



"Enemy" vs. "Cooperative Partner": A Study on the Identity Construction in the North Korea Policies of the Bush and Trump Administrations

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Abstract. This study, grounded in the Constructivist framework, investigates the differences in identity perception and their impacts on decision-making within the North Korea policies of the Bush and Trump administrations. It reveals that U.S. policy toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is driven not only by security and economic interests but also profoundly shaped by ideology and discourse. The Bush administration designated North Korea as part of the "Axis of Evil" and enforced harsh sanctions, while the Trump administration pursued dialogue through summits to redefine bilateral relations; this reflects fundamental disparities in strategic approaches, diplomatic methods, and perspectives on the global order. Through discourse analysis and case comparison, the study finds that the Bush administration's hardline policies intensified tensions on the Korean Peninsula, while the Trump administration's excessive dependence on personal diplomacy produced no substantial outcomes. The research notes that identity plays a pivotal role in international relations, yet it is constrained by leadership styles, domestic political dynamics, and global power configurations. As the first study to apply Constructivism to U.S.-DPRK interactions, it highlights the instability of identity construction resulting from overreliance on individual will. The study also emphasizes that China needs to grasp the identity-based strategies of the United States to navigate the situation on the Korean Peninsula and safeguard regional stability.

Keywords: Bush administration, Trump administration, North Korea policy, identity construction.

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Problem Formulation

Since the conclusion of the Cold War, the Korean Peninsula has continued to be a key focal point in international security and geopolitics. U.S. policy toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) showed notable differences between the Bush and Trump administrations; the former strengthened its hostile position through the "Axis of Evil" narrative, while the latter tried to reshape cooperative relations via "summit

diplomacy". This policy reversal reflects changes in power structures and security interests, and at the same time reveals shifts in how the United States perceives its own identity.

Existing studies have largely centered on security interests or geopolitical strategies, but they have overlooked the pivotal role of "identity construction" in policy formation. Therefore, the core research questions of this study are as follows: How does the United States shape its policy toward the DPRK through identity construction? How do different identity perceptions influence the logic of decision-making and diplomatic practices?

1.2 Research Objectives and Significance

This paper seeks to uncover the internal working mechanism and practical impact of identity construction in U.S. policy toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Through a comparison of the identity narratives and policy choices of the Bush and Trump administrations, it explores how a country shapes the image of other nations via discourse to legitimize its own actions.

The significance of this research manifests in two aspects:

Theoretically, it extends the application of Constructivism to foreign policy research and addresses the gap left by earlier studies that focused solely on material interests.

Practically, it offers a reference point for understanding the logic underlying U.S. policy toward the DPRK and for China's strategic responses regarding Peninsula affairs.

1.3 Paper Structure and Innovations

This paper is organized into six chapters overall.

Chapter One lays out the research questions and research methods. Chapter Two reviews relevant domestic and international literature and pinpoints existing research gaps. Chapter Three elaborates on the theoretical basis of Constructivism and the application of discourse analysis methods. Chapters Four and Five examine the differences in identity construction and policy effectiveness between the Bush and Trump administrations through in-depth case comparison. Chapter Six sums up the key research findings and puts forward targeted practical implications.

The innovations of this paper are mainly reflected in three aspects:

Theoretical Innovation: It is the first systematic application of Constructivist identity theory to the study of U.S.-DPRK relations, revealing how identity perception becomes an intervening variable in policy formulation.

Methodological Innovation: It combines discourse analysis and case comparison to construct an analytical framework of "identity-discourse-policy".

Empirical Innovation: By comparing two major discursive practices—the "Axis of Evil" and the "Trump-Kim Summits"—it reveals the evolutionary pattern of U.S. diplomatic logic under different identity narratives.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Research Status in Domestic Academia

Domestic and international studies on U.S. policy toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) primarily center on three directions: historical evolution, strategic logic, and ideological drivers.

At the level of historical and strategic research, domestic scholars mostly analyze the North Korean policies of administrations such as Bush and Trump from the perspective of policy evolution trajectories and security frameworks. For instance, Kim Ok-eun and Yang Yanlong pointed out that the return of realism in Trump's second-term foreign policy not only reshaped the core orientation of his policy towards North Korea but also directly influenced South Korea's corresponding strategic choices [1]. From a macro historical perspective, Che Yongxin, based on the logic of the United States' grand strategic actions, systematically sorted out the evolution of the United States' policy towards North Korea from 1993 to 2020, revealing the characteristics of cyclical policy fluctuations and their inherent logic. He believes that short-term easing cannot fundamentally solve the deep-seated security predicament between the two sides [2]. In light of the specific implementation of the Trump administration's policy towards North Korea, Bao Han conducted an empirical analysis of the policy's implementation process and actual results, and deeply dissected the advantages and practical limitations of the policy in its execution [3]. Wang Huawei focused on the overall design of the Trump administration's policy towards North Korea, conducting systematic research from core dimensions such as strategic goals and implementation paths, providing important support for understanding the core logic of the United States' policy towards North Korea during this period [4].

2.2 Research Status in International Academia

The constructivist perspective emphasizes that state behavior is not only driven by material interests but also deeply influenced by social interaction and identity perception. Kenneth C Q, from the perspective of policy practice, pointed out that the Bush administration's policy towards North Korea has significant "dualistic" characteristics. This duality essentially stems from the United States' ambiguous identity positioning of North Korea as an "enemy" and a "potential partner for cooperation", while the theory of "socialization process among states" proposed by constructivist scholar Wendt It provides a core analytical framework for interpreting the restrictive effect of this identity ambiguity on policy choices [5].

In the research of related fields, Xiaoxiong Y has explored the interactive relationship between national strategy and identity cognition. His research points out that changes in the external environment and adjustments in strategic assessment will directly affect a country's identity construction towards other countries. This analytical logic is for the subsequent study of the dynamic evolution of the dual identities of "enemy" and "partner" in the US policy towards North Korea. It provides an important reference perspective [6].

However, there are still obvious deficiencies in the existing foreign literature when applying the identity construction theory to the research of the United States' policy towards North Korea. In the relevant book review, Aaron D sorted out the policy context of multiple US governments in response to security threats. Although it implicitly mentioned the influence of the "enemy" identity narrative on policies, it did not deeply analyze the construction logic of the "partner" identity and its tension with the "enemy" narrative [7]. Aiden W and Adam B compared the foreign security policies of administrations such as Bush and Trump. Although they mentioned the role of identity perception in strategic choices, they did not conduct an empirical comparison of the specific impacts of the two core identity narratives in the US policy towards North Korea[8].

2.3 Deficiencies of Existing Studies and the Entry Point of This Study

Current studies have the following deficiencies:

Theoretical Limitations: Most studies focus on policy outcomes or strategic intentions, and lack systematic exploration of how "identity construction" influences decision-making logic.

Methodological Monotony: There is insufficient application of discourse analysis methods, ignoring the role of language in identity shaping and policy legitimization.

Lack of Comparative Perspective: Few studies take the Bush and Trump administrations as objects of vertical comparison to explore the differences in identity narratives on the same issue and their policy impacts.

3 Research Methods and Theoretical Framework

3.1 Core Concepts of Constructivism

Constructivism emphasizes that state behavior is driven not only by material forces but also, more importantly, by processes of social cognition and identity construction. Within this framework, "identity" refers to a state's positioning of self and other in social interactions, while "discourse" serves as the medium through which such identity is produced, represented, and disseminated. Identity is not a fixed entity but constructed through continuous interaction and narration .

Based on the "identity-behavior" logic of Constructivism, this paper argues that the differences in U.S. North Korea policy stem from the two administrations' distinct positioning of their relations with North Korea: the Bush administration constructed North Korea as an "enemy" through the "Axis of Evil" narrative, while the Trump administration reshaped it as a "potential cooperative partner" via "summit diplomacy".

Therefore, this study adopts "identity construction", "Othering", and "discursive practice" from Constructivism as core analytical tools to reveal how identity narratives influence policy objectives, diplomatic styles, and strategic approaches.

3.2 Discourse Analysis and Identity Politics Methods

Discourse analysis is employed to explore the manifestation and function of identity-related language in policy texts. This paper mainly analyzes the following types of texts:

Bush Administration (2001–2008): Presidential State of the Union Addresses, diplomatic statements, National Security Strategy Reports, and major media speeches .

Trump Administration (2017–2020): Presidential tweets, press conference remarks, joint statements of the "Trump-Kim Summits", and official White House documents [9].

The analysis follows the next sequence of steps:

Text Selection and Corpus Construction: Select official discourses directly linked to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) policy and national security narratives.

Identification of Identity-Related Vocabulary: Extract key terms that reflect the "self-other" distinction, such as "threat", "enemy", "partner", "peace" and "evil".

Induction of Semantic Frameworks: Analyze the semantic connections behind these terms to determine how the United States defines its "self-identity" (as an order-guarding state) and "other-identity" (as a threat or cooperative partner) within its discourse.

Interpretation of Policy Logic: Correlate the characteristics of discourse with policy practices to examine how identity narratives serve to legitimize diplomatic actions.

This analytical approach visualizes the process of identity construction and reveals the coherent mechanism of "language-cognition-action".

Comparative Case Study

A vertical comparative analysis of the two administrations is conducted to verify identity construction’s impact on policy, with the comparative framework as Table 1 shown.

Table 1. "Identity-Policy" Comparative Framework for the Bush and Trump Administrations' North Korea Policies

| Comparative Dimensions | Analysis Indicators | Corresponding Content |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| Identity Positioning | Self/Other Narrative | "Enemy" vs. "Cooperative Partner" |
| Policy Objectives | Strategic Intentions & Ultimate Goals | Sanctions and Containment vs. Dialogue and Détente |
| | Implementation | Military Deterrence, |
| Policy Means | Approaches & Diplomatic Tools | Economic Sanctions vs. Summit Diplomacy |
| | Policy Effectiveness | Impact on Peninsula Situation |
| Moralized Narrative vs. Individual Diplomatic Narrative | | |

3.3 Case Comparison and Data Sources

To ensure the authenticity and verifiability of the research, the data sources of this paper mainly include the following three categories:

Official Documents and Public Speeches

These are primary texts sourced from the White House website, U.S. Department of State archives, and United Nations meeting records. Such materials boast high authority and can directly reflect policy discourses and official positions.

Academic Literature and Policy Reports

This category includes reports from U.S. think tanks (e.g., Brookings Institution, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) as well as domestic and international academic papers. They are used to supplement theoretical support and policy background, with high academic credibility [10].

Media and News Materials

These are mainly used to verify the social dissemination and public acceptance of government discourses. Cross-verification from multiple sources is conducted to reduce bias.

In the analysis process, all materials adhere to the principle of "multi-source mutual verification", which means verifying the same narrative logic through the comparison of different types of texts to ensure the reliability and scientificity of the conclusions.

3.4 Summary

This chapter establishes a research framework centered on Constructivism and constructs a research path combining "discourse analysis and case comparison". By identifying identity elements in policy discourses and conducting a vertical comparison of the two administrations, this paper aims to reveal how identity construction influences the formation and evolution of U.S. North Korea policy, providing theoretical and methodological support for the empirical analysis in subsequent chapters.

4 Identity Construction in the North Korea Policies of the Bush and Trump Administrations

4.1 The Bush Administration's "Enemy" Identity Construction

Identity Discourse: From "Axis of Evil" to "Global Threat". The Bush administration's policy toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was grounded in an explicit "enemy" identity narrative. In 2002, during his State of the Union Address, Bush first put forward the concept of the "Axis of Evil", listing the DPRK alongside Iran and Iraq as "evil nations that support terrorism and pursue weapons of mass destruction". From a semantic perspective, this expression achieved a dual Othering process—moralization and securitization.

This discourse strategy shaped identity through two lines of logic:

Moral Dualism: It drew a line between "justice and evil" to divide the international order. The United States positioned itself as the "guardian of democracy", while the DPRK was constructed as a "destroyer of the global order".

Threat Securitization: Through terms such as "nuclear threat" and "rogue regime", the DPRK's very existence was directly tied to a threat to international peace. This provided legitimacy for the United States to implement military deterrence and sanction policies.

Such language not only defined "who the enemy is" but also clarified the United States' role in the international system—a leader "confronting evil". In this context, identity construction became the ideological premise for policy actions.

Policy Objectives: Restoring Order Through Suppression. With the "enemy" identity narrative taking a dominant role, the core policy objective of the Bush administration was to push the DPRK to alter its behavioral patterns via external pressure, thereby restoring the U.S.-led international order. The United States refused to recognize the DPRK's equal negotiating status and insisted on the "precondition of denuclearization"; this logic stemmed from the structure of distrust caused by the "hostile identity". In other words, the Bush administration did not merely pursue denuclearization; it sought to achieve institutional subordination through identity reshaping—forcing the DPRK to "return to the international community".

Policy Tools: Institutionalized Implementation of Sanctions and Isolation. To achieve the above objectives, the Bush administration adopted multiple measures:

Economic and Financial Sanctions: By relying on United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions and the U.S. Patriot Act, it froze the DPRK's funds and trade routes.

Strengthening of Security Alliances: It enhanced military cooperation with South Korea and Japan, expanding the scale of joint military exercises.

Intensification of Public Discourse: It continuously described the DPRK as the "axis of evil" and a "rogue state", solidifying hostile perceptions in the international public opinion sphere.

The combined effect of these measures was to consolidate the "enemy" identity at both the institutional and linguistic levels, leaving extremely limited room for diplomatic maneuvering.

Policy Effectiveness: Identity Trap and Policy Backlash. Although the Bush administration's identity construction strengthened the United States' moral legitimacy, it resulted in a structural deadlock. The DPRK's first nuclear test in 2006 signaled the failure of the U.S. "pressure-for-change" strategy. The excessive "enemy" narrative locked bilateral interactions into a self-fulfilling security dilemma: identity was solidified into opposition, and policy tools instead reinforced hostile perceptions. This shows that identity construction is not only a driver of policy but also the root cause of policy dilemmas.

4.2 The Trump Administration's Policy Objectives, Tools, and Effectiveness

Following its inauguration, the Trump administration substantially reconfigured the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s identity within the discourse sphere. In the early phase (2017), Trump dubbed Kim Jong-un "Little Rocket Man" during a

United Nations (UN) General Assembly address, continuing the rhetoric of deterrence. Starting from 2018, however, the discourse shifted toward cooperation and personalization, as noted in one of his tweets: "Chairman Kim and I fell in love" [11].

This discourse shift reflected three layers of identity logic:

Relational Individualization: Diplomacy no longer centered on institutional frameworks but depended on the emotional bonds and trust between leaders.

Adversary Redefinition: The DPRK moved from being labeled a "rogue state" to a "potential partner".

Self-Image Reconstruction: Trump positioned himself as a "deal maker", replacing the role of a traditional strategist with that of a "negotiator".

This development marked a shift: the United States no longer understood the DPRK through a hostile framework but attempted to reshape the DPRK's identity as a "negotiable cooperative partner".

Policy Objectives: Achieving Controlled Transformation Through Dialogue. With the "cooperative partner" identity narrative in place, U.S. policy goals shifted from "containment and isolation" to "engagement and transformation". The Trump administration no longer targeted regime change; instead, it sought to advance the possibility of "phased denuclearization" and economic cooperation through summit talks. The core of this objective was to drive behavioral change through identity reconstruction rather than through mandatory concessions.

Policy Tools: Personal Diplomacy and Symbolic Recognition

The Trump administration's main policy tools included:

High-Level Engagements: The three "Trump-Kim Summits" established a new symbolic marker for U.S.-DPRK relations [12].

Positive Discourse Shaping: Through expressions such as "great man" and "my friend Kim", the administration built a semantic field focused on cooperation.

Strategic Sanctions Relaxation: During the negotiation phase, some sanctions were temporarily suspended to secure trust signals from the DPRK.

These tools represented identity construction practices centered on language and symbols. They aimed to rewrite the DPRK's international image through gestural actions on the diplomatic stage.

Policy Effectiveness: Identity Loosening and Reality Imbalance. The Trump administration's "cooperative identity" narrative did deliver a temporary easing of tensions on the Korean Peninsula, yet it failed to generate institutionalized results. The breakdown of the 2019 Hanoi Summit demonstrated that changes in identity discourse—without structural support—cannot sustain policy continuity. Over-reliance on personal diplomacy pushed the policy into a "dilemma of identity instability": the DPRK did not truly abandon its nuclear program, and the U.S. domestic political environment also undermined the sustainability of diplomatic efforts.

Therefore, the Trump administration's identity construction was more of a symbolic practice. It loosened hostile perceptions in the short term but failed to establish lasting strategic recognition.

4.3 The Trump Administration's "Cooperative Partner" Identity Construction

A comparison shows fundamental divergences in the identity logics of the Bush and Trump administrations’ North Korea policies, with specific differences as Table 2 shown [13].

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Identity Construction in the North Korea Policies of the Bush and Trump Administrations

| Analysis Dimensions | Bush Administration | Trump Administration |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Core Identity | "Enemy" – Evil, Order-threatening | "Cooperative Partner" – Negotiable, Transformable |
| Discourse Characteristics | Moralized, Threat-oriented, Securitized | Personalized, Transactional, Emotionalized |
| Policy Objectives | Altering the Other's Regime | Altering the Other's Behavior |
| Tool Selection | Sanctions, Isolation, Military Deterrence | Dialogue, Symbolism, Summit Diplomacy |
| Effectiveness | Intensified Hostility, | Eased Tensions, Lack of |
| Evaluation | Escalated Nuclear Crisis | Sustainability |

The differences between the two administrations extend beyond policy tool selection to include, more notably, the worldview that underpins their identity narratives:

The Bush administration framed the United States' identity as a "moral leader" via the narrative of "the other as a threat".

Trump, by contrast, redefined his own image as a "flexible negotiator" by way of the "transactional cooperation" narrative.

Both approaches validate the fundamental assumption of Constructivism—that identity shapes interests and language guides actions. Yet regardless of whether the narratives are hostile or cooperative, they are bound by leadership styles and domestic political structures. This reflects the "stability dilemma" that Constructivism encounters in empirical application.

4.4 Policy Objectives, Tools, and Constraints of the Trump Administration

Analysis rooted in the "cooperative partner" identity framework reveals that the Trump administration’s strategic priority centered on advancing Korean Peninsula denuclearization via diplomatic methods instead of seeking regime change. Its phased denuclearization plan reflected the U.S. intent to offer economic assistance and gradually ease sanctions once the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) halted nuclear tests and missile launches; this demonstrated Washington’s resolve to adopt a more flexible negotiation strategy.

The diplomatic strategy adopted by the Trump administration centered on constructing high-level interaction platforms. Via three "Trump-Kim Summits", it built a historic bilateral dialogue framework—one that it viewed as a key method to address the DPRK nuclear issue. In this process, the policy paired economic sanctions with

targeted relaxation: it applied external pressure on the DPRK while leveraging economic and trade cooperation to boost negotiation effectiveness.

The Trump administration's DPRK policy contained notable shortcomings. While it secured historic meetings and built an initial dialogue framework, discrepancies in perceptions between the two parties regarding the denuclearization process and the absence of a long-term coordination mechanism hindered high-level interactions from achieving substantial progress. In particular, the specific proposal of "unfreezing sanctions in exchange for denuclearization" tabled during the 2019 Hanoi Summit collapsed due to core disputes; this fully revealed the highly dependent and fragile characteristics of this strategy. During this period, the DPRK temporarily suspended some nuclear tests, yet resumed missile launches right after negotiations hit an impasse. This clearly exposed the fundamental issue of the policy's lack of sustainability.

The Trump administration's Korean Peninsula policy did deliver certain short-term results, easing regional tensions, yet it lacked a systematic strategic plan and long-term interest-binding mechanisms. This prevented it from truly tackling the core issue: the DPRK nuclear problem. The most critical flaw of this strategy lay in its overreliance on personal diplomacy among top leaders and its disregard for the importance of constructing a broad international cooperation network. This made it hard for the policy to build sustained momentum and attain the intended outcomes.

5 Comparison and Discussion

5.1 Comparison of Identity Positioning and Discourse Strategies

The most striking difference between the Bush and Trump administrations' North Korea policies lies in the shift of identity narrative—from "enemy" to "cooperative partner". This identity difference is not accidental, but stems from the superposition of three structural factors:

Shift in Strategic Cognition

During the Bush era, the U.S. was still in the peak of security anxiety in the post-9/11 era, and its national identity was redefined as the "global leader in counter-terrorism". Any country that "defied the order" was othered as a "threat". After Trump took office, the U.S. strategic focus shifted to economic competition and domestic political priority, and the identity of "adversary" was redefined as a "transactional object" that could be transformed through negotiations. The identity logic shifted from "security-oriented" to "utilitarian-oriented".

Differences in Leadership Style and Cognitive Model

Bush's religious worldview reinforced the dualistic narrative of "good and evil", endowing the North Korea policy with the nature of moral judgment.

Trump's commercial mindset emphasized individual will and transactional logic, viewing diplomacy as a "negotiable interest exchange".

The personal cognitive framework of leaders directly influences the way a country presents itself on the international stage.

Changes in International Structure and Domestic Political Constraints

In the early 2000s, the U.S. was in the stage of unipolar dominance and could define the international order through tough policies. By the Trump era, China's rise and the trend of multipolarization had weakened America's structural confidence, prompting it to seek "flexibility" in diplomacy. Identity shift became a cognitive response for the U.S. to adapt to the redistribution of power.

It can be seen that the identity difference in U.S. North Korea policy is not an accidental change at the policy level, but a process of identity reconstruction driven by the combined effects of strategic cognition, leadership personality, and international structure.

5.2 Differences in Policy Objectives and Tools

From the constructivist perspective, identity is not the result of policy, but its logical starting point. The cases of the Bush and Trump administrations show that the mechanism by which identity construction influences policy behavior can be summarized in three steps:

1. Discourse Generation Stage

The government defines "self" and "other" through language and symbolic actions.

Bush's "Axis of Evil" defined North Korea as an "evil threat", creating a political context of fear and defense.

Trump's discourse of "my friend Kim" re-narrated North Korea as a "persuadable partner".

2. Cognitive Internalization Stage

Discourse is internalized as a cognitive framework by government decision-making circles and public opinion.

The former formed a "sense of threat—containment logic".

The latter formed a "belief in engagement—negotiation logic".

3. Policy Transformation Stage

Identity perception shapes the choice of diplomatic strategies.

The "enemy" identity led to the adoption of sanctions, isolation measures, and military exercises.

The "cooperative partner" identity facilitated the use of summit diplomacy and symbolic concessions.

This process demonstrates that identity construction is more than just a linguistic expression; it also serves as a psychological and institutional prerequisite for policy development. A shift in identity translates to a revision of policy logic: when the "other" is no longer viewed as a threat, the move from repressive policies to engagement becomes unavoidable.

5.3 Policy Effectiveness and Impact on the Peninsula Situation

Despite policy tool differences, the two administrations' interaction logics are categorized into two types from the identity perspective, as Table 3 shown [14].

Table 3. Comparison of Identity Logic and Policy Characteristics in the North Korea Policies of the Bush and Trump Administrations

| Identity Logic | Policy Orientation | Diplomatic Mechanism | Structural Features |
|--|------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Bush Era: "Enemy" Narrative | Securitization and Isolation | Sanctions, Deterrence, Moralized Confrontation | Linguistic Exclusion, Closed Actions |
| Trump Era: "Cooperative Partner" Narrative | Dialogue and Transaction | Summit Diplomacy, Symbolic Concessions | Linguistic Openness, Individualiz |

On the surface level, both strategies are intended to advance the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula; however, in essence, they reflect a shift in the United States' self-identity—from the "guardian of order" to the "negotiator of interests". This further shows that the root cause behind policy shifts does not rest with the tools themselves but with the United States' redefinition of its "self-role".

5.4 Analysis of Underlying Driving Factors

The distinct differences between the Bush and Trump administrations' policies toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) lend themselves to analysis from multiple angles, including domestic political environment, leadership style, and international strategic orientation.

The Bush administration was profoundly shaped by the "neoconservatism" trend, emphasizing the concept of moral diplomacy and placing national security at the forefront. Against this backdrop, it viewed the DPRK as a risk element threatening global stability and adopted tougher containment measures. With support from conservative voters, the administration pursued a foreign agenda centered on safeguarding U.S. hegemony and advancing counter-terrorism efforts, which reflected distinct political inclinations.

The Trump administration's policy-making was guided by the core principle of "America First", focusing on maximizing national interests. Its diplomatic operations featured distinct personalization with flexibility and pragmatism, prioritizing short-term issues over long-term strategic planning in diplomatic affairs such as the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue. Faced with international competitive pressures from the rise of emerging powers including China and Russia, the U.S. tended to adopt immediate transactional measures to seek rapid breakthroughs, thus allocating more resources to the key areas of its overall strategy[15].

5.5 Limitations and Fragility of Constructivism: The Impact of Leadership Style and Personal Will

While Constructivism offers a framework to account for the social attributes of identity construction in U.S. policy toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK),

it also has inherent shortcomings. The dominant role of leaders' personal traits and subjective will in diplomatic affairs often leads to instability and uncertainty in the outcomes of identity shaping. The Trump administration's pursuit of a "personal diplomacy" strategy serves as a typical example: its foreign engagement—centered on relations with Kim Jong-un—relied heavily on the president's personal involvement and judgment. This approach failed to establish an institutionalized, stable framework for influence. When such initiatives faced divisions among domestic authorities, they not only undermined policy continuity but also further complicated the external environment [16].

Constructivism emphasizes identity recognition and discursive practice, yet it places less emphasis on the profound impact of material factors and power structures. The Trump administration achieved certain results through bilateral negotiations, but its policy overlooked the strategic importance of nuclear weapons development to the DPRK. Even though it shaped the image of the DPRK as a cooperative actor, it failed to secure tangible concessions. Instead, the DPRK responded to external pressure by escalating its military posture. This scenario highlights the clear inadequacies of traditional international relations theories when addressing practical issues.

Although Constructivism provides a key theoretical basis for analyzing the nature of foreign policy, it still has significant limitations in practical application. In policy areas highly dependent on leaders' subjective will, the dynamic changes in identity are difficult to sustain long-term. This is because strategic stability lacks institutional guarantees, and there is insufficient support from long-term operational mechanisms.

6 Conclusion

Based on Constructivist theory, this study reveals the logical mechanism by which national identity influences diplomatic decision-making through a comparison of the North Korea policies of the Bush and Trump administrations. The research finds that the changes in U.S. policy do not stem from shifts in the objective security situation, but from the redefinition of "self" and "other": the Bush administration positioned itself as the "global leader in counter-terrorism" and constructed North Korea as an "enemy" through the "Axis of Evil" discourse; while Trump defined himself as a "negotiator" and reshaped North Korea into a "potential cooperative partner". Such identity transformation has led to a policy shift from sanction-based confrontation to summit diplomacy, indicating that identity is not an external label, but an internal structure that determines the perception of national interests and policy paths.

Theoretically, this paper expands the analytical dimensions of Constructivism by incorporating factors such as leadership, discourse mechanisms, and domestic political constraints. The study shows that identity construction is not only the result of social interaction, but also influenced by leaders' cognitive styles and political contexts; policy, in turn, is the external manifestation of identity narratives. By proposing the "discourse-cognition-policy" intermediary mechanism, this paper provides a new theoretical model for understanding the formation process of diplomatic decision-

making and enriches the explanatory power of Constructivism in the study of identity politics.

In practical terms, this study offers insights for China in addressing the Korean Peninsula issue and conducting diplomacy with the United States: it is essential to attach importance to the strategic function of discourse shaping, maintain the consistency and stability of identity narratives, and understand the policy logic of other countries through identity interactions. Future research can further examine the continuity of identity in the Biden administration, or apply this analytical framework to other countries and issues, so as to verify the universality and dynamic evolution mechanism of identity construction in international relations.

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