

North Korea and Identity Politics in South Korea

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AT HIS INAUGURATION, SOUTH KOREAN President Lee Myung Bak proclaimed that his country “must move from the age of ideology into the age of pragmatism.”² At a time when South Korean voters were fatigued by outgoing President Roh’s particular brand of politics heavily steeped in ideology, Lee’s image as an effective, non-ideological manager had proved appealing. Though during the campaign Lee had vowed to strengthen the alliance with the United States and to insist on greater conditionality in inter-Korean relations, these issues were not the headlines of the 2007 presidential contest—in sharp contrast to the previous one. In fact, they received little traction. Instead, economic issues had top billing and Lee won based on economic promises. In a sense, this zeitgeist represents a departure from the previous 10 years of Korean politics, when the reassessment of the South Korea’s relationships with North Korea and the United States were central and divisive issues.

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Yet, it would be imprudent to declare the demise of identity politics in South Korea. As Suh asserts, the country has been “caught between two conflicting identities: the alliance identity that sees the United States as a friendly provider and the nationalist identity that pits Korean identity against the United States.”³ Sharp division and disputes over the North and the alliance will not disappear in the near future because, for Koreans, these issues are intimately related to the basic and contested question of national identity. In fact, as clearly displayed during his first visit to Washington in April 2008, Lee’s “pragmatic” policy is firmly grounded in the “alliance” identity and

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has already provoked strong reaction from progressive forces that have promoted the nationalist identity.⁴

Using newly collected data from the South Korean media, this article examines differing South Korean views of the North from 1992 to 2003, the critical time of the post-cold war era, during which traditional notions of national identity have been challenged. While significant attention has been paid to how differing U.S. and South Korean perceptions of the North led to strains in the alliance, less is known about how these issues have been discussed, debated, and contested within the South, as well as why this fractious national debate has been laden with such intensity and emotion.⁵ We need to understand how these debates were related to efforts to (re)conceptualize South Korean identity vis-à-vis two principal “significant others”—the North and the United States—and how identity politics will continue to shape alliance relations as well as inter-Korean relations.⁶

Our central argument is that while U.S. officials approach North Korea principally as a matter of policy, North Korea and inter-Korean relations have been fundamental to the evolution of South Korean national identity in this new era. South Koreans, led by liberals,⁷ have sought to redefine their national identity in the newly forged and evolving regional and global orders of the post-cold war era, and the North lies at the heart of the process. In the Korean context, identity politics involving the North takes on a special meaning, due to the rather peculiar circumstance of a nation with a strong sense of ethnic homogeneity being divided into two political entities. Throughout their post-1945 history, this shared sense of ethnic identity within discrete political systems has caused the governments of the two Koreas to contest rightful political leadership of the conceived national community. At present, we witness the same agreement on ethnic unity and disagreement over the political notion of nation within South Korea. Ethnic nationalism and the unique bitterness associated with in-group disagreement over identity must be properly considered in understanding identity politics involving the North in South Korea.

Deep division in the South over the North means that the United States faces distinct policy challenges in coordinating with a government—whether conservative or liberal—that represents a starkly divided polity. Though there has been much optimism regarding Lee’s election and prospects for improved cooperation between the United States and South Korea, it must be emphasized that this event has happened within a transformed political context and does not represent a return to a mythical “golden age” of the past. The United States must consider the interests associated with both identities and should be wary of creating hasty expectations for dramatic changes in South Korea as a result of this power shift. While Washington works closely with the new conservative government in Seoul, it must reach out to progressive forces as well.

SOUTH KOREA'S POLITICS OF IDENTITY⁸

The North is undoubtedly an important element in South Korea's conception of national identity. Koreans (on both sides) have traditionally shared a strong sense of ethnic homogeneity, a dynamic that remains today.⁹ However, the post-1945 territorial division created the "unnatural" situation of the single Korean family being divided into two parts. Both sides claimed the legitimate right to represent the entire ethnic Korean community, appropriating a particular ideology—anticolonialism/anti-imperialism in the North and liberalism/anti-Communism in the South—and linking these respective ideologies to national identity. In both Koreas, contention over national representation was framed as a struggle between patriots and traitors to the "true" nation, with the "Other" portrayed as catering to the interests of "foreign imperialists" (either the United States or the Soviet Union).

The late 1980s brought important structural changes. Internally, South Korea underwent democratization, and externally, it witnessed the collapse of the Soviet empire. In the post-cold war context, the power of anti-Communism as a unifying political ideology was weakened, and the Korean government pursued a "Northern" policy, normalizing relations with former "enemies," notably Russia and China. However, the cold war structure on the peninsula did not crumble like its European counterparts, and South Korean views of the North were still largely negative. Nonetheless, in a democratizing South, the authoritarian state-sanctioned "anti-Communist" identity faced serious challenges from a developing civil society, which diversified discourse on a number of issues ranging from unification with the North to the U.S.–South Korea alliance. The question of national identity came to the fore, provoking an intense and emotional contest between the authoritarian state and a burgeoning civil society. Once again, there was a struggle to represent the "true" Korean national community, this time within the South.

A turning point in South Korea's policy toward the North occurred with Kim Dae Jung's "Sunshine Policy." South Koreans in the 1990s were increasingly concerned about the prospect of heavy financial burdens if a hasty reunification occurred, having seen the "costly" unification process of Germany. The Sunshine Policy was inspired by this new thinking. Supporters argued that it would be prudent to stretch out "peaceful co-existence" for a lengthy period during which the North's economy could be strengthened to minimize the financial consequences of eventual reunification. Kim's Sunshine Policy separated business from politics and advocated economic aid to the North to encourage its efforts at reform. It led to the historic inter-Korean summit in the summer of 2000 in Pyongyang. While its tangible outcomes were modest, it was instrumental in transforming many South Korean views of the North from enemy to

partner.

The policy, however, provoked a strong reaction from conservatives in the South. Though not necessarily opposed to engagement, conservative forces were skeptical that the North would change, and they demanded greater reciprocity.^{10,11} In their view, the North Korean threat had not diminished, and the pursuit of rapprochement seemed disconcerting at best. The bitter contention between progressives and conservatives in South Korea on the North Korea issue has been referred to as the “South-South conflict” or “a house divided.”¹² The engagement policy, furthered by the Roh government, has also clashed with the Bush administration’s tough policy stance on North Korea, straining U.S.–South Korea relations. Once again, this new assertion of national identity should be understood within the larger framework of South Koreans, led by liberals, actively seeking to (re)define their position vis-à-vis their northern half and foreign powers like the United States.

DATA AND METHOD

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This article is based on the analysis of editorials and columns on North Korea published in two major newspapers, *Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh*.¹³ These newspapers serve as good proxies, respectively, for conservative and progressive views in the country regarding the North and inter-Korean relations. Public opinion research has shown that the news media often set the agenda for public discussion of key policy issues and that exposure to news can significantly influence public opinion on foreign policy issues as well as perceptions of other nations.^{14,15} Indeed, experts on Korean affairs view South Korean media outlets as political actors whose explicit “campaigns” for or against particular issues have partially contributed to South Koreans’ shifting perceptions of the North (and the United States).¹⁶ Through this examination, we can assess the importance that both conservatives and liberals assign to issues relating to the North and how this has changed in accordance with events and politics, especially since the implementation of the sunshine policy. In a similar way, we can evaluate their respective tones toward key issues and policies related to the North and inter-Korean relations. In this article, we use newly collected data consisting of a total of 1,084 editorials and columns about North Korea, published from July 1992 to July 2003 in *Chosun* (597) and *Hankyoreh* (487).

THE NORTH IN SOUTH KOREAN NEWS

THE PRIMACY OF INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS

The interest of both the conservative and liberal media lies not so much in the North

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itself but in its relations with other nations, especially the South. As Figure 1 shows, the majority (60 percent) of editorials and columns in both newspapers focused on inter-Korean relations and nearly 20 percent covered U.S.–North Korea relations. In contrast, there was comparatively little interest in North Korea itself at only 8 percent.¹⁷

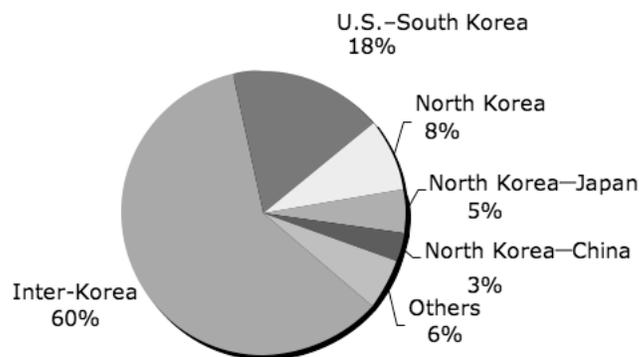


Figure 1: North Korea Coverage by Focus Categories

These data (composed of editorials and op-ed columns) illustrate that the primary question facing the South Korean people has not been in defining the nature of its northern neighbor but rather in formulating an appropriate response to the precarious situation there. In the post–cold war years, the nature of the northern regime and the challenges it faces have become quite clear; both conservatives and liberals see a government with an underdeveloped economy that struggles to feed its people while channeling resources to nuclear and military programs. The study period includes President Kim Dae Jung’s engagement policy, including the inter-Korean summit, and two nuclear crises. These developments spurred a great deal of discussion and debate within the South about inter-Korean relations and U.S.–North Korea relations, as these relationships will influence the future of the peninsula.

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SECURITY AND POLITICS OVERSHADOW ECONOMY

What issues do the South Korean media address in editorial coverage of inter-Korean relations? Figure 2 details the amount of attention the two newspapers devoted to issues within the category of inter-Korean relations over the study period. Naturally, peace and unification captured a large share of newspapers’ attention (23 percent).¹⁸ As one might expect, coverage of this issue spiked in 2000 in the wake of the historic inter-Korean summit and remained relatively high in 2001. In addition, both newspapers published significant numbers of editorials and columns on North Korea’s impact on

East Asian security within their coverage of inter-Korean relations (22 percent). This is understandable, as this study period covers two nuclear crises, the North's 1998 missile test over Japan, and military conflict between the two Koreas in the West Sea (Yellow Sea). The threat presented by the North is a point of fervent debate in South Korean society, with conservatives focusing on Pyongyang's continuing threat and dangerous drive for asymmetric capabilities while progressives tend to see its sometimes provocative behavior as an outcome of U.S. policy and largely confined to the context of U.S.–North Korea relations. These differing views have an impact on how liberals and conservatives conceptualize inter-Korean relations.¹⁹

Humanitarian and human rights issues ranked as the third largest coverage category, making up 19 percent of inter-Korean relations news. From the liberal perspective, humanitarian aid is essential to saving the North's starving population and improving inter-Korean relations. In contrast, conservatives are concerned that aid may not go to those in greatest need and may also strengthen the autocratic regime. With regard to human rights, while liberal South Korean governments pursued economic initiatives they hoped would lead to development and better human rights conditions, believing that publicly pressing human rights issues would be counterproductive, conservative forces accused the government of "appeasement" for its silence on the oppression of their "brethren" in the North. President Lee's recent promise to the international community to confront the issue of human rights in North Korea more directly reflects conservative attempts to correct what they see as failed liberal policies on this issue.²⁰

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U.S. leaders tend to conceptualize the situation in North Korea in more universal terms, focusing on violations of human rights by the "authoritarian" and "evil" state or regime.

Despite the controversy over the role the human rights issue should play in Seoul's approach to inter-Korean relations, it is important to emphasize that South Koreans tend to view the issue in particular terms, focusing on the suffering of Korean people—their people—as both conservative and liberal newspapers use terms like "compatriots,"

"brethren," "brothers," and "miserable victims of national division." In contrast, U.S. leaders tend to conceptualize the situation in North Korea in

more universal terms, focusing on violations of human rights by the "authoritarian" and "evil" state or regime.²¹ This difference in Korean and U.S. perceptions has been translated into differing policies toward North Korea. This includes the South's approach of economic engagement and aid, intended to alleviate the suffering of "brothers and sisters," as compared to the U.S. tendency to isolate and punish a regime engaged in the practices of torture, forced labor, and prohibition of religious freedom.

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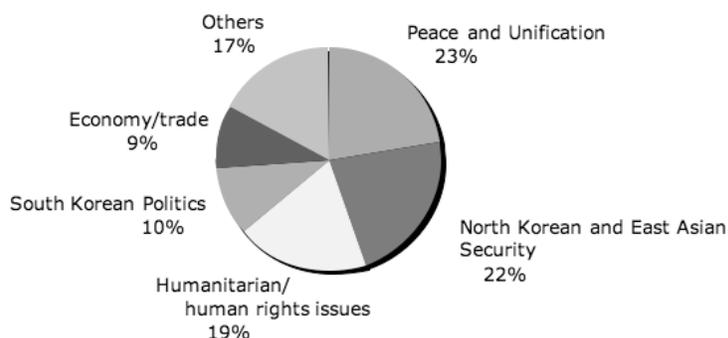


Figure 2. Topics in Coverage on Inter-Korean Relations

It is interesting to note that although two liberal South Korean governments held up economic cooperation as the backbone of burgeoning inter-Korean relations—with the Kaesong Industrial Complex and South Korean tourism to Mt. Kumkang portrayed by progressive forces as the most tangible successes of engagement—Figure 2 illustrates that economic and trade issues received little coverage. *Chosun* and *Hankyoreh* accorded only 9 percent of inter-Korean opinion pieces to this issue, the smallest volume of coverage of any of the major inter-Korean issue categories. As might be anticipated, coverage of economic issues rose in the wake of the 2000 summit, with the progressive newspaper according more attention to these types of developments than the conservative newspaper. Overall, it is clear that political and security aspects (i.e., the summit, nuclear programs, etc.) of inter-Korean relations are more visible in editorial coverage, as these issues elicit greater public interest, emotion, and debate.

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Figure 3 shows changes in media attention to security and economic issues over the course of the study period, allowing us to examine more closely the disparity in coverage between these two sets of issues. From 1992 through 1999, we note a very low—nearly non-existent—level of conservative and progressive interest in North Korean economic and trade issues. Economic and trade coverage peaked in the summit year of 2000 (14 for *Hankyoreh* and 9 for *Chosun*) and remained above pre-summit levels for the rest of the study period. Yet overall, the volume of economic coverage pales in comparison to that of North Korea's impact on regional security, and the discrepancy in North Korean-related economic and security coverage increased in post-summit years.²²

While the surge in security coverage during 2002 and 2003 reflects the second nuclear crisis, the general disparity between economic and security coverage suggests three things. First, it may be the case that there had been less disagreement between conservatives and liberals on economic and trade issues; therefore, these issues have

received less editorial coverage overall. In fact, as shown below (Table 2), economic and trade issues seemed to be one of the least polarizing issue categories. The fact that the actual amount of economic cooperation was small—both in absolute terms and especially as a portion of the South Korean economy—may also have contributed to this relative lack of attention. Moreover, it may be suggested that despite the South Korean government's attempts to focus on economic engagement, the profundity and primacy of the security situation was inescapable. As such, security issues dominated the opinion pages in both publications, which took starkly different positions on the nature of the North's threat and the best policy approach. An inflamed security situation on the peninsula—especially in the face of a second nuclear crisis—constrained the ability of South Korean governments to pursue improvements in inter-Korean relations (including new economic projects) and diverted public attention away from economic and cultural matters. Indeed, a second inter-Korean summit had been deemed impossible until North Korea appeared to be making some progress on denuclearization; President Roh Moo-Hyun was only able to travel to Pyongyang in late 2007, after North Korea had shut down the Yongbyon reactor, permitted inspections, and pledged complete denuclearization. Thus, the security situation not only overshadows economic news but actually prevents strides in inter-Korean economic and trade relations.

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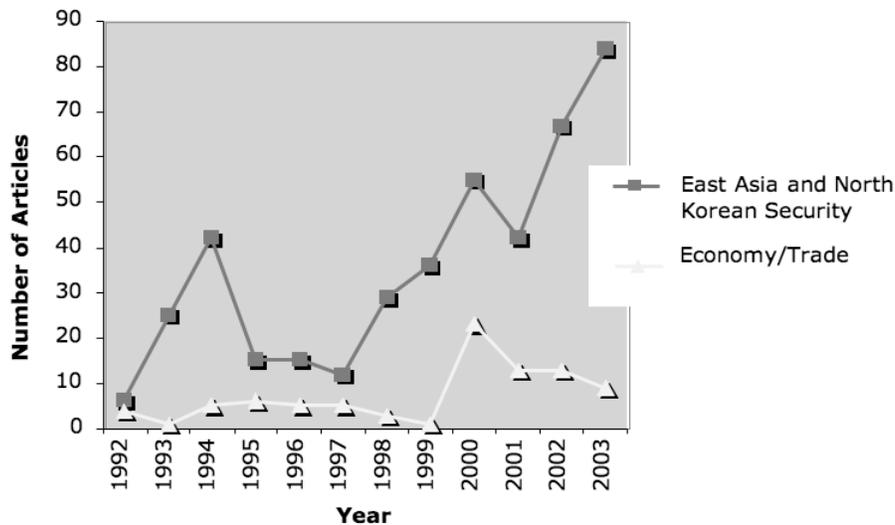


Figure 3. Security and Economy Coverage over Time. (Note: 1992 and 2003 are weighted).

CONTENTION AND PERCEPTION GAP

The North Korean issue became more contentious and divisive in the latter years of this study. As Figure 4 presents, South Korean coverage of the North increased considerably from the late 1990s, with the most dramatic increase in 2000, the year of the historic

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inter-Korean summit, when *Chosun* coverage more than doubled and *Hankyoreh* coverage increased by over four times over the previous year.²³ Though this increased volume was not sustainable, for every year after the summit, coverage remained above pre-summit levels. The Kim Dae Jung government's efforts to establish inter-Korean political and economic ties and the ensuing society-wide debate on how to handle the volatility of inter-Korean relations placed these matters on the editorial pages of newspapers far more often. As shown in Figure 4, temporal changes in these two ideologically polarized publications align quite closely, suggesting that progressives and conservatives are engaged in a fierce debate over North Korea-related issues, which is part of a larger struggle to define national identity vis-à-vis this significant "other."

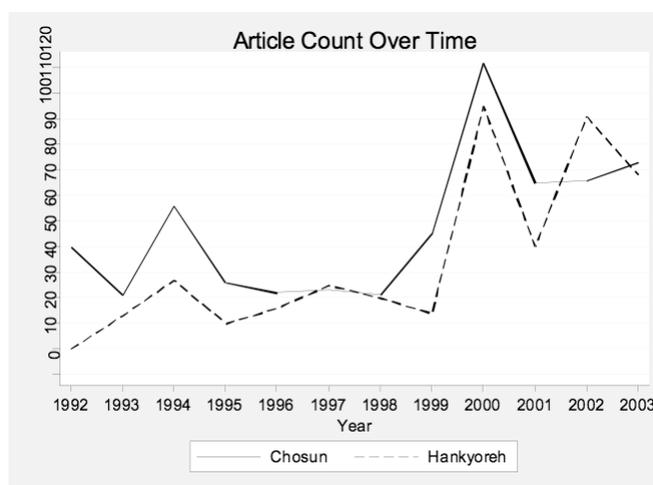


Figure 4. North Korea Coverage over Time. (Note: 1992 and 2003 are weighted).

As the North Korean issue became more contentious, South Korean views have become sharply divided. As Table 1 illustrates, there are marked disparities between the two newspapers' average tones toward North Korea-related issues.²⁴ *Chosun* is clearly negative on inter-Korean relations (-0.62), while *Hankyoreh* is actually positive (0.04), on average. The disparity demonstrates that during the study period, Korean conservatives remained skeptical of prospects for inter-Korean relations despite aggressive engagement by the South. We observe a similarly notable difference in their respective tones toward the North (-0.69 for *Chosun* and 0.03 for *Hankyoreh*). While neither group may dispute the characterization of North Korea as a failing regime, this finding demonstrates liberals' tendency toward more sympathetic discourse, while conservatives voice more critical rhetoric.

Both newspapers reveal their most negative average tone ratings in the category of U.S.–North Korea relations, wherein—unlike other categories—there is virtually no

inter-newspaper difference (-0.71 for *Chosun* and -0.68 for *Hankyoreh*). This suggests that during these years both conservatives and liberals were quite pessimistic about U.S.–North Korea relations—not surprising given that the study period includes two nuclear crises. Yet, despite similar scores, the newspapers have come to this shared pessimism through differing assessments—the conservative newspaper predominantly blamed the northern regime for poor U.S.–North Korea relations, while the liberal newspaper most often reproached the United States for such tension.

	<i>Chosun</i>	<i>Hankyoreh</i>	Overall
Inter-Korea	-0.62	0.04	-0.31
U.S.–North Korea	-0.71	-0.68	-0.70
North Korea	-0.69	0.03	-0.35
Average	-0.60	-0.14	-0.39

Table 1. Average Tones toward Focus Categories

Table 2 presents average tones on the five most frequently editorialized issues within the category of inter-Korean relations. As expected, *Chosun* was more negative than *Hankyoreh* on all five categories, with especially negative tones toward security, South Korean politics, and humanitarian issues. Indeed, there were significant disparities between the two newspapers in nearly all issues, indicative of a highly contentious political landscape. It is not surprising that the category of “North Korea and East Asia Security” yielded highly negative coverage in both newspapers, as the study period encompasses many critical security-related events, such as the two nuclear crises, numerous missile tests, and various small-scale North-South military clashes. It is, however, noteworthy that both newspapers recorded quite negative ratings on South Korean politics (within the context of inter-Korean relations). In fact, *Hankyoreh*’s most negative tone in any category is found here. Conservatives have long been critical of what they consider the liberal administrations’ manipulation of inter-Korean issues for political gain. As recently as 2007, conservative forces accused President Roh of scheduling the second inter-Korean summit directly before the presidential election in order to give a political boost to progressive forces. Yet, these negative tone ratings on national politics run deeper, as each side’s politics is connected to its respective identity. Each side strongly believes that it has the correct prescription for the terms on which inter-Korean relations should be pursued, and these beliefs—grounded in identity, vis-à-vis the North and the United States—do not yield easily to political compromise.

It is interesting to note that though a significant disparity existed between conservative and liberal editorial tone scores on peace and unification, *Chosun*’s tone is only mildly negative at -0.31. This suggests that even conservatives tend not to criticize

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the goals of peace and unification, but rather the methods and priorities that liberal governments have employed in attempting to move closer to realizing these aspirations. Even in the presence of starkly differentiated conservative and liberal identities, the establishment of a peace regime and eventual unification are broadly held goals. Indeed, in the lead-up to the June 2000 summit, the Kim Dae Jung government received much praise from the conservative press.²⁵ The establishment of a peace regime and eventual unification continue to be important, broadly-held ideas. Though they may not be buttressed by the same levels of optimism and hope, adherence to these ideals has become “politically correct,” even a marker of Korean patriotism. Indeed, the fact that both newspapers accord more positive (or less negative) tone ratings to peace and unification than to inter-Korean relations in general supports this point.

	Chosun	Hankyoreh	Overall
Topic			
Peace and Unification	-0.31	0.41	0.03
North Korea and East Asia Security	-1.09	-0.36	-0.81
Humanitarian/Human Rights Issues	-0.71	-0.04	-0.44
Economy/Trade	-0.16	0.38	0.16
South Korean Politics	-1.18	-0.61	-0.80

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Table 2. Average Tones for Inter-Korean Relations by Topic Categories

U.S.—NORTH KOREA RELATIONS AND INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS

Finally, our findings demonstrate that U.S.—North Korea relations significantly affect inter-Korean relations. Figure 5 depicts the two newspapers’ tones toward inter-Korean relations during four combinations of U.S. and South Korean administrations. The Clinton—Kim Dae Jung years recorded the most positive tone ratings in both newspapers. These years not only included the inter-Korean summit but also featured significant improvements in U.S.—North Korea relations, evidenced by high-level dialogue and reciprocal visits.

In contrast, the Clinton—Kim Young Sam and Bush—Roh Moo Hyun years recorded more negative tone ratings. Each of these periods included a nuclear crisis, which seems to have influenced both newspapers’ views on prospects for inter-Korean relations. Indeed, during the first nuclear crisis, *Chosun*’s tone toward inter-Korean relations was -0.31, and during the second nuclear crisis its tone was -0.48. However, during years not characterized by nuclear crisis, this conservative publication’s tone

toward inter-Korean relations averaged -0.26. A similar dynamic is also evident in the liberal *Hankyoreh*, wherein tone toward inter-Korean relations was 0.05 during the first nuclear crisis, -0.01 during the second nuclear crisis, and 0.19 during years when there was no nuclear crisis. Thus, both newspapers are more positive (or less negative) on inter-Korean relations in the absence of security tensions. Thus, our finding demonstrates that security tensions on the peninsula, especially tensions largely perceived to be “U.S.–North Korea problems,” such as the two nuclear crises, dull both liberal and conservative hopes for progress in inter-Korean relations. In other words, inter-Korean relations are bounded by the security situation on the peninsula, especially by tensions in U.S.–North Korea relations.

The data in Figure 5 provide the basis for additional interesting observations. *Chosun* recorded its most negative tone rating during the Clinton–Kim Young Sam years, while *Hankyoreh*’s most negative tone toward inter-Korean relations occurred during the Bush–Roh years. The Kim Young Sam government took a tough line toward North Korea and was not satisfied with the Clinton administration’s response to the North’s “hostile” behavior. In response to North Korea’s actions from its announcement of withdrawal from the Nonproliferation Treaty to its September 1996 submarine incursion into the South, the Kim government and South Korean conservatives viewed the United States’ “soft” response toward the North as appeasement.²⁶ The combination of the North’s hostile behavior and U.S.–South Korea disagreement led conservatives to evaluate prospects for inter-Korean relations in very negative terms during the overlap of the Sam and Clinton administrations. In contrast, during the Bush–Roh years, the U.S.–North Korea confrontation over a presumed uranium enrichment program coupled with U.S. tactics of isolation and punishment caused a clash between the liberal Korean government and the Bush administration and hindered further progress in inter-Korean relations. In both these cases, inter-Korean relations seem to have been affected by heightened tension in U.S.–North Korea relations.

Recently, President Lee asserted that inter-Korean relations can only develop when the alliance is strong, in essence taking an inverse view of the causal variables in this complex triangular relationship. While President Roh resented the constraints that the nuclear issue put on inter-Korean relations but attempted to carry on with engagement, under the new Lee administration, the nuclear issue is not perceived as a frustrating hindrance. Rather, it is seen as a legitimate threat that necessarily upends engagement efforts. Emblematic of the progressive response to the new administration’s approach, a *Hankyoreh* editorial recently criticized President Lee’s North Korea policy, asserting that he “might as well be declaring that no effort is going to be made in relations with the North until the nuclear issue is resolved.”²⁷

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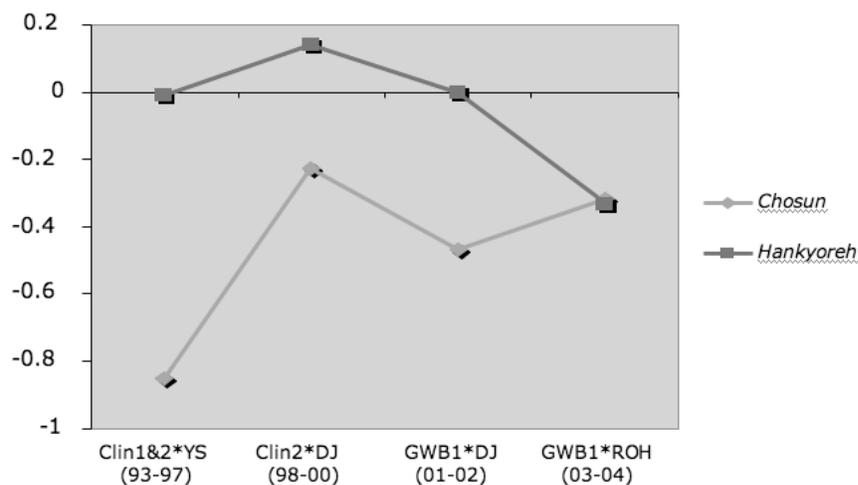


Figure 5. Average Tones for Inter-Korean Relations: U.S.-South Korea Administration Combinations

FUTURE PROSPECTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

Whereas North Korea is viewed as a security issue in the United States, it is intimately linked to issues of identity in South Korea. As presented in this article, South Koreans generally perceive North Korea-related events within the context of inter-Korean relations, in accordance with a broadly held belief that someday the peninsula will be (re)unified. The North is therefore a “Korean” issue, inseparable from inter-Korean relations. A key question—hotly debated and immersed in identity politics—has been what approach to take toward the failing regime and the “suffering” of northern “brethren.” Though they seek different policy approaches, both sides recognize the need for engagement, which is hard to reject given the strong sense of ethnic unity. Whereas progressives emphasize prioritizing inter-Korean collaboration, conservatives underline the need for greater reciprocity from the North. Each side believes that it has the correct prescription for the terms on which inter-Korean engagement should be pursued. Because these prescriptions are closely tied to identity, they do not yield easily to political compromise.

This contention over the North must be understood in the larger context of the politics of national identity. Through the collapse of the Soviet empire, democratization, and the implementation of the Sunshine Policy, Koreans, led by liberals, have sought to redefine their conceptions of national identity. The North, viewed as a divided part of the same ethnic Korean nation, is intimately tied to this process. However, this process of redefining or reformulating national identity can be contentious and conflict-ridden; during this study period, one group firmly retained the established identity and

another group reinterpreted relationships and events in forging a progressive identity. These two stances, in direct contraposition, have hardened over time, especially since the implementation of the sunshine policy.²⁸ Although the intensity of identity politics seems to have decreased over the past few years, a polity divided along these lines is likely to remain a durable feature of the Korean political landscape.

It is encouraging for U.S. policymakers that the Lee administration's policy toward North Korea will be noticeably closer to the U.S. position.²⁹ President Lee has indicated he will stress denuclearization and employ more conditionality in inter-Korean relations, and he has not hesitated to raise uncomfortable issues, including the North's human rights record. He has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the U.S.–South Korea alliance, and the “wave” of anti-Americanism associated with the beginning of the Roh administration seems to have passed. Indeed, according to a bipartisan group of former U.S. policymakers and experts on Korea, “South Korean popular protests against the United States in 2002 are an outdated image reflecting a transitory set of circumstances at the time.”³⁰ Yet even with the promise of more positive attitudes toward the United States and improved U.S.–South Korea policy coordination, the United States should be wary of creating unrealistic expectations of dramatic change in South Korean attitudes. Enduring contention over identity may still hinder the ability of the new Korean government to think and act strategically.

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In order to better secure long-term interests and continued cooperation, the United States must consider the interests associated with both identities (including how both sides perceive uncertainties about their region, such as the rise of China and new security roles for Japan), and acknowledge and be sensitive to the constraints a divided polity imposes on the Korean government. Although the voice of Korean progressives was weakened by defeat in the recent presidential and National Assembly elections, their perspective remains salient in Korean society, as we have witnessed recently by progressive citizens' and legislators' ability to constrain the Lee government through popular protest and by preventing the National Assembly from convening. Their views have become part of mainstream national politics, and this is something the United States cannot afford to overlook. Furthermore, the establishment of a conservative administration may galvanize progressive forces to challenge its policy agenda. In this respect, the trade relationship with the United States, namely the beef issue, allowed an early opening. Additional challenges may be made to the Lee administration's North Korea policy, especially if a famine in the North exposes what may be popularly perceived as relative government inaction on a critical humanitarian problem. In a sense, progressives were contained and at times co-opted by the liberal governments of Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun, accepting, albeit quite reluctantly, certain policies such as South Korean troop deployments to Iraq. In the face of a pro–United States conserva-

tive administration, however, they are likely to be more aggressive in advancing their progressive views on the North and the United States, and such efforts may even take an anti-U.S. tone. This could mean a return to a more intense identity politics. While the United States works with the new conservative administration in Seoul, it must also reach out to progressive opposition forces. 

NOTES

1. The authors wish to thank John Feffer, David Straub, and Daniel Sneider for their reviews and constructive comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

2. "Together We Shall Open A Road to Advancement," Address by President Lee Myung Bak at the 17th Inaugural Ceremony, Government Press Release, Office of the President, 25 February 2008. <http://english.president.go.kr/>.

3. J.J. Suh, "Bound to Last? The U.S.-Korea Alliance and Analytical Eclecticism," in *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power, and Efficiency*, eds. J.J. Suh, Peter J. Katzenstein, and Allen Carlson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 169. Please note that in using Suh's terms, "alliance identity" and "nationalist identity," the authors are not rendering judgment on the relative patriotism of these two groups, which are both admirably devoted to the Korean nation and the protection of its interests.

4. For example, see a 15 April 2008 editorial entitled "Concerns about this week's summits," in which *Hankyoreh* argued that President Lee's "greater emphasis on strengthening U.S.-Korea relations could very likely make relations more subordinate, and in so doing, hurt the national interest," maintaining that inter-Korean relations had already been negatively affected. According to the progressive newspaper, Lee's initiatives on Japan are similarly flawed, demonstrating "the ills of pragmatism without principles."

5. American experts and policymakers concerned about tension in the U.S.-South Korea alliance in recent years have sought to understand this development as a consequence the allies' increasingly disparate perceptions and policy toward North Korea—a phenomenon first set in motion by President Kim Dae Jung's visit to Washington to meet a newly inaugurated President George W. Bush. A number of thoughtful works address these issues. For example, see Balbina Hwang, "Defusing Anti-American Rhetoric in South Korea," *Backgrounder #1619*, The Heritage Foundation, 23 January 2003; Derek Mitchell, ed., *Strategy and Sentiment: South Korean Views of the United States and the U.S.-ROK Alliance*, (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004); Mark E. Manyin, "South Korean Politics and Rising 'Anti-Americanism': Implications for U.S. Policy Toward North Korea," Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service, 6 May 2003; Testimony of L. Gordon Flake, "U.S.-Republic of Korea Relations: An Alliance at Risk?" House Committee on International Relations, 27 September 2006; and Seung-Hwan Kim, "Anti-Americanism in Korea," *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 109-122, among others.

6. China may be considered another "significant other," though not as significant as North Korea or the United States. We have addressed the China factor in South Korean politics of national identity elsewhere. See Gi-Wook Shin, "Asianism and Korea's Politics of Identity," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6, no. 4 (December 2005): 616-630. Also see Peter Hays Gries, "The Koguryo Controversy, National Identity, and Sino-Korean Relations Today," *East Asia* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 3-17.

7. In this paper, we use "liberals" and "progressives" interchangeably.

8. Much of this historical context is discussed in my earlier work: Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), chs. 8 and 9.

9. According to a survey, 95 percent of the respondents said that "North Korean people are of the same Korean ethnic-nation (minjok)." Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism*, 2.

10. Polls consistently show that a high percentage of Koreans back engagement. For example, a poll published by *JoongAng Ilbo* on 13 October 2006 found that even after the North's nuclear test, substantial support for the engagement policy continued, with over 70 percent of Koreans stating that "dialogue between North and South Korea was the best way to resolve the current crisis." This poll was conducted

by Joins P'unghyang-gae (research.joins.com) polling company and its publication in *Joongang Ilbo* was cited in Sheila Miyoshi Jager, "Time to End the Korean War: The Korean Nuclear Crisis in the Era of Unification," *Policy Forum Online* 06-93A, Nautilus Institute, 2 November 2006, <http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0693MiyoshiJager.html>.

11. Lack of conditionality or reciprocity came to be a central pillar of conservative criticism of the liberal governments' approach to the North, and so it is interesting to note that reciprocity was originally one of the sunshine policy's core components. However, after Pyongyang met this approach with criticism and prolonged disengagement, the Kim Dae Jung administration began to employ "flexible reciprocity," meaning that "The ROK, as the stronger 'elder brother,' would be patient and allow North Korea to reciprocate South Korean measures at an undetermined time, and in some undetermined way, in the future." Norman D. Levin and Yong-Sup Han, *Sunshine in Korea: The South Korean Debate over Policies toward North Korea* (San Diego, CA: RAND Corporation, 2002), 25-26.

12. Hahm Chaibong, "The Two South Koreas: A House Divided," *The Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 57-72, and Byung-Hoon Suh, "Kim Dae Jung's Engagement Policy and the South-South Conflict in South Korea: Implications for U.S. Policy," *Asian Update*, Asia Society, Summer 2001, http://www.asiasociety.org/publications/update_southkorea.html.

13. The data were collected as part of a larger project on the U.S.-South Korea relations and its results will be published as a book tentatively entitled *Transforming U.S.-ROK Relations: Identity Politics and Policy Disputes in the Alliance*.

14. For example, see David K. Perry, "The Mass Media and Inference about Other Nations," *Communication Research* 12 (1985) and David K. Perry, "The Image Gap: How International News Affects Perceptions of Nations," *Journalism Quarterly* 64 (1987): 416-421.

15. Robert B. Albritton and Jarol B. Manheim, "News of Rhodesia: the Impact of a Public Relations Campaign," *Journalism Quarterly* 60 (1983): 622-628 and Robert B. Albritton and Jarol B. Manheim, "Changing National Images: International Public Relations and Media Agenda Setting," *The American Political Science Review* 78, no. 3 (September 1984): 641-657.

16. See Levin and Han; Eric V. Larson, Norman D. Levin, Seonhae Baik, and Savych Bogdan, *Ambivalent Allies? A Study of South Korean Attitudes Toward the U.S.* (San Diego, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004); and Scott Snyder, "The Role of the Media and the U.S.-ROK Relationship," *Strategy and Sentiment: South Korean Views of the United States and the U.S.-ROK Alliance*, ed. Derek Mitchell (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004).

17. Though there has been relatively little news, since Kim Jong Il assumed the mantle of leadership after his father's death in 1994, it is clear from data on tone that the two newspapers' sentiments toward the North are quite distinct.

18. We note here that peace and unification are not synonymous, and indeed, represent two different strategies that have spurred serious political debate in the South. Unification is most often regarded as a long-term goal, while many argue that establishing a peace regime on the peninsula is the more immediate objective. In fact, after the historic inter-Korean summit in 2000, much of the discussion focused on prospects for transitioning from a continuing state of war to a peace regime, and many called talk of unification premature. Our coding scheme does not distinguish between discussion of a peace regime and unification, but rather pairs these concepts together in this category, which broadly speaks to amicable visions for the future of the peninsula.

19. Gi-Wook Shin and Kristin C. Burke, "North Korea and Contending South Korean Identities: Analysis of the South Korean Media; Policy Implications for the United States," *On Korea*, Academic Paper Series 1, Korea Economic Institute (2007): 150-167.

20. "Lee Government Takes Stand on North Korean Human Rights," *Chosun Ilbo*, 4 March 2008.

21. For notable examples, see "President Delivers State of the Union Address," Text of the Speech, News Release, Office of the Press Secretary, White House, 29 January 2002; and "Opening Remarks by Secretary of State-Designate Dr. Condoleezza Rice," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, 18 January, 2005.

22. 2001 generally represents an aberration in security-related coverage, owing to the "hot spot" issues related to the September 11th terrorist attacks on the United States. This seems to be especially true in

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the case of *Hankyoreh*, which is a smaller newspaper and does not have the same capacity that the more comprehensive *Chosun* has to simultaneously cover multiple big stories.

23. 1994 shows some modest increase in media coverage. It was the year of the first nuclear crisis and the conclusion of the Agreed Framework, as well as Kim Il Sung's death and the resultant leadership transition.

24. The tone is measured with the five-point scale ranging from -2 (very negative) to +2 (very positive).

25. Yonhap Reviews ROK Dailies' View of Prospective N-S Summit, 11 April 2000.

26. In the wake of a 1996 North Korean submarine incursion, for instance, the Kim administration took a tough line with the North, suspending inter-Korean economic cooperation and withdrawing from KEDO activities. Yet the Clinton administration did not endorse such moves, as it place priority on burgeoning American relations with the North and keeping the Agreed Framework on track. According to Oberdorfer, "For the first time in such a conflict, Washington found itself positioned between the two Koreas, with important interest on both sides . . . The ROK, which had received unqualified U.S. backing in military disputes in the past, was disappointed and angered by the altered American posture, all the more so because policy toward the North—once a taboo subject—had become a central political issue in Seoul." Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 388-389.

27. "Retgression on North Korea Policy," editorial, *Hankyoreh*, 27 March 2008.

28. See Shin and Burke, "North Korea and Contending South Korean Identities."

29. Ibid.

30. "New Beginnings' in the U.S.–South Korea Alliance: Recommendations to U.S. Policymakers," The New Beginnings Group, The Korea Society and the Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center of Stanford University, April 2008, http://iis-db.stanford.edu/evnts/5343/Revised_New_Beginnings_FINAL_April_9_2008.pdf.