

OSIPP IRC-Korea Foundation Project
Korea and Japan in the Evolving China US-Relations

Report on the Special Roundtable

“Japan and Korea in China-US Relations: A Reappraisal of the Post-War Order”

2020 AAS-in-Asia Conference, Online

31 August – 4 September 2020

I. Roundtable Abstract

This roundtable examines Japan-Korea relations by focusing on the bilateral relationship's rapidly changing international context. Rather than focusing on the dominant issues particular to Japan–Korea relations, this project looks at the two powerful drivers of East Asian international politics of late, namely China and the US, that inform and influence Japan and Korea’s domestic politics and international behaviour. As such, the interest of this project is to give greater attention to the interaction between Japan’s and Korea’s relations with both China and the US in order to shed light to the spill over effect of China-US relations on Japan-Korea relations. It aims to be both an exercise in reappraising America’s hub-and-spokes system in the context of changing power dynamics from the China challenge, and an attempt to assess the historical significance of Japan–Korea relations in the transformative phase of modern East Asian politics.

II. Roundtable Members

Haruko Satoh, Osaka University, Japan (chair)

Brendan Howe, Ehwa University, South Korea

Jaewoo Choo, Kyung Hee University, South Korea

June Park, National Research Foundation of Korea, South Korea

Kei Koga, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Xianfeng Yang, Yonsei University, South Korea

Mingjiang Li, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

III. Average Number of Attendees/Audience

75-80 conference participants

III. Introduction (Haruko Satoh)

- a. South Korea and Japan have similar interests in Southeast Asia within the American-led hub-and-spokes system.
- b. The panel discusses the prospects and challenges of a South Korea-Japan bilateral relations that could influence great power politics between U.S. and China.
- c. Introduction of discussants and their key topics.

IV. Brendan Howe: Focus on Non-traditional security (NTS)

- a. Despite the challenges in traditional security areas under US-China leadership contestation and Korea and Japan relations, there is more cause for optimism in the NTS arena.
- b. Old state-centric models of traditional security are insufficient to address current challenges such as COVID-19 that require far more than the management of conflict and war prevention among states.
- c. Security actors (X axis)
 - ◆ Need to realize that security actors are not only states. Security also involve non-state actors: TNC, civil society, international organization
 - ◆ State responses have actually led to more conflict.
 - ◆ Superpowers/state actors are causing more problem than addressing the problem.
 - ◆ Changing conditions: great power contestation no longer tenable, unlike before where we could rely on the U.S. as the “voice of reason”; even after Trump it would be difficult for the U.S. to get back to normalcy
- d. Security threats (X axis)
 - ◆ Look outside the box: non-state-centric threats, existential threats, pandemics, climate change, refugees, transnational cybercrime are integral to regional security.
- e. Why is a broader view of security (X and Y axes) necessary in East Asia?
 - ◆ Region is predominantly state-centric; the Westphalian view of international politics still prevails; state sovereignty is still defended.
 - ◆ **BUT NTS gave opportunities for other actors to shine and to cooperate:**
 - Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have a tradition of NTS promotion especially in Southeast Asia e.g. New Southern Policy (South Korea and Taiwan), Human Security Initiative (Japan)
 - Although Japan and South Korea are still constrained by traditional geopolitics, they have freedom to act in these areas vital for their “niche diplomacy” of having an impact in the global stage.
 - Less well-known instances of cooperation in NTS area e.g. development and peacekeeping operations.
 - Vietnam and Singapore applauded for how they dealt with COVID-19 security environment; they may lack the moral authority as quasi-authoritarian states and the societal contributions.
- f. Conclusion
 - ◆ With the failure and abdication of great power leadership, NTS cooperation between South Korea and Japan may end up not only be within their own national interest, but also a strategic necessity.
 - ◆ NTS action might spill-over other sites for cooperation between Japan and South Korea; if not confidence-building and de-escalation of the rhetoric and between the two.
- g. Comments and segue to next speaker (Haruko Satoh)

- ◆ Hung-up on rhetoric, and broad support-base to antagonize each other. South Korea's "anti-Japan" makes them more vulnerable in the context of US-China rivalry e.g. THAAD incident
 - Created a thorny atmosphere, which might require a clean slate to communicate with each other where NTS could be a space.
 - The challenge is we cannot be seen to work together, but this does not mean there are no opportunities.
- ◆ South Korea (Moon Jae-in Administration)
 - A matter of South Korea's long-term vision regarding reunification and denuclearization; current administration is a radical departure from the past, which was not explicitly anti-Japan.
 - Aggravation also changed Japanese public opinion regarding Koreans.
- ◆ Japan (Abe Shinzo Administration)
 - Also contributed to the antagonisms e.g. curb semi-conductor exports
 - Withdrawal of the GSOMIA Treaty.
- ◆ We need to recalibrate. What are the openings for both South Korea and Japan to pursue less antagonistic relations? Is the relationship reparable?

V. Jaewoo Choo: Politicization and the securitization (P and S) of NTS

- a. Question: do we want to go with NTS or emerging security?
 - ◆ Brendan Howe: NTS vs emerging security: the latter is about the emerging challenges to state security while the former has referent objects other than the state.
- b. Politicization and securitization of NTS impedes any progress of ROK-Japan bilateral relations.
 - ◆ Whether it is for domestic politics or not is debatable, but we are stuck with politicization and securitization:
 - We already know that cooperation among states is vital when it comes to daily needs such as water and energy.
 - NTS concerns, when politicized and securitized, become traditional security concerns.
 - ◆ Need to look at the processes involved.
 - The most damaged country would be South Korea, especially when it comes to territorial disputes in the South China Sea and protecting the sea lanes in Southeast Asia.
 - Sanctions served as retaliatory measures e.g. Korean peninsula case where both North and South are being sanctioned by China and Japan
 - If we do not examine these, we could expect more sanctions and military deployments in the region.
 - ◆ Great power allies need to play a more constructive and positive role.
 - Absence of great power leadership: not necessarily the US, but look at the context of the region (China and Japan)

- Emphasis on the leadership role of Japan to reach a more concrete conclusion where South Korea could play a role as a middle power, and Japan as a regional power.
- With China rising as a communist state, the value of democracy and liberalism are endangered.

VI. Xianfeng Yang: Difference in geostrategic conditions of Japan and South Korea

- a. Geostrategic divergence between Japan and South Korea
 - Economic dependence on China in terms of market and trade, U.S. in terms of security
 - Yet, a closer look reveals that Japan and South Korea's priorities are different which will impact the balance of relations.
- b. Issues of divergence
 - We need to also talk about how to deal with North Korea.
 - Bigger problem for South Korea than Japan
 - Japan is peripheral to denuclearization, reunification and other issues of long-term peace in the Korean peninsula.
 - Underlying issues of Pan-Korean nationalism which affects the geopolitical positioning of Korea e.g. first Korean Summit; South Korean public opinion reflect positive views on North Korea.
 - Summit between Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un illustrate how South Korea is marginalized in other instances.
- c. South Korea's polarized domestic politics
 - Makes it harder for South Korea to choose given its alliance with the US.
- d. Conclusion
 - For Japan, dealing with China and US is much simpler and straightforward, while for South Korea it is a lot more complicated.

VII. Kei Koga: Japan-South Korea-India Relations and prospects in multilateralism

- a. Is there a possibility to facilitate Japan-South Korea relations in the multilateral setting?
 - The existing multilateral and trilateral relations did not improve the relationship between Japan and South Korea because they are not institutionalized.
- b. Context
 - East Asian geopolitical setting; frictions in trade and security between China and US great powers, yet there are also trends emerging in East Asia, such as strategic visions of middle and emerging powers (e.g. FOIP, Southern Policy, and India's Act East Policy).
 - Rise of multilateralism e.g. Japan, India, US and Australia QUAD meetings, but they have yet to translate to concrete policy action; we are not sure when they will be institutionalized formally; issues with existing perception gaps and level of commitment to the region.

- We have yet to see to what extent is the US willing to commit in the Indo-Pacific; China's increase in assertiveness.
- Are there other frameworks we could look at? Can middle powers cooperate to decrease dependence?
- c. Status of Japan-South Korea bilateral relations
 - Joint Declaration for Partnership (1999) improve relations but this relationship was not institutionalized; remained in the context of multilateral framework.
 - If issues such as history problem come up, the two parties just halt the partnership because of its informal nature.
- d. Status of Japan-India Bilateral relations are improving
 - Improving e.g. PM Mori's visit to India (2000s) in cooperative frameworks especially in the economic field (other examples 2+2, leadership dialogues and exchanges)
 - Even if there are perception gap, there are mitigated by these developments.
- e. Status of South Korea-India bilateral relations
 - Weakest link, but there are efforts e.g. New Southern Policy Southeast Asia and India.
- f. Opportunities for Action
 - India as a possible hub where the two could meet.
 - Functional areas such as infrastructural cooperation: India has human resources, South Korea has technology and Japan's experience with infrastructure development.
- g. Challenges
 - Uncertainty with the COVID-19 situation.

VIII. June Park: Tech-wars and COVID-19 in Japan and South Korea Relations

- a. Context
 - ◆ NTS and technology cannot be separated anymore
 - ◆ Difficulties in predicting; so many changes which makes us more vulnerable to the expectation of other changes that would come along.
 - ◆ Tech wars (e.g. chips race, semiconductor sector) and geopolitical discussion of why the conflict could be heightened even with the results of the US Presidential elections this year.
- b. U.S. and China tech wars
 - ◆ Tech split: not a complete economic decoupling, but tech decoupling is likely although it would take time.
 - ◆ The semi-conductor link to the US, China, Japan and South Korea relations.
 - US and European countries such as the UK and France banning Huawei 5G technology.
 - Curbing semiconductor supply; banning transactions with Huawei is a way to curb semiconductor supply to China and other interested affiliates is the core of these policies.

- ◆ How does the decoupling of tech is exacerbated by COVID-19?
 - The geopolitical side: Who gets to rule and obtain revenue from worldwide and widespread standardization?
 - The US is ahead in term of system and microchip development; South Korea is only ahead in terms of memory chips.
 - Change in the leadership as the industry progresses; the real driving force behind tech wars is the US drive to curb advanced semiconductors to China, not just Huawei.
 - System and memory chips may be under US sanction
 - The geoeconomics side: the implications of contactless economy
 - Increase in the demand for related technology.
 - Pre-trade war (pre-January 2018); existence of export curves the phase of worldwide outbreak
 - Post-COVID tech wars e.g. AI, surveillance issues, social media, WTO ROK-Japan case file are interlinked; together with leadership change
- c. Possible scenarios in the Post-COVID era
 - ◆ Contactless economy as a norm
 - ◆ Change in leadership: post-US presidential elections may exacerbate the tech wars; change in Japanese PM may not have an impact in the ongoing semiconductor case; promises of new South Korea leadership are uncertain.
 - ◆ The drive for the technology conflict is mainly about US and China.

VIX. Mingjiang Li: Assessment of China's Health Silk Road in the COVID-19 Context

- a. Did China's health diplomacy contribute to its soft power?
- b. Context
 - ◆ Historically, it is less known that the silk road functioned as channel for health cooperation i.e. dissemination of health-related knowledge and products e.g. acupuncture.
 - ◆ Recent resurrection of the public health cooperation initiative by the Chinese government calling it "Health Silk Road" (concept inaugurated in Xi Jinping's visit to Uzbekistan).
 - ◆ Establishment of various health cooperation initiatives in East and Central Asia since 2015 e.g. Lifeline Express Project, Peace Arc providing medical services, engagement with international institutions such as WHO.
- c. The COVID-19 outbreak changed the seemingly positive environment for the Health Silk Road.
 - ◆ Health Silk Road quickly became part of China's Emergency/Health Diplomacy e.g. offering increased medical assistance with Italy, France, Spain (including staff, protective suits, masks, respirators and testing kits); China's neighborhood diplomacy in Southeast Asia, also in Africa
- d. Impact of China's Health Silk Road in its soft power

- ◆ Positive reception reflected in the survey; majority thought China handled the pandemic better than the US.
- ◆ Soft power perceptions vary in the West and East e.g. Pew Research polls show negative perception of China.
- ◆ The Health Diplomacy did not make a significant contribution to China's soft power, yet it confirms the pattern in China's soft power we have seen: it tends to do well in the developing world, but there is a huge deficit in the Western world.

X. Open Forum

- a. On India being a hub for enhanced Japan-South Korea dialogue
 - ◆ Kei Koga: could work because multilateral settings usually include great powers US and China, which affects the configuration of compliance; but if India is there, then both countries do not need to worry as much, more frank conversations could take place; economic incentives could be a common meeting point despite political difference; digital could be a good area cooperation because this is where the great power rivalries are currently intensifying.
 - ◆ Brendan Howe: Good idea to keep great powers out in regional cooperation; Japan is partially to blame because whenever there is a suggestion for regional cooperation, Japan is always keen to bring the US in which keeps others from listening to Japan.

XI. Key Points/Inquiries that Emerged

- a. What are the promising areas of cooperation between Japan and South Korea?
 - ◆ NTS, multilateral projects with Southeast Asia and India, departure from great power politics towards niche diplomacy and assuming middle power roles.
- b. What are the hurdles to these opportunities?
 - ◆ Predominance of Westphalian, state-centric conduct of international politics in the region; politicization and securitization of NTS issues, tech wars between US and China; diverging geostrategic interests and priorities between South Korea and Japan.
- c. What could be done to mitigate these hurdles?
 - ◆ Look at the less known initiatives where Japan and South Korea share a common ground e.g. NTS in Southeast Asia; broaden the scope of partnerships within and beyond the region; acknowledge the complicated nature of each country's domestic politics; become less dependent on great power allies in dealing with problems in the region.