

SUNSHINE OVER A BARREN SOIL: THE DOMESTIC POLITICS OF ENGAGEMENT IDENTITY FORMATION IN SOUTH KOREA

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South Korea's "Sunshine" engagement policy during the Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun administrations (1998-2007) invited heated debates over the policy's ability to induce formidable changes within Pyongyang in terms of nuclear-weapons development and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula. Critics argued that Seoul's engagement policy would incubate Pyongyang's nuclear program, not hamper it. The policy also created coordination problems in the ROK-U.S. alliance and domestic political cleavages in South Korea. This article assesses the rationale behind South Korea's engagement policy, and argues that it initiated a politics of identity reformulation between Sunshine proponents and opponents. The two liberal administrations' Sunshine policy also contributed to changes in the South's role identity vis-a-vis North Korea by resetting the concept of national interest, the identity of North Korea, and alternative means to move away from a containment strategy. The article thus contends that the unit-level change in the state's role identity must go through a political struggle against the established security identity of a state. Reconciliation through engagement in a protracted conflictual relationship has to successfully win out over the old idea of containment.

Key words: inter-Korean relations, engagement/Sunshine policy, national identity formation, reconciliation, containment

Why Seoul Kept Giving In to Pyongyang

Reconciling with an enemy state is not an easy choice in a protracted conflictual relationship.¹ Its success is uncertain, and requires a dramatic policy shift from a policy of containment to that of reconciliation.² Moreover, reconciliation with an enemy invites harsh criticism and opposition within the domestic politics of a reconciling state. A new idea of reconciliation is also politically fragile: It typically lacks solid domestic support, while the old idea of containment may enjoy habitual but sturdy support. Force of habit is oftentimes stronger than the idea of change. Therefore, in a protracted conflictual relationship, the idea of reconciliation with an enemy state has to be implanted in politically barren soil.

In this respect, South Korea's comprehensive engagement or Sunshine policy with Pyongyang for the ten years of the Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun administrations (1998-2007) faced fierce opposition from the conservative section of Korean society, created strains in the alliance with the United States under George W. Bush, and endured harsh criticism in and outside Seoul about how the policy was essentially spoiling and nurturing the regime in Pyongyang just when it was on the verge of collapse. Moreover, Pyongyang was not helping the proponents of the engagement policy; it was deceiving too often, demanding too much, and derailing too rapidly.

In hindsight, Seoul's engagement policy had to overcome many hurdles within its domestic political environment and then with its alliance partner, the United States, only to deal with the unfriendly regime in Pyongyang. And whether the South's engagement policy did induce any formidable changes

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1. Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann and Mark Gibney, "Introduction: Apologies and the West," in Mark Gibney, Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Niklaus Steiner, eds., *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 2-6.
 2. I define reconciliation as a process by which conflictual states intentionally establish structures and procedures for transforming the relational status of confrontation to durable peace.

within Pyongyang still remains a topic of hot debate in Korean society. Pyongyang conducted long-range missile tests a few times, nuclear tests twice, and naval skirmishes with South Korea three times. Pyongyang's economy showed no signs of recovery. Despite these obstacles, critics of the engagement policy argue, Seoul kept giving in to Pyongyang. Yet the two minority liberal governments of Kim and Roh maintained a persistent commitment to the engagement policy for a decade, utilizing their political and diplomatic resources in order to carry out comprehensive engagement of the hostile neighbor in the North.

Given that political reconciliation on the Korean peninsula may become the structural cornerstone for regional stability in East Asia, South Korea's policy toward Pyongyang is more than just an important aspect of Korean affairs. Seoul's policy choice between containment and engagement will critically determine the direction of constructing a peace structure in Northeast Asia. In this vein, this article raises an important question: How was it possible for Seoul to continue its commitment to the engagement policy despite extensive domestic and international opposition? In short, why and how was Seoul able to pursue such a difficult policy in such a difficult time?

Seoul's comprehensive engagement policy required attitudinal and cognitive changes within South Korea's public and security expert groups toward its main enemy—something that looked like a change in South Korea's collective identity toward the unfriendly regime in Pyongyang. Not only was the success of its policy highly uncertain; the Kim and Roh administrations also had to fight an uphill battle to rally the support of both the public and experts who had long been used to the idea of containing North Korea. Their choice of comprehensive engagement was also risky for the proponents, as it could have cost them their fragile political foundation. In this respect, Seoul's persistent choice presents a puzzle unsettled by structural or interest-based explanation, and provides an opportunity for idea-based research to expound on the underlying causes behind "why Seoul kept giving in to Pyongyang" even at the risk of alienating the United States at a time of North Korean nuclear

adventurism.³

This article argues that Seoul's engagement policy initiated a politics of identity reformation between Sunshine's proponents and opponents. In fact, the policy contributed to changing the role identity of South Korea vis-à-vis North Korea by resetting the concept of national interest, the identity of North Korea, and the alternative means to move from containment to engagement. The argument here is that the unit-level change in the state's role identity has to go through a political struggle against the established security identity of a state. In short, reconciliation through engagement in a protracted conflictual relationship has to successfully win out over the old idea of containment. The article will not cover the principles of the engagement policy, since many analysts have written about them.⁴ For the same reason, the article will not discuss how the policy interacted with Pyongyang in times of nuclear crises, nor emphasize why the engagement policy is important in achieving reconciliation between two Koreas. Rather, the point of analytical inquiry will be how engagement as a new idea was fiercely opposed by South Korean groups that identified with containment, and how the two liberal administrations promoted the new idea of engagement. Understanding the domestic political dynamics of engagement-identity formulation can shed light on why Seoul was able to keep giving in to the North.

This article also offers some insight on how a policy of reconciliation survives and prevails even when the policy environment is not so friendly, when the drivers of the policy are not a

3. Carin Zissis, "US-South Korea: Uneasy Allies," Analysis Brief by Council on Foreign Relations (September 14, 2006), available at www.cfr.org/publication/11436/ussouth_korea.html.

4. Chung-in Moon and David Steinberg, eds., *Kim Dae-jung Government and Sunshine Policy: Promises and Challenges* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1999); Norman D. Levin and Yong-Sup Han, *Sunshine in Korea: The South Korean Debate over Policies toward North Korea* (San Diego, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2002), chap. 2; Key-young Son, *South Korean Engagement Policies and North Korea: Identities, Norms and Sunshine Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Victor Cha, "Engaging North Korea Credibly," *Survival*, vol. 42, No. 2 (January, 2000), pp. 136-55.

political majority, and when the policy target and partners are not cooperative. This article is in essence about sunshine over a barren soil.

Domestic Politics of Collective Identity Reformation toward an Enemy State

Role Identity

A state's identity type is the product of regime types, dominant religions, and geographical location. The state can be Asian, democratic, or Buddhist. However, what seems to be more intriguing is how a state forms its role identity, which is the product of a dyadic relationship among states; states may be friends or enemies, allies or rivals.⁵ In essence, role identity is a relational concept. One's identity is essentially defined by others who surround it. Animosity and enmity toward others often last centuries, but ceases to exist or shifts at critical junctures.⁶ Thus, a state's role identity determines its preferences and actions. The role identity is constructed within the social environment of domestic politics as well as in the arena of international politics.

In the world of realist power politics, structural interest determines a state's identity; my enemy's enemy becomes my friend.⁷ Also, in a material world of realism, the distribution of power in the form of either power balance or power transition determines the state's identity as a balancing or bandwagoning actor. However, such interest-based or structurally determined identity formation does not explain how identity lasts and changes within.⁸ At the end of the Cold War dramatic changes in Viet-

5. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 224.

6. Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 152-72.

7. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

8. Peter J. Katzenstein, eds., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and*

nam's, China's, and the Soviet Union's foreign policy behavior toward their enemy, the United States, exemplify role changes due to shifts in domestic politics. In this regard, one can argue that identity is a domestic attribute arising from changes in prevalent ideas set forth by the dominant political groups.⁹

Collective identity formation within a state vis-à-vis its enemy requires much more than redefining its concept of national identity.¹⁰ In the research domain of state identities and foreign policy behavior, there have been few empirical analyses about how a new ideational political group played its political game, struggled against old ideas, changed the culture of national security, and reconstructed the state's collective identity toward the enemy. Just as the structure does not come with an instruction sheet,¹¹ a new idea does not automatically get implanted in the domestic politics.¹² A new collective identity has to be presented, programmed, and planted in the power-struggling environment of domestic politics, which is essentially the marketplace for a new idea. Especially if the new idea is about how differently to perceive and approach the enemy state, the political struggle between the fresh but fragile and the traditional but sturdy idea groups will become even more fierce and formidable for the new ideational group.

My proposition is simple: The political leadership must engage in a political battle in which it markets new ideas for justification, competes against vested interest groups, and presents more viable alternative visions of the future than its opponents.¹³

Identity in World Politics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

9. Michael Marnett, "Culture, Strategy and Foreign Policy Change: Israel's Road to Oslo," *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), pp. 5-36.
10. William Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 1990).
11. Mark Blyth, "Structures Do not Come with an Instruction Sheet: Interests, Ideas, and Progress in Political Science," *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 1, No. 4 (Winter, 2003), pp. 693-706.
12. Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971).
13. Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs,*

Identity formation may be set forth not only through national and/or cultural selection processes but also through competitive political processes.¹⁴ For any new idea to be accepted as the social norm, it must go through a political process at its beginning. During that process, new political groups with new ideas will face many difficulties, not least in introducing incentive and disincentive structures, especially vis-à-vis the enemy state and their own state. At the end of the day, innovation always invites great criticism and strong counter-coalitions; following the old way to deal with enemy states seems to be a safer way in the case of protracted interstate conflicts.¹⁵ This game of identity formation is not politically safe for the new idea groups as the new idea is by its nature uncertain and “the old idea school” tends to be the majority.

Then, how does this game of identity formation play out? Norm entrepreneurs who simply dislike the existing norms and taboos in dealing with the enemy state have to emerge and often band together with other supporters of policy changes. Obviously, these ideational activists lack conventional political powers compared with the vested interest groups that favor traditional containment ideas. The constant process of political persuasion vis-à-vis the existing groups becomes an integral part of forming a new culture of collective ideas vis-à-vis the enemy state. The activists may form a small but strong epistemic community of reconcilers within domestic politics who venture a series of political campaigns in order to spread their convictions based on new norms, with the intent to construct a new culture of national security conducive to their ideas.

Naturally, the old schools will also rally their coalitions and present their own logic as to why the new idea (engagement) is essentially futile and how it challenges the existing role identity of the state. However, the activists will urge the need for dramatic

Institutions and Political Change (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).

14. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory*, pp. 321-24.

15. Daniel Kahneman and Jonathan Renshon, “Why Hawks Win,” *Foreign Policy*, vol. 29, No. 1 (January-February, 2007), pp. 34-38.

policy changes toward the enemy state by arguing that past policies of containment have failed to resolve the situation. They will call for reconciliation and adoption of the new ideas in response to an acrid policy environment and protracted conflicts.¹⁶

The old identity of the reconciling state cannot change over a short time.¹⁷ The activist government needs to initiate public campaigns to market its new ideas in the face of traditional security identities and threat perceptions. Usually, a society in a protracted conflict tends to hang onto a particular identity that people believe has protected that which they value. It is difficult to adapt to a different resolution.¹⁸ Especially in a democracy, the process of persuasion becomes the real game to play. In this sense, identity is what political activists make of it after winning in the political arena.

Reconciliation

Justification for reconciliation will be based on reformulation of three critical domains: the national interest, threat perceptions, and policies for dealing with the enemy state. The core national interest of the state is to stay away from unnecessary war and to maximize the potential for mutually beneficial cooperation with the rest of the world. In this vein, the activist group will present the reasons why reconciliation yields better prospects for achieving core national interests. It will criticize the traditional strategy of containment for failing to satisfy the national interest.

By setting reconciliation as the core national interest, a new idea group reframes the perception of the enemy state as one

16. Mlada Bukovansky, *Ideas and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

17. Nadim N. Rouhana, "Group Identity and Power Asymmetry in Reconciliation Processes: the Israeli-Palestinian Case," *Peace and Conflict*, vol. 10, No. 1 (March, 2004), pp. 33-52.

18. Daniel Bar-Tal, "From Intractable Conflict through Conflict Resolution: Psychological Analysis," *International Society of Political Psychology*, vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer, 2000), pp. 351-65.

not so much a threat as an opportunity for collaboration. Reconciliation policy must begin with a logical justification as to why a reconciler needs to reframe its attitude toward the enemy state. As actors learn their “identities and interests as a result of how others treat them,” enemies become enemies “in ways that do not recognize their life and liberty.”¹⁹ Thus, a policy of reconciliation naturally resets threat perceptions toward the enemy state. The activist group will emphasize how engagement with the enemy state will essentially lessen the current hostile relationship and bring about more stable and peaceful relations that are both beneficial to the national interest and critical to national security.

Table 1. Three Domains of Reconciliation

Reconciliation	
National Interest	Hostility by Deterrence → Engagement for Peaceful Coexistence
Threat Perception	Enemy: Threat to Contain → Opportunity to Engage
Program for Action	Strict Reciprocity → Diffuse Reciprocity

As a methodology for achieving reconciliation, engagement will be presented through diffuse reciprocity, in contrast with containment, which is presented through strict reciprocity. The new idea will emphasize non-equivalence and non-contingency. In other words, rather than insisting on a strict equivalence of benefits, the engagement policy will continue to provide incentives to construct more stable relations, which are beneficial for the engager’s national interest of peaceful coexistence. Thus, the reconciliation policy through engagement is not contingent upon the enemy state’s reaction. Rather, it becomes determined more by the engager’s strategic calculus.²⁰ The new idea holders must have a high level of network cohesiveness and a similar

19. Wendt, *Social Theory*, p. 171.

20. Robert Keohane, “Reciprocity in International Relations,” *International Organization*, vol. 40, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), pp. 1-27.

background identity, which leads to the formation of a strong in-group identity. Their shared identity will increase the intensity of their cooperation against the old school in the political struggle. Since the new activist group has a strong commitment to its beliefs and in-group cohesiveness, it will maximize any political opportunities to advance its new ideas.

Sunshine over Barren Soil: Domestic Political Opposition

The liberal administrations of the Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun faced a decade of identity challenges from the vested interest groups within South Korean society.²¹ These groups denounced and defamed the comprehensive engagement policy. The debate centered on the administration's substitution of reunification with reconciliation as the operational goal of South Korea's northern policy.²² Since, for critics of the Sunshine policy, the schema of unification with the North essentially constituted their identity (particularly in the form of anti-communism),²³ the notion of peaceful coexistence through reconciliation came as an existential challenge to what they saw as South Korea's national identity. The opponents perceived inter-Korean relations as inherently conflictual and resisted the new policy.²⁴ For example, Korea Freedom Federation, a conservative civic group that supported past military governments, called into question the identity of comprehensively engaging North Korea,

21. Byung-Hoon Suh, "Kim Dae Jung's Engagement Policy and the South-South Conflict in South Korea: Implications for U.S. Policy," *Asian Update* (Asia Society), Summer 2001 at www.asiasociety.org/publications/update-southkorea.html.

22. Norman D. Levin and Yong-Sup Han, *Sunshine in Korea: The South Korean Debate over Policies toward North Korea* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2002), chap. 4.

23. Haksoon Yim, "Cultural Identity and Cultural Policy in South Korea," *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring, 2002), pp. 42-43.

24. James Liu and Denis Hilton, "How the Past Weighs on the Present: Social Representation of History and Their Role in Identity," *British Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 44, No. 4 (December, 2005), pp. 537-56.

contending that it meant moving away from South Korea's long-standing commitment to spreading liberal democracy across the Korean peninsula.²⁵ The National Actions for Campaign for Freedom and Democracy, supported by 189 organizations under its umbrella, denounced the engagement policy as denying South Korea's anti-communist identity and polluting South Korea's state identity.²⁶

Most contentious was the issue of how Seoul should frame North Korea's identity in relation to South Korea. While the comprehensive engagement policy optimistically focused on North Korea as presenting an opportunity for engagement, the opponents bluntly argued that North Korea was a national security threat to South Korea and that Pyongyang was unpredictable and unreliable.²⁷ Opponents criticized the liberal governments for saving North Korea's face while failing to objectively assess North Korea's growing military threat. In their view, security had to come before engagement. These criticisms were constantly raised by the Grand National Party, the main opposition party representing the mainstream conservative forces and also the majority party in the National Assembly for most of the ten years under liberal administrations.²⁸ During this period, it constantly argued that South Korea's aid to North Korea was a one-sided concession that failed to yield the changes that the engagement policy anticipated. Rather, they maintained, the North would only seek additional spoils from Seoul. Moreover, it denounced the engagement policy as an unbalanced policy that lacked "sticks," thereby failing to deal with the contingency of North Korea's cheating.²⁹

At the end of the day, the critics argued that obsession with engagement of Pyongyang undermined cognitive preparedness

25. Levin and Han, *Sunshine in Korea*, chap. 4.

26. See the group's home page at <http://nac.or.kr>.

27. Hahm Chaibong, "The Two South Koreas: A House Divided," *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 28, No. 3 (Summer, 2005), pp. 57-72.

28. David I. Steinberg and Myung Shin, "Tensions in South Korean Political Parties in Transition: From Entourage to Ideology?" *Asian Survey*, vol. 46, No. 4 (July-August, 2006), pp. 517-37.

29. Levin and Han, *Sunshine in Korea*, chap. 4.

for the North's potential military provocations and national unity, and only created benign neglect of national security.³⁰ Despite increasing inter-Korean exchanges, summit meetings, and high-level official talks that resulted in agreements, the essence of the North Korean identity remained offensive to the critics' perspectives. For example, the Korean Association of Retired Generals and Admirals maintained the view of North Korea as the enemy state of the South. The Korean Veterans Association, one of the oldest and most established civic groups, focused its opposition on the Kim and Roh administrations' unidirectional assistance as a virtual concession to Pyongyang and a sign of South Korea's appeasement. These steps, they said, would only weaken South Korea's position in dealing with the North. The National Congress for Freedom and Democracy, an ultra-conservative civic organization, demanded a formal apology from North Korea for past provocations and a pledge to terminate its nuclear-weapon program as a prerequisite for inter-Korean reconciliation.³¹

This relational identity by the opponents was based upon what they perceived as Pyongyang's unwavering commitment to unification on the North's terms, the regime's continuing spy campaigns, its ceaseless probing along the demilitarized zone, and its overwhelming budget priority given to the military in spite of a shrinking economy. Thus, they consistently argued that the liberal government's Sunshine policy was essentially the product of a self-fulfilling prophecy. North Korea's reception of South Korean aid was said to be merely a tactical shift: The Sunshine policy would not change the DPRK's fundamentally aggressive strategies aimed at undermining the South Korean system.

Strident critics from the media were the two conservative media outlets, *Chosun Ilbo* and *Dong-A Ilbo*. They used their influential positions to manipulate public opinion by attacking the liberal government.³² They were fierce and audacious in their criti-

30. "Gong Ro-Myung Criticizes President Kim's Foreign Policy," *Monthly Chosun* (June, 2002), pp. 100-118 (in Korean).

31. Levin and Han, *Sunshine in Korea*, chap. 4.

32. For an empirical analysis of the media impact on the public opinion regarding the Sunshine policy, see Sei-Hill Kim, Mijeon Han, James

cism of the comprehensive engagement policy. They asserted that it would essentially weaken the South's national security and endanger its security alliance with the United States. Engaging North Korea and changing its identity were naive assumptions, they argued. For example, during the Kim Dae Jung administration, *Chosun Ilbo* published eighty-three editorials on the government's North Korea policy. Among these, fifty-one argued that North Korea's capacity to reform was virtually zero as its failure to open up was due not to the lack of external security assurance but to its internal security needs.³³ The leadership in Pyongyang understood the implications of openness for its political survival, since any serious reform policy would naturally undermine the Kim Jong Il regime.³⁴ Therefore, the Sunshine proponents were misreading the intention of North Korea, which was abusing Seoul's goodwill as the North continued its nuclear-weapons development. Throughout the ten years of liberal governments, *Chosun* maintained this negative tone on the engagement policy.³⁵

In this vein, all the critics of the Sunshine policy demanded that Seoul maintain its traditional stance with Pyongyang, which was strict reciprocity as a requirement for improving inter-Korean relations as well as securing South Korea's overall integrity. The comprehensive engagement policy, they asserted, only created the illusion of diffuse reciprocity that Pyongyang would change if

Shanahan, and Vicente Berdayes, "Talking on 'Sunshine in North Korea': A Test of the Spiral of Silence as a Theory of Powerful Mass Media," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 2004), pp. 39-61.

33. Author's dataset based upon newspaper editorial content analysis, using the search engine for major events in inter-Korean relations at www.kinds.or.kr.

34. "DJ on a Tiger," *Chosun Ilbo* (English ed.), July 1, 2000. See also Choong-Nam Kim, "Pyongyang's Dilemma and Opening: How to Compromise Economic Benefits with Political Risks," *Korea and World Affairs*, vol. 24, No. 2 (Summer, 2000), pp. 270-76.

35. Gi-Wook Shin and Kristine C. Burke, "North Korea and Identity Politics in South Korea," *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 15, No. 1 (Fall/Winter 2008), pp. 297.

Seoul kept handing out “goodies.” To the opponents, Pyongyang’s identity as the enemy state enforced the notion of strict reciprocity, namely, that a bilateral relation of hostility should start with equal and real-time exchanges of give-and-take. Giving to the enemy state was morally wrong in terms of South Korea’s national identity.³⁶ North Korea’s continuing delinquent behavior, such as its nuclear program, provocation of naval skirmishes, and submarine intrusion only confirmed their view that it was simply inappropriate to continue with the engagement policy. Therefore, the engagement policy would only worsen South Korea’s alliance with the United States.

The engagement policy thus provoked an ideological confrontation between the conservatives and the policy’s supporters.³⁷ The conservatives and liberals regularly exchanged accusations: The former were called “Cold War Retards,” while the latter were labeled “North Korea Sympathizers.” The new idea of reconciliation toward the enemy state ironically generated political confrontations over South Korea’s relational identity with the North. The engagers had to engage the South Korean conservatives, who possessed different ideas of national and relational identity.

Collective Identity Reformation: Engagement Campaigns

Reframing National Security

From the power-politics and interest-based perspectives, South Korea’s rational choice is to define North Korea as its enemy given more than a half century of conflict and national division and the South’s alliance with the United States. Seoul’s

36. Sung Won Park, “Conservatives Looking for Counterattack by the Progressives” (*Bosu neun Bangyok eul Norinda*), *Shindonga*, September 2000, pp. 76-109.

37. Do Chul Shim and Brong-keun Jhee, “How Does Democratic Regime Change Affect Mass Political Ideology? A Case Study of South Korea in Comparative Perspective,” *International Political Science Review*, vol. 26, No. 4 (Winter, 2004), pp. 381-96.

enforcement of the comprehensive engagement policy requires a different explanation, however, as the liberal governments of South Korea reacted to the worsening security environment in ways inconsistent with interest- and structure-based explanations. The Kim and Roh administrations followed their own road map based upon their beliefs about how their choice of comprehensive engagement could better guarantee peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. This generated a political process that involved formulating how Seoul should interact with Pyongyang and what Seoul should be in terms of its relational identity with its longstanding enemy in Pyongyang.

The idea entrepreneur, Kim Dae Jung, upon his election as the first president of an opposition party, presented a new policy called comprehensive engagement or Sunshine policy. He framed the national interest of South Korea as peaceful coexistence with North Korea, not unification, which at that time presumed absorbing the North's regime. The Kim administration believed that the Cold War power confrontation had caused Korea's division. South Korea should be in the driver's seat "to demolish the trapping structure of the Cold War and to bring peace and stability on the Korean peninsula through our own initiative."³⁸ In order to meet the newly defined national interest, the Kim administration attempted to change the identity of North Korea from an enemy to be contained to a potential partner through cooperation.³⁹

The Kim and the Roh administrations chose not to deal with North Korea's nuclear program as a source of threat to South Korea. Rather, the nuclear problem was perceived as a matter for diplomacy, the logical ground for cooperative solutions in multilateral settings such as the Four Party and Six Party talks. To both administrations, war aversion on the Korean peninsula constituted a bedrock principle of engagement with the North.

38. Ministry of Unification, *Two Years of the Government of the People: Achievements and Assessments of North Korean Policy* (Seoul: Ministry of Unification, 2000), pp. 29-31.

39. Ministry of Unification, *Policy towards North Korea for Peace, Reconciliation, and Cooperation* (Seoul: Ministry of Unification, 1999).

Simply put, identifying North Korea's nuclear program as a source of imminent threat would result in accepting a surgical strike as an option.

President Roh exhibited this attitudinal shift more bluntly and rigidly by stating, "As a nation that has built the Korea of today from the ashes of yesterday, we simply cannot be asked to relive that traumatic experience."⁴⁰ Such a commitment by the Roh administration was on display when North Korea tested the Taepodong II intercontinental ballistic missile. Seoul did not perceive it as threatening, whereas Japan punished Pyongyang with unilateral economic sanctions. Seoul continued its engagement policy by holding a ministerial meeting with the North; thus, negotiating with the enemy was standard South Korean policy toward North Korea. The stance of both governments was firm in terms of reframing North Korea's identity⁴¹ as a partner for cooperation: "trust can come only when the North is recognized and is engaged through dialogue."⁴²

With this newly introduced identity of North Korea, comprehensive engagement took center stage in the South's domestic politics and led toward resetting a collective identity within South Korea. The new idea groups both in the Kim and the Roh administrations deplored the vicious cycle of temporal dialogues, confrontations, and crises and argued for a virtuous cycle of institutionalized real-time communication and mutually beneficial exchanges for establishing peace on the Korean peninsula.⁴³ The norms that guided how Seoul should behave in times of crisis—a code of conduct—were set during the Kim Dae Jung administra-

40. Secretariat of the National Security Council, "President's Remarks on the North Korean Nuclear Issue," January 2005, p. 3.

41. For North Korea's own identity, See Han S. Park, "North Korean Perceptions of Self and Others: Implications for Policy Choices," *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 73, No. 4 (Winter, 2000), p. 504.

42. Chung-in Moon, "Diplomacy of Defiance and Facilitation: the Six Party Talks and the Roh Moo Hyun Government," *Asian Perspective*, vol. 32, No. 4 (Winter, 2008), p. 77.

43. Soon-young Hong, "Thwarting Korea's Cold War: the Path to Peace on the Korean Peninsula," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 78, No. 3 (May-June, 1999), pp. 8-12.

tion and carried through under Roh from 2003 to 2008.

The Roh administration was even clearer than Kim's in reframing Pyongyang as a subject for cooperation as it essentially believed that North Korea could not be perceived as a constant source of threat. Accordingly, in 2004 Seoul, for the first time since the end of the Korean War, did not designate North Korea as an enemy state in its defense white paper.⁴⁴ The reinterpretation of threats from the North became an inseparable part of the identity dynamics in South Korea's choice of comprehensive engagement. In 2005 the Inter-Korean Exchange Law was revised in a way to simplify the bureaucratic and legal processes for inter-Korean individual contacts.⁴⁵ In this vein, South Korea's comprehensive engagement policy constituted the basis for behavioral norms of how threats and opportunities were judged.

The Kim and the Roh administrations emphasized the importance of political and economic engagement as a tool for escaping the perils of the security dilemma. Both administrations argued that North Korea might be forced to choose military options once caught in spirals of crisis, and that engaging North Korea and socializing it to cooperating with the rest of the world would improve stability prospects across the Korean peninsula. Therefore, as Moon has elaborated, South Korea's engagement policy carried with it a functionalist nuance called "flexible dualism"—the separation of politics and economics, in place of previous governments' priority to politics and its linkage to the economy.⁴⁶

44. The previous Ministry of Defense white paper in 2000 had referred to "those immediate threats from North Korea, which, as the nation's main enemy, could endanger our survival." See Ministry of Defense, *2000 Defense White Paper* (Seoul: Ministry of Defense, 2000), p. 34.

45. South Korea's National Security Act used to function as the governing law prohibiting South Koreans' direct contact with North Koreans unless authorized by the government. Without prior authorization, South Koreans who contacted North Koreans or entered the territory of the North would be legally placed under arrest. The revised Inter-Korean Exchange Law enabled South Koreans to obtain a permit from the Ministry of Unification upon application, contact North Koreans, and visit the North as long as the permit remained valid.

46. Chung-in Moon, "Understanding the DJ doctrine: The Sunshine Policy

Functional dualism marked a paradigm shift in South Korea's behavior, a new strategic option separate from military options. The South Korean public was persuaded.

The Roh administration even raised the idea of an inter-Korean economic community through engagement. This was framed as a contribution to creating a Northeast Asian regional community, which provided a viable future vision for how peace and stability on the Korean peninsula would promote South Korea's national interest.⁴⁷ The Roh government believed incremental changes in North Korea and reconciliation between the two Koreas would form the basis for shaping a new regional order in Northeast Asia. The rapid growth of economic relations in Northeast Asia would serve as a locomotive for North-South cooperation. South Korea identified a North-South Korean railroad, energy, and logistics networks as major national projects.⁴⁸

Architects of Comprehensive Engagement

The architects, practitioners, and missionaries of the comprehensive engagement policy safeguarded the integrity of the new idea by forming a Sunshine policy activist government. These engagement proponents had the President's unquestionable support and ideational commitments to Sunshine.⁴⁹

Kim Dae Jung installed a vanguard of Sunshine policy promoters throughout his government. He established the National Security Council (NSC) for orchestrating the government's North-

and the Korean Peninsula," in Chung-in Moon and David Steinberg, eds., *Kim Dae-jung Government and Sunshine Policy: Promises and Challenges* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1999), p. 39.

47. Ministry of Unification of the Republic of Korea, *Ministry White Paper 2003* (Seoul: Ministry of Unification, 2003), p. 36.

48. Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Business Hub, "Vision and Tasks for a Northeast Asian Business Hub" (in Korean) (Seoul: Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Business Hub, 2003).

49. Author's interview with Kim Geun Sik, Professor of Political Science at Kyungnam University who participated in the second summit in 2007 and assumed the role of a Sunshine missionary during the Roh administration.

ern policy, used the National Intelligence Service for communicating with Pyongyang, and mobilized the unification ministry and his ruling Democrat Party for dealing with the South Korean public. The comprehensive engagement policy was essentially coordinated by the president's closest aide, Lim Dong Won. Lim Dong Won was twice appointed minister of national unification for a total of thirteen months in 1999 and 2001. In between, he was appointed director of national intelligence, coordinating the first inter-Korean summit from December 1999 to March 2001. Afterwards, Lim continued to be a de facto chief adviser and mentor to the practitioners of Roh's engagement policy while serving as chairperson of the Sejong Institute.⁵⁰

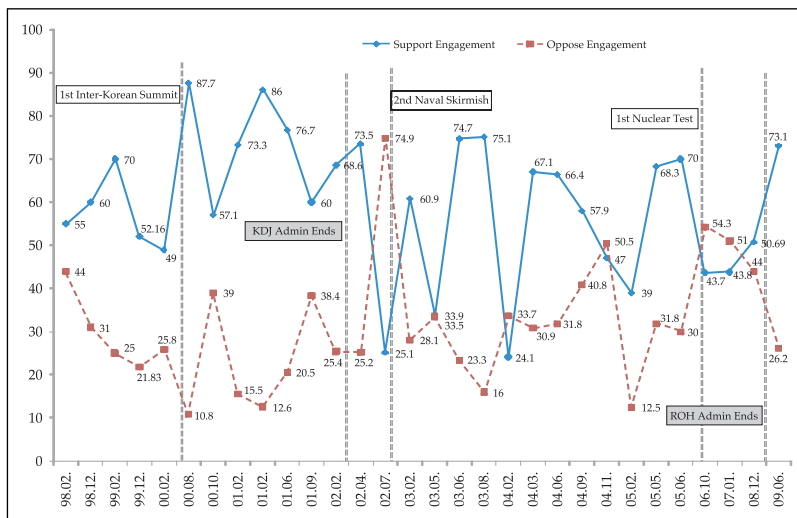
During Kim's tenure, two scholars—Moon Chung In and Lee Jong Seok—assumed the role of so-called Sunshine missionaries, waging campaigns before domestic and international audiences. Later, these men played critical roles in sustaining and strengthening Roh's comprehensive engagement policy. During the transition from the Kim to the Roh administration, Kim's last unification minister, Cheong Se Hyun, served for fourteen months. His role was to ensure the institutional continuity of the engagement policy into the Roh administration. Minister of National Unification Park Jae Kyu, who was in charge of managing the first summit, established the University of North Korean Studies in 2000. It is the first graduate school devoted to training professionals in inter-Korean exchanges, thereby expanding the pro-engagement base throughout Korean society.

During the Roh administration, Lee Jong Seok played a critical role as a "control tower" coordinating its Northern policy. As deputy secretary general of the NSC, he strengthened its role in coordinating the work of the ministries of unification, foreign affairs, and defense. (Later, he was appointed minister of unification.) Chung Dong Young, a presidential candidate of the ruling Uri party, headed the ministry of unification from 2004 to 2005. Moon Chung In, the chairperson of the Presidential Committee

50. Author's interview with Moon Chung In, Professor of Political Science at Yonsei University. He participated in both inter-Korean summits.

on Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiatives, strengthened the logical foundation of Roh's engagement and foreign policy. All in all, these Sunshine proponents formed a cohesive group, not only working closely with each other but also networking with middle-level technocrats in the government. Both administrations engaged in an incremental public campaign to persuade the public of the virtues of engaging the North. This was a challenging task as the North Korean government was perceived by many as inhumane, irresponsible, delinquent, and militant.

Figure 1. Percent of South Korean Public Favoring Engagement with North Korea, 1998-2009



Source: Compiled by the author from the *Munwha Daily*, August 24, 1998, August 25, 2000, February 16, 2002, and February 27, 2003; Korea Institute of National Unification (KINU), December 31, 1998, December 31, 1999, and December 31, 2008; *Hangyeoreh Daily*, September 24, 1999; *Kookmin Daily*, December 10, 1999; *Chosun Daily*, February 4, 2000 and June 23, 2007; *Kyunghyang Daily*, October 6, 2000 and February 23, 2001; Ministry of Unification, February 25, 2001, June 20, 2001, September 23, 2001, and April 9, 2002; Korea Gallup, July 6, 2002; Korea Society Opinion Institute, June 24, 2003 and October 12, 2006; Korea Broadcasting Company, May 30, 2005; *Munwha Broadcasting Company*, June 13, 2005; East Asia Institute, June 5, 2009.

However, the engagement policy may have been a polarizing issue among the politically sensitized portion of South Korean society. As Figure 1 indicates, public opinion was evenly split when the engagement policy had not yet begun in full force; support for engagement was still only 55 percent, while opposition to the policy was 44 percent in 1998. After the first inter-Korean summit, public support for the Sunshine policy increased to 87.7 percent, the highest ever recorded. Public support for the engagement policy during and after Kim Dae Jung's leadership is an important indicator for the diffusion of the new norm opting for the strategy of negotiation, inter-Korean reconciliation, and engagement. Such support was also the political resource Sunshine proponents drew upon in their political campaigns against the traditional advocates of containment. Over the ten-year period of the Sunshine era, the stable and steady support for engagement indicates that the new identity of reconciliation had penetrated Korean society. Despite many security crises mentioned earlier and Pyongyang's provocations, which were in fact framed by critics as demonstrating the failure of the Sunshine policy, the South Korean public continued to favor engagement and reconciliation with Pyongyang.

Time Ahead: Legacy of Engagement

Identity does not automatically change. Neither does the structure of international relations have an overwhelming influence on the state. The state processes a new identity through a game of political collision between old and new identities. As argued, reconciliation in a protracted conflictual relationship, as a new idea, has to persuade the public as to why such a policy shift yields a better future than the traditional policy of containment. Proponents of reconciliation must then prepare for fierce discursive battles with the traditional identity groups. In short, one should not presume a given identity for states just because the exogenous environment is believed to change. Politics still matters.

The South Korean case clearly demonstrates the above

process. The two minority administrations that promoted the Sunshine policy embraced a new self-identity and identity in relation to Pyongyang. They set in motion a discourse of engagement in South Korean society. The roles of norm entrepreneurs and their vanguards were important, especially when the traditional identity of containment opposed the newly presented idea of reconciliation. Conservatives fought the Sunshine campaign for ten years, backed by a well-placed pan-national conservative coalition.

Seoul's engagement policy has not achieved full inter-Korean reconciliation, and its road ahead is bumpy and uncertain. Nonetheless, engagement created a new ideational platform that has implications for stability on the Korean peninsula. The idea of war aversion as the legacy of the engagement policy, which rejects war as a means to resolve the North Korean problem, is now a common ideational feature between both the engagement and the containment groups. In South Korea's public domain, virtually no one is promoting the idea of military means to counter Pyongyang's delinquent behavior. Even with the sinking of South Korea's navy vessel, *Cheonan*, in 2010 the South Korean voters did not rally behind the conservative ruling Grand National Party in the June 2 local election. Rather, South Koreans handed the Democrat party, the political heir of the two late Presidents Kim and Roh, a landslide victory. Fear over national security and the revived inter-Korean tension backfired for the conservative administration. The likelihood of South Korea initiating war in the Korean peninsula is low. In this sense, the engagement policy continues on; the norm of war aversion has become the de facto security culture of South Korea. The option of engagement still lingers through South Korea's national identity, though the prospects for the return of an engagement policy are not clear.

Reconciliation on the Korean peninsula has now returned to ground zero as of 2010. Those "Sunshiners" of past administrations are now lethargically watching inter-Korean relations deteriorate. Uncertainty coupled with a pessimistic outlook looms large. At the least, prospects for resumption of the Six Party Talks are not good, and even less any breakthrough in inter-Korean relations. Perhaps we may need atrophy to stimulate the realization that the

only route to reconciliation has to begin with changes within ourselves and that containment strengthens the hardliner faction within the enemy state. Reflecting on South Korea's case, it might be suggested that there is a long-term solution to a protracted conflict that does not have to do with external pressure, sanctions, and the threat to use force. It seems possible that reconciliation might be brought about not principally by mechanical reciprocity, but by a daunting wake-up call that, since containment is essentially irrelevant to reconciliation, it is profoundly foolish.

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