

## North Korea and Contending South Korean Identities: Analysis of the South Korean Media; Policy Implications for the United States

*by Shin Gi-wook with Kristin C. Burke*

After North Korea's nuclear test on 9 October 2006, the fate of South Korea's engagement policy with North Korea seemed to hang in the balance. To many, the nuclear test stood as a clear indictment of the Sunshine Policy and its successor, President Roh Moo-hyun's Peace and Prosperity Policy. After years of investment and aid to the North under these policies, South Korea appeared to have received little in return. Conservative lawmakers charged that the nuclear test amounted to the "death penalty" for the Sunshine Policy,<sup>1</sup> and former president Kim Young-sam proclaimed that the policy "should be thrown into a trash can."<sup>2</sup> Roh's unification minister apologized to the National Assembly.<sup>3</sup>

But others did not see the nuclear test as a verdict on South Korean engagement of the North. To more progressive forces, including the Roh administration, this is not a story of inter-Korean cause and effect; engagement represents a much larger inter-Korean effort, while the nuclear issue is rooted in problematic U.S.-DPRK relations. In their view, the nuclear test occurred because the Bush administration has taken a hard line with North Korea, creating an environment—featuring "regime change" rhetoric and the pre-

emptive-strike doctrine—that spurred the North to pursue weapons considered the ultimate guarantee of security. The Sunshine Policy cannot be held to account for ruinous U.S.-DPRK relations, though such a circumstance can hinder inter-Korean engagement. While Roh offered a careful, politically calibrated suggestion to the public in the wake of the nuclear test, saying he "would like to suggest that we take time to figure out the causal relationship between the engagement policy and the nuclear test,"<sup>4</sup> former president Kim Dae-jung pressed the progressive perspective in no uncertain terms, offering a direct, clamant answer: "North Korea has never said it would develop nuclear weapons because of South Korea's Sunshine Policy. It said that it was developing nuclear weapons as a last resort to survive, because the United States was hard on the country."<sup>5</sup>

In the face of such bold North Korean action, President Roh was under immense pressure to reconcile his party's progressive policies with U.S. demands to suspend economic engagement and sign onto the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI),<sup>6</sup> a U.S.-led initiative aimed at interdicting shipments of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) through improved intelligence cooperation and more

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robust enforcement of existing national regulations. Immediately after the North's test, Roh called for a full review of the engagement policy. But, just days later, the South Korean president decided that, except for temporarily suspending aid and assenting to a limited UN Security Council resolution,<sup>7</sup> his government's policies would remain the same. Economic engagement projects at Kaesong and Mt. Kumgang, which many in the United States and the conservative Grand National Party (GNP) believe to be a significant source of cash for the DPRK (possibly channeled toward weapons programs), would continue, and Seoul would not sign onto the PSI.

Roh and his supporters had quickly reached the conclusion that there was no viable alternative to engagement—they argued that complete suspension of inter-Korea relations would leave them worse off in the long run and a military accident might result in war if South Korea participated in the PSI. U.S. policymakers were forced to face the stark reality that even a North Korean nuclear test could not encourage South Korea to use its leverage over its northern neighbor and that the South would not agree to help stop illegal shipments of WMD through the multilateral PSI.<sup>8</sup>

A growing body of work explains recent strains in the alliance as a consequence of increasingly disparate U.S. and Korean perceptions of North Korea. Within South Korea, a recent wave of anti-Americanism, continued inter-Korean engagement through the nuclear standoff, and the perception that the United States is a greater threat to peace on the peninsula than North Korea have captured the attention of experts seeking to chart a viable way forward for the alliance in light of these facets of an emergent, progressive perspective in South Korea.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, during recent years these views have become a durable feature of the political landscape in South Korea. However, these perceptions of the North and the alliance—often simply termed “South Korean views”—represent only one view and half the story. As illustrated by reactions to the DPRK's nuclear test, South Korea is deeply divided, and incongruous perceptions of North Korea and the United States held by conservative and progressive factions are central to these divisions. For South Koreans, the North Korean question is not simply a matter of policy; it is intimately related to the issue of national identity. Although significant attention has been paid to differing U.S. and Korean perceptions of the North, less is known about how these issues have been discussed and debated *within* South Korea, as well as why this fractious, seemingly intractable national debate is laden with such emotion.

This paper will examine how Korean conservatives and progressives have advocated their views of North Korea through its analysis of issue frames employed by two lead-

ing ROK newspapers. Public opinion research shows that the media influence—either directly or indirectly, or both—public perceptions of other nations and can even provide an important medium in forging a nation's identity, which offers, as constructivists of international relations argue, “the foundation of state power and foreign policy.”<sup>10</sup> Using editorials and columns from *Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh Shinmoon*, which represent conservative and progressive views, respectively, we look at South Koreans' views of the North and examine how these views have evolved from the pre-Sunshine period to more recent years.

Our central argument is that, while U.S. officials approach the alliance and the DPRK as matters of national security policy, the U.S.-ROK alliance and relations with the DPRK are fundamental to the evolution of South Korean national *identity* in the post-Cold War, post-authoritarian era. Deep and bitter division over these issues within South Korea means that the United States faces distinct policy challenges in coordinating with a government that represents a starkly divided polity. The nature of this political division on the question of identity means that, even if South Korean conservatives win the Blue House in the upcoming presidential election, there will not be a dramatic change in policies or attitudes. This paper will examine the nature of identity politics in South Korea and discuss implications for U.S. policymakers.

This study is based on the premise that perception and identity matter in international relations and foreign policy. In the Korean context, identity politics involving inter-Korean issues takes on a special meaning because of the rather peculiar circumstance of a nation with a strong sense of ethnic homogeneity being divided into two political entities. Throughout the history of the political division of the Korean peninsula, this shared sense of ethnic identity within discrete political systems has caused the governments of the two Koreas to contest rightful political leadership of the conceived national community. At present, we witness the same agreement on ethnic unity and disagreement over the political notion of nation *within* South Korea. Ethnic nationalism and the unique bitterness associated with in-group disagreement over identity must be properly considered in understanding identity politics in South Korea.

### Politics of National Identity in Korea

The politics of identity is not new in Korea.<sup>11</sup> A century ago, for instance, Koreans were seeking to (re)position their nation vis-à-vis a newly emerging regional and world order. At the time, their quest reflected the decline of China, the rise of Japan, and the increasing presence of the West in Northeast Asia. It was during this period that *nation* emerged as a key source of new collective identity among

Koreans. The politics of national identity was further intensified after 1910, as Korea experienced the oppressive rule of Japanese colonialism. In particular, Koreans fiercely resisted colonial assimilation, which threatened to impose Japanese culture and identity, by stressing the purity and uniqueness of the Korean nation and race. In the end, Japanese rule did not erase or weaken Korea's national identity but rather reinforced its sense of ethnic national identity based on the shared bloodline.

In the postcolonial period, the politics of national identity remained a significant force on the peninsula, but it took on a different nature owing to the post-1945 territorial division. The violation of the "nationalist principle of congruence of state and nation," to use Ernest Gellner's well-known phrase,<sup>12</sup> created the "unnatural" situation of the single Korean family being divided into two parts. Combined with a strong sense of ethnic homogeneity, territorial partition set in motion a contest for "national representation" between the two Koreas. Both sides claimed the legitimate right to represent the entire ethnic Korean community, appropriating a particular ideology—anticolonialism and anti-imperialism in the North and anti-Communism in the South—and linking these respective ideologies to national identity. Contention over national representation was framed as a struggle between patriots and traitors to the true nation, with the other portrayed as the "black sheep" that contaminated the purity of the Korean national community by catering to the interests of foreign imperialists (either Americans or Russians). Within this process, both the North and the South distinguished between the "traitor" regime and its people—Korean brethren believed to be innocent victims waiting to be liberated.

In the course of processes associated with the politics of national representation, anti-Communism—a major ideology of the capitalist bloc during the Cold War—became powerful in the South and was often used as a construct to legitimize authoritarian politics. In the face of contention over national representation and both sides' strong desire to restore national unity, their respective identities hardened, especially after the Korean War, by which time anti-imperialism and anti-Communism were perceived to be more firmly established as indisputable ideologies on respective sides of the border. In South Korea, as a result, the authoritarian state monopolized discourse and policy toward the North, leaving little space for opposing views. Anti-Communism, including intense anti-North Korea rhetoric and thought, became an indispensable element of the South Korean national identity.

In later years, contention over national identity expanded beyond the inter-Korean state level, moving into the realm of a state-society conflict within the South. Most notably,

during the democracy movements of the 1980s, the authoritarian state's notion of national identity based on anti-Communism faced serious challenges from democratizing civil society. Although the protest movement began with anti-*yusin* populism (called the *minjung* movement) in the 1970s, it evolved into a nationalist struggle for democracy and eventual unification in the 1980s. In challenging the state-sponsored ideology of anti-Communism in pursuit of democracy, the close association between the United States and the authoritarian regimes led to questioning of the U.S. role, and the movement came to incorporate a vehement anti-Americanism, as featured in protest rhetoric and tactics. Not only was the United States the foreign "other" seen to be preventing realization of national unification, but there was a strong perception that the United States had been involved in recent injustices and violations of the people's human rights, in collusion with the authoritarian government. In this struggle for political democracy, the question of national identity came to the fore, provoking an intense and emotional contest between the authoritarian state and democratizing civil society. Here, once again, we see the previously described dynamic of identity politics, that is, the struggle to represent the "true" Korean national community.

The late 1980s brought important structural changes to South Korea. Internally the ROK underwent democratization, and externally it witnessed the collapse of the Soviet empire. In the post-Cold War context, the power of anti-Communism was weakened, and the Korean government pursued a "northern" policy, normalizing relations with Russia and China. However, the Cold War structure did not disappear from the peninsula, and South Korean views of the North were still largely negative (with the exception of a minority of activists who were sympathetic to the North). With democratization, anti-American nationalism gradually declined in the 1990s, although events such as the 1997 financial crisis did occasionally spark resurgence of these ideas. More broadly, a rich civil society developed, expanding and diversifying national discourse on a number of issues ranging from the North to the U.S.-ROK alliance.

A turning point in South Korea's policy toward the North occurred with Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy. South Koreans had witnessed the effects of a terrible famine in a North Korea now lacking its state sponsor, the collapsed Soviet Union. Motivated by progressive ideology and nationalism, President Kim instituted this engagement policy to assist North Korea and ensure peace on the peninsula. His policy also separated business from politics and advocated economic aid to the North to help its efforts at reform. This aggressive engagement policy led to the historic inter-Korean summit in the summer of 2000 in

Pyongyang. While its tangible outcomes were modest, the summit was instrumental in transforming many South Koreans' views of the North from an enemy to a partner.

The Sunshine Policy-provoked strong reaction from conservatives in the South. Though not necessarily in opposition to engagement,<sup>13</sup> conservative forces were skeptical that the North would change, and they demanded greater reciprocity. In their view, the North Korean threat had not diminished, and thus the pursuit of rapprochement seemed disconcerting at best and an open threat to national security at worst. The bitter contention between progressives and conservatives on the North Korean issue has been referred to as the "South-South conflict" or "a house divided."<sup>14</sup>

The politics of identity had clearly reemerged within South Korea. Now forces within civil society were locked in dispute over the politics of national identity, and the leading advocates of leftist-nationalist ideology stood at the head of government instead of in the streets. This engagement policy, which has been furthered by the Roh government, has also clashed with the Bush administration's tough line on DPRK policy, straining U.S.-ROK relations. This new iteration of the politics of national identity should be understood within the larger framework of Koreans actively seeking to (re)define their position vis-à-vis foreign powers like the United States as well as their northern half. This new outlook is closely related to self-assessment in the context of a changing regional order, especially the rise of China, and (South) Korea's discontent with U.S. unilateralism, especially its handling of the North Korean nuclear issue. But, ultimately, the North lies at the heart of the current politics of national identity.

## Data and Method

We examine this new politics of national identity in South Korea by analyzing media frames. Public opinion research has shown that the news media often set the agenda for public discussion of key policy issues and that exposure to news can significantly influence public opinion on foreign policy issues<sup>15</sup> as well as perceptions of other nations.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, many observers of Korean affairs perceive Korean media outlets as political actors whose explicit campaigns for or against particular issues have—at least partially—contributed to the South Korean public's shifting perceptions of North Korea (and the United States).<sup>17</sup> Still, no rigorous attempts have been made to examine what kinds of public discourse and messages ordinary South Koreans encounter, especially through the media, regarding various issues concerning the North.

In our analysis of South Korean media coverage of North Korea, we adopt the notion of "issue framing." At the most

general level, issue framing refers to alternative definitions, constructions, or depiction of a policy problem.<sup>18</sup> Policy issues are multifaceted, and political elites define them for the public in the ways that would shine the best possible light on their own preferred course of action. By doing so, they attempt to impose their own meaning on the issue and gain popular support.<sup>19</sup> The mass media serve as the conduits through which their messages flow and can offer an important medium in forging a nation's identity.

In the present study, we examine how two major South Korean newspapers have framed issues within their coverage of North Korea.<sup>20</sup> In particular, we look at the frequency with which South Korean newspapers employ various issue frames related to relations with North Korea over the study period of 1992–2003. To evaluate how the discourse has evolved over time and to demonstrate the significant psychological impact of the Sunshine Policy, we also consider the frequency of North Korea-related media frames before Kim Dae-jung's term in office (the 1992–97 period) compared with the period after his inauguration (1998–2003). We utilize constructivist theories of international relations in arguing that conceptions of national identity are central to South Korea's relationship with the North and, by extension, its relationship with the United States. Issue frames related to the North, bound together, compose a political orientation that is largely rooted in identity.

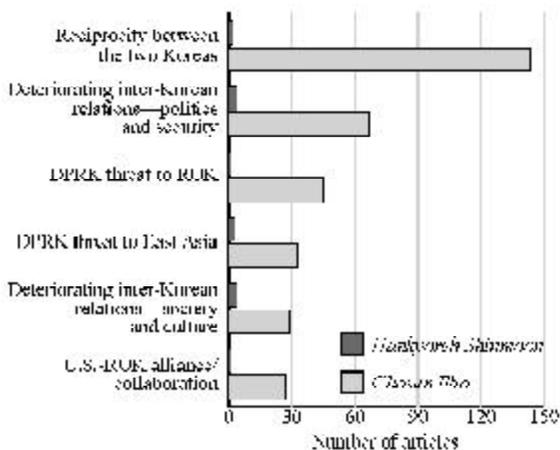
We examined more than 1,000 editorials and columns that appeared in two newspapers, *Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh Shinmoon*, between 1 July 1992 and 30 July 2003. These newspapers serve as a reasonably good proxy for major and often contending views in the South Korean press regarding North Korea and inter-Korean relations. The *Chosun Ilbo*, founded in 1920, is both the oldest and largest newspaper (in terms of circulation) in Korea and represents conservative views. The *Hankyoreh Shinmoon* was founded in 1987 in the midst of democratization and represents "progressive" views. Despite a smaller circulation, this liberal newspaper exerts strong influence in Korean policymaking circles because of its ties to progressive forces in power since the late 1990s. The South Korean news media have been a major forum in the national debate over policy toward North Korea and prospects for the alliance.

## Media Frame Analysis

From our data, we observe stark contrasts in conservative and progressive framing of issues related to North Korea and the alliance. The data also reveal the extent of disagreement between conservative and progressive views and how particular issue frames coalesce around distinct, opposing identities.

**Figure 1** depicts the six most prevalent media frames in *Chosun Ilbo*'s North Korea coverage from 1992 to 2003.<sup>21</sup> These six media frames are congruous with traditional conservative rhetoric in South Korea: highlighting the need for greater reciprocity in Seoul's engagement of Pyongyang, disparaging the current state of inter-Korean relations, reaffirming the North's security threat, and emphasizing cooperation within the U.S.-ROK alliance.

**Figure 1: Most Prevalent News Frames in *Chosun Ilbo*, 1992–2003**



Source: Authors' data

The relative incidence of these frames gives us important insight into the terms of the DPRK-related debate that courses through Korean media. By far the most prevalent frame, which emphasizes reciprocity between the two Koreas, represents both a policy prescription and an indictment of successive administrations' engagement of the North featuring front-loaded benefits. It is clear that the terms on which the ROK government pursues a relationship with Pyongyang has elicited a more voluminous response than any other aspect of the "North Korean problem," as it is termed. This fervent suggestion of a basis on which to rectify the course of engagement policy is logically supported and is made more pressing by the observation inherent in *Chosun*'s second most frequently used frame—that inter-Korean relations in the political and security arenas are deteriorating. In other words, these findings suggest that Korean conservatives may not object to the engagement policy per se but that they are dissatisfied with the current state of inter-Korean relations, especially the perceived asymmetry of gains and sincerity.

In large part, the other top media frames from *Chosun* speak to basic interpretations of the political and strategic landscape rather than stand as explicit policy recommendations. Although the ROK government has taken conciliatory actions such as removing references to North Korea as the

"main enemy" from defense white papers (based on DPRK complaints rather than in-kind actions), *Chosun*'s body of editorials and columns affirms that conservatives continue to view North Korea as a threat to the ROK and, secondarily, to the region. The prevalence of these threat frames (third and fourth most frequent) indicates that the newspaper is motivated to highlight this view.

The U.S.-ROK alliance is the sixth most prevalent frame within *Chosun*'s news on North Korea. Although the conservative newspaper used this frame with less than one-fifth the frequency of its primary frame (reciprocity between the Koreans), from *Chosun*'s perspective this does not suggest the lack of a significant role for the alliance vis-à-vis North Korea. Instead, the smaller number of frames simply reflects the fact that this data set includes editorials and columns primarily about North Korea, not the United States or the U.S.-ROK alliance. It can thus be said that the conservative paper clearly continues to equate the North Korean threat and the importance of the alliance. Out of the entire set of frames about North Korea, the alliance frame is one of the most frequently used.

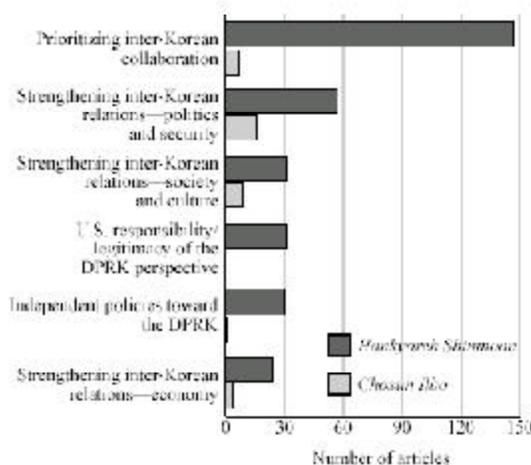
In addition to featuring *Chosun Ilbo*'s most prevalent media frames, Figure 1 also includes data on the frequency with which *Hankyoreh Shinmoon* used these same frames. Conspicuously, the progressive *Hankyoreh* almost never used any of the media frames that *Chosun* used with relatively great frequency, clearly showing polarization in views of the North within South Korea.

The stark differences between the two newspapers' coverage of North Korea becomes even more dramatic upon observation of **Figure 2**. It reveals that *Hankyoreh*'s six most prevalent media frames address the same issue areas as *Chosun*'s frames, but they take antithetical positions in nearly every case, signaling the vehement, seemingly interminable debate over the DPRK in the South Korean media. Similar to the dynamic we observed between the two newspapers in Figure 1, we see from Figure 2 that *Chosun* hardly utilized any of *Hankyoreh*'s most frequently employed media frames concerning North Korea. Thus, data on media rhetoric bears out the popular perception of diametrically opposed media outlets engaged in a belligerent debate in which neither side has yielded even middle ground. The extent of disagreement is truly striking.

Like *Chosun*, *Hankyoreh* most frequently uses a frame that encapsulates its position toward engagement with North Korea. The persistent use of the conservative "reciprocity in inter-Korean relations" and the progressive "prioritize inter-Korean collaboration" by the newspaper of that particular outlook at a rate proportional to the use by the other newspaper of its most prevalent frame—and at rates sev-

eral times higher than any other preferred frame—demonstrates that the issue of the *terms* of engagement with North Korea is of profound importance in this debate. Once again, this finding suggests that both sides recognize the need for engagement, which is hard to reject given a strong sense of ethnic identity, but the newspapers’ policy approaches are fundamentally different. One stresses inter-Korean relations above other priorities while the other demands more reciprocity from the North.

**Figure 2: Most Prevalent News Frames in *Hankyoreh* and *Chosun Ilbo*, 1992–2003**



Source: Authors’ data.

Other frames frequently used in the progressive newspaper’s editorials and columns are also strongly associated with the politics of national identity. The frame regarding “U.S. responsibility” and “legitimacy of the DPRK perspective” speaks to the perception among progressives that the United States has fostered a security environment in which Pyongyang had few options but to develop nuclear weapons. This perception has come to prominence more recently, in connection with the Bush administration’s rhetoric about an “axis of evil” and “regime change” and its preemptive strike doctrine. Former president Kim Dae-jung echoed variations of this reasoning in the wake of North Korea’s nuclear test. The “independent policies toward the DPRK” frame is linked to these perceptions and underpinned by the ideas, popularized by the 1980s protest movements, that the U.S.-ROK alliance has been grossly inequitable and that the ROK must extricate itself from U.S. influence. This nationalistic, essentially anti-American, component of nationalism was largely dormant during the 1990s (with the exception of the financial crisis) but has been reawakened by a new generation of policy elites—former activists now integrated into electoral politics and the bureaucracy—as well as by recent U.S. policies perceived to be heavy-handed and counter to South Korean interests.

Additional prevalent *Hankyoreh* frames include the strengthening of inter-Korean relations across a number of areas—politics and security, society and culture, and the economy. Interestingly but not surprisingly, the newspaper has put the most emphasis on political relations, which may have had the biggest psychological impact on South Koreans, although it is actually economic projects that have come to form the backbone of the government’s engagement policy.

The filtering of current events through these ideological, opposing media frames at once caters to two political expressions of nationalism—two *identities*—and reinforces the views of each camp. We expect that, in the wake of Kim Dae-jung’s implementation of the Sunshine Policy, the two identities developing in South Korea vis-à-vis the North and the United States will have hardened, thus creating a more contentious political atmosphere. To examine this proposition, we divided the media frame data into two distinct time periods within the study period: before Kim Dae-jung’s presidency and after his inauguration. These analyses will shed light on how disparate identities have evolved over time and in response to events. President Kim’s policies toward North Korea represented a departure from the approach of previous administrations, and the Sunshine Policy’s implementation signified a profound, normative statement on the shape and priorities of his country’s nationalism. We expect the prevalence of certain media frames (demonstrating a polarized, national debate on North Korea) to increase after Kim took office. Although we expect this will be the case in both newspapers, we forecast that the increase will be greater in *Hankyoreh* as the introduction of the Sunshine Policy created more political space for the expression of progressive views on North Korea.

The Sunshine Policy has proceeded in fits and starts with Olympic cooperation, aid shipments, naval cooperation, economic agreements, and promised meetings scrapped along the way. Its successor, President Roh’s Peace and Prosperity Policy, has weathered the peninsula’s second nuclear crisis, including a nuclear test, but not without great debate over its efficacy. Given the way North Korea-related issues are tied to these two senses of identity, each side has experienced these events in different ways. The media frames and their frequency provide insight into these experiences, revealing the filters through which new information is often assimilated, in line with these respective identity-based political views.

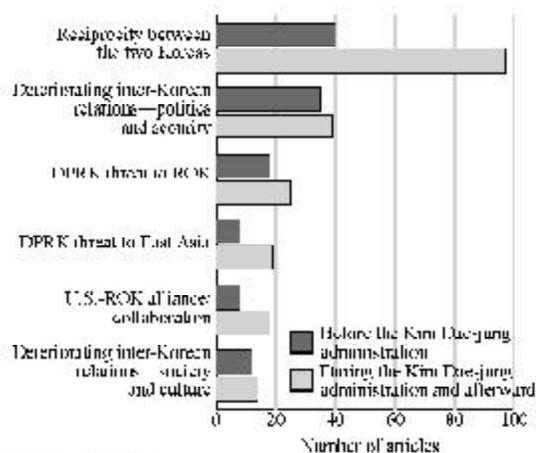
*Figure 3* and *Figure 4* show that both newspapers increased their use of the media frames discussed above after Kim Dae-jung took office.<sup>22</sup> The frequency of the “reciprocity” frame more than doubled, reflecting conservatives’

dissatisfaction with the Sunshine Policy. The number of editorials and columns using the two “deteriorating inter-Korean relations” frames also increased. The same is true for the frame concerning the DPRK’s threat to the ROK. It is interesting that the frame concerning the DPRK’s threat to East Asia as well as the frame on the U.S.-ROK alliance became more than twice as prevalent after Kim became president. It was during Kim Dae-jung’s presidency that the North test-fired a two-stage ballistic missile over Japan (1998) and became embroiled in a nuclear crisis (2002), certainly raising concerns about regional security. That *Chosun* coverage making use of the “DPRK’s threat to East Asia” frame seemed to increase in tandem with the “alli-

ance” frame is logical—if one is increasingly concerned that North Korea is a threat, one is more willing to accept the U.S. troop presence and more likely to value the alliance’s contribution to regional stability.

As anticipated, in *Hankyoreh Shinmoon* coverage, the prevalence of the previously discussed top six media frames increased significantly from before Kim’s presidency to after his inauguration. In fact, as Figure 4 shows, the prevalence of each frame increased by at least 100 percent. A progressive administration in office and early gains made by the Sunshine Policy created a different political environment,<sup>23</sup> one in which there was more political space for advocacy of progressive views on North Korea. The environment also featured strong criticism of the government’s engagement policy from conservative media, which created the necessity of a strong response from the perspective of progressive media. The finding that not a single frame category from either newspaper decreased in prevalence strongly suggests the hardening of both the conservative and progressive identities since the institution of the Sunshine Policy.

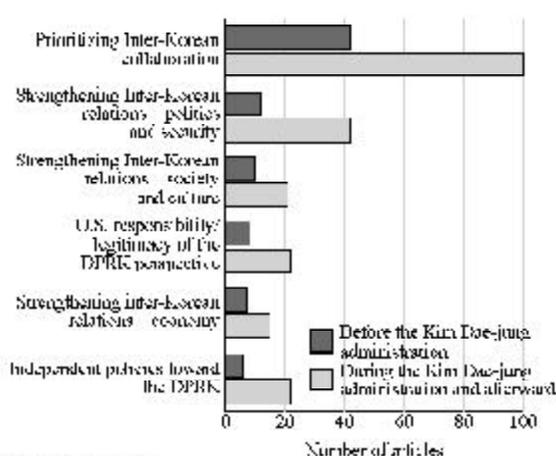
**Figure 3: Most Prevalent News Frames in *Chosun Ilbo*, the time before the Kim Dae-jung administration compared with during and after his administration**



Source: Authors’ data

Most conspicuous in Figures 3 and 4 is the increased prevalence of the “reciprocity” (*Chosun*) and “prioritizing inter-Korean collaboration” (*Hankyoreh*) frames from the earlier to the latter period. Once again, these findings indicate that Kim’s Sunshine Policy has provoked intense debate over the proper policy approach toward the North—that is, the *terms* of engagement rather than the broad concept in itself. The Sunshine Policy has had a powerful, lasting psychological effect in South Korea, increasing the debate and hardening politically constructed notions of identity in the process. Among progressive forces, it has changed threat perception and therefore devalued the alliance in some respects. The younger generation has come to find the politics of national identity appealing, and, much like the student movements of the mid and late 1980s, the youth are eager to liberate a proud, successful, prosperous Korea from foreign (read U.S.) influence. Especially since the George W. Bush administration took office, many Koreans of this orientation have questioned the compatibility of Korean and U.S. interests and priorities.<sup>24</sup>

**Figure 4: Most Prevalent News Frames in *Hankyoreh Shinmoon*, the time before the Kim Dae-jung administration compared with during and after his administration**



Source: Authors’ data

## Discussion and Policy Implications

North Korea is a policy issue for the United States, but it is fundamentally an issue of identity for South Korea. Through the collapse of the Soviet empire, democratization, and the implementation of the Sunshine Policy, South Koreans have sought to redefine their view of the North in relation to conceptions of national identity. The process of redefining or reformulating national identity can be contentious and conflict ridden. This is exactly what we see today in the

South with respect to views of the North, with one group firmly retaining the established identity and another group reinterpreting relationships and events and forging a progressive identity. As we observed from the findings above, these two identities, in direct contraposition, have hardened over time; and this process is not likely to reverse itself in the near term.

Although both groups agree on a shared sense of ethnic unity, they debate the political notion of nation. Counterintuitively, agreement on ethnic unity makes the political debate especially bitter, because it creates normative expectations and prescriptions for behavior (in other words, one group expects the other group to behave just as it would). When the groups articulate disparate political conceptions of the nation, the conflict is highly charged. The conflict does not lend itself to political compromise because each views its position as part of an essential state of order not conducive to concessions. Each is wedded to a vision of ethnic unity in which the greatest threat to identity is not external actors but *internal* challenges and corrosion.<sup>25</sup>

South Koreans' views of the North are closely intertwined with their views of the United States. As shown above, the conservative newspaper stresses North Korean threats and the importance of the alliance, while the liberal newspaper advocates improved collaboration between the two Koreas and charges that the United States is responsible for North Korea's behavior and the current standoff. In addition, the conservative newspaper emphasizes reciprocity in relations with the North, while the liberal newspaper argues that inter-Korean relations should be a top priority. These findings support the contention that South Koreans are now caught between two conflicting identities: the "alliance" identity that sees the North as a threat and the United States as a key provider of security, and the "nationalist" identity that pits Korean identity against the United States and advocates close collaboration with the North as a national priority of the first order.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the gap in views of the United States and North Korea has widened in recent years, especially since the launch of the Sunshine Policy. These conflicting identities are unlikely to be mitigated or muted in the near future, thus presenting a fundamental challenge to the alliance.

Although progressive, or nationalist, notions of identity and policy preferences clearly pose a more fundamental challenge to the alliance, it is important to recognize that there is not necessarily a direct relationship between policy preferences associated with the "alliance" identity and those preferable to the United States. For example, GNP delegations visited Washington in the months before the 2006 Security Consultative Meeting, at which a timetable for the

transfer of wartime operational command from the U.S.-led Combined Forces Command to the Korean military was to be decided. GNP legislators had campaigned hard at home against this initiative and an accelerated time line, and they came to the United States seeking to convince Bush administration officials that an early transfer was far from prudent and perhaps even irresponsible, given the current nuclear standoff. Yet they found a less sympathetic ear in Washington than they had expected, as administration officials told them that the United States wants to see Korea take greater responsibility for its own defense and that the United States views transfer of wartime control as being in line with this long-planned objective.<sup>27</sup>

In a similar vein, the "nationalist" identity's interests do not always run counter to those of the United States. At certain junctures, they may coincide. This was apparent when President Roh sent Korean troops to Iraq (even if it was a tortured decision-making process). His administration has also pushed hard and made significant compromises in order to conclude a free trade agreement with the United States (still pending legislative approval in both countries) despite strong opposition from his own constituents.

Yet the coincidence of interests (or ostensible *quid pro quo*) is no substitute for shared, fundamental interests that outlast presidential administrations' varying interpretations and priorities. Within the U.S.-ROK alliance, these types of interests remain, and they should be central to efforts to revitalize the alliance, especially as other important—but not vital—issues remain intractable. According to a June 2006 World Gallup Poll, despite the finding that fewer than half (43 percent) of Koreans feel seriously threatened by North Korean nuclear weapons, two-thirds (66 percent) of Koreans believe a U.S. withdrawal from their country would greatly impact the stability of Northeast Asia. Indeed, more than 70 percent of Koreans want to retain the U.S. presence.<sup>28</sup>

These somewhat conflicting findings suggest that Washington and Seoul need to work together to develop a new justification, beyond the North Korean threat, to maintain the U.S. presence in the ROK. Beyond the defense of Korea and Japan, U.S. alliances with these nations have contributed significantly to regional stability in East Asia. Focusing on this imperative would necessarily involve compromise and political will from Seoul (given that the United States would likely emphasize increased Korea-Japan cooperation and multilateral initiatives such as the PSI in pursuit of this goal), but it would also stand as a powerful U.S. acceptance of progressive Korean attitudes and a continued resolve to work together for the good of the region—a logical role for Korea given its increased economic and diplomatic stature as well as its geographical location.

Even if the conservatives regain power in upcoming elections, their administration will face the daunting task of building consensus for its policy toward the North. The United States should be wary of creating expectations for a dramatic change in South Korea as a result of this potential domestic political power shift. To better secure long-term interests and continued cooperation, the United States must consider the interests associated with both identities and acknowledge the constraints a divided polity imposes on the Korean government. In addition, the establishment of a conservative administration in South Korea may galvanize the progressives in challenging its policy agenda, including—and perhaps foremost—its approach toward the North. In a sense, progressives were contained by the liberal governments of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun as they reluctantly agreed on certain policies like sending the troops to Iraq. In the face of a conservative administration, however, they could become more aggressive in advancing their progressive agenda. This would mean further intensification of identity politics, and the United States could easily be caught between a conservative Blue House and progressive activists.

This study has defined the most contentious and hotly discussed issues in the North Korea debate currently taking place in South Korean society. This debate is a stark reality, and the United States must take it into account in policymaking toward Korea. Indeed, former U.S. defense secretary William Perry's well-known axiom about North Korea also applies to the South: the United States must deal with the ROK as it is, not as we might wish it to be.<sup>29</sup> In managing the alliance in the face of such ostensibly durable division and identity politics within South Korea, the United States must strive to identify bases for cooperation that appeal to both progressive and conservative constituencies. This is no doubt a complicated exercise, but careful alliance management and creative thinking on alliance revitalization is in the interest of all parties—the United States, the Republic of Korea, and the region, including Japan.

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20. Native Korean-speakers who were graduate students (or mature undergraduate students) at a major university in South Korea served as coders for the classification of these media frames. To reach the level of inter-coder reliability generally accepted by the research community, all coders went through extensive training. In addition, all

articles were randomly assigned to coders in accordance with their publication dates in order to prevent coder-specific attributes from confounding temporal trends in the data. In analyzing news frames, we coded the full text of editorials and columns concerning North Korea. The search that selected these editorials and columns was based on a Boolean search string. We used the KINDS database, the most extensive newspaper archive in Korea. For searching articles on North Korea, the following keywords were used in Korean: North Korea, the North, Pyongyang, Kim Il Sung, and Kim Jong Il. We also used the Chinese characters corresponding to North Korea and the North because they are commonly used in South Korean newspapers. To maintain the sample size at a manageable level, we searched only the keywords in the article's headline. A total of 1,119 (614 for *Chosun Ilbo* and 505 for *Hankyoreh Shinmoon*) editorials and columns were examined.

21. For a complete list of the North Korea-related media frames coded in this study, please reference the appendix.

22. The same six news frames described in Figures 1 and 2 were also the most prevalent in the time period before Kim Dae-jung's presidency as well as in the time period after his inauguration. This was true in both newspapers.

23. Kim Dae-jung's election was not the product of such an environment. Rather, according to Hahm in "The Two South Koreas: A House Divided," page 63, "the financial crisis created widespread panic and disgust among the population with the ruling conservative coalition's corruption and mismanagement of the economy, providing the opportunity for Kim Dae-jung to surmount" significant obstacles that would normally keep him from winning a presidential election. Thus, Kim Dae-jung's election helped shape an environment in which progressive ideas were gaining credence.

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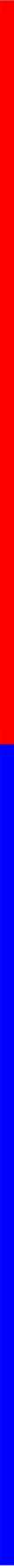
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## Appendix

### Media Frames Used

Autocratic nature of the DPRK  
Concern for human rights in the DPRK  
Deteriorating inter-Korean relations—politics and security  
Deteriorating Inter-Korean relations—society and culture  
Difference between the two Koreas  
DPRK regime in crisis  
DPRK threat to East Asia  
DPRK threat to the ROK  
Economic burden of the DPRK  
Emphasizing similarities between the two Koreas  
Independent policies toward the DPRK  
Inter-Korean economic cooperation  
Need for North Korea's participation in the world community  
Neglect of DPRK human rights issues  
North's broken promises  
Partially allowing for legitimacy of the DPRK regime  
Possibility of change in the DPRK economic system  
Prioritizing inter-Korean collaboration  
Publicizing DPRK human rights issues  
Reciprocity between the two Koreas  
Reduced threat from the DPRK  
Retaining the current DPRK regime  
South's new perspective toward DPRK  
South's responsibility North's economic crisis  
Stability of the DPRK  
Strengthening inter-Korean relations—economy  
Strengthening inter-Korean relations—politics and security  
Strengthening inter-Korean relations—society and culture  
U.S. responsibility/legitimacy of the DPRK perspective  
U.S.-ROK alliance/collaboration



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