

Irreparable Animosity? Centripetal versus Centrifugal Force in South Korea-Japan Mutual Perceptions, 1998-2015

Yangmo Ku

Using the framework of centripetal and centrifugal force, this article analyzes alternating periods of peace and conflict in South Korea-Japan mutual perceptions since 1998 when the two nations took unprecedented conciliatory actions. Centripetal force is comprised of political leaders' reconciliation initiatives, restrained historical/territorial disputes, and common security threats. Centrifugal force incorporates heated historical/territorial disputes, political leaders' use of those disputes for their political purposes, and divergent security priorities. This article suggests that top political leaders in both nations can play a significant role in improving or aggravating mutual perceptions between the two neighbors. However, political leaders' conciliatory initiatives are a necessary but insufficient condition in reconciling the two former adversary states.

Keywords Korea-Japan reconciliation, mutual perceptions, centripetal force, centrifugal force, political leaders, historical/territorial disputes

Introduction

It is not easy for former adversary states to attain deep reconciliation. Except in a few cases,¹ it is quite common that unresolved past wounds continue to impair current relationships, as shown in the Sino-Japanese and Greco-Turkish cases. The postwar relationship between the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) and Japan falls into this category. In 1945 Korea was liberated from 36 years of Japanese colonial rule, and three years later the ROK was established. For the next two decades, South Korea and Japan did not have diplomatic relations. After long and hard negotiations the two countries signed a normalization treaty in 1965, but this agreement failed to overcome mutual antagonism. In the years following that milestone treaty, the ROK-Japan relationship largely swung between friction and limited cooperation (Cha 1999; Yoon 2006). Since the demise of the Cold

War the two nations have shared not only democratic governance and free market economies, but they have also had the United States as a common ally. Despite these favorable factors, they have not been able to reach a successful reconciliation.

Fluctuations in South Korea-Japan relations during the post-1998 period present an enigma that needs to be carefully analyzed. In 1998 the two former adversaries began to adopt groundbreaking conciliatory measures to move their relationship forward. Among them were Japan's first written apology to South Korea, the ROK's acceptance of the Japanese apology, and the opening of South Korea's markets to Japanese cultural products. These acts significantly improved the relationship between the two former adversary states at both the inter-governmental and societal levels. However, this peak of goodwill in the South Korea-Japan relationship did not continue for long. Since 1998 the two nations have experienced alternating periods of harmony and tension, particularly in their perceptions of each other. How, why, and to what extent did these mutual perceptions vary between 1998 and 2015? What measures will be necessary to improve the relationship between the two neighbors?

In addressing these questions this article, first of all, presents the significance of mutual perceptions in interstate reconciliation and seeks to develop the concepts of centripetal and centrifugal force in South Korea-Japan mutual perceptions. It then explores how both centripetal and centrifugal forces worked in four cross-temporal cases during the period 1998-2015 and which forces affected ROK-Japan mutual perceptions the most. After analyzing the impact of these contradictory forces on their perceptions, some findings and policy recommendations are proposed that could improve the relationship in the long term. The main argument is that political leaders' conciliatory initiatives are a necessary but not sufficient condition for reconciling these two former adversary states. A more fundamental factor should be for both governments and societies to make every effort to reduce a huge historical perception gap between the two nations. Political initiatives could be helpful in reconciling the former adversaries, but they could produce a much more successful reconciliation if more favorable mutual perceptions of each other existed.

Mutual Perceptions in Interstate Reconciliation

As many scholars note, reconciliation between former adversary states contains both government-to-government and people-to-people dimensions (He 2009; Feldman 2012; Chun 2015). The intergovernmental dimension includes diplomatic normalization, stable peace, the issuance of apologetic statements, the provision of official reparations or compensations, and comprehensive and smooth economic interactions. The popular dimension places great emphasis on

harmonious mutual feeling. These two dimensions could work in an interactive manner. Intergovernmental reconciliation could produce harmonious mutual feelings among ordinary citizens, while such harmonious mutual feelings could serve as a catalyst for stimulating reconciliation at the intergovernmental level.

This article pays special attention to the popular dimension of interstate reconciliation for the following two reasons. First, adopting mutual perceptions as a dependent variable is extremely useful in avoiding a tautology, which is primarily caused by the adoption of very similar dependent and independent variables. As analyzed later, this article examines the roles of top political leaders and common, or divergent, security priorities as independent variables, which are also closely linked to the intergovernmental dimension of reconciliation. Second, the improvement in mutual perceptions is an extremely important component in interstate reconciliation. Mutually favorable feelings reflect an improved relationship between former adversaries, laying the groundwork for top political leaders to adopt further reconciliatory initiatives. On the other hand, unfavorable mutual perceptions could easily dampen cooperative measures taken by state leaders on the basis of shared strategic and/or economic interests. The recent diplomatic agreement on comfort women, made between the South Korean and Japanese governments on December 28, 2015, is a good example of how significant mutual perceptions are in achieving interstate reconciliation. Many advocates of former comfort women in South Korea were outraged by the agreement because the ROK government did not even consult the elderly comfort women survivors until after the deal was struck. Furthermore, the unfavorable perception of Japan by South Koreans further weakened the validity of the political deal, even though it was more conciliatory than earlier statements in terms of the acknowledgement of the Japanese government's responsibility (though not legal responsibility) for the misdeeds and the offer of Japanese governmental funds for compensating comfort women survivors (*New York Times* 2015).

Analytical Framework: Centripetal vs. Centrifugal Force

Many scholars have tried to explain South Korea-Japan relations by focusing on various variables, including historical grievances (Lee 1985; Cheong 1991), the U.S. role (Cha 1999), threat perception (Yoon 2006; Park 2008a), NGOs' activities (Ku 2008), and national identity (Kim 2015; Glosserman and Snyder 2015). However, the existing literature lacks direct analysis of factors that influence South Korea-Japan mutual perceptions. To fill this gap in the extant literature, this article analyzes variations in ROK-Japan mutual perceptions during the post-1998 period by emphasizing the dynamics between political leaders and historical/territorial disputes, as well as common or divergent security priorities.

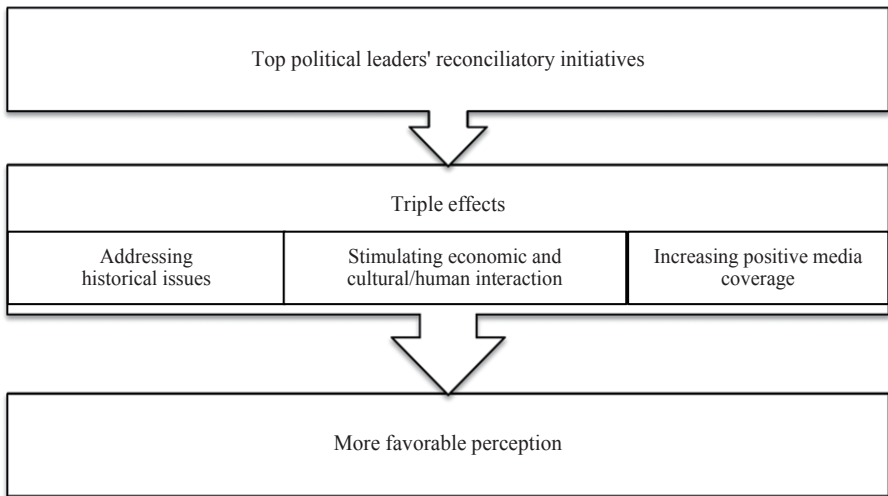
Table 1. Key Factors that Constitute Centripetal and Centrifugal Force

Factors	Centripetal Force	Centrifugal Force
Top Leaders	Reconciliation gestures	Political use of disputes
History/territory	Restrained disputes	Heated disputes
Security	Common threat	Divergent security priorities

Particular emphasis is placed on these three variables,² as they could have direct impact on ROK-Japan mutual perceptions. In addition, as shown in Table 1, the three key factors could work as either centripetal or centrifugal forces in impacting mutual perceptions between the two former adversary nations. In this article, centripetal force is defined as the power to make South Korea and Japan move toward mutual understanding and cooperation, while centrifugal force is the energy that pulls the two former adversaries apart from each other.

Two complementary models seem pertinent to explain the variance in South Korea-Japan mutual perceptions during the post-1998 period. First, compatible with one of primary tenets of realism, sharing a common security threat, such as the North Korean nuclear/missile adventurism and the rise of China, could make the former adversaries move toward mutual cooperation and understanding (Walt 1987; Yoon 2006). On the other hand, divergent security priorities could work as a centrifugal force that pulls the two nations apart from each other. For instance, South Korea made serious efforts to engage North Korea despite its provocative acts during the 1998-2007 period, while Japan maintained a hardline policy toward North Korea during that period due to the North's nuclear/missile adventurism and the abduction issue.

Second, top political leaders' reconciliatory initiatives could serve as a vehicle for improving mutual perceptions between South Korea and Japan, as they directly address historical issues or stimulate mutual cooperation measures (Bargal and Sivan 2004). As illustrated in Figure 1, reconciliation gestures by top political leaders include coming to terms with past misdeeds, such as the issuance of sincere apologetic statements by Japan, thus helping improve ROK-Japan mutual perceptions. As a consequence, increasingly positive media coverage of such political acts may contribute to the improvement of their mutual perceptions as well. Such initiatives could also lead to the deepening of economic interdependence by stimulating trade and investment between the two countries. As liberalism posits, the growth of economic interdependence could contribute to improving their mutual perceptions, because gaining economic benefits weakens the desire to move toward conflict. Such political acts could also increase cultural and human exchanges between the two nations. As constructivism denotes, the growth of cultural/human exchanges can play an important role in cultivating a favorable perception of each other since through social interactions they create

Figure 1. The Impact of Political Leaders on Mutual Perceptions

opportunities to promote understanding of their nations' cultures and values (Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998). On the other hand, political leaders' frequent use of historical/territorial disputes as tools for achieving their own political purposes is harmful to mutual perceptions. These political acts can bring about a spillover effect into different sectors, thus constricting economic interaction, as well as cultural and human exchanges. Such acts can also lead to extremely negative media coverage regarding the counterpart country. All of these adverse consequences will tend to increase mutual antagonism between the two nations.

Related to the role of top political leaders, restrained or heated historical/territorial disputes themselves can exert direct influence on ROK-Japan mutual perceptions. As South Korean society became democratized in the late 1980s, many civil society organizations that had been suppressed during three decades of authoritarian rule began to raise their voices. These voices now criticized Japan's past wrongdoings, including sexual slavery, forced labor, and harsh colonial rule (Shin 2014). At the same time, Japanese society also started to come to terms with its war responsibility, as the ideological confrontation with the communist bloc receded with the end of the Cold War. This process involved a series of historical disputes, including the issues of comfort women, forced labor, Japanese history textbooks, and the Yasukuni Shrine. Also intensified were territorial disputes surrounding Dokdo/Takeshima Island. Such escalated historical/territorial disputes produce anger and resentment between former adversary nations, seriously damaging mutual perceptions. Those conflicts could dampen economic, cultural, and human exchanges as well. On the contrary, de-escalation

of historical/territorial disputes, either by political leaders' conciliatory initiatives, or because of the weakness of social movements to trigger those disputes, could provide a favorable environment in which the two nations improve their mutual perceptions (Kim 2014).

Using this analytical framework, the subsequent sections provide an empirical analysis of the varying dynamics of centripetal and centrifugal forces and how they helped to frame mutual perceptions between South Korea and Japan from 1998 to 2015.

Explaining South Korea-Japan Mutual Perceptions between 1998 and 2015

This article focuses on the 17 years after 1998, the year when South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo took unprecedented reconciliation measures. Analyzing the 1998-2015 period is particularly important in the sense that it shows clear changes in mutual perceptions between the two nations caused by alternating centripetal and centrifugal forces. In other words, the relationship between Koreans and Japanese since 1998 has fluctuated notably depending on the extent to which centrifugal forces have overwhelmed centripetal forces, and vice-versa. The 1998-2000 period witnessed powerful centripetal forces that markedly improved mutual perceptions, while centrifugal forces dominated the years between 2011-2015. The intervening periods, between 2001-2007 and 2008-2010, saw the level of mutual perceptions fall into the middle, between the two extremes.

Phase I, 1998-2000: Overwhelming Centripetal Force → Significant Upgrading in Perceptions

From 1998 to 2000 centripetal forces in South Korea-Japan relations were exceptionally strong. Reconciliation initiatives by political leaders were dramatic and unprecedented. At a 1998 summit meeting, Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo, for the first time by a Japanese leader, issued a written apology for the sufferings inflicted on the Korean people during Japanese colonial rule from 1910-1945. Korean President Kim Dae-jung gladly accepted the apology. Moreover, the two leaders declared a new Korea-Japan partnership towards the 21st century. As a concrete demonstration of the declaration, the Korean government gradually opened the nation's markets to Japanese cultural products, a measure that would have been unimaginable in the past (Moon and Suh 2005, 564). This political action played a key role in promoting cultural exchanges and laid the groundwork for the rise of *hallyu* ("Korean Wave" of popular cultural outflows) in Japan after 2003.

Though still debatable, the primary motives for President Kim taking these

unprecedented actions may have been the eruption of the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis and the adoption of the so-called Sunshine Policy, an engagement policy toward North Korea (Cho 2015). Since the financial crisis had seriously damaged the South Korean economy, President Kim desperately needed economic support from Japan. It was also necessary for him to gain Japanese political and diplomatic support for pursuit of a new engagement policy toward North Korea. In the same vein, it was necessary for Prime Minister Obuchi to cooperate with President Kim in order to effectively cope with the fallout from North Korea's launch, in August 1998, of a long-range Taepodong missile that flew over Japan. This incident clearly endangered the nation's security. Although these realpolitik concerns may have prompted the two leaders to take reconciliatory measures, the political will by the leaders themselves for reconciliation was indispensable as a catalyst for their actions (Ku 2008).

These reconciliatory initiatives increased positive media coverage of the ROK-Japan relationship in both nations. According to Ji Young Kim (2015, 494), *Yomiuri Shimbun* and *Sankei Shimbun* reported that the Kim-Obuchi summit played a pivotal role in improving ROK-Japan relations by resolving the history problem. Many South Korean media outlets also covered the event in a highly positive manner, despite a critical evaluation that the declaration of a new Korea-Japan partnership toward the 21st century did not thoroughly deal with the history problem (*Hankyoreh* 1998; *Hankook Ilbo* 1998). As another derivative effect, economic interdependence between the two countries deepened. Their trade volume in 1993 was about \$31 billion but, by 1999, it had increased to approximately \$40 billion (Korea International Trade Association 2011). In the wake of the historic 1998 summit the two governments began to consider a Korea-Japan Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Although negotiations over the FTA eventually ceased in November 2004, for economic and political reasons (Lee 2013), nevertheless it was evident that during the 1998-2000 period the two nations anticipated deeper economic cooperation through successful conclusion of an FTA.

In addition to these major factors, it should be added that the prospect of jointly hosting the 2002 World Cup as well as the increase in human exchanges also served as catalysts for improving mutual perceptions. The number of Korean visitors to Japan increased from 914,155 in 1991 to 1,100,939 in 2000, while the number of Japanese visitors to South Korea showed even more remarkable growth, from 1,455,090 in 1991 to 2,472,054 in 2000 (Korea National Tourism Organization 2000).

A commonly perceived security threat from North Korea also increased the centripetal force during this period. North Korea's missile adventurism caused the two nations to recognize that they shared common security concerns. The Taepodong missile flight in the skies over Japan shocked the Japanese and increased the necessity of bilateral cooperation. As a result, the two countries

agreed to enhance security cooperation in order to deter North Korea's military threat, although the scope of the security cooperation actually remained at the level of rudimentary confidence-building measures, such as military exchanges and joint trainings. However, it should be noted that the threat perception of the two nations diverged somewhat when President Kim Dae-jung initiated the Sunshine Policy toward North Korea, diluting the centripetal force. In other words, Japan continued to have a strong threat perception deriving from North Korea's missile adventurism, while South Korea began to have a more lenient perception toward North Korea (Kim 2015, 492-493).

On the other hand, the centrifugal force was far weaker than the centripetal force during this period. As noted above, the divergent threat perceptions of North Korea worked as a centrifugal force. However, no heated historical or territorial disputes between the two nations erupted, despite the fact that the transnational comfort women movement and legal lawsuits of Korean forced laborers in Japanese courts continued (Ku 2015, 261-262). In addition, political leaders in both nations refrained from utilizing historical/territorial issues for promoting their domestic popularity during this period.

As a consequence of stronger centripetal forces, South Korean and Japanese public perceptions of one another significantly improved. As shown in Table 2 Table 2, 68.9% of Korean people had an unfavorable perception of Japan in 1995, but this percentage decreased to 42.2% in 2000. The percentage of Koreans who had favorable feelings toward Japan shifted from 5.5% in 1995 to 17.1% in 2000, although this number was still low in absolute terms. In a similar vein,

Table 2. Koreans' Perceptions of Japan (unit: percent)³

Year	1990	1995	1997	1999	2000	2001	2005	2010	2011	2015
Dislike	66	68.9	65	42.6	42.2	56.6	63	36	50	50
Like	5.4	5.5	8	9.6	17.1	12.1	8	11	12	6

Source: Donga Daily (1990-2015)

Table 3. Japanese Perceptions of Korea (unit: percent)⁴

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2004
Feel No Intimacy	53	54	59.9	57.5	49.8	46.9	44	45.5/40.5	41/39.2
Feel Intimacy	41.9	42.2	35.8	37.9	46.2	48.3	51.4	50.3/54.2	55/56.7
Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2012	2013	2014
Feel No Intimacy	44.3	47.1	42.6	40.9	34.2	36	35.3/58	58	66.4
Feel Intimacy	51.1	48.5	54.8	57.1	63.1	61.8	62.2/39.2	40.7	31.5

Source: Japanese Cabinet Office (1995-2014)

53% of Japanese citizens felt no friendship with South Korea in 1995, but this number decreased to 46.9% in 2000, as illustrated in Table 3. In terms of positive feelings toward South Korea, the numbers increased from 41.9% in 1995 to 48.3% in 2000. The year 2000 was the first time when the percentage of Japanese who had favorable feelings toward Korea became larger than that of Japanese who disagreed. During the period 1998-2000, therefore, the centripetal force created by South Korea-Japan reconciliation was very strong, producing an unprecedented improvement in mutual perceptions.

Phase II, 2001-2007: Powerful Centrifugal Force → Notable Downturn in (Korean) Perceptions

The period between 2001 and 2007 saw a significantly different dynamic between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Unlike in the first phase, the latter overwhelmed the former during the second period. The centrifugal force significantly increased due to the escalation of historical and territorial disputes as well as the use by political leaders of those controversies as instruments to achieve their political purposes.

In April 2001 the Japanese Ministry of Education approved a nationalistic history textbook written by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (*Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai*, hereafter Tsukurukai). This event triggered harsh South Korean and Chinese protests, as the Tsukurukai textbook whitewashed and justified Japan's past misdeeds, including sexual slavery, forced labor, and the Nanjing Massacre (Saaler 2005, 41-42). Thanks to this textbook issue, historical disputes between Japan and its former adversaries have become regular occurrences. When the Japanese government has announced its approval of new nationalistic school textbooks every four years, the South Korean and Chinese governments, as well as nongovernmental organizations such as the Asia Peace and History Education Network in South Korea and the Children and Textbooks Japan Network 21, have vehemently protested against the Japanese government's action (Ku 2014, 272-277). Moreover, the textbook issue has made historical disputes between South Korea and Japan far more intense since it is closely linked to other contentious issues such as sexual slavery and Dokdo/Takeshima Island. The Japanese government has approved school textbooks that removed descriptions of the comfort women issue and included depictions of Dokdo/Takeshima as Japanese territory. Needless to say, these actions have augmented Korean fury against Japan.

Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro also worsened South Korean perceptions of Japan by making annual visits, from 2001 to 2006, to the Yasukuni Shrine, considered a symbol of Japanese war aggression (Cheung 2010). Though not an ardent historical revisionist, Koizumi needed to gain support from conservative and nationalist forces within Japan in order to push for his neoliberal economic reforms, such as the privatization of Japan Post (*Economist* 2006). Thus,

his annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, where 14 war criminals were enshrined in 1978, augmented his domestic popularity, but such acts enraged South Koreans and the Chinese, who were the main victims of Japan's past militarism.

Furthermore, in February 2005 the Shimane prefectural assembly enacted a bill designating February 22 as "Takeshima Day." On the same day, the Japanese ambassador to South Korea, at a press conference for the foreign media held in Seoul, declared Japan's sovereignty over Dokdo/Takeshima. In April 2005, the Japanese government again announced the approval of the Tsukurukai textbooks that contained Japan's claims of sovereignty over the island but omitted mentioning Japan's past wrongs during World War II. In response South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun declared a "diplomatic war with Japan" in March 2005. Although Japan's provocative actions were a main cause of the downturn in the relationship at this time, President Roh was not free from the accusation that he used historical/territorial disputes with Japan to reverse his declining domestic popularity (Park 2008b, 18-21). Abe Shinzo, during his short tenure as prime minister (2006-2007), further aggravated South Korean perceptions of Japan. As part of his campaign to make Japanese historical narratives more nationalistic, he denied Japan's involvement in the forced mobilization of comfort women, a point that had been officially acknowledged by the Japanese government in 1993 (Yang 2008, 74-75).

During this second phase, South Korean news media extensively addressed such historical/territorial disputes, significantly increasing negative coverage criticizing Japan for its unapologetic stance on past misdeeds.⁵ An editorial article in *Hankook Ilbo* (2005) pointed out that the Tsukurukai textbook, which had been again approved by the Japanese government, still showed historical descriptions justifying Japan's colonial rule over Korea and its aggressive war. The article urged Japan to consider the future of Asia by correcting its distorted historical views. While criticizing Japan's attempts to render Dokdo a disputed area, another editorial pressed the ROK government to strengthen its sovereignty over Dokdo by adopting a series of practical measures, such as allowing the public to visit the island and enacting a special bill to develop the site (*Seoul Shinmun* 2005). As an intervening variable, all of this negative media coverage contributed to the deterioration of South Korean perceptions of Japan.

In addition, the diverging security priorities between South Korea and Japan continued to work as a centrifugal force. The South Korean government continued to adopt the Sunshine Policy based on closer relations with North Korea, even though Pyongyang had revealed a secret uranium-enrichment nuclear program in October 2002 and had conducted its first nuclear test in October 2006. In contrast, Japan largely took a hardline policy due to North Korea's continuous nuclear/missile adventurism and the abductions of Japanese citizens by North Korea. Prime Minister Koizumi and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il had made a joint Pyongyang Declaration in September 2002,

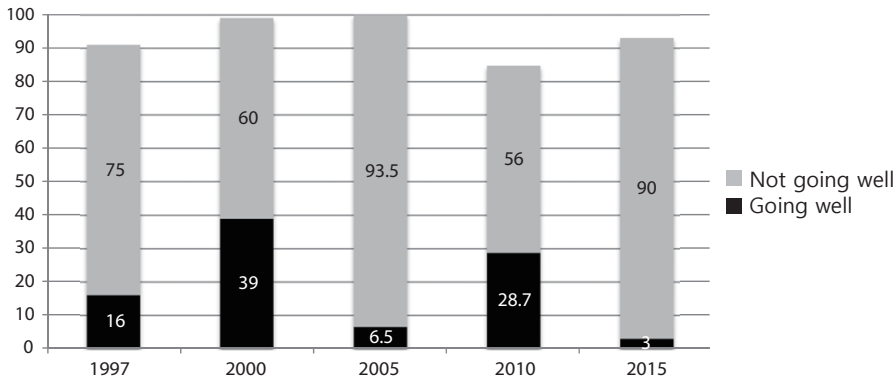
which promised to overcome past grievances and promote bilateral cooperation between the two countries. However, the abduction issue, which had been admitted by Kim Jong-il as a reconciliatory measure at the 2002 summit meeting with Koizumi, seriously damaged Japan-North Korea relations, because the North Korean regime did not reveal accurate information regarding the 17 Japanese abductees (Arrington 2013). As a consequence, the Japanese government maintained its stance that “without the resolution of this issue, there can be no normalization of relations between Japan and North Korea” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2015).

Compared to this powerful centrifugal force, centripetal forces were quite weak during this second period. President Kim Dae-jung’s conciliatory stance towards Japan regressed somewhat due to the rise of the textbook dispute in 2001. President Roh and Prime Minister Koizumi actually attempted to move the ROK-Japan relationship forward in early 2003. However, such conciliatory gestures did not culminate in improved bilateral cooperation. Rather, the two leaders later became embroiled in a harsh diplomatic rupture by utilizing historical/territorial issues as a vehicle for boosting their domestic popularity, as noted above. Nevertheless, the two nations continued to deepen their economic interdependence. Trade volume drastically increased from \$43.1 billion in 2001 to \$82.6 billion in 2007 (Korea International Trade Organization 2011).

Despite the eruption of serious historical/territorial disputes, the Korean cultural boom in Japan may have played a critical role in defusing the negative influence of the centrifugal forces (Glosserman and Snyder 2015, 7). Following the broadcast, in April 2003, of the Korean drama “Winter Sonata” on Japanese public television, *Nippon Hoso Kyokai* (NHK), hallyu started to become widespread in Japan. The sales of DVDs and books related to “Winter Sonata” reached about ¥14.5 billion during the entire period between 2003 and 2005 (Choi 2012, 220). After 2005 NHK and many other private broadcasters televised numerous Korean dramas. As a result, many Korean celebrities, K-pop singers and movie/soap opera actors became very popular in Japanese society. As shown in Table 3, this strong impact of hallyu in Japan could explain why Japanese perceptions of South Korea were not aggravated, but instead slightly improved, despite powerful centrifugal forces during the second period. Similarly, Japanese cultural products, including manga and computer games, began to be widely consumed in South Korea, but this did not prevent South Korean perceptions of Japan from becoming more aggravated.

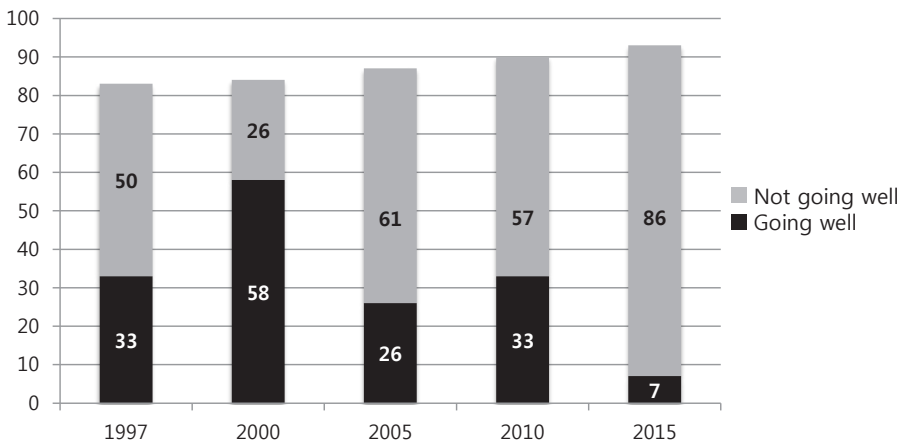
Unlike the first phase, therefore, in the second phase centrifugal forces overwhelmed centripetal forces, seriously damaging South Korean perceptions of Japan. As illustrated in Table 2, Koreans’ unfavorable perceptions of Japan increased from 42.2% in 2000 to 63% in 2005, whereas Koreans’ favorable feelings toward Japan decreased from 17.1% to 8% during the same time period. On the other hand, Table 3 shows that the more positive image that the Japanese had of

Figure 2. Korean Perceptions of Korea-Japan Relations (unit: percent)



Source: Donga Daily (1997-2015)

Figure 3. Japanese Perceptions of Japan-Korea Relations (unit: percent)



Source: Donga Daily (1997-2015)

South Korea did not vary notably during the period, thanks to the positive impact of hallyu. As Figures 2 and 3 illuminate, other public opinion surveys, conducted by *Donga Daily* and *Asahi Shimbun*, show negative changes in mutual perceptions between the two nations at this time. In 2000, 39% of Korean respondents replied that South Korea-Japan relations were going well, while 60% said the opposite. In 2005 only 6.5% of Korean respondents assessed South Korea-Japan relations positively, while 93.5% expressed negative views. In the Japanese case, 58% of the respondents perceived that Japan-South Korea relations were progressing well, whereas only 26% said the opposite in 2000. These numbers changed to 26% and

61% respectively in 2005.

Phase III 2008-2010: Strong Centripetal Force → Rebounded Favorable Perceptions

Compared to the second phase, the period between 2008-2010 saw a significant decrease in the strength of centrifugal forces while witnessing a notable increase in centripetal forces. During this third period, top political leaders did not use historical/territorial issues as a vehicle for their political purposes. There were also no intense historical or territorial disputes that fanned Korean and Japanese nationalistic sentiments, although the transnational comfort women movement, aimed at pressuring the Japanese government to officially acknowledge that Japan's military "comfort system" was a systemic war crime, continued. The previously divergent security priorities between South Korea and Japan vis-à-vis North Korea shifted to a converging one, as discussed below.

The first change in centripetal forces was the increased number of reconciliation gestures by top political leaders. On February 25, 2008, when Lee Myung-bak was inaugurated as the South Korean President, he held a summit with Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo. They agreed to take a future-oriented approach toward historical issues that had bedeviled South Korea-Japan relations (Kang and Lee 2008). In a speech commemorating Korea's March 1st Independence Movement, President Lee emphasized pragmatic diplomacy as opposed to calling upon Japan to make sincere apologies and follow-up actions. This was a clear departure from former President Roh's approach.

After the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) took power in August 2009, the first DPJ Prime Minister, Hatoyama Yukio, adopted a highly conciliatory policy toward his nation's East Asian neighbors. Moving beyond a U.S.-centric foreign policy, Hatoyama sought to cultivate close ties with neighboring countries, particularly China and South Korea. In 1999 Hatoyama joined a political team, which consisted of Diet members from the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party, in proposing a bill to establish an investigative body to deal with Japan's war crimes. After proclaiming he would not visit the Yasukuni Shrine, he also proposed moving the memorial tablets of the fourteen class-A war criminals from the shrine to a less controversial location (Yang and Lim 2009, 66). In August 2010 the next DPJ Prime Minister, Kan Naoto, also issued an apology to South Korea for its brutal colonial rule, and he even promised to return historical documents and other cultural artifacts taken from the Korean Peninsula during Japanese colonial rule (*New York Times* 2010). During this third phase, therefore, top political leaders in both nations made efforts to improve South Korea-Japan relations, and neither used historical or territorial disputes to buttress their domestic popularity.

Also, economic interdependence deepened and cultural exchanges between the two nations flourished during this third phase. In 2011 bilateral trade volume increased to approximately \$107 billion, whereas it had been approximately \$82

billion in 2007 (Korea International Trade Association 2011). The Korean cultural boom, hallyu, was still a dynamic force in Japanese society (Takeda 2011).

In addition, after the conservative Lee Myung-bak government came to power, in February 2008, South Korean policy toward North Korea shifted drastically, from engagement to a hardline policy based on clear reciprocity. While pointing out the failure of the Sunshine Policy, President Lee launched an initiative for “Denuclearization, Openness, and 3000.” This meant that “South Korea would provide assistance to North Korea in cooperation with the international community to help it attain US\$3,000 in per capita income within 10 years if the North gives up its nuclear programs” (Yoon 2008). This initiative was regarded as a hostile policy by North Korea. Thus, this policy shift worked as a centripetal force in South Korea-Japan relations, as the previously diverging security priority changed into a converging one. Furthermore, a series of military incidents on the Korean Peninsula significantly augmented the centripetal force. In May 2009, the North Korean regime conducted its second nuclear test, drastically heightening tensions in the East Asian region. Furthermore, a North Korean torpedo attack most likely sank the South Korean navy ship *Cheonan* in March 2010 (Bechtol 2010). Moreover, North Korea’s first direct attack on South Korean territory since the Korean War took place in November 2010 on Yeonpyeong Island. All of these incidents increased the desire of South Korea and Japan to enhance mutual cooperation in response to the growing North Korean threat.

All of these positive factors strengthening the centripetal force drew the two nations closer together. As shown in Table 2, Koreans’ unfavorable perception of Japan significantly decreased from 63% in 2005 to 36% in 2010. Table 3 indicates that positive Japanese feelings for South Korea increased from 51.1% in 2005 to 61.8% in 2010. Figures 2 and 3 also show that in 2005, 93% of Korean respondents said current South Korea-Japan relations were not going well, while 56% of them agreed with this view in 2010. In Japan, 61% of the respondents said the relationship was not going well in 2005, but this number decreased to 57% in 2010.

Phase IV, 2011-2015: Dominant Centrifugal Force → Dramatic Downturn in Perceptions

Unlike in the third phase, the time period between 2011 and 2015 saw a dramatic increase in centrifugal factors with a notable decrease in centripetal force, in the end seriously damaging mutual perceptions of both the Korean and Japanese peoples.

During this fourth phase there were only two factors that increased the centripetal force. The first was a powerful earthquake, a devastating tsunami, and the threat of radioactive contamination that struck Japan in March 2011. As soon as these disasters erupted, the South Korean government and public were willing

to help the Japanese. These humanitarian initiatives, though, did not affect Japan's stance on its claims of sovereignty over the Dokdo/Takeshima.⁶ The second factor was the necessity of security cooperation in the face of the North Korean nuclear/missile threat (Lewis 2013). In February 2013 the Kim Jong-un regime displayed unprecedented military aggressiveness toward the United States and South Korea by launching a long-range missile and conducting a third nuclear test.

On the other hand, various elements amplified the centrifugal force during this period. The most significant factors were Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's unreflective, provocative stance on historical/territorial issues and Korean President Lee Myung-bak's political use of those issues. In December 2013 Prime Minister Abe visited the Yasukuni Shrine without considering the disapproval of neighboring nations (*CNN News* 2013). Demonstrating an unapologetic stance on the issue of comfort women, in June 2014, the Abe administration reviewed the process of formulating the Kono Statement, announcing that the statement was made by a political compromise between the Japanese and South Korean governments. This stance undermined the validity of the Kono Statement, which in 1993 had, for the first time, acknowledged Japan's involvement in the forced mobilization of comfort women (*Japan Times* 2014). The Abe government has also sought to make Japanese history textbooks and education in general more nationalistic by attempting to revise textbook screening standards and teacher practice manuals for school curriculum guidelines (*New York Times* 2013). The purpose was to include sympathetic views of Japanese expansion in World War II in school textbooks and underscore the Japanese government's position that the disputed Dokdo/Takeshima and Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are indigenous territories of Japan.

Furthermore, without critically reflecting upon its past, in July 2014, the Abe government reinterpreted the war-renouncing Article 9 of the peace constitution and enabled Japan to claim the right to collective self-defense, which would allow the nation to come to the aid of an ally under armed attack (*Guardian* 2014). In 2015, despite strong protests from the Japanese public, the Abe administration pushed controversial security bills through the Lower House (in July) and Upper House (in October) of the Diet (*Japan Times* 2015; *Diplomat* 2015). It goes without saying that South Korean news media harshly criticized Abe's provocative acts. All of these dynamics greatly increased distrust and anger among the Korean people, seriously damaging Koreans' perceptions of Japan.

Meanwhile, Korean President Lee began to take a harsh stance on historical issues after August 2011, when the Korean Constitutional Court announced a ruling that the South Korean government had not done enough to seek redress from Japan on behalf of former South Korean comfort women and forced laborers (Etsuro 2013). Affected by this court ruling, President Lee raised his voice over the issue of comfort women and in a summit meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko, in December 2011, strongly pushed Japan to

resolve the longstanding issue (*Chosun Daily* 2011).

President Lee took a series of actions in August 2012 that seriously hurt Japanese perceptions of Korea. Lee suddenly visited the Dokdo/Takeshima, using Japan as a scapegoat to restore his declining domestic popularity (*New York Times* 2012). Furthermore, in response to Japan's proposal to bring the territorial dispute to the International Court of Justice, President Lee commented that Japan's influence in the international community was not be as powerful as it once was (*Korea Times* 2012). Even though the Japanese government had shown no intent to send Emperor Akihito to visit South Korea, Lee remarked that the emperor would not be welcome without a direct acknowledgment of guilt for Japan's colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945 (*Asahi Shimbun* 2012). These actions by President Lee unnecessarily stirred up anti-Korean sentiment among the Japanese.

Park Geun-hye, who succeeded Lee as Korean president in February 2013, also took a highly antagonistic stance regarding the Abe government's unreflective historical views, particularly toward the comfort women issue. Thus, for the first two and a half years of her term President Park refused to hold a summit meeting with Prime Minister Abe. In contrast, Park had multiple summits with Chinese President Xi Jinping, reflecting much friendlier relations between South Korea and China. This may also have contributed to a negative perception of South Korea among the Japanese public.⁷

Influenced by these Korean leaders' negative actions, the Korean cultural boom in Japan regressed notably. For instance, many broadcasters that had continually televised Korean dramas after the "Winter Sonata" debut in 2003, changed their attitudes. Right after President Lee's visit to the Dokdo/Takeshima, in August 2012, Fuji TV stopped televising Korean dramas. TBS ceased to broadcast Korean dramas in March 2014. NHK also ceased to televise Korean dramas in August 2015 and, as of October 2015, showed no intention to resume broadcasting them (*Kyunghyang Shinmun* 2015b). In addition, President Lee's visit to the island played a key role in fanning anti-Korea sentiment in Japan. Since 2012, anti-Korean protests, initiated by Japanese nationalist groups, have taken place more often within Japan, and many conservative/nationalist Japanese magazines and books have expressed anti-Korean sentiments (*Joogang-Sisa Magazine* 2015).

Furthermore, the trade volume between South Korea and Japan decreased significantly after 2011, although the two countries have largely maintained their economic interdependence. In 2011 their bilateral trade volume was \$108 billion. This number decreased to \$95 billion in 2013 and to \$72 billion in 2015, mainly due to the weak Japanese yen and Korea's reduced reliance on Japanese parts and materials (*Korea Herald* 2014). The possibility of concluding an FTA between South Korea and Japan also weakened as the Korea placed a higher priority on its FTA negotiations with China.

As a result of the predominance of centrifugal over centripetal force, this fourth phase saw a significant deterioration of both nations' perceptions of the other. As shown in Table 2, Koreans' unfavorable perception of Japan shifted from 36% in 2010 to 50% in 2011 and 2015. Table 3 also illustrates that 36% of Japanese respondents felt negatively about South Korea in 2010, but this number increased to 66.4% in 2014. Figures 2 and 3 indicate movement in the same direction. In 2010, 56% of South Korean respondents said that South Korea-Japan relations were not going well, but this number increased to 90% in 2015. In the Japanese case, 57% of the respondents perceived that Japan-ROK relations were not going well in 2010, but this increased to 86% in 2015. Other public opinion polls conducted by the East Asia Institute and the Genron NPO also reflected these worsened mutual perceptions. The percentage of Koreans having a negative image of Japan was 76.6% in 2013, 70.9% in 2014, and 72.5% in 2015. Japanese people's negative image of Korea rose from 37.3% in 2013, to 54.4% in 2014 and 52.4% in 2015 (Jeong 2015).

Concluding Remarks with Policy Recommendations

This article has explored how centripetal and centrifugal forces have shaped South Korea-Japan mutual perceptions from 1998 to 2015. The article has three important findings. First, top political leaders in both nations have played significant roles in improving or aggravating the mutual perceptions of the two nations. As noted before, the reconciliation initiatives taken by South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo contributed greatly to improving mutual perceptions and constraining the eruption of historical/territorial disputes. On the other hand, Prime Ministers Koizumi and Abe served as catalysts for worsening Koreans' impression of Japan, because they had an unreflective stance on Japan's past wrongs, and they often used historical issues for raising their domestic popularity. In a similar vein, Presidents Roh Moo-hyun and Lee Myung-bak took advantage of territorial and historical disputes in order to reverse their declining domestic popularity, thus damaging Japanese perceptions of South Korea.

Related to this finding, political leaders' reconciliation initiatives have been a necessary condition for reconciling the two former adversaries, but they are not a sufficient condition for achieving that goal. The fanning of historical and/or territorial disputes, which are usually laden with strong nationalistic sentiments in both nations, has disrupted the reconciliation measures adopted by top political leaders. In 2001, for instance, Japanese history textbook controversies drastically dampened the reconciliatory atmosphere generated by President Kim Dae-jung and Prime Minister Obuchi.

Third, motives for security cooperation deriving from the North Korean

nuclear/missile threat have worked as a centripetal force, but they have had a limited impact on improving mutual perceptions. Regardless of the security factor, the two nations became easily stuck on historical and territorial disputes, which provoked ongoing negative feelings toward the other. In addition, the divergent security priorities between South Korea and Japan worked as a centrifugal force, especially during the 1998-2007 period, when the South Korean government launched the engagement policy toward North Korea. Even after 2008, the two nations had a different stance on the rise of China, which therefore worked as centrifugal force. For South Korea, China was an important partner to effectively deal with the North Korea nuclear problem and prepare for future Korean unification, whereas Japan came to have serious concerns over the rapidly rising and more assertive China.

These findings suggest that it is necessary for the two nations to launch a long-term reconciliation project to improve mutual perceptions. Short-term political/diplomatic initiatives are not unimportant in achieving that goal, but their impact is limited unless their wide historical perception gaps are narrowed. A significant number of Japanese people still believe that Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 was legal based on international law and Japanese colonial rule over Korea helped Korea's modernization. They also argue that all issues of wartime reparation/compensation were "completely and finally" settled with the 1965 Basic Relations Treaty with South Korea (*Japan Daily Press* 2013). These views run completely counter to mainstream Korean perspectives. Most Koreans highlight the illegal nature of the annexation, their great sufferings by the harsh colonial rule, and the exploitation of Korean material resources by Japan. They also think that the 1965 treaty did not include such issues as comfort women, Sakhalin detainees, and atomic bomb victims, so these victims still have rights to claim reparations by the Japanese government (*Kyunghyang Shinmun* 2015a).

To narrow down such wide historical perception gaps, therefore, three practical recommendations can be made. First, it is vital that consistent history dialogues be held among historians of both countries. As we saw in the Franco-German and German-Polish reconciliation cases, it took more than half a century for history textbook commissions to produce common history textbooks between the two countries. This enduring work played a crucial role in reducing historically rooted antagonisms between the former adversarial nations and creating a culture of mutual cooperation (Kim and Lee 2008). Though not supported by the two governments, some civil society organizations in South Korea and Japan have tried to write common history textbooks. For instance, since the mid-1990s, the Asia Peace and History Education Network in Seoul has aligned with a Japanese NGO, the Children and Textbooks Japan Network 21, to write common history textbooks. As a result of their efforts, a textbook entitled "History that Opens the Future" was published in 2005. In 2015 a second common effort, "East Asian Modern History," was published. According

to a Korean civil activist directly, involved historians who have participated in these efforts have initiated a third project to write another common history textbook (Mikang Yang, author's interview, Okinawa, October 30, 2015). To reduce historical perception gaps more effectively, the South Korean and Japanese governments should consistently support such civic activism and launch history dialogues at the governmental level as well.

Second, South Korea and Japan need to launch and institutionalize large-scale youth exchange programs, as Germany has done with its former adversaries France and Poland. It is critical not to transfer nationalistic sentiments to the next generation, and this can only be accomplished through genuine dialogue between young people in both nations. The better the mutual perceptions among the young generation, the better the future relationship between South Korea and Japan may be. In 2007 the Japanese government initiated the JENESYS Program (Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths). Through the exchange program, 3,305 Koreans went to Japan and 1,593 Japanese visited South Korea (Chun 2015, 326). Despite its positive impact, its scale is too small compared to the successful Franco-German exchange program, in which more than 200,000 people are annually involved (Franco-German Youth Office 2015). In addition, it is necessary to further strengthen sister relationships between local governments in the two countries. Since there are currently 197 sister relationships between local governments in South Korea and Japan, it would be relatively easy to expand the number and quality of such exchanges, thereby enhancing mutual understanding and cooperation (Governors Association of Korea 2015). All of these measures should be sustained regardless of any serious fluctuations in the relationship between the central governments.

Third, top political leaders in both countries should no longer use historical and territorial issues for their political purposes. As shown above, such negative acts have seriously damaged mutual perceptions of the other, working as a major impediment to successful reconciliation between South Korea and Japan. Cheol-hee Park (2008b) shows that Korean political leaders no longer gain much from Japan-bashing. Thus, the top leaders in both nations should have a clear vision to construct a peaceful East Asian community in the long term rather than pursuing short-term, parochial political goals to augment domestic popularity.

Though not an easy process, it will be very important for South Korea and Japan to achieve a successful reconciliation, as it could play a key role in cultivating peace and stability in the East Asian region. If the two former adversary states, which currently share liberal democracy and a free market system, can overcome deeply rooted historical antagonism and move towards a reconciled relationship, this could serve as a catalyst for transforming the East Asian region, which is currently fraught with strong rivalry, mistrust, and uncertainty, into a peaceful regional community.

Notes

1. In recent world history, the most successful examples of international reconciliation could be Franco-German and German-Polish cases. For detailed accounts of these cases, see Yinan He (2009), Lily Gardner Feldman (2012), and Thomas U. Berger (2012).
2. As Cha (1999) posits, it might be necessary to address the role of the United States in analyzing variations in ROK-Japan relations during the post-Cold War period. In this article, however, I do not highlight the U.S. variable because it does not seem to have direct impact on ROK-Japan mutual perceptions, although the United States could exert diplomatic pressure to improve the intergovernmental relationship.
3. The Japanese Cabinet Office has annually conducted public opinion polls, which show annual variations regarding Japanese perceptions of South Korea. However, there does not exist such an equivalent public opinion data set that shows annual variance regarding South Korean perceptions of Japan. Nevertheless, public opinion polls conducted by the *Donga Daily* since 1984 provide the most comparable and reliable data over fluctuations in Korean perceptions of Japan, even though it has not been annually collected.
4. Japanese Cabinet Office's public opinion polls were conducted twice in 2002, 2004, and 2012.
5. For instance, 2,633 news articles dealt directly or indirectly with the Japanese history textbook issue between April and July 2001. Over the four-month period between February and May 2005, 4,703 news articles generally covered the stories related to Japan's historical/territorial issues, including 147 editorial articles in major dailies such as *Donga Daily*, *Hankook Ilbo*, and *Hankyoreh*. Furthermore, the issue of the Yasukuni Shrine was addressed in 7,874 news articles between 2001 and 2006, which included 366 editorial articles in major dailies (Korean Integrated Newspaper Database System 2006).
6. Koreans' humanitarian support did not prevent Japan's Ministry of Education from promoting its sovereignty claims over Dokdo/Takeshima. In its middle school textbook review in March 2011, "reflecting a conservative shift in Japanese society, all 18 geography, civics, and history textbooks present the island as Japanese territory, with 4 arguing that Korea is illegally occupying Japan's territory, and the proportion of textbooks containing Japan's territorial claim increasing from 43 to 66 percent" (Park 2011).
7. A summit between President Park and Prime Minister Abe was eventually held in November 2015 (Guardian 2015).

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Yangmo Ku is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Norwich University. His research focuses on the politics of memory and reconciliation in East Asia and Europe, East Asian security, and U.S. foreign policy. His previous research has appeared in *the Journal of East Asian Studies*, *Asian Perspective*, *Pacific Focus*, and *the Yale Journal of International Affairs*, as well as in an edited volume, *The Routledge Handbook of Memory and Reconciliation in East Asia*. He previously taught in the School of International Service at American University. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science from George Washington University. E-mail: yku@norwich.edu

Submitted: February 1, 2016; Revised: April 5, 2016; Accepted: April 18, 2016