

THE REGIONAL POWER BALANCE IN EAST ASIA AND ITS IMPACT ON KOREA'S JAPAN POLICY

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The high volatility behind Korea-Japan relations is a conundrum in international relations. Both countries share the same ally, close economic ties, and a vested economic interest in mutual cooperation. Moreover, their geographic proximity to a rising China and a threatening North Korea makes closer military and political cooperation needed to cope with common security threats. However, this cannot be observed today as both countries seem to embark on a confrontational path over history, guilt, and memory on the issue of a shared colonial past. In explaining this puzzle, existing models neglect to incorporate the changing regional power balance. This paper offers an alternative, positing that the overarching balance of power in the region makes cooperation between the two countries less needed. Employing the Correlates of War (COW) from a national capabilities dataset, the paper finds that the international environment evolved favourably for Korea, thereby allowing other factors, such as historical grievances, to play a role in foreign policy formation.

The world of international relations is comprised of theories and scholars. States confront states in a game over power and security, constantly threatened to be permanently extinguished as countless empires before them. The interpretations of underlying forces and even subjects of international relations have been highly debated. For some, states aim to maximize power; for others, capital seeking individuals make use of states' resources for individual gains. On the other hand, many understand power as an act of speech and scholars of international relations have to be highly careful in their understanding of the main driving forces, as this set of chosen theoretical foundations is likely to narrow possible outcomes. Being the most dynamic region of the world today, East Asia forms a perfect laboratory to apply theoretical insights. From a geopolitical perspective, Japan and the

Republic of Korea (thereafter “South Korea” “Korea” or “ROK”) seem to be natural allies in East Asia. Both countries share the same ally, the United States, have close economic ties, and a vested economic interest in mutual cooperation. Moreover, the geographic proximity of both countries to a rising China and a threatening Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (thereafter “North Korea” or “DPRK”) makes closer military and political cooperation between them a necessity in order to cope with common security threats. According to neorealist approaches, propositions would typically result in deeper cooperation and more cooperative foreign policy between the two countries, yet this cannot be observed. Despite incremental and bilateral interests, both countries, overall, seem to embark on a confrontational path over history, guilt, and memory on the issue of a shared colonial past. Surprisingly, such high sensitivity has not been present after the liberalization of Korea in 1945, but it gained increasing influence on Korea’s Japan Policy, following the end of the Cold War and the beginning of democratization in Korea after 1987. It seems astonishing that quarrels over historical grievances are able to shape the foreign policy of a country deeply threatened by its regional environment. Moreover, it comes as a surprise that, in the mid-1960s and early 1980s, South Korea took a cooperative approach with the conclusion of the 1965 Treaty establishing bilateral relations and the comprehensive loan agreement in 1984. What has caused the evolution in general, and more precisely, the ability of domestic factors, such as historical grievances, to influence Korea’s Japan policy? After discussing the need for a theory of foreign policy, the paper assesses existing models and their explanatory power to describe Korea’s Japan Policy. Based on this assessment, the Correlates of War (COW) from the national capabilities dataset is used to offer an explanatory alternative based primarily on the regional international environment, which allows for deterioration in South Korea’s Japan Policy.

A Theory of Foreign Policy

For scholars of international relations, there is an ocean of approaches and theories to choose from. One of the most influential and most autochthonous theories in international relations is neorealism. Philosophically originating in the writings of Thucydides, Thomas Hobbes, and Niccolò Machiavelli, realism posits a pessimistic image about humankind, refuses teleological notions of progress, and regards the moral as a function of power. In pre-civil times, the individual was in a state of anarchy, relying on his own

strength and understood only his capabilities to survive.¹ Individual units in international relations – be they tribes, city-states, or nations – are similarly placed in an environment of anarchy and absent of any overarching, governing force able to secure the survival of individual states.² To ensure the national interest – defined by Hans Morgenthau as “the national pursuit, within certain moral limitations, of the power objectives of the state”³ – states can only rely on their national capabilities, always fearing stronger states will claim their lands or simply overtaking the state’s institutions.⁴ As such, what drives the national interest is the security for survival.

Structural realism, as promulgated by Kenneth Waltz’s balance-of-power theory, Stephen M. Walt’s balance-of-threat theory, and John Mearsheimer’s offensive realism, provides a comprehensive analysis of the international system, its structure, and forces. Anarchy, resulting from the continuous drive for survival by states aiming to maximize power or security, leads to recurring systemic outcomes and polarity. Obviously, recurring patterns of the international structure are caused by systemic forces outside the control of individual states. In the long run, they are, to borrow the metaphor of Fareed Zakaria, mere “billiard balls” of outside forces. Fairly accurate predictions of these developments are given by structural realist approaches. Yet, because billiard balls are “made of a different material, affecting its speed, spin, and bounce on the international plane,”⁵ their lane on the international plane might be different. The foreign policy of a country at a given time might be fundamentally departing from structural realist predictions precisely due to different specifications. The inability of structural realist approaches to incorporate unit-level variables, however useful for the description of the international system, becomes a hindrance for a neorealist analysis of the foreign policy of a particular country. For an investigation of the distribution of capabilities of states in the system, no internal factors are important. For an investigation of a state’s response to this distribution of capabilities,

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- 1 For statements on human nature see Hans Morgenthau *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, (Chicago: University Press, 1946); Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, (New York: Columbia University, 1959).
 - 2 Steven Lobell et al, “Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy,” in: *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven Lobell et al (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 14.
 - 3 Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: Struggle for Power and Peace*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 240.
 - 4 Morgenthau defined national security as “integrity of the national territory and its institutions”; *ibid.* 586.
 - 5 Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 9.

however, they are indispensable. Waltz himself described that “[n]either realists nor anyone else believe that unit-level factors can be excluded from foreign policy analysis.”⁶ His argument rests on a distinction of causality. While theories of international politics regard foreign policy as independent and the international structure as the dependent variable, the causality in a realist theory of foreign policy is reversed. It is therefore critical to distinguish between a theory of international politics and a theory of foreign policy.⁷ So how can we integrate domestic factors into a neorealist analysis of foreign policy?

In a 1998 influential review article from *World Politics*, Gideon Rose investigated recent realist scholarly research and found an increasing departure from black-box approaches to the study of international politics.⁸ For him, the relative distribution of capabilities shapes the parameters for state action but its content is confined to the country’s foreign policy elite, constrained by their ability to extract resources from society. Thus, what Rose labeled neoclassical realism is, in fact, an incorporation of external and internal variables into the investigation of foreign policy decision-making. As a rule, Gideon finds that, with growing resources, states tend to expand their ambitions in the international arena. As the information provided by the international system, however, is indirect and complex, the pressure to be international must be translated through intervening variables. Rose termed this function a “transmission belt,”⁹ at which point domestic factors can influence foreign policy making. Though, existing literature expresses that internal debates can exert influence only in a permissive international environment. The realist assumption that states “as a minimum, seek

6 Kenneth Waltz, “International Politics is not Foreign Policy,” *Security Studies* 6, no.3, (2007): 56.

7 Note, there are other theories of foreign policy, for example: Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow *Essence of Decision-Making. Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, 1999); Richard Rosecrance *The Rise of the Trading State. Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World*, (New York: Basic Books, 1986); or Joseph Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes*, (Cleveland: A Meridian Book, 1955).

8 Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998); Michael Brown et al *The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security*, (Cambridge: MIT Press; Christensen, 1995); Thomas Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict 1947-1958*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Randall Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler’s Strategy for World Conquest*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); William Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance. Power and Perception during the Cold War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

9 *Ibid*, 147.

their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination”¹⁰ makes a point in this case. What is sought by a state depends on the relative ability of a state to realize those goals. Already, Machiavelli emphasized that the distribution of capabilities sets necessities for state action, which narrow the range of alternatives for the statesmen to pursue.¹¹ Similarly, Waltz argues that “in the absence of counterweights, a country’s internal impulses prevail.”¹² This implies the notion explored by Steven Lobell et al. that “anarchy gives states considerable latitude in defining their security interests.”¹³ Thus, there is a link between national capabilities and scope of international ambition. Taking this debate further, several authors argue that domestic factors matter in a permissive international environment. Generally, they matter because the external environment “set[s] the parameter... [while] unit-level factors ... determin[e] both the character and the venue” of foreign policy.¹⁴ In that way, unit-level factors are of substance as they “constrain or facilitate the ability... to respond to systemic imperatives.”¹⁵ Zakaria, for example, aims to take account of the hesitation of the United States of America to become a great power. Investigating the period 30 years prior to 1908, he finds that, despite a permissive international environment, domestic structures prevented a bid to great power status.¹⁶ Importantly, the supremacy of the international over the domestic is defining the scope of ambitions but not the individual response and timing of the state. In this vein, Colin Dueck argues that, because leaders have to manage domestic politics at the same time with international constraints, sub-optimal policy outcomes are likely if a permissive international environment prevails.¹⁷ This seems logical as domestic actors place their demands on the state. The state, however, can only be receptive to such demands if they do not threaten its very existence and, as a result, can only be fulfilled in a permissive environment. Applying this linkage to South Korea will shed light upon the underlying factors setting the margins of action for its *Japan Policy*.

10 Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (Long Grove: Waveland, 1979), 118.

11 Bernard Crick, *Machiavelli: The Discourses*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 62-63.

12 Kenneth Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War” in *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*. Ed. John Ikenberry (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 5.

13 Steven Lobell et al (2009), 7.

14 *Ibid*, 3.

15 *Ibid*, 4.

16 Fareed Zakaria, (1998),. 11

17 Colin Dueck, “Neoclassical Realism and the National Interest: Presidents, Domestic Politics, and Major Military Intervention” in: *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven Lobell et al (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Existing Models

The relationship between Korea and Japan has been studied extensively and competing explanatory models have emerged. This section explores, at first, the five most prominent explanatory models and is followed by the authors' critique of them¹⁸

Quasi-Alliance Model

The most cited approach is Victor Cha's "quasi-alliance model." Accordingly, the cooperation between the two countries cannot be explained by psycho-historical approaches emphasizing historical animosity alone. Neither is the balance-of-threat model able to fully account for changes in cooperation and conflict. He suggested an understanding of the bilateral relations between Korea and Japan as a function of patron-commitment by the US. Hence, existing threats are seen through the perception of patron-commitment in Japan and Korea. Differences in abandonment or entrapment fears cause either friction or cooperation.¹⁹ He argued that, in cases of asymmetrical feelings of abandonment/entrapment, friction is likely to prevail. Conversely, if both countries experience symmetrical fears, then cooperation is likely.²⁰ Therefore, "promises of the great power patron can influence alignment behavior more than external threats."²¹ A vital point to his model is that security engagement with the US allows the two countries to have a "free-ride" on security by relieving the pressure to cooperate.²² In scholarly literature there are three critiques to his model. First, Woo Seung-ji points out that it does not explain the period prior to diplomatic normalization in 1965. In this time, the US exerted extensive pressure and this can be interpreted as engagement. However, the result was cooperation and not friction.²³ Sec-

18 There are more explanatory models. However, the five presented form a comprehensive overview of underlying forces. Further studies include: Gilbert Rozmann and Shinhwa Lee, "Unravelling the Japan-South Korea 'Virtual Alliance,'" *Asian Survey* 16, no. 5 (2006); Kevin Cooney and Alex Scarborough, "Japan and South Korea: Can These Two Nations Work Together?," *Asian Affairs* 35, no. 5 (2008); Kil J.Yi, "In Search of a Panacea: Japan-Korea Rapprochement and America's 'Far Eastern Problems,'" *Pacific Historical Review* 71, no. 4 (2008); or Hyon Joo Yoo, "Domestic Hurdles for System-Driven Behaviour: Neoclassical Realism and Missile Defence Policies in Japan and South Korea," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 12, no. 2 (2012).

19 Abandonment is "the fear that the ally may leave the alliance" while "entrapment occurs when an alliance commitment turns detrimental to one's interests..." Victor Cha, "Abandonment, Entrapment, and Neoclassical Realism in Asia," *International Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2000): 265.

20 *Ibid.*, 269-273.

21 *Ibid.*, 283.

22 *Ibid.*, 284-285.

23 SJ Woo, "[Korean] Puzzle of Korea-Japan Cooperation in the Cold War," *Korean Journal of Political*

ond, Hwang Ji-hwan raises the point that disengagement of the US from Korea and Japan is likely to result in competitive internal balancing and, thus, competition between the two.²⁴ Third, Park Cheol-hee criticizes that historical animosity is treated as a constant factor, while, for Park, it can “either be escalated or de-escalated by political leaders and civic groups”²⁵ and has to be understood as a variable, not as a constant.

Colonial Legacy Model

Hwang developed the “colonial-legacy model” to account for the volatile relationship, despite common threats and patrons. He argued that, in times of US disengagement, both countries did cooperate, but only to a limited extent. Investigating those periods, he found that they engaged in extensive military build-up and only marginal cooperation, indicating both countries were balancing against each other. For Hwang, the underlying cause of this antagonism rests in historical animosity.²⁶ However, the necessity to cooperate as directed by the international environment is likely to outweigh domestic concerns, such as historical animosity, if threats are significant. Cha argues similarly, where, according to his investigation, the cooperation between 1969 and 1971 resulted in the 1969 Korea clause, and the Okinawa base agreement was clearly attributed to US President Nixon’s Guam Doctrine, which foresaw a disengagement of the US from the region.²⁷

Net Threat Theory

Yoon Tae-ryong developed a threat model to further explain the relationship. Accordingly, Yoon combines the common threat perceived by Japan and Korea with the commitment of the US into one threat variable, called “net threat.” He shows that increases in net threat result in increasing cooperation incentives, as structural realism would predict. However, he limits his predictions since incentives alone cannot adequately account for the actual cooperation or friction observed.²⁸ For him, the crucial intervening variable

Science, 37, no. 3 (2003): 143; Note, the author is unable to read Korean. Therefore the information in Woo (2003) is derived from Cheol Hee Park, “Cooperation Coupled with Conflicts: Korean Japan Relations in the Post-Cold War Era,” *Asia-Pacific Review* 15, no. 2 (2008).

24 Jihwan Hwang, „Rethinking the East Asian Balance of Power: Historical Antagonism, Internal Balancing, and the Korea-Japanese Security Relationship,” *World Affairs* 166, no. 2 (2003).

25 Park, C. (2008) p. 16

26 Hwang (2003).

27 Cha (2000), 273-276.

28 Tae-Ryong Yoon, “Fragile Cooperation: Net Threat Theory and Japan-Korea-US Relations,” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2006).

is historical animosity²⁹ and, thus, Park criticizes Yoon's "net threat theory" on two grounds. First, he argues that it fails to take into account diverging/converging threat perception and, second, works with concepts of conflict that are too broad to be useful for predictive purposes.³⁰

Engagement-Coalition Model

Woo developed an "engagement-coalition model" incorporating US engagement with the domestic politics of the two countries. Even though he acknowledges the role of the US, as can be seen in Cha's model, he stated that the party politics of domestic Japanese politics can either facilitate or hamper cooperation. Different from Cha, however, he regards the engagement with the US as promoting cooperation. In times of US engagement what makes the difference is whether there are "Alpha coalitions" or "Beta coalitions" in power in Korea and Japan. "Alpha coalitions" are anti-communist and promote closer alignment with the US "Beta coalitions." represented by centrist governments, balance between cooperation with the US and neighboring countries. He predicted that, in times of US engagement, cooperation would occur if the same coalitions were in power between the two countries. Astonishingly, however, he attributed a pro-cooperation attitude to Korea, thereby limiting the role of coalitions to Japan³¹ and, subsequently, Park grounds his two criticisms on this assumption. First, with rising progressive forces in Korea, the pro-cooperation stance cannot be assumed anymore. Second, the changed political climate in South Korea favors historical animosity in order to influence bilateral relations.³²

Convergent-Management Model

Park developed a "convergent-management model." whereby, basing his argument on Cha, he argues, firstly, that the "perception about the threatening third, not the allied third, party"³³ is crucial for determining cooperation. Thus, if faced with symmetric threats the two countries will enhance cooperation. Moreover, he takes into account the point of Hwang's model that historical memory matters. For him, historical animosity matters but is a variable in itself that can be engraved or tampered by elites or societal actors.

29 Ibid, 24-26.

30 Park, (2008), 18.

31 Woo (2003).

32 Park (2008), 17.

33 Ibid, 19.

Therefore, historical animosity can be de-escalating or escalating, leading to either cooperation or friction. Next to these two independent variables, he includes the alliance management of the US as an intervening variable that can either enhance cooperation, if done symmetrically, or lead to friction, if asymmetrically performed.³⁴

Critique

In conclusion, some points of critique could be voiced about these models. First, a difference between threat by a third party and threat of abandonment or entrapment is inherent in the models. Theoretically, it seems not deducible that the source of threat makes a difference for foreign policy decisions. One can regard threat in the form of a reduced ally commitment to be the same as threat of an increasing adversary. In the wording of Walt, what counts is that “one state or coalition appears especially dangerous.”³⁵ Thus, threat remains threat regardless of the source. Second, all models involved do regard the relative distribution of power capabilities fixed throughout time. As will be seen in the following part, significant changes in the regional distribution of power are neglected. Third, the China factor is understudied by the models, because, after all, opportunities to choose cooperation with third countries effect costs/benefits calculation of cooperation with Japan. Since the end of Cold War, the relationship of trilateral China-Korea-Japan opened diverging opportunities for cooperation. For Korea, China presents a potential partner, while there still remain significant obstacles between Japan and China.³⁶ Thus, a new model recognizing the effects of changes to the relative distribution of power in the region, in general, and for Korea, in particular, is essential.

Evolution of the International Environment in East Asia

To assess the relative distribution of power in East Asia and its evolution throughout the last decades, the paper employs the Correlates of War (COW) from the national capabilities dataset. It categorizes power in three components: (i) military, representing current force level; (ii) industrial strength, measuring war potential; and (iii) demographic data, mirroring the power of

34 Ibid, 19-21.

35 Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987): 263.

36 See, for example, Suk-hee Han, *South Korea Seeks to Balance Relations with China and the United States*. Current Issues in U.S.-ROK Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, Other Reports, 2012.

endurance and the capability of increasing the level of forces. Each category is divided into two subcomponents: for military strength, it is the number of military personnel and expenditure; the industrial component is measured by the production of pig iron before 1900 and ingot steel after 1900, as well as by primary energy consumption; finally, the demographic aspect is described by the total and urban population.³⁷ The accuracy of data and the ability to measure power as a function of three broad categories might be disputable. However, by making the measurement transparent, it reaches a coherence that allows for the reliable comparison of countries across different times. Moreover, Schweller, in his study on inter-war Europe, tested the reliability of the COW dataset. He added eight other indices and found no significant effect.³⁸ The countries selected represent the members of the Six-party talks, as they are assumed to be the most influential members in the region. The time frame is from 1960 to 2003, as data on the DPRK's military expenditure is missing from 2004 and onwards.

The author computed: (i) the relative strength as a percentage share of the six components, as well as (ii) the overall strength as a percentage share of total major power-capabilities. To compare these figures more effectively (iii), the relative strength as power ration with 5 as the top score was calculated.³⁹ While these findings are presented in table 1 in a 5 years cycle, figure 1 shows the power distribution of major regional actors since 1960. Three trends are visible, which are discussed in this section, followed by an analysis of their long-term impact on Korea's *Japan Policy*.

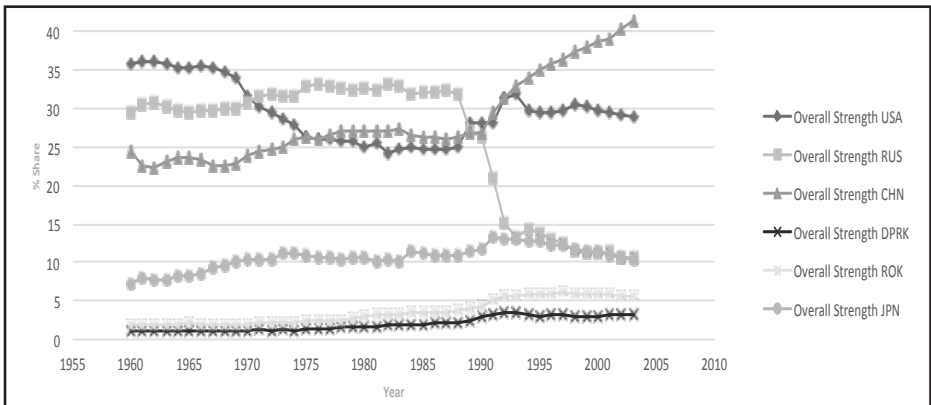


Figure 1: Evolution of COW Capabilities, 1960-2003, in %

37 For a detailed discussion of the COW project, see: Correlates of War Project. National Material Capabilities Data Documentation Version 4.0 2010, <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/>

38 Randall Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances. Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest*, (New York: Columbia University Press Appendix, 1998).

39 See for a similar approach Schweller (1998), 26-31.

		Industrial Strength		Military Strength		Demographic		Overall Strength	Relative Strength*
		Iron and Steel	Petroleum Consumption	Military Personnel	Military Expenditure	Urban Population	Total Population		
USA	1960	45,75	58,05	22,06	50,52	23,95	15,29	35,94	5
	1965	44,99	57,55	29,33	45,89	19,72	15,03	35,42	5
	1970	42,96	56,91	28,95	50,82	19,17	14,91	31,52	5
	1975	39,55	57,64	30,14	51,84	18,74	14,77	26,27	4,00
	1980	39,23	57,19	30,30	49,45	18,25	14,62	25,02	3,83
	1985	38,10	55,67	29,43	47,33	18,68	14,47	24,73	3,83
	1990	34,18	52,18	26,61	42,90	18,92	14,36	28,13	5
	1995	31,85	50,58	24,93	41,02	18,44	14,25	29,49	4,21
	2000	32,65	50,02	21,73	40,33	17,92	14,13	29,81	3,85
CHN	1960	9,48	11,92	30,94	7,49	30,96	55,66	24,41	3,40
	1965	4,61	6,12	26,47	12,21	35,88	56,39	23,61	3,33
	1970	5,10	9,64	24,70	13,10	33,38	58,15	24,01	3,81
	1975	6,28	11,72	36,33	11,25	33,39	59,42	26,40	4,02
	1980	8,88	12,87	38,30	7,35	35,32	60,00	27,12	4,15
	1985	11,32	13,28	34,54	1,16	36,88	60,58	26,30	4,08
	1990	14,65	13,99	31,31	1,29	37,44	61,67	26,73	4,75
	1995	25,02	17,82	36,44	7,12	56,91	66,91	35,04	5
	2000	29,05	18,03	39,27	9,18	69,83	67,22	38,77	5
RUS	1960	33,17	25,72	34,44	41,15	24,08	18,14	29,45	4,10
	1965	34,34	29,53	30,66	40,73	24,45	17,86	29,59	4,12
	1970	33,23	29,81	37,26	42,55	25,73	17,00	30,93	4,90
	1975	37,07	32,49	34,64	50,50	26,11	16,30	32,85	5
	1980	35,39	34,14	32,12	51,87	26,48	15,95	32,66	5
	1985	37,60	31,26	32,86	50,05	26,12	15,70	32,26	5
	1990	34,01	27,20	30,41	27,45	24,47	15,02	26,43	4,70
	1995	13,54	14,09	17,42	17,73	11,47	8,10	13,72	1,96
	2000	13,50	12,44	14,03	11,37	7,89	7,73	11,16	1,44
JPN	1960	11,25	3,78	2,52	0,51	17,98	7,89	7,32	1,02
	1965	15,53	5,67	2,71	0,75	16,94	7,57	8,20	1,16
	1970	26,73	7,07	2,05	0,91	18,26	7,24	10,38	1,65
	1975	26,90	8,63	2,00	1,79	18,38	7,15	10,81	1,64
	1980	26,64	8,03	1,99	2,40	17,29	7,02	10,56	1,62
	1985	25,54	14,56	2,03	2,58	16,19	6,84	11,29	1,75
	1990	24,36	14,63	2,24	6,12	15,87	6,59	11,63	2,07
	1995	26,67	16,16	2,99	10,86	12,89	6,88	12,74	1,82
	2000	24,30	15,71	3,31	9,91	9,11	6,67	11,50	1,48
ROK	1960	0,03	0,16	6,22	0,11	2,73	2,12	1,89	0,26
	1965	0,07	0,57	6,66	0,10	2,68	2,22	2,05	0,29
	1970	0,14	0,69	5,59	0,15	3,28	2,26	2,02	0,32
	1975	0,53	0,83	5,32	0,23	4,77	2,26	2,32	0,35
	1980	3,45	1,07	4,94	0,85	5,14	2,29	2,96	0,45
	1985	4,52	2,21	5,06	0,83	5,89	2,31	3,47	0,54
	1990	5,40	2,88	5,81	2,26	6,60	2,29	4,21	0,75
	1995	9,65	5,18	9,33	3,07	5,85	2,47	5,92	0,85
	2000	9,84	6,88	9,55	2,79	3,25	2,46	5,79	0,75
DPRK	1960	0,33	0,37	3,83	0,22	0,31	0,89	0,99	0,14
	1965	0,46	0,56	4,18	0,31	0,33	0,93	1,13	0,16
	1970	0,63	0,61	3,80	0,39	0,43	1,00	1,14	0,18
	1975	1,37	0,74	3,97	0,35	0,59	1,04	1,34	0,20
	1980	1,39	0,79	5,77	0,37	0,73	1,06	1,68	0,26
	1985	1,58	0,79	6,61	0,76	0,90	1,07	1,95	0,30
	1990	1,77	0,97	10,73	1,11	1,57	1,09	2,87	0,51
	1995	0,16	0,94	13,68	1,13	1,35	1,21	3,08	0,44
	2000	0,07	0,27	14,74	0,46	0,99	1,26	2,97	0,38

Table 1: Evolution of COW Capabilities, 1960-2000, in % (*Relative strength has 5 as a top score)

From a Tripolar to Bipolar System

First, there is a move from tripolarity to bipolarity that is observable. During the Cold War, there have been three powers in the region: the Soviet Union, the United States, and China. Intuitively, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia ceased to be among the major powers. Instead, the US and China, account for more than 60 percent of regional capabilities from 1990 and onwards. What are the effects of the move from tripolarity to bipolarity? First, there should be a conceptual note on polarity. The concept itself seems to be under-defined and can be understood to mean both: (i) the number of states as poles and (ii) the number of alignments within a system.⁴⁰ In Cold War terms, this distinction would mean to regard the US and Soviet Union as poles or, alternatively, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact. This can only be meaningfully incorporated when assuming that there is a stable alliance between Russia and China, which did, in fact, once briefly exist.⁴¹ Moreover, as the Cold War was not confined to East Asia, the figures would not give a meaningful indication for the distribution of power beyond the region. Therefore, the analysis below deals with poles understood as individual countries and reveals a move from tripolarity to bipolarity, as can be seen in Figure 2.

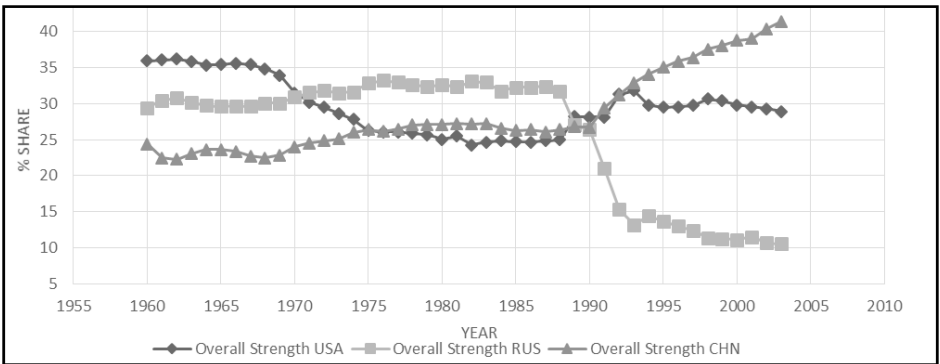


Figure 2: Distribution of Capabilities, Major Power 1960-2003

In scholarly literature there are supportive and opposing views about the stability of tripolar systems. Note: stability is defined as “the preservation of all actors in the system.”⁴² Unipolar and bipolar systems are assumed to be

40 Ibid, 39-40.

41 A striking example of Sino-Soviet confrontation is the 1969 border clash.

42 Schweller (1998), 42.

most stable because balancing is achieved through internal means – say domestic build-up – rather than external means – say alliance formation – involving lower transaction costs and higher certainty.⁴³ In contrast, opinions diverge on the stability of tripolar systems. Schweller identifies that different interpretations on the meaning of tripolarity cause this friction. While advocates of stability regard tripolar systems generally as any triadic relationship, those in the instability camp regard tripolarity as three actors of roughly equal size.⁴⁴ Proponents of instability include Robert Gilpin, who posits that “almost all agree that a tripolar system is the most unstable configuration”⁴⁵ or Morton Kaplan arguing that two actors are likely to form an alliance to eliminate the third.⁴⁶ Supporting Kaplan, Waltz finds that “[t]wo of the powers can easily gang up on the third.”⁴⁷ Likewise, Schweller attributes the instability of tripolar systems to the odd number of powers. For him, it is “obvious that all even-numbered systems are capable of balance, while all odd-numbered systems are not.”⁴⁸ Accordingly, in cases in which the main actors are endowed with roughly equal capabilities, one can observe that bipolar systems, even debatable ones, tend to be more stable than tripolar systems. This allows for the conclusion that the East Asian region, *ceteris paribus*, enhanced its stability over the course of the last half-century as it moved from a dangerous tripolar system to a more predictable bipolar system, in which China and the US. remain the two dominant powers.

Increasing Relative Power of Korea Towards Japan

The second observation is a rise in the relative power of Korea vis-à-vis Japan. At the outset of 1960, the national capabilities of Korea approximated around 1.9 percent of capabilities in the region, which contrasted with 7.3 percent for Japan. The dyadic power distribution evolved favorably for Korea as it improved to 5.5 percent in capabilities for Korea and 10.3 percent for Japan in 2003. Hence, the bilateral distribution ratio improved for Korea from 26 percent to 53 percent. As can be seen in Figure 3, the gap is narrowing.

43 Ibid, 44.

44 Ibid, 41.

45 Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 235.

46 Morton Kaplan, *System and Process in International Relations*, (New York: Wiley, 1957).

47 Waltz (1979), 163.

48 Schwelle (1998), 42.

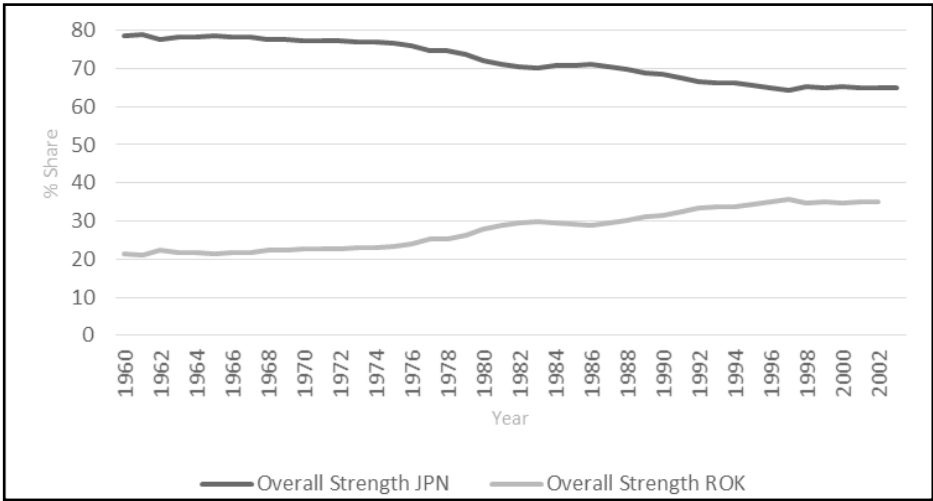


Figure 3: Distribution of COW Capabilities between ROK and JPN

Indeed, Korea has experienced a rapid increase in nearly all political fields. The economy sky-rocketed in the period of investigation and, while its GDP in 1970 was only 8.1 Billion USD, it stood at 1.128 Billion USD in 2012, an increase of 140 times in 40 years.⁴⁹ Similarly, Korea is one of the most industrialized countries in the world, symbolized by the accession to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1996.⁵⁰ As such, the manufacturing base is remarkable, ranking first in mobile phone production, second in semiconductors and shipbuilding and fifth in automotive production. Ranking fourth in patent registration shows the advance of its economy.⁵¹ With its economic rise, Korea positioned itself among the main international institutions. The creation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations “plus 3” (ASEAN+3) platform resulted from an initiative of South Korea. Moreover, it engaged in regional security dialogues as a member of the Six-Party Talks, the North East Asian Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD), the North East Asia Security Dialogue (NEASED) and the North East Asian Cooperation Initiative (NACI).⁵² In addition, the country was

49 See, Economic Statistic System of the Bank of Korea, <http://ecos.bok.or.kr/> (accessed November 3, 2013).

50 See, Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mofa.go.kr> (accessed November 3, 2013).

51 Korea International Trade Association, Korea, Seen by Statistic Figures, (2013), www.global.kita.net (accessed November 3, 2013).

52 For a good overview of the aspirations of South Korea, see David Shim, “A Shrimp Amongst Whales? Assessing South Korea’s Regional-Power Status,” GIGA Research Programme, no. 107 (2009).

supporting the Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO) by tremendously pursuing a “central role” with the provision of personnel and light water reactors until it was terminated in 2006.⁵³

In direct comparison, Japan recognizes Korea as “influential in terms of security in the Asia-Pacific region.”⁵⁴ Table 2 shows a direct comparison on strength, according to the military segment. The military build-up is especially astonishing in regard to the navy. Under the assumption of countering North Korea, the military would center on ground and air forces, and, with the existence of a fleet of nearly half the tonnage of Japan, this is remarkable. Traditionally, Japan is regarded as a maritime power, while Korea historically tended to put emphasis on ground forces.⁵⁵ Recent debates have sparked on the usefulness of a blue-water navy for Korean national interests. In a direct conflict with the North, the navy would represent a marginal factor only and could, in this light, be interpreted as a waste of resources. However, if seen through the lens of regional action, a powerful navy might divert threats from other neighboring countries and function as a symbol of self-confidence.⁵⁶

	Ground Forces	Naval Vessels	Combat Aircraft
South Korea	547 000 Troops	190 Vessels 193 000 Tons	620 Aircraft
Japan	140 000 Troops	141 Vessels 452 000 Tons	410 Aircraft

Table 2: Military Forces of South Korea and Japan, adapted from *The Military Balance 2013*

Thus, Korea today plays a crucial role as an economic stronghold, with increasing military sophistication and an active engagement in regional security dialogues. So much for the famous notion of Korea as “Shrimp amongst Whales” that was applicable half a century ago; we have to regard Korea now as an influential actor in the region, especially towards Japan. Moreo-

53 Charles Kartman, R. Carlin, and J. Witt, “A History of KEDO 1994-2006”, Policy Brief. Stanford Centre for International Security and Cooperation, June 2012.

54 Japanese Ministry of Defence., Defence of Japan 2013, <http://www.mod.go.jp> (accessed on December 2, 2014), 4.

55 For a distinction between maritime powers and land based powers in East Asia, see: Ki Chan Bae, Korea at the Crossroads. The History and Future of East Asia (Seoul: Happy Reading, 2007), 26-39.

56 On the debate, see: Sung-ki Jung, “Korea Launches AEGIS Warship,” Korea Times, May 25, 2007; Kyle Mizokami, “South Korea’s New Navy is Impressive ... and Pointless,” The War is Boring Blog, October 19, 2013, <https://medium.com/war-is-boring/513b93e52b84> (accessed on November 4, 2013); or Richard Farley, “Why South Korea’s Building an Impressive Navy,” The Diplomat, October 24, 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/flashpoints-blog/2013/10/24/why-south-koreas-build-an-impressive-navy/> (accessed on October 24, 2013).

ver, scholars identify a qualitative improvement in South Korea's military. Given the absence of these factors in the COW project itself, they add significance to the purely quantitative findings. Moon Chung-in and Lee Jin-young argue that, in the 1970s, Korea's procurement policy was mainly centered on conventional arms, such as armored vehicles or short-range artillery. In the 1990s, however, it approached the characterization of a revolution in military affairs (RAM) pioneered by the US, which refers to the application of "multiple innovations in technology, device, system, operational concept, and military doctrine and force structure [*sic*]." manifested in the investment in surveillance and networks, such as the acquisition of AWACS.⁵⁷ As a second tendency, South Korea is aiming to increase its own military technology and, therewith, reduces the importance of military technology transfers from abroad. Therefore, they argue, the South Korean military industry was better able to enhance self-sufficiency than other second-tier military countries. Moon attributes the incentives in the "waning US hegemonic power" in the region.⁵⁸ Clearly, be it in military technology, international outreach, or raw capabilities data, South Korea advanced rapidly, effectively creating a more favorable power balance between Korea and Japan.

A Rising China

The third observation is a relative decline in the capabilities of the US in light of a rising China. While China is the strongest state in the region since 1993, the US declined from a level on par to only 70 percent of China's capabilities. This trend seems to continue despite the "Asian Pivot" envisioned by US President Obama.⁵⁹ The diverging trend line between US and Chinese capabilities in figure 4 indicates this development.

57 Chung-iin Moon and Jin-Young Lee, "The Revolution in Military Affairs and the Defense Industry in South Korea," *Security Challenges* 4, no. 4 (2008): 118.

58 Hee-Jung Moon, "The Diamond Approach to the Competitiveness of Korea's Defense Industry: From Park, Chung Hee to Lee, Myung Bak Era," *Journal of International Business and Economy* 11, no. 1 (2010):101.

59 The Asian Pivot was first elaborated upon in Hilary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2011.

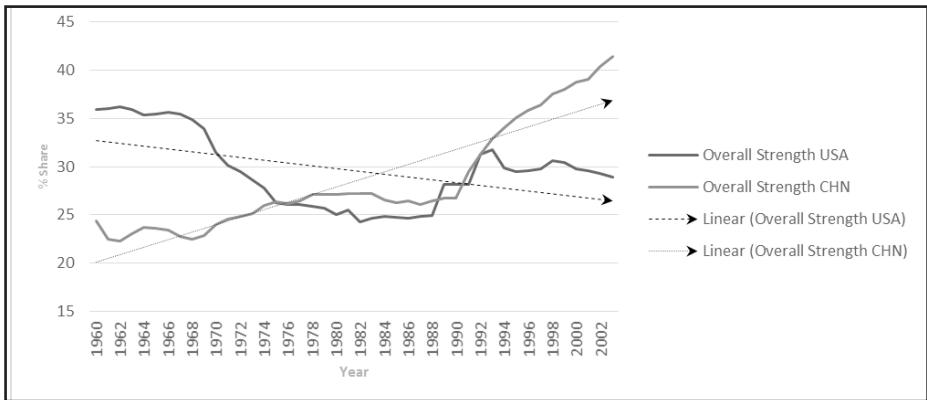


Figure 4: COW Trend Evolution US and CHN, 1960-2003

How is this perceived by South Korea and Japan? In overall terms, China, with 41 percent of capabilities in 2003, was equating the combined capabilities of the US, Japan, and South Korea. The effects are, however, regarded differently in Japan and Korea. The Japanese *Defense White Paper 2013* stresses the development of Chinese military capabilities combined with unclear intentions as a “matter of concern for Japan.”⁶⁰ In contrast, the Korean pendant highlights the cooperation between Korea and China and is more cautious in its formulation of security threats describing them as a result of “competition for regional ascendancy.” Moreover, Korea identifies a security threat in the “perceptions of past histories, territorial disputes, and demarcation of territorial waters”⁶¹, a claim directly connected to the Korea-Japan contestations about islets as well as Japan’s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. While, for both countries, China matters in economic terms with about 18 percent percent of total trade for each⁶², security relations are different. In South Korea, relations with China are seen through a lens of rational gains. Robert Sutter attributes five motives for enhanced cooperation with Seoul, namely (i) facilitation of trade and investment, (ii) deal with contingencies of North Korean threat, (iii) guard against a potentially assertive China, (iv) broaden foreign policy options, and (v) act as a mediator in the

60 Japanese Ministry of Defense (2013): 3.

61 Korean Ministry of Defense, 2012 Defense White Paper, <http://www.mnd.go.kr>, (accessed December 2, 2014).

62 For South Korea it is 17.7 percent; for Japan it is 18.1 percent, see Commission of the European Communities, *EU Bilateral Trade and Trade with the World*, (Brussels: European Commission, 2013).

region.⁶³ Zhiqun Zhu argues that the rise of China, alongside a reduced level of overall threat, “helped South Korea to pursue a more independent foreign policy.”⁶⁴ In contrast, Japanese tensions with China have also given rise to the Senkaku/Diaoyu island dispute. The Japanese *Defense White Paper* regards the motives of China as a means “to weaken the effective control of other countries over the islands which China claims.”⁶⁵ Japan recently even threatened to open fire on unarmed Chinese drones intruding within Japanese airspace.⁶⁶ Overall, as Paul Smith argues, the relationship between the two states is overshadowed by: (i) the islet dispute; (ii) historical grievances; (iii) the status of Taiwan; (iv) the declining leadership role of Japan in the region; and (v) the Japan-US alliance. Moreover, it is in this period, for the first time in history, that both Japan and China are strong at the same time. This could result in increasing competition.⁶⁷

In summary, while a rising China poses similar challenges in regard to material capabilities, the opportunities for Japan and Korea are different. For Japan, the aspirations of a rising China depict direct challenges to its security, while this also creates possibilities for South Korea to diversify its foreign policy. This allows for the conclusion that the international environment evolved favorably for Korea and that cooperation with Japan is less needed than in the past, given new alternatives.

Impact of the Changed Security Context on Japan-Korea Relations

While the security framework remained relatively fixed during the times of the Cold War, there were tremendous changes in its aftermath. Where, according to Cha’s model, patron commitment was the main driver of confrontation and friction, the empirical findings above signify a different causality. A more independent South Korea, confronted with an increasing menu of foreign policy choices, experienced a rise in relative power alongside a reduction in overall threat. Notwithstanding, specific instances in time identified by Cha, such as Nixon’s Guam doctrine or the asymmetrical fear of abandonment

63 Robert Sutter, “Korea: Improved South Korea-Chinese Relations. Motives and Implications,” Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 1997.

64 Zhiqun Zhu, „Small Power, Big Ambition. South Korea’s Role in Northeast Asian Security under President Roh Moo-hyun,” *Asian Affairs* 34, no. 2 (2007): 74.

65 Japanese Ministry of Defence (2013), 42.

66 Carsten Germis, [German] Streit um Senkaku-Inseln. Japan droht mit Abschuss chinesischer Drohnen. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 28, 2013, <http://www.faz.net> (accessed December 17, 2013).

67 Paul Smith, “China-Japan Relations and the Future Geopolitics of East Asia.” *Asian Affairs* 35, no. 4(2010).

during the Sino-American détente, suggests that overall there are three developments in the long run – a move from tripolarity to bipolarity, a relative increase of Korea towards Japan, and a rising China. A long run investigation of those trends allows for an elimination of other factors involved. There are three arguments about how these developments can diminish the cooperation benefits of Japan with Korea and, therewith, increase the possibility for domestic factors to influence its *Japan Policy*.

First, South Korea seems to internally balance against Japan with the establishment of a sophisticated defense industry and the aspiration of a blue-water navy. Of course, one could argue that the military build-up is mainly designed to enhance its security vis-à-vis a nuclear capable North Korea. However, from the COW dataset, it becomes clear that the South Korean military outweighs the North by a factor of two. In addition, the build-up of naval capabilities is unlikely to be directed towards the North but, rather, represents an increasing aspiration to become a power in the region. Therefore, Korea and Japan enter, overall, in a more competitive environment, which, of course, is mitigated by a common ally but equally by a more assertive Korea willing to defend what it perceives to be its national interest.

Second, an overall reduction in the threat level reduces the necessity of cooperation between the two countries. While North Korea was typically described as “main enemy” by the Korean Ministry of National Defense, the *Defense White Paper 2012* tuned down the wording, describing only the North Korean military and regime as “enemies of the South.”⁶⁸ A second source of reduced threat level is increasing cooperation with China. With the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1992, cooperation increased, leading to closer coordination regarding North Korea, the planning of a free trade agreement (FTA), and warm relations. This reduced threat level makes cooperation with Japan less needed as the benefits reduce in light of ongoing disputes on territory and wartime history. This argumentation is in line with Yoon’s “net threat model.” as reductions in the overall threat should lead to a more confrontational outlook on Korea’s *Japan Policy*.

Third, a fundamental change is observable in the bilateral relationship. While it could be described as hierarchical in the period after decoloniza-

68 Officially North Korea is referred to as follows: “The North has posed serious threats to the South’s security with its large-scale conventional military forces, development and enhancement of WMDs, including nuclear weapons and missiles, and constant armed provocations as shown by the attack on the ROK ship Cheonan and the artillery firing at Yeonpyeong Island. As long as such threats continue, the main agents of the provocative acts, which are the North Korean regime and its military, will remain enemies of the South.” see Korean Ministry of Defence (2012): 24.

tion, it evolved into a horizontal relationship. This has important effects on the bargaining power of the two countries. Seoul was very cautious when Japan renegotiated the US-Japan treaty so as to include the Korea clause in 1969. Today, in times of reduced threat level and capabilities to defend itself, Japan is about to lose these bargaining chips in bilateral negotiations. In numbers, 1960s Japan was able to provide five times the capabilities of Korea to a conflict, but it would only double them today. As a consequence, it should be observed that the cooperative outlook of Korea should reduce as the benefits of Japan can provide a diminishing outcome. Again, this increases the window of influence for domestic factors and is equally expressed in a changed economic relationship. The China factor is crucial in this regard, as the historical alliance and close connection with the US and South Korea is aspiring towards a more active role regarding economic integration of the region.⁶⁹ For example, while it was initially envisioned to form a trilateral free-trade agreement between China, Korea and Japan, CJK-FTA talks stalled due to historical animosities and territorial disputes between China and Korea confronting Japan. Acknowledging the competitive character of economic integration, this paper interprets an alternative to a CJK-FTA in the bilateral China-South Korea FTA. As of September 2013, both countries tentatively agreed on a tariff reduction of 90 percent and turned to “sensitive issues.”⁷⁰ This stage is far ahead of CJK-FTA negotiations, despite being initiated at a later stage.⁷¹ Choi Nakgyoon argues that the motives of the Korean government rest next to economic gains in the achievement of a more independent foreign policy, while enhancing the diplomatic and geopolitical relationship between Korea and China, mainly by creating deeper interdependence as well as “help the Chinese leadership and private sector to realize the importance of political as well as military security in the Korean Peninsula [sic].”⁷² Still, rapprochement of Korea and China should not suggest an abandonment of the US as a strategic ally in the future. Some even call for an engagement of the US on the Korean Peninsula after unifica-

69 Since the end of the Cold War a more independent foreign policy evolved, see for example the Nordpolitik of Roh Tae-woo, the Sunshine policy of Kim Dae-jung, the mediator role envisioned by Roh Moo-hyun or the Trustpolitik of Park Geun-hye, see for a good overview Shim(2009).

70 Seoul, Beijing agree on interim 90 percent Trade liberalization,” MK Business News, September 6, 2013, <http://news.mk.co.kr/newsRead.php?year=2013&no=816756> (accessed December 2, 2014).

71 In contrast, CJK FTA just completed the joint feasibility study, see www.mofa.go.kr/ENG.

72 Nakgyoon Choi, Impacts and Main Issues of the Korea-China FTA. Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (2012): 32., www.keia.org(accessed December 2, 2014).

tion.⁷³ However, as the China factor seems to be understudied in the existing models, it should receive a more prominent role here.

Conclusion

Despite many concerns, cooperation between Japan and Korea has never become superfluous. After all, both countries share similar security concerns, but, with a more favorable international environment, the benefits of cooperation with Japan are likely to diminish, effectively allowing for the deterioration of Korea's *Japan Policy*. A relatively stable regional environment, South Korea's catch up with Japan as well as different opportunity structures in regard to a rising China work as a break mechanism in the long run and allow other factors to exert influence on South Korea's *Japan Policy*. Therefore, cooperation was never a foregone conclusion and is today less "commanded" by the international system than ever before. Different models have been suggested in scholarly literature on the high volatility of bilateral relations between Korea and Japan. They neither take the changed security environment into account nor enable reduction under the pressure to cooperate. Despite clear, long-term developments, there have been times of rising cooperation or friction in a relatively short period of time. These short term fluctuations cannot be understood by investigating the long term capabilities alone. However, they set the stage on which the other factors, be it ally commitment, are the perceived threat or where the historical antagonism needs to be analyzed from. In this vein, the broad evolutions of material capability are the benchmark for any investigation to start with and should redefine our understanding of Korea's *Japan Policy*. Y

73 See for example, the comments of Wang, F. at the Korea Institute for Unification (KINU) Forum 2011, see *US-China Relations and Korean Unification*, ed. by Jiwon Choi, KINU Report Grand Plan for Korean Unification (2011):05, <http://www.kinu.or.kr> (accessed December 2, 2014).