

Shifting Strategic & Diplomatic Relations with the Koreans

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THE FUTURE OF THE KOREA-JAPAN STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP: A CASE FOR CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

Park Cheol-hee *

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** Park Cheol-hee is an associate professor at the Graduate School of International Studies, Seoul National University.*

I. Introduction

Korea and Japan are two key allies of the United States in East Asia. These two countries are “window models” of postwar democratization and economic advancement in a free world. Sustained security provision of the United States to these two allies during and after the Cold War period provided a stage for upgrading their global status as well as enhancing the quality of life of the people of the two countries.

For the past 43 years, since Korea and Japan normalized their relationship in 1965, cooperative ties between the two countries have leaped forward. In 1965, the number of people visiting the other country was approximately 10,000. In 2006, 4.46 million people visited each other, which means that more than 10,000 Japanese and Korean people have been entering the two countries in a single day. In 1965, bilateral trade between the two countries was only \$240 million. In 2006, trade between the two was recorded at \$78.5 billion. The “Korean wave,” or *hallyu*, is so widespread that Japanese housewives and youngsters are fascinated by Korean movie stars. Increasing number of Japanese style *izakaya* are found in Seoul.¹ These are living examples of deepening ties between Korea and Japan.

However, frictions between the two countries have never faded away. We find more, not fewer, instances of history-related frictions since the mid-1990s. History textbook controversies, Yasukuni shrine visits, and Dokdo/Takeshima disputes galvanize both the Korean and Japanese publics. Anti-Japanese sentiments in Korea are not necessarily on the rise, but reactions to the Japanese provocations are becoming intensified (Park 2008b, 5–30). Also unlike the Cold War period when both Korea and Japan antagonized North Korea, the two countries have acquired diverging perceptions of the North Korean threat during the past decade. This laid the groundwork for submerged but potential conflict.

There is no doubt that cooperation has increased and deepened during the past few decades, but frictions persist. What is going to happen in the future of the Korea-Japan relationship? Is cooperation between the two promised? Or is conflict unavoidable? In a word, where to from here? These are profound questions that this article tries to address.

As for the future of the Korea-Japan strategic relationship, opinions are divided and empirical realities are mixed and complex. Assuming that theories can

1. Izakaya is a Japanese-style pub restaurant.

work as a guiding light to navigate through the unknown future, I would like to address this puzzle from an analytical point of view. I will apply contemporary international relations theories—realism, liberalism, and constructivism—to the future of Korea-Japan relations and interpret mixed signals with a prism of theoretical perspectives. After reviewing both optimistic and pessimistic views drawn from diverse perspectives, I would like to draw out a synthesis that stands on cautious optimism.

II. Where To from Here: Contending Perspectives and Mixed Signals

There is no consensus about what is going to happen in the future of Korea-Japan relations. Hopes for the future are abundant. Expectations for upgraded and future-oriented ties have been voiced many times. However, troubles that twisted the relationship between the two countries have existed at all times. From time to time hopeful expectations turned into despair. Also, omens suggesting the worst case often preempted discussions between the two countries.

As the backdrop for the unfolding realities in recent times, this article highlights logical and empirical grounds for optimism as well as pessimism about the prospects for future bilateral ties between Korea and Japan. Realists, liberals, and constructivists prescribe different versions of cooperation as well as conflict between the two countries in the coming years.

Liberal Optimism

Liberals present an optimistic view about international relations. They focus on economic interdependence, regime type, and institutional linkage. Most of all, they highlight the so-called pacifying effects of liberal institutional linkage and socioeconomic transactions.

Economic interdependence is widely known as a factor facilitating cooperation among nations (Copeland). Keohane and Nye (1977) addressed this issue earlier and argued that cooperation is likely to emerge when interdependence deepens among nations. If we follow this logic, Korea and Japan are more likely to cooperate. Trade interdependence is peculiar between the two countries. Japan is the largest import partner to South Korea. Japan also constitutes the third-largest export partner to South Korea. Japan is also a country that invests in Korea more than other countries.

Liberals also take note of the nature of a regime. Widely known is the democratic peace theory, that is, liberals argue that democracies do not fight each other (Russett 1993). Korea and Japan are outstanding democratic countries with market economic systems. Because of the similar quality of the two governments and economic systems, the two countries have little incentive to fight each other.

The third element for liberal optimism is the role of international institutions. International institutions help to improve communication between states, reducing uncertainty about intentions and increasing the capacity of governments to make credible, binding commitments to one another (Keohane 1984; Martin and Simmons 1998, 729–57). Liberal optimists note that Korea and Japan join multiple, multilayered, and multifunctional international institutions together. Because of their coaffiliation in international institutions, Korea and Japan have acquired habits of cooperation through regularized norms of international society. Working in institutional settings like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Plus Three, and others, Korea and Japan have learned how to adapt to international situations in an accommodative manner.

Despite these optimistic prescriptions, counterfactual assumptions are also presented. First of all, people are skeptical about the spillover effect of economic interdependence, which is linked to the point that issue linkage should not be exaggerated. Issues are, liberals presume, so interconnected that cooperation in one area will produce positive side effects in the other issue areas of cooperation. However, a reality check of this theory demonstrates that issue linkage is often limited. Economic cooperation, if full-blown, is expected to spill over to other areas of cooperation. However, no one can authoritatively judge when the point of conversion will come and where the threshold lies. The fact of the matter is that, despite increasing economic interdependence, conflicts regarding historical contentions are unending.

Second, there is no denying that democracies have little reason to fight each other. War is not likely among democracies, but this does not mean that democracies are conflict-free. Political leaders in a democratic setting are not immune to the conflictive claims between countries. More often than not, democratic leaders are sensitive to public opinions of domestic constituencies. If opinions prevail in a way that corners political leaders to stand upright, democratic leaders' realm of choice is confined by them.

Furthermore, despite frequent interactions between the two countries, there are no binding rules that Korean and Japanese leaders should expect a penalty for unacceptable behavior. Institutional interactions have not been fully internalized

yet. As long as binding rules that constrain leaders of the two countries are absent, Korean and Japanese leaders will look to domestic political opinion rather than an institutional mandate for cooperation that might be merely symbolic.

Also, deepening interdependence does not necessarily mean the equal sharing of vulnerability and sensitivity. Though Keohane and Nye (1977) suggest that a sense of vulnerability leads to cooperation, a country with the upper hand would be less constrained by this logic. In its extreme case, one country's sense of dependency can generate distrust in the other, which can evolve into conflicts. Although the liberal optimistic view is grounded in the concept of rationality and exchange of interests, historical records illustrate that emotions and perceptions intervene in international politics (Jervis 1976).

In general, liberal optimism accounts for the long-term upward progress in Korea-Japan relations. However, liberal optimism cannot explain why there are still recurring cycles of friction. Despite, not because of, the presence of liberal elements, Korea and Japan have at times been immersed in conflict.

Liberal Pessimism

Not all liberals are optimistic. Liberal elements can work as a stumbling block for cooperation. Aaron Friedberg (1993) argued that the East Asian region lacks the pacifying institutional elements that are often found in Western Europe. He puts emphasis on the lack, not the malfunction, of liberal elements. As a result, he claims, East Asia is ripe for rivalry rather than cooperation. In other words, liberal moments have not arrived yet. At best, the development of liberal elements is at the incipient stage. Jones and Smith argue, in connection with regional integration, that Asia is making only process, not progress (Jones and Smith 2007, 148–84). Although institutional arrangements have been made, trust building has not taken root to the point of reducing uncertainties among nations. Asian countries, including Korea and Japan, are making ritualistic commitments rather than trying to produce tangible results of cooperation. If we extend this logic, institutions are not guarantors of cooperation.

Dependence, not interdependence, also matters. In particular, Korea runs a huge trade deficit with Japan. As this is a structural problem, the deficit is likely to increase as Korean exports grow. This is so because Korea imports parts, machinery, and materials from Japan.² Although the existence of a trade deficit

2. President Lee Myung-bak of Korea raised this question officially during the summits with Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda of Japan in February and April 2008.

does not preclude the possibility of cooperation, it can work as a stumbling block for deepening collaboration.

Furthermore, because Korea and Japan are democratic countries, they are more apt to be vulnerable to changing public opinion. Sensitivity to public opinion can lead to unexpected troubles, which may preempt the potential for cooperation between political leaders.

One does not have to remain pessimistic because of the immature development or lack of liberal elements. First, unlike the seemingly laggard development of institutions, institutional cooperation in East Asia is intensifying. Among ASEAN Plus Three countries, of which Korea and Japan are a part, intraregional trade and investment are growing. Institutional collaboration is becoming more multilayered, agendas for cooperation are becoming more concrete, and leaders meet more frequently than before (Kim 2008). Analysis of the internal processes of institutional cooperation attests to the case that Korea and Japan are institutionally bound. One can hardly think of the two countries opting out of the process.

Second, dependence and interdependence are not mutually exclusive. Because economic transactions are not exclusively bilateral, global export targeting can weaken the effects of dependency. In other words, economic growth is still possible although a country may be more reliant upon other parties in terms of their export markets as well as import sources. In reality, the case of Korea illustrates such a case in its trading regime (Haggard 1990).

Democracy may function negatively because of the overriding weight of public opinion in a country. However, public opinion is not stagnant but varying. Public opinion can turn sour for a certain period of time, but then the furor settles down and discussion returns to a normal tone with the passage of time. A high number of exchanges and transactions in diverse arenas can also tame the elements of conflict between two countries, too.³

Constructivist Pessimism

Constructivists highlight the subjective side of international relations as well as the interactive composition of realities. Socially constructed perceptions and mental structure work as a guiding principle of the relationships among countries

3. When conflicts between Korea and Japan were expected in July 2008, a number of Korean leaders in various circles, including bureaucratic, political, business, and scholarly circles, traveled to Japan to interact with their Japanese counterparts. This is a show of the willingness to cooperate.

(Wendt 1992). Perceptions and images are historically made and socially defined. They do not change easily. Also, depending on the nature of interaction among nations, particular images and perceptions can be consolidated or redefined. Interaction itself does not define the relationship, but the nature of the interaction can shape the direction of the relationship.

Pessimists in the constructivist circle focus on the “hardening” effects of existing perceptions and images (Friedberg 2005). Socially constructed identity prevents East Asian countries from moving forward in various areas of cooperation. According to Thomas Berger (2003, 387–420), in the post–Cold War context, collectively shared memories work as a negative factor that disrupts the relationship among East Asian countries. “Wounded nationalism” finds its way into conflicts among nations in East Asia. Korean national identity at its core incorporates an anti-Japanese stance. Korean identity that is founded on anti-Japanese feeling is an everlasting source of conflict and friction between Korea and Japan.

Constructivists also shed light on the hardening effects of rituals and repeated interactions. Politically symbolic rituals can strengthen misperceptions among nations. The Yasukuni shrine visits by Japanese prime ministers are a good example. For the Japanese leaders, visiting the Yasukuni shrine may be a political ritual to satisfy conservative domestic constituencies. In the eyes of the Koreans and Chinese, however, the same ritual can be interpreted as a political gesture to justify the war and colonialism of the past because 14 A-class war criminals are enshrined in the Yasukuni shrine. This daunting perception gap between Japan and Korea has served as a barrier to the betterment of ties.

The unexpected development of crises and events can also mold negative perceptions in the course of interaction among nations. Often problematic remarks by political leaders twist misperceptions between the countries. For example, a few Japanese leaders repeatedly argue that Japan did good things, not only bad things, to Korea during the colonial period. On the part of the formerly victimized nation, this remark sounds as if Japan is not genuinely apologetic for the wrongdoings in the past. We find numerous occasions when Japanese political leaders’ remarks have exacerbated the problematic parts of the relationship between Korea and Japan. More often than not, Japanese arrogance stimulates Korean prejudice against Japan, which eventually escalates any existing conflicts between the two countries.

Despite the legitimacy of constructivist pessimists’ claims, it is noteworthy that those who distort perceptions in a negative way do not make up the majorities

in either society. The vast majority of Koreans and Japanese still aspire to upgraded partnership between the two countries. A gradual increase in positive perceptions toward Koreans among the Japanese, which is verified by an opinion survey conducted by the Cabinet Office of Japan, shows the changed perceptions among the Japanese.⁴

Also noteworthy is the dwindling negative emotional responses in Korea to Japanese actions, believe it or not. In times past, if Japan provoked the Korean side, demonstrations on the street would surge over an extended period of time in widely dispersed areas. Nowadays, however, anti-Japanese demonstrations are confined to limited areas such as in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. They do not proliferate into other areas as well. Neither do they continue for a long period of time. Emotional responses may surge at one point, but they evaporate after a while.

Historical comparison enables us to see that issue linkage between past history and today's cooperative agendas is becoming remote, not closer. In the mid-1990s, if an issue of the two countries' historical past surfaced, both governments refused to talk and stopped their cooperative projects by linking the history issue with other issues. But, recently, the history issue has been contained separately from other cooperative projects. The year 2005, which was a Korea-Japan friendship year celebrating the 40th anniversary of diplomatic normalization, is a good example. In 2005, the Dokdo/Takeshima controversies between Korea and Japan imperiled the smooth progress of the relationship. But even in the middle of that conflictive controversy, numerous projects celebrating the 40-year ties between the two countries proceeded as planned.

Therefore, one does not have to remain overly pessimistic about the future of the Korea-Japan relationship.

Constructivist Optimism

Although optimistic constructivists highlight perceptions, identity, and socially constructed norms as pessimistic constructivists do, they remain optimistic about the future of the Korea-Japan relationship. They shed light on the softening nature of interaction between the two countries.

4. At public opinion polls conducted by the Cabinet Office in Japan, the ratio of the Japanese who have favorable feelings toward Korea steadily increased from 35.8% in 1996, 50.3% in 2001, and to 57.1% in 2008. On the other hand, the ratio of the Japanese who do not have favorable feeling decreased from 59.9% in 1996, 45.5% in 2001, and to 40.9% in 2008. Refer to a home page of the Cabinet Office of Japan, <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey>. (Accessed on January 16, 2009).

First of all, elevated images and perceptions about each other have been grounds for optimism. In the process of long-term interaction between Korea and Japan, people have obtained positive images about the other party. Prejudices and biases are being dismantled, though gradually. One can hardly find any Japanese person who calls a Korean *chosenjin* as they did in the past. The term *chokkbari*, which was a pejorative slang term to refer to the Japanese in the past, is rarely spoken in Korea these days. Korean kimchi, which was thought to be a disgusting-smelling food from an unknown country, is found in local supermarkets in Japan. Japanese tourists wander around the city of Seoul without reservation about speaking Japanese in public.

Second, despite socially shared mental barriers like anti-Japanese feelings, initiatives for future-oriented ties between Korea and Japan have been repeatedly raised by almost every Korean president since the mid-1990s. This signifies that people in both countries are ready to accept such rhetoric. J. J. Suh (2007, 382–402) suggests that even the conflictive dialogue about past history between Korea and Japan can develop into a regional communicative dialogue. He is not pessimistic at all about the conflictive nature of dialogue. For him, dialogue in any form is better than the lack of dialogue. According to Suh, the gradual learning process can serve as a springboard for a better future.

These optimistic prescriptions, however, cannot be justified as they are. There remain concerns despite optimistic signals.

First, although perceptions about each other are improving over time, they can worsen at any time. Positive perceptions have not been solidly rooted or unchangeably consolidated. When the ties between the two countries become turbulent, especially related to the emotionally touchy history issues, negative perceptions surge to the surface.

Also, initiatives for future-oriented ties between Korea and Japan have often degenerated into conflicts in the middle or at the end of a presidential term. President Kim Young-sam of Korea adopted a future-oriented initiative between Korea and Japan. But around 1995, when Japanese cabinet members commented on the legality of Japan's past Korean annexation and the positive effects of the colonial rule, conflicts began. The time in office of Kim Dae-jung and Keizo Obuchi was rather an exception in maintaining favorable ties, but even the Kim Dae-jung administration took a critical stance toward Japan when the Yoshiro Mori and Junichiro Koizumi cabinets endorsed the review in 2001 of a textbook that contained right-wing elements. Roh Moo-hyun started with future-oriented agendas toward Japan and even said during a summit in Jeju in July 2004 that

he would not raise the history issue during his tenure. However, as soon as the Dokdo issue came to the fore, around March 2005, the Korea-Japan relationship turned extremely volatile.

Learning history from a new perspective by the next generation is a source of concern, unlike constructivist optimism. Japanese conservatives try to revise textbooks in a way that resurrects national prestige and esteem. This entails the possibility of widening the perception gap between the Koreans and the Japanese. This may lead to repeated and extended hardening over generations. What Suh calls regional communicative dialogue has not fully materialized.

Thus, socially constructed identity, norms, and perceptions have dual possibilities. They can open a road for optimism. But at the same time a pessimistic view is not groundless.

Realist Optimism

Realists are interested in power-centered relationships among countries. Positional interests at the system level, defined by the capability of a country, is for them a guiding principle of international relations. In a system where world government does not exist, a nation's survival interest and the security dilemma derived from it shapes the nature of interstate relationships. The problem of relative gains makes it difficult for countries to cooperate with each other. As a result, realists are relatively pessimistic about cooperation among countries, but, as Jervis (1988, 317–49) argues, cooperation is possible under the security dilemma.

Optimists in the realism school hint at the possibility of “muted” conflicts between Korea and Japan. Realists remain optimistic about Korea-Japan relations mostly because of U.S. engagement. Korea and Japan are two key allies of the United States. As democratic nations with market economies under the U.S. security umbrella, the two countries would not enter into military conflicts. Korea and Japan may fall into the trap of frictions from time to time, but they are highly unlikely to fight against each other because the two countries are what Victor Cha (1999) calls “virtual allies.” Because of their indirect security connection through the United States, the security dilemma between Korea and Japan is muted.

Realists also take seriously the role of the United States in managing the relationship between the two countries. Utilizing the quasi-alliance model, Cha (1999) claims that Korea and Japan are more likely to cooperate when the

United States signals the withdrawal of security commitment. Both nations would fear being abandoned by the United States and they are more prone to cooperation. In contrast with Cha, who advocated the gradual finality option as the U.S. strategy, Woo (2003, 129–50) suggests that Korea and Japan are more likely to cooperate when the United States engages. In any case, optimists in the realist school highly appreciate the positive function of the U.S. security nexus in managing Korea-Japan relations.

Optimists among realists also focus on the limited strategic aims of Japan. Unlike those who argue Japan's superpower orientation, Soeya (2005) maintains that Japan has been, is, and will be a middle power. Although Japan's economic capability is number two in the world, he argues, Japan would remain a country of reserved middle power diplomacy without superpower orientation. Japan would not aspire to be a global superpower. Hence, Korea would feel comfortable about a Japan that is confined to limited strategic purposes.

Also in terms of military capability, realist optimists imply, Japan will not easily equip itself with global power projection capability (Lind 2004). Because of its national security culture, Japan is not likely to arm itself with nuclear weapons, aircraft carriers, and intercontinental ballistic missiles (Hughes 2007, 67–96). Furthermore, even though Japan's military capability is upgraded, Japan would not carelessly categorize Korea as an enemy of Japan. In particular, as long as the United States maintains an alliance partnership with Korea and Japan, the two countries will work as cooperative partners. In that sense, cooperation is promised.

A closer look at the realities suggests, however, that cooperation is not fully guaranteed. Unlike the rational expectations of realist optimism, the possibility of unwanted and unintended military conflicts between Korea and Japan cannot be discounted. Escalation of conflicts concerning Dokdo/Takeshima are a possible place. In 2005, when Japan dispatched a coastal guard ship to the Dokdo area, crisis was imminent. Military tension is probable in the context of rising nationalism related to territorial sovereignty. Emotional conflicts charged with nationalist fervor, if not controlled properly, can lead to irrational behaviors.

The perception, not the reality, of Japan as a rapidly emerging regional military power can reshape the mind-set of the Korean people. Remaining suspicion over Japanese intent as well as a lack of full-fledged trust in the Japanese purpose can lead to spirals of prolonged conflicts between the two countries. An assertive and proactive Japan may serve U.S. interests in East Asia (Green 2007), but this does not necessarily serve South Korea's interests. Without transparency and

accountability to neighboring countries, a Japanese assertive move, especially in the security arena, could bring about a vicious cycle of suspicion and loss of confidence between the two.

Realist Pessimism

Pessimists in the realist school look at the role of the United States in Korea-Japan relations in a different way. Unlike optimists who generally appreciate the positive impact of U.S. engagement for Korea-Japan relations, pessimists imply that the United States has little control over bilateral issues between Korea and Japan. The United States cannot force the two countries to cooperate with each other. Nor can the United States prevent frictions between the two. The role of the United States is important, but it is not a determinant of the Korea-Japan relationship (Yoon 2007, 169–205). There is an independent logic of Korea-Japan relations detached from U.S. influence. In particular, the United States cannot solve conflicts between Korea and Japan stemming from the legacy of the past. In contrast with Cha's prediction, conflicts may deteriorate if the United States hints at the possibility of pulling out from the region.

Pessimists also notice the implication of the potential power transition of Japan. From the realist standpoint, it would not be unusual at all for Japan, with its immense economic capability, to transfer its power resources to the military arena (Gilpin 1981). Like other countries with economic capabilities, it is only a matter of time before Japan makes a power transition as well (Waltz 1993, 44–79). Although Japan continues to support the United States, it can aspire to be a regional hegemon or a normal superpower. In other words, Japan can be an aspiring revisionist country in the region. Korea would feel uneasy about a militarily active Japan, which leads to conflictive ties.

Increasing voices for Japan's becoming a normal country with an independent military capability are often cited as a movement for Japan's march toward superpower status. Previously unheard arguments for an autonomous Japan are surfacing more frequently in Japan (Samuels 2007). Japan as a nonnuclear peaceful nation that refuses to dispatch its Self-Defense Forces overseas is a story of the past. In the diplomatic arena, Japan aspires to be a global partner of the United States. International security, which goes well beyond national security, has become an integral part of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces' mission.

Korea is not always wary of Japanese moves toward defensive realism although Japanese power untied from the United States or untamed by the security alliance with the United States could be a threat to Korea. In fact, an increasing number

of Koreans are perceiving Japan as a threat. Underlying the concern is the deeply rooted suspicion over Japanese strategic intent.

The diverging strategic aims of the two countries since the end of the Cold War has set another stage for mutual conflict. In particular, Korea and Japan have developed different threat perceptions of North Korea. In the eyes of Koreans, North Korea, which is economically troubled and politically volatile, is perceived as a lesser threat to Korean security compared with the threat of the past. In contrast, in the eyes of the Japanese, North Korea is perceived as a real security threat to Japan, especially since the *Taepo-dong* missile launch and the issue of Japanese abductees. As a result, cooperative potential in the area of security is less than before.

Those who are inclined to support realist pessimism count too much on the skewed interpretation of the Japanese defense buildup and the domestic political atmosphere. Japan is not necessarily pursuing the goal of becoming another superpower in the region. Much more likely is a Japanese version of becoming a British-style coalition partner of the United States (Inoguchi and Bacon 2008, 79–98). This is not a harmful strategic option in Korea's eyes.

Japan is perceived as a perilous gambler if we turn our ears to the voices of right-wing-oriented people in the Japanese political arena. However, right wingers are not a majority in Japan. Neither are their voices reflected in policy decisions, as they claim. Also, despite an elevated role for Japan in international security and other global businesses, Japan is not likely to give up its peaceful orientation as well as civilian control of the military.

Furthermore, in the foreseeable future, Korea and Japan have more to defend together than they have for pursuing their independent strategic goals. Their perceptions of threats from North Korea and China may vary, but Korea and Japan have more to lose unless they cooperate with each other in Northeast Asia.

A tightening security alliance between the United States and Japan is not a source of worry for Korea. Rather, the security commitment of the United States to Japan works as a pacifying element for the security dilemma between Korea and Japan. Without the U.S. security commitment, Korea and Japan might balance each other (Cha 1999; Yoon 2007; Park 2008a). Therefore, the U.S. security provision in the region should be welcomed not only for the stability of the entire region but also for the stable management of the bilateral relationship between Korea and Japan.

III. Synthesis: Grounds for Cautious Optimism

We have reviewed contending perspectives and mixed signals related to the future of the Korea-Japan strategic relationship. How then can we discover diverging trends? Is cooperation doomed or promised? Is conflict inevitable or manageable? I will now set out the argument for cautious optimism.

If constructive pessimists prevail, Korea-Japan relations would be expected to deteriorate over time. Rather than moving forward, Korea-Japan ties would degenerate into prolonged conflicts if the pessimists' prediction is right. In other words, Korea-Japan relations would show a downward spiral. However, the historical record shows that Korea-Japan relations have improved over time although there have been twists and turns. Areas of cooperation have expanded in the past few decades. Transactions expanded rapidly. Exchanges have been dramatically enlarged.

Also, without the promise of optimism, Korea-Japan relations may have remained stagnant without showing any change, upward or downward. Again the history of Korea-Japan relations illustrates that they have never remained flat. If historical animosity works as a primary variable that influences the bilateral ties between Korea and Japan, the two countries would be antagonists for longer periods of time without showing any signs of cooperation. But, as Victor Cha (1999) showed, alignment despite antagonism was the reality during the Cold War period. Despite continued ups and downs, the Korea-Japan relationship showed a general upward movement.

This does not mean that bilateral ties between Korea and Japan have upgraded in a single, unbroken line. The relationship between the two countries has often been interrupted by troubled times and turbulent periods when frictions rose to the surface. However, these frictions subdued after momentary conflicts. In other words, frictions are not a constant feature of the relationship. Nor are frictions the representative feature of the relationship. While Korea-Japan relations move in an upward direction, the two countries have often faced unexpected and mutually unintended cycles of frictions. Hence, the bilateral ties between Korea and Japan should not be understood as simply reproducing cycles of cooperation and conflict.

Therefore, what we see in reality is long-term progress toward an upward move interrupted by recurring frictions in the short-term (Yoon 2007). It is fair to say that elements of liberal optimism and realist optimism generally contributed to the upward move. Increasing transactions, assimilating values and systems,

and security ties mediated through the United States have worked toward an upgraded relationship over time. Elements of constructivist optimism are yet to come. Although positive dialogue channels are developing in the region, full-scale regional communicative dialogues have not materialized fully yet. Still we have reason to believe that current cooperative trends toward an upgraded strategic partnership will not be reversed easily. This provides us with grounds for optimism.

Why should we remain cautious about the future of Korea-Japan relations? It is because a cooperative strategic relationship does not arrive naturally with the passage of time. Also there are many hurdles that both nations need to overcome. Elements related to constructivist pessimism drag down cooperative moves occasionally, though not always. New identity building for escalating national pride can hurt the feelings of neighbors. Remarks or rituals serving domestic political constituencies can provoke the formerly victimized country. If not properly managed, repeated interaction can fortify misconceptions or biases already held by the people. Identities, images, and perceptions are all malleable. They are in a sense volatile. If political leaders of both countries remain cautious, mutual provocations can be prevented or at least managed. This is why we remain cautious but not necessarily pessimistic. Simply speaking, beliefs are not unchangeable. If leaders of both countries agree to control changes, it is not impossible to manipulate the situation to the benefit of both Korea and Japan.

In the post-Cold War context, elements of realist pessimism, often packed into misperceptions about each other, have added to the tones of conflicts ignited by nationalist emotional conflicts. Elements of liberal pessimism do not constitute major barriers to cooperation although they suggest increasing areas of mutual coordination in the years to come.

Past trends will basically continue in the future. Hence, the future of the Korea-Japan strategic relationship is likely to be affected by various factors coming from diverse sources. Whether Korea and Japan can maximize the effects of optimism while they effectively minimize the impacts of pessimism will determine the nature of the strategic ties between the two countries. An optimistic future does not arrive naturally or automatically. Neither do pessimistic elements decrease with the passage of time. A cooperative future should be of what countries in the region make of it, as anarchy is of what states make of it (Wendt 1992).

To facilitate cooperation between Korea and Japan in the future, several policy measures should be introduced. First, historical controversies should be managed properly by political leaders. Historical memory cannot be cured or deleted. It is

hard to reach mutually satisfactory solutions to this problem. However, reaching a consensus about not provoking each other as well as nonproliferation of the conflictive situation is not impossible.

Second, together with controlling negative effects of historical debates, transactions and exchanges between Korea and Japan should be widened and deepened. Functional cooperation alone cannot completely fulfill the goal of building trust between suspicious friends, but, when combined with managing historical controversies, socioeconomic cooperation will help to alleviate the burden of history.

Third, the continued engagement of the United States in the region is crucial not only for alleviating the security dilemma between the two countries but also for developing a reliable partnership between the two. In particular, the United States should not try to take one side at the expense of the other. Instead, the United States should place itself evenly in both Korea and Japan.

Fourth, eventually, in order to establish long-term cooperative ties between Korea and Japan, the two countries are highly encouraged to develop their common vision of the future. Sharing strategic goals in the region and finding ways to carry out those goals together will enhance the potential for deepened cooperation.

Finally, Japan and Korea should work to achieve cooperation in the multilateral or minilateral setting as a way to soften conflicts and upgrade cooperative ties.

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