

Institution: Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)		
Unit of Assessment: UoA34 Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
Title of case study: Understanding the role of identity in shaping foreign policy discourse and preventing conflict in East Asia		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Rex Li	Professor of International Relations	1992 to date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>East Asia is widely known for its economic dynamism and success but it is also a region of great power rivalry and unresolved territorial disputes. The existing research tends to focus on the material dimensions of international relations such as military competition and economic rivalry, which fails to explicate the persistence of tensions among major East Asian countries despite their close economic interactions and trade relations. The project addresses this research problem by investigating the important role of identity discourse and identity tensions in shaping their changing security relations. The research has stimulated and contributed to policy debates on East Asian security within governments and the diplomatic circles in the UK, Europe and East Asia. The key researcher's contribution to these debates has led to a greater understanding of identity politics in conflict prevention and peace promotion among diplomats and foreign policy-makers.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>This research is undertaken and led by Professor Rex Li, Professor of International Relations at Liverpool John Moores University. It began in the late 1990s as part of an ESRC-funded project on the post-Cold War security environment in the Asia-Pacific region, which was later developed into a major project on the rise of China as a great power and its regional and global implications. Since the mid-2000s, with funding from various sources, including the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences, the project has extended its analysis of China to other East Asian countries, focusing in particular on the role of identity in conflict prevention and peace promotion in East Asia. East Asia is an economically dynamic and vibrant region, which has extensive trade and economic links with the countries around the world. However, it is also a region where there are traditional rivalries, unresolved disputes and potential conflicts. Specifically, this project has investigated how security relations in the region are shaped by changing identity discourses among the key players, including China, Japan, the United States and Korea. Building on the Project Leader's previous research, the project examines the intricate links between recent tensions in the region and the process of identity construction in these countries that reflects their historical memory and future aspirations (UR1).</p> <p>This project challenges the assumptions of Realist theory that are ingrained in the study of international relations by offering a cultural analysis of international relations. It argues that the roots of the volatile relationships among Japan, China, America and Korea lie in their changing self-identity and perceived identity of each other. The project takes a Constructivist perspective that focuses on how the national identities of these countries are (re)defined and (re)constructed, and how their changing identity discourses are linked to their foreign policies and security strategies (UR3, UR4, UR6). In addition, the research has investigated how America and China</p>		

have exploited their adeptly constructed narratives of the international order to enhance their discursive power in East Asia (UR6). The project adopts an interdisciplinary approach drawing on the theoretical insights of International Relations, Media and Communication Studies, Social Psychology and Sociology (especially Social Identity Theory) (UR1, UR2, UR3, UR4, UR5, UR6). Utilising qualitative research methods underpinned by interpretivism, the primary research includes a discourse analysis of government statements, official speeches, policy reports and news articles in English and several East Asian languages. This is supplemented by interviews with policy elites, officials and diplomats. The research outputs have made a unique contribution to the literature and existing knowledge in Cultural Studies and International Relations (UR2, UR5, UR6).

The project has significant policy relevance, as tensions and conflicts among East Asian countries would have a detrimental impact on the regional economic and security environment (UR3, UR4, UR5, UR6). The key research insights of this project indicate that China, Japan, the US and Korea perceive each other's efforts to construct a potent national identity as a challenge to their own identity formation. This has also led to an intensification of a discursive rivalry between the US and China (UR3, UR4, UR5, UR6). The research concludes that whether peace can be maintained in the region will to a considerable extent depend on how serious the East Asian identity tensions are and whether and to what extent they may be reduced (UR2, UR5). The research suggests that these countries would have to make a serious attempt to escape from their 'identity dilemma'. If perception is socially constructed, it may be altered via the development of intersubjective knowledge, ideas, norms and institutions. Another significant research insight is related to the psychological dimension of identity construction, in that these countries need to learn to appreciate the sensitivity of historical memory and accommodate each other's distinctive national identity and national aspirations. Only then would they be able to build sustainable mutual trust and develop a more positive relationship (UR1, UR2, UR5).

As the UK and Europe have extensive economic and trade relationships with East Asia, it is in their interest to promote a stable and peaceful environment in the region. One of the major research recommendations is that Western analysts and policy-makers need to monitor East Asian powers' identity discourse and competing narratives closely, which has been changing substantially (UR4, UR5, UR6). East Asian leaders should be persuaded that the economic vitality of the region will rest on their willingness and ability to maintain a peaceful security environment (UR1, UR5). Meanwhile, the UK and other European countries should seek to instil positive influence into East Asian identity and security thinking wherever possible through all the available political and diplomatic channels (UR1, UR2, UR5, UR6).

3. References to the research

UR1 – Li, Rex (2009) *A Rising China and Security in East Asia: Identity Construction and Security Discourse*, Routledge, London. 320 pages. ISBN: 978-0-415-44940-3

UR2 – Li, Rex (2013) "National Identity and Changing Great Power Relations in the Asia-Pacific: Is a Cold War Emerging?", *The Asan Forum*, July-August, 2013, pp. 1-16. ISSN: 2288-5757

UR3 – Li, Rex (2015) "Great Power Identity, Security Imaginary and Military Transformation in China", in Pauline Eadie and Wyn Rees, eds., *Military Transformation in the West and Asia: Security Policy in the Post Cold-War Era*, Routledge, London, pp. 119-147. ISBN: 978-1138886230

UR4 – Li, Rex (2016) "China's Sea Power Aspirations and Strategic Behaviour in the South China Sea from the Theoretical Perspective of Identity Construction", in Enrico Fels and Truong-

Minh Vu, eds., *Power Politics in Asia's Contested Waters: Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea*, Switzerland, Springer, pp. 117-137. ISBN: 978-3319261508

UR5 – Li, Rex (2018) “Identity Tensions and China-Japan-Korea Relations: Can Peace be Maintained in North East Asia?”, in Kevin Clements, ed., *Identity, Trust, and Reconciliation in East Asia: Dealing with Painful History to Create a Peaceful Present*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 47-73. ISBN: 978-3319548968

UR6 – Li, Rex (2019) “Contending Narratives of the International Order: US/Chinese Discursive Power and its Effects on the UK”, *Asian Perspective* (Johns Hopkins University Press, USA), Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 349-385. ISSN: 0258-9184

This research project has been supported by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences, with a competitive grant of £35,000 awarded to Dr Rex Li for the ‘East Asian Peace Programme’ (2012-2015). The project is also supported by the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (£1,000, 2017) and Research England (Strategic Priorities Fund, £10,000, 2019-2020). The quality of all the outputs from the project is demonstrated by a rigorous process of peer-review before they were accepted for publication.

4. Details of the impact

The research project is essentially concerned with gaining a thorough understanding of the self-identity of the key East Asian countries (China, Japan, the United States and Korea) and their discourse of each other's identities. The findings of the project indicate that the policy elites in these countries tend to perceive each other's identity construction as a major challenge to their own identity. Their responses to the foreign and security policies of other countries are driven largely by a re-evaluation of their self-identity and the identity of their perceived competitors. This changing identity discourse is of direct relevance to preventing conflict and maintaining peace in East Asia. In addition, a sound understanding of the security dynamics in East Asia is important to Western governments, including the British government, in formulating their policy towards East Asia, given the growing significance of the region in international affairs and international trade.

The links between Professor Rex Li and the British foreign policy communities were established initially in the late 1990s through his ESRC-funded research projects, which involved policy advisors and officials of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Ministry of Defence (MoD). Through various international collaborative projects, his contacts with the policy communities have extended from the UK to other European countries (e.g. Belgium, France, Norway and Sweden) and Asian countries (e.g. China, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Vietnam). Professor Li's reputation and status in the field of East Asian security have grown substantially during the last twenty years. He has been regularly invited to give presentations derived from his research at leading foreign policy think-tanks.

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In conclusion, the impact case study has demonstrated that the impact derived from this research project has reached a wide range of groups of beneficiaries in the diplomatic, foreign and security policy communities in the UK, Europe and East Asia. While the nature of the impact activities is highly sensitive with most events being held behind closed doors, the evidence provided has clearly confirmed the importance of the Project Leader's involvement in these high-level meetings, and its significant impact on enhancing and enriching the beneficiaries' understanding of the role of identity in shaping foreign policy discourse and preventing conflict in East Asia.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- CS1** – Correspondence (February/March 2014).
- CS2** – Conference Report (February/March 2014).
- CS3** – Conference (See page 2) (October 2014).
- CS4** – Roundtable Seminar Report (see Page 15) (November 2015).
- CS5** – Email (November 2015).
- CS6** – Letter (August 2015).
- CS7** – Agenda (March 2015).
- CS8** – Poster (April 2015).
- CS9** – Email (April 2015).
- CS10** – Correspondence (November 2017).