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Getting the East Asian Core
Triangle Right: South Korean Adjustment
to the Sino-Japanese Rivalry

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**Getting the East Asian Core Triangle Right:
South Korean Adjustment to the Sino-Japanese Rivalry**

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ABSTRACTS: South Korea lacks a clear strategy for adjusting triangular ties with China and Japan in the shadow of strained relations with its ally, the United States. While taking into account U.S. scepticism toward China's push for regionalism and its own autonomous inclinations, it has yet to adjust to deteriorating Sino-Japanese relations. Bandwagoning with China or strong balancing with the U.S. and Japan are unlikely choices, leaving as the optimal option the role of a patient facilitator concentrating on linkages with both close neighbors. Recently Seoul overreached in a desperate response to a difficult environment. This paper traces the historical background of this triangle and the recent U.S. impact on it. It evaluates ties with Japan, putting in a triangular context the sharp slide in cooperation. Next it assesses relations with China and how hard the challenge is of synchronizing them to other ties. As a middle power facing both North Korean threats and the goal of reunification, Seoul has reason to tread cautiously as it tries to maintain a balance between two assertive, nearby competitors.

KEYWORDS: Northeast Asia, security triangle, South Korean-Japanese relations, South Korean-Chinese relations, South Korean-U.S. relations, Sino-Japanese relations

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As a middle power (economically and militarily ranked about tenth in the world), South Korea is situated at the crossroads of four great powers, each of which considers itself in the top ranks and entitled to an assertive regional policy. This is a unique environment, strikingly different from that of a European middle power such as Italy without assertive neighbors or some scattered middle powers such as Brazil far from great power competition. South Korea also has the unparalleled challenge of seeking reunification with a state that is militarily and economically beyond the normal means of control of the global community and even poses an enormous threat to it. Thus, it has an abiding need for support from other states to meet this threat, to persuade North Korea, and eventually to embrace reunification and its enormous costs. In these enduring circumstances, a new phenomenon has arisen: the South's two closest neighbors have, on fairly equal terms, begun an intense rivalry. How it responds is likely to have significant consequences for its relations with its lone ally, the U.S., its ties to North Korea, and its ability to convert its middle power status into a meaningful asset in the world's most ascendant region.

After successfully following the policy of *nordpolitik* to entice Moscow and then Beijing into normalized relations and then launching the Sunshine Policy by rallying support from these two capitals as well as Washington and Tokyo, Seoul has since 2001 and especially in 2005-06 lost ground in working with the great powers. It is not easy to be buffeted by four states whose foreign policy, arguably, does not measure up to the standards needed for our times, each reacting to recent international events by accentuating worrisome trends. George W. Bush has steered the U.S. toward an inconsistent regional strategy in which Richard Armitage's Japan first approach followed by Robert Zoellick's

encouragement of China to become a “stakeholder” has been interspersed with Dick Cheney’s neo-conservative quasi-containment of China and ideological rejection of diplomacy with North Korea.¹ Simultaneously, Koizumi Junichiro’s obsession with visiting the Yasukuni Shrine overwhelms traditional diplomacy, denying efforts to staunch an upsurge of ultra-nationalist claims in Japan or to try to contain the damage across the region. Hu Jintao’s transgressions are less flagrant, but some would argue that he has betrayed early expectations that China was ready to find common language to reassure the U.S. and Japan by exploring shared values with increasing transparency. Finally, Vladimir Putin resuscitated the image of an authoritarian leader in Moscow narrowly concerned with supporting dictators in order to expand his state’s influence regardless of the impact on regional stability and human rights. In the shadow of the urgent U.S. drive to sustain its influence and Russia’s struggle to reassert its, South Korea is challenged to adjust to a new Sino-Japanese rivalry that looms as the most destabilizing consequence in Northeast Asia of altered great power ties.

The intensified rivalry between China and Japan poses new challenges for many countries. The U.S. faced unprecedented concern that this rivalry was spoiling the atmosphere for strategic cooperation in East Asia, leading officials to debate quiet intervention to find a way to ameliorate damage from Koizumi’s visits to the Yasukuni Shrine while still giving priority to boosting Japan versus China. ASEAN states struggled with the impact of the rivalry on plans for regionalism, agreeing with Japan’s desire to expand the new East Asian Summit with three additional members that had the effect of diluting China’s potential dominance but then welcoming China’s call to confine discussion on forging an

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East Asian Community to the more compact ASEAN + 3 setting. Russia and India debated counteroffers by these two other claimants to Asian great power status, without making abrupt changes. Yet, the most important battleground for China and Japan once again became the Korean peninsula, which faces the most urgent decisions on how to manage this rivalry and a fraying U.S. alliance.

Why is the deterioration in Sino-Japanese and Japanese-South Korean relations of late different from other setbacks in the region over the past decades? First, contrary to what is asserted in most coverage, it is about fundamental matters of security and identity. Second, it should be understood not only as another instance of “economics hot, politics cold,” but, as explained by former Japanese ambassador Tanino Sakutaro, also as “people cold.”² Even Japanese-South Korean mutual trust, which had been rising since 1998 and benefited from the “World Cup,” the “Korean wave,” and a surge in cross-tourism, has fallen with 89 percent of the Koreans saying that they cannot trust Japan, including a doubling from 2002 to 38 percent who cannot trust it at all.³ Third, it exposes the difficulty for Seoul in steering a middle road. Cognizant of forces that complicated its choices, our task is to assess how it might respond anew.

Observers have misjudged the Sino-Japanese-South Korean triangle for several reasons. First, they have been preoccupied with the alliances of the U.S. with each of these countries as well as with steps in 1998-2004 to strengthen the Japanese-South Korean leg of the triangle. Overrating these steps, many lost sight of the strategic context, including the forces pulling the two sides apart. Second, many keep concentrating on economic relations as a force drawing countries closer, ignoring that the rise of China demonstrates that its

positive role as an economic magnet does not cancel out a disruptive geopolitical impact.

Third, enthusiasm about accelerating cultural linkages between Japanese and South Koreans obscures awareness of cultural ties of a different sort associated with historical memories instead of drama, cinema, and tourism. Fourth, overemphasis on proximate causes in the handling of historical issues has distracted attention from deeper forces at work. A triangular approach shows how Seoul has recently found it harder to navigate between Tokyo and Beijing.

Among three options for South Korean diplomacy in the coming years, only one is bound to serve the national interest best; yet, given policy choices favored in the four competing powers and North Korea's inclination to seek advantage from hyperbolic rhetoric and purposeful threats, the path forward is not easy. One choice is to accept the vision of U.S. neoconservatives and Japanese ultranationalists and draw a taut line against North Korea in the Six-Party Talks while recognizing that a three-way alliance must stand firm against China's drive for regionalism. Taking this strong balancing approach toward China and admitting that the Sunshine Policy was wrong would be tantamount to conceding that the cold war continues in Asia along with the logic of the 1950s-1980s. A second choice is to accede to the rise of China as the center of regionalism, essentially reverting to the sinocentric order in the millennium before the end of the nineteenth century. Given the rapid economic integration with China and its preeminent influence with North Korea, such bandwagoning might seem to be a realistic adjustment to ongoing trends if it were not obvious that it would betray aspirations for autonomy and leverage in foreign policy that have escaped Koreans since the seventh century and only from 1990 became a serious

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possibility. Finally, South Korea could strive for a region in equilibrium where the weight of China would be balanced by the weight of nearby Japan coupled with that of distant U.S., and its own flexibility would be maximized. This requires calibrating the course of Sino-Japanese relations and making realistic choices about possible responses, avoiding overreaching by claiming to be a balancer and underachieving by fearing to draw criticism.

Sino-Japanese-South Korean relations form the core triangle of the East Asian region; yet attention has often gone to other triangles. For a long time, the word strategic triangle was reserved for U.S.-Soviet-Chinese relations, and even with a diminished Russia this draws some interest from security experts. Yet, the main focus now is the U.S.-Sino-Japanese triangle with grander horizons for great power analysis. Lately, North Korea has begun to figure into pacification and reunification small triangles with South Korea and the U.S. or China or even with its old allies in Beijing and Moscow. With so many choices, it has been easy to overlook the core of the region, where the three are rising economically (soon to approach \$8 trillion in Gross National Product), where intra-regional trade soon will near \$500 billion, and where military expenditures may be above \$150 billion. Only in Europe and North America are such levels reached. The core triangle is intriguing not only because of what Chinese describe as the “comprehensive national power” of the three and their growing tendency to seek leverage as they measure themselves against each other, but also for mutual perceptions that bring sharp responses and, I would argue, overreactions along with one-sided images. Below I note realist elements in seeking balance, but my general perspective is that of constructivism in losing clarity on the challenges.

The Historical Background

Apart from the thirteenth-century Mongol use of Korea as a launching pad for an invasion fleet, Korea went more than 900 years without becoming a target of geopolitical competition between China and Japan. China had the greater influence, and it refrained from pressing its advantage in a way that might have caused a backlash, as warring lords across Japan concentrated their attention on consolidation of power on their own islands. Only in the 1590s after the struggle had been resolved inside Japan through unification that recognized a decentralized balance of power did Hideyoshi Toyotomi launch a ruthless invasion, which was rebuffed with the help of the Chinese army. If over the next three centuries Japan made no further aggressive moves memories endured of Korea's vulnerability. The image survived of a peninsula at risk should the balance of power be altered between continental and maritime neighbors.

When in the 1890s-1900s the peninsula emerged as the dividing line between contending spheres of influence, its leaders, torn in their response, did not adequately resist Japan's imperialist ambitions. Korea was annexed by Japan, leading subsequent generations to draw lessons about the danger of their land becoming a pawn in great power struggles. The cold war division across the thirty-eighth parallel, which allowed little scope to either side after the carnage of the Korean War, reinforced these lessons. Now that the Korean peninsula is again the center of regional rivalry,⁴ attention is shifting from the old divide between Washington and Moscow to rising competition of Beijing and Tokyo.⁵

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In the 1990s the most favorable opportunities arose for breaking down barriers in East Asia. Japan wavered on the intensity of its ties to the U.S., optimistic about leadership in Asia, and flexible about concessions over history. China reacted to the sanctions on it from 1989 and to intensified U.S. criticism by boosting regional ties, gradually growing more positive toward regionalism in Asia as it opened wide for trade and investment. In a matter of a decade South Korea moved from no diplomatic relations and weak economic ties to perhaps the closest partner of China in terms of per capita economic relations and public approval. Its economic foundation with Japan remained, which in per capita terms stayed its closest economic partner, amidst a broad opening of cultural, political, and even security ties. The economic integration of the core triangle advanced perhaps more rapidly than any previous integration of separate, major countries in world history. Yet, these ties were complicated by the fragile nature of the accord in October 1998 between Obuchi Keizo and Kim Dae-jung that had given a big boost to all-around relations as well as to treating differences over history as resolved, and by China's claim to be even-handed between North and South Korea. Most importantly, the Sino-Japanese political relationship and mutual images were deteriorating, damaged anew by the fiasco of Jiang Zemin's visit to Japan in November 1998. With the Sunshine Policy at the end of the decade, a strategic divide was growing between Seoul's focus on engaging Pyongyang and rallying other states to this cause and Tokyo's inclination to contain it and, before long, to welcome a tougher U.S. posture. A window of opportunity for Seoul-Tokyo ties was closing just as some assumed it was opening,⁶ and the U.S. factor would strain what Seoul might do with Beijing.

In 2000 South Korea appeared to be emerging as a double center: the driving force for

prying open North Korea with support from four powers; and the centerpiece in regionalism in ASEAN + 3 with prospects for an upsurge of regionalism in Northeast Asia too.⁷ Even in 2002 it seemed that South Korea had an opportunity to draw China and Japan closer with itself at the center. Economic ties kept thriving, the “Korean wave” was rising, and uncertainties over U.S.-North Korean relations briefly pulled the region together along with the halo from the co-hosted World Cup. As for North Korea, a July 1 summit saw agreement between Kim Dae-jung, who argued that the Sunshine Policy was the only choice, and Koizumi’s view that dialogue was the only way.⁸ If plans for Koizumi’s visit to Pyongyang in September were still incomplete and secret, it seemed unlikely that a strategic divide would arise. Instead, South Korea became caught in a double squeeze: between the U.S. and North Korea in the nuclear crisis, and between China and Japan as their rivalry unfolded.

In the first nuclear crisis the South Korean-Chinese-Japanese triangle played little role. None of the three was eager to become involved, rejecting the economic sanctions some in the U.S. had proposed. The situation changed in 1997-98. At the end of 1997 China started to offer more support to North Korea to reduce the chances of a collapse and, increasingly too, to respond to U.S. appeals to use its leverage on the North.⁹ Then after a North Korean missile was fired over Japan at the end of August 1998 Japan became more active in coordinating with the U.S. and South Korea. With the Perry process bringing U.S.-led consultations, Kim Dae-jung could pursue his strong desire to engage North Korea without fear of compromising relations with the U.S., but also with new attention to supporting roles for China and Japan. On the one hand, Japan beckoned along with the U.S. with calls for closer military cooperation and joint strategic thinking along the following lines: only a U.S.

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preponderance of power prevents instability in Northeast Asia, China's rise can be better managed by coordination among the three other leaders in the region; and Japan shares with the South universal values while it poses no threat in the region. On the other, China made the case to the South that it favors stability through regional balance, it represents the gateway to North Korea, and its rising power cannot be contained. As nationalism intensified on both sides, Korea was caught in the middle. For a while, however, even if its wings were clipped by loss of leverage in dealing with North Korea and regionalism, it did not need to take sides.¹⁰

As long as North Korea loomed as a threat, Japanese-South Korean ties gained a boost. In 1998 when Japanese awakened to a serious North Korean threat, they were eager to carry this logic to a new stage and were inclined to view Kim Dae-jung's support for this in the context of an all-around upgrading of relations as confirmation that South Koreans agreed. Yet, instead of seeking support in isolating the North, the leaders in the South turned to persuading the North of the benefits of reconciliation. This gave the edge to China and posed new challenges for relations with Japan.¹¹ With some in the South fearful of Japanese militarism or at least doubtful that Japan would welcome a united Korea less dependent on the U.S., the burden was on Japan to win the trust of its former colony. Instead, with the Bush administration fully supportive of Japan's lead role in Asian security and assuming that it could steer Japanese-South Korean ties toward a full-fledged security triangle, the situation was ripe for growing distrust. By 2004-05 the core triangle had become much more difficult an environment. After all, this is not an equilateral triangle: even as South Korea continues to gain ground on Japan as China draws even with it (using purchasing power), the ratio of the

economies when the regional economy reaches about \$10 trillion will be roughly 1:5:5. As a middle power facing a large power gap and operating in the shadow of the U.S., whose economic and military power exceed that of the entire triangle, and of North Korea, whose regime is a dangerous outlier, Seoul must tread carefully.

The U.S.-Japan-South Korean Alliance Triangle

In Bush's first term Seoul found some success in straddling the widening divide between Tokyo and Beijing. Patiently, Seoul accepted the Triangular Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) and separately increased security ties to Tokyo as shuttle summits started occurring twice a year. There was potential trouble, however, from three developments: 1) U.S. pressure for strategic realignment, shifting U.S. troops from resisting an invasion by the North to preparing for a clash across the Taiwan Strait in conjunction with Japan; 2) U.S. coolness toward regionalism, a favorite theme of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, as a way of slowing China's rise to leadership in Asia; and 3) most importantly, U.S. handling of the nuclear crisis with increasing Japanese consent against the pleas of South Korea as well as China for a package deal based on wide-ranging negotiations. If the divisions were obscured in the spring of 2004 as Japan joined in urging the U.S. to show more flexibility and Koizumi visited Pyongyang again, that soon changed as Koizumi strongly backed Bush.

The U.S.-Japan-South Korea triangle was redefined in the shadow of the nuclear

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crisis. Suspected of anti-Americanism, worried about a drop in foreign investment, and fearful of abandonment, Roh acquiesced to a quiet role despite refusing to agree to pressure rather than dialogue in dealing with the North. Indeed, Japan's handling of the June 2003 summit in Tokyo led some in Korea even to charge Roh with "kowtowing." Yet, this was not a stable arrangement both because the U.S. and Japan lacked a viable strategy toward North Korea and because Roh personally and South Koreans in general resented blatant subordination of their national interests. As Bush and Koizumi drew closer and each pursued policies anathema to Roh, his position grew more difficult.

In the transition from Bush term-1 to Bush term-2 a new climate arose. U.S. relations with South Korea slipped and set the background for a much steeper plunge in the South's relations with Japan. In 2004 groups advising the South Korean government met to set a strategic course that suggested a kind of "cooperative independence." Terms such as "balancer" or "harmonious balancer" followed. Roh's speech in Los Angeles en route to the APEC meetings in Chile startled the U.S. with the empathy shown to North Korea's strategic logic for developing nuclear weapons. This produced awkwardness when he met Bush in Chile. Since the time of his election, U.S. officials had shown their suspicion of Roh on various occasions and old doubts were revived. Hesitant to put the U.S. alliance at risk and given a provocation bound to stir public discontent when Shimane prefecture indicated that it would designate an annual day in honor of Takeshima (Dokdo) island, Roh turned on Japan. The year 2005 revealed not only the enduring legacy of history but also a security chasm. Sensing the resurgence of neo-conservatives as Richard Armitage along with Colin Powell left their posts at the State Department, Roh lashed out at Koizumi, who was embracing the

Bush agenda, as well as parading his historical insensitivity.

From January to May 2005 the triangle became more problematic. Roh vilified Japan on March 1 at his speech in honor of the Korean independence movement, on March 17 in a report through the National Security Council, and on March 23 in a message to the nation. One Japanese publication traces this response to a Blue House report in late January signifying a sharp realignment in South Korean foreign policy, breaking the agreement with Bush of May 2003 on linkage of North-South relations to progress in eliminating the North's nuclear weapons, placing the South in a neutral position if a Sino-U.S. conflict erupted over Taiwan without accepting the call for strategic flexibility for U.S. forces in the South, and reacting negatively to Japan's diplomatic and strategic repositioning.¹² When Roh used the term balancer for Seoul's emerging role in Northeast Asia this symbolized an affront to the U.S. and Japan, but acquiescence as the weak leg in the alliance triangle was not easy to accept.

The nuclear crisis was at an impasse when U.S. and Japanese foreign ministers met on May 2, 2005 to pressure China in order to make North Korea change.¹³ Somehow, South Korea managed to turn the situation around for a time, claiming that it knew how to appeal to the North and in early June getting Bush's consent to proceed. Yet, the summer thaw leading to the September 19 Joint Statement at the Six-Party Talks only delayed the downward slide in Seoul's maneuverability. It became almost completely stymied: little able to impact the U.S., frozen in ties to Japan, and without prospect to turn to China.

In 2006 in the throes of uncertainty two initiatives were launched with the U.S.: negotiations on a rush schedule to establish a bilateral FTA; and a strategic dialogue at the

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level of foreign ministers. These attempts to prop up fraying ties could not obscure the fact that sharp differences exist in perceptions of regional security and North Korea. They are less likely to sustain the hub and spokes approach long favored by the U.S. than to buy time for both sides to reawaken to the importance of their relations. Seoul must clarify its relationship to its only ally and that ally's evolving strategic aims in order to know how to respond to China and Japan within a multilateral context, and that is unlikely without a more viable U.S. strategy for resolving the nuclear crisis. When Roh in May challenged the U.S. further with a speech in Mongolia proposing "unconditional support" in systems and goods for the North's economy and a more independent policy and then it was made clear that even if the North did not resolve the nuclear crisis normalization is possible, it seemed as if relations were in further trouble, but on May 17 it was revealed that Bush was preparing to shift to allow simultaneous negotiations on a peace treaty, as Roh had urged.¹⁴ With Japan as well as Russia excluded as non-signatories of the 1953 armistice, Seoul, which also had not signed but had an indisputable place, would be dealing with Beijing but not Tokyo. The road ahead was far from clear.

Critics of Roh fault him for endangering relations with the U.S. more than with Japan. One view is that only by drawing closer to the U.S. and, of necessity, accepting it as the true balancer in the region can Seoul limit an exclusive alliance that gives carte blanche to Japan's nationalism. It holds too that only continued strong alliance with the U.S. serves the twin goals of forging good relations with North Korea and advancing peace and security in the region.¹⁵ Yet, as much as criticisms of Roh may be warranted for shaking U.S. confidence, they fail to address the dilemma of how can Seoul pursue its own interests if the U.S. and

Japan continue to ignore them. Without letting relations with the U.S. slip very far as Seoul continues to wait for a more forthcoming position to North Korea and regionalism, it cannot ignore the challenge of dealing with Japan and China and their new troubles. The alliance triangle is not an end in itself. As the U.S. keeps working with China within the context of the grand great power triangle that leaves Japan rather skittish and China intensifies ties with Russia and keeps trying to engage North Korea, the other triangular contexts invite the South to pursue its own national interests elsewhere. As its ties with the North remain fragile, nowhere is this more critical than in the regional core triangle.

South Korean-Japanese Relations within the Core Triangle

Improvements in Japanese-South Korean relations were rooted in at least three basic understandings. First, the history issue would be handled with sensitivity by Japan. Second, generous financial assistance and economic cooperation would lubricate ties. Third, the two states share a common security outlook, grounded in alliances with the U.S. and extending to management of ties to North Korea. When defense exchange began in 1969 and at other times when ties were upgraded, such as 1994 when the first nuclear crisis prompted more coordination, the security factor played a large role. In 1983 both Japan and South Korea were more security conscious, as was the U.S. under Ronald Reagan, who prioritized security ties with each. In 1992 Japan agreed to forsake separate negotiations it was conducting with North Korea in order to coordinate with the South. Most heralded was the 1998 breakthrough

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to more substantial military ties, but this was only an apparent meeting of the minds. In 2003 as Roh and Koizumi appeared to be upgrading relations, none of the three binding forces was operating. Financial aid was over, and South Korea's commerce with China was rapidly overtaking that with Japan. Koizumi and Roh were sharply at odds in their historical thinking. Also, strategic thinking split the two leaders, although in the shadow of the U.S. push for a united front to force North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons a semblance of agreement existed. Having in 1999 refused to join the U.S. missile defense program and then been reluctant to discuss China-related issues in the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG), South Korea was clearly heading in a different direction. Unlike the cold war era, China was beckoning with economic and even strategic lures.

South Koreans are sensitive to Japanese unilateral moves toward North Korea, positive or negative. When Roh Tae-woo was pursuing *nordpolitik*, the influential LDP leader Kanemaru Shin led a high-level Japanese delegation to seek a breakthrough with the North. Kim Young-sam was resisting economic ties with the North when Japan decided to send a lot of rice as humanitarian assistance. In each instance, Tokyo did not coordinate, and Seoul found these moves in conflict with its own. More seriously, from 2003 Japan's obsession with punishing the North for not resolving the abduction issue contradicted Roh's appeal for continued engagement. This divide became a critical factor spoiling bilateral relations, especially in the midst of a nuclear crisis frustrating to all.

Why has Japan missed many opportunities to stabilize relations with South Korea? One reason is a failure to grasp the significance of the South to its security and the reality since the end of the cold war that the South has more options. This reflects a lack of strategic

thinking toward Asia,¹⁶ and also a nationalist streak in Japanese domestic politics and debates about identity that skews discussions of the history issue and its consequences. A second reason is U.S. foreign policy, which sometimes appears to give Japan excessive support and to oversimplify strategic choices in Asia, rather than exploring with it tough choices that might provoke renewed debate about the alliance. Japan anticipated a close partner along with the U.S. in demanding that China accept democratic values and pressuring the North to yield with the possibility of collapse. In contrast, South Korea sought a partner in building a cooperative regional order, normalizing ties with the North and joining with China in steps toward regionalism.¹⁷ Koreans emphasized preventing a great power struggle, while Japanese focused on unity to block an unfavorable regional power balance.

South Korea made its boldest moves: to reach an accommodation with Japan on the revisionism issue in 1998, to take charge of the reunification issue with Japan as well as China encouraged to play supporting roles in 2000, and to press for regionalism in a broad context in 2001 and then with a narrower emphasis in 2003. After being disappointed by Japan's responses, it moved instead to stand against Japan's push to capitalize on UN reform by joining others in support of a "middle-power" alternative in the winter of 2005; and then in the summer of 2005 to move into the forefront in preparations for the Six-Party Talks. Japan not China appeared to be thwarting its expectations. All entreaties were rebuffed. The strategy in 1998 to stop raising the history issue if Japan would stop making provocative moves over it, a way to reassure those who blamed Seoul for "playing the history card" had not worked. Instead, a decision from the end of 2004 made the test for becoming a permanent member of the UN whether a country "enjoys the trust of its neighbors."

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Roh is known to be intrigued with comparisons between European reconciliation and regionalism and Northeast Asian prospects. He wants Japan to behave like Germany, atoning for its past in a similar fashion, and reconciling with China as Germany did with France. However many the parallels, this outlook has several pitfalls. First, Japan's view of its conduct in China, the Korean peninsula, and beyond is much more ambivalent than Germany's war memories. Second, the rise of China has no equivalent in Europe where regionalism could proceed without any country becoming dominant. Third, the U.S. government's views of Europe during the cold war and Asia of late are diametrically opposed with regard to regionalism. Finally, South Korea's place in Northeast Asia as the third party to the core triangle as well as a divided country striving for reunification has no parallel in Europe. Yet, for Japan to pretend that it has nothing to learn from Germany is short-sighted.

Indeed, Japan in late 2004 and 2005 made its most vigorous push for power since 1945 with insistence that the history issue has no more relevance. By the end of 2004 its campaign to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council was gaining momentum. As preparations for the East Asian Summit in December 2005 necessitated some critical choices, Japan grew assertive in opposing China's strategy. On the Six-Party Talks Japan took a harder line, shifting decisively toward the U.S. and away from South Korea in three-way preparations. Finally, on historical revisionism Koizumi pressed further for standing firm on his Yasukuni visits and ignoring the views of others on related matters. In all respects, South Korean leaders were frustrated by the widening strategic gap with Japan and the failure, despite shuttle summits and all-around improvement in relations, to get Japanese leaders to consider the impact on their country. Understandably, it sought

leverage on Japan.

The United Nations reform imbroglio of 2005 left South Koreans weighing their status in the hierarchy of world powers. The U.S. obviously reigns as the first power, and China is methodically rising to become second to it. Each is already ensconced as a permanent member of the Security Council. Japan is a step lower, and if it became a permanent member, a new line would be drawn recognizing more than the current five great powers as a special set and leaving South Korea (and eventually a united Korea) just on the other side of the line. It would also make Japan more insistent on its special status as leader in East Asia. Similar to Italy, South Korea champions regionalism and balance within the region conducive to the voices of many rising above the voice of one or two. If the U.S. and China are bound to be competitive, then if Japan throws its weight fully behind the U.S., regionalism cannot advance. If, however, Japan shows flexibility, the South can strive for a region in balance and an elevated voice.

Although Koizumi in 2001-2003 showed some interest in regionalism through ASEAN + 3, he was less energetic than his predecessor Obuchi and failed to define Japan's path. Mostly, he was playing catch-up to China in Southeast Asia. Increasingly, he left South Koreans in doubt that he was serious about "reentering Asia." Identity issues took priority: the shift in negotiating strategy toward Russia in favor of "four islands in a batch" from the spring of 2001, the abduction theme treated as North Korea's challenge to Japan which had to stand up for its sovereignty from late 2002, the nebulous concept of a China "threat" intensifying sharply in 2004-05, and nonchalance to South Korean concerns in 2005 because of historical identity priorities. Such wariness left the South with few options, especially

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because Japan's wrath was directed largely against China while the South's alternatives are concentrated there.¹⁸

The concept of Asianism in Japan has troubled associations with leftist rejection of realism tied to the U.S. and to the "friendship" mode of superficially cultivating ties without addressing real barriers. In 2001-03 it survived with emphasis on regionalism and mitigating differences with China as linkages to South Korea prospered, but Tanaka Makiko's chaotic stint as foreign minister undercut it as did relentless attacks by the right wing on the Foreign Ministry. Coordination with South Korea was sacrificed to the assault on a supposedly weak-willed approach to China and then North Korea. This relates to identity confusion in Japan as well as contradictory value consciousness. Recently championing human rights and the spread of universal values as the key to global and regional cooperation, it has grown more adamant in refusing to appraise its own historical conduct as a matter that reflects on current values. Chinese and South Koreans see this as hypocrisy. Such identity disorientation makes realist choices difficult, but South Koreans also face an identity battle.

Revisionism in Japan and South Korea takes different forms. In Japan it means, among other things, clarifying historical judgments on the period 1905-45 in Japanese-Korean relations. These include: 1) the 1905 treaty to register Takeshima as Japanese territory was not a forced agreement by an imperialist power, but a valid treaty that should have established continued Japanese control rather than being ignored after the war as Korea asserted its control over Dokdo; 2) the 1910 annexation of Korea by Japan was not coerced but a voluntary decision; and 3) the purpose and impact of Japanese rule over 35 years should be judged as largely positive, protecting Korea from predators such as Russia

and enabling its economic development and initial all-around modernization. In Korea revisionism largely takes the form of clarifying historical judgments on the period 1945-87 with consequences for delving deeper into developments under Japan's occupation. In 2004 the issue of investigating who had collaborated with the Japanese came to the fore with an obvious message that their advantages continued in the postwar era and helped to shape the formation of an elite of dubious legitimacy. In 2005 attention turned to the 1965 normalization treaty and Roh's call not only to reassess it but also to renegotiate it. Newly unclassified documents reveal clearly that Korean atomic bomb victims were not included in the negotiations over economic assistance in lieu of reparations as the military dictatorship run by collaborators absolved Japan of future indemnity of victims in return for \$500 million in assistance.¹⁹

While ostensibly the critical difference between Japan and South Korea is over the four decades to 1945, the period after 1965 figures into disagreements too after Roh criticized the failure to normalize relations in the true sense. In turn, *Sankei shimbun* accused South Koreans of having a "self-destructive" historical perspective by not appreciating the value of what was gained in 1965, bringing Japanese capital and technology along with infrastructure, while praising in glowing terms normalization with China in 1992.²⁰ Appreciative of Park Chung-hee's development orientation and strategic outlook, some Japanese set aside his dictatorship or affronts to Korean national identity. They tend to ignore why the South is favorable to China and how Japan can respond.

Reminders of the end of the war in 1945 cast a dark shadow on its sixtieth anniversary. Koreans recalled the unsatisfactory normalization of relations with Japan in January and

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again in August when archival documents from 1965 were released as well as in when the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute was reignited. Japanese faced the war legacy also when Koizumi at the last minute decided to join world leaders in Russia's victory celebration on May 9, when Russians and Chinese lauded Germany but not Japan as a country that had reflected deeply on its aggression and taken responsibility before international society.²¹

Joint research on historical issues and on textbooks continues to be a convenient stalling device that suggests progress will be made in reaching mutual understanding. Yet, the main area where efforts have proceeded to narrow differences is coverage of distant history. Discussion of the annexation treaty that cost Korea its independence only arouses fierce disputes. The subject of territorial disputes is too sensitive even to raise.²² We should give no credence to more joint commissions or publication projects along these lines.

Roh's restraint toward Japan in 2003-04 continued the strategy of Kim Dae-jung for balanced and positive relations with all four great powers active in the region, pursuing crisis resolution, gradual reunification, and regionalism. In the spring of 2004 when Koizumi went to Pyongyang, he not only retrieved the family members of hostages, but also aspired to reassert Japan in the strategic hunt as an active force in the Six-Party Talks and sided with Roh in urging the U.S. to be more flexible, leading to some movement at the third round of talks. At the first summit of the new shuttle diplomacy in July the message from Seoul was that it wanted cooperation on the North Korean nuclear issue. With increased trust a central theme in preparing for the fortieth anniversary of normalization and FTA talks scheduled to reach agreement in 2005 too, the July 21-22 summit was well anticipated.²³ Hopes faded, however, with Koizumi's assertiveness to Russia over disputed islands (just before Roh went

to Moscow for a warm summit with Putin), North Korea on the abductees, and China.

In the current atmosphere minor matters can set off a chain reaction. The 1999 fishing agreement between Japan and South Korea came on the heels of the historic Kim Dae-jung summit in Tokyo and accompanied an upturn in naval cooperation as well as bilateral relations in general. Yet, fishermen of Shimane around Takeshima. In contrast to the just concluded agreement with Russia on fishing near the four disputed islands north of Hokkaido, where Japanese local communities realized many benefits (customers in their shops, cheap consumer prices for imports, and good access to fish even if the cost to their government is considerable), resentment in Shimane led to political action. This precipitated Roh's assault on the cornerstones of the bilateral relationship as well as his use of the concept of "balancer." Japanese analysis blamed this on ambition to boost national power, charging that after reflecting on Korean history as a series of struggles with hegemonic powers, Roh seeks to use the Six-Party negotiating process to forge a peace and security framework for the region odds with U.S. and Japanese relations.²⁴ In this concept they see seeds of unreliability, a view reinforced when Koizumi visited for what would be the final shuttle summit.

At the June 20, 2005 summit in Seoul, apart from Roh's lengthy lecture on history that only exposed the well-known gulf between the two sides, the second issue facing Roh and Koizumi was the North Korean crisis and how to restart the Six-Party Talks. Already in the midst of an intense effort, approved by the U.S., to lure the North back to the talks, Roh was positive about the prospects and interested in winning Japan's backing. Yet, Koizumi allegedly dismissed the initiative and urged Roh to pressure the North as the way to proceed. While one side was striving to "rescue" the talks with a "win-win outcome," the other saw

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this approach as playing into the stalling tactics of the North.²⁵ This summit harmed both countries. Coverage was critical, and there were no redeeming benefits as relations kept deteriorating. Instead of a forward focus, talks were mired in contentious historical issues. For Koizumi it was one more sign, after a series of blows in relations with China, North Korea, and Russia, of isolation in Northeast Asia. For Roh it was tantamount to the loss of the Japanese leg in Korea's regional strategy.²⁶ Japanese were perplexed after the World Cup spirit of 2002, the Korea wave of 2003, and the shuttle diplomacy of 2004 that relations could have deteriorated so far. Koreans faulted Japan's provocations, finding no explanation for them in its national interests.

South Korea had long been subject to a dual assault from the Japanese right and left wing, accounting for a situation where in the 1980s the percentage of Japanese feeling friendly toward China was roughly double that feeling friendly to the South. Even after South Korea became democratic and China experienced the Tiananmen brutality, the gap remained substantially in China's favor.. Only as views of China slipped from the mid-90s and those of South Korea steadily climbed did a new preference clearly emerge.²⁷ Yet, an opinion survey in the summer of 2005 shows a lingering strategic gap. While Koreans are confused about the source of threat in East Asia (mentioning the U.S., China, Japan, and North Korea in fairly equal numbers, of 17-24 percent each), Japanese focus on the dual threat of North Korea and China (37-38 percent each).²⁸ With some insistent that South Koreans are driven by anti-Japanese sentiments and now pro-Pyongyang,²⁹ the downturn in relations has not led to soul-searching on how to renew the long-sought momentum in relations, but rather to the right wing reinforcing its message of hopelessness in which Japan bears no responsibility.

South Korean-Chinese Relations within the Core Triangle

In November 1995 when Jiang Zemin visited Seoul Kim Young-sam joined him at a joint news conference lambasting Japanese handling of history. This gave the impression, which had earlier been conveyed by Korea's ambassador to China, that a tilt toward China was occurring. This did not serve South Korean diplomacy well, and care has been taken to avoid any repetition. A disruptive tilt in the core triangle is growing harder to avoid in the face of China's inexorable rise as well as Japan's insensitivity to history and even security matters.³⁰

Roh is not close to China, but he uses the unspoken prospect of increased ties to China to gain leverage on the U.S. If the meaning of "balancer" is to forge an equidistant triangle with China and the US while relegating Japan to the sidelines, this would be an exaggerated notion of Seoul's leverage. Even if it suggests an ambition to steer Sino-Japanese relations onto the course desired by Seoul, it overplays a rather weak hand. Roh has been careful not to assert plans to draw closer to China or promote its role in a multilateral context, denying critics a clear target to be used against his strategic reasoning, but the image keeps emerging that China and South Korea have found common ground. In March/ April 2005 they experienced parallel, and some would say reinforcing, outcries against Japanese revisionism. Over the summer they worked hard to turn the Six-Party Talks toward compromises that led to the Joint Statement, and as Japan pressed its campaign to

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become a permanent member of the Security Council, these two states railed against it. Then, in October they each responded vehemently to Koizumi's Yasukuni visit, followed in December by agreement not to meet with him to convene the +3 at the ASEAN + 3. Even as this strategic convergence was occurring, however, both South Korea and China were careful not to suggest that it meant much, prudently reflecting realities.

Having worked hard to normalize ties with China and still concerned that China might tilt more to North Korea, South Koreans are largely in agreement to tread cautiously. Even if there is an undercurrent of differences of opinion, few warn about China's motives or press for moves to criticize that country. In contrast, diplomat professionals in the South repeatedly struggle to calm uproars over Japan and reassert realist rhetoric focusing on shared interests. Despite the garlic war with China in 2000 and the Goguryeo historical controversy in 2004, relations have remained on a remarkably even keel.

Emotionalism toward Japan, arguably, reverberates in a dearth of realism toward China's rapid rise and potential power projections. Without more realism about Japan's upgraded military role and alliance with the U.S., there may continue to be a tendency to give China the benefit of the doubt. This means not confusing Japan's natural response to a more insecure world marked by U.S. appeals for assistance with revisionist rhetoric. Realistic Koreans recognize that China's rise poses a greater long-term risk to an independent, balanced foreign policy for the South than does Japan's groping for a place in Asia. Yet, in the current environment that message has not drawn much attention.

The campaign by some Japanese authorities such as Nishihara Masao president of Defense University to transfer the blame for revisionism to the Chinese complicates Seoul's

task. After April 2005 demonstrations Nishihara echoed Foreign Minister Machimura's demands for a Chinese apology and compensation for damages, accusing China of a strategy to block the expansion of Japanese military power and influence in Asia in order to build its superior position there. He added that Koizumi had been too weak, furthering Japan's friendship diplomacy in order to avoid offending China. In contrast, he contends that China's erroneous history spread through more than 200 museums around the country commemorating the war of resistance exaggerates past misdeeds by Japan.³¹ This way of thinking can only drive Chinese and South Koreans closer together. It raises the likelihood that South Koreans will view Japan's shift to the right as continuity with the historic emperor system while overlooking the legacy of communism in China and its role in the Korean War as well as in sustaining suffering in the North. Such Japanese thinking may fuel erroneous reasoning that Japan's system poses more of a threat to peace and collective prosperity in Northeast Asia than China's.³²

China is better at concealing its revisionist inclinations than Japan and those sentiments would not tap the same reservoir of victimization in South Korea. For China restoring normality in historical perspective may signify seeking a return to the vertical order in imperial times, redressing the verdicts on the international system and its victims during the era of imperialism, and also contributing to a positive reassessment of the role of socialism from the Bolshevik Revolution through Maoist rule and the Tiananmen suppression of "counterrevolutionaries." South Koreans may sympathize with some of China's rethinking of the international system and imperialism, but they may have experienced a foretaste of sinocentrism in the 2004 uproar over China's claim to Goguryeo.

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As lively as South Korean debates over the U.S., Japan, and North Korea have been, the debate over China remain much quieter. Even realization in 2005 that while others were debating how to proceed with talks China was forging closer ties to North Korea, however much it prodded the South to redouble its own efforts with the North, did not produce a substantial debate.

Chinese are forging a continental strategy, appealing to South Korea to join. In contrast, Japanese are distancing their country from it, seeking to counter with a maritime strategy reliant on the U.S., and calling on South Korea to complete the alliance structure from the cold war. This tug-of-war has many dimensions, each of which demands a response from the South. We can discern economics, security, and culture at work, and not always in synch with each other. In all areas South Korea may prefer to find a balance between the two sides, but this is not easily maintained. Economically, China is becoming the principal trading partner, but to a great extent this represents imports of South Korean parts for assembly in order to export to the U.S. and Japan. The stability of Chinese economic growth is not so certain nor the ability of South Korea to retain the advantage in its few cutting edge industries for any tilt to be advisable. In security unpredictability of North Korean behavior as well as of China's rise make it important for South Korea to cling to the U.S. alliance and use restraint in distancing itself from Japan. Finally, cultural issues—mixing universal human values, regional history issues, and new popular culture—offer a mixed picture, but no uniform appeal to show preference to China.

The downswing in Sino-Japanese relations is rooted in strategic differences such as Chinese concern that the February 2005 2 + 2 statement made Taiwan a strategic target for

Japan and also Japan's United Nations Security Council ambitions. New assertiveness over the territorial dispute with South Korea was interpreted in the Chinese press as part of a three-pronged attack reported in Japan as: in the north over the Northern Territories, in the west over Takeshima, and in the south over the Senkaku islands.³³ Yet, South Koreans should be cautious about making common cause over territory. They need to keep their eyes on the big strategic picture, especially since their control over Dokdo is secure and secondary considering the serious problems they face.

On the three major diplomatic issues facing Seoul in 2005 both government and public reasoning was much closer to Beijing's than Tokyo's. Preparing for the fourth and fifth rounds of the Six-Party Talks, the consensus in South Korea was to engage the North more fully along lines proposed by China as mediator rather than the US as antagonist. On the United Nations Security Council reforms to be debated in the fall, the consensus was to oppose an expansion of permanent members with Japan entitled to a seat, making a moral argument similar to that in China about the inadequacy of reflecting on history. And on the East Asian Summit as well as the preceding ASEAN + 3 session in December, South Koreans approved energetic efforts to forge regionalism parallel to those favored by China but at odds with the wariness in Japan. While Roh at the end of 2004 in Los Angeles and Paris gave speeches that may have exaggerated what Seoul could achieve by asserting its moral leadership and claim to be a balancer,³⁴ he was giving voice to the concerns of a nation that saw itself stymied by these interconnected strategic issues.

Chinese have been reluctant to acknowledge the emergence of a triangle with Seoul in the middle between Beijing and Tokyo. As this pattern emerged in ASEAN + 3, it drew

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little attention in China. Instead, it was China's emergence at the center that mattered. In regionalism China's growing ties with Southeast Asia became the focus. In the Six-Party Talks China is host and intermediary, solidifying its role as the natural filter between North and South. With Russia cooperating closely and the U.S. requiring China's help, the broad geopolitical framework leaves no room for taking seriously the core triangle in which South Korea might wield some leverage. Strategic thinking centered on great powers eclipses regional understanding of the triangle with the greatest potential.

China seeks assurance that Japan is not joining those in the U.S. inclined to contain it, even if that is not the official policy, and especially that it does not support Taiwan's formal independence. Japan seeks from China indications that it is not trying to dominate regionalism and to override Taiwanese concerns that human rights and foreign balance against possible Chinese misuse of power will be lost. South Korea's search for mutual trust may require an even more deft hand in working with China's leadership that lacks the habit of seeking South Korea's counsel or the shadow of the U.S. looming behind the Japanese-South Korean relationship. If forthright responses to Japan's behavior are engrained, Seoul may need new tools for subtly influencing China's. The geopolitics of the Korean nuclear crisis so far expose a wider gap with Japan than with China,³⁵ but the reunification process may reveal sharp competition with China too.

Conclusion

Three rivalries cast a dark shadow on Northeast Asia and especially on South Korea. The Sino-U.S. rivalry, if somewhat stabilized after the flare-up in 2001, poses difficulties for a U.S. ally drawing ever closer to its traditional protector and most important trading partner. The U.S.-North Korean standoff left South Korea's Sunshine Policy in shambles and put it in the middle of a tug-of-war over how to resolve the nuclear crisis. Finally, the Sino-Japanese competition raises sensitive issues of security and history on which the South cannot be an innocent bystander. If the first two rivalries may find some accommodation, the third is likely to endure as the driving force in the region. At the pivot of the grand great power triangle, the U.S. is likely to strive for more stability and has the balancing power to make some headway, while North Korea's priority seems to be security and economic help that would ensure its regime stability. If South Korea at the pivot of the core regional triangle lacks balancing power, it must find other ways to cope with divisive forces.

China and Japan as well as South Korea seek increased power in Asia. All consider the cold war era an anomaly, when their power aspirations were not met. Japan was struggling with its legacy as a defeated power that had to prove itself first economically and rely on the U.S. before "reentering Asia." South Korea was part of a divided country that awaited the end of the cold war while depending on its alliance. And China was under containment as a communist state until a breakthrough with the U.S. gave it a chance to shift its strategy and begin integration into the world economy as the path to asserting political power and regaining Taiwan. All three countries find that they are not alone in seeking more power in Asia, must adjust to the U.S. strategy, and need Asian partners.

The fundamental difference in East Asia is over the balance of power in the region not

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history. China is rising and seeks a balance based on multilateral power and regionalism that can limit the U.S. alliances or security hegemony. Japan is in limbo without desired regional leadership but determined to rise as a political power on the back of its alliance and nationalist cohesion. That leaves South Korea in the middle unprepared to abandon its own place in the alliance system while the future of North Korea is uncertain but inclined to cooperate with China in forging a multilateral structure that balances rival claims to power and embraces regionalism. The North Korean nuclear crisis exacerbates these differences in strategic thinking.

The immediate challenges for the region are to achieve maximum consensus to resolve the nuclear crisis and exert influence on North Korea for long-term stability while preventing regional polarization into a U.S.-Japan alliance and a China-centered group. Both of these challenges put South Korea in the middle, but it lacks standing to shape any outcome until major changes occur in the other countries. The Sunshine Policy brought not only growing consensus in the South on a need to engage the North but also a vision of multilateral security in Northeast Asia that would allow Koreans for the first time in history, after failed attempts from the 1880s to 1905, to become an active force in shaping great power relations related to the peninsula and regional cooperation.³⁶ With fresh hopes in 2000 from U.S. encouragement and ASEAN + 3 cooperation, Seoul was reluctant to follow the Bush or Koizumi lead toward a divided region where its only realistic option was again to be a junior partner in the alliance triangle. Yet, until the U.S. and China agree on the basic contours of power sharing and, in the process, a new approach is tried toward North Korea, Seoul has little prospect of gaining much leverage in the core regional triangle.

The Japanese right wing links anti-Japanese and pro-North Korean emotions in South Korea, suggesting that the downturn in views of Japan is essentially beyond Japan's control and linked to fanatical patriotism.³⁷ In the more strident criticisms of Japan launched in the Chinese press, including *People's Daily* in 2005, there were accusations that its right wing is uninterested in a peaceful resolution of the nuclear crisis because of an obsession with making Japan a military great power.³⁸ And in on-line Korean sources tirades against Japan are welcomed as long overdue and completely provoked by the sharp turn in Japanese foreign policy.³⁹ Extreme mutual accusations lower the potential for overcoming problems. The idea that confrontational tactics are desirable because they convey real intentions and put an end to past evasions has become popular to the dismay of diplomats interested in reducing tensions.⁴⁰ The notion that attitudes in other countries are so extreme, such as that 95 percent of South Koreans see a possibility for the revival of Japanese militarism, that no middle ground can be found, suits zealous nationalists on each side.⁴¹

Personal relations have contributed greatly to reestablishing ties and overcoming hurdles that keep arising in Northeast Asia. Yet, along with attacks on diplomats as if they are easily vulnerable to being "captured" by the other side, we observe a frontal assault on officials and politicians who aspire to be "pipes" friendly to their counterparts.⁴² Also earlier emphasis on letting the other side have some "face" and showing respect for its deepest feelings is now brushed aside in favor of defending one's national interests. Managing relations is now more difficult. There is no reason to think that South Korean politicians, even if conservatives were to take power in 2008, can overcome this problem.

Apart from a minority who support strong triangular ties with the US and Japan,

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South Korean conservatives frantically search for middle ground as they blame all sides for the gloomy prospect of a conflict-ridden region. Goguryeo claims by China as well as “vulgar nationalism” seen in demonstrations against Japan confirm the “rough manner” of a Communist Party dictatorship wielding great power. Recent Japanese right wing resuscitation of war criminals clashes with any inclination to give Japan credit as the “most developed democracy and champion of human rights in Asia.” It is beyond any strategizing to indicate how Seoul can overcome these while actively pursuing reunification with Pyongyang and playing the leading role in cooperation and reconciliation.⁴³ By the end of 2004 conservatives had also endorsed engagement, albeit more cautiously, with the North, while faulting Roh for alienating the U.S. and overreacting to Japan.

Even under a conservative president, South Korea is unlikely to give up its interest in regionalism and reconciliation. A new president will replace Roh early in 2008 and may well start with reassurance to the U.S. and outreach to Japan, but if the course set by Bush and Koizumi persists, we can expect a quick shift back toward urging the other states to engage the North and embrace regionalism. Just as Seoul faces a crossroads, Tokyo risks isolation by pressing its historical revisionism and denying Seoul’s security concerns. Both sides should recognize that Tokyo has little prospect of “reentering Asia” without Seoul at its side and Seoul has little chance to play a flexible, bridging role in Asia without good relations with Japan as well as the U.S. and China.

Seoul might realistically seek to play the role of facilitator in the core triangle. When the Sino-U.S. relationship enables regional cooperation to go forward and both Beijing and Tokyo welcome a third, non-threatening party to smooth their ties, Seoul can find a way to

promote cooperation. At other times it may keep a low profile and do what it can to encourage a more positive outlook on all sides. Given the likely lasting divide between the U.S. and Japan on one side and China, Russia, and North Korea on the other, Seoul should avoid the temptation of casting its lot with the continental group in hope of speeding reunification, which would be unlikely or at least not occur on favorable terms. Yet, it also cannot serve its national interests well by rubberstamping U.S. and Japan views that harden the region's divide. Its challenge is to bring the parties closer together. To do this it must keep in perspective on the one side Japan's offensive treatment of history and excessive U.S. alliance demands, and on the other side North Korea's provocative outbursts and China's potential for regional dominance. Accurate perceptions are needed to make expert analysis of the changing power balance and promote regional reconciliation and Korea's sustained rise in influence beyond what was possible over the past 1300 years.

Numerous possibilities of facilitating may emerge. With Beijing and Tokyo eyeing each other warily, Seoul is the optimal host for regional bodies. In the midst of cultural clashes, Seoul's general embrace of universal values as well as of historical resentments may, if handled cautiously, allow it to gain trust on both sides. Its voice on regionalism may arouse the least suspicion. In dealing with North Korea, it can make sure to encourage reconciliation with Japan in order to keep some balance with China. Such moves involve soft power rather than hard power. They require control over great power pretensions that of late have appeared in some circles and also willingness to jettison the passive legacy of the cold war era when there was little room to exert influence. Above all, this means navigating among three triangles at the forefront in the region: the grand triangle of the U.S.-China-Japan that is

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gaining priority; the alliance triangle of the U.S.-Japan-South Korea that remains important; and the rising core triangle of China-Japan-South Korea that with careful nurturing will take its place as a new force linked closely to regionalism and capable of ameliorating the threat of instability in Northeast Asia from the Sino-Japanese rivalry. Many ignore the triangle without the U.S. at the peril of failing to grasp how a region with stunning economic integration and common interests is coming together.

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² *Mainichi shimbun*, June 9, 2005, p. 6.

³ *Yomiuri shimbun*, June 10, 2005, p. 1.

⁴ Charles Armstrong, Gilbert Rozman, Samuel S. Kim, and Stephen Kotkin, eds., *Korea at the Center: Dynamics of Regionalism in Northeast Asia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006).

⁵ Gilbert Rozman, "Sino-Japanese Competition over the Korean Peninsula: The Nuclear Crisis as a Turning Point," in Jonathan D. Pollack, *Korea: The East Asian Pivot* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2006), pp. 287-306.

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¹⁰ Taeho Kim, "The China Factor: The Underlying Strategic Drive in U.S.-Japan-Korea Security Cooperation," in Sang-woo Rhee and Tae-hyo Kim, eds., *Korea-Japan Security Relations: Prescriptive Studies*, pp. 69-80.

¹¹ Kan Choi, "Korea-Japan Security Cooperation in the Post-Unification Era: Breaking the Barriers," in Sang-woo Rhee and Tae-hyo Kim, eds., *Korea-Japan Security Relations: Prescriptive Studies*, pp. 213-30.

¹² Kohari Susumu, "Roh Moo-hyun seiken wa naze 'tainichi kyoko' ni natta noka?" *Sekai shuho*, June 7, 2005, pp. 50-51

¹³ *Mainichi shimbun*, May 8, 2005, p. 3.

¹⁴ *Chosun ilbo*, May 13, 2006, p. 1; David Sanger, "U.S. Said to Weigh a New Approach on North Korea," *The New York Times*, May 17, 2006.

¹⁵ Yi Chongsan, "Gyunhyongja oigyo oa Hanmi dongmaeng oe patan," *Wolgan Chosun*, May 2005, pp.?

¹⁶ Gilbert Rozman, Kazuhiko Togo, and Joseph P. Ferguson, eds., *Japanese Strategic Thought toward Asia* (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming).

¹⁷ *21 segi oe Han-Il goangye: chigum, muos ul haeyahal gos inga?* (Seoul: Asia yongu kigum, 2003).

¹⁸ Gilbert Rozman, "New Challenges in the Regional Integration of China and Japan in 2005," in Li Enmin, ed., *The Possibility of an East Asian Community: Rethinking the Sino-Japanese Relationship* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu shobo, 2006), pp. 385-406.

¹⁹ *The Korea Herald*, June 17, 2005, p. 2.

²⁰ *Sankei shimbun*, July 1, 2005, p.1.

²¹ *Sankei shimbun*, May 9, 2005, p. 3.

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- ²² *Asahi shimbun*, June 28, 2005, pp. 2, 3.
- ²³ *Hokkaido shimbun*, July 18, 2005, p. 2.
- ²⁴ “Kankoku no baransaa ron towa naninka?” *Sekai shuho*, July 12, 2005, pp. 28-31
- ²⁵ *The Korea Herald*, June 20, 2005, p. 1.
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- ²⁷ *Yomiuri shimbun*, August 10, 2005, p. 11.
- ²⁸ *Tokyo shimbun*, August 1, 2005, pp. 1, 3, 4.
- ²⁹ *Sankei shimbun*, August 13, 2005, p. 7.
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- ³⁹ *Naeil shinmun*, March 3, 2005, p. 23.
- ⁴⁰ *Naeil shinmun*, June 22, 2005, p. 23.
- ⁴¹ *Sankei shimbun*, August 16, 2005, p. 7.
- ⁴² *Sankei shimbun*, June 21, 2005, p. 2.
- ⁴³ *JoongAng Daily*, December 24, 2004, editorial.