

TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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**COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST:
THE CASE OF JAPAN-SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

The logic of Northeast Asian politics has manifested itself as a deadlock on many pressing issues, notably those involving memories of Japan's colonial rule and Second World War responsibility. With regard to coming to terms with the past, the process of reconciliation between Japan and South Korea does not seem to come near a convincing progress, being commonly described as contentious rather than cooperative. In order to interpret the future the Japan-South Korea conflict-ridden relationship, it is important to analyze both perspectives of the postwar consensus building and identify key policy aspects preventing the Japanese and South Koreans from moving beyond the nationalist impulse. While critical voices juxtapose the German and Japanese models of reconciliation, it would be false to suggest that the Japanese attitude towards historical wrongs had not leaned towards the appropriate direction, whereas South Korea's anti-Japanese sentiment came into existence as a convenient strategy for managing internal circumstances. Entangled in domestic calculations and electoral gains, the discord between identity politics in Japan and South Korea comes with high diplomatic losses in the government-level dialogue.

Keywords: Japan, South Korea, history, nationalism, reconciliation.

INTRODUCTION

International efforts towards peace and security in East Asia remain inextricably interlinked with cooperation and trust building within the region. However, domestic and regional political circumstances reveal a much larger complexity of politics and history. The logic of Northeast Asian politics has essentially manifested itself as a deadlock on many pressing issues, notably those involving memories of Japan's colonial rule and Second World War responsibility. After more than 70 years since the end of the Second World War and Japan's colonial aggression, the wartime history remains a perpetual source of tension between South Korea and Japan. The debate over Japan's wartime behavior discloses serious limitations to the prospects of reconciliation and bilateral cooperation between the two neighboring nations. At the core of the issue lies a dichotomy of willingness for pragmatic and forward-looking cooperation alongside remembrance of the past that continues to stir long-held resentment among many Koreans and nationalist elements found in Japanese society.

Thus, in order to interpret the future of the Japanese-South Korean pattern of cooperation and conflict, it is important to analyze both perspectives of the postwar consensus building and promote a better understanding of how and why the historical issue continues to impede the bilateral improvement. When it comes to the future prospects of the Japan-South Korea relationship, this paper explores the way politically constructed identities, shaping individual political behaviors and national foreign policy practices, affect extremely volatile ties between both nations. By bringing together perspectives from Japan and South Korea, it analyzes the history of Japan-South Korea diplomatic narrative based on a chronological order of political events. Through discourse analysis, a theoretical and empirical research approach, the paper identifies key policy aspects preventing both nations from moving beyond the emotional past.

Although the recurrence of politically symbolic rituals and decisions undertaken by the Japanese conservative camp might be sending mixed signals about Japan's stance on the historical controversies, several Japanese governments have sought to come to terms with colonization and wartime aggression in the form of official apologies and financial restitution of the victims. Conversely, South Korea's emotional response to the history of Japanese colonialism and

aggression prior to 1945 may possibly obscure and generalize present facts. Such deeply rooted anti-Japanese sentiment in South Korea has manifested itself as a part of the post-Cold War identity formation and disputable political narratives that continue to sabotage the efforts of final reconciliation.

Chapter 1 outlines the controversy behind several historical issues remaining a perpetual source of tension in the Japan-South Korea conflict-ridden relationship. Following the historical background, the chapter introduces the theme of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or “coming to terms with the past”: the culture of remembrance that emerged in Western European politics of the twentieth century echoing various historical wrongdoings and colonial behavior. It is commonly assumed that in Northeast Asia, historical reconciliation has been less convincing and successful. However, the key aspects discussed almost exclusively focus on Japanese accountability, while reconciliation works only in two directions and cannot be achieved, unless the other side is willing to accept the terms.

Chapter 2 offers a closer examination of the widespread, stereotypical views on the Japanese resistance to acknowledge its responsibility for the past atrocities. In order to understand the Japanese way of coming to terms with the past and why it is being perceived as unsustainable, the section develops possible interpretations in the context of Japanese politics and underlying motivations of Japanese nationalism. Despite the controversy of its historical narratives adopted since 1945, Japan has been far more willing to apologize for the past aggression than is commonly assumed.

Chapter 3 analyzes the South Korean stance in dealing with the shared past. It explores possible explanations for the logic of South Korean nationalism and anti-Japanese sentiment in the historical and structural context, the narrative that have been developed through the enormous stresses of the colonial rule, national division, and subsequent attainment of political and economic development. South Korea’s emotional response towards Japan’s interpretation of the wartime history have manifested itself as a part of the national Korean identity, which further complicates reconciliation between the perpetrators and the victims. Having analyzed different sides of coming to terms with the wartime past, it additionally offers a number of findings, interpreting continuous tensions between Japan and South Korea.

If both nations want to move beyond the wartime history, facing up to the shared past will be an essential factor in making definitive reconciliation possible. The main argument concludes that domestic pressures and short-term political brinkmanship, largely appealing to the nationalist sentiment, create considerable hurdles to the prospects of mutual, future-oriented reconciliation.

1. JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS THROUGH THE LENSE OF HISTORICAL ANTAGONISM

1.1 Japan, Korea, and colonialism

The unbridgeable gap in Japan-South Korea relations dates back to the outset of the twentieth century, meaning Japan's colonization of the Korean Peninsula. In 1905, at the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan had imposed a protectorate over the Korean Peninsula to annex it formally in 1910. According to Kim, Japanese authorities demonstrated a substantial lack of knowledge about Korea's traditional social and political setup. In the "trial-and-error" method of decision-making, "the Japanese authorities wittingly or unwittingly developed a colonial military dictatorship" over the peninsula that lasted until the collapse of the Japanese empire in 1945 (1962, 59). After more than 70 years since the end of the Second World War, sensitivity of the subject resonates in daily lives of many Koreans and Japanese, frequently resulting in substantial diplomatic crises in the government-level dialogue.

In the discussion about the Japanese colonial administration in Korea, one side of the argument would suggest that by achieving institutional control over the Korean economy by 1920, Japanese authorities significantly contributed to Korea's sustained economic development and modernization, thus laying the groundwork for the modern Korean economy already in the early twentieth century. One may refer to the history of controversial remarks made by Japanese government officials, scholars, and media observers with regard to the positive effects of Japan's colonial rule in Korea. During the coverage of the recent Pyeongchang Olympics, attended by Prime Minister Abe, a controversial remark made by the NBC analyst in respect to Japan's economic, technological, and cultural primacy over South Korea ignited an immediate outrage among many South Koreans.

Indeed, given the limits of colonial growth, Korea's balance of trade remained largely unfavorable: Korean imports continuously exceeded Korean exports that mostly relied on supplementing Japanese economic needs for raw materials. The Sino-Japanese War induced a disproportional

growth of Korea's industrial sector, but the overall level of living standards for the Korean working class and peasantry had only decreased over time. It is generally assumed that the economic impact the Japanese colonial control imposed on Korean economy brought about both modernization and exploitation. (King 1977; Ha et al 2013; Suh 1978) In the meantime, several other historical tensions continue to hinder the ongoing process of reconciliation, whether they are acts of Second World War aggression or ways of addressing the difficult past shared by the two nations.

The comfort women issue remains one of the stumbling stones in Japanese-South Korean ties that has particularly intensified beginning from the early 1990s. The term is a literal translation of the Japanese/Korean euphemism for girls and women trafficked into sexual slavery to serve the Imperial Japanese Army both before and throughout the Second World War. The Kono/Murayama statements, analyzed in the following chapter, are often quoted as the Japanese government's position on the issue of wartime sexual violence. At the same time, some conservative Japanese leaders and scholars maintain there was no physical coercion in recruiting Korean girls and women and accept no historical responsibility for the act, thus promoting lingering tensions in the conflict-ridden relationship between Japan and South Korea.

Although the long-running "comfort women" argument does not tend to result in a significant political or security turmoil, and the 2015 Japan-South Korea Comfort Women Deal may have officially settled the issue, it continues to impose political hurdles through temporary diplomatic suspensions between Tokyo and Seoul. Public protests of the surviving victims and the comfort women advocates in South Korea demand from Japan full and sincere acknowledgement of the facts and acceptance of state's responsibility for the wartime action, free from covert economic or geopolitical motivations. An illustrative episode in early January 2017 involves Tokyo's decision to recall its ambassador, suspend talks, and pull its consul-general in the South Korean city of Busan. The move came in as a response to the comfort women statue installed by the local activists outside of the Japanese consulate a month earlier. Evidently, the comfort women issue brings much disappointment into Japan-South Korea relations based on diverging views on shared history and undermines efforts to improve the bilateral relationship.

Alongside the grievances over the Japanese-South Korean settlement of the comfort women issue, there is a highly politicized debate over the ways of addressing wartime memories in the areas of remembrance and education. The controversy surrounding Japanese Yasukuni Shrine and history textbook revision sends undeniably mixed signals and additionally strains extremely volatile relations with South Korea. Located in central Tokyo, the Yasukuni Shrine honors Japan's estimated 2.5 million war dead, including those 14 found guilty by Allied war tribunals of committing A-class war crimes. Many Japan's high-ranking officials paid their respects to the

controversial shrine thought to house the souls of those who made sacrifices and lost their lives in the war. As may be expected, such acts of commemoration, seen by the Koreans as a gesture of glorifying Japan's wartime aggression, consequentially negate the progress achieved in improving diplomatic ties with Seoul and further exacerbate the existing tensions. Aware of such international implications, Prime Minister Abe and his Cabinet Members as of late refrained from visiting the shrine in order to avoid triggering criticism among the Koreans at a time of expected cooperation progress.

Finally, the history textbook issue represents another contentious aspect of the Japanese-South Korean dispute over unsettled historical interpretations. In 2001, the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (Tsurukai) undertook an initiative of defining "the Japanese side of the story", which significantly minimized Japan's responsibility for the early twentieth century colonial conquest in East Asia. In attempt to whitewash the dark side of modern Japanese history, the textbook proposal omitted the comfort women discussion, not to mention other acts of Japan's aggression in the Asia-Pacific and Sino-Japanese wars. Although the edition subsequently received substantial criticism from Japanese historians and progressive media, it embodied a grass-root movement of Japanese rightists who sought to promote a nationalistic version of Japanese history that appealed to the recovery of Japanese national pride after the 1990s depression (Mitani 2008). If the process of Japanese-South Korean reconciliation remains subject to continuous tensions, the actors of reconciliation might want to find an opportunity to minimize the differences, such as "to understand that the other side has a fundamentally different view on history and, with time, gradually to find ways to reach a common perspective" (Togo 2008, 70). To summarize, the Japanese-South Korean historical debate involves a bitter legacy of colonialism and wartime aggression in the first half of the twentieth century, as well as a number of contentious points in addressing the overall aspects of the war memories and colonialism in present-day Japan.

1.2 Resurging nationalism and prospects for reconciliation

Although Japanese-South Korean diplomatic relations have normalized since 1965 and the existing bilateral ties had deepened over the past few decades, recurrent short-term frictions over historical controversies continue to interrupt the long-term progress (Park 2009, 247). Speaking of the German theme of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the past, the reconciliation in East Asia does not seem to come near a convincing progress, in contrast to the successful regional integration in the postwar Europe (Nijhuis 2016). The conventional/Korean interpretation of this issue argues that should the Japanese accept the illegitimacy of the 1910

Annexation Treaty, produce an acceptable resolution of the comfort women issue, and acknowledge national responsibility for the wartime aggression in the early twentieth century, both parties will eventually be able to witness positive effects of the reconciliation process. Some authors analyze the categories of “good” Germany and “bad” Japan, referring to the European progress of historical reconciliation (Berger 2013; Nijhuis 2016).

This brings to mind *Kniefall von Warschau*, the evocative image of Willy Brandt, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, kneeling before the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial in acknowledgement of shared historical wounds. In 1970, Brandt demonstrated the world what facing the sorrowful past and the desire for reconciliation, embodied in the new Ostpolitik, could be like. Since then, many observers juxtapose the German and the Japanese models of remembrance and reconciliation, criticizing Japan for failing to come to terms with the past. Yet it would be wrong to assume that the 1990s Japanese attitude in coming to terms with past had not leaned towards the appropriate direction of confronting the dark pages of shared history.

While comparing those two cases, one may not overlook the level of European integration as opposed to divergent geopolitical circumstances in the context of Northeast Asia. International security studies have shown that durable security partnerships inevitably depend on common identity and trust among its actors (Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002, Suh 2007 cited in Bong 2013, 48), while the creation of a regional identity consistently rests upon decisive reconciliation between the former adversaries (Crocker 1999, He 2008, Ku 2008 cited in Bong 2013, 48).

Notwithstanding close economic relationship between Japan and South Korea, two of the major economic actors in Asia, nationalist sentiments and historical legacy create significant hurdles to the prospects of establishing future-oriented cooperation. The fact that Japan and South Korea have not yet signed any high-level agreement on economic partnership and security demonstrates that both nations have failed at developing Northeast Asian regionalism and moving beyond the nationalist ideology, not least due to South Korea’s strong suspicion towards Japan. Setting aside divergent interpretations of common history, South Korea-Japan territorial dispute over Dokdo-Takeshima islands portrays a textbook case of a modern territorial dispute associated with escalating nationalist rhetoric, notably in South Korea (Weinstein 2006). In this sense, historical tensions and pending territorial dispute between Tokyo and Seoul became highly politicized on the grounds of nationalism, often exploited by domestic policymakers through asserting national interests in a self-reliant, uncompromising manner.

Considering the circumstances, the assumption that Japan failed to follow through the theme of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* appears to be too simplistic. According to Berger, the German model

of remembrance would be neither entirely irrelevant, nor exemplary for the Japanese. In fact, Japan has been more contrite about its imperial aggression than many Western European states were in regards to their wartime and colonial past, i.e. Austria in acknowledgment of its Second World War responsibility until after the end of the Cold War. (2013, 103-104). Many argue that the South Korean counterpart and international observers hold Japan to unrealistic expectations of apology and remembrance based on the exemplary model of historical contrition in Germany. In this context, international criticism directed against the Japanese culture of remembrance cannot universally appeal to rather a unique German experience, whereas Japan would probably be on par with a number of modern states, holding an equally appalling record of imperialist aggression. (Suzuki 2015)

One point to make clear from the outset is that the decision to accept the apology and terms of reconciliation remains at a discretion of the offended party. The key aspects discussed by Japan's critics almost exclusively focus on the Japanese accountability, while reconciliation works only in two directions and cannot be achieved, unless the other side is willing to accept the terms. Formation of the postwar Korean self-identity has shifted from a defensive posture against the colonial rule to reintegration of the divided nation and elevated sense of pride with the attainment of political and economic success. It has been certainly reliant on the anti-Japanese sentiment that significantly contributed to widening the perception gap and caused recurring frictions between the neighboring nations. (Park 2008)

Essentially, the emotional Korean response to historical controversies and collectively shared memories demonstrates that the reconciliation progress cannot be achieved, unless both Japan and South Korea renounce the post-Cold War spirit of "wounded nationalism" (Berger 2003) in favor of facilitating sustainable economic and security cooperation in the region. Efforts of developing a feasible strategy of achieving peace and stability in East Asia call for a closer examination of resurging nationalist inclinations not only among Japanese, but among their counterparts, too (Mitani 2008). Perhaps the future of their cooperation largely depends on emotions and perceptions of each other, while domestic gains based on identity politics and nationalist sentiments tend to come with high diplomatic losses.

2. HISTORY OF THE APOLOGY DISCOURSE: THE VIEW FROM JAPAN

2.1 Repeated calls for apology, repeated Japanese apologies

Postwar Japan represents a compelling case study of a political apology and acknowledgement of historical wrongs; in other words, coming to terms with the past for the purpose of reconciliation. The history of Japanese apology discourse involves numerous statements on Japan's war legacy by monarchs and senior officials that particularly addressed South Korea in a desire to rebuild fractured relations with the offended party.

Following the normalization of Japanese-South Korean relations in 1965, Prime Minister Shiina Etsusaburo expressed Japan's deep remorse over the "unfortunate times" in East Asian history. However, beginning from the mid-1980s, tensions over Japan's war responsibility, or *sensou sekinin*, became a recurring issue in Japanese-South Korean diplomatic interaction, still fraught with distrust more than seventy years after the war. Having identified how historical issues re-emerged at the forefront of contemporary Japan-South Korea relations, this section analyzes Japan's war apology statements in order to challenge the simplistic view that Japan has never apologized for its colonial and wartime past, thus failing to follow through the acts of remembrance and reconciliation. Based on a chronological analysis of political statements and events, it explores how domestic calculations associated with identity politics and emotions may frequently result in considerable diplomatic losses.

In 1982, the textbook controversy over reported alteration of the wartime history brought about an emotional public response from South Korea, thus drawing attention to the underlying sense of distrust and suspicion at the heart of Japanese-South Korean relationship. This event, associated with the history of Korean discrimination by the Japanese, heated Korean public opinion until the extent of official remarks of regret made by Emperor Hirohito in 1984. The first official postwar visit of a Korean head of state to Japan was made upon a condition of an imperial apology, since the 1910 annexation of the Korean Peninsula had been undertaken in the name of the emperor. Upon welcoming South Korea's President Chun Doo Hwan in Tokyo, Hirohito voiced an

unprecedented remorse over the “unfortunate past” shared by both nations, the past that should never be repeated again.

In the same way, newly elected President Roh Tae Woo visited Japan six years later, and Korean authorities repeatedly asked the Emperor Akihito, who now occupied the throne, to express a word of regret and apology. In a 1990 meeting, Akihito stated, “When I think about the sufferings of the people in your country caused by our country in this unfortunate period, I cannot help but feel intense sorrow” (Yamazaki 2006, 39). Oftentimes at the center of controversy surrounding Japan-Korea relations, the Emperor has long sought to institute secure ties between Korea and Japan, a task frequently dismissed by domestic political attitudes in both countries. Notwithstanding the strict constitutional framework placed upon the Emperor’s role, in the 1990s, Akihito has voiced a number of wide-ranging statements of remorse to Asian countries for their suffering under Japanese colonial rule. At a subsequent time, many considered the imperial apologies insufficient in accepting Japan’s responsibility as a perpetrator towards the perpetrated. In the early 1990s, many associated South Korea’s quest for improved cooperation with Japan with President Roh’s pragmatic considerations of domestic political turmoil and economic gains, while Akihito’s stance on restoring relations with neighboring Korea could go deeper than mere concerns of geopolitics and reconciliation due to his Korean ancestry.

The short list of Japanese political apologies would now bring forward the so-called Kono Statement of 1993, one of the landmarks of Japanese apologies for historical aggression and colonization. Beginning from 1989 to the early 1990s, the comfort women controversy became a hotly debated subject of public attention in Japan and South Korea. Preceded by the individual stories published in the 1970s, the debate was highly intensified due to the collective lawsuit of the surviving victims that had come forward to accuse the perpetrators. As explained by Yamazaki, although the Japanese government was apologizing for a specific act of wartime aggression, “the crisis resulted not simply for the historical wrongdoing itself but from the government’s previous denials of involvement” (2006, 57). In 1991, official Tokyo reacted with several consecutive investigations in regards to the comfort women allegations, each of them accompanied by a public report and apology, which resulted in “perhaps the most eloquent and detailed official apologies for Japanese wrongdoing” (Ibid, 63).

Following Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa’s visit to Seoul where the two governments shared intense talks on the issue, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono made a statement in August 1993, establishing the Japanese government’s position in response to the lawsuit crisis and international criticism. Having acknowledged that “the then Japanese military was, directly or indirectly, involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and transfer of comfort

women”, Kono conveyed Japan’s “sincere apologies and remorse to all those who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds”. (Togo 2008, 64)

What followed next was the establishment of the Asian Women’s Fund in 1995 under the leadership of Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, an architect of the benchmark Japanese apology who accepted Japan’s national responsibility for aggression and colonial rule. The Asian Women’s Fund was founded as a means of extended atonement of the Japanese people for the wartime sexual slavery through financial restitution of the victims and the government’s expression of apology and remorse. In response to widespread criticism for soliciting the funds from the Japanese public, the Japanese government eventually agreed to bear the costs required for the fund’s operation and implementation. According to the official positioning, “the Government of Japan made great efforts to raise public awareness and gain a better understanding of the comfort women issue” (Measures Taken ... 2014).

On August 15, 1995, on the 50th anniversary of Imperial Japan’s defeat in the World War II, Prime Minister Murayama delivered a speech, commonly perceived as the hallmark of Japan’s adherence to its moral responsibility and wartime memory. The Murayama Statement came to be instrumental in synthesizing the Japanese government’s position on historical recognition and reconciliation with the offended party, inherited by subsequent cabinets. (Togo 2013). The key section of the statement goes as follows:

During a certain period in the not too distant past, *Japan, following a mistaken national policy*, advanced along the road to war, only to ensnare the Japanese people in a fateful crisis, and, through *its colonial rule and aggression*, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. In the hope that no such mistake be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of *deep remorse* and state my *heartfelt apology*. Allow me also to express my feelings of profound mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, of that history. (Togo 2013, 3; emphasis added).

As an official and unanimous decision of the cabinet, the Murayama Statement explicitly acknowledged Japan’s national responsibility for the acts of colonialism and aggression against neighboring states. In a strong, concrete expression of Japanese remorse, it voiced national willingness to advance regional cooperation based on mutual understanding and trust. Nevertheless, according to the Asan Monthly Opinion Survey conducted by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in March 2012, only 14.3% of the South Korean public have heard of the Murayama Statement, whereas the vast majority, fairly spread across various demographic and political

backgrounds, proved to be unaware of it or misunderstood its central theme (cited in Bong 2013, 56).

Given the low level of South Korea's public awareness of the Murayama Statement, dismissing its value as the centerpiece of Japan's postwar apology and historical reconciliation would lay a trap for Japanese and South Korean nations in their own negative self-fulfilling prophecies and mutual suspicion, thus neglecting bilateral efforts in remembrance and reconciliation (Bong 2013). As explained by Berger, the Murayama Statement embodies a far more outspoken acknowledgement of Japan's responsibility for the imperial aggression that was offered by most European states until after the end of the Cold War, with an exception of Germany (2013, 104). In this sense, many Japanese conservatives, arguing against Japan's isolation on the grounds of downplaying national responsibility for past aggression, might be essentially right.

Although numerous efforts have been addressing Japan's past crimes and wrongdoings up to the extent of a political apology, the official government's position remains unclear due to the apparent lack of internal consensus. Oftentimes, Japan's official apologies have been partially undone by remarks and national rituals performed by senior Japanese officials (Lind, 2008). On the 60th anniversary of Japan's Second World War surrender, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi expressed an apology for the country's past militarism in Asia: "Our country has caused tremendous damage and pain to the peoples of many countries, especially Asian countries, through colonial rule and invasion. Humbly acknowledging such facts of history, I once again reflect most deeply and offer apologies from my heart". In his official statement, he reached out directly to China and South Korea by encouraging peace, cooperation, and development within the region. He added, "I would like to forge a future-oriented relationship of cooperation based on mutual understanding and confidence with Asian countries by squarely facing up to the past and correctly understanding history". (Norimitsu 2005)

Only two days prior to the anniversary, Koizumi paid his annual visit to Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine. Beginning from 1985, Japan's prime ministerial leadership abstained from visiting the shrine on August 15 due to the obvious diplomatic sensitivity of the issue; in South Korea, this day is known as Liberation Day from Japanese rule. Although aimed to avoid public attention and further diplomatic tensions, Koizumi's gesture provoked considerable regional and international criticism and further destabilized diplomatic ties with South Korea, already strained over the 2001 history textbook controversy. When asked about the significance of his annual Yasukuni visits, Koizumi replied, "I am not visiting the shrine as a duty of prime minister, I am visiting due to my own beliefs" ("Private Citizen" Koizumi's Visits ... 2005, 2).

One may wonder what could be wrong with paying respect to those who lost their lives for their own country in a war of the past. Yet one must also address the sensitivity and consequences of such issue. As Japan's prime ministers and high-ranking officials pay reverence to the soldiers perished in the war, whether in a private or official capacity, they are most likely to remain the representatives of the Japanese nation mourning the A-class war criminals enshrined among the 2.5 million war dead. What Japanese politicians see as "mourning of dead soldiers", the regional community interprets as "justification of aggression" and "rejection of the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal" (Pollmann 2016, 126). Somewhat exaggerated, such perceptions and criticism are nevertheless expected from a nation invaded and victimized by the Japanese military in the past (China-Japan Relations ... 2005, 4).

Given the deep-rooted sensitivity surrounding the Yasukuni Shrine politics, the next section aims to explore domestic motivations behind Japan's "symbolic provocative behavior" (Ibid, 133) and disputed stance in a historical rapprochement. The argument connects structural factors determining Japanese culture of remembrance together with the topic of Japan's nationalist revival and controversial acts of individual political behavior, primarily the Yasukuni Shrine visits.

2.2 Facing the past in the logic of Japanese domestic politics

For all countries, historical interpretation remains a contested political arena; as a part of the national identity, the narrative of the past frequently determines contemporary decisions and actions, thus being subject to an emotional debate (Yamazaki, 2006, 72). The controversy surrounding the Yasukuni Shrine politics continues to be further entrenched in the Japanese-South Korean nexus of cooperation versus competition; those opposing historically controversial behavior of the Japanese political elite commonly perceive it as a sign of resurging Japanese nationalism and glorification of Japan's militaristic past. No matter how the shrine visit supporters may advocate Yasukuni as a domestic issue, it will effectively produce diplomatic and security repercussions for Japan (Smith 2013).

With regard to Japan's dichotomy of domestic constituency and foreign policy implications, Pollmann applies Robert Putnam's Two-Level Game model to suggest that as anywhere else, Japanese policymakers would want to achieve a win-set that could produce a win in two different levels simultaneously. A visit to the shrine could advance the Japanese politician's objective domestically, i.e. to retain the office position facing the institutional factors, conservative domestic constituency, and Japanese public opinion; at the same time, such gesture would significantly undermine Japan's international goal of reconciliation with the neighboring South Korea.

Conversely, a non-visit solution might result in an opposite impact. (Pollmann 2016; Putnam 1988).

Speaking of the Yasukuni politics, domestic and international criticism of Japan's failed culture of remembrance generally refer to the signs of nationalism resurging within the elements of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party that almost continuously dominates political power in Japan since 1955. "Unlike in Europe", states Kingston, "Where fringe parties tend to be the standard-bearers for controversial nationalistic sentiments [...], in Japan, the ultra-nationalistic fringe is a core constituency of the LDP" (2016, 187). In 2013, Shinzo Abe, an undisputed leader of the LDP on his track to becoming the longest-serving prime minister in Japan's postwar history, visited the Yasukuni Shrine in his official capacity as a senior government leader. On the one hand, the gesture represented a well-calculated risk, with the domestic circumstances firmly in Abe's mind, aimed at attaining a political boost for the previously ousted LDP (see Katsuyuki 2014). On the other hand, such gesture immediately provoked international criticism against whitewashing Japan's militaristic history of aggression and colonialism, notably in South Korea.

In earlier 2007, Abe openly denied Japan's government involvement in the wartime sexual slavery, in spite of an estimated 80,000 to 200,000 victims throughout Asia in the 1930s and 1940s, including South Korea (Dudden, Mizoguchi 2007, 1-2). Ironically, on the very same day, South Koreans commemorated the 1919 national protests against the Japanese colonial rule. For many observers, this leads to a greater precariousness in respect to the logic of Japanese politics that perhaps might rely on a nationalist sentiment rather than strategic course of a rational action. Yet Abe's nationalist revival does not represent the Japanese nation in its entirety. As antagonized South Korean observers refer to Abe's revisionist stance and his controversial record of wartime remembrance, it is important to realize that "the spectre of an ultranationalist turn in Japanese political life exists mainly in the dreams of Abe and his conservative supporters" (Kersten 2013).

It would be false to assume that Japan maintains a national consensus in addressing the issues of political apology and remembrance. One may not overlook Japan's domestic opposition to the Yasukuni Shrine visits and other highly politicized actions inclined to revise Japan's colonial and imperial past at an increasingly high diplomatic cost. Central political players, such as the LDP's conservative coalition partner New Komeito Party, the left-wing Japan Communist Party and Socialist Party of Japan, as well as former democratic opposition have thus far resented indoctrination of Japanese nationalism and constitutional revision. Mainstream Japanese media consistently assume a critical position towards Japan's politics of remembrance, scrutinizing recurring issues in accepting national historical responsibility.

Finally, as the Japanese public becomes more aware of the international costs that Japanese resistance to the “masochistic” view of history bears in the relationship with South Korea, the opposition grows at a steadily increasing rate. Following Abe’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in 2013, the Asahi Shimbun 2014 survey revealed that 41% of the respondents did not perceive the visit as an issue, while 46% stated he should not have gone. This is to compare with the results of the preceding survey conducted by Asahi Shinbun immediately after Koizumi’s visit to the shrine in 2006, where 49% supported Prime Minister’s gesture and only 37% opposed. (Japan Bullet 2014).

As the international opinion poses considerable challenges not only to the prospects of regional reconciliation, but for the Abe cabinet’s tenure in the following years, Prime Minister Abe is no longer likely to visit the Yasukuni Shrine in person. Instead, he might want to turn his back to the rightwing posture in favor of a pragmatic foreign policy approach and demonstrate Japan’s willingness for the regional diplomatic rapprochement, principally with South Korea.

As has been noted, South Korean observers frequently refer to Japan’s resurging nationalism and incidents of provocations by political and non-elected actors, simplistically perceived as a general absence of remorse among the Japanese nation. As a matter of fact, Japan’s postwar nationalist revival appeared as a reaction to the early 1990s threats of the post-Cold War era and the loss of national identity, not so rare for the late twentieth century international practice. Internationally, the end of “the East-West binary has undermined Japan’s identity as the democratic front against Communism in Asia without providing new structures to explain that”, and thus Japan remained an economic superpower with no political leadership on the world arena (Gerow 2000, 79).

In other words, Japanese nationalist resurgence appeared as a means of translating economic strength into political weight. In 2007, 86.5% of the Japanese maintained that Japan’s pacifist constitution had brought about Japan’s “economic miracle”, not the least facilitated by the lasting peace (Yomiuri Polling Data 2007 cited in Penney and Wakefield 2008, 540). Whereas in prewar Japan, a nationalist shade of Shintoism served to strengthen national and social unity in the face of the Japanese expansionism, it now functioned as a mobilizing drive of economic success (Schmidt 2016, 14).

In addition, the nationwide identity crisis co-existed with increasing political and security concerns over Asian economic growth and emerging China; as of 2018, Japan faces Chinese and South Korean maritime sovereignty claims and Pyongyang’s unequivocal nuclear-threat potential. This is in contrast to Germany whose political weight had consolidated through the institutionalized North-Atlantic and European integration accompanied by historical reconciliation measures,

principally between Germany and France, already in the 1950s. As Japanese nationalism and historical revisionism advanced by Abe and his conservative supporters continues to hinder Japan-South Korea cooperation, it is important to remember that Abe's Japan exists in a contrasting environment of geopolitical rivalry, which adds more complexity to the task of reconciliation with the offended party.

It is widely accepted that in 2018, the constitutional revision will likely dominate Japan's political agenda, which would grant the existing Japan Self Defense Forces constitutional recognition as a military force by 2020. Such conclusions are attributed to Japan's nationalist sentiment, the growth of which has recently secured the two-thirds Diet majority for the ruling LDP in 2017 snap elections. Observers outside of Japan frequently portray Japan's constitutional revision as a grassroots movement within the neo-nationalist political platform. In South Korea, the dominant view suggests that Abe's effort in constitutional revision introduces a potential threat to South Korea's security in the absence of trust and historical reconciliation between both nations (Cho and Shin 2017).

As of early 2017, only 41% of the Japanese agreed to the constitutional change with 50% opposing the revision (Poll ... 2017), while the constitutional revision itself remains a marginal issue, as opposed to prioritization of economic and welfare policies. Additionally, many Japanese remain cautious about the constitutional change in spite of the effort advanced by the ruling conservatives; hence, the national debate continues to be fairly split. While foreign criticism commonly hold Japan to unreasonably high standards of an apology and remembrance, Japan's pacifist identity *per se* may have served as a projection of guilt and remorse among the Japanese public, expressed less explicitly as opposed to the German history of contrition.

Having challenged the views concerning the perceived dominance of the right-wing nationalist discourse in the Japanese public, one might look into the incidents of right-wing provocations by bureaucratic and non-elected actors, frequently addressed by South Korean observers as a general absence of remorse within Japanese political leadership and public opinion.

In 2013, following Abe's remarks concerning the lack of historical evidence supporting wartime sexual slavery, Toru Hashimoto, an outspoken nationalist mayor of Osaka, articulated the military necessity of the comfort women system throughout the World War II. Unsurprisingly, this statement was followed by an immediate storm of public protest and formal condemnation from the South Korean government. Although such unapologetic figures as Hashimoto tend to remain on Japan's political fringe, they nevertheless stay in the focus of much public attention, both domestically and internationally, thus intensifying criticism that Japan's public and political

establishment have failed to come to terms with the past. Consistently with the central theme of this study, over 70% of Japanese public condemned Hashimoto's remarks as "inappropriate" and "problematic" (Polls ... 2013), while the *Japan Times* labelled the politician "a Japanese version of Trump" in regard to the shocking and offensive nature of his remarks (Johnston 2016).

As Japan's attitude towards the wartime history and remembrance remains in the spotlight, political errors, such as those of Hashimoto, are perilous in being regarded as the Japanese government's position in addressing certain parts of national history. Conversely, they willingly provoke emotional counter-attacks, labelled as anti-Japanese forces and dangerous Korean nationalism. Nonetheless, right wing nationalism does not speak for Japan and remains on the political sidelines, and to condemn the Japanese culture of remembrance because of Hashimoto's comments would only increase their populist appeal.

Whereas prewar Japan largely defined itself as a "the land of warrior", postwar Japan consistently follows the path of a "peace nation" by renouncing military build-up and geostrategic power in favor of trade and economic development (Berger 2000, 423). Having undergone such a transformation of self-image, deeply ingrained in Japan's national identity, many Japanese remain cautious about the right wing brinkmanship, pushing Japan into a confrontation. Whereas Japanese ultranationalists have indeed been brusque in their rhetoric and actions, resurgence of the right wing nationalism does not portray the objective reality, unlike many South Koreans would like to declare in reference to Japan's political, non-mainstream extremes.

Considering deeply rooted, emotional resentment towards the Japanese, many South Koreans fail to see that modern Japanese society holds entirely different values than it did in the first half of the twentieth century. Largely defined by the anti-Japanese sentiment, strategically motivated South Korean nationalism would require considerable political determination to acknowledge the recognition and remorse the Japanese have offered to the offended party. Although Japan's conservative establishment is not blameless in provoking modern South Korean antagonism, the following section discusses how South Korea's hardline anti-Japanese, emotion-based diplomacy further increases the perception gap, existing within the conflict-ridden interaction between both nations.

3. THE KOREAN PERSPECTIVE: POTENTIALS AND LIMITATIONS OF JAPAN SOUTH-KOREA RECONCILIATION

3.1 South Korean national identity: from a proactive to reactive nationalism

Since the 1965 Normalization Treaty, shared security cooperation with the United States, considerable economic interdependence in trade and investment, as well as far-reaching cultural and interpersonal exchange between both nations have further strengthened cooperation between Japan and South Korea, although nationalist sentiments and domestic calculations continue to intricate foreign policy on a bilateral level. Such clash of national identities naturally results in an emotional, rigid political response that frequently comes into play at high diplomatic cost. As will become evident, systematic nationalist biases, especially characteristic for the Korean side, generated an atmosphere of contempt and distrust, which makes compromise or concession in negotiations rather difficult, and the perspective of a rational dialogue remains too distant to be achieved (Cha 2010, 313-314).

Before drawing conclusions concerning the “diplomatic war of nationalism” between Tokyo and Seoul (Li and Moon 2010, 343), it is important to explore the genesis of modern Korean nationalism that has evolved from a defensive, proactive discourse into a self-reliant, reactionary posture triggered by Japan’s provocative behavior. Although at present, anti-Japanese sentiments do not reflect the central theme of South Korean concerns, emotional reactions to occasional Japanese provocations oftentimes intensify lingering frictions and thwart the progress of historical reconciliation.

Continuous resistance against the Japanese colonial rule and war of aggression has marked the development of Korean national identity and deep-rooted anti-Japanese sentiment in the first half of the twentieth century. In other words, the defensive posture of Korean nationalism, or “anti-Japanism” (Cha 2010, 314), emerged from more than three decades of colonial subjugation to the external aggressor, whose occupation government waged a war on Korean culture and ruthlessly exploited the nation. Following the defeat of imperial Japan in 1945, the liberated Korean Peninsula was divided into two occupation zones. In 1950, the left-right ideological divide collided

in the Korean War between the Soviet and Chinese-backed north and the United States and the United Nations-backed south, leaving an enduring imprint on Korea's post-colonial, stateless mindset of a disintegrated nation.

Staunch anti-communist, assertive rule of President Syngman Rhee marked the first decades of South Korea's nationalist rhetoric designed to establish popular legitimacy of the suppressive, unpopular authoritarian regime. Following the 1961 coup d'état, Park Chung-hee's authoritarian presidency spawned mass movements for democratic change, thus adding a new dimension to the South Korean identity in the form of a unified national consciousness (Porteux 2016, 5).

When it comes to antagonism with neighboring Japan, geopolitics of the Cold War and close proximity of the communist regimes compelled South Korean political leadership, additionally encouraged by Washington, to compromise with Tokyo irrespective of memories of the recent past. In the mid-1960s, pragmatic considerations of economic development and industrialization also gained control over South Korean anti-Japanism, thus paving the way for the 1965 rapprochement between Park Chung-hee and Japan's Prime Minister Eisaku Sato, who presided over Japan's postwar reemergence as a model of successful economic growth.

Although South Korean public remained suspicious in regards to Japanese supremacy and infiltration, strategic motives prevailed over historical grievances, and "alignment despite antagonism" (Cha 2009) became a central theme of the period concerned. In spite of occasional, emotionally charged anti-Japanese movements, Park's regime advanced South Korea's cooperation with Japan as a key economic role model and perceived the alliance more in economic rather than political terms (Park 2008, 194). Then again, one may note the significance of a political leadership as a crucial variable in the Japanese-South Korean complexity of rivalry and cooperation, when the left-wing opposition to Japan's conservative LDP partly contributed to the conclusion of the 1965 Basic Relations Treaty with South Korea. On the other hand, earlier rapprochement would remain unimaginable, given Syngman Rhee's personal bitterness towards Japan and Yoshida Shigeru, Sato's predecessor in Japan's prime ministerial office.

Subsequently, South Korea's democratic transition and economic development elevated South Korean national identity to the sense of self-confidence, thus ending the North-South Korean rivalry for political legitimacy and economic capability. At the conclusion of the Cold War, Seoul re-established diplomatic relations with the communist Soviet Union and China, set the course of co-existence with North Korea by signing the South-North Basic Agreement in 1991, and became admitted to the United Nations membership in 1992. For South Korea, such realignment of the geopolitical landscape opened a window of opportunity for suppressed historical grievances and

submerged anti-Japanism. Furthermore, political liberalization of the late 1980s brought South Korean public to the forefront of national affairs, thus forcing the political establishment to produce policies appealing to the nationalist sentiment (Rozman 2010, cited in Porteux 2016, 7). In the democratic era, historical disputes re-emerged within political elites and grassroots nationalism, hence future-oriented reconciliation has become more complicated for both South Korean and Japanese leadership in the years to follow.

As identified by Moon and Li, South Korean politics of identity gradually evolved from a proactive into reactive nationalist sentiment, systematically projected into the foreign policy agenda. Proactive nationalism of South Korean postcolonial development came as a deliberate political choice directed at preserving political and territorial integrity, fostering modern state building and economic modernization, as well as unification of a divided nation. In the post-Cold War political environment, South Korea's nationalist sentiment transformed into a spontaneous, reactive action against an "external stimuli that undermines national identity or interests, [...] fluctuates over time and across different issue areas [...] and can be amplified by the ruling political elite for domestic political purposes". (2010, 334-335)

Observers commonly associate the apology discourse between Tokyo and Seoul with the concept of high profile "visit diplomacy" (Edstrom 1999 cited in Yamazaki 2012, 33). "Whenever a high-ranking dignitary from Korea [...] made an official visit to Japan, or when a Japanese dignitary visited abroad, an apology from Japan was requested and forthcoming [...] to reaffirm the notion of Japan's history as "aggressor nation" (Ibid, 33). The first test to reconciliation efforts came in the 1990s, when critical voices in South Korea demanded that Japan genuinely comes to terms with the past and fully accepts national responsibility for its historical record as a precondition for prospective cooperation. As discussed in the previous chapter, the government in Tokyo expressed apology and remorse on the colonial aggression and the comfort women issue on behalf of the Japanese nation in 1993 and 1995 respectively. In 1998, South Korea's President Kim Dae Jung and Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi concluded the Joint Declaration of a New Japan-Republic of Korea Partnership Towards the Twenty-First Century: a milestone agreement on the future-oriented cooperation, based on mutual understanding and trust.

The South Korean political establishment has acknowledged such steps as Japan's government position in the historical debate. However, South Korean public and politicians commonly assert that the Japanese fell short of delivering a heartfelt apology due to the absence of a concrete, state-level action to conform to the principles of atonement and remembrance. Moreover, triggered by Japanese nationalist assertiveness and right-wing history distortion, South Korea's political elite frequently responds with retaliatory measures and diplomatic repercussions, reviving anti-

Japanism at the forefront of domestic and regional affairs. Here, the core argument of the study argues that the South Korean government intentionally politicizes and intensifies the historical debate, especially in reference to the extremes of Japanese neo-nationalism, as a convenient diversion from a domestic turmoil, utilizing it as a source of legitimacy and electoral advantages.

For this reason, one may look into the brief account on the Japan-South Korea diplomatic crisis of 2005, found in Moon and Li. In 2003, Roh Moo-hyun entered his presidential office with an intention to establish close ties of cooperation with Japan as Seoul's strategic partner in the progressive Northeast Asian environment. During the 2004 bilateral summit with Japan's Prime Minister Koizumi, Roh pledged to continue the efforts of reconciliation and advanced an early conclusion of the Japanese-South Korean free trade agreement, painting an optimistic picture of a bilateral, forward-looking shuttle diplomacy. Shortly after, a series of nationalist Japanese moves and controversial historical claims, explored in the previous chapter, triggered harsh voices of South Korean criticism and "led to a negative amplification of mutual distrust and suspicion, resulting in the worst crisis between the two countries since diplomatic normalization in 1965". (2010, 336-340). Ironically, both governments declared the year 2005 as the Korea-Japan Friendship Year to mark the 40th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations and prevent historical antagonism from plaguing the new era of Northeast Asian government-level dialogue.

The emotional response that followed within South Korea involved Roh's personal statement that true Japanese-South Korean reconciliation can come only on terms of correct understanding of shared history, sincere remorse and apology, contrition and remembrance. What followed next, was South Korean withdrawal of support for Japan's permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council, to which Japan retaliated by casting an opposition vote to Ban Ki-Moon's election to Secretary General of the UN. The Free Trade Agreement "became an innocent victim of the diplomatic war of nationalism", being permanently terminated at the sixth round in 2004. (Moon and Li 2010, 341-343). As bilateral foreign policy remains entrenched in the nationalist impulse, the clash of national identities frequently results in unwillingness to compromise. Involving primarily nationalist sentiments and historical grievances, reactive South Korean nationalism of the Roh administration was rather temporal, random, and loosely organized (Ibid, 352).

3.2 Japan-South Korea strategic relations: future reconciliation challenges

In spite of genuine efforts and diplomatic breakthroughs, most recent developments continue to demonstrate a wide gap over unresolved historical animosity, existing within the Japan-South Korea relationship. As noted by Snyder, “With the near-simultaneous elections of Prime Minister Abe and President Park Geun-hye in December of 2012, the Japan–South Korea relationship went from bad to worse” (2015), reinvigorating identity politics as the central theme of Northeast Asian diplomacy. Park’s political campaign focused on the need for historical reconciliation, as the nationalist sentiment continue to run through South Korean media and society, in contrast to Shinzo Abe’s hawkishness in historical revisionism and nationalist thinking.

Subsequently, both governments have seemed to achieve an agreement over the comfort women issue in 2015, as Japan has agreed to apologize and contribute 1 billion yen to the South Korean government’s fund supporting the surviving victims. Nevertheless, tensions continue to impede the prospects of a “final and irreversible” improvement, while critical voices within South Korean civic groups and media commonly portray the comfort women deal as trading the dignity of living victims for a short sighted geopolitical gain (meaning, in fact, Northeast Asian security dynamics) (Panda 2017). Should the bilateral state-level dialogue produce a consensus over the historical dispute, another challenge faced by the South Korean leadership would be associated with the government’s ability to bring about the national support for reconciliation with the Japanese.

As of recently, South Korea’s political turmoil and unfavorable public discourse cast doubts on the Japanese-South Korean resilience over the 2015 agreement, and evidence suggests South Korea is unlikely to cease pressuring the Japanese government to deliver a heartfelt apology any time in the near future. This is not to mention mass and diplomatic repercussions caused by the comfort women memorials remaining in a close proximity to the Japanese diplomatic missions in Seoul and Busan, as well as recurring clashes over the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute.

When it comes to a political apology, levels of threat perception within Japan-South Korea relations remain significantly high, as the issues of apologies and denials by the Japanese endure in South Korean consciousness (Lind 2002 cited in Bong 2013, 49). Regardless of both government’s pledge to set aside the long-standing diplomatic antagonism “finally and irreversibly”, such assurance falls short of universal public approval in South Korea. From the South Korean perspective, the Japanese have failed in delivering an adequate apology for Japan’s national behavior in the past, a message repeatedly conveyed to Japan by South Korean political leaders and public. In addition, South Korea’s political elite would be even more likely to initiate

a diplomatic dispute with the Japanese in order to divert public attention from a domestic turmoil to unresolved historical grievances and territorial controversies.

Conversely, as Japanese gestures of remembrance and reconciliation continue to face unceasing backlash from South Korea, it leads to indicate that contrition only increases nationalistic mobilization against the “masochistic” view of national history, while enduring frustration over South Korea’s attempts to hold Japan continually responsible for its historical record has manifested itself as the “avoidance phenomenon” (Cha 2000, 313). On many occasions, the Japanese political establishment has offered national regret and apology for Japan’s historical record of colonialism and aggression, often exploited and overly politicized by the South Korean counterpart. Evidence demonstrates how Japan’s neo-nationalist discourse had emerged not the least from frustration and fatigue over repeated demands of remorse; from Japanese politicians, it requires much effort and skill to justify an unpleasant and demeaning exercise of apology to its own constituency.

Thus far, renewed hostilities seem to appear particularly from the public pressure and media reports, and one may only speculate about the future impact of reportedly intensifying anti-Japanese sentiment under the Moon Jae-in administration. As of 2017, Moon and Abe found a common ground in deterring North Korean belligerence, an encouraging trend in a bilateral cooperative framework, political and security costs of which both leaders understand irrespective of the nationalist impulse. In the foreseeable future, the recent turning point in dealing with Kim Jong-un’s regime makes a long-term Japanese-South Korean cooperation central to sustaining Northeast Asia’s peace and security, in spite of deep-rooted grievances over the colonial past. In addition, regional security dimension includes opportunities for an expanded cooperation between Japan, South Korea, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in addressing shared security challenges. Under these circumstances, managing unresolved historical tensions, systematically impeding state’s foreign policy, can be in the national interest; in addition, political efforts to address the historical issues can contribute to defusing the nationalist sentiment, frequently imposing hurdles on the exercise of political judgment (Berger 2013, 104).

CONCLUSION: LESSONS FOR JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA

With regard to coming to terms with the past, the process of reconciliation in Northeast Asia does not seem to come near a convincing progress, being commonly described as contentious rather than cooperative. The study proposes several findings accounting for the enduring tensions surrounding fraught Japanese-South Korean relations. The argument centers on the Japanese invasion and colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula prior to 1945, as well as present means of addressing Japan's modern history where Japan and South Korea parted ways in the early 1990s.

Having examined history, rhetoric, and motivations behind Japan's apology discourse since the end of the 1980s, the research has challenged the widespread assumption that Japan never atoned for the policy of colonization and aggression, thus failing to come to terms with the past. While critical voices juxtapose the German and the Japanese models of remembrance and reconciliation, it would be false to suggest that the Japanese attitude towards historical wrongs had not leaned towards the appropriate direction.

While this is the case, reconciliation might also have a potential of producing the opposite effects, hindering close, future-oriented cooperation between Japan and South Korea. Korea's relentless criticism and repeated demands for the Japanese apology eventually resulted in the Japanese right-wing argument of a self-demeaning, masochistic view of national history, conversely perceived by the South Koreans as an attempt of whitewashing Japan's historical record and aggression. Although it does not mean that Japan has to continue apologizing for the past, Japanese right wing, nation-centered attempts to advocate the wartime behavior are sending the wrong message to the offended party, willingly or unwillingly drifting away from the prospects of deeper cooperation. In other words, raising historical controversy through the lens of Japan's right wing nationalism does not serve Japan's strategic interests within the region, and the Japanese political elite could learn to leave with it.

This leads to the problem of Japan's and South Korea's foreign policy towards one another. Entangled in domestic circumstances and electoral gains, the discord between identity politics comes with high diplomatic losses in the government-level dialogue. As South Korea's anti-

Japanese sentiment has evolved from politics into an identity, it came into existence as a convenient strategy for managing internal circumstances. Having suffered from the enormous stresses of the colonial rule, state building within a disintegrated nation, and rapid economic modernization, South Koreans found themselves increasingly anti-Japanese, portraying Japan as an unrepentant military colonialist and competitor for economic success. Previously entrapped in a contrasting geopolitical space, Seoul no longer has to compete against North Korea in spite of a strong ideological division, while the historical controversy might bring democratic South Korea and authoritarian China closer in the area of contention with the Japanese.

Similarly, Japanese politicians frequently encounter a major dilemma in the relation between domestic and international policymaking, vividly illustrated by Putnam's Two-Level Game in respect of the Yasukuni Shrine visits. By paying a visit to the shrine, Japanese leaders trigger immediate criticism from South Korea; however, not paying the tribute would cost the LDP its reliance on conservative electorate. In addition, Japan's leadership has to account for self-demeaning exercise of apology to domestic constituents; hence, domestic political considerations prevail over rational foreign policy strategies, and the nationalist sentiment remains at the forefront of Northeast Asia's conflict-ridden diplomacy.

All of the above suggests that domestic pressures appealing to the nationalist impulse and identity politics create considerable hurdles to the prospects of finding a common ground on the Japanese and South Korean divergent perspectives. Historical hostilities separating both nations might have subdued in the recent past, and South Korea's sense of anti-Japanism is not necessarily on the rise. Nonetheless, diplomacy with Japan remains a highly sensitive political issue for South Korea, and recurring provocations by Japanese political and non-elected actors, simplistically perceived as a general absence of remorse among the Japanese nation, cast a shadow on the progress attained in Japan's reconciliation with Seoul. Given the fraught political atmosphere surrounding Japan-South Korea relations, neither Japanese, nor South Korean political establishment enjoys sufficient support to advocate stronger ties with one another. In the foreseeable future, it would require true statesmanship and progressive vision to withstand nationalistic pressures and demonstrate a top-level commitment to reconciliation for both the perpetrator and the offended party.

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