reminds us, 'China's rise presents an intellectual challenge to the American people and their leader' – and this is not just because, as he notes, China cannot be pigeon-holed easily as a friend or foe. Rather, China is re-emerging as a great power in a manner that conforms neither to the expectations of narrow international relations theories nor to the aspirations of ideological revolutionaries. At the same time, many in the United States feel that its hard-won global primacy is now being threatened in a comprehensive way by a more credible challenger. In this climate, it is incumbent upon scholars and policy-makers to work harder at developing new ways of understanding and living with China and the United States.

**Evelyn Goh**
Department of Politics and International Relations
Royal Holloway, University of London
Egham
UK
evelyn.goh@rhul.ac.uk

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## Deconstructing Japan's Image of South Korea Identity in Foreign Policy

Taku Tamaki
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### Will the Real Japan Please Stand Up?

How to understand Japan's identity is one of the most enduring themes in research on the country's international relations. In the past few years, there has been an increase in the number of theoretically innovative analyses, which go beyond, and problematize, the alleged 'peace' identity stipulated by Peter J. Katzenstein (1996) and Thomas U. Berger (1998) in the 1990s. Xavier Guillaume (2011) published a monograph last year, while Alexander Bukh (2010) and Taku Tamaki made one valuable

contribution each in 2010. The aim of this article is primarily to review Tamaki's book, but to some extent this is done in light of those other works. Just like Bukh and Guillaume, Tamaki adopts a relational understanding of identity, where the self is defined in opposition to other(s). However, where Bukh analyses the Soviet Union/Russia as Japan's 'other', and Guillaume directs his investigation towards multiculturalism and 'the West', Tamaki's focus is squarely on Japan's relationship with South Korea.

Tamaki's book is lucid and well written, and his analysis is very persuasive. The gist of his argument is that a Japanese 'leadership' identity keeps materializing in the relationship with South Korea. First, Japanese narratives on history tend to downplay the country's responsibility for colonialism and wartime aggression, and to trivialize historical claims to suffering by the Korean people, because these claims – if taken seriously – would threaten the legitimacy of Japan's place in the imagined international hierarchy. Second, Japanese narratives in the realm of bilateral summitry with South Korea are focused on the promise of future relations, and as such they construct a discursive sphere where the past is de-emphasized and where 'Japan is depicted as the locomotive and South Korea as the carriage' (p. 156). Third, the image of Korean backwardness is reproduced in various economic narratives through precisely this kind of temporal differentiation, where South Korea is construed as less developed than Japan. Korean backwardness is further stressed by Seoul's persistent protests about the past: although Japan does its best to build a future-oriented relationship, the narrative goes, this is constantly spoiled by a backward South Korea. Hence, overall, South Korea is narrated as a partner which is 'difficult' for Japan to manage.

Taken together, the three narratives construct a Japan that is ahead of South Korea in both developmental and moral terms. Although the emergent identity seems to be akin to the 'peaceful merchant' described by Katzenstein, Berger and others, in Tamaki's account this identity is far from being constructed by peaceful norms or a particularly anti-militaristic culture; nor is it the antithesis of colonialism and wartime aggression. Rather, it is constructed based on the notion of international hierarchy and Japanese uniqueness. As these figments of imagination have persisted since Japan's encounter with the West in the mid-1800s, the bottom line is that the Japanese 'leadership' identity is highly

resilient. Although the term *kokutai* (polity) has been largely absent from political discourse since the Second World War, Tamaki argues that the identity construction epitomized in the *kokutai* discourse has persisted, continuously reproducing a Korean otherness, which is inferior to the Japanese self.

The notion of a 'resilient identity' is not only an important empirical finding in Tamaki's book; it is also meant to be its most important theoretical contribution. Tamaki positions himself against both constructivism and post-structuralism (in the guises of Alexander Wendt and David Campbell, respectively), arguing that they are 'similar in their preoccupation with the performative identity' and in their reluctance 'to countenance the reification of identity as a social possibility' (p. 6). In a central paragraph Tamaki asks: '[I]f only through performance can the self be defined, how do the actors enter into such a performance in the first place? Who is performing it?'(ibid.). Out of concern that actors will be reduced to 'automatons simply waiting for subjectivity to take hold of them' (ibid.), Tamaki devotes considerable space to developing a realist ontology for his constructivist account of identity.

Although I agree with Tamaki's observation that constructivist and post-structuralist accounts of identity are not necessarily that far apart, I have three objections to his realist ontology. First, and perhaps most importantly, I doubt strongly that the notion of resilient identity requires realism. Arguably, even Campbell takes the 'writing' of 'danger' to be a resilient component in US identity (Campbell, 1998). Analyses by Bukh and Guillaume also manage to demonstrate a certain resilience in Japan's identity construction, without subscribing to realism. Bukh, first, shows that 'the West' has had a lingering importance for Japan's identity construction vis-à-vis Russia. Guillaume, in turn, echoes Tamaki in observing the resilience of *kokutai* ideas in contemporary Japan – evident, for example, in the *nihonjinron* (theory of the Japanese) discourse. Guillaume even backs this resilience theoretically by interpreting *kokutai* as a 'narrative matrix', the more sedimented and long-term presence of which 'delimit[s] the conditions of possibilities of *politics of alterity*' (Guillaume, 2011, p. 8, italics in original). Hence, the bottom line is that one can take the reification of certain identities seriously, and develop a layered model, even without developing a meta-theoretical position influenced by realism.

Second, Tamaki traces the resilience of Japan's 'leadership' identity to the mid-19th century, and certainly, to the extent that modern Japan was established alongside, and through, the *kokutai* discourse, this may be considered as close to a 'core' as one can get. Still, at the same time this also clearly shows the historicity of the 'who' concerned. Over time and space, 'Japan' is far from being a coherent entity, and even the appearance of a resilient Japanese identity must be understood as the result of previous disjunctures in imagination. What is more, the attribution of cores to countries could even *fuel* 'othering' processes in the sense that actors start to treat them as unchangeable reality. An intellectually more interesting, and politically and morally less doubtful, strategy would thus be to treat identities as constructs 'all the way down', and to understand the matter of resilience as an empirical question. However, this does not necessarily make 'Japan' an automaton. Even if one treats agents (and structures) as in a constant state of becoming, determinism is not necessarily implied. Tamaki's frequent use of the notion of 'automaton' seems like little more than a 'strawman'.

Third, I have quite fundamental doubts that realism can serve as a viable ontology for the social sciences. Social scientists are typically not interested in (seemingly) tangible, material stuff (such as the types of furniture frequently invoked to build a realist case: see, e.g. Wendt, 1999, p. 216; cf. Edwards, Ashmore and Potter, 1995) but in social phenomena, and in the meanings ascribed to them. Having said that, however, I acknowledge that ontological differences are not typically resolved by resort to good arguments, and especially not in the limited space of a book review. This discussion will have to take place elsewhere.

To conclude, I argue that Tamaki's lengthy appeal for a realist ontology is not only unnecessary but also imputes too much of a core to what would better have been understood as in a process of becoming. My only other objection is that I would have liked to know more about the methods underlying the empirical account: how were empirical contexts chosen and what is the rationale behind the materials analysed? Despite these critical remarks, I would like to end this review on a more positive note, namely by re-emphasizing that *Deconstructing Japan's Image of South Korea* is an original and innovative addition to the literature on Japan's international relations.

**Linus Hagström**
[1]Japan Foundation Fellow and Visiting Scholar, Kyoto University
[2]Senior Research Fellow, Swedish Institute of International Affairs
[3]Research Fellow, Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities
Box 27035, 102 51 Stockholm, Sweden
E-mail: linus.hagstrom@ui.se

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