

Korea–European Union relations: beyond the FTA?

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Abstract

In 2009, Korea and the European Union (EU) signed a free trade agreement. Using a traditional list of state goals in foreign policy – national security, economic growth, prestige-seeking, and values-promotion – I examine the prospects for cooperation and integration in the future. I find that deeper engagement is unlikely. Most importantly, neither side is relevant to the basic security issues of the other. Specifically, the EU cannot assist Korea in its acute security dilemma, and ‘sovereignist’ Korea does not share EU preferences for soft power, regionalization, and multilateral collective security. However, Korea is likely to pursue the relationship for cost-free prestige-taking. And the EU will understand this ‘Asian bridge’ as a success for the promotion of liberal-democratic values in a non-European context. Pro-regionalist elites, most notably the ‘eureaucracy’, may pursue ‘inter-regional’ ties for internal institutional reasons, but deep Korean attachment to the Westphalian state model will likely stymie such efforts.

1 Introduction

In 2009, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the European Union (EU) concluded a free trade agreement (FTA). This is the most significant step forward in the postwar history of these actors (Bridges 2008; Park and Yoon, 2010, p. 178). European, and more specifically EU, interest in Korea has been traditionally quite low; the EU common foreign and security policy (CFSP) literature says little on Korea (Krotz and Maher, 2011). Similarly, the ROK has had little need for an ‘EU policy’ in its history (Heo, 2004, pt. V). This may be changing, as the FTA promises closer observation of each by the other. Both the EU and Korea have recently turned toward FTA as a foreign policy tool (Bhagwati, 2008; Gavin and Sindzingre, 2009; Ravenhill, 2010). For both sides, this FTA is arguably the most important completed to date (Lee-Makiyama, 2010). This lays a foundation on which to conceivably build a relationship beyond the sheer material utility of trade (Gilpin, 2001, ch. 13).

This paper examines the lineaments of a conceivable post-FTA deeper Korea–EU relationship. It begins from a basic list of goals which states pursue in world politics. This list is framed very generically in order to avoid paradigmatic contentions among various international relations (IR) paradigms. I suggest four goals: national security, economic growth, prestige, and values promotion. Because both sides perceive the FTA to bolster economic growth – otherwise, they would not have approved it (Krugman and Obstfeld, 1991, ch. 9; Ravenhill, 2010, p. 202) – I focus my attention on the other three aspects. In brief, my question is, how does a deeper (more cooperative, perhaps more integrated) EU–Korea relationship serve the national security, prestige desires, and political/cultural values of each side?

Following a rationalist logic of expected utility, my answer is that a deeper relationship does not in fact serve these goals much, most importantly that of Korean security (Park and Yoon, 2010). Because the EU cannot credibly bolster South Korean (SK) security against North Korea (NK), it is unlikely that Korea will find much utility in a richer political/military dialogue. Korea’s primary further interest in the EU is likely its rising, middle power interest in status-seeking (Huer, 2009; Oh, 2010, p. 129; Park and Yoon, 2010). The ROK will broadcast its EU relationship to its own citizens and the global media as an example of ‘Korea

rising.’¹ But positional prestige-taking – while a deep craving of rising postcolonial powers like Korea (Nel, 2010) – does not equal a desire for further bilateral integration (Rosen, 2005).

For the EU, already a highly visible and prestigious actor, the relationship with Korea offers little status gain. Instead, the EU will take psychological satisfaction in building a bridge to one of the Asia’s few cultures to fully adopt European Enlightenment values. Ironically, the EU need not engage in values promotion with Korea – as it does with China or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – because Korea has already been won over (Obama, 2009, 2011; Park and Yoon, 2010, p. 190).

Finally, certain sub- and supra-national actors may seek to encourage deeper EU–Korea relations. Specifically, the European Commission and the wider ‘eureaucracy’ are likely to push for more for bureaucratic infighting purposes (Moravcsik, 1998; Krotz, 2009). Foreign relationships conducted at the EU level, a genuine CFSP, help establish the EU’s still-contested ‘actorness’ (Toej, 2011) and improve its bargaining position against member-states fighting to retain foreign policy-making authority (Bersick, 2002a; Rueland, 2002a,b; Krotz, 2009; Krotz and Maher, 2011). Kantian-Europhilic elites – both the EU and academic – are also likely to push for further SK–EU integration, including through the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM). The European literature on ASEM is suffused with normative exhortation for its further integration (Lim, 2001; O’Brien, 2001; Gilson, 2002, 2005, 2007; Lawson, 2002; Rueland, 2002a; Bersick, 2002b, 2004; Gilson and Yeo, 2004; 2006; Reiterer, 2006, 2009). To the extent that East Asia regionalizes and negotiates with the EU as ‘Asia’ in ASEM, this too helps the EU’s domestic bureaucratic interest in consolidation and the reduction of internal member-states’ autonomy (Toej, 2011). However, Korea remains deeply wedded to the modernist, the Westphalian model of the autonomous state representing a distinct people and culture (Cumings, 2005; Kang, 2009; Kim, 2010a, b). It does not share the EU (self-) interest in Asian regionalization and consequent ‘interregional’ dialogue.

1 ‘Global Korea’ is an initiative of the current South Korean administration, which sponsors an eponymous annual conference (<http://www.globalkorea2011.kr/>). Reporting on the President Lee’s remarks at the 2010 conference, Hwang (2010) writes that ‘the Lee government’s core goal for 2010 and beyond is raising national prestige, including assuming a bigger international responsibility commensurate with its economic power ...’.

Given the incongruity of interests and capabilities beyond just more trade, I predict that the FTA is the likely plateau of the relationship – despite, perhaps, a post-FTA uptick in tourism, language learning, academic studies, and other such soft ‘people-to-people’ interaction.²

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 introduces the thin history of Korea–EU relations before the FTA, stressing the irrelevance of either side to the other. Section 3 introduces the basic ‘super-paradigmatic’ IR model of four state interests. Sections 4 and 4 map those interests onto the relations of the EU and Korea, respectively, and suggest likely future policy efforts. Section 6 tabulates the summed benefits of a future partnership, stressing prestige gains for Korea and values promotion gains for the EU. Section 7 concludes that differences in perceived utility and political values – especially between a multilateralist–integrationist EU and nationalist–statist Korea – will block much future partnership. The methodology is simple rationalist process-tracing, in which each actor is presumed to pursue its national interests as generously defined in Section 3.

2 The EU–Korea relationship prior to the FTA

Typically, treatments of Europe’s interaction with Asia stress the semi-imperial contact of traders and later governments in the early nineteenth century (Chanda, 2006; Balme and Bridges, 2008; Kang, 2010). Korea however was generally spared this penetration. The external power that pushed Korea into modernization was Japan, with perhaps a dalliance of Russian intervention (Shin and Robinson, 2001). Japanese power over Korea was finally broken in 1945, but the postwar external influences over Korea were, and continue to be, broadly American and historical Chinese. Europe’s role has been minimal.

Great Britain did send 63,000 soldiers to fight in the Korean War, but Europe’s other major powers did not seriously assist. More generally, as the European powers retrenched from empire in the 1960s and 1970s, they grew more distant from Korean affairs. The United States, both militarily and economically, became the ROK’s sole alliance partner.

2 For example, see the annual Korean World Fora: http://www.koreanglobalfoundation.org/en/forum/?p_url=forum_c.

Similarly, the EU's primary relationship increasingly narrowed to the transatlantic alliance.

This Amero-centric posture changed in the 1990s (Brimmer, 2004; Posen, 2006; Kim, 2010b). For both, the Cold War's end encouraged new political-security thinking beyond a hard power tie to the United States. And the rise of Asia's 'tiger economies' encouraged both sides to look at each other's relevance anew. In Korea, the effective collapse in the 1990s of Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) as a credible competitor empowered a wave of anti-Americanism (Hwang, 2003). No longer a Cold War frontline state adjoining a hostile China, Soviet Union, and North Korea, South Korea could entertain new autonomy from the United States, and relations with the EU served this purpose. Europe too could look further afield as the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) also relaxed its dependence on the US power (Rosato, 2011). Asia's rapid growth, with Korea as one of its leading 'geese', created new possibilities for at least a trading relationship. This thinking, throughout Asia, culminated in the establishment of ASEM in 1996 (Connors *et al.*, 2004, ch. 7).

ASEM has only been a mixed success (Rueland, 2006; Reiterer, 2009). Touted as the third pillar in a 'triadic' world economy, it has not, as yet, fulfilled the hope of balancing the depth of the US–Europe or the US–East Asia bonds. ASEM has not spurred much in the way of deeper cooperation, much less integration (Yeo and Hofmeister, 2010). An ASEM FTA is to date unforeseeable. Other modes of cooperation, on issues such as terrorism, tourism, or student exchange, have been soft or minimally intrusive. ASEM's value-added, beyond an ethereal contribution to 'multilayered global governance', is sparse (Rueland, 2002b).³

Asia has not generally responded positively to the ASEM expectation of 'inter-regionalism'. Asian states remain too suspicious of each other⁴ for serious regional integration, without which a yet further 'inter-regional' dialogue could not meaningfully occur. Asian regionalism tends to focus on cooperation not integration, with the EU as an inappropriate template (Beeson, 2009). Indeed, the sluggishness of ASEM (Bersick, 2010) exemplifies the values collision between the EU

3 On the rule-making and analytical confusion generated by the proliferation of such vague global governance mechanisms, see Schweller (2009).

4 This is a widely noted concern among the contributors of Shambaugh and Yahuda (2008).

and Asian states generally. ‘Post-modern’ European preferences for regionalization, multilateralism, soft-power, and an ‘inter-regional’ foreign policy are not shared in Asia generally, nor in Korea specifically (Kagan, 2004; Bersick, 2008; Jhee, 2009). Asians remain deeply statist and ‘sovereignist’ (Spiro, 2000; Beeson, 2009, p. 511); Sutter writes, ‘the governments of Asia are strong, the peoples look to the governments to make key foreign policy decisions, and the governments do so on careful consideration of their national interests’ (2008, p. 93). Many have only recently escaped colonial or semi-imperial control. They have little interest in moving toward European–Kantian supranationalism (Cossa, 2008, p. 328; *Global Asia*, 2010).

In this environment, both the EU and Korea have recently turned to FTAs a centerpiece of foreign policy (Gavin and Sindzingre, 2009). The World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Doha Round is troubled, so both have drifted from WTO universalism toward the bilateralism of FTAs. The EU cannot achieve an ASEM FTA because of Asian intransigence; it has begun to seek individual partners in Asia, including proposed FTAs with China and India. Korea too has sought FTAs, beginning first with small economies such as Singapore and Chile, and moving now toward its larger ‘strategic partners’, the EU and United States. The EU–Korea FTA was initialed in October 2009 and entered into force on 1 July 2011.

Talks on the FTA began in May 2006. The negotiation rounds lasted from 2007 to 2009. The language was modeled on the Korea–US (‘Korus’) FTA also under negotiation. Progress was rapid, in part because of the low anticipated intra-industry competition (*Chosun Ilbo*, 2011). By 2010, the deal was signed, and in 2011 both legislatures ratified the deal.⁵ Unlike Korus, this deal faced little coordinated opposition (Na, 2011).

The FTA liberalizes several large markets for each player – high-end automobiles, chemicals, and precision machine tools for the EU, and mid-range autos, electronics, and ships for Korea. Unsurprisingly, agriculture remains broadly protected, and services remain less open than goods (especially for sensitive cultural products such as film). Overall, the FTA is expected to double EU–Korea trade, which is already substantial. In

5 The Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade provides a helpful chronology (<http://www.mofat.go.kr/english/econtrade/fta/Concluded/EU/index.jsp>).

2010, Korea was the EU's eighth biggest importer and tenth biggest export destination; the EU is Korea's fourth biggest importer and third biggest export destination. Total trade volume exceeds \$100B per annum. The FTA follows on the establishment of Korea–EU 'strategic partnership' in 2009 and 'Framework Agreement' in 2010.⁶ This general thickening of relations prompts this paper's question.

3 'Superparadigmatic' list of state goals in foreign policy

With the FTA in force, discussion of possible future ties is enticing (Park and Yoon, 2010, p. 185). To evaluate possible futures, I propose a basic list of highly generic foreign policy goals which states pursue in world politics. I then map these against Korea and the EU to determine what benefits might exist in a deeper relationship.

States broadly pursue four goals in world politics: national security, economic growth, national prestige vis-à-vis other states, and the promotion of their domestic values toward others (Morgenthau, 1973, pt. III; Waltz, 1979; Gilpin, 1981; Kennedy, 1987; Lebow, 2008, chs. 2–3). As early as Thucydides, his Athenians say (1.75.3, 1.76.2) that the Peloponnesian war began because of fear (security), interest (growth), and honor (prestige); later, the Athenians and Spartans aggressively promoted their own domestic political values on their allies (Lebow and Kelly, 2001). Hobbes famously repeated Thucydides' tripartite list of state goals (1.61–62 *Leviathan*), and IR theory has generally followed this rough outline of state pursuits (Aron, 1984, p. 102; Johnson, 1993; Larson and Schevchenko, 2010), with the further inclusion of values promotion (Leffler, 2004; Lebow, 2008; Ferguson and Mansbach, 2010). Ideally, this goal list is 'superparadigmatic'; it reaches for least common denominators of national interest which IR theorists of all paradigmatic persuasions can accept.

1. National security is the protection of territory, citizens, physical infrastructure, and the basic constitutional order. At minimum, this suggests a 'defensive realism', as states must ensure that they are not

6 Extensive data sheets on the FTA can be accessed on the European Commission's SK page: <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/countries/korea/>.

eliminated entirely.⁷ Survival is the primary goal, as Waltz (1979) notes.

2. But survival is unlikely without economic growth. Almost no state goal is conceivable without material resources. States will seek economic gain in their interaction with other states (Kennedy, 1987; Gilpin, 2001).⁸

Points 1 and 2 correspond to the notion of high or realist politics, and low, liberal trade politics. Goals 1 and 2 are materialist, but states, like all social actors, also pursue the psychological benefits of recognition and validation by others (March and Olson, 1989; Gutman, 1994; Nel, 2010; Wolf, 2011). Goals 3 and 4 capture the psychological or ideological cravings of states for status.

3. States clearly seek prestige, as conferred by peer states especially (Larson, and Schevchenko, 2010; Wolf, 2011). States seek acclaim and recognition for their contributions to ‘civilization’ and frequently generate self-serving nationalist or civilizational narratives to demonstrate their greatness to citizens and foreigners alike (Mead, 2002). Hobbes’ ‘glory’ is a positional good. Only one state can be the leader; only one can be number two, and so on. Prestige flows downhill, from the ‘great’ to the small (Larson and Schevchenko, 2010, p. 68), so competition for such ‘ontological security’ is correspondingly intense (Mitzen, 2006).

Goals 1–3 are largely uncontroversial; their pedigree in IR theory is deep.

4. But the desire to promote one’s own internal values to others is clearly another widely shared state goal (McFaul, 2002, 2004–05; Carothers, 2003, 2006; Kagan, 2004; Traub, 2009). Revisionists across time and space have exported, occasionally by force, their ideological/theological/cultural notion of the ‘good life’. Although modern ‘revolutionary’ states (Waltz, 1979) as various as the United States (somewhat), the USSR, Napoleonic France, Shiite Iran, or Nazi Germany are the best know examples, the classical Greeks, Rome, almost every Chinese dynasty in its relations with its

7 No opinion is voiced on the offensive/defensive realist disagreement over states’ propensity to expand. My only concern here is to establish a baseline interest in national security.

8 This need not imply free trade. American and Chinese officials in the nineteenth century both thought protectionism served their growth goals. The point is simply to establish enrichment as a generic state goal.

tributaries, and Muslim states across the centuries also sought to export their visions of proper social organization and values to others.⁹ Harsh versions of this impulse are captured today in the ‘clash of civilizations’ debate (Huntington, 1996), while even soft power or cultural diplomacy retain a controversial edge of re-making others in one’s image.¹⁰

These four generic goals may be ranked in importance, in which material trump non-material goals in necessity. Material success is the base on which reputation is built (Wolf, 2011, p. 123ff) and an example to others why they should adopt one’s values. Hence, the following ranking:

1. National security: this precedes all others, because existence is the minimum requirement for all other state action.
2. Economic growth: material prosperity provides the resources that make all other goals possible. At minimum, security requires healthy soldiers and weapons which an economy provides. Prestige is frequently based on cultural achievements facilitated by wealth and leisure.
3. Prestige: peer recognition responds to deep psychological cravings for respect and attention, but it is impossible without 1 and 2.
4. Values promotion: this is ideal, a ‘bonus’, but somewhat disposable benefit, because states regard it as fundamentally altruistic or other-regarding (even if others understand it as cultural or ‘human rights imperialism’ [Pillar, 2011]). Promoting one’s values to others is for their ‘benefit’; hence, states will rarely carry serious costs solely for this.¹¹ Of mostly rhetorical value to states, it lacks the bite or urgency of Goals 1–3 (Powers, 2007).

This ranked list provides a basic matrix to determine what benefits, if any, further Korean–EU relations bring to each partner. Goal 2 is not covered, as the mutual ratification of the FTA allows us to assume

9 Morgenthau (1973) identified the self-congratulatory tendency of states to export their politics or culture. The classical realist ethic of prudence begins in the fear that this could turn ‘normal’ interstate conflicts into brutal, long, ‘total war’ ideological crusades.

10 Note that the Korea–EU FTA retains barriers to cultural exchange; also Kelly (2009c).

11 Consider the high risk-aversion of western states to solely humanitarian missions in places like Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, and now Libya. Similarly, once the ‘hard’, national security rationale for the second Iraq war disappeared with the lack of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, western popular support evaporated.

both partners perceive it to be at least minimally welfare-enhancing (Ravenhill, 2010).¹²

4 The value of the Korean relationship to the EU

A deeper EU–Korea relationship offers little national security value to the EU, but it does raise the prestige of the EU as an international actor – a special value in the European Commission and bureaucracy’s internal conflict with powerful member-states – as well as confirm European sensibilities about the universality of European values.

4.1 Goals

National security. On the most central issue for any state – security – Korea has little to offer the EU or its constituent member states. Korea’s ‘loss of strength gradient’ (Lemke, 2002) toward Europe exceeds its grasp. The central security issues for Europe relate to its periphery – the stabilization and integration of southern and eastern Europe, the future of Russia, terrorism, and relations with Islam and the Middle East (Howorth, 2007; Keukeleire and MacNaughton, 2008). None of these issues – but perhaps for Russia’s course, especially regarding energy – is much relevant to Korea, nor can Korea help the EU much to determine their outcome.

Korea has little national interest in the course of the Balkans, former Soviet republics, or North Africa. The global war on terror (GWOt) has broadly passed by the Buddhist–Confucian bloc in Asia (Huntington, 1996). What commitment Korea has in the GWOt is channeled through its ‘strategic partnership’ with the United States. Korea’s Afghan contribution, for example, is focused more on alliance maintenance with the

12 As my reviewers argued, the FTA might very well serve other goals beyond enrichment. This is almost certainly true, as, for example, an FTA with a major player like the EU helps boost SK’s global reputation as ‘the’ Korea in its standoff with NK. However, these extra possible goals in the economic relationship are unpacked under the other three rubrics here. For purposes of analytic clarity, I understand the FTA in strictly welfare-enhancing, orthodox economic terms (Krugman and Obstfeld, 1991). It is also true that the benefits of the FTA may be asymmetric. As the smaller of the two partners, classical trade theory suggests that Korea will both benefit more but also adjust more. The sheer scale of the EU toward Korea (500M citizens to 50M) suggests EU comparative advantage in more sectors. My minimalist interpretation here is only that it serves the broadly conceived, material, national interest of both parties, regardless of interest group unhappiness and internal jockeying – otherwise, one or both democracies would have rejected it. In the end, the treaty entered into force.

United States (Kelly 2010a) than immediate physical security or religio-political competition with Islam. Even Russia is no burning issue. Russia has all but abandoned its position in East Asia (Economist, 2009). It primarily behaves today as a European power, focused on ‘Atlantic’ issues such as gas feeds to Europe, NATO expansion, and American basing in the GWOt. With Russian power in Asia collapsed since the 1980s, it plays no meaningful role in Korean politics and provides no issue bridge (Cossa, 2008, pp. 323–24). Despite a vague Korean desire for Russian stability, there is little it can do to assist the EU in tempering Russian erraticness.

Prestige. A deeper relationship with Korea does mildly raise the EU’s global profile (‘validation’: Larson and Schevchenko, 2010, p. 84). This serves not only the universal psychological craving for attention and status, but also the functional desire of the ‘eureaucracy’ to bolster the EU’s ‘actorness’ (Rueland, 2002a,b; Toej, 2011; Zaiotti, 2011). The EU bureaucracy faces a persistent struggle against member-states, especially the largest, over competencies, both domestic and external. The EU’s CFSP remains mired in confusion, overlap, and turf conflict (Hoffman, 2009; Bickerton *et al.*, 2011). The outside world remains unsure if there is a European foreign, much less defense, identity (Rosato, 2011). The widening rifts of the slow-burning debt crisis only worsen this tension (Mead, 2010b).

Deeper Korean relations therefore serve the eureaucracy’s bureaucratic interests as it simultaneously serves the EU’s general prestige. If Korea deigns to see the EU as one actor and negotiate with it as such, that mildly raises the EU’s global prestige. An EU–Korea FTA is sure to generate headlines.¹³ But Korea’s small size and low global profile cannot confer much meaningful peer ranking on the EU. Because prestige flows downhill, Korea captures the greatest prestige gains (discussed below). Only the United States or other large powers can confer on the EU the prestige it seeks as self-hyped, ‘emergent’ global actor (Posen, 2006; Erlanger, 2010). More importantly though, deepening EU–Korea ties bolster Brussels’ prestige against intra-European national competitors,

13 For example, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/16/business/global/16trade.html>, http://www.thegovmonitor.com/world_news/britain/uk-endorses-eu-korean-free-trade-agreement-39934.html, or <http://joongangdaily.joins.com/article/view.asp?aid=2926906>.

particularly London, Paris, and Berlin (Wong, 2005; Slapin, 2008, p. 140; Hoffman, 2009).

Values promotion. Finally, a deeper relationship with the EU does reap the psychic benefits of external confirmation of internal values. Korea is a deeply culturally ‘Asian’ state (Buswell, 2006). Confucianism, Buddhism, and a strong belief in the distinctiveness of Korean culture and race (*minjoek*) are characteristic of Korean politics and society (Breen, 2004; Cumings, 2005; Clark, 2008). Nevertheless, Enlightenment values of liberalism, democracy, and human rights have enrooted themselves deeply in the last two generations (as has Christianity). Insofar as these values originated in Europe, their successful transplantation to such foreign soil represents a major cultural triumph. Korea’s increasing liberalization reflects back to Europe a preferred image of its values as not just regional, European, or Christian, but as universal and global (Obama, 2009, 2011; Park and Yoon, 2010, pp. 185, 190). This will strongly appeal to academic, eurekaocratic, and NGO elites with a vested ideational interest in the EU as a ‘civilian superpower’ deploying ‘soft power’ (in contradistinction to the United States particularly) (McCormick, 2006; Bickerton *et al.*, 2011; Rynning, 2011).

4.2 Future issues: inter-regionalist foreign policy discourse as a tool against member-states

Given the irrelevance of Korea to the EU’s physical and national security, the European interest in a future relationship will turn on its ideational value to the eurekaocracy and more generally to pro-European elites. I therefore predict that the EU will primarily instrumentalize Korean relations for the eurekaocracy’s ongoing tug-of-war at home (Krotz, 2009; Bickerton *et al.*, 2011).

Specifically, the eurekaocracy and affiliated elites will elaborate a self-serving discourse of ‘inter-regionalism’ toward Korea (Bersick, 2004; Gilson and Yeo, 2004; Balme and Bridges, 2008). As a discursive frame, inter-regionalism – ASEM in this context – strongly serves the psychic preferences of EU/pro-European elites (Rueland, 2006):

1. It fosters the perception that the EU is in fact a coherent actor, which is almost certainly untrue at this point (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2008, pp. 31–32; Hoffman, 2009).

2. It suggests to the EU member-state audience that they should rally more clearly to the EU, because other regions are regionalizing into coherent actors too (Bersick, 2004). An inter-regional narrative of world politics ‘back-legitimizes’ the EU by arguing that other geopolitical spaces are regionalizing as well. The EU is thereby ‘normalized’ insofar it is only doing what everyone else is doing. Inter-regionalists will declaim that EU should act as one in engaging with other regions, because regional, rather than national, bilateralism is the ‘future of global governance’ (Bersick, 2004; Gilson, 2005, 2007; Reiterer, 2009). This is also highly disputable, insofar as Europe is significantly more regionalized than other global regions (Moravcsik, 1998; Rosato, 2011), and the national state is almost certainly still the central actor in world politics.
3. Finally, an inter-regionalist foreign policy frame permits the EU to ‘see’ other regions in the world or find other geopolitical lines on the map instead of just the state – its domestic opponent which it wishes to discredit (Parsons, 2006; Rosato, 2011). It is therefore likely that the EU and sympathetic NGO and academic elites will push other countries to ‘re-think’ themselves as participants in a region even if they do not wish to. EU elites will encourage regional institution-building, norms, and a pan-regional identity, even if actual regional identity is wispy and thin (Smith and Jones, 2007; Yeo and Hofmeister, 2010; Bersick, 2010). Strikingly, if these regions do not meaningfully exist in the eyes of locals, the EU will be in the bizarre position of encouraging local identity-change from without, for its own domestic purposes, possibly against local opposition. Rueland (2002a) refers to the EU as an ‘external federator’ of other regions, raising the obvious question of whether other regions want to be ‘federated’.¹⁴ Specifically, regarding Korea, pro-European elites in the future will encourage Koreans to ‘re-think’ themselves as Asians or East Asians (Rueland, 2002a; Roessler, 2009; Yeo and Hofmeister, 2010), and work through ASEM (even though Koreans do not wish to do so in a deep way [Jhee, 2009; Park and Yoon, 2010]).

14 This may be so in Africa, where the African Union explicitly modeled itself on the EU, but it is heroic assumption regarding Asia, as discussed below.

5 The value of the EU relationship with Korea

As with Korea for Europe, a deeper Korea–EU relationship offers little national security value to Korea. But it does markedly raise Korea’s prestige as a mature actor, beyond the Korean peninsular ‘ghetto’, and open a small door for the promotion of Korean cultural products to the West.

5.1 Goals

National security. Unlike the EU, the ROK faces a regular existential threat, from the DPRK. As such, the overwhelmingly central priority of Korean foreign policy and alliance behavior is assistance with its extreme security dilemma (Kim, 2010b). Beyond North Korea, South Korea’s primary security concerns are the rise of China, suspicion of lurking Japanese revisionism, and the possible decline of the United States (Kang, 2009). The EU is irrelevant to all these concerns, beyond the general, global confirmation the FTA provides that SK is ‘the’ Korea – modern, globalized, normal – against the errant North.

The EU, including its most militarily capable member-states, abjures the ability to project power to Asia (Kagan, 2004). These days are long gone, the final step being the British retrenchment east of Suez in 1971. The Five Power Defence Arrangement and peripheral French Pacific ports mean little in Northeast Asia.

The EU has occasionally dipped into the North Korea ‘vortex’ (Cumings, 2005). It helped fund the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). In the wake of post-Cold War mutual diplomatic recognition, the EU has pursued ‘quiet diplomacy’ with the North. But KEDO closed in 2006, and the EU’s engagement of North, at a ‘standstill’ today, has achieved little (Berkofsky, 2003). As the relevant Northeast Asia security discussion moved from the Agreed Framework of the 1990s to the Six-Party talks in the 2000s, the EU’s role in Korean security effectively ended. NATO’s flirtation with ‘out of area’ operations has not extended to East Asia.

The EU is not, nor is envisioned to become, a member of the stalled Six-Party process. While the EU does participate in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), this body has done little concrete to bolster SK security. The ARF has helped further diplomatically isolate NK, but this

was already fundamentally achieved.¹⁵ Suggestions that the EU ‘pile-on’ NK with the other five parties to compel North Korean change have not materialized.¹⁶ Although a member of the Proliferation Security Initiative, the EU has not engaged substantially in the interdiction of NK’s restricted outflows. Today, the EU’s North Korea policy is effectively one of the well-wishing vagaries of peaceful resolution (MacDonald 2009; Kelly 2009b).

Regarding China, Korea and the EU have a similar, but not mutual, position of strategic ambiguity. It is unclear if this is a basis for cooperation. Neither is quite sure how to respond to China’s rapid rise (Bersick, 2008; Gallagher, 2010; Lee, 2010b). In contrast, Japan and the United States are more openly alarmed and consequently hedging China (Medeiros, 2005–06; Qingguo and Rosecrance, 2010). Korea and the EU share a curious distance from China as a threat. Under the liberal governments of Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun, Korea drifted toward China, perhaps from historical fraternal-cultural bonds.¹⁷ And the EU has never been as geographically exposed to Chinese power as the United States and Japan. China’s loss of strength gradient of power projection toward the EU is even higher than vice versa. The seminal EU–PRC security issue is the EU’s weapons embargo. While Japan and the United States have fought efforts from various EU member states to lift the ban, Korea has generally avoided the issue (Bersick, 2008, p. 118).

Regarding residual Korean suspicions of Japan (Kang, 2009, p. 10; Oh, 2010, p. 137), the EU is irrelevant. Korean interests regarding the Liancourt Rocks or Japanese history textbooks are improved by Korea’s relationships with China and the United States, but not the EU. Nor is the EU a likely replacement should the much-prophesied decline of the US power in Asia occur.¹⁸ In brief, the EU is essentially irrelevant to Korean security.

15 Cossa (2008, pp. 327–28) calls the ARF a ‘consolidating and validating mechanism’ of local security, but still a ‘talk shop’.

16 Heo, (2004, pp. 315, 318, 326) suggests a ‘Six + EU dialogue’ and combined Europe–Asia effort through ASEM might ‘transmit immediately high-voltage pressure to Pyongyang’.

17 Kang (2008) has argued vigorously that Korea, more than another state, accepts, or ‘band-wagons’ to a Chinese leadership role in East Asia.

18 Elsewhere I specifically investigate this counterfactual – that the EU could step into Korea for a declining US hegemon – but find it wanting (Kelly 2009a).

The cause of this EU irrelevance is well known. Unlike the American ally, which can provide significant military assets to the ROK, the EU and its member-states suffer markedly from the loss of strength gradient toward Asia. EU states have only three aircraft carriers. Their submarines never travel to the North Pacific Ocean. There is no integrated EU command and control. The EU has no meaningful ground forces deployable to the Asia-Pacific for any length of time.¹⁹ Park and Yoon (2010, pp. 182, 184, 186) note that Korean elites do not perceive the EU to be a hard or security power.

Prestige. Korea may pursue deeper relations with the EU for prestige purposes. The global status is a deeply sought goal for Korean elites (Huer, 2009; Ser, 2009; *Chosun Ilbo*, 2010a,c; Lee, 2010c). For decades a small, poor state peripheral to world politics, Korea has emerged in the last several decades as a G-20 economy. Both the Korean government and affiliated foreign policy and academic elites are strident in their desire to promote Korea to the world (Economist, 2010b). An obsession for peer-recognition by other members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development dominates the Korean media's portrayal of Korea's foreign interaction (Huer, 2009; Kelly 2010c),²⁰ and 'prestige-enhancement' is literally listed as a central goal of the government's own 2009 Diplomatic White Paper (Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2009, pt. V). No less than President Lee Myung-Bak said: 'The world can be split into two groups. One group sets global rules, the other follows ... [South Korea has] successfully transformed itself from a passive follower into an active agenda-setter' (quoted in Oliver and Pilling, 2010; also Pilling, 2010).

The EU can help slake this deep thirst for recognition (Wolf, 2011, pp. 111–12, 116). The EU represents a package of philosophic ideals, economic wealth, physical comfort, democratic practice, and cultural

19 Blitz and Pfeifer (2010) provide a useful breakdown of the inability of even the EU's most 'hard-powerful' member-states to project power into Asia. Stephens (2010) notes the gradual contraction of Britain's reach, the EU power traditionally most interested in East Asia. Rogers and Simon discuss the possibilities of EU power projection (2009) but concede (2010) the huge EU capabilities gap.

20 In 2009, the ROK government launched a high-profile campaign, led by the Korean first lady, to place Korean food in the world's 'top five rank', even though no such ranking exists (Moskin, 2009). The Korean media routinely attribute unrelated trends with little serious process-tracing to Korea's 'rising status', including immigration (Bae, 2009), terrorism (Kelly 2009e), or development assistance (Kim, 2009).

status – in short, ‘civilization’ – to which Korea aspires (Bowden and Seabrooke, 2007; Larson and Schevchenko, 2010, p. 71). The 2009 White Paper openly asserts Korea should ‘Realize the Vision of a Global Korea through Promoting Korea’s Image as a Culturally Advanced Country’ (Part V.3.2). Europe reflects what Koreans would like their country to be in the world’s imagination (Park and Yoon, 2010, p. 182); it is a ‘reference group’ against which to measure its upward ‘social mobility’ (Larson and Schevchenko, 2010, pp. 70–71). Instead of a half-country whose international image is dominated by a clownish rogue despot, Korea craves Europe’s status and rank. Its famous antiquities, high-profile tourism locations, rich history of art and culture – all nested in a wealthy, healthy, international society broadly at peace with itself – strongly attracts the Korean imagination (Kim and Jaffe, 2010), and lurked behind the relentless promotion of the 2010 G-20 summit as a big moment for Korea (Ser, 2009; Snyder, 2010). Hence, extended and broader association with the EU raises South Korea’s general global profile, helps distinguish it from NK, and roots it in the first world of modernity and ‘civilization’. This hankering for prestige is a psychic need, and marketing the EU relationship as Korea’s ‘arrival’ in international society slakes that desire.

Values promotion. Unlike the EU, Korea’s traditional values have not spread and have little likelihood to do so. Korean’s religious traditions in Confucianism, Buddhism, and shamanism remain largely limited to East Asia (Buswell, 2006). Korea’s native political tradition – a weak hereditary monarchy, a mildly predatory aristocracy, a *mandarin*-style academic class – do not appear generalizable either.²¹ The values traffic between the EU and Korea has largely been one way. Korea is one of the great successes in the transplantation of liberal, democratic, Enlightenment values outside of the West; Korea is routinely touted a central case that these values are not in fact ‘western’, but universal (Obama, 2009, 2011). In contrast, the export of Korean intellectual products, ‘*Hallyu*’, is limited to less important cultural outputs such as food, film, or pop-music with arguably limited reach into Europe (*Korean Herald*, 2008). Korea captures little benefit from the values relationship, regardless of its symmetry around liberal democracy.

21 In fact, Cumings (2005, ch. 1) argues that Korea’s socio-political traditions were routinely abused by foreign intrusion and require protection.

5.2 Future issues: prestige-driven public relations promotionalism

Korea captures little specific gain from the relationship with the EU beyond the FTA. On security issues, the EU has not been present in Korea since KEDO, and the common ambiguity over China does not lay the groundwork for cooperation, only shared confusion. Nor will Korean cultural values make noteworthy inroads in the EU. Kimchi, K-pop, Confucianism, and the like have little resonance in the West outside of immigrant communities.

Hence, I predict the Korean emphasis on the relationship will be mostly promotionalist and boosterish, filled with vague claims of Korea's new status as reflected by the EU's interest in Korea, but with little real substance or commitment (Park and Yoon, 2010; Hwang, 2010; Zaiotti, 2011, p. 548). ROK government, think-tank, and academic elites will instrumentalize the EU relationship to validate Korea's claim to be a rising power (Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2009). Korea will promote cultural exchange with the EU in an effort to capture reflected prestige. Korean students, versed in European languages, music, or art, will broadcast to the world the cosmopolitan, future-oriented look that Korean elites seek for the nation (Kim and Jaffe, 2010). This helps balance the domination of Korea's reputation by Kim Jong-Il.

Nevertheless, this euro-philia will remain instrumental public relations maneuvering. The intended audience is Korea's own population, not outsiders. Ultimately, it is dissatisfied Koreans who will pass judgment on whether their state receives adequate external recognition (Wolf, 2011), and it is the Korean press that will mediate the outside world to Koreans (Huer, 2009; Chosun Ilbo, 2010a,c). This will be a domestic discourse, constructed for internal psychological needs, so its actual relationship to the EU itself is tenuous (Zaiotti, 2011). Should any serious material costs, such as alienation from the United States because of an 'EU tilt', arise, the relationship will be shed easily (Kim, 2010b).

6 Tabular results

This paper reviews the utility of the EU–Korea relationship to each player in the dyad. It assumes that both actors are pursuing their self-interest – defined broadly to include both material and psychological gain – in the relationship. This does not imply that Korea and the EU are coldly exploiting one another; it does however assume that Korea

and the EU do not share so much constructivist ‘we-ness’ or shared sense of self that they are making joint altruistic decisions (Adler and Barnett, 1998; Checkel, 2005; Lebow, 2008). The EU finds it difficult enough to aggregate its member-states’ national interests into one EU foreign policy interest. It is highly unlikely Korea and the EU would be making decisions beyond the realm of traditional national interest.

I created a four-part schematic of national interest and applied it to each partner in the dyad. I posited that states will pursue, in ranked order, their national security, economic growth, prestige, and domestic values in their relations with other states. The first two are ‘material’ interests; the latter are ‘psychological’. Given that the FTA is complete, I assume that both parties read it as cost-beneficial (otherwise they would not have ratified it). So, my analysis focused on the three remaining interests.

I summarize my findings of the probable benefits of deeper relations for each partner in Table 1. I have italicized the primary benefits:

7 Conclusion: marginal benefits on which to build

A cost–benefit analysis of further interaction on these three vectors finds few commonalities on which to build. The most important features for states in determining the depth of a partnership – possible contributions to security – are minimal. Neither side can meaningfully contribute to the other’s primary security challenges. As such it is unlikely that the ‘partnership’ will blossom into a meaningful alliance (Snyder, 2007). Their shared liberal democratic values place them broadly in the liberal security community of the democratic peace (Adler and Barnett, 1998), but a more positive military contribution to either’s security is unlikely.

Both sides derive some prestige from the relationship. Korea, small and peripheral to the global economy until recently, captures most of the benefits here. The current Lee administration especially would like Korea to escape from the ‘ghetto’ of the Korean peninsula, where Korea’s foreign policy and its global image are dominated by the North–South standoff (Oliver and Pilling, 2010; *Economist*, 2010a). Lee would like Korea to cut a more global profile, ‘Global Korea’, and has hence pursued ‘strategic partnerships’ with the United States, and the EU. This suggests that Korea is not just a bit-player in East Asia but now a globally recognized contributor in the G-20 (*Chosun Ilbo*, 2010c). As such, Lee has ordered the return of Korea to Afghanistan.

Table 1 EU–Korea dyadic benefits

Foreign policy goal	Benefits to party	
	EU	Korea
Security	Minimal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No Korean power projection to Europe - Korean irrelevance to Russia, GWoT/Islam, Southern and Eastern Europe 	Minimal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No EU role in six-party talks - No EU global posture, esp. re: the DPRK - Shared ambiguity on PRC - EU irrelevance on Japan
Growth	Welfare-enhancement of FTA assumed	Welfare-enhancement of FTA assumed
Prestige	Middling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Korea too small to meaningful raise EU's global status - Korea relationship serves eurekaucracy's internal bureaucratic interest 	<i>High</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large, 'civilized' EU raises Korea's global profile - Validates Korea's place in the G-20 as an 'advanced' country
Values	<i>High</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Korea as central example of universality of European values 	Minimal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low likelihood of <i>Hallyu</i> success in the EU/West

The EU captures little prestige directly from its relationship with Korea. It is already a well-known, highly recognized 'global player'. Its constituent member-states frequently feel the ache for global recognition (most notably France and Britain, as evidenced in the recent Libya intervention). But as a bloc, the EU – should it truly congeal into a state – would clearly be a global superpower. As such, Korea offers little. However, the Korean partnership does offer utility to pro-European elites within the EU, most notably in the EU bureaucracy. The eurekaucracy, trapped in a decades-long turf-battle with the national bureaucracies, is likely to seize on the prestige of a direct EU-level relationship with a G-20 economy. This is ammunition against criticism that the EU is simply a trade deal or that other states do not take it seriously (Rosato, 2011; Park and Yoon [2010] find that Korean elites perceive the EU primarily as an

economic zone of unified rules). If the 2010 host of the G-20 summit takes the EU seriously enough to label it a ‘strategic partner’, then the eureka gains in the intra-European conflict to establish the EU more soundly and eventually build a real CFSP (Hoffman, 2009).

However, this internal eureka interest in a continued Korean dialogue will likely lead in directions Korea will reject (Park and Yoon, 2010, pp. 182–83). Korea, like most Asian states, remains deeply committed to the Westphalian model of world politics (*Global Asia*, 2007; Sutter, 2008). Kantian–Europhilic elites in academia and the EU increasingly understand the EU’s role as overcoming the nation-state and building a regional community, if not identity (Parsons, 2006; Balme and Bridges, 2008; Mead, 2010a; Krotz and Maher, 2011, pp. 565–69). In contrast, Koreans are nationalistic and do not share the post-modern European sensibility that nationalism is something to be overcome (Park and Seo, 2007; Myers, 2010; Lee, 2010b). Nationalist Koreans do not view Asian regional organizations, much less ‘inter-regional’ organizations such as ASEM, the same way (Jhee, 2009). Asian international politics is characterized by much speculation and wishful thinking about prospects for an East Asian Community (EAC)²² but almost no binding agreements to achieve it (Yamashita, 2009; Aggarwal and Chow, 2010). As Jones and Smith (2007) note, Asian regionalism is accepted as an article of faith among local elites despite the persistence of ‘ASEAN Way’ talk-shop intergovernmentalism and consensus decision-making in Asian organization. Optimistic Asian regionalism is a discourse strangely abjured from the empirical reality of low integration and persistent nationalism.

To this should be added the speculative hopefulness of European scholars of East Asian regionalism discussed earlier. Reference to the EU as an ‘external federator’ of Asia – with no serious evidence of EU-style integration in Asia – reflects the Kantian–multilateralist prejudices of pro-EU elites in Europe (Bickerton *et al.*, 2011, pp. 9–10), rather than the reality of Asian regionalism.²³ Such normative-constructivist calls to ‘re-see’ East Asia as a meaningful identity actually serve the

22 As with the now-defunct *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Global Asia*, arguably its *Foreign Affairs*-style successor, is rife with these sorts of articles in its brief six-year life. Consider issues 1/1, 3/1, 3/3, 4/3, 5/1.

23 A more empirically plausible reading of ASEAN and other Asian regional organizations is not as integration vehicles but for joint sovereignty reinforcement – the exact opposite of the normative purpose of European integration theory (Kelly 2007).

interest of the EU, where decision-makers and national publics are skeptical about integration as well (Etzioni, 2011; Rosato, 2011, pp. 80–81). Fanciful construction of a coherent East Asian region generates a parallel or ‘back’ legitimacy for Europe itself to be a region, not just a space of nation-states (Bickerton *et al.*, 2011, p. 2). For these reasons, Korea should expect a steady exhortation from pro-EU elites to regionalize into an EAC (Yeo and Hofmeister, 2010). Nationalist Korea will likely reject these calls, stymieing deeper cooperation.

Finally, the EU does reap psychological gains from the relationship on the domestic values vector. The EU will continue to emphasize issues such as human rights, democracy, and liberalism in its relations with Korea. No longer controversial in Korea itself, the relationship with Korea (and Japan) will aid the EU in its values-export with the rest of ASEM (Rueland, 2006; Balme and Bridges, 2008; Reiterer, 2009). The EU has struggled with the Asian members of ASEM over these questions since ASEM’s inception. The normative acceptance of Enlightenment liberalism in Korea (and Japan and Taiwan) helps excise the cultural-racial bite of the ‘Asian values’ and ‘human-rights imperialism’ arguments made by Asian actors such as the Chinese Communist Party or Matathir Mohamad. By validating Europe’s own normative-political preferences of the good society, Korea should expect to be regularly utilized as an exemplar by the EU in its values diplomacy. Conversely, Korea will find little back-traffic. Despite heroic efforts to export Korean cultural products to Europe, these will not catch on. In tandem, Korea will likely ignore meaningful liberalism-promoting ventures with the EU, such as sanctioning China or Burma (Kelly 2011).

The EU and Korea have an unremarkable relationship. Given the mutual irrelevance of one’s security to the other, it is easy to predict that no alliance is likely. The FTA is step forward, but ultimately one based solely on material utility. The EU also trades with Iran, and Korea with Singapore; this provides perspective on the rhetoric of ‘strategic partnerships’. These are now proliferating so quickly for both sides that they are losing their veneer of criticality.²⁴ A ‘friendly partner’ is more credible assessment. The EU–Korea relationship will not mature into meaningful bonds to rival the more critical relations of either with the United States, China, Japan, or Russia.

24 For example, Korea now has a strategic partnership with Kazakhstan (Chosun Ilbo, 2010b).

In the psychological terms of prestige and values, ‘mild friendship’ is the likely future (Park and Yoon, 2010, p. 186). The EU’s preference for Asian regionalism will generate resistance, although Korea will tolerate it in order to retain the huge prestige boost of an EU relationship (Park and Yoon, 2010, pp. 183, 187). Hence, the greatest frustration in the relationship will fall on the European side. Korea’s prestige gains are already captured by the completion of the FTA and the strategic partnership. Korea can therefore politely ignore the ‘external federator’. So long as Korea, and East Asia generally, remains committed to the intergovernmental ‘ASEAN Way’, little deep regionalism will occur. As American Asia observers have noted (Bobrow, 1999; Berger, 2006), the United States generally feels unconcerned about Asian regionalism because of its talk-shop, consensus-based character. Meager concrete movement toward the ‘closed regionalism’ of binding institutions avoids the meaningful political tradeoffs and constraints on members on which the EU is built (Yamashita, 2009). In such an environment, Kantian–Europhilic elites – pro-EU, pro-EAC, and pro-ASEM – are likely to find nationalist Korea, and Asia, a frustrating ‘inter-regional’ partner.

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