

ROLE OF IDENTITY IN THE MAKING OF REGIONAL SECURITY BLOC: THE CASE OF NORTHEAST ASIA

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Abstract

The thesis aims to answer– why there is a lack of multilateral security alliance in Northeast Asia? Can a constructivist approach explain this absence? The mainstream IR theories have failed to explain the lack of such multilateral institution. The thesis thus, employs Constructivist approach and takes identity as a variable in order to explain this absence. The research argues that due to the lack of regional identity and strong national identity, the region is devoid a security regime involving major powers. Moreover, the research also argues for the necessity to demarcate and differentiate the sub-regions correctly in order to mitigate the fallacy in analysis that wrongly demarcated geographical sub-regionals can create.

For the research the idea of self-perception of each state is mapped through the rhetoric on Nationalism in each state vis-à-vis other states in the region. The thesis employs three methods of research– First, Case studies, using case studies of episodes of heightened tension such as the South China sea and East China sea crisis and its coverage by media of respective countries. Second, Text analysis of speeches and interviews by political elites and diplomats over such disputes. Third, analysis of social media, Chinese social media posts will be analysed during rather peaceful times to inquire into a general discussion among the population viz-a-viz each country. The research surveys the Chinese social media platform *Weibo* to map out the discussion on Japan and S. Korea in the Chinese society. For the analysis of rhetoric on Nationalism in mainstream media, the research uses the newspaper articles in *Global Times*, *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) and *Xinhua* net.

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List of Abbreviations

CCP: Chinese Communist Party

DPPA: Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

DPRK: Democratic People's Republic of Korea

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

IR: International Relations

ROC: Republic Of China

ROK: Republic Of Korea

PPP: Purchasing Power Parity

PRC: People's Republic of China

QUAD: QUADrilateral security dialogue

THAAD: Terminal High Altitude Area Defense

UN: United Nations

US: United States

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WWII: World War II

Introduction

The Northeast Asian region is often characterised as a ‘region without regionalism.’ Interestingly, “Confucianism continues to serve as the basis for East Asian regional identity” and is a resource for Chinese, Korean, and Japanese individuals to construe contemporary life¹. However, despite this common ground, the general structure is defined by inter-state rivalries—the rivalry between the two Koreas, the disharmonious cross-strait relations, and the antagonistic trilateral relation between China–Japan–S. Korea, to name a few. The post-WWII period was defined by relative peace in this region. This has been because the Northeast Asian nations decided on peace to foster economic development over national rivalries. However, despite being economically interdependent, the region lacks a multilateral security institution. Therefore, the region is considered to be “Asia’s Paradox” – a disconnect between growing economic interdependence, between the countries of the region on the one hand, and widening of the gap in the area of political and security cooperation on the other². The region is fraught with mutual distrust and political rivalries. Moreover, any attempt at security integration in the region is plagued by “diversity, ideological polarisation, as well as competing national and sub-regional identities”³. The Nationalist identity, especially in China, Japan, and S. Korea, is so strong that it prevents the formation of a working multilateral dialogue.

¹ Richey, J. (2013). Confucius in East Asia - Association for Asian Studies. *Association for Asian Studies*. Retrieved 27 May 2022, from <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/aaa/archives/confucius-in-east-asia/>.

² Council on Foreign Relations. (2013). South Korean President Park's Remarks at a Joint Session of Congress. CFR.org. <http://www.cfr.org/south-korea/south-korean-president-parks-remarks-joint-session-congress-may-2013/p30669> (accessed May 20, 2022).

³ Acharya, Amitav. (2007). *Reassessing Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific: Competition, Congruence, and Transformation*, edited by Amitav Acharya and Evelyn Goh. Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 19-40.

The research seeks to explain the “organisation gap”,⁴ i.e., an overarching multilateral arrangement that helps in the resolution of security concerns and further positive dialogues to build long-lasting mutual trust among nations in Northeast Asia. For this, it takes identity as a variable, as used in the constructivist and post-structuralist approach, to explain the absence of a multilateral security institution in Northeast Asia. The thesis argues that the national identity as a Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean creates a deep cleavage among nations and proves to be an obstacle to creating a region-wide collective identity and thus has proved as an impediment to the formation of a regional security arrangement. The idea of self-perception of each state will be mapped through the rhetoric on nationalism in each state vis-à-vis other states in the region. The existing scholarly work that looks at the security regime in the region using identity as a variable has used the US as a focus point. The argument that it posed was that the emergence of the “Hub and Spokes”⁵ system in the region has been due to the narrower identity gap between the US and Japan, S. Korea and Taiwan, while with China and North Korea, the gap was wider. Therefore, the research also aimed to work as an intervention to the existing literature on the subject, which has been focused on the Western perspective of collective identity in the region. The research argues that even if one excludes the US, a multilateral alliance between the countries of the region had not been possible due to the ‘distance’ in identity between the states themselves. The research employs Identity Distance Theory (IDT) as a theoretical framework of the thesis, and empirical examples are used to prove the theory. The study also argues the importance of correctness in demarcating sub-regional boundaries through a discussion on Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT).

⁴ Calder, K., & Ye, M. (2004). Regionalism and critical junctures: ‘Explaining the organization gap’ in Northeast Asia. *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 4(2), 191–226. doi:10.1017/S1598240800001818.

⁵ Cha, V. (2010). Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia. *International Security*, 34(3), 158-196. doi: 10.1162/isec.2010.34.3.158.

The existing IR literature explains the lack of a Northeast Asian security alliance from a neo-realist, liberal and constructive approach. The sub-field of security studies in International Relations (IR) has been dominated by the (neo-) realist understanding of international security. Moreover, the IR literature on East Asia in general and Northeast Asia, in particular, has been heavily influenced by the realist school⁶. The concept of Balance of Power is the core of realism; they argue that stability in the international sphere stems from equal distribution of power. Therefore, stability in world politics can be considered only in a Bipolar or Multipolar world. Thus, the Cold War in the region guaranteed stability, and the post-cold era was equally stable due to US hegemony. The realist argues that, with more than two states, the system is prone to conflict⁷. Therefore, northeast Asia “is multipolar, a configuration more prone to instability”⁸. China’s rise as a contending power is cited as the main reason that can cause a rupture in the existing international order in general and regional order in particular, thus causing conflict and a barricade to form a multilateral security institution⁹. Moreover, another vital narrative of the realist school of thought is that the states seek to maximise their national interest at all times and through all their actions.

The (neo-) liberal school of IR focuses on the peace fostered by economic integration. As argued, coordinated cooperation between nations is a byproduct of expanding economic interdependence¹⁰. Trade increases communication between trading partners, enhancing social links and mutual trust, leading to lesser chances of a conflict¹¹. For liberals, the formation of a

⁶ Choi, J. K., and Moon, C. (2010). Understanding Northeast Asian Regional Dynamics: Inventory Checking And New Discourses On Power, Interest, And Identity. *International Relations Of The Asia-Pacific*, 10 (2): 343-372. doi:10.1093/irap/lcq003.

⁷ Waltz, K. (2000). Structural Realism after the Cold War. *International Security*, 25(1), 5-41. doi: 10.1162/016228800560372.

⁸ Mearsheimer, J. (2001). The tragedy of great power politics. W.W.Norton & Company.

⁹ Gilpin, R. (1981) War and Change in World Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰ Keohane, R., & Nye, J. (1989). Power and interdependence. [New York]: Harper.

¹¹ Benson, B., & Niou, E. (2007). Economic Interdependence and Peace: A Game-Theoretic Analysis. *Journal Of East Asian Studies*, 7(1), 35-59. doi: 10.1017/s1598240800004847.

“community of security is based on two pre-conditions the region-wide spread of the free-market system, and the other is enlargement of democratic political structures”¹². This line of argument has used the formation of the European Union (EU) as a benchmark. The liberals argue that with an already established high level of economic integration, the Northeast Asian region will eventually follow suit.

The constructivist approach to analysing security studies in IR is relatively new compared to the liberal and realist approaches. The constructivist argument is based on ontology and epistemology. Their critique of neorealism and neoliberalism stems from the ignorance, in these schools, of ideational factors when analysing state behaviour. They argue that identity rather than power and economic interdependence proves to be a better analytical tool for understanding state behaviour. Alexander Wendt argues that “the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces”¹³. Further, he argues “that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature”¹⁴. Hemmer and Katzenstein’s work have been a significant contribution to this approach. They argue that for a formation of a multilateral alliance, a strong sense of collective identity is the most fundamental factor¹⁵. This argument is the departure point for the research undertaken in this work. However, the work of Hemmer and Katzenstein suffers from a gap that will be discussed in the next section.

¹² Choi, J. K., and Moon, C. (2010). Understanding Northeast Asian Regional Dynamics: Inventory Checking And New Discourses On Power, Interest, And Identity. *International Relations Of The Asia-Pacific*, 10 (2): 343-372. doi:10.1093/irap/lcq003.

¹³ Wendt, A. (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Hemmer, C., & Katzenstein, P. (2002). Why is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism. *International Organization*, 56(3), 575-607. doi: 10.1162/002081802760199890

The -isms and the literature discussed above suffer from some significant gaps. For realism and liberalism, the critique emanates from the constructivist school itself. First, both schools have been ignorant of taking social and ideational factors into account when presenting their analysis of state behaviour. Second, when a study of each school's discussion of the security situation in Northeast Asia is undertaken, it can be argued that the realist school suffers from *status quo* bias. Those in favour of maintaining US hegemony and the importance of US allies (Japan, S. Korea, and Taiwan) in the region argue in favour of the rise of China as a barricade to the formation of a multilateral system in the region. The reason, as stated above, is changing the region into a multipolar one, thus exuding instability. However, this line of argument has been contended on the basis that the region has been multipolar for a long time and the realist perspective is in favour of a US–Japan–Korea multipolar region because these states showcase sharing norms and political ideologies with the US. Therefore, the realist doubt vis-à-vis China's rise is based on China's lack of shared identity with the US and US allies rather than on the Balance of Power rationale. The lack of an alliance in the region is based on 'China's rise' because China does not share ideational factors with other US allies. Moreover, the realist argument tends to ignore the anti-Japanese sentiments present in the region. It has been a strong reason for the lack of alliance even between the democracies of the region.

The liberal analysis too suffers from a significant flaw; the volume of trade between the Northeast Asian nations is quite high, with China being the largest trading partner of most of the states in the region. However, economic interdependence has not translated into a formation of a multilateral security institution in the region. It is further argued that whatever little progress has been made in terms of constant dialogues and policy networks among the states has been due to a major ideational shift¹⁶. "Diffusion of liberal democracy and market economy

¹⁶ Alagappa, M. (1998). *Asian Security Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

cannot heal the past scars of colonial domination and subjugation. Shared traumatic memories have shaped opposing collective identities, which have led to antagonistic forms of nationalism”¹⁷.

The constructivist analysis provides a general critique of the neorealist and neoliberal approach to security in Northeast Asia. Therefore, the basis of the research undertaken here is the constructivist theory. The gap discussed in this section is not so much of the theory but the most crucial research work done using the theory. The position of Hemmer and Katzenstein can be problematised on two bases. First, the work questions the US-led bilateral security arrangement of the Asia-Pacific formed during the Cold war era. They argue that the gap between the shared identity of the US and Asian allies was large. Hence, the US adopted a bilateral system of alliance famously known as the ‘Hub and Spokes’ system in the region, contrary to a multilateral NATO formed in Europe. However, the rationale of identity has been looked at from the US perspective. “Missing from the picture is any consideration of the norms and collective identities of the Asians themselves and intra-regional interactions in shaping the prospects for a regional security organisation in post-war Asia”¹⁸. The other issue that the work faces is the that it “appears to fail to pay attention to the issue of sub-regional disaggregation and differentiation”. Hemmer and Katzenstein’s work does not have a clear geographical understanding of what constitutes Northeast Asia. The importance of defining the geographical region accurately will be further discussed in Chapter 1.

The research undertaken here focuses on filling the gaps that each of these schools of IR and literature suffers from. Therefore, rather than a critique, the research is an attempt to add to the

¹⁷ Choi, J. K., and Moon, C. (2010). Understanding Northeast Asian Regional Dynamics: Inventory Checking And New Discourses On Power, Interest, And Identity. *International Relations Of The Asia-Pacific*, 10 (2): 343-372. doi:10.1093/irap/lcq003.

¹⁸ Acharya, A. (2005). Why Is There No NATO in Asia?’ The Normative Origins of Asian Multilateralism. Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, 05.

plethora of work done on the subject. This is because this research, in agreement with scholars such as Thomas Berger, believes that for the analysis of this region, “exclusive reliance on one or the other approach to analyse the real world leads to a myopic perception of the dynamics that are actually at play. A more comprehensive effort to analyse interstate affairs should view these approaches as complementary, as opposed to mutually exclusive”¹⁹.

As discussed above, the departure point for the thesis is— a strong sense of collective identity is a precursor to the formation of a multilateral institution. The thesis aims to answer the research question: What explains the lack of a regional security bloc in Northeast Asia? Can a constructivist approach explain the absence? The research will analyse the pattern of national identity formation in China, Korea, and Japan. The identity will be treated in terms of ‘self’ versus ‘other’, other being the different countries in the region.

A detailed discussion on identity and how it will be treated in the research will be provided in Chapter 1. The thesis will employ three methods of research— First, Case studies, using case studies of episodes of heightened tension such as the South China Sea and East China Sea crisis and its coverage by media of respective countries. Second, Text analysis of speeches and interviews by political elites and diplomats over such disputes. Third, analysis of Chinese social media, during relatively peaceful times, will be conducted to inquire into a general discussion among the population vis-à-vis each country. I survey the Chinese social media platform *Weibo* to map out the discussion on Japan and S. Korea in the Chinese society. The conclusion brought through the study of *Weibo* is based on a two weeks analysis (one week in May and another in April). The social media was searched for simple terms— *Riben* (日本), for Japan and *Hanguo*

¹⁹ Berger, T. (2000). Set for stability? Prospects for conflict and cooperation in East Asia. *Review Of International Studies*, 26(3), 405-428. doi: 10.1017/s0260210500004058.

(~~韩国~~), for South Korea. Examples of the type of posts are provided for better understanding.

For the analysis of rhetoric on nationalism in mainstream media, the research uses the newspaper articles in Global Times, *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) and *Xinhua* net; this will be used as a material for both Case Study and Text analysis. Example of discussion in mainstream will also be provided. The examples in each case (social media and mainstream media) is provided if there is a large quantity of post and articles with similar content and thus forms a pattern. The research will also use statements and white papers released on government websites. The research pays special attention to the Chinese perspective, in terms of collecting and analysing first-hand data, for two important reasons; first, there has already been research on this topic, but it has been done from a Japanese perspective, therefore as China becomes the most important country in the region in this decade, a particular focus must be given to it. Second, the researcher is adept with the Chinese language and can collect first-hand data from the sources. For the analysis of identity formation in Japan and Korea, the research depends on secondary data such as surveys conducted by various research centers.

The empirical study undertaken in this research can add to the work of scholars such as Choi and Moon, which has provided a rich theoretical understanding of the subject matter but is devoid of empirical examples. A discussion using the analysis of empirical material will be provided in detail in Chapter 2. Due to the language barrier, the research has not been able to analyse Japanese and Korean social media and thus has some gaps in the work, which can be filled by future research. Similarly, for speeches too, the research has relied on English translations of the texts.

Northeast Asia is both –the most significant and one of the most ‘unstable’ regions in the world. The region is home to some of the biggest economies in the world; the region holds a massive \$27.5 trillion in nominal GDP and is home to 20.5% of the total world population. Moreover,

even though there has not been a massive blowout after the Korean War. However, “Not only does the region house some of the world’s largest and increasingly sophisticated armies, but it also includes key geopolitical hotspots such as the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait”²⁰. Therefore, it is crucial to analyse this region for being significant, both geopolitically and economically, for any crisis in this region can have a tremendous worldwide impact. Moreover, the region also proves to be an excellent case study as an antithesis for major theories such as the Democratic Peace Theory. A broader discussion on the region and its importance and the need to study it will be provided in Chapter 1.

The structure of the thesis is divided into Introduction, which includes a brief idea about the subject, a literature review, a research methodology, and the research topic. The following section is—Chapter 1, which deals with major definitions of identity and how it would be treated in the research, an introduction to security in general, a subsequent section which would provide detail on the relationship between identity and security in general and vis-a-vis Northeast Asia in particular, and the last section on the introduction of the theory that would be used for the research—Identity Distance Theory (IDT). Chapter 2 provides a background on the region of Northeast Asia, and the analysis of empirical study that was conducted for the research will be provided. The chapter through empirical analysis tries to prove IDT and its usage for the security studies in Northeast Asia. The thesis ends with a conclusion and a bibliography.

²⁰ Pempel, T., & Lee, C. (2012). *Security cooperation in Northeast Asia*. London: Routledge.

Chapter 1

Level of Analysis, Definitions and Theoretical Approach

The chapter employs Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) in order to argue the necessity to demarcate the geographical sub-regional boundaries concretely. Further, the chapter discusses the concepts of identity and security. The last section discusses the Identity Distance Theory, which the thesis will try to prove through the empirical study in chapter 2.

1.1 Defining Northeast Asia

The level of analysis taken for the research is regional; this is because there has been scholarly work on the security regime of the Northeast Asian region using leaders, states, systems and the international arena as the level of analysis. However, there is a shortage of literature which uses the region of Northeast Asia as a level of analysis because, as pointed above, most literature does not pay attention to the disintegration and differentiation of sub-regions in Asia, i.e., there is no convergence in terms of which countries constitute the Northeast Asian region.

The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) describes the importance of using a region as a level of analysis when looking at the security situation in a geographical area. It posits that international security must be analysed from a regional perspective. This is because “all the states in the system are enmeshed in a global web of security interdependence...The normal pattern of security interdependence in a geographically diverse anarchic international system

is one of the regionally-based clusters, which we label regional security complexes (RSCs)”²¹. Further, Buzan argues that “the formative dynamics and structure of an RSC are generated by the states within it: by their security perceptions of, and interactions with, each other”²² therefore, the analysis of security situation in a particular sub-region must be based on the study of the interaction between states that constitutes one RSC. Taking the whole of Asia as a level of analysis or even juxtaposing two sub-regions of the Asian continent results in a faulty analytical outcome.

Furthermore, “regions are not just material constructs but also ideational ones”²³, and intra-regional identity, especially those formed by historical processes, is different in each region. Additionally, Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde have also argued that each region or a sub-region has a distinctive ontological sense²⁴ that it seeks to save more often than not from the states in its geographical proximity. Therefore, it can be well concluded that region and, in this case, sub-region, proves to be a more suitable level of analysis as it serves as a case to study the interaction between different states of a region, that forms the self-perception or identity of each state vis-à-vis other states and thus can help us testify formulation by constructivists, of international social structures in terms of enemies, rivals and friends ²⁵,but on a regional level. Northeast Asia proves to be an appropriate case study for this, even though this region, in most scholarly work, is treated as an *overlay*²⁶ ; however, this research, through its empirical

²¹ Buzan, B. (2003). Regional Security Complex Theory in the Post-Cold War World. In F. Söderbaum, *Theories of Regionalism*. Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited.

²² Ibid.

²³ Acharya, A. (2011). Asia Is Not One: Regionalism and the Ideas of Asia. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 69 (4): 1001–1013.

²⁴ Buzan, B., Waever, O., & Wilde, J. (1997). Security: A New Framework for Analysis. *International Journal*, 53(4), 798. doi: 10.2307/40203739.

²⁵ Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

²⁶ “*Overlay* means that one or more external powers move directly into the regional complex with the effect of suppressing the indigenous regional security dynamic”.

examples, proves that there is an indigenous security dynamic (devoid of the US) in the region that is based on historical animosity.

Northeast Asia was the region where the Cold war turned into the Hot War (Korean War 1950-1953). However, the region was treated as being peripheral in its importance. Currently, the region is home to some of the world's largest economies (China, Japan and ROK), with a high volume of intra-regional trade. It also constitutes the world's most populous country—China, which is also the world's second-largest economy in terms of nominal GDP and the largest in terms of PPP. The region proved to be a dynamo of the world economy, especially after its miraculous performance during the 2008 financial crisis²⁷. Although there hasn't been a full-blown war in the region since the Korean War, "the region is still grappling with historical and territorial disputes"²⁸. There have been low-intensity conflicts in the region, e.g., the South China Sea and the East China Sea conflicts. However, even with the absence of any major conflict, the region is considered one of the world's most unstable regions due to several flashpoints. Lee and Pempel write, "one of the most vexing and consequential security challenges confronting Greater Asia and the world in the early twenty-first century lies in co-shaping and forecasting the evolution of its most dynamic, powerful, and historically discordant sub-region—Northeast Asia"²⁹.

The mainstream theories in IR *inter alia* neorealism, liberal institutionalism, and neo-functionalism fail to fully answer the region's lack of a multilateral security regime.

²⁷ Asia's Recovery Highlights China's Ascendance. (2009). Retrieved 3 June 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/24/business/global/24global.html>.

²⁸ Northeast Asia | Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. (2022). Retrieved 3 June 2022, from <https://dppa.un.org/en/northeast-asia>.

²⁹ Pempel, T., & Lee, C. (2012). *Security cooperation in Northeast Asia*. London: Routledge.

Moreover, the relations in the region prove to be an antithesis of dominant IR theories such as Democracy Peace Theory³⁰, which argues that democracies “comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international, relations”³¹, the example for this is the fraught relation between Japan and ROK. Further, some of the most influential concepts that define alliance formation, such as Common Threat Perception, also fail to determine the absence of, if not multilateral, then at least a trilateral alliance between the US–Japan–ROK (Soviet Union and recently China). Lastly, the region has dramatically shifted from a passive sub-system defined by the international system and great power rivalry to a region with its own character and security dynamics. Along with those outlined in the introduction, the reasons above prove that Northeast Asia is a fitting case for analysis for studying regional security regimes.

“The name ‘East Asia’ itself began to gain traction due to the dynamic economic growth shown in particular countries of the region since the 1970s. Until then, the region had been just a geographic concept used and defined mainly by the Europeans”³². When looked at geographically, East Asia is a region which comprises two sub-regions, Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. However, in the cite work it is unclear if ‘East Asia’ denotes the whole East Asian region or if it is used to denote the Northeast Asian sub-region. However, it can be inferred from this that the Western literature employs orientalism when demarcating the non-western regions.

The Northeast Asian sub-region is defined as the geographical area encompassing China, Japan, two Koreas (ROK and DPRK), and Taiwan (although Taiwan is not designated with the

³⁰ The Democracy Peace Theory argues that democracies do not have conflictual relation with each other and have a rather peaceful relation.

³¹ Choi, A. (2003). The Power of Democratic Cooperation. *International Security*, 28(1), 142-153. doi: 10.1162/016228803322428009.

³² Kim, K. (1998). East Asia and the world system theory. *Journal Of Spiritual Culture Studies*, 21(1), 27-45.

status of a state by the UN, its presence still proves to be a defining feature of the region), and Mongolia. A significant drawback of the literature on Northeast Asia is the failure to determine the geographical region accurately. The fallacy in defining the sub-region leads to errors in analysing the security situation in the region. Choi and Moon argue that Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Asia-Pacific have been used interchangeably and without any qualifications³³ in the existing literature. Their comment on the blurring of geographical focus by most scholars, working on the subject, provides a comprehensive analysis of the importance of concreteness in defining the region. Their critique is based on Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde's argument that "a loose definition of region and sub-region is bound to produce serious analytical flaws because a region or sub-region bears its distinctive ontological meaning as a unit of analysis"³⁴. Thus, with its distinctive history, which serves as a basis for understanding the region even in the 21st century, Northeast Asia is a sub-region that needs to be looked at as a separate geographical focus and must not be merged with other regions such as Southeast Asia.

1.2 Understanding Identity in IR

Constructivism and Poststructuralism argue in favour of the importance of identity in international politics. Ruggie contends that even the post-WWII of the international structure was a result of the identities of the dominant states³⁵. Not only the international system but also the security alliance (defining feature of the Cold War era) during the Cold War period was a result of solidarity based on identity among states. Constructivism argues that identity is not objective but rather intersubjectively construed. Since it is now common knowledge that

³³ Choi, J. K., and Moon, C. (2010). Understanding Northeast Asian Regional Dynamics: Inventory Checking And New Discourses On Power, Interest, And Identity. *International Relations Of The Asia-Pacific*, 10 (2): 343-372. doi:10.1093/irap/lcq003.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ruggie, J. (2004). *Constructing the World Polity*. London: Taylor & Francis Inc.

nation-states are ‘imagined’³⁶, the unitary narrative of what constitutes Japan, China or Korea is created intersubjectivity through an amalgamation of how a state defines itself in absolute terms and how it perceives itself vis-à-vis the other. Constructivists also argue that “cultural phenomena are just as objective, just as constraining, just as *real* as power and interest”³⁷. The Northeast Asian case proves to be an apt example of how cultural phenomena constrain the states in forming an alliance.

Poststructuralism also focuses on identity in defining international politics. It argues that the sense of ‘self’ is created through the actors as the way they perceive and define themselves, but also by the ‘other’. Therefore, each ‘self’ needs an ‘other’ against which it is fully developed³⁸. Similar is the case with ‘state identity’³⁹. Thus, both approaches provide a basis for understanding the security situation in the Northeast Asian sub-region. The importance of identity in understanding state action and preference as well as regional dynamics is proved in the research through empirical examples.

Collective Identity

The research will employ the idea of collective identity, which is analysed on two levels—National (state) and regional. The thesis argues that because the strong national identity in the Northeast Asian region is based on ‘self’ versus ‘other’, it proves a hurdle in forming collective identity on a regional level.

National level: this type of identity is formed between individuals who share collective history, shared norms, and culture and are said to inhabit a clearly defined territory, i.e., the state. Liu

³⁶ Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities*. London: Verso.

³⁷ Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

³⁸ Neumann, I. (1999). *Uses of other*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

³⁹ Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics. *International Organization*, 46(2), 391-425. doi: 10.1017/s0020818300027764.

and Turner write, “national identity refers to the identity of the citizens of a country with their own country’s historical and cultural traditions, moral values, ideals, beliefs, national sovereignty, and so on. It is manifested as individuals or groups believe that they belong to a country as a political community,”⁴⁰ e.g., one’s identity as a Chinese, South Korean or Japanese. Further, “collective memory of the past becomes a critical component in national identity formation and can escalate conflicts between nations that have experienced histories of violent trauma”⁴¹, which is essentially the case with Northeast Asian states. The collective memory is both from the perspective of the preparator and the victim and is treated differently by each and thus, “divided memories of past trauma between the transgressor and the transgressed can lead to a memory war and perpetuate the conflict” e.g., the difference between the way past trauma of atrocities committed by Imperialist Japan is evaluated from the Japanese perspective on the one hand and by China and Korea on the other. Among both types of identities analysed for the research, this variant is micro.

Regional identity: “Regional identity is a kind of spatial identity on a certain scale called the meso-level. Regional identity is located between the national and the local level”⁴². Regional identity is formed by the convergence of values, norms, and political systems among the states inhabiting that region. Within a specific geographical region, there is regional as well as the sub-regional identity, e.g., identifying oneself as an Asian as well as a Southeast Asian. Most importantly, it must be noted that “Co-presence is not really necessary to establish that feeling of togetherness”⁴³, which is essentially the case in the Northeast Asian sub-region.

⁴⁰ Liu, Q., & Turner, D. (2018). Identity and national identity. *Educational Philosophy And Theory*, 50(12), 1080-1088. doi: 10.1080/00131857.2018.1434076.

⁴¹ Shibata, R. (2018). Identity, Nationalism and Threats to Northeast Asia Peace. *Journal Of Peacebuilding & Development*, 13(3), 86-100. doi: 10.1080/15423166.2018.1516157.

⁴² Pohl, J. (2001). Regional Identity. In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*.

⁴³ Ibid.

Identity in Northeast Asia: Confucianism serves as a basis for Northeast Asian identity. It is argued that the East Asian identity was based on a stable relation corresponding to the “Confucian We-ness”⁴⁴. Moreover, the spread and followers of Buddhism are a common factor that forms the identity of the region. The sub-region, however, does not have a ‘regional identity’ per se. The multilateral integration of the sub-region did not move from economic integration to a socio-political one. The presence of several conflicts, majority of which are based on ideational factors, prevented the integration from transcending the boundary of the economic sphere. Nawrot points out, “It would appear that the region’s countries have been distracted from building a single effective bloc by their involvement in numerous overlapping negotiations. The numerous bilateral disputes, which have dissipated the goodwill and trust needed to build integration, only serve to emphasize the point”⁴⁵. What is also important to note here is that the national identity of one state in this region is formed against the distrust, and suspicion against the other state, e.g., Chinese identity is formed based on both belonging to the territory of China as well as through anti-Japanese sentiments present in the Chinese society. The lack of mutual trust and a strong sense of nationalist identity results in the absence of a sense of region-wide collective identity, which in turn prevents the formation of a multilateral security bloc. Therefore, contrary to the discussion on the wide identity gap between the US and its Asian allies, which resulted in bilateral security arrangements in the region in the post-Cold War era, it was the Asian countries that rejected the collective defence in the region and continue to do so⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ Kelly, R. (2011). A ‘Confucian Long Peace’ in pre-Western East Asia?. *European Journal Of International Relations*, 18(3), 407-430. doi: 10.1177/1354066111409771.

⁴⁵ Nawrot, K. (2020). Does Confucianism promote cooperation and integration in East Asia?. *International Communication Of Chinese Culture*, 7(1), 1-30. doi: 10.1007/s40636-020-00173-2.

⁴⁶ Acharya, A. (2005). Why Is There No NATO in Asia?’ The Normative Origins of Asian Multilateralism. Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, 05.

1.3 Understanding Security

Scholars of constructivism argues that the states seek to ensure both physical and ontological security, i.e., the safety of self and self-conception vis-à-vis others. With a high level of mutual distrust, the states in Northeast Asia aim at safeguarding the ‘self’—both physical and ontological. The region includes some major flashpoints—the Korean peninsula, Taiwan Strait, South China Sea, etc. Therefore, the Northeast Asian region is home to some of the world’s largest armies that possess some of the most sophisticated weapons⁴⁷. Apart from this, the states also seek ontological security vis-à-vis others. Neumann points out that “human collectives such as nation-states forge their identities by offsetting the collective against other entities”⁴⁸, such is the case in this region, with identities formed through anti-Japanese sentiments (in China and S. Korea) and anti-Chinese sentiments (in Japan and S. Korea). Thus, by default, the states seek to safeguard the ‘self’ against which their identities are formed. Wæver puts forth the response that states seek in preserving themselves; he argues that states are engaged in “defending culture with culture, and consequently, culture becomes security policy”⁴⁹, and eventually, it takes the form of Cultural Nationalism. The Northeast Asian states are quintessential nations that have, over the years, witnessed an increased sense of Cultural Nationalism.

1.4 Relation between Identity and Security

Constructivism provides an argument in favour of the relation between identity and security. It argues that the growth of shared identity among states is directly proportional to the pacifist

⁴⁷ Largest armies in the world by personnel 2020 | Statista. (2022). Retrieved 31 May 2022, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264443/the-worlds-largest-armies-based-on-active-force-level/>.

⁴⁸ Neumann, I. (1999). *Uses of other*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

⁴⁹ Wæver, O., & Carlton, D. (1993). *Identity, migration and the new security agenda in Europe*. London: Pinter.

relation between them⁵⁰. Their argument is based on the concept of ‘Security Community’ put forward by Karl Deutsch⁵¹. It argues that a group that is created based on a shared identity can lead to the development of mutual expectation for a peaceful resolution, diminish the chances of conflict, and thus provide security to the states. The lack of mutual trust and high scepticism among nations of Northeast Asia prevents the formation of a security community. It is not to say that to eliminate the security dilemma, the states cannot come together to form a community. However, in this case, the complexity is increased by the fact that first, such a move will affect the legitimacy of the regime in the domestic sphere, and second, the involvement of the US in the region. Another aspect of the security-identity dynamic is to secure what is threatened. In this case, the identity as a Chinese, Japanese, or Korean would be threatened if the identity as a Northeast Asian were put forward; this is, however, not peculiar to Northeast Asia, and we have witnessed episodes such the Brexit, which was highly influenced by the threat to identity as a British. Similar is the case in Northeast Asia, e.g., the Japanese concept of *Nihonjinron* (Japaneseness) is based on racial homogeneity and purity and sees the Japanese race as higher than its neighbours. It is a popularly and positively accepted concept in Japanese society⁵² that will be threatened by the formation of such a multilateral community and hence affect the nationalist politics in the state.

1.5 Theoretical Approach

Identity Distance Theory

Identity Distance Theory (IDT) is put forth by Johnston and Ryu and deals with the external dimension of social identity. “In IDT, what matters is not the role conception of the actor, but

⁵⁰ Adler, E., & Barnett, M. (1998). *Security communities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵¹ Deutsch, K. (1954). *Political community at the international level*.

⁵² Befu, H. (2004). *Cultural nationalism in East Asia*. Berkeley: Inst. of East Asian Studies, Univ. of California.

the actor's perception of relevant outgroups in relation to her own ingroup"⁵³. The theory borrows heavily from sociology and psychology, especially the Social Identity Theory⁵⁴ (SIT). It states that intergroup conflict stems from a social comparison that maintains and reinforces one's self-esteem. One's identity is derived from the group it belongs to. Therefore, to maintain one's identity, the group members try to preserve the group's identity. This is done by creating positive differentiation between ingroup and outgroup members. The beliefs and norms held by the outgroup are consciously derogated to legitimise the ingroup's identity. The second theory which forms the basis of IDT is Contact Theory. As opposed to SIT, Contact Theory argues that social interaction can lead to intergroup cooperation. The IDT tries to juxtapose both the SIT and Contact Theory and formulated the concept of 'Identity distance'. "Identity distance refers to the degree to which members of the ingroup perceive the ingroup to be different from the relevant outgroup(s), and measure perceived psychological differences between groups"⁵⁵. The theory originally argues that "If the identity distance among the regional countries widens, then regional disputes are more likely to increase in number and intensity. In contrast, if the identity distance among the regional countries improves, then regional disputes are less likely to decrease in number and intensity"⁵⁶. Since the theory has been applied on a comparative study, it seeks to explain the increase and decrease in the amount of conflict in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. However, the research undertaken here uses the theory to look at how 'Identity distance' between states results in the absence of a multilateral security community in Northeast Asia. The subsequent chapter uses empirical examples from surveys of newspaper articles and speeches of political elites as well as of

⁵³ Ryu, Y. (2011). *Identity and Security: Identity Distance Theory and Regional Affairs in Northeast and Southeast Asia* (PhD). Harvard University.

⁵⁴ Tajfel, H.; Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behaviour. In S. Worchel; W. G. Austin (eds.). *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall. pp. 7–24.

⁵⁵ Ryu, Y. (2011). *Identity and Security: Identity Distance Theory and Regional Affairs in Northeast and Southeast Asia* (PhD). Harvard University.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Chinese social media–*Weibo*, in order to prove the relevance of the theory in the Northeast Asian context.

Chapter 2

Northeast Asia and Its Identity Crisis

The chapter uses empirical study in support of IDT. Through the results of the empirical study, the different sections are providing an analysis of how identity in each state has been formed in the form of ‘self’ versus ‘other’. Since the ‘other’ in these cases are other states of the region, the chapter provides a testimony that because of the wide distance between ‘self’ and ‘other’, the IDT is proved to be true. Subsequently, it will be proved, through the empirical study, that since the national identity in the regions is based on nationalism and nationalism is based on anti- ‘other’ sentiments, regional identity and as a result, a regional security bloc seems implausible.

2.1 History of Northeast Asia

The sub-region of Northeast Asia has been defined by China’s tributary system, Confucius order, Japanese imperialism, WWII, decolonisation, Cold War, Japan’s decline, and China’s rise. “The regional order in [North] East Asia has emerged from 2,000 years of Chinese hegemony, followed by 100 years of Japanese hegemony, and is currently experiencing a situation in which China is attempting to restore its hegemonic position.”⁵⁷

It is essential to understand the history of the region because, even though there has been improvement in the relationship between states in recent years, the sub-region has a ‘history problem’ and thus suffers from a ‘history spiral’ which “is likely to remain a fixture of

⁵⁷ Nam-Kook, K. (2016). *Trust Building and Regional Identity in Northeast Asia*. Presentation, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI).

Northeast Asia's international politics owing to the region's changing strategic order"⁵⁸. The Cold War era began following WWII and the Northeast Asian region underwent a paradigm shift during this period. The sub-region was divided between the communist and capitalist camps. However, the critical characteristic of the impact of the Cold War in the sub-region is that the focus of the states (not only China and South Korea but also Japan) in the region shifted from the misdeeds of Japanese imperialism to new enemies—Taiwan or ROC and the US for China and temporary 'partners'—Japan for South Korea⁵⁹. However, as the Cold War came to an end, the states were faced with the issue of domestic legitimacy (China), a national identity crisis (Japan) and the growth of a new civil society and a search for a National identity (S. Korea), this gave rise to the re-emergence of re-remembering WWII history by elites and the population in these countries. The sparking of nationalism in these countries had much to do with domestic politics. Moreover, as Evelyn Goh out points, that the end of Cold War also led to the demise of the "strategic imperative" that bonded Japan, Korea and China against the USSR⁶⁰. What is important to note here is that a common threat does not lead to the formation of a long-lasting strategic partnership or alliance, and for any sort of alliance to stay, the ideational factor plays an important role.

In complete contrast to the socio-political situation in the region, economic integration progressed in full swing. There have been various Tripartite summits and meetings which have been institutionalised in the region to foster economic intra-regional cooperation. "These three powerful engines of the global economy have interlocked themselves and produced a very condensed 'natural' trading zone without much artificial arrangements critical to each state's

⁵⁸ King, A., & Taylor, B. (2015). Northeast Asia's New 'History Spiral'. *Asia & The Pacific Policy Studies*, 3(1), 111-119. doi: 10.1002/app5.123.

⁵⁹ Mitter R. (2003). Old Ghosts, new Memories: China's Changing War History in the era of Post-Mao Politics. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38(1).

⁶⁰ Goh E. (2013). *The Struggle for Order: Hegemony, Hierarchy, and Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

economic development”⁶¹. The region’s elites decided on peace and adopted economic development over conflict.

Japan was involved in several wars and took over a massive territory under its rule. At the height of Japan’s imperialist rule, Japanese territory was made of *inter alia* Korean Peninsula and most of China’s coastal area. The empire came to an end after Japan’s defeat in WWII. Following that, the Tokyo War Crime Tribunal⁶² was held. It was a military trial held to try the Japanese emperor for war crimes and a crime against humanity. The Tokyo Trial was supposed to solve the ‘history problem’ that the sub-region was facing; however, the trials ended with punishing Japan for its atrocities against the western world and the Asian countries, including China and Korea, which were the primary victim of Japan’s crime were not represented. Thus, the ‘history problem’ was not solved. Issues including but not limited to Yasukuni Shrine, comfort women, conflicts over rocks and islets, and school textbooks which will be discussed in subsequent sections, have been present in the sub-region and act as a base on which ‘history spiral’ works in the sub-region.

Although being treated as a subsidiary and peripheral during the great power rivalry during the Cold War, the era shaped the dynamics in the region, which are present till now. The strategic interaction between US and USSR thus formed the geopolitical destiny of the region. The two most essential episodes were the division at the 38th Parallel, the division of the Korean Peninsula between the communist and the capitalist camp, and the subsequent Korean war, which made the reunification of the Korean Peninsula inevitable. Moreover, the area is now a

⁶¹ Choi, J. K., and Moon, C. (2010). Understanding Northeast Asian Regional Dynamics: Inventory Checking And New Discourses On Power, Interest, And Identity. *International Relations Of The Asia-Pacific*, 10 (2): 343-372. doi:10.1093/irap/lcq003.

⁶² UN Repository. (2022). Retrieved 6 June 2022, from https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.3_1946%20Tokyo%20Charter.pdf

significant flashpoint in the region and accounts for the unstable security situation of Northeast Asia. Second, what evolved in this region during the Cold War was the defining ‘Hub and Spokes system’ led by the US. This system was in sharp contrast with the multilateral system that NATO is based on. The system, which is still in place, has made the Northeast Asian region one of the most militarised zones in the world and has been instrumental in preventing the formation of a multilateral security alliance.

Pohl argues that ‘Regional identity is grounded in the regional history’⁶³. In the case of Northeast Asia, history is rooted in hatred, animosity and enmity and thus plagued by the ‘history problem’. Therefore, forming a regional identity in this region has been implausible.

2.2 China’s understanding of the region and other states

Known officially as PRC, China’s perspective on the region is based on the China-led 2000-year hegemonic Confucian order. For China, it was the Middle Kingdom and thus the name *Zhongguo*. Chinese government see the region through the prism of the Tributary system, with China as the main focus and other countries being its vassal⁶⁴. However, starting of Japan’s modernisation after the Meiji Restoration and the eventual demise of the Qing dynasty in China finally reversed the Confucian order. The Cold War witnessed China’s changing relations with the US and USSR. China’s relationship with its neighbours in the Modern period started after Deng Xiaoping decided to end China’s 30 years of isolation.

Interestingly, Taiwan and Japan were the first countries to normalise relations with China after the infamous Tiananmen Square massacre⁶⁵. Both the countries realised the economic

⁶³ Pohl, J. (2001). Regional Identity. In *International Encyclopaedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences*.

⁶⁴ Kelly, R. (2011). A ‘Confucian Long Peace’ in pre-Western East Asia?. *European Journal Of International Relations*, 18(3), 407-430. doi: 10.1177/1354066111409771.

⁶⁵ Bader, J. (2005). China’s Role in East Asia: Now and the Future. Retrieved 7 June 2022, from <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/chinas-role-in-east-asia-now-and-the-future/>.

opportunities China had to offer, and these countries took advantage of the Chinese market. At the same time, China used its neighbours to end its isolation in the international system.

With the end of the Cold War and the subsequent Tiananmen Square incident, another critical issue emerged; the declining domestic legitimacy of the CCP. To sustain its legitimacy, China encouraged and allowed to flourish the anti-Japanese sentiments in the society that were subdued during the Cold War period. Thus, China's image of 'self' has been formed through anti-Japanese sentiments and Korea as a tributary.

The current rise of China led to the emergence of new phenomena vis-à-vis China's identity, which are interrelated. First is the return of China's understanding of looking at the Northeast Asian region through a Confucian paradigm and working towards regaining China's actual place in the international and regional system. Second, this gave rise to 'China threat' rhetoric among its neighbours. Third, the rhetoric on 'China Threat' gave rise to the rhetoric of 'peaceful rise of China'⁶⁶ by the Chinese political elites. This is in tandem with Wendt's idea that a country's identity is imperative in terms of how the global system perceives the states as well as how other states respond to it⁶⁷. Therefore, China's identity as a 'socialist democracy' or the rhetoric of the 'peaceful rise of China' has everything to do with forming a positive identity of oneself to be treated positively by the global system and the countries. Moreover, as argued earlier, a state's identity is an amalgamation of how it perceives itself as well as how others perceive it. This rhetoric on China's threat and the subsequent rhetoric on China's peaceful rise exemplifies this.

⁶⁶ White Paper: China's Peaceful Development. Retrieved 7 June 2022, from <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cein/eng/zt/peaceful/t855717.htm>.

⁶⁷ Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

China-Japan

Japan has been a regional hegemon for many years, and its status has been challenged and taken over by China. Thus, although not an all-out conflict, strain in bilateral relations has increased.

Through an analysis of Chinese social media *Weibo*, which was conducted for this research, it was gathered that a single search on 日本 (Japan) had majorly two types of posts⁶⁸. First, the posts regarding textbooks, education and the influence of western as well as Japanese culture on China. These posts thoroughly depict the anti-Japanese sentiments present in Chinese society. To provide an example, one such post said, “I feel that Japanese people can come for a visit, can come for a tour, can buy a house in China; however, no matter how much money they give out, they cannot build schools. Things that interfere with our culture and education cannot be allowed to take place. This is China’s threshold, which is being crossed. Compatriots, unite and stand up and make them return. We must walk forward for this”⁶⁹. There are many such posts on social media site. Second, there are positive posts, but most of them are related to Japanese scenery, food, and tourism. A post on *Weibo* mentioned, “Be sure to go to the Japanese summer festival fireworks display.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ It is important to mention that the social media accounts that were analysed were unverified accounts and did not belong to Chinese official newspapers, media outlets, ministries or any government official. This was done in order to understand the image of Japan in the eyes of common Chinese citizen.

⁶⁹ This is the translated version of the original post. The original post is “我覺得在華日本人可以觀光，可以旅遊，可以在中國買房，但是絕不允許他在這裡建他們自己的學校，給在多錢都不行，祇要涉及到文化，教育的事，都不行！這是中國的底線！！現在是底線沒了！國人應該團結起來讓他們滾回去，自己在自己家裡跑著學吧”. Retrieved from Weibo (posted on 2022-6-3).

⁷⁰ This is a translated version of the original post. The original post is “一定一定要去一次日本夏日祭烟火大会” (Retrieved from Weibo).

In the South China Sea conflict, Japan does not have a direct claim in the dispute; however, it was criticised by the Chinese political officials and diplomats. In 2016, China's ambassador to Japan (2010-2019), Cheng Yonghua answering a question by a Xinhua reporter, said Japan is "showing extraordinary concern for the issue, even though Japan is not a party to the dispute"⁷¹. Among several such reports and articles, a report published in 2016 in Xinhua says that since 2012, "Japan, by employing different tactics such as diplomacy, media publicity, law, external help, military affairs, etc., has developed a mechanism to encircle China from outside on the South China Sea dispute"⁷². The Japanese actions are in line with its 'China Threat' narrative, which feeds the domestic politics and crisis of National identity.

On the East China Sea, China and Japan are in direct dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. Both sides' dispute over which country has the historical claim over the Senkaku (in Japanese) and Diaoyu (in Chinese) islands⁷³. The claims on Diaoyu/Senkaku islands are more than merely territorial disputes. It aims at establishing historical narratives, especially the narrative on WWII. As soon as Japan purchased the islands, the Chinese government criticised Japan for not obeying international norms by defying the Cairo and Potsdam declarations⁷⁴. This had to do with China's attempt at delegitimising Japan as a rule-abiding nation. This dispute over

⁷¹ "南海问题应由当事国双边谈判解决" - 中华人民共和国驻日本大使馆. (2016). Retrieved 25 May 2022, from <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cejp/chn/tpxw/t1368014.htm>.

⁷² 日本想在南海扮演什么角色--六论南海仲裁案及南海问题-新华网. (2016). Retrieved 25 May 2022, from http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2016-07/04/c_1119161157.htm.

⁷³ 《钓鱼岛是中国的固有领土》白皮书（中文、日本語版、English edition). (2022). Retrieved 25 May 2022, from <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cgnigata/chn/zt/dydw/t973540.htm>.

⁷⁴ Xi slams Diaoyu 'purchase' - USA - Chinadaily.com.cn. (2012). Retrieved 24 May 2022, from <http://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201209/20/WS5a2f3814a3108bc8c6721d39.html>.

which country's narrative will prevail also plays a vital role in determining the regional order in Northeast Asia.

Further, the Chinese government recently hit back against Japan for hyping up the 'China threat' during Russia's attack on Ukraine. Zhao Lijian, a foreign ministry spokesperson, argues that Japan has been using the 'China threat' narrative to build up its army. This is an accusation that China has been making against Japan for a long time. Similar to this, during the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute, China accused Japan of consciously hyping the conflict to increase army buildup. As China grows in size and the power disparity between China and Japan decreases, Japan disavows Pacifism and continuously increases its military buildup⁷⁵. More than a decade ago, China was in a similar position and had been increasing military buildup because of China's distrust of Japan fuelled by the 'history problem'⁷⁶. These situations have led to the security dilemma being exacerbated in the sub-region. The military buildup of Japan has not only to do with China's increasing power but also with China's rise as a catalyst for aggravating Japan's National identity crisis. Other issues, such as Yasukuni Shrine, which remains a flashpoint for regional tension, are also a reason for creating a rift between Japan on the one hand and China and South Korea on the other.

China-Korea

China sees South Korea through the historical prism when Korea was a tributary of China. A similar analysis of *Weibo* on 韩国 (South Korea) reveals that three types of posts are frequent.

First, which are related to Korean beauty, dental implants and K-POP. Second, those related to the Goguryeo controversy serve as a reason for the 'history problem' for the China-ROK

⁷⁵ Lind, J. (2021). Japan must disavow pacifism for collective defence. Retrieved 7 June 2022, from <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/06/japan-must-disavow-pacifism-collective-defence>.

⁷⁶ Christensen TJ (1999). China, the U.S.–Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia. *International Security* 23(4), 49–80.

relations. The controversy involves not only China and ROK but also DPRK. The conflict is a dispute over whether Goguryeo was a Korean dynasty or a local minority regime of China. One could find several posts criticising dramas made on the Goguryeo dynasty. One such post read, “The Goguryeo is an ancient Chinese frontier regime. The drama actor looks Korean and has a Korean hairstyle and hairpins. Does this drama intend to say that the Goguryeo belonged to South Korea? The costumes, however, are of the Tang Dynasty in ancient China. Is the drama trying to distort Chinese history and trying to give up Chinese costume and frontier regime?”⁷⁷. The third kind of post often relates to South Korea-US relations and is highly critical of it. In the official discourse on South Korea, the ROK-US relations dominate the narrative. The newly elected South Korean leadership is pro-US, causing tension in China-ROK relations. China has warned that if the ROK leadership continues this trend, “it will go beyond the China-South Korea strategic and cooperative partnership to undermine China’s interests”⁷⁸.

The above discussion supports the Identity Distance Theory, as it provides how an amalgamation of ‘history problem’ and new issues created a wide ‘identity distance’ between China-Japan and China-Korea. This has been imperative for the absence of a regional identity, thus making the formation regional multilateral security bloc unlikely. Subsequent sections will showcase that not only China but Japan and Korea too harbours a similar feelings towards China as well as toward each other.

⁷⁷ This is the translated version of the original post. The original post is “高句丽是中国古代边疆政权找一个韩裔的演员并且还是韩国发型以及韩国发簪 请问剧方是打算把中国古代边疆政权高句丽送给韩国是吗？还有服饰这是中国古代唐朝服饰 请问剧方这是要歪曲历史把中国古代服饰文化以及中国古代边疆政权拱手相让吗”. Retrieved from Weibo (2022-1-29).

⁷⁸ South Korea's Alignment With US at Odds With China, Analysts Say. (2022). Retrieved 7 June 2022, from <https://www.voanews.com/a/south-korea-s-alignment-with-us-at-odds-with-china-analysts-say-/6599855.html>.

2.3 Japan's approach to the region and its neighbours

Japan's image in the sub-region has been built as a coloniser which has committed war crimes against the Chinese and Koreans. Japan is put in the same bracket as other white colonisers and imperialists. On the other hand, Japan's right-wing Nationalist politics tries to frame Japan as a victim of WWII. Japan view itself as racially and ethnically superior and pure to its neighbours and views the region through that lens.

Japan-China

Apart from Japanese imperialism, the Cold War security alliance, Japan's decline and China's economic and military rise serve as a basis for Sino-Japanese relations. The focus of the relationship is based on the interpretation of history, especially of WWII, and gaining legitimacy over the narrative both domestically and in the region. Pew Research conducted in 2016 gives out the Japanese's views of the Chinese. "Only 11% of the Japanese express a favourable opinion of China, while 14% of the Chinese say they have a positive view of Japan. In both countries, positive views of the other nation have decreased since 2006"⁷⁹. The views are related to stereotypes one nationality holds towards the other, which are based on the history of WWII. The research also found out that both Japan and China have a favourable view of other neighbours than they have of each other.

Japan-Korea

Further, "only 27% of Japanese express a favourable view of South Korea"⁸⁰. The negative of South Korea is based on ROK pressing the Japanese accepting greater responsibility for WWII war crimes committed by Japan, especially vis-à-vis 'comfort women'. Moreover, the visit of

⁷⁹ Hostile Neighbors: China vs. Japan. (2016). Retrieved 26 May 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/09/13/hostile-neighbors-china-vs-japan/>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Japanese officials to Yasukuni Shrine⁸¹ is also a point of contestation between Japan and South Korea. Another issue that plagued the relationship was revising the junior high school history textbook in 2001. Korea and China protested that even after 137 revisions (mainly due to backlash from China and Korea), the textbooks still do not sufficiently describe Japan's war crime. Several sections of the book include a distorted form of history⁸². Along with this, new conflicts such as the Dokdo/Takeshima islets dispute in the Sea of Japan have also worsened the relationship between the two democracies.

2.4 Korean perspective of Northeast Asia

Korea has been viewed as a 'Swing State' in the region. It has tried to balance between China—the US, and Japan. Among the three, South Korea is the weakest and thus sees both countries with suspicion (Japan more than China but with the changed leadership, the trend might change). Moreover, being a Middle Power, ROK has been trying to hedge between the great powers involved in the region. South Korea's reluctance to join QUAD is one of the ways in which it tries to balance itself between China and the US.

South Korea - China

South Korea and China have shared a relatively peaceful relationship since 1992, when they formally established diplomatic relations. However, in 2004 the relations suffered a light blow due to the Goguryeo controversy. In 2014 China built a Shrine in Harbin dedicated to the Korean independence activist Ahn Jung-geun⁸³. This was seen as an attack against Japan by both China and Korea. However, there is a limit to how cordial the relations can get. A survey

⁸¹ A shrine situated in Japan that commemorates Japanese WWII war dead, including war criminals.

⁸² Lee, M.-W. (2001). Textbook Conflicts and Korea-Japan Relations. *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 15(2), 421–446. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23255916>.

⁸³ Ahn Jung-geun regarded as an activist in Korea and criminal in Japan had killed four times Japanese Prime Minister Ito Hirobumi.

showed that as China put economic sanctions on South Korea after the deployment of THAAD, the South Korean views on China plummeted⁸⁴.

Moreover, there has been fresh controversy regarding the origin of *hanbok* and *Kimchi*. Koreans accuse China of passing Korean culture as their own. Further, much like in China, dramas in Korea which have been accused of Chinese style props and distorting Korean culture, have also been a part of the controversy⁸⁵. However, the North Korean angle serves as a need for South Korea to maintain an amicable relationship with China. Denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula has been the driving force of South Korean foreign policy. Since China is the only country that can influence North Korea's behaviour, ROK is interested in maintaining friendly relations with PRC. The strained relationship has also do with US-South Korea relations; the current pro-US leadership, which seems to be moving closer to the US and has also expressed its desire to join QUAD, can deteriorate the relations extensively.

South Korea – Japan

South Korea-Japan relations have also been highly strained, majorly due to Japan's role during WWII. The issue of 'comfort women'⁸⁶ still haunts the relationship. The Koreans believe that Japan has not acknowledged its crimes sufficiently, while Japan believes it has apologised for its crimes. Despite being democracies, the countries do not share a good relationship and thus falsify the Democracy Peace Theory.

⁸⁴ South Koreans Are Rethinking What China Means to Their Nation. (2022). Retrieved 25 May 2022, from <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/south-koreans-are-rethinking-what-china-means-their-nation>.

⁸⁵ Conran, P. (2021). Period K-drama axed amid fury at historical distortion, Chinese props. Retrieved 24 May 2022, from <https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/k-pop/k-drama/article/3127083/period-korean-drama-joseon-exorcist-cancelled-over-chinese>

⁸⁶ Comfort women were Asian women, majorly Korean, who were forced into sex slavery by the imperialists in Japan during WWII.

2.5 Analysis

Pempel and Lee note that “Northeast Asia stands out as a unique laboratory for world politics precisely because it simultaneously embodies, embraces, and seemingly falsifies these two contending schools of thought”⁸⁷. As discussed in the introduction, the realists and the liberal theories fail to define the region-wide trend vis-à-vis security in Northeast Asia. However, with its focus on identity, constructivist theory can grasp a region-wide trend more suitably. More specifically, it can be seen that the IDT theory, through the empirical study detailed above, can help understand the absence of a multilateral security institution in the sub-region. The distance between the states is already wide due to regional history, and the new problems created due to globalisation and the ‘history spiral’ have widened the distance even more. The national identity of each state is based on the othering of other states. Thus, a regional identity cannot be formed. What can also be pointed out through this is that the creation of identity based on ‘self’ and ‘other’ takes place in an upward fashion, i.e., the ‘othering’ of the state is done more when it is stronger than the ‘self’, China in the case of not only ROK but also Japan and Japan in case of both China and S. Korea. The region suffers from the ‘history problem’, which is here to stay and will be difficult to root out for it is a part of the identity as a Chinese, Japanese or Korean. It serves as a source of legitimacy to the regimes in the domestic sphere. Further, the nationalism in these regions works in both top-down and bottom-up approach and feeds into each other.

However, it must be understood that while identity as a variable can explain several aspects of the absence of a multilateral security alliance in the sub-region, it still cannot comprehensively grasp every aspect of this ‘Asian Paradox’ and application of other theories as well as the level

⁸⁷ Pempel, T., & Lee, C. (2012). *Security cooperation in Northeast Asia*. London: Routledge.

of analysis, which was beyond the scope of the undertaken research, is needed in order to understand the sub-region comprehensively.

Conclusion

The Northeast Asian sub-region has been called the “Asian Paradox” because it has a high level of economic integration, but that has not been translated into socio-political integration. Through the research, the thesis has argued that identity can explain the absence of a multilateral security institution in the region. The analysis employed the IDT and presented the empirical study in support of the theory. The thesis argued that the national identity of these countries is based on ‘self’ and ‘other’, and the othering of states is based on mutual distrust, animosity and enmity, which has been created by an amalgamation of ‘history problem’ as well new issues created by globalisation. Therefore, a regional identity cannot be created in Northeast Asia. And since collective identity is a precursor to multilateral blocs, an absence of a regional identity thus explains the absence of a multilateral security institution.

Another argument posed by the thesis is the necessity to demarcate and differentiate regions and sub-regions correctly. Through a discussion on RSCT, the thesis argued that with each sub-region having its RSC, wrongly demarcating sub-regions can lead to fallacy in analysis results. Therefore, Northeast Asia must be analysed as a separate sub-region and should not be juxtaposed with other sub-regions such as Southeast Asia.

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