

MORAL LEVERAGE AS A MEANS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE CASE OF JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA

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1. INTRODUCTION

The history of the relationship between Japan and South Korea is long and complicated. Even today, Japan's relations with South Korea can be seen as an extreme example of Japanese relations with other Asian countries. Traditional theories such as found in the Realist or Interdependence schools can to some extent explain how their relationship operates yet, there remain facets which point to the need for reconsideration of this. Specifically, despite the stronger economic position of Japan vis-à-vis South Korea, deftly using historically sensitive issues, this country has demonstrated the ability to use moral leverage over Japan and in turn exert influence that draws into question the nature of its power base. The aim here is to explain what this powerbase is, how South Korea has and continues to employ it and what the implications are for Japanese foreign policy.

In economic terms, the dominant issue in consideration of Japan's role in Asia, South Korea clearly appears to be following Japan as a role model. It has followed Japan's economic success to become the second Asian member of OECD, and both countries' economies are closely linked. It has even followed Japan's movements in respect to its Asian identity: just as the Japanese have for a long time followed the "Leave Asia, Enter Europe" slogan and considered Japan as different from the rest of Asia, but recently turned around to "Enter Asia", South Korea has also only in recent years started to discover common features with Asia, as a South Korean observer notes, so that both countries suddenly find themselves side by side heading toward Asia (*Gaikō Forum* 1/1994: 27).

On the other hand, on the international stage, South Korea is, together with China and North Korea, most critical of Japan in regards to the Japanese treatment of its historical legacy. Frequently, South Korean politicians and media draw attention to movements in Japan that they interpret as signs of resurgent nationalism, militarism, or striving for regional dominance. This paper suggests that South Korea has used these issues successfully to increase its own position versus Japan and to achieve other diplomatic aims.

These two aspects of the Japanese-South Korean relationship, South Korea following the Japanese successes closely and using moral issues to impede Japan from taking on a greater leadership role, are symptomatic of the balance between admiration and animosity that Japan encounters in Asia. Although Japan's failure to come to terms with its past is frequently mentioned as an obstacle to a greater Japanese role in the region and in the world (*e.g.* FUNABASHI 1994: 19; LEITENBERG 1996: 37–39), neither Realist nor Interdependence theories recognize the importance of such 'soft' issues in international relations. Considering Japan's economic might and its defence expenditure compared to Korea, these theories cannot explain why South Korea should have any influence over Japan. The only area in which South Korea is superior to Japan is what may be called moral leverage. The Japanese-South Korean relationship suggests that moral leverage is a factor of similar importance as military and economic capacity in international relations and can be used as a base from which to exert power in other areas as well.

Theoretical examinations of moral leverage as a 'soft' base of power are scarce. This paper argues that moral leverage can be considered similar to the concept of prestige as used by traditional theories of international relations. When prestige is described by scholars as a major goal of states, this usually means prestige based on military and economic capacity. In this understanding, prestige simply becomes a "reputation for [military or economic] power" (GILPIN 1981: 31) and can be maintained only by avoiding weakness or any suspicion of a "failure of will" (DORE 1975: 203; HOLSTI 1977: 149). Yet, international prestige can also be based on legitimacy and moral authority, provided there is a common understanding between the nations concerned as to what constitutes moral authority. HALL (1997) cites medieval Europe as a system in which a common culture provided for such understanding. It can be argued that even today the rules and norms of international society sufficiently define what is 'right' and 'wrong', and that these rules are frequently followed by states (BULL 1977: 48; FRANCK 1990: 196). If such an understanding exists, a nation's prestige will be ranked in accordance with it. The argument here is that moral leverage can be used as a base for power akin to 'traditional' prestige, as South Korea's influence over Japan demonstrates.

In order to demonstrate this impact of moral leverage in international relations, this paper outlines the relationship between Japan and South Korea and shows how it has been affected by historical issues that tarnish Japan's international reputation. Japanese efforts to maintain or increase its relative prestige will also be addressed.

2. THE UNRESOLVED PAST: JAPAN AND KOREA AFTER 1945

Korea came under Japanese control in the Russo-Japanese war and was officially annexed in 1910. Different from most other colonies, it was envisioned that Korea was to be completely Japanized. Koreans were not only taught Japanese but also forced to take on Japanese names and were drafted into the military and labour service during the Pacific War. A still popular Japanese opinion is that the Koreans actually *wanted* to be Japanese and that the annexation of Korea was carried out in mutual understanding. Even Prime Minister Murayama of the Social Democratic Party asserted in the Diet in October 1995 that the Treaty of the Annexation of Korea, signed in 1910¹, is regarded as legal by the Japanese government (*Nikkei Weekly* 16.10.1995: 4). The Korean position is that it was forced upon Korea by Japan and thus has been null and void from the beginning (*The Joong-Ang Daily News* 14.10.1995; *Akahata* 2.-4.10.1986). So-called *bōgen*, unapologetic remarks by Japanese politicians, regularly upset relations between the two countries. Although they are usually made in an informal setting and not meant for quotation, they often find their way into the popular press and become widely known. Koreans consider them as the true feelings of the politicians, in contrast to the formal statements, which they see as only being empty words. Such *bōgen* include for example the remark made by Okuno Seisuke, Director of the Land Agency, in April 1988, that, in world history, most colonisers were Western countries and it is not fair to blame only the Japanese for war and colonialism. In May 1990, the then LDP general-secretary Ōzawa Ichirō said that the mere fact that, in present times, Japan co-operated with Korea already showed its efforts to make amends for its past, and that further prostration certainly was not necessary (*Asahi Shinbun* 7.5.1994: 7). In 1994, several members of the Murayama Cabinet denied that Japanese actions in the Pacific War could be considered a war of aggression, which was by then a rather established government viewpoint (*Asahi Shinbun* 14.11.1995: 2). Other problematic statements include rather frequent denials of the Nanjing massacre in China by Japanese politicians, and in recent years, the issue of the so-called “military comfort

¹ When the Treaty of the Annexation of Korea was signed on 22 August 1910, Korea was already under *de facto* Japanese control. As early as 1905, the Japanese military, after its victory over Russia, had forced upon Korea the Protectorate Treaty of 17 November 1905. A detailed account of the Korean position can be found in LEE Ki-Baik (1984: 309–313).

women" (*jūgun ianfu*), which will be discussed in detail below, have become major points of debate.

Japanese apologies and measures to make good for the suffering caused to South Korea during the colonial rule, on the other hand, have been somewhat limited. Immediately after the War, Japanese official statements never indicated any remorse for the past. Only in the past two decades has this lack of expressed remorse become a heated topic between Japan and South Korea, and appears to command greater attention in their diplomatic relations than trade, military or territory related frictions. Following a diplomatic row with China and South Korea caused by the use of the words "invasion" (*shinryaku*) and "advance" (*shinshutsu*) in Japanese school textbooks in 1982 (ORTMANN-SUZUKI 1989), the Japanese Ministry of Education revised the regulations for authorisation of history textbooks and ordered that other countries' standpoints should be considered (*Japanese Viewpoints: Question 42*). Following revisions introduced more liberal standards, gradually introducing slightly more explicit descriptions in textbooks (ŌTAKE 1994: 23), but these tendencies have in recent years again been challenged by groups calling for more patriotic textbooks.

When Emperor Hirohito said in 1984 to South Korean President Chun that the past was "regrettable" (*ikan*), many LDP politicians and Foreign Ministry officials tended to regard that as a sophisticated form of apology, given the inability of the Emperor to make outright political statements. Most Koreans, however, thought it was dishonest and evasive and consequently exacted satisfaction (BRIDGES 1993: 63). Since then, virtually every Japanese politician visiting Asian countries has made apologetic statements in one form or another, indicating their "deep reflection" (*fukai hansei*) and "personal feelings" (*ikan, owabi*). During visits of Asian countries in May 1991 and January 1992, the LDP Prime Ministers Kaifu and Miyazawa expressed respectively their "deep reflection" and regret over Japan's deeds of the past and the suffering inflicted on the many people in the Asia-Pacific region (*Asahi Shinbun* 16.8.1995: 2).

As the first prime minister of a non-LDP government since the foundation of the LDP, Hosokawa Morihiro stated on 15 August 1993, the anniversary of the end of the War, that Japan had waged a war of aggression. This was the first time that a prime minister officially apologised for the aggressive behaviour of Japan, and since then, this notion has become rather a standard position of the government. In August 1994 and 1995, the first socialist prime minister since 1947, Murayama, expressed his deep reflection and heartfelt apology about the Japanese aggression in their colonisation of Korea, and the resulting suffering inflicted on many people (*Asahi Shinbun* 16.8.1995: 2). Prime Minister Hashimoto in September 1997

apologised to China for Japan's wartime aggression and visited a museum in Shenyang dedicated to the Manchurian Incident² (*Asahi Evening News* 6.9.1997: 1).

More substantive efforts towards reconciliation were made when the Socialist-led Murayama government launched the "Peace, Friendship and Exchange Initiative" in August 1994 to "manifest feelings of remorse" vis-à-vis Asian countries. Over 10 years, 100 billion Yen have been allocated to a range of research projects on the history of the peoples and countries of Asia, and academic, youth, and grassroots exchange programmes (MENDL 1995: 68; *Japanese Viewpoints*: Question 39). A Korean observer commented:

The program provides young people in Asia with opportunities to learn the Japanese spirit of frugality and discipline. It also provides the Japanese people with an opportunity to reduce any concern and mistrust that neighbours might have about Japan (SHIN 1994: 14)

The position the Japanese government displays in these issues appears reluctant and hesitant, considering that Japan not only did commit atrocities, but also lost the war *and* is now by far the most prosperous nation in the region. With the German precedent of more generous compensation payments, it is not surprising that the neighbours turn bitter. While the Japanese government tends to be content with the slow pace achieved so far, the Korean side demands more than timid gestures. It appears that most outside observers agree with them that a clearer signal is needed to get over the past once and for all (GLAUBITZ 1994: 91; BURUMA 1994).

Japan has never made formal reparation or compensation payments to its Asian neighbours. However, many Japanese, like the former Asia Division director in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IKEDA Tadashi (1994: 59), like to point to payments made to Asian countries shortly after the War when they are confronted with new compensation demands by individual victims (*Japanese Viewpoints*: Question 40). After the War, Japan had offered economic aid packages in accordance with the San Francisco Peace Treaty and various bilateral treaties. These payments and credits, usually called "independence congratulation fund" or just "economic aid" rather than "compensation", were meant as substitutes for compensation payments. Between 1955 and 1976, Japan paid a total of about \$1.7 billion to

² On 18 September 1931, the Japanese Kwantung Army, stationed in Manchuria, where Japan supported a puppet regime of warlord Chang Hsueh-Liang against Chinese nationalists, plotted a fake attack on a railway line and "in response" started to occupy Manchuria, thus beginning the war against China. See BEASLEY (1990: 169–175).

11 countries, including, for example, Burma, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam (MASUDA and KIMURA 1995: 150–151; *Nikkei Weekly* 19.8.1996: 3). None of these treaties explicitly awarded the money as compensation or reparation payments, but rather merely as economic aid. They did include the additional clause that by virtue of accepting this economic aid, any right to make claims for further compensation was forfeited. The prevailing Japanese position is that those aid packages sufficiently indicate apology, without any need to do so in more explicit terms.

It was later often criticised that large parts of that aid benefited Japanese companies, which exported to those countries, rather than the receiving countries' economies. In addition, the payments were made bilaterally to mostly rather autocratic governments, and most Asian countries after the War were not in a sufficiently stable domestic situation to press their claims against Japan. In the case of South Korea, the Normalization Treaty in 1965 was signed with the military regime of President Park against fierce opposition in both countries, but economic needs forced South Korea to accept Japan's conditions. Before its division, the southern part of the Korean peninsula was a predominantly agricultural area, while industry sprang up in the north because of its rich natural resources. This was still true after the division of Korea, and in fact, until the 1960s North Korea was economically superior to the south. Only under President Park's military regime did South Korea follow a rigid course of industrialisation and modernisation patterned after the Japanese model. Different from the vehement anti-Japanese sentiment of the first president, Syngman Rhee, the leaders of the following Park and Chun regimes were basically pro-Japanese and often Japanese-educated. They were familiar with Japan, and willing to copy the already visible success of Japan (SEJIMA 1995: 420).

For this, they needed large amounts of capital, and thus Japan and South Korea finally concluded this long negotiated Peace Treaty, in which Japan gave \$500 million in economic assistance and a further \$300 million in private loans to South Korea, about one third of Japan's total compensation payments to Asian countries. In exchange, South Korea gave up all further claims on compensation (MASUDA and KIMURA 1995: 151, 162; AHN 1993: 265). The government used the capital to improve the infrastructure and promote economic development, rather than giving direct compensation to the victims, so that most Koreans feel they were never directly compensated. While the Japanese government insists that all compensation claims have already been dealt with in this Treaty, the dissatisfaction of individual victims has recently been gaining a stronger voice with the increasing prosperity and democratisation of South Korea. Additionally, many Koreans feel a bitterness toward Japan because Korea was divided as a result

of the Second World War, while Japan, the aggressor, remained united and prospered.

All these issues remain a major obstacle in Japanese-South Korean relations, and most South Koreans regard history as the most important influence on their bilateral relations. There is the prevalent feeling among Koreans that Japan has not sufficiently dealt with its past. A South Korean political campaigner of the opposition was asked to comment freely on relations with Japan and started with the words "Then I want to talk about past history",³ and a government expert on Japan said that the most important factor in Japanese-South Korean relations was prestige and national sentiment related to their historical experiences⁴.

Japanese policy-makers are generally aware of the importance these issues have, but the typical Japanese government approach is not to stir them up, hoping that they will gradually fade away. In contrast to the Korean insistence that the history issue must be solved before relations can seriously improve and before Japan can take on any major regional role (KIM 1994: 537)⁵, Japanese government officials often argue that it is impossible to satisfy Korean demands because history cannot be undone, that all compensation claims have been waived in bilateral treaties, and that no country except Germany has ever paid individual compensation. Thus, they say, the historical problems cannot be solved by the Japanese side, and the remaining option is to solve other, more concrete problems first and leave the emotional issues aside⁶.

Yet, as will be seen, a close analysis of Japanese-Korean relations shows that these issues can never be completely ignored. Even if they are not explicitly mentioned, they are present in the background of other issues, even economic ones. Japanese policy makers may not be too eager to mention them, but it is suggested here that their Korean counterparts are willing to do so to advance their position on other issues. Thus, the historical legacy greatly affects other, superficially unrelated issues. South Korea has employed the history issue as one way of exercising its moral leverage.

³ KIM Sei-Ung in an interview on 13.2.1997 in Seoul.

⁴ SHIN Hee-Suk in an interview on 14.2.1997 in Seoul.

⁵ LEE Ju-Heum in an interview on 13.2.1997 in Seoul.

⁶ E.g. KAKIZAWA Kōji in an interview on 28.1.1997 in Tōkyō and OKONOGI Masao in an interview on 7.11.1996 in Tōkyō.

3. JAPANESE-KOREAN RELATIONS IN THE 1990S

Today, the relationship between Japan and South Korea appears to be dominated by their economic positions in Asia. While being most critical of Japan, South Korea has also been the closest follower of the Japanese path to economic success. It was this strategy of copying the Japanese success that has made South Korea in turn a model for other Asian countries. South Korea has followed the Japanese model closely by giving preferential treatment to large industrial conglomerates (*chaebol*, the Korean version of Japanese *zaibatsu*). These large conglomerates were also able to build up an export-led industry under government guidance (NAGANO 1996: 135–136). To sustain this economy, South Korea imported not only the Japanese system, but also Japanese goods, particularly machinery and superior technology needed to increase competitiveness in global markets. In the 1980s, when the phenomenal economic growth which had started in the 1960s and 70s became quite obvious with growth rates higher than 10%, South Korea was admired as one of the “Little Tigers”. The growth gradually slowed down in the 1990s, before it was hit by the Asian economic crisis, but by then the South Korean economy had become the second largest in the region⁷. In 1996/7 South Korea gained a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the first time (MOFA 1997: 368). In 1995, the South Korean GDP per capita crossed the psychologically important \$10,000 threshold (MOFA 1997: 368). Furthermore, in 1996 it was admitted to the OECD, which greatly bolstered South Korean self-confidence. Even the enormous IMF bailout fund of \$57 billion for South Korea’s troubled economy in December 1997 demonstrated the international importance that it has gained (*NAPSNet Daily Report* 5.12.1997: II.2.).

Thus, the South Korean economy expanded rapidly in the postwar period, and although South Korea started off later than Japan, it is already a close competitor. On the other hand, it continues to depend heavily on Japanese imports. For Japan, on the other hand, South Korea is only a minor trade partner in spite of the geographical and cultural proximity⁸. South Korea has had a trade deficit with Japan even when its total trade balance was positive in the late 1980s. In 1996, it amounted to about \$15

⁷ South Korea’s annual GNP growth rate was about 9% in 1990 and 1991. It fell to about 5% in 1992 and 1993, but then climbed back to 8.6% in 1994, 8.9% in 1995 and 7.1% in 1996. Its per capita GNP reached the \$10,000 mark in 1995 (KEIZAI KIKAKUCHŌ 1997: 298–302).

⁸ In 1995, 24.1% of total ROK imports were from Japan, and 13.6% of total exports were destined for Japan (KOREA STATISTICAL YEARBOOK 1996: 310–311; TANINO 1988: 349). In 1994, 4.9% of Japan’s total imports were from ROK, and 6.2% of total exports were destined for ROK (KEIZAI KŌHŌ CENTER 1996: 54).

billion, accounting for half of South Korea's total trade deficit (KOREA STATISTICAL YEARBOOK 1996: 310–311).

Compared to other Asian countries, South Korea's conditions in the 1960s and 1970s were more favourable to copy the Japanese economic success. South Korea is not only larger than Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, but geographical proximity, historical connections, and cultural similarities to Japan have all made it easier for Korea to copy the Japanese model. In addition, the generation which initiated economic development patterned after the Japanese model were raised during the Japanese colonial period and thus spoke Japanese, which certainly facilitated the interaction with Japan. Yet the other Newly Industrializing Economies (NIEs) and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries followed in the South Korean footsteps, and since the end of the Cold War even Vietnam and China have learned from other Asian countries' economic successes (NAGANO 1996: 131). This has made Asia one of the major growth regions in the world, subsequently turning Japan's – and the West's – attention to Asia. Japanese politicians now say that the way to the recent economic success of the Asia-Pacific region is a new model for the world, and have accordingly made the Asia-Pacific⁹ one of Japan's main focuses of diplomacy (IKEDA 1996: 4). South Korea may have a special forerunner status in this new Asian economy, and it may be regarded as a typical example for Asia.

4. KEY ISSUES IN JAPANESE-KOREAN RELATIONS

In order to demonstrate the interaction between various issues in Japan-South Korean relations and the use of moral leverage by South Korea, several central issues in contemporary Japanese-Korean relations will now be examined. These are the "comfort women" issue in the area of diplomatic status, the trade relationship in the economic area, and the question of Korean unification in the area of security.

4.1. Military Comfort Women

One issue in Japanese-Korean relations which has recently gained worldwide attention is that of the "military comfort women". They were forced prostitutes who worked in so-called "comfort stations" (*jūgun iansho*) for

⁹ Note that Japanese statements usually refer to the "Asia-Pacific", thus including the US, rather than speaking of Asia alone.

the Japanese army, mainly at the Chinese and Southeast Asian front lines. The stations were first set up under direct military control in Shanghai in 1932, as a means of preventing further incidents of rape. General Okamura explicitly mentioned in his notes that he was the first to set up the “comfort women” system with women recruited from Nagasaki Prefecture when he was an officer in Shanghai (INABA 1970: 302; HICKS 1995: 19). Recruitment, as well as operation of the comfort stations, seems to have been carried out largely by civilian entrepreneurs, who were often Korean collaborators; though, in many cases the military was apparently directly involved (HOWARD 1995: 19, 46, 65, 81; SENDA 1984: 72–76). The total number of “comfort women” has been estimated at about 100,000–200,000, or possibly even more, and about 80% of them, depending on the region, are thought to have been Koreans (HOWARD 1995: 16; HICKS 1995: xviii). SONE claims that the military authorities sought to reach a ratio of one woman per 40 soldiers, although they may not have been successful in reaching this ratio at all stations (1988: 233–234).

The fact that such a system existed was not completely unknown through the postwar period, but it was rarely mentioned until a campaign, started in 1991, actively sought survivors and a South Korean woman publicly stated that she had been a “comfort woman”. More Korean women followed her example, and in December 1991, they launched a law suit demanding compensation from the Japanese government. In 1992, a Filipino woman also responded to the campaign, followed by over 160 testimonies by Filipino “comfort women” and a separate Filipina law suit against the Japanese government (CALICA and SANCHO 1993: 2, 210–211; *Asahi Evening News* 20.8.1997: 3). Since then, several hundred women have come out as former “comfort women”, and several law suits demanding compensation from the Japanese government have been launched.

The Japanese government has continuously rejected these claims but in 1995 decided to set up a private *Asian Women’s Fund* to collect donations from the public to pay compensation to former “comfort women” (*Japanese Viewpoints*: Question 40). It agreed to support the fund logistically and is believed to have spent about \$4.6 million on this task during the first year alone (*Asiaweek* 7.6.1996). However, the fund suffered not only from a tepid response to its call for donations, but was also not successful in persuading many prospective recipients to accept the money. Although a few individual women were willing to take it, their support organisations generally rejected it as a cheap substitute for formal government compensation (*CND nm News Watch* 28.3.1996; *Nikkei Weekly* 19.8.1996: 3). In August 1996, Prime Minister Hashimoto hesitatingly followed his predecessor Murayama’s plan to send letters to about 300 former comfort women, which included, according to a provisional translation, his “sincere apol-

ogies" (*owabi*) and "personal feelings" (*fukai hansei*) (SWB 15.8.1996: E/1). Critics say, however, that the actual text that reached the women only included the word "excuse", and that it was not written in the Prime Minister's official capacity¹⁰. The fund was even criticised by some of its initiators and supporters, such as Miki Mutsuko, the widow of the former Prime Minister Miki Takeo, who resigned after only a few months as chairwoman having failed to gain sufficient government support for this project (ASAHI SHINBUN 1997: 259). Payment of the money actually started in January 1997 with a private ceremony for 7 Korean women who had accepted it. This was followed by harsh protests by media and support groups (*Asahi Evening News* 16.1.1997: 4; *Nikkei Net* 16.1.1997).

In this context, it has to be mentioned that a special report issued by a UN conference on human rights in 1996 urged the Japanese government to pay individual compensation to the former "comfort women" (ASAHI SHINBUN 1997: 76). Such a conference may not be a particularly powerful authority, but for Japan with its high regard for the United Nations and a history of impeccable compliance with international rules such a reproof can be interpreted as a considerable blow to its legitimacy (GONG 1984: 164–200; DORE 1975; NETTL and ROBERTSON 1968: 138). By taking this issue onto the international stage, the Korean side has been successful in increasing its prestige further and deteriorating that of Japan.

A similar problem is that of forced labourers, drafted during the War primarily from Korea to work in Japanese mines, factories, and the construction of subterranean shelters. After the War, they lost their Japanese citizenship and thus all claims to pensions or compensation. In December 1997, a claim for compensation and unpaid wages by a Korean forced labourer injured in the Nagasaki atomic bombing was rejected by the Nagasaki District Court (*Asahi Evening News* 3.12.1997: 3), and a group of survivors of the "Hanaoka Incident", in which over one hundred Chinese forced labourers were tortured to death in 1945, lost also at the District court level (*Asahi Evening News* 11.12.1997: 3; BURUMA 1994: 275–277). A claim by a group of Taiwanese soldiers who served in the Japanese Imperial Army had already been rejected by the Supreme Court in 1989¹¹. Several law suits are still pending.

Koreans had been coming to work or study in Japan before the War, which had brought the number of resident Koreans to about 550,000 in 1937, but the initiation of a draft plan in 1939 caused the number of Koreans living in Japan to swell to about 2.4 million in 1945 (BRIDGES 1993: 119–120). Of these, about 1.5 million had been forcibly drafted, and most of

¹⁰ MAEDA Akira in an interview on 28.11.1997 in Tōkyō.

¹¹ MAEDA Akira in an interview on 28.11.1997 in Tōkyō.

them returned to Korea after the War. About one million returned immediately after the war, about 500,000 were repatriated to South Korea in the early 1950s, and about 85,000 to North Korea during the 1960s, but a Korean minority has remained permanently in Japan. Its size remains relatively stable, with close to 600,000 permanent Korean residents in 1952, and 640,000 in 1993. Recently, their numbers have been supplemented by about 40,000 non-permanent Korean residents, mostly businessmen and students from South Korea. Their affiliation to either North or South Korea has changed over the years. An allied study in 1946 found that only 2% wanted to return to North Korea, reasons for which were apparently based on origin rather than ideology. Yet, although the majority of resident Koreans had originally come from the southern part of Korea, in 1950 85% felt closer to North than South Korea. By the 1970s, however, the pattern of affiliation had shifted to a larger percentage of Korean residents identifying with the South (NAGANO 1995: 1–6, 10; IWAMOTO 1997: 51–52).

4.2. Market Access in South Korea

The distinct style of the development of the South Korean economy resulted in a Korean dependence on Japanese imports. In Korea, this dependence and the South Korean companies' difficulties to export to Japan are often attributed to the closed Japanese market and the Japanese reluctance to transfer more technology. The South Korean government has reacted strongly to the "invisible barriers" of the Japanese market, and reduced the volume of imports from Japan by banning a number of these products¹². These goods are listed on an "index of articles subject to import diversification" (*yunyūsaki takakuka hinmoku*), which practically means that their import from Japan is prohibited. These quite visible barriers have made the Korean market by far the more closed of the two. Yet, few people apart from some specialists in both countries are aware of this fact, and Japan has not tried to publicly challenge South Korean criticisms by demonstrating them to be unfounded.

Why, then, is South Korea permitted to criticise Japan for the trade imbalance which is essentially its own fault, as even Korean experts acknowledge? It is suggested here that Japan is not in a position to accuse South Korea, even if the criticism should be justified, because South Korea has often enough demonstrated that it will respond by criticising Japan's past.

¹²LEE Ju-Heum, Japan Division Director in the ROK Foreign Ministry, described them as "a few Japanese products" in an interview on 13.2.1997.

South Korea has successfully depicted itself as a victim of Japanese aggression and thus increased its moral leverage over Japan. Japan, with all its economic superiority, could not force South Korea to open its markets, but instead had to bear South Korea's criticism¹³.

4.3. Korean Unification

Another issue which demonstrates the surprisingly strong position South Korea holds in its relationship with Japan is the security factor related to Korean unification and the new geostrategic order in Asia. The end of the Cold War has already led to changes in the regional order, but the rearrangement will only be complete once the situation on the Korean peninsula is decided. Unification of Korea has become more likely and is in principle not questioned by most observers, although the estimates for the time frame vary from "very soon" to "in a few decades". In fact, the enthusiasm for unification sparked by the unification of Germany in 1990 has gradually waned away even in South Korea. The South Korean government has been reluctant to push unification talks forward, and the new president, former dissident Kim Dae-Jung, stated that South Korea, itself in an economic crisis, could not shoulder the economic burden of a sudden unification but should rather try to support North Korea with massive food aid to prevent a collapse of the North Korean regime (*NAPSNet Daily Report* 12.12.1997: II.1.; 23.3.1998: II.2.). Ordinary people, a few years ago firm supporters of unification as soon as possible, have become increasingly afraid of the potential economic impact of unification on their lifestyle (*NAPSNet Daily Report* 4.9.1997: I.6.)¹⁴.

Unification would likely be a strategic shock to the rest of the region as well, because a unified Korea would have to define its position between China, the US and Japan. This, in turn, poses the question about the future of US troops in South Korea (MANNING 1997). China, the rising power in Asia, apparently does not welcome the prospect of an expanded South Ko-

¹³ Liberalisation of South Korean markets has started not under Japanese, but only under international pressure, as South Korea became more active in the international trading system and eager to join the OECD (which it did in December 1996). Then, the import diversification list was gradually shortened and finally abolished altogether (JETRO 1996: 186; LEE Doowon 1996: 40).

¹⁴ HAN Taejoon (Chung-Ang University, Seoul), in a presentation on the cost of Korean unification in Tōkyō on 6.12.1997, quoted data suggesting that a large majority of South Koreans favoured a slow approach to unification and in particular opposed any substantive tax hike. HAN went on to explain that unification would not be as expensive as is widely thought.

rea with US troops right on its border. China may be pressuring North Korea for economic reforms, but it has also proved to be North Korea's most supportive ally when there was concern that it might collapse due to food shortages. China has not only given vast amounts of aid over the past years, but also encouraged regional trade and exchange in the border region to sustain North Korea (*The Daily Yomiuri* 27.5.1997: 3).

On the other hand, it is conceivable that a unified Korea would rather lean toward China and ask the US troops to leave. As Japan and China are unquestionably the main competitors for regional "leadership" in whichever sense considered, such a decision on the part of Korea would tip the balance in favour of China. Apparently most Japanese do not regard this scenario as very likely, but some do privately mention concerns about a closer alliance between China and a unified Korea¹⁵.

This competition between Japan and China is taken quite seriously in South Korea, which became clear when a Korean observer expressed his concern about the military build-up in China and immediately added that Japan's military spending has also greatly increased. He claimed that Japanese military expenditures doubled over the 1980s (KIM 1994: 524), although this calculation is apparently based on dollar figures. Most Koreans seem obsessed with figures indicating the rise in Japanese military strength¹⁶, which places them in the middle between two rising superpowers – regardless whether this perception is correct or not. The Japanese, on the other hand, flatly dismiss the claim that Japan is increasing its military strength, and instead point to China as the really dangerous country. Some Japanese suggest instead that South Korea, or a unified Korea, should seek an alliance with Japan to prepare against a possible Chinese hegemony or at least a military threat from China¹⁷.

It is interesting to note that Korean and most foreign observers (JOHNSON 1995: 66; YAN 1982: 80; MIASNIKOV 1996: 36; MENDL 1995: 77) have come to the conclusion that Japan is opposed to and accordingly trying to obstruct Korean unification, a conclusion which is based entirely on the above considerations of the future geostrategic situation. Japanese on the other hand insist that Japan is not opposed to Korean unification, that its options to support or obstruct unification are extremely limited and that Japan has consistently followed South Korean requests on this issue, a claim which

¹⁵ IKEI Masaru in an interview on 26.11.1996 in Tōkyō, and IZUMI Hajime at a conference on 5.12.1997.

¹⁶ Most Koreans the author spoke to in 1997 mentioned that Japan had the second highest military spending world-wide.

¹⁷ E.g. AEBE Takanori in an interview on 21.2.1997, ISHIZU Tomoyuki in an interview on 21.11.1996.

well-informed South Korean policy makers support¹⁸. This indicates the international standing South Korea has gained and which causes foreign observers to regard Japanese claims with caution.

5. REGIONAL REARRANGEMENT AND THE NEED FOR RECONCILIATION

These examinations serve to clarify the ways in which Japan's past has been an obstacle to a leading, active role with respect to Korea and to some extent to the rest of Asia. This suggests that Japan, in order to attain a position in Asia which is not limited to a very restricted form of economic leadership, will have to overcome these fetters which hamper its actions in the diplomatic realm. This means first of all to indicate a willingness to come to terms with its past so as to counter criticism from Asia and abroad, and to increase the trust placed in Japan as a political leader. Only in combination with such efforts will other measures to enhance Japan's role in Asia, such as promoting a specific Japanese or Asian way of life, or taking security initiatives, be effective.

This task is further complicated by the post-Cold War geostrategic reshuffling of Asia. With Russia's importance declining and China on the rise, the future balance in the region is still uncertain. For the time being, most Asian countries, concerned about both Japan's and China's power, are quite content with the balancing role the US plays in Asia, but the process of regional realignment requires Japan to take more initiative in its Asia policy (AHN 1991: 167). Japan will have to make some efforts to become a more respected member of the Asian community in order to keep the delicate balance stable. As no other country in the region is in the position to take up that balancing role, many Asians expect Japan to take more responsibility and assume a soft form of leadership in Asia, but on the other hand they are concerned about Japanese hegemony and a more full-fledged leadership role. Particularly Korean experts do admit that Japan appears to be the obvious candidate for economic leadership in the region, but they always add that aspirations for political leadership must be accompanied by a "deeper reflection on the past" (SHIN 1994: 14). When Japanese policy-makers demand that Japan takes more international responsibility, they are often aware of these difficulties, although their most common conclusion is that time will heal old wounds, and that it will simply take longer to improve Japan's international role (IKEDA 1994: 60; SOEYA 1994: 64). Some Japanese simply attribute Asian concerns to a misunderstanding and claim that Japan is in reality not aspiring for leader-

¹⁸ E.g. LEE Ju-Heum in an interview on 13.2.1997 in Seoul.

ship at all, and only comparatively few insist that Japan must clear up historical issues first to promote understanding especially with neighbouring Asian countries (NAGANO 1996: 143–144).

The Korean peninsula is an important factor in the equation of regional rearrangement, because unification – sooner or later – appears almost inevitable, and good relations with the ensuing state will be desirable for Japan. Yet, compared with the rest of Asia, reconciliation with Korea appears to be a difficult task. Japanese Defence Agency officials say that Japan is sponsoring many conferences and fora on multilateral, soft security arrangements and taking part in studies on the future of the Korean peninsula. They say, however, that these meetings are only a very informal way of confidence building and not particularly effective¹⁹. On the other hand, then Deputy Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs OGURA (1996: 9–10; currently ambassador to South Korea) displayed optimism concerning the US and Japanese strategy in Korea and pointed to Japan's participation in KEDO (Korean Energy Development Organization)²⁰ as an example of a remarkably coherent approach to improving relations with Korea. In fact, most Japanese observers characterise the development of Japanese-South Korean relations as “slow, but positive”, and they tend to be quite content with the fact that trade frictions do not play such an important role as they did a decade ago, and that the still existing South Korean ban of Japanese mass culture (pop songs, *manga* magazines etc.) is gradually being lifted or at least not taken as seriously (*Asahi Shinbun* 23.9.1993: 30; *The Joong-Ang Daily News* 7.9.1995).

Japanese governments have made some efforts at actively promoting Japan's prestige and changing its image. Moves toward a leadership position show that reconciliation and better relations with other Asian countries are a precondition. Most Japanese leaders do realise that it is necessary to improve Asia's perception of Japan, mend distrust, and improve co-operation in various fields, be it in matters of security or the recent economic crisis in Asia. For Japan, the use of its economic clout to act as a spokesman for Asia in global matters is largely limited as long as it is not accompanied by reconciliation measures. If it fulfils this task satisfactorily, this will in turn improve its position within Asia (TOYODA 1994). Yet

¹⁹ ISHIZU Tomoyuki and TAKESADA Hideshi in interviews in Tōkyō on 21.11.1996 and 16.10.1997.

²⁰ KEDO was established in March 1995 in accordance with the October 1994 Geneva Agreement between the US and North Korea, in order to provide North Korea with light water reactors in exchange for North Korea shutting down its graphite moderated reactors. Original member countries are the US, South Korea and Japan, the EU joined in 1997.

most of the Japanese efforts to improve its image did not derive their impetus from the public airing of these sensitive history related issues, but instead tried to increase co-operation, and thus build trust, in other areas, including security, with bilateral US-relations at the hub and supplementing multilateral efforts for consultation. This Japanese approach is similar to that of the South Korean foreign ministry, which also regards the bilateral ties with the US as the foundation for regional security, to be complemented with more consultation and confidence-building²¹.

Accordingly, an ever increasing number of conferences, semi-official, and even official talks on security issues are being held, aside from the multilateral efforts surrounding KEDO and the 4-party peace talks on the Korean peninsula. China showed interest in such a dialogue in order to minimise the danger of Japan's potential nuclear armament after Korean unification, which could accordingly result in a nuclear-arming of a unified Korea. Formal security contacts between Japan and South Korea are still rather limited, but interaction is taking place, however symbolic it may be²². At least since the 1980s, Japan has embraced the concept of comprehensive security, and it is generally accepted that security includes far more than only military aspects, *e.g.* co-operation in KEDO and 4-party peace talks²³. To facilitate further such developments, Japan must try to improve its reputation in Asia in order to overcome the prevailing distrust that would prevent other countries from closer co-operation. It can be stated that efforts to improve Japan's reputation significantly are certainly worthwhile, and the sooner they are realised the better.

Many Asia experts in Japan continue to stress that Japan must be cautious in taking any steps toward regional leadership or even a more affirmative stance, because Asian countries on the whole 'do not trust Japan'²⁴, and doubt that Japan has sufficiently reflected on its past (IKEDA 1994: 59). The word trust (*shinrai*) plays an important role in statements from scholars, bureaucrats, left-wing politicians and many business leaders, as well as Koreans, on Japan's role in Asia and Japan's national interest²⁵. In contrast, conservative Japanese often tend to use the word harmo-

²¹ LEE Ju-Heum in an interview on 13.2.1997 in Seoul.

²² TAKESADA Hideshi in an interview on 16.10.1997 in Tōkyō.

²³ *E.g.* NISHIHARA Masashi (National Defense Academy) in a symposium on "Sub-regional Dynamics of Asian Security", sponsored by Keiō University and the University of Hawaii, on 13.3.1997 in Tōkyō.

²⁴ NAKAHARA Michiko in an interview on 23.1.1997 in Tōkyō.

²⁵ *E.g.* in interviews on the question of "Japan's national interest" by SAKAMOTO Yoshikazu (20.11.1997), BESSHO Kōro (12.3.1997), TAKESADA Hideshi (16.10.1997), DEN Hideo (11.8.1997), AKIBA Tadatoshi (16.12.1997), KIM Myong-Su

ny (*chōwa*)²⁶. Critics of Japan quote as an example of their lack of trust in Japan that no Asian country supports Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council – although Japan has won a non-permanent seat as many as eight times since 1958 (compared to four times for both German states combined) (MOFA 1997: 368). Distrust in Japan may be less distinctive in other Asian countries than it is in South Korea, but memories of the War still remain throughout Asia and strain dialogue with Japan, with negative images in some cases even increasing over time (MENDL 1995: 120–121). Even conservative Japanese acknowledge the existence of anti-Japanese emotions of many people in Asia due to scars from World War II that have not yet disappeared (HASHIMOTO 1994: 84).

The issue of Japanese leadership in Asia is regarded as a question of nuance. Even the interpretation of the word *rīdā* [leader] in Japanese seems to be much softer than in English. Many Japanese agree that Japan, as the major economy in the region, must take some form of leadership, but that means mainly promoting dialogue and making suggestions about the future of the region. They argue that other Asian countries expect that much, but that such a leadership role must not become dominant or be associated with the former plans for a Great East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere. Thus, Japan can only take part and promote common activities but not assume an individual role (SOEYA 1996: 266).

6. CONCLUSION

An examination of some of the issues in Japanese-South Korean relations shows that South Korea is able to exert an influence over Japan which most models of international relations cannot explain. It appears that, on the international stage, South Korea has successfully increased its moral leverage in its relationship with Japan and derived a prestigious position from it. This relative prestige is mainly based on 'soft issues', in particular its history of oppression by Japan, which is utilised to decrease Japan's prestige, and it is supplemented by South Korea's economic success and democratisation. South Korea has then applied this prestige as a resource to exert power over Japan in other issues, for example in the bilateral trade relationship, and thus been able to increase its economic position further.

(3.7.1997), LEE Ju-Heum (13.2.1997, Seoul); poll of business leaders in *Keidanren Review* (4/1992).

²⁶ E.g. SATŌ Seizaburō in an interview on 25.11.1997 and KAKIZAWA Kōji in an interview on 28.1.1997, both in Tōkyō.

The 'soft' emotional issues are of extreme importance in Japanese-South Korean relations because Korea, together with China, was most directly affected by Japanese aggression. The Japanese colonial rule over Korea lasted for 35 years and was seen as very brutal. Furthermore, problems concerning the discrimination against the Korean minority in Japan have added to the Korean resentment. Thus, there seem to be more reasons for Koreans to quarrel with Japan than for most other countries, but an additional reason for the fierceness of the confrontation may be that South Korea, and especially South Korean individuals, have recently gained a position that enables them to complain effectively. Unquestionably, the cries for apologies and compensation are louder in South Korea than in any other Asian country – but they are also louder than they were 30 years ago. When the Normalization Treaty was concluded in 1965, the military regime of President Park, in need of Japanese capital, was not in a negotiating position to ask for Japanese apologies or "compensation" as such (rather than "economic assistance"). Only since the 1980s, with the democratisation of South Korea and its economic success, have individual victims gained freedom and influence to press their claims, and South Korea's international standing also rose sufficiently that these claims started to be heard. The South Korean approach to take the "comfort women" issue to an international stage was particularly successful, taking into consideration South Korea's rising international status, which is not based on military but on economic and 'soft' factors such as democracy, participation and being a peaceful, innocent victim of Japanese aggression and the Cold War.

It is true that South Korea's position with respect to Japan is somewhat special, but its criticism of Japan's dealing with the past is by no means unique. Other Asian countries have followed South Korea's economic example of copying Japan, and they might follow the South Korean strategy of increasing their relative prestige versus Japan through the use of historical issues as well. The South Korean example demonstrates how influential such criticism can be, and polls indicate the potential for criticism in other countries even if it is not voiced to the same extent as in South Korea. Japan's efforts to protect its own prestige have so far been defensive and mostly limited to a certain restraint in other issues, so as to avoid South Korean attacks. In the long run, however, it will be imperative for Japan to make active efforts to increase its international prestige if it intends to take a leading role in Asia. Certainly the benefits of such an effort would outstrip its costs: the importance of international diplomatic prestige for a state's foreign policy options cannot be ignored, and if Japan wants to enhance its regional role it will have to take measures to increase its diplomatic standing, too.

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A number of people commented in personal interviews on the issues in question. They include:

AEBA Takanori (Kyorin University), AKIBA Tadatoshi (Social Democratic Party of Japan), BESSHO Kōro (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), DEN Hideo (Member of the House of Councillors, independent), IKEI Masaru (Keiō University), ISHIZU Tomoyuki (National Defence Agency), IZUMI Hajime (Shizuoka University), KAKIZAWA Kōji (Liberal Democratic Party), KIM Sei-Ung (Forum of Democratic Leaders in the Asia-Pacific, Seoul), KIM Myong-Su (Chōsōren, General Association of Korean Residents in Japan), LEE Ju-Heum (ROK Foreign Ministry), MAEDA Akira (Tōkyō Zōkei University), NAKAHARA Michiko (Waseda University), NISHIGAIRO Wataru (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), OKONOGI Masao (Keiō University), SAKAMOTO Yoshikazu (International Christian University), SATŌ Seizaburō (Institute for International Policy Studies), SHIMAUCHI Tetsuya (Institute for International Policy Studies), SHIN Hee-Suk (Asia-Pacific Policy Research Institute, Seoul), SHINDŌ Tatsuhirō (Institute for International Policy Studies), TAKESADA Hideshi (National Defence Agency).