

Round Table
on “Historical Reconciliation and East Asian Transnational Relations”

The Hard Case of Japan-Korea Reconciliation:

Global Structural Changes, Perception Gaps in New Norms and Institutions,
and A Recipe for Public Diplomacy

Yuki ASABA

Professor, University of Niigata Prefecture
Adjunct Professor, University of North Korean Studies, Korea
yasaba@unii.ac.jp

1. The 2015 accord on the comfort women issue

- The issue must have been “resolved finally and irreversibly” at least at the governmental level
- Generally accepted by the Japanese people
- As long as the statue of a comfort woman remains in front of Japanese embassy in Seoul, the perception of the issue being unresolved continues
- The second statue erected in front of Japanese Consulate-General in Busan one year after the accord
- The mayor of San Francisco accepted the statue of comfort women from non-governmental “Comfort Women Justice Coalition”
- In protest, Osaka Mayor threatens to terminate the sister-city relationship
- Japanese government intervenes in the dispute

1. The 2015 accord on the comfort women issue

- As the accord was flatly denied by the Korean people, President Moon Jae-in once called for “re-negotiation” in the election campaign
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs’s task force soon to publish the results of the policy review
- Modelled after Japanese PM Abe’s policy review of the Kohno Statement in 1993 and the Asian Women’s Fund
- Among the 47 survivors, 36 accepted the atonement money
- As the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan has for decades denied any kind of Japanese government’s actions less than “legal responsibility” and “reparation,” no exception this time too

1. The 2015 accord on the comfort women issue

- “the Government of Japan is painfully aware of responsibilities,” “Prime Minister’s sincere apologies and remorse,” “1 billion yen contributed by the Japanese government to the Korean government-established fund,” “recovering the honor and dignity and healing the psychological wounds of all former comfort women,” “100 million won distributed to each individual without restrictions on use” : virtually, individual compensation as a whole
- Two “waza-ari” once counted as “ippon” in Judo
- What does the “resolution” of history issue mean in the first place? What is “historical reconciliation” all about?
- Is sincerity (진정성/真情性) indispensable for historical reconciliation as the Korean people vehemently calls for it?

2. The “hard case” of Japan-Korea reconciliation

- Intervention by the US and the issue-linkage
- Irrespective of “basic values,” both JPN and ROK share “strategic interests” to counteract the threats from North Korea and to rally around the US (MOFA)
- As “a chain is no stronger than its weakest link,” “the JPN-ROK link” in the USA-JPN-ROK security triangle is in question
- “USA-JPN/ROK,” “USA-ROK/JPN,” “USA/JPN-ROK”
- Sharing “the fear of entrapment” in the case of President Trump’s quick decision on preemptive attack without prior consultation
- Sharing “the fear of abandonment” in the case of a big deal on the nuclear/ICBM freeze between US and DPRK (Cha 1999)

2. The “hard case” of Japan-Korea reconciliation

- Lack in PR strategy
- With whom (Public) to establish relations, what kind of Relations?
- How is the accord among the governments is accepted by the peoples each?
- Transnational relations and international organizations (Yamaguchi et al 2016)
- The limits of understanding in “the history issue between Japan and Korea” (Kimura 2014)
- Public diplomacy to “win the hearts and minds”
- Diplomacy with Korea sidelined amid strategic priority on the US and China
- Text and “a picture”

2. The “hard case” of Japan-Korea reconciliation

- In the wake of “the Candle-light Revolution,” the past wrongdoings, norms and institutions once deemed as such become the target of “correction” and “straightening out”
- Anything but Park Geun-hye: final and irreversible resolution of the comfort women issue, GSOMIA with Japan, deployment of THAAD
- During his visit to APEC annual conference, President Moon Jae-in stated, “Although the Korean people feel beholden to Vietnam (for sending troops to the Vietnam war), we are now an important partner to each other”
- Reflection on their own past and other cases

3. Global structural changes and “strategic interests”

- Is the goalpost “moving” again?
- Compatibility with higher law such as “*pacta sunt servanda*,” “*clausula rebus sic stantibus*,” “*jus cogens*”
- PM Abe’s Statement on the 70th Anniversary of the End of the WW II, after-empire/post-colonialism
- Liberation without independence war, ROK denied participation in the San Fransisco Treaty
- agree to disagree on “*already* null and void” in the diplomatic normalization in 1965 and political prudence
- “Fiction” of PRC-ROK “anti-Japan” joint front on history, Republic of Korea established in 1919, “null and void *ab initio*”
- The 1965 System in limbo

3. Global structural changes and “strategic interests”

- “Identity clash”? (Glosserman and Snyder 2015)
- US-led post-war liberal international order based on rules and norms in limbo by President Trump’s “America First”
- Perception gaps in new norms and institutions: Indo-Pacific, “One Belt, One Road (OBOR),” Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Missile Defense (MD) system
- Bare power politics emerging
- From “sharing basic values” to “sharing strategic interests”
- Perception gaps in “strategic interests”: priority on “dialogue and pressure” towards North Korea, policy towards China
- “JPN-USA” “JPN-USA-ROK”/ “ROK-USA-JPN” lacking
- ROK-USA-PRC, 3 No’s to THAAD

4. “Counting” emotions

- Historical antagonism is not “a constant” (Cha 1999) but “a variable”
- Its relative significance changes historically
- Fear of Japan’s militarism, objection to ROK-JPN FTA, closed identity→negative perception of Japan (Choi, Jeong and Jung 2014)
- Although not significant, visit to Japan has some positive effects on positive perception of Japan
- ROK-USA-JPN trilateral security cooperation is the sequence of bilateral missions with ROK and JPN for USA
- Preventing the decoupling of JPN-ROK tie by third party is necessary

4. “Counting” emotions

- When the Korean people think Korean economy will surpass Japanese one in the future, they are more open to ROK-JPN cooperation (Kobayashi et al)
- Koreans can be more flexible on ideal issues, depending on the (perception) changes in power balance in the material sense
- Although the right in Japan and the left in Korea is negative towards JPN-ROK security cooperation, they become positive once they just watch the 38-second movie on the 38 parallel, an outlet of the US Pacific command’s public diplomacy (Asaba et al)
- Not a “moving goalpost” but “moving pictures/movies” in question
- “Over-representation” of history issue in the overall JPN-ROK relations
- Electoral reform towards “proportional representation system” is needed

Figure 1: Featured Scenes from the Treatment video



(1)



(2)



(3)



(4)



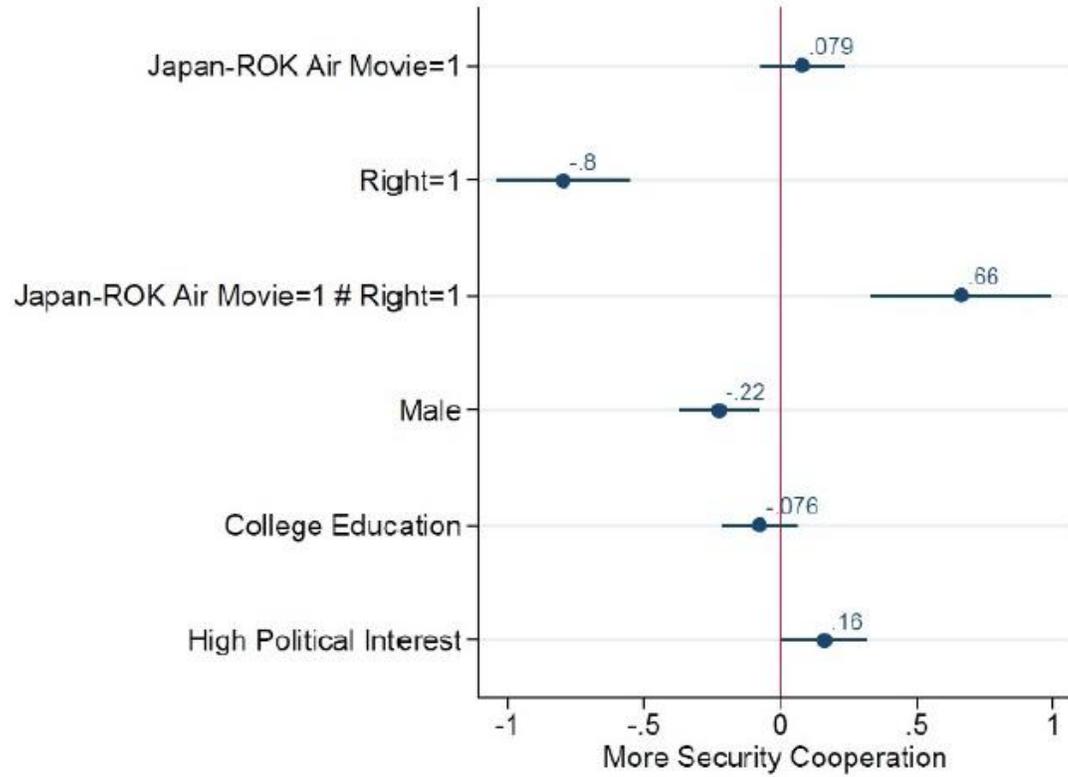
(5)



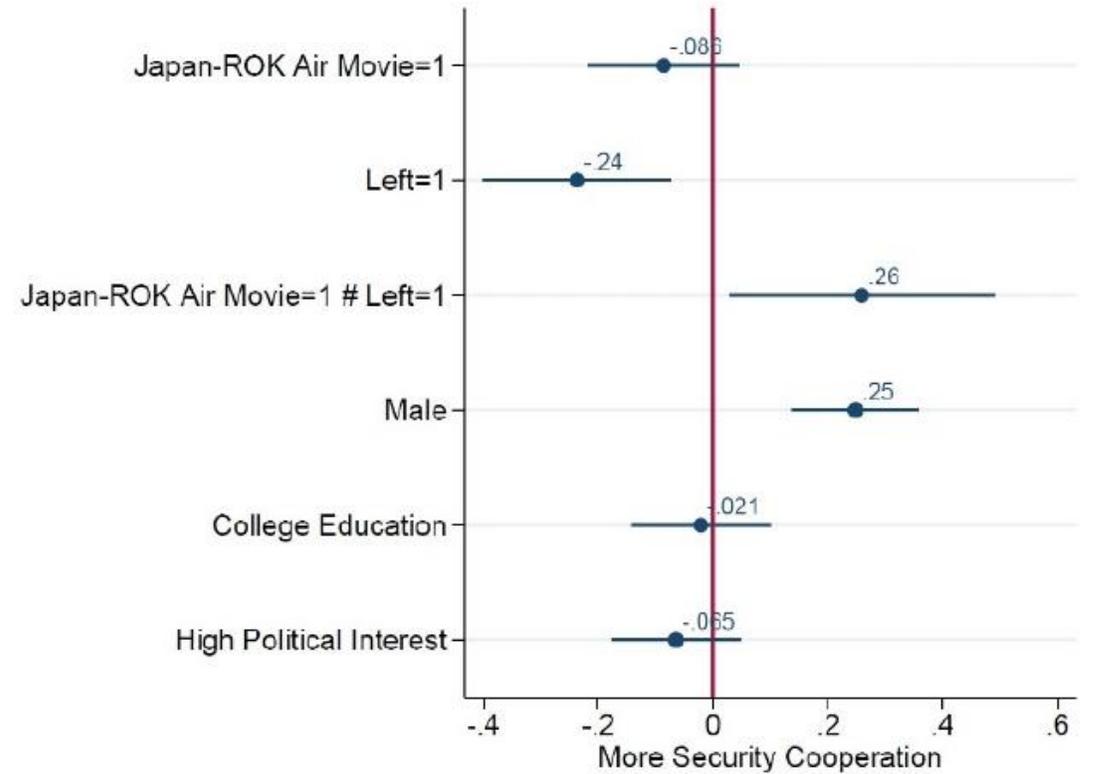
(6)

Source: Asaba et al

Japan



South Korea



Source: Asaba et al

5. References

- Kan Kimura, *What is the History Issue between Japan and Korea? History Textbooks, "the Comfort Women," and Populism* (in Japanese), Minerva, 2014.
- Tomomi Yamaguchi, Motokazu Nogawa, Tessa Morris-Suzuki and Emi Koyama, *The Comfort Women Issue going overseas: An Examination of "the History War" by the Right* (in Japanese), Iwanami, 2016.
- Jongho Choi, Han-Wool Jeong, and Heon Joo Jung, "An Empirical Study of South Korean Attitude toward Japan: Japan's Military Threat, Economic Cooperation and Identity (in Korean)," *Journal of International Politics*, 19-1, pp.41-76.
- Tetsuro Kobayashi, Yuki Asaba, Kyu S. Hahn, Seulgi Jang, and Atsushi Tago, "Perceptions of relative economic power and nationalism in Japan and Korea : A cross-national comparative experiment," presented at International Communication Association's 67th Annual Conference.
- Yuki Asaba, Kyu S. Hahn, Seulgi Jang, Tetsuro Kobayashi and Atsushi Tago, "38 Seconds above the 38th Parallel : How short video-clips produced by the US military can promote alignment despite antagonism between Japan and Korea," mineo.
- Victor Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle*, Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Brad Glosserman and Scott A. Snyder, *The Japan–South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States*, Columbia University Press, 2015.