

Deciphering the Trade War Between Japan and South Korea: How to Read the Geopolitics of Past, Present and Future in East Asia

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Following the failure to build up constructive talks, by claiming that this is an act of economic war either for the court's rulings or for the export restrictions, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and South Korean President Moon Jae-in respectively face citizenries whose misgivings about the other country are hardening. Taking into account the given circumstances, this study first examines what gave rise to the deadlock of current Japan-South Korea relations, and then explores how the media frame of war metaphor leads Japanese and South Korean people to act more like foes than friends. By doing so, the study also shows why it has been pessimistic over the Japan-South Korea relationship of trust from a post-cold war perspective.

1. INTRODUCTION

The war over trade between the United States and China, which account for about forty percent of global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018, continues to make a considerable impact on the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other existing multilateral trade-government systems. Since his inauguration on January 20, 2017, the global trade system has been overwhelmed by both words and actions by U.S. President Donald Trump for bilateral trade deals in place of multinational free trade agreements (FTA). Threatening to impose tariffs on cars imported into the U. S. market, Trump succeeded in replacing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) by a new pact, the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). Given the globe's interconnected supply chain, it is easy to understand that the latest escalation in the commercial confrontation between the two superpowers brings about the wider effects of uncertainty on the Asia-Pacific region and the rest of the world ("The twilight," 2019). Whereas the second largest power challenges to the U. S. economic and political dominance in world affairs, another trade war broke out in the region.

Following the failure to build up constructive talks, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and South Korean President Moon Jae-in respectively face citizenries whose misgivings about the other country are hardening. In the South Korean perspective, Tokyo has not sufficiently

acknowledged Japan's wartime wrongdoings on the Korean Peninsula. In the Japanese eyes, Seoul has fostered such historical animosity for domestic politics and constantly changed its demands for war restitution. In other words, Japan-South Korea talks over the recent past tend to be led more by emotion than by reason. This study first examines what gave rise to the current Japan-South Korea trade war in terms of public diplomacy, and then explores how the frame of war metaphor extended Japan-South Korea rows from the wartime forced-labor lawsuits to economic and national-security issues. By doing so, the study also shows how difficult it has been for the U.S. key allies against China's growing assertiveness and North Korea's nuclear armament in East Asia to rebuild their relationship of trust.

2. THE SPIRALING JAPAN-SOUTH KOREA TRADE WAR

The dynamics of public diplomacy takes into account how the national interests should be presented on the international scene because of its significant impact on the making of foreign policy. According to Jarol B. Manheim (1994), the emphasis can be characterized as addressing four distinctive aspects of diplomatic activities, (1) the traditional form of diplomacy (government-to-government contacts), (2) personal diplomacy (diplomat-to-diplomat

contacts), (3) one form of public diplomacy like cultural exchange designed to explain and defend government policies and to present the country to international audiences (people-to-people contacts), and (4) another form of public diplomacy designed to change public opinion in a second nation and to turn the foreign policy of the target nation to advantage (government-to-people contacts) (pp. 3-4). In the age of public diplomacy, international as well as bilateral relations must take a relatively new style of information management to determine how the country is perceived by others. For the sake of domestic political interests, the fourth phase makes a considerable impact on international power politics. In the face of international opinion, the government indeed recognizes the importance of managing the nation's perceptions that the government and the people of other countries hold.

A year after South Korea's Supreme Court ruling had ordered Japan's Nippon Steel and Sumitomo Metal to compensate their wartime forced labor, two plaintiffs filed an appeal with the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council. Not only more lawsuits involved the victims and their bereaved families follow suit in South Korea, but also the appeal to the UN addresses the forced-labor issue in the international community. These voices pressure Japan on changing its tough stance. The Japanese government has opposed any deal mandating war compensations as it goes against the Japan-South Korea Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Cooperation in 1965. Tokyo even cast doubts on how much Seoul is willing to compromise on such history issues. Whereas the conservative Abe administration is less willing to encourage the country's reckoning about Japan's wartime wrongdoings, the liberal Moon administration is less willing to take a more forward-looking, pragmatic approach toward Japan. Taking into account each domestic politics, the future of historical reconciliation will be pessimistic. In a broader geopolitical context, since the United States has maintained a low-key stance in current Japan-South Korea conflicts, the stalemate could have knock-on effects for the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific strategy.

On July 1, 2019, immediately after Prime Minister Abe Shinzō played the chair of the Group of 20 Summit in Osaka in confirming the promotion of free trade and anti-protectionism, not Foreign Affairs Minister Kōno Tarō, but

Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Sekō Hiroshige announced that Japan would tighten regulations on the export of three chemicals critical to South Korea's vast electronics industries from July 4, 2019 onward. This move was soon taken as a de facto *embargo* because it would likely strike a blow to the South Korean economy. In hopes to break the deadlock on history issues, on that very day, Japan released another export regulation to revise the ordinance to exclude South Korea from preferential treatment under the export control system from August 28, 2019 onward. At first, Tokyo insisted that the curb was a mere review of trade controls, and then claimed its vague, unspecified concerns about national security. In response, Seoul argued against the move as "a retaliatory measure defying common sense" in reference to its consideration of filing a case with the WTO ("Japan-South Korea," 2019). By calling for national security as a justification for cutting off trade, Japan devaluated the global rules designed to keep trade disputes from spiraling out of control.

In spite of defending its diplomatic strategies, i.e., stricter controls on exports to South Korea, for national security threats, Prime Minister Abe was dubbed a hypocrite in the international news coverage (Dooley, 2019; Kim & Lee, 2019, p. A3). In contrast, the national media highlighted his effort to assuage a series of South Korean explosive reactions with rancor to cancel plane tickets to Japan, to scratch Japanese-made cars, and to launch a boycott of Japanese goods. While labeling Japan's export controls as *economic sanctions*, President Moon stepped up safety measures starting with tourism, food and trade (Sim, 2019). He also decided to remove Japan from South Korea's list of trusted trading partners. As trade measures reflect the broken trust between the two countries, Tokyo and Seoul began accusing each other of having been uncooperative in reaching a diplomatic compromise.

At issue, as ever, are chronic historical grievances, specifically over Japan's annexation of Korea and the suffering inflicted on its people under the Japanese colonial occupation. Here language plays a central role in rebuilding Japan-South Korea relations by shaping the context in which Japanese and South Koreans fight about the past, the present and the future. At the moment when the potential for nuclear confrontations with North Korea and Iran is rising, the media frame of trade confrontation in

warfare has been symbolic. In the frame of war metaphor, both Prime Minister Abe and President Moon call for total victory. On the one hand, it is useful in concealing reality instead of representing it, in distorting the facts instead of describing them, and in omitting qualities and particulars instead of depicting them (Zarefsky, 1986, pp. 13-19; Macagno & Walton, 2014, p. 5; See also Bolinger, 1980). Tragically, on the other hand, the given frame in itself proves to be dysfunctional in working to the deteriorating relationship of trust in a cool-headed manner.

3. THE FRAME OF WAR METAPHOR

The rise of populism along with globalization spreads and strengthens unilateralism, xenophobia and protectionism in democratic countries, which also deepen division and disunity in society (Stephens, 2019). Here reflects the structure of an argument—attack, defense, and counterattack among others—as “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3). Within a particular setting, metaphoric symbols resemble what they symbolize. A metonymic symbol is also related to what it symbolizes not by resemblance, but by contact. As Kenneth Burke puts it, “every perspective requires a metaphor, implicit or explicit, for its organizational base” (Burke, 1941, p. 152). In the national as well as the international media coverage, the deteriorating relations between Japan and South Korea are structured by the concept of war. The ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor structures, at least in part, what the two countries do and how they understand what they are doing when they argue.

In laying hold of new experience, “the language of politics encourages us to see and to feel them as separate” (Edelman, 1975, p. 21). Even though labeling policies is both metaphoric and metonymic, it highlights a similarity to something familiar while masking other critical features. In doing so, it legitimizes a specific kind of political authority while degrading the claim of the counterpart to participate in policymaking. Since the trade war has an argumentation form structured in terms of battle, Japan and South Korea are likely to lose sight of the cooperative aspects, but intensifying hostilities. As with national politics, so with international, Edelman (1975) concludes that “symbolic cues... define the geography and topography of everyone’s

political world” (p. 21). Therefore, the overall picture of the Japan-South Korea trade war comes to be partial, not total.

On the whole, the concept of war in developing political arguments plays an effective role in strengthening national identity, heightening a shared sense, and making a political decision within a familiar mental scheme like an enemy, a territory that is fought for, allies, and an ultimate purpose of victory. What follows shows the way in which the war metaphor encourages Japan and South Korea to take an adversarial political stance on economic, national-security and history issues. For the time being, dialectics between right and wrong, and between good and evil leads Japanese and South Koreans to abandon the idea that the economic and diplomatic ties including the relationship of trust are mutually beneficial.

4. THE DECLINING U.S. STRATEGIC SUPREMACY IN EAST ASIA

The day of October 8, 2018 marked the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Japan-South Korea Joint Declaration by then Prime Minister Obuchi Keizō and then South Korean President Kim Dae-jung. The 1998 declaration was an epochal document that aims to surmount the unfortunate history in the past and to develop the future-oriented relationship. In the joint declaration, while Japan apologizes for *damage and suffering* inflicted because of its colonial rules from 1910 to 1945, South Korea appreciated postwar Japan’s role in contributing to world peace and prosperity. The declaration was a result of continued efforts by the two nations to improve their ties after diplomatic relations were normalized in 1965. In 2002, Japan and South Korea cohosted the football World Cup in Seoul and a Korean boom generated in the Japanese society. While the number of South Korean visitors to Japan has increased since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the growth of South Korea’s economic power has restructured their anti-Japanese nationalism.

4.1 The Japan-South Korea Trade War

A series of these diplomatic predicaments seemed unconnected at a first glance, but they pointed to a collapse of the regional strategic order by which the United States fostered peace and stability in East Asia. There are three parts to the argument.

The first is that, given growing uncertainties over the U.S.-China trade war, businesses in the two regional democracies are more worried. Indeed, the past forty years have been a period of unprecedented growth and prosperity in the region. The conditions were established in the mid-1970s—with the end of the Vietnam War and the U.S. rapprochement of China. At that time the United States was tolerated, and even helped its new relationship with China mutually beneficial. Around the July and August of 2019, however, a series of tensions between Washington and Beijing emerged over such flashpoints as Taiwan, the South China Sea and Hong Kong, then giving rise to the U.S.-China trade war. China's growing assertiveness, once viewed by Washington as healthy competition, pushed for the U.S. leadership role and diplomatic predictability no longer to be taken for granted. In addition to the shift of regional power balance, Japan faced the serious deterioration in its relationship with South Korea.

In front of world leaders at the Group of 20 Summits in June 2019, on the one hand, Abe presented himself as a guardian of the global trade order that Trump continued to fracture by issuing the declaration that each G20 country would “strive to realize a free, fair, nondiscriminatory, and transparent trade and investment environment” (“Editorial: Regain unity,” 2019). On the other hand, two days later Tokyo made an announcement to limit South Korea's access to Japanese chemicals essential to one of its biggest industries due to national-security concerns. In the international light, Prime Minister Abe followed President Trump and President Putin by using national-security exception as a justification for labeling its trading partners as security threats. The move to coerce South Korea over export restrictions was viewed as the challenge to the global trade rules for commerce and economic growth. The concept of national security is indeed open to broad interpretation. According to Japanese officials, some South Korean companies *inadequately* managed the chemicals that could be used to make weapons, citing concerns that components might end up in North Korea. Taking this as a retaliatory measure linked to the forced-labor lawsuits, South Korean people accused Japan of an “economic invasion” (Rich, Wong & Choe, 2019; See also Choe, 2019, p. A4). Here the deep-rooted cause of broken trust—South Korean historical grievances and Japanese exasperation with its chronic emergence—appeared.

Seeming to wield trade as a political cudgel in Trump's playbook, Abe made strategic use of national-security grounds to gain a majority of Japanese voters' support for his *Japan First* policy (Hwang, 2019). He then turned the tables by claiming that South Korea *mishandled* materials that could be used for military purposes. In the metaphorical frame of war, President Moon argued against that “we will never again lose to Japan,” reminding the country of Japan's colonial occupation (White & Lewis, 2019). He also declared that South Korea was to lessen its dependence on Japan-made chemicals and high-tech electronics materials by finding alternative sources for imports. Because of its rapid economic growth, South Korea began to consider Japan as a rival to overcome by comparing the number of Olympics gold medals won to that of Nobel Prize recipients. The country also took pride in overtaking Japan in shipbuilding and memory chips manufacturing. Even though the typical rise of nationalism surged against Japan or South Korea—which leaders of each country used to be careful to avoid in state-to-state relations, the Tokyo-Seoul disputes are as much about their painful history rather than about trade conflicts (Harding & White, 2019).

4.2 The Rise of China

The second is geopolitics that the importance of the Japan-the U.S.-South Korea trilateral security partnership could not be underestimated in sustaining the U.S.-established East Asian strategic order. The security environment of each nation is not granted, but founded. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, Beijing started to pressure Seoul to water down its defense cooperation with Japan as well as the United States. This indeed affects each strategic deterrence (“Chaguan: A great,” 2019). By and large, it is high time for Washington to seat its two most important regional allies down for a frank and constructive talk, and to mediate in the spiraling confrontation. For President Trump, however, the major preoccupation has been a deal, especially the trade war with China. What is more, it is Trump himself who has brought about uncertainty rather than offering reassurance by openly questioning the value of the U.S. alliances. As a result, the loss of the U.S. regional authority became apparent as well as the outlasting damage to the U.S. leadership in the world (Wolf, 2019).

For its regional meddling, the United States deliberately left most of the historic disputes and rivalries in the Asian-Pacific region unresolved.

As soon as Tokyo threatened to slow down exports of materials essential to South Korea, Seoul took it as retaliation for the forced-labor and comfort-women issues and threatened not to extend the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). Even though the United States considered this intelligence-sharing agreement crucial to monitoring North Korea's nuclear build-up and its missile tests, President Trump shrug off such provocations with a wait-and-see attitude toward the soaring Japan-South Korea relationship (Rich, Wong & Choe, 2019; Borger, 2019; Sanger, Wong & Crowley, 2019, p. A1). The United States has long relied on Japan and South Korea to stand alongside and to help counter the rise of China as well as the nuclear armament of North Korea. Nevertheless, Trump has been reluctant to help mediate a deepening divide between Japan and South Korea (Choe, 2019, p. A9; Johnson, 2019d).

China, sensing such division and disunity, took up a challenge to the postwar U.S. strategic dominance in East Asia (Montague, 2019). While overhauling the economic and diplomatic relations with rising China, the Abe administration wanted Japan to have more self-reliant military (Ikeda & Higa, 2019, P. 2). In the latest Upper House election campaign, he indeed called for a mandate to change Japan's pacifist Constitution. He implicitly, and yet surprisingly, campaigned on the bitter historical revisionism ("Japanese scholar," 2019). For all the concerns that Abe is spearheading a right-wing turn in Japan, the rise of nationalism that buoys him seems largely rooted in nostalgia not for the wartime past, but for a nationally unifying moment ("Banyan: Shinzo Abe's," 2019). Compared with Japan, South Korea's relations with China were less encumbered by history issues. But the large U.S. military presence was a constant irritant, symbolized by confrontation between Seoul and Beijing over the U.S. deployment of a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile-defense system in South Korea in 2017 (Lee, 2019). Furthermore, Washington's complaints about *unfair* trade and defense costs began to raise skeptical voices questioning the U.S. reliability among Japanese and South Koreans (Johnson, 2019b; Johnson 2019a; Denyer & Kim, 2019, p. A14; Armitage & Cha, 2019, p. A17; "South Korea's," 2019). As a matter of fact, a lack of consistent U.S. commitment and of vision for East Asia resulted in handing Beijing some easy wins.

4.3 History War

The spiraling tensions between Japan and South Korea evolved from a diplomatic conflict over Japan's war restitution into trade war and security cooperation ("A slow road," 2019). The third is that South Korea has played its own version of the historic card which would upend Japan. The two countries are, under the security umbrella of the United States, vital links in the global economic supply chains. In spite of cultural, social and economic affinity, Japan and South Korea have rarely boasted of their cordial ties. In particular, the people of South Korea, keeping the wounds of Japan's colonial rules on their minds, began insisting that Japan never made a sincere apology for its wartime offenses since the end of the Cold War. In response to such anti-Japanese national sentiments, Japanese people claimed that Japan did enough both legally and politically. In terms of the politics of memory, however, Seoul and Beijing have taken a tough stance on Tokyo by insisting that Japan has never fully reckoned with its past.

In November 2018, President Moon Jae-in, impeaching former President Park Geun-hye, dissolved the foundation established under the comfort-women settlement. It was just a month after that South Korea's Supreme Court ruled that Japanese firms, which had used South Koreans as forced labor during the war, should pay compensation to surviving victims. Over these two years, the Moon administration neither abolished nor renegotiated the bilateral accord in 2015, but did not accept it. All of a sudden, pledging its support for victim-centered principles, President Moon announced his decision to dissolve the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation founded on the 2015 accord. He stated that the bilateral accord does not sufficiently reflect the opinions of former comfort women and that the comfort-women issue will not be resolved with the accord (Moss, 2019). In response to this unilateral disbandment, Prime Minister Abe criticized that "[i]f international promises are not observed, forging ties between countries becomes impossible" ("Editorial: Unacceptable," 2019). He also made an additional remarks, "We hope that South Korea, as a member of the international community, will act responsibly" ("Editorial: Unacceptable," 2019). As a result of these historical conflicts, Tokyo and Seoul failed to hold summit talks in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in November 2018 or in the Group of 20 Summit in June 2019,

symbolizing deterioration in Japan-South Korea relations (“Editorial: Follow up,” 2019).

This shows how the unsettling prospect of the Japan-South Korea trade war stems from the undermined legal foundation of the 1965 Japan-South Korea treaty. On October 30, 2018, the South Korean Supreme Court’s final decision, which rejects the two countries’ common position on the bilateral treaty which the United States brokered in 1965, brought Japan-South Korea relations to a crossroads. Preceding South Korean administrations took a stance that the issue of individual claims was confirmed to have been “settled completely and finally” by the 1965 treaty. Hence the Roh Moo-hyun administration devised a policy in 2015 that the South Korean government would extend relief to those wartime victims. However, the Moon Jae-in administration, showing its respect for the judiciary authorities, introduced a new interpretation to acknowledge the individual rights of surviving wartime victims to claim compensations. Seoul is cautious of being seen as capitulating to Tokyo’s positions on international law and bilateral agreements. The sudden departure from the preceding standpoint leaves the legitimacy of diplomatic normalization in 1965—the final settlement of war reparation matters—questionable.

The root cause of the Japan-South Korea trade war requires the two countries to come to terms with the past. The Moon administration has been slow in taking any diplomatic steps to deal with matters of history. While waiting for Seoul’s deliberative response, the Abe administration reiterated a warning that Japan would take resolute actions. Japan’s trade sanctions triggered South Korea’s reactions to cancel cultural exchanges and to boycott Japanese products. In contrast, Japanese public opinion is not yet vocally anti-Korean, but perceiving South Korean intransigence as “untrustworthy” and “faithless” (“The feud,” 2019, p. 22; “Charlemagne: The risks,” 2019). As their confrontation over history spilled into stable economic relations and then national-security cooperation, the two neighboring countries had difficulty in finding a face-saving resolution or an outside help (Wang, 2019). Without future-oriented relationship-building efforts, it is not yet clear whether and when Japan and South Korea will be able to settle such a contentious issue on history.

5. CONSEQUENCES

The multiplication of historical catastrophes during the first score of the twenty-first century, and their cumulative effects, made the following questions ever more urgent. What do we receive and transfer knowledge of these events? How can we best carry such stories forward, without appropriating them, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them? Some of us still have a “living connection” with a traumatic personal and generational past, and that past is being transmuted into history (Sigrid, 2002; See also Young, 1997). Descendants of victim survivors as well as of perpetrators and of bystanders who witnessed massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation’s remembrances of the past. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present as well as the future. How is memory transmitted to be repeated and reenacted, not to be worked through?

The trade war between the two neighbors came from South Korea’s Supreme Court decision issued on October 30, 2018. Under the left-leaning Moon Jae-in administration, the court ordered the Japanese companies to pay compensation to 10 South Koreans who were conscripted to work as part of Japan’s wartime effort. In response, the right-leaning Abe Shinzō administration reiterated Japan’s uncompromising line that all wartime claims were settled in 1965 when the two countries normalized relations and Japan paid \$500 million for South Korea in aid and loans for war restitution. South Korea invested the Japanese funds to lay the foundation of its economic modernization without paying out to individual war victims. President Moon announced no intention of interfering the judiciary decision. By pointing out such an irresponsible attitude that Seoul leaves the matter to the judgement of its judiciary, Prime Minister Abe thus accused his counterpart of breaching international law and bilateral agreements by going against the 1965 treaty and the 2015 accord. In the media coverage, the frame of war metaphor discourages both Tokyo and Seoul from taking conciliatory steps to reach a diplomatic compromise.

In the short term, Japan scales back its economic relations and security cooperation with South Korea. The on-going Japan-South Korea

trade war shows how vulnerable the interconnected supply chains are to be overturned by nationalistic lines. Instead of banding together against a common adversary, the two crucial U.S. allies chose to be locked in their own bitter battle over history. Without the U.S. mediation, neither succeeded in steering clear of easing tensions over economic, strategic, historical disagreements (Taylor, 2019). By dissociating the trade stand-off from matters of national security as well as history, Tokyo weaponized economic sanctions in order to coerce Seoul into action to change its stance on history matters. Structured in the media frame of war metaphor, playing the *untrustworthy* card to guarantee domestic support—if the relationship of trust would be restored, trade disputes would be kept from spiraling out of control—has cast a shadow over Japan-South Korea relations.

In the long term, elevating explosive issues of populism and nationalism to the economic sphere will lead the two nations likely to regard each other with hostility. Emphasizing Japan's lack of sincerity, on the one hand, Seoul seeks to recover the rights of victims who were forced to work for Japanese firms and to have sex in Japanese army brothels. On the other hand, Tokyo must face a challenge to reflect on the recent past in spite of shifting the frame of argument from history issues to economic conflicts. A shift of focus from history to economic and national-security concerns not merely deteriorates Japan-South Korea security cooperation, but encourages North Korea to develop its nuclear and missile technology (Ikeda, 2019, p. 1). On the whole, the bilateral relationship is indeed in transition as it responds to the shift of regional power balance ("Did Korea," 2019).

As for public diplomacy, Tokyo should have made through diplomatic efforts to prevent its confrontation with South Korea over history from disturbing the Japan-the U.S.-South Korea trilateral partnership. For resolving the North Korean issue, i.e., its number one priority, Seoul has an alternative. Indeed the Moon administration came to approve a *phased denuclearization* of North Korea with diplomacy based on ethnic nationalism (Johnson, 2019c). In contrast, the Abe administration remained unchanged, merely calling for North Korea to *complete denuclearization*. As the U.S. supremacy in East Asia has declined, Tokyo has no alternative but to formulate its diplomatic strategy on the premise that the mending of Japan-South Korea relations will not move

forward for the time being (Rafferty, 2019). In other words, Tokyo should avoid emotional exchanges of criticism, and instead put forward its legitimate claim founded on the international law.

Finding a compromise way for Prime Minister Abe Shinzō would not be easy. Even though Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics have been postponed to 2021, the number of Korean tourists to Japan is falling sharply and Japan's public image is damaged seriously. Abe failed to establish a communication channel with President Moon Jae-in due to the following three factors of structural change in geopolitics. The first factor was the rise of China. Seoul's economic dependence on Beijing was increasing further to its detriment (Lee, 2019). In fact, its trade with China has surpassed the sum of its trade with Japan and that with the United States over these ten years. The Second was over North Korea's nuclear armament. Whereas Seoul focuses on preventing a nuclear pre-emptive war and moves on reconciliation with North Korea, Japan takes the initiative to contain North Korea due to its national-security concern ("Trump expects," 2019; Withnall, 2019, p. 33). The last but not the least, the shadows of the past require a special sensitivity. Seoul's shift of high priority from Japan to China with economic and geopolitical considerations allows the country to give rise to its anti-Japanese sentiments and to voice the long-simmering issue on Japan's colonial occupation of the Korean Peninsula in the lead-up to the Second World War (Chen, 2019; Tan, & Sim, 2019). Overall, Japan's countermeasures to elevate its conflicts with South Korea to the trade friction will not help settle the issue of war reparations, but face hurdles in building future-oriented relations between Japan and South Korea.

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