

Japan's Grand Strategy on the Korean Peninsula: Optimistic Realism

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The Japanese have always considered the Koreans to be an inferior race. [Wajima] said that a very elaborate study on the racial characteristics of Koreans had been prepared during the war and that it had concluded that the mental and social capacities of the Koreans were of a very primitive nature. He said that this feeling on the part of the Japanese that Koreans are inferior to a great extent motivates Japanese uncertainty and hostility in regard to the Koreans.¹

An all-out invasion of Japan by Korea is inevitable if Korea is unified . . . [when it comes] it will be a blitz attack like the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait . . . therefore it is in Japan's best interests to help North Korea economically so the Korean peninsula remains divided as now.²

Korea is one of the most complex, critical, and yet understudied of Japan's foreign policy relationships. While much attention in US policy and academic circles has focused on Japan's future relations with China as the key variable for regional stability in the twenty first century, an integral part of the security dynamic in East Asia has been driven by the Japan–Korea axis.³ In the late-nineteenth century and

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¹ 'Memorandum of Conversation on February 3, 1949 Between Richard B. Finn and Wajima Eiji, Director of the Control Bureau of the Foreign Office', from POLAD to the Secretary of State, 894.4016/2–1849, RG 59, Internal Affairs of Japan, cited in Sung-Hwa Cheong (1991: 72).

² Kenichi Takemura (1991: 31).

³ Until the 1990s, there were only a handful of scholarly monographs on Japan's Korea policy (Okonogi (ed.) 1988; Chae-Jin Lee and Hideo Sato 1982; Chong-Sik Lee 1985; Chin-Wee Chung (ed.) 1985; and Bridges 1993). Since the end of cold war, interest in the topic has grown largely

early twentieth century, two major power wars in Asia (i.e., Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese) had this relationship as a proximate cause. During the cold war, the Japan–Republic of Korea (ROK) axis facilitated the American presence as an Asia-Pacific power and security guarantor. And in the post-cold war era, outcomes in the Japan–Korea (united or still divided) relationship are critical to the shape of future balance of power dynamics in the region and with it, the future American security presence. How then should we be thinking about future Japanese relations with the Korean peninsula? What are Tokyo’s hopes and concerns with regard to Korea? How do they view the prospect of a united Korea? Is there a Japanese ‘grand strategy’ regarding the peninsula?

The conventional wisdom offers a pessimistic response to these questions. As encapsulated in the quotations above, this view posits a combination of historical contempt and geopolitics as auguring poorly for Japan’s relations with a united Korea, hence compelling the Japanese in the direction of policies that seek to prop up the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK) and keep the peninsula divided.⁴

The conventional wisdom is wrong. While such a ‘pessimistic realist’ view is often accepted at face value by both scholars and practitioners of Asian security, upon closer analysis, I argue that outcomes on the Japan–Korea axis are not nearly as negative as popularly conceived. Japanese grand strategy thinking, although cognizant of the variables for competition with the Korean peninsula, seeks actively to cultivate the potential for cooperation and to preempt possible security dilemmas. This more ‘optimistic realist’ assessment derives from a number of larger geostrategic and domestic political trends as well as from specific policies enacted by Tokyo and Seoul in the last decade that have improved relations considerably. I begin with a discussion of the conventional wisdom, followed by criticisms of this view. I then offer the argument for ‘optimistic realism’ *vis-à-vis* Japanese grand strategy on the peninsula and conclude with propositions regarding the policy implications of this strategy.⁵

due to DPRK agitation and concern about contingency planning (Cossa (ed.) 1999; Young-Sun Lee and Masao Okonogi (eds.) 1999; Sang-Woo Rhee and Tae-Hyo Kim (eds.) 2000; Center for Naval Analyses, Korea Institute of Defense Analyses, 1887, 1998, 1999. This later generation of literature focuses on specific issues regarding trilateral coordination and DPRK contingencies; it does not directly address the question of Japanese grand strategy. Many of these works make implicit assumptions about such a strategy, but relatively few works really spell out or try to rigorously infer what such a strategy might entail (Green 1998: 37–39).

⁴ Examples of this pessimistic realism include: Menon and Wimbush 2000: 78–86; Friedberg 2000: 147–159; Betts 1993/94: 34–77; Friedberg 1993/94: 5–33; Bracken 1999; Byong-man Ahn 1978: 179–197; and Foster-Carter 1992. Others are cited below.

⁵ In this paper, I do not employ the term ‘realism’ in strict international relations theory terms (i.e., structural or classical realism). Instead, I utilize the term loosely in that both the pessimistic and optimistic assessments of Japan–Korea relations studied in this paper privilege capabilities-based variables to explain outcomes. This does not deny that other factors of a non-realist nature (domestic politics, historical enmity, etc.) are employed to embellish the analysis. For other different realist interpretations of Japanese foreign policy, see Eric Heginbotham and Samuels 1998: 171–203; Drifte 1996; Pyle 1996; and Green and Self 1996: 35–58.

Peer competition

The conventional wisdom argues that Japanese grand strategy is premised on avoiding peer competition with a united Korea. This anticipated competition derives from several factors.

Geopolitics

Proponents of this view cite Japanese concerns about geography and potentially threatening Korean capabilities. Geographic propinquity has always made Japan – as an island nation – somewhat uneasy with its continental Korean neighbor. Should a regime hostile to Japan ever control the peninsula, it would be strategically well-situated to threaten Japan. Indeed, historically when Japan faced external threats to its security, more often than not these emanated from the direction of the continent via the Korean peninsula. For the Japanese, then, Korea has always been the ‘dagger pointed at the heart’ of Japan. This geostrategic fact will never change.⁶

Growing Korean military capabilities also concern the Japanese. The South Korean military through US assistance and indigenous modernization efforts dating back to the *Yulmok* plans of the 1970s has transformed itself into a highly competent military.⁷ What was once a poorly trained and deficient force wholly dependent on the US at the end of the Korean war has now become one capable of defending against most ground contingencies *vis-à-vis* the North (O’Hanlon 1998: 135–170). Unification would bring an enhancement of these capabilities. A united Korean military, the pessimistic realists argue, would possess a military of nearly 1.8 million with commensurate capabilities and aspirations to be a regional military player.⁸

Hate

Realism dictates that a significant increase in relative capabilities between proximate states can give rise to insecurity spirals (Jervis 1978: 167–214). In Japan’s case these concerns regarding Korea are exacerbated by two additional factors. The first is the deep historical antagonism between the two countries stemming from the occupation period (1910–1945). Arguments on the Korean side for this anger (in Korean, *han* or unredeemed resentment) are well-known. On the Japanese side, this history manifests itself in a superiority complex toward Korea inherent in the collective mindsets of former colonizers. It is also manifested in an ‘avoidance phenomenon’ – a combination of discomfort and frustration at Korean attempts to hold Japan eternally responsible for its history (Tanaka 1981: 30–38; Yasumasa 1978).

⁶ See Izumi Hajime 1988; Hisahiko 2000: 89–90. For the classic statement, see Morley 1983.

⁷ For the most recent modernization plans for the ROK military, see Ministry of National Defense 2000.

⁸ This is based on a simple aggregation of current DPRK and ROK capabilities. The militaries are respectively 1.1 million and 670,000. For further details, see Ministry of National Defense 2000: Parts I and II; also see Bennett 2000. As will be discussed below, estimates based on a simple aggregation like this are flawed.

Moreover, this negative historical memory has become deeply ingrained in the two peoples' mindsets through a variety of formal and informal institutions. Antagonistic images are passed down generationally through family folklore, chauvinist histories taught in secondary schools (on both Korean and Japanese parts), and popular and mass media-perpetuated stereotypes such that the negativism becomes a part of one's identity. This is especially prevalent on the Korean side where parts of the Korean self-identity become constructed in linear opposition to Japan. For example, the two national holidays in Korea (1 March or *samilchol* and 15 August or *kwangbokchol*) celebrate Korean patriotism by specifically resurrecting anti-Japanese images. The fiftieth anniversary celebrations of Korean independence in 1995 were marked by the razing of the National Museum (the former colonial headquarters of Japan).⁹ When the two Korean leaders agreed at the June 2000 North–South summit to hold family reunions, the date chosen for this symbolic affirmation of a united Korean identity was 15 August – the date of liberation from the Japanese occupation.

Because Korean nationalism is anti-Japanism, difficulties in the relationship remain prevalent despite seemingly compelling material forces for less friction.¹⁰ For example, despite the string of Japanese colonial statements of contrition, Koreans remain unsatisfied with Japan's 'haughty' attitude. Despite the benefit to South Korean security of the revised US–Japan defense guidelines, Koreans expressed trepidation at the marginally more active role Japan could play in a contingency in the region. While Japanese PKO contributions took place under severe self-imposed restrictions and far outside East Asia, Koreans still expressed concerns about renewed Japanese militarism. Although the DPRK August 1998 Taepo-dong launch was provocative and threatening, South Koreans took perverse hidden pleasure in Japanese convulsions over the event. Seen through the lense of identity, this otherwise puzzling behavior makes sense. Remaining even mildly neutral about Japan is in essence to deny a critical part of one's identity as Korean. Advocating security cooperation with Japan becomes synonymous with treason and once again subjugates Korea to Japanese domination. This ideational barrier to cooperation is manifested on the Korean side as a general state-of-mind as well as domestic political aversion to discussions about Japan in a positive light. It is seen by many as a more formidable obstacle than any other in promoting cooperation.¹¹

⁹ Although Kim Dae Jung has gone to great lengths to improve relations with Japan (discussed below), the degree to which even he lapsed into invoking images of 'imperialist Japan' and blaming Tokyo in conjunction with the other major powers for Korea's division at the 80th anniversary celebrations of *samilchol* is a reminder of how deeply negative and anti-Japan are Korean conceptions of nationalism (see Kim's speech as cited in 'A Nation Recalls a Bold Bid for Freedom', *Newsreview*, 6 March 1999). Negatively constructed nationalisms and nationalist myths are not unique to Korea; however the degree to which this identity is so viscerally framed against a past aggressor may marginally distinguish the Korean case.

¹⁰ For identity-based arguments in this vein, see Izumi Hajime 1998; Berger 1998; and Gong (ed.), 1996.

¹¹ In social science terms, systematic biases of a cognitive or affective nature stemming from this history on the part of the government and general public give rise to an atmosphere of distrust

Chinese bandwagon

Coupled with the history issue is Japanese concern with potential balancing dynamics in Northeast Asia. In a post-unification scenario, the pessimists argue, the likelihood of a Korea–China coalition that alienates Japan is high. The end of the North Korean threat will most likely mean decreased support for US forces in Korea as well as the end of the overarching security imperative for cooperation that characterized the US–Japan–ROK security triangle during the cold war. As the new united Korean entity seeks to define its place in the region, it will be drawn into a closer alignment with China (Chung 1999). This is (as the Chinese are fond of saying) the ‘natural order of things’ in Asia given the pre-twentieth century history of Asian international relations when the Chinese tributary system dominated (in this sense, the post-1945 order was the historical aberration rather than the norm). It is also a function of geography (i.e. what some post-cold war analyses of the region have termed continental power accommodation) (Ross 1999: 81–118), and a civilizationally inherent bandwagoning dynamic among smaller Asian powers in the region *vis-à-vis* China (Huntington 1996: 229–238). Reinforcing this alignment trend will be a revanchist nationalism in a united Korea that finds a natural ally in China against Japan as the two share similar victimization experiences at the hands of Japanese colonizers.

Pessimists would argue that examples of this dynamic are already evident. When China and South Korea normalized relations in 1992, this rapprochement was celebrated in the language of restoring what was historically a ‘natural relationship’.¹² Even before the 1992 reconciliation, Seoul and Beijing were natural allies whenever an ill-conceived Japanese statement about history raises problems. The ROK’s decision not to participate in American-led research on theater missile defense (TMD) architectures in East Asia (while Japan has) is in good part a function of Korean desires not to alienate China (Cha 2000: 151–152). Indeed virtually all of the post-cold war analyses of the region assume a consolidation of the China–Korea axis against Japan.¹³

Japan’s purported grand strategy: predatory

The upshot of these commonly held assumptions for Japanese grand strategy is that a United Korea would possess the capabilities, motivations (revanchist nationalism), and lack the impediments (cooperation based on the US–Japan–Korea triangular alliance) for peer competition with Japan. For this reason, pessimists argue, Japan’s long-term strategy regarding the peninsula is a predatory one – to keep Korea divided and/or not encourage or facilitate a process of unification. This strategy is manifest in practices like Japan’s ‘comprehensive security’ policy. Devised by Ohira Masayoshi, this doctrine maintained that Japan could provide for its

and contempt which makes compromise or concession in negotiations extremely difficult. This in turn prevents the possibility of amiable or rationally based negotiation.

¹² For a thorough and insightful analysis, see Chae-Jin Lee 1997.

¹³ Examples include: Betts 1993/94: 34–77; Friedberg 1993/94: 5–33; Ross 1999.

security through non-military means which primarily meant economic assistance for prosperity and stability of the region (Sato, Koyama, and Kumon 1990: 450–456). Applied to the Korean peninsula, this strategy was seen by South Koreans as thinly veiled attempts to keep Korea divided by Japan's providing assistance to the North. Even more directly a reflection of Japan's purported grand strategy was the 'equi-distance policy' for the peninsula. Conceived in the early 1970s by the then-premier Tanaka Kakuei and foreign minister Kimura Toshio, this policy's rationale was that Japanese security was best served not by siding solely with the South but by maintaining equal contacts with both regimes, thereby fostering a balance of power on the peninsula. Similarly high-level dialogue during the Nakasone years in the 1980s was seen as part of the grand plan to keep Korea down (Curtis (ed.) 1993: 263–272). Normalization dialogue at the end of cold war (i.e., Kanemaru mission) and current dialogue are seen in similarly negative light. Though couched in the language of economic assistance, humanitarian aid, and comprehensive security, this is all part of an overall predatory grand strategy that seeks to aid the North to keep the peninsula divided and thereby avoid peer competition.¹⁴

Reassessing the conventional wisdom

Faulty assumptions

The conventional wisdom is wrong (or at least questionable) because many of the basic assumptions informing the view do not stand up well to more discriminating analysis. For example, while historical and geographical arguments for a united Korean security threat to Japan abound, historical precedents for such arguments are absent (Morley 1983: 8). While Korea is often referred to as the 'dagger' pointed at the heart of Japan, aggression has historically come *through* Korea (by China) and not from Korea itself. In all likelihood a united Korea would be more preoccupied with securing its new northern border (discussed below) and gaining domestic stability than with entertaining any designs on Japan.¹⁵ In addition, arguments that Japan would be threatened by a joint North–South Korean military are unfounded. The two Korean militaries aggregated might total 1.8 million which indeed would be intimidating for Japan. However in a unification scenario a rationalization of the two militaries is likely. The more appropriate military force would number around 650,000, which is comparable to current ROK levels.¹⁶

Second, while some Japanese hold negative images of Korea, these do not necessarily derive from peer competition. The modern-day origins of these images derive in good part from mass media critical coverage of authoritarian ROK politics

¹⁴ On comprehensive security, see Tetsuya Umemoto 1988: 28–49.

¹⁵ For one of the early and eloquent expositions of this contrarian argument, see Fitzpatrick, 1991. Arguments against the Chinese bandwagon dynamic are addressed below.

¹⁶ This figure is based on the traditional benchmark of military forces as approximately 1 per cent of total population.

in the 1970s. Japanese looked with disdain on the martial law brutality, political repression, and human rights abuses, particularly beginning with the Kim Dae-jung kidnaping in 1973. The opposition politician Kim Dae-jung was kidnaped from a Tokyo hotel room by KCIA operatives in what was a clear violation of Japanese sovereignty by the authoritarian Park regime. The repressive regime under Park (*Yusin* system) also undertook a number of actions against Japanese nationals and press agencies in the 1970s that nearly ruptured diplomatic relations (Takesada 2000: 125; Lee 1985: Chapter 4; Oberdorfer 1997: 41–56). Yesterday's negative media coverage contrasts sharply with today's reports praising Korean political liberalization, economic development, the Seoul Olympics (1988), the Taejon World Expo, and the 2002 World Cup. Coupled with this was an almost naive infatuation with North Korea growing out of the 1970s that was rooted in three developments: the regional detente spurred by Sino-American rapprochement; the DPRK's success as a member of the non-aligned movement (and the ROK's failure to win membership); and the poor state of Japanese–ROK relations at the time. Among Japanese left and intellectuals there were also views of North Korea as the true representation of Korean nationalism as the South remained under the military 'occupation' of the US (Kyrata 2000). The point here is not to deny that negative history-based images exist but that there are plausible alternative explanations deriving from politics to explain the contemporary incarnations of these biases. Moreover, as the origins of these emotions are traced to variables (i.e., authoritarianism v. democracy; underdevelopment v. development) rather than constants (history), then the argument that these images are not malleable and unchanging (assumed by the pessimistic realists) becomes less credible.

The final point regarding the conventional wisdom relates to agency. Proponents of these viewpoints on Japanese grand strategy, ironically, tend not to be Japanese but Koreans. Hence, these agents are not so much providing a window on Japanese strategic thinking as they are on nationalist thinking in Korea. They assign intentions and preferences to Japan deriving from their own fears and preoccupations regarding Japan. The result are arbitrary (and often logically inconsistent) assertions about Japanese predatory grand strategy that have little empirical validity. In spite of this, because these arguments are dynamic, controversial, and 'sexy' (i.e., presage coming conflict), they often tend to get published over the more sober, cautionary, and less sensationalist views. From the Korean side, cognitive biases are apparent as any optimistic or conciliatory views that may emanate from Japan regarding the peninsula are usually not taken at face value and instead seen at best as aberrant behavior and at worst as duplicitous.¹⁷

One illustration of the Korea-bias in the scholarship is the conspicuous absence of discussion regarding the two variables most likely to cause peer competition

¹⁷ For examples, see Choon-Kun Lee 2000; Hong-nak Kim 1987: 497–514; Dal-joong Chang 1983: 114–136; Byong-man Ahn 1978: 179–97. For an exception to this view, see Ro-Myung Gong 1999: pp. 18–24.

between Japan and Korea: ROK military modernization and nuclear weapons. Some observers argue that the ROK's post-cold war military modernization and buildup eschews conventional ground war capabilities necessary for a North Korean contingency and instead emphasizes force projection capabilities such as a blue water navy, ballistic missile technology, in-flight re-fueling, and satellite technology. For example, the ROK Navy recently completed the first stage of the KDX Destroyer Program which entails development of 3200-ton destroyers (KDX1) to replace old Gearing-class ships acquired from the US Navy in the 1960s and 1970s. There are also plans for construction by 2006 of nine 4300-ton destroyers (KDX2) with an operating range of 4000 miles; and eventually, acquisition of state-of-the-art Aegis-class destroyers (KDX3) starting in 2010. An active submarine program is also underway. The ROK's first submarine program started in 1987 and will produce 12 new 1200-ton 209-class diesel submarines (a joint venture of Daewoo and Germany HDW) by 2001 (nine completed). The new SSU program plans include acquisition of six 1500 to 2000-ton submarines by 2002. This would be followed by indigenous production of 3000-ton submarines in the future.¹⁸ This buildup has continued in spite of the acute material constraints imposed by the 1998 financial crisis, and many argue that the ROK military in looking past the North Korean contingency is building to prepare for future regional conflicts, potentially with Japan.¹⁹ Moreover, a united Korean entity based on current capabilities in the two countries, would undoubtedly have available to it the options of nuclear weaponization as well as long-range ballistic missiles.²⁰ These are the variables most likely to cause security

¹⁸ On these points, see Ministry of National Defense 1999; 'Defense Ministry pushes Destroyer Plan,' *Korea Herald*, 8 June 1998; Myung-ho Moon 1997; 'Military Concerned about Defense Budget Cuts,' *Korea Herald*, 7 February 1998; Morrison (ed.) 1997; 'Major Military Procurement Projects to be Delayed or Canceled,' *Korea Times*, 8 January 1998; 'South Korea to Buy Eight CN-235 Indonesian Military Aircraft,' *Korea Herald* 20 November 1997; Morrison 1995; Yong-sup Han 1997; Joon-ho Do 1993; Seo-Hang Lee 1997.

¹⁹ See *Korea Times*, 12 November 1995 ('ROK Navy Pursues Blue Water Ambition'), Seo-Hang Lee 1997: 26–36; and *Wall Street Journal* 17 January 1995; *JoongAng Ilbo* 23 January 1995; Calder 1996; and Foster-Carter 1992.

²⁰ Given current trends in both Koreas, it is difficult to imagine a future Korea without some form of substantial ballistic missile capability. The DPRK ballistic missile program since the early 1980s has produced a range of missile systems, either deployed or tested, demonstrating progress beyond most expectations. Despite its dire material constraints, the North accomplished this largely through reverse-engineering of SCUD-B missile technology acquired from the Soviet Union. The August 1998 test flight of the Taepodong-1 over Japan demonstrated an unexpected leap in IRBM technology (albeit a failed three-stage payload launch). The ROK has sought to move away from a 1979 agreement with the United States that restricts South Korean missile ranges to 180 km. Seoul wants greater independence from the United States in terms of an indigenous missile program capability and membership in the MTCR which would enable the ROK to develop missiles to 300 km. To the surprise and unease of the US government, the ROK test fired a surface-to-surface missile some eight months after the Taepodong test, demonstrating both the capabilities and determination to develop a more advanced and independent missile deterrent (analysts maintain that the South Korean missile already violates the 1979 limits but was deliberately under-fueled to deflect accusations by the US). US intelligence reports cite evidence of clandestine ROK activities in rocket motors indicative of an

dilemmas and peer competition between the two countries but they are never ones cited by the Koreans (i.e., conventional wisdom).

I do not advocate wholly discarding the conventional wisdom as there is no denying some elements of truth to it. Instead, this short exercise raises legitimate questions about accepting outright this view, because the assumptions which inform it, if not simply incorrect, are certainly susceptible to debate. Some of the most problematic variables that should be talked about by the Korean side are not. And there are a plethora of plausible alternative explanations for evidence cited by the conventional wisdom as validating the predatory arguments regarding Japanese grand strategy. I now turn to developing an alternate interpretation of this strategy.

The fear of entrapment and determinants of Japan's Korea policy

Since the normalization of relations in 1965, the factors that have driven policy toward Korea are more subtle and complex than simply an overarching desire to keep the peninsula divided. A key factor I have argued that is crucial to understanding Japanese strategic thinking on Korea has been the fear of 'entrapment' (Cha 1999a). Deriving from the literature on alliance theory, entrapment generally refers to the expectations and anxieties of mutual support that underpin interaction between allied and aligned states (Snyder 1984: 461–496; 1997). Entrapment occurs when a commitment to an alliance turns detrimental to one's interests. It means being dragged into a conflict over an ally's interests that one does not share or shares only partially (Snyder 1984: 467).

Perhaps more than any other factor, the fear of entrapment has been the most consistent single driver of Japan's Korea policy. Japan and the ROK are not party to a mutual defense treaty, but this does not preclude the existence of alignment patterns between the two states. As a result of their geographic proximity, prominence in the region, common security interests, and triangular alliance arrangements with the US, the two nations exhibit alignment patterns and *de facto* security ties that play an important part in their overall relationship.²¹ These informal defense links were first publicly enunciated in the joint communique issued at the conclusion of the November 1969 Nixon–Sato summit. Known as the 'Korea clause', it stated that the

effort to develop longer-range missiles (*New York Times* 14 November 1999). In addition, the ROK has renewed strong interest from the 1970s in a civilian space launch vehicle program (see *New York Times*, 15 January 2000 [Calvin Sims, 'South Korea Plans to Begin Rocket Program']).

²¹ For example, throughout post-war and cold war eras, the two states essentially comprised an integrated unit in US defense planning in the region. The presence of American ground troops in South Korea was as much an extending frontline of defense for Tokyo as it was for Seoul. Similarly the US seventh fleet and marine units in Japan provided rearguard support for the ROK. Joint US–Korea military exercises regularly employed bases in Japan for logistic support; US tactical air wing deployments rotated frequently between Japan and Korea; and air and naval surveillance of North Korea was operated out of bases in Japan. In addition, Seoul and Tokyo conducted periodic exchanges of defense officials, developed bilateral fora for discussion of security policies, and engaged in some sharing of military intelligence and technology.

security of the ROK was essential to Japan.²² Concurrent with the enunciation of the Korea clause was the Okinawan base agreement, which asserted that, in the event of a second North Korea invasion, Japan would permit the US unconditional access to bases in Okinawa for the defense of South Korea.²³ These two agreements constituted the closest approximation to a defense treaty between Japan and the ROK.

In the context of this triangular security relationship, Japan's strategy *vis-à-vis* the peninsula is informed by anxieties about becoming entrapped in contingencies that were unwanted or would put Japan in awkward positions. For example, an over commitment to Japan–ROK defense ties, in the form of strong support for the 1969 Korea clause, could lead to formal acknowledgment of the ROK's indispensable security contribution to Japan's defense. In addition, although the region is relatively stable, an over commitment to Japan–ROK defense ties could actually have destabilizing second-order effects. Strong backing of the South could create a more volatile situation on the peninsula by increasing North Korean fears of encirclement. It could also embolden the South to become more provocative and intransigent toward the North. The result in either scenario would be a preemptive lashing out by the North, the consequence of which could be direct retaliation against Japan.

Minimizing these entrapment fears serves several Japanese needs. First, by promoting a stable status quo on the peninsula, Japan avoids having to contend with a host of politically difficult domestic issues. North Korean belligerency as a result of strong Japan–ROK ties would force Tokyo to contend with issues of rearmament and re-evaluation of Article IX of the constitution. Japan would also have to deal with problematic issues such as internal monitoring of a substantial North Korean (*Chosen Soren*) resident population and absorbing the potential outflow of Korean refugees in the event of a second Korean war.²⁴ Entrapment into relations with the ROK that alienated communist neighbors would close off potential export markets in Japanese economic interests and run contrary to its *seikei bunri* (separation of economics from politics) policies. It also would run counter to the *senjo shori* post-war vision of re-establishing relations with all nations Japan had warred with or victimized in the past.

Second, by refraining from acknowledgment of a direct Japan–ROK security link, Tokyo avoids becoming vulnerable to the 'bulwark of defense' argument and ROK demands for 'security rent'.²⁵ An additional Japanese concern regarding such

²² Joint Communique Between President Richard Nixon and Prime Minister Eisaku Sato, 21 November 1969, sec. 4.

²³ This commitment was originally made in Sato's National Press Club address in Washington after release of the Nixon-Sato joint communique. Also see Sato Eisaku 1970: 333–340.

²⁴ Monitoring of the *Chosen Soren* was a constant source of friction between Tokyo and Seoul during the 1960s and 1970s as North Korean infiltration of the South was largely conducted through Japan. The refugee issue, though less openly stated by Japanese, is nevertheless a very salient concern. These numbered between 200,000 and 500,000 during the Korean war.

²⁵ This essentially states that Japan should provide economic aid as a form of 'security rent' to the ROK as the latter bears the burden of undergirding stability in the Japanese defense perimeter.

funds is to avoid Seoul's continual use of colonial contrition arguments as leverage to extract monetary forms of 'moral repentance'. Tokyo must also avoid succumbing to accusations that it withholds economic funds to stifle South Korea's rise as a rival competitor in Japanese market sectors.²⁶ Finally, Japan must straddle entrapment anxieties *vis-à-vis* the ROK with burden-sharing pressures from the US. This pressure often takes the form of calls for Japanese assistance of South Korean economic development to promote prosperity and stability on the peninsula.²⁷ In sum, Tokyo's entrapment fears center on striking a balance between providing strong political and economic support for the ROK, and, at the same time, abstaining from overt security ties that would leave it vulnerable to South Korean demands for security rent or moral repentance.²⁸

The entrapment dynamic is useful because it sheds light on evidence that pessimists often point to as indicative of predatory Japanese long-term strategies on the peninsula. For example, pessimists point to Japan's renegeing on the Korea clause in the 1970s (Sato in January 1972 and Foreign Minister Ohira in August 1973 made statements backing away from commitments in the Korea clause and Okinawa base agreement²⁹) and the Tanaka government's attempts at improving relations with North Korea as validation of the strategy to keep the peninsula divided. However, the alternative explanation is that these actions were motivated by entrapment fears. In particular, detente both offered Tokyo opportunities to capitalize on its *seikei bunri* policies of expanding economic contacts with new countries and heightened its desires not to get entrapped into tight alignments with the ROK. The latter could (1) undercut the former objective by unnecessarily antagonizing potential parties or (2) incite greater hostility in the region contrary to the new trend toward conciliation at the time.

The equidistance policy practiced by Japan in the 1970s and part of the 1980s was not so much about keeping the two Koreas down (as the pessimists argue) than a reflection of the more complex considerations the Japanese had about the peninsula. The equidistance policy showed how Japan's security concerns on the peninsula were of a more multi-dimensional nature than those of the ROK. While the paramount

²⁶ This is termed the 'boomerang effect'. For example, South Korean authorities accused Tokyo of denying funding of the Kwangyang Steel works complex because Japan's earlier support of the P'ohang steel complex in 1969 made the ROK a rival supplier of steel. More recently, the ROK has used this argument in connection with Japanese reluctance to provide technology. Japan does not want to give in to South Korean complaints and become locked into investment projects in the ROK when cheaper sources of labor exist elsewhere (e.g., Southeast Asia). In addition, Tokyo sees technology transfer issues as a private sector decision that is beyond the realm of direct government influence (see Kubota Akira 1986; Hy-sang Lee 1985; and Soon Cho 1985).

²⁷ One manner of contending with these forces was as noted earlier the 'comprehensive security strategy' (CSS). First conceptualized by Ohira in 1973 and later formalized by Suzuki in 1981, this states that Japan will promote regional peace and stability through non-military means.

²⁸ For elaboration of the argument, see Cha 1999: Chapter 2.

²⁹ *Korea Herald*, 9–11 January 1972 and 4 August 1973.

concern for both was an unprovoked North Korean attack, Japan was also concerned about South Korean intransigence that might provoke the North as well as by a general war arising out of the superpower confrontation in the region. These disparities in what was seen as threatening on the peninsula reinforced Japanese entrapment fears regarding strong ties with the ROK and informed the equidistance policy.

During the 1980s, Japan adamantly stated that it would not negotiate loan agreements with the ROK if the funds were classified as security related. Pessimists see this as evidence of Japanese attempts to avoid enhancing ROK capabilities (Lee 1985). But again, this behavior stemmed less from predatory peer competition and more from desires not to become entrapped in 'security rent' rationales. And when Tokyo refused to link historical repentance issues with economic negotiations, rather than being evidence of Japan's aversion to resolving the history, this represented more the desire to avoid becoming entrapped into untenable bargaining positions. There are many more examples that could be cited, but the upshot is that entrapment fears offer an alternative explanation to Japanese behavior on the peninsula. Moreover, if one tracks the consistency of the two explanations across time, the entrapment variable can better account for changes in behavior than the predatory pessimist argument (i.e., there are policies that Japan took which are *not* explainable by the latter argument but are explainable with the entrapment variable).³⁰

Components of Japan's long-range strategy in the post-cold war era: optimistic realism

If the pessimists' argument about predatory Japanese strategies does not hold water, then what are the components of such a grand strategy? I argue that an 'optimistic' realist approach better characterizes Japanese thinking. This has four basic tenets:

- 1 Japan does *not* oppose unification of the peninsula.
- 2 Japan proactively seeks alignment with this entity as a hedge (balance) against China.
- 3 Japan does not fear and therefore seek to preempt Korean revanchist inclinations.
- 4 Japan seeks to reconstruct the 'ideational' base of the relationship (i.e. history).

No opposition to unification

Contrary to the pessimists, Japan does not seek to keep the Korean peninsula divided. Such an assertion raises the prior question of what exactly Tokyo seeks in

³⁰ An in-depth discussion of the empirical tests is beyond the scope of this paper (see Cha 1999a: Chapter 7).

terms of their own national security from the Korean peninsula. Japan's has two key objectives in this regard: (a) stability; and (b) ensuring that alterations to the status quo work in Japan's favor. Regarding the former objective, although the DMZ remains one of the most heavily armed borders in the world where peace is sustained only by the 1953 armistice, an odd form of stability has emerged and one that, on the whole, does not disadvantage Japan greatly (or at least no more so than any of the other major powers in the region). In this sense, Japan's needs are met by the 'known' status quo on the peninsula rather than the unknown non-status quo option. Tokyo is therefore not opposed to unification per se; it is in favor of stability – which at present is met by the status quo.

Having said this, if the two Koreas chose to reunify tomorrow, Japan would *not* oppose or impede this unification process in any way, and most likely would proactively support it.³¹ This is because any other option would defeat the long-term objective of assuring non-adversarial relations with a united Korea (b above). Impeding the process of unification once it started (as the predatory argument might predict) would ensure an outcome contrary to Japanese interests (i.e., an adversarial united Korea). This sort of argument is also evident in discussions of Japanese economic aid or ODA to North Korea. The premise of such funds is not for the explicit purpose of propping up the DPRK and keeping the two Koreas divided, but about preventing a collapse of the North and/or facilitating a regime transition that would cushion unification's political and economic effects on both Seoul and Tokyo (Okonogi 1999; Murooka 1999; Fukugawa 1999). While the impetus for changing the status quo is not likely to come from Japan, Koreans can be assured that once they started the process themselves, Tokyo would be obligated to support it. This would not be out of affinity, goodwill, or loyalty (although these factors may be present), but because it is in Japan's national interests to do so. Thus to say that Tokyo opposes unknown changes to the status quo on the peninsula but still would support unification are not necessarily logically inconsistent statements.

Balancing against China

Japan actively seeks close relations with a united Korea as a hedge against China. Again, one of the basic assumptions in the predatory argument for Japanese strategy is that Japan fears Korea bandwagoning with China against it; however, this view runs counter to basic realist logic. South Koreans certainly welcomed normalization with Beijing in 1992. This marked a triumphant crossing of the cold war divide, and the opening of tremendous economic opportunity. Perhaps more significantly, however, Seoul welcomed normalization because in the South's zero-sum mentality, it amounted to the ultimate diplomatic coup over the North.³² Along with Soviet normalization in 1990, Seoul succeeded in effectively isolating Pyongyang from its

³¹ For arguments in a similar vein, see Izumi Hajime 1999: 9–10.

³² On the ROK's zero-sum mentality and classically Realist conceptions of security, see Morgan 1995: 81–106.

two primary cold war patrons. In this sense, the existence of the North Korean state has acted as a sort of buffer for unbridled ROK enthusiasm for relations with Beijing.

In a unification scenario, however, this buffer disappears, and a united Korea faces the prospect of a 800-mile contiguous border with a militarily and economically burgeoning communist China whose intentions are not transparent. Moreover, it faces this most likely without the same US security guarantees enjoyed during the cold war. In addition, renewed Korean nationalism as a result of unification may translate into animosities and suspicions regarding China. The political mood of a post-unified Korea would be distrustful of a Chinese government as it stands today. In particular, once North Koreans realize the extent of their relative deprivation under Kim Il-sungism, any residual affinity for socialism that might be harbored in a united Korea would fall by the wayside. The possibility therefore arises that the new Korean state might view China with concern, and might heavily fortify its northern border.

Similar threat perceptions are not unthinkable on the Chinese side as well. Of all the powers in the region, Beijing has the most direct stake in the status quo on the peninsula. As a recent Peoples Liberation Army editorial stated, 'The Korean Peninsula is at the heart of northeast Asia and its strategic importance is obvious, to control the peninsula is to tightly grasp hold of northeast Asia'.³³ More specifically, as two Chinese analysts noted, loss of the North would leave China 'deprived of an indispensable security buffer proximate to both the nation's capital and to one of its most important industrial regions' (Hao and Qubing 1992: 1137). A united Korea presents Beijing with the unwanted prospect of another non-compliant power (like Vietnam) on its southern flank with a competing ideological and social system. Moreover, China would not pass lightly over the security implications of such a situation. It has already expressed concerns about the buildup of South Korean (and Japanese) naval forces, and such concerns are likely to be heightened in the case of a united Korea.³⁴ Moreover, if relations between Beijing and the US are tense, then the Chinese perception that the West might utilize Korean unification as a means of containing China is far from remote. For these reasons, a lengthy 1992 report on future peninsular strategies by the Communist Party Central Committee (CPC) stated that despite Seoul-Beijing normalization North Korea was still 'China's Northeast Asian strategic bulwark'. It stated that the North's absorption by the South would have a 'devastating psychological impact', on China, and therefore Beijing's priorities center on preventing Korea from becoming 'the route for the overthrow of socialism by peaceful means from the West'.³⁵ As one specialist noted, for these and other reasons, the Chinese perception of a united Korea is therefore far from one of unadulterated optimism:

³³ *PLA Daily*, 10 July 2000 (editorial).

³⁴ 'Chinese Military Wary of Naval Buildup of Japan, Korea', *Korea Herald*, 10 November 1992.

³⁵ See Korean coverage of the CPC report in *Mal* ([Free] Speech) October 1994 in *FBIS-EAS* 94-245 December 21, 1994, pp. 38-46.

From a longer-term perspective, China is apprehensive about potential threats to its interests from a reunified Korea. In the economic sphere, Beijing is wary of competition from a united Korean economic powerhouse. Politically, the Chinese are uncertain about the role that a united Korea might play in the region and worried that Japan could eventually dominate the peninsula and undermine China's growing influence in Korea. Militarily, the prospect of a reunified Korea with at least a potential if not an actual nuclear capability is also cause for Chinese concern. In addition, some Chinese foresee the possibility that a reunified Korea would seek to reclaim Chinese territory bordering Korea that both North and South view as the birthplace of the Korean nation. (Glaser 1993: 261–262)

History has shown that states with contiguous borders, whether intentionally or not, often lapse into competition driven by security fears (Mearsheimer 1993: 54). In this regard, Japan is fully aware that the most proximate threat to a united Korea may emanate from China, not Japan.³⁶ A united Korea does not have the autonomous capabilities to balance against China; in addition, in the post-cold war era, it does not have the luxury of certain US security guarantees. Furthermore, while a united Korea will certainly harbor its share of animosities toward Japan, this relationship (presumably between Tokyo and a united government under Seoul) would still be grounded in the decades of Japanese–South Korean normalized relations that preceded unification.³⁷ It would also be grounded in a familiarity bred through common security ties with the US for the entire post-war and cold war eras.³⁸ By contrast, the cumulative experiences undergirding a united Seoul–Beijing relationship would not extend further back than 1992. Compelled to balance against the more proximate and unfamiliar threat, Korea could look to Japan with greater fondness.

In addition, the pessimist's argument for Japanese peer competition with Korea fails to acknowledge that Japanese grand strategy is not made in the vacuum of Tokyo–Seoul bilateral relations but must be consistent and conversant with the larger foreign policy picture (Myachi 2000: 262–265; Fukuyama and Oh 1993: 7–48). For example, Japanese geostrategic thinking in the twenty first century faces a number of cross pressures and imperatives.³⁹ Japan faces uncertain relationships with Russia

³⁶ It is interesting to note that in a 1993 trip to Beijing, ROK Foreign Minister Han Sung-joo explicitly stated that while Japan once administered Korea as a colony, it was no longer seen as threatening (see Ching 1993: 42).

³⁷ For arguments regarding Japan–South Korea cooperation implicitly as a hedge against China, see Takesada 2000: 131–133; Akutsu Hiroyasu 2000: 146–151; Michishita Narushige 1999: 68–83; and Okazaki 2000.

³⁸ While these relations do not constitute 'institutions' in the formal sense of a European NATO or EC, they do breed a familiarity between Japanese and Korean leaders. For a related point on how such institutions engendered a familiarity among European leaders that mollified anxieties about German reunification, see Friedberg 1993/94: 13. On the need for building on this baseline of familiarity, see Gong 24; and Kang Choi 293.

³⁹ For background see 'The Modality of the Security and Defense Capability of Japan: A Report

and China (the latter is where peer competition is likely); imperatives for a more independent foreign policy and a larger leadership role in the region commensurate with its economic capabilities; and the need to move beyond its one-dimensional security dependence on the US (Nagashima 2000: 174–175; Green and Self 1996: 35–58; Gong 1999: 21–22). At the same time, pursuit of more proactive defense policies must not contradict constitutional principles; must not disregard domestic aversion to rearmament; and must not raise regional concerns about renewed Japanese militarism. A *thriving* relationship – not peer competition – with Korea seems to fit well with these needs. It provides for Japanese security and regional stability, and, at the same time, strikes a balance between a policy not too strong to raise regional suspicions and incite anti-Japan balancing coalitions, but not too weak to embolden influence-seeking by China.

Not concerned with Korean ‘revenge’

As noted earlier, the arguments regarding Korean revanchist nationalism are overstated and misfounded on three points. The first is with regard to intentions – while Korea has often been referred to as a ‘dagger pointed at the heart of Japan’, aggression has historically come from China (via the peninsula), not by aggressively intended Koreans themselves. The second is with regard to geography – as alluded to above, a united Korea would be more preoccupied with threats on its contiguous northern land border than with any far-flung designs on Japan across the sea. The third is with regard to capabilities – i.e., arguments that Japan would be threatened by a joint North–South Korean military are misfounded as a combined military force would be greatly rationalized.

One area in which potential security dilemmas do arise for Japan is future Korean force procurement. This breaks down along three lines – the extent to which Korea seeks naval capabilities; the extent to which it deploys ballistic missiles; and whether it becomes a nuclear power. The likelihood of any of these is far from remote. As noted above, naval modernization programs in submarines and destroyers have proceeded in spite of the 1998 financial crisis with Korean intentions clearly to develop competent regional capabilities. On the Korean peninsula today, between the two regimes, there exists the capabilities to field a wide array of short- and medium-range ballistic missiles. Seoul has expressed a clear desire to upgrade its own missile ranges beyond those specified in the 1979 bilateral agreement with the US. Finally, DPRK interests in nuclear weaponization have been clearly documented. And on the South Korean side, if unification means a retrenchment of the US, the two times historically that the ROK was interested in nuclear weapons were the two times the US commitment to Korean security was perceived to be deficient.

From the Japanese perspective, what is key to averting security dilemmas with

of the Prime Minister’s Advisory Group on Defense Issues’, 12 August 1994; Mochizuki and O’Hanlon 1998: 127–134; and Ralph Bunche Institute 1998.

Korea over these issues in the future is to create and maintain as much dialogue and transparency as possible in the present (Nagashima 2000: 171; Umio 1997). Rather than complain about the ROK's naval modernization plans (as China has done or as the ROK has done *vis-à-vis* Japanese PKO participation and revision of the US–Japan defense guidelines), Japan has taken the high road, ignoring third party speculation that the ROK buildup is directed against Japan, and actively seeking ways to enhance maritime coordination and dialogue.⁴⁰ This has been manifest in an unprecedented increase in bilateral security activity in the past five years including exchange visits between working level officers, up through JCS chairs and defense ministers, cadet exchanges, and the first-ever port calls and search and rescue exercises (SAR) (Nagashima 2000: 165–166; Kawamura 2000; Park 1998). It is also evident in activities at the Track II level aimed at creating familiarity and seeking new avenues of military coordination.⁴¹ With regard to potential Korean nuclear and missile proliferation, Japan would seek to facilitate to the extent possible that a united Korea remain compliant with nonproliferation regimes (as the ROK does now). Again, the key point here is that the Japanese response has not been to complain, accuse, or rally regional support to prevent such scenarios from occurring (as a predatory strategy might suggest, or as South Koreans have done regarding certain Japanese behavior), but a more patient approach that seeks to develop a cooperative foundation upon which to manage away any potential problems along these lines.

Reconstructing history

The fourth tenet of Japan's long-term strategy is to construct a new ideational base for the Japan–Korea relationship. One that moves away from the current fixation on the colonial period and historical animosity and gives the relationship a more positive identity (Miyachi 2000: 270–271). There are interesting parallels here with China. As pessimists argue, the construction of the Korea–China relationship has been wholly positive, drawing on common Confucian heritage and the history of the tributary system. But who is to say that such constructions remain constant over time? As one observer noted, often-cited Korean resentments toward Japan seem equally relevant in the Chinese case:

⁴⁰ Interviews with Maritime Self-Defense Forces officers. Also see Akutsu 2000: 155–158; Kawamura Sumihiko, Miyachi Shinobu, and Takesada, in Rhee and Kim 2000.

⁴¹ See Akira 2000: 325–56; Ralph Cossa (ed.) 1999. With regard to the exchanges and minor joint exercises documented in these works, these might objectively appear like small accomplishments; however, it was only within one generation's lifetime that the notion of Japanese military personnel setting foot again on Korean soil provoked wrenching reactions. The stigma was so acute that Syngman Rhee during the Korean war threatened to surrender the entire country to the communists rather than enlist Japanese support in 1950; Korea threatened to sink Japanese boats in violation of fishing waters; and ceremonial defense exchanges in the 1960s were downplayed from public attention. In this light, security cooperation represents a major transformation of relations.

When Koreans get around to nursing grudges, they might consider which neighbor [Japan or China] saddled them with Kim Il-sung, which gave the go-ahead for the Korean War, and which prevented non-Communist unification in late 1950 by massive, undeclared intervention. (Fitzpatrick 1991: 430)

Traces of this sort of problem were already apparent in the negotiations leading up to the 1992 normalization treaty. As an ROK foreign ministry official recalled, China's outright rejection of statements expressing remorse or repentance for the Korean war in the treaty left a sobering subtext to the fanfare of the moment.⁴² In addition, nationalist fervor from a united Korea might also raise Beijing's concern about the two million-strong ethnic Korean community in Manchuria (Jilin province), the largest contingent of overseas Koreans in the world. Unification raises a plethora of unpleasant scenarios for Beijing regarding mass migration or ethnic identification of this group with the new Korean state. As early evidence of this, China already expressed disapproval at former President Roh's advocacy of an international community of Koreans (1989). Sensitivities were also manifest in Beijing's harsh criticism in 1995 that seemingly innocuous Korean tour groups to Manchuria might incite secessionist movements among the ethnic minority.⁴³ In addition, during normalization talks in 1992, Beijing rejected ROK proposals for establishment of consulate offices in Jilin, and remains reluctant to permit ROK heads of state to tour this area during summit visits.⁴⁴

A trend that weighs strongly in favor of a positive reconstruction of the Japan–Korea relations is democracy.⁴⁵ In particular, the ROK's democratic consolidation and economic prosperity transform Japanese images of its neighbor. As noted earlier, a good part of the negativism surrounding Korea in Japan derived from the repressive practices of the authoritarian regimes in Korea in the 1970s and 1980s. As Korea developed and liberalized, this gradually influenced the Japanese government and general public to hold more positive images of Korea and Koreans. One manifestation of this was the *Kankoku boomu* (Korea boom) in which Korean language, food, and music experienced an upsurge in popularity in Japan in the late-1980s.⁴⁶ Plans to start Korean language broadcasting in Japan by the end of the century have also been

⁴² Won-soo Kim (then-director, Treaties division, MOFA), personal interview, 26 October 1994, Stanford, CA. The only reference agreeable to China was to the 'abnormal' state of past relations (*bijōngsang kwan'gye*) (see the Roh-Yang Shangkun communique in MOFA, *Woegyo yōnp'yo: 1992* [Diplomatic Documents Annual], pp. 560–561).

⁴³ See 'After 1300 Years, White Collar Armies Target Manchuria', *Wall Street Journal*, 9 October 1995; and 'Beijing Asks Seoul to Curb Activities of Korean Civilian Body in Manchuria', *Korea Herald*, 11 October 1995.

⁴⁴ By contrast, meetings with expatriate communities are a standard itinerary item in ROK summits to Japan, the US, South America, and Europe (Won-soo Kim [former Director, Treaties Division, MOFA], personal interview, 26 October 1994, Stanford, CA).

⁴⁵ See Cha 1999a: Chapter 7; and Gong 1999: 25. For a contrasting argument that questions the degree to which the two perceive each other as democracies, see Owen 1997.

⁴⁶ See Kil Soong-hoom *et al.* 1984: 149–150; and 'Japan's Korea Boom', *Korea Herald*, 8 September 1988.

implemented (Lee 1997: 92). A study on the Korean minority in Japan noted additional ways in which perceptions are changing: 'A new image is emerging for Koreans in Japan. This new image is vibrant, dynamic, and self-confident, backed not only by growing economic power but by changing cultural attitudes' (Hoffman 1992: 489).

On the Korean side, as the country embraces democracy and progresses toward economic prosperity, its enhanced international prestige (reflected in events such as the 1988 Seoul Olympics, UN membership in 1991, OECD membership in 1996, and 2002 World Cup with Japan) fosters a growing self-confidence among Koreans that reduces national insecurities and xenophobia, and nurtures a less petty, less emotional attitude in dealings with Japan.

This process of identity change was evident at the October 1998 summit between Kim Dae-jung and Obuchi Keizo. It was not evident, as the popular press focused on, in the colonial apology, the fishery zones agreement, the commitment to joint naval exercises, or the joint action plan.⁴⁷ These were undoubtedly all unprecedented material accomplishments, but what was of significance from an ideational perspective was instead the little things that went largely unnoticed. In speeches before the Diet, Kim Dae-Jung spoke of how Koreans were equally responsible as Japanese for putting the history issue to rest and moving forward. The two leaders called 'infantile' the fixation on 50 years of negative Japan–ROK interaction at the expense of 1500 years exchanges and cooperation. Japan trumpeted Korea's successful road to democracy while Korea lauded Japan's peace constitution and commitment to overseas assistance.⁴⁸ These attempts to reconstruct history, to emphasize the positive interaction over negative, to express admiration for the other's accomplishments were not present in past interaction. They represented subtle but important manifestations of Japanese desires to change templates and transform the identity of the relationship.

Policy implications of Japan's Grand Strategy on Korea

Two tasks inform this final section. First, given the paper's interpretation of Japanese grand strategy, what are the implications for current policy? Second, how plausible are certain suggested scenarios for security outcomes in the region involving Japan given what we know about the strategy?

Engagement with the DPRK

The pessimists would see Tokyo's current policy of re-starting normalization negotiations in early 2000 with Pyongyang as well as the overall engagement strategy with North Korea as consistent with the predatory grand strategy. Japan continues to

⁴⁷ See Nagashima 2000: 167–68; *Choson Ilbo*, 11 October 1998; *Washington Post*, 8 October 1998; *New York Times*, 8 October 1998.

⁴⁸ See transcripts of Kim Dae-Jung's address to the National Diet, 8 October 1998 and the Joint Declaration, 9 October 1998 (unofficial translations) at <www.kocis.go.kr>.

prop up the North indefinitely with assistance, couching this in the benevolent language of engagement and humanitarian aid, but really for the purpose of averting a reunited Korea.⁴⁹ I do not believe this is an accurate interpretation. Tokyo's engagement policy with Pyongyang is not informed or motivated by an overarching desire to delay unification but by a variety of other less menacing motives. A degree of entrapment anxieties informs the policy in the sense that Japan still seeks to avoid situations in which the DPRK feels so encircled and isolated that it might lash out.⁵⁰ Economic assistance to the DPRK is provided by Tokyo not so much to 'prop up' the North as to avoid 'hard landing' scenarios that would have destabilizing repercussions for Seoul, Tokyo, and the region as a whole (Murooka 1999; Fukugawa 1999). Engagement is also a function of short-term expediency. Kim Dae-jung's 'sunshine policy' and the Perry review's emphasis on trilateral coordination compelled Tokyo to step in line on the policy in spite of substantial inclinations to the contrary after the Taepodong test flight over the home island in August 1998. In addition, Tokyo had few other alternatives. A hardline position after the launch (encompassing the levying of sanctions and renegeing on financial commitments to KEDO) would have had little effect on North Korea and would have alienated Japan in relations with Seoul and Washington.

The likelihood of a positive result in these negotiations is not good. The DPRK's refusal to acknowledge (let alone investigate) the alleged abductions of Japanese citizens from Japan dating back to the 1970s remains a major impediment. In addition, a normalization settlement that entailed large sums of money in the range of \$5–10 billion that essentially masqueraded as a bribe to moderate the DPRK missile threat to Japan would be domestically unacceptable.⁵¹ Perhaps the most useful insight that the grand strategy discussion offers here is with regard to the flexibility of Japan's position on engagement. While the predatory argument would see Tokyo as wedded to engagement (i.e., as long as the DPRK is in relatively dire straits, prop up the regime to prevent collapse and unification), Japan's grand strategy actually allows for much greater flexibility. Because this strategy does not in fact 'fear' unification (and would seek to accommodate and support such a process were it to occur), Tokyo would not be constrained from shifting away from engagement toward more coercive or isolation policies if the consensus among the allies in the region moved in that direction.⁵²

⁴⁹ For a statement of this view (although the author disagrees with it), see Dong-man Suh, 'Outlook for North Korea-Japan Ties', *Korea Focus*, 8.2 (March–April 2000), pp. 27–43.

⁵⁰ This became less of a factor for Japan after the transition from the YS to DJ governments in Korea and the concomitant shift to an open-ended engagement policy by Seoul that did not seek to isolate Pyongyang.

⁵¹ For discussion of the sums of money involved and the relationship of such an agreement with the 1965 Japan-ROK treaty, see Manyin 2000.

⁵² An interesting contrast here is with China. Unlike Tokyo, Beijing's grand strategy for the peninsula is explicitly premised on maintaining the division and hence the DPRK buffer on its southern flank. This strategy thus compels China to engage and prop up the North. Moreover,

China–South Korea relations

Another policy implication that can be deduced from the grand strategy is with regard to how Tokyo views Beijing's actions on the peninsula. China has certainly had a more prominent role than Japan in the post cold war on peninsular issues. Beijing participates in the Four Party Talks on the armistice; it has provided the venue for much of the North–South contacts, including the ones that led to the agreement on the June 2000 Pyongyang summit; it has played subtle but important roles in defusing the nuclear crisis in 1994, and the DPRK missile testing moratorium. Tokyo on the other hand has been relegated to a secondary role largely as a financial contributor to KEDO. Japan might therefore be concerned about the degree to which China exercises an inordinate amount of influence on the peninsula.

There is no denying Beijing's enhanced role in shaping events on the peninsula, and China–South Korea relations since 1992 remain on an uptick (as do China–DPRK relations given the recent visit by Kim Jong-il to Beijing).⁵³ However, Japan while cognizant of this, is not overly worried. As noted above, this is because of a realization that in the longer term, regime type, geography, economics, and familiarity work in favor of Japan–Korea alignments and to the disadvantage of China–Korea ones especially if the North Korean buffer is gone. The one exception to this might be economic complementarities on the China–Korea axis; however, even here the outlook is not nearly as sanguine as the popular wisdom predicts.⁵⁴

Other security outcomes

Finally what does the strategy tell us about Japanese reactions to other security scenarios in the region? Given the DPRK's unexpected resiliency and the June 2000 Korea summit, increasingly there is discussion of non-zero sum peace solutions on the peninsula where the two regimes co-exist rather than reunite. Indeed the 2000 joint declaration between the two Koreas expressed explicit agreement between Seoul and Pyongyang that the commonality in respective unification formulae was a long interim period of coexistence under 'one nation, two systems' type vision. There is nothing *a priori* in Japanese strategic thinking that would be averse to such an outcome, but then again, it would depend greatly on the circumstances of this end state on the peninsula. If, for example, the one nation–two systems solution left two

the more the regional consensus shifts in favor of containment, the more wedded Beijing becomes to engagement with the DPRK. Japan faces no such constraints.

⁵³ On the former, see Victor Cha 1999b.

⁵⁴ In particular, China's growth may change its trade needs in ways that increase competition with Korea. Already, a combination of high growth and fixed resource endowments have made China a net importer of food products and raw materials, and a net exporter of labor-intensive manufactured goods. Given China's comparative advantage in labor costs, this leads to fierce competition with Korean industries for international markets. Competition also grows as Korea faces pressures from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to liberalize, making the country more vulnerable to a flood of Chinese imports (see Dollar, 1989: 1167–1168; and Cha 1999b: 91–93).

Korean regimes in peace and compliant with arms control and non-proliferation regimes, then Japan might favor such stability. On the other hand, if this end state came about without substantial moderation of DPRK military capabilities, then Japan would be no better off. In other words, if the inter-Korean peace solution deals only with those things relevant to peninsular security like DMZ troop reductions and artillery, but does not address long-range missiles, then Japan would most likely oppose such an outcome. Tokyo would not oppose the inter-Korean peace per se, but would be very concerned about another form of entrapment – in this case, the ROK incentive to take its newfound peace with the DPRK (i.e., moderation of the threat of invasion and artillery) and ‘decouple’ its security from Japan with regard to missiles or nuclear weapons.

What about the possibility of Japan shedding its non-proliferation identity as a response to continued DPRK threats? Or, conversely, Japan bandwagoning with China and the DPRK to mollify its external threats? Either proposition is certainly plausible. In the former case, Japan clearly possesses the capabilities, technology, and infrastructure to proliferate. In the latter, if one is a fan of cultural arguments for security, there exist precedents for a bandwagoning with China dynamic in the region (Huntington 1996; Ross 1999; Brzezinski 1997). The answer to this question lies less in Japanese grand strategy on the peninsula and more in Japanese confidence in the US alliance. As long as US commitments remain firm, the likelihood of Japan seeking alternative internal or external balancing options is low. In other words, the causal arrow is more likely to run in the direction from weakened US alliance to alternative balancing options, rather than from alternative balancing options to weakened US alliance. As one longtime Japan expert observed, ‘So long as the United States sustains its existing presence in the region, Tokyo will undoubtedly maintain its cooperation with Washington as a core element of its foreign policy. Under current circumstances, it is highly unlikely that Japan will try to establish a cooperative system with its regional neighbors in an effort to free itself from the sphere of US influence’. (Gong 1999: 20; Berger 1998; Pyle 1996).

Conclusion

Since the division of the Korean peninsula in 1945, the common assumption is that Japan’s predatory grand strategy has been premised on a fear of unification and a desire to prevent it. At times this has been explicit through the equidistance policy of the 1970s or more subtle through post-cold war humanitarian aid and economic assistance policies to prop up the DPRK regime. But a true understanding of grand strategy must look for the continuities in Japanese attitudes toward the peninsula not just since 1945 but over the past centuries. What emerges from this longer-term view are two constants with regard to Japan’s grand strategy. First, Japan has always sought a relationship with Korea that works to Japan’s security advantage in the region; and, second, Japan has always seen Korea policy embedded in the larger

context of the region's balance of power. What has changed in the latter half of the twentieth century and twenty first century is the mode by which Japan has sought these objectives. In the past, this was based on unilateral military domination of the peninsula; today, it is based on alignment and cooperation within the context of US–Japan–Korea relations. The point to be made here is that neither of these objectives logically dictates Japanese opposition to a unified peninsula in the twenty first century. As this paper has shown, arguments that have suggested such predatory motives have done so based less on a reading of the continuities in strategy and more on historical biases and enmity. What emerges in the former case is a grand strategy for Japan, not prejudiced against unification, but actively in pursuit of unification outcomes that work to Japan's advantage in the regional distribution of power. This translates to support for the DPRK not because Tokyo wants to keep the peninsula divided, but because it wants to cushion and shape unification in stable directions that benefit Japan. Moreover, Japan seeks more political and military cooperation with South Korea not because it is carefully planning its opportunity to repeat history, but because, in the longer term, there is a realization that confidence, trust, and transparency on this axis can only benefit Japan's security under virtually all balance of power configurations one could imagine in the region's future. This indeed is a very realist perspective but also an optimistic one.

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