

SOUTH KOREA IN THE DYNAMICS OF INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY: HERMIT KINGDOM 4.0

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ABSTRACT

South Korea is a country that historically has always been flanked by major powers around it such as Japan, China, Russia, and even the United States. Nevertheless, South Korea in this era of globalization actually has a large capacity as a middle power country engaged by influential multilateral organizations such as the OECD, MIKTA, and G20. Later, South Korea also had huge popular culture implications around the world through its Korean Wave. So why is South Korea less politically active on Indo-Pacific issues than other East Asian countries, such as Japan with the Quad or China in the Indo-Pacific issue? Whereas by weight of issue and substance, South Korea has a big point to play strategically on Indo-Pacific dynamics issues, such as the North Korea issue or the Alliance of South Korea and the United States. The study will use Economic Diplomacy and Middle-power-ship to explain the reasons why South Korea tends to be politically inactive.

Keywords: Constructivism Political Economy, Indo-Pacific, Middle Power, New Southern Policy, South Korea.

1. Introduction

1.1 Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific in recent times may be the best act of maritime history as two world giants with their own army band joining the competition of two largest oceans in the world combined. The US with its own triumphant maritime history and background in various wars and conflicts throughout history may need a way to contain the new rising star of the region, China. Having previously conquered Hawaii, Guam and the Philippines in late 1898, the U.S. victory in the 1941-1945 Pacific War against Japan was dramatic. The U.S. succeeded in becoming a hegemon in the Pacific by first taking control of Caroline and Marianas in the Pacific Islands, then putting Japan into Japan itself – which became an ally of the U.S. after losing the Pacific War as a U.S. military base in the Western Pacific (Scott, 2018). Afterwards, in 1980, the US gave its dominant narrative in strategic thinking also known as the Asia-

Pacific (Cummings, 1997). In the narrative, economic dynamics become the main discussion and give birth to new economic strengthened countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore (Scott, 2018). The establishment of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is the result of this perspective is very Asiatic while other actors envisioned more broader terms or subject to be included in this scheme.

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of China's economic revival on today's era is unstoppable, as well as the emergence of other new regional forces such as India, Australia, South Korea and Indonesia making the US feel anxious that geopolitical dominance will decline (Pan, 2014). On the other hand, geo-economics related to changes in general trade volume in the Pacific Indian Ocean is one of the reasons for the demonstration of the U.S. strategic concept in the region (Scott, 2018). The strategic discourse of the 'Indo-pacific' in the US itself

first appeared in the official lexicon of US foreign policy in 2010 (Choong, 2019). This momentum was put to good use in President Obama's leadership with the vision of the U.S. 'Pivot to Asia' since 2011 and back to and more tangible implementation of the Trump regime in 2017. The concept of 'Indo-Pacific' was first initiated by German geopolitical expert Karl Haushofer in 1920 (Haushofer, Tambs, & Brehm., 2002). At the time, the concept attracted less geopolitical observers but, by the late 2000s, the concept of trying to unite the Indian Ocean into the Western Pacific Ocean to become one geopolitical stage was now considered to have reflected a new geopolitical reality as stated by Mohan (2012) and Pan (2014).

Choong (2019) also revealed that Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) is likewise concerned with the many sources of instability in various regions that have the potential for open conflict. Warming up the four potential points of conflict in the Indo-pacific namely the Korean Peninsula, East China Sea, South China Sea and South Taiwan is an area that is feared to be a major war (Taylor, 2018). Japan, which is geographically neighboring china and a U.S. ally in the Pacific, is also fretting about China's rise. Japan under Shinzo Abe's government responded to China's threat by issuing a Free Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) foreign policy, which is essentially a policy of cooperation with India, the US and Australia that brings together two Indian and Pacific Ocean seas in the areas of security, defence, trade and freedom of navigation aimed at creating a rich and stable region based on universal values as argued by Rossiter (2018) and Hosoya (2019). Moreover, FOIP is also a collective response to prevent the growing dominance of Chinese influence in Southeast Asia and South Asia. Abe also took advantage of the Trump administration's seemingly neglected

opportunities and did not provide any specifics to strategic direction in the Indo-Pacific region, so that momentum has made Japan a major player in maintaining regional stability (Katagiri, 2019). The FOIP initiative as Japan's foreign policy is considered as a response by the Japanese government to China's rapid rise. Thus, the author harmonizes with anything as Hosoya (2019) said that nowadays, Japan seems to have more to shape its own regional order than is formed by China.

In 2007, to strengthen the concept of Indo-Pacific, Japan, the US, India and Australia conducted a quadrilateral strategic dialogue or "Quad" pre-initiated by Prime Minister Abe and US Vice President Dick Cheney (Hosoya, 2019). However, on its way, "Quad" encountered obstacles, other actors of other countries such as ASEAN considered the formation of the "Quad" had deviated from the principle of ASEAN centrality (Hosoya, 2019). On the other hand, the long-term loss of ASEAN's collective strength may lower the importance of ASEAN centrality in responding to the four Quad countries (Teo, 2020). Moreover, Sulaeman (2020) had argue that if ASEAN itself joins the band-wagon-ing with the US and quad, then there is a threat of conflict in Southeast Asia that not only originates external intervention but also comes from among ASEAN member states themselves. As we know, ASEAN also divided as some of its member may lean more to Chinese realm than to Western realm, and in contrast some of its member leaning toward US alliance instead of Chinese scheme.

1.2 South Korea and Indo-Pacific

As a state that located in Asia Pacific Region, South Korea extremely engaged with global dynamics. For a simple example, South Korea itself is part of alignment within United States' alliance toward North Korea in

the Korean Peninsula issue. Furthermore, Revere (2016) stated that the 28,500 U.S. forces in Korea show America's resolve to protect a key ally and represent U.S. commitment to the region. Therefore, South Korea as part of somewhat greater interest toward Asia Pacific in general.

For a long time in history, South Korea always surrounded by great powers. Park (2015) explained that Korea has been a disputed realm among the major powers in Northeast Asia since ancient times. Now that China is reemerging, Japan is re-energizing, and the United States is rebalancing toward Asia, rivalry over Korea is likely to return and become a crucial problem among the contending forces. Therefore, the rising of China, growing Japan, Russia/USSR in the past, and even the United States meddling in Asia Pacific proves those facts.

In nowadays dimension, the term Asia Pacific also changing as the actors intertwined with this area also expanding. Heiduk and Wacker (2020) briefly described that the word "Indo-Pacific" is used to refer to different, often divergent, definitions of Asia-Pacific that may include India. In terms of prejudice and unclear context, each of the actors may have their own understanding of what is known as the Indo-Pacific.

Furthermore, Helduk and Wacker (2020) clarify that the word "Indo-Pacific" is primarily interpreted within Beijing as a US-led containment policy directed against China. ASEAN or India then emphasizes issues such as economic growth, connectivity and multilateral cooperation between the two oceans in their Indo-Pacific concepts. While in the US, Trump's administration is using it to curb China's rising influence.

Then, where is Korea in all these complexes? Kim (2018) stated that President Moon 's Chief Economic Advisor bluntly opposed the idea, arguing that FOIP (Free and Open Indo-Pacific) is a Japanese

initiative to connect Japan to the United States, Australia, and India. As a result, South Korea will see no gain from participating. Hence, South Korea is in dilemmatic position to thrive the global affairs in that situation. Alongside with that, Robertson (2020) has argued that from dilemmatic position might give South Korea better stance to face the so-called Indo-Pacific. He added that the idea that South Korea could move beyond the tension between China and the United States and actually gain benefit from ties with both countries is a common one. He even certain South Korea may be the Finland, Sweden or Switzerland in North East Asia.

Then, he also said that the concept is most often haunted by misinterpreted ideas of how much it implies to be a middle power. In South Korea, the clear understanding of becoming a middle power is as traditional as the more complex meanings relevant to foreign affairs beyond Korea itself. This means, South Korea becoming an underdog that could retract its way to benefit from its situation that pinched among great powers from a long time. However, the main question regarding this is why South Korea less politically active despite get a lot of influences from those great powers. Is becoming great middle power or upper-middle power really a thing to pursue? Or any other reasons beyond mentioned above still becoming a relevant subject to be analyzed.

1.3 South Korea as Middle Power

As middle-power, South Korea already played the role very well. South Korea is very keen to maintain its position through development program or multilateral diplomacy to sway its unluckiness to be hit among great powers as geographical weakness. Sohn (2016) argued that in an evolving world, South Korea seems to be a significant middle power country. South Korea played a part in convening

collaboration frameworks, participating itself in non-traditional security issues and developing free trade platforms.

Furthermore, he also added that intriguingly, all of this has been achieved by South Korea without formally using the word "medium-power diplomacy" that is closely identified to nations like Canada and Australia that usually correlated with terms like good neighbors, multilateral players, and fair brokers. Then, For one nation like South Korea that always faced with persistent, severe security threats, and almost in every timeline of history getting desperate by great nations, could help put extra benefits to reinvent itself as middle-power country like already described above. In addition, South Korea now finds it very useful to be actively involved in the field of diplomacy, which involves information, culture, institutions, the economy and technology.

South Korea activations as middle power country are ranging variously. From culture, environments, investments, and capacity buildings are provided by South Korea. Rhyu (2018) said that those issues and problems may compiled by President Moon's new policies as South Korea now look further south and more global. Policies like New Southern Policies, Digital New Deal, Green New Deal, other priorities, and course of the economic policies of the President Moon administration might be contentious, but they were among the politically viable choices available when it came to work. Moreover, Kelly (2019) argued that the key argument of President Moon's calming effort was that of his liberal peers from 1998-2008, which was that North Korea would change its actions, or even become an ally to South Korea, if South Korea brought it into chill not rage.

South Korea as middle powers also an interesting subject to sees. A modern middle power with such capabilities to create impactful wave across the globe should be

appreciated. In the region that extremely complex, South Korea as middle power country is not always under the spotlight of global transformations. A mentioned above, even located in paramount location of Indo-Pacific dynamics, South Korea still not a major player of the issue. Robertson (2020) even argued that the supremacy of North Korea in every studies or research of the Korean Peninsula has been impressive. In a strategic sense, South Korea is more critical and substantially stronger economically, more populated and more socio-politically diverse rather than North Korea. South Korea as middle power also appears low-key and segmented, regarding the cultural diplomacy that had been taken. In the complex of Indo-Pacific region with complicated actors, South Korea may look invisible as we discussed above. Therefore, the necessity to explore how South Korea reacts or behave in the capacity as middle power country is still very relevant. The puzzle on how and why South Korea and Indo-Pacific relations still an open water to explore.

2. Literature Review

Currently there is very little literature to discuss South Korea and Indo-Pacific. However, there are many clues that can be put together to find out how South Korea can get involved in the Indo-Pacific. Soeya (2020) explained how middle power cooperation can occur amid the rivalry of Indo-Pacific strategy led by the U.S. and BRI China should be reviewed and updated with the strengthening of cooperation institutions and see the threat of outside involvement to gain political dominance South Korea as middle power is included in the case studies discussed. Swielande, (2019) also describes South Korea as one of the case studies of middle power plays an important role in the world order. Swielande (2019) also presents its hypothesis on the search for new powers

that could affect new regional relations, as well as how middle power can potentially fill the power vacuum to ensure the status quo in a region. Koo M. G. (2020) argued from a national security and interest point of view explained that China's push to conduct reclaimed islands in the South China Sea has caught the world's attention. In addition, BRI has encouraged the U.S. and Japan to oppose it through the FOIP strategy. Therefore, in his journal, Koo M. G. (2020) stated at the rivalry between the U.S., Japan and China that impacts South Korea through the perspective of 'Point-line-study' and advises South Korea to restore its long-lost identity in maritime affairs as well as cooperate with the Vietnamese Navy. Despite the different languages, the journal has provided new insights and reaffirmed South Korea as a strategic position.

Not from a middle power perspective alone, Patterson & Choi (2017) explained economic growth has brought South Korea to the international stage. This is inseparable from the diplomatic efforts of the South Korean president in the early aftermath of the ceasefire that has now had a positive impact. The tools of diplomacy through meetings between heads of state have expanded South Korea's trade relations so that Seoul has now enjoyed tremendous economic growth. Meanwhile, Bradford (2015) explained South Korea uses middle power diplomacy in global governance. Furthermore, he also explained how the global influence on South Korea's middle power. Dent (1998) also explained how foreign economic policy (FEP) could shape South Korea in its economic development. In the end, this journal describes the direction of FEP Korea can be a consideration to conduct economic diplomacy. In contrast to Nagy (2020), which describes middle power countries adapting and transforming the original middle power diplomacy to neo middle power in short, neo

middle power involves behavior that includes lobbying, isolation, and rule-making in the fields of security, trade and international law and aims to ensure that the interests of middle powers are not affected by Sino-U.S. strategic competition.

However, Jung, Lee, & Lee (2020) sees middle power Asian countries, one of which South Korea faces a strategic dilemma in the face of U.S.-China rivalry. On the other hand, quad members can recruit new members because according to Jung, Lee, & Lee (2020) the hegemon coalition will decline against the liberal international order. In addition, Rinna (2020) describes Russia's role in establishing relations with Seoul as an effort to increase its influence in East Asia, which combined with South Korea's middle power foreign policy has led the two to make policy alignments in contrast to U.S. policy such as North Korea-related policy. But this, according to Rinna (2020) could lead to a major tension between Russia and the US. While, Wei (2020) through constructivism approach, argued that the Indo-Pacific requires constitutive rules and norms to conduct broader practices in regional processes to achieve peace in the region. Through economic development priorities such as RCEP and CPTTP and AIIB can be used as a code of ethics process as a recommended means and practice for the rule making of maritime order (Wei, 2020).

Therefore, there are plenty of gaps in order to discuss a specific South Korean dilemma, or we can call it hermit capacity in so-called Indo-Pacific paradigm, through middle power-ship of South Korea. Especially, in order to answer "why is South Korea less politically active on Indo-Pacific issues than other East Asian countries, such as Japan with the Quad or China in the Indo-Pacific issue?" there is still new perspective needed. Moreover, the path that we use in this

paper also seems to be new additional to the discussion room of this issue as above.

Indo-Pacific has now become the next strategic arena in the future. The widespread geographic reach and growing number of new regional actors such as Indians makes interaction between actors in the region more complex. The presence of hegemonic rivalry between the US and China as well as the emergence of new regional powers such as India, Australia, Indonesia and South Korea, forced each country to reposition its foreign policy to ensure the national interest remains secure, but at the same time can still maintain harmonious relations between countries. South Korea is one of the countries that can be considered as middle power, meaning that South Korea has a potential power and internationally acceptable influence. Through K-Wave's global impact, South Korea managed to play soft power and public diplomacy well. Cultural diplomacy has also been one of his main strengths. On the other hand, South Korea has emerged as a major player in the formation of FTAs in East Asia by successfully completing FTA with the US (Sohn, 2016). In addition, South Korea also plays respectable middle power role such as being involved in the Trans-Pacific Partnership as an extension of economic cooperation from FTA and at the same time, is also part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) based in Asia. In this situation, South Korea is in a strategic position to play the role of middle power.

Geologically, South Korea is in the midst of a rivalry of two superpowers. Often, IR observers and international politics refer to South Korea as the Buffer State. In general, buffer states are countries that are located among rivalries of two potentially major strengths. Working with Japan and Russia makes South Korea have to ensure its national security. The conflict on the Korean peninsula, where North Korea's nuclear

projections have always been a major threat, also makes South Korea once again have to pay more attention to its security. But amid the complexity of its national security issues, South Korea can solve its various threats through trilateral military reinforcement with the U.S. and Japan, while conducting a network of Cooperation in various layers with China to make China feel involved in maintaining the stability of the Korean peninsula region. Not only focused on security and economy, South Korea has also started regional cooperation by participating in MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia). The Northeast Asia Peace and Co-operation Initiative (NAPCI) is another regional multilateral that South Korea aims to build trust through established habits of cooperation. In context, Indo-pacific, South Korea as a middle power plays a different role to East Asian countries in general which focus on security and balancing strength. In the Indo-Pacific, dampening China's dominant influence has become a major origin. The U.S. assesses the presence of Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) and some countries can interfere with the geopolitical solidities of the Indo-Pacific. Meanwhile, the Koreans themselves sought to bridge the BRI with the New Southern Policy to facilitate the construction of an instructor connecting South and North Korea and the Eurasia Continent (Iuppa, 2020).

Hence, South Korea in the Indo-Pacific, has furthered accentuates economic diplomacy and utilizes its middle power to defend its national interests. Therefore, through the above series of mystifying disclosures regarding South Korea, the author identified the formulation of the problem by asking the question "why is South Korea less politically active on Indo-Pacific issues than other East Asian countries, such as Japan with the Quad or China in the Indo-Pacific issue?" Throughout the concept of Middle

Power and Economic Diplomacy, the Author tries to find the right reasons for how South Korea can weigh in on a complex Indo-Pacific with few political problematic moves in order to keep head up in the game of the rival titans in the region.

3. Research Method

3.1 Qualitative Descriptive

This paper uses qualitative descriptive research methods to reflect ideas that then adjust and test the concepts and data we find in the research process. Neuman (2007) stated that qualitative research is research that uses data collection from interviews, writings, videos or sounds. Dawson (2007) also explained that qualitative research is a research that explores attitudes, behaviors and experiences through interview methods or focus groups. Nassaji (2015) also explained that qualitative research in social sciences often emphasizes detailed examination of cases that appear in the flow of social life. While descriptive method according to Nassaji (2015) is describing a phenomenon and its characteristics. General descriptive research also emphasizes more about what questions than how or why something happens.

Therefore, qualitative descriptive methods in the study try to describe South Korean behavior and interaction through various sources. Dawson (2007) also said qualitative research uses preliminary data collection as a guide to be able to adjust and sharpen research. While Nassaji's interpretation (2015) is also more holistic and often involves a rich data set of various sources such as opinions, perspectives and behaviors of the research object itself. Furthermore, Nassaji (2015) also explained the behavior of all qualitative researchers relying on a positivist approach to social sciences. This happens because they follow a linear research path, speak in the language of

"variables and hypotheses", and emphasize precisely the measurement of variables and test hypotheses associated with common causal explanations.

Furthermore, Nassaji (2015) explained that there are some people who believe that qualitative data is soft, intangible and intangible. However, on the other hand, Collier, Seawright, & Brady (2003) said that qualitative data is empirical because it involves documenting real events, recording what the source says, observing certain behaviors, studying written documents and visually examining images.

3.2 Literature Study

Aside of qualitative descriptive, in this paper we also use literature study to review arguments that we need to build better analysis for this paper. Snyder (2019) stated that a literature study is appropriate for the purpose of offering an analysis of a particular topic or research issue. Usually, this form of literature review is performed to determine the state of information on a specific issue. It could be used, for instance, to construct research areas, to define research divergence, or simply to address a specific topic.

Therefore, in this paper, since the issue is very limited to South Korean interactions and behavior, this method is relevant to be accepted as one of the method to conduct analysis deeper. Furthermore, Lingard (2015) argued that literature study is similar with eavesdropping a bunch of conversations, synthesis it, then add our point of views regarding the topic in the conversations. She explained that "Imagine yourself joining a conversation at a social event. After you hang about eavesdropping to get the drift of what's being said (the conversational equivalent of the literature review), you join the conversation with a contribution that signals your shared interest in the topic, your knowledge of what's

already been said, and your intention". It means, literature study is searching all the data regarding the specific topic you will research on then put down your perspectives regarding the topic as your key analysis argument in order to deliver it. Moreover, Boyer (2016) argued that with such method, researcher could get help in order to help articulate specific expectations, demonstrate proof of sufficient planning, choose suitable pathways, share information about relevant outcomes, partake in constructive criticism.

Further, Bordage (2009) argued that studies, which lack logical basis or a theoretical context, case the design and analysis of the research problematic to produce. Maggio et al (2016) said that, at the end of the day, a thorough literature review is the first critical step towards defining the appropriate analysis conceptual contexts.

3.3 Middle Power

Middle power as concept raises discussion among experts in International Relations. However, Jordaan (2003) explained that middle powers are countries which are neither large nor small in regards to foreign strength, capability and influence, and which show a tendency to foster cohesion and peace in the global system. Moreover, he also add that all middle powers show foreign policy behavior that stabilizes and legitimizes the global order, especially through multilateral and cooperative framework. Furthermore, South Korea as explained above, engaged in more libertarian issues in its diplomacy, especially currently under President Moon that already emphasizing that South Korea will forge ahead with inter-Korean cooperative projects as stated by Lee (2020), an exceptionally egalitarian way to face North Korean regime. This effort resembling Sunshine Policy in a glimpse as President Moon came from the same party

with Ex-President Kim Dae-Jung as explained by Lee (2020).

Middle power in Jordaan (2003) can be divided into two parts, traditional and emerging. Tradition middle power is middle power countries that seem to be sustained democratic countries and are also more interested in the global political economy. Whereas the emerging middle powers are recently developed democratic countries and so are more focused in the regional political economy. In addition, Jordaan (2003) also stated that middle-powers self-interest can be located at multiple stages, yet generally identified similarities are in the interest of global stability, controllability and predictability, a conservative approach that has the effect of legitimizing the status quo, and reinforcing (and amplifying) existing inequalities in power and wealth to their relative gain.

Thus, as explained above, South Korea is relatively sustained democratic country and more tempted with global political economies. These are proved by Briskey (2020) that stated that South Korea is one of established Asian democracies, then Park in Hsiao (2014) stated that South Korea is likely to be anywhere between electoral democracy and liberal democracy after the transition to democracy in 1987. This means that if we recognize that by now, in 2020, South Korea 's democracy is 33 years old, it is very advanced as opposed to Indonesia, for example, which had its transition to democracy in 1999. Furthermore, Roach et al (2010) argued that South Korea is an Asian Miracle in terms of economic growth and development. Now, South Korea is a major economy and a world-class manufacturer whose products trade around the globe with most research that emphasized on technology and design as its power, such as Samsung and LG Electronics. Moreover, they, for instance, have been sweeping international design

awards and other international achievements in regard of economy as mentioned before. These are meant that South Korea is looking for international level growth instead of just local or regional aims. In line with what Jordaan has stated before, those facts described that South Korea is a well-positioned middle power yet why is South Korea less politically active on Indo-Pacific issues than other East Asian countries, such as Japan with the Quad or China in the Indo-Pacific issue? Remains biased of we not discuss this particular situation with economic diplomacy perspective as may help us to understand South Korean behavior toward the Indo-Pacific framework.

3.4 Constructivism Political Economic Diplomacy

Economic diplomacy in general term is one of the most important foreign political instruments for a country after the security and sovereignty sector. Many definitions explain what economic diplomacy looks like. However, Pajtinka (2016) explaining the term economic diplomacy in the contemporary era has two meanings, namely the meaning of diplomacy can be eaten as an effort to achieve the foreign economic interests of a country. Furthermore, Pajtinka (2016) also argues that the term economic diplomacy is "a specific type of activity of state bodies for economic relationships and their representatives vis-a-vis foreign countries conducted as a part of overall diplomacy of a state with the aim of achievement of the achievement of the goals of the foreign economic policy of a state." In other words, economic diplomacy is an activity that includes all diplomatic activities aimed at organizing foreign political interests in the economic field.

Meanwhile, according to Saner & Yiu (2001) defines economic diplomacy as "the activity of diplomatic missions aimed at the

promotion of the business and financial sector of the home state with the aim of supporting its economic development'. That is, the meaning of this second economic diplomacy, related to the use of economic tools to achieve every national interest in international relations. Different from Tóth & Horváthová (2016) and Saner & Yiu (2001), which define economic diplomacy with the perspective of the state and national interests, Bergeijk & Moons (2017) defines economic diplomacy as "a series of activities related to cross-border economic activities carried out by state and non-state actors in the world."

Then, Wilson (2017) also explained that trade and connectivity in the Asia Pacific has been running very intensely, but this economic trend has not been able to extend to the west in the Indian Ocean. The presence of regional economic institutions such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN+3, and APEC to IORA has been the foundation of the framework of economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (Wilson, 2017). Similarly, economic diplomacy should be a top priority of countries in the region.

Now, South Korea, which is in the midst of Indo-Pacific complexity, has used economic diplomacy as one of its good foreign policy instruments. This can be seen from the policy of restructuring FDI in the aftermath of the Asian crisis, establishing official development assistance (ODA) policies to participate in regional economic agendas such as OECD, APEC and ASEM further strengthen Korea's economic influence in the Indo-Pacific (Dent, 1998). Not only that, Paterson & Choi (2017) also argued that during the founding of South Korea since the 1950s until now, South Korean presidents have always paid attention and improved the quality of its diplomacy with other countries, especially in economic diplomacy. Thus, economic diplomacy is South Korea's priority instrument to survive

in a situation dominated by security issues in the Indo-Pacific.

While Balaam and Dillman (2013) explained that, constructivism in the field of international political economy is relatively breakthrough as new perspective in the broader sense of International Relation. Same with Constructivism in political context, in political economy context, they explained that economy policy as foreign policy are being valued as in their social context with emphasizes on the value, moral, pattern, and the meaning of the policy. Moreover, in their book, they also discussed that Constructivism Political Economy is highly underlined with identity, purpose, and meaning of the policy by the policy makers.

4. Results and Discussion

Korea as Middle Power in Indo-Pacific

This part of paper will try to solve why is South Korea less politically active on Indo-Pacific issues than other East Asian countries, such as Japan with the Quad or China in the Indo-Pacific issue? Bonsal (1907) once stated that the Joseon Dynasty of Korea was sometimes portrayed as a kingdom of hermits. Later, Lubina (2015) described that a hermit kingdom/state is a concept applicable to any nation, entity or culture that voluntarily or conditionally walls off either metaphorically or geographically. Therefore, if we try to look metaphorically (and geographically), modern South Korean society has clamped by economy and military giants as China, Japan, and Russia. Plus, if we want to count North Korea, that means South Korea is full surrounded by threats so the term is still intact.

Moreover, Kennedy (2010) explained that South Korea's priority is its economic success. Further, Korean society is also understands the necessity to gain better wellbeing, as once South Korea was a poor and war-destroyed country. Then, South

Korean foreign policy and military strategy are very precarious as mentioned before, clamped by giants thus military force is essentially everyday knowledge. This particular point is proved by military mandatory that exists for South Korean young men (Kim, 2010). This means, the necessity to prepare the worst is still high for South Korea in order to be equipped for facing Kim Jong-Un's regime.

In addition, Kennedy (2010) also explained that small countries are essentially "consumers" of security because in an uneven environment, they generally cannot protect themselves; they thus depend on the international community. National Geographic once said (2020) South Korea is a small country with a lot of people. Consequently, the rich but small, those words maybe the best tagline for modern South Korea. As a small nation, Kennedy (2010) then stressed that South Korea, with all its stability, is peering into the 21st century with a curious mixture of economic hope and physical vulnerability.

The reasons maybe abundant, if we follow President Moon Jae-In policy in recent years, as in Indo-Pacific era, we could dub it as pacifist yet inward beneficial policies as President Moon's priority are peace first, mutual respect, and open policy (Ministry of Unification ROK, 2017). Huang (2017) said that President Moon might be too nice with North Korea. In comparison to his predecessors, he signaled that he would press for a measured relationship with the North. Rich, small, and pacifist in digital era, no doubt if we wanted to say Korea is still a hermit in 2020. New Southern Policy, Further North Policy, and Green New Deal are several series of policies that being undertaken by President Moon to thrive South Korea's row between the titans in the broader region of Asia Pacific (or Indo-Pacific). Yeo (2020) argued that South Korea

is trying to develop its own foreign policy approach. Therefore the sense of constructivism political economy diplomacy for South Korea is proven as Yeo mentioned. This effort is being taken by South Korea to exclusively presenting themselves in the Indo-Pacific apart from the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy that carried by Japan and the United States (to contain China). Although, President Moon's administration understands the pressures of major powers and the intensification of China – U.S. foreign policy rivalry, to seek alternative growth in ASEAN and South East Asia maybe the win-win solution that President Moon to avoid the clash of the titan as could harm South Korea in a sense. As Kim (2018) put it, South Korea is getting a dilemma in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) scheme. The prosperity of South Korean people is rigid for President Moon in no matter what. It gives a humble vibes of benign capitalism to thrive economic growth for South Korea as getting tug war by the Trump-Xi's trade war. Panda (2019) even stated that President Moon came close to endorsing the Indo-Pacific strategy without actually doing so. Kennedy (2010) described the prosperity was, well, right in your face. From the squeaky-clean Incheon International Airport to the ultra-high-class shopping stores in central Seoul, it was clear that money, money, and money was the vital word in the game. Thus, money game has spoken, the hunt for growth and prosper is in high stake for South Korea, especially President Moon.

In broader sense, South Korea as tiny bit in titan's pool may be resulted from old problem, the UN Security Council. More generally, Kennedy (2010) added that stability may derive from a controlled international framework wherein the Major Powers (Russia, China, the United States, France, the United Kingdom) might have to

do most of the dirty work, supply the bulk of the peacekeepers, and recognize their greater obligations (their charge, after all for a veto by the Security Council). Then as middle power, South Korea, as argued before, not join the band of ensembles in the parade of Free and Open Indo-Pacific. South Korea chooses its way to differ the giants and decided to choose its own way to face Indo-Pacific. New Southern Policy becomes the headline of President's Moon facing and choosing the two plates of United States and China. One of the big marks of the New Southern policy is where South Korea decided to invest large sum of electric cars plant in Indonesia carried by Hyundai and LG (Rustandi, 2020).

Moreover, Robertson (2020) adding that South Korea could be Asian Switzerland, but their geographical and geopolitical dilemmas prohibit it from being blunt to conclude that growth is still the target to be accomplished, but peace and prosperity remains one side of the political fence, while North Korea's policies remain another. Hence, South Korea uses its middle power status to seek economic prosperity for its own agenda instead of join the political heyday of Indo-Pacific euphoria so South Korea's economic interest are bigger than political interest in Korea's mind of Free and Open Indo-Pacific. This means, as middle power, South Korea play economic end in general, compare to political end as the main statecraft for handling Indo-Pacific issues. North Korea relation also another mainframe that South Korea cannot avoid and instead distracted by the United States and China's competition, President Moon made trip across South East Asian to consolidated economic gain to boos South Korea bargain toward North Korea.

In addition, Ferrier (2020) said that South Korea should be the gateway to an updated US Indo-Pacific solution to the economic and governance foundations of the

policy that has been dominated by security concerns in terms of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific. Therefore, South Korea, as Ferrier said, could be alternatives if the United States wanted to fix fewer security concerns in the region. Chinoy (2020) also argued that South Korea should not afford to stay on the sidelines for a long time in continuing US-China disputes. As top-tier economy, state like South Korea, seen as a key possible substitute to China in the global telecommunications, digital technologies, artificial intelligence distribution networks.

Economic Interest Than Political Interest In this part of paper, the author will try to analyze "why is South Korea less politically active on Indo-Pacific issues than other East Asian countries, such as Japan with the Quad or China in the Indo-Pacific issue?" as described above, South Korea, categorized as middle power, tends to use economic diplomacy to achieve its economic interests. The South Korean government's defense of its economic interests has been evident from every leadership of a South Korean president from time to time. During the leadership of President Park Chung-Hee, a major part of South Korea's development strategy prioritized preferential lending to export businesses and protectionism of the domestic industry and gave the blessing of free competition by compromising on "Chaebol" – a designation for large companies owned by rich families, to ensure South Korea's export economy can grow (Albert, 2018). Chapman (2018) also argued that President Park at the time also had confidence that industrialization was the best step for Koreans to rise up from the downfall of the Korean War and achieve economic success. Then, this agenda of economic interest continued after the Asian economic crisis, in which South Korea eventually restructured FDI and conducted debt swaps and signed international debt with its

economic security (Koo & Kiser, 2001). After going through a period of crisis, South Korea again expanded its economic interests by conducting FTA cooperation with the U.S., Australia and others and participating in regional economic cooperation such as ASEAN+3, APEC and other. From this, we can see that South Korea has always put economic interests first in a variety of ways.

This is certainly inseparable from South Korea's strict education system and highly motivated and educated population, so these factors have spurred South Korea to be able to develop high technology early and experience rapid economic development (ICEF, 2014). This also aligned with Santacreu (2018) who argues that innovation and technology are the main factors to shore up South Korea's export competitiveness and drive significant economic improvement over the past few decades.

Today, the geopolitical and geo-economic expansion to the Indian Ocean, driven by U.S. efforts to restore dominance in Asia due to China's seemingly unstoppable rise, is having an impact on allied countries and their partners (Park, 2019). The existence of China's BRI Strategy and the U.S.-led FOIP forced countries in the region to make the right strategic choices, of course this makes it difficult for partner countries to choose. Park (2019) explained that, the Indo-Pacific dynamics filled by U.S. and U.S. rivalries make South Korea more careful in determining each of its foreign policies, trying not to get caught up in the situation of U.S. and Chinese rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region. (Kim, 2018) also pointed out, the South Korean government under the leadership of President Moon Jae-in, the Blue House paid little attention to the FOIP that considers the Strategy, mostly aimed at rivaling China's dominance. Pardo (2019) also argued that, South Korea sees no clear and strong reason to choose between the U.S.

and China, as long as Seoul continues to benefit from both. Meanwhile, South Korea's relations with Beijing are still needed to maintain its economic interests. Although China does not always support BRI, Korea is also aware that China is the largest trading partner. Korean trade in term of export to China is 26.7%, therefore, South Korea chose to avoid hostilities with Beijing (Park, 2019). South Korea has its own way of maintaining neutrality from the political economic dominance between the U.S. and China but at the same time, still prioritizes its national economic interests in regional interactions in the Indo-Pacific region. South Korea's involvement in the U.S.-led multilateral Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP) does not make South Korea hesitant to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a strategic trade partnership led by China (Sohn, 2016). This makes South Korea in a strategic position to play economic interests as a middle power country (Sohn, 2016).

South Korea's economic interests became increasingly visible when President Moon issued an NSP (New Southern Policy) policy that prioritizes cooperation with ASEAN member states and India aimed at not only strengthening economic cooperation, but cultural cooperation, people-to-security exchanges (Kwak, 2020). In the midst of fierce rivalry of influence between the U.S. and China in Indo-Pacific, South Korea through NSP offers regional strategies and cooperation oriented towards prosperity, peace and people-centered community of peace (Kwak, 2020). In order to gain maximum economic interest, President Moon made visits to 10 ASEAN countries and India and held a summit a year after the NSP declaration in 2017 (Kwak, 2020). This proves that economic interests are a priority agenda in the Indo-Pacific region. Kwak (2020) also explained that NSP takes South

Korea policy one step further by including the scope of security, diplomacy and economic cooperation that has never even been included in ASEAN policy also aligned with what Lee have said (2020). The important thing to know is the reputation of South Korea that has long been involved in international development projects for underdeveloped and developing countries through foreign development assistance (Park, 2019). It can be the capital and profit of South Korea to create new partnerships. Moreover, through NSP, for instance, South Korea received investment and business gains in electronic vehicle (EV) business in Indonesia through Hyundai and LG.

Although the Government of South Korea has run NSP in several ASEAN countries, Seoul does not seem to have any intention to rival the U.S. FOIP policy or BRI China, it is seen that the Government of South Korea decided to conduct policy collaboration between NSP and Indo-Pacific through the signing of the agreement between the Republic of Korea and the U.S. (Department of State of the US, 2020) and although not explicitly, South Korea also strengthened bilateral relations with China in various aspects (Park, 2019).

5. Conclusion

Hence, from the arguments mentioned above, South Korea could become the neutral zone with focus on becoming a hub on education, innovation, and economic across the region in order to develop more growth. South Korea role to play is rowing between the seas of the clash of titans. The absent of South Korea in the thrive of Indo-Pacific noise give assumption that South Korea may represent Andrzej Sapkowski famous quote from the Last Wish "I'm to choose between one evil and another, then I prefer not to choose at all". Moreover, the complete sentence of this quote is "I'm not a

pious hermit, I haven't done only good in my life. But if I'm to choose between one evil and another, then I prefer not to choose at all". Thus, Korea may not want to be hermit all the time, so in order to prove it to the world, South Korea need to stand up on its feet to decide the best decision for it, yet as a middle power, South Korea also need to calculate every step as not to be misjudge by the titans surround it, so a very careful and measured way as the New Southern Policy, or not to choose both sides and use its own perspectives instead, may be the best answer for South Korean middle power-ship. Even, South Korea is not saint like Switzerland or Canada; South Korea with all its competitive advantage in technology and culture may become a hybrid of neutral country alike.

Middle power role of South Korea may resulted middle way or in between of two options that South Korea is facing now. In one side, South Korea may be an ally for United State's configuration in Asia Pacific region. On other side, South Korea may still need China for its undoubtedly large market to thrive the economic growth. Yet all of these reasons may resulted in the New Southern Policy to engage South East Asian Region (and India) to sustain more growth in absence of China to some extent toward the US trade war in recent years.

Economic growth is a necessity that every country needs to thrive, to survive, and to live in this very competitive world. South Korea also no exception for it, combination of its middle power role to play in global pop culture, innovation and technology, and green energy sector may boost Korea for once and all. As a hermit crab, South Korea need to look out very carefully when and where it may out to continue walk, or in this sense, is to progress. Timing is crucially essential for South Korea. Situation and condition from the titans that clashed may progress South Korea in a unique way. The

capability of South Korea in creates their own opinion that win-win solution them in very ambiguous situation recently is a very smart diplomatic moves.

The narrow path between the titans might affect President Moon to decide what should he do for a mediocre South Korea to face to face with eagle and dragon. As a newly industrialized country, he may not want to risk the momentum to growth for South Korea as it already burden by the brotherly problem of the north. He consolidated South Korean potential profit in a relatively new traditional market of South Korean economics as the trade war continues.

The North Korean problem also another issue to worsen the dilemma of South Korea in the Indo-Pacific scheme. The Sino-North Korean relation and South Korean alliance with the West should be not hampered with new problem. The in-between way to go down to South East and South Asia, not to right or left, maybe the best option for South Korea the mediocre and newly rich country to not being pulled in the US-China rivalry. South Korea has invented the alternative to bargain in the heavy weight tug-of war game in North East Asia. As in other word South Korea also need to consolidate its voices in neutral countries, such as South Asian and South East Asian countries, in order to face its own problematic issues with the North.

Therefore, the question like "why is South Korea less politically active on Indo-Pacific issues than other East Asian countries, such as Japan with the Quad or China in the Indo-Pacific issue?" is kind of a reflection for South Korean behavior as middle-powered, high-tech, and cultured hermit in globalization era. Hermit 4.0 as we dubbed in the title of this paper may suit South Korean depiction in rise of the Indo-Pacific era as we argued before. The unusual mediocrity of South Korea in combine

culture, technology, and innovation give a blunt second exit to shape its own vision in the Indo-Pacific framework. South Korean answer to not choose either way may be a good lesson for other rising or emerging middle countries such as Indonesia, Turkey, and Mexico to be able use all of the

possibilities in their own displacement in very own region. As middle power may grow as upper power, this kind of innovative moves of diplomacy may needed for them in order to survive the in the titans chessboard of global politics and economy.

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