

Perception of Korean Reunification among Japanese Experts: The Collective Frame Approach

KOROSTELINA, Karina and UESUGI, Yuji

Abstract

With the unfolding process of reunification between two Koreas, Japanese experts have very limited information to make reliable predictions. This study asks how experts in Japan assess and construct meaning of the reunification of two Koreas and evaluate its impact on Japan. Our assumption is that while Japanese experts have incomplete knowledge about perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of North Koreans, they form their expectations and predictions regarding reunification of two Koreas based on their views gained through their interactions with South Koreans as well as meanings of national identity and the perceptions of the position of Japan in the region.

The results show that in assessing the possibility of reunification of two Koreas, the respondents used four major frames—(1) protection; (2) moral responsibility; (3) restorative justice; and (4) peace—with four overlapping areas that united pairs of frames. All four frames represent the same structure: (1) a definition of the possible outcomes of the reunification, (2) a justification of this definition based on perceptions of national identity in Japan and relations between Japan and South Korea, and (3) prescriptions for future actions and policies. They also represented the three sets of perceived problems of reunification, expressed by all respondents: (1) low support towards reunification among the population in South Korea, (2) uneven political, economic and social status of two Koreas, and (3) the attributed position of North Korea on the reunification.

INTRODUCTION

With the unfolding process of reunification between two Koreas, it is important to explore how experts in Japan assess and understand the process and consequences of the reunification of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). Based on the insights from the fields of conflict analysis and resolution and psychology, this paper asks how experts frame the process of reunification and evaluate its impact on Japan. The collective frame explains the process of the assessment of social reality and meaning-making in situation of uncertainty based on the already established interpretative schemata. The authors predict that incomplete knowledge about perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of North Koreans among experts in Japan has led to the formation of expectations and predictions regarding reunification of South and North Korea. It is also anticipated that these experts' views were gained through their perceptions of relations between Japan and South Korea, of national identity, and of the position of Japan in the

region.

Our research is based on the triangulation of qualitative methods that includes semi-structural interviews and focus group discussions as methods of data collection, and the phenomenological analysis as a method of data analysis. Our main sample consists of 20 experts. In addition, 17 students were also interviewed to check the level of propagation of the experts' views in the public. The results show four major frames used by the respondents in their assessment of the possibility of reunification of South and North Korea: (1) protection; (2) moral responsibility; (3) restorative justice; and (4) peace. The respondents also expressed their opinions on perceived problems of reunification that can be united in three groups: (1) low support towards reunification among the population in South Korea, (2) uneven political, economic and social status of South and North Korea, and (3) the attributed position of North Korea on the reunification.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF FRAMES

The meaning of specific communicative acts gains meaning within larger interpretive frames⁽¹⁾ that act as cognitive schemata or mental frameworks that define our perceptions, understandings and views of reality.⁽²⁾ They help us systematize our experience and provide normative prescriptions for possible actions. In dealing with the complex social reality, people employ these acquired structures of interpretation to examine, categorize and make meaning out of situations and experiences.⁽³⁾ Frames as a form of analytical constructs—“concrete and stable system of symbols,”⁽⁴⁾ “conceptual scaffolding,”⁽⁵⁾ “primary frameworks,”⁽⁶⁾ or symbolic references⁽⁷⁾—help us develop comprehension of the world organizing coherent ideas essential for our perceptions and actions.⁽⁸⁾

It is important to underline that a frame defines not only our ways of interpretation of specific situations but also what particular issues or conditions receive our attention. They set specific expectations for what we should be looking for and what matters and what is important to notice.⁽⁹⁾ Within different frames, the same situation will be more or less important for the observer and, thus, will have different meanings or significances.⁽¹⁰⁾ These frames can differ in terms of the scope and the level of conceptualization.⁽¹¹⁾ Broader, more expansive and inclusive interpretive frames are considered to be the master frames, such as frames of injustice, human rights, democracy and anti-globalization.⁽¹²⁾

In defining social reality, these master frames fulfil different functions. The social command frame defines social relations in terms of dominance and obedience, strength and weakness, control and dependency, as well as threat and security.⁽¹³⁾ It is a hegemonic and oppressive construct that emphasizes a hierarchical order supported by coercive power. The social contest frame defines societal relations as a competition for scarce resources and opportunities between self-interested individuals. Within this frame, effective laws and institutions help organize social relations in affective and productive ways, however, social injustices and inequalities remain embedded in the society. The third frame, the social body frame, stresses the importance of interdependence, peace, justice and humanity for the well-being of every

individual or group.⁽¹⁴⁾

A close analysis of the types of frames provides a foundation for understanding of how people contrast ingroup and outgroup in the process of framing. Gamsen argues that people use three kinds of frames: “aggregate frames”; “consensus frames”; and “collective action frames.”⁽¹⁵⁾ Aggregate frames identify issues as social problems and motivate people for particular actions. Consensus frames stress a resolution approach to a social problem through collective actions. These types of frames contribute to the salience of ingroup identity, but do not position what the outgroup is accountable for this problem. The concentration on a certain outgroup that creates a problem through essentially wrong actions is evident in collective action frames. They also outline an adversarial relationship between the ingroup that is motivated and able to deal with the problem through collective actions and the outgroup that is profane and resisting the ingroup. Collective action frames are rooted in three component frames: injustice, agency and identity.⁽¹⁶⁾ Similarly, Snow and Benford describe several types of frame that define how people deal with the social issues.⁽¹⁷⁾ ‘Diagnostic framing’ clearly outlines a problem and allocates a blame for the problem to a specific person or a group. ‘Prognostic framing’ provides ideas for solutions and detailed strategies, tactics and objectives. ‘Motivational framing’ develops motivation to pursue the goals.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Data for the study was collected in the capitol of Japan, Tokyo, during the Summer of 2018 through the use of face to face semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Each interview included six questions that were developed to explore the formation and functioning of interpretative frames, including the construction of ingroup and outgroup identities and meanings in the process of framing. For this purpose, we concentrated on the importance of history and memory for national identity in Japan, the connection between interpretations of history and current conflicts between South Korea and Japan, and an assessment of the reconciliation process between South Korea and Japan, including official apologies made by successive Japanese governments. The list of questions included: How are history and memory

important for the national identity in Japan? How current relationships between South Korea and Japan are affected by the history? Do you see the possibility of improving relationships between two Koreas? Will the reunification of two Koreas impact the relationship between Japan and the united Korea? Why is the post-war settlement and reconciliation between South Korea and Japan still an issue? Why does South Korea perceive attempts of Japan to apologize as non-sincere? What should be done to promote the reconciliation between Japan and Korea? Each individual interview and focused group discussion lasted between one and two-and-a-half hours.

The sampling method employed for the study comprised snowballing with several entry points to ensure a diversity of views and attitudes. The final sample for individual interviews included 20 respondents, including 16 academics (historians, political scientists, sociologists, and international relations scholars who work as university professors or scholars in think tanks), two representatives of non-governmental organizations (including peacebuilding and youth organizations), and two doctoral students working on projects in the field of foreign affairs. Six of the interviewees were female and 14 were male; the age of the participants varied from 28 to 70, with the largest group being approximately 45 years old. The interviews were conducted primarily in English, though an interpreter assisted in one interview. Given the majority of the interviewees write and communicate in English in professional and international settings, English proficiency of most of the interviewees was high. The final sample for focused group discussions included 17 respondents, including BA and MA students from Waseda University and International Christian University in Tokyo. Ten interviewees were female and seven were male, and their age varied from 19 to 25. The interviews were conducted in English. Given all of them write and communicate in English in academic settings, and their English proficiency was high.

The interview protocol was approved by the Institutional Research Board (Project Number: 1245830-1). According to the protocol, the data in this study is to be confidential and no name could be mentioned in the analysis or presentation of the results.

Data Analysis

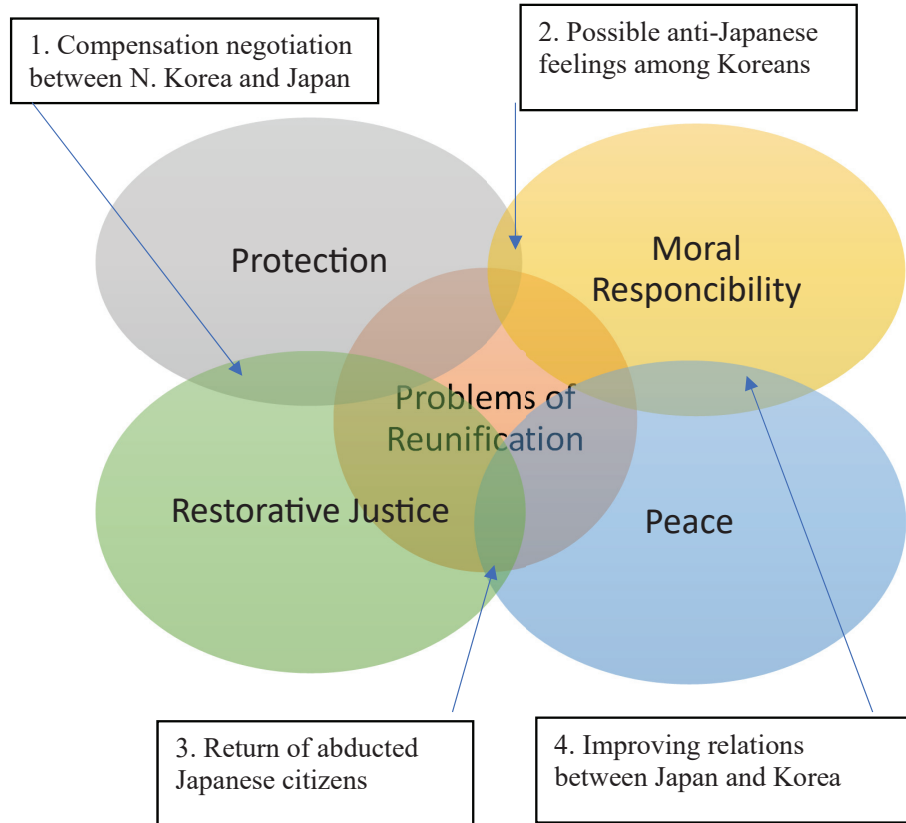
A phenomenological analysis was employed to analyze the interview data. This method of data collection enables researchers to understand what social boundaries people perceive in their understanding of past events and experiences in the context of today's discourse. Several stages comprise a phenomenological analysis. First, several themes were identified to manage large data clusters without losing the deep meaning of received information or the focus of the research questions.⁽¹⁸⁾ We formed specific clusters by merging similar or related themes and making a summary table of the structured themes. These clusters were independent from the six questions as many themes were cross-cutting across the questions. The analysis carried out on each individual interview contributed to the generation of common and general themes for all or most of the interviews.⁽¹⁹⁾ The themes were then combined into four clusters related to four frames: (1) protection; (2) moral responsibility; (3) restorative justice; and (4) peace. Second, within each cluster, we identified factors that define the perceptions of possible reunification of two Koreas. Within each cluster, all respondents provided similar descriptions, thus one coherent narrative is presented to describe each cluster. Third, we identify three clusters within perceived problems of reunification shared by all respondents independently of the frame they employ to discuss the effects of reunification.

In the result section, the descriptions of the frames are based on the analysis of the positions of our respondents and are not opinions of the authors. Through the analysis, we used various concepts as they were expressed by the respondents. For example, references to Japan are connected with the perception of Japan as a country, while references to Japanese people are connected with the perceptions of citizens of Japan. In Japan, people with Korean origin (both from North and South) form a special group called 'Zainichi' Koreans. They were not treated as a distinct category in our research.

RESULTS

The data analysis revealed four major frames used by our respondents in describing their views on possible reunification of two Koreas. These four frames include (1) protection; (2) moral responsibility; (3) restorative justice; and (4) peace (see Pic. 1). We

Picture 1. Four frames of assessment of the reunification of two Koreas.



also found four overlapping areas that united pairs of frames. Thus, both protection and restorative justice frames stress the importance of negotiation on compensation for victims of Japanese occupation of Korea. The frames of protection and moral responsibility emphasize possible anti-Japanese feelings among North Koreans. The importance of returning Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea constitutes an important part of both restorative justice and peace frames. Finally, the frames of peace and moral responsibility stress the importance of improving relations between Japan and the united Korea. We also found the perceived problems of reunification represented across all four frames, expressed by all respondents.

PROTECTION FRAME

This frame emphasizes the threat that the united Korea can pose to Japan. Many respondents stress that the reunification can help Koreans form a joint front against Japan and it can negatively impact relations between the united Korea and Japan. As one respondent states, “When two Koreas will have good relations, it will harm (their) relations with Japan.” Another respondent echoes, “South Korea and North

Korea are anti-Japanese nations thus the (re)unification (of the two) can be a threat to Japan. Reunification of two Koreas can allow them to unite against Japan.” The respondents expect that the united Korea can become more hostile to Japan than the current divided Koreas. As one respondent explains, “Nationalism in Korea will grow, so the united Korea will be more nationalistic and anti-Japanese.” These respondents also predict that the united Korea will have more power in the region, more control over the disputed island and more abilities to harm the position of Japan in the world. As one respondent describes, “Japan and South Korea should be allies, but if North Korea, with its positive relations with China, joins South Korea, it will be very damaging to Japan.” Some respondents stress that the worst-case scenario of the reunification is the genesis of a nuclear united Korea. As one respondent explains, “Seventy million people with nuclear weapons and good economy can be a strategic threat to Japan.” Another respondent seconds, “We see North Korea as more threatening than South Korea. I hope that the threat will be reduced, and de-nuclearization will happen.”

This protection frame is deeply rooted in the

opinion expressed by many respondents that there is limited knowledge among Japanese experts about the North Korean regime and (the feeling of) uncertainty about its position vis-a-vis reunification. As one respondent explains, "It is not clear how North Korea will change. It is a strange country because of its political regime." Another respondent also emphasizes the doubts, "We do not know how North Korea represents history. All we know is that North Korea has abducted (Japanese) people, so the reunification could bring more problems to Japan."

To overcome this uncertainty, the respondents use their knowledge of South Korea and extrapolate them into the reunification process. Their perception of South Korea as a nationalistic country with its nationalism rooted in historical narratives helps them predict possible negative effects of the reunification. Respondents believe that South Korea promotes negative stereotypes about Japan through salient anti-Japanese education. According to respondents, majority of South Koreans have accepted adverse attitudes toward Japan which were indoctrinated through the compulsory education in South Korea. As one respondent states, "Education in South Korea plays a very important and negative role. Many people in South Korea, including students, are always reminded what Japan did during the era of colonization. They see themselves as victims of Japan's aggression." Another respondent echoes, "In South Korea, they are told that they are victims, and it is profound in their history education and national narratives. It shapes their perception of the WWII." Some respondents also underline that both media and public diplomacy in South Korea endorse nationalistic attitudes toward history between two countries portraying Japan in a very negative light. As one respondent states, "In South Korea, there is much more awareness about history. They employ very good public diplomacy and public opinion making based on history. Japan is not good at it."

Majority of our respondents emphasize how South Korea employs historical narratives to spread nationalistic sentiments among its citizens as well as to increase its power in the international arena. As one respondent states, "South Korean Government is using this conflict to increase its power. They manipulate power and history to unite its country." Another respondent describes, "For South Korea, the memory

of Japanese occupation dominates. South Korea always tries to bring this issue, and Japan think they are using it to gain more power and influence." Yet, another respondent echoes, "South Korea is deliberately using the issues of comfort women and the disputed island for political purposes, bringing them to the international level and harming the image of Japan. It succeeds in undermining Japanese position by using the idea of victimhood. They use all available means." Respondents consider such a use of a historical narrative by South Korea as a tool for negotiating with Japan that helps South Korea maximize its gains.

Some respondents believe that this emphasis on history in South Korea arrives from the necessity to increase the sense of national unity among people. This focus on negative history and victimhood in domestic dynamics in South Korea. According to some respondents, this helps South Korean politicians to acquire and preserve their power. As one respondent states, "Victimhood and negative attitudes towards Japan unites people in South Korea. It is hard to become a politician there without catering to the public. It is a self-trap there." Respondents also stress the link between the historical discourses and the contemporary situation. Thus, according to them, Takeshima/Dokdo island is a positive symbolic representation of the independence war and their national identity. As one respondent explains, "South Koreans did not get their independence as a result of their war efforts, it was brought by the U.S. victory. On the other hand, the island was taken forcefully from Japan by South Korea's unilateral action, thus the island is a representative of the Korean victory." Another respondent echoes, "The fight for the island is a representation of their national pride." They also emphasize the role of civil society in shaping negative attitudes toward Japan. As one respondent explains, "They redefine violence and colonization as human right issues: for them de-colonization and democratization are connected." Another respondent stresses "Civic movement brought up the comfort women issue and media contributed to rising tensions."

According to some respondents, this nationalistic approach to history in South Korea results in negative collective emotions, strong nationalism and negative perceptions of Japan. They also stress the persistence of these negative views on Japan among the public that are hard to challenge, much less change. They

extrapolate this negativity toward Japan to North Korea and believe that the reunification will require more defensive measures from Japan to protect their position in the region and the image in international relations. Thus, some respondents stress that the united Korea needs to convince Japan that it will be peaceful. However, according to them, there are no considerable or credible information that the unified Korea would neither be nuclear nor anti-Japanese. Respondents underscore the importance of protecting Japan's interests when two Koreas start the process of reunification.

This frame is connected to the justice frame as it stresses the possibility that North Korea will request compensations and retributions. One respondent states, "North Korea wants to receive money as we did not pay because we did not have diplomatic relations with them. Now North Korea can claim payments and compensations." While the process of compensation can be an excellent opportunity for Japan to make economic contributions, and profit out of reconstruction and development business, these respondents frame the possible demand for payments from North Korea as an additional threat to Japan. They also underline the importance of protecting Japanese interests and positions. The frame of protection is also connected to the moral responsibility frame: they both emphasize possible anti-Japanese feelings among North Koreans. However, while the moral responsibility frame is rooted in the feeling of accountability of Japan for the division of Korea, the protection frame stresses negative feelings of citizens of both Koreas toward Japan that can result in aggressive actions of the united Korea.

MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FRAME

This frame is rooted in a deep feeling of moral responsibility of Japan for colonizing and mobilizing Koreans for the war as well as for the divisions of Koreas. Responders express a strong belief that as Japan is responsible for the division, the reunification represents a great opportunity for Japan to address this issue. As one respondent explains, "Division of Koreas in 1948 was a tragedy for everyone. It has led to a civil war. In 1950s, the U.S. needed an ally to fight against North Korea and thus it built cooperation with Japan. The participation of Japan in the Korean War provided a boost for Japanese economy. This divide

was a mistake. Japan should have helped the reunification and de-nuclearization of Korea." Some respondents argue that in Europe, the aggressor state—Germany—had been divided by the victorious powers, but in North East Asia, it was Korea that became a victim of ideological and territorial division. They acknowledge the role that Japanese aggression played in the partition of Korea. As one respondent discusses, "As Japan did not surrender in time, it should take responsibility for the division of Korea and help the (re)unification process."

The frame of moral responsibility rests on the perceptions of unfinished reconciliation between Japan and two Koreas. Respondents acknowledge that many Japanese people, especially representatives of the older generation, have self-condemning attitudes and regrets regarding actions of Japan in Korea. Their feelings are deeply rooted in pacifism and a belief that Japan needs to apologize and compensate for its colonial policies in Korea. As one respondent states, "People feel very sorry for what Japan did to Korea, for colonialism and aggression, and believe that Japan needs to deal with it." As another respondent verifies, "Japanese people feel guilty and nervous in relations with South Korea." However, some respondents emphasize that the situation is changing. As one respondent explains, "Feeling of guilt is still important among the older generation. Many older teachers were left-wing activists and sought a controlled education, but in 1980s such a trend disappeared, and teachers' unions are no longer active."

According to many respondents, this shift in the feeling of guilt and the importance of apology is rooted in the recent changes in history education and increasing collective amnesia. Respondents emphasize that in Japan the knowledge about Japanese occupation of Korea is very limited. As one respondent clarifies, "In Japan, people do not know what really happened during the occupation, and thus, they are frustrated by South Korean Government's attempt to bring an accusation again and again. Japanese only know the fact that Japanese colonization accelerated the modernization process of South Korea. They only have positive knowledge about the occupation and thus, do not understand why South Korea is still arguing about it. They could not appreciate properly the significance of Japan's colonization policies in Korea and thus, they could not understand why Koreans have

to raise this issue again and again.”

Many of respondents discuss that the colonial history in Japan is often denied and many facts regarding the number of victims and forced laborers are misrepresented. They point out the fact that very limited or absent portrayal of comfort women and colonization in history textbooks used in a compulsory public education in Japan. This misinformation by the Japanese Government and its approach to history education, according to respondents, can be explained by “the need to rescue history from the victor’s interpretation.” Unable to deal with the difficult past, people discontinued thinking about history and turn to forgetting. As one respondent states, “It is hard to apologize and rescue history at the same time. It is a symbolic phenomenon that shows how deep historic amnesia progresses in Japan.” Another respondent emphasizes, “In Japan, people consider history belong to the past and do not want to return to it again and again.”

To address this dilemma of moral responsibility and a denial of history, many respondents underline the need for a historic analysis. As one respondent states, “Memory of the war is very important. All political and economic problems are discussed in terms of Japan’s war responsibility in the WWII.” Similarly, another respondent argues, “We need to start reviewing what we have done in the past. Both glories and mistakes are important for Japanese history. Japan has to face all of it.” These respondents believe that history of Japan’s colonial occupation and the role of Japan in the division of Korea should be represented in Japan’s history textbooks and should not be negated by the Japanese Government. It would help to approach the process of reunification of Korea from the point of moral responsibility and support both Koreas in this process.

This moral responsibility frame is interconnected with the protection frame. Many respondents discuss that because of the issue of Japan’s responsibility for the occupation and the subsequent division of Korea has not been adequately addressed, people in the united Korea could still hold very strong anti-Japanese feelings. As one respondent states, “Koreans believe that Japan benefited from the separation of Koreas and the Korean War.” Another respondent echoes, “People in both Koreas hold Japan responsible for the division and violence between Koreas.” In addition, both frames of peace and moral responsibility underscore

the importance of improving relations between Japan and Korea. However, if the peace frame sees better relations as a way to peace, the moral responsibility frame threatens them as an opportunity for Japan to finally make things right.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE FRAME

This frame highlights the importance of restorative justice in relations between Japan and North Korea. It underlines that restorative justice is a reciprocal process that requires both compensation of victims of Japanese occupation policies in Korea and the return of Japanese abductees from North Korea. Many respondents state that victims of Japanese aggression who live in North Korea should be compensated by Japanese Government. As one respondent stresses, “After the (re)unification, Japan needs to negotiate compensation with North Korea.” Another respondent echoes, “We need to discuss compensation with North Korea, because we have never done it.”

At the same time, many respondents emphasize that all abductees should be returned to Japan by North Korea. As one respondent stresses, “Japan is a victim in this relation. It is important to return victims of abduction.” Another respondent discusses, “Together with the compensation for North Koreans, the issue of abducted people should be resolved.” Other respondents emphasize, “Japan should insist on returning the victims of abduction as it is an issue of human rights.” They believe that the reunification will create the conditions necessary for the resolution of the abduction issue. As one respondent discusses, “We still need to remember abductions. Japanese citizens were not returned. The reunification of Korea is a hope for their return.”

According to some respondents, Korean reunification will help deal with the legacy of colonialism. They believe that North Korea has more legitimacy in terms of dealing with the perpetrators of violence and war. As one respondent explains, “North Korea resolved the issue of the past, punished or expelled all collaborators with Japan while in South Korea many of the former perpetrators’ children are still in power.” As another respondent discusses, “South Korea did not deal with colonialism, have difficulties to face it, and it affects its relations with Japan. The approach that North Korea used toward the history may help to finish conversations about the war.” Thus, these

respondents think that North Korea has dealt the issue of the perpetrators of violence in a more ‘just’ manner than South Korea and that South Korea should adopt such an approach after the reunification.

The frame of restorative justice rests on the perception of Japanese responsibility and an unfinished process of forgiveness on the part of Koreans. Thus, many respondents believe that the Japanese Government’s apology is only partially complete or not sincere, with many politicians expressing opposite points of view. As one respondent states, “Japan issued an apology for only few things, it does not cover everything.” As one respondent describes, “Even some leaders apologize, (while) others continue to believe that Japan did all the right things. Some Japanese politicians cater to the conservative public that honestly believes that Japan did nothing wrong and thus demonize South Korea.” Another respondent echoes, “Japan never did enough for reconciliation, some politicians ignored or denied responsibility.” Many respondents believe that Japan should compensate the victims and sincerely apologize to them.

Another important basis for the justice frame is the belief in shared responsibility of both Japanese and South Korean Governments. Respondents state that Korean leaders also participated in colonization and collaborated with the Japanese Imperial Government. Thus, they see it as an issue of human rights of women and forced laborers that should be addressed by both Japanese and South Korean Governments. The respondents believe that restorative justice will help to finally address the issues of the contentious past and accept responsibility of both Japanese and South Korean leaders for autocracies and violent policies toward the Korean people.

This restorative justice frame is connected to the peace frame as respondents believe that the reunification will help the united Korea return Japanese abductees and thus restore peace and justice in the region. Both protection and restorative justice frames stress the importance of negotiation on compensation of victims of Japanese occupation of Korea. However, while the protection frame positions the possible claim of payments by North Korea as a threat to Japan and highlights the significance of protection of Japanese direct economic and diplomatic interests, the restorative justice frame sees compensation for victims as an important foundation for justice and sustaining

peace in the region.

PEACE FRAME

This frame emphasizes the importance of the reunification for the resolution of conflicts in the region and achieving peace. As one respondent states, “The (re)unification will create peace. I am very positive about it.” They also believe that the reunification will start a new post-war era of lasting peace that will finally resolve all the WWII related issues. Respondents discuss positive outcomes of the reunifications for both relations between two Koreas as well as for the region. As one respondent states, “Now Koreas are divided as a nation in conflict. Their (re)unification will bring peace and improve relations in the region in general.” Another respondent echoes, “The (re)unification is good, because it will improve relationships between Koreas. Recently observed joint participation in the Olympic game by both Koreas is a good development.”

Many respondents also believe that the reunification will help improve relations between Koreas and Japan. As one respondent discusses, “Koreas can improve relations with Japan when they both become more open.” Some respondents state that better relations between Koreas will lead to better interrelations with Japan because Japan will be less concerned about North Korea, nuclear weapons, and escalation of conflict in the region. One respondent explains, “Japanese people believe that they need to protect themselves from nuclear weapons in North Korea but if peace is achieved; we can start a positive communication with them.” Finally, some respondents believe that the reunification will help Japanese people to get more knowledge about North Korea which help them better understand Korea in general.

Some respondents also discuss that the peace in the region will be achieved through the cooperation between the new united Korea and Japan. They believe that this new alliance will help Japan to stand against Russia and China. As one respondent states, “It is very important to improve relations with Korea, as Japan is a small country. We face the same threats and need to unite with each other to face the rise of China and Russia.”

This frame is based on a deep belief among respondents that Japan is a country with a strong value of peace. Majority of them state that Japanese national

identity is not rooted in nationalistic or aggressive sentiments. They stress that public education in Japan avoids nationalism and it is rather a moral education that emphasizes what is right for the society, how to maintain social order, and what social norms are important for the society. As one respondent states, “There is no common meaning of identity and views on history in Japan. Education avoids emphasizing national identity, nationalism and patriotisms. Not a lot of respect for national symbols because they are connected to war.” Many respondents discuss that the war history had not only a negative impact on Japanese national identity but also it generated strong inspirations and aspirations for peace among people. As one respondent stresses, “Being peaceful is the most important value for Japanese identity.” Another respondent explains, “History of the WWII made us very careful and peaceful, and very conscious about how easily you can become powerful and then fail. So, it is very important to be careful not to become nationalistic.” Thus, these respondents show that Japan promotes values of peace and sees the reunification of the two Koreas in the context of developing peace in the region.

The importance of returning Japanese abductees by North Korea constitutes an important part of both restorative justice and peace frames as they both stress that the reunification can help to restore justice and build peace in the region. Both frames of peace and moral responsibility highlight the importance of improving relations between Japan and Korea. However, while the moral responsibility frame treats improved relations between two Koreas as an opportunity for Japan to finally make things right, the peace frame sees better relations between Japan and the united Korea as a way towards peace in the wider region.

PROBLEMS OF REUNIFICATION

Problems of reunification were discussed by respondents representing each of four frames. Independently of a specific frame, problems can be organized in three clusters: (1) Low support among population in South Korea, (2) uneven status of Koreas, and (3) the position of North Korea toward reunification.

Many respondents discuss the low support among the population of South Korea as an impediment for

the reunification. One of the reasons for this perceived disinterest in the reunification is widening gaps between generations. Respondents believe that older generations in South Korea want reunification because it was promoted by their parents as well as through the state education. However, younger generations are not interested in the united Korea. As one respondent states, “The higher number of older people in South Korea feel that it is good to unite Korea than younger people. Younger people do not see (re)unification as good.” Another reason for the low support discussed by our respondents is negative attitudes among people in South Korea toward its northern compatriots. Negative attitudes are especially strong among people who escaped from North Korea. As one respondent stress, “It is not easy for many people in South Korea, as they are against the reunification and see North Korea as their enemy.”

The second cluster of anticipated problems of reunification reflects concerns about uneven status of two Koreas and a deep gap that exists between them on political, economic and social spheres. As one respondent states, “Koreas are too different to be united. South Korea is more developed, but North Korea has more legitimacy in terms of the legacy of war.” Some respondents emphasize significant differences of the two Koreas and substantial costs of reunification, implying that the process of reunifications will be very costly and difficult. They also expect that former citizens of North Korea will be discriminated against the former citizens of South Korea in the united Korea. As one respondent discusses, “After the (re)unification, North Koreans will be treated as secondary people and tensions will raise between them and South Koreans. The gap is very wide.” Anticipating such complications, many respondents suggest that there should not be one united country of Koreans but rather efforts to build a better relation between them should be required.

Finally, respondents emphasize that the position of North Korea would be the main problem for the reunification process. They do not believe that North Korea would give up its nuclear weapons. As one respondent explains, “North Korea is aware of the cost of being swallowed. Kim (Jong-Unn) denies the possibility of giving up his nuclear weapons. North Korea has successfully developed nuclear weapons to protect itself and get a world-wide attention. Kim would never

give them up, so the talk will eventually lead to a deadlock.” Other respondents discuss the imminent destruction of the regime in North Korea as a result of the reunification process, and stress that North Korean leadership is aware of such consequences and it would seek to preserve its power at any cost. As one respondent states, “North Korea could not survive in this (re)unification. If it introduces change, people would not want the North Korean Government any more. North Korea will be swallowed by the South.” Thus, our respondents are skeptical about the prospect of the reunification process and the probability of reestablishing the united Korea.

DISCUSSION

The results of our study show that the respondents used collective frames to systematize their knowledge and experience of dealing with South Korea, and provided normative prescriptions for possible actions, when they were addressing the issues of the reunification of North and South Korea. It reflects the theoretical understanding of framing that a response to complex social realities would be determined based on already developed structures of interpretation, categorization and meaning-making. Depending on the theoretical notions about the types of collective framing, we assume that the process of framing will involve the construction of the meaning of Japan and Japanese people as an ingroup and North and South Korea as an outgroup. Based on the description of the types of frames made by Gamson,⁽²⁰⁾ we found that our respondents have used collective action frames, utilizing three main component frames: injustice, agency and identity. More specifically, the perception of the possible reunification of Korea can be described through (a) a definition of the reunification within specific frames, (b) an identification of the possible problems or perspectives based on perceptions of relations between Japan and South Korea or the position and values of Japan, and (c) specific prescriptions, strategies, and methods to deal with this situation and with South and North Korea. As our research shows, each of the four frames has the similar structure, reflecting these three components: a definition, a justification and a normative prescription. This finding resonates with the description of diagnostic and prognostic framing made by Snow and Benford.⁽²¹⁾ However, we found components of both of these

frames represented in opinions of our respondents.

Our analysis shows that the protection frame represents the prospective united Korea as a threat to Japan. The frame described the united Korea as extremely nationalistic, aggressive and anti-Japanese with the intentions to harm Japan and undermine its position in the world. This frame is deeply rooted in the belief that South Korea promotes negative perceptions of Japan and acts as its protagonist in the region. This frame prescribes a very careful approach to the reunification and developing strong protective measures against the united Korea.

The moral responsibility frame acknowledges the accountability of Japan for the division of Korea and describes the reunification process as a much-anticipated possibility to finally address the issue of war responsibility. This frame rests on the beliefs that Japan does not deal with its history in a rightful way. It suggests that Japan has an obligation and a moral duty to support the reunification process and help unite the separated Korea.

The restorative justice frame emphasizes the importance of reciprocity in relations between two Korea and Japan. It is based on the perceptions of the unfinished process of reconciliation and the failure of Japan and South Korea to collaboratively and effectively address the issues of the past. It requires the compensation for the victims of Japanese occupation who now live in North Korea as well as the return of all Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea.

The peace frame provides a very positive and optimistic view on the reunification as an opportunity to finally resolve conflicts and create peace in the region. It is rooted in the belief that Japan is a peaceful nation and values collaboration and concord in the region. It prescribes support for the reunification process and the participation of Japan in the regional cooperation for such a process.

These four frames can be described as the social contest frames and social body frames.⁽²²⁾ The protection frame that defines societal relations as a competition for power, and it emphasizes the need for security is a representation of social contest frames. Other three frames—moral responsibility, restorative justice and peace—are social body frames that highlight the significance of peace, justice and reconciliation in relations between nations.

CONCLUSION

The possibility of reunification of Korea creates multiple discussions and diverse opinions among Japanese experts. According to our respondents, the information about North Korea is very limited, thus experts in our interviews relied on their knowledge about social and political processes in South Korea, the dynamics of relations between Japan and both Koreas, and meanings of national identity of Japan. Despite differences in opinions, our study has helped identify four major frames that represent the position of experts toward reunification. These frames range from the expectations of increasing threat to the prospects of peace and justice. However, all four frames represent the same structure: (1) a definition of the possible outcomes of the reunification, (2) a justification of this definition based on perceptions of national identity in Japan and relations between Japan and South Korea, and (3) prescriptions for future actions and policies.

The study also reveals the clusters of problems that, according to our experts, can impede the reunification process. The first cluster is based on the low support toward reunification among the population in South Korea, especially among younger generations and people who defected from North Korea in the past. The second cluster includes different dimensions of the uneven status of Koreas: economic, political and social. The third cluster describes the problematic position of North Korean leadership toward reunification and its unwillingness to give up its nuclear weapons and power.

As the process of reunification will unfold and more information about North Korea will be available to experts in Japan, their opinions may change. However, the authors believe that the four frames that our study has revealed will continue to define major patterns of perceptions and attitudes among Japanese experts toward the reunification of South Korea and North Korea.

NOTES

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