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Cover Photo: Max Miller
Pictured: People’s Liberation Army Soldiers outside Kunming, Yunnan Province.
Section: 377A  
Keeping Singapore in the Closet

By Katri Stanley

A fter a half-century of rapid economic growth and vast improvements in all material facets of life, Singapore, an island nation of 5.4 million people, has the unceremonious distinction of being the only developed nation to still have laws criminalizing consensual adult homosexual activity.

Called 377A laws after their original section of the British Penal Code, the Singaporean legislature and courts have denied repeated attempts to eliminate this relict of colonial rule, with the most recent efforts coming in 2007 and 2014. Though there is no proactive enforcement of 377A laws, they nonetheless continue to have a corrosive influence on society.

Not only do these laws formally rob LGBTQ people of an integral part of their identity, and relegate the concerns of this community, and broader discussions around sexual orientation and gender, to whispered conversations away from the public sphere. Furthermore, by deferring to public consensus on the matter (or rather, its perception of the public’s opinion), the government defies the very ethos it has relied on for the past fifty years that brought Singapore unprecedented success: a tough decision making that overrides the preferences of the majority to serve the best long-term interests of Singapore.

Old Laws in a Modern City-State  
As part of the British-controlled Straits Settlement, Singapore inherited the common law tradition from the United Kingdom, and more specifically, the 1861 Penal Code. The 1871 Straits Settlement Penal Code was retained by Malaysia upon its independence from Britain in 1957, and again by Singapore when it was expelled from Malaysia in 1965 and became its own independent nation. Section 377 of the code attempted to police all non-procreative sexual activity, but 377A, a derivative of the Labouchere Amendment (section 11 of the UK Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885), was focused specifically on male homosexuality.

During a government review of the Penal Code in 2007, article 377 attracted the most attention. Though the broader provisions in article 377, which prohibited oral and anal sex among consenting adults, was repealed, 377A – prohibiting similar acts between male homosexuals – was retained after much heated debate.

Gay rights activists have long argued that the anti-sodomy laws are a violation of universal human rights, and that the government has no place in policing the private activities of consenting adults. The pushback from more conservative factions of society has amounted to the view that the repeal of 377A would allow the West’s liberal influence to alter Singapore’s traditional Asian values, a claim notable for its irony in that the law itself is a colonial import from the West – as is the Christianity of the churches at the forefront of the movement to retain 377A.

In his speech at the close of the 2007 parliamentary debate, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong tried to argue that while homosexuals were an important part of, and welcome in, Singaporean society, that this alone did not merit overturning 377A, because Singaporean society remained conservative at heart. By stressing that the law had been inherited from the British, PM Loong almost seemed to imply that if Singapore were starting...
from scratch and writing the entirety of its laws today, it is unlikely that explicitly anti-homosexual provisions would be included.

But since the law has long been in place, its removal would be akin to condoning homosexual behavior and even promoting it. The government was not willing to risk its legitimacy by side-stepping public opinion for an issue it judged of little economic consequence.

The Politics of (In)Justice

The repeal of 377A again became a hot issue in 2014, when its constitutionality was challenged before the Court of Appeals, Singapore's highest court. Arguments from two separate cases, one brought by a long-term gay couple, and the other by a man who had been arrested for oral sex in a public toilet, were heard at the same time and a single decision was rendered.

Lawyers for both parties contended that Section 377A contravened Articles 9 and 12 of the Singapore Constitution. Article 9 holds that “no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty save in accordance with the law,” while Article 12 maintains that “all persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law.” Yet in striking down their argument, the court relied on a narrow interpretation of Article 9, and maintained, in accordance with prior court decisions, that Article 12 still allowed lawmakers to pass laws that treat people differently, so long as the differential treatment is based on “reasonable classification.”

Furthermore, because the latter article does not specifically prohibit discrimination based on sex, gender or sexual orientation, the Court held that the issues involved with Section 377A were beyond its scope. In short, having recently failed in both the legislative and judicial arenas, it appears that 377A will remain in Singapore’s body of laws for the foreseeable future.

In his 2007 parliamentary speech, PM Loong advised gay rights activists to let the situation evolve gradually, and warned them that to campaign too forcefully on the issue would be self-defeating because of the certain pushback they would encounter from conservatives. Yet if to publicly acknowledge one’s sexual identity is to essentially declare oneself to be in violation of the law, it is difficult to see a path forward for greater acceptance.

This is particularly true in a place like Singapore, which attributes much of its success to being a law-abiding society where daily conduct is dictated by a clear set of rules. Public health experts have warned that for HIV prevention programs to be effective, homosexual activity must be decriminalized, for it is only through decriminalization that the stigma associated with these behaviors diminishes. The barriers preventing gay men from pursuing a rich and meaningful life are substantially higher in a context where they cannot readily seek out information about their most basic sexual health needs.

As evidence of society’s conservative views, 377A proponents point to public polling which indicates that a large majority of Singaporeans find gay sex morally wrong. Of course, the more that homosexuals are “hidden” in society, the higher the likelihood that the broader public will rely on offensive and inaccurate stereotypes and tropes to form negative impressions about their sexual activities and lifestyle, perpetuating a vicious cycle.

Singapore has had a track record of success largely thanks to decisions made by an elite group of leaders who were unabashed in their estimation that they knew what was in the best interest of society and were not afraid to act accordingly. And yet this leadership is alarmingly absent on the issue of 377A, as the government tries to cling to an outdated provision that is morally untenable.

Finally, regardless of one’s views on anti-sodomy laws per se, the fact that the prime minister has signaled that there will be no proactive enforcement of an existing law sets a dangerous precedent. In a country where daring to question the independence of the judiciary is certain to invite a lawsuit, it is a seeming contradiction to argue, as the government has, for the retention of a law under which no one will be prosecuted. 377A flies in the face of Singapore’s efforts to position itself as a modern, cosmopolitan city.
Secular Theocracy in The Hermit Kingdom

By Charissa Lee

The North Korean ruling family has maintained its legitimacy for over sixty years through the cultivation of a “secular theocracy” and the establishment of a value system that has pervaded all aspects of life in the country. The two elements constitute a self-reinforcing cycle of virtues, and shed light on the longevity of Kim family rule in a system anachronistic to every other in the region. However, the foundations of this belief in the divinity of the Kim family and in the Juche ideology have been shaken since the death of the nation’s founder, Kim Il-Sung, and will continue to be eroded as change gains momentum in the country.

Kim Il-Sung, considered the epitome of revolution, the central figure and decisive authority in all matters. North Koreans continue to praise his excellence and foresight in political administration, defense, economics, infrastructure planning, and social cohesion. He is designated in the North Korean constitution as the country’s “Eternal President,” and his birthday is a religious holiday known as the “Day of the Sun.”

Perhaps no other event in the twentieth century shook the public consciousness of North Korea as deeply as the death of the “Great Leader,” on July 8, 1994. American journalist Barbara Demick, in her book Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea, describes the emotional trauma and disbelief the death of Kim Il-Sung imparted to the citizens of North Korea:

“She was numb. She couldn’t understand it ... she knew that mortals were made of flesh and blood and lived finite lives. But Kim Il-Sung, she thought, was something other. If the Great Marshal could die, then anything could happen.”

Secular Theocracy

Kim Il-Sung leveraged both traditional Confucian thought and his mythologized Paektu-san lineage to establish a secular version of theocracy in North Korea. A well-oiled propaganda machine portrayed Kim Il-Sung as a being that was equal to heaven – transcending both law and reason – an ultimate authority that informed the value system of an entire society. This infallibility serves as the basis for the secular theocracy that continues to sustain the Kim personality cult.

After Kim Il-Sung’s death, this theocracy was institutionalized through the passing of rule to his son, Kim Jong-Il. The Kim family’s divinity is maintained by the public’s continued reference, even in death, to their honorific titles: “Great Leader” and “Dear Leader.” This practice is reinforced by the government’s “Ten Principles for the Establishment of the One-Ideology System,” – a possible reference to the Ten Commandments – which seeks to ensure permanent idolization of the deceased leaders.

Kim Jong Un, the current ruler of North Korea and direct descendent of Kim Il-Sung, is imbued by this theocracy with the same divinity, excellence and mandate to rule.

How to Legitimize a Cult of Personality

This secularity of this theocracy is illustrated by the persistence and pervasiveness of Kim-worship in North Korean ideology and politics. In 1955, Kim Il-Sung introduced the ideology and political philosophy of Juche to the North Korean public consciousness. Since then, Juche, often translated as “self-reliance”, has guided every aspect of North Korean society. The entire social fabric of the country is imbued with the Kim family’s ideology, continually reinforcing the...
Kim Il-Sung with his son and successor Kim Jong-Il. © thetravelitch.blogspot.com

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**Juche** was born following the armistice that divided the Korean Peninsula following the Korean War. In an effort to distinguish North Korea from South Korea, which was heavily dependent on assistance from the United States, Kim Il-Sung resolved to maintain the country's self-sufficiency through any means. **Juche**, which espouses self-reliance based on Marxist-Leninist principles, was vindicated by the relative political stability and economic superiority of North Korea compared to South Korea and China. The public's adherence to **Juche** was a demonstrated admiration for Kim Il-Sung as the originator of the concept and savior of the nation, and loyalty to the dynastic regime was built upon this ideology. To this day, questioning **Juche** is equivalent to questioning the greatness of the Kim leaders – blasphemy subject to denouncement and punishment. Kim family rule and **Juche** are mutually reinforcing, and together create a system to ensure the dynastic regime's absolute control.

The twin secular and theocratic components of the regime's control were publicly demonstrated in the December 2014 purge of Jang Song-Thaek, uncle to Kim Jong Un and a veteran of the Party and National Defense Commission. The Korean Central News Agency denounced Jang by labelling him a “False God,” who appeared greedy for power and thought he could overrule Party issues.

By simultaneously denouncing the status of Jang's *being* and repeatedly describing him as an enemy of the Party, State and Socialist revolution, the governmental news agency reinforced the theocratic nature of the state apparatus, and revealed how tightly the Kim leaders have bound themselves to the very concept of the State in the North Korean public consciousness. Any challenge to this authority would equate to an existential disconnect in the three generations of North Korean leaders.

The regime's legitimacy is maintained through the preservation of this secular theocracy. The Kim family is the only recent non-monarchy that has successfully transferred power to a third generation. As long as the Kim bloodline continues and the **Juche** ideology endures, this de facto monarchy will continue to perpetuate itself though a rigid value system based on divine fear of the Kim family.

**Harkening Change**

**Juche**, the defining ideology of the Kim family's secular theocracy, has been eroding steadily since the 1990s. Despite Kim Il-Sung’s stricture that North Korea maintain absolute independence, his regime was nonetheless reliant on economic and political support from the Soviet Union. The collapse of the USSR marked an end of this support and shook the foundations of **Juche** philosophy. At the same time, both South Korea and Japan were enjoying unprecedented economic growth under the protection of the United States. The North suffered famine and decline while its divine enemies saw increasing success.

The Kim regime's absolute control over information, a critical component for the sustenance of its legitimacy and ideological integrity, has been subtly compromised by the slow trickle of foreign information that has penetrated North Korea following the 1996-97 famine. The current generation of North Koreans, with a median age of thirty-three, have no emotional attachment or direct memory of the good times under Kim Il-Sung. Instead, they have known only famine, hardship and fear of the godlike Kim regime under **Juche**. This generation, sometimes referred to as the *jangmadang*, or “Black Market” generation, is much more individualistic. The practice of independent trading on the market in pursuit of profit encourages individual thought and cultivates doubt in the sustainability of the North Korean system under **Juche**. These factors may work to catalyze positive change in the near future by undermining the credibility of **Juche** ideology and the secular theocracy of the Kim family cult on which it is founded.
Một ngày ở chợ

A Day at the Market
Japan Looks to The South China Sea

Regional Tensions Brew

By Joyce Dong

Japan's expanding presence in the South China Sea (SCS) has added a new level of complexity to the ongoing regional dispute over territorial claims. Japan has recently sought to bolster the military capabilities of several Southeast Asian (ASEAN) territorial claimants through a series of enhanced bilateral treaties and increased arms and military equipment sales. This policy, along with the U.S. “rebalance” to Asia, may serve as an effective counterweight to China's increasing assertiveness in the SCS. However, Japanese involvement so far away from its shores is also antagonistic towards China and may escalate regional tensions. While Japan has no territorial claims in the SCS, it has played an active role in the region since the late 2000s. It has endeavored to internationalize the SCS dispute by voicing dissent of Chinese actions at international forums and strengthening relations with other SCS claimant states. However, the recent effort to expand bilateral security relationships with ASEAN claimant states marks a significant change in Japan's foreign policy. This essay will highlight the rationale for Japan's increased involvement in the SCS, the key mechanisms of this approach, and how ASEAN states have capitalized on the strategic opportunity afforded by Japan's heightened presence.

The Japanese Rationale

Japan has several maritime security interests that are affected by disputes in the SCS and provide rationale for a more assertive Japanese defense policy in the region. Firstly, from Japan's perspective, the disputes in the SCS and the East China Sea (ECS) are closely interlinked. China's adherence to international norms in the SCS has implications on its claims in the ECS. Maintaining a presence in the SCS allows Japanese policymakers the opportunity to analyze Chinese actions in the region with an eye towards the future. Secondly, Japan's trade, commerce and energy supplies are highly dependent on the SCS. In an effort to supplant its reliance on nuclear power following the 2011 Fukushima crisis, Japan became the world's largest importer of liquified natural gas (LNG), representing thirty-seven percent of global imports, according to the Energy Information Agency (EIA). Fifty-eight percent of the world's LNG trade passes through the SCS, most of it making its way towards Japan. Over the past
four years, Japanese energy security has increasingly become dependent on the flow of goods through SCS shipping lanes, and it behooves Japanese interests to play an active role in ensuring freedom of navigation throughout the region.

While Japan has no direct territorial claims in the SCS, it has consistently claimed that the elevated regional stakes entitle it to a place at the table. As stated in the Japan's 2013 Defense White Paper, the SCS is a “common matter of concern for the whole international community and is directly related to the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region.” However, Yuichi Hosoya, professor of international politics at Keio University, revealed in an interview with The Diplomat that there are also domestic political limitations to the Japanese government’s actions in the SCS, as the Japanese public would only support military action abroad if there are direct implications for Japan’s survival.

Nevertheless, with a Look South foreign policy antecedent, Japan has taken a multilateral approach towards security in the SCS, focused on bolstering Japanese-ASEAN maritime security cooperation and increasing military transfers to these partner states. It is no small coincidence that these regional players each have notable territorial disputes with China in the SCS. As Jeff Smith, director of Asian Security Programs at the American Foreign Policy Council, said in a statement to CCTV, Japan's moves in the SCS in recent months are “...very bold and very significant changes to a Japanese foreign policy that appears to be going all-in on a hedging strategy toward China”. Since taking office in 2012, the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has emphasized forging closer defense ties with regional SCS powers in the following ways:

With Vietnam, bilateral relations were elevated to a new level of “Extensive Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia.” An agreement was made in March 2014 that Japan will supply Vietnam with six maritime patrol boats and that Japan will enhance Vietnamese capabilities in maritime law enforcement. In November 2015, Vietnam and Japan inked an agreement to allow vessels from the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Forces to make port calls in Cam Ranh Bay, a deepwater harbor in central Vietnam alongside the South China Sea.

With Indonesia, both countries agreed to set up a new high-level bilateral maritime forum in March 2015 as part of their strategic partnership to improve maritime safety and promotion of maritime industries. Japan will also enhance Indonesia’s Coast Guard and maritime infrastructure capabilities.

With the Philippines, Japan has pledged to bolster Filipino Coast Guard capabilities and supply patrol boats as part of its commitment to strengthen its strategic partnership. In May 2015, under the aegis of improving cooperative disaster response, the two countries conducted their first-ever joint drills in the SCS, near the heavily disputed Scarborough Shoal.

The Other Claimant State

While these ambitious goals may be hindered by domestic political constraints faced by ASEAN countries and lack of coordination among different maritime law enforcement agencies, the new relationships themselves have sent a strong signal to China that Japan has plans to stay in the region. Alongside these new diplomatic overtures in the SCS, Japan's rhetoric towards China has grown progressively more hardline under the Abe administration, as exemplified in its July 2015 Defense White Paper. In the paper, Japan stated that there were “concerns among the international community” on China’s “coercive attempt at changing the status quo” in the SCS. Japan also added an additional comment (compared to the 2014 version) that China is “poised to fulfill its unilateral demands without compromise.”

In November 2015, during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Manila, Abe solidified the Japanese commitment towards the SCS in his remarks to President Obama by stating that Japan would consider sending the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force on patrols in the SCS.

In response, China has been highly critical about Japan’s actions in the SCS. As stated in a 2015 article by Xinhua, the Chinese state’s official press agency, Japanese “interference in the disputes aims to divert Beijing’s attention and resources from the East China Sea, where China-Japan tension over the Diaoyu Islands has been rising.” China regards Japan as a non-claimant state, with no right to involve itself in the SCS. According to the Chinese, Japan has deliberately dramatized tensions in order to pass domestic security legislature overhauls and distract the public from Japan’s reluctance to apologize for its World War II atrocities.

Indeed, some see Abe’s efforts in the SCS as one aspect of a multi-pronged remilitarization of Japan. His efforts to reinterpret Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and pass domestic military reforms that would allow
Japan to engage in “Collective Self Defense,” have rung alarm bells in Beijing and elsewhere in the region. However, while the ghosts of WWII and past Japanese atrocities still weigh enormously on the foreign policy discussions in Northeast Asia, it seems that the past does not seem to cast as strong a pall over ASEAN’s impression of Japan. According to Pew Research polls from 2014, Japan enjoys high popularity outside of Northeast Asia. In the five largest ASEAN countries, Japan has a favorability rating over seventy-five percent, and ASEAN countries have been quick and proactive in encouraging Japan to commit to a greater provision of defense technology and equipment to the SCS.

The ASEAN Perspective

ASEAN countries see three distinct benefits from a more robust Japanese defense engagement with the region. Firstly, Japanese presence in the SCS makes the price of any potential conflict more costly, and ASEAN countries are betting on a policy that more deterrents are better. As the International Crisis Group notes in its 2012 paper on the SCS tensions, Vietnam has also made outreaches to Australia (supporting its bid for East Asia Summit membership) and Russia (an open invite to explore for oil and gas) in the hope that “By increasing the number of nations with a stake in a peaceful South China Sea, Vietnam hopes to force Beijing to recalculate the cost of future aggression.”

Secondly, Japan’s heightened security interests allow ASEAN countries to push for higher-end defense technology transfers and initiatives that would be otherwise inaccessible. The Philippines, for example, has made clear its intention to acquire the advanced P-3C Orion surveillance aircraft from Japan, despite its exorbitant costs. In an interview with the Financial Times, Akira Sato, Japan’s State Minister of Defense, explained that the Japanese are willing to export military hardware, even where it is not profitable, if it contributes to better security: “We have to count how much we can contribute to world peace, so it is not just a matter of price.” The Philippines has taken advantage of this political opportunity by pushing to conclude a Visiting Forces Agreement with Japan that would allow Japanese troops to engage in military exercises in Filipino territory.

Thirdly, ASEAN countries recognize that their interests overlap with Japan’s in countering the Chinese action in the SCS and that Japan has the military and maritime infrastructural capacity to help ASEAN countries fulfill their security goals. The Brookings Institute reported in 2014 that Indonesian president Joko Widodo took office by invoking the slogan “Jalesveva Jayamah” (In the Ocean We Triumph). With Japan’s commitment to help develop Indonesian maritime infrastructure, the Southeast Asian country is poised to become, in Widodo’s terms, “a global maritime axis,” between the Pacific and Indian Ocean.

In conclusion, Japan’s overtures towards the SCS are driven by a concern for regional security and a desire to curtail Chinese assertiveness in the region. Over the past several years, Japan has reinforced its “Look South” policy by strengthening cooperative security relationships with SCS claimant states and signing deals for military equipment sales. ASEAN states have welcomed Japanese overtures to the region with open arms. SCS claimants see cooperation with Japan as a strategic check on Chinese ambition in the region and an opportunity to obtain defense technology that may be otherwise inaccessible. While Japanese and ASEAN interests continue to align as a counterweight to China, the region will still need to come to terms with the unresolved tension between these two major players.
Salami Slicing in the South China Sea

An Interview with Professor Andrew Nathan

Andrew J Nathan is the Class of 1919 Professor of Political Science at Columbia University and a former director of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute. He is a member of the boards of Human Rights in China and the National Endowment for Democracy. He is the author, most recently, of *China’s Search for Security*, coauthored with Andrew Scobell (Columbia University Press, 2012).

Another article in this issue discusses the Vietnamese and other ASEAN strategies to deter Chinese aggression in the South China Sea (SCS): raising the stakes of any potential regional conflict by bringing additional stakeholders into the arena. How do you think that’s played out?

The primary Vietnamese strategy has been to get the ASEAN grouping to endorse codes of conduct and peaceful resolution to the disputes in SCS, and that hasn’t had any visible effect on the Chinese. The Chinese have been engaged in what some people have called a salami slicing strategy, gradually increasing their physical presence in the SCS. They have not engaged in what you would call aggression – attacking landforms that are possessed by other powers – but they have built up these three positions on the coral reefs and they have increased the frequency and scale of their Coast Guard, Navy and fishing presence throughout the SCS. And they have been more forceful in articulating their claims. This is a multi-pronged approach of basically just beefing up their presence throughout the SCS. The Vietnamese strategy has not stopped them. The American strategy has not stopped them. The Japanese strategy has not. None of these things have interfered with the Chinese strategy.

Over time we’ve seen two different competing philosophies in Chinese foreign policy. One is the historical idea of the Middle Kingdom, the attitude that China is a big country that can demand tribute from smaller countries. The other idea is an unwavering respect for the sovereignty of other countries. How do you see those two ideas coming together in the 9-dash line and the system that the Chinese have come up with in the SCS?

The nine-dash line was created in the late 1940s by the nationalist government that preceded the PRC. The story is that after the war in the Pacific had ended, and the Japanese had pulled out of occupied Southeast Asia, someone in the Foreign Ministry asked someone in the map division what the Chinese position in the SCS was, and someone wrote this map. At the time it had eleven dashes on it, but two of the dashes disappeared about ten years ago when China and Vietnam negotiated an agreement on the part between Hainan and Vietnam. So the Chinese legal position is consistent with the idea of sovereignty. They have purposely refused to articulate their argument at great length, which leaves a lot of room for ambiguity. But their point is basically: *This was our territory historically. It is still ours. We have an old map that shows so, and we’re not going to give it up.* And this position is consistent with the concept of sovereignty. I think that sovereignty is really the key to the rhetorical position of Chinese foreign policy today.

They would never talk about the tribute system as a model for contemporary relations with states today, but they talk about the respect other sovereign states have for the legitimacy of core Chinese interests. Like any great power, like the United States for example, the Chinese would think that nearby smaller powers should naturally respect the sovereign rights and interests of the major power in the neighborhood. I think that, below the level of rhetoric, the Chinese feel that it is a win-win for neighboring states to be cooperative with China because China is the major power in the region.

Can you draw a comparison between Chinese activities in Latin America and Africa and activities in the SCS by analyzing their policies through the lens of economics, that everything is about the bottom line?

The SCS strategy is driven by what you might characterize as even more important than economics. And that is security. There is an economic aspect to Chinese interests in the SCS, which has to do with undersea oil and fisheries. Of course,
with a population of 1.4 billion, you do need a lot of fish to eat!

But I think what’s really important for China in the SCS is the fact that it is what they call a Near Sea. It is only seven or eight hundred miles away from the Chinese coast, and this creates three important security concerns. One is the sea lanes though which so much of Chinese import and export goes. The second is that the SCS has been pretty much dominated by the American Navy for all of these years. The American Navy goes unimpeded, and conducts air and sea surveillance operations at the twelve-nautical-mile line off of the Chinese coast. The Americans have been doing this for many years and it is too close for the comfort of the Chinese. The third security issue is for the Chinese to secure egress to the blue waters. As the Chinese Navy has now begun to develop a real blue water, ocean-going capability, it needs the ability to come and go at will through what is called the first island chain. China really needs to control that egress and they do that by controlling the SCS. It does not necessarily have to be that by driving the Vietnamese off their little islands or driving the U.S. Navy completely out of the SCS. It just has to be the dominant navy there and get the U.S. to reduce its presence.

If you approach this issue from a 10,000 ft perspective and examine it along an extended timescale, do you think that the Chinese island building activity – which comes down to dredging sand and building runways – will it actually affect anyone’s lives in a meaningful way?

AN Yes. I think it will in two ways. First of all, these man-made islands are in the southern reaches of the SCS. If the Chinese build runways and port facilities and station personnel there, then these three islands, in and of themselves, significantly increase the ability of the Chinese Navy and Coast Guard to project power in areas of the sea that are remote from the naval bases on the Chinese coast.

Secondly, by doing this and not being effectively checked, they are getting away with doing it. The Chinese have sent a signal that changes the diplomatic calculus of the other powers. It is a signal that the Chinese are here to stay and they are not going away. They intend to expand their influence. Deal with it.

The Chinese have handled it very cleverly, because the U.S. does not really have an attractive option. The U.S. can sail a ship into the twelve-mile line and out again, which makes a legalistic point, but also demonstrates the lack of options available to the U.S. You are not going to pick a war over these three sandy islands.

China has fourteen land borders. Many of these countries have had conflict with China in the past. Yet most of these territorial disputes have been resolved.

AN Yes they have settled their border disputes with all of the countries except India, and of course the maritime disputes in the SCS.

So will those maritime disputes follow the trend and be resolved peacefully, at a low cost?

AN I don’t think that the Chinese strategy is to achieve a legal resolution of those disputes. I think their strategy is to achieve a de facto superior naval presence throughout the whole SCS.

Enough so that it just doesn’t matter what’s on paper.

AN Whoever is occupying this or that small island, let them occupy it. I think that is probably the Chinese strategy and I certainly do not think that their strategy is to have any kind of kinetic clash with anybody. But if they do, certainly not with the United States. It could happen with one of the smaller countries, especially those that don’t have formal defense treaties with the U.S. But cases so far … have been handled in a very deft fashion.

Do you think that the changing de facto security situation in the SCS will influence the way events in the East China Sea play out as well?

AN In the Senkaku area, the Chinese have tried and will continue to try to create facts on the ground. I do not have the data on the number of Chinese fishing boats, Coast Guard vessels, naval ships and aircraft that enter the twelve-nautical-mile zone around the Senkaku, but I am going to guess that it goes up and down, with a trend towards being more. The Chinese can lower and raise the temperature and the Japanese are hard-pressed to know what to do. They can scramble, they can issue warnings, and so on. The Japanese have avoided shooting at any Chinese air or maritime vessel that has entered this zone and so the Chinese can enter it. I think the Chinese strategy is just to be there, and let that become the new normal. At some opportune moment they will increase tension there, when they see the Japanese political system as being more malleable. But as I said, people have described it as salami slicing tactics. Take a little bit at a time. That seems to be the strategy, and that has succeeded in my opinion.
Resolving the Elderly Suicide Crisis in South Korea

By Matthew Graham

Introduction

South Korea has the highest rate of suicide in the developed world, and seniors make up the largest proportion of these deaths. The government of South Korea has crafted policies to address the issue. However, these policies tend to focus on combating the economic indicators for suicide, such as alleviating the disproportionate poverty experienced by seniors. Recent initiatives, such as the Well-Dying Program, attempt to address the social factors connected to elderly suicide. Nevertheless, these policies fail to incorporate into their design the underlying cultural issue driving seniors to suicide, which is the growing insignificance of filial piety in Korea. So far, the government has not invested sufficiently to develop the local mental health infrastructure needed to help seniors cope with the loss of attention and support that children formerly provided. To reduce elderly suicide rates and avoid losing the socio-economic benefits seniors provide, promoting family interaction must be the primary objective of policies aimed at prevention. At the same time, the government must improve the access and delivery of treatment by developing community-based mental health services.

Background

Suicide among seniors has become an increasing cause for concern in South Korea. In the developed world, South Korea has by far the highest suicide rate, and the nation ranks third globally in the same category. Seniors are the principle contributor to these suicide rankings. Instances of suicide in Korea rise sharply with older age, and the elderly are at least seven times more likely to commit suicide than age groups below forty-five years. In addition, unlike most other developed nations, suicide among the elderly is growing, and as a result, suicide has become Korea’s fifth most common cause of death.

Since 2000, health expenditure per capita grew more in Korea than any other developed nation, and the cost burden associated with the rising rate of elderly suicide is putting an increasing strain on the economy. Self-injury is the second leading cause for hospital stays in Korea, and visits from seniors represent the majority of hospital expenditure. The National Health Insurance Service of Korea estimates that the cost of suicide and depression rose forty-two percent between 2007 and 2011, and this surge in expenditure is likely to increase. Life expectancy in Korea is above the average for developed nations, and the country is aging faster than any other country in history. As the proportion of seniors grows, the instance of suicide and depression will rise. Without altering the trend in elderly suicide, the subsequent costs will make health spending unsustainable.

The government, however, has not provided sufficient social and economic incentives to deter many seniors from committing suicide. Roughly half of all seniors live below the poverty line. The government provides a national pension, but it was created in 1988 and does not cover seniors born before or around 1950. For seniors who are eligible, inefficiency in the system’s development often results in inadequate payments to retirees. In 2007, the Basic Old-Age Pension (BOP) was created to help seniors struggling financially. However, the amount given by the BOP represents one-fourth of the minimum sum needed to sustain a single household. Increasing expenses for healthcare...
are exacerbating the situation. With seniors living longer, the prevalence of chronic disease has increased, which requires more costly treatment. The government subsidizes care for seniors through Long-Term Care Insurance, but out-of-pocket spending is higher in Korea than most developed nations.

Despite their financial hardship, culture is the primary cause for the negative perceptions of life that drive seniors to commit suicide. Neo-Confucianism and the tenet of filial piety have been the dominant cultural influences in Korea for centuries. In the context of Korean tradition, filial piety – reverence for elders, particularly parents and ancestors – dictates that caring for one’s parents forms the bedrock of an ideal society. In this sense, the responsibility to provide parental care not only represents a familial duty, but is viewed as an honor.

The low contribution of government spending to the social welfare of seniors reflects the expectation that children will care for their parents. However, the structure and perceptions of family have changed. Rapid urbanization, particularly over the last thirty years, has pushed most youth to the cities, where the competition for employment is intense. Employees in South Korea work some of the longest hours in the world, which leaves little time to care for parents. Over time, the pressure experienced at the workplace and the increasing value placed on individuality has altered the manner in which Koreans view filial piety today. According to the national statistics bureau, since 1998, the percentage of Koreans that believe children should care for their parents has declined from ninety percent to thirty-three percent. This change in perception has also resulted in major declines in the number of parents residing with children and the amount of financial assistance given to them once they reach old age.¹

The government should continue to encourage society to strive for the valuable ideals embodied in Korea’s Neo-Confucian tradition.

While younger generations have been able to adjust, filial piety is the only culture that most seniors know. The dislocation from family has left many seniors feeling abandoned, lonely and humiliated by the need to request assistance from strangers, such as volunteers distributing food assistance during church welfare programs.

### Policy Gaps

Structurally, the policies crafted by the government to combat elderly suicide fit into South Korea’s Neo-Confucian tradition. However, for suicide prevention and treatment to be effective, the government must refine policies, so that they promote the practice of filial piety in modern Korea. Instead of merely using this tradition as a general framework for creating initiatives, policies must take into account the gap between belief and practice of Korean cultural traditions. While citizens may still identify with Neo-Confucianism in principle, policies aimed at combating the increasing instance of elderly suicide need to reflect the changing perceptions of society by acknowledging that the practice of filial piety is no longer relevant in daily life.

However, policy reform is not an endorsement to abandon Neo-Confucianism outright. The government should continue to encourage society to strive for the valuable ideals embodied in the country’s Neo-Confucian tradition. Filial piety provides a familiar frame of reference that can be used by policymakers in persuading society to adopt reform measures regarding parental care.

The government’s current programs lay a strong foundation for developing policies to combat the suicide rate among seniors. Pension reforms, such as the Old-Age Pension and Long-Term Care Insurance, will

¹ The graph shows the age-standardized suicide mortality rate per 100,000 persons for 2011 or nearest year. The data is from the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development.
ensure seniors do not face increasing financial hardship as they grow older. However, these initiatives will take time to produce results, as they target long-term, institutional issues. Therefore, the government should focus on enhancing the policies that it has already implemented. Korea has few preventative mental health measures, and existing policies aimed at prevention fail to address the dislocation of families. Health expenditure is also growing rapidly. Taking these concerns into account, new policies should be crafted according to three main criteria:

- The policy effectively promotes filial piety.
- The policy can be implemented feasibly in the short- or medium-term.
- The policy does not significantly increase or may reduce government expenditure.

**Policy Options**

**Option #1: Subsidizing Seniors to Provide Childcare**

The government can create a subsidy that incentives and supports seniors providing childcare for their grandchildren. The subsidy would consist of a tax break for offspring who use their elderly parents for childcare, and would provide seniors with a stipend that can be distributed through the Old-Age Pension. The benefits of this policy are two-fold: it reduces seniors’ increasing feelings of loneliness and isolation by encouraging familial interaction, and also gives children the chance to regularly monitor the physical and mental well-being of their aging parents.

Encouraging elderly family members to handle childcare for their offspring provides seniors the chance to connect with their grandchildren, regain their purpose in life, and continue experiencing the Neo-Confucian familial traditions in which they find comfort. In addition, by providing a substantive service to their children, seniors will not feel patronized or have the impression that they are a burden on the family.

Currently, the two main factors inhibiting children from caring for their parents are time constrains and physical distance (retired rural parents, working urban offspring). The childcare tax break gives offspring the incentive to host their parents permanently or for a period of time throughout the day, which has been shown to be a successful method of lowering the poverty rate among the elderly.²

Logistically, the childcare subsidy would be easy to implement in the short- or medium-term. The financial structure of this policy is based on the well-established platform of the Korean Old-Age Pension system. However, its notable shortcoming is that the policy inherently excludes childless seniors and those whose offspring have not had kids. With a declining birth rate, eligibility for the subsidy will increase. Nevertheless, the relatively low eligibility means that government expenditure for the measure would not be overly burdensome. The low cost may convince citizens and policymakers to support the measure, despite the exclusions, as the policy’s impact outweighs its cost.

**Option #2: Developing Community-Based Mental Health Infrastructure**

Currently, mental health treatment and services are provided principally by hospitals, and the few outpatient facilities in Korea are located in cities. The lack of rural and suburban mental health facilities and services inhibits the effectiveness of government efforts to treat seniors contemplating suicide, because many seniors live outside cities. In these areas, mental health treatment carries high degrees of social stigma. The few seniors that do seek mental health services are often thought of as being “institutionalized”. Not surprisingly, suicide rates among seniors are highest in rural areas. Localizing mental health treatment through smaller mental health facilities in rural and suburban settings increases awareness among the broader community and helps combat existing stigma against seniors seeking treatment. Community members that become accustomed to the sight of

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mental health facilities may lose their impression of patients as people that should be isolated from the general population. These community-based mental health facilities can also help reduce the high health expenditure associated with treatment at hospitals by lowering the demand for hospital beds, while also allowing more space for people with urgent physical injuries and illnesses.

While this policy facilitates treatment for seniors suffering from mental health issues, it has the potential to reduce family interaction and filial piety. Local access to treatment increases seniors’ ability to live independently and does nothing to incentivize children to provide personal support to their aging parents.

The timeline for the implementation of this policy varies. Developing certain aspects of community-based, mental health services can occur in the medium-term, while other components will develop later. Reforms that improve efficiency and effectiveness of healthcare delivery will manifest following the initial implementation of the policy.

Mental health services in South Korea are dismal across several metrics. Of OECD nations, South Korea has the fewest mental health nurses and psychiatrists per capita despite the number of psychiatric hospital beds being on the rise. Inefficiency in the system has resulted in the longest mental-health related hospital stays among all developed nations. Community-based services address all of these issues and can alleviate the high costs of inefficiency. The growing need to staff new mental health facilities will hopefully encourage policy makers to streamline the hiring and training processes for mental health personnel.

Policy Analysis

Options #1 and #2 should be implemented as a cohesive plan, as they complement the initiatives already taken by the government. While Option #1 builds filial piety and reduces poverty among seniors, Option #2 strengthens the institutional policies already in place by reducing health expenditure for seniors, children and the government. These two policy options outline a feasible, cost-effective plan to improve efficiency and efficacy in mental healthcare, while working cohesively with the current preventative and treatment strategies being taken by the government.

By addressing the declining rates of co-residence through Option #1, fewer seniors will seek psychiatric care. The supervision and inclusion of elderly parents fostered by this plan will limit the progressive burden of senior care that public facilities will bear if the decline in co-residence is left unaddressed and the hospital visits of depressed seniors continue to rise. The savings gained by decreasing these hospital visits will be further bolstered by shifting mental health treatment to community-based facilities. Instead of becoming de facto shelters for increasing numbers of lonely, unassisted seniors, treatment centers will be used as a support mechanism for infrequent cases.

Politically, this policy agenda should be popular among both policy makers and civil society. The established institutional channel of the Basic Old-Age Pension make the subsidy and tax break of Option #1 very easy for the government to implement. The increase in childcare options encouraged by this policy benefit the general public. Furthermore, by fostering greater incidence of co-residence and shifting a larger proportion of mental health treatment to community-based facilities, public expenditure on senior healthcare will noticeably decrease. Together, these policies address some of the stresses of modern Korean society by subsidizing childcare and reducing public health expenditures, while simultaneously addressing the decline of traditional filial piety.

Conclusion

Addressing the underlying cultural dissatisfaction experienced by seniors holds more promise for reducing the high rate of elderly suicide than policies focused on income. While escaping poverty will undoubtedly bring joy to seniors, improving the financial condition of seniors is a short-term solution. The changing national perspective regarding family structure is an existential problem for Korea’s elderly. The shift away from traditional Neo-Confucian values is leaving seniors confused about their place and purpose in the world. In turn, they are losing their will to live. While the government has already taken steps to stabilize the financial condition of seniors, it must now try to rebuild the social construct that guides Korean society.

Toriko Iwa, Tokio Yasuda, Chin-Chun Yi, and Guihua Xie. "Intergenerational Coreidence in China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan." Journal of Comparative Family Studies 42, 5 (2011)

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