

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF
KYIV-MOHYLA ACADEMY**

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGIES

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

**“CHANGE OF SOUTH KOREA’S ROLE IDENTITY VIS-A-VIS JAPAN
DURING YOON SUK-YEOL’S PRESIDENCY (2022-2023) THROUGH
THE FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM”**

by a student in the fourth year of study
of programme 291 “International Relations, social communications
and regional studies”

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KYIV – 2023

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INTRODUCTION

The tenure of the former President of South Korea Moon Jae-In (2017-2022) was characterised by a notably hard line on Japan. At the beginning of his term, the bilateral relations between the states deteriorated sharply in terms of both economic cooperation and diverging historic perceptions¹. Moon Jae-In's presidency was marked by what is often referred to as the “economic war between” Japan and South Korea (Pham, 2019) as well as repeated demands for compensation to the comfort women and victims of forced labour by the Japanese side (Yeung et al, 2021). The bilateral relations during his and Shinzo Abe's leaderships have been often reported to “have reached rock bottom” (Wroughton, 2019). However, upon Moon's succession by Yoon Suk-Yeol, a 180-degree switch in South Korean foreign policy towards Japan could be observed, with the new president expressing hope for an improvement in bilateral relations (The Japan Times, 2022). The perceived rapprochement culminated on the 6th of March 2023, when South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin announced that the claims for the payment of compensations to the victims of forced labour by the Japanese companies will be withdrawn and instead suggested a voluntary donations scheme via the third-party "Foundation for Victims of Forced Mobilization by Imperial Japan” (Kim et al, 2023). Several events indicating improved bilateral connections followed since then, including Yoon's visit to Tokyo (Davies & Inagaki, 2023) and progress in the settlement of the abovementioned trade disputes (The Japan Times, 2023).

Therefore, the **chronological framework** covers the period from February 2022, when Yoon Suk-Yeol became the president of South Korea, until April 2023.

There appears to be little academic consensus on what implications domestic and (exogenous) foreign factors had on the rapprochement under Yoon Suk-Yeol's presidency.

¹ Diverging historic perceptions in Japan include disputes over the contents of historic textbooks, recognition and compensation for the victims of forced labour and comfort women during the times of occupation, and appropriateness of the Yasukuni Shrine visits, Dokdo/Takeshima territory dispute, etc. (Kimura, 2019)

Some scholars and think tanks suggest that the improvement of the bilateral relationship is spurred by the positive change in public opinion regarding Japan among South Koreans (Kudo, 2021; the Genron NPO, 2022; Glosserman & Snyder, 2015; p. 6). On the other hand, proponents of the alternative view argue that public attitudes to Japan are a negative factor for the change of South Korea's role identity towards Japan, and it is rather facilitated by the exogenous factors, such as the converging international interests of the two states and their common views on regional security and policy towards China (Atkinson, 2023; Pollmann, 2023; Pardo & Kim, 2023; p. 15). This discrepancy of views on the factors impacting South Korea's identity change during the presidency of Yoon Suk-Yeol is thus the **problem** of this research.

This work will explore the relationship between the change in South Korea's foreign policy towards Japan and the factors, both endogenous and exogenous, that potentially spurred it. The **research question** is therefore "What implications did the endogenous factor of public opinion change and exogenous changes in the international system have for the shift in South Korea's foreign policy towards Japan in 2022-2023?".

While the framework of social constructivism is frequently employed to explain the deterioration of the bilateral relations between South Korea and Japan, it has rarely been utilised to analyse the impact endogenous and exogenous factors have on their improvement. Realism remains dominant in the academic reasoning of the North Korean and Chinese factors for ROK²-Japan relations and the implications of the domestic factors are often taken for granted. The given work will attempt to make up for this gap and provide an analysis of the endogenous and exogenous factors influencing the recent rapprochement grounded in the constructivist theory, which constitutes its **novelty**.

The **purpose of the research** is to test the hypothesis that the change of South Korea's role identity vis-a-vis Japan during the Presidency of Yoon Suk-Yeol (2022-2023)

² ROK - Republic of Korea (abbreviation)

is rather facilitated by exogenous factors such as common threats and interdependence than driven by the domestic change of attitudes towards Japan on the grassroots level.

The following **objectives** have been set to achieve this goal:

1. To provide an overview of the theoretical and methodological basis of the research, focusing on social constructivism and its main notions relevant to the given work;
2. To define the role identities of South Korea and Japan vis-a-vis each other through the previously outlined theoretical framework;
3. To determine the implications South Korean public opinion and its change have for the change of South Korea's role identity under Yoon Suk-Yeol's presidency;
4. To discover the impact exogenous factors such as the North Korean nuclear threat, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, relations with China and the US, and economic interdependence with Japan have on the change of South Korea's identity during Yoon Suk-Yeol's presidency.

The **object** of the research is South Korea's role identity vis-a-vis Japan, and the **subject** is its change from February 2022 until April 2023 impacted by the determined external and internal factors.

Sources utilised in the research include both primary and secondary ones such as relevant academic literature, official documents, statistical reports and quantitative datasets.

The literature examined in the paper includes scholarly works of leading historians, sociologists, and Political Science and International Relations scholars in **English and Korean languages**.

From the theoretical perspective, the research will build upon the social constructivism of Alexander Wendt who is a Merston Professor of International Security and Professor of Political Science at The Ohio State University. The overview of the key

relevant notions theory will be based on his works, such as “Social Theory of International Politics” (1999), “Constructing International Politics” (1995) and “Anarchy is what States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics” (1992).

Further suggested definition of South Korean and Japanese national identities builds upon the analyses of the scholars of both countries such as Kan Kimura, Professor at the Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies at Kobe University, Jungmin Seo, researcher at the Department of Political Science and International Studies at Yonsei University, Akiko Hashimoto, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh, Il Joon Chung, Professor of Sociology at Korea University, and others.

The research analyses two perceptions of the factors facilitating the recent change of South Korean role identity towards Japan emphasising the domestic and the external dimension respectively. Works of Yasushi Kudo, the founder and president of The Genron NPO independent think tank, Brad Glosserman, Deputy Director of the Center for Rule-making Strategies at Tama University, Scott A. Snyder is senior fellow for Korea studies and director of the program on U.S.-Korea policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, and others are primarily employed as representative of the opinion that South Korea's foreign policy change is driven by the change in public opinions regarding Japan. On the contrary, scholars including Ramon Pacheco Pardo, Professor of International Relations at King's College London, Saeme Kim, KF Indo-Pacific Programme Visiting Fellow at RUSI, Joel Atkinson, professor in the Graduate School of International and Area Studies (GSIAS) at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and others support the position that the factors primarily facilitating current rapprochement are the changes in the international environment.

The *official documentation* analysed in the research includes statements, press releases and other materials published by the governments of the Republic of Korea, the People's Republic of China, Japan, and the United States of America. In particular, the “Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region” launched by South

Korea in December 2022 will be analysed to determine the change in the foreign relations of South Korea with the observed actors.

The *quantitative data* from survey reports released by leading Japanese and Korean think tanks, namely The Genron NPO, East Asia Institute, Realmeter and Gallup Korea, will be employed to statistically support the findings. In particular, the dataset by East Asia Institute and Chicago Council on Global Affairs titled “*International Public Opinion Survey*” will be utilised for the purpose of quantitative analysis of the historical background, and more relevant data reports from 2021-2023 will be employed to test the theoretical assumption of this research.

The **methodology** of the given research is based on three methods: quantitative analysis, content analysis and case study. The “*International Public Opinion Survey*” dataset released by East Asia Institute and Chicago Council on Global Affairs in 2008 is utilised to fit three statistical models: two ordinal logistic regressions and one binomial logistic regression. These models are utilised to form a theoretical assumption, that is further tested with the help of statistical data reports from 2022-2023: The 9th and the 10th Surveys on “*Mutual Perceptions of South Korea and Japan*” by East Asia Institute, “*Daily Opinion No. 507*” and “*Daily Opinion No. 533*” by Gallup Korea, and Realmeter *Weekly Trends of the 4th Week of February*. More details on the methodology will be provided in Chapter 1.

In the **first Chapter**, I provide an overview of the social constructivism theory and provide the reasoning for its selection as the research foundation. I further employ this theory to define the main characteristics of South Korean and Japanese national identities to establish a background understanding of the issue. I then focus on South Korean public opinion change as the endogenous factor affecting the ROK-Japan rapprochement in the **second Chapter**. For this purpose, I choose two levels of analysis. The first level is that of general opinions regarding Japan and anti-Japanese sentiment in South Korean society. The

second level represents political perceptions of Japan as a state entity and public preference for certain foreign policy decisions regarding it. It will be concluded that while the improvement in general public attitudes to Japan is to an extent facilitating the current rapprochement, the dominance of negative political opinions regarding it is obstructing the internalisation of a new identity. In the **third Chapter**, I analyse the potential impact exogenous factors, namely changes in the international environment and economic interdependence with Japan, had on the improvement of the bilateral relations between the states. I conclude that exogenous factors have to a degree advanced South Korea's identity change in 2022-2023; however, they are not sufficient for its internalisation unless followed by increased political trust in Japan.

CHAPTER 1. The theoretical and methodological foundation of the research

1.1. Social Constructivism and the key notions

In this work, the research issues will be addressed through the theoretical paradigm of Social Constructivism. This framework emerged as an attempt to fill in the theoretical gap between the materialist and rational theories of IR. It focuses on ideas and knowledge in its explanation of the international system and its effect on the relations between states as central actors.

The main concepts of social constructivism further employed in this research will be those of *structure*, *identities*, as well as corresponding to them *structural and identity change* drawing mainly on interpretations suggested by A. Wendt, the Ralph D. Mershon Professor of International Security at the Ohio State University and one of the main theorists of social constructivism in International Relations. These concepts will be utilised to define ROK's role identity towards Japan, shaped throughout the end of the XX and the beginning of the XXI century, as well as to analyse the tendencies of its transformation in 2022-2023. *Master variables* that can spur collective identity formation, namely *interdependence*, *common fate*, *homogeneity*, and *self-restraint* determined by A. Wendt will be applied to the case of changing bilateral relations between ROK and Japan. Separated into two groups of domestic (*homogeneity*, and *self-restraint*) and exogenous (*interdependence*, *common fate*) factors, the effect each of the variables has on the object of the research will be analysed. This will be done to assess to what degree and in which ways domestic factors and the international environment conditioned the recent perceived rapprochement between the countries.

One of the core notions for most IR theories is that of 'structure'. Although not defining 'structure' as a term explicitly, Wendt claims that it consists of three main elements. First, it is defined, to a limited extent, by the *material resources* possessed by the actors. However, in contrast to the prominent place of material power in the realist

analysis, Wendt emphasises that it explains nothing unless given a context by shared knowledge. According to a constructivist approach, states' perceptions of each other and respective material resources are unconditionally defined by shared understandings, expectations, or knowledge. This *shared knowledge* constitutes the second element of the international structures, relatively neglected in both rational and materialist theoretical approaches. Lastly, structures are understood as *practices*, as in line with Wendt's definition they only exist as long as states adhere to them (Wendt, 1995; p. 72-73). This approach to the understanding of structure presents it as a highly ideational, socially constructed notion (Wendt, 1999; p. 20). Accepting such a stance on the nature of the international structure allows us to examine the process of structural change in the relations between South Korea and Japan from a multitude of angles and analyse the social factors that influence it. This way, the room for the analysis of structural change is significantly wider compared to that offered by previously dominant neorealism, which saw such a phenomenon only as a change in the distribution of material capabilities (Wendt, 1999; p. 314).

A. Wendt distinguishes between *three cultures of anarchy* that define socially-structured international systems. These cultures are Hobbesian (based on enmity), Lockean (based on rivalry), and Kantian (founded on friendship) (Wendt, 1999; p. 258). He argues that structural change, or transition from one culture to the other, occurs when actors "redefine who they are and what they want" (Wendt, 1999; p. 336). However, Wendt also emphasises that structural change is rarely easy, and in some historical circumstances, the constraints might hurdle such a change significantly. The more deeply the previous culture is internalised by the actors, the more difficult such a structural change would be (Wendt, 1999; p. 314-315). Thus, Wendt acknowledges the importance of the historical background for the potential structural change, which is particularly relevant for the relations between South Korea and Japan, conditioned by a substantial gap in historical perceptions.

The major relevant mechanisms, generally allowing for the change from Lockean to Kantian cultural models are “*role-taking*” and “*altercasting*”. The former mechanism involves choosing one’s interest and representations in the interaction with the Other; the latter is generally described as treating the Other as if they already possess some identity, anticipating them to conform to it (Wendt, 1999; p. 329-331). As the rapprochement between South Korea and Japan constitutes nothing but the transition from Lockean culture to Kantian, these mechanisms are essential for the understanding of structural change in the given bilateral relationship. In Chapters 2 and 3, the notions of role-taking and altercasting will be applied to the behaviour of South Korea towards Japan during the presidency of Yoon Suk-Yeol to explain the structural change of their bilateral relations in 2022-2023.

International structures, discussed above, are in turn seen to construct *state identities* (Wendt, 1999; p 20-21). Wendt defines identity as a “subjective or unit-level quality, rooted in an actor's self-understandings” (Wendt, 1999; p. 224) and distinguishes between its four kinds:

- *personal or corporate identities*: self-regulating structures that make actors distinct mutually irrelative entities and serve as platforms for other identities;
- *type identities*: emerging based on shared characteristics, behavioural traits, attitudes, experience, historical commonalities, etc.;
- *role identities*: culturally rooted and existing only in relation to Others;
- *collective identities*: implying identification of the Self with the Other and transcending respective boundaries (Wendt, 1999; p. 224-229).

Wendt’s statement often quoted in modern academia is “identities may be hard to change, but they are not carved in stone” (Wendt, 1999; p. 21). It implies that just like international structures, state identities are fluid and possible to transform according to the theory of social constructivism. However, structural and identity change are not interchangeable notions: while the former constitutes a change at the macro-level, the

scope of the latter is limited to the micro-level (Wendt, 1999; p. 338). If the macro-level structural change only becomes possible when enough actors change their self-perception and behaviour, unit-based identity change is not constrained by such conditions (Wendt, 1999; p. 340). The notion of identity change and the factors that influence it are the central theoretical pillars of the given paper. The change of political vector, observed in South Korea under the presidency of Yoon Suk Yeol can thus be observed through the prism of these phenomena.

Notably, in contrast to other IR theories, which assume the domination of inherent selfishness in the states' behaviour, social constructivism allows for the formation of Kantian collective identity involving a degree of compromise with the egoistic identity (Wendt, 1999; p. 317, 337). As mentioned before, the transition from the relations of rivalry to friendship and an attempt at collective identity formation is a common interpretation of the current ROK-Japan rapprochement in the media (Roy, 2023) even though it is yet unclear whether such cooperation between the states will be a successful case. Theoretical understanding of the potential factors facilitating or obstructing the common identity construction is thus invaluable for the analysis of the states' current behaviour and the potential of the recent initiatives.

A collective perception of the international actors is founded on cooperation between them and depends on the four major factors or “master variables”: *interdependence, common fate, homogeneity, and self-restraint* (Wendt, 1999; p. 343).

- Interdependence constitutes actors' dependency on each other's choices made through their interaction. For instance, changes in one actor's circumstances might affect other actors of the same collective identity (Wendt, 1999; p. 344);
- Common fate is similar to interdependence, but its distinctive feature is the presence of the third party (i.e. third actor). If the third party perceives a group of states in the same way and defines them by the same categories, this can facilitate the formation of a common identity between them (Wendt, 1999; p. 349);

- Homogeneity implied that the actors perceive each other as alike and thus accept it as a common ground for cooperation (Wendt, 1999; p. 353);
- Self-restraint is presented by Wendt as a key factor for identity formation, in the absence of which none of the above factors is significant enough. Self-restraint and confidence in the self-restraint of the Other are necessary to overcome the fear of being engulfed by the Other, which often hurdles the formation of a common identity (Wendt, 1999; p. 344). Wendt outlines three pathways for achieving self-restraint in bilateral relations: ‘reciprocal learning pathway’ which stands for repeated reciprocal compliance with the shared norms, ‘domestic politics pathway’ in which domestic predisposition to shared security norms precedes top-level rapprochement, and ‘self-binding’ which implies certain sacrifice and compromising of the one side with no expectations of reciprocity (Wendt, 1999; p. 360-362)

These four factors and their combination are the key facilitators of identity change and common identity formation between the international actors. This classification as well as other notions suggested by A. Wendt should be further applied to the analysis of exogenous and endogenous factors facilitating or obstructing change of South Korea’s role identity vis-a-vis Japan and the formation of the collective identity in Chapters 2 and 3.

1.2. Methodology

As previously mentioned, the methodology of the given research is based on three methods: quantitative analysis, content analysis and case study.

The structure of the research will follow Alexander Wendt’s classification of the *master variables* facilitating identity change. As two of them are primarily subjective and lie in the dimension of the domestic public perceptions (Wendt, 1999; p. 354), they will be examined in the second Chapter. Those are the variables of *homogeneity* and *self-restraint*. The two other variables suggested by Wendt are mainly objective conditions and are

endogenous in nature (Wendt, 1999; p. 349). Such variables are *common fate* and *interdependence*. They will be analysed separately in Chapter 3.

For the purpose of **quantitative analysis**, several datasets and data reports will be used. First of all, the “*International Public Opinion Survey*” dataset released by East Asia Institute and Chicago Council on Global Affairs in 2008 is utilised to fit three statistical models: two ordinal logistic regressions and one binomial logistic regression. These models are utilised to form a theoretical assumption, that is further tested with the help of statistical data reports from 2021-2023. The dataset from the year 2008 was chosen for two main reasons. First, 2008 is the first year of President Lee Myung-Bak’s tenure. His presidency was marked by high hopes for the political rapprochement with Japan, which he announced as one of foreign policy his priorities, along with closer cooperation with the other regional neighbours (Snyder, 2009; p. 89). He promised to strive towards a “future-oriented relationship” with Japan and expressed the desire to solve the issues of historical perceptions between the countries (Snyder, 2009; p. 89). Because of Yoon Suk-Yeol’s current foreign policy priorities, he is often compared to Lee Myung-Bak in the media (Minegishi, 2022). As this comparison might be indicative of similar trends under these presidents’ tenures, a dataset from 2008 will be used as a theoretical reference, which will then be tested with more recent statistical data.

Secondly, the “*International Public Opinion Survey*” dataset has separate variables representing general attitudes to Japan and political opinions regarding it. This distinction is relatively rare for the datasets on the topic. However, as one of the tasks is to test the correlation between general and political opinions on Japan, it is essential for the given research.

To test this hypothesis I use the variables of “feeling close towards Japan” and political opinions on the sensitive issue over Dokdo/Takeshima territorial affiliation and response to the Yasukuni Shrine visits by the Japanese prime ministers as dependent variables. To understand the roots of the presumed disparity between them I will analyse

the way such opinions are formed and what factors influence the establishment of each of them respectively.

The dataset has a total of 1029 valid observations collected through the sampling procedure of multi-stage stratified sampling. The data was collected via face-to-face interviews, which can reveal a potential shortcoming of a dataset, as this method of data collection may encourage responses that are less likely to be judged by a survey conductor. Moreover, the fact that more than 10 years have passed since the publication of the survey results must be acknowledged; therefore, the more relevant results of Gallup Korea will be used to support the findings in the following sections.

A common conclusion of the relevant research is that the general *anti-Japanese sentiment* is to a degree affected by the personal experiences of respondents on the grassroots level (i.e. interpersonal communication and cultural exchange) (Chen, 2020; p. 249). Based on the preliminary literature overview, I suggest that the *political opinions* regarding Japan as a state entity are not formed through the same bottom-up fashion as the anti-Japanese sentiment and are rather dependent on the perceptions of Japan and other regional neighbours as international actors (Friedhoff & Kang, 2013; p. 2-8).

Building upon this theoretical assumption, I selected independent variables that represent both interpersonal and intergovernmental levels of influence. The variables belonging to the first group are thus “Frequency of consuming Japanese pop culture” and “Ever met a person from Japan”. They are expected to play a major role in the reduction of anti-Japanese sentiment but only affect political opinions to a limited extent. Instead, the variables of the second group, accounting for interstate relations, are expected to have a more significant effect on the political opinions constituting the top-down fashion of their formation. They include “Threat: development of China as a world power”, “Threat: confrontation between China and Taiwan”, “Threat: China as a military threat”, “Japan respects the sovereignty of the Asian countries” and “Threat: rise of Japan as a military power”. The control variable of “Level of education” is included in the given study.

A table of descriptive statistics (Table 1) is given below to provide an overview of the data used in this section.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Feelings towards Japan		Ever met a person from Japan	
Mean (SD)	49.7 (22.8)	Mean (SD)	1.61 (0.489)
Median [Min, Max]	50.0 [0, 100]	Median [Min, Max]	2.00 [1.00, 2.00]
Missing	7 (0.7%)	Missing	11 (1.1%)
Compromise over Dokdo		Threat: development of China as a world power	
Mean (SD)	1.78 (0.412)	Mean (SD)	1.63 (0.609)
Median [Min, Max]	2.00 [1.00, 2.00]	Median [Min, Max]	2.00 [1.00, 3.00]
Missing	519 (50.4%)	Missing	10 (1.0%)
Protests against Yasukuni Shrine visits		Threat: confrontation between China and Taiwan	
Mean (SD)	1.65 (0.526)	Mean (SD)	2.24 (0.627)
Median [Min, Max]	2.00 [1.00, 3.00]	Median [Min, Max]	2.00 [1.00, 3.00]
Missing	526 (51.1%)	Missing	23 (2.2%)
Level of education		Threat: China as a military threat	
Mean (SD)	3.35 (1.62)	Mean (SD)	2.10 (0.723)
Median [Min, Max]	3.00 [1.00, 6.00]	Median [Min, Max]	2.00 [1.00, 4.00]
Missing	1 (0.1%)	Missing	8 (0.8%)
Frequency of consuming Japanese popculture		Japan respects the sovereignty of the Asian countries	
Mean (SD)	3.82 (1.09)	Mean (SD)	4.96 (2.25)
Median [Min, Max]	4.00 [1.00, 5.00]	Median [Min, Max]	5.00 [0, 10.0]
Missing	5 (0.5%)	Missing	524 (50.9%)
		Threat: rise of Japan as a military power	
		Mean (SD)	1.68 (0.634)
		Median [Min, Max]	2.00 [1.00, 3.00]
		Missing	7 (0.7%)
		Economic importance of Japan	
		Mean (SD)	7.75 (1.94)
		Median [Min, Max]	8.00 [0, 10.0]
		Missing	7 (0.7%)

Note: Compiled by the author based on the International Public Opinion Survey 2008 (EAI & CCGA)

The important value that can be observed from Table 1 is the number of missing values in the given dataset. The percentage of such values ranges from 0,1% to as much as 51,1%. Thereby, the accuracy of the analysis involving variables with missing values accounting for more than half of the responses may be challenged to an extent.

The relevant statistical reports released in 2021-2023 will be utilised to further test this hypothesis on the timeframe of Yoon Suk-Yeol's presidency. These are the 9th and the 10th Surveys on “*Mutual Perceptions of South Korea and Japan*” by East Asia Institute, “*Daily Opinion No. 507*” and “*Daily Opinion No. 533*” by Gallup Korea, and Realmeter *Weekly Trends of the 4th Week of February*.

The **case study** method will be employed to define the main factors influencing the formation of public opinion during the presidencies of Lee Myung-Bak and Kim Young-Sam and compare the findings to the current tendencies of Yoon Suk-Yeol's tenure. Quantitative data as well as available academic literature will be utilised for this purpose.

Lastly, the research method of **content analysis** will be employed primarily to assess the significance and impact of international events on the formation of a common identity between South Korea and Japan as well as perceptions of common threats between the countries. Official documentation including statements, press releases, strategies and other materials published by the governments of the Republic of Korea, the People's Republic of China, Japan, and the United States of America will be analysed to define the main recent trends of ROK's relations with China, Russia, North Korea and the US as well as their mentions in the ROK-Japan bilateral documentation and estimate the impact that changes of the international system had on the change of South Korea's role identity vis-a-vis Japan.

1.3. Defining South Korean and Japanese national identities and the cultural model of their relations through the constructivist framework

The theories, which previously dominated the International Relations academia, fail to address the current state of South Korea-Japan bilateral relations (Brustad & Kim, 2020; p. 668). According to both realist and liberalist frameworks, the two states are anticipated to have a generally friendlier relationship and closer cooperation than observed throughout the recent decades (Glosserman & Snyder, 2015; p. 14). From the realist standpoint, major common threats, including China and North Korea, as well as the common alliance with the USA is supposed to bring ROK and Japan together as natural allies. From the liberal viewpoint as well, a substantial basis for close economic cooperation would be expected to constitute common ground for the ROK-Japan alliance. Unfortunately, the sharp aggravation shown by the mutual perceptions between Japan and South Korea (Kimura,

2019; p. 177) fails to meet such optimistic theoretical expectations. What both of these theories fail to account for is historically shaped common knowledge and the national identities that such knowledge constituted.

Using the main theoretical notions outlined in the previous section, here I will attempt to provide an overview of the identities South Korea and Japan had since the two decisive events - World War II and the Korean War - throughout the beginning of the XXI century. Having a good grasp of the actors' initial identities is essential for the further discussion of the potential identity change, or structural change, in Chapters 2 and 3. Therefore, this section is called to serve as a basis for further analysis.

World War II and the Japanese occupation of Korea resulted in a major hierarchical shift (Seo, 2021; p. 11). It has therefore had a different impact on the identity formation of each of the countries. For Japan, the war ended with an infamous defeat, leaving it behind the Western great powers. The debacle stayed engraved in the collective memories of Japanese society, becoming one of the central constituents of the major national disappointment along with the economic recession (Hashimoto, n.d.; p. 3-4). Due to these factors, the identity of Japan became primarily focused on the global international society, striving to prove capable of attaining a great power status along the leading Western states (Choi, 2018; p. 234). In contrast, South Korea, devastated after the Japanese colonisation and the Korean War, and separated from the DPRK, has found its key goal in exploring its new identity in direct relation to the most significant regional neighbours, including Japan. The primary orientation of such a national identity can be thus seen at the local level, examining notions of 'us' and 'them' with Japan as one of the main benchmarks (Choi, 2018; p. 237) and shaping a new civic self-perception based on traditional values (So et al, 2012; p. 800). Therein, I suggest taking a closer look at each of the states specifically.

Since the beginning of the Meiji Restoration in Japan in 1868 and its consequential opening up to the world, the country has experienced a considerable change of identity, taking up its place in a newly discovered international system. The rapid modernisation,

induced by the West, has urged Japan to follow the example of the great Western powers and become a significant player in its own region of interest (Hashimoto, n.d.; p. 2). A basis of the newly established Japanese identity has become the desire for leadership in East Asia (Anno, 2018; p.5) - a goal which was manifested in the rise of the Japanese colonial empire later in the XIX century. By occupying the top of the hierarchical order in its own region, Japan attempted to conceal its inferiority to the Western empires (Seo, 2021; p. 7-8). Being a part of the Japanese-led international structure, Korea was seen as a mere element of the common imperial state and a structured nostalgia of East Asia. As pointed out by Seo Jungmin, the Professor of political science and international studies at Yonsei University, in contrast to the organisation of many Western colonial institutes, having ethnic representatives as local leaders, Korea was ruled and managed directly by the Japanese settlers. Moreover, its historical and cultural achievements were attributed rather to East Asia as a whole, blending the ethnic identities together and composing a common great power (Seo, 2021; p. 8).

However, the end of World War II marked the collapse of the Japanese empire and the arising need to establish a new pacifist identity. While the means of achieving the main goal have switched from the military to economic, the foundational aim of staying a significant international actor remained unchanged for the Japanese state (Hashimoto, n.d.; p. 3-4). In this dominant national identity of Japan, Korea occupies its place among the other regional neighbours as one of the bricks constituting the global international society. Compared to South Korea, which perceives Japan as one of its key neighbours and main spheres of interest (Choi, 2018; p. 237), as will be shown later, Japan appears to attribute a lot less importance to its relations with South Korea. This difference demonstrates the mainly outward focus of the Japanese national identity with Korea having only a significance of an ordinary neighbour. The survey results of The Genron NPO think tank published in 2022 revealed that compared to almost 83% of Korean respondents who find ROK-Japan relations important, the corresponding number of Japanese respondents did not exceed 57% (The Genron NPO, 2022). Moreover, a drastic difference can be noticed

between the most common responses to the question “Why should the ROK-Japan bilateral relations improve?” among Japanese and Korean citizens. While the Koreans tend to focus their attention on the pragmatic benefits of cooperation, the Japanese people rather focus on more vague cultural and political commonalities (The Genron NPO, 2022). The latter also tend to see the importance of the ROK-Japan relations through the prism of their common ally - the United States (East Asia Institute, 2022; p. 14). Along with a sense of involvement with Korean modernisation and its transformation from a backward state to an economic rival, this perception of ROK as *one in the multitude of global international actors* constitutes the *role identity of Japan towards South Korea*.

The Korean national identity, and thus its role identity towards Japan, show completely different characteristics. First, as mentioned before, during World War II Korea was in a position of the colonised, naturally shaping its identity vis-a-vis its coloniser since 1945. While Professor of History at Saint Cloud State University, Marie Seong-Hak Kim, argues that “Japan and colonial Korea formed a collective identity—in law, politics, and economy” (Kim, 2022a; p. 483), this statement is rather made from the point of view of a historian. As it is impossible to talk about the common identity in the absence of two sovereign states as a main unit of the constructivist analysis (Wendt, 1992; p. 412-413), we cannot analyse the national identity of South Korea of that period. Instead, Korean national identity can rather be said to have been muted during the Japanese occupation. The experience of colonisation provoked the formation of a new identity since 1945 based on the contrast to the former metropole. Such a trend can be traced in the initiatives to restore the historical names of towns and bring back the vocabulary of native Korean origin, replaced by Japanese-style words during the occupation (Cho, 2018).

While the Japanese Empire, and later Japan, attempted to claim the top of the economic and political hierarchy of East Asia, Korea focused on proving its moral superiority in relation to Japan (Kim, 2015; p. 372-373) (Chung, 2015, p. 68). Therefore, control over the issues of historical perceptions poisoning the bilateral relations between

the states has become crucial for practising the identity formed in the mid-XX century. The issues that have become the cornerstone of the ROK-Japan conflicts include disagreements over the compensation for comfort women, forced labour during colonial times, misrepresentations of history in the textbooks, etc., and all of them have come to constitute the national identity of South Korea. As Marie Seong-Hak Kim mentions: “The Korean Supreme Court’s decision in 2018 declared that the failure to hold Japanese wartime corporations liable for colonial wrongdoings would contradict South Korea’s national identity and fundamental values” (Kim, 2022a; p. 488).

The issue of historical perceptions is brought closer to the core of the South Korean identity due to its politicisation in recent decades (Kang, 2020; p. 16-17). Due to the second major event of Korean history - its separation into the DPRK and ROK - the ethnic foundation of the South Korean identity was aided by the newly introduced political values of anti-communism, capitalism and democratisation. While ethnic traditions and values stayed an important element of South Korean national identity (So et al, 2012; p. 800), the rise of the civic identity (in contrast to the ethnic identity) (Kang, 2020; p. 2) contributes to the hardening of the line on the issues contradicting the key national values, including moral superiority over Japan.

Therefore, Japan can be described as one of the key “Others” and the major reference for a South Korean self-perception alongside North Korea. The main characteristics of the *ROK’s role identity vis-a-vis Japan* can be found in the notions of *moral superiority and rivalry with the former metropole*.

To summarise, the place of the Other in the national identities of South Korea and Japan is different. The primary orientation of Japan’s national identity lies in the international society, with only an ordinary role of a neighbour allocated to South Korea. In contrast, Japan is one of the key neighbours for the national identity of South Korea, with

moral superiority over its former metropole being one of its cornerstones. Negative or insufficient value given by the actors to each other in their national identities explain why the relations between the two states fail to meet the rational expectations to form a Kantian friendship and rather *constitute a cultural model of the Lockean structure based on rivalry* according to Wendt's classification. However, the unexpected compromise over the issue of compensations for the victims of forced labour as well as rapidly increased security cooperation in March 2023 is often assessed by observers as the long-awaited shift towards the Kantian structure and change in the core of the South Korean national identity. In the following Chapters, I will explore the domestic and international factors that have influenced such a structural change under Yoon Suk-Yeol's presidency.

CHAPTER 2. Korean public opinion as a factor affecting the change of South Korea's role identity vis-a-vis Japan

Out of the four master variables, which facilitate the transformation of the Lockean culture relations to those of the Kantian culture, two are predominantly subjective and are located in the dimension of domestic perceptions, namely *homogeneity*, and *self-restraint* (Wendt, 1999; p. 354). In this chapter, I will analyse these two variables and assess the effect they had on the change of South Korean identity in 2023. For this purpose, I separate the public opinions of Korean society towards Japan into two categories: general opinions towards Japan and its citizens (i.e. anti-Japanese sentiment); political opinions on Japan, its government and the foreign policy towards it.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the variable of *homogeneity* represents the perception and categorisation of the Other as similar to the Self (Wendt, 1999; p. 353). In South Korea, the domination of the anti-Japanese sentiment in public opinion often prevents its citizens from seeing Japan as alike in many respects. Therefore, the first question I answer in this Chapter is “How the changes in anti-Japanese sentiment and the variable of homogeneity, or their absence, have influenced the identity change of South Korea vis-a-vis Japan in 2022-2023?”

Self-restraint, another master variable suggested by Wendt, stands for the trust that the Other will respect the needs of the Self and refrain from engulfing it (Wendt, 1999; p. 358). In the case of South Korea, the changes in the level of *self-restraint* are reflected by the opinions regarding the government's policies towards Japan or trust in the sincerity of the Japanese government. Therefore, the second question of the Chapter is “What influence did the political opinions and level of public trust towards Japan as a state have on the collective identity formation between South Korea and Japan in 2022-2023?”

I conclude that while the change in the variable of *homogeneity* (i.e. reduction in the anti-Japanese sentiment) has facilitated the change of South Korea's role identity vis-a-vis

Japan, this positive effect is considerably restricted by the absence of change in the *self-restraint* variable. Although general attitudes to Japan and the Japanese people have improved substantially by 2022, the political distrust towards Japan as a state remains dominant in Korean society. In line with A. Wendt's theoretical conclusions, negative political attitudes to Japan are the key factor preventing the internalisation of the new role and collective identity in South Korea (Wendt, 1999; p. 346).

2.1. Master variable of homogeneity in the historical context. Change in general anti-Japanese sentiment

Attitudes of the Korean public to Japan are often seen to be the main factor influencing the change in the bilateral relations between ROK and Japan, with many media outlets as well as research centres in the world using it as a main variable for their predictions on the topic (The Genron NPO, 2022) (Glosserman & Snyder, 2015; p. 6) (Onchi, 2023). This widely accepted assumption has come to constitute the common wisdom on the given topic throughout time. However, the main drawback of such statements is that they usually equate the level of anti-Japanese sentiment with the public attitude towards the Japanese government and preferred foreign policy (Kim, 2021; p. 3), which results in misleading conclusions. Such predictions, therefore, fail to account for the sophistication of South Korean public opinion towards Japan highlighted by the alternative academia.

Alternative research and public opinion surveys point out the disparity between the public attitude to individual Japanese citizens and Japan as a country (Kimura, 2019; p. 79; Gallup Korea, 2022; p. 18; Isozaki, 2017; p. 18). Following the same logic, a substantial discrepancy can be seen between the general attitudes to Japan as a country and opinions on the Japanese government, representing Japan as a state entity and an international actor (EAI, 2022; p. 10). Karl Friedhoff, the Fellow for Asia Studies at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, and Kang Chungku, the Principal Associate at the Asan Institute for Policy

Studies, have also conducted a relevant public opinion survey data analysis and suggested that general public opinion on Japan does not necessarily correspond to the political opinions on the preferred policy towards Japan (Friedhoff & Kang, 2013; p. 2-8). If these alternative suggestions, which contradict the conventional intuition, are the case, the impact of the anti-Japanese sentiment and political attitudes to Japan should be analysed separately, as the change in the former may not reflect the change in the latter.

Therefore, in this section, I suggest a hypothesis that general attitudes to Japan as a country and the indicators of the anti-Japanese sentiment do not correspond to the political opinions on Japan and preferred policy towards it as an international actor. As no recent datasets are distinguishing specifically between general and political attitudes to Japan, I use the data derived from the results of the International Public Opinion Survey jointly conducted by the East Asia Institute and Chicago Council on Global Affairs in 2008 (EAI & CCGA; 2008) to analyse the formation of such attitudes in 2008, which will be then used as a reference for the analysis of the more recent trends. More recent data reports from 2022 and 2023 will be used to test the theoretical assumptions of this section on the chronological frame of the research.

The relevant data outlined in Section 1.3. are fitted into three statistical models (Table 2) to test the correlation between the independent variables and each of the independent variables. The ordinal logistic regressions are created for the ordinal variables of “Feelings towards Japan” and “Protests against Yasukuni Shrine visits” and the binomial logistic regression is created for the binary variable of “Compromise over Dokdo”.

Table 2. Statistical models

Regression results			
	Feelings towards Japan ordered logistic 1	Compromise over Dokdo logistic 2	Yasukuni Shrine protests ordered logistic 3
Level of education	-.002 (.056)	.175* (.081)	-.072 (.067)
Frequency of consuming Japanese pop culture	-.259** (.081)	.139 (.110)	-.056 (.090)
Ever met a person from Japan	-.379* (.172)	-.129 (.247)	-.073 (.204)
Threat: development of China as a world power	.265 (.143)	-.175 (.203)	-.238 (.177)
Threat: confrontation between China and Taiwan	-.017 (.127)	.374* (.180)	.044 (.151)
Threat: China as a military threat	.066 (.119)	.230 (.172)	.581*** (.147)
Japan respects the sovereignty of the Asian countries	.189*** (.041)	-.123* (.057)	.070 (.046)
Threat: rise of Japan as a military power	.299* (.133)	-.467* (.188)	.138 (.161)
Economic importance of Japan	.271*** (.049)	.016 (.066)	.090 (.056)
Constant		.666 (.960)	
observations	486	485	482
Log Likelihood		-238.960	
Akaike Inf. Crit.		497.920	
Notes:	*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001		

Note: Compiled by the author based on the International Public Opinion Survey 2008 (EAI & CCGA)

The first column of Table 2 displays the results of the first model, testing the correlation between the dependent variable of “Feelings towards Japan” and the independent variables. As obvious from the calculated *p values*, the general attitudes to Japan correlate with independent variables from both groups, which represent bottom-up and top-down patterns of formation. Both variables representing the personal experiences of South Korean citizens (pop culture consumption and personal encounters with the Japanese people) and variables presenting Japan as a state entity (Japan’s respect for sovereignty, its potential rise as a military power and economic importance for South Korea) are seen to be statistically significant in the model. Such results are indicative of the mixed understanding of a question asked about Japan in general, with respondents relying both on their experience of intercultural interactions and their perceptions of the Japanese government.

In the second and third columns of Table 2, the results displayed show the correlation between the political opinions of South Korean citizens regarding Japan and the

independent variables. In contrast to the first column, here variables of interpersonal and intercultural exchange appear to be statistically insignificant. In both cases observed, namely the political position regarding contested Dokdo/Takeshima island and visits to the Yasukuni Shrine by the Japanese Prime Ministers, correlation can be observed only with the independent variables of the top-down formation pattern. Political opinion towards Japan and the related foreign policy is thus seen to be structured primarily by the perceptions of the Japanese government and the political situation in the region. For instance, according to the fitted models, respondents who see potential threats from China or its confrontations with Taiwan are more likely to welcome compromise with Japan over historical issues and presumably seek cooperation in this sphere. At the same time, respondents who see potential military or ontological threats in Japan itself are less likely to tolerate compromise over the point of confrontation.

Moreover, according to the results of the second model, Korean citizens' political opinions regarding the compromise over Dokdo showed a statistical correlation with the level of education obtained by the respondents. According to the results of the model, people with higher levels of education are less likely to welcome South Korea's compromise over the issue. Taking into account the high degree to which the South Korean national curriculum is politicised, such a finding emphasises the top-down nature of the formation of political opinions regarding Japan, supported by multiple relevant studies (Lee, 2014; p. 294) (So, 2020; p. 175).

Therefore, via the means of quantitative analysis, it was established that anti-Japanese sentiment and general opinions towards Japan as a country are formed through both bottom-up and top-down patterns. On the other hand, political opinions on Japan and the preferred foreign policy do not correlate with the personal experiences of the respondents and the patterns of their formation are generally top-down, which implies that they are more reactive to the changes in the international structure and actions of the governments. This means that an improvement in general opinions regarding Japan does

not necessarily imply an improvement in political opinions, as they are formed by different factors.

To double-test this conclusion, I add the variable of “Feelings towards Japan” to the models reflecting political opinions of the Korean society (Table 3) to find out if there is a correlation between the variables.

Table 3. Statistical models

Regression results		
	Compromise over logistic	Dokdo Yasukuni Shrine protests ordered logistic
	1	2
Level of education	.171* (.081)	-.074 (.068)
Frequency of consuming Japanese pop culture	.121 (.111)	-.029 (.091)
Ever met a person from Japan	-.175 (.250)	-.029 (.207)
Threat: development of China as a world power	-.154 (.204)	-.273 (.180)
Threat: confrontation between China and Taiwan	.373* (.181)	.048 (.152)
Threat: China as a military threat	.233 (.173)	.573*** (.148)
Japan respects the sovereignty of the Asian countries	-.116* (.058)	.046 (.047)
Threat: rise of Japan as a military power	-.448* (.189)	.085 (.163)
Economic importance of Japan	.024 (.069)	.047 (.058)
Feelings towards Japan	-.005 (.006)	.013** (.005)
Constant	.894 (.976)	
Observations	484	481
Log Likelihood	-237.520	
Akaike Inf. Crit.	497.041	
Notes:	*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001	

Note: Compiled by the author based on the International Public Opinion Survey 2008 (EAI & CCGA)

According to the regression results, the variable of general “Feelings towards Japan” is only significant for the “Yasukuni Shrine Protests” variable and is statistically insignificant for “Compromise over Dokdo”. Thus, it can be seen that the general and political opinions of South Korean society regarding Japan do not always correlate.

Therefore, even though improvement of the general attitudes to Japan in South Korean society (*homogeneity* variable) can to an extent facilitate change of South Korea’s role identity, it cannot be enough to predict successful rapprochement between the states

despite the common attempts discussed earlier. This is because they do not necessarily mean an increase in the *self-restraint* variable, or political trust in Japan, which, according to Wendt, is essential for the internalisation of the collective identity.

It can be concluded that due to the discrepancy of factors shaping general and political opinions Korean citizens often retain negative views regarding the Japanese government even when they perceive the Japanese people positively thanks to intercultural exchange (East Asia Institute, 2022; p. 10; Isozaki, 2017; p. 19; Glosserman, 2020). Thus, change in the anti-Japanese sentiment cannot be fully representative of the political opinions of the Korean public as the former is shaped by a wider set of factors and the latter is formed through the top-down pattern. This means that even if the variable of *homogeneity* is showing positive bottom-up change, the internalisation of the new role identity is substantially obstructed unless followed by the change in the variable of *self-restraint* (Wendt, 1999; p. 343).

2.2. Master variable of self-restraint in the historical context. Change in political opinions regarding Japan

As established in the previous section, there are a lot more factors that positively influence anti-Japanese sentiment than the political opinions of the public. Therefore, improvement of the general public opinion on Japan and its citizens does not necessarily mean improvement of political attitudes and does not ensure internalisation of the new role identity, for which *self-restraint* is essential. The logical question following these findings is “What impact did the political attitudes to Japan have on the change of South Korea’s role identity throughout its history and especially throughout 2022-2023?”. This is the question I will attempt to address in this section by applying quantitative findings presented in the previous section to the historical cases, namely Kim Young-Sam’s and Lee Myung-Bak’s tenures.

According to the quantitative findings, in contrast to the general anti-Japanese sentiment that is formed through both bottom-up and top-down patterns, political opinions are strictly reactionary to the changes on the intergovernmental level. As established in the previous section, public opinion on preferable foreign policy regarding Japan is heavily dependent on perceptions of the Japanese government and neighbouring states, as well as on the respondents' level of education. These findings imply that there are three major factors with which the *self-restraint* variable and trust in Japan correlate: *perceptions of Japan's behaviour* (You & Kim, 2016; p. 424-426), *perceptions of threat from the international actors* (i.e. China, North Korea) and the *ability of the South Korean government to promote rapprochement with Japan domestically*, in particular through the politicised national curriculum (So, 2020; p. 175). As the external factors will be further analysed in Chapter three, this section will primarily focus on the correlation of *self-restraint* with Japan's behaviour and possession of sufficient political capital for domestic influence by the South Korean government.

Professor of the Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies at Kobe University, Kan Kimura, suggests that to encourage positive political opinions regarding Japan the South Korean government needs to possess sufficient approval rates (Kimura, 2019; p. 167) (Kim, 2021; p. 3). It has been often observed by scholars that South Korean presidents pursue a friendlier foreign policy towards Japan when the public support for their regime is strong. On the other hand, they tend to take a harder line on Japan and pursue less compromise over historical issues when their domestic approval rate is low, failing to resist predominant negative political attitudes toward Japan (Kimura, 2019; p. 167; You & Kim, 2020; p. 63; Jeong, 2015; p. 5). Therefore, sufficient political capital possessed by the South Korean government is the first factor facilitating the improvement of political attitudes to Japan.

Secondly, according to the quantitative results, a lower threat perception of Japan is also beneficial for the improvement of political attitudes towards it and the successful

internalisation of the friendly role identity. These findings are supported by relevant research (You & Kim, 2020; p. 63). You Chaekwang, Associate Research Fellow at National Assembly Futures Institute (NAFI), and Kim Wonjae, a graduate researcher at Columbia SIPA/Sciences Po, suggest that such a perception of Japan as threatening is connected with the provocative and hawkish actions of its government, which negatively impact political trust in Japan in South Korean society (You & Kim, 2016; p. 424-426).

A significant influence of these two factors on the political attitudes towards Japan can be observed during Lee Myung Bak's presidency, which covers 2008 when the *International Public Opinion Survey* was conducted. At the beginning of his tenure, he was able to achieve significant breakthroughs in bilateral relations and substantially increase support for such foreign policy change. Scholars often point out the connection of such bilateral success with Lee Myung-Bak's approval ratings (Kimura, 2019; p. 167; You & Kim, 2020; p. 67), which were increasing steadily during the forest years of his presidency, reaching 51,6% in January 2010 (The Korea Times, 2010). Thanks to the possession of sufficient political capital by his government he was able to draw attention away from the historical perceptions issues and focus on facilitating bilateral economic cooperation (Snyder, 2009; p. 89-90)

These factors' significance is further confirmed in the quantitative research conducted by You Chaekwang and Kim Wonjae, which covers the years 1988-2012 (You & Kim, 2020). The repetition of this trend throughout South Korean history shows that they constitute a tendency rather than a unique occasion for Lee Muyn-Bak's tenure. The importance of Japan's behaviour and approval rates of ROK's president for the role-identity change can also be observed in a similar scenario during the early years of Kim Young-Sam's presidency when substantial efforts and political capital were directed at achieving a fair compromise with Japan over the historical perceptions issue on the governmental level (Brustad & Kim, 2020; p. 673) (Kimura, 2019; p. 132). The rapprochement was initiated by the South Korean government on a peak of its public

support, with its approval ratings reaching 80% in April 1993 (Cha, 1993; p. 863) which are referred to by some scholars as ‘stratospheric’ (Yoon, 1996; p. 515). This high level of public support ensured increased leverage over public opinion for the government. In the following month, ROK’s parliament passed legislation ensuring compensations to former comfort women were paid by the South Korean government (Kimura, 2019; p. 132). As a response, Japan has made its own step forward, releasing the milestone statement by Secretary Kono containing apologies for the colonial period atrocities (Kimura, 2019; p. 134-136). Such expression of friendliness by the Japanese government significantly reduced the perceptions of Japan as a military threat (You & Kim, 2016; p. 424-426), directly impacting the *self-restraint* variable. With sufficient approval ratings, Japan’s cooperative behaviour and favourable public opinion on the rapprochement with Japan, Kim Young-Sam’s government was able to widen bilateral security cooperation in the following years (Brustad & Kim, 2020; p. 673).

In both cases, the combination of these two facilitating factors made it possible to increase trust in Japan through the balanced *reciprocal learning pathway*, outlined by A. Wendt (Wendt, 1999: p. 361). This pathway based on mutual compromise is arguably the most suitable for South Korea, where mistrust in Japan is ingrained in its national identity. In the absence of Japan’s cooperation, the bilateral improvement attempted by South Korea can rather be defined as *self-binding*, which is challenging to implement both due to its inherent limitations (Wendt, 1999; p. 363) and centrality of moral superiority over Japan for South Korean national identity (Kim, 2015; p. 372-373) (Chung, 2015, p. 68). The *self-binding* strategy often fails as the Other is not guaranteed to ever reciprocate, while the public backlash to the ‘humiliating policies’ and deteriorating public attitudes to the Other becomes difficult to resist, especially if the president’s approval rates are low. The failure of such a strategy has become to constitute the deterioration of bilateral relations at the end of both Lee Myung-Bak’s and Kim Young-Sam’s tenures.

A dramatic turnaround in Lee Myung-Bak's policy towards Japan and his controversial visit to the Dokdo-Takeshima island in 2012 are generally associated with his increased disapproval due to the domestic scandals (You & Kim, 2020; p. 65) as well as his obligations in accordance with the decision of the Korean Constitutional Court made a year earlier (Kimura, 2019; p. 171). Announcement of this decision, Japan's negative response to it (Nam, 2019) and several provocative acts of its government (You & Kim, 2020; p. 68) had a detrimental impact on the political attitudes to Japan among the South Korean public (Jeong, 2015; p. 5). In the absence of sufficient political capital, he was not able to resist the decrease of political trust in Japan. The drastic decrease of the *self-restraint* variable and the impossibility of the internalisation of the pursued earlier common identity made him abandon the initial plans for rapprochement with Japan and pursue a more hard-line foreign policy towards it.

Bilateral deterioration caused by similar challenges can be observed in the second half of Kim Young-Sam's tenure. In 1995-1996 his public approval rates dropped to a mere 30%, depriving him of the first listed advantage (Yoon, 1996; p. 515). In addition, the Japanese government released a highly controversial Murayama Statement in 1996 which was followed by a series of 'irresponsible statements' of the Japanese government officials, justifying deeds of the colonial period (Kimura, 2019; p. 140-142). The trust in the Japanese government within Korean society decreased again, and possessing low public support Kim Young-Sam could no longer afford to compromise with visibly confrontational Japan. Major anti-Japanese demonstrations filled the streets of Seoul (Kimura, 2019; p. 142). This combination of factors led to the termination of the pre-existing security cooperation in 1996 and the further deterioration of the bilateral relations (You & Kim, p. 446). The latter years of Kim Young-Sam's presidency thus exemplify the *self-binding* strategy to increase *self-restraint* and its failure due to the low political capital possessed by the government and perceptions of Japan's behaviour as uncooperative.

The variable of *self-restraint* played an essential role in the internalisation of a new Kantian role identity vis-a-vis Japan on different occasions in South Korean history. This variable shows a correlation with three top-down factors: the Korean government's approval rates, the political behaviour of Japan and perceptions of threat from other international actors. The successful combination of these three factors constitutes the “*reciprocal learning pathway*” suggested by Wendt, through which *self-restraint* (or political trust in Japan) is the most likely to increase. In the absence of these factors, the bilateral improvement attempted by South Korea can constitute a rather challenging “*self-binding*” strategy, which is less likely to result in increased *self-restraint*, preventing the collective identity from internalisation on the grassroots level (Wendt, 1999; p. 346).

2.3. Implications of public opinion for the rapprochement with Japan under Yoon Suk-Yeol's presidency

In this section, I will compare the findings from the previous two sections of this chapter to the apparent rapprochement between South Korea and Japan under Yoon Suk-Yeol's presidency as of April 2023. I conclude that even though the variable of *homogeneity* (general public attitudes to Japan) did show a visible increase in 2022 and could have thus had a limited positive impact on the change of South Korea's role identity, the internalisation of the new identity is significantly obstructed by the absence of change in the *self-restraint* variable (political public attitudes to Japan). The political mistrust towards Japan remained dominant in 2022-2023, much like in preceding years, which can be explained by the low approval rates of the current President and the reputedly uncooperative behaviour of Japan.

I should start with a discussion of the *homogeneity* variable, analysed using quantitative methods in Section 2.1. I will attempt to test the findings of the previous sections using more relevant quantitative data from 2021-2023.

To analyse the factors that shape general attitudes to Japan in South Korea I use the 9th and the 10th Survey on Mutual Perceptions of South Korea and Japan released by the East Asia Institute in 2021 and 2022 respectively. The recent survey data shows that the most common reason for favourable impressions of Japan among South Korean respondents is the impression of Japanese people as “kind and hardworking” (EAI, 2021; p. 14). The respective reports of the EAI highlight that consumption of Japanese popular culture and interpersonal exchange can be seen to be a “central force in driving favorability” with 67% of Korean respondents forming positive impressions of Japan through popular culture (EAI, 2021; p. 61) and 17,6% of Korean respondents favourably changing their attitude to Japan after visiting it (EAI, 2022; p. 8). Negative perceptions of the Japanese people are also one of the top-3 reasons for unfavourable general attitudes to Japan, with 22,8% of the respondents agreeing with the statement “They are different from what they seem” (EAI, 2021; p. 14). These results show the importance of bottom-level factors, such as the interpersonal exchange and opinions of the Japanese people, for the formation of general opinions towards Japan. At the same time, the actions of the Japanese government and the perceptions of it have a considerable impact on South Koreans’ general perceptions of Japan as well, as the response “Because Japan is not repenting its historical faults in a righteous manner” remains the most common reason for unfavourable impressions of Japan, with 66,7% of respondents supporting it in 2021.

At the same time, in line with the previous findings, perceptions of the other international actors appear to be irrelevant to the formation of general attitudes to Japan. The results of the survey conducted by Gallup Korea in 2022 suggest that preference for the US or China as allies does not correlate with South Korean respondents’ attitudes to the Japanese people (Gallup Korea, 2022; p. 18).

Indeed, compared to 63,2% of South Korean respondents holding unfavourable opinions on Japan in 2021, the corresponding number reduced to 52,8% in 2022 (EAI, 2022; p. 4). Thus, the variable of *homogeneity* did show a considerable increase at the

beginning of Yoon Suk-Yeol's tenure, which, according to Wendt, is beneficial for the creation of a common identity between South Korea and Japan.

No such dramatic change could be observed in the *self-restraint* variable. The low levels of trust in the Japanese state remained unchanged, with even more respondents thinking that "Japan is not repenting its historical faults in a righteous manner" (EAI, 2021; p. 15).

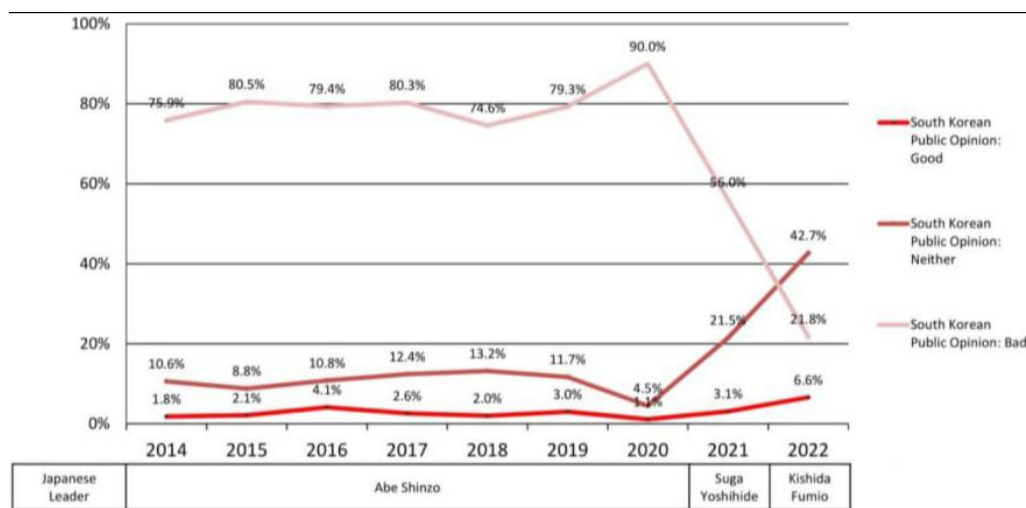
As was concluded in the previous section, the significance of the three main factors for the formation of political opinion regarding Japan can be seen as overarching throughout South Korean history. These factors are *perceptions of Japan's behaviour*, *approval rates of the South Korean government* and *perceptions of threat from international actors*. As the external factor of the international actors' impact will be discussed in detail in the next Chapter, I will again focus on the former two and see if they are still significant in 2022-2023.

Firstly, the perceptions of Japan's behaviour appear to be still significant for the definition of the preferable policy towards it. 89% of the respondents who believe that Japan is reflecting on its military past and thus does not constitute a threat anymore support the compensation plan suggested by the government in March. On the contrary, 68% of the respondents who are not convinced that Japan has successfully abandoned its past military aspirations are also opposed to Yoon's third-party compensation scheme (Gallup Korea, 2023; p. 15).

There are a few misleading conclusions that can be made from looking at the relevant statistical data in this regard. For instance, some could claim that the Korean public's trust in Japan increased significantly following Fumio Kishida's succession of the Prime Minister's post. Indeed, the unfavourable perceptions of the Japanese Prime Minister among Korean society were the lowest in more than a decade with only 21,8% of respondents maintaining "bad" impressions of the Japanese leader in 2022 compared to

56% and 90% in 2021 and 2020 respectively (Table 3). However, it is crucial to note that more than a twofold decrease in negative perceptions did not mean a major increase in positive impressions. The favorability of Fumio Kishida among South Koreans accounted for only 6,6%, which is not significantly higher than the approval rates of Shinzo Abe and Yoshihide Suga. Instead, the majority or 42,7% of respondents mentioned that they held neither positive nor negative opinions of Kishida yet (Table 4) (EIA, 2022). This observation means that the given statistics reflect the improved expectations from the Japanese government rather than increased trust in it.

Table 4. Responses to the question “What is your impression of the other country’s (Japan/South Korea) leader?”



Source: East Asia Institute (2022) *The 10th Survey on Mutual Perceptions of South Korea and Japan*; Available at: <http://www.eai.or.kr/main/english/>

As these expectations were not met (no cooperative behaviour of Japan or apologies from the Japanese government followed), political opinions regarding the historical perceptions remained unchanged. When answering the question “What problems should be resolved in the historical issues between Korea and Japan?” the majority of Koreans pointed out the “Japanese history textbook problem”, “Comfort women issue” and “Association of Japan with military aggression” with 60 to almost 70% of respondents sharing such opinions (Genron NPO, 2022). Moreover, the most common response to the question “What should be done to solve the problem of forced labour?” among South

Korean citizens was “The compulsory execution as settlement should be carried out in accordance with the decision of the Korean Supreme Court³” with 36,5% respondents sharing this opinion in 2022 - an increase compared to 32,6% in 2021 (Genron NPO, 2022).

Thus, a step forward from Japan was required to seal the improvement of trust towards it in South Korean society and change in the *self-restraint* variable. As many experts argue, the absence of such a step or gesture of goodwill could become a reason for the relative unsuccessfulness of Yoon Suk-Yeol’s rapprochement attempt as of April 2023 (Atkinson, 2023; Song-Pehamberger, 2023). Based on the statistical data analysis, it can be suggested that the Korean society was ready to welcome rapprochement based on the “reciprocal learning pathway”, that has previously led to successful breakthroughs in ROK-Japan bilateral relations throughout the recent decades. Instead, the current shift in the relations appears to be seen by both the Korean public and external experts as “self-binding” with South Korea initiating compromising in all spheres of rapprochement with minimal reciprocity (Snyder, 2023; Park, 2023b). On the next day after the announcement, both the opposition and the civic groups expressed their perception of the rapprochement as unbalanced, calling it a “National Humiliation Day” (Park, 2023a; Mackenzie & Yong, 2023). According to the survey conducted by Gallup Korea after this announcement, 85% of South Korean respondents are still sceptical about Japan’s reflections on its imperial past (Gallup Korea, 2023). The concerns of many were reinforced after a series of Japan-related controversies followed. At the end of March, the government of South Korea released a statement protesting distortions of history in the newest Japanese textbooks, sparking a new round of public discontent over the issue (MOFA ROK, March 2023). Four statements of protest to Japan’s claims over Dokdo/Takeshima island have been published on the official website of ROK’s Ministry of

³ Referring to the series of South Korea’s Supreme Court’s decisions ordering Japanese companies to compensate the victims of wartime forced labour (Denyer, 2018) despite the bilateral “Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Cooperation Between Japan and the Republic of Korea” of 1965 (UN, 1965)

Foreign Affairs since the beginning of 2023 (MOFA ROK, 2023). An even more explicit protest was expressed regarding the Yasukuni Shrine visits paid by the Japanese leaders in April, with the South Korean government stating “The Korean government urges responsible figures in Japan to face up to history and show humble introspection and true remorse for the past through action. Full stop.” (MOFA ROK, April 2023). Moreover, the restored debates over Japan’s decision to release radioactively contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant contributed to the concerns of the Korean public (Yonhap News, 2023a). It is difficult to expect substantial compromise from Japan, taking into account the secondary place of the ROK in the prism of Japanese national identity and Kishida’s domestic constraints (Yeo, 2023). However, judging by the reaction of both the Korean government and the public, it appears to be essential for the common identity internalisation in South Korea (Wendt, 1999; p. 346).

Second, even though Yoon Suk-Yeol’s approval rate had been growing slightly in the weeks before the forced labour compensation plan announcement, a mere 37% to 40,4% (by different estimates) support appears to have been yet insufficient to increase the trust in Japan in the South Korean public (Realmeter, 2023; Gallup Korea, 2023). Unlike many of his predecessors, who achieved success in the field of bilateral improvement and were mentioned in the previous section, Yoon decided to attempt a breakthrough with a lot more modest political capital. There is no consensus on the rationale behind the widely recognised “diplomatic boldness” of the President (Nilsson-Wright, 2023), but some observers speculate on Yoon’s background as a prosecutor and lack of political experience (Pollmann, 2023). In the days following the governmental statement, the president’s public support decreased to around 34% (Gallup Korea, 2023), with the downward trend continuing as of April 2023 (Yonhap News; 2023b). It is undoubtedly more challenging for a weak president to encourage the internalisation of new norms and *role identity* on the grassroots level. As A. Wendt argued: “It will be hard to sustain a strategy of self-binding over the long run if Others never reciprocate” (Wendt, 199; p. 363) and in the South

Korean case it can be even harder for the government not possessing sufficient political capital.

These two factors virtually prevent the new role identity, promoted by the current South Korean government, from internalisation on the grassroots level.

In this Chapter, I conclude that even though general attitudes to Japan and Japanese people improved by 2022, the same trend could not be observed in the political attitudes to the Japanese state and preferred foreign policy towards it. Therefore, the change in the master variable of *homogeneity* can be seen to have facilitated the change of South Korea's role identity vis-a-vis Japan in 2022-2023. However, its impact can be only limited as, according to Wendt, *self-restraint* is essential for the Kantian common identity internalisation (Wendt, 1999; p. 344).

The master variable of *self-restraint* stayed virtually unchanged, with political mistrust in Japan remaining dominant in South Korean society. The improvement of political attitudes to Japan depends heavily on two top-level factors - Japan's cooperative behaviour and the high approval rates of the ROK's government. The absence of these two factors from the current rapprochement can constitute an unbalanced *self-binding* strategy and be detrimental to the internalisation of South Korea's new *role identity* vis-a-vis Japan.

Another factor affecting both *self-restraint* and another variable - *common fate* - is the exogenous factor of changes in the international system. Along with the variable of *interdependence*, its impact on South Korea's role identity change will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3. Impact of the events in the international environment on the change of South Korea's role identity vis-a-vis Japan

In the first Chapter, I discussed master variables that can be rather subjective and therefore lie in the dimension of public opinion and domestic perceptions of Japan in South Korea. This Chapter is in turn focused on the implications of the international environment and its changes for South Korea's role identity change. They constitute the variables of *common fate* and *interdependence*. In order to facilitate identity change these two variables can only be objective conditions of an international system (Wendt, 1999; p. 349).

The first variable I analyse in this section is *common fate*. It is usually constituted by a third party that defines the Self and the Other as members of the same group. Such influence can be positive in separate cases, but a *common fate* is usually manifested in an external threat that the two states share (Wendt, 1999; p. 349). In the case of bilateral relations between ROK and Japan, the main third parties are China, North Korea and the US, the relations with which have been heavily impacted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The second variable examined in this Chapter is *interdependence*. In contrast to *common fate*, it does not entail a third party and is constituted by the density of the countries' interactions and dependence on each other's decisions in certain fields (Wendt, 1999; p. 349). Even though there are different aspects to interdependence including political, security, and others, this Chapter will focus on the economic interdependence between South Korea and Japan. The reason behind this choice is the salience of the issue of economic dependence/independence in the ROK-Japan relations highlighted by the trade dispute of 2019, discussed later in this Chapter.

I conclude that both variables had a facilitating effect on the identity change in South Korea. However, according to the constructivist framework, they are insufficient unless followed by an increase in the *self-restraint* variable.

3.1. Master variable of common fate. Implications of international system changes: Russian Invasion of Ukraine, relations with China, North Korea and the US

As visible from the quantitative results in the first Chapter, even in 2008 perceptions of **China** and its role as an international actor affected political attitudes to Japan in South Korea. Those respondents who saw China as a confrontational power or a potential threat were more likely to welcome a compromise with Japan over the long-standing bilateral controversies. Since 2008, the tensions between China and South Korea have only been growing. The announcement of the joint deployment of the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) by the US and South Korea in 2016 has become one of the biggest recent sources of confrontation with China (Kim, 2022b). The perceptions of China's importance as an international partner among the Korean public further deteriorated in 2019 after the beginning of protests in Hong Kong (Power, 2020) and have been showing a downward trend ever since as of 2022 (Gallup Korea, 2022; p. 14).

A similar pattern can be observed in Japan's attitudes to China. In both Japan and South Korea perceptions of China as a military threat have increased dramatically since 2019 - from 46,1% to 72,1% and 45,2% to 65% respectively (EAI, 2022; p. 11). Moreover, the recent convergence of opinions on ROK's and Japan's policies against China has been registered in the 2022 survey by East Asia Institute, with the majority of respondents in both countries supporting restrictions on economic relations with China (EAI, 2022; p. 15).

South Korea's closer alignment with the US after a long period of "strategic ambiguity" (Kim, 2023) is apparent from the statements and strategies released by the government of South Korea since 2022. In the joint statement released by the leaders of the US and ROK in May 2022, the two presidents highlighted the "importance of preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait" (The White House, May 2022). This position was further reiterated in the "Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region" released at the end of the year (MOFA ROK, December 2022; p. 28) along with

the desire for “a sounder and more mature relationship [with China]...guided by international norms and rules” (MOFA ROK, December 2022; p. 14). Japan has welcomed and supported the release of the long-awaited document (MOFA Japan, January 2023), as the tensions surrounding the Taiwan Strait are becoming its own growing security concern as well (Pardo & Kim, 2023; p. 12). The response of China was not nearly as positive, with the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin expressing his concern over “exclusive coteries” that this strategy may imply (MOFA PRC, December 2022).

The term “exclusive coteries” used by the representative of China is the epitome of its understanding as a *common fate* factor for the bilateral ROK-Japan relations. China, being the third party in this relationship, defines South Korea and Japan as an exclusive group and treats them as its members. In line with Wendt’s theoretical conclusions, such behaviour of China and the converging perceptions of it as a common threat facilitate the rapprochement between South Korea and Japan and the formation of a common identity between them.

The threat of China as a country that challenges universal norms and values has become more salient since the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 and China’s balancing regarding it (Jie, 2023). For similar reasons, South Korea had to reevaluate its relations with **Russia** itself (Roehrig, 2022; p. 887). In an even more straightforward manner than China, Russia defined both Japan and South Korea as members of the group of “unfriendly states”, the list of which was released by its government in March, less than a month after the invasion started (TASS, 2022). Similarly to China, Russia is among the third-party states constituting the *common fate* of South Korea and Japan.

From the perspective of the South Korean government, the importance of the Russian invasion of Ukraine for the ROK-Japan bilateral relations is significant not only for the trilateral connections between the states but for East Asia and the Indo-Pacific region in general (Pardo & Kim, 2023; p. 9). According to Ramon Pacheco Pardo, the Professor of International Relations at King's College London, and Saeme Kim, the KF

Indo-Pacific Programme Visiting Fellow at RUSI, the commitment of both states to the preservation of peace and stability in the region and Russia's threat to it could have been a significant factor in "Seoul's calculus in terms of bilateral relations with Tokyo" (Pardo & Kim, 2023; p. 12). Its facilitating effect on the bilateral relations can be also observed in the bilateral statements released by the two states. In the press release following the states' first bilateral summit in 12 years, the issue of the Russian invasion of Ukraine is specifically highlighted, with both Yoon's and Kishida's condemnation of an "attempt to unilaterally change the status quo by force" performed by Russia (MOFA Japan, March 2023). A similar narrative was followed at the Japan-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting in May (MOFA Japan, May 2023). This makes it apparent that Russia and its war in Ukraine have to an extent brought South Korea and Japan closer through the increase in the *common fate* master variable.

Even though the Russian invasion is far from being mentioned at every bilateral meeting, it remains one of the cornerstones for the trilateral US-ROK-Japan cooperation (U.S. Department of State, 2023). The same goes for multiple spheres of cooperation between South Korea and Japan implemented predominantly with the involvement of the US. As pointed out by A. Wendt, *common fate* can be someone constituted by positive factors, and the **United States of America** can be perceived to be one of them in the discussed case (Wendt, 1999; p. 349).

As established in the first chapter, Japan's national identity has a rather global focus and is directed at improving its position as a global international actor. For this reason, cooperation with the US and the preservation of common interests is undoubtedly key for Japan. It, therefore, views its bilateral relations with South Korea through the prism of trilateral cooperation (East Asia Institute, 2022; p. 14). Likewise, ROK's shift towards increased international reliance on the US and global identity orientation could be also seen in 2022 (Pardo, 2022; p. 2), after the announcement of the intention to turn South Korea into "a global pivotal state" made by Yoon Suk-Yeol (Nilsson-Wright, 2023). The

perceived importance of partnership with the US among South Korean citizens in 2022 has been also at its highest in a decade (Gallup Korea, 2022; p. 14). Even though many are sceptical about the potential success of such aspirations (Nilsson-Wright, 2023), the increased role of the US bilaterally and trilaterally leaves little doubt as South Korea joins its allies in releasing “Strategy for a Free, Peaceful and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region” (The White House, February 2022) (MOFA Japan, December 2015) providing an overview of its self-perception as a global player. The ROK-Japan rapprochement in 2023 was also warmly welcomed by the US, with Joe Biden praising the “groundbreaking new chapter” of the bilateral relations between the states (Yeo, 2023). Joint anti-submarine naval drills held by the US, Japan and South Korea also started soon after the summit held by Yoon and Koshida in Tokyo (Song-Pehamberger, 2023). The longstanding role of the US as a factor bringing together South Korea and Japan, which has increased even more recently, is thus one of the constituents of the *common fate* of the two states facilitating the formation of a common identity between them.

Finally, one of the most apparent and “immediate” factors facilitating the change of South Korea’s role identity vis-a-vis Japan is the increasing common threat of **North Korea** and the countries’ converging interests in resistance to it (Pollmann, 2023). The North Korean threat and possible approaches to it have been discussed virtually at all top-level meetings between the representatives of South Korea and Japan since 2022 and mentioned in all of the joint statements released by the states (MOFA Japan, February 2022). The event of particular importance, however, is North Korea’s ICBM-class ballistic missile launch on the 18 of February 2023 which landed within Japan’s exclusive economic zone, about 200 km off the coast of Japan. It has received special attention at the meetings of the states’ Foreign Ministers (MOFA Japan, February 2023). North Korea’s missile launches are becoming a more frequent occurrence in the Japanese close whereabouts after the first occasion in 2017 (Phipps & Russel, 2017). By Pyongyang, South Korea and Japan are getting to be defined as members of the same group, constituting their *common fate* as international actors. President Yoon has highlighted the

cooperation with Japan in resistance to this threat as one of the key potential benefits of the current rapprochement (The Yomiuri Shimbun, 2023b). The factor of North Korea is thus a facilitating factor for the change of role identity of South Korea vis-a-vis Japan since 2022.

Despite the significance of all these countries for the shift in ROK-Japan relations, Wendt warns that the “*common fate* is not a sufficient condition for collective identity formation because...actors may fear exploitation by others in the collective” (Wendt, 1999; p. 353). Again, this marks the centrality of the *self-restraint* variable and highlights that despite the multitude of facilitating factors the main challenge of South Korea’s identity change is the lack of trust in Japan as a state.

To summarise, the significant changes in the international environment, namely the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and the changes in ROK’s and Japan’s relations with multiple international actors constitute the *common fate* variable for the formation of the common identity between the states. Converging security interests, mainly regarding such states as China, Russia, North Korea and the United States, have undoubtedly facilitated the bilateral rapprochement between South Korea and Japan. However, according to Wendt’s theoretical conclusions, *common fate* alone is not a sufficient factor for the internalisation of a new role identity vis-a-vis Japan in South Korea, as *self-restraint* is essential for its internalisation.

3.2. Master variable of interdependence. The economic aspect of the bilateral relationship

Last but not least master variable I analyse in this work is that of *interdependence*. According to Alexander Wendt, *interdependence* can be easily confused with *common fate*; however, while the latter “is constituted by a third party which defines the first two as a group” *interdependence* is founded in the bilateral cooperation of the actors (Wendt, 1999; p. 349). He describes interdependence as a phenomenon which appears when “the outcome

of an interaction for each depends on the choices of the others” (Wendt, 1999; p. 344). In essence, the more an actor is influenced by the decisions of the Other and the higher the “dynamic density” of interactions between them, the deeper the mutual dependence between them (Wendt, 1999; p. 344-345).

Wendt also warns that interdependence is issue-specific. This means that high mutual dependence of the actors in one sphere does not imply a spillover effect on the other areas of cooperation (Wendt, 1999; p. 345). In this section, I will primarily focus on the economic *interdependence* between South Korea and Japan. The reasons for the emphasis on this specific area lie in its high relevance in modern academia due to the notorious trade dispute between Seoul and Tokyo that started in 2019 (Ezell, 2019). Moreover, Yoon Suk-Yeol himself highlights overcoming this dispute and recommencing economic cooperation, in particular in the field of semiconductors, as one of the key goals of the current rapprochement (Park, 2023).

Scholars often argue that the political as well as economic interdependence of South Korea and Japan has been steadily declining since the end of the Cold War (Koga, 2023; p. 66) (Kimura, 2019; p. 36-37). Kan Kimura argues that one of the reasons for this can be globalisation and the increased multitude of “international choices”. He explains that this is a trend observed across bilateral relations between geographically close countries across the world, the importance of which is being substituted by more global connections (Kimura, 2019; p. 40). Indeed, Wendt also mentions that bilateral *interdependence* often decreases in the contemporary world as actors multiply as well as interactions between them (Wendt, 1999; p. 347). Undoubtedly, this factor along with the other aspects has contributed to a general decrease in Japan’s importance for South Korea, which Kimura shows using the data from the Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS) portal (Kimura, 2019; p. 36). However, taking a closer look at the separate economic sectors reveals that this statement cannot be applied to all of them, in particular the semiconductor industry.

In 2018-2019 the Supreme Court of South Korea released a series of decisions claiming material compensation to forced wartime labourers and their families from Japanese companies (Lendon & Bae, 2023). In what is widely considered to be a response to such rulings, the Japanese government removed South Korea from its export “white list” (Ezell, 2019) and announced an export restriction on the three components key for the South Korean semiconductor industry. These were namely Fluorinated Polyimide, Photoresist, and Hydrogen Fluoride (Dumas, 2021; p. 2). In response to these restrictions, Seoul had to introduce immediate measures to reduce their economic reliance on Japan for these chemicals, including allocating around \$6,48 million to facilitate their production locally (CNBC, 2019). Later in 2020 Moon Jae-In, then the President of South Korea, announced at a press conference that the country managed “to turn the crisis into an opportunity” by localising production of the materials and diversifying supply channels (KBS, 2020). He argued that South Korea had successfully withstood the challenge and rid itself of its dependence on Japan. However, many Japanese, as well as Korean scholars, remained rather sceptical regarding such a statement.

Several fact-checking attempts have been performed in the following years after the former President’s speech. First of all, it has been claimed that the numbers suggested by the government were rather deceiving. For instance, even though Seoul claimed that the decrease in photoresist imports from Japan was achieved thanks to increased importing from Belgium, the materials bought from Belgium were in fact manufactured by a unit of the Japanese company (Hosokawa & Kurose; 2021). Moreover, local observers as well highlight the incomplete decoupling from the Japanese companies. Kim Yang-Hee, Director-General of the Department of International Economy, Trade, and Development Studies at Korea National Diplomatic Academy, points out cases of getting around new regulations to maintain well-established business connections with Japanese companies (Kim, 2021; p. 19). She also mentioned that the restrictions were not implemented by Japan to the fullest extent in the first place as it too would have suffered consequences of disrupting the long-established supply chains (Kim, 2021; p. 29). Therefore, South Korea

and Japan “were confronted in a modest manner” because of the realisation by both of the deep *interdependence* between the states (Kim, 2021; p. 19). She concludes that political decoupling from Japan did not mean economic decoupling in 2019, with the industries of the two remaining intertwined (Kim, 2021; p. 29).

The scepticism regarding complete decoupling from Japan is expressed by other scholars as well, including Loïc Dumas, Analyst in Market Intelligence with Cision. He is emphasising that some of the materials involved in the dispute, such as highly refined HF, are “exceptionally hard to find internationally” (Dumas, 2021; p. 10), and due to it, the multiplication of actors mentioned by Wendt is less likely to decrease interdependence in this case. Moreover, with the decrease in dependence on Japan, more materials started to be exported from China (Dumas, 2021; p. 9-10) (OECD, 2021) (World Bank, 2019). With the recent attempts to decrease economic reliance on China (EAI, 2022; p. 15), in particular, because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, South Korea would need to find other suppliers of essential production or develop its own capabilities. Given the difficulty of finding needed materials of high quality internationally, returning to increased trade turnovers with Japan can be one of the options involving the least losses time- and resource-wise, underlining the states’ interdependence (Kim, 2021; p. 30). Such cooperation with Japan to reduce reliance on China is considered likely by some observers (Yomiuri Shimbun, 2023a), even though new agreements with Washington and Taipei are currently being considered.

The special significance of the factor is allocated in Yoon Suk-Yeol’s statements. In March 2023 he called for further cooperation in the field of semiconductors as well as other technological sectors (Jo; 2023). Moreover, he has made the first move to return Japan to South Korea’s export “white list”, hoping for a reciprocal act from Japan, which has indeed followed (Park, 2023).

However, Wendt again warns that “*interdependence* is not a sufficient condition for collective identity formation among states” if the bilateral relationship is lacking in

self-restraint (Wendt, 1999; p. 348). Similar concerns are expressed by scholars in relation to the South Korea-Japan case specifically. For instance, Dumas mentions that the inherent enmity between the two states prevents their economic and security interdependence from being institutionalised (Dumas, 2021; p. 6). This means that insufficient *self-restraint* prevents the new role identity from internalisation in South Korea even if its change is facilitated by other factors, including *interdependence*.

To conclude, in this Chapter, the implications of the two master variables suggested by Alexander Wendt, namely those of *common fate* and *interdependence*, for South Korea's *role identity* change vis-a-vis Japan in 2022-2023 were defined. It can be seen that both variables have to an extent facilitated this process. First, the *common fate* of the ROK and Japan constituted by their common threats and alliance with the United States has contributed to the current rapprochement between the countries. Second, the economic *interdependence* between South Korea and Japan, especially in the semiconductor industry that has been weaponized previously, has also advanced the formation of a common identity between them.

However, in line with Wendt's theoretical conclusions, the internalisation of the new role identity in South Korea is obstructed by the insufficiency of *self-restraint* - or political trust in Japan. Mutual trust between the countries needs to be achieved before the common identity between them can be successfully internalised.

CONCLUSIONS

The plan to compensate victims of Japan's wartime forced labour through the contributions of South Korean companies, which was announced on the 6th of March 2023 by the Minister for Foreign Affairs Park Jin, came as a surprise to many observers. Many scholars saw the main cornerstone of the ROK-Japan rivalry ingrained in their national identities and thus deemed the situation unlikely to change on a grand scale. However, what the South Korean government initiated was the change of this very identity for the sake of rapprochement with Japan. As there is no consensus on how the international environment and the domestic attitudes to Japan impacted this process, this work aimed to determine the implications these factors had on identity change in South Korea towards Japan in 2022-2023 through the framework of social constructivism.

The main notions of social constructivism relevant to the given research were those of *structure*, *identity*, *structural* and *identity change* as defined by Alexander Wendt. A closer look was taken at the *master variables* that can facilitate identity change and the formation of a common identity between the states. These master variables - namely the domestic (*homogeneity*, and *self-restraint*) and the exogenous (*interdependence*, *common fate*) - were used as a framework for the research as each of them was examined separately in this work.

Japan's national identity is primarily oriented on securing its place in the international society and sees ROK as a neighbour of average importance and a regional rival. On the other side, one of the cornerstones of the South Korean national identity is its perceived moral superiority over the former metropole of Japan. This difference between the values these two actors allocate to each other is thus the main challenge for the formation of a 'Kantian friendship' between them.

The shift towards friendlier bilateral relations was initiated by the South Korean government, in particular Yoon Suk-Yeol, in 2023. Both domestic and international factors

were impacting this decision. The analysis demonstrated that the theoretical expectations outlined in the **purpose of the research** were not fully met.

On the one hand, as expected initially, the exogenous factors (master variables of *common fate* and *interdependence*) did have a facilitating effect of South Korea's identity change. This is primarily due to factors such as the economic interdependence of the states and their common threats reiterated by the recent changes in the international environment.

On the other hand, it cannot be said that the domestic environment and the opinion of the South Korean public are impacting its identity change exclusively negatively. The variable of *homogeneity*, which is characterised by the general attitudes towards Japan and the Japanese people did show an increase of 10% in 2022 compared to 2021 (EAI, 2022; p. 4) and thus had a positive effect on the current rapprochement. At the same time, the data suggests that a change in the general attitudes towards Japan does not necessitate a change in political opinions regarding it. In fact, political mistrust towards Japan remains dominant in South Korean society, which is likely connected to Yoon Suk-Yeol's low approval rates and the predominant perception of Japan's behaviour as uncooperative. The variable of *self-restraint* is reflective of the level of political trust between the actors and the most important one according to Wendt. It remained unchanged throughout 2021-2023 and is therefore negatively impacting South Korea's identity change vis-a-vis Japan. As *self-restraint* is essential for a successful change of identity, it is preventing the common identity between South Korea and Japan from internalisation.

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ANNOTATION

Тема: «Change of South Korea's Role Identity vis-a-vis Japan during Yoon Suk-Yeol's Presidency (2022-2023) through the Framework of Social Constructivism»

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(вчений ступінь, вчене звання, прізвище та ініціали)

Захищена “ ____ ” _____ 2023 р.

Короткий зміст роботи:

Метою дослідження була перевірка гіпотези, що зміні рольової ідентичності Південної Кореї по відношенню до Японії під час президентства Юн Сок-Йоля (2022-2023 рр.) радше сприяють екзогенні фактори, такі як спільні загрози та взаємозалежність, ніж зміна ставлення до Японії з поміж південнокорейського суспільства. У дослідженні використовувалися методи кількісного, контент-аналізу та кейс стаді. Очікування, викладені в меті дослідження, не повністю виправдалися. Аналіз показав, що, як і очікувалося, екзогенні фактори справді сприяли зміні ідентичності Південної Кореї у 2022-2023 роках. З іншого боку, не можна сказати, що думка південнокорейської громадськості впливає на зміну її ідентичності виключно негативно. Було виявлено, що покращення загального ставлення до Японії та японців сприяло зміні рольової ідентичності Південної Кореї. Однак рівень політичної довіри

до Японії залишився досить низьким протягом аналізованого періоду часу, що перешкоджає інтерналізації нової спільної ідентичності.

Short summary:

The purpose of the research was to test the hypothesis that the change of South Korea's role identity vis-a-vis Japan during the Presidency of Yoon Suk-Yeol (2022-2023) is rather facilitated by the exogenous factors such as common threats and interdependence than driven by the domestic change of attitudes towards Japan on the grassroots level. The methods employed in the research are quantitative, content analysis and case study. The expectations outlined in the research purpose were not fully met. The analysis showed that, as expected initially, the exogenous factors did have a facilitating effect of South Korea's identity change in 2022-2023. On the other hand, it cannot be said that the domestic environment and the opinion of the South Korean public are impacting its identity change exclusively negatively. The improvement of general attitudes to Japan and the Japanese people has been found to have a facilitating effect on South Korea's role identity change. However, the level of political trust towards Japan remained considerably low in the analysed timeframe, preventing the new common identity from internalisation.