 (2014) Hanilgwangyewa yeoksagaldeungui guseongjiujieok iha 한일관계와 역사갈등의 구성주의적 이해 (The Social Construction of Korea-Japan Relations and Conflicts over History), Gukjejeongchiyeongu 국제정치연구 (The Journal of International Relations) 17(2): 171-191. Yang finds that the deterioration of Japan-South Korea relations in the Post-Cold War era is related to an increase in the number of statements made by Japanese officials regarding historical matters that inflame the South Korean public, and a decrease in the degree to which such statements force said officials to resign.

\(^{53}\) Guillaume (2002).
Hagström and Gustafsson. The nature of these modifications to Guillaume’s method are expounded upon later in this section.

2.2.1 Guillaume

Drawing on the ideas of Russian intellectual Bakhtin, Guillaume advocates for a dialogical approach to analyzing identity within International Relations and foreign policy. The dialogical approach has an essentially constructivist outlook much reminiscent of that of Wendt, in that the social world is viewed as being constructed “through an interweaving of mutually-responsive discourses between several agents”. Through analyzing this interweaving of discourses, the researcher is able to discern identities through the interpretative tool of the hermeneutical locus. The hermeneutical locus in Guillaume’s model is national identity, and by discerning the expression, context, and relationality of national identity Guillaume aspires to establish an understanding of foreign policy in terms of a politics of alterity. The concept of the politics alterity is the centerpiece of Guillaume’s theory, and it is paired with the concept of transgredience. In essence, identity is viewed as being relational, and always having the constitutive parts of a Self and an Other. The hermeneutical locus defined as national identity allows us to understand “who the addressees of the [S]elf are”, and as such, what implication its expression has for the understanding and construction of the Other. The politics of alterity is the process by which the identity of the Self and the corresponding identity of the Other becomes established, and the fact that the Self always presupposes an Other is the transgredient quality of this process. The subject of analysis are the utterances and practices of actors involved in the process of constructing national identity, and in analyzing this process, Guillaume employs three basic distinctions in the method of establishing and employing the hermeneutical locus:

1. Expressivity: the way in which a specific utterance or series of utterances are articulating an identity of Self. Identity here is not considered something given before the fact, but is rather located and discerned through viewing it as a narrative event through the lens of the hermeneutical locus. National identity, then, can be understood as “narratively performed … in order to give it its symbolic boundaries and, through the state, its formal, physical and legal boundaries”.

2. Contextuality: the way in which the expression of a specific national identity becomes “analytically meaningful by its contextualization within a historical environment, a socio-cultural structure and a

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56 Ibid., pp. 3, 5, 8-10.
57 Ibid., p. 9.
58 Ibid., pp. 12-14.
59 Ibid., p. 13.
political setting”. Contextuality allows the researcher to sift through the various expressions of national identity and determine which ones are dominant and pervasive, and in so doing move from situated subjectivity to situated intersubjectivity.

3. Relationality: the way in which the dominant dialogical expression of identity is put in contrast with other counterfactual expressions in order to establish “what is part of the national self and what is not”, and can thus be understood “within a process of identification”. This to underscore the ever-present possibility of change in national identity and avoid reifying it as a subject of analysis.

Guillaume uses a broad definition of dialogue which is not limited to actual conversations between actors. Instead, he proposes viewing it as a “general process underlying continuous active and passive interactions”. Indeed, even an utterance made in a monologue “if it represents the reflexive absence of an [O]ther, still participates in a dialogue”, and a dialogical approach therefore does not preclude analysis of things other than a direct dialogue. The author of an utterance can therefore construct identity vis-à-vis a recipient without being engaged in actual conversation, in a process of “instrumenting alterity” by which “the [O]ther becomes an object of the [S]elf’s own conscience, which can be interpreted and modified at will as a function of the self’s own needs as an identity”. Utterances of this kind constitutes the primary subject of analysis of this thesis. It should also be pointed out that the author of such utterances is not necessarily aware of the consequences of such a process of identity construction: “An identity participates in a dialogical interaction with other identities, the latter being ‘co-opted’ by the former in either a conscious or unconscious manner to define itself”.

2.2.2 Hagström and Gustafsson

Hagström and Gustafsson share many theoretical sensibilities with Guillaume. They too propose a relational conceptualization of identity, though they recognize the existence and usefulness of a more norm-oriented approach where identity is seen as constituted by domestic norms and culture, which then gives rise to interests that determines behavior. However, their model views identity discourses that arise as a result of differentiation vis-à-vis Others as all-encompassing, and “[n]either ‘domestic’ nor ‘material’ factors can exist outside of such identity constructions”. In other words, identity informs actors in each and every facet of existence, and there is no way of stepping outside of such a

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60 Ibid., p. 13.
62 Ibid., p. 10.
63 Ibid., p. 6.
64 Ibid., p. 9.
65 Ibid., p. 11.
66 This is reminiscent of the view of identity presented by Tamaki (2010).
discourse without stepping into another, and any meaning ascribed to material conditions will inevitably be informed by discourse.\textsuperscript{68} The particularities of a given discourse become the lens through which reality is made sense of, and potential actions are restrained and enabled accordingly. In this way, they diverge from Guillaume’s view that interests, power and identity can be studied and understood separately, since the formation of identity through discourse ultimately enables and constrains actions and an actor’s interest in performing them. Furthermore, Guillaume holds the normative view that “[m]onological utterances […] stand on an unsound ethical and epistemological position. In fact, they tend to subvert the [Other], and do not allow it a proper conscience that is reflexively identical to them. Within a monological configuration, the [O]ther becomes an object of the self’s own conscience, which can be interpreted and modified at will as a function of the self’s own needs as an identity”.\textsuperscript{69} True as this may be, it is a standard of communication that few actors could live up to, and it is the fact that they inevitably diverge from it that makes their utterances interesting with regard to identity formation. The thesis therefore makes no ethical judgment with regard to the utterances of the actors included in this study, and instead opt for an approach more akin to that of Hagström and Gustafsson that focuses on the constraining and enabling effects of certain identity formations. That is not to say that normative analysis is not potentially interesting, but it lies firmly outside the scope of this thesis. The thesis does, however, draw normative conclusions regarding the outcomes of specific identity formations, but does not ascribe responsibility for such outcomes onto individual or collective interlocutors. It also includes in its analysis estimates of epistemological soundness.

As for the degree to which identities are resilient or fluid, Hagström and Gustafsson adopt an ontology that aspires to determine this through empirical observation. This translates into a three-layered model where interacting layers of identities are studied separately according to the degree to which they are institutionalized. They refer to these layers as being more or less ‘sedimented’ (meaning more or less prone to change and politicization), and describe their interactions thusly: “[I]dentity change in the less institutionalized layers interacts with and builds on layers that are more institutionalized – whether they too change or not. The latter layers are more ‘fundamental’ to the extent that they are more ‘more solidly sedimented and more difficult [for actors] to politicize and change’”.\textsuperscript{70} Hagström and Gustafsson highlight the importance of emotion and identity entrepreneurs in such interactions.\textsuperscript{71} Furthermore, they suggest that “the most sedimented layer of Japanese identity construction is an understanding of Japan’s position in hierarchical terms, where Japan is constructed through its differentiation from Others, who are alternately understood as superior or inferior to Japan”. They conclude that a narrative of a superior West and an inferior Asia has been pervasive

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{69} Guillaume (2002), p. 9.
\textsuperscript{70} Hagström and Gustafsson (2015), p. 6.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 1.
since Japanese modernization in the 19th century, and that this paved the way for the subsequent emergence of a narrative of wanting to catch up to and becoming recognized by the West as an equal, and perceiving Asia as either an opportunity or a threat.72

Hagström and Gustafsson understand the least institutionalized layer in the following way: “[This] is where policies and specific political issues are discussed and where agents operate. The way in which bilateral problems are discussed and understood in this layer is constrained by and has consequences for identity constructions in the other layers, particularly identity constructions in relation to specific [O]thers in the middle layer”.73

Seeing as how the subject of this thesis is editorials discussing the nature and circumstances of a specific policy issue, it is the least institutionalized layer that forms the basis for its analysis and discussion, and thus its hermeneutical locus.

72 Ibid., pp. 6-7.
73 Ibid., p. 7.
3. Method and material

The previous section outlined the use of relational identity as a method of inquiry in International Relations. This section expands further on how this method is applied for the purposes of this thesis, and provides a detailed description of the material used for its analysis.

3.1 Selection and use

There are two reasons as for why newspaper editorials deserve scrutiny in the context of the research problem of this thesis. First of all, they provide the opinions of not just a single individual, but the editorial staff of an entire newspaper. Seeing as how newspapers attempt to appeal to a certain audience and mirror their views (if not directly influence them), they can also be said to represent the readership of that newspaper at large to a certain extent. Given the considerable number of subscribers to the four newspapers included in this study, it is likely that they capture the opinions of large sections of society in a way that would be difficult to accomplish using an academic survey.\(^{74}\) Both conservative and progressive newspapers are included in order to maximize the level of representativeness, and in order to reflect internal inconsistencies of opinion and identity within the two countries.

Secondly, using editorials provides an insight into oft-overlooked aspects of identity formation in IR. In an increasingly globalized world, news consumers are increasingly taking part in the coverage of news as it is being reported outside their domestic national borders. Newspaper coverage in both Japan and South Korea frequently feature description and analysis of what is being written on the pages of the newspapers of the other country. Furthermore, certain changes in foreign policy that cannot be accounted for by analyzing the behavior of state actors may be elucidated by looking at the doings of non-state actors. Case in point: the Japan-South Korea agreement on the comfort women was initiated and signed by the Park administration in 2015, but after having been ousted by a popular protest movement of unprecedented scale, newly elected president Moon has promised to scrap the deal and demand a renegotiation of terms, seemingly buckling under popular pressure.\(^{75}\) Therefore, taking a closer look at the domestic process of identity formation in both countries appears appropriate.


\(^{75}\) Chosun Ilbo (2016-12-17).
Moreover, I believe that a comparative approach to analysis may have unexplored potential benefits. Given the basic ontological view of identity as being relationally constructed and (re)produced in a dialogical manner, analyzing only the Japanese part of the ‘conversation’ leaves out a crucial part of how identity is formed, and diminishes our chances of evaluating its resilience. Again, this does not necessitate the occurrence of actual conversation. All that is required is the possibility of actors gaining knowledge of some of each other’s statements. Such a process has been emblematic of Japan-South Korea relations, as pointed out by Kim Yong-seul: “[T]he relationship between Japan and South Korea was never a dialogue, but instead, it has always been an exchange of monologues”. 76 The editorials are taken from the following four Japanese and South Korean newspapers:

1. Asahi Shimbun (朝日新聞). Japan’s largest progressive newspaper.
2. Yomiuri Shimbun (読売新聞). Japan’s largest conservative newspaper, and largest newspaper overall.
3. Chosun Ilbo (조선일보). South Korea’s largest conservative newspaper, and largest newspaper overall.
4. Hankyoreh (한겨레). South Korea’s largest progressive newspaper, co-founded by South Korea’s incumbent President Moon Jae-in.

All editorials have been accessed through the respective historical database of each newspaper. 77 The search terms used were “editorial” and “comfort women”. 78 Given that the focus of this thesis is the 2015 comfort women agreement, the time span for editorials included in the search is from 2015-11-01 – which marks the beginning of the Japan-South Korea summit meetings that would eventually produce the agreement – to 2017-06-01, which marks the day when I started writing this thesis. These search conditions resulted in a total of 96 editorials. 79

Technically, there is no upper limit to the number of editorials that could be fruitfully incorporated into this study. However, within the time span selected, only the most relevant editorials have been included. Editorials whose main topic does not directly relate to the comfort women issue have been excluded. As have editorials that contain statements more thoroughly expressed in another editorial, and editorials that only mention the issue in passing. In order to guarantee that each newspaper’s view receive equal representation, the same number of editorials has been chosen from each outlet. As a result, five editorials from each newspaper are included in the study, for a total of twenty editorials. All editorials have been translated by the author, and a sentence-by-sentence translation can be found in the appendix at the end of the thesis. After having located the specific expressions of national identity within the editorials, the thesis proceeds to search for patterns of continuity within these identities and how they are established vis-à-

77 Access to these databases were provided by Stockholm University’s Asia Portal.
78 Japanese: shasetsu (社説) and ianfu (慰安婦); Korean: saseol (사설) and wianbu (위안부).
79 44 from Yomiuri, 30 from Asahi, 10 from Chosun Ilbo, and 22 from Hankyoreh.
vis specific Others. It then determines which are the dominant narratives, and discusses how one could go about evaluating their resilience. Finally, it compares the findings of this thesis to those of extant scholarship and looks for similarities and discrepancies.

3.2 Validity and reliability

As stated above, a basic assumption of this thesis is that the statements and opinions presented in the editorials included in the study are representative, to a certain extent, of the Japanese and South Korean public at large. However, there are, of course, limitations to such an assumption in terms of its validity.

First of all, even though newspapers tend to be read and subscribed to by people who share their views generally, there are no guarantees that this applies to the particularities of the issue of the comfort women agreement. As detailed in the results section below, the identities discernable in the editorials do not align neatly along the lines of the left-right political spectrum. One might therefore reasonably suspect that the respective readership of each newspaper hold more diverse opinions regarding this issue than they would regarding one of, say, a common-place domestic issue such as the educational system or the economy.

Secondly, one might question whether looking at newspaper editorials is the best choice of material in the first place. As mentioned above, I believe that using newspaper editorials allows one to discern and analyze identities that are representative of the Japanese and South Korean public in a way that would be hard to accomplish using another means of research such as academic surveys. This does not, however, imply that academic surveys are not potentially useful as a research tool in this context. Nor does it imply that findings from such surveys could not potentially improve upon, or call into question, the findings of this study.

Furthermore, there is the question of whether my interpretation of the material included in this thesis is one which could be deemed reliable. As with any qualitative study, the question of whether the results of this study are reproducible in any meaningful way ultimately hinges upon whether other observers of the material arrive at the same conclusions as I have, or at least deem them plausible. As such, an immediate assessment of reliability is difficult since it presupposes the critical eye of a reader who will be able to access the thesis only after its completion. The fact that all of the sources are in either Japanese or Korean poses a problem as well for readers who are not fluent in these languages. However, given that the editorials have all been translated into English and are included in the appendix at the end of the thesis, any person able to read this thesis is able to engage critically with the primary sources as well.

With above limitations in mind, I still believe that the material included in this study is representative of the Japanese and South Korean public at large to the degree that it validly applies to
the purposes of this thesis. I also believe that I have provided ample opportunity for readers of the thesis to critically evaluate its reliability.
4. Findings

This section details the relevant contents of the editorials described in the previous sections. In order to provide an understanding of the progression of specific identity constructions discernable in the coverage of each newspaper, the contents are presented newspaper by newspaper in chronological order.

4.1 Yomiuri Shimbun

_Yomiuri Shimbun_ 2015-11-25\(^{80}\)

Yomiuri expresses concern about an ongoing trial in South Korea regarding the publication of the book _The Imperial Comfort Women_ by Professor Park Yu-ha. In her book, Professor Park describes the Korean comfort women as having “basically formed ‘consensual’ relationships with the [Japanese] soldiers”. Due to these statements, she stands accused by the South Korean prosecutors for having violated the human rights of the comfort women, and for having deviated from academic freedoms. Yomiuri says that given all of this, “free and level-headed research concerning history is not feasible”, and that the event “casts a complicated shadow over Japan-South Korea relations”. It also laments the fact the prosecutor’s interpretation of the term academic freedom that is supposed to be protected by the South Korean constitution. It calls the prosecutor’s actions arbitrary, and says that they might be considered an abuse of power. It also accuses the prosecutor of using its conclusion to praise documents and statements that Yomiuri perceives to be false, such as the Kōno Statement and the Coomaraswamy Report of the UN Human Rights Council.\(^{81}\)

Yomiuri goes on to point out that even though Professor Park views the Korean comfort women as not having been forcibly abducted, she is still a vehement critic of the actions of the Empire of Japan. It then concludes by saying that constructive conversation for Japan and South Korea on this issue seems unlikely “if the expression of objective opinions such as these are constrained”.

\(^{80}\) _Yomiuri Shimbun_ (読売新聞). (2015-11-25) “Kankoku paku kyōju kiso Jiyūna rekishi kenkyū wo fujirunoka 韓国朴教授起訴 自由な歴史研究を封じるのか” [The indictment of South Korea’s Professor Park Putting the lid on free historical research?].

On the day after the conclusion of the Japan-South Korea agreement on the comfort women, Yomiuri describes the details of the agreement and describes the South Korean removal of a comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul as “the pillar of the agreement”.

Yomiuri says that the agreement should not hurt Japan’s legal standing, but expresses concern that the money donated by Japan may be misconstrued as state reparations. It accuses President Park Geun-hye of hampering the celebratory mood of the 50th anniversary of the normalization of Japan-South Korea diplomatic relations through her “excessive obsession with the comfort women issue”. It also expresses skepticism over whether the agreement will improve relations between the two countries. It reproaches the South Korean side for not having appreciated and understood measures taken by Japan regarding the comfort women issue in 1995, and cautions against repeating such actions.

Furthermore, it says that it is important that “South Korea not drag up the issue again in the future”, and that the responsibility for this lies mainly with South Korea, since it has a history of rekindling issues it has promised not to bring up. It accuses the South Korean government of having a “tendency to abdicate all responsibility to public opinion” and a “lack of awareness for the parties involved”, using President Park’ remarks that “we need a solution that can be accepted by the victims and citizens of South Korea” as an example of this. It also expresses doubt over whether South Korea will refrain from bringing up the issue on the international stage, referring to South Korea’s registration of materials related to the comfort women as a UNESCO world heritage.

Moreover, Yomiuri calls for repentance on behalf of South Korea for criticizing Japan in the presence of third-party countries, so called “tattletale diplomacy”, and for the installment of comfort women statues by Korean diaspora groups in the US. It intimates that such things are necessary in order to put an end to the Japanese feelings of hatred toward South Korea that President Park has brought upon herself. It also expresses sympathy for criticism that Japan is conceding too much to South Korea, but explains that concessions are necessary for strategic purposes such as trilateral cooperation with the US against North Korea and China, and that it is a way to return South Korea to the fold.

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82 Yomiuri Shimbun (読売新聞). (2015-12-29) “Ianfu mondai Kankokuha 「fukagyakuteki kaiketsu」wo mamore 慰安婦問題 韓国は「不可逆的解決」を守れ” [Comfort women agreement South Korea must abide by “irreversible solution”].
Amidst the “state of turmoil” of President Park’s impeachment proceedings, Yomiuri calls the installment of a comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese consulate-general in Busan by a South Korean citizen’s group “an illegal act”, and bemoans acting president Hwang Kyo-ahn’s perceived inability to “maintain a minimum of diplomatic order”.

Yomiuri says the fact that a majority of comfort women have accepted money donated by Japan as part of the agreement between the two countries “has not been sufficiently reported in South Korea”. It then goes on to express concern that aspiring presidential candidates of the powerful South Korea opposition are advocating renegotiating the comfort women agreement and supporting the installment of the comfort woman statue in Busan.

Yomiuri maintains that domestic and international issues should be kept separate, and that South Korea’s current inability to do so makes a surge of feelings of hatred toward South Korea among Japanese citizens inevitable. It accuses South Korea of using historical disputes with Japan as a justification for breaking domestic and international laws and agreements as it pleases. It says that South Korea’s cultural and physical predisposition to act in such a way “only serves to degrade their foreign image”.

Yomiuri describes Japan’s having called back its ambassador from South Korea for an unprecedentedly long time as inevitable due to the South Korean government not having removed the comfort women statues in front the Japanese embassy in Seoul and the Japanese consulate-general in Busan. It acknowledges that South Korea is in “a state of dysfunction” due to the impeachment of President Park, but says that this should not affect the removal of the statue, and that the government’s inability to do so is “nothing but evasion of responsibility due to a fear of backlash from public opinion”.

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83 Yomiuri Shimbun (読売新聞). (2017-01-06) “Shōjozō pusan secchi Nikkan gōiwo sokonau fuhō kōida 少女像釜山設置 日韓合意を損なう不法行為だ” [Installment of comfort woman statue in Busan An illegal act damaging the Japan-South Korea agreement].

84 Yomiuri uses the word “taishitsu (体質)”, which the Shogakukan Daijisen Japanese Dictionary defines as “遺伝的素因と環境要因との相互作用によって形成される、個々人の総合的な性質”：“The interaction between genetic and environmental factors according to which the comprehensive disposition of individuals are formed”, see “taishitsu (体質)”. Shogakukan Daijisen Japanese Dictionary: https://dictionary.goo.ne.jp/srch/jn/%E4%BD%93%E8%B3%AA/https://dictionary.goo.ne.jp/srch/jn/%E4%BD%93%E8%B3%AA, accessed on 2017-07-19.

85 Yomiuri Shimbun (読売新聞). (2017-02-09) “Taikan sochi ikkagetsu Shōjozō tekkyohe kōdōga mienai 対韓措置一か月 少女像撤去へ行動が見えない” [One month after measures against South Korea No sign of action toward removal of comfort woman statue].
Moreover, Yomiuri says that the South Korean has to mobilize top-level officials to deal with the situation in Busan. If not, it will remain in violation of the comfort women agreement, and will not be considered a “country that keeps its promises” by the international community.

Yomiuri also expresses worry over reports that the South Korean opposition are calling for the recalling of the South Korean ambassador to Japan and returning the money donated by Japan through the comfort women agreement. Yomiuri cautions against falling into a vicious circle of diplomatic retaliation, saying that it will have adverse consequences for trilateral Japan-US-South Korea cooperation against North Korea. However, it says that the only way forward is for South Korea first to break the deadlock by removing the comfort woman statue and “engage in serious discussion with Japan”.

Yomiuri Shim bun 2017-05-1286

Three days after the election of South Korean president Moon Jae-in, Yomiuri is expressing concerns that he might scrap the Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement, a promise the he made during his candidacy. It notes, however, that no concrete plans to do so were mentioned in the President’s first telephone conversation with Prime Minister Abe, though the President did say that “in the current situation, a majority of South Koreans are not emotionally accepting the agreement”.

Yomiuri cautions President Moon against sticking to his promise, saying his words and actions have inflamed the comfort women issue and Japan-South Korea relations. In addition, it criticizes President Moon’s stated readiness to hold talks with North Korea, saying that “conversation for the sake of conversation does not lead to the solution of problems”. It also criticizes President Moon for having gotten himself into a troubled situation with China over the deployment of THAAD87. Yomiuri strongly advices against such overtures, referring to previous failures by former South Korean president Roh Moo-hyun, and against “disturbing the unity of Japan, the US, and South Korea”.

86 Yomiuri Shim bun (読売新聞). (2017-05-12) “Kankoku munjein gaikō Ianfu gōiwo hogoni surunoka 韓国文在寅外交 慰安婦合意を反故にするのか” [South Korea: the foreign policy of Moon Jae-in Will he scrap the comfort women agreement?].

87 Terminal High Altitude Area Defense. Japanese: shūmatsukōkōdobōē (終末高高度防衛); Korean: jongmalgogodojıyeokbangwi (종말고고도지역방위), see BBC (2017-06-17).
4.2 Asahi Shimbun

Asahi Shimbun 2015-12-29

In the wake of the conclusion of the Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement, Asahi assumes a tone of hopefulness and optimism. It hails the comfort women agreement as “historic progress for Japan-South Korea relations”, and welcomes that “the governments of the two countries have transcended bad blood and taken this wise step toward overcoming their negative history”.

Asahi praises the “openhearted expression” of Prime Minister Abe, and says the “the fact that the core parts of the talks were announced in South Korea is of great significance”, even though the talks themselves were conducted by foreign minister Kishida. It praises South Korean foreign minister Yun Byung-se’s description of the agreement as a “final and irreversible solution” as being conscious of Japanese criticism that “even if South Korea makes a promise, it keeps moving the goal posts”.

Asahi then goes on to describe the details of the agreement and the history of the issue. It expresses sympathy for South Korea’s opposition of the handling of the issue in the 1990s, and hope that both sides can learn from past mistakes. It also says that the focus now should not be on the details of the fund stipulated by the agreement, but rather the comfort women themselves and their suffering.

Asahi cautions against resorting to nationalism on either side, calling the successful implementation of the agreement the only way forward. It reminds readers of the great economic strides that particularly South Korea has made since diplomatic relations were first normalized in 1965, and that the developments that followed have been of great benefit to both countries. It urges for continued dialogue in the future, pointing to the “tattletale diplomacy” used by both countries in relation to the US over the past few years as a cautionary example.

Asahi concludes by expressing its wishes that Japan and South Korea develop an even closer relationship over the next 50 years, saying that “there are innumerable projects which Japan and South Korea should tackle hand in hand as fellow major countries representing Asia”.

Asahi Shimbun 2016-03-09

Asahi reports that the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has criticized the Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement on grounds that the “victim-centered
approach is insufficient”, and that Japanese foreign minister Kishida has opposed the criticism, calling it “a far cry from the reaction of the international community”.

Asahi expresses worries that this might run contrary to the spirit of the agreement, and that it might send the wrong signals to citizens in both Japan and South Korea. Instead of resorting to criticism on the international stage, Asahi advises further efforts toward making the agreement a reality. It does maintain, however, that the comfort women fund can and should be considered part of a victim-centered approach.

Asahi explains that while the agreement has been warmly welcomed internationally, it remains contested in Japan and, particularly, in South Korea. However, it sees certain events, such as South Korean foreign minister Yun Byung-se refraining from raising the issue in a meeting at the UN Human Rights Council, as a positive development, and calls for more such efforts in order to build trust between Japan and South Korea, and change the way the international community views the comfort women issue.

Asahi Shimbun 2016-07-29

A day after the inauguration of the Japan-backed South Korean fund for the support of the comfort women, Asahi cautions against expectations that the fund will be instantaneously effective, saying that “the wounds suffered by the victims cannot be expected to heal immediately”. It calls for continued efforts on behalf of both Japan and South Korea, stating that “common efforts toward a solution of the issue have only just begun”.

Asahi highlights the problem with responsibility regarding the comfort women as one of the major reasons why the issue has not been successfully resolved. It recognizes that some comfort women and their supporters find the agreement’s descriptions of Japan’s responsibility vague and dissatisfactory, but maintains that Prime Minister Abe has acknowledged the responsibility of the Japanese government through his letter of apology. Asahi urges South Korean support groups to rally around the fund and use it as a platform to further their interests instead of demanding a complete revocation of the agreement.

Asahi advises against rushing demands for the relocation of the comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul, arguing instead for creating an environment of trust where a relocation becomes possible. It also criticizes Prime Minister Abe for inviting doubt regarding his true motives by keeping silent on the agreement in the National Diet. It concludes by once again underscoring the need for respect and cooperation, and cautions against “making unilateral interpretations of one another”.

Asahi Shimbun (朝日新聞). (2016-07-29) “Ianfu zaidan Shoni tsuitani suginai 慰安婦財団 緒に就いたにすぎない” [The comfort women fund The common effort has only just begun].
With regard to the “not guilty” verdict passed down to Professor Park Yu-ha concerning her book *The Imperial Comfort Women*, Asahi welcomes the outcome as appropriate, but stresses that “public power should refrain from intervening in academic inquiry that pursues coming to grips with historical facts”.

Asahi describes the details of the prosecution’s argument and the result of the trial, pointing out that the South Korean justice system “has been accused of being apt to be influenced by relentless public opinion when it comes to matters of historical awareness regarding Japan”. It describes Professor Park’s claims that violent abduction of Korean comfort women did not necessarily occur as not merging “well with the image of the comfort women that persists in South Korea today”, but cautions against putting restraints on historical research, and emphasizes that “for the powers that be to curb freedom of expression or academic inquiry almost amounts to renouncing democracy”.

Asahi praises Professor Park’s stance that “Japan and South Korea need reconciliation that transcends a nationalist butting of heads”, and underlines that the discussion regarding the historical particulars of the comfort women issue belong in the world of academia.

In the wake of the election of South Korean president Moon Jae-in, Asahi argues for the reintroduction of the Japan-South Korea shuttle diplomacy that was suspended in 2011 after a breakdown brought about by differences of opinion regarding the comfort women issue. It welcomes the reaching out of President Moon to Prime Minister Abe, expressing hopes that it may become a catalyst for reigniting regular meetings in the future.

Asahi stresses that the most important aspect of shuttle diplomacy is the opportunity for continuous dialogue, something that it hopes will mitigate friction in the fragile relationship of the two countries. Detailing the failures of the shuttle diplomacy of the past, it urges both countries to learn from past mistakes, and emphasizes that “the window of conversation should not be closed even if relations turn sour”.

Asahi acknowledges that views of the agreement differ greatly between Japan and South Korea, with the former viewing it as being done and over with after Japan’s donation of one billion Yen, and the latter calling for a renegotiation of the agreement. However, it sees using the agreement as a framework for future relations as the only option, and urges leaders of both countries to do their utmost to make this a reality without resorting to nationalism.

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91 *Asahi Shimbun* (朝日新聞). (2017-01-27) “Paku kyōjuno hanketsu Gakumonno jiyū okashita sotsui 朴教授の判決 学問の自由侵した訴追” [Professor Park’s verdict Legal action encroaching on academic freedom].

92 *Asahi Shimbun* (朝日新聞). (2017-05-19) “Nikkan kankei Shunjō kōryū no sōki hukkatsuwo 日韓関係 首脳交流の早期復活を” [Japan-South Korea relations Early leadership interaction].
4.3 Chosun Ilbo

_Chosun Ilbo_ 2015-12-28\(^93\)

On the day of the kickoff of Japan-South Korea talks over the comfort women issue, Chosun Ilbo details the preliminary deliberations of the proceedings and the strong political will that lies behind them. It then goes on to accuse Japan of having “opted for noisy negotiations”, saying that it has “leaked half-baked information to the press that has not been agreed upon yet”. For example, it says that the fact that the Japanese media has been reporting that South Korea has “started to investigate a relocation of the [comfort women] statue” should be interpreted as “reflecting the intentions of the Japanese government”. It also criticizes reports of plans to use the US as a guarantor for the agreement, and plans for an announcement of a final solution of the comfort women issue at a separate Japan-South Korea-US summit at the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington in March 2016.

Chosun Ilbo expresses certitude of Japanese “calculatedness”, saying that the government was behind the media reports of the relocation of the comfort woman statue, and those of the US acting as a guarantor for the agreement. With regard to Japan’s plans for the future of the agreement it says the following:

> Once South Korea-Japan relations improve, Japan will say that it took the lead in preemptively solving the situation, using the agreement on the comfort women as an opportunity. If an agreement is not reached, it will say to the international community that Japan made efforts but that South Korea turned the deal down. One cannot know if our government really is grasping fully these Japanese ulterior motives going into the talks.

Chosun Ilbo cautions that an agreement will be difficult to accept for South Korea and other nations whose citizens were comfort women “if Japan sneakily attempts to shirk its governmental responsibility by creating a fund of joint South Korean and Japanese ownership, or tries to make do with a vague and ambiguous apology”. It concludes by saying that South Korea will have to take the initiative if the agreement is to become a successful one, and not let itself be “dragged along by Japan”.

\(^93\) _Chosun Ilbo_ (조선일보). (2015-12-28) “Jeongbu, ‘wianbu hyeopsang’ sikkeureopge naoneun il uido algoneun inna 정부, ‘위안부 협상’ 시끄럽게 나오는 일 의도 알고는 있나” [Does the government have any idea about the intentions of Japan’s noisy negotiations?].
A couple of days after the Japan-South Korea agreement on the comfort women issue, Chosun Ilbo expresses doubts over whether Japan intends to honor it. It describes the Japanese media as being full of dubious reports, and that the “Japanese authorities in a position of responsibility are even giving the impression that they are instigating or abetting this”.

Chosun Ilbo describes reports by Japan’s Sankei Shimbun stating that Prime Minister Abe the day after the agreement had said that “the South Korean foreign minister said in front of TV cameras that [the deal is] irreversible” and that “in so doing, South Korea is done as a member of the international community if it breaks its promise”. It also cites reports by Asahi Shimbun that the government is viewing the relocation of the comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul as a precondition for donating one billion Yen to the support fund for comfort women. It then goes on to say that if this is true, “the basis of the agreement is as good as broken already”.

With regard to reports of Japanese foreign minister Kishida telling Japanese journalists that “all we have lost is one billion Yen”, Chosun Ilbo says that it “would like to ask if he means that the ‘apology and remorse’ toward the forcible mobilization of the comfort women were nothing but insincere embellishments wrapped up in a billion Yen”. It then describes domestic voices saying that “[we] have traded the comfort women issue for one billion Yen in humiliating negotiations” as inevitable.

Chosun Ilbo calls the history of the comfort women “the worst case of violation of women’s rights in the 20th century”, and says that the international community has shown South Korea’s view of the issue full support for the past 20 years. It then goes on to say that it understands the political circumstances such as pressure from the US that has gotten South Korea to the negotiating table, and the political circumstances in Japan such as pressure from public opinion on Prime Minister Abe not to apologize. It stresses, however, that this does not serve as an excuse for Japan’s current behavior.

Regarding the South Korean government and its mistakes before and during the negotiations of the agreement, Chosun Ilbo says the following:

After being dragged around by Japan during the negotiation process, [the South Korean government] is now suspected of having made reckless promises to Japan in secrecy. It is still not too late to reveal the full contents of the agreement to the citizens and let them be the judge. It is also a matter of course that [the government] must announce the denunciation of the agreement itself the moment Prime Minister Abe or any Japanese government official let slip a comment that damages the spirit of the agreement ever so slightly.

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94 Chosun Ilbo (조선일보), (2015-12-31) “Iri wianbu ‘chaegim-sagua’ bujeonghaneun sungan habui pagn seoneonaehaeya言い ‘위안부 책임사과’ 부정하는 순간 합의 선언해야” [The moment Japan denies “responsibility and apology for comfort women” [South Korea] must announce denunciation of agreement].

In the run-up to the 2017 South Korean presidential elections, Chosun Ilbo criticizes former representative of the Democratic Party of South Korea Moon Jae-in for having promised to reverse the Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement. It cautions against breaking agreements with allied nations, saying that it jeopardizes “South Korean policy continuity”, and that it will have adverse effects for South Korea-US relations as well.

Chosun Ilbo recognizes that some criticism of the comfort women agreement is valid, but says that the agreement constitutes a “solemn international promise”, and that “if [the agreement] breaks now [that a year has passed], South Korea-Japan relations themselves will break”. Chosun Ilbo contends that former representative Moon is aware of this, and that he has no intention of reversing South Korean security and foreign policy “altogether”, nor the ability to do so even if that were in fact his wish. It describes his statements as “deceiving the electorate in order to pander to his diehard supporters”.

The day after Japan’s calling back of its ambassador and consul-general from South Korea, Chosun Ilbo accuses Japan of resorting to action which it always has been quick to denounce every time it has been taken by South Korea: the “[handling] of historical issues in relation with those of foreign policy”. Chosun Ilbo asks itself if Japan has decided to abandon this decades-long guiding principle of South Korea policy, adding that “if the side that is not the victim, but rather the perpetrator, says it wants to abandon the present on grounds of historical conflict, it changes the situation greatly”.

Chosun Ilbo acknowledges that the installment of the comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese consulate-general in Busan goes against the purposes of the comfort women agreement, but denies any wrongdoing on behalf of the South Korean government. It then goes on to name US pressure as the main cause for the South Korean government entering the agreement, and denounces Abe for trying to “drag the US back into the issue” by calling the American vice president, saying that such action on behalf of Japan “may magnify the issue beyond what is reasonable and bring about adverse consequences for all three nations”. It concludes by emphasizing the need to remain calm and composed, and that “if Japan abandons its principle of separation between issues of history and foreign policy and starts acting emotionally, it will cause conflict between the two nations to grow exponentially and move in a direction that is not desirable for anyone”.

96 Chosun Ilbo (조선일보). (2016-12-17) “Mun, jikiji motal eogyo-anbo dwijipki kongeoneun haji malla 文, 지키지 못할·외교·안보 뒤집기 공언은 하지 말라” [Moon, don’t make promises about “reversing security and foreign policy” that you cannot keep].
97 Chosun Ilbo (조선일보). (2017-01-10) “Ilbon wianbu sonyeosang gongse wiheumhada 일본·위안부 소녀상·공세 위험하다” [Japanese aggression toward comfort woman statue is dangerous].
Chosun Ilbo 2017-01-16

Chosun Ilbo is taking a stance against criticism made against South Korean foreign minister Yun Byung-se after advocating a relocation of the comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese consulate-general in Busan on the grounds that it is in violation of the Vienna Convention. It describes how the foreign minister and the ministry of foreign affairs have been criticized for being “pro-Japanese”, and satirized as being a spokesperson for Prime Minister Abe. It adds that some members of the National Assembly have also been calling the comfort women agreement an “act of treason”.99

Chosun Ilbo recognizes that certain actions of the Park Geun-hye administration, such as the inability to make a separation of “past history and current foreign relations” in dealing with the comfort women issue, are worthy of criticism, but that the criticism ought to be “logical and rational”. It does not, however, condone viewing the agreement as being “pro-Japanese”, but instead sees it as the product of several actors and factors, where “inevitable aspects of complicated international political circumstances played a large part”.

While acknowledging that the problem of responsibility is a complicated one, Chosun Ilbo strongly denounces remarks saying that “[we] have sold out [our comfort women] for one billion Yen”, which it describes as “running rampant”. It then goes on to emphasize the importance of acting level-headed in times when one has to make uncomfortable choices for the greater good of the nation, saying that “if at such times we always resort to one-dimensional and emotional criticism, crying ‘treason’ and ‘pro-Japanese’, the country cannot move forward”.

4.4 Hankyoreh

Hankyoreh 2015-12-29100

The day after the Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement, Hankyoreh describes the agreement as a “foreign policy humiliation on par with the 1965 South-Korea Japan treaty”, and strongly denounces both the South Korean and the Japanese government’s involvement. Detailing all the ways in which it perceives the agreement to be flawed, with regard to the Japanese government’s monetary

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98 Chosun Ilbo (조선일보). (2017-01-16) “Danseonjeok ‘chinil’ ‘maeguk’ sigageuro gukjegwangye hechyeogagenna 단선적 ‘친일’ ‘매국’ 시각으로 국제관계 혼차가겠나” [Plowing through international relations from a simple-minded perspective of “treason” and “pro-Japanese”].

99 The Korean word for “pro-Japanese” is chinil (친일) or chinilpa (친일파). In South Korean politics, it is often used as a means of delegitimizing or insulting one’s political opponents. The same holds true for the Korean word for “treason” which is maeguk (매국 or 팔국; literally to “sell one’s country”), often personified as maegukja (매국자 or 팔국자; literally a “person who sells his or her country”, i.e. a traitor). These words are used almost exclusively in relation to Japan.

100 Hankyoreh (한겨레). (2015-12-29) “‘Yeoksa jeongui’ baebanhan wianbu guryogoegyo ‘역사 정의’ 배반한 ‘위안부 굴욕외교’” [A foreign policy humiliation that betrays historical justice].
contribution to the comfort women fund, it says that “it is the same as our government taking Japan’s money and selling them an indulgence”.

Hankyoreh then goes on to describe the South Korean government’s actions as tantamount to “willingly putting a gag in one’s own mouth”, and empowering Japan by being “the reason why the perpetrators are unjustly raising their voices”. Regarding the comfort women statue, it praises it as a “symbol of the conscience of a global society reflecting on its painful past”, and criticizes the South Korean government’s stated efforts to relocate it as “ahistorical”.

Hankyoreh also accuses the US of having helped Japan put undue pressure on South Korea to enter the agreement, and reproaches the South Korean government for having forgotten its moral duties while at the same time incurring an ever greater financial and political burden. It concludes by calling for the immediate nullification and renegotiation of the agreement.

*Hankyoreh 2016-02-05*

A little more than two months after the conclusion of the comfort women agreement, Hankyoreh accuses Japan of reneging on its responsibilities to co-manage the support fund stipulated by the agreement, and criticizes the South Korean government’s decision to assume responsibility for operations as a “foolish act of taking upon oneself the task that should be carried out by the perpetrator”. It then goes on to describe Japan’s actions after the agreement as “getting ever more shameless”, referring to the Japanese position that the Korean comfort women were not recruited by means of coercion. Hankyoreh calls the South Korean government’s accommodation of this position “yet another humiliation”, and adds that “to bend the knee even though Japan has barely changed at all is no way to conduct foreign policy”.

Hankyoreh views this sequence of events as a “contradiction”, and says that the root cause for such contradictions is the comfort women agreement itself. It advocates abolishing it, saying that the South Korean government otherwise “will continue its displays of subservience” in a way that is no “no different from the pro-Japanese bureaucrats of the past suppressing their own brethren”.

*Hankyoreh 2016-02-29*

Five days after the opening of the South Korean movie *Spirits’ Homecoming* about the plights of the Korean comfort women, Hankyoreh describes the movie as a “social phenomenon” that has taken the country by storm. It attributes the success of the movie to growing dissatisfaction with the
comfort women agreement among the South Korean populace, saying that “the rightfully indignant public can be said to have entered a ‘battle of memory’ through the movie ‘Spirits’ Homecoming’.

Hankyoreh then proceeds to describe the South Korean government’s continued support of the agreement as “dishonorable demeanor”, and points out that while the South Korean government is keeping a low profile, the Japanese government has “ruined” the agreement by sticking to its position that no forcible abduction of Korean comfort women ever occurred. Hankyoreh also criticizes action taken by the South Korean Ministry of Education to stop plans by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education to furnish school libraries with copies of the “Dictionary of Names of Pro-Japanese collaborators”.

Hankyoreh concludes by calling for the nullification and renegotiation of the comfort women agreement, and saying that, given the current situation, “this [year’s] Samiljeol is in no way a mere occasion for celebration”.

Hankyoreh 2016-07-28

On the day of the inauguration of the “Reconciliation and Healing Fund” stipulated in the Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement, Hankyoreh reports on the protests from comfort women support groups that has resulted from it, saying that “there is a strong possibility that the inauguration of the fund will be anything but a starting point for reconciliation and healing, and more likely a powder keg of discord and backlash”.

Hankyoreh ascribes the failure of the fund and of the agreement to the indecisive actions of the Park Geun-hye administration, reproaching it for not showing the issue the same care and attention that Japan has shown the North Korean kidnapping issue. It then goes on to predict that Japan, once it has made its donations to the comfort women support fund, will go into “full-scale attack mode” on the issue of the removal of the comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul, and that there is a high likelihood that it will “be fiercely meddlesome” with regard to how the donations are used. Hankyoreh sums up the events surrounding the inauguration of the fund as follows:

This can all be viewed as a misfortune that the rudderless government’s backbone-bereft policy has brought upon itself. The citizens’ responsibility to rectify and make up for errors like this [just] got even bigger.

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103 Samiljeol (삼일절 or 三一節; literally the “March 1st holiday”) is celebrated every year in South Korea on March 1st to commemorate the anniversary of the March 1st Movement against Japanese colonial rule in Korea that started in 1919, see Tamaki (2010), p. 97.

104 Hankyoreh (한겨레), (2016-07-28) “Banbalgwa galdeung soge chulbeomhan wianbujaedan 반발과 갈등 속에 출범한 ‘위안부재단’” [The comfort women fund, inaugurated amidst backlash and discord].

105 For more on the North Korean abduction issue and Japan’s reaction to it, see Hagström and Hanssen (2015).
In the wake of impeachment proceedings having been initiated against South Korean President Park Geun-hye, Hankyoreh criticizes her foreign policy officials for not showing sufficient remorse for their past actions, calling them “brazen and shameless”. Regarding foreign minister Yun Byung-se’s position that the removal of the comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul is in accordance with international law, Hankyoreh says that it “makes one confused as to which country’s foreign minister the man really is”, and that “it is something that a spokesperson for Prime Minister Abe Shinzō would say”. It also criticizes remarks made by foreign minister Yun regarding potential consequences – such as a downgrade of South Koran international creditworthiness – of not adhering to the comfort women agreement in the following way:

It is shameless beyond belief that the man responsible for the ‘foreign policy disaster of the comfort women’ – that made the perpetrator country Japan give moral lectures to the victim country South Korea – is now threatening [his own] citizens.

Hankyoreh then proceeds to level criticism at another official of the Park administration, Director Kim Guan-jin of the Office of National Security, saying that he “was no less pathetic than Minister Yun” during negotiations with the US over the deployment of THAAD. Hankyoreh contends that foreign minister Yun and Director Kim should not be making such “reckless remarks”, since they “are people who have contributed to causing great suffering for [South Korean] citizens”, and that the comfort women agreement they are espousing must be renegotiated due to being “fundamentally flawed”.

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5. Analysis

The previous section summarized the contents of the editorials included in this study. This section provides a more thorough analysis and discussion of the contents according to the method described in section 3.1.

5.1 Japan

Upon review, significant thematic differences between the editorials of Yomiuri and Asahi can immediately be discerned.

In Yomiuri’s coverage of the comfort women agreement, South Korea emerges as a clear Other. South Korea is depicted as being unreasonable and difficult to deal with, and even before the conclusion of the agreement, Yomiuri presents a pessimistic outlook on the chances of having a constructive conversation, much less bringing to bear a lasting agreement. It also describes South Korea as not having understood, or willfully misunderstood, the actions and intentions of Japan in the past, and expresses misgivings that this is bound to happen again. Yomiuri’s coverage of the South Korean government is akin to that of a disgruntled older sibling describing the temper tantrums of a younger one: obsessive, lacking in self-awareness, indifferent to rules, and chomping at the bit to run and tell mom and dad. Yomiuri does not prescribe mutually proactive dialogue in order to get past the issue, but rather to wait until South Korea is ready to have an earnest conversation as adults. However, given its views of the South Korean government as hostage to the emotionality of public opinion, it sees the prospects of such a thing happening as unlikely.

Yomiuri appears to ascribe rather little value to the contents of the agreement itself, but rather views it as an instrument to achieve other objectives such as trilateral cooperation between Japan, South Korea and the US. Yomiuri’s stance that South Korea’s inability to conform to Japanese standards of diplomacy and etiquette makes hatred of South Korea inevitable firmly cements its role as an Other distinct from the Japanese Self. Any responsibility for the flaws and failures of foreign policy outcomes is inevitably ascribed to this Otherness, which in turn reaffirms Japan’s role as the thoughtful and measured leader of the region. This is underscored by Yomiuri’s depiction of South Korea as both genetically and culturally incapable of sticking to the rules.

Such expressions of identity bear a distinct resemblance to the findings of Tamaki. Tamaki traces these narratives of identity back to the colonial era, and says that “[in Japan] it is almost taken for granted that the bilateral relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea (the ROK; South Korea) are bound to be tempestuous”107, and that “Japan’s collective self-understanding is predicated

upon identifying Korea as an enigma in its foreign policy formulation”.

Tamaki contends that Japan is reinforcing the legitimacy of its Self as a forward-looking country by depicting and reiterating Korean Otherness as one of backwardness and being unjustly and unnecessarily preoccupied with the past. Tamaki sees this identity construction as reified and having remained more or less intact all the way to the present day: “The Past, Future and Backwardness constitute a triumvirate in Japan’s Korea and ultimately Asia imaginary that is reminiscent of a colonial relationship at its core”. He cautions, however, that “I am not suggesting that Japan is exploiting Korea today; but the language of Korean Otherness has not witnessed a significant change despite the postwar transformation of Japan itself”. This description of Japanese identity vis-à-vis South Korea meshes well with Yomiuri’s seeming disinterest with the past and its calls for future-oriented relations between the two countries.

Asahi, on the other hand, presents a significantly different conception of South Korea, and thus of Japanese identity in relation to it. While still maintaining a partially hierarchical worldview where Japan stands at the fore of developed Asian nations, Asahi welcomes the economic and cultural ascension of South Korea. In that sense, Asahi’s depiction of South Korea is still one of a relatively backward country catching up with a superior one, but there are no connotations of apprehension or of one’s own Japanese identity being under threat; on the contrary, Asahi conveys a sense of longing for South Korea to finally blossom into a full-fledged Asian peer with whom it can stand on equal footing. Unlike Yomiuri, Asahi emphasizes the intrinsic value of the comfort women agreement, and thus weaves into the narrative the comfort women themselves and the past they represent. It also expresses sympathy and understanding for previous actions taken by the South Korean government with regard to the issue, and ascribes the issue having remained unresolved to nationalist tendencies and shortcomings of both countries. More than anything, it stresses the importance of continued dialogue and interaction between Japan and South Korea that aspires to an honest understanding of each other’s position, both on a civic and governmental level.

There are also recurring themes. Both Yomiuri and Asahi are primarily focused on the future, and to the extent that the past is important, it is because of the need to move beyond it. However, while their main objective is essentially one and the same, their respective ways of attempting to realize it are vastly different. This becomes apparent when looking at how expectations of the

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108 Ibid., pp. 7.
109 Ibid., pp. 15-17.
110 Ibid., pp. 178, 182.
111 Ibid., pp. 178.
112 Yomiuri uses the word mirai shikō (未来志向; future-oriented). This is one of the keywords in the Japanese vocabulary describing itself in contrast to South Korea according to Tamaki. He describes it as attempts by Tokyo to “entomb the past”, see Tamaki (2010), pp. 8-9, 141-156. For another example, see Wakita Yūichi (2013) Konnō nikkan kankō to rekishi ninshiki mondai: Miraishikō (Future Japan-South Korea relations and the issue of historical awareness), Rippōto chōsa (Legislation and investigation) 337: 88-102.
agreement differ between the two newspapers. Yomiuri perpetuates the conception of South Korean Otherness by describing the agreement as essentially doomed to fail even before the fact. Asahi, meanwhile, is so eager to confirm its own conception of South Korea as a likeminded equal that it declares a premature victory. Yomiuri wants to maintain South Korea as a difficult and intractable Other in order to not have to deal with its depictions of the past; Asahi wants to merge the Japanese and South Korean Selves in order to accomplish the same thing.113

5.2 South Korea

When reviewed in chronological order, the editorials of Chosun Ilbo and Hankyoreh initially reveal a striking thematic resemblance. The first two editorials of each newspaper provide a very similar depiction of Japan and its government as an antagonist Other who is not to be trusted.

In its two editorials published in late 2015, Chosun Ilbo presents an image of Japan and its government as calculated, manipulative and opportunistic, and expresses concern that the South Korean government might fall prey to its sneakiness. It accuses the Japanese government of attempting to lure South Korea into an immoral agreement from which they will not be able pull out, and describes the Japanese media as being complicit. It also accuses the South Korean government of allowing itself to become led astray, and of letting Japan get away with its crimes without having paid its due.

By likening the agreement and the fund it stipulates to the selling of indulgences, Hankyoreh similarly depicts Japan as a shameless and unrepentant sinner and the South Korean government as an unjust enabler. However, in contrast with Chosun Ilbo, its criticism of the South Korean government is even stronger than its criticism of Japan. It accuses the South Korean government of willingly having relinquished its moral duties and restricted its own agency.

Both South Korean newspapers make a clear demarcation between Self and Other by invoking a distinction between victim and perpetrator. In contrast to the nefarious perpetrator that is Japan, South Korea is directly and indirectly described as a morally just country that has fallen victim to the evil deeds of internal and external enemies. These narratives echo findings by Podoler regarding the way South Korean identity is constructed vis-à-vis Japan in historical monuments and exhibitions throughout South Korea.114 Podoler finds that Japan has served and continues to serve as a prominent Other against which South Korean identity is constructed, with depictions of Japan as “aggressive, domineering, evil, cunning, and culturally lagging”.115 He also finds South Korean descriptions of colonial life to be rather simplistic, establishing a “dichotomy between the exploiting occupier and the

113 Interestingly, both Yomiuri and Asahi consistently refer to the comfort women as former comfort women: motoianfu (元慰安婦). The South Korean newspapers use no such temporal qualifier.
115 Ibid., pp. 125-126.
exploited occupied people”. With regard to the problem of pro-Japanese collaborators, Podoler describes the often indiscriminate use of the term and how “materialistic opportunists, pragmatists who sought to adapt to the harsh reality, as well as nationalists and ideologists who believed that for the time being cooperating with the authorities would be best for the nation, are commonly lumped together with true pro-Japanese”. Podoler outlines three images produced by South Korean depictions of Japanese colonialism: “firstly, the capability of Koreans to resist despite unbearable conditions; secondly, the unique Korean self-identity of “Us” in comparison to the Japanese “Other”; and thirdly, the pure “Us,” devoid of traitors.”

Hankyoreh presents a narrative that remains consistent with such conceptions of identity throughout its coverage of the agreement. Hankyoreh’s coverage is characterized less by descriptions of the villainy of Japan itself, and more by descriptions of the moral decrepitude of pro-Japanese collaborators enabling Japan to unjustly exploit their own countrymen. The imagery of treason is vivid: the government and its actions are variously described as subservient, self-censoring, ahistorical, indecisive, brazen, pathetic and “bending the knee”. Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se comes to embody all of these qualities when he is scornfully satirized as a spokesperson for Prime Minister Abe. For Hankyoreh, then, the defining characteristic of the South Korean Self is the ability to fulfill one’s moral duty of protecting the South Korean nation against internal traitors jumping at every chance to sell out their country for personal gain.

Curiously, however, after having not published an editorial on the matter for almost a year, Chosun Ilbo’s subsequent editorials deviate significantly from this well-established narrative and strike a substantially different tone. While Chosun Ilbo does maintain the dichotomy of victim and perpetrator, it returns to deliver a meta-critique of the very same narratives it had employed itself a year prior. In stark contrast to its previous stance, it argues for the importance of honoring imperfect agreements for the sake of policy continuity, and cautions against what it considers to be the irresponsible and frivolous use of contentious terms such as “pro-Japanese” and “treason”. It also cautions against emotionality in foreign policy in a way that is more reminiscent of Asahi than its South Korean counterpart.

This points to an interesting identity dynamic internal to South Korea. Though the Otherness of Japan looms large throughout the coverage of both newspapers, it is clear that conservative and progressive conceptions of identity are also derived by contrasting themselves with one another, which has interesting consequences in terms of what actions are enabled and constrained. Chosun Ilbo’s drastic change in tone can be interpreted as a manifestation of such a dynamic. Due to the entrenched status of progressive circles as an Other for conservative South Korea, Chosun Ilbo is forced to

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116 Ibid., p. 236.
117 Ibid., p. 102.
118 Ibid., p. 237.
119 This happened despite Chosun Ilbo having had the same owner and editor-in-chief for the extent of the period covered in this study.
distance itself from the narrative of pro-Japanese and treason. Similarly, the fact that the comfort women agreement was reached by a conservative government forces Hankyoreh to oppose it and invest itself ever more heavily into the very same narratives.

5.3 Discussion and conclusions

It would appear, then, that the comfort women issue rising to such prominence in Japan-South Korea relations is at least in part the result of an internal South Korean power struggle between progressive and conservative forces. In that sense, it is reminiscent of findings by Bukh regarding the emergence of Takeshima Day as an issue in Japan. Bukh contends that the of establishing of Takeshima Day was the result of a domestic power dynamic between Tokyo and Shimane Prefecture in which South Korea had only marginal involvement.¹²⁰ Bukh’s findings and the findings of this study remind one that conflict regarding an external Other can arise or become magnified from within.

The narratives in the editorials used in this study make it evidently clear that neither Japanese nor South Korean identity is a monolith. This runs counter to Tamaki’s ideas that reified identities persist unchallenged over long stretches of time, and highlights the fluid and performative quality of identity.¹²¹ This is not to say that identities are in a constant state of flux and chaos; clearly there are recurring patterns. However, in order to see all narratives at work in the materials used in this study as variations on a single reified identity, one would have to heighten the level of abstraction to a point where talking about identities becomes of very little help as an analytical tool. It points toward the fact that there are several persistent identities, each of which could potentially become dominant enough to enable actions that are currently constrained, or vice versa. This is one of the benefits of studying identity formation in its least institutionalized layer.

It should be said that while Tamaki does not discount the role of non-elite actors his focus is policy elites.¹²² On the pages of Asahi Shimbun, we see narratives that clearly go against those described by Tamaki, though to be fair, the journalists at Asahi Shimbun are probably not what Tamaki has in mind when he speaks of elites. Nevertheless, it shows the existence of a persistent and widespread identity narrative that challenges the one described by Tamaki as reified and dominant. Likewise, there are several narratives at play with regard to identity in the editorials of the South Korean newspapers as well. The question of which of these identities will end up becoming dominant is of paramount importance to the outcome of the comfort women agreement, since one narrative enables the continued implementation of the agreement while the other constrains any action toward that end. While it is uncertain how the dynamic between these two competing identities will play out

¹²⁰ Bukh (2014).
¹²² Ibid., pp. 4-5.
in the long run, it appears unlikely that the narrative of pro-Japanese collaboration and treason will lose force in the immediate future. Though the fact that Professor Park Yu-ha walked free after her defamation trial is encouraging, the harsh punishment that was recommended for her and the tremendous stress she must have gone through as a result indicate the existence of strong incentives against challenging the narrative, and is a testament to its current resilience.\textsuperscript{123} Also, the way that shame and humiliation is invoked in response to actions that do not conform to the narrative constitutes a similarly forbidding emotional incentive.

Looking at the identity formation of both sides in tandem highlights the incompatibility of the narratives as a reason for relations not moving forward. However, it also shows that there is common ground of which both sides seem at least partially unaware. Simply put, the two sides are talking past one another, or, to use Guillaume’s vocabulary, they stand on an unsound epistemological position.\textsuperscript{124} With regard to three out of the four newspapers included in this study, one could not be blamed for suspecting that such unilateral interpretations of the other side are at least somewhat willful. However, Asahi appears to make genuine efforts to understand the South Korean side of the story, but only with partial success.

In South Korea, Japan clearly constitutes an Other of great importance. However, the most significant Other in this context is perhaps not Japan itself, but rather the pro-Japanese traitors who are perceived always to lurk about, threatening the integrity and prosperity of the country. Even though Asahi makes clear attempts at taking into account the positions of the other side, the editorials included in this study suggest that it is largely unaware of this important distinction, rendering it unable to account for the lack of success of the agreement. In the editorials of the South Korean newspapers, the presence of the comfort women themselves as individuals is largely peripheral, indicating their highly symbolic function as a part of the discursive field of South Korean identity. While Asahi succeeds in recognizing the suffering of the comfort women, it fails to account for its role in the formation of South Korean collective identity and the consequences this has for bilateral relations.

Hankyoreh appears similarly unaware of the existence of any goodwill whatsoever on the Japanese side, and unlike Asahi – who views the 50 years that have passed since the treaty of normalization of relations as a triumph of progress – it sees the opening up of relations in 1965 as having been a mistake in the first place. Given their political views, one would expect these progressive newspapers to have an at least somewhat similar outlook on the issue, yet differences abound between the two. The same holds true to a certain extent for the conservative newspapers:


\textsuperscript{124} Guillaume (2002), p. 9.
Yomiuri consistently expresses doubts and misgivings about the agreement and about Japan-South Korea relations in general, while Chosun Ilbo (eventually) insists on their importance.

Given the apparent relative dominance and resilience of identities that constrain behavior conducive to cooperation, one might feel inclined to view the future development of Japan-South Korea relations with a great deal of pessimism. However, the fact that alternative identity constructions exist should allow one to be at least cautiously sanguine. Reifications of identity only seem inevitable until the moment their contingent nature becomes exposed, and the parallel existence of various identities presented in this study reveals such contingencies.

None of the narratives outlined in this study are dominant to the extent that they are unchallenged, even in the mainstream media. Looking at non-state actors shows that there are persistent and widespread identities beyond those expressed in interactions between foreign policy officials, and that the democratic nature of Japan and South Korea inevitably causes leaders on both sides to take these into at least partial account. This highlights the potential for change, and suggests the possibility of finding inconsistencies and fluidity even in the most seemingly resilient of identities.

5.4 Future Research

Given the existence of multiple contentious issues in Japan-South Korea relations, it would be interesting to see if studies of editorials concerning other issues would produce similar interpretations of how identity is constituted relationally. For example, one could imagine using the dialogical methodology employed in this thesis and conducting a study on the issue of Dokdo/Takeshima or the issue of history textbooks. Such a study could be conducted using the same four newspapers included in this thesis in order to further investigate the resilience and/or fluidity of identities found in this study. One could also imagine reproducing this thesis using other Japanese and South Korean newspapers in order to accomplish the same thing.
Summary

This thesis argues that a dialogical perspective on relational identity in International Relations has unexplored potential for explaining cases that are puzzling from the standpoint of traditional perspectives within the field. Building on the constructivist methodology of Guillaume, it applies such a perspective to statements made in editorials by four major Japanese and South Korean newspapers regarding the 2015 Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement in order to simultaneously analyze and contrast the identity formation of Japan vis-à-vis South Korea and the identity of South Korea vis-à-vis Japan. It confirms findings by previous scholarship regarding persistent dichotomies of Self and Other that constrain action aimed at reconciliation and friendly relations. However, it also finds that these seemingly dominant and all-encompassing conceptions of identity are challenged by narratives proposing alternative conceptions of identity that would enable cooperation. It suggests that such findings are made possible by studying the identity formation of a variety of non-state actors in tandem. It also highlights the incompatibility of narratives as a potential reason for relations not improving.
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Editorials

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Yomiuri Shimbun (読売新聞). (2015-12-29) “Ianfu mondai Kankokuha fūkagyakuteki kaiketsu jwo mamore 慰安婦問題 韓国は「不可逆的解決」を守れ” [Comfort women agreement South Korea must abide by “irreversible solution”].
Yomiuri Shimbun (読売新聞). (2017-01-06) “Shōjozō pusan secchi Nikkan gōiwo sokonau fuhō kōida 少女像釜山設置 日韓合意を損なう不法行為だ” [Installment of comfort woman statue in Busan An illegal act damaging the Japan-South Korea agreement].
対韓措置一か月 少女像撤去へ行動が見えない

対韓措置一か月 少女像撤去へ行動が見えない

One month after measures against South Korea: No sign of action toward removal of comfort woman statue.

Ianfu mondaino gō 历史- transcending progress for Japan and South Korea

The agreement on the comfort women issue

Ianfu mondai 日韓合意を育てるには

In order to nurture the agreement

Ianfu zaidan 緒に就いたにすぎない

The common effort has only just begun

朴教授の判決 学問の自由侵した訴追

Professor Park’s verdict Legal action encroaching on academic freedom

日本の意思決定をはかって不快感を助長するまい

Don’t make promises about “reversing security and foreign policy” that you cannot keep

Japanese aggression toward comfort woman statue is dangerous

A foreign policy humiliation that betrays historical justice
Hankyoreh (한겨레). (2016-02-05) “Galsurok mosun keojineun wianbu habui 갈수록 모순 커지는 ‘위안부 합의’” [The ever-growing contradictions of the comfort women agreement].

Hankyoreh (한겨레). (2016-02-29) “Wianbu darun yeonghwa gwihyangui seupleun heunghaeng 위안부 다른 영화 ‘귀향’의 슬픈 흥행” [The sorrowful success of the comfort women movie “Spirits’ Homecoming”].


Hankyoreh (한겨레). (2017-01-15) “Jalmotdoen eogyoanbo gyeoljeonge daemotjilhaneun moryeomchi jeongbu 잘못된 외교안보 결정에 대못질하는 ‘몰염치 정부’” [Shameless government clinging to erroneous decision on security and foreign policy].

Online Resources


Recent Japan-South Korea relations, *Northeast Asia Division 東アジア課*


“*taishitsu (体質)*”. *Shogakukan Daijisen Japanese Dictionary:*
https://dictionary.goo.ne.jp/srch/jn/%E4%BD%93%E8%B3%AA/m0u/, accessed on 2017-07-19.


Appendix

The following are sentence-by-sentence translations of each editorial included in the study. The date and the name of the newspaper are indicated at the top of every translation, followed by the headline of the editorial in italics.

Yomiuri Shimbun

2015-11-25 (Yomiuri)

The indictment of South Korea’s Professor Park  Putting a lid on free historical research?

At this rate, free and level-headed research and debate concerning history is not feasible. The prosecution of academic research might very well amount to abuse of public power, and it casts a complicated shadow over Japan-South Korea relations.

A South Korean district public prosecutor’s office has indicted Professor Park Yu-ha (Sejong University) without arrest for libel, saying that she has injured the honor of the former comfort women by denying their forced abduction in her book The Imperial Comfort Women.

The prosecution has arbitrarily decided that Professor Park’s position that no state violence in the form of forced abduction was used against the Korean comfort women is false. It has also problematized her description that the Korean comfort women “basically formed ‘consensual’ relationships with the [Japanese] soldiers”.

As grounds for indictment, the prosecution says that she has violated the human rights of the former comfort women, and deviated from the “academic freedom” that the constitution guarantees.

In June last year, eleven former comfort women charged a complaint, and a district public prosecutor’s office in eastern Seoul is investigating [the matter]. Whether the prosecutor will look into the contents of historical facts - over which even experts are divided - before handing down a sentence is doubtful.

Professor Park objects that this “is her opinion”. She contends that the circumstances of the comfort women are varied, and that one cannot lump them all together as “sex slaves” or “prostitutes”.

In her book, she also points out the issue that, even now, many people who were laborers in the volunteer corps during the war are being confused with comfort women.

Something that can’t be overlooked is the fact the district public prosecutor’s office is using their conclusion that Professor Park’s position is false as basis for praising, among other things, the Kōno Statement and the UN Human Rights Council’s (UNHRC) Coomaraswamy Report.
In the process of drawing up the Kōno Statement, no documents were found that substantiates the [claims of] “forced abduction” of comfort women on behalf of the Imperial Japanese Army. The fact that the statement was a product of a political compromise between Japan and South Korea was shown in an examination by the Japanese government in June last year.

The Coomaraswamy Report includes a great number of poorly founded claims, saying that 200,000 Korean comfort women became sex slaves, and that the majority were thereafter killed. It also cites the false testimony of Yoshida Seji saying that comfort women were forcibly abducted from South Korea’s Jeju Island. To use any of these theories of forced abduction of comfort women as a basis [for claims] is not possible.

A partly revised version of The Imperial Comfort Women has been published in Japanese, and has been selected for Waseda University’s Ishibashi Tanzan Memorial Journalism Award.

Although Professor Park points out that the Korean comfort women were cooperators of the Imperial Japanese Army, she also fiercely criticizes the Empire of Japan, saying that it bears the responsibility for having created such cruel circumstances.

If the expression of objective opinions such as these are constrained, one has to admit that constructive conversation for Japan and South Korea concerning the comfort women issue will be difficult.

2015-12-29 (Yomiuri)

Comfort women agreement  South Korea must abide by ‘irreversible solution’

◆ The removal of the comfort woman statue is also an important touchstone

In order to build future-oriented Japan-South Korea relations, a major condition will have to be South Korea’s faithful implementation of the agreement [on comfort women].

Foreign minister Kishida and foreign minister Yun Byung-se have met for talks in Seoul and reached an agreement regarding the comfort women issue.

Japan states that it “fully realizes its responsibility”, that it will donate a billion Yen to a new fund for the support of the former comfort women, and that Prime Minister Abe will issue an apology. Both countries confirm that this is a “final and irreversible settlement”.

South Korea will make efforts to remove the statue that symbolizes the comfort women that has been installed in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. This is the pillar of the agreement.
Will the new fund be able to enter orbit?

In her talks with Mr. Kishida, President Park Geun-hye stated that she “hopes this will become a fresh start for South Korea-Japan relations.”

Japan has insisted that the issue of reparations to the former comfort women already had been resolved through the agreement on Japan-South Korea claims of 1965. The new fund is one of wholly humanitarian aid, and Japan’s legal standing will not be harmed. However, one wonders if the donation of funds on behalf of the government will not be misunderstood as state reparations.

Mr. Kishida stated that he is “certain that Japan-South Korea relations will enter a new era.” Mr. Yun stressed that he “prays that the honor and integrity of the comfort women will be restored, and that the wounds of their hearts will be healed.”

Despite this year being a critical juncture for the 50 year anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations, the celebratory mood has been lacking due to Mrs. Park’s excessive obsession with the comfort women issue. One will want to wait and see whether the agreement will become a chance to improve stagnant Japan-South Korea relations.

In 1995, Japan established The Asian Women’s Fund and presented 61 comfort women with, among other things, a letter of apology from the Prime Minister and monetary compensation. However, a sense of dissatisfaction remained with the Japanese side, due to the South Korean side not having appreciated the effort and not having explained it to its domestic audience. We must not go down this track [again].

Persuading the support groups is key

In addition to faithfully working to launch the enterprise of the new joint fund into orbit, the important thing is that South Korea not drag up the issue again in the future.

The lion’s share of the responsibility for that, of course, lies with South Korea. This is because it has been swayed by public opinion and reversed its stance, even though former Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun both clearly stated with regard to historical awareness that “from here on, we will not bring up issues of the past.”

If an issue is rekindled every time there is a change of presidents, diplomacy is not viable. It is only natural that Prime Minister Abe after the settlement [of the comfort women] stressed that “we must not burden the generations of our children and grandchildren with the fate of continuous apologizing.”

South Korean support groups for the former comfort women have criticized the agreement [on the comfort women] for being “diplomatic collusion that betrays victims and citizens alike.” They are also opposed to the removal of the comfort woman statue installed by a support group.
One cause for the agreement on the comfort women issue having dragged on is to be found in the South Korean government’s tendency to abdicate all responsibility to public opinion, and its lack of awareness for the parties involved.

Without suggesting a concrete agreement proposal, Mrs. Park’s statement that “we need a solution that can be accepted by the victims and citizens of South Korea” during the Japan-South Korea summit meeting in November is emblematic of this.

If the South Korean government is serious about fulfilling the agreement, it must first ask itself whether it can persuade the domestic forces insisting it should be opposed. The removal of the comfort woman statue will be an important touchstone as well.

Included in the Japan-South Korea agreement is both countries refraining from criticizing and accusing one another over the comfort women issue in places such as the UN.

One wonders whether South Korea is keeping this in mind as it prepares to register materials related to the comfort women as a part of UNESCO’s world heritage.

Showing a confrontational stance against one another on the international stage is a minus for Japan and South Korea alike. One would like to put an end to this unproductive bickering.

■ Putting an end to feelings of “South Korea hatred”

One would imagine that Mrs. Park would like to see efforts to put an end to the surge of Japanese feelings of “South Korea hatred” that she herself has incited. But do we not also need repentance over the issue of criticizing Japan in third-party countries using “tattletale diplomacy”, and the issue of South Korean diaspora groups installing comfort women statues in various places across the United States?

Domestically [in Japan], objections stating that “we are conceding too much” and that “we should just leave the Park regime alone” are being heard.

Prime Minister Abe nevertheless saying that he will “take personal responsibility” and deciding to supply funds can be interpreted as an aim to go beyond the improvement of Japan-South Korea relations, and revive Japan-US-South Korea cooperation against North Korea’s continued development of nuclear missiles.

If Japan and South Korea can overcome the issue of historical awareness, it will lead to returning South Korea - who is recently getting closer with China at a rapid pace - to the side of Japan and the US. It also has strategic meaning in that it will restrain China from using history as a diplomatic tool, while at the same time pushing Japan-China relations forward.

In Japan-South Korea relations, there is a large number of unresolved issues: among others, the lawsuits regarding reparations for damages incurred against former forced recruits; the restriction of imports of Japanese marine products; and the negotiations of a Japan-South Korea free trade agreement. It is imperative to diligently make efforts to resolve them one by one.
Installment of comfort woman statue in Busan An illegal act damaging the Japan-South Korea agreement

With South Korean politics in a state of turmoil, illegal acts damaging [South Korea’s] relations with Japan are being overlooked. It is a state of affairs worthy of concern.

A citizen’s group has installed a statue symbolizing the comfort women on a public road in front of the Japanese consulate-general in Busan in southern South Korea. The local authorities originally attempted to stop the installment on account of it breaking a road act, but eventually gave in to protests from different groups and shifted to approving of it.

The fact that the South Korean government, stating that it is a judgment call for local authorities, has not clearly stated its position on this is dubious.

Since President Park Geun-hye is having her professional duties suspended due to an incident of intervention into state affairs by a friend, Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn is serving as the acting president. Should the government not maintain a minimum of diplomatic order?

The Japanese government, saying that this is in violation of the Vienna Convention on consular relations, objected to South Korea and demanded the removal [of the statue]. The convention obliges [signatories] to uphold the “peace and dignity” of consular agencies.

Very serious is the fact that this installment violates the aims of the Japan-South Korea agreement regarding the issue of comfort women from the end of 2015. According to the agreement, South Korea is to create a fund for the support of the former comfort women, and Japan is to donate one billion Yen. This confirms the “final and irreversible solution” [of the problem]. South Korea promised to make adequate efforts toward solving the problem concerning the comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul that Japan is demanding be removed. Nevertheless, regrettably, a new statue has been installed in Busan.

The fund says that it has used the aforementioned one billion Yen and paid one hundred million Won (around ten million Yen) each to 29 out of the 46 comfort women alive at the time of the agreement. However, this fact has not been sufficiently reported in South Korea.

It is not possible to shut one’s eyes to the fact that influential members of the dominant opposition camp looking to run in the [South Korean] presidential election have advocated renegotiating the agreement. They have also publically supported the installment of the Busan statue. Is this not fanning the flames of anti-Japanese sentiment?

Seeing that the operations of the fund have progressed this far, the agreement is “irreversible”, and there is no room for renegotiation. The fact that Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn has stated that “the maintenance of continuity is desirable” likely has its origin in the recent series of events.
Whether Mrs. Park should be impeached or not is a matter of internal affairs. The idea of a complete repudiation of diplomatic accomplishments on the grounds that citizens’ criticism of the current political regime is growing stronger is unbecoming.

Thanks to the agreement [on the comfort women issue], Japan-South Korea relations were heading toward improvement. The installment of the new comfort woman statue has poured cold water all over this momentum. It is inevitable that feelings of hatred toward South Korea on behalf of Japanese citizens rise up anew.

As long as the justification is a historical dispute with Japan, any inability to adhere to domestic and international law or an agreement with another country is pardoned. This self-righteous South Korean predisposition only serves to degrade their foreign image.

2017-02-09 (Yomiuri)

One month after measures against South Korea  No sign of action toward removal of comfort woman statue

In order for Japan-South Korea relations to not deteriorate further, South Korea must diligently fulfill the agreement on the comfort women issue and take concrete action.

On the ninth, it will have been one month since Ambassador Nagamine Yasumasa and his diplomatic mission returned home for the time being. The calling back [of the ambassador] to Japan is a measure resulting from a comfort woman statue having been installed in front of the Japanese consulate-general in Busan, South Korea at the end of last year.

Even when compared to the 13 days the ambassador was called back after President Lee Myung-bak’s visit to the Liancourt Rocks in 2012, the length of this callback is unprecedented.

The installment of the comfort woman statue is in violation of the spirit of the “final and irreversible solution” of the Japan-South Korea agreement of December 2015, where South Korea clearly stated their efforts toward the removal of the comfort woman statue in Seoul. There are also issues concerning the Vienna Convention that establishes the protection of diplomatic missions and consular agencies.

Seeing that the South Korean side has carried out no discernable effort toward the removal of the comfort woman statue during over the course of this one month, one might think it impossible to return the ambassador to his post.

Granted, due to President Park Geun-hye having had her professional duties suspended, the South Korean government is in a state of dysfunction. However, the excuse that the government’s ability to deal with the comfort woman statue is restricted due to it having been installed by a non-government organization is nothing but evasion of responsibility due to a fear of backlash from domestic public opinion.
There are reports that the comfort woman statue was temporarily forcibly removed by the local authorities in Busan due to it being in violation of a road act directly after its installment. Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn declared that “it will take time, but we will make efforts to conquer the problem without fail.” This demands that he put his words into action and, among other things, dispatch high-level officials from the government to Busan, and consult with local authorities and non-government organizations.

Based on the agreement [on the comfort women issue], the Japanese government has donated one billion Yen to a South Korean fund. At the end of last year, more than seventy percent of former comfort women and their families had accepted monetary support. Only if the South Korean government also faithfully carries out its part of the agreement will it be rated a “country that keeps its promises” by the international community.

At the beginning of this month, the leader of the Korean Residents Union in Japan also visited South Korea and requested to foreign minister Yun Byung-se that the comfort woman statue be moved to a different location.

What’s worrying is that the biggest party of the opposition, the leftist Democratic Party of Korea, has been making statements openly about, among other things, recalling its ambassador to Japan and returning the one billion Yen in funds as a countermeasure against Japan. Based on the military threat posed by North Korea, the importance of Japan-US-South Korea cooperation is growing. Japan and South Korea must both avoid nonsense tending toward unfriendly actions and falling into a vicious circle.

First of all, South Korea must take steps toward breaking the deadlock of the situation, engage in serious discussion with Japan, and take proactive administrative measures concerning the removal of the comfort woman statue. If South Korea’s efforts are clear, it is essential that Japan deal with the situation flexibly.

2017-05-12 (Yomiuri)

South Korea: the foreign policy of Moon Jae-in   Will he scrap the comfort women agreement?

Is the intention to scrap the achievements of Japan-South Korea diplomatic negotiations regarding historical issues? The new South Korean regime must not forget the importance of the agreement [on the comfort women].

In a telephone conversation with President Moon Jae-in, Prime Minister Abe Shinzō stated regarding the agreement on the comfort women from the end of 2015 that “it is important to assume responsibility and carry out this agreement that has been highly valued by the international community” and demanded its faithful implementation.
Mr. Moon assumed a passive stance on the implementation of the agreement, saying that “in the current situation, a majority of South Koreans are not emotionally accepting the agreement.”

Furthermore he stressed that “there is a need to make an effort to tackle wisely these historical issues together.” One wonders if he is keeping in mind his electoral promise to demand renegotiations of the agreement. If Mr. Moon stubbornly persists in his promise, further cooling of Japan-South Korea relations is inevitable.

The two leaders were in agreement regarding the need to hold talks early because of opportunities such as a Japan-China-South Korea summit meeting. It is essential to be cautious lest the words and conduct of Mr. Moon, that again has inflamed the comfort women issue, exert a negative influence on Japan-South Korea relations as a whole.

Prime Minister Abe pointed out the importance of showing North Korea, who has been accelerating its nuclear missile development, “serious intention and concrete action toward denuclearization.” This appears to be aimed at curbing Mr. Moon’s proactive attitude toward conversation between South and North [Korea].

In his inauguration speech, Mr. Moon stated that “if necessary, I will fly to Washington at once. I will also go to Beijing and Tokyo, and if the conditions are right, I will go to Pyongyang as well”, making dealing with the North Korean situation a highly urgent issue. Conversation for the sake of conversation does not lead to the solution of problems.

In a telephone conversation with American President Trump, both parties [the US and South Korea] were in agreement over the need to strengthen the alliance. One wonders if Mr. Moon attaching such importance to relations with the US carries meaning as a measure against domestic popular opinion. This since the birth of the left wing administration has caused deep concerns over the instability of the alliance in chiefly conservative circles.

A predictor of the future of the alliance will be the handling of the US military’s THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) missile defense system, which is set to be installed in South Korea, and which was agreed upon by the Park Geun-hye administration.

In his speech, Mr. Moon said that he will “negotiate with China in order to solve the THAAD issue”. However, in a telephone conversation with Chinese head of state Xi Jin-ping, Mr. Xi stated that he is “hoping for real action in order to develop the [China-South Korea] relationship”, and thus finds himself in a difficult situation where he is instead pressured to review the deployment [of THAAD].

Former president Roh Moo-hyun strained relationships with Japan and the US by, among other things, trying to become a mediator of US-China relations, and advocating reconciliation policies toward North Korea. One would like for his close associate Mr. Moon to not make the same mistakes, and refrain from disturbing the unity of Japan, the US and South Korea.
The agreement on the comfort women issue  History-transcending progress for Japan and South Korea

70 years after the [Second World] War, a half century after normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea. After such a year, governments of the two countries have reached an agreement regarding what has been the largest unresolved problem, the issue of the comfort women.

It is historic progress for Japan-South Korea relations, and fitting for the critical juncture that is this year. We welcome that the governments of the two countries have transcended bad blood and taken this wise step toward overcoming their negative history.

After yesterday’s foreign minister talks, foreign minister Kishida defined the comfort women issue as “an issue of having hurt the honor and dignity of a great number of women under the supervision of the [Japanese] army”, and declared that “the Japanese government fully realizes its responsibility”.

The Japanese government, referring to the agreement on Japan-South Korea claims from 50 years ago defining the matter as “legally resolved”, has been passive when it comes to language associated with state responsibility. While still maintaining this principle, this time it has ventured into more openhearted expression.

As Prime Minister of Japan, Abe Shinzō has expressed his “heartfelt apologies and remorse” toward the former comfort women.

Even though Prime Minister Abe has previously made remarks regarding the revision of the “Kōno Statement”, and even though these talks were held through foreign minister Kishida, the fact that the core parts of the talks were announced in South Korea is of great significance.

■ The Japanese government’s declaration of responsibility

In turn, South Korean foreign minister Yun Byung-se responded to the Japanese government. Regarding the agreement, provided the “faithful implementation of measures by the Japanese government”, he asserted that he is “confirming the final and irreversible solution [of the issue]”.

This declaration is a firm promise that is aware of Japanese criticism that “even if South Korea makes a promise, it keeps moving the goal posts”.

Both foreign ministers swore a firm oath to the citizens of both countries through the media. We would like for the agreement to be implemented in full.
South Korea will create a fund in order to heal the wounds of the hearts of the former comfort women and restore their honor and dignity, and Japan will donate to it around one billion Yen from its national budget.

In the 90s, Japan started operations of the “Asian Women’s Fund” with monetary compensation made up of donations from private citizens and state funds aimed at medical, welfare and support services, and also including a letter of apology from the Japanese prime minister. It achieved success in South East Asia, but in South Korea voices of dissent grew strong and the situation came to a standstill.

There are several main causes as to why the meaning of the fund was not understood by the South Korean side. Calling it evasion of responsibility, the South Korean side opposed the fund because, among other things, the Japanese government hadn’t assumed an entirely proactive stance in dealing with the operations [of the fund], and because private donations had been used as “monetary compensation”.

Along with both governments, as well as the supporters and support groups of the former comfort women and the media, we wish to keep the lessons learned during that time in mind. The details of how the newly established fund will be managed can be worked out later. What should be prioritized above all will have to be consideration for the various feelings of the surviving 50 comfort women.

South Korean support groups are criticizing the agreement for being “diplomatic collusion that betrays victims and citizens alike”. Japanese voices of discontent driven by nationalism are likely to be heard.

However, this agreement is a valuable foundation for constructing new Japan-South Korea relations. There is no way forward except for the Japanese government to sincerely implement the agreement, and for the South Korean government to seriously strengthen domestic discussions.

■ Strengthening mutually beneficial relations

December 18th, 50 years ago. In Seoul, Japan and South Korea took a new step forward and exchanged ratification documents of a basic treaty and four agreements.

In addition to rights of claims, the four agreements included fisheries, cultural assets and cooperation, and legal rights of South Korean citizens in Japan, and occasionally improvements have been added according to the current state of affairs.

This “1965 system” can be considered the starting point for current Japan-South Korea relations, and thinking about its framework in relation to the times is a responsibility that citizens of both countries and of all generations must shoulder.

Over the course of the past half century, Japan-South Korea relations have made great strides. The national income per capita for South Koreans has gone from a little over 100 dollars to just below
30 000 dollars. Japanese economic aid has been of help toward that end. Japan has also received enormous gains from the rapidly growing South Korea.

The past half century has been the progression of a mutually beneficial relationship working together toward the expansion of gains, and this ought to be the shape of relations for the two neighboring nations in the future as well.

The US, who strongly supported the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea, participated to a great extent in this reconciliation as well. For two and a half years, Japan and South Korea have been unfolding a relentless “tattletale diplomacy” with Washington as their main stage. As a result, Japan and South Korea, hurt and exhausted, have realized the obvious: “unproductive bickering creates nothing”, and have returned to the starting point that is dialogue.

■ Security and a large number of other challenges

In a time where not only the economy, but also security, humanitarian disaster aid, environmental policy and many other challenges are on a global scale, there are innumerable projects which Japan and South Korea should tackle hand in hand as fellow major countries representing Asia.

Yesterday, the two foreign ministers expressed their hope by saying that they are “certain that Japan-South Korea relations are entering a new era”, and that they are “looking forward to being able to open up new relations from next year”.

Starting with the New Year three days from now, we want to make this the beginning of another 50 years of Japan and South Korea walking forward together.

2016-03-09 (Asahi)

The comfort women issue   In order to nurture the agreement

With regard to the Japan-South Korea agreement concerning the comfort women issue from the end of last year, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has expressed its regret and presented its final opinion that, among other issues, the “victim-centered approach is insufficient”. As a response to this, foreign minister Kishida Fumio has stated that this is “a far cry from the reaction of the international community”, and the Japanese government is expressing its opposition.

However, by only opposing the opinion of the committee, one wonders if it does not send a message far from the spirit of the agreement to the citizens of Japan and South Korea alike. The response to such an opinion or view should be one’s utmost efforts to take the content of the agreement one by one and diligently translating it into action.
The comfort women issue finally reached a settlement at the tail end of the critical juncture year that was the 50th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea, after having been an unresolved problem for the governments of both countries for many years. Starting with UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon and the US, there was a movement of many different countries expressing welcoming sentiments regarding the efforts and achievements of Japan and South Korea.

However, inside Japan and South Korea, the contents of the agreement cannot be said to have permeated [the popular consciousness]. Rather, in both Japan and South Korea, but above all in South Korea, the current situation is one of strong dissenting opinion. To that extent, if both governments do not keep their promises, a final solution cannot be expected. For that to happen, a strong [sense of] purpose on behalf of the political leaders of Japan and South Korea is essential.

Actually, there are also signs of change. After the announcement of the agreement, in response to a JDP member of the Japanese Diet having referred to the comfort women as “professional prostitutes”, Prime Minister Abe immediately admonished that he should use “speech based on the agreement.” Meanwhile, in a recent meeting at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), South Korean foreign minister Yun Byung-se did not mention the comfort women issue. It is the first time this has happened during the Park regime. It is important that both sides keep making efforts such as these.

Japan and South Korea are both in agreement that Japan pay one billion Yen to a fund established by the South Korean government. This is in order to establish an “enterprise dedicated to the restoration of the honor and dignity, and the healing of the wounds of the heart of the former comfort women”. A part of this goes toward the “victim-centered approach” recommended by the final opinion [of CEDAW].

Furthermore, both governments have mutually confirmed that it is a “final and irreversible” solution. Officials of both governments need to make efforts toward maintaining the agreement and proceed with a stance marked by composure and based in facts.

Changing the way the international community views the comfort women issue is bound to depend upon an accumulation of efforts where Japan and South Korea hand in hand diligently fulfill the contents of the agreement and nurture it together while deepening a relationship of mutual trust.

2016-07-29 (Asahi)

The comfort women fund  The common effort has only just begun

Yesterday, the South Korean fund for supporting the former comfort women forced to become sexual partners of Japanese soldiers during the war was inaugurated.
Established following the agreement by the Japanese and South Korean governments at the end of last year, it amounts to a concrete measure to [help] the former comfort women.

While it may be true that the agreement should allow the two governments to put an end to a problem that has remained unresolved for many years, the wounds suffered by the victims cannot be expected to heal immediately.

Japan and South Korea must both continue to make constant efforts so that the former comfort women can live the rest of their lives with a little more peace of mind. Common efforts toward a solution of the issue have only just begun.

The views of the former comfort women are diverse. The only option is to intently listen to what they have to say and diligently translate that into action, starting with the things we can achieve right now.

When the management of the fund visited the former comfort women and asked them their opinions one by one, a considerable number [of them] indicated a supportive view of the fund.

In contrast, some of the former comfort women and their support groups, pointing to the fact that the political agreement does not clearly describe Japan’s legal responsibilities or state reparations, are demanding a complete revocation.

The problem regarding responsibility is one of the reasons why the two countries have not been able to reach a settlement over the last quarter century. However, the agreement states that the issue occurred under the supervision of the Japanese military, and Prime Minister Abe has, among other things, expressed his apologies and regret, and acknowledged the responsibility of the government.

The important thing now should be to use the agreement as a foundation and decide how to go forward with providing concrete aid to the former comfort women. In order to further that goal, one would like the South Korean support groups to express their opinions within the fund and join forces with it.

The Japanese government plans to donate one billion Yen to the foundation after going through talks with bureau directors at the beginning of next month. Seeing as it is action based on the agreement, it may be considered a natural decision.

Within the LDP, there are voices urging for a firm promise on the relocation of the comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. However, if one stubbornly persists, it makes the implementation of the agreement more difficult. Instead, one should hurry to provide for an environment in which a relocation is possible.

Moreover, in South Korea, the fact that Prime Minister Abe is not openly discussing the contents of the agreement is inviting more distrust. In the [Japanese] National Diet in January of this year, the Prime Minister declined to repeat the wording of the agreement, saying that “it does not amount to being finally and irreversibly settled”. Such a thing makes the raising of doubts regarding the Prime Minister’s true motives unavoidable.
In order to achieve a final and non-retrograde solution, the governments of both Japan and South Korea must work together, as is stated in the agreement.

To show the agreement a maximum amount of respect without insisting on making unilateral interpretations of one another: One must once more keep firmly in mind that this is the quickest path toward a solution of the issue.

2017-01-27 (Asahi)

Professor Park’s verdict  Legal action encroaching on academic freedom

Public power should refrain from intervening in academic inquiry that pursues coming to grips with historical facts.

In the trial concerning Professor Park Yu-ha’s (Sejong University, South Korea) publishing of the literary work The Imperial Comfort Women in South Korea, a district court in Seoul has handed down a “not guilty” verdict.

Even though this is a justice system that has been accused of being apt to be influenced by relentless public opinion when it comes to matters of historical awareness regarding Japan, this can be considered an appropriate verdict that is in accordance with the law.

In this trial, the prosecutor’s office indicted Mrs. Park without arrest, claiming that The Imperial Comfort Women had injured the honor of the former comfort women.

In the verdict, out of the 35 counts of libel presented by the prosecutor, the majority was found to be cases of Professor Park merely having expressed her opinion, and it was pointed out that there were no specific passages pointing at individual comfort women.

Moreover, the “not guilty” verdict was derived from the fact that Mrs. Park’s motivation to write the book was to further reconciliation between Japan and South Korea, and not to degrade the social status of the former comfort women.

Through the accumulation of research that has been carried out in the academic world of Japan and South Korea, the realities of colonialism have been brought to the fore in many shapes and forms. It has shown that aspects of the recruitment of comfort women on the Korean Peninsula was systematized to the point that violent abduction was not even needed.

While it may be true that there are aspects of this that do not merge well with the image of the comfort women that persists in sections of South Korean society, it is a mistake to attempt to put a lid on opinion and analysis in historical research. Still more, for the powers that be to curb freedom of expression or academic inquiry almost amounts to renouncing democracy.

Nevertheless, at the end of last year, the prosecutor made an unprecedentedly harsh demand for a sentence of 3 years in prison for having “deviated from freedoms of expression and academic inquiry”.

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The prosecutor must reconsider this legal action that never should have taken in the first place, and return the locus of discussion for the comfort women issue from the courts to the world of academia [where it belongs].

Meanwhile, the agreement concerning the comfort women issue between the Japanese and South Korean governments is in an existential crisis due to the installment of statues symbolizing the comfort women, first in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul, and then near the Japanese consulate-general in Busan.

Professor Park’s consistent stance is that Japan and South Korea need reconciliation that transcends a nationalist butting of heads.

For Japan and South Korea alike, there are no gains to be had by prolonging confrontation. One would like to get back to thinking about the significance of reconstructing and developing the relations of the two countries.

**2017-05-19 (Asahi)**

*Japan-South Korea relations  Early leadership interaction*

Though differences of opinion exist, one would like to build mutually proactive relations. A clear intention toward that end appears to have been confirmed.

A little more than a week has passed since the inauguration of South Korea’s Moon Jae-in regime. President Moon’s special envoy has arrived in Japan and conducted talks with Prime Minster Abe and foreign minister Kishida.

The special envoy delivered a handwritten letter from President Moon to Prime Minister Abe, requesting the resumption of shuttle diplomacy, where the leaders of Japan and South Korea visit each other’s countries. It has been reported that the Prime Minister displayed a proactive stance toward a resumption. Shuttle diplomacy was started in 2004 by then leaders Koizumi Junichiro and Roh Moo-hyun.

There are various pending issues between the two countries, such as the Dokdo/Takeshima issue, and historical issues including visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. Also, oversensitive reactions of public opinion frequently narrow the breadth of political alternatives. With relations such as these, it is a particularly wise endeavor to have the two leaders attempt to meet regularly without feelings of constraint.

Even now, the revival of shuttle diplomacy should be effective in strengthening the ever fragile bond between Japan and South Korea. Using the inauguration of the new South Korean regime as an opportunity, one should aim for an early resumption. When that happens, there are things of which both sides need to be mindful.
The shuttle diplomacy was supposed to be a framework for overcoming various unresolved problems, but in reality it was misused and suffered repeated postponements and interruptions. The two countries should make a clear distinction between issues of politics and other issues such as culture and the economy, and bear firmly in mind that the window of conversation should not be closed even if relations turn sour.

Shuttle diplomacy stopped six years ago when then President Lee Myung-bak visited Japan. That time, it broke down over the comfort women issue. Mr. Moon has included renegotiations of the Japan-South Korea agreement on the comfort women issue as one of his electoral promises, but his special envoy did not request this during their visit to Japan this time. However, they did explain that there is a strong sense within South Korea of finding the deal emotionally difficult to accept.

Within Japan, there is a view that Japan’s responsibilities have been fulfilled through a donation made from the government budget to a support fund for the former comfort women. Meanwhile, in South Korea, it has been pointed out that comfort women statues, such as the one in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul, is not a concern of the government since they were installed by non-government organizations.

Both positions go against the spirit of the agreement on the comfort women issue] that stipulates the “cooperation of the governments of Japan and South Korea”. The only way forward from here is to keep showing action and consideration that fully takes into account the position of the other party, and nurture this agreement into a national one.

Prime Minister Abe told the special envoy that he will “appropriately manage the relations of the two countries, including the Japan-South Korea agreement”.

To restrain nationalism-inciting movements and actively persuade citizens of the value of friendship with neighboring nations: a highly prudent diplomatic approach such as this is what is demanded from the leaders of Japan and South Korea.

Chosun Ilbo

2015-12-28 (Chosun Ilbo)

*Does the government have any idea about the intentions of Japan’s noisy negotiations?*

The South Korea-Japan diplomatic talks regarding the comfort women of the Japanese military start today. These talks mark the 50th anniversary for the normalization of diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan, and are the de facto last opportunity [this year] to solve the comfort women issue and move beyond the past toward the future. It has been reported that the Japanese side has
proposed a plan of establishing a fund of about 1-2 billion Won together with South Korea during preliminary deliberations over a bureau director’s meeting on the 27th. Discussions of plans for Prime Minister Abe to send the comfort women a letter of apology were also reported.

At a summit meeting last month, President Park Geun-hye and Prime Minister Abe promised to make efforts to solve the comfort women issue before the end of the year. It has been reported that the two countries have been conducting under-the-table discussions regarding solutions for the comfort women [issue] through senior-level channels since then. To that extent, the will to produce results at these talks should be strong.

However, before the talks have [even] started, Japan has opted for noisy negotiations, leaking half-baked information to the press that has not been agreed upon yet. Last weekend, regarding the issue of the comfort woman statue installed in front of the Japanese embassy in South Korea, Japanese media reported that the South Korean government has “started to investigate a relocation of the statue”. Since the comfort women statue is installed on a sidewalk used by the citizens, the statue may be moved at some time in the future by an agreement internal to our society, but because of its symbolism it is not something that the government can relocate unilaterally. Nevertheless, when looking at reports such as these from the Japanese media, one has no choice but to interpret them as reflecting the intentions of the Japanese government.

Japanese media have also reported that, if the South Korea-Japan negotiations reach an agreement, there are plans to hold a separate South Korea-US-Japan summit at the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington of March next year, and have the third party US government make an official declaration as a “guarantee for the final solution [of the issue]”. To have a third party country that has not been a concerned party to the negotiations guarantee the contents of an agreement between two [other] countries is something that almost never happens in international politics.

The fact that Prime Minister Abe said “I will assume responsibility”, while instructing foreign minister Kishida to visit South Korea was also first reported by the Japanese media. In the leaks about the relocation of the comfort woman statue and the plan for US acting as a guarantor there is bound to be the trademark calculatedness of Japan. Once South Korea-Japan relations improve, Japan will say that it took the lead in preemptively solving the situation, using the agreement on the comfort women issue as an opportunity. If an agreement is not reached, it will say to the international community that Japan made efforts but that South Korea turned the deal down. One cannot know if our government really is grasping fully these Japanese ulterior motives going into the talks.

If the Prime Minister is truly willing to “assume responsibility”, he must openly recognize [Japanese] state responsibility for the forcible mobilization of comfort women, and apologize to the comfort women with sincerity. If Japan sneakily attempts to shirk its governmental responsibilities by creating a fund of joint South Korean and Japanese ownership, or tries to make do with a vague and ambiguous apology, it will be difficult to accept not only for our citizens, but for other countries who have been victimized through their comfort women as well.
It is difficult for any single agreement proposal to satisfy the comfort women victims one hundred percent. Such a situation may bring about completely different results depending on whether an agreement is reached where South Korea is dragged along by Japan, or whether a proposal is put forth with South Korea taking the initiative. If a proposal is created only in accordance with the aims of the Japanese side, not only will the victims concerned and the groups around them oppose [the deal], it will also be difficult to obtain popular support. One wonders if the South Korean government really is appropriately dealing with Japan’s choice of noisy negotiations.

2015-12-31 (Chosun Ilbo)

The moment Japan denies “responsibility and apology for comfort women” [South Korea] must announce denunciation

Since the South Korea-Japan agreement on the comfort women, there have been repeated actions on the Japanese side that cast into doubt whether it really intends to honor it. In the Japanese media, reports of uncertain veracity are being made daily, and Japanese authorities in a position of responsibility are even giving the impression that they are instigating or abetting this.

According to reports from Japan’s Sankei Shimbun, on the 29th – the day after the agreement [on the comfort women] – Prime Minister Abe Shinzō said that “the South Korean foreign minister said in front of TV cameras that [the deal is] irreversible” and that “in so doing, South Korea is done as a member of the international community if it breaks its promise”. Furthermore, on the 30th, Asahi Shim bun reported that the Japanese government understands the relocation of a comfort woman statue as a precondition for their donating one billion yen to a support fund for the comfort women. If Prime Minister Abe really said that, and if that is really the understanding of the Japanese government, the basis of the agreement is as good as broken already.

The statements and actions that have damaged the spirit of the agreement started immediately after the agreement [was reached]. As soon as his press conference with foreign minister Yun Byung-se had ended, foreign minister Kishida Fumio told Japanese journalists that “all we have lost is one billion Yen”. One would like to ask if he means that the “apology and remorse” toward the forcible mobilization of the comfort women were nothing but insincere embellishments wrapped in a billion Yen. The following day, it was even reported that South Korea had decided to suspend its registration of historical records of the comfort women as part of UNESCO’s world heritage. The domestic voices saying that [we] have traded the comfort women issue for one billion Yen in humiliating negotiations are inevitable.

Whether in terms of the scale of forcible mobilization of the female victims or their wretched living conditions, this is in every aspect the worst case of violation of women’s rights in the 20th century. This is also the reason why the South Korean government has demanded a governmental
apology and the recognition of legal responsibility for more than 20 years, and why the international community has shown its full support for this endeavor. The reason why the South Korean government nevertheless has approved this agreement and even abandoned their former position is above all because of considerations for South Korea-US relations and long term South Korea-Japan relations. This is also likely the reason why President Park Geun-hye asked for “broad understanding” from comfort women victims and citizens immediately after the agreement.

The Japanese government also likely has domestic political circumstances in mind. We are of course not unaware of the view of the Abe cabinet that the backlash in certain parts of Japan that has resulted from content included in the agreement – such as the “Japanese government’s full realization of responsibility” and “the expression of heartfelt apologies and remorse” – needs to be pacified. However, the current events taking place in Japan are far beyond such measures.

The South Korean government has made three promises, including the “confirmation of [this] being a final and irreversible solution”. There is no reason to think it did not anticipate domestic opposition. However, in [the agreement] was a clear prerequisite calling for the “faithful implementation of the agreement by the Japanese side”. The Japanese government must understand that the perception of this being sincere or not depends on how genuinely Japan maintains its attitude of “responsibility” and “remorse”.

The comfort women agreement is an extremely sensitive issue that can crumble completely over something very small. Just because there has been an agreement on the government level it doesn’t mean that [the issue] is over. The South Korean government has been failing repeatedly not only in the process of the agreement itself, but in process of maintaining it after the fact. Persuasion would have been difficult even if the President and all the relevant government departments took action directly; instead they sent only deputies from the foreign office to convince the comfort women. After being dragged around by Japan during the negotiation process, [the South Korean government] is now suspected of having made reckless promises to Japan in secrecy. It is still not too late to reveal the full contents of the agreement to the citizens and let them be the judge. It is also a matter of course that [the government] must announce the denunciation of the agreement itself the moment Prime Minister Abe or any Japanese government official let slip a comment that damages the spirit of the agreement ever so slightly.

2016-12-17 (Chosun Ilbo)

Moon, don’t make promises about “reversing security and foreign policy” that you cannot keep

Former Democratic Party representative Moon Jae-in has made clear his intentions to reverse the core security policies of the Park Geun-hye administration. Through a gathering at the Seoul Foreign Correspondents’ Club and interviews with the media, he has said that the industrial complex at
Kaesong should be reopened immediately, and that decision regarding the deployment of THAAD should be handed over to the next administration. With regard to the South Korea-Japan comfort women agreement he promised a reversal saying that a “new agreement” is needed, and he said he would reconsider the South Korea-Japan GSOMIA.

There are many cases of presidential candidates form the opposition criticizing policies of the current administration and promising to change them if they come into office. However, overturning agreements with foreign governments is different from changing policies that apply only to a domestic electorate. Foreign policy can, of course, also change direction. However, if, like former representative Moon says he will, one attempts to destroy a core agreement with an allied nation, South Korean policy continuity itself is negated.

THAAD is a weapons defense system that the two countries of South Korea and the US and its military authorities after prolonged deliberation have decided to implement to fill an interception vacuum against North Korean missiles. It defends South Korea-US military facilities and entry ports for additional American forces in a time of emergency. The US government has repeatedly stressed that the deployment of THAAD has to be carried out as soon as possible. If one adopts former representative Moon’s approach, damage to our alliance will be inevitable.

The suspension of the industry complex at Kaesong is a promise to the international community. It is a measure taken by our government preemptively to do our part for the UN resolution on sanctions against the 4th round of nuclear experiments by the North. In order to decrease the number of dollars entering North Korea, imports of Chinese coal to the North are being blocked as well. We are cautioning the entire world about the dollars flowing into North Korea. What will happen to our country if we then say we are again going to provide the North with 500 million dollars yearly through the Kaesong industrial complex?

It is a fact that opinions on the South Korea-Japan comfort women agreement are extremely divided. One may criticize the government for having suddenly changed their Japan policy. However, this is a solemn international promise. Also, almost a year has transpired. If [the agreement] breaks now, South Korea-Japan relations themselves will break. Signatures have already been made to the South Korea-Japan General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) whose function is for South Korea and Japan to exchange information on North Korea and complement each other’s weaknesses. The reason for this is that we are gaining a lot [of intelligence], such as [information on] movements of North Korean submarines.

It’s hard to believe that former representative Moon is not aware of such issues. If former representative Moon really does enter office, he will not reverse our security and foreign policy altogether, and it looks like he won’t be able to [even if he wanted to]. If so, former representative Moon is now making statements that deceive the electorate in order to pander to his diehard supporters. If former representative Moon really does believe it is okay to break agreements with allied nations there is nothing left to say.
Japanese aggression toward comfort woman statue is dangerous

On the 9th, the Japanese ambassador to South Korea returned to Japan temporarily along with the Japanese consul-general. This is a measure protesting the comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese consulate-general in Busan. Along with this [measure], on the 6th, the Japanese government even announced the suspension of currency swap negotiations and consultations of top economic officials. Every time South Korea has treated historical issues in relation with those of foreign policy, the Japanese government has always demanded that matters of history and foreign policy be handled separately. This has been the guiding principle of Japanese foreign policy toward South Korea for the past decades. One now wonders if Japan has decided to abandon this principle. If the side that is not the victim, but rather the perpetrator, says it wants to abandon the present on grounds of historical conflict, it changes the situation greatly.

Questions about [the legitimacy of] the installment of facilities that are shunned by foreign nationals right in front of an official residence that belongs to the very same nation are being raised in South Korea as well. International treaties stipulate the “duty to protect the peace and dignity of official residences of foreign nations”. At the end of 2015, the Japanese government recognized its responsibility for the comfort women and Prime Minister Abe expressed his apologies and remorse. Regarding the comfort woman statue, the South Korean government promised to “make appropriate efforts toward a solution”. While it is a fact that the installment of a comfort woman statue by an NGO in front of the Japanese consulate-general in Busan runs contrary to the purposes of the agreement, the South Korean government cannot be said to have broken it.

The reason why our government defied the opposition of public opinion and concluded the comfort women agreement was pressure from the US. Using this agreement as a foundation, the two countries started discussions on economic and security cooperation, and at the end of last year even completed the GSOMIA. Currency swap negotiations within the economic realm are an extension of this. Immediately after the installment of the comfort woman statue in Busan, Prime Minister Abe called the American vice president and tried to drag the US back [into the issue]. If Japan keeps acting like this, it may magnify the issue beyond what is reasonable and bring about adverse consequences for all three nations.

Candidates in the presidential election are advocating for the nullification, renegotiation and reexamination of the comfort women agreement. Since these are statements conscious of public sentiment, it is uncertain if they will be acted upon after the election. However, if Japan abandons its principle of separation between issues of history and foreign policy and starts acting emotionally, it
will cause conflict between the two nations to grow exponentially and move in a direction that is not desirable for anyone. All concerned nations must remain calm and composed.

2017-01-16 (Chosun Ilbo)

Plowing through international relations from a simple-minded perspective of “treason” and “pro-Japanese”

Foreign minister Yun Byung-se has made clear his position regarding the comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese consulate-general in Busan: “In accordance with the Vienna Convention, the installment of controversial sculptures in front of an official residence of a foreign country is undesirable.” Thereupon, a movement centered in the political circles criticizing foreign minister Yun and the ministry of foreign affairs for being “pro-Japanese” has been gaining momentum. In comments made by the People’s Party [of South Korea], foreign minister Yun was satirized as being the spokesperson of Prime Minister Abe. Some members of the National Assembly have criticized the comfort women agreement as an “act of treason”.

Criticizing is easy and anyone can do it. However, it has to be logical and rational. The failure of foreign policy toward Japan started with President Park Geun-hye declaring at the beginning of her term that she would not hold summit talks without a solution to the comfort women issue. Making no separation between past history and current foreign relations, this declaration was doomed on arrival. In the end, in December 2015, everyone was taken by surprise when a South Korea-Japan agreement on the comfort women was suddenly announced. It was an embarrassing foreign policy U-turn. The problem with the South Korea-Japan comfort women agreement lies precisely in this process.

That being said, it does not mean that the government entered this agreement because it is “pro-Japanese”. The government probably dislikes this Japan policy U-turn more than anyone else. However, international relations do not always go the way we would like. Concluding that South Korea is leaning ever close toward China when it comes to Sino-Japanese clashes, the US has been pressing heavily for the restoration of South Korea-Japan relations. The US considers the South Korea-Japan-US cooperation system the central axis of its East Asia policy. Out government was not the only one who wanted a comfort women agreement. Inevitable aspects of complicated international political circumstances played a larger part.

One piece of homework from the comfort women issue for our foreign policy was the fact that the monetary compensation should be paid with tax money from Japanese citizens. This since it signifies Japan’s state responsibility. Having refused this [in the past], this time Japan agreed to pay one billion Yen from its state budget. The sum is not an issue. Despite the considerable significance of “tax money from Japanese citizens”, slanderous and simple-minded remarks saying that “[we] have sold out [our comfort women] for one billion Yen” are running rampant. In foreign relations,
occasionally there are times when we have to make choices that we do not like. This in order to further greater and more important national interests. If at such times we always resort to one-dimensional and emotional criticism, crying “treason” and “pro-Japanese”, the country cannot move forward. The comfort woman statue can be erected anywhere. However, we have to think twice about putting it in front of a Japanese official offices. There is no guarantee our diplomatic and consular offices will not meet the same fate.

Hankyoreh

2015-12-29 (Hankyoreh)

A foreign policy humiliation that betrays historical justice

The people trying to achieve justice for history and the [comfort women] victims are indignant, and those trying to cover up the problem are laughing. This is the state [we are in] after the declaration of the South Korean and Japanese governments’ “final solution” of the issue regarding the comfort women of the Japanese army on the 28th. It is a foreign policy humiliation on par with the 1965 South Korea-Japan treaty, but the government is incapable of even showing embarrassment.

Ever since the comfort women issue was first raised, the Japanese government’s recognition of responsibility has been the central key to a solution. The government has [now] tossed this out like a pair of worn-out shoes. The [South Korean] government is patting itself on the back saying Prime Minister Abe has recognized “responsibility” for the first time, but the Japanese has reconfirmed that it is indeed not a “legal responsibility”. Nominal responsibility and legal responsibility are as different as the heaven and the earth. To assume legal responsibility is to recognize past war crimes and adopt necessary follow-up measures. Included [in these] are various recurrence-preventing policies, starting with a thorough investigation of the truth of the issue and a trial against those responsible, a clearly stated apology based in fact, reparations for the victims, making relevant materials open to the public, and making sure accounts [of the issue] in textbooks honor the memory [of the comfort women] with respect and affection. However, not a single mention of such a thing is included in this agreement. All Japan has to do is donate one billion Yen (9.7 billion Won) to a comfort women-related fund that our government is going to create. Also, these are not reparations but aid. It is the same as our government taking Japan’s money and selling them an indulgence.

Even more egregious is the declaration of the “final and irreversible solution” of the comfort women issue. It is an act of willingly putting a gag in one’s own mouth. There can be no such thing as a full stop for weighty historical crimes. Much time has passed since Germany signed and implemented the international treaty on the holocaust issue, but even now it continues to untiringly
The ever-growing contradictions of the comfort women agreement

The contradictions of the December 28th South Korea-Japan comfort women agreement are revealing themselves for all to see. As feared, domestic discord is growing, and the perpetrator Japan is prevaricating. It is not too late make the right choice and look for a new solution.

The fact that the [Japanese] ministry of foreign affairs on the 4th announced that it will mainly use the earmarked sum of one billion Yen (10.2 billion Won) as “pure aid” to benefit the individual [comfort women] victims is self-contradictory. This is not only because the whole affair will be over and done with once Japan pays the money, but also because our side will have to take the lion’s share

2016-02-05 (Hankyoreh)
of responsibility for the establishment and management of the fund. This even runs counter to the contents of the agreement. At the time [of the agreement], Japan said that “the governments of the two countries will cooperate to form an enterprise for the restoration of the honor and dignity of the victims and the healing of the wounds of their hearts.” Now our government is saying it will assume that responsibility. It is a foolish act of taking upon oneself the task that should be carried out by the perpetrator.

It is perhaps only natural that the Japanese side is getting ever more shameless. Emblematic of this is the fact that the Japanese government after the South Korea-Japan comfort women agreement conveyed its uncorroborated stance to the UN that the Japanese military and authorities did not forcibly abduct any comfort women. It is a reduction of the comfort women issue from a state crime perpetrated by the Japanese military, to a [moral] deviation on behalf of a handful of tradespeople. Yet another humiliation is our government’s lukewarm attitude toward this, saying it will not get involved in disputes over “minor issues such as the narrow sense of forcibleness”. To bend the knee even though Japan has barely changed at all is no way to conduct foreign policy.

The root cause for these contradictions lies within the December 28th agreement itself. The declaration of the “final and irreversible solution to the comfort women issue” without holding Japan at all legally accountable was an ahistorical overextension of authority. As long as it is tied down to the wording of the agreement, there is a high probability that the [South Korean] government will continue its displays of subservience. The government is keeping its mouth shut regarding Japan’s misconduct, and has gone as far as taking a confrontational stance toward many NGO’s and [comfort women] victims. In the grand scheme of things, it is no different from the pro-Japanese bureaucrats of the past suppressing their own brethren.

2016.02.29 (Hankyoreh)

The sorrowful success of the comfort women movie “Spirits’ Homecoming”

Having sold one million tickets just five days after its opening, the movie “Spirits’ Homecoming”, and its depiction of the pain suffered by young girls dragged off to become comfort women in the Japanese army, is taking movie theaters by storm. Ticket reservations are growing by the day, and the box office trend is predicted to surge. Since before the opening, an online movement has been organized to purchase tickets in advance in order to make sure that the movie gets screened, and there has been a steady stream of group viewings by schools, teaching companies, NGO’s and the political community.

The success of “Spirits’ Homecoming” can be seen as a “social phenomenon” that is distinct from ordinary interest in cinema. In the background lies wide-spread discontent with the “December 28th agreement” that the [South Korean] government entered with Japan at the end of last year. The agreement talks about things such as the “irreversible solution” of the comfort women issue, and
amounts to a demand for historical oblivion. The rightfully indignant public can be said to have entered a “battle of memory” through the movie “Spirits’ Homecoming”.

Even after the agreement, the [South Korean] government has stuck to its dishonorable demeanor, continuing to turn down demands by legal groups to make public the details of telephone conversations and negotiation documents from South Korea-Japan summit meetings. It has even gone as far as removing from state-designated textbooks mentions and photographs of the comfort women. The Ministry of Education has also put the brakes on a policy by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education to provide school libraries with [copies of] the “Dictionary of Names of Pro-Japanese Collaborators”. While the government keeps making history-defying moves, the wrath of the citizens is growing stronger. In contrast with the low profile kept by our government, the Japanese government has repeatedly denied the forcible abduction of comfort women to the international community, and reckless remarks by the ruling party remain unchanged. Even the nonsensical 28th December agreement is as good as ruined. Now the government must honestly recognize the agreement as having been a foreign policy disaster, and make moves toward nullification and renegotiation.

Since the beginning of this year, already two comfort women have passed away. Even though the success of “Homecoming” is much welcome in the sense that it rightly records and ruminates upon a historical tragedy, the 70 years of undiminished suffering by the comfort women victims that lie at its foundation is only a cause for sadness. This [year’s] Samiljeol is in no way a mere occasion for celebration.

2016-07-28 (Hankyoreh)

The comfort women fund, inaugurated amidst backlash and discord

On the 28th, the “Reconciliation and Healing Fund” for the implementation of the 2015 “December 28th agreement” was officially inaugurated amidst backlash from comfort women victims and citizen’s support groups such as The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. Though the [South Korean] government is doing this as a part of the implementation of its agreement with the Japanese government, from the standpoint of the victims and the groups there is no alternative to receiving it as an action that once again sows the seeds of suffering in various ways. Therefore, there is a strong possibility that the inauguration of the fund will be anything but a starting point for reconciliation and healing, and more likely a powder keg of discord and backlash.

The root cause for the government being out of sync with the victims and the groups is the Park Geun-hye administration rushing the December 28th agreement, and in so doing missing the mark on the standards of “seeing eye-to-eye with the citizens” and “being accepted by the victims” that it had consistently advocated as a guiding principle since its inception. Despite the government’s core stance that the comfort women issue was not resolved along with other issues – such as Korean deaths as a
result of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the forced deportations of Koreans to Sakhalin Island – in the 1965 treaty on rights to claims, it concluded the December 28th agreement by accepting the Japanese logic that all historical issues including that of the comfort women had been resolved in that [very same] treaty. As a result, we find ourselves in a strange situation where the discord between South Korea, Japan and the international community has transformed into a domestic political feud in our country.

Even when setting fundamental issues such as these aside, it is impossible not to criticize the government’s stance during the inauguration process of the fund. With an issue of national discord of this magnitude, persuading the victims would be difficult even if the president or the foreign minister went to meet them directly, but neither showed any such good faith. Compared to the stance of Abe Shinzō’s Japanese government regarding the issue of [North Korean] kidnappings, it is a difference as large as that between heaven and earth.

Being the most hotly disputed matter of the agreement, the removal of the comfort woman statue is a ticking time bomb as well. Judging by the attitude of the Japanese government, it might pay the one billion to the fund without demanding the removal of the statue as a precondition, but as soon as it has paid the money it is predicted to go into full-scale attack mode on the issue. It is also highly probable that it will be fiercely meddlesome in how we use the donations [to the fund]. This can all be viewed as a misfortune that the rudderless government’s backbone-bereft policy has brought upon itself. The citizens’ responsibility to rectify and make up for errors like this [just] got even bigger.

2017-01-15 (Hankyoreh)

*Shameless government clinging to erroneous decision on security and foreign policy*

The remarks and actions of the foreign policy and security officials of the now impeached Park Geun-Hye administration are becoming ever more a sight to behold. Having been abandoned by the people, repentance and self-reflection is not enough [to make up for what they done], but instead [of apologizing] they are clinging to their erroneous decision while kicking and screaming, and out of all their brazen and shameless acts, this one truly takes the cake.

The remarks made by foreign minister Yun Byung-se in the National Assembly [of South Korea] on the 13th makes one confused as to which country’s foreign minister the man really is. By saying that “the position that the installment of facilities or sculptures in front of a diplomatic or consular agency is undesirable is a universal one within international society”, he de facto advocated the moving of comfort women statues to a different location. This is something that a spokesperson for Prime Minister Abe Shinzō would say. Sure enough, the Japanese government welcomed minister Yun’s remarks, adding that “the implementation of the agreement is important”.

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The [foreign] minister went even further, saying that the December 28th comfort women issue agreement in his estimation was “a result as close as possible to the solution we wanted”. This is an extremely far cry from critical domestic public opinion saying that [we] have sold out the comfort women issue for one billion Yen. [The Park administration] completely botched the job [they were supposed to do], yet they are singing their own praises. Minister Yun also said that breaking the comfort women issue agreement could exert adverse influence on our national interest, such as a downgrade of our international creditworthiness. It is shameless beyond belief that the man responsible for the “foreign policy disaster of the comfort women” – that made the perpetrator country Japan give moral lectures to the victim country South Korea – is now threatening [his own] citizens.

Kim Guan-jin, director of the Office of National Security, was no less pathetic than minister Yun. Last week, Director Kim met with the national security advisor-designate of the incoming US administration and said that he “will push for the deployment of THAAD on the Korean Peninsula according to plans even if China opposes it”. There is no reason to bring up “China” and further incite an already infected situation where China is vehemently opposing the deployment of THAAD using economic retaliation. To make matters worse, Director Kim is the security adviser of President Park Geun-hye, whose professional duties have been suspended by the impeachment in the National Assembly. For such a person to go all the way to the US and make dangerous remarks is a mockery of the impeachment process.

Minister Yun and Director Kim are people who have contributed to causing great suffering for [South Korean] citizens through the foreign policy failures of the Park Geun-hye administration. This is not the time to go around making thoughtless remarks that go against the will of the people. Since the comfort women agreement is fundamentally flawed it has to be renegotiated. One would also hope that the [current] government officials keep in mind that the THAAD deployment issue has to be handed to the next administration so that it may become subject to a national discussion.