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Korea's Growing Role(s) on the World Stage –
South Korean Identity and Global Foreign Policy
in the Early 21st Century

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Abstract

South Korea is usually seen as a ‘shrimp amongst whales’, a minor player with limited agency in regional and global affairs. After colonization, the Korean War, national division and decades of military rule in the 20th century, however, South Korea today contributes to international peace and security with its peacekeeping troops and has successfully promoted its ‘green growth’ vision of sustainable development. The rising status of Korea begs the question about related changes in the South Korean identity or ‘sense of self’ in the world. In the respective International Relations and Korean Studies literatures this question has not yet been fully addressed beyond hopes for South Korea to be a future cornerstone of the liberal international order. Further, a wide variety of ‘identity’ conceptualizations has been leading to ‘definitional anarchy’ as well as ‘confusion and analytical ambiguity’ in the study of identity in general and South Korean international identity in particular.

This thesis presents a theoretically rigorous and empirically rich approach for the inquiry into state identity through the utilization of conceptual tools from symbolic-interactionist role theory as a contribution to the research on state identity and foreign policy. By focusing on South Korean agency and domestic self-identification practices, the empirical analysis at hand is able to provide a comprehensive account of the various identity narratives and role conceptions at play in South Korea’s global engagement in peacekeeping and climate diplomacy, complementing more systemic identity approaches such as the literature on norms and socialization. It argues that in the cases of peacekeeping and climate diplomacy South Korea’s identity as an international actor has been dominated by practices of self-identification that locate the country at the brink of advanced countries, aspiring to lead the rest of the world on the basis of the Korean developmental experience, but with the overall objective to maintain national autonomy in a changing regional and global context. Finally, this study is a contribution to the Korean Studies literature on how South Korea confronts globalization on the level of identity and politics.

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Note on transliteration

There are several transliteration systems for Korean, with the so-called McCune–Reischauer and Revised Romanization of Korean schemes being the most widely used. The transliteration of Korean in this study is based on the latter, which was introduced in July 2000 by the South Korean government as the official romanization system for Korean. Transliterations have been done with the help of the Korean Romanization Converter (http://roman.cs.pusan.ac.kr/input_eng.aspx) provided by Busan National University. Further, Korean names are written according to the customary usage in Korean with surnames preceding given names. Exemptions are made in cases where a different name order or spelling has already been established in the academic literature, for example, ‘Syngman Rhee’ instead of ‘Lee Seung-man’. Also, for better clarity regarding references, given names of Korean authors are written with capitalized initials for each syllable, for example, Lee SM., 2010: 89.

Glossary

AKS	Academy of Korean Studies
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide
COP	Conference of the Parties
DAC	(OECD) Developmental Aid Committee
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
G20	Group of Twenty
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GGGI	Global Green Growth Institute
HLF-4	Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INTERFET	International Force for East Timor
IR	International Relations
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force (in Afghanistan)
MIKTA	Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, Australia
MINUSTAH	Mission des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en Haïti/ United Nations Stabilisation Mission In Haiti
MNF	Multinational Force
NAMAs	Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions
NPT	Nuclear Proliferation Treaty
NSS	Nuclear Security Summit
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPCON	Operational Command
PKO	Peacekeeping Operations
PCGG	Presidential Committee on Green Growth
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea
SINGG	Seoul Initiative Network on Green Growth
SIT	Social Identity Theory
UN	United Nations

UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNOSOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
US/USA	United States/United States of America

1. Introduction

“No longer is [Korea] a backward hermit kingdom, but rather one of the world’s leading countries in terms of its economic and political systems.”¹

“A strong and prosperous South Korea is starting to think and act as such. The rest of the region will have to deal with it.”²

In the 20th century Korea lost its independence, was colonized, then liberated, devastated by war, divided by geopolitics and ruled by military dictators. Robinson therefore spoke of a “turbulent twentieth century” for Koreans with a “disproportionately important role in the last hundred years of world history.”³ The hardships of the Korean twentieth century are usually explained with the country’s geographical position amidst bigger, more powerful neighbours⁴ and often described with the metaphor of a small ‘shrimp’ amongst big ‘whales’, after the Korean proverb “a shrimp’s back breaks in a fight among whales”.⁵ The ‘shrimp’ metaphor alludes to the country being merely a small nation geographically caught in between powerful neighbours, Japan, China and Russia, and consequently a perennial victim at the hands of greater forces. It is Korea’s geopolitical vulnerability that is said to have led to colonialism, war and national division. As a ‘shrimp’, Korea has for a long time been seen as a minor player with limited agency that was determined by an unfavourable regional power structure and thus in need of protecting allies, whether these were the Chinese dynastic emperors in a Sino-centric world of tributary relations, Imperial Japan amidst Western encroachment upon Asia or the United States of America during times of national division and the Cold War.⁶

But Koreans in the Southern Republic of Korea (ROK or hereafter South Korea) have also experienced unprecedented economic development, built a stable democracy and initiated (a once promising) rapprochement and engagement with their estranged Northern cousins through what became known as the ‘sunshine’ policy. With regard to the achievements of South Korea, in contrast, Cumings spoke metaphorically of Korea entering the world stage

¹ Oh Hassig KD.K., 2013.

² Denney S. and Friedhoff K., 2013.

³ Robinson M.E., 2006: 1.

⁴ Oberdorfer D., 1997: 9; Kim SS., 2006: 1; Chun CS., 2013: 162; De Ceuster K., 2005.

⁵ In Korean: “*Goraessaume saeu deung teojinda.*”

⁶ Compare Bae KC., 2007.

and finding its “place in the sun”⁷ as one of only a handful in the “solar system of advanced industrial states.”⁸ This “rising Korea”⁹ is generally referred to as a ‘middle power’ that has been repeatedly “punching above its weight”¹⁰ or is described metaphorically as a “dolphin”¹¹ that is outsmarting¹² other ‘sea creatures’. These images refer to the facts that Seoul now is part of the G20, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the ‘club of rich countries’, and the OECD Developmental Aid Committee (DAC), as the first former aid recipient country ever to do so. Just a few decades after the Korean War, in which soldiers from over 20 United Nations (UN) member states fought alongside South Koreans, today ROK troops are serving as UN peacekeepers in South Sudan and in coastal waters of Lebanon. The country too initiated its own space programme¹³ and is an emerging power in polar politics.¹⁴ Therefore, at the dawn of the 21st century, South Korea started to be seen as “no longer a pawn but a pivotal player in Northeast Asian affairs.”¹⁵

Today, international scholars and pundits project certain hopes and expectations on the country for the present and the future. For Ikenberry and Mo, the middle power ROK is already at the centre of today’s global order and will be one of the key states for the future of liberal internationalism,¹⁶ quite in contrast to other rising powers, such as China or Russia. Snyder, however, sees Seoul more through the prism of its longstanding alliance with the US and thus as a supporter of US hegemony in East Asia, as well as a key pillar of Washington’s ‘pivot to Asia’.¹⁷ The story told is that of Korea’s journey from an “insular country to an outward-looking nation”,¹⁸ that engages with the rest of the world to an unprecedented extent.¹⁹ Typical for these perspectives is the realist focus on South Korea’s position or standing vis-à-vis other states, which is something that can be assessed from the outside without necessarily consulting Korean domestic perspectives. To these observers,

⁷ Cumings B., 2005.

⁸ Ibid.: 9.

⁹ Hwang B.Y., 2004.

¹⁰ Bradford C.I., 2015.

¹¹ Oh K.D., 1999; Brazinsky G., 2007; Tudor D., 2014.

¹² Brazinsky G., 2007: 7.

¹³ Kang T.J., 2015.

¹⁴ Brady A.M. and Kim S.R., 2013; Watson I., 2016.

¹⁵ Kim S.S., 2006: xiv.

¹⁶ Ikenberry G.J. and Mo J.R., 2013: 164-165.

¹⁷ Snyder S.A., 2018.

¹⁸ Bradford C.I., 2015: 11.

¹⁹ Armstrong C.K., 2014: 34.

rising South Korea looks like a middle power, walks like a middle power and thus is a middle power.²⁰ In their prognoses, South Korea is likely to and is also well advised to proceed on a ‘middle power’ trajectory towards a stronger US alliance, more business with China, further contributions to the common good, eventual unification with the North and maybe even a ‘normal’ relationship with the former colonial master, Japan.²¹ What is missing from this picture, however, is how the Republic of Korea and South Koreans themselves are seeing their role and place in the world. What is missing is how South Korea as a country relates itself to a globalized world. This crucial question is more about self-identity and agency than structural position and behaviour.

To be clear, identity is a broad, multi-layered and multifaceted concept and can be explored among individuals, social groups or polities, and South Korea’s international rise and encounter with a globalized world has been investigated on different levels of analysis and from different angles. In the cultural and everyday social spheres, for example, Lee explored how national and global identities were negotiated on Korea’s theatre stages,²² while Chun and Han researched the global ambitions of language-travelling Korean youth and how these students saw their place in an international order vis-à-vis Canadians and Filipinos.²³ In the religious and political sphere, Han documented how Korean evangelical missionaries “constructed and presented Korean history as a teleology of modernization, industrialization, and Christianization”²⁴ in Africa, and Robertson studied the diplomatic style of Seoul’s emissaries on the world stage, finding, for example, “a preoccupation with status, widening generational change, [and] high levels of cosmopolitanism”²⁵ among South Korean diplomats.

There is no comprehensive study as yet looking at the formation and changes of state identity from a perspective of South Korean global foreign policy, neither in the International Relations nor the Korean Studies literature, which is, I would argue, still one of the main avenues for the construction and formation of South Korean international identity.²⁶ A telling example for this gap is the edited volume *Korea Confronts*

²⁰ See also O’Neill A., 2015: 78ff.

²¹ Compare Kim HW., 2011: 73; Chun CS., 2013: 167-168.

²² Lee HJ., 2015.

²³ Chun J.JH. and Han JH.J., 2015.

²⁴ Han JH.J., 2011: 154.

²⁵ Robertson J., 2016: 180.

²⁶ See also Berenskoetter F., 2014: 283; compare Campbell D., 1992.

Globalization,²⁷ which features chapters on globalization and women's identities, regionalism, labour relations, democratization, party politics and religions, but none on Korea's relations to other countries or global governance. What is most significant, however, is that a sound understanding of state's identity is, first, instrumental in understanding the stability and trajectory of a state's foreign policy behaviour. Identity matters, as constructivism teaches us, because "without interests identities have no motivational forces, without identities interests have no direction."²⁸ Second, taking the self-identity of a state actor seriously is a way of taking the state actor's own agency seriously, especially in a post-colonial context like this. Simply inferring the 'identity' of a polity from its behaviour, or its role performance, towards other political communities ends up as a convenient ignorance that obscures a better understanding of a polity and its constitutive inner conflicts and deviant voices.

1.1. Research questions

Against this background, a number of questions arise: how did the proverbial shrimp grow into a dolphin? What happened to the old 'shrimp' self-understandings of post-colonialism, anti-communism and anti-imperialism? Is the wishful optimism about Korea's future global foreign policy behaviour by some observers justified and is the rising Korea really going to be a cornerstone of liberal internationalism? Is the global outreach of the early 21st-century South Korea commonplace among foreign policy makers or is it politically contested within the country? Was it maybe just a phase with a 'globalist school'²⁹ at the helm of Seoul's foreign policy agenda or has there been a substantial and lasting change in state identity supported by the foreign policy community and the Korean society at large? And what is the self-understanding put forward by the 'globalist school'? Is it about transcending national boundaries, as Robertson's finding of "high levels of cosmopolitanism"³⁰ among South Korean diplomats might indicate, or a mere extension of the 'national interest' into the global arena? All these questions, however, ultimately come down to the main question of how does rising South Korea's global foreign policy and

²⁷ Chang YS., Seok HH. and Baker D.L., 2009.

²⁸ Wendt A., 1999: 231.

²⁹ Chun CS., 2013: 164.

³⁰ Robertson J., 2016: 180.

Seoul's unprecedented international leadership ambitions relate to a Korean collective 'sense of self' or the country's international identity?

Generally, the narrative from “insular country to an outward-looking nation”³¹ that focuses on the hermit kingdom turned global model student should be treated with caution. There are three main reasons for this. First, when South Korea opened up its economy for global markets in the 1990s, it was a “state-enhancing, top-down strategic plan”³² termed *segzehwa*, literally meaning globalization, initiated by President Kim Young-sam (1993–1998) and aimed at enhancing the nation's international competitiveness. The plan was to restructure Korea not just economically, but also politically, socially and culturally in an attempt to transform Korea into an ‘advanced nation’. For several critics of the ultimately unsuccessful programme, *segzehwa* remained “subservient to nationalist goals”,³³ with “no fundamental learning – no paradigm shift [... and] only situation-specific tactical adaptation.”³⁴ Others suggested that globalization, by being “appropriated by the Korean nation”,³⁵ has actually been reinforcing nationalism, leading to a “paradox”³⁶ of Korean globalization. To illustrate this, a recent media analysis of the South Korean global citizenship discourse of the last two decades also supports a sceptical observer in finding that “global citizenship is primarily about national advancement rather than any sort of transcendence of national identity into cosmopolitan ideals”.³⁷

Second, the entrenched “generally negative, self-doubting narrative”³⁸ that Korea is a small country and a perennial victim of larger forces surely must remain influential, but how so? The experiences of Western encroachment, colonization and national division have fostered a deep sense of the inherent value of national sovereignty in both South and North Korea. What happened to those traditional identity understandings that have been politically relevant for decades? True, one segment of Korean society, the younger generation, is beginning to see things differently. According to the findings of a long-term study, “pride in ROK's achievement and its growing international importance is a key part

³¹ Bradford C.I., 2015: 11.

³² Kim SS., 2000: 3.

³³ Shin GW. and Choi JN., 2009: 252.

³⁴ Kim SS., 2000: 275.

³⁵ Shin GW. and Choi JN., 2009: 265.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Schattle H., 2014: 2.

³⁸ Tudor D., 2014.

of [younger Koreans'] national identity”,³⁹ but how this relates to changing concrete foreign policy actions remains unclear, especially because Koreans in their twenties have been found to be “security conservative” often in accordance with the generations older than 60 years.⁴⁰

Third, one may want to challenge the purported novelty of ‘Korea’s rise’. Even Cumings, in his seminal monography *Korea’s place in the sun*, did not only refer the metaphor to Korea’s 20th century development, but had already titled one of the book’s subchapters on the scientific, technological and cultural advances of Goryeo (918–1392) and medieval Joseon Korea “Korea in the sun”.⁴¹ For example, he refers to Koreans inventing movable metal type printing in 1234, long before Johannes Gutenberg in Europe. The capital of Goryeo, Kaesong, back then was an important trade hub at the end of the silk road, with traders from as far as Arab lands, and allegedly the most populous city in the whole region.⁴² Other culturally important products of the era include the refined jade-green Celadon porcelain as well as the World Heritage Tripitaka Koreana, a comprehensive Buddhist canon on woodblocks. Further, there are contributions to astronomy, agronomy and most importantly the invention of the scientific written Korean alphabet, *Hangeul*, introduced by King Sejong in 1446.⁴³ Back then, Japan was considered a mere recipient of culture and an inferior, peripheral country, far from the centre and thus the dignifying influence of the Chinese Emperor, ‘the Son of Heaven’.

This worldview is also mirrored in the *Gangnido* world map of 1402, one of the oldest surviving Northeast Asian world maps, where an enlarged Korea sits just next to the central China, connected to the Middle East and a tiny continental appendix in the West, Europe. This is why Cumings states that Koreans have always seen their country as “important, advanced, significant”,⁴⁴ and as a nation that is now, after the humiliation of the imperial era, “reoccupying its appropriate position in the world.”⁴⁵ This perspective strikingly mirrors those of modern Chinese and also Indian status aspirations in today’s international system and begs the question about the country’s own understanding of its ‘appropriate

³⁹ Campbell E., 2011: 128.

⁴⁰ Denney S. and Friedhoff K., 2013.

⁴¹ See Cumings B., 2005: 67.

⁴² Jun SH., 2014: 264.

⁴³ Cumings B., 2005: 67.

⁴⁴ Ibid.: 9-10.

⁴⁵ Ibid.: 10.

position in the world'. A look at how Koreans themselves calibrate and reflect upon their role in the world seems more than warranted, especially so, as the South Korean debate is still ongoing:

*“South Korea, which for many years lacked a forward-looking strategy, is now in a position to opt for something longer term and ambitious. These days, there are growing debates and burgeoning discourses about the desirable future trajectory of South Korean foreign policy.”*⁴⁶

South Korean identity is certainly “transforming”⁴⁷ or “at crossroads”,⁴⁸ but how so and in which direction? And most importantly, what does it mean for South Korean international state identity and its future trajectory as an international actor?

Accordingly, this study at hand investigates the relationship between the global foreign policy and international state identity of 21st century South Korea as its main question. There are a number of sub-questions, however: first, it has to be asked whether a ‘globalist’ self-understanding that aims “to rethink the whole paradigm of calculating national interests and to broaden the range of South Korean’s influence”⁴⁹ in a “post-Westphalian global order”⁵⁰ is firmly established in the domestic foreign policy discourse. Further, it has to be seen whether a globalist outlook actually translates into a normative post-Westphalian ‘globalist’ identity that embraces international law and limitations of national sovereignty and adheres to international responsibilities as a ‘global citizen’. Only then the hopes that Korean ‘middle powermanship’ could lead to a brighter future of liberal internationalism would seem realistic and justified. The second sub-question asks about the alleged established postcolonial norms that prioritize national sovereignty and ‘anti-imperialist’ justice. How do these identity narratives relate to South Korean global foreign policy in the 21st century? The third sub-question aims at the potential influence of Pan-Asian narratives that have been popular in the late 19th and 20th century where the perceived threat of Western internationalization was confronted by Pan-Asian cooperation or, for example, with an ‘Asian values’ debate. The main question and all three sub-questions will be answered in detail in chapter 7.

⁴⁶ Chun CS., 2013: 155.

⁴⁷ Ikenberry G.J. and Mo IR., 2013: 164; Denney S. and Friedhoff K., 2013.

⁴⁸ Rozman G., 2012: 67.

⁴⁹ Chun CS., 2013: 164.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

1.2. Outline

This study is divided into three parts. The first part is ‘setting the stage for the inquiry’ into South Korean state identity and foreign policy. In two steps I am first reviewing the literature on Korea’s relations with the outside world, its foreign policy and its self-understanding in chapter 2. In consequence, we will arrive at an empirical and conceptual double gap: empirically we are still missing a comprehensive assessment of South Korean state identity as a rising global power, while conceptually there is a lack of agency-oriented approaches to studying the state identity of South Korea as an international actor. In a second step, I am then reviewing the IR literature on identity as an analytical concept in chapter 3. Because of the elusiveness of the concept and the “definitional anarchy”⁵¹ still prevalent in IR identity studies, I am introducing the integrative potential of symbolic interactionist role theory for the inquiry into international state identities.

In the second part, the investigation into Korea’s role-playing ‘on the global stage’ takes place. First, I am presenting an approach inspired by symbolic interactionist role theory for the investigation of international state identity in the methodology section in chapter 4. The approach is informed by theoretical insights from International Relations (IR) constructivism, International Political Sociology and particularly role theory, for which “[s]tates [...] hold a host of national and international roles that constitute their identity, regulate their behavior and shape the international order.”⁵² A role identity here is best seen as the social dimension of an actor’s identity, which is directly linked to action, in this case foreign policy.⁵³ Any role has to be based in a corresponding identity element, and any identity has to be reaffirmed by respective role playing. Hence, identity affirmation is only possible due to role enactment, as only social roles give identity meaning.⁵⁴ By analysing the foreign policy discourse of domestic political legitimation for foreign policy actions in the search for self-identification practices, which are understood as linkages between role conceptions and self-images, we will arrive at a comprehensive account of South Korean state identity in relation to foreign policy, with the self-images even allowing insights into larger South Korean international identity. An understanding of these two layers of

⁵¹ Abdelal R. et al., 2006: 695.

⁵² Harnisch S., 2012: 252.

⁵³ McCourt D.M., 2011: 1604.

⁵⁴ Ibid.: 1619.

international state identity, the easily observable manifestation of dominant role conceptions as role identities and the directly related but more elusive self-images, provides a better and agency-oriented insight into the constitution of South Korea as an international actor than conventional studies. This approach will be applied to two different foreign policy fields in two separate case studies. In chapter 5 the analysis is focused on South Korea's international peacekeeping, whereas chapter 6 is dedicated to Seoul's climate diplomacy, as these foreign policy fields have been identified as one of the most salient for South Korea's emergence as a global power in the respective literature. In these cases South Korea is not only expressing global leadership claims but is at the same time very much exposed to international expectations about their foreign policy behaviour.

In the third and last part of the thesis, a comprehensive account of the self-identification practices retrieved from the two case studies will help to answer the study's main research question about the relationship between South Korea's international state identity and global foreign policy in the early 21st century. Further, the key argument of this study, that South Korean international state identity is mostly dominated by the objective to raise the country's international standing in order to foster national autonomy in a changing regional and global context, will be presented in chapter 7. Lastly, there will be concluding remarks about the limitations of this work and further potential research questions in chapter 8, as well as the bibliography in chapter 9. The study at hand aims to be a theoretically sound and empirically rich agency-oriented inquiry into the international state identity of Korea as an emerging global power. The ultimate goal of this project is to provide a better and more comprehensive understanding of the international actor South Korea, while combining an International Political Sociological framework with Korean Studies expertise in language, history and culture.

**PART I: SETTING THE STAGE FOR INQUIRY – KOREA IN THE
WORLD AND IDENTITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

2. Korea in the World: Identity and Foreign Policy

This chapter reviews the literature on Korea's place in the world, its position vis-à-vis other states and how Korea has related itself to the outside world. Before the dawn of the Western Westphalian 'international order' of sovereign nation states in East Asia in the 19th century, Korea was close to the civilizational centre in the Sino-centric world as a major cultural and economic hub. Beginning with Qing China's downfall, this changed and ended in Joseon Korea's colonization by the Japanese Empire, after unsuccessful attempts at domestic modernization. During the Cold War, South Korea served as a bridgehead of the US-led so-called 'free world' against communism, despite being ruled by military dictators until the late 1980s. Since then South Koreans have been redefining their place in the world with an unprecedented global outreach in cultural, economic and security-related matters. But what is South Korea's place on the global stage in the eyes of others and Korea itself? As will be shown in the following, there are hopes for South Korea to become a future leader of the liberal international order as a middle power or a building-block for deeper regional integration. Others point to a resurgence of Korean nationalism and a desire for external status affirmation.

The following sub-chapters look at the literature on Korean collective identity and external relations in a chronological order, starting from the Sino-centric world order, to the colonial era and the national division after liberation and finally the present with a democratized South Korea entering the global stage as an OECD and G20 member. From this literature review, a double gap in the research on South Korean foreign policy and international identity will emerge: on the one hand, there is no comprehensive empirical assessment of international state identity or self-understanding of South Korea as an emerging global power, with potentially globalist, regionalist as well as nationalist self-understandings at play. On the other hand, identity as an analytical concept has been applied in various divergent ways in the study of South Korean foreign policy, but with an overall lack of taking South Korean perspectives and ultimately agency into account. It is the aim of this study to close this double gap by providing a theoretically sound and empirically rich agency-oriented inquiry into the international state identity of Korea as an emerging global power.

2.1. Korea in the Sino-centric world

Before the Western encroachment on Northeast Asia in the 19th century, Joseon Korea had for centuries been part of the Sino-centric world order with the Chinese emperor, the ‘son of heaven’, at the political, economic and cultural centre. Relations between China and secondary states were organized through a tributary system based on a formal status hierarchy but allowing for significant local autonomy. Key institutions within this system were the recognition by the superior state through ‘investiture’, which signified peaceful relations and mutual protection against external threats⁵⁵, as well as the right of entry into China and the duty to send regular tribute missions to the Chinese court from the inferior state.⁵⁶ Early Joseon, for example, sent up to three missions a year to the Ming dynasty, not just as a diplomatic duty but also for economic exchange and cultural borrowing.⁵⁷ For this close relationship, Joseon Korea used the term *sadae*, which translates to “serving the great”.⁵⁸

Within the Sino-centric world, the source for a country’s ranking was determined not so much by its power but by its cultural similarity to the Chinese civilizational centre.⁵⁹ Joseon Korea ranked first in the hierarchy during the Ming dynasty from 1368 to 1644, as it was from early on emulating, conforming to and even trying to excel in the mastery of Chinese ideas, principles and norms.⁶⁰ Ming-Joseon relations had been close right from the beginning. In 1388 General Yi Seong-gye, an acclaimed military leader who had fought against Japanese pirates, the Chinese Red Turban rebels and as a military commander of Yuan China in Manchuria,⁶¹ carried out a coup d’état and explicitly sought investiture from the Ming court to garner domestic legitimacy for his rule.⁶² He subsequently became King Taejo of Joseon in 1392, establishing Korea’s longest ruling dynasty.⁶³

Later in the early 17th century with the rise of Jurchen or Manchu state in the northern border regions and despite careful attempts to avoid being drawn into conflicts there,

⁵⁵ Kim Haboush JH., 2001: 21.

⁵⁶ Kang D.C., 2010: 56.

⁵⁷ Lee KB., 1984: 189.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Kang D.C., 2010: 54.

⁶⁰ Kim Haboush JH., 2001: 22.

⁶¹ Lee KB., 1984: 165.

⁶² Ibid.: 189.

⁶³ Cumings B., 2005: 44.

Joseon Korea had to comply with Ming requests for military support and dispatched 10,000 troops, which were advised to surrender to the mighty Manchus if necessary to avoid being drawn into larger conflict.⁶⁴ When the Ming finally fell to Manchu invaders, who in turn established the Qing dynasty, it still came as a shock to Joseon Korea, who perceived this as “tantamount to the disintegration of civilization”.⁶⁵ Facing the centre of their world ruled by “northern barbarians”,⁶⁶ Confucian Korea’s “sense of cultural competition with China”⁶⁷ from the centuries before now turned into a feeling of being “culturally superior”⁶⁸ and indeed the “last bastion of Confucian orthodoxy”⁶⁹ as well as the “sole carrier of the civilized tradition which was lost in China”⁷⁰. This notion was also reflected in the term ‘small China’ or *sojunghwa*. Despite these reservations, the Manchu-led Qing dynasty ultimately enforced tributary relations with Joseon through invasions in 1627 and 1637,⁷¹ after which the Qing did not further interfere with Korean affairs until the late 19th century. According to Phillips, the Qing acted towards Joseon within established rules in the beginning, because “given Korea’s unimpeachable Confucian credentials, its endorsement of the Manchus as legitimate heirs to the Mandate of Heaven represented a potential propaganda coup for the ascendant Qing Dynasty.”⁷²

In contrast to ‘shrimp’ narratives that focus on Korea’s perennial victimhood at the hands of external forces, Kang classifies the Sino-centric tributary system as relatively stable and peaceful at least among the major Sinicized powers, China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam.⁷³ Apart from low intensity skirmishes with Japanese pirates or nomadic raiders from the North, he qualifies only two conflicts involving Korea as major wars: the devastating invasions of the Korean peninsula by Hideyoshi Toyotomi from 1592 to 1598, known as *Imjin War* in Korea, and the Manchu campaigns to enforce Joseon’s tributary status in the early 17th century.⁷⁴ Kang thus speaks of a “longer peace”⁷⁵ throughout the last centuries for Korea and East Asia as a whole. In addition, Shin emphasizes that despite the

⁶⁴ Lee KB., 1984: 215.

⁶⁵ Kim Haboush JH., 2001: 23.

⁶⁶ Cumings B., 2005: 78.

⁶⁷ Kim Haboush JH., 2001: 23.

⁶⁸ Lee KB., 1984: 216.

⁶⁹ Kim Haboush JH., 2001: 23.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 24.

⁷¹ Cumings B., 2005: 78.

⁷² Phillips A., 2017: 16.

⁷³ Kang D.C., 2010: 82ff.

⁷⁴ See also Kang D.C., 2010: 83.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*: 82.

widespread image of being a “hermit kingdom”,⁷⁶ Joseon Korea “was an active participant in the larger East Asian cultural space.”⁷⁷

This rather stable and peaceful Sino-centric world order was shaken when European imperialist powers arrived in East Asia, putting pressure on Qing China in particular. The Qing were already facing domestic unrest when the British Empire ‘opened’ China with the two Opium Wars from 1839 to 1842 and from 1856 to 1860, imposing preferential trade access through the so called ‘unequal treaties’. Similarly, in 1853, American Commodore Matthew C. Perry forced the opening of protectionist Tokugawa Japan through gunboat diplomacy with his famed ‘Black Ships’. Despite a few earlier Western expeditions, Joseon Korea did not yet see the same fate and was still trying to preserve its autonomy and Confucian orthodoxy. But the decade of the 1860s was also for Koreans the beginning of their enforced modernization: “[h]ere is the beginning of modern Korea: its leaders no longer could shape events as they wished. For the first time in its history, the country was shaped from without more strongly than from within.”⁷⁸ In all three major East Asian states the old regimes tried to respond to the new challengers with programmes of reform in the name of “restoration”,⁷⁹ for China and Korea very much in vain, but in the case of Meiji Japan’s ‘modernization’ ultimately successful.

Joseon’s worldview and foreign policy towards the Qing, European powers and missionaries can be illustrated with a brief event in 1865/66 at the demise of the old order. It was these events of 1865/66 that awakened interest in Korean affairs by other actors such as the United States and Japan, as it became clear that France and Russia had been increasing their influence in the region. In 1865/66, Joseon was ruled by Prince Heungseon as the regent *Daewongun* on behalf of his eleven-year-old son, the newly selected King Gojong. The *Daewongun*, having been banned from politics before because of his low-born but royal background, believed that factionalism at court was the main malady of the Joseon court and hence pushed for a dynastic revival through centralization and royal restoration.⁸⁰ Kim describes him as largely “ignorant of the outside world”⁸¹ and assesses the

⁷⁶ Griffis W.E., 1882.

⁷⁷ Shin GW., 2005: 617.

⁷⁸ Cumings B., 2005: 86.

⁷⁹ Ibid.: 86-87.

⁸⁰ Kim KH., 1980: 44.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Daewongun's foreign policy goals as seclusion and resistance towards Western imperialism. For the *Daewongun* the fate of civil war that plagued Edo Japan was a warning example, because in his eyes the Tokugawa regime had failed to resist the destructive Western influence.⁸² The only relevant external power for Joseon's ruling elite remained the Qing court, to where any diplomatic matters with either France, Russia or Japan were delegated with the request for "Chinese guidance and protection",⁸³ despite Qing China's fading capabilities of meeting Joseon's expectations about dealing with the foreign intruders. Cumings summarizes this neglect for building new international ties: "[T]o those who knocked at its gates, Korea said in effect, 'We have nothing and we need nothing. Please go away.'"⁸⁴

For the Joseon government, the spread of Christianity in particular had hitherto been perceived as a dangerous, alien challenge to the cultural and political hegemony of Confucianism within the country. Among the frequent and bloody persecutions of Catholic Koreans, the year 1866 stands out, when most of the French missionaries, who had only been in the country since 1834, were killed, as well as thousands of Korean Catholics. The latter had allegedly reached out to the *Daewongun* to form a triple alliance with France and Great Britain to counterbalance Russian advances into Northeast Asia. Despite the reported initial interest of the *Daewongun*, the plans were never realized.⁸⁵ Not only did the conservatives at court very much disapprove what was seen as a possible affront to Qing China and hence a violation of the traditional East Asian order, but French missionaries, who were approached as potential intermediaries, also did not want to become involved in politics, fearing the very reprisals that were nevertheless soon to happen to them.

To give some brief context, in France Napoleon III pursued the goal of leading France back to past glory, which translated into a project of global, imperial expansion.⁸⁶ Relying on a nationalist and Catholic support base, from 1853 to 1855 he engaged in the Crimean War with Russia over the title of 'protector of the Holy Land' and invaded Mexico as well as China, the latter from 1858 to 1861. At the same time, in 1860, Qing China had given Imperial Russia a lease on the Liaodong peninsula, tightening already existing border

⁸² Kim KH., 1980: 44.

⁸³ Ibid.: 48.

⁸⁴ Cumings B., 2005: 87.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ See also Kim YK., 2001: 24.

problems such as raids and uncontrolled migration in the north of the Korean peninsula, fitting traditional Korean threat perceptions. As a result of the 1866 Catholic persecutions, Imperial France sent a punitive expedition that first temporarily seized Ganghwa Island at the estuary of the Han river leading to Seoul, in a prelude to a series of gunboat interferences there that ultimately ended with the Treaty of Ganghwa Island of 1876, the ‘opening’ of Joseon Korea by Meiji Japan.

By the end of the 19th century, the struggle over the future course of the country was at its height, with Joseon elites and people trying to recalibrate their country’s place in a changing world, not without significant foreign influence from especially Japan, Russia and China. The *Donghak* peasant movements of 1894, for example, fought against the Chinese-centred tributary relations of Joseon Korea, while the so called *Gabo*-reform, a modernization attempt after the example of Meiji Japan, faced opposition from anti-Japanese rebels.⁸⁷ Thirty years after Korea had been ‘opened’, the First Sino-Japanese War from 1894 to 1895 finally buried the old East Asian world order of China-centred tributary relations. Joseon Korea was broken out of the Chinese sphere of influence when it was declared an ‘independent’ country after the terms of winning Imperial Japan. Amidst this decline of China and the rise of Japan as well as the entry of European powers, Koreans needed more than ever to redefine their position in the region and beyond.⁸⁸

During the Russo-Japanese War from 1904 to 1905 over the influence over Manchuria and the Korean peninsula, the Joseon court remained officially neutral, but fell more and more under control of Imperial Japan.⁸⁹ After Japan had won the war against the Russian Empire, in September 1905 the Treaty of Portsmouth ensured Japanese supremacy in Korea.⁹⁰ Previously other European powers had already recognized the Japanese claim to and increasing control over Korea in the secret Taft-Katsura Agreement between the United States and Japan from July 1905 and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance from August 1905.⁹¹ This left the Joseon court internationally side-lined and resulted in the forceful conclusion of the Protectorate or *Eulsa* Treaty in November 1905, which gave Japan full control over Korea’s external relations.

⁸⁷ Mishra S.K., 2011: 17; Shin GW., 2008: 149.

⁸⁸ Shin GW., 2005: 618.

⁸⁹ See also Schmid A., 2002: 28.

⁹⁰ Eckert C.J. et al., 1990: 239.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*: 238.

The ensuing international isolation of Korea was demonstrated to a global audience during the so-called Hague Secret Emissary Affair (*heigeu teuksasageon*) in 1907. Just before the Second Hague Peace Conference in 1907, Emperor Gojong, who reportedly had never agreed to the Protectorate Treaty,⁹² sent secret emissaries to the Netherlands “to expose the injustice done [to] Korea and ask for redress.”⁹³ The delegation was refused entry on grounds of not having diplomatic sovereignty,⁹⁴ and one of the emissaries, Yi Jun, even committed suicide in the days after.⁹⁵ The whole affair generated significant international media attention, but ultimately only led to the Japanese authorities forcing Gojong to abdicate.

It was during this period that the Japanese adaptation of Western concept of a ‘nation’ as a racial category also started to bear fruit in Korea. The idea of a distinct Korean nation, *minjok*, a nationalist foundation myth with an ancient ancestor *Dangun* at the centre,⁹⁶ as, for example, in the work of nationalist historian Sin Chae-ho,⁹⁷ and an understanding of ‘sovereignty’ as a “pedagogy for imperialism and colonialism”⁹⁸ started to develop.⁹⁹ Despite the efforts of reformist thinkers such as Yu Kil-chun who had tried to reconcile the old ways with the new, this “internationalization” (*gukjehwa*) ultimately ended in the enforced adoption of Western modernity.¹⁰⁰ Another influential idea of the time that gained a certain prominence throughout East Asia was that of a pan-Asian unity in a global struggle against Western imperialism. According to Shin, this thinking about “[y]ellowness, as a category transcendent to the nation, was not seen as undermining the sovereignty of the nation.”¹⁰¹ Ultimately, Imperial Japan utilized a similar ‘Western threat, Eastern solidarity’ narrative in order to build a regional identity that served as justification for colonial expansion into East Asia.¹⁰² Later in post-liberation Korea, this colonial link left ideas of pan-Asianism politically tainted and thus neglected until the late 1990s.

⁹² Eckert C.J. et al., 1990: 240.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Lee KB., 1984: 311.

⁹⁵ Cumings B., 2005: 145.

⁹⁶ Rozman G. and Kim A., 2012: 202f; Moon CI. and Suh SW., 2005; Em H.H., 2013: 77.

⁹⁷ Robinson M.E., 1984.

⁹⁸ Em H.H., 2013: 3.

⁹⁹ Kim HJ., 2011: 227.

¹⁰⁰ Ha YS., 1999: 161-162.

¹⁰¹ Shin GW., 2005: 619-620.

¹⁰² Ibid.

2.2. Korea in the world during colonization and national division

During colonization by Imperial Japan from 1910 to 1945, Korean nationalist liberation movements such as the March First independence movement of 1919 or the later upcoming communist or radical nationalists further developed Korean nationalism, similar to the situation in other colonized countries. According to Rozman and Kim, the nation or *minjok* became the “core identity, making it the means for national survival and [...] a source of legitimacy”.¹⁰³ The forced assimilation by Japan made the Korean nationalists more aware of distinct cultural attributes as the only way to ensure their nation’s survival in the face of threatening Japanese absorption. Others, such as Korean proponents of pan-Asianism, subscribed to the Japanese theory of common Japanese and Korean ancestry, *nissen dōsoron*. According to this official colonial ideology, Japanese and Koreans descended from the same race, but with the Koreans in need of Japanese guidance to achieve ‘civilization and enlightenment’. Shin writes that Korean merchants and capitalists especially tapped into this narrative in a pragmatic manner, as Korea was located strategically in the centre of the Japanese colonial trade network.¹⁰⁴

After liberation from Japanese colonial rule, the contestation over the meaning of the Korean nation further deepened due to the establishment of two separate Korean states. In both states’ official national imagination Korea remained a ‘perennial’ victim that had suffered a variety of invasions by external powers from the region.¹⁰⁵ In the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) or North Korea, Kim Il Sung’s *juche* ideology, which is usually translated as self-reliance or self-autonomy, heavily relied on anti-imperialism and anti-Japanism. For some scholars, North Korea today can barely be seen as a communist country but more as a fascist state that advocates the preservation and protection of the racial and hence moral purity and uniqueness of the Korean race.¹⁰⁶ In South Korea, military strongman Park Chung Hee came to power through a coup d’état and envisioned the “modernization of the fatherland”¹⁰⁷ through instruments of repression as well as selective use of Korean historiography.

¹⁰³ Rozman G. and Kim A., 2012: 203.

¹⁰⁴ Shin GW., 2005: 620.

¹⁰⁵ Rozman G., 2012: 54.

¹⁰⁶ See also Myers B.R., 2010; Mishra S.K., 2011: 23.

¹⁰⁷ Shin GW., 2008: 152.

Central to Park's promoted nationalism was the understanding that Japan's colonization of Korea was only possible because Joseon Korea and also its successor state, the Korean Empire (1897–1910) that was already heavily influenced by Japan, had been internally and externally weak. The entirely outdated Korean state thus was easy prey to successfully modernized Meiji Japan (1868–1912). According to this perspective, colonial history proved the lesson that, for the survival of the nation, Koreans have to modernize their state after the example of the West and Japan in particular. But Park's nationalist ideology incorporated ethnic as well as political dimensions: North Koreans, for example, were seen as 'brethren', as descendants of the same 4,000 year old race, sharing the same history, language and destiny.¹⁰⁸ In terms of a political nation, North Koreans did not belong to the same community and thus should get help for removing the 'un-Korean' and alien communist rule – the only legitimate national identity was incorporated by the Southern state, the Republic of Korea. Hence, there was an overarching ethnic 'national unity' that had to be restored politically by a "clear-cut nation saving policy of independence, self-reliance and self-defense."¹⁰⁹

The South Korean democracy movements of the 1980s, too, were founded on a nationalist historiography.¹¹⁰ This strain of the so called 'people'-oriented (*minjung*) nationalism criticized Park's regime for enslaving the South Korean people and, due to its anti-communism, fostering the division of the Korean peninsula. According to this narrative, the main tasks for the nation are democratization and unification: for the democratic opposition, Park's authoritarian regime was largely a product of US containment strategies towards communism in East Asia and democratization. Correspondingly, liberating the nation meant overcoming not only Park's dictatorship but also the influence of yet another external and almost neo-imperial power, the United States of America.¹¹¹ The key difference here is that, according to the earlier state-led nationalism, the Korean identity lies in the sacrifice for the 'modernization of the fatherland' and anti-communism, whereas for oppositional thinkers such a behaviour is seen as anti-Korean, construing the suppressed 'people' and fighters for national self-determination as the true bearers of the nation.

¹⁰⁸ Mishra S.K., 2011: 24-25; Shin GW., 2008: 152.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Shin GW., 2008: 154.

¹¹⁰ Rozman G., 2012.

¹¹¹ Shin GW., 2008: 161.

Common to both self-understandings, but even for North Korean *juche* ideology, was the centrality of a national struggle for liberation from foreign dominance, be it from Japanese imperialism, Western communist thought or perceived American ‘neo-imperialism’. This is illustrated in this quote from President Roh Moo-hyun, a former pro-democracy activist and civil rights lawyer: “No other interests or values could compete [with] those of liberating the motherland from foreign domination and securing political sovereignty.”¹¹² Moreover, generations of Koreans until today have been raised and educated with specific ideas about the uniqueness of the Korean people, culture and the “sanctity of [the] territory, creating a nationalist consensus among Koreans of all ages.”¹¹³ Hahm and Kim speak of two main pillars of modern South Korean self-identity: anti-communism and anti-colonialism – Japan in particular is seen as the ‘other’ for the Korean ‘self’, but anti-communism would have loomed larger during the Cold War standoff on the peninsula.¹¹⁴ For them finally, with the end of the Cold War, the balance changed and a nationalism-centred discourse resurfaced. Furthermore, Kim sees this ethnic Korean nationalism as the “perspective [that] is fixated on the artificial division of the Korean people by foreign powers, tempered only by the belief that their destiny lies in the emancipation of their political divisions through their common essence.”¹¹⁵

South Korea was usually regarded as a ‘shrimp amongst whales’, as a minor, squeezed-in player that was all too often victim of the battles between larger forces. Due to this geopolitical situation, post-liberation Korea was also attributed only limited leeway in its foreign policy choices and thus had to constantly manoeuvre between the more powerful regional actors.¹¹⁶ The ROK’s economic and security position has thus been crucially dependent on the asymmetrical alliance with the United States of America. Both states had signed the ‘Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea’ after the Korean War in 1953 – and the United States still holds wartime operational command (OPCON) over South Korean forces until today. Son therefore attributes South Korea – what he calls – the international security identities of “garrison state” and “blood-forged ally”, when describing South Korea as a foreign policy actor vis-à-vis the United

¹¹² Moon CI. and Li CF., 2010: 334.

¹¹³ Hermanns H., 2006: 7.

¹¹⁴ Hahm CB. and Kim SG., 2006: 101.

¹¹⁵ Kim A., 2011: 10.

¹¹⁶ De Ceuster C., 2005; Kang SH., 2011.

States.¹¹⁷ When South Korean troops were sent to fight in the Vietnam War from 1964 to 1973 it was by direct request from Washington; Seoul saw the contribution mostly as a tool for alliance management¹¹⁸ or to generate revenue through inclusion in the war economy.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, a key aspect of the Seoul's Cold War-foreign policy was the quest for domestic and international legitimacy in relation to North Korea. Domestically, in the absence of democracy, authoritarian rulers opted for nationalist and anti-communist narratives to sustain their regime,¹²⁰ while internationally Pyeongyang and Seoul competed in a race for external recognition and international support as *the* Korean state.¹²¹ This mostly ended in 1991 when both Korean states finally became members of the United Nations. In 1996 South Korea even became a member of the OECD, while North Korea was internationally isolated over its announced withdrawal from the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and was suffering from large-scale famines resulting in the death of over a million people.¹²² In the eyes of the world, the race for international legitimacy and recognition between the two Koreas had been largely decided by now.

¹¹⁷ Son KY., 2011.

¹¹⁸ Hwang B.Y., 2012: 15.

¹¹⁹ Breuker R., 2009: 40-41.

¹²⁰ Kim HJ., 2011: 220ff.

¹²¹ Koh BC., 2001: 232.

¹²² See also Noland M., Robinson S. and Wang T., 2001: 741.

2.3. Korea in the post-Cold War world

In the late 1980s much had changed within South Korea and in the wider region. Internally the country underwent an impressive transformation from authoritarianism to democracy and internationally for the first time diplomatic relations were re-established with China and Russia, as a result of President Roh Tae-woo's '*nordpolitik*' initiative. Moreover, President Kim Young-sam had just started his ultimately economy-focused *seggyehwa* (globalization) process, attempting to open up Korea more to the outside world, when the Asian financial crisis hit South Korea and the International Monetary Fund intervened. In consequence, the proud developmental narrative about the 'miracle from the Han river' suffered substantially.

In terms of Korean international identity, though, in the literature this outreach to the world of the 1990s is not seen as a wholehearted embrace of globalization. Alford stressed here the perceived threat of globalization to the social fabric of Korean societal relations.¹²³ Moreover, because of 1990s democratization processes, state-led and popular nationalism became disconnected and Seoul lost its influence over public discourse on national identity.¹²⁴ Hundt and Bleiker added that in newly democratized South Korea, for the first time, "long-held and long-repressed feelings of resentment [were able] to emerge."¹²⁵ Anti-Japanese and anti-American sentiments made their way into the media, whereas previously such voices and political demands had been mostly suppressed by the military dictatorships. This was seen as an indication that the opening of the country in the 1990s was reinforcing nationalism, the "paradox of Korean globalization."¹²⁶ Whether indeed a paradox or not, Shin made the point that the instrumentalist appropriation of globalization by the Korean state was "a familiar paradigm in Korea's history of social change"¹²⁷ and "a necessary means of enhancing national interests."¹²⁸ Saxer likewise argues that "for close to two decades Korean governments have [...] emphasized the aspirations of taking advantage of globalization to improve the status and international position of the country."¹²⁹

¹²³ Alford C.F., 1999.

¹²⁴ He B.G., 1999.

¹²⁵ Hundt D. and Bleiker R., 2007: 68.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Shin G.W., 2006: 209.

¹²⁸ Ibid.: 211.

¹²⁹ Saxer C.J., 2013: 398.

For the area of national security, Cha spoke of “a tension between globalization pressures on the one hand and localization imperatives on the other.”¹³⁰ For Cha, a realist himself, these structural constraints necessarily led to Korea being “firmly entrenched in a classic realist mindset [...] the residue of history and certain immutable geopolitical traits.” Further, he describes the resulting “Korean identity [...] as] strongly negative in strain” and as “reactive nationalism”¹³¹ fed by anti-foreign Confucian values.¹³² Besides, Shin noted the resurgence of another Asianism narrative through conservative intellectuals for the first time after the colonial era, that of ‘Asian values’ as a defence to maintain “society and identity against the state-led globalization that promoted neo-liberal ‘Western’ values.”¹³³ The Singaporean President Lee Kuan Yew had spearheaded this international debate by arguing that “what he termed Asian values such as respect for authority and consideration of the community’s interests above the individual’s interests could allow for economic growth and promote social harmony while avoiding the social pathologies prevalent in the West.”¹³⁴ The prominent South Korean opposition figure and democracy activist Kim Dae-jung, however, argued that Lee’s take on Asian culture was a selective mischaracterization based on a “myth”¹³⁵ as “Asia has a rich heritage of democracy-oriented philosophies and traditions.”¹³⁶

In 1998 the same Kim Dae-jung became the first progressive President in the country’s history. Particularly Korea’s relationships with two significant others, North Korea and Japan, were now re-calibrated, in what was understood as a “shift in identity.”¹³⁷ The ‘sunshine policy’ engagement of Pyongyang as well as the steps towards reconciliation with the former colonizing power, Japan, were very much set to change the rules of regional power game, although neither had a lasting effect beyond Kim’s presidency (1998–2003). Conservatives in particular remained sceptical of Kim’s advances with North Korea, due to their fear of a subsequently weakened US-ROK alliance. According to Snyder and Glosserman, “they saw the alliance as a necessary support for South Korea’s diplomatic

¹³⁰ Cha V., 2000: 236.

¹³¹ Ibid.: 238.

¹³² Ibid.: 239.

¹³³ Shin GW., 2005: 624.

¹³⁴ Myers T.E., 2011: 48.

¹³⁵ Kim DJ., 1994: 189.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Snyder S.A. and Glosserman B., 2015: 64.

efforts in the region and focused more on raising South Korea's profile on the global stage rather than diplomatic initiatives to strengthen regional cooperation in East Asia."¹³⁸

In contrast, President Roh Moo-hyun (2003–2008), also from the progressive camp like his predecessor, advocated a focus on regional integration and envisioned a balancer (*gyunhyeongja*) role for Korea, very much in equidistance to both the United States as well as China, which was initially very popular with the South Korean public¹³⁹ but with little external recognition from Japan and China, and effectively leading to a weakening of ties with Washington.¹⁴⁰ As a reaction, the conservative Park Geun-hye, the daughter of former authoritarian leader Park Chung Hee and later South Korean President herself, accused President Roh of “sabotaging Korean national identity.”¹⁴¹ In addition, as Ryu elaborates, President Roh pursued a strategy aiming at more independence or autonomy (*jaju*) from the United States, in particular with regard to Korea's own military capabilities and the transfer of mission control.¹⁴² Ryu further argues that the emphasis on a more independent foreign policy, especially vis-à-vis the United States was typical of the generation of democratization and student protest that came to power during the progressive presidencies.¹⁴³ This is the so called 386 generation of those born in the 1960s, who went to university in the 1980s and were 30 years old during the 1990s, when the term was first coined. President Roh's ROK National Security Council had also declared that Korea is nowadays “a major actor, not a subordinate variable” in Asia.¹⁴⁴ According to Cho and Park, it has been a key feature of South Korean and Japanese foreign policies not to be “content to play the role of followers”¹⁴⁵ of neither the USA nor China and therefore to propose “alternative region-making initiatives appealing to domestically contested views on how best to seek autonomy from the region's Great Powers as a way to enhance their political standing domestically and regionally.”¹⁴⁶ They conclude that Japan and South Korea are both pursuing a vision of more regional autonomy outside of US-led hub and spoke system of alliances in East Asia.

¹³⁸ Snyder S.A. and Glosserman B., 2015: 67.

¹³⁹ Cho IH. and Park SH., 2014: 601.

¹⁴⁰ See also John J.V., 2013: 17.

¹⁴¹ Kim BK., 2006: 81.

¹⁴² Ryu YW., 2013: 117-118.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Snyder S.A. and Glosserman B., 2015: 69.

¹⁴⁵ Cho IH. and Park SH., 2014: 584.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.: 583.

With the two progressive presidencies, the first in South Korean history, a new form of progressive Asianism came to the fore, but this time it was based on a confidence in the economic rise of East Asia and a changing perception of North Korea from a threat to an object of pity.¹⁴⁷ This is reflected in Campbell's long-term study about young South Koreans, for who the ethnic dimension of Korean national identity lost its relevance.¹⁴⁸ Also, given the potential costs of reunification with the impoverished North, many South Koreans became highly sceptical of any short- or medium-term solution to the division of the Korean peninsula. This is also the reason why young South Koreans, who are used to economic prosperity and a relatively stable security environment, have been described as more 'security conservative' than previous generations, putting them in the same group with the strongly pro-American, anti-communist 60-plus generation.¹⁴⁹ Campbell moreover observed ROK centred, oppositional motivations and protest, diagnosing a change in national interests and thus indirectly raised the question about the underlying change of identity formation. Environmentalism, personal well-being, historical issues such as the disputes about the naming of the East Sea/ Sea of Japan and most prominently the Dokdo/Takeshima-territorial dispute are on the centre stage nowadays. Furthermore, Campbell alludes to the still latent anti-Americanism as expressed by the protests against the import of US beef in early 2008 and to the high appeal of status-related goals such as improving South Korea's national brand, global ranking or leadership capabilities in the international community. She concludes that "[f]or many young people, pride in ROK's achievement and its growing international importance is a key part of their national identity, and as such they demand appropriate recognition for South Korea and respect from the international community."¹⁵⁰

A major development in this regard was also the unprecedented global circulation of Korean popular culture, known as *hallyu* or the 'Korean Wave'.¹⁵¹ Starting in the 1990s South Korea successfully developed transnationally successful music, television and film industries, systematically supported by the government in an effort to find new products and export markets. Globalization had initially been seen as a dangerous "Western cultural invasion [...] amplified by the uncertainty of the competitiveness of Korean popular

¹⁴⁷ Shin GW., 2005: 625.

¹⁴⁸ Campbell E., 2011.

¹⁴⁹ Denney S. and Friedhoff K., 2013.

¹⁵⁰ Campbell E., 2011: 128.

¹⁵¹ Kim YN., 2013: 1.

culture,”¹⁵² and until 1998 even Japanese cultural imports have been banned in South Korea. The success of the ‘Korean Wave’ changed this and became an international testament to the risen status of Korean culture. In consequence, at least for younger generations, “globalisation [became] a tool for building South Korea’s national brand and to gain international leadership.”¹⁵³

Likewise, with the help of public opinion data, Denney and Friedhoff showed how for Koreans the times of being a ‘shrimp amongst whales’ are coming to an end with their country “assuming its rightful place in the hierarchy of nations.”¹⁵⁴ According to their findings, there is the rise of a new nationalism as a “manifestation of a new national identity and a natural outgrowth of the country’s material development and newfound confidence.”¹⁵⁵ Many Koreans now see their country overcoming “the stigma of being a victim of colonization”¹⁵⁶ and support efforts to raise Korea’s international visibility and recognition as an important state among the first ranks of world affairs. Kim, for example, emphasizes that many South Koreans focus on their country’s “impressive achievements, from outperforming many of the world’s most advanced nations in fields as varied as technical innovation and hosting the Olympics.”¹⁵⁷ Rozman also points towards a more and more confident and status-driven South Korean self-understanding on the world stage:

*“South Koreans aspire to a proud national identity based on something more than economic accomplishment, democratic rights, and a well-respected place in international society. Success on those dimensions has not quenched the thirst for deeper appreciation of the South Korean state and for the Korean people for their special significance in the past, present, and future of Northeast Asia.”*¹⁵⁸

On the other hand, Ducke suggests that precisely because of the strong international status-inclination of Korea, Seoul should be more compliant with expectations from the international community.¹⁵⁹ What this survey data does not reveal, however, is how these attitudes relate to concrete foreign policy decisions and the wider foreign political discourse.

¹⁵² Kim YN., 2013: 4.

¹⁵³ Campbell E., 2010.

¹⁵⁴ Denney S. and Friedhoff K., 2013.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Hermanns H., 2006: 7.

¹⁵⁷ Kim A., 2011: 10.

¹⁵⁸ Rozman G., 2012: 64.

¹⁵⁹ Ducke I., 2002: 121.

In any case, the most outstanding recent period in terms of global outreach was the Presidency of the conservative Lee Myung-bak from 2008 to 2013. In 2009 the newly inaugurated President presented his National Security Strategy called *Towards a Global Korea*, aimed at performing middle power diplomacy “not only to improve Korea’s image, but also to exert influence on the international system.”¹⁶⁰ The national vision drew the picture of a globally interconnected, modern and responsible member of the international community that is prone to assume leadership for the first time in such traditional OECD-areas as international peacekeeping (PKO), official development assistance (ODA) and climate diplomacy.¹⁶¹ A fundamental image evoked was that of a model student that succeeded in fast modernization and development and is hence in a position to finally give back. Moreover, there was an ambition to serve as a ‘bridge’ between the developed world and developing countries. This very assertive idea about Korea seems to mirror Campbell’s assessment about younger Koreans’ proud focus on South Korea’s more recent developmental achievements. Rozman and Kim moreover see the appeal of traditional self-understandings undermined by Lee’s election and the rise of an identity, which is focused on shared values such as democracy or free-market-capitalism.¹⁶² The ‘Global Korea’ image is seen as a more positively defined self-image, quite in contrast to the victimization inherent in more traditional understandings. According to Cho and Park, President Lee’s foreign policy and national security advisor expressed that “the Lee government’s goal was to enhance South Korean *gukgyuk* [sic] (or national prestige) on the global scene.”¹⁶³

Under Lee’s presidency, Seoul did successfully bid for its very own approach to sustainable development by establishing the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), and hosted multiple multilateral summits such as the G20 in 2010, the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011 and the Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) in 2012. Lastly, Korea also joined a newly formed “platform for middle power cooperation,”¹⁶⁴ MIKTA, which stands for Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia. South Korea is also the first country to have ever developed from an aid-recipient to an international aid donor. In contrast to the ‘shrimp’ narratives, Korea’s newfound status was thus described with the

¹⁶⁰ John J.V., 2013: 20.

¹⁶¹ See also Snyder S.A., 2012.

¹⁶² Rozman G. and Kim A., 2012: 215.

¹⁶³ Cho IH. and Park SH., 2014: 599.

¹⁶⁴ Conley Tyler M. and McDonald-Seaton D., 2014.

metaphor of a “dolphin”.¹⁶⁵ With the inauguration of President Lee, Chun argues that a new “globalist school of thought” emerged in South Korean foreign policy making, but he also concedes that all presidential candidates had voiced similar visions about Korea’s expanding global horizon.¹⁶⁶ Chun further suggests that ‘globalists’ in Seoul favoured such roles as “mediator, facilitator of co-operation, convener in international co-operation, agenda-setter, bridge-builder, or switcher in international networks.”¹⁶⁷ On the other hand, he sees the main challenge for a globally oriented South Korea in a lack of globalist identity as “the South Korean public still adheres to its old self-perception to confine South Korea’s role and target regions.”¹⁶⁸

To put this into some context, in a 2010 national identity poll¹⁶⁹ over 75 percent of South Korean respondents indeed viewed their country as a middle power that, according to half of all respondents, should serve as a mediating bridge between the developed and developing worlds; but significantly fewer saw their country already as a “leader.”¹⁷⁰ In the corresponding larger long-term survey on the Korean public and national identity, which was undertaken by the East Asia Institute (EAI) 76.8 percent in 2010 and 69.4 percent of respondents identified their country also as a middle-ranking country (*jungjingung*) and 19.9 percent in 2010 and 27.2 percent in 2015 perceived their country still as a small nation (*yaksoguk*).¹⁷¹ Further, about half of the respondents (40.7 percent in 2005, 49.4 percent in 2010 and 50.9 percent in 2015) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “Our country should increase aid to poor countries.”¹⁷² In other findings, a strong majority of the respondents (67 percent in 2005, 50.5 percent in 2010 and 65.1 percent in 2015) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “Korea is not being properly treated on the international stage.”¹⁷³ With regard to regionalism or Asianist positions, 54 percent in 2010 and 68.2 percent in 2015 supported the formation of a regional, borderless union between China, South Korean and Japan similar to European Union,¹⁷⁴ with two thirds of

¹⁶⁵ Oh KD., 1999; Brazinsky G., 2007; Tudor D., 2014.

¹⁶⁶ Chun CS., 2013: 164.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.: 169.

¹⁶⁹ Lee SJ., 2011: 91.

¹⁷⁰ Lee SJ., 2011: 92; 2012: 20.

¹⁷¹ Lee NY. and Yoon IJ., 2016: 310.

¹⁷² Ibid.: 312.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.: 313.

respondents generally in favour of such a regional integration even without the involvement of the United States.¹⁷⁵

In terms of a globalist self-conception there is however a significant trend of increasing support for compliance with the decisions and rules of international organizations: 37.5 percent of respondents in 2005, 51.4 percent in 2010 and 59.1 percent in 2015 agreed or strongly agreed with this position.¹⁷⁶ A similar survey of South Korean 200 policymakers' attitude towards overseas developmental aid (ODA), undertaken by the Asan Institute in 2016, found that, while 99.5 percent of elites strongly or moderately supported South Korean ODA, there was somewhat less support (86.5 percent)¹⁷⁷ from the Korean public.¹⁷⁸ There were also minor differences between progressives and conservatives when it came to the reasons behind their support for ODA. While 46.8 percent of progressives gave the contribution to international peace and stability as their main reason, 38.7 percent of conservatives named the improvement of South Korea's image and foreign relations as their main motivation.¹⁷⁹

The earlier mentioned East Asia Institute, a well-established think tank with close links especially to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was one of the main drivers behind the recommendation for the government to consider middle power concepts for Seoul's future diplomatic trajectory¹⁸⁰ and so was South Korea's main ally, the United States of America. Lee Sook-jong, the EAI President argued that "South Korea's growing multilateral diplomacy has been pursued at no cost to its alliance ties with the United States. On the contrary, South Korea has utilized its political and diplomatic ties with the United States in promoting its regional and global influence."¹⁸¹ Accordingly, President Lee Myung-bak also shifted the administration's diplomatic focus back to the US-ROK alliance and pursued a rather hard-line stance towards North Korea, effectively ending the era of engagement with the north supported by his two predecessors.

¹⁷⁵ Lee NY. and Yoon IJ., 2016: 314.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.: 313.

¹⁷⁷ The discrepancy between the numbers in support for ODA in the Asan Institute survey and the East Asia Institute survey may simply be explained by the slightly different questions asked. While the EAI asked about the support for an increase in ODA, the Asan Institute asked about general support.

¹⁷⁸ Kim J.J. et al., 2017: 19.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.: 20.

¹⁸⁰ See also Lee SJ., 2015: 117.

¹⁸¹ Lee SJ., 2015: 118.

After all, there remains an ambivalent picture about the emergence of a new post-Westphalian globalist identity that is transcending national boundaries, especially if one remembers President Roh's focus on a more 'independent' and regionalist foreign policy as well as the earlier assessments of the 'paradox of Korean globalization', where the global order was mostly seen as a competition between nations.¹⁸² Kalinowski and Cho, for example, argue that Korea's global strategy with regard to ODA and international agenda-setting has been dominated by national economic interests to safeguard the competitiveness of Korean businesses:

*“Korea's global strategy is dominated primarily by short-term economic interests of Korean businesses. This pattern can be explained by the path dependency of Korea's mercantilist development strategy. Ironically, the institutional legacy of Korea's global economic success has become an obstacle to a broader global political role that is recognized and accepted by countries around the world.”*¹⁸³

Even Ikenberry and Mo, who suggest South Korea's global leadership as the future of the international liberal order¹⁸⁴, concede that an international profile and extensive multilateralism is “not an obvious outcome”¹⁸⁵ for a nation formerly known as the 'hermit kingdom' that has suffered various foreign invasions throughout history and was very recently a war-torn country. The tensions between the different identity conceptions are especially visible in the relationship with Japan. Here the post-colonial objections against external forces and the significance of self-autonomy collide with the capitalist and globalist self-understanding that President Lee tried to address when he, for example, suggested pragmatic and future-oriented cooperation with Japan. But even this trait can have conflictual consequences insofar as more self-assertive self-understandings may pave the way for status-battles, for example, in case of the naming of the East Sea/Japan or Dokdo/Takeshima: “Sensing a lack of international profile and recognition, Korea quite literally wants to be put on the map by demanding the international classification of Korean names for geographic features.”¹⁸⁶

Today it is widely agreed that South Korea is a 'middle power' in regional and global affairs. In the early 2000s, Seoul's global role had already been categorized as an emerging middle

¹⁸² Shin GW. and Choi JN., 2009.

¹⁸³ Kalinowski T. and Cho HK., 2012: 252.

¹⁸⁴ Ikenberry G.J. and Mo JR., 2013: 164-165.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.: 8.

¹⁸⁶ Hermanns H., 2006: 7.

power,¹⁸⁷ an actor that is still unlikely to lead and thus more likely to be led.¹⁸⁸ Since at least 2008, however, when Seoul successfully became a member of the G20, most scholars¹⁸⁹ agreed with Nye that South Korea had become an “important middle-ranking power in global affairs”¹⁹⁰ and a more confident emerging global power with its own leadership ambitions.¹⁹¹ The definition of what constitutes a middle power is contested in the literature,¹⁹² but, as neither great nor small powers, these countries are supposed to have the will and capacity to pursue niche diplomacy that targets limited policy fields or an instrumental interest in multilateral cooperation and international institutions for constraining more powerful states.¹⁹³ Therefore, they are said to have some rule-making power, which makes them more than mere rule takers, even though this can be said for small powers as well,¹⁹⁴ such as Qatar, Norway or New Zealand. Still, South Korea today is regarded as an exemplary middle power and a regional hub for trade and innovation with a strategic position in the global economy. Cooper even sees South Korea as a “stand out case” of rising middle powers “not only as a specific non-traditional middle power but also as a leader in a wider East Asia ‘wave’.”¹⁹⁵ Rozman, too, emphasizes Korea’s “special opportunity to play a critical role in the emergence of substantial regional linkages”¹⁹⁶ precisely because of its geographical regional centrality. In contrast, according to Kim’s survey of foreign policy experts, Seoul’s middle powermanship is underpinned by a “self-perception as a newly advanced economy and mid-ranked global power, capable of making a distinctive contribution to the global common good,”¹⁹⁷ while the experts were quite wary about the concept of middle power in South Korean diplomacy overall. Kim thus concludes that “there has been much confusion and analytical ambiguity over South Korea’s articulation of a middle-power posture.”¹⁹⁸

In addition, there appeared to be very different uses of the concept of identity with regard to South Korea as a foreign policy actor, as well as a widespread but merely anecdotal use

¹⁸⁷ Jordaan E., 2003.

¹⁸⁸ Kim SH. and Lim WH., 2007; Rozman G., 2006.

¹⁸⁹ See Hundt D., 2011; Ikenberry G.J. and Mo JR., 2013; Saxer C.J., 2013; Kim SB., 2014.

¹⁹⁰ Nye J., 2009.

¹⁹¹ Chun CS., 2013: 155.

¹⁹² Saxer C.J., 2013: 398-400; Robertson J., 2017.

¹⁹³ Cooper A.F., 1997; Easley L.E., 2012.

¹⁹⁴ See also Maass M.M. and Chong A., 2010.

¹⁹⁵ Cooper A.F., 2015: 32.

¹⁹⁶ Rozman G., 2006, ix.

¹⁹⁷ Kim SM., 2016: 5.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.: 14.

of role-theoretical conceptual language. Son, for example, without further definition or explanation of the concept, introduces ‘international security identities’ such as “garrison state” or a “blood-forged ally”, when describing South Korea as a foreign policy actor vis-à-vis the United States.¹⁹⁹ It will become apparent in the following that what Son referred to is better described as ‘international roles’ or ‘international role identities’. Also, Easley’s comparative analysis of South Korean and Vietnamese national identities in light of their middle power foreign policies²⁰⁰ simply looked at similarities between different national identities and infers from assumed closeness or distance that this also creates a specific “geopolitical distance.”²⁰¹ But the case at hand of the Korean peninsula shows that such simplified models are of little explanatory value: there are two Korean states that share the same people, language and history, but how does that explain any of both Koreas’ foreign policies? As already illustrated, both Korean states actually claim to provide the better nation state platform for the Korean nation.²⁰² Lastly, Easley’s understanding of identity as national self-conceptions of domestic elites remains rather vague and anecdotal, although he himself concedes it is very difficult to track identity “accurately and reliably”.²⁰³ For Kim, who has looked primarily at Seoul’s developmental policy, middle power is a “diplomatic identity”, a “policy frame” as well as a “self-identity”²⁰⁴ that remained too vague and confusing for Korea’s regional situation, aspirations and strategic imperatives. Hence Kim argued for the adoption of different concepts, such as a ‘creative and constructive power,’ which she understands as “an aspiration for the country to play a ‘creative’ role [sic] and exert ‘constructive’ influence to lessen security tensions in the region.”²⁰⁵ While I agree with Kim’s assessment of the vague and inconsistent use of ‘middle power’ in the political and academic discourse, I would argue that the confusion mainly stems from a more basic lack of conceptualization of what ‘identity’ and ‘role’ mean in the context of nation states and foreign policy.

Taking up the challenge of providing the field with comprehensive analytical tools to study identity, Rozman presents a six dimensional approach to investigate national identity

¹⁹⁹ Son KY., 2011.

²⁰⁰ Easley L.E., 2012.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² See also Koh BC., 2001: 232.

²⁰³ Easley L.E., 2012: 437.

²⁰⁴ Kim SM., 2016: 3.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.: 12.

comparatively in East Asia.²⁰⁶ He introduces several descriptors such as ideological (left, right, centrist), temporal (pre-war, postwar, post-Cold War) or sectoral (culture, economics), which reveal his treatment of identity as mere set of properties, leaving the constitutive and formative aspects of identity completely aside. The closest of Rozman's categories to 'international identity' is his horizontal dimension, which focuses on the respective relations of Seoul with the US, Northeast Asia and the whole world. After all, Rozman's approach is only a descriptive and external categorization, without any theorization of his understanding of 'identity'. In contrast, Kim, aware of the need for an approach bridging levels of analysis, calls for a redefinition of national identity along the lines of what he calls synthetic national identity theory, because most IR approaches "demand [...] either domestic level factors or the international system as the determinant in framing foreign policy".²⁰⁷ Even though his attempt to bridge levels of analysis has to be welcomed, his suggested 'synthetic theory' falls short of conceptual clarity and richness, leaving open what and how to synthesize.

²⁰⁶ Rozman G., 2012.

²⁰⁷ Kim SS., 2006: 27.

2.4. Bridging the empirical-conceptual double gap

In conclusion, this literature review arrives at a double gap in the literature. The first gap is empirical about the content of South Korean state identity as a rising power. As yet there is no comprehensive assessment of the international state identity of South Korea as an emerging global power. Korea's place in the world developed, but for the most of the time Korea was not simply a small and marginal 'shrimp' and neither was its self-understanding. Before the dawn of the Western Westphalian 'international order' of sovereign nation states, Korea was close to the civilizational centre in the Sino-centric world as a major cultural and economic hub. Beginning with the Qing China downfall, this changed and ended in Joseon Korea's colonization by the Japanese Empire, after unsuccessful attempts at domestic modernization. During the Cold War South Korea was for the most part ruled by military dictators and the country served as a bridgehead of the US-led so-called 'free world' against communism. Since the 1990s South Koreans have been redefining their place in the world with an unprecedented global outreach in cultural, economic and security-related matters. In the early 21st century South Korea is now showing a new-found international confidence and has voiced global and regional leadership ambitions. When it comes to the related literature, there is an agreement that the proverbial shrimp is no more, but it is unclear what has changed in South Korean international state identity and how. Given the above literature review, it seems still quite possible that South Korea's global outreach is underpinned by regionalist, nationalist, post-colonial and globalist self-understandings. Hence, the question about South Korea's international state identity in context of its global foreign policy remains an empirical question, deserving further investigation. The potential influence of globalist, post-colonial and Pan-Asian identity narratives thus has to be of concern as the three sub-questions for this study.

The second gap is conceptual and consists of a lack of agency-oriented approaches to studying the state identity of South Korea as an international actor. Identity as an analytical concept in IR has been applied in various divergent ways in the study of South Korean foreign policy, often conflated with the concept of 'role', but with an overall lack of taking South Korean perspectives and ultimately agency into account. Moreover, the often referred to structural notion in assessments of South Korean status seems rather overvalued.

Not every small state is automatically weak²⁰⁸ and the historical vulnerability in the Northeast Asian geopolitical setting may even have served as an opportunity for Seoul as well. Woo, for example, has showed how South Korean governments have had a “remarkable leverage on the big ally”²⁰⁹ precisely because the “United States has historically been willing to pump financial resources into the country”²¹⁰ enabling Seoul to capitalize on Washington’s strategic and security concerns in Northeast Asia. Moreover, the challenging regional geopolitics have been a constraining reality for any state in the region, for neither rising China, the global superpower US, nor maverick North Korea can easily project their power there.²¹¹

It is the aim of this study to close this double gap by providing a conceptually sound and empirically rich agency-oriented inquiry into the international state identity of Korea as an emerging global power. In order to do so, I will further review ‘identity’ as an analytical concept in IR in the next chapter and then suggest a role-theoretically inspired approach focusing on self-identifications and particular self-images in South Korea’s global foreign policy in chapter 4.

²⁰⁸ See also Ingebritsen C. et al., 2006.

²⁰⁹ Woo JE., 1991: 9.

²¹⁰ Ibid.: 8.

²¹¹ See also Shim D. and Flamm P., 2013.

3. An Elusive Concept in IR Theory: ‘Fixing’ Identity

Identity is one of the main concepts in International Relations (IR) and its prominence has much to do with the emergence of the interpretative and post-rationalist approach of constructivism since the 1990s. However, due its inherent complexity there have been a great diversity of different ontological and epistemological assumptions employed in the study of identity, leading to infamous “definitional anarchy”.²¹² Recently there have been attempts in IR to coordinate and integrate different identity conceptualizations in order to realize the potential of identity based research while acknowledging the plurality of identity perspectives. After a brief discussion of the developments and shortcomings in constructivist identity research, in this chapter I will then, first, consolidate some parameters for what a theoretically sound and empirically useful identity approach has to encompass and, second, illustrate the corresponding gap of state identity research on South Korea as a foreign policy actor and present the integrative potential of role theory as a further way forward.

²¹² Abdelal R. et al., 2006: 695.

3.1. Identity in constructivism

‘Identity’ as a concept in International Relations is an analytically elusive and contested issue. Because of its multiple applications and its conceptual vagueness, some social scientists²¹³ have even argued to abandon the concept completely. However, if vagueness is a problem for complex phenomena, maybe IR scholars also have to abandon concepts like power or the state.²¹⁴ Identity has been explored on various levels of analysis, from the individual, to social groups, states and international organizations and from different sociological, psychological and philosophical traditions. This can lead to a lot of confusion, as identity may refer to the individual beliefs and actions of a state leader, the politics of belonging and citizenship in a political community or the role and interests of an international military alliance such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The status of ‘identity’, “*the shooting star of international relations theory*”,²¹⁵ is closely linked to the emergence of what became known as ‘constructivism’ in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Before, identity did not feature greatly in the traditional realist theories of realism and liberalism, as both approaches treated the state as a more or less autonomous unit in an anarchical systemic environment, which was seen as either pitting states against each for survival or incentivizing them to overcome this conflictual setting by cooperation, facilitated by mutual trust.

For (neo-)realists, all states have the same basic interest in survival and so they fight for the better relative gains in the zero-sum game that is international politics. According to this understanding, state identities are fixed, systemically determined, and states are self-help units.²¹⁶ A further specification is maybe the categorization of state actors in super-, great-, middle- or small powers as measured by their material power capabilities that equips those states with different options for action. As in the case of the ROK during the Cold War, a small power hence is likely to balance, bandwagon, hedge or counterbalance together with other states against a greater power. And only weak or failed states, this is the historical lesson for realists, have not enjoyed sovereignty.²¹⁷ Because (neo-)realists solely focus on systemic determinants for state behaviour, they not only neglect the

²¹³ Brubaker R. and Cooper F., 2000.

²¹⁴ Berenskoetter F., 2010: 3600.

²¹⁵ Ibid.: 3595.

²¹⁶ See van Evera S., 1994.

²¹⁷ See Krasner S., 1999; Jackson R., 2000.

domestic debating and decision-making but also call for a strategic and rational thinking according to those systemic determinants. Proponents of the ‘liberal school’ of IR thought share the basic assumption about the ontology of the international sphere and about state identities, but they draw a different conclusion from that: Cooperation – action, not identity – actually helps to overcome the zero-sum-situation as long as state actors concentrate on absolute gains.²¹⁸ Furthermore (neo-)liberals have a tendency to ascribe different characteristics to different regime types: democracies are said to behave differently from non-democracies as for example illustrated in the liberal peace theory, which posits that democracies are less likely to fight wars with each other. This perspective typically focusses on the benefits of interdependence through trade, international institutions, and regional integration. The key property of sovereignty here remains crucial, but can actually be compromised, if for rational, absolute gains considerations. According to Harris, “‘the nation’ and its identity do not appear to feature highly on the agenda that deals with ‘real’ national interest analyzed by classical rationalist theories of international relations.”²¹⁹ Constructivists, however, disagree with the rationalist ontology of the axiomatic status of a stable anarchical international system, emphasizing the dynamic social construction and co-constitution of structure and agents through state identities or in the words of Wendt: “Anarchy is what states make of it”.²²⁰

When the nascent constructivist approach was challenged by the rationalist establishment of the discipline to adopt a positivist epistemology in order to develop into a ‘proper scientific’ approach, a split between constructivists was the result.²²¹ Those answering the call to come up with testable hypotheses in order to “be seriously considered [as] a contender in IR theory”²²² started to focus on ‘norms’ as their prime research object and worked for example on national security²²³ or the social construction of national interest through interaction.²²⁴ At the same time, more radical constructivists continued to resist these “disciplining expectations”²²⁵ and pursued ‘critical’ projects on, for example,

²¹⁸ See Keohane R.O., 1989.

²¹⁹ Harris E., 2009: 175.

²²⁰ Wendt A., 1992.

²²¹ See also Price R. and Reus-Smit C., 1998.

²²² Hofferberth M. and Weber C., 2015: 78.

²²³ Katzenstein P., 1996.

²²⁴ Wendt A., 1992; Klotz A., 1995; Finnemore M., 1996.

²²⁵ Hofferberth M. and Weber C., 2015: 78.

discourses of national security²²⁶ or the constitution of collective identities.²²⁷ In consequence, identity research ended up being rather fragmented. Whereas the norm literature focused mostly on the diffusion of norms through socialization of actors, post-structural identity perspectives focused most of their attention on processes of ‘Othering’.

Further, Zehfuss criticises the most prominent constructivist take on identity, Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Relations*,²²⁸ for failing to account for the domestic formation of identity and simply treating the state as a unitary actor. By doing so, Wendt takes a systemic perspective and simply looks at changes in behaviour while attributing them to changes in identity. Such an approach reduces ‘identity’ to a mere behavioural profile and “to something negotiable between states”.²²⁹ Cedermann and Daase thus called for constructivists to “endogeniz[e] corporate identities”.²³⁰ By corporate identity they mean the pre-interaction identity of a state actor, “constituted by [...] territory, legal frameworks and other institutions”,²³¹ in contrast to social identity, such as small or a great power. Besides, Aggestam’s take on foreign policy and identity is representative for the early ‘culture’ oriented constructivism in the 1990s. She treated ‘culture’ as the “broader context in which individual and collective identities are linked, producing shared meanings that influence the framing of political action”²³² and in consequence conflating identity with the related concept of ‘role’. McCourt criticised this widespread conflation of the two concepts, which lead in effect to the results of “multiple ‘social identities’”²³³ of state actors, for example, in the works of Legro²³⁴ and Hopf.²³⁵ On the distinction between identity and role, McCourt argues that most constructivist identity approaches simply assume a direct link between identity and action, according to which “states act because their identities predispose them to certain interests or preferences.”²³⁶ For him, because agency is not simply following out of a given identity, such identity-based accounts “leave open the important question of why observed action was socially meaningful in any particular

²²⁶ Campbell D., 1992; Weldes J. et al., 1999.

²²⁷ Neumann I.B., 1996.

²²⁸ Wendt A., 1999.

²²⁹ Zehfuss M., 2001: 335.

²³⁰ Cedermann L.E. and Daase C., 2003.

²³¹ Ibid.: 8.

²³² Aggestam L., 1999: 2.

²³³ McCourt D.M., 2011: 1606.

²³⁴ Legro J., 2009.

²³⁵ Hopf, T., 2002.

²³⁶ McCourt D.M., 2011: 1604.

instance, which requires recourse to social roles.”²³⁷ If not, actors would simply be slaves of their defining properties, without any real agency to themselves. According to McCourt then, “roles are [...] the necessary social vehicle for action in its meaning-creating, identity-affirming sense.”²³⁸ In my conceptualization of identity I will also follow this approach. More on role-theoretical approaches to international identity and agency will be discussed in subchapter 3.3.

Similar to the constructivist split in IR, which is mostly concerned with questions about the international system, order or society, there are more positivist and more interpretative identity perspectives²³⁹ in the subfield Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), which focuses on understanding and explaining the behaviour of specific actors within the system by unpacking the unitary actor’s foreign policy making. Whereas FPA positivists are more concerned with questions of fixed identities and their effects on foreign policies – “causes for action” – the interpretative strand emphasizes the crucial role of language as a medium for the social constitution of identities: how it was possible that a certain identity understanding was established discursively by certain agents – “reasons for action”.²⁴⁰ Common to all identity based FPA is the focus on effects of national self-understandings on interest formation and consequently on foreign policy action, mostly for the purpose of either understanding foreign policy behaviour or the formation of the international system.

Actually, despite the multitude of different usages and definitions of especially the concepts of ‘identity’, ‘culture’ and ‘role’, there seems to be a pattern underlying most of the prevalent approaches, mirroring the distinction between ‘I’ and ‘Me’ in the formation of the ‘Self’, which was introduced by American pragmatist philosopher and sociologist George Herbert Mead.²⁴¹ For example, the first, more fundamental and pre-interaction part of the Self, has been termed ‘corporate identity’ by Cedermann and Daase or ‘role identity’ by Wendt, and more broadly ‘culture’ by Aggestam, whereas the latter, the social and contextual manifestation of the Self has been defined as either ‘social identity’ (Cedermann/Daase), ‘role’ (Wendt), or just ‘identity’ (Aggestam).

²³⁷ McCourt D.M., 2011: 1605.

²³⁸ McCourt D.M., 2012: 370.

²³⁹ See also Checkel J.T., 2008: 72.

²⁴⁰ Stahl B. and Harnisch S., 2009: 32.

²⁴¹ Mead G.H., 1934.

Moreover, the agreement by most constructivists on the relational and contextual nature of identity lead to the adoption of a notion from sociology and social psychology about ‘multiple identities’. Following McCourt,²⁴² I would still like to problematize its application to polities in particular. If one accepts that the relational and contextual nature of ‘identity’ may lead to different social identities, we can indeed speak of multiple (social) identities. But how far does this multiplicity go? Does it affect the more stable, elusive and fundamental Meadian ‘I’ or ‘corporate identity’? If so, what ties the multiplicity of identities ultimately together, what is the referent object? If a polity engages in various social contexts and develops a multitude of identities that are anything more than social, does this not automatically lead to the fragmentation and dissolution of the initial political community into a multitude of political communities? Must there not be a more fundamental ‘corporate identity’ part that experiences and ensured the sameness throughout time and space and thus various social contexts, even though it is certainly not immune to changes influenced by the social environment? For this reason, I am following McCourt and Harnisch²⁴³ here, in that the Republic of Korea has only one corporate identity as a state, which may be manifested in different social or role identities in different international contexts. More on this perspective will follow in chapter 4, where the methodological approach will be presented.

In his entry on identity in the *Handbook for International Studies*, Berenskoetter offers the most comprehensive review of the concept from an IR perspective to date.²⁴⁴ Acknowledging the complexity of identity, which encompasses the individual and the collective, state and nation as well as historical, cultural and material aspects, he rebuffs simple or parsimonious conceptualizations of identity and makes the case for a set of parameters which constitute the core of any theoretically rigorous and empirically applicable understanding of identity in IR. According to Berenskoetter, there is a common sense agreement that “having an identity means having a sense of self”,²⁴⁵ without which the actor would be unable to perceive and enact any meaningful agency. This precarious state has been termed “ontological insecurity”,²⁴⁶ and the need for a stable sense of self on

²⁴² McCourt D.M., 2011: 1606.

²⁴³ Harnisch S., 2014: 13.

²⁴⁴ Berenskoetter F., 2010.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.: 3600.

²⁴⁶ Steele B., 2008; Mitzen J., 2006.

the individual level has been attributed to a human desire for cognitive stability²⁴⁷ and for belonging and recognition.²⁴⁸ The challenge for constructivism is, however, how to understand the formation of this inherently dynamic and situational idea about oneself.

Here, drawing from works by Hall and Bloom²⁴⁹ on the desire for a stable sense of self, Berenskoetter introduces the satisfaction of a ‘will-to-manifest-identity’ as the main driving force behind social agency: “what one ‘is’ (or want to be) is sustained by what one ‘does’”.²⁵⁰ This way he highlights the performative aspect of identity and the significance of active processes of identification. Identity here is a dynamic, situational and non-essential phenomenon that has to be constantly reaffirmed through performance and can thus only be stabilized temporarily. Herein lies also the difference between the broader and fuzzier term ‘culture’, which he dubs a “depository of various structural parameters in a society”,²⁵¹ and identity, “the action unit of culture”,²⁵² which is established through the selective invocation of certain cultural parameters, generally understood as ‘identity politics’. Lastly, Berenskoetter notes the central role of drawing boundaries with ‘Others’, against which or with which the Self is formed. This last aspect, known as ‘Othering’, is at the core of a post-structural understanding of state identity, in which the constitution of difference is seen as the main practice of foreign policy.²⁵³ But because of this “neglect [of] non-hostile implications of self and other distinctions”,²⁵⁴ the result is an overemphasis of just one dimension of identity and thus on conflict and threats to the self. Also, many studies invoking ‘national identity’ tend to focus solely on the politics of drawing boundaries, for example, with regard to multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism or the emergence and nurturing of a European supra-national identity.

Stark Urrestarazu’s account of identity as a concept complements Berenskoetter’s perspective fittingly. While she also acknowledged the vast variety of different identity perspectives, she criticizes that too often scholars opt for tailored and self-serving *ad hoc* definitions of identity or that they exhibit a tendency to just address partial aspects of

²⁴⁷ Kowert P., 1999; Hopf T., 2002.

²⁴⁸ Ringmar E., 1996.

²⁴⁹ Hall R.B., 1999: 6; Bloom W., 1990.

²⁵⁰ Berenskoetter F., 2010: 3601.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Fitzgerald T.K., 1993: 186.

²⁵³ Campbell D., 1992.

²⁵⁴ Stark Urrestarazu U., 2015: 134.

identity. In order to yield the “highest possible theoretical exploit”²⁵⁵ she too calls for multi-dimensional understanding of identity as an ‘analytical prism’, similar to Berenskoetter’s ‘eye opener’ analogy, to shed light on the complexities of the practice and constitution of the actors and structures of world politics. In order to do so, she proposes a multidimensional model of identity focusing on narratives, performances and emotions. It has to be stated though that Berenskoetter and Stark Urrestarazu are speaking of identities of organized collectives, particularly of states and their foreign policies. In contrast to many other identity approaches, most notably Wendt, the state is hence not a unitary actor, but a composite actor, a social structure itself.

²⁵⁵ Stark Urrestarazu U., 2015: 135.

3.2. A multidimensional model of identity: narrative, performance and emotion

Starting from the premise that there is no foreign policy practice that is not driven by identity, Stark Urrestarazu highlights the constitutive role of the intersubjective “establishment of continuity via a narrated ‘story’ of the actor’s own historical development as a collective”.²⁵⁶ Berenskoetter too elaborates on the narrative side of identity, while advocating for the study of ‘biographical narratives’ in order to take the internal processes of collective identity formation within a given polity seriously,²⁵⁷ rather than just focusing on ‘Othering’. He sees the function of ‘biographical narrative’ in providing “the Self with knowledge about its place in ‘the world’, specifically to meaningfully situate the Self and delineate its existence in time and space, to provide us with a necessary sense of orientation about *where* we come from and *where* we are, or could be going”.²⁵⁸ A great number of IR scholars²⁵⁹ have been applying narrative approaches to identity matters and the narrative aspects of identity formation are widely accepted, however with one major caveat: one has to be careful not to essentialize identity again,²⁶⁰ by condensing fixed and timeless unitary ‘national characters’ or ‘national cultures’. In order to escape this trap, a second identity dimension deserves attention: performance.

In its performative dimension, identity is constituted situationally and relationally, as “actors might advert to several different possible narratives in a given situation”.²⁶¹ Crucial here is the actual selective identification with certain narratives over others and the consequential actions. This performative dimension is best illustrated through recourse to Mead’s work on the Social Self,²⁶² which was later subsumed under the label ‘symbolic interactionism’ by Mead’s student Herbert Blumer and introduced to the social sciences by Erikson.²⁶³ It is in concrete moments of interaction, when the Self is facing an Other, when “self-fulfilment takes place through an evolutionary process in which the acting Self, the ‘I’ driven by intuition and instinct, gradually comes to internalize the ‘attitude of the whole

²⁵⁶ Stark Urrestarazu U., 2015: 137.

²⁵⁷ Berenskoetter F., 2014: 282.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.: 269.

²⁵⁹ Ringmar E., 1996; Bially Mattern J., 2005; Hansen L., 2006; Steele B., 2008; Wæver O., 2002; Weldes J. et al., 1999.

²⁶⁰ Epstein L.M. et al., 2013.

²⁶¹ Stark Urrestarazu U., 2015: 137.

²⁶² Mead G.H., 1934.

²⁶³ Erikson E., 1968.

community’, devising a sense of ‘Me’ by adopting to a social group”.²⁶⁴ This view is also supported by the influential Social Identity Theory (SIT),²⁶⁵ which presents a theory of action centred on in-group/out-group dynamics. SIT locates the constitution of identity in interaction and ongoing comparison with Others, “resulting in multiple in-group/out-group categorizations based on emotion-laden situational social similarities and differences.”²⁶⁶ Accordingly, deviant in-group identity conceptions constitute a threat but are also the only source for identity change.²⁶⁷ The unfortunate consequence of such an identity perspective is the rather narrow focusing on binary identity and conflict, neglecting the potentially positive and confidence building function of identifying with an Other. From a perspective of International Political Sociology, Adler-Nissen argues that SIT approaches tend to neglect the social constitution of the Self in favour of a psychological processes vis-à-vis others assuming a universal desire for self-esteem.²⁶⁸ The more recent literature on status²⁶⁹ or prestige²⁷⁰ in IR similarly builds on this psychological understanding of the Self. In consequence, as Adler-Nissen criticizes, SIT approaches fail to note that international positions of state actors can also be “a result of their dealings with their own past and domestic conflicts.”²⁷¹

Further, the focus on situational and performative dimensions ties in well with more recent adaptations of relational sociology²⁷² in the study of international politics. These studies²⁷³ adopt a relational-processualist perspective mostly in a critique towards the great body of work on norms in international relations, where “states have the choice either to reject or embrace a given norm but not to (re)define its meaning”.²⁷⁴ Relational-processual approaches stress the role of norms for orientation but insist that actors have creative agency and are not simply ‘norm dupes’ blindly following a script. Key in this understanding is the theoretical premise that actors only gain consciousness over their actorhood in relations to others due to their sociability. Further, it is through “drawing on

²⁶⁴ Berenskoetter F., 2010: 3602.

²⁶⁵ Tajfel H. and Turner J.C., 1986.

²⁶⁶ Stark Urrestarazu U., 2015: 133.

²⁶⁷ See also Johnston A.I., 2005.

²⁶⁸ Adler-Nissen R., 2016: 32-33.

²⁶⁹ Welch Larsen D. and Shevchenko A., 2010.

²⁷⁰ Lebow R.N., 2008.

²⁷¹ Adler-Nissen R., 2016: 33.

²⁷² Emirbayer M. and Mische A., 1998; Joas H., 1996.

²⁷³ Bucher B. and Jasper U., 2017; Hofferberth M. and Weber C., 2015.

²⁷⁴ Hofferberth M. and Weber C., 2015: 85.

norms [that] actors are able to make sense of indeterminate situations with which they are constantly confronted”.²⁷⁵ Thus, proponents of this approach claim to account more fruitfully for norm change through taking agency seriously. Their research strategy thus is to “look at the interpretations, reasons and justifications that agents offer for their actions and to investigate how they change.”²⁷⁶

Moreover, the situationality of identity results in different identity manifestations through practice depending on the social context. This also means that foreign policy practice cannot simply be inferred (or predicted) from identity representation retrieved independently from the practice in question, because every action depends on an actual mobilisation of identity elements by actors in any given situation.²⁷⁷ Accordingly, the same actor can mobilize the same identity understanding in different social contexts to a different outcome. Lebow, however, boldly discards the use of the term ‘identity’ for collectives, because for him it implies the existence of a ‘true’ Self, whereas it is “really a composite of numerous self-identifications”.²⁷⁸ His argument rests on the premise that states have no reflexive self, the Meadian ‘I’, as “there is no conscious center able to develop its own identification and resist, assimilate or reformulate those imposed from the outside”.²⁷⁹ For him, roles, affiliations, bodies and narratives are the main sources for self-identifications, with different identity claims simply imposed on the community by its members. Importantly, Lebow concedes that, when taking an international perspective, states “have identifications that are in part self-chosen in the sense that they are coming from within. Other identifications are external and originate with other actors or are negotiated by states.”²⁸⁰ From this, one can equate his suggested ‘identifications’ to more conventional terms such as ‘identity conceptions’, ‘identity representations’ or ‘self-identifications’. One wonders whether the solution for the terminological confusion may be in reserving the term ‘identity’ solely for the elusive ‘sense of Self’ of the state actor or the corporate identity as McCourt and Harnisch have argued,²⁸¹ thus presuming an ontology of only one identity with differently manifested self-identifications per actor. Also, one would then focus on the easier-to-trace different social dimensions of identity in different social contexts, which are

²⁷⁵ Hofferberth M. and Weber C., 2015: 85.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: 90.

²⁷⁷ Stark Urrestarazu U., 2015: 139.

²⁷⁸ Lebow R.N., 2016: 79.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*: 82.

²⁸¹ McCourt D.M., 2011: 1606; Harnisch S., 2014: 13.

manifested through self-identification practice but nevertheless contested from the inside as well as from the outside (other-identification). Such a reading is still in line with the gist of Lebow's intervention, but does not disregard the use of the term 'identity' for collectives or composite actors completely. As will be shown in chapter 4, this is how 'identity' has been conceptualized in this study.

Third, more and more scholarly attention²⁸² is dedicated to a rather neglected aspect of identity: emotion. Following social psychological insights, any identity manifestation, (re-)formed through narration and performance, is also emotional.²⁸³ Stark Urrestarazu points to the well-established link between group membership and personal self-esteem, thus highlighting the importance of political status enhancement or humiliation.²⁸⁴ For some scholars working with psychological insights, experiencing ontological insecurity is *feeling* ontological insecurity.²⁸⁵ Mercer, for example, differentiates between individual and group emotions, suggesting that identity always depends on social emotions, because "[i]dentification requires a feeling of attachment; it is intrinsically social".²⁸⁶ But group members also share, validate and discipline each other's feelings, thus structuring social relations²⁸⁷, as otherwise "[a] group without emotion is a mere collection of autonomous individuals."²⁸⁸ From his SIT perspective, at least, it appears plausible that the importance of 'recognition' of a Self by Other(s) also stems from its emotional value of positive external affirmation, as suggested by the growing body of work on 'status' in international relations.²⁸⁹ In contrast, Reus-Smits questions whether a state can indeed be treated as a social group, such as a family, and argues from an institutionalist perspective that the state can "not be reduced to society: the two must be treated as analytically distinct."²⁹⁰ While this debate in IR about the role of emotions in world politics has been described as "one of the field's 'great frontiers'"²⁹¹, it remains largely theoretical with few particularly

²⁸² See, for example, Crawford N.C., 2000; Bially Mattern J., 2011; Bleiker R. and Hutchison E., 2014; Koschut S., 2017.

²⁸³ Stark Urrestarazu U., 2015: 137.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Kinnvall C., 2017.

²⁸⁶ Mercer J., 2014: 517.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.: 530.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.: 524.

²⁸⁹ Forsberg T., Heller R. and Wolf R., 2014; Lindemann T. and Ringmar E., 2014; Daase C. et al., 2015.

²⁹⁰ Reus-Smit C., 2014: 571.

²⁹¹ Ibid.: 568.

discursive empirical applications beyond the “‘emotions matter’ approach of the first wave of emotions scholarship in IR.”²⁹²

Lastly, Berenskoetter points to the specific situations where actors encounter each other “with a stock of private knowledge providing a stable sense of Self in time and space with the objective to keep their narrative going”.²⁹³ It is this ‘inter’-space between actors where identity is manifested in practice through narration, performance and emotions that should be the starting point for empirical analyses.²⁹⁴ Thus for international politics, the practice of foreign policy is the site where the formation and contestation of international identity takes place. It is here where countries’ relationship to the outside world, their places in the world, are (re-)calibrated.

After this brief review of the identity as a concept in IR theory, it becomes clear that any identity focused analysis has to encompass certain parameters and to face specific challenges: in the absence of a consensus on how to conceptualize and identify identity even within constructivism, any identity approach has to make clear the specific operationalization, the level of analysis, whose identity is investigated, where actorhood is seen as located, who is acting on behalf of the identity bearer and how identity is formed and changed. If one is particularly interested in the identity representations underpinning foreign policy practice of a given state it seems important to only claim inquiry into the ‘international identity’ of that state and not the ‘identity’ or broader culture of that community as a whole, even though these are certainly connected. Further, in order to avoid reductionism, one has to account for more than just one dimension of identity; it is not enough to just rely on either the internalization of norms, narrative representations or processes of Othering.

From the review above, one can conclude that identity, individual and collective, in IR literature is about stabilizing a sense of self which is important for meaningful agency and a sense of belonging. Because identity is contingent and situational, it can only ever be fixed or stabilized temporarily, which highlights the performative dimension of identity as a practice of identification. Thus, any identity research should focus on specific practices

²⁹² Koschut S., 2017: 2.

²⁹³ Berenskoetter F., 2014: 281.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.: 283.

of the actor of concern and the related 'identity politics', because it is only here where an otherwise contingent and broader sense of self becomes actualized in a specific situation to a specific time. For the stabilization of a certain identity understanding through time and space, the narrative dimension stands out, as situational identity representations are bound together to a 'biographical narrative'. Moreover, identity is contested, from within and without. Identification with or against others takes place in order to make sense of 'being' in a given situation. Both a 'logic of appropriateness' as well as a 'logic of consequence' can be the result, depending on the creative agency of actors and recognition by others. While there is an interesting IR debate ongoing about the social emotions and state identity, this remains still largely theoretical and with little empirical applicability for now. Finally, it has to be said that, because of the overly systemic focus of especially the norm-oriented socializing literature, a perspective focusing on internal or domestic identity politics, meaning the formation and contestation of different identity claims in different practice situations, seems warranted.

3.3. The potential for integration: role and identity

With the aforementioned identity parameters in mind, I would like to introduce the very similar but distinct concept of ‘role’ and the corresponding theoretical approach. I believe that the rich role-theoretical conceptual language can have an integrative function regarding the already discussed identity perspectives, clarifying terminology and opening up an empirically promising way of grasping ‘international state identities’ beyond their manifestations in social or role identities. To put it very simply, roles are the results of the encounter of an actor’s identity with the expectations of a given social environment. Any role has to be based in a corresponding identity element, and any identity has to be reaffirmed by respective role-playing. Hence, identity affirmation is only possible due to role-playing, as only social roles give identity meaning.²⁹⁵

3.3.1. Introduction to role theory

The sociological concept of role was first introduced into FPA by Holsti in 1970, but early approaches focused mainly on elite perceptions and on the restraining effects of role-based action.²⁹⁶ For Holsti role theory offered a framework for describing foreign policy behaviour or ‘role performance’, and role conceptions and their sources²⁹⁷. He defines ‘role’ or ‘role performance’ as “behaviour (decisions and actions) [which] can be kept analytically distinct from *role prescriptions* [sic], which are the norms and expectations cultures, societies, institutions, or groups attach to particular *positions* [sic]”²⁹⁸. Still, he contends that because of the relative social ‘thinness’ of international politics, expectations of Others (*alter*) are less relevant compared to internal role-making processes (*ego*). This is the reason why he suggests we speak of the more dynamic ‘status’ in international politics instead of a more rigid ‘position’ as in more structured social settings. Walker and Barnett²⁹⁹ further explored the possibilities of role-theoretical insights for the study of international politics, but for the most part the use of role theory remained largely “implicit”³⁰⁰ and anecdotal in constructivism. The most prominent exception is maybe Wendt, who introduced different cultures of international politics according to only three

²⁹⁵ McCourt D.M., 2011: 1619.

²⁹⁶ Aggestam L., 2006: 12; Breuning M., 2011: 17.

²⁹⁷ Holsti K., 1970: 246-247.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*: 239.

²⁹⁹ Walker S.G., 1987; Barnett M.N., 1993.

³⁰⁰ Breuning M., 2011: 20.

ideal type state identities, rival, friend or enemy.³⁰¹ It is important to note, however, that there is no single role theory but rather different sociological strands with sometimes conflicting use of concepts. Nabers identifies five perspectives, structuralist, functional, symbolic interactionist, organizational and cognitive role theory, each with their own strengths and shortcomings.³⁰² While the first two stand points are seen as overemphasizing the constraining functions of norms, the symbolic interactionist approach, for example, has been criticized for neglecting contextual constraints on actor's interactions. Adler-Nissen in contrast argues that “[i]nstead of interpreting interactions as a one-way disciplining process, symbolic interactionism explores the negotiation of social order as a complex interactive process.”³⁰³

Therefore, role theory is also capable of bridging these levels of analysis, the individual and the domestic sphere as well as the international system. Holsti described the international system as a distribution of different roles, already foreclosing the constructivist premise about the dynamic nature of international system. Thus in reference to Wendt's famous catchphrase, Harnisch coins this insight as follows: “international social order is what states make of it, and thus what roles they play”.³⁰⁴ In consequence, much role-theoretical work has been dedicated to questions about the stability of orders due to different role playing by the respective actors. There is a great variety of different understandings of roles in the literature such as rival, enemy, friend, superpower, great power, residual great power, leader of the west, middle power, balancer, faithful ally, defender of the faith, status quo oriented power, robust defender of human rights, nonaligned power, sovereign state or colonial power. But as roles and thus order emerge from the interaction of actors specific to time and space, there is no agreed upon catalogue of roles. Further, the different role types have different scopes and criteria. Superpower, for example, might also be considered a ‘role set’ or master role that is supported by auxiliary roles, such as leader of the west and robust defender of human rights.³⁰⁵

³⁰¹ Wendt A., 1992.

³⁰² Nabers D., 2011: 75.

³⁰³ Adler-Nissen R., 2016: 36.

³⁰⁴ Harnisch S., 2011: 2.

³⁰⁵ Sandstrom K., Martin D. and Fine G., 2010.

Most recently, a number of IR scholars³⁰⁶ reinvigorated the symbolic interactionist strand in role theory in FPA, drawing from sociological theories about the role of the individual in society. They made use of the Meadian understanding of individuation as a constant social process between an ‘I’ and a ‘Me’. The latter is the self-image when actors look at themselves through the eyes of the other, through ‘taking the role of another’, as illustrated in figure 1.

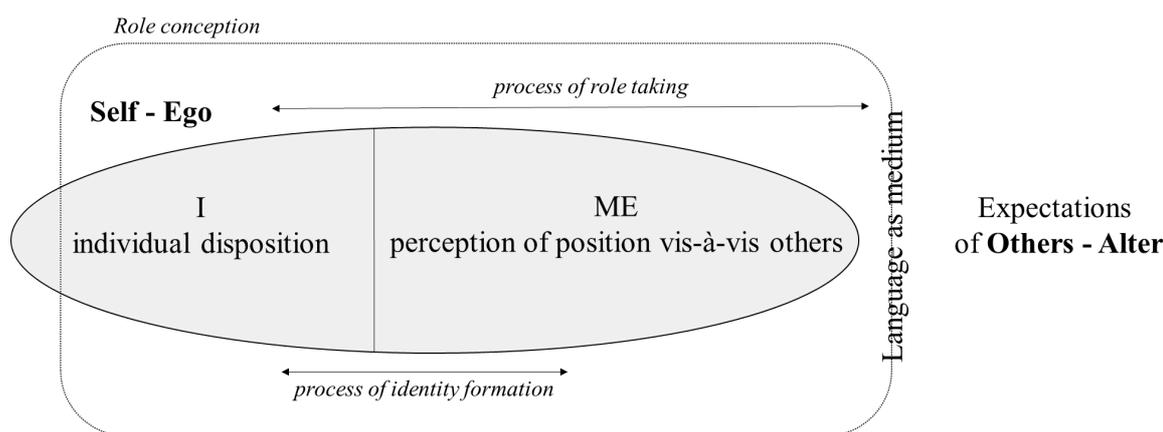


Figure 1: The Self, I and Me in Role Theory (Own Depiction after Harnisch 2016: 10)

In addition to significant concrete others, Mead³⁰⁷ made the case for the importance of the generalized other for the ‘Me’, which is anticipating and reflecting upon the internalized, whether assumed or experienced, attitudes in the respective social context, without taking concrete expectations into account.³⁰⁸ It is through this interpretative process of self-identification, of ‘taking the role of the other’, that the self is constituted. The sense of self, or corporate self-identity, is thus located in the ego part³⁰⁹ of which role conceptions are an integral part in the ‘Me’, but not the role itself, which is the concrete, situational manifestation of ego-alter interaction. According to Mead, only this ‘Me’ is empirically observable in a specific action-demanding situation: “We are aware of ourselves, and of what the situation is, but exactly how we will act never gets into experience until after the

³⁰⁶ Harnisch S., Frank C. and Maull H.W., 2011; Harnisch S., 2012; Harnisch S., Bersick, S. and Gottwald, J.-C., 2016; McCourt D.M., 2011, 2012; Cantir C. and Kaarbo J., 2012, 2016; Brummer K. and Thies C.G., 2015; Wehner L.E. and Thies C.G., 2014.

³⁰⁷ Mead G.H., 1934: 154.

³⁰⁸ Harnisch S., 2016: 10.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.: 11.

action takes place”.³¹⁰ Importantly, the experiencing ‘I’ part is only known through reflection, becoming objectified or manifested as a “historical figure”³¹¹ in the ‘Me’.

The crucial outcome from this perspective is that the self is not a passive recipient of social rules or a zombie-like executor of his ‘basic character’, for that matter, but an active interpreter of social attitudes when taking up the role of the generalized other.³¹² Here, roles are not understood as detailed scripts that are directing decision-makers behaviour but as the emergent relational outcomes of ongoing process of interaction, with the ‘Me’ providing a stable or habitual framework for agency and the evasive ‘I’ as a feeling and creative ‘mainspring’.

International roles relate to identities in different ways: roles are specific manifestations of ego-alter expectations, whereas identities also include ideas and emotions about the self that are maintained throughout time and space.³¹³ In consequence the past, experience and memory are all part of an actor’s identity as “former stages of in the self-identification process.”³¹⁴ The longer the self-identifications go back and the higher their institutionalization, the stronger are the incentives to the related role performance and expectations.³¹⁵ Harnisch refers to these constitutive identities as individual or corporate and he locates the discussion of ontological security here.³¹⁶ But he also mentions further identity types such as social identities stemming from group membership or type identities which refer to specific characteristics, such as being an autocracy or socialist country. Lastly, he also defines ‘role identities’ “as conceptions of individuals or states about themselves as role players”.³¹⁷ According to Harnisch, only these role identities account for a particular social task or purpose, whereas social or type identities fulfil constitutive functions. Moreover, his understanding of the state as a social structure opens up the opportunity for looking into the ego-part of an international role which is open to domestic contestation.³¹⁸ Here role theorists distinguish between vertical and horizontal perspectives on domestic role contestation: whereas the vertical contestation is, for example, between

³¹⁰ Mead G.H., 1934: 178.

³¹¹ Ibid.: 174.

³¹² Harnisch S., 2012: 53.

³¹³ Harnisch S., 2016: 8.

³¹⁴ Ibid.: 11.

³¹⁵ Burke P.J. and Stets J.E., 2009: 202.

³¹⁶ Harnisch S., 2016: 8.

³¹⁷ Ibid.: 8-9.

³¹⁸ Cantir C. and Kaarbo J., 2016.

elites and masses, the horizontal is between different political agents within the same polity. It has to be noted that in the role-theoretical literature, there are different understandings of the relationship between role and identity. For Nabers, identity simply equals role identity, which could also be seen as a dominant role conception that is linked to an actually enacted role and therefore not a rivalling, deviant or counter role conception.³¹⁹ Most of the related literature was primarily interested in exploring the role playing of a state actor and the negotiation of different expectations while neglecting the related domestic political processes.³²⁰ Thus, Cantir and Kaarbo attempted to ‘unpack the ego’ with a focus on domestic role contestation. For them, “both identities and roles are ideational factors that have a bearing on a state’s behaviour, [with] the latter carry[ing] more specific prescriptions for action.”³²¹

Now, the formation of role conceptions, which can be abstractly understood as a conversation within the ‘ego’ between ‘I’ and ‘Me’ in a given situation prior to concrete ‘alter’ expectations, is where identity elements are utilized in order to identify with the internalized ideas about the generalised other. In case of state actors, it is fair to assume that this contested decision-making process is about the legitimization of actions in reference to certain identity elements, which are consequently reaffirmed through role performance.³²² It is also possible though that an actor grows increasingly away from a role enactment with decreasing identification in “a sort of detachment [...] which goes with dissatisfaction and estrangement.”³²³ This is called ‘role distance’ and is a key indicator for role and identity change.³²⁴ It is this link between evasive identity elements that gets manifested through the reflective and contested formation of role conceptions and in turn lends legitimacy to specific role performances that can serve as the entry point for inquiries into identity.

3.3.2. Integrating identity perspectives through role theory

³¹⁹ Nabers D., 2011.

³²⁰ Kaarbo J. and Cantir C., 2013: 467-468.

³²¹ Cantir C. and Kaarbo J., 2016: 18.

³²² Flockhart T., 2006: 92; McCourt D.M., 2011: 1619.

³²³ Nabers D., 2011: 84.

³²⁴ Ibid.

Both in constructivist identity research as well as in the study of South Korea as a foreign policy actor, role-theoretical rhetoric has been used occasionally but mostly anecdotally and seldom to its full potential.³²⁵ Moreover, role playing has been often understood in a simplistic way. An illustrative example for the latter is the socialization-focused argument by Checkel that rejects role playing as superficial internalization and mere simulation of behaviour.³²⁶ But because of his focus on norm internalization imposed from the outside, Checkel overlooks internal processes of identity formation.

With regard to the usage of role-theoretical language in studies on South Korea, Easley referred to middle power as a role,³²⁷ although against the background of the wider role-theoretical literature, middle power is better seen as a role set. Kim in contrast compiled four “identities [(sic!), which] exemplify the distinctive characteristics of middle power”:³²⁸ early mover, bridge, coalition coordinator and norm diffuser, all of which are obviously better defined as roles or role identities forming together a middle-power role set. Only Hermanns has so far applied role-theory concepts directly for an analysis of Lee Myung-bak’s ‘Global Korea’ policy.³²⁹ She derived three different roles from this specific role performance: responsible global player, culturally relevant player and economic power. Her account rests very much on the perspective of mostly decision-makers and remains unclear about the domestic contestation in the larger identity discourse. John also had used role-theoretical language anecdotally, but without theoretical rigour and therefore without exhausting the analytical power of the approach. In an analysis of Seoul’s middle power diplomacy, he simply attributes the roles of facilitator, interlocutor and norm entrepreneur to Korea without going into greater detail on the formation, contestation and maintenance of these specific roles.³³⁰

Hence it is appropriate to bring a theoretically sound and empirically rich understanding of role theory back into the wealth of identity perspectives in general, but also the study of South Korean identity in particular. In his comprehensive account of the history and development of role theory in IR and FPA, Thies had highlighted the great integrative

³²⁵ Compare Lebow R.N., 2012.

³²⁶ Checkel J.T., 2005.

³²⁷ Easley L.E., 2012.

³²⁸ Kim S.J., 2014: 3.

³²⁹ Hermanns H., 2013.

³³⁰ John J.V., 2014.

potential of role theory for both sub-disciplines.³³¹ In this spirit and by going back to the parameters for identity research compiled from Berenskoetter³³² and Stark Urrestarazu,³³³ the advantages of taking a role-theoretical perspective to explore agency-oriented identity issues related to foreign policy become apparent. With the focus on role performance, role theory is very much in line with the performative and situational aspects of identity. For role theorists, any role has to be based in a corresponding identity element in order to be meaningful and thus legitimate, and any identity understanding can only be reaffirmed by respective role playing. A sense of self or a self-identity is thus acquired through the reflection of and interaction with significant and generalised Others. Theoretically, this sense of self is further expressed and habitualized in a narrative way and either routinely enacted (with the ‘Me’ dominating) or creatively newly calibrated (with the ‘I’ dominating) especially in times of crisis, when old frames of meaningful behaviour lose their value. Whereas the former can be tracked by the researcher, the latter puts the analyst into an epistemological impasse. Further, unpacking the identity formation within the ‘ego’ opens up opportunity to also trace the emotional dimension of identification politics along the horizontal and vertical contestation of the formation of role conceptions. As Mercer put it, “[w]ho we are is what we feel. Identity and emotion depend on each other. Identification without emotion inspires no action for one does not care.”³³⁴

Taking Lebow’s criticism about the use of the term identity seriously again,³³⁵ it seems only justified to use the term ‘identity’ for the elusive ‘I’ part of the ego. But likewise it would make sense to use the term ‘self-identity’ for the observable aspect of the ego, formed through the situational interplay of ‘I’ and ‘Me’, which is narrated for stability and legitimacy. Here, identities are understood as self-descriptions or self-images, and are “not related to any particular social function or action in or for a group as such [and t]hey are also unspecific with regard to time and social context.”³³⁶ The bearer of the self-identity is here a nation state as an international foreign policy actor towards other international foreign policy actors or organizations. But the state as a composite actor is itself a social structure in which different political actors, individuals and political groups, challenge the

³³¹ Thies C.G., 2017.

³³² Berenskoetter F., 2010; 2014.

³³³ Stark Urrestarazu U., 2015.

³³⁴ Mercer J., 2014: 522.

³³⁵ Lebow R.N., 2016.

³³⁶ Harnisch S., 2014: 13.

boundaries and direction of the organized collective, the polity. Just to be clear, the government of this state may also engage in similar role-playing with trade unions over labour policies, and there may be an international dimension to this, but this is not what is in the focus here. Because of the situational and performative dimensions of state identity throughout various policy fields, it seems to be either an illusion or at least a very ambitious goal to aim for a complete assessment of the identity of a polity at a given time. Having said that, there are indeed recent positivist attempts to “make identity count”,³³⁷ for example, by building a database of great power national identities from 1810 to 2010 based on ‘identities’ retrieved from official government text sources. Before embarking on such large-scale positivist and government-centric projects, I argue that too many aspects have been unclear and neglected in the study of identity, especially those of smaller or middle-sized countries whose agency and internal sources for identity formation remain outside of the focus of mainstream IR and FPA. In the following, I will show how such an agency-oriented framework for tracing identity can be developed by utilizing role-theoretical concepts.

³³⁷ Hopf T. and Allan B.B., 2016.

**PART II: ON THE GLOBAL STAGE – AN INQUIRY INTO SOUTH
KOREAN GLOBAL ROLE-PLAYING AND SELF-
IDENTIFICATIONS**

4. Methodology: From Roles to Self-identifications

As introduced earlier, the aim of the study at hand is an inquiry into the ‘international identity’ of the nation state Republic of Korea. The question is how the South Korean republic relates itself to the world in the early 21st century or, put differently, what kind of international identity is underpinning the ROK’s rise on the global stage. After reviewing the literature on South Korea’s international identity in chapter 2, I argued that there is an empirical gap with regard to South Korean identity and global foreign policy and concluded that South Korea’s global foreign policy is potentially linked to different identity narratives, from nationalism and post-colonialism over Pan-Asianism to globalism. In addition, based on the literature on South Korean identity, I expressed some scepticism especially with regard to the alleged influence of a ‘globalist’ or liberal internationalist self-identity in the South Korean international identity discourse. As I have further argued, by conflating role and identity, by treating the state as a unitary actor and by solely categorizing actors according to their behaviour (as, for example, a middle power), we remain unable to understand South Korea’s own take on its place in the world and thus also Seoul’s international behaviour. Such a simplistic understanding of identity is obstructing our view regarding the actual identity dynamics that would allow us, first, to understand the ROK better as a foreign policy actor and, second, to grant South Koreans some agency in the shaping of their relationship with the world.

In line with the parameters identified for research into state identity in the previous chapter, in this study the nation state is not treated as a unitary actor, but as a social structure itself within which different domestic political actors compete for dominance. In terms of methodology, I am grasping the international identity of the state actor ROK through focusing on what I call practices of self-identification in two selected foreign policy fields, international peacekeeping and climate diplomacy. I am defining self-identification practices as specific links between role conceptions and self-images by different political actors within the domestic setting of the ROK. In an inductive, textual analysis of these respective foreign policy discourses, I am able to account for the different self-identifications at play in different foreign policy decisions, while the focus lies on the domestic contestation and stability of these self-understandings over time. The comparison of these retrieved self-images in these self-identifications from both policy fields and over

time allows inference of larger patterns of international self-identity narratives. As ‘snapshots’ of an international, collective sense of self, these self-images enable insights into the larger international identity dynamics behind Korea’s global foreign policy.

4.1. Conceptualization and definitions

As one can see from the review of literature on identity from IR constructivism, identity is not easily conceptualized for empirical applications and thus identity studies have to be clear and upfront about the level of analysis, the location of agency and the political actors considered to be acting on behalf of the state in order to plausibly and reproducibly account for the politics of international state identity (re-)formation. In the following I am presenting an approach based on symbolic-interactionist role-theoretical concepts to theorize the link between foreign policy and state identity and to empirically investigate the international identity of the Republic of Korea in global governance. Due to this role-theoretical approach I am able to provide an agency-oriented account of the ROK's international state identity in selected foreign policy fields, while also doing justice to the fragility and complexity of South Korean state's self-identity on the global stage.³³⁸

This interpretative approach can be situated in the IR field of International Political Sociology that works with “a relational and processual ontology which endogenises interest or identity formation, resists different forms of reifications of structures, institutions or agents/subjects, as well as materialist or idealist reductionism.”³³⁹ As such, the approach developed here stands – like most IR constructivism – in the tradition of Max Weber's interpretative sociology that focuses on *verstehen* or *understanding* of social action from the perspective of agents and how these assigned meaning to and made sense of their actions and the world around them.³⁴⁰ For IR theory, Hollis and Smith termed this post-positivist approach of understanding an insider's story “told so as to make us understand what the events mean, in a sense distinct from any meaning found in unearthing the laws of nature”,³⁴¹ and Wendt called it the question of “how are things in the world put together so that they have the properties that they do?”³⁴² Accordingly, the main research question at hand asks not so much about the causality behind but the constitution of South Korea's international agency or, differently put, the relationship between its emergence as a key global player and South Korean state identity.

³³⁸ Compare Adler-Nissen R., 2016: 32.

³³⁹ Guzzini S., 2016: 5.

³⁴⁰ Weber M., 1968.

³⁴¹ Hollis M. and Smith S., 1990: 1.

³⁴² Wendt A., 1998: 103.

The symbolic interactionist role-theoretical identity-perspective at hand emphasizes the agency of actors as not simply norm dupes or zombie-like executors of a ‘basic character’, but as active interpreters of social attitudes. Moreover, as McCourt put it, “roles are the necessary social vehicle for action in its meaning-creating, identity-affirming sense.”³⁴³ Hence, roles are understood as emergent relational outcomes of an ongoing process of interaction between the Self and significant and generalized Others, whereas the contestation over role conceptions within a composite actor is about the legitimation of actions in reference to certain identity elements. These identity elements or self-images are consequently reaffirmed through role performance. In consequence, self-identity here is not fixed, but constantly formed through practices of self-identification or the linking of self-images and role conceptions to make sense of and justify certain political actions. In this conceptualization, South Korea has one state identity only, even though it is contested from within through different self-identifications.³⁴⁴ In line with Zehfuss’s notion, an actor’s identity here is more than just its social manifestation in role identities and thus more than “something negotiable between states”.³⁴⁵ Importantly though, because of their situational and performative character, state actors’ identities can only be grasped through these social manifestations.

In this particular Korean case, where there is another state that claims to be Korean, Pyongyang’s Other-identification from the outside may theoretically also be relevant for self-identification within South Korea, but only if domestic political actors choose to tap into self-images originating from the North. Practically, however, with the National Security Law restricting any pro-North political agitation, this seems less likely. Further, it is often simply a state actor’s role playing and thus role identity that changes with a change of government, but not the more fundamental identity. It may help to think of this as differently utilized or ‘activated’ identity elements or self-images that have been part of the political discourse all along, which are then linked to role conceptions by domestic political actors, forming role identities of the state once enacted. Also, role-theoretical works have often been focused on the emergence of roles and stability of orders, whereas in this study identity is investigated through the utilization of role-theoretical concepts. This approach leads us to two observable layers of the ‘international self-identity’ of the state actor

³⁴³ McCourt D.M., 2012: 370.

³⁴⁴ Compare McCourt D.M., 2011: 1606; Harnisch S., 2014: 13.

³⁴⁵ Zehfuss M., 2001: 335.

Republic of Korea: the layer of concretely manifested role identities in a given social context and the more basic layer of self-images that have been employed for the legitimation of specific role conception and related actions. Finally, going beyond the layer of a state's role identities in the analysis enables us to gain insights into or 'snapshots' of the broader international identity of South Korea.

Accordingly, I am proposing to start the inquiry into the ROK's international 'sense of self' from actual role performance or foreign policy actions, because this angle allows me to account for the performative and situational aspects of identity. As all foreign policy actions have to be based in an identity in order to be meaningful and because identity can only be actualized and manifested through performance,³⁴⁶ I suggest starting an inquiry into the self-identity of a nation-state actor by analysing the contested decision-making process about role conceptions in concrete action-demanding situations. The formation of role conceptions in the decision-making discourse is where self-images are utilized in order to legitimate actions and are consequently reaffirmed through role performance.³⁴⁷ Hence, this interpretative approach is in line with perspectives that emphasize identification practices³⁴⁸ and also gels with the relational-processual research programme that suggests looking "at the interpretations, reasons and justifications that agents offer for their actions and to investigate how they change."³⁴⁹ A crucial focus lies here on the domestic horizontal contestation of role conception where political elites have to justify their role conceptions (and role behaviour) and win the support of other political actors and the citizenry in accordance with larger identity narratives.³⁵⁰ By interpretatively reconstructing these domestic debates about role conceptions over a longer period, during different events and over different policy fields, one will be able to map how certain role conceptions relate to specific self-images as practices of self-identification. One can further think of these distinct self-identifications as different 'international selves' that in all their variety constitute the international state identity, in contrast to socially manifest international role identities and the broader international identity of the actor (compare figure 2).

³⁴⁶ McCourt D.M., 2011: 1600.

³⁴⁷ Flockhart T., 2006: 92; McCourt D.M., 2011: 1619.

³⁴⁸ Lebow R.N., 2016.

³⁴⁹ Hofferberth M. and Weber C., 2015: 90.

³⁵⁰ Harnisch S., 2012: 63; see also Abdelal R. et al., 2006.

Importantly, foreign policy practice cannot simply be inferred from identity elements retrieved independently from the practice in question, because every action depends on an actual mobilization of identity elements by actors in any given situation. The same actor can mobilize the same self-image in different social contexts to a different outcome, because these identity elements are undetermined and can be linked to different role conceptions. It is this link between evasive identity elements and contested role conceptions which lend legitimacy to specific role performances as practices of self-identification that serve as the entry point for inquiries into international identity.

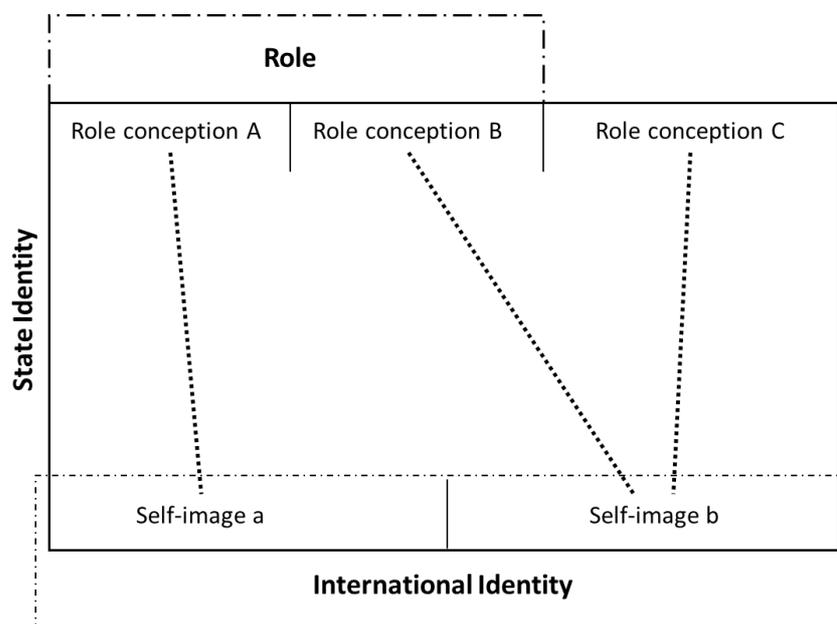


Figure 2: Role, State Identity and International Identity – Practices of Self-identification in Foreign Policy Discourses

This is illustrated in figure 2, where, for example, the same self-image, here self-image b, was linked by discursive agents to two different role conceptions, B and C. However, only role conception B ultimately supported a socially recognized role. An example for such a case would be the German decision to participate in the Kosovo War 1998–1999. On the one hand, the German self-image of being responsible for the Holocaust was used to justify military action against another feared genocide on the Balkans, whereas on the other hand the German self-image of being responsible for World War II and the Holocaust led domestic political actors to put forward a role conception of Germany as a non-military, civilian power. As we know, this struggle over the right role for Germany in this context ultimately led to the country’s participation in the NATO-led intervention. In this exemplary case we have two distinct patterns of self-identification practices both referring

to the same self-image: first, Germany as a humanitarian-interventionist power because of the narrative of historical responsibility and, second, Germany as a non-military, civilian power because of the narrative of historical responsibility. Again, in symbolic interactionist role theory, it is through the interpretative process of self-identification that the Self is constituted.

For empirical analyses, the first task lies in identifying key events of foreign policy decisions relevant for a particular role enactment as starting points for in-depth analysis. In a second step follows an inductive, textual analysis to retrieve the various role conceptions and related goals and proposed actions that have been employed in the legitimation of the selected foreign policy decisions. As there is no universally agreed catalogue about roles in international relations,³⁵¹ an inductive close reading of the text seems to be more appropriate than a deductive content analysis.³⁵² Finally, after tracing the self-images as part of the role conceptions referenced in the foreign policy discourse, an intertextual, interpretative reading of all these self-identifications, understood as links between self-image and role conception, will lead as ‘snapshots’ to larger identity narratives. I argue that only the comprehensive mapping of these different self-identifications (on both layers of role identities/conceptions and self-images) deserves to be called an acceptable assessment of a state’s international identity, because such a description is reflecting their contestation and stability over different foreign policy fields and over time. In addition, the retrieved self-images provide snapshots of the broader international identity of South Korea.

The guiding questions for the textual analysis of self-identifications in specific discourses of foreign policy decisions are:

1. What were the potential roles considered by which discursive agents?
2. Which options/actions were seen as appropriate and recommended?
3. What are the related goals?
4. How was a specific role conception legitimated?
5. Which identity representations (self-images) have been utilized?
6. How successful were those attempts and were they contested?

³⁵¹ For an early compilation of international roles, see Holsti K., 1970: 255; 296.

³⁵² Cantir C. and Kaarbo J., 2016: 19.

These questions, which are inspired by Stahl and Harnisch,³⁵³ will enable the analyst to retrieve the specific practices of self-identification understood as distinct links between role conceptions and self-images. The comparison of the different self-identifications from different foreign policy fields then allows insights into larger self-identity narratives at play. The degree of contestation over self-identifications and the stability of these patterns of self-identification over time are the main indicators for the prevalence and stability in content of these wider self-identification practices. Only if there are indeed hegemonic and stable patterns of self-identification over time and over different foreign policy fields is it justified to speak of one of these as the ‘international identity’ of the ROK. If this is not the case, then the complexity and contestation of self-identifications in these foreign policy fields has to be adequately reflected in any account of ‘international identity’ of a state actor.

Furthermore, the agency-oriented approach opens the ‘black box’ of the nation-state actor and focuses on horizontal domestic role contestation, which “disaggregates the ego into a number of actors that contest how the state should behave.”³⁵⁴ Generally, new self-images and role conceptions must be more or less in line with or adapt to established self-understandings: “New ideas about social order and the nation state need to resonate with previously embedded and institutionalized values, symbols and myths.”³⁵⁵ But one should also keep in mind that political agents are very likely choosing only ideas that are in line with or supporting their own interests in what Marcussen et al. call “interest assumption”.³⁵⁶ As soon as a self-understanding becomes consensual, “the number of legitimate ideas available in a political discourse decreases and the institutionalization of ideas in institutions and political culture makes them resistant to challenges”.³⁵⁷ Obviously, not all political actors are equally influential in this struggle over the right role behaviour of the nation state. Depending on the respective decision-making processes, economic, military, political, institutional or charismatic authority will be distributed differently between political actors. The rather transparent democratic decision-making processes are also easier to observe and analyse than those in totalitarian regimes, for example, in North Korea. Just because it is hard to assess the different power factions behind the ambiguity and

³⁵³ Stahl B. and Harnisch S., 2009: 51.

³⁵⁴ Cantir C. and Kaarbo, J., 2016: 6.

³⁵⁵ Marcussen M. et al., 1999: 616.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.: 617.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

secrecy of Pyongyang politics, it does not mean that there is not contestation over the ‘right role behaviour of the state’ as well.

In the case of South Korea, the relevant political actors in the “wider foreign policy debate”³⁵⁸ are the government, consisting first and foremost of the President, the Ministers and ministry officials, as well as the political opposition. In the Republic’s presidential system, the President as commander-in-chief and head of state possesses considerable authority over foreign affairs and the legislative process and is elected by popular vote for a single five-year term. In practice, presidents often try to shape their personal legacies by pursuing their own big and bold strategies and initiatives with little regard for their predecessor’s work, which ultimately hinders consensus and continuity, especially over foreign policy issues.³⁵⁹ The National Assembly, the South Korean unicameral parliament, is one of the key venues for horizontal role contestation³⁶⁰ between elites, because it is here that the government has to build support for its actions and justify its intended role behaviour towards the political opposition and the public. Further, in the South Korean political system both the president and parliament have the right to initiate legislation.³⁶¹ Because Rathbun pointed to the role of political parties as “vehicles for ideologies”³⁶² that “bring ideas with them through the front door”,³⁶³ Cantir and Kaarbo noted that “[p]arlaments allow for representation of a wide range of viewpoints and thus may be a forum for discourse on and contestation of national role conceptions.”³⁶⁴

The South Korean political landscape is dominated by two ideologically distinct party blocs, the conservatives (*bosu*) and the progressives (*jinbo*), with several small fringe parties on the right as well as on the left. Typical for South Korean party politics is the lack of institutionalization and relative fluidity³⁶⁵ that results in regular re-brandings of the personalized party platforms, mostly due to changes in leadership and less so because of contentious changes of policy or ideology.³⁶⁶ The two-bloc structure has been very stable

³⁵⁸ Hansen L., 2006: 57.

³⁵⁹ Kim SM., 2016.

³⁶⁰ Cantir C. and Kaarbo J., 2016: 12.

³⁶¹ Hix S. and Jun HW., 2009: 668.

³⁶² Rathbun B.C., 2004: 7.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Cantir C. and Kaarbo J., 2016: 12.

³⁶⁵ Hoon JU., 2010: 239.

³⁶⁶ See also Park CH., 2012.

since the 1990s with the, as of 2017, progressive-left Democratic or *Minjoo* Party of Korea and the conservative Liberty Korea Party being the main umbrella outfits for various splinter factions within their ideological blocs. The defining ideological cleavage is the foreign policy and national security question of how to pursue relations with North Korea and the United States respectively.³⁶⁷ Whereas the *Minjoo* Party has been supporting engagement with Pyeongyang and a more autonomous stance on the US-alliance is forming the so-called self-reliance faction (*jajupa*), the conservatives forming the so-called alliance faction (*dongmaengpa*) have been traditionally in strong support of a close US-alliance and a more hard-line approach to North Korea.³⁶⁸ Apart from these politically contentious issues, however, there has been traditionally a rather broad consensus on most other foreign policy issues in the National Assembly.³⁶⁹

An inquiry into the self-identification practices of state actors and their foreign policies is focused on the narratives of legitimation in the political decision-making process and does not include, for example, media discourse or public opinions. Future research may want to include these additional sources for a more detailed and more comprehensive depiction of a greater diversity of self-identifications, but if these more marginal or deviant self-understandings from the media or public sphere are to have some political effect, they will have to be fed into the political decision-making process at some point. With the constitutive approach suggested here, one is mainly able to grasp the state identity formation related to foreign policy in retrospect. If, however, a study is primarily interested in prognoses or likelihoods of future foreign policy and identity developments, it is advisable to include media and public discourses in the research design in order to also account for self-identifications that have not yet been ‘politicized’ by actors in the political system. Therefore, the state identity-focused methodological approach and scope of this study can only serve as ‘pixelated snapshots’ of the broad South Korean international identity. But as a starting point, they can illustrate where and how to focus the analytical ‘lens’ beyond state identity for further similar inquiries into, for example, media, civil society or cultural discourses.

³⁶⁷ Park CH., 2012: 137-138; Hix S. and Jun HW., 2009: 689.

³⁶⁸ Chae HS. and Kim S., 2008; Kim SM., 2016: 4.

³⁶⁹ Hix S. and Jun HW., 2009: 689-690; see also Chae HS. and Kim S., 2008.

4.2. Case selection and data collection

The goal of the study at hand is to investigate precisely which self-identifications related to state identity and in consequence which ‘snapshots’ of international identity can be observed in the legitimation of various global foreign policy actions in the domestic foreign policy discourse. South Korea’s rise in global affairs takes place in various foreign policy fields. For example, Seoul is active in global trade, contributes to international peace and security, has emerged as a major donor in international developmental aid, and takes part in global human-rights debates. The country is playing a leading role in international climate diplomacy and, also, pursues scientific and political interests through its space programme³⁷⁰ and polar strategy.³⁷¹ Any ‘complete’ account of South Korean international state identity in global affairs has to cover all of these policy areas in what would amount to a large-scale research task for a whole research group. Given the limited scale of this study, it seems legitimate to focus on only a selection of policy fields. Thus, for the empirical analysis of the relationship between South Korean international state identity and Seoul’s global foreign policy, I am turning to two salient foreign policy fields of South Korea’s global outreach as identified by the related literature: South Korean international peacekeeping³⁷² and Seoul’s climate diplomacy.³⁷³ These two fields are fitting for analysis as they are not only central for national security, sovereignty and prosperity, but also for multilateralism and supra-national governance. Both selected policy fields are also at the intersection of other relevant foreign policy matters: whereas international peacekeeping as an issue touches upon the US-ROK security alliance and intra-Korean relations, climate diplomacy is closely related to issues about South Korea’s international trade competitiveness and developmental assistance. Further, Seoul showed the greatest leadership aspirations in those two policy fields and, if a somehow ‘globalist’ self-identification has indeed started to develop in the South Korean international identity discourse, as is one sub-question of this study, it has to be observable here.

The outstanding period of South Korea’s global outreach was with no doubt the Presidency of Lee Myung-bak, a conservative, former Hyundai CEO and former mayor of Seoul, from

³⁷⁰ Kang T.J., 2015.

³⁷¹ Brady A.M. and Kim SR., 2013; Watson I., 2016.

³⁷² Hwang B.Y., 2012; Ikenberry G.J. and Mo JR., 2013: 145; Heo U. and Roehrig T., 2014: 172.

³⁷³ Saxer C.J., 2013; Ikenberry G.J. and Mo JR., 2013.

2008 to 2013. Under his leadership the government promoted the vision of ‘Global Korea’ as a National Security Strategy aimed at building “a nation that aims to contribute to global peace and development under a broader vision and a more proactive approach to interacting with the international community.”³⁷⁴ Key issue areas in the strategy were free trade, developmental assistance, peacekeeping, climate change and energy matters as well as cultural diplomacy. Seoul also made several successful efforts to host major international gatherings, such as the 2010 G20 summit, the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF-4) which took place in Busan in 2011 and the second Nuclear Security Summit in 2012. It is with regard to this diplomatic focus on global leadership and agenda-setting that observers³⁷⁵ agree to attribute to South Korea the status of an “important middle-ranking power in global affairs.”³⁷⁶ John argues from a post-structural perspective that “Global Korea was not merely a point of departure in Korean foreign policy but was also the key site of Korean national identity construction.”³⁷⁷ Because of this, the Presidency of Lee Myung-bak is at the centre of this study at hand, but I will extend the observation period for the empirical study to include the previous Presidency of the progressive Roh Moo-hyun from 2003 to 2008 and the succeeding Presidency of the conservative Park Geun-hye from 2013 to late 2016, just before her impeachment. In doing so, the whole observation period of 14 years starting from 2003 to 2016, will cover conservative and progressive governments and different parliamentary majorities, as well as a ‘before’ and ‘after’ of the formative events of the Global Korea vision. As indicated earlier, the study also looks at two different policy fields, peacekeeping and climate diplomacy, in order to allow for a cross-sectoral and cross-ideological comparison of the self-identifications retrieved from the empirical analysis.

The first case study on international peacekeeping focuses on key decisions made in the South Korean National Assembly, such as the troop deployments to the second United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL II) in 2006, the disaster relief-focused UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) from 2010 until 2012, and the deployment to the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) since 2013. A key event in this policy area was the debate over the legislation of the ‘United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

³⁷⁴ Cheong Wa Dae, 2009: 3.

³⁷⁵ Nye J., 2009; Ikenberry G.J. and Mo JR., 2013; Saxer C.J., 2013; Kim SB., 2014.

³⁷⁶ Nye J., 2009.

³⁷⁷ John J.V., 2015: 38.

Participation Act' in 2009, which has been the legal framework for peacekeeping deployments ever since. With regard to the second case study on international climate diplomacy, key events identified are the parliamentary debate about the 'Framework Act on Low Carbon and Green Growth' in 2009, the establishment of the Global Green Growth Institute in 2012 and the successful bid to host the United Nations Green Climate Fund in Songdo, Incheon City, in 2012, as well as the ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2016.

Sources for the textual analysis are all statements made by government representatives, from the president to ministry officials, as well as the political opposition and parties. These sources were available in digitalized form, mostly in the online archives of speeches, policy and press statements of government officials on the respective websites of these institutions,³⁷⁸ or sometimes interviews or opinion pieces in newspapers or think-tank publications. Most of these were in addition to the Korean original also available in an English language version. After taking a random sample of sources, a check of the English language translation provided by the respective institutions confirmed that there were no substantive discrepancies between the different language versions. When quoting sections from these sources, I thus used the (American) English language translation provided by the respective government institution. The parliamentary debate from plenary, standing committee, special committee to sub-committee sessions is accessible through the digital archive of the National Assembly Minutes³⁷⁹ in text and video, both in Korean language only. The respective sources have been translated by the author, who bears the sole responsibility for any mistakes in this regard. The organization, inductive coding and interpretation of the generated data collection was done with the help of the qualitative data analysis computer software package NVivo, produced by QSR International. A list of the nodes for the retrieved self-images from my NVivo database can be found in the appendix

³⁷⁸ The URLs for these online sources are for President Roh Moo-hyun: http://16c wd.pa.go.kr/cwd/en/archive/archive_list.php?meta_id=en_speeches&navi=president. President Lee Myung-bak's webpage was until recently archived under the following URL: http://17c wd.en.pa.go.kr/pre_activity/speeches/speeches_list.php. But it appears that the Presidential Archive is currently restructuring their online resources, to the end that the archives of Presidents Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye will only be accessible through the Presidential Archive's main webpage: <http://pa.go.kr/portal/com/viewMainPage.do>. The webpage of the incumbent President, currently Moon Jae-in, is the *Cheong Wa Dae* webpage: <http://english1.president.go.kr>. For the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: http://www.mofa.go.kr/ENG/press/speeches/minister/incumbent/index.jsp?menu=m_10_40_10; for the Ministry of National Defense: http://www.mnd.go.kr/mbs/home/mbs/mnd_eng/; and for the Ministry of Environment: <http://eng.me.go.kr/eng/web/main.do>.

³⁷⁹ The URL for accessing the National Assembly Minutes search interface is <http://likms.assembly.go.kr/record/mhs-60-010.do#none>.

in chapter 9 for illustration. All in all, the analysis yielded results from 2005 to 2016 in the form of around 150 different source materials with retrieved identity elements, such as speeches, statements and parliamentary recordings, sometimes including more than one speaker.³⁸⁰

Lastly, in an effort to address the issue of ethical consequences of this study, I am aware that as a non-Korean, as non-native speaker of Korean and as a researcher outside of the country, I am contributing to an academic representation of what ‘Korea’ *is* in the world with my research. Through my approach I am quite literally ‘taking the role of Korea’ and I am aware of the limitations of this positionality, as well as of the responsibilities. With this study I, too, am casting and framing Korea in a specific way from the outside in an academic discourse, while the burden to negotiate between the expectations evoked by my representation and ‘self-identifications’ is left to Korea and Koreans. Having said that, one goal of my study is to shift the focus from mostly external categorization of South Korean behaviour to a perspective that tries to take South Korean agency seriously. As I have said before, I am aware that this can only be a start for a different approach to study international state identity in the case of South Korea at best and I am welcoming (South) Korean voices to engage in this academic debate. In terms of research beneficence, my being an outsider may have the potential benefit of offering a less or at least differently obstructed view on the issues of identity and agency at hand. As such it can only ever be a starting or complementary take on what South Korean identity *is* in the 21st century.

The following two chapters present the results of the empirical analysis organized around the identified role conceptions, key themes, self-images and thus practices of self-identification prevalent in the two case studies about South Korean international peacekeeping and international climate diplomacy.

³⁸⁰ See Appendix.

5. Self-identification Practices in South Korea's UN Peacekeeping

The following chapter is the first of two case studies on self-identification practices, understood as specific linkages of role conceptions and self-images, in the South Korean global foreign policy discourse. It is focused on the policy field of United Nations peacekeeping operations (UN PKO), which has been identified as one of the key areas of South Korean global foreign policy ambition in the respective literature.³⁸¹ The first subchapter briefly introduces the history as well as the academic literature on South Korean peacekeeping, followed by the results of my empirical analysis. The focus hereby lies on role conceptions and key themes exhibited and contested by different actors in the South Korean peacekeeping discourse of the last decade. The last subchapters are dedicated to the retrieved self-images that, linked to role conceptions as specific practices of self-identification, allow a small glimpse of the larger identity narratives underlying South Korea's global foreign policy.

³⁸¹ Hwang B.Y., 2012; Ikenberry G.J. and Mo JR., 2013: 145; Heo U. and Roehrig T., 2014: 172.

5.1. An introduction to South Korean peacekeeping

Shortly after finally becoming a UN member state in 1991 as a “relative latecomer,”³⁸² South Korea’s first contribution to UN peacekeeping was in 1993, when Seoul sent an engineering battalion of 252 soldiers to Somalia as part of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) II.³⁸³ During the 1990s mostly engineering units, medics or military observers were deployed in non-military assignments to places like Western Sahara, Bosnia, Angola, Georgia, India and Pakistan. Only in 1999 did President Kim Dae-jung decide for the first time to send combat forces, an infantry battalion, as a contribution to the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET), a Multinational Force (MNF) led by Australia that subsequently turned into a Peacekeeping Operation under a UN mandate.

Since then, South Korea’s involvement with UN peacekeeping grew increasingly and in 2009 the National Assembly passed the ‘United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Participation Act’ in order to speed up and streamline procedure for future deployments under the UN umbrella.³⁸⁴ Other measures that were part of the PKO act are the establishment of a standing unit for overseas deployment, the *Onnuri* Unit (meaning ‘the whole world’), and the expansion of the Peacekeeping Training Centre at the National Defense University.³⁸⁵ Recently, South Korean peacekeepers have served in more robust assignments, such as the 350-personnel strong *Dongmyeong* Unit as part of the second UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL II) since 2007, the disaster relief-focused 240-person engineering-focused *Danbi* Unit to the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) from 2010 until 2012, and the deployment of the *Hanbit* Unit with just under 300 medics, engineers and infantry to the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) since 2013. Today, Seoul has deployed around 120,000 personnel to various assignments in 128 countries, with around 642 personnel being deployed at the end of 2016.³⁸⁶

Because of the geopolitical situation on the Korean peninsula, military deployment decisions have always been a politically sensitive matter. For long, overseas troop deployments, whether in PKO or MNF assignments, were mostly seen either as a necessity

³⁸² Howe B. and Kondocho B., 2014: 146.

³⁸³ Hong KD., 2009: 176.

³⁸⁴ Chung ES., 2010; Lee SW. and Park JS., 2014.

³⁸⁵ Lee SW. and Park JS., 2014.

³⁸⁶ Ministry of National Defense, 2016: 170.

of or an opportunity to strengthen the US-ROK defence alliance. Hwang, for example, refers to PKOs as traditional “utilitarian tool of [US] alliance management” with little independent value for South Korean foreign policy makers.³⁸⁷ Given the tense security environment on the peninsula, Seoul is said to “privilege [...] commitments to the US over commitments to the UN”³⁸⁸ when having to decide over the deployment of ultimately limited defence capabilities. From a military standpoint, however, PKOs have been seen as a welcome opportunity to gain operational experience in an international environment.³⁸⁹

In terms of public support for peacekeeping operations abroad, the literature on South Korean peacekeeping identifies a widespread sentiment that South Korea is a “child of the UN” and hence has a moral obligation to “pay back” to the international community.³⁹⁰ This development from being “the host of the largest UN enforcement operation to date”³⁹¹ in the Korean War to being a significant troop contributor country nowadays is a widespread narrative regularly shared by South Korean decision makers. Further, in his assessment of South Korean overseas troop deployments, Hong contrasts this ‘paying back syndrome’ with a ‘Vietnam syndrome,’ stemming from the contentious South Korean participation in the Vietnam War.³⁹² In order to comply with requests from the United States, their main ally and geopolitical protector, and in exchange for Washington’s investment commitments, hefty compensations and most importantly lucrative business opportunities in the US war economy, South Korea deployed around 300,000 soldiers to Vietnam until 1973.³⁹³ According to an Asan Institute survey from 2012, 57 percent of Koreans believed the participation in the Vietnam War was the right choice and around half, 54 percent, “think that ROK forces were deployed to gain economic benefits for Korea.”³⁹⁴ According to Breuker, in mainstream historiography today the Vietnam War is mostly seen as a way of ‘jump starting’ South Korea’s export driven economic development under the military dictatorship of Park Chung-hee.³⁹⁵ Still, Hong sees a key challenge in

³⁸⁷ Hwang B.Y., 2012: 19.

³⁸⁸ Lee SW. and Park JS., 2014.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Sesay A., 1997; Hong KD., 2009: 76; Lee SW. and Park JS., 2014; Howe B. and Kondoch B., 2014: 137.

³⁹¹ Howe B. and Kondoch B., 2014: 137.

³⁹² Hong KD., 2009: 173.

³⁹³ Cumings B., 2005: 321.

³⁹⁴ Baek G., 2013.

³⁹⁵ Breuker R.E., 2009: 40-41.

how peacekeeping operations are legitimated domestically.³⁹⁶ Especially for the political left, the participation in the Vietnam War “was a wrong decision [...] forced by the United States.”³⁹⁷

Even despite their general support for PKOs, the main concern of the political parties in the National Assembly as well as the population is the safety of the deployed personnel. Understandably, then, Ruffa notes in her comparative study of different armies in the UNIFIL II mission to Lebanon that the Korean army, being rather new to peacekeeping, chose a comparatively cautious operational approach with a high perceived threat level, a focus on force protection and specific resources allocated to civil-military cooperation, such as on-site Taekwondo training for locals, ultimately aimed at improving the image of South Korean peacekeepers.³⁹⁸ Finally, international expectations for Korea to contribute to international peace and security certainly play a role as well,³⁹⁹ especially when voiced by a Korean at the helm of the UN, the former Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who is also a former South Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Lee and Park nod further to a study that links the support for PKO deployments to the ambition to support ‘one of their own’ as Secretary General.⁴⁰⁰

A further political motivation for an active engagement with global governance in general and peacekeeping in particular is seen in the rivalry for international support with other East Asian states, most prominently China and Japan.⁴⁰¹ For South Korea, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), as a permanent member and thus veto power in the UN Security Council, and Japan, as a major contributor to the UN budget, are both already well established rivals within the UN framework in a race for international support.⁴⁰² Beijing’s position on peacekeeping, however, remains rather ambiguous because, despite a role as staunch defender of the non-interference principle, it is still deploying peacekeepers to resource rich areas in Africa. Japan, on the other hand, with a pacifist constitution and pacifist constituencies remains largely uneasy about overseas troop deployments.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁶ Hong KD., 2009: 182f.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.: 175.

³⁹⁸ Ruffa C., 2014.

³⁹⁹ Ikenberry G.J. and Mo JR., 2013: 145.

⁴⁰⁰ Lee SW. and Park JS., 2014.

⁴⁰¹ Hwang B.Y., 2012: 20; Lee SW. and Park JS., 2014.

⁴⁰² Howe B. and Kondocho B., 2014: 136.

⁴⁰³ Hwang B.Y., 2012: 20.

Against this background in Korea, a pro-active peacekeeping profile is seen as an opportunity to demonstrate a committed middle power role, with China and Japan being restricted to the side-lines. International observers now attribute to Korea a growing status and influence as a “rising middle power”, with the country “becoming more of a provider of global security than solely a consumer.”⁴⁰⁴ Under the ‘Global Korea’ National Security strategy of President Lee Myung-bak, especially, peacekeeping played a central part in Seoul’s aspiration for “middle power activism”⁴⁰⁵ or in the ambition to “embrace international responsibilities and actively contribute to resolve global challenges.”⁴⁰⁶

The follow subchapters are now not so much an assessment of the performance or efficiency of South Korean peacekeeping but are focused on how major peacekeeping deployments during the Presidencies of Roh Moo-hyun, Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye have been legitimated in the wider domestic political discourse. These are, basically starting in 2006, the contributions to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), as well as the ‘United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Participation Act’. Because the wider political discourse consists of the government, in this case the President, the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs and National Defense, as well as the political opposition, this approach foregrounds domestic contestation (especially in the National Assembly) as well as changes over time. At the centre of the analysis are questions about which specific role conceptions and self-images have been used by different political actors to justify the peacekeeping deployments and legislation.

⁴⁰⁴ Heo U. and Roehrig T., 2014: 166.

⁴⁰⁵ Ko ST., 2012.

⁴⁰⁶ Hwang B.Y., 2012: 15.

5.2. Role conceptions, key themes and significant Others

There are a number of retrieved role conceptions that have been employed in the South Korean peacekeeping discourse from 2006 to 2016 throughout the political spectrum: the dominant being ‘responsible member of the international community’, minor ones like ‘guardian of world peace’ and ‘global model nation’, as well as the main rival role conception of ‘anti-militarist power’. The main role conception over the whole observation period was the little contested and thus hegemonic ‘responsible member of the international community’, championed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which was complemented by the minor ‘guardian of world peace’ role conception put forward by representatives from the Ministry of National Defense and the minor ‘global model nation’ role conception pushed for by the Lee Myung-Bak administration. The sole rival role conception is titled ‘anti-militarist power’, which has been put forward by minor parties from the political left, but also from progressive lawmakers from the main opposition party, in its various platforms as *Uri Party*, *Minjoo* or Democratic Party (DP). The three role conceptions will be dealt with separately in the following subchapters.

Overall, there was broad bipartisan support for the participation in UN peacekeeping missions since 2006, as illustrated by the two following figures. In table 1, there is a list of the votes against the ‘United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Participation Act’,⁴⁰⁷ which was tabled in the National Assembly on 29 December 2009 and was approved by 64.8 percent of lawmakers. The law stipulates a clear and transparent institutional process for contributing South Korean troops only to UN missions and ensures the parliament’s rights for the approval, extension and cancellation of deployments.⁴⁰⁸ It also allows for the establishment of standing forces, an aspect that was met with significant criticism during the debate in the National Assembly. Out of 199 votes, there were 129 in favour of the act, with 54 ‘no’-votes and 16 abstentions.⁴⁰⁹ This can be considered broad support for Seoul’s PKO profile. The ‘no’-votes, however, came from all parties then present in the parliament, from the ruling conservative Grand National Party (*Hannaradang*; GNP) over the main opposition party, the progressive Democratic Party (*Minjoodang*; DP) to the left-wing

⁴⁰⁷ A full text of the Act in an English translation can be found here: http://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_service/lawView.do?lang=ENG&hseq=19640.

⁴⁰⁸ Lee SW. and Park JS., 2014; Chung ES., 2010.

⁴⁰⁹ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary Session 18-285-1.

Democratic Labor Party (*Minju Nodongdang*; DLP). Also noteworthy is that half of the representatives from the progressive Democratic Party did not support the PKO bill. After all, the DP is the main opposition party and has had their candidates successfully run for President, as in the cases of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun.

<p>‘No’-votes and abstentions on the ‘United Nations Peacekeeping Participation Act’, according to party membership National Assembly, 29 December 2009. Source: National Assembly Minutes of the 18th National Assembly, 285th Meeting and 1st Session, Plenary Session.</p> <p>Overall 199 votes YES 129 (64.8 percent)</p>	
<p>NO 54</p> <p>Conservative: <i>Grand National Party</i> 6/153 <i>Liberty Forward Party</i> 7/18 <i>Future Hope Alliance</i> 1/14</p> <p>Progressive: <i>Democratic Party</i> 31/81 <i>Democratic Labor Party</i> 4/5 <i>New Progressive Party</i> 1/1 <i>Creative Korea Party</i> 1/3 <i>Independents</i> 3/25</p>	<p>Abstentions 16</p> <p>Conservative: <i>Grand National Party</i> 5/153 <i>Future Hope Alliance</i> 3/14</p> <p>Progressive: <i>Democratic Party</i> 8/81</p>

Table 1: ‘No’-votes and abstentions on the ‘United Nations Peacekeeping Participation Act’, according to party membership.

When looking into the plenary debate about the PKO bill in the National Assembly, the main points of disapproval concerned the perceived attempt by the government to limit the parliament’s constitutional right in the approval of overseas deployment potential, as well as the risk of being drawn into international crises once standing units had been set up. Representative Cho Seung-soo from the minor left-wing NPP, for example, warned his colleagues that quicker approval guidelines might be abused by the government to pressure the National Assembly with reference to international expectations into agreeing with their deployment proposals.⁴¹⁰ The conservative lawmaker Park Seon-yeong from the minor Liberty Forward Party compared voting for the bill to “committing suicide as parliamentarians.”⁴¹¹ Another explanation for the high number of no-votes or abstentions

⁴¹⁰ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary Session 18-285-1, 17.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.: 16.

might be found in the fact that the issue of overseas troop deployments was politically still sensitive after the more controversial decision to contribute the *Zaytun* Unit to the US led ‘coalition-of-the-willing’ Multi National Force (MNF) in Iraq from 2004 to 2008. The support for the *Zaytun* Unit’s deployment to Iraq was orchestrated by the progressive President Roh Moo-hyun, despite criticism from his own party, as a necessity in order to strengthen the US-ROK alliance. This initial hesitance and disapproval by parliamentarians concerning PKO deployments did fade however, as can be seen in table 2. The approval for the extensions of UNIFIL and UNMISS deployments was consistently high, despite left-wing parliamentarians disapproving and for some years even without any debate before the voting in the National Assembly.

Parliamentary approval of UNIFIL and UNMISS PKO deployments, 2006–2015								
Source: Own compilation based on National Assembly Minutes.								
Date (NA-Meeting- Session)	Bill	Overall Votes	Yes	No	Abstention	Yes in %	No in %	Abstention in %
2006.12.22 (17-263-1)	UNIFIL Deployment Bill	175	119	34	22	64.3	21.1	12.8
2008.07.06 (18-276-5)	UNIFIL Extension	199	187	10	2	94.0	5.0	1.0
2009.07.15 (18-283-1)	UNIFIL Extension	245	221	11	13	90.2	4.5	5.3
2011.12.29 (18-304-2)	UNIFIL Extension	149	145	3	1	97.3	2.1	0.7
2012.09.27 (19-311-9)	UNMISS Deployment Bill	159	113	27	19	71.1	17.0	11.9
2012.11.22 (19-311-12)	UNIFIL Extension	154	118	14	22	77.1	9.8	13.1
2013.12.19 (19-321-1)	UNMISS Extension	199	179	13	7	89.9	6.5	3.5
	UNIFIL Extension	194	171	13	10	88.1	18.3	5.2
2014.12.02 (19-329-13)	UNMISS Extension	249	214	17	18	85.9	6.8	7.2
	UNIFIL Extension	251	218	14	19	86.9	5.6	7.6
2015.11.30 (19-337-12)	UNMISS Extension	202	183	6	13	90.6	3.0	6.4
	UNIFIL Extension	210	192	6	12	91.4	2.9	5.7

Table 2: Parliamentary approval of UNIFIL and UNMISS PKO deployments, 2006–2015.

5.2.1. The hegemonic role conception: ‘responsible member of the international community’

Throughout the whole observation period from 2006 to 2016, the South Korean debate about peacekeeping deployments was governed by a hegemonic role conception, generally supported by conservatives and progressives, but ultimately not by the political far-left. This role conception can be labelled ‘responsible member of the international community’ after the wording (*gukjesahoeui irwon*) regularly used by the different administrations. In this discursive formation, ‘duty’ and ‘responsibility’ that come with the status of an advanced country on the global stage are central aspects. Starting with the first debate about the deployment of the *Dongmyeong* Unit to UNIFIL in the National Assembly Standing Committee on Unification, Foreign Affairs and Trade on 5 December 2006, this trope was at the core of the legitimization narratives for peacekeeping deployments by all three administrations, whether conservative or progressive.

For example, in that first meeting on UNIFIL, then First Vice Foreign Minister Jo Jung-pyo justified on behalf of the government the deployment of troops to Lebanon as a “responsibility in the international community”⁴¹² and an “opportunity to show strong commitment to Lebanon and to world peace.”⁴¹³ This was later reiterated in the plenary debate on 22 December by Representative Im Jong-seok from the ruling *Uri* Party, the main progressive party that later morphed into various Democratic Party outlets, when he stated that UN peacekeeping corresponds with Korea’s international position and is thus in the national interest.⁴¹⁴ There are more examples: two and a half years later, in July 2008, conservative lawmaker, Rep. Hwang Jin-ha, nicknamed the “Peacekeeping Preacher”⁴¹⁵ because of his strong advocacy for South Korean peacekeeping, of the now ruling GNP, finished his special committee’s report on the extension of the UNIFIL deployment with the notion that “our country is determined to be a responsible UN member.”⁴¹⁶ Moreover, in July 2009 Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan argued for another extension of the UNIFIL mandate “as a member of the UN”⁴¹⁷ and in 2013 his successor as Foreign Minister Yun elaborated that as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, a position Seoul held from 2013 to 2014, ongoing support for the PKO deployment is expected of Korea

⁴¹² National Assembly Minutes, 2006: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Session 17-262-17.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ National Assembly Minutes, 2006: Plenary Session 17-263-1.

⁴¹⁵ Lee SW. and Park JS., 2014.

⁴¹⁶ National Assembly Minutes, 2008: Plenary Session 18-276-5.

⁴¹⁷ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary Session 18-283-2.

and is thus appropriate.⁴¹⁸ Lastly, the Ministry of National Defense refers to Korea as a ‘responsible member’ in their Defense White Papers in 2010, 2012 and 2014 with regard to the country’s participation in UN peacekeeping.⁴¹⁹

Further, this role conception was exhibited by Presidents Roh Moo-hyun and Lee Myung-bak, as will be shown in the following selection of statements. In order to assess the larger meaning of these references, it is insightful to have a closer look at the framing of the ‘responsible member’ trope. In his State of the Nation Address presented to the National Assembly on 6 November 2006, for example, President Roh announced that “in accordance with its elevated international status, Korea will faithfully carry out its role as a responsible member of the international community.”⁴²⁰ And in his New Year’s Address to the Nation in 2009, President Lee Myung-bak remarked:

*“The Republic of Korea is not the marginal state it was in the latter part of the 19th century when it suffered from the whims of international currents; nor is it the flickering candle that it was during the foreign exchange crisis. The country is emerging as a responsible member of the leading nations helping create a new international order.”*⁴²¹

The two aforementioned quotes by Korean Presidents stand as representative of two main points about the ‘responsible member’ narrative.

First, highlighting South Korea’s responsibilities in the international community is closely linked to the acknowledgement of Seoul’s risen international status. The prevalence of the argument in the South Korean domestic debate about peacekeeping deployments speaks for its effectiveness as a legitimation strategy, as it obviously resonates with the participants of the foreign policy discourse. Anyone who agrees with the image of Korea holding an ‘elevated status’ and being ‘not marginal’ anymore, remains susceptible for expectations to play the appropriate international role as a PKO deploying nation. Second, against the background of a modern history of marginalization and domination by foreign powers, the prospect of being a member of ‘leading nations’ by exhibiting the responsible or appropriate behaviour for one’s international status raises the likelihood for external recognition as ‘one of them’. Participating in the peacekeeping practice can be considered

⁴¹⁸ National Assembly Minutes, 2013: Plenary Session 19-320-4.

⁴¹⁹ See Ministry of National Defense, 2010: 106, 2012: 3, 2014: 143.

⁴²⁰ Roh MH., 2006.

⁴²¹ Lee MB., 2009a.

a safe route to external recognition as a committed country in the thick of global affairs. In the Lee Myung-bak quote from 2009, however, there is also an indication of a growing ambition to lead together with others and shape the future order. As will be shown shortly, there is more to be said about this leadership ambition.

5.2.2. *Drawing from history*

There are two further aspects of the ‘responsible member of the international community’ role conception that are worth noting: the selective use of historical references and the keen ambition to foster and not damage diplomatic standing and influence. The duty or responsibility to participate in UK peacekeeping operations is not only linked discursively to the reassurance of status but also very concretely to the narrative that South Korea is a ‘child of the UN’ because of the UN support during and after the Korean War. Government officials and representatives of the ruling parties, especially, refer to this ‘historical debt’ towards the international community (and the UN in particular) that can be paid back through peacekeeping efforts. These historical references are a constant feature of the ‘responsible member’ role conception, regardless of party ideology or time period. For example, in December 2007 Foreign Minister Song Min-sun emphasized the importance of this ‘payback’ in a television interview with the Korean *Arirang* Channel:

*“We were helped by the international community half a century ago. If we were not helped by the international community, nobody could have enjoyed this peace and prosperity in which we are now living. It is time for us to requite, to return the benefits we got from the international community to the world.”*⁴²²

Historical debt was also noted by Representative Jeong Ok-im from the conservative GNP as a reason why Seoul should continue to deploy peacekeepers to UNIFIL during the plenary debate on 15 July 2009.⁴²³ Another example is the 2010 statement of Vice Foreign Minister Shin Kak-soo at a luncheon at the Korean UN Association in Seoul on UN Day, 25 October: “As a country that owes much to the UN, Korea has embarked on a path to contributing actively to the world community.”⁴²⁴ There is, however, more to this historical narrative, as it is not simply focused on historical debt but also on historical achievement. Take, for example, President Lee’s Address to the Nation in November 2009, where he

⁴²² Song MS., 2007b.

⁴²³ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary Session 18-283-1, 9.

⁴²⁴ Shin KS., 2010.

adds the following passage after acknowledging the historical support from the international community:

*“The Republic demonstrated that the assistance and collaboration from the international community was never wasted and that it was only right for such aid to be further expanded. In this regard, Korea was an exemplary beneficiary of international aid and cooperation in the 20th century. In the 21st century, the nation stands as a beacon for developing countries. Now is high time for the nation to return in full what it owes to the international community. Among other things, the Republic intends to share what it has experienced in achieving success with other countries across the globe.”*⁴²⁵

Here, the experience of the Korean War and subsequent reconstruction becomes a “unique experience”⁴²⁶ that is supposed to serve as a model for other conflict-ridden countries while South Korea is capable and willing to help and assist. Thus, South Korea is not only acting out of a perceived duty to pay back a historical debt, but also because Seoul sees itself as uniquely positioned to be a role model in the fields of development assistance and peacekeeping. Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan, for example, expressed this explicitly in 2008: “We believe that our own experiences of rebuilding the nation in the aftermath of a devastating war enables us to play a unique role in these areas.”⁴²⁷ In 2015 the Director for International Policy at the Ministry of National Defense described this as a development “from beneficiary to benefactor.”⁴²⁸ Whereas peacekeeping deployments have been rendered meaningful and appropriate as a grateful duty in order to repay historical debt, the focus on national achievements in terms of development and defence makes peacekeeping a proud display of economic and military might as well as of a certain ‘generosity.’ According to this framing, Korea is not so much historically obliged to engage in UN peacekeeping, but is uniquely qualified to share its own experience and viewpoints with the world, because Korea has something to offer to the world itself. President Park Geun-hye also tried to evoke this spirit of national achievement, for example, in a statement on the 2015 New Year:

“Having been one of the poorest countries in the world after the Korean War, Korea has risen to become [one of] the world’s major economies and the only country to

⁴²⁵ Lee MB., 2009d.

⁴²⁶ Kim BH., 2013.

⁴²⁷ Yu MH., 2008.

⁴²⁸ Ha JS., 2015.

have successfully accomplished heavy chemical industrialization without going to war. Ours is the first country in the world to have gone from aid recipient to aid donor. Such is the strength of the Korean people, which is why I am confident we will be able to overcome whatever difficulties lie before us."⁴²⁹

The perspective is not just present under conservative leaders. During the progressive Presidency of Roh Moo-hyun, Foreign Minister Song Min-sun in 2007 as well as Vice Foreign Minister Jo Jung-pyo in 2006 made the case for Korea's unique potential to contribute to international peace and security, especially in the Middle East as a non-Muslim country that shares the experience of being colonized, in contrast to many other major powers.⁴³⁰

Among the three analysed administrations, the Lee Myung-Bak administration stands out in its frequent use of the 'beneficiary to benefactor'⁴³¹ historical narrative. Against the background of President Lee's ambitious 'Global Korea' National Security Strategy this is hardly a surprise. This national project was set up to transform Korea into an "advanced and globally prestigious country"⁴³² not just in the eyes of world but also Koreans themselves. In one of his last major speeches before the end of his Presidency in February 2013, Lee Myung-bak reiterated what he had told Koreans often before:

"In 2011, a renowned foreign magazine evaluated Korea, noting that long ago the world had taken note of Korea as a model for growth and newly emerging power, but that Koreans themselves did not seem to be aware of the fact."

Although President Roh had also repeatedly encouraged Koreans to have more confidence in the country's potential and achievements,⁴³³ President Lee's vision went further in suggesting a clear path for how to achieve a Korea that is at the centre and on top of global affairs, a Korea that is leading rather than being led and a Korea that is inspiring other nations to follow suit. In his first National Address on Liberation Day, 15 August 2008, he told the country about a dream that he framed as the dream of all Koreans:

"We are all dreaming of an advanced nation standing tall in the international community where the happiness of each individual goes hand in hand with the

⁴²⁹ Park GH., 2015.

⁴³⁰ Song MS., 2007b; National Assembly Minutes, 2006: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs 17-262-17, 17.

⁴³¹ Ha JS., 2015.

⁴³² Yu MH., 2009.

⁴³³ Roh MH., 2004b; Roh MH., 2005.

progress of the nation and where material abundance strikes a balance with mental maturity. It will be a strong nation of an affluent people and a compassionate society. Such a nation will serve as a paragon for humankind and will be respected by other countries in the international community.”⁴³⁴

Clearly, President Lee formulates a goal here for a future Korea as an “advanced nation” (*seonjinguk*) which he suggests can be realized through the Global Korea strategy. This strategy stands for global outreach and more international engagement, with peacekeeping as one of the key policy areas. However, there are two slightly different goals formulated in the quoted paragraph, one about the aspiration to maturity and the other about the ambition to lead.

First, there is the aspiration to become a mature global country (*seongsukan segyegukga*). Mature behaviour here may be understood as a foreign policy that is not simply about acting ‘selfishly’ but as an attitude beyond self-interest that contributes to the ‘common good.’ In a speech on nation branding from 2013 President Lee makes clear, however, that a mature foreign policy behaviour is not a value in itself, but serves a further purpose:

“The principle that works in the improvement of an individual’s reputation can also be applied to a nation’s brand value. People do not show respect to those who are simply rich, but rather to those who share what they have and serve others. In addition, people have a tendency to be fascinated by those who exhibit sophisticated cultural maturity. The same is true for a nation. A country can win global confidence only by becoming a mature member of the international community that shares and gives help to other nations going beyond establishing itself as an economic powerhouse.”⁴³⁵

This rare statement reduces ‘maturity’ explicitly to a way of fashioning a certain brand and of gaining trust on the global stage, because the respective practices are seen as conducive to gaining a higher status. In the literature on norm socialization such an instrumental perspective would be seen as “Type I socialization” achieved through what Checkel called – in a, for role theorists, simplistic understanding – ‘conscious role playing’: agents are simply “knowing what is socially accepted in a given setting or community” without having norms internalized completely and without seeing them as “the right thing to do.”⁴³⁶ From

⁴³⁴ Lee MB., 2008.

⁴³⁵ Lee MB., 2013.

⁴³⁶ Checkel J.T., 2005: 804.

most other less explicit statements in the peacekeeping discourse though one cannot draw similar inferences about the exact understanding of ‘maturity’ held by various other political actors. In the end, the question of whether President Lee has internalized ‘international norms’ and actually believes in ‘contributing to the common good’ is less relevant for the analysis at hand. What matters here is how specific actions have been framed as appropriate, meaningful and legitimate with regard to collective identity narratives, as these interactive structures of meaning underpin and constitute foreign politics as a whole.

Second, President Lee formulated the clear ambition not just to commit to the global order but also to shape the international affairs through displaying leadership. This is very clear in his address on 15 August 2012, Liberation Day, when the President was reflecting on the global power shift from West to East after the Global Financial Crisis (GFC):

*“At this important juncture, Korea has just entered the ranks of advanced nations breaking away from the group of late starters that it had long belonged to. From now on, it is not viable to follow others. Our country is now in a position to open a path on its own. We have to develop ‘a Korean route’ that no one else travelled before. [...] The strength that we have had so far as a runner-up may ironically become a stumbling block as a frontrunner.”*⁴³⁷

Note the parallel between the ‘from runner-up to frontrunner’ and the ‘from beneficiary to benefactor’ narratives. President Lee’s envisioned Global Korea is not simply content with committing itself to the status quo international order, but has to lead the world itself. This leadership ambition based on historical achievements could be seen as the core of yet another role conception, that of a ‘global model nation’. In the peacekeeping context, this role conception is only expressed by the representatives from the Lee Myung-bak administration and is complementing rather than contesting the main role conception of ‘responsible member of the international community’. Still, in 2013, Representative Hwang Jin-ha from the conservative New Frontier Party (*Saenuridang*; formerly the Grand National Party, GNP), a retired ROK Army Lieutenant General who himself was a Force Commander of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP)⁴³⁸ from 2002 to 2003 and an influential lawmaker on the issue, confronted Foreign Minister Yun

⁴³⁷ Lee MB., 2012b.

⁴³⁸ Secretary General of the United Nations, 2001.

Byung-se over what Hwang called lack of ambition over finally making a Korean commander of UNIFIL, after deploying units to Lebanon for over six years, to the positive appraisal of the UN as well as the Lebanese government. Furthermore, Hwang said he was “embarrassed.”⁴³⁹ Foreign Minister Yun agreed that there should be more Koreans serving at the UN in high-ranking positions.⁴⁴⁰ In 2015, this aspect was reaffirmed by Col. Ha Jong-sik from the Overseas Deployment Division at the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff: “South Korea will dedicate significant diplomatic efforts to ensure that its officials have senior-level PKO positions. [...] corresponding to South Korea’s contribution to UN PKO activities.”⁴⁴¹ Another minor role conception found is that of ‘guardian of world peace’, mostly used by officials from the Ministry of National Defense and more intended for the global role of the ROK military than for the whole country. Take for example this other statement made by the same official from the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff:

*“During the Korean War, Korea received aid from many countries around the world, but now it has become a donor that provides support to other countries. As such, the 634 troops currently carrying out their duties as part of seven PKO missions will fulfil their role as guardians of world peace.”*⁴⁴²

This role conception too does not stand in conflict with the main role conception of ‘responsible member of the international community’ but rather complements it in its commitment to the status quo international order. What is common to all three role conceptions is that the significant other is the rather abstract ‘international community’, often simply represented by the United Nations, which may not be that surprising at all as this analysis is concerned with UN peacekeeping. Still, it is the perceived appropriate behaviour and expectations from this international sphere that are used by political actors to justify their commitment to the peacekeeping deployments.

5.2.3. *Raising international standing and external recognition*

Besides historical references, international standing is the other core aspect of the ‘responsible international member’ role conception in the South Korean political discourse on peacekeeping. It remained a constant feature of the government’s case for peacekeeping deployments, which was also framed as an opportunity to further raise Seoul’s international

⁴³⁹ National Assembly Minutes, 2013: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Session 19-321-3, 7.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Ha JS., 2015.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

status, standing or brand. For example, on the website of the ROK Permanent Mission to the UN, for example, it reads: “The level of Korea’s participation in PKO is a reflection of the government’s willingness to contribute to world peace and security, thus enhancing its status in the international community while simultaneously making the world a safer place.”⁴⁴³ In the 2012 Defense White Paper it says: “Through the expansion of global peacekeeping activities, the ROK Armed Forces are fulfilling our responsibility to the international community on a level that is befitting our national power. In the process, we are enhancing our global stature as a defender of world peace.”⁴⁴⁴ During the 2009 debate over the extension of the UNIFIL extension in the National Assembly Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade and Unification, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Shin Kak-soo promised that “the government will continue to make efforts to enhance the international status of Korea by actively contributing to the UN’s efforts to maintain international peace and security.”⁴⁴⁵ In a similar but ultimately more insightful way, Parliamentary Senior Expert Seong Seok-ho explains the government’s proposal to extend the mandates of the Korean deployments to UNIFIL and the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH):

*“Through the extensions, we hope to contribute not only to peace and stability in the region, but also to secure a strong base for diplomatic ties between those countries and Korea as well as to expand our influence in the international community through military contributions corresponding to our financial support.”*⁴⁴⁶

From this exemplary statement it becomes clear what is at the core of nearly all justifications of peacekeeping deployments coming from the Lee Myung-bak administration: the belief that the PKO deployments will help to foster diplomatic ties and thus increase Korea’s influence around the world. Again, this is very much in line with the global outreach envisioned by the Global Korea strategy, as the following statement by Foreign Minister Kim Sung-Hwan illustrates: “[N]etworks are emerging as a key element in the diplomacy of the 21st century. Achieving the goal of a global Korea will also depend

⁴⁴³ Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations webpage: <http://un.mofa.go.kr/english/am/un/bilateral/policy/activities/>.

⁴⁴⁴ Ministry of National Defense, 2012: 3.

⁴⁴⁵ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Session 18-283-4, 2.

⁴⁴⁶ National Assembly Minutes, 2011: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Session 18-304-2, 4.

on how effectively we can build networks of cooperation with countries around the world.”⁴⁴⁷

This diplomatic campaign is supposed to be achieved through the successful establishment of an international perception of Korea as ‘a responsible member of the international community.’ However, the promises and pitfalls of this ‘military diplomacy’ became visible in quite practical terms in two events in 2008 and 2013. On the one hand, during the initial review of the UNIFIL deployment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff Operations Division Chief Jang Gwang-il reported how Korea’s reputation was not only successfully improved among Lebanese locals through Taekwondo and Korean language classes, but also through the establishment of personal ties with other peacekeeping units deployed there. When in 2008 “one of the largest earthquakes in human history in terms of socio-economic losses”⁴⁴⁸ devastated the Chinese province of Sichuan, the Korean peacekeepers collected donations and delivered them to a neighbouring Chinese peacekeeping battalion.⁴⁴⁹ On the other hand, in late 2013 news broke about a controversy between Korea and Japan over an incident in South Sudan, where in a tense security environment South Korean peacekeepers from the *Hanbit* Unit had requested additional ammunition from the UNMISS command and were handed bullets from Japanese peacekeepers. Back home, the Japanese opposition claimed that arms export rules had been violated and the Korean side refuted reports that the *Hanbit* Unit had made a direct request to their Japanese peers, attributing the whole story to a malicious spin by Prime Minister Abe’s administration.⁴⁵⁰

The importance of diplomatic ties and how to avoid damaging them with peacekeeping deployments had already been an issue under President Roh Moo-hyun in 2006, when the UNIFIL deployment was first debated in parliament. Whereas Vice Foreign Minister Jo Jung-pyo argued that the Lebanon engagement would ultimately help foster diplomatic ties with Arab nations, because the Korean reputation in the region had suffered after supporting the United States in Iraq with the *Zaytun* Unit,⁴⁵¹ Representative Im Jong-in from the ruling progressive *Uri* Party feared that the damaged “brand” of Korea would not

⁴⁴⁷ Kim SH., 2011.

⁴⁴⁸ Daniell J., 2013.

⁴⁴⁹ National Assembly Minutes, 2008: Special Committee on Reviewing the Extension of the UNIFIL Mandate Session 18-276-1, 7.

⁴⁵⁰ Fischer M., 2013; Ha EY. and Seok JH., 2013.

⁴⁵¹ National Assembly Minutes, 2006: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Session 17-262-17.

be improved by such a measure and only endanger Korean soldiers there.⁴⁵² As I will show in the next subchapter about the main rival role conception, not only was this purported diplomatic benefit from peacekeeping deployments contested by parties from the political left, but also by the selective use of historical references as well as the perception of the international community.

The final aspect of the ‘responsible member in the international community’ role conception is closely related to the goal of raising Korea’s international standing: external recognition. In what can fittingly be illustrated with Putnam’s logic of the two-level game,⁴⁵³ South Korean decision makers have to negotiate their roles not only domestically, which is the focus of the analysis at hand, but also internationally with other international actors. Accordingly, through their commitments to international peacekeeping efforts South Korean decision makers aim to become recognized as ‘responsible members of the international community’ while establishing networks for further projection of national influence, as shown above. On the other hand, however, international recognition of a certain status and the related expectations for appropriate behaviour can serve as a welcome legitimization strategy to garner domestic support. If South Korean decision makers and citizens want to continue seeing their country holding a certain status, they have to support the prescribed behaviour or role performance. The fulfilment of these expectations in turn validates the role playing country’s status aspirations and ambitions. It is no wonder then that a key feature of any parliamentary debate about peacekeeping mandate extensions is based on the government’s report about the various praise the deployed units and the whole country received locally as well as internationally.

For example, in the 2008 Defense White Paper, the *Dongmyeong* Unit reportedly was praised as “Godsend”⁴⁵⁴ or “a family, a brother”⁴⁵⁵ by the Lebanese locals. Further, the unit was awarded a UN Medal and hailed by the UNIFIL Force Commander as an “exemplary unit involved in peacekeeping operations.”⁴⁵⁶ President Lee Myung-bak told Koreans on the patriotic March First Independence Movement Day in 2012 that “[o]ur Armed Forces have won the hearts and minds of local residents more than any other

⁴⁵² National Assembly Minutes, 2006: Plenary Session 17-263-1.

⁴⁵³ Putnam R.D., 1988.

⁴⁵⁴ Yoon SG., 2016.

⁴⁵⁵ Ministry of National Defense, 2008: 136.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

country's military forces. They are thus receiving high appraisal internationally."⁴⁵⁷ In 2014 a Vice Foreign Minister made the case for a further UNIFIL mandate extension as follows:

*"The United Nations and the Lebanese government highly appreciate the accomplishments of our united forces and are requesting continued dispatch, and it is hoped that the extension of our dispatch will enhance our international status and role and contribute to the development of bilateral relations between Korea and Lebanon."*⁴⁵⁸

According to Lee Jeongkyu, Director-General for International Policy Bureau in the Ministry of National Defense, the UNMISS Force Commander also praised one operation by the *Hanbit* Unit as "one of the most successful operations carried out for the protection of refugees in the history of the UN Peacekeeping Forces."⁴⁵⁹ Lee further reports that:

*"[a]t first, locals took an aloof attitude toward the presence of the ROK troops, but they have gradually opened up in response to the sincere humanitarian aid and services that the troops have provided. Now, they shout 'Korea wonderful!' and give a thumbs-up to members of the Hanbit Unit when they pass by. Some of them even greet the troops with basic Korean words."*⁴⁶⁰

These reported successes in 'military diplomacy' are not what critics of South Korean peacekeeping deployments had feared a decade ago. Back then, criticism was coming from the political left, which contested not only the selective use of history to legitimate peacekeeping deployments, but also more generally troop deployments and military diplomacy as appropriate means for global engagement, as will be shown in the next subchapter.

5.2.4. The rival role conception: 'anti-militarist power'

The final and main rival role conception could be called 'anti-militarist power'. This role conception was exhibited by a number of left-wing opposition parties, such as the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) and the splinter New Progressive Party (NPP), which both merged later again as the Unified Progressive Party (UPP). But related concerns about peacekeeping deployments were also voiced by individual lawmakers from the main

⁴⁵⁷ Lee MB., 2012a.

⁴⁵⁸ National Assembly Minutes, 2014: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Session 19-329-5.

⁴⁵⁹ Lee JK., 2014.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

progressive opposition party, the *Minjoo* or Democratic Party (DP) which was formerly the *Uri* Party under the progressive Presidency of Roh Moo-hyun. This role conception remained marginal but present throughout the observed period and may hold some explanatory value also for the abstentions regarding peacekeeping deployments by significant numbers of more mainstream DP lawmakers.

A key theme for this rival role conception is also the use of historical narratives, but whereas the Korean War and the subsequent Korean development were central to the ‘responsible international member’ role conception, for the political left the relevant historical events are the contentious deployment of troops to two wars fought alongside the United States, Vietnam and Iraq. This is very much in line with what has been termed the tension between the “Vietnam syndrome”⁴⁶¹ and the ‘child of the United Nations’ narrative in the literature on South Korean peacekeeping. Whereas the former is a discourse about futile military adventures for the sake of the US-ROK alliance, the latter emphasizes the historical debt of South Koreans towards international support during and after the Korean War.

The left-wing lawmaker Cho Seung-soo from the New Progressive Party (NPP), which separated itself from the Democratic Labour Party (DLP) in 2008, illustrates the ‘Vietnam syndrome’ during the plenary debate on the mandate extension for deployed South Korean peacekeepers to Lebanon in July 2009 and in the debate about the UN Peacekeeping Participation Act in December 2009. Additionally to introducing Korea’s involvement in the Vietnam War as a negative lesson from history (“We already have such an experience in history when we sent tens of thousands of soldiers to Vietnam and inflicted pain on the Vietnamese people. This was due to our US-centered foreign policy.”⁴⁶²), Cho directly contested the argument that ‘historical debt’ translates into a responsibility to contribute military troops to international peacekeeping efforts. Instead he used the collective experience of the Korean War to paint the image of Koreans as “our peace loving people” (*pyeonghwareul saranghaneun uri gungmindeuri*) who are shamefully being led into war by the main two parties, the conservative GNP and the progressive DP.⁴⁶³ To him the envisioned fast deployment capabilities through the establishment of standing units were

⁴⁶¹ Hong KD., 2009: 173.

⁴⁶² National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary Session 18-283-1, 8.

⁴⁶³ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary Session 18-285-1, 18.

not sending the right image of Korea as a “peaceful country” (*pyeonghwagukga*) to the Middle East, risking that the South Korean soldiers will again be seen as “mercenaries of the United States” (*migugui yongbyeong*).⁴⁶⁴ He stated that this misperception ultimately leads to less safety for Korean soldiers and citizens around the world. Further for Cho, the fast deployment capabilities from the PKO Act not only violated the rights of the National Assembly to examine and approve overseas troop deployments but also the peaceful spirit of Article 5 of the Korean Constitution, which prohibits wars of aggression.⁴⁶⁵ But lawmaker Cho also reaffirmed that his party was committed to international development, and saw the majority of ordinary Koreans behind his position.⁴⁶⁶ Finally, Cho’s linked the historical Korean participation in the Vietnam War with today’s UN PKO in order to frame present-day peacekeeping deployments as a distortion of Korea’s peaceful nature.

In a similar way, in 2006 in the debate about the first UNIFIL deployment Representative Im Jong-in from the then ruling *Uri* Party had warned that the Korean image in the Middle East, which had already suffered from the Korean involvement in the Iraq War, would only deteriorate further, damaging the Korean brand (*hanguk beuraendeu*) even more.⁴⁶⁷ For him the decision about the deployment proposal was clear: “Please stop this motion and raise our country’s prestige again.”⁴⁶⁸ This is in stark contrast to the ‘responsible member’ role conception, where discursive agents construed an improved image and heightened prestige in the ‘international community’ as a result of peacekeeping commitments with boots on the ground. Common to both of them, however, is the concern for Korea’s international standing and diplomatic ties, especially to countries in the Middle East. Another example for this aspect is DLP lawmaker Gwak Cheong-suk’s concern that relations with Arab nations might suffer over the deployment.⁴⁶⁹ In addition, he accused the government of hiding costs for PKOs from the National Assembly and doubted that the peacekeeping had any effect whatsoever on the security situation in Lebanon.⁴⁷⁰ While he agreed that Korea has the mission to work towards international peace, he saw this goal only as served through a withdrawal and not further deployment of forces.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁴ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary Session 18-283-1, 8.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary Session 18-285-1, 18.

⁴⁶⁷ National Assembly Minutes, 2006: Plenary Session 17-263-1, 50.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.: Plenary Session 17-263-1, 51.

⁴⁶⁹ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary Session 18-283-1, 10.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.: Plenary Session 18-283-1, 11.

Likewise, in 2012 Representative Kim Mi-hee from the United Progressive Party (UPP), a merger of various left-wing parties in succession of the DLP and prohibited by the Constitutional Court in 2014 for pro-North Korean views, called the peacekeeping mandate of the *Hanbit* Unit into question. For her, having combat troops in South Sudan to fulfil mainly reconstruction works and medical services was not conducive to the local security situation, as it might lead to the escalation of the local conflict: “The dispatch of Korean troops can intensify the dispute in South Sudan and not contribute to peace.”⁴⁷² Instead of military troop deployments, she called for “unconditional and humanitarian support,”⁴⁷³ while suggesting that most other international powers from the US and China to Japan hold a presence in South Sudan only because of its rich natural resources.

This is illustrative of a certain scepticism towards the ‘international community’ among left-wing politicians. For Cho Seung-soo from the NPP, international politics is usually governed by great power logics, what leads him to call for Korea to balance for peace during the debate on the PKO law in 2009.⁴⁷⁴ DLP lawmaker Hyeon Ae-ja described the UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which calls for the disarmament of Hezbollah, the Shiite political party and militant group whose war with Israel in July 2006 which led to the second UNIFIL deployment in the South of Lebanon, as one-sided in favour of Israeli and US interests.⁴⁷⁵ Furthermore, she criticized the ‘international community’ for staying silent “when Lebanon was helpless against Israel’s bombing.”⁴⁷⁶ The significant Other in the rival role conception ‘anti-militarist power’ is not the ‘international community’ but the United States, given Korea’s history of military deployments in context of the US-ROK military alliance as well as the United States’ interventionist foreign policy in the Middle East. It is against this background that the political left in Korea tries to re-establish a self-image of Korea as a peaceful country that is not taking part in ‘resource imperialism,’ as the DLP’s Kim Mi-hee was suggesting.⁴⁷⁷ This leads the analysis at hand to the final subchapter about the self-images at play in the discursive contestation over the different role conceptions with regard to South Korean peacekeeping.

⁴⁷² National Assembly Minutes, 2012: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs 19-311-9, 22.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary Session 18-283-1, 18.

⁴⁷⁵ National Assembly Minutes, 2006: Plenary Session 17-263-1, 51.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.: Plenary Session 17-263-1, 52.

⁴⁷⁷ National Assembly Minutes, 2012: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs 19-311-9, 22.

5.3. Self-images

After identifying the main role conceptions, key themes and significant others in the South Korean wider foreign policy discourse on peacekeeping deployments, the final step of the analysis consists of a close, intertextual and interpretative reading of the utilized self-images, as well as their commonalities and differences. Through these ‘snapshots’ of identification practices, one can in a next step acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying identity narratives informing and being informed by the global foreign policy actor, South Korea.

The first self-image prevalent in the peacekeeping discourse is closely linked to the hegemonic role conception ‘responsible international member’ as well as the minor role conception ‘guardian of world peace.’ It is the image of a risen South Korea, a once peripheral and marginal country that has now entered the ranks of advanced, relevant countries and stands tall, proud of its achievements, on the global stage. Korea here seeks the global spotlight and is eager to contribute to the ‘international community’ in order to acquire self-assurance through external recognition as ‘one of them,’ a privilege that has been withheld from Koreans since the turbulent end of the Joseon dynasty amidst the dawn of ‘the international’ in East Asia. This is well illustrated by the earlier introduced quote from President Lee Myung-bak’s 2009 New Year Address:

*“The Republic of Korea is not the marginal state it was in the latter part of the 19th century when it suffered the whims of international currents. [...] The country is emerging as a responsible member of the leading nations helping create a new international order.”*⁴⁷⁸

The global outreach is thus a way of raising the visibility of Korea’s journey from the periphery to the centre, one might say back to a position ‘close to the centre’ that Joseon Korea once occupied in the Sino-centric world order before Western encroachment. The ‘beneficiary to benefactor’ historical narrative that is central to the ‘risen Korea’ self-image is a testament to this perspective. Moreover, the significant Other here is not North Korea or the United States, but the past-Korea, ‘the marginal state’ or ‘the beneficiary’. All in all, peacekeeping operations are a suitable way of forging ties with various international partners in a policy and diplomatic area of comparatively high international legitimacy,

⁴⁷⁸ Lee MB., 2009a.

bestowed through the UN system and the obligatory invitation for UN PKO from the host country and despite the inherent risk for the safety of deployed military troops, the small costs which are facilitated through the compensations from the UN budget. It is noteworthy that there is a new element to this, one that is reflected by the emergence of the role conception of being a ‘global model nation’. Here Korea has the unique potential and ambition to venture further, to shape global affairs from the centre as a pioneer. President Lee Myung-bak’s Liberation Day address from 2008 is a good example of this: “[An] advanced nation [...] will serve as a paragon for humankind and will be respected by other countries in the international community.”⁴⁷⁹ Proponents of the main rival role conception ‘anti-militarist power’ wouldn’t even argue against President Lee’s dream, which is an expression of the ‘model Korea’ self-image, but they would certainly differ on the ways and means through which Korea can achieve the aforementioned goal.

Their utilized self-image is that of Korea as country of peace, which is an idea that had also been championed by President Roh Moo-hyun in 2007. In his address on the March First Independence Movement Day he had laid down a vision of Korea that merged several of the earlier mentioned key themes:

*“As a nation that has done no injury to another throughout history, Korea holds a sufficient moral ground and qualification to lead peace efforts in Northeast Asia. The geopolitical map also places Korea on an equilibrium point where it is able to maintain the peace structure. When Korea’s strength reached a high tide, peace in Northeast was preserved and when it slid down to a low ebb, the region was swirled into a maelstrom of war, a manifestation that the order of Northeast Asia depends on the action that this nation takes.”*⁴⁸⁰

This self-image, which can be called ‘moral Korea’, is inherently peaceful and a force for peace in the region. Moreover, Korea has the “moral ground” and potential to lead the region into an era of peace. This mirrors the remarks of NPP lawmaker Cho Seung-soo, who warned that the “peace loving Korean people”⁴⁸¹ might risk being misunderstood or misperceived as “mercenaries of the United States” by others over their growing peacekeeping profile in the Middle East, somehow against their ‘true nature’. Regarding Roh’s historical claim of Korea’s peaceful rise, it can be argued that this is at odds with

⁴⁷⁹ Lee MB., 2008.

⁴⁸⁰ Roh MH., 2007.

⁴⁸¹ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary Session 18-285-1, 18.

Korea's involvement in the Vietnam War, which proved instrumental in funding South Korean economic development.

Finally, the left's image of a peaceful Korea is very much at odds with the mainstream self-image of a South Korea at the centre of today's US-led international order. For the political left, the 'peaceful Korean people' can and should stand aside when others are engaging in militaristic 'resource imperialism' and neglecting the needs of ordinary, helpless people around the world. These left-wing advocates of a pacifist, humanitarian or civilian South Korea are not calling for isolationism – and here is the common key theme to both major self-images and respective role conceptions – but for a widespread and largely non-confrontational international outreach.

5.4. Concluding remarks

Overall, there was broad political support for participation in UN peacekeeping missions since 2006. The main role conception over the whole observation period was the little contested and therefore hegemonic ‘responsible member of the international community’, linked to a self-image of a risen South Korea, a once peripheral and marginal country that has entered the ranks of advanced countries and is eager to contribute to the ‘international community’ in order to acquire self-assurance through external recognition. However, the duty or responsibility to participate in UN peacekeeping operations is not only linked discursively to the reassurance of status but also the historical experience of being helped by the UN during and after the Korean War. In addition, South Korea is not only acting out of a perceived duty to pay back a historical debt, but also because Seoul sees itself as uniquely positioned to be a role model in the fields of development assistance and peacekeeping. This leadership ambition, which is most at the core of President Lee Myung-bak’s ‘Global Korea’ strategy, is based on historical achievements which could be seen as the core of yet another role conception, that of a ‘global model nation’; this in turn is linked to the ‘beneficiary to benefactor’⁴⁸² historical narrative. The discursive agents behind the ‘responsible member’ role conception also emphasised the image improvements and heightened prestige in the international community as a result of peacekeeping commitments with boots on the ground.

This concern for Korea’s international standing and diplomatic ties especially to countries in the Middle East is common to both proponents of the dominant role conception as well as the major deviant role conception ‘anti-militarist power’. This rival role conception was put forward by representatives from the political left who argued that ‘historical debt’ does not automatically translate into a responsibility to contribute military troops to international peacekeeping efforts. Instead they used the collective experience of the Korean War to paint the image of Korea as a peaceful nation opposed to war and argue that Korea should stand aside when others, especially the United States, are engaging in militaristic ‘resource imperialism’. In consequence, the political left’s image of a peaceful Korea is very much at odds with the mainstream self-image of ‘rising Korea’ at the centre of today’s US-led international order.

⁴⁸² Ha JS., 2015.

Figure 3 is an attempt to visualize these self-identifications as links between role conceptions and self-images. Because stability of the self-identifications link the self-images of ‘rising Korea’ and ‘model Korea’ to the ‘responsible international member’ role conception, one can conclude that there was indeed a dominant role identity throughout the observation period, that of ‘responsible international member’. Through the focus on self-identifications, however, the analysis revealed how the role playing was contested and which self-images were linked to which role conceptions in what way.

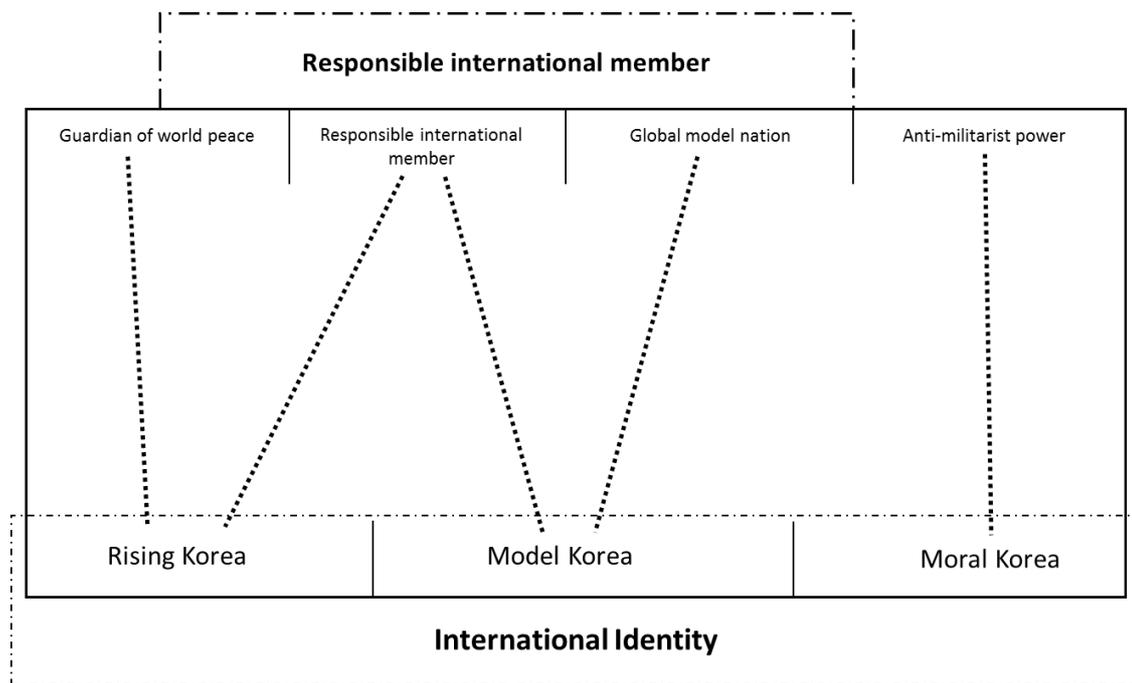


Figure 3: Roles, Role Conceptions and Self-images in ROK Peacekeeping 2006–2016.

6. Self-identification Practices in South Korea's Climate Diplomacy

The following chapter is the second of two case studies on self-identification practices, understood as specific linkages of role conceptions and self-images, in the South Korean global foreign policy discourse. It is focused on the policy field of international climate diplomacy, which also has been identified as one of the key areas of South Korean global foreign policy ambition in the respective literature.⁴⁸³ The first subchapter briefly introduces the history as well as the main literature on South Korean climate diplomacy, followed by the results from the empirical analysis. The focus hereby lies on role conceptions and exhibited key themes put forward and contested by different actors in the South Korean climate diplomacy discourse of the last decade. The last subchapters are dedicated to the retrieved self-images that, linked to role conceptions as specific practices of self-identification, allow a small glimpse of the larger identity narratives underlying South Korea's global foreign policy.

⁴⁸³ Saxer C.J., 2013; Ikenberry G.J. and Mo JR., 2013.

6.1. An introduction to South Korean climate diplomacy

The starting point for international climate change diplomacy was the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, where the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) treaty aiming at “the stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system”⁴⁸⁴ (Art. 2) was signed. The parties to the convention agreed to work towards this goal “on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities”⁴⁸⁵ with developed countries taking the lead (Art.3(1)). Since 1995 the parties have met annually at the Conferences of the Parties (COP) to assess progress and debate further measures in fighting climate change, such as the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 or the Paris Agreement in 2015.

In the early 1990s South Korea was still categorized as non-Annex I country, meaning a developing nation under the UNFCCC and most Korean governments since then tried to retain this status while participating in an increasing number of environmental negotiations, but ultimately “maintain[ing] a passive stance as an observer of international climate change issues.”⁴⁸⁶ The major concern of the administrations back then was to ensure continuing growth for the economy amidst increasing global competition and especially in the aftermath of the 1998 Asian Crisis or International Monetary Fund (IMF) crisis, as it is known in Korea. Yoon argues that Seoul’s attitude towards climate change diplomacy and global environmental politics on the whole still “reflect[ed] its prioritization of its economic interests in its foreign policy.”⁴⁸⁷ Further, as Watson points out, under the authoritarian strongmen of previous decades, environmental concerns were seen as ‘dangerous subversion’, because economic development has been the key for South Korea’s main national security strategy towards North Korea.⁴⁸⁸

At the same time, environmental concerns were widespread among the South Korean public, as the decades of ‘compressed modernization’ and development also came at the price of environmental depletion and pollution. With regard to greenhouse gas emissions, Peritore

⁴⁸⁴ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1992: 4.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Kim SJ., 2014: 1.

⁴⁸⁷ Yoon ES., 2006: 75.

⁴⁸⁸ Watson I., 2012: 541.

wrote that, in 1998, 77 percent of Koreans were “in favour of major action on climate change issues”⁴⁸⁹ and that the international community increasingly demanded Seoul’s “participat[ion] in global efforts for environmental protection in ways that are commensurate with its economic capacity and emissions volumes.”⁴⁹⁰ Prior to 2008, however, South Korea’s involvement in global climate change negotiations remained “practically non-existent”,⁴⁹¹ until President Lee Myung-bak’s administration announced the so called ‘Low Carbon Green Growth’ strategy in 2009.

President Lee’s green growth strategy was an ambitious plan to transform the country’s economy which was based on ‘brown growth’ industrial development through a Green New Deal, making innovative green industries the future growth engines. In addition to this domestic dimension, ‘green growth’ was also expected to enable South Korea to enact “multiple leadership roles”⁴⁹² in the international sphere. The explicitly stated strategic objective was to become a global “role model”⁴⁹³ for green growth, which was sought to be achieved through performing a bridging role in international climate change negotiations, the promise to allocate significant ODA funds for green growth projects as well as the establishment of the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) in order to become a global hub for green growth know how.⁴⁹⁴

Generally, South Korea’s diplomatic green growth offensive is seen as exemplary commitment and a success, for example by the World Bank⁴⁹⁵ and the OECD.⁴⁹⁶ Korea not only established the GGGI as an international organization in 2012, but also won the hosting right for the UNFCCC Green Climate Fund (GCF) in 2012. Accordingly, Ikenberry and Mo attribute to South Korea the roles of ‘agenda setter’ for promoting green growth internationally in the OECD and UNEP, ‘mediator’ for facilitating the UNFCCC registry for Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) involving developing countries at COP 15 in Copenhagen 2009, and ‘bridge’ for hosting the GCF. Due to the successful international promotion of ‘green growth’, Blaxekjær concludes that South Korea has

⁴⁸⁹ Peritore N.P., 1999: 91.

⁴⁹⁰ Yoon ES., 2006: 91.

⁴⁹¹ Kim SJ., 2014: 1.

⁴⁹² Ikenberry G.J. and Mo JR., 2013: 100.

⁴⁹³ Lee MB., 2012d.

⁴⁹⁴ Ikenberry G.J. and Mo JR., 2013: 101.

⁴⁹⁵ The World Bank, 2012.

⁴⁹⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017.

established itself internationally as a major actor in international environmental politics and hence categorizes Seoul as a “green middle power”.⁴⁹⁷ Ikenberry and Mo even see Seoul’s green growth efforts as “driven by liberal international values in terms of substance as well as formality”.⁴⁹⁸ Others⁴⁹⁹ speak of South Korea as a middle power more generally in international climate diplomacy, but there is also some criticism about the South Korean projection of a green image, especially in context of the discrepancy between international aspirations and domestic environmental performance.⁵⁰⁰ Here the green growth paradigm is seen as little more than another top-down⁵⁰¹ developmental state-driven economic stimulus package,⁵⁰² involving polarizing measures such as the large-scale Four River Restoration project as well as the promotion of nuclear power.⁵⁰³ Further, while generally agreeing with the need for a greener developmental model, the South Korean public has not been really supportive of global leadership claims: in the 2013 Public Opinion Survey on the Green Growth Policy undertaken by Lee Myung-bak’s Presidential Committee on Green Growth (PCGG) no more than 2.8 percent of the respondents gave a priority to the enactment of global leadership. Over half of the respondents (54.6 percent) however were primarily concerned with renewable energy sources.⁵⁰⁴

Again, the following subchapters are not an assessment of the performance of South Korean climate diplomacy efforts, but rather an inquiry into how South Korean political actions related to international climate diplomacy have been legitimated in the wider domestic political discourse. In particular, the analysis is focused on the Framework Act on Low Carbon and Green Growth in 2009, the support for the establishment of the GGGI in 2012 and the bid to host the GCF in 2012, as well as the ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2016. Because the wider political discourse consists of the government, in this case the President and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Environment, as well as the political opposition, this approach foregrounds domestic contestation (especially in the National Assembly) as well as changes over time. At the centre of the analysis are questions

⁴⁹⁷ Blaxekjær L., 2016.

⁴⁹⁸ Ikenberry G.J. and Mo JR., 2013: 110.

⁴⁹⁹ Kim SJ., 2014; Kim IK., 2014; Han HJ., 2015; Dent C.M., 2015; Watson I., 2015.

⁵⁰⁰ Han HJ., 2015.

⁵⁰¹ Compare Yun SJ., Ku DW. and Han JY., 2013; Watson I., 2012.

⁵⁰² Dent C.M., 2015.

⁵⁰³ Shim D., 2009; O’Donnell J., 2013.

⁵⁰⁴ Han HJ., 2015: 745.

about which specific role conceptions and self-images have been used by different political actors to justify the climate diplomacy and green growth legislation.

6.2. Role conceptions, key themes and significant Others

There are a number of retrieved role conceptions that have been employed in the South Korean discourse on climate diplomacy from 2005 to 2016 throughout the political spectrum: the consistently influential ‘bridge between developed and developing world’, the stand-out ‘green leader’ and two marginal, rivalling responses to the latter, the traditional ‘non-Annex I country’ and the more recent network-focused ‘climate hub’.

In contrast to the political debate in the United States, for example, throughout the whole observation period there has been a political consensus that climate change and global warming are human-made through increasing greenhouse gas emissions. Further, neither the fact that South Korea is a major carbon emitter nor the country’s high dependence on energy imports were politically questioned or challenged. The main political issues with regard to international climate diplomacy were, first, how to balance economic growth with the legitimate need for less carbon emissions and, second, whether Seoul should pursue a global leadership strategy in international climate talks. The stable, main role conception underlying South Korea’s climate diplomacy engagement was that of a ‘bridge between developing and developed world’, though with regard to the concrete meaning of this rather wide trope there have been two progressions. On the one hand, President Lee Myung-bak’s green growth promotion drastically redefined South Korea’s bridge role conception in climate diplomacy, while putting Seoul under some pressure to live up to these newly raised expectations about Korea being a ‘green leader’ around the time of the Paris agreement.

This can also be illustrated with the voting figures on the controversial ‘Framework Act on Low Carbon and Green Growth’ from 2009, which was a key piece of legislation of the Lee Myung-bak administration, and the ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2016. As one can see in table 3, South Korea’s commitment to a proactive diplomatic stance on cutting carbon emissions became less controversial over time. The Framework Act even saw no votes from all parties present in parliament that time. A more detailed description of the political debates and various arguments will be given in the following subchapters.

Framework Act on Low Carbon and Green Growth, 29 December 2009. ⁵⁰⁵	Ratification of the Paris Agreement, 3 November 2016. ⁵⁰⁶
Yes-votes: 140	Yes-votes: 255
No-votes: 40	No-votes: 0
Abstentions: 10	Abstentions: 6

Table 3: Voting shares of major climate diplomacy legislation, National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, 2009–2016.

A key factor for this development is to be found in the change in international context. Under the Kyoto-framework international negotiations were initially locked in a diplomatic stalemate over the unequal responsibilities to cut carbon emissions between developing and developed countries. In the lead-up to the successful COP 21 in 2015, however, a deal struck between China and the United States in 2014 changed the momentum and enabled the signing of the Paris Agreement.

6.2.1. The main role conception: ‘bridge between worlds’

The key trope used in the South Korean domestic discourse on international climate diplomacy over the whole observation period from 2005 to 2016 is that of a ‘bridge between developing and developed countries’. This is also similar to the debate on overseas developmental assistance where the South Korean elites like to stress their countries’ developmental success story, the ‘miracle on the Han river’, which uniquely qualifies South Korea to understand and speak on behalf of the developing countries’ interests. All three observed administrations consistently argued for a ‘bridging’ role of South Korea in international affairs and especially climate diplomacy.

For President Roh Moo-hyun himself, global climate diplomacy was not a high priority, but his general vision for Korea saw the country as a central hub or node for regional relations. Roh’s idea about Korea’s bridging role was decidedly regional in scope while he focused on the geographical centrality of the Korean peninsula in Northeast Asia:

⁵⁰⁵ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary 18-285-1.

⁵⁰⁶ National Assembly Minutes, 2016: Plenary 20-346-11.

*“The Korean Peninsula is located at the heart of the region. It is a big bridge linking China and Japan, the continent and the ocean. Such a geopolitical characteristic often caused pain for us in the past. Today, however, this same feature is offering us an opportunity. Indeed, it demands that we play a pivotal role in the Age of Northeast Asia in the 21st century.”*⁵⁰⁷

His foreign minister Song Min-soon however made clear that Korea as “an OECD member country and a major greenhouse gas emitter”⁵⁰⁸ plans to enact this bridge role also in international efforts related to climate change:

*“As a newly industrializing country standing between developing and developed nations, Korea will work together with the international community in devising innovative solutions to climate change, in an effort to bridge the gap between developed and developing countries by forming a strong partnership between the two.”*⁵⁰⁹

Song further calls on the international community to work together towards a “more flexible” post-Kyoto framework that succeeds in accommodating the interests of developed countries sceptical of the Kyoto-Protocol, for example the United States and Australia, as well as fast growing economies of developing countries, such as China or India. This is indicative of the conundrum South Korea saw itself in within the Kyoto-regime: on the one hand, the country is eager to take up international responsibilities as an OECD country and does not dispute its high share in greenhouse gas emissions, but, on the other hand, it has been categorized as a non-Annex I country and intends to safeguard its status as a ‘developing country’ which is exempt from binding restrictions on CO₂ emissions.

Against this backdrop the role of ‘bridge’ appears to be a fitting solution to the climate diplomatic dilemma. Through evoking South Korea’s recent developmental history, the government is able to carve out a special position as a ‘bridge’ to project the image of a responsible nation and to match international expectations, while avoiding strict regulations for domestic businesses. Similarly in 2009, under the Presidency of the conservative Lee Myung-bak, Kim Hyeong-guk, the Chairman of the newly established Presidential Committee on Green Growth, describes South Korea’s role in international climate

⁵⁰⁷ Roh MH., 2003.

⁵⁰⁸ Song MS., 2007a.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

diplomacy as ‘bridge’, while stressing that Korea has no historical responsibility for climate change:

*“As a member of the OECD and as an emitter of greenhouse gases, we are committed to participating in global climate change efforts that correspond to our national strength. As a non-Annex I country, we plan to voluntarily announce country-specific reduction targets similar to those of developed countries. [...] However, since Korea has different historical responsibilities for climate change than developed countries, we also seek to pursue a different approach than developed countries. Furthermore, we will enhance the image of the country through constructive negotiation proposals and we will build trust in the international community and act as a bridge for developing countries.”*⁵¹⁰

Korea’s role here is conceptualized as ‘mediator’ or ‘honest broker’, particularly for developing countries’ interests. However, there is a major problem with the credibility and plausibility of this narrative as it is. South Korea’s economic development was achieved through CO₂-intensive industrialization or ‘brown growth’ and thus the South Korean developmental experience can hardly serve as a good example for sustainable development. This problem is only solved through President Lee’s international promotion of ‘green growth’ as new developmental paradigm from 2008 onwards.

6.2.2. The complementary role conception: ‘green leader’

Despite the legitimate criticism that the concept of green growth prioritizes economic growth over sustainability and environmental concern, Seoul’s global promotion of its ‘green growth’ profile fixes the credibility problem faced by a bridge narrative based on a ‘brown growth’ development experience. The promotion of green growth domestically and internationally was – together with the Global Korea National Security Strategy – a trademark policy of President Lee Myung-Bak. Even though the Seoul Initiative Network on Green Growth (SINGG) had already been established under President Roh Moo-hyun in 2005, it was only made a major policy under President Lee Myung-bak.⁵¹¹ The extent to which President Lee invested his own personal reputation for the green growth agenda explains also his stand-out discursive position in the climate diplomacy discourse.

⁵¹⁰ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-5, 5-6.

⁵¹¹ Blaxekjær L., 2016: 455.

Blaxekjær even concludes that green growth became “synonymous with President Lee”⁵¹² and reports how the OECD called Lee the “father of green growth”.⁵¹³

For the Lee administration, green growth was the fitting next step in South Korea’s development and its roles as bridge, a global leader and – after its admission to the G20 – a role model can be seen in the following quote by President Lee from 2012:

*“Korea is the only country that rose to a member of the G20 from a poverty-stricken nation in a matter of a generation. Many developing countries are benchmarking Korea as a role model. Furthermore, our nation is in the midst of successfully overcoming environmental destruction caused by fast growth and development. Thanks to these experiences, the Republic of Korea has exercised great persuasive power in spreading the value of green growth to developing countries that are experiencing rapid growth.”*⁵¹⁴

Here Korea has two experiences to offer: first, the success story of the rise to a G20 nation due to economic development and, second, the recent experience as a green growth pioneer. Both together support Seoul’s claim to act as a ‘bridge between developed and developing world’, while the country still only commits to voluntary and not internationally binding measures, according to its non-Annex I status. When announcing voluntary reductions of carbon emissions in 2010, President Lee alluded to moral obligations instead:

*“Last year, Korea announced that it will reduce its carbon emissions 30% of BAU by 2020. Korea is a non-annex I country so we have no legal obligations but we understand we have moral obligations. This is why we voluntarily decided to abide without any conditions the highest standard set by the international community.”*⁵¹⁵

The central balancing act between economic interests and international climate commitments was prominent during the debate about the bill for a ‘Framework Act on Low Carbon and Green Growth’ in the National Assembly’s Special Committee on Measures against Climate Change on 14 April 2009. The oppositional Democratic Party lawmaker U Je-chang, for example, raised the question of whether the South Korean economy’s industrial base and its competitiveness vis-à-vis other developing countries such as China

⁵¹² Blaxekjær L., 2016: 455.

⁵¹³ Ibid.: 459.

⁵¹⁴ Lee MB., 2012d.

⁵¹⁵ Lee MB., 2010.

and India would be unnecessarily damaged by the government's voluntary 'low carbon' measures.⁵¹⁶ Representative Kim Nak-seong, from the small conservative Liberty Forward Party, also challenged the government's assessment of an international trend towards more carbon trading initiatives and suggested a more cautious 'wait and see' approach before committing to any climate action that may hinder Korea's international competitiveness.⁵¹⁷ Because of the international stalemate between Annex I and non-Annex I countries under the Kyoto-regime, namely between the USA and China, they didn't see an international context given where Korea should risk damage to its international competitiveness by constraining its economy with legislating carbon cuts. The conservative GNP lawmaker Jeong Du-eon also questioned Korea's responsibilities with regard to climate change in general: "We actually do not have a historical responsibility. That's why we are being treated as a developing country and not as an OECD country."⁵¹⁸ For others, for example, Democratic Party lawmaker Kim Jae-yun, the government's green growth strategy was either a lofty and ambitious talk by the President with little benefit for the wellbeing of the people⁵¹⁹ or was seen as not really all that 'green' for a lack of focus on sustainability, as in the case of Creative Korea Party's opposition lawmaker Yu Weon-il.⁵²⁰

To summarize this briefly, the main objections to President Lee's green growth agenda were that it was either unnecessarily ambitious and risky for Korea's economic competitiveness or not really sustainable and 'green' enough. Both positions can be read as direct responses to the 'green leadership' role aspiration, even though both lost influence and remained rather marginal throughout the observation period. Still, the first objection can be seen as the traditional 'non-Annex I country'-role conception that prioritized economic development over environmental concerns and was held by South Korea during the 1990s and early 2000s,⁵²¹ whereas for other marginalized voices the 'green leadership' was not green or environmentally friendly enough.

Moreover, there were two major domestic aspects of the bill that faced particular opposition in parliament. First, parliamentarians successfully stopped the inclusion of the promotion

⁵¹⁶ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-5, 26.

⁵¹⁷ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-5, 18.

⁵¹⁸ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-6, 24.

⁵¹⁹ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-5, 11-12.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-5, 13.

⁵²¹ Yoon ES., 2006: 75.

and export of nuclear power in the law and, second, oppositional lawmakers expressed their concern over one of President Lee's main campaign pledges, the construction of a Grand Channel through the country from coast to coast. The latter project, however, later became a reality in a watered-down version as the Four Major River Restoration project, despite significant resistance from the political opposition, the media and the public. Notably, both policies were framed as measures to fight climate change or to adapt to it. In case of nuclear power, President Lee argued that, "[o]ur development strategy aims to make Korea a leader in green growth by implementing proactive and pre-emptive policies that will tackle climate change. Exporting nuclear power plants is one good example of such a strategy."⁵²² And with regard to the Four River Project, the President had leveraged general international support for the project:

*"Korea's climate change policy received high praise at the Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Cancun, Mexico, at the end of last year, and was ranked as the second best out of 57 countries. The Four Major Rivers Restoration Project is also highly recognized in the international community. The UN Environment Programme announced that Korea's Four Rivers Project is an exemplary model of environment-friendly endeavours as well as an efficient means of coping with climate change."*⁵²³

Other investments planned were in renewables, research and development as well as 'green' cars and infrastructure, in order to make Korea a "leading powerhouse in the green technology market".⁵²⁴ The declared goal was to boost domestic growth while making the country more energy-independent. President Lee's call for the transformation of the national economy was presented to the country with a 'we have caught up with the world before' spirit. Take for example these quotes from his address on the 63rd anniversary of national liberation and the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Korea on 15 August 2008:

"Green growth will enable a Miracle on the Korean Peninsula to succeed the Miracle on the Han River. When the Republic first manufactured its own vehicles, the technology gap with the advanced countries amounted to at least 50 years. As far as semiconductors are concerned, it was more than 20 years behind. However,

⁵²² Lee MB., 2010.

⁵²³ Lee MB., 2011a.

⁵²⁴ Lee MB., 2008.

the Republic grew into a technology powerhouse, which ranks first in terms of producing semiconductors and ships, and fifth in automobiles. If we make up our minds before others and take action, we will be able to lead green growth and take the initiative in a new civilization. To do this, I will make sure that the country comes up with new green growth engines for the next generation to use for 10 to 20 years. [...] If Korea makes an audacious and swift move just as it did to advance its information capabilities to make up for belated industrialization, the country will undoubtedly be reborn as a green power.”⁵²⁵

President Lee framed the moment as an opportunity for Korea to put its economy ahead of other international competitors, if the country follows his plan for yet another rebirth as a ‘green power’. Using the historical precedent of the miraculous developmental modernization undertaken in the last decades, the President tried to build support for his contested domestic agenda. In another way of justifying his ‘green growth’ agenda, Lee regularly references proudly the international acknowledgement and recognition for the Korea’s ‘green growth’ agenda. In his retelling, the strategy paid off and the world recognized the global contributions by Korea, which in turn proves the country’s (and thus his own) successful leadership, as the following quotes from speeches mostly from Liberation Day addresses in 2009, 2011 and 2012 illustrate:

“We have already applied the idea of green growth to our economy and see the results that what is better for the economy has proven to be better for the environment and vice versa. Last June, the OECD officially adopted this Korean initiative as an official ministerial declaration. The importance of this method is recognized by the world.”⁵²⁶

“[C]limate change constitutes a task that requires the joint endeavours of the global community without any further delay. However, the differences of opinions between advanced countries and newly emerging economies, including China and India, still remain unabated. In order to address this problem particularly, I put forward a proposal to set up a working group to take concrete measures. The co-chair of the summit, US President Barack Obama, accepted the proposal on the spot, saying that it was a very effective and practical suggestion.”⁵²⁷

⁵²⁵ Lee MB., 2008.

⁵²⁶ Lee MB., 2009c.

⁵²⁷ Lee MB., 2009b.

*“Our vision of green growth is the first time in our history where a global issue is recognized as our own. It is also pivotal to our mission of becoming a greater Republic of Korea.”*⁵²⁸

*“As part of the efforts to respond to climate change, Korea worked together with many countries around the world and established the Global Green Growth Institute. [...] Through the Institute, the first international organization established at Korea’s initiative, green growth has become an enduring goal for the international community. Over the years, the Republic of Korea has grown into a greater country, and its global leadership has been further cemented.”*⁵²⁹

Also in 2012 he left no doubt about his own personal share in this diplomatic success:

*“In my 2008 Liberation Day remarks, I declared green growth, which is aimed at striking a balance between the economy and the environment, as the new vision for national progress. This vision has now become a mega trend embraced by many countries around the world. As a result, the term ‘green growth’ emanating from Korea is now a part of the common language of the world.”*⁵³⁰

On other occasions, President Lee cited the emotional praise, tears of joy and gratitude expressed towards him by leaders from developing nations or him expressing surprise over the positive effects Korea’s and his own leadership have had on the world. Lee uses these anecdotes as testaments for the appropriateness of his strategy for international green growth promotion. For example, when South Korea won the hosting rights for the UN Green Climate Fund in 2012, President Lee commented proudly:

“It is the first time for an Asian country, let alone Korea, to become the host of such a significant international organization. Last year when Korea unveiled its intention to host the organization, everyone thought our chances were slim. Germany, one of the competing rivals, is the most renowned green nation in the world. [...] For these reasons, Korea was regarded as the underdog in the competition. The news that Korea beat out rivals to host the organization despite such disadvantages came as a surprise upset to the international media. One head of state said to me, ‘The Republic of Korea is able and qualified to contribute to the

⁵²⁸ Lee MB., 2011c.

⁵²⁹ Lee MB., 2012b.

⁵³⁰ Lee MB., 2012d.

international community. I supported Korea because it has sufficient capabilities.”⁵³¹

*“At the GCF council meeting on October 17, a South African delegate praised Korea with emotion saying that he wants to share Korea’s experiences in national development and green growth. By playing the role of a bridge between the developing and developed worlds, our country can contribute to the international community and find our own future there.”*⁵³²

*“The leaders who were most impressed about the summit results were those from poor African nations. When I met them, they grabbed my hands and expressed their genuine thanks with tears filling their eyes. [...] The reason we were able to rouse gratefulness in these nations is that we can read their mind and understand their situations quite well.”*⁵³³

After establishing the GGGI as an international organization and securing the hosting rights for the GCF in Incheon, it is fair to assess South Korea’s role playing as a leading power in climate diplomacy and as a green pioneer. Through President Lee’s promotion of green growth, South Korea established itself as a credible ‘bridge between developing and developed countries’ in international climate diplomacy. This strategic move was helped, however, by a stalemate in climate diplomacy after the failure of the COP 15 in 2009 and a lack of effective leadership towards a post-Kyoto consensus regarding binding levels for CO₂ emissions in the aftermath. But with a rapprochement between the United States and China in a deal to cut CO₂ emissions in 2014,⁵³⁴ this diplomatic environment changed and led to the Paris Agreement in 2015. This changing international context also put South Korea’s credibility as a ‘green leader’ to the test, as will be shown in the following subchapter.

6.2.3. *International context and expectations: ‘green race’*

Throughout the whole observation period, international expectations were a main issue in the South Korean climate diplomacy discourse. At the core of this was the awareness that

⁵³¹ Lee MB., 2012d.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Lee MB., 2010.

⁵³⁴ Taylor L. and Branigan T., 2014.

Korea's official status as a developing country under the regulations of the Kyoto-Protocol was only ever a temporary exemption from legally binding measures as the country was rising through the ranks of the international community. As Yun Jong-soo, a Climate Policy Officer at the Ministry of Environment put it in 2009 during a Public Hearing on climate change measures and green growth-related regulation, "it is doubtful whether Korea can remain a developing country while being in the OECD for 13 years."⁵³⁵ Already in 2005 Deputy Minister of Environment Park Seon-sook had raised that even though Korea has no legal obligations, it has the fastest growing rate of carbon emissions among OECD countries⁵³⁶ and even the Deputy Minister from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Energy, Lee Weon-geol, conceded that "Korea is expected to play a responsible role corresponding with its status in the international society".⁵³⁷

While Korea was increasingly expected to pull its weight as an OECD country and major CO₂ emitter, in addition policy makers in Seoul saw a growing challenge in the gaining international momentum in favour of further measures to tackle greenhouse gas emissions. Yun Jong-soo, the Climate Policy Officer at the Ministry of Environment, for example, warned of a worldwide "green race"⁵³⁸ where plans for emission trading schemes by the EU and the United States would lead to "a situation where other countries cannot help but join this very rapidly".⁵³⁹ The Representative Lee In-gi from the ruling conservative Grand National Party, similarly argued for "a need to push forward, as advanced countries' climate change legislation is in full swing".⁵⁴⁰ When making the case for the 'Framework Act on Low Carbon and Green Growth' in 2009, Prime Minister Chung Tae-shin referred to the international momentum and drastically exclaimed, "Now this is not a question of our choice, it is a matter of necessity".⁵⁴¹ There was even a sense of risking falling even further behind "advanced nations"⁵⁴² if Korea was to miss this development, as expressed by GNP lawmaker Yu Gi-jun ahead of the (ultimately unsuccessful) COP 15 in Copenhagen: "It is clear that the Copenhagen meeting will greatly strengthen international obligations to reduce greenhouse gases and in such a situation Korea will be bound to participate in the

⁵³⁵ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-6, 11.

⁵³⁶ National Assembly Minutes, 2005: Special Committee on Climate Change 17-256-4, 12.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.: Special Committee on Climate Change 17-256-4, 11.

⁵³⁸ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-6, 11.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-6, 12.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-6, 1.

⁵⁴¹ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-5, 35.

⁵⁴² National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary 18-285-1, 36.

efforts of the international community.”⁵⁴³ President Lee Myung-bak too referred to this international momentum and the global financial crisis since 2008 when he made the case for Korea to seize the opportunity and put itself at the top of the alleged international trend towards a greener economy and diplomacy. In 2011, for example, President Lee addressed the nation with the following words:

*“During the 1970s, we experienced oil shocks twice. In 1997, we suffered a foreign exchange crisis. In 2008, there was a global financial crisis. But the nation has coped with all these and other hardships wisely. In fact, Korea is known internationally as a country that overcomes major crises in the most exemplary fashion. Whenever the nation is faced with major difficulties, I am reminded of the great Korean people with pride and gratitude for what they have overcome. I believe in the potential of the Republic of Korea that becomes even stronger in times of crisis.”*⁵⁴⁴

His successor, President Park Geun-hye, also repeatedly made the case for decisive climate action as an opportunity rather than a crisis. At the opening ceremony for the Green Climate Fund in Incheon President Park said:

*“When viewed with an eye to action, the challenge posed by climate change is indeed an opportunity—to redefine our values, generate new markets and create new jobs. I am confident that we can combat climate change in more efficient and environmentally friendly ways with the help of science and technology.”*⁵⁴⁵

Further, in her 2014 New Year address, she reaffirmed the leadership ambition that President Lee had expressed: “We too must step into the currents of change, not only joining but also taking the lead.”⁵⁴⁶ In many ways her administration’s stance on climate diplomacy was a continuation of President Lee Myung-bak’s policies, exhibiting the same complementary role conceptions of ‘bridge’ and ‘green leader’. For example, in her speech in front of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2014, President Park promised that “[t]he Republic of Korea is ready to play a bridging role between developed and developing countries as the post-2015 development goals are being set, by harnessing our unique historical experience”.⁵⁴⁷ The following statement by her Foreign Minister Yun

⁵⁴³ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary 18-285-1, 36.

⁵⁴⁴ Lee MB., 2011d.

⁵⁴⁵ Park GH., 2013c.

⁵⁴⁶ Park GH., 2014a.

⁵⁴⁷ Park GH., 2014b.

Byung-se also illustrates the continuing commitment to the climate diplomacy pursued by President Lee, focusing on the GCF and GGGI:

*“To maintain its leading position in the field of climate change and to actively participate as a party in the follow-up negotiations for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, Korea has also been supporting the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Global Green Growth Research Institute (GGGI).”*⁵⁴⁸

Moreover, the parliamentary debate around the ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2016 is insightful especially with regard to the ‘green leader’ role conception, as well as the sense of a ‘green race’. The ratification of the agreement found resounding support both from the government as well as in the National assembly. In the end it was accepted with 254 ‘yes’-votes out of 261 casted votes, with only seven abstentions (six from the centre-left *Minjoo* Party and one from the centrist People’s Party) and no ‘no’-votes.⁵⁴⁹ Whereas the government made the case for the ratification of the treaty with reference to the international consensus and the ambition to remain a leading green power in international climate diplomacy, conservatives and progressives alike criticized the government for its lack of concrete further policy plans in order to cut CO₂ emissions. For example, in the discussion over the proposal in the Foreign Affairs Standing Committee on 28 October 2016, the chairman Lee Jong-Hu argued that “[i]n order to lead the discussion of the international community on the future climate change response, it is considered necessary to approve the ratification”.⁵⁵⁰ Further he referred to Korea’s “international responsibility as a greenhouse gas emitter country”.⁵⁵¹ Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cho Tae-yeol, also pointed out that because India, China and the European Union were all quickly progressing with the approval of the treaty, “we would be too lagging behind if we do not ratify [the Paris Agreement] quickly”.⁵⁵²

In terms of criticism, *Minjoo* Party Representative U Weon-sik made clear that the Paris ratification is only part of what the government should do about fighting climate change. For him, the government’s measures were not green enough and so he referred to the international NGO Climate Action Tracker, which assessed South Korea’s response to

⁵⁴⁸ National Assembly Minutes, 2016: Subcommittee for Judicial Review 20-346-2, 5.

⁵⁴⁹ National Assembly Minutes, 2016: Plenary 20-346-11.

⁵⁵⁰ National Assembly Minutes, 2016: Subcommittee for Judicial Review 20-346-2, 17.

⁵⁵¹ National Assembly Minutes, 2016: Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs 20-346-4, 9.

⁵⁵² National Assembly Minutes, 2016: Subcommittee for Judicial Review 20-346-2, 17.

climate change as ‘insufficient’. In line with earlier calls for a greener leadership role, he closed by demanding more action: “Even if our Parliament passes the ratification today, the government will have to propose additional reduction targets that match our status in the international community, so that we do not pass on the burden to future generations.”⁵⁵³ Despite the fact that his conservative colleague from the ruling New Frontier Party, Hong Il-pyo, also evoked the fate of future generations, Hong’s emphasis lay on the ‘green growth’ opportunities: “Because developing and developed countries are participating this time in the Paris Agreement, it is a good opportunity for us in our middle-position and with our technological strength to take the lead in the fourth industrial revolution and the new energy market paradigm.”⁵⁵⁴

Notable here is the absence of the traditional ‘non-Annex I country’ role conception that tries to allow only as little environmental regulation as possible, for the sake of economic growth and international competitiveness. The main reason for this lies in the change of international context from a stalemate between developing and developed countries under the Kyoto-regime, to a ‘green race’ after the US-China deal on carbon emission in 2014 cuts as well as the Paris Agreement of 2015. The significant Others in South Korea’s climate diplomacy are thus first and foremost the United States, whose domestic climate change debate had been regularly discussed in the National Assembly, as well as international economic competitors, most importantly China and Japan.

⁵⁵³ National Assembly Minutes, 2016: Plenary 20-346-11, 4.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.: Plenary 20-346-11, 5.

6.3. Self-images

After identifying the main role conceptions and key themes in the South Korean wider foreign policy discourse on international climate diplomacy, the final step of the analysis consists of a close, intertextual and interpretative reading of the utilized self-images, as well as their commonalities and differences. Through these ‘snapshots’ of self-identification practices, understood as specific linkages between role conceptions and self-images, one can in a next step acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying identity narratives informing and being informed by the global foreign policy actor South Korea.

The main self-image prevalent in the climate diplomacy discourse is that of a ‘rising Korea’ with the country being at the brink of becoming an advanced nation or a country ‘in-between worlds’. It is at the core of the ‘bridge’ as well as the ‘green leader’ role conception. Central to this self-image is the narrative about Korea’s successful development, the ‘miracle from the Han river’, as well as the transformation from ‘a beneficiary to a benefactor’. Here, Korea has arrived, travelling from the periphery to the centre, finally gaining ‘a seat at the table’. The country is aware of its rising responsibilities and is generally eager to live up to them. With President Lee’s green leadership ambition, this self-understanding gets a re-definition and undergoes a further transformation. Here, Korea still pursues a role as a ‘bridge between developing and developed world’, but not just because of its development history and risen status, but because of its potential and agenda as a ‘model Korea’.

The ‘green leader’ role conception highlights the belief that the Korean nation has always thrived in crises and is now eager to teach this ‘unique experience’ to the world. President Lee, for example, repeatedly urged the Korean nation to see climate change as “the most fundamental and colossal threat humankind has ever experienced”,⁵⁵⁵ and also as an opportunity to adapt quickly and close up to more advanced countries, not simply through economic development or military might, but agenda setting and norm entrepreneurship “for humanity”:⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁵ Lee MB., 2010.

⁵⁵⁶ Lee MB., 2012d.

*“Economic might and military power are still important. But, these alone will not make a country a global leader. What we need now is a vision that can be accepted and shared by the world. In this regard, Korea’s ‘Low Carbon Green Growth’ vision, which pursues sustainable development while responding to climate change, is widely recognized by the international community as a common vision for the future.”*⁵⁵⁷

Thus, the related self-image can be called ‘model Korea’. Already at the very beginning of his term, in one of his first major speeches, the address on the 63rd anniversary of national liberation and the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Korea on 15 August 2008, President Lee’s leadership vision is explicitly a transformative one, aiming at fulfilling his “dream of an advanced nation”.⁵⁵⁸ He also spoke of being “reborn as a green power”⁵⁵⁹ and the Chairman of the Presidential Committee on Green Growth, Kim Hyeong-guk, argued for the ‘Framework Act on Low Carbon and Green Growth’ at some point to be in line with a “global morality of advanced countries”.⁵⁶⁰

Further, President Lee also promises that through his promotion of green growth internationally, Korea will be able to punch above its weight and carve out a new future path for development as a major Asian nation. In his rationale, he also makes use of the trope of an ‘underdog’, showing how Korea’s potential had been underestimated internationally, for example, in context of winning the GCF hosting rights.

*“It is the first time for an Asian country, let alone Korea, to become the host of such a significant international organization. Last year when Korea unveiled its intention to host the organization, everyone thought our chances were slim. Germany, one of the competing rivals, is the most renowned green nation in the world. Worse yet, the Interim Secretariat of the Green Climate Fund is presently located in Bonn, Germany. For these reasons, Korea was regarded as the underdog in the competition. [...] In this connection, the fact that Korea was chosen as the host country of the Green Climate Fund carries added significance indeed.”*⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁷ Lee MB., 2010.

⁵⁵⁸ Lee MB., 2008.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-5, 26.

⁵⁶¹ Lee MB., 2012d.

Also, the successful establishment of green growth institutions in international climate diplomacy, an issue area that is inherently about cooperation,⁵⁶² was a welcome opportunity to build further diplomatic ties and networks, making Korea a well-connected and highly regarded networking power or climate hub. Take for example this quote by President Lee from 2009:

*“But I do not think we can cope successfully with issues that affect all mankind, such as climate change, with efforts by a small number of countries alone. I believe that only when all countries join efforts can they create a green big bang, a new world order, under which economic growth can be pursued in harmony with environmental protection. [...] I stress once again that Korea will continue to lead green growth by efficiently coping with climate change and through the formation of the East Asia Climate Partnership with neighbouring countries.”*⁵⁶³

The establishment of the GGGI was also argued for in making the case for global partnerships beyond climate diplomacy, especially with Denmark, which later co-founded the institute together with Korea. See for example these quotes from President Lee:

*“For green growth to be sustainable, I believe global partnership is vital. No one living on this planet can escape from the devastation that is brought on by climate change. Therefore, finding a solution is our collective responsibility. As part of our contribution to global partnership, Korea proposed setting up the Global Green Growth Institute.”*⁵⁶⁴

*“Cooperation with Denmark, which boasts the best green technology in the world, will serve as a great opportunity to open a new chapter in Korea’s economic progress. The Danish economy substantiates the fact that green growth industries, as future growth engines, are conducive to creating new job opportunities. Between 2000 and 2008, the export of Denmark’s environment-friendly technologies and goods increased by two and a half times, thereby accounting for 11 percent of its total exports.”*⁵⁶⁵

His successor, President Park Geun-hye, also utilized the green growth platform to further Korea’s diplomatic influence, especially in Africa: “In responding to climate change issues

⁵⁶² Young O.R., 2016: 240.

⁵⁶³ Lee MB., 2009b.

⁵⁶⁴ Lee MB., 2010.

⁵⁶⁵ Lee MB., 2011b.

such as land degradation, water shortage and food scarcity that confront many African states, Korea plans to take joint action with Africa through the Green Climate Fund and the Global Green Growth Institute based in Korea.”⁵⁶⁶ In the same way oppositional Democratic United Party lawmaker Hong Yeong-pyo was expecting that the opportunity to host the GCF will “improve the national brand image and make Korea a climate change hub”.⁵⁶⁷ Here another aspect of the ‘model Korea’ self-image becomes apparent: as the country is seeking ties around the world, in order to expand and secure its newfound influence and status as a leading nation in green growth, it has to live up to the international expectations and the context of a ‘green race’. Given the high level of domestic support with the ‘green leader’ role conception, the self-image as a ‘model country’ that is taking the lead on climate change-issues meant that Korea’s appropriate action with regard to the Paris-Agreement was to not ‘fall behind’ and sign up to the global leadership or ‘green race’ unfolding. The role conception ‘bridge between worlds’ remained the broader frame of Korea’s engagement with the world, but it was only meaningfully manifested through the clear adherence to ‘green leadership’. Or, put differently, without acting as a green leader, Korea would have trouble upholding the much wider role identity of a ‘bridge’, externally and internally.

This is in stark contrast to the earlier dominant, less self-confident and more cautious self-image of Korea as nation that is still developing and that should therefore not risk economic growth. Conservative lawmaker Yu Gi-jun, for example, reminded his colleagues during the parliamentary debate about the ‘Framework Act on Low Carbon and Green Growth’ that “[Korea] is a country that still needs growth [...]”.⁵⁶⁸ Proponents of this self-understanding called for a more cautious approach in contrast to a ‘Me First’ leadership as envisioned by the Lee administration. For them, the international responsibility as a major carbon emitter was contrasted with fact that Korea had no historical responsibility for high levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.⁵⁶⁹ However, as indicated already, this economic growth-focused, caution-advising strain of the ‘rising Korea’-self-image lost traction domestically over the international success of the ‘green leadership’ ambition.

⁵⁶⁶ Park GH., 2016a.

⁵⁶⁷ National Assembly Minutes, 2012: Standing Committee on Planning and Finance 19-311-5, 7.

⁵⁶⁸ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-5, 44.

⁵⁶⁹ See also National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Special Committee on Climate Change Measures 18-282-6, 24.

6.4. Concluding remarks

The analysis of the wider political discourse of South Korea's international climate diplomacy showed the large impact of President Lee's green leadership ambition through the international promotion of green growth. While the main role conception of being a 'bridge' has been stable and dominant over the whole observation period, the inherent tension between Korea's global role model aspirations and its actual 'brown growth' development track was only resolved through President Lee Myung-bak's focus on leading in international climate diplomacy through green growth promotion. Only then was Korea able to enact an internationally recognized role that fitted its own status and self-image. The aspect of the 'rising Korea' self-image about being a country still in development and thus in need of prioritizing economic growth over climate change concerns made way for a green growth vision that still focused on economic opportunities, but this time in low carbon future-growth industries and markets. However, with a changing international context and a global momentum towards another climate accord, South Korea's hand was forced to secure its newfound status as a green leader in the post-Kyoto regime. The main goal now was to use the established green growth platforms and climate diplomatic channels to maintain and further expand the country's network and influence as a green leader and climate hub.

Figure 4 is an attempt to visualize these self-identifications as links between role conceptions and self-images. It is illustrative in that the initial vagueness of the 'bridge' role conception relates to several self-images but only becomes manifested in a more meaningful role identity through the 'green leadership' strategy of President Lee, building on the 'rising Korea' self-image but ultimately transcending it.

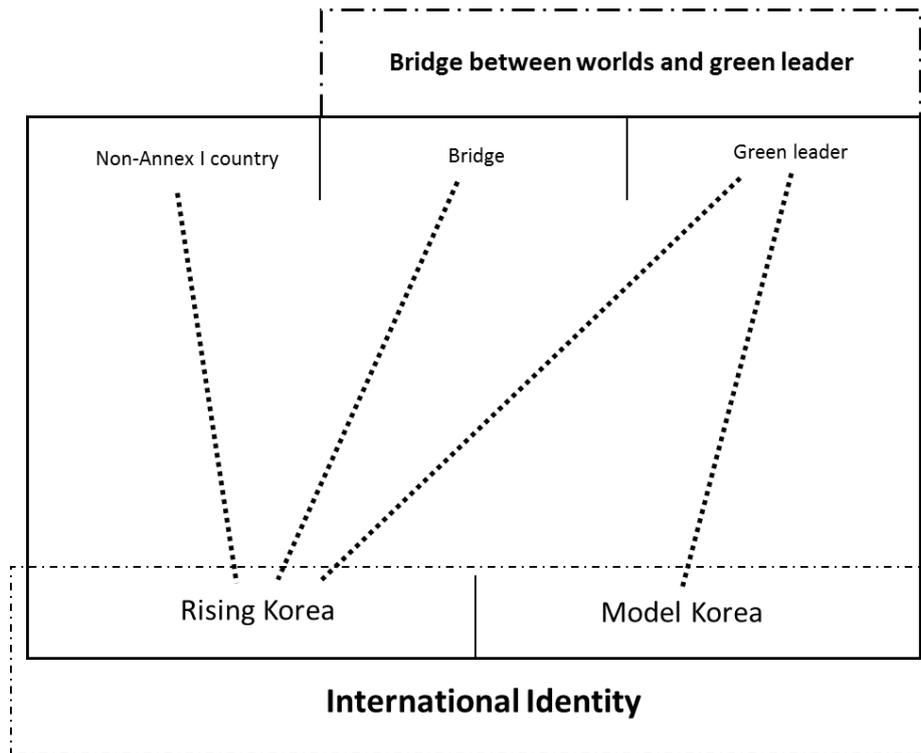


Figure 4: Roles, Role Conceptions and Self-images in ROK Climate Diplomacy 2005–2016

In the next chapter, these insights into the practices of self-identification prevalent in the case studies on international climate diplomacy and international peacekeeping will be compared, analysed and put in context with the established literature on South Korea’s identity narratives and foreign policy.

**PART III: FROM THE PERIPHERY TO THE CENTRE STAGE –
SOUTH KOREAN IDENTITY AND GLOBAL FOREIGN POLICY**

7. The Dream of a Responsible, Mature and Autonomous Country

The study at hand is concerned with the main question of how South Korean international state identity relates to Seoul's global foreign policy in the 21st century, as there is, as yet, no comprehensive assessment of the international state identity of South Korea as an emerging global power in the academic literature. There are, however, various expectations for South Korea's future trajectory as an international actor, ranging from a future leader of the liberal international order to a building-block for deeper regional integration and a resurgence of Korean nationalism. The three sub-questions of this study are concerned with these potential identity narratives: Are there 'globalist' self-understandings linked to roles like 'global model' or 'global citizen' that transcends national boundaries, embraces international law and limitations of national sovereignty and adheres to international responsibilities as a 'global citizen'? Or is the 'globalist school' of Seoul's foreign policy simply about pursuing a narrower, more traditional 'national interest' in the global arena? How about traditional postcolonial narratives that prioritize national sovereignty and 'anti-imperialist' justice? And, lastly, did Pan-Asianist narratives play any role in the legitimation of South Korea's global foreign policy?

In addition to this empirical gap, I have also pointed out a conceptual gap in that, amidst various unconvincing conceptualizations of identity employed in the study of South Korean identity and foreign policy where often 'identity' was conflated with the concept 'role', most failed to account for the domestic Korean 'sense of self' in the world. Hence, I have developed a symbolic interactionist role-theoretical approach for the study of state identity in order to provide a conceptually sound and empirically rich agency-oriented account of Korea as an emerging global power. Through the focus on domestic legitimation and practices of self-identification underpinning the global foreign policy outreach, I was able to retrieve self-images as 'pixelated' snapshots of a broader international identity in relation to the respective role conceptions from case studies on two outstanding South Korean global foreign policy fields, international peacekeeping and climate diplomacy. So now, what are the identity narratives underpinning South Korean global foreign policy?

First of all, the study at hand suggests in the theoretical and methodological chapters that there is no 'single identity' in relation to Seoul's global foreign policy. By treating the state as a unitary actor and by categorizing actors simply according to their behaviour, one not

only misses the complexity of identity dynamics at play but also further obscures any comprehensive understanding of the state actor's present and future behaviour to the outside world. It is helpful in this regard to introduce the concepts of 'role' and 'role identities' to the discussion of state identity and agency and to think of state identity as two-layered with role conceptions linked to self-images. 'Role' and 'role identity' are terms that have often been conflated with 'identity' in the literature. Whereas roles are the emergent relational outcomes of an ongoing process of interaction between the 'Self' and the 'Other', the contestation over the 'right roles' or role conceptions within the 'Self' – the state as a composite actor – is about the legitimation of actions in reference to certain identity elements. As McCourt put it, "roles are the necessary social vehicle for action in its meaning-creating, identity-affirming sense."⁵⁷⁰ Hence, the self-identity of a state actor is not fixed in this understanding, but is constantly formed through practices of self-identification or the linking of self-images and role conceptions by domestic political actors to make sense of and legitimate certain political actions. These self-images are employed to legitimate political action in domestic decision-making and are linked to specific role conceptions in the given social context. As the identity elements are generally undetermined, they can be linked to different role conceptions and to different outcomes, as was also apparent in the analysis at hand where in the case study on climate diplomacy the development-focused self-image 'rising Korea' had been linked to the role conceptions 'Non-Annex I' country, which advised against voluntary counter-measures to carbon emissions, and the role conception 'bridge between worlds', where such voluntary measures were supported.

In the following two subchapters, I gather first the main findings with regard to the main question and three sub-questions with regard to the retrieved practices of self-identification. In the final subchapter, I complement this detailed and comprehensive assessment about the role identities, role conceptions and self-images at play with a final argument about South Korea's international state identity and Seoul's global outreach in the early 21st century: that it is mostly dominated by the objective of fostering the Republic of Korea's international standing for maintaining national autonomy.

⁵⁷⁰ McCourt D.M., 2012: 370.

7.1. Role identities, role conceptions and self-images

In the conceptualization of state identity developed here, there are two observable layers of the international self-identity of the state actor Republic of Korea. These are the layer of concretely manifested role identities in a given social context and the more basic layer of self-images that have been employed for the legitimation of specific role conception and related actions. In the following chapter, this more comprehensive assessment of the state identity dynamics at play will be presented and discussed and put in context with the established literature on South Korean identity and foreign policy. The respective enacted roles and the related dominant role conceptions are treated as role identities and the self-images utilized in the legitimation of specific foreign policy actions are treated as snapshots of the elusive corporate identity of South Korea as an international actor. The main self-images are that of a 'rising Korea' focusing on Korea's elevated status as a result of economic development and democratization, on which the understanding of a 'model Korea' builds with a pronounced and confident leadership claim. Apart from these major self-images, there are slightly deviating and more marginal self-understandings, for example, where Korea's development is not yet successfully finished and still has to be safeguarded, or the image of Korea as a peaceful nation that does not participate in modern day 'imperialism' practised by the United States and China, as well as Japan.

As has been shown in chapters 5 and 6, there was a general consensus over South Korea's appropriate role playing in both case studies. The dominant role conception 'responsible international member' was enacted as a stable role identity with support from two minor auxiliary role conceptions, 'guardian of world peace' and 'global model nation' in the case of Seoul's peacekeeping, but with a rivalling role conception 'anti-militarist power'. In the case of South Korean climate diplomacy there was a rather vague and also contested role conception of being a 'bridge between worlds' over the whole observation period, however, this conception really became meaningful and internationally recognized through its later transformation and manifestation in the 'green leader' role conception during the Presidency of Lee Myung-bak. Because of the dominance, stability (despite the transformation from 'bridge' to 'green leader') and external recognition of the main role conceptions, it is plausible to attribute to South Korea the roles or role identities 'responsible international member' in international peacekeeping and 'bridge between worlds' and 'green leader' in climate diplomacy. These role identities could indeed be

subsumed under a ‘middle power’ role set, but an investigation into international state identity should not stop here. In order to *understand* and not just *describe* South Korea as an international actor, it is necessary to focus on how these role identities have been legitimated with reference to self-images within the domestic decision-making process. Through the analysis of self-identification practices, I am able to provide a comprehensive assessment not only of the dominant role conceptions and the related self-images but also of their contestation and the more marginal rivalling role conceptions and self-images that are also part of the actor’s international state identity. In the following, these ‘snapshots’ of the wider international identity will be also presented and compared.

7.1.1. Rising Korea: finally in the global spotlight

The main self-image over the whole observation period and linked to the dominant role conceptions ‘bridge between worlds’ and ‘responsible member’ as well as to the minor role conception ‘green responsible nation’ is what I call the ‘rising Korea’ image with narratives about Korea’s hierarchical and geographical ‘in-between-ness’ and its responsible advance from the periphery to the global centre. Korea here is seen as a once peripheral and marginal country that is about to enter the ranks of advanced and relevant countries and has therefore found its ‘place in the sun’ as a major player:

*“The nation now stands side by side with other leading countries. Korea is no longer just a small speck on the global scene. It has become a major player. Korean-made cars and electronic goods are gaining accolades all around the world. [...] Korea has become a country that all nations around the world want to have closer ties with.”*⁵⁷¹

The proud achievement of the successful development of Korea is at the core of this self-image, exemplified by the historical narratives about how Korea is the first country to transform from an aid recipient to a donor country as well as “from beneficiary to benefactor”.⁵⁷² In this self-image Korea is moving from the periphery to the centre and now stands tall on the global stage, being proud of its achievements in economic development, democratization and international diplomacy:

“Korea has transformed itself from an aid recipient to a donor despite all our difficulties. Ours is an unparalleled story in world history. Furthermore, the country

⁵⁷¹ Lee MB., 2009c.

⁵⁷² Ha JS., 2015.

has now become the chair of the G20 and will host the summit where leaders from around the world are to discuss the issues surrounding the economy and security. We are now squarely heading toward center stage from the periphery of the international arena.”⁵⁷³

All three presidents likened Korea’s and their region’s rise to a journey from the periphery to the centre stage of the global order. When President Roh Moo-hyun spoke of the past remoteness of Korea and Northeast Asia he evoked a sense of regional identity and partnership with Asian neighbours in global affairs:

“As Northeast Asia is no longer on the periphery of the new international order, Korea is not a remote country any more. We will cast off our historic fate of being overshadowed and will instead come forward boldly and proudly to walk shoulder to shoulder with neighboring powers at the forefront of the new global order.”⁵⁷⁴

President Lee, however, regularly referred to Korea’s trajectory from the periphery to the centre stage of the global order, without the regional dimension:

“Korea has taken on challenges with indomitable determination and worked hard to enter onto the center stage from the periphery of the international arena. [...] Over the past several years, Korea has taken a big step toward the center of the global stage. The country is now seizing the global spotlight like never before in its history.”⁵⁷⁵

President Park Geun-hye too referred to this metaphor, but related it to Northeast Asia’s rise in world affairs as a whole:

“A mere few decades ago, East Asia was considered peripheral. Today, it is increasingly becoming the center of gravity of the world. This is clearly seen in the fact that the three East Asian countries – Korea, China, and Japan – account for a quarter of global output and more than 20% of world trade.”⁵⁷⁶

The country is aware of its risen status and knows about the responsibilities that come with it. In the case of peacekeeping, there was a strong notion about giving back to the United Nations and the international community after South Korea had been assisted and supported by UN troops during the Korean War. As Vice Foreign Minister Shin Kak-soo put it in 2010, “as a country that owes much to the UN, Korea has embarked on a path to

⁵⁷³ Lee MB., 2010.

⁵⁷⁴ Roh MH., 2003.

⁵⁷⁵ Lee MB., 2012b.

⁵⁷⁶ Park GH., 2014c.

contributing actively to the world community.”⁵⁷⁷ This narrative of historical debt played an important role in the case of legitimating peacekeeping deployments and was regularly expressed by political actors throughout most parts of the political spectrum, apart from the political far-left.

Overall, there is a sense, however, of having been overlooked for too long, leading to an urge to utilize any opportunity to raise the visibility of Korea’s rising status, for example the hosting of international summits or conferences. The following quote from a speech by President Lee Myung-bak is a fitting illustration of these aspects:

*“Over the past several years, Korea has taken a big step toward the center of the global stage. The country is now seizing the global spotlight like never before in its history. For the first time, Korea became a member of the G20, the premier economic forum in the world. It also became the first emerging and Asian country to host a G20 Summit in Seoul, which it did to great success.”*⁵⁷⁸

The global outreach and the taking up of international commitments is hence a way of gaining self-assurance as a country of rising status at the centre of the global order through the external recognition of the enactment of the related role identities ‘bridge between worlds’ and ‘green leader’ in climate diplomacy, as well as ‘responsible international member’ in peacekeeping. In 2013 Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se even suggested that international journalists attending the World Journalist Conference in Seoul should relay the following images of Korea to the world:

*“A ‘Secure Korea’ undisturbed by the recent North Korean agitations, a ‘Credible Korea’ that honors its promises, an ‘Empathetic Korea’ that truly understands the hardships of others, a ‘Sharing and Caring Korea’ that takes lead in development cooperation, and a ‘Responsible Korea’ that contributes to regional and world peace. I am confident that at the end of your stay in Korea, you will be convinced of these attributes of Korea, as a safe, credible, empathetic, caring and responsible nation that is reaching out into the world. I hope you will join us as we strive to achieve these noble endeavors. As leaders that shape the global opinion, I hope you will widely tell the story of Korea’s success and vision.”*⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁷ Shin KS., 2010.

⁵⁷⁸ Lee MB., 2012b.

⁵⁷⁹ Yun BS., 2013.

Domestically, the external validation of the status aspirations and role identities has been regularly used to rally popular support for foreign policy positions and to legitimate the government's standing more generally.⁵⁸⁰ The 2010 hosting of the G20 summit in Seoul is a case in point here. In the aftermath, President Lee called the summit a “triumph for of the Korean people and the Republic”⁵⁸¹ (and not just the city of Seoul) and applauded the bipartisan support in the National Assembly for the summit to “be turned into an epochal catalyst for the country's great advancement onto the center stage of the world”.⁵⁸² Pride as an emotion was encouraged and individually expressed by decision-makers and international praise for Korea's performance to “global standards” was highlighted:

*“The leadership and capabilities Korea has so far cultivated on the international scene were fully demonstrated on this occasion. Many talented people exhibited a high level of expertise that matches global standards. Many foreign professionals who worked together with Korean experts were deeply impressed and gave high marks to their abilities. Leaders of nations were also amazed at the seamless and convenient operation of meetings. [...] The Republic came to preside over a global summit and take the lead in reforming international financial organizations, including the IMF. We can now justifiably hold out our chests and step forward with self-confidence in the international arena.”*⁵⁸³

Lastly, it has to be noted that in this self-image Korea's rise is still in the making, with the country still being seen ‘in-between’ truly advanced countries and the rest of the world. This is where the ‘dream of an advanced country’ that has also been referred to in the literature on South Korea as a middle power⁵⁸⁴ or the ‘Global Korea’ project⁵⁸⁵ connects the more widespread ‘rising Korea’ self-image to the more confident and ambitious ‘model Korea’ self-image championed by President Lee Myung-bak's government, where the country has finally found entrance to the realm of advanced countries.

The significant Other for the ‘rising Korea’ self-image is the so called ‘past-me’, the marginal and weak late Joseon and colonial Korea. It is here where the ‘shrimp’ narrative about Korea's geopolitical vulnerability and marginalization is overcome by the projection

⁵⁸⁰ Compare von Soest C. and Grauvogel J., 2017.

⁵⁸¹ Lee MB., 2010.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Saxer C.J., 2013.

⁵⁸⁵ John J.V., 2015.

of global relevance through contributions to international peace and security, as in the case of peacekeeping, but also in Korea's active agenda setting in climate diplomacy. As Foreign Minister Song Min-soon put it in his farewell speech in front of his ministry staff:

*“We must write the history of Korea by ourselves. The world history tells us that if a country cannot take care of its own matters, others will intrude. Korea is not a small country. Korea, as a middle power, can take a part in changing the world order related to our country by playing a due role. We have actually done that for the last few years, and the countries in our region as well as the international community have acknowledged our accomplishments.”*⁵⁸⁶

In this regard, Korea today is no longer the country that was turned away from the doors of the Second Hague Peace Conference a century earlier, but is now the host of the biggest and most important international summits, such as the G20 or Nuclear Security Summits, themselves, with every international gathering, raising the visibility of Korea's advanced status to a global audience. Korea today literally cannot be overlooked anymore and its leaders have been consistently expressing this, while conjuring up today's Korea's international agency:

*“Korea today is not Korea of 100 years ago when it was divided into pieces sandwiched in the power struggles between China, Japan and Western powers. We now have sufficient power to maintain our history and territory. Depending on where the Korean people want to go, order in Northeast Asia is bound to be affected. The choice made by the Korean people will constitute to be essential in the business of predicting the future of Northeast Asia.”*⁵⁸⁷

*“History is not pre-ordained. It is us who are making and creating it. Korea is no longer a shrimp surrounded by whales.”*⁵⁸⁸

Here, Korea is at the brink of advanced countries, the dream is about to become true and Koreans see themselves with more confidence and more and more as masters of their own destiny:

“The kind of nation our patriotic forefathers intended to create was an upright, independent country, which carves out its own destiny. We have now been building up sufficient strength to be self-reliant and independent. Our economic power and

⁵⁸⁶ Song MS., 2008.

⁵⁸⁷ Roh MH., 2004b.

⁵⁸⁸ Yun BS., 2014.

defense prowess have come of age. We are no longer a peripheral country, which is one-sidedly swayed by developments in Northeast Asia.”⁵⁸⁹

In a minor deviation of the rising Korea self-image, that was only referred to early in the observation period and during the initial debate surrounding President Lee’s green leadership plans in 2008, Korea’s development and international competitiveness were seen as still not strong enough to be risked over voluntary measures to limit carbon emissions. The narrative here was very much in line with what the literature on the matter had identified as the traditional prioritization of economy growth and argued that South Korea should not risk its international trading competitiveness vis-à-vis China and the United States, who were also not restricted by the Kyoto Protocol regulations. Korea’s lack of historical responsibility for the amount of carbon in the atmosphere as well as the country’s corresponding official status as a Non-Annex I (and therefore developing country) were raised as the main arguments.

7.1.2. Model Korea: aspiring leadership

The second major self-image present in both case studies is what I have called the ‘model Korea’ self-image which was linked to the role conceptions global model nation, responsible member, bridge and green leader. In many aspects this self-image builds on the other major self-image ‘rising Korea’ with a focus on Korea’s successful development from being a small and weak country to a wealthy and influential nation in global affairs, but it goes one step further: here Korea as a developed nation is either just at the brink of joining the exclusive club of ‘advanced countries’ or has already made it. This self-image is closely related to the administration of President Lee Myung-bak and was to a large part the self-understanding linked to his ‘Global Korea’ agenda. In this self-understanding, Korea offers itself as a model to other countries not just for its own economic development or domestic democratization but for its ‘Me-first’ leadership with regard to pioneering a green growth model of development. It aims for the roles of mediator and agenda-setter in order to establish Korea at the centre of the global order, from where Korea with its “unique development experience and knowhow”⁵⁹⁰ is poised to shape global affairs in the future, not as a follower but as a rule maker and “paragon for humankind”.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁹ Roh MH., 2004a.

⁵⁹⁰ Lee MB., 2012c.

⁵⁹¹ Lee MB., 2009a.

For this self-image, too, the significant Other is not so much a third country but a past-Me, this time the developmental South Korea of authoritarian President Park Chung Hee and the ‘miracle of the Han river.’ In contrast to the ‘rising Korea’ self-image that emphasizes the international support for South Korea during and after the Korean War, under the self-image ‘model Korea’ there is a discursive shift to focus more on Korean achievements and the “unique experiences of overcoming colonial occupation, internecine war and poverty”⁵⁹² through Korean sacrifices and hard work. Therefore, it is unsurprising that President Park Geun-hye, his daughter, also tapped into the ‘beneficiary to benefactor’ historical narrative to project a bridging and leading role internationally when she was linking the hard-earned developmental success to her father’s decisions to send tens of thousands of Koreans to work as miners and nurses in Germany, as soldiers to Vietnam or as construction workers and engineers to the Middle East from the 1960s to the 1970s.

*“Some call [the South Korean economic development] the ‘Miracle on the Han River.’ But for those of us in Korea, it was anything but a miracle. And it wasn’t just built from within. Koreans worked tirelessly in the mines of Germany, in the jungles of Vietnam and in the deserts of the Middle East.”*⁵⁹³

*“‘A smooth sea never made a skilled mariner.’ The words of this English proverb could not ring truer for Korea. For Korea has built up its strength from the crucible of the War and by weathering countless storms. Having once been on the receiving end of foreign aid, Korea is now a nation that gives. It is today a contributor both to fighting global poverty and to maintaining international peace.”*⁵⁹⁴

Further, the international community represented anecdotally through tearful African leaders (“When I met them, they grabbed my hands and expressed their genuine thanks with tears filling their eyes.”⁵⁹⁵) or international observers with only praise for Korea’s contributions function as signifiers of external recognition of South Korea’s international ambitions, which in turn is used for gaining domestic legitimacy for the very same measures:

“In this sense, Korea’s unique experiences of overcoming colonial occupation, internecine war and poverty, can be used for the benefit of humanity. Dr. John

⁵⁹² Yun BS., 2015.

⁵⁹³ Park GH., 2013a.

⁵⁹⁴ Park GH., 2013b.

⁵⁹⁵ Lee MB., 2010.

Hamre of CSIS recently wrote about redefining Korea as a global leader. However, we in Korea should admit that there is a perception gap in how we view ourselves, and how the international community regards us in terms of our global role. As a recipient-turned-donor country, we need to contribute in a way that befits a country of our stature, and a divided nation with a thirst for greater peace as well as ultimate unification.”⁵⁹⁶

7.1.3. Moral Korea: a peaceful nation

Finally, the major deviant self-image is that of ‘Moral Korea’, as observed in the peacekeeping case study, as the self-understanding put forward by the political left. In this self-image Korea is an inherently peaceful nation that has achieved its heightened international status without doing harm to any other country. According to this self-image, “as a nation that has done no injury to another throughout history, Korea holds a sufficient moral ground and qualification to lead peace efforts in Northeast Asia.”⁵⁹⁷ This is at odds, however, with South Korea’s participation in the Vietnam War, which jump-started the country’s export-driven economic development under the military dictatorship of Park Chung-hee.⁵⁹⁸ For the political left, the “peace-loving [Korean] people”⁵⁹⁹ are misled into ‘resource imperialism’ and military adventures through their affiliation especially with the United States,⁶⁰⁰ potentially endangering the lives of Korean soldiers and ruining the good image of Korea in the Middle East in particular.⁶⁰¹ The significant Other is correspondingly the United States with its damaging influence on Korea and its ‘imperialist clout’ in the international community.⁶⁰² Hence, this self-image emphasizes more independence or autonomy in Korea’s relationship with the United States and also beyond the international community.

No potential influence was observed of Pan-Asianist identity elements on the global foreign policy in the fields of peacekeeping and climate diplomacy, which was one of the sub-questions of this study. This might simply be because of the case selection, however. In the

⁵⁹⁶ Yun BS., 2015.

⁵⁹⁷ Roh MH., 2007.

⁵⁹⁸ Breuker R.E., 2009: 40-41.

⁵⁹⁹ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary Session 18-285-1, 18.

⁶⁰⁰ National Assembly Minutes, 2012: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs 19-311-9, 22.

⁶⁰¹ National Assembly Minutes, 2009: Plenary Session 18-283-1, 8.

⁶⁰² National Assembly Minutes, 2006: Plenary Session 17-263-1, 51.

case study on peacekeeping, China has been framed as a ‘resource imperialist’ power, just like the United States or Japan by the far-left politicians.⁶⁰³ Whereas the South Korean military proudly reported positive personal exchanges with Chinese soldiers in Lebanon through military diplomacy,⁶⁰⁴ there is hardly a more complicated military cooperation partner imaginable for the South Korean military than Japan’s Self Defense Forces, as illustrated by the political fallout of the ‘ammunition’ incident in South Sudan.⁶⁰⁵ In the case study on South Korean climate diplomacy, too, there were no substantial Pan-Asian identity elements present. China especially was cast first as a major economic competitor and also Non-Annex I country under the Kyoto-regime and then as a political rival with regard to green leadership after the US-China climate deal. It is possible, however, that a case study dealing with South Korean global developmental aid may yield different results regarding Pan-Asian self-understandings.

Finally, the analysis turns to the related other two sub-questions about the roles of traditional postcolonial principles that prioritize national sovereignty and anti-imperialism as well as of a ‘globalist’ self-understanding in the legitimation of South Korean global foreign policy in the 21st century. How has the traditionally strong ‘Westphalian’ emphasis on securing sovereignty been linked to the global outreach and did a post-Westphalian ‘globalist’ self-understanding of sorts take hold in the global foreign policy discourse? As will be shown in the following subchapter after a close reading of the historical narratives employed in these cases, the answer is – for now – that there has been no major self-understanding observed which somehow transcends national boundaries.

⁶⁰³ Compare National Assembly Minutes, 2012: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs 19-311-9, 22.

⁶⁰⁴ National Assembly Minutes, 2008: Special Committee on Reviewing the Extension of the UNIFIL Mandate Session 18-276-1, 7.

⁶⁰⁵ Fischer M., 2013; Ha EY. and Seok JH., 2013.

7.2. Seeking international standing and national autonomy

After a first glance at the retrieved practices of self-identifications, one notices the presence of seemingly normatively globalist, post-Westphalian role conceptions, such as ‘global model nation’ and ‘responsible international member’ and rather singular rhetoric references to global morality or international interdependence. A closer look at the related self-identification practices, however, the discursive linkages to the more basic level of self-images, leads to more traditional narratives of legitimation that prioritize sovereign autonomy and national advancement as key objectives of South Korea’s global foreign policy. This argument rests on three aspects: the meaning of responsibility, the exhibited understanding of maturity and the explicit objective to acquire international friends and knowledge against the backdrop of Korea’s historical vulnerability.

First, when looking closer into the ‘responsible international member’ role conception and the related self-images, it becomes apparent that these are dominated by decidedly national and not international narratives. In the ‘responsible international member’ role conception and the related self-images ‘rising Korea’ and ‘model Korea’, South Korean responsibility in the international community is discursively linked to external recognition or validation of Seoul’s risen international status. On the one hand, South Korea is acting out of a perceived duty to pay back a historical debt for the United Nations’ support during and after the Korean War, but, on the other hand, Seoul sees itself uniquely positioned to be a role model in the fields of development assistance and peacekeeping. Take this quote again from President Lee Myung-bak, for example:

*“The Republic demonstrated that the assistance and collaboration from the international community was never wasted and that it was only right for such aid to be further expanded. In this regard, Korea was an exemplary beneficiary of international aid and cooperation in the 20th century. In the 21st century, the nation stands as a beacon for developing countries. Now is high time for the nation to return in full what it owes to the international community. Among other things, the Republic intends to share what it has experienced in achieving success with other countries across the globe.”*⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁶ Lee MB., 2009d.

In consequence, Korea's international responsibility is nothing more than Korea's national responsibility in the international realm. In the first case the peacekeeping deployments have been rendered meaningful and appropriate as a grateful, national duty in order to repay historical debt, and in the second case the focus on national achievements in terms of development and defence makes peacekeeping a proud display of economic and military might, as well as of a certain generosity. Accordingly, in this framing from the 'model Korea' self-image, the country is not so much historically obliged to engage in UN peacekeeping but is uniquely qualified to share its own experience and viewpoints with the world, because Korea has something to offer to the world itself.

Second, the dream of Korea as an 'advanced nation' (*seonjinguk*), as expressed and pursued by, for example, President Lee's 'Global Korea' strategy, was aimed at making Korea a 'mature global country' (*seongsukan segyegukga*). Even though mature behaviour may be understood as 'unselfish' international behaviour that works towards the 'common good' and not national interests, President Lee, for example, made clear that a mature foreign policy behaviour is not a value in itself, but serves a further purpose: "A country can win global confidence only by becoming a mature member of the international community that shares and gives help to other nations going beyond establishing itself as an economic powerhouse."⁶⁰⁷ This statement reduces maturity simply to a brand image and conducive to gaining "global confidence" for achieving a higher status and more influence.

Third, in addition to the widely referred to geopolitical dilemma Korea has found itself in as a 'shrimp', there was another argument raised in the wider political discourse about why Korea lost its sovereignty a century ago: a lack of international understanding and relations. Korean decision makers explicitly referred back to the late Joseon dynasty, when presenting the lesson learned from history that – in order to secure autonomy and agency – a country has to reach out to the world. President Lee Myung-bak, for example, remembered Yu Kil-chun, the 19th-century intellectual and independence activist: "In the late 19th century, Yu Kil-chun said that we should not be passive in opening up the country, but rather should take a more proactive role. Likewise, the 21st century calls on us to take on a more proactive role on the global stage."⁶⁰⁸ And at the 120th anniversary of the beginning of the Japanese-

⁶⁰⁷ Lee MB., 2013.

⁶⁰⁸ Lee MB., 2009c.

style *Gabo* reforms in 1894, Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se referred to the historical lesson that in order to be prepared against international power politics one must study international affairs and find allies.

*“Sadly, Korea at the time did not possess the knowledge about the outside world nor the strength to protect itself. As a result, reform failed and led to the loss of its sovereignty. [...] Another lesson is the importance of diplomacy – making friends and neutralizing enemies. Throughout history, Korea was invaded by outside powers so many times. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Korea learned the hard truth about the nature of power politics.”*⁶⁰⁹

This post-colonial perspective links back to the great importance that Korean leaders have attributed to the expansion and maintenance of international standing in both case studies on peacekeeping and climate diplomacy. Accordingly, the hosting of the GCF was to support because it was expected to “improve[...] the national brand image”,⁶¹⁰ and the extension of mandate for deployed peacekeepers was important because it served the objective of raising international influence:

*“Through the extensions, we hope to contribute not only to peace and stability in the region, but also to secure a strong base for diplomatic ties between those countries and Korea as well as to expand our influence in the international community through military contributions corresponding to our financial support.”*⁶¹¹

In this light, Korea’s global outreach appears to be a way of securing the nation’s sovereignty and agency through a global exercise of ‘know-your-enemy’ and ‘make friends and neutralize enemies.’ Seen from this angle there is no post-Westphalian globalist self-understanding, but a nationalist self-assertion from a post-colonial perspective. The same logic is evident, for example, in President Roh Moo-hyun’s attempts to nurture a more independent (*jaju*) military stature vis-à-vis the United States⁶¹² and other regional powers, which is also part of the earlier discussed ‘moral Korea’ self-image on the political left:

“The kind of nation our patriotic forefathers intended to create was an upright, independent country, which carves out its own destiny. We have now been building up sufficient strength to be self-reliant and independent. Our economic power and defense

⁶⁰⁹ Yun BS., 2014.

⁶¹⁰ National Assembly Minutes, 2012: Standing Committee on Planning and Finance 19-311-5, 7.

⁶¹¹ National Assembly Minutes, 2011: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Session 18-304-2, 4.

⁶¹² Ryu YW., 2013: 117-118.

*prowess have come of age. We are no longer a peripheral country, which is one-sidedly swayed by developments in Northeast Asia. In light of our stature and role, it is reasonable for us to preserve our security with our own strength. We will do so without fail. Along with this effort, we will continue to nurture the ROK-U.S. alliance.”*⁶¹³

Korea’s global diplomatic outreach thus looks like a diversification of means to pursue the same interests of autonomy that has also been underpinning the ROK-US military alliance.

These findings are in line with what Park identified as ‘sovereign autonomy’,⁶¹⁴ the key source for political legitimacy as well a key feature in both South Korean and Japanese foreign and security policy. She argues that ‘sovereign autonomy’ is “commonly understood as status to be negotiated through relations with other dominant powers in the international system. [...T]he constraints of hierarchy are a socially recognized fact and they provide meaning for leaders’ actions and words.”⁶¹⁵ According to her conceptual history of ‘autonomy’, political actors in both Japan and South Korea are contesting the meaning of the ‘language of autonomy’ in their strategic discourses especially towards the United States through framing vocabularies such as ‘independence’, ‘self-reliance’ or ‘autonomy’, which are in effect indicating status-seeking through “insulating”⁶¹⁶ within the given international hierarchy. Then again, the different framing vocabulary of “advanced nations”, “‘international contributions’ [...], global standards, national status, or position”⁶¹⁷ is pointing towards a more integrative-frame for a given international hierarchy. In addition to terms like ‘duty’ and ‘responsibility’, these were exactly the terms at the core of the legitimation narratives supporting the role identity ‘responsible member of the international community’ (*gukjesahoeui irwon*) in the case study on peacekeeping. Still, Park overall concludes that,

*“the need to enhance status within an international hierarchy has surprisingly, and quite stubbornly, remained a resonant goal among Japanese and Koreans. This has remained the case despite structural transformations – including deimperialization, decolonization, rapid economic development, and democratization – that have pushed these two countries to become modern ‘Westphalian’ states.”*⁶¹⁸

⁶¹³ Roh MH., 2004a.

⁶¹⁴ Park SH., 2017.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.: 22.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.: 103.

⁶¹⁷ Park SH., 2013: 17.

⁶¹⁸ Park SH., 2017: 12-13.

The findings of the study at hand support Park's assessment for the case for South Korea's global foreign policy in the early 21st century, at least in the cases of peacekeeping and climate diplomacy. It is because of the absence of a pattern of self-identification that is transcending national boundaries with global commons oriented or post-Westphalian globalist inclination, and because of a strong focus on international standing and autonomy in the self-identification practices in the observed cases, that I would conclude that South Korean international state identity is dominated by the objective to maintain national autonomy above all in a changing regional and global context. This is not to say, however, that international identity changes towards more post-Westphalian globalist practices of self-identification, which would justify hopes for Seoul to be a liberal internationalist cornerstone, might not occur in the future.

Also, on a different note, one might wonder what this assessment of practices of self-identification and the importance of autonomy mean for a unified Korea in the future. Even though this remains for a large part conjecture, the example of reunified Germany provides some indications here, particularly with regard to overseas troop deployments such as peacekeeping dispatches. In a recently published study of public attitudes towards overseas troop deployments of the German military since reunification in 1990, Mader⁶¹⁹ concluded that there remained a significant, though weakening difference between East and West Germans in terms of their support for the two salient norms of anti-militarism and Atlanticism in German foreign policy with regard to troop deployments. According to his findings,⁶²⁰ for West Germans anti-militarism as a lesson learnt from Nazi Germany's responsibility for the Second World War was largely compatible with the alignment with the West and NATO (*Westbindung*) and principles such as multilateralism or international responsibility (Atlanticism). In contrast, among East Germans the norm of anti-militarism against the backdrop of Nazi Germany's militarism was also supported strongly, but the Atlanticist norm drastically less so. For an explanation, he points to the different socialisation of East and West Germans and especially their different understandings of NATO as a mechanism of collective security on the one hand and an instrument of 'imperialist' intervention on the other.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁹ Mader M., 2017.

⁶²⁰ Ibid.: 196.

⁶²¹ Ibid.: 90.

So even in the (unlikely) case of a German style-reunification of the Korean peninsula, where the Southern Republic of Korea peacefully absorbs the Northern state as an expanded democratic federation, the German example shows that a unified Korea will probably experience a growing role distance and changing practices of self-identification towards roles such as ‘responsible member of the international community’ or ‘global model citizen’. If we assume that in a unified Korea the “insulating”⁶²² status-seeking already present on the ROK’s political left will be bolstered by isolationist and anti-imperialist attitudes held by a significant number of North Koreans especially towards Seoul’s present-day allies United States and Japan, overseas troop dispatches such as peacekeeping will be harder to legitimate with reference to alliance needs or international responsibilities. Of course, this extrapolation is little more than speculation; nevertheless, it may provoke more thinking about our assumptions about the future trajectory of (reunified) Korea in the world.

⁶²² Park SH., 2017: 103.

8. Conclusion and Limitations

This study set out to explore the identity in “transformation”⁶²³ or “at crossroads”⁶²⁴ of the Republic of Korea as an emerging global player, as there is no comprehensive study yet about how South Korea as a country relates itself to a globalized world beyond the usually covered bilateral relationships with, for example, North Korea, China, Japan and the United States. The main research interest was about the relationship between the international state identity of South Korea of the early 21st century and Seoul’s global foreign policy in the areas of peacekeeping and climate diplomacy. In order to undertake such an investigation into international state identity in relation to foreign policy, I have developed a symbolic interactionist role-theoretical conceptualization of international state identity understood as a set of discursive practices of self-identification for the domestic legitimation of foreign policy actions. The state is understood as a composite actor here, a social structure within which domestic political actors contest over the ‘right’ course for their polity by employing different role conceptions linked to self-images in order to legitimate political actions as purposeful actions. This study offers a novel empirical approach to the study of state identity in IR as a contribution to the theoretical development of ‘identity’ and its relationship to ‘role’ in International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis.

Besides the conceptual-theoretical contribution, the study at hand provides a comprehensive and agency-oriented account of the relationship between international state identity and global foreign policy of South Korea. With regard to the main research question of how South Korean international state identity relates to Seoul’s global foreign policy in the 21st century, this study has shown that there is no single unitary state identity underpinning South Korea’s global outreach. Korea was able to successfully enact distinct roles as a ‘responsible international member’ in peacekeeping and as ‘bridge between worlds’ through the ‘green leader’ role identity in climate diplomacy, but these are case dependent and only the outer layer of South Korean international state identity. The inner layer consists of self-images on which different role conceptions and eventually established role identities are built upon. These self-images that are utilized in the legitimation of specific foreign policy actions are treated as snapshots of the elusive broader international identity of South Korea. One of the key findings of this study is accordingly the account of

⁶²³ Ikenberry G.J. and Mo JR., 2013: 164-165; Denney S. and Friedhoff K., 2013.

⁶²⁴ Rozman G., 2012: 67.

the three major self-images which I termed 'rising Korea', 'model Korea' and 'moral Korea'.

In the most dominant self-image 'rising Korea', the country is moving from the periphery to the centre and now stands tall on the global stage, being proud of its achievements in economic development, democratization and international diplomacy. The global outreach is here a way of gaining self-assurance as a country of rising status at the centre of the global order through heightened visibility and the external recognition, against the background of Korea's own colonial experience, geopolitical vulnerability and marginalization. The self-image of a 'model Korea' builds on the previous image with a more pronounced and confident international leadership claim. Here, Korea offers itself as a model to other countries for its own economic development, domestic democratization and leadership, especially with regard to pioneering a green growth model of development. It aims to firmly establish Korea at the centre of the global order, from where Korea is poised to shape global affairs in the future, not as a follower but as a rule maker. Global engagement is here a way of raising the country's international status and brand even further and to project Korean norms and values in the international arena. Finally, there was also a minor, deviant self-image put forward by the political left, for which South Korea's morally and peacefully 'pure' state is tainted by the association with the United States and unjust international power politics.

In contrast to other studies that are either simply assuming a unitary actor, focusing solely on government views or conflating role and identity, the approach developed here also accounts for rivalling role conceptions and deviant self-images. In the case study on peacekeeping, for example, it was shown that there is a distinctly different role conception of 'anti-militarist power' and a related self-image about a 'moral Korea', in which inherent peacefulness is betrayed by military overseas deployments in support of the US-led international order. The research has also shown that at the core of South Korea's relationship with global affairs lies the objective of expanding Seoul's international standing in order to assure national autonomy. Global foreign policy has been a means of validating the risen international status of the country and a way of trying to establish South Korea as a rule-maker rather than a rule-follower. Its legitimation was dominated by narratives about fostering a premium nation brand and extensive ties around the world, against a referenced historiography of vulnerability due to the lack of international

connections and knowledge. The most recent global outreach, whether pursued by conservative or progressive administrations, of the emerging power Korea is thus not simply exemplary middle powermanship⁶²⁵ in support of the existing liberal international order,⁶²⁶ but more a way of integrating into a given international hierarchy in order to secure what Park called “sovereign autonomy”.⁶²⁷ This follows from an intertextual and cross-sectional reading of the retrieved self-images of the political debate in the observed cases and does not mean that there are no political actors currently putting forward a self-image of Korea as a ‘global citizen’, where the self-understanding is transcending national borders. There may well be actors in civil society, the media, the bureaucracy or political parties who support such a post-Westphalian globalist self-image in general, but it has yet to be ‘activated’ politically with regard to legitimating foreign policy action in the two observed policy fields. This limitation due to scope and case selection is the main limitation of this study. The self-images as snapshots of the broader South Korean international identity are in consequence rather ‘coarsely pixelated’, but insightful nonetheless.

For a more ‘zoomed-in’ or ‘panoramic’ account of South Korean international identity in general, future research might investigate other policy fields as cases, such as overseas developmental assistance or global trade policy, but also different levels of analysis as, for example, civil society or media discourses, either separately or in addition to the political discourse. Ultimately it could also be worthwhile to turn to popular-culture discourses and explore how self-identification occurs in novels, comics, movies and TV dramas, but – for the role-theoretical approach at hand – this would be relevant politically only indirectly. Following the “aesthetic turn”⁶²⁸ in International Relations, popular texts are not just a mere reflection of a political reality, but are also shaping social reality, meanings, values, identities and thus politics. Apart from cultural representations manufactured explicitly for political purposes, Grayson, Davis and Philpott point out that “[b]eyond formal policy statements, press interviews and traditional forms of propaganda, popular culture draws attention to how understandings of world politics and the legitimation of policy postures can be generated”.⁶²⁹ Consequently, politicians have to draw from cultural resources to make sense of political options and decisions, for themselves, but also for their

⁶²⁵ Cooper A.F., 2015: 32.

⁶²⁶ Ikenberry G.J. and Mo JR., 2013: 164-165.

⁶²⁷ Park SH., 2013.

⁶²⁸ Bleiker R., 2001.

⁶²⁹ Grayson K., Davies M. and Philpott S., 2009: 159.

constituencies.⁶³⁰ It is the main focus of these approaches to examine the workings of power involved in the production of meaning through cultural artefacts, in which a cultural text can both support and/or subvert the established power relations.⁶³¹ For example, when former South Korean President Park Geun-hye was meeting South Korean peacekeepers from the *Hanbit* Unit in South Sudan in May 2016, she praised them as the “real descendants of the sun” in front of the TV cameras,⁶³² referring to the very popular and successful TV drama of the same name. *Descendants of the Sun* aired in early 2016 and stands out as one of the first mainstream popular-cultural imaginations of South Korea as a developed country and peacekeeping actor in a distant country. In the drama’s representation, the Republic of Korea is a rich and good member of the international community, naturally contributing to the security and development of the fictional country Urk somewhere in the Balkans through the deployment of peacekeepers, medical volunteers and the construction of a solar power plant. But through reading the drama in context of the ‘real world’ South Korean global politics and focusing on which aspects of reality might have been normalised or reinforced, one can gain further insights into the popular-cultural underpinnings of current South Korean state identity and global foreign policy that political leaders tap into.

For example, the usually referred to historical context of the United Nations support for South Korea during and after the Korean War and related the narrative of ‘paying back’ to the international community as a ‘child of the United Nations’ is noticeably absent in *Descendants of the Sun*. Further, throughout the whole series the UN is only represented through some flags in the background and without the typical peacekeeping signifiers such as the iconic UN blue helmets or scarves missing from the South Korean and any other military uniforms. In contrast, the presence of South Korean military troops in the fictional country is never challenged by the drama’s characters but instead experienced as a ‘normal’ reflection of the country’s risen status. Characters explicitly voice their positive emotions and patriotism in view of Korean language signage in distant lands, whether on a Korean-built futuristic solar power plant or on donated t-shirts worn by poor local children. In the context of the ‘model Korea’-self-image that was retrieved in the study at hand, the South Korea of *Descendants of the Sun* appears to be represented as a shiny ‘premium brand’ and

⁶³⁰ Weldes J., 2003: 7; Kiersey N.J. and Neumann I.B., 2013: 9.

⁶³¹ Weldes J., 2003: 7-8.

⁶³² Park GH., 2016b.

“paragon for humankind”,⁶³³ acting not to repay historical debt, but to display national achievement untainted by Korea’s own dark chapters of history.

Another further research area is the dimension of emotion in the self-identification practices of South Korean state identity and global foreign policy. Because of the still largely theoretical debate about emotions in world politics and the corresponding lack of empirically applicable conceptualizations of emotions and state identities, this identity-dimension was not part of the approach presented here. As illustrated in the case study on South Korean peacekeeping, however, there have been discursive features such as emotion terms, connotations, analogies and metaphors⁶³⁴ such as pride, when President Lee Myung-bak praised the “global standard”⁶³⁵ of South Korea’s (and not Seoul’s) hosting of the G20 summit in 2010, and embarrassment, when Rep. Hwang Jin-ha scolded the government for a lack of ambition to put more South Korean officers in leadership roles of international peacekeeping missions.⁶³⁶ Following Koschut, these emotional features may be worth further exploration with regard to the discursive practices of emotional Othering as well as the performativity and interpellation of emotions.⁶³⁷ The research task here would be to move analytic focus “from tracing the meaning of single or multiple emotion words to contextualizing their meaning by looking at how these expressions are directed at and resonate with particular audiences.”⁶³⁸ Another way of approaching the emotional dimension of state identity is to focus on group-level emotions “where one feels guilty not for something one did oneself but for something one’s group did”.⁶³⁹ Mercer, for example, argues that identity always depends on social emotions, because “[i]dentification requires a feeling of attachment; it is intrinsically social”.⁶⁴⁰

In terms of policy relevance, this study teaches us caution with regard to drawing conclusions from assumed ‘politico-cultural’ identities or cultural norms of countries, as these are neither zombie-like executioners of alleged ‘national characters’ nor dull norm-dupes complying with norms once they have been internalized. As the symbolic role-

⁶³³ Lee MB., 2009a.

⁶³⁴ Koschut S., 2017: 3.

⁶³⁵ Lee MB., 2010.

⁶³⁶ National Assembly Minutes, 2013: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Session 19-321-3, 7.

⁶³⁷ Koschut S., 2017: 4.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

⁶³⁹ Reus-Smit C., 2014: 569.

⁶⁴⁰ Mercer J., 2014: 517.

theoretical approach here suggests, a state actor's self-identification is a constant performative and narrative (but also emotional) process in which political decision-makers have sometimes more, sometimes less agency. Therefore, if one is interested in either the foreign policy behaviour of any given state or the stability of the order emerging from different roleplaying actors, a look at the domestic self-identification practices is advisable, as illustrated with this study at hand. With regard to the new administration of President Moon Jae-in, who was inaugurated in May 2017 after the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye, it is too early to draw any conclusions as to which global role identities his government will pursue and try to enact. If his early speeches at the G20 summit in Hamburg in July 2017 are any indication, he follows his predecessors in seeing climate change response as "an investment in future generations and also an opportunity to create new jobs and growth engines".⁶⁴¹ He also sets a new tone with regard to the international refugee crisis by referring to Korean history and the many refugees from the Korean War, which is also part of his personal family history. His parents were among the 14,000 North Korean refugees evacuated on board the US cargo freighter SS Meredith Victory from the besieged port of Hungnam in December 1950.⁶⁴² Moreover, his administration seems strongly focused on domestic issues, such as institutional reforms and job creation, as well as inter-Korean relations. Notably, President Moon has already announced⁶⁴³ the phasing out of the country's nuclear reactors because of safety concerns in the context of the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011 and the strongest ever earthquake in the history of Korea in late 2016, despite South Korea's strong reliance on this energy resource and the internationally very competitive nuclear export industry.

Furthermore, this study bridges a gap between Korean Studies and International Relations, as it is dedicated to the question of how Korea confronts globalization on the identity and cultural level, but with a focus on state and political identities and with IR theory and methodology applied. Besides, for the discipline of IR, this study can serve as an example of how to think about South Korea as a foreign policy actor by taking Korean agency and domestic self-identification practices more seriously and less so outsider's normative strategic biases. The agency-oriented perspective at hand treats identity as a fragile and continuously contested 'sense of self' that has to be constantly manifested through role

⁶⁴¹ Moon JI., 2017b.

⁶⁴² Jung MH., 2017.

⁶⁴³ Moon JI., 2017a.

enactment and promises to complement more systemic identity approaches, such as the literature on norms and socialization. Finally, for the discipline of Korean Studies, this study has illustrated that IR approaches can also contribute to our understanding of Korean collective identity and globalization, in addition to the political-strategic questions about, for example, inter-Korean relations or the impact of the different missile defence systems on a regional 'balance of power' which are prevalent in foreign policy focused studies on Korea.

9. Appendix

List of inductively retrieved identity elements from both case studies

(Exported nodes of identity elements coded as ‘self-images’ from 150 sources with 1476 references in NVivo database)

<i>Self-image</i>	<i>Sources</i>	<i>References</i>
A country standing tall in the world.	10	12
A good neighbour to the world.	5	6
Advocate for universal values.	6	6
Being a link, node or friend - centre not periphery.	28	34
Colonialism. Never again weak.	12	21
Colonized, because domestic elite was rotten.	1	1
Colonized, because internally weak.	1	1
Colonized, because of internal factions.	1	1
Feng Shui - flow of national spirit.	1	1
March 1st 1919 as beacon of hope.	2	2
Stolen independent development.	1	1
Spirit of March 1st inherited.	1	1
Development not finished - Economic, Democratic, now Social.	4	4
Dream of advanced nation.	32	147
Advanced country equals high GDP.	5	8
Advanced means democratic.	4	7
Country in twilight zone.	2	2
Korea at the verge of becoming an advanced country.	15	32
Korea must be a place for happiness and wellbeing.	10	11
Rule of Law and corruption.	7	8
Social safety foundation for advanced nation.	8	9
Trust and accountability.	6	8
First latecomer now leader.	15	18
From aid recipient to donor country.	30	37
From periphery to centre stage.	18	20
Global Korea.	29	70
Building a World-class Nation.	6	8
Economy, trade central to Global Korea.	4	4
Korea opens up for talented migrants.	4	4
Networking, international clout.	10	14
PKO central to Global Korea.	10	10
Good global citizen.	14	19
Greater Korea.	4	4
Military guardians of world peace.	3	3
Innovative Korea.	3	3
Korea a key player in international affairs.	10	10

Korea has always preserved dignity.	1	1
Korea as a defense industry powerhouse.	1	1
Korea as a non-Muslim country helpful.	2	2
Korea as a peaceful nation.	7	12
Korea as a (potential) green power.	39	83
Aspiring to leading as green tech powerhouse.	11	13
Aspiring to become an energy independent nation.	5	6
Exploration of polar regions.	4	11
Polar regions as treasure troves for natural resources.	1	1
Natural green leader.	1	1
Oil prices high, oil dependence.	6	7
Past carbon, future hydrogen.	3	3
ROK has no resources but ingenuity to make use of crises.	6	7
ROK as technology powerhouse.	4	4
We've caught up before, we can catch up again.	12	13
Korea at crossroads - world in crisis.	42	93
Established, advanced countries failed the world.	4	4
Korea has to take that opportunity now.	21	25
Korean adaptiveness.	1	2
Overcoming crisis through national unity.	20	26
Korea is an example for clean, good governance.	2	2
Korea not just US ally, but mercenary.	2	3
Korean exceptionalism.	4	4
Korean rise is a surprise but a success story.	5	6
Koreans are masters of their fate/miracles.	17	26
K-pop – Korea as a cultural power.	8	14
Leadership role.	45	72
Mighty nation.	10	13
More independent foreign policy.	4	8
More proactive role in global affairs.	25	27
Next step unification.	4	4
One of select few.	23	27
Pride in miracles – museum/monument building.	2	2
Reliable ally of US.	5	9
Pro US forces in Korea.	1	1
US alliance basis for development.	1	1
Responsible member of International community.	34	46
Rising power, new G20 power.	18	23
Korean resurgence.	2	2
ROK a liberal democracy.	7	8
ROK a major player, others want ties with us.	17	19
ROK a maritime nation.	1	1
ROK a mature country.	8	9

ROK a Newly Industrialized Country (NIC).	1	1
ROK a safe place (vis-à-vis North Korea).	3	4
ROK a sports powerhouse.	1	1
ROK an advanced Economy.	1	1
ROK an advanced nation (in parts).	8	12
ROK as a middle power.	9	10
ROK as a partner for development.	13	24
ROK has credibility (at stake).	9	11
ROK as a developed country (helping others).	37	64
Surprise story - beacon of hope for others.	11	17
ROK as a model for economy and democracy.	24	26
ROK aspiring to become model nation.	13	17
ROK a child of UN.	30	69
Paying back to UN.	18	25
UN helped ROK.	18	23
ROK country of education.	9	11
ROK country of hope for others, but not all rosy.	1	1
ROK development success economic but also democratic and hosting, sporting.	7	8
ROK economic, not military power.	2	2
ROK grateful, remembers past.	1	1
ROK history a miracle.	59	142
Healthy confidence - pride appropriate.	15	21
ROK NOT small and marginal anymore.	12	16
ROK was in ruins.	17	19
Small country - synonymous with war and poverty.	18	23
ROK is a small country, we should/can't do that.	1	3
ROK IT power.	3	4
ROK moral actor.	9	9
ROK not a colonizer.	1	1
ROK nuclear tech power.	7	8
ROK OECD member.	4	7
ROK power for free trade.	13	17
ROK space power.	1	1
ROK uniqueness.	3	3
Rule maker not follower.	16	33
Exploring new paths, Korean route.	7	11
New thinking demanded.	3	4
Self-determination without too much external powers involved.	3	3
Showing pioneering spirit.	14	19
South Korean nationalism (exclusive North Korea).	2	3
Sovereign, independent nation.	3	3
Transform crisis through centrist pragmatism.	11	15
Korea and the world in harmony.	6	6

Unified Korea at centre of Eurasian-Pacific Age.	9	14
Unified Korea in spirit of UN.	1	1
Widening horizon to globe.	8	9
ROK logistics and financial hub.	2	2
ROK only non-western OECD DAC next to Japan.	5	5
Trustworthy partner.	2	3
UN Sec Council seat.	1	1

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