

2013



JOINT U.S.-KOREA ACADEMIC STUDIES

ASIA'S UNCERTAIN
FUTURE: KOREA, CHINA'S
AGGRESSIVENESS, AND
NEW LEADERSHIP

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:
GILBERT ROZMAN

Vol. 24

JOINT U.S.-KOREA
ACADEMIC STUDIES

2013 | VOLUME 24

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:
GILBERT ROZMAN,
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

BILATERAL COMPETITION AND
COOPERATION UNDER NEW LEADERSHIP

South Korea and Japan

Cheol Hee Park

The relationship between South Korea and Japan resembles a seesaw or a pendulum. Ups and downs are normal. The Lee Myong-bak administration is no exception, although many expected a different path from the previous administration. Lee showed an extraordinary degree of restraint in Japan-related issues until the summer of 2012. He may be the only Korean president who did not mention Japan critically in his speeches on the two major Japan-associated Korean holidays, Independence Movement Day and Liberation Day. Also during his tenure, South Korea and Japan discussed the possibility of concluding a GSOMIA (General Security of Military Information Agreement), exemplifying upgraded ties between the two countries by discussing security cooperation in a newly evolving regional context with third parties in mind. However, after Lee visited Dokdo on August 10, 2012, ties rapidly deteriorated. The two countries faced an unprecedented challenge in navigating through the popular uproar. Around October, the turbulent tide stabilized, but ties never returned to the “good old days.” The potential exists for another eruption of emotional conflict. With a new president, Park Geun-hye, elected to replace Lee as the standard bearer of the conservatives, just days after a general election brought Abe Shinzo to the post of prime minister after more than three years when the LDP had remained in the opposition, the bilateral relationship is being tested in 2013 under new leadership.

This chapter reviews the development of historical and territorial controversies in the late stage of the Lee administration. Then, it assesses the meaning of the election of the two leaders, reflecting on their general foreign policy lines during the campaign period. Next, it analyzes the challenges the two leaders are facing on both the domestic and regional front. Finally it considers the development of relations in 2013.

WIDENING CRACKS AFTER A FOUR-YEAR HONEYMOON

Around the time Lee took office, domestic political developments in South Korea and Japan helped both sides accommodate each other. Critical of his predecessor Roh, Lee took a policy turn that could be termed “ABR” (anything but Roh), including Japan policy.¹ Roh remained extremely critical of Japan after the Dokdo/Takeshima controversy that started in February 2005,² continuing for the next two years what he called a “diplomatic war” with Japan. Roh did not meet Japanese leaders except at multilateral settings.³ Lee strengthened ties with the United States, which served also to improve ties with Japan. Not only did he meet Prime Minister Fukuda as his first guest after the February 2008 inauguration ceremony, but he willingly had summit meetings with the next prime ministers Aso Taro of the LDP, and Hatoyama Yukio, Kan Naoto, and Noda Yoshihiko of the DPJ. Hatoyama took a forward-looking posture toward both South Korea and China by prioritizing the East Asian community idea. He and his wife Miyuki showed personal affection for Korean culture.⁴ Kan made a more serious attempt to improve relations. On the one hundredth anniversary of Japan’s annexation of Korea in August 2010, the “Kan Declaration” apologized for the unhappy historical experience with Korea while also acknowledging that colonial domination was against the will of the Korean people. Kan also returned more than 1,200 books that Japan had taken from Korea during the colonial period. The declaration, specifically designed for South Korea, was a step forward in relations. Though conflictual issues arose, favorable attitudes toward each other smoothed ties.

After Noda took office, relations grew tense. Because of the worsening territorial dispute with China, Noda strengthened the alliance with the United States and after the Great Tohoku earthquake he focused more on domestic economic issues such as a consumption tax increase. In South Korea, the comfort women issue unexpectedly emerged as a more serious diplomatic concern. Victims had been demonstrating in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul from 1994 and had pressed their case against Japan in Japanese courts without success.⁵ After repeated failures to draw public attention, they sued the Korean government in the Korean Constitutional Court, claiming that it had not done enough to resolve their issue. On August 30, 2011, the court ruled that the government is responsible for failing to fully address this issue diplomatically.⁶ Accordingly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) immediately organized a task force team and communicated its concern to Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). This issue emerged as a hot potato at the summit between Lee and Noda in Kyoto in December 18, 2011. Noda argued that the issue had already been resolved in the 1965 normalization treaty, and Japan had no more legal responsibility.⁷ The summit atmosphere was ugly, leaving a mark on bilateral relations.

After the Kyoto summit, diplomats on both sides were seeking a compromise solution. Other issues, such as the Korea-Japan FTA and GSOMIA, were on the table, waiting to be settled. MOFA proposed further efforts by Japan to put the dispute to rest. Around April 2012, Administrative Vice Foreign Minister Sasae Kenichiro suggested that Japan's prime minister apologize again formally, the Japanese ambassador in Korea engage in public diplomacy toward the "comfort women," and the Japanese government compensate the surviving victims from its budget.⁸ Japan appeared willing to handle the issue in a new fashion, although not to fully satisfy the Korean counterpart. However, MOFAT, minding the reactions from civic groups supporting the women, retorted that those actions are not enough. It argued that Japan should assume "state responsibility" instead.⁹ This almost brought the talks to a standstill, while leaving the two sides suspicious of each other's intentions. Japanese foreign policymakers thought that MOFAT had no willingness or capacity to control the situation and deliver a desirable result, while MOFAT officials thought that their Japanese counterparts were trying to settle this issue without an adequate response. Negotiations were stuck without showing any sign of progress in the ensuing months.

Around June 2012, the Korean government hurried to sign the GSOMIA with Japan when opposition parties were still raising concerns. Because of the new composition of the foreign relations committee in the National Assembly after the general elections on April 11, 2012, government officials had no time for detailed background briefings about this issue. When exaggerated concerns were raised about the GSOMIA with Japan, the government refused to sign only one hour before the designated time for signing the treaty in Tokyo on June 29, 2012. A secretary in charge of external strategy, Kim Tae-hyo, stepped down, taking full responsibility for this unexpected development.¹⁰ He was, perhaps, the only remaining high-ranking official in the Blue House who had a relatively good understanding of Japan. At the same time, a director general of the bureau of Northeast Asian affairs, Cho Tae-young, had to step down, taking responsibility for the ill-mannered handling of the issue. Relations were more perilous.

Ties deteriorated sharply after Lee visited Dokdo on August 10, 2012. The island has been controlled by Korea from 1952, but Japan has always claimed that it is its territory.¹¹ Japan strongly protested Lee's visit, which, actually, was an unexpected event for Koreans as well. This abrupt action was planned and executed at the suggestion of the public relations section in the Blue House without full consultations.

Lee's move was a delayed response to Japanese actions. Despite repeated opposition, Japan escalated tensions over the island by passing a review of textbooks where pictures of Dokdo were featured, and it reacted strongly when Korean Air had a test flight over the island with a newly imported plane.¹² On August 1, 2011 three LDP politicians were refused entry into Gimpo Airport when they attempted to visit Dokdo.¹³ Though Lee remained generally passive in raising controversial issues, in his final year as president he made up his mind to show his will to keep the island from any controversy. Ironically, his visit aroused a Japanese uproar. Also, dissatisfied about Japan's responses to the "comfort women" issue, Lee was determined to confront Japan with firmer political will. In this sense, his island visit was politically charged, rather than strategically coordinated. Furthermore, Lee wanted to extinguish turf battles within his own government. The Korean Ministry of Land and Oceans (MLO) planned a huge research facility on Dokdo, preparing a budget of more than 4.3 billion won for construction. MOFAT was strongly against this move, because it would anger Japan without any benefit. Still the MLO pushed it through. Lee's visit temporarily silenced MLO because, accompanied by the minister of environment, he claimed the island should be treated as a natural environmental park.¹⁴ Despite the controversy of the trip, Lee tried to resolve the turf battle within his cabinet by taking preemptive symbolic action.

Lee's Dokdo visit aggravated the already tense relationship with Japan. When Japan protested the visit, a Blue House spokesperson's comment (that Japan's international presence is on the decline) made the Japanese furious. Moreover, an August 14 comment by Lee on the Japanese emperor was delivered to the media in a twisted way. He intended to say that many controversial issues between the two countries could be peacefully resolved if the emperor visited Korea some day and showed repentance, but it was reported that he should apologize to the Korean people sincerely if he comes to Seoul.¹⁵ This was a blow to many Japanese, not only to policymakers. The emperor did not have any plans to visit Korea. He is not supposed to deliver a political message of any kind. It sounded as if Korea was trying to make use of a potential visit by him for political advantage. Many Japanese were furious, including a spectrum of intellectuals. The Korea-Japan Forum, a high-level dialogue, was cancelled at the request of the Japanese organizer only at the last moment.¹⁶ Japan's prime minister sent a personal letter to Lee that strongly resisted his action. When the letter was sent back to Japan, MOFA declined to accept it.¹⁷

In the midst of the territorial controversy between South Korea and Japan, another territorial controversy erupted. Earlier, in May 2012, the then Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintaro claimed that the Tokyo metropolitan government would be willing to purchase the Senkaku islands that were owned by a private Japanese citizen. Ishihara's move was taken as a provocative manipulation of the territorial issue by right wing groups against Noda and the DPJ. Concerned about this manipulation of the issue, the Noda cabinet decided to nationalize the island in spite of Hu Jintao's argument at the APEC meeting in Vladivostok in early September that this should be avoided. Proceeding on September 10, 2012, Noda aroused fierce resistance from

the Chinese side, which interpreted it as a tacit alliance between the Noda cabinet and Ishihara, though they formally denied that. In the eyes of the Chinese, this nationalization scheme was construed as a change in the status quo. After the nationalization, China bullied Japan with unprecedented infringements of its claimed territorial boundaries.

Territorial consciousness among the Japanese has been elevated. Those who did not know anything about Dokdo/Takeshima are now aware of the issue.¹⁸ Three territorial claims – Southern Kuriles/Northern Territories, Dokdo/Takeshima, and Senakaku/Diaoyu – are now treated as a single set of issues that Japan should confront with strong determination. These controversies helped Abe, who took a hard-line policy, to be elected president of the LDP. He had not been the frontrunner, but his strong stance against China appealed to the public and LDP members. Abe's election as LDP president, combined with Ishihara's alliance with Hashimoto Toru, the Osaka mayor, to form a new political party by the name of Nihon Ishin no Kai, drew more attention than any other political party could arouse. Facing this right-wing surge, Noda began arguing that those parties were going too far and the DPJ that he leads is a center right party, not a right wing political party. However, the overall shift toward strong territorial claims was his own doing. Until the last moment he was blind to the fact that the territorial controversies primarily helped the LDP and Ishihara.

One unintended consequence of the intensifying territorial conflict between Japan and China is that the dispute with South Korea has faded into the background. As long as Chinese assertiveness continues, the absence of anti-Japanese demonstrations and confrontations suggests relative constraint by South Korea. Japan faced a need to narrow its focus to a single front. Even though MOFA at first claimed that its dispute with South Korea should go before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), from around October, Japan seemed to favor postponement.¹⁹ As a dispute can only be argued before the court following the consent of both concerned parties, Japan understood that its appeal would only be symbolic. At a United Nations speech, Noda argued that the controversy should be resolved by international rules and suggested bringing the issue to the ICJ, but he did not concretely name the countries he had in mind.²⁰ Though South Korea did not publicly indicate that it was on the Chinese side, Japan had nothing to gain if South Korea and China stood together to confront it.

In the election campaigns in the two states, domestic political issues overshadowed territorial controversies. Yet Abe's policy promises revived Korean concerns. All the LDP promises on foreign and security issues directly touched upon Korean concerns. The LDP advocated constitutional revision, including Article 9, to change the status of the Self Defense Forces into National Defense Forces. It also promised that the gathering on Takeshima Day, which had been hosted by the local Shimane prefecture, would be organized by the central government. Furthermore, it was committed to revising what the right wing calls a self-torturing historical perspective, eliminating any reference to satisfying neighboring states and agreeing that prefectural educational committees should be appointed by the governors. Abe also claimed that the Kono declaration, which apologized for the forceful mobilization of the "comfort women," should be revised. In addition, Abe said he would visit the Yasukuni shrine without fail if he became prime minister again. All these intentionally provocative promises surprised Korean intellectuals and policymakers, who responded critically.²¹ It looked as if South Korea and Japan had entered a phase of silently managing controversial issues, but, in reality, new sources of conflicts were emerging in the latter half of 2012.

NEW LEADERS AND NEW POLICY LINES: POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES

The LDP landslide victory, obtaining 294 seats independently and 325 seats in coalition with New Komeito, gave it firm control over the Lower House, as the DPJ only secured 57 seats, contrasting to the 230 seats it had before. The LDP victory came mainly from dissatisfaction with DPJ policies, especially the tax increase, but the LDP benefited too from an opposition divided across twelve political parties. The newly formed Nihon Ishin no Kai rose to the fore, getting 54 seats. Co-organized by Ishihara and Hashimoto, it emerged as the third political party. Emphasis on strong leadership and toughness against China and on territorial issues won voter support.

The composition of the Abe cabinet gives a hint to his policy direction.²² Abe included many political friends such as Aso, Amari, Nemoto and Suga, in major posts, especially in economics and finance, to concentrate on rehabilitation after two decades of recurrent recession and the shock of the 3/11 earthquake. In the area of foreign and security policy that directly deals with neighboring countries, Abe put relative soft-liners like Kishida, Tanigaki, Onodera, Hayashi, and Ota, who take a balanced position. Yet, the ministers in charge of politically sensitive issues such as abductees, territorial claims, education, and telecommunication issues, are hard liners Furuya, Shimomura, Shindo, Inada, and Yamamoto. When Abe seeks to improve relations with neighboring countries, he can turn to dovish cabinet members. Abe has right wingers in place to avoid any concessions on territorial and historical issues. For example, education minister Shimomura will revolt against any fuzzy compromise when it comes to textbooks and “comfort women.” Furuya, who is in charge of abductees and the national identity issue, is likely to stand against any tactical compromise on Yasukuni shrine visits. All the right wingers would go against softness on territorial issues. The cabinet members mutually check and balance each other. It is likely that Abe will take a realistic stance on many foreign policy issues, but his cabinet members will still remain outspoken and prevent concessions from going very far.

Though Abe is likely to focus mostly on economic revival, rehabilitation from the earthquake, and crisis management – as he mentioned in a press conference on January 4, 2013²³ – he will unavoidably be drawn into a number of foreign policy disputes. His grand strategy can be summarized as follows. At the core is the idea of strengthening independent defense capability, increasing the defense budget combined with the initiative to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance. In the face of the increasing challenge from China, Abe thinks that cooperation with the United States is unavoidable to secure his country. At the outer rim of his policy line is the goal of linking Japan to democratic countries in the Asia-Pacific, such as the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, in what has been called “value diplomacy.” Though Abe does not actively use the term “the arc of freedom and prosperity,” which was associated with his first cabinet in 2006, his first trip abroad was to a few Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand and Indonesia, which symbolize this ideal and may be considered possible partners in deterring the expansion of China’s influence in the region. Japan is willing to cooperate with China on issues of mutual benefit, but on other matters it may shy away from China. In this context, Abe is trying to improve the deteriorated ties with South Korea. What preoccupies him is an assertive China.²⁴ Despite campaign promises that alarmed South Koreans, Abe’s priorities may keep tensions under control.

This goes well with the general policy line of the American government. The United States and Japan are in basic agreement that Chinese aggressiveness should be checked with the cooperation of U.S. allies and friends in the region.²⁵ However, Abe's policy line can go further than the U.S. way of thinking in that it basically aims at containing China rather than constructively bringing China into rule-based international institutions. Highly nationalist rhetoric focused on territorial issues may bring out unexpected military contacts between Japan and China, which the United States does not desire. Also troublesome for the United States is Japan's relationship with South Korea. The two countries are expected to align together to cope with regional challenges, but they are still in dispute regarding territorial and historical issues. Abe's priority in facing China may not suffice to manage this divide.

Park Geun-hye was elected in what had appeared to be a tight competition with Moon Jae-in, benefitting from high voter turnout of 75 percent and especially from the fact that 89.9 percent of voters in their fifties went to the polls, of whom two thirds voted for Park. South Korea is rapidly aging. A higher voting rate does not necessarily work to the detriment of conservatives.²⁶ Park took a stance quite different from Lee Myong-bak by addressing popular policy issues, including social welfare, economic democratization, regionally balanced development, and national integration. In other words, she stole the weapons of the opposition and fought the electoral game on the opposition's court, enlarging the support basis from moderate voters. Park emphasizes "trust diplomacy," engaging North Korea as long as it keeps its promises and behaves like an ordinary country. Without trust, however, ties will not go forward.

This way of thinking can be applied to her approach to Japan too. Park is unlikely to hurry to resurrect broken ties, though she will take a forward-looking stance. The first envoy she accepted as president-elect was from Japan. Abe sent Nukaga as a special envoy to Park to deliver his message of congratulations and desire to improve ties.²⁷ Yet, this is not a sign that Park favors Japan over China. She sent her first envoy to China, who was received by Xi Jinping favorably.²⁸ "Trust diplomacy" suggests a few guidelines in handling foreign affairs, especially with neighboring countries. First, she is not going to hurry up mending ties unless accumulated exchanges suffice to demonstrate that the other party can be trusted. Second, if trust is betrayed by any words or deeds, she is going to wait until the dust settles down before proceeding again. Third, she is likely to take a bottom-up approach rather than top-down initiative. Trust can be built by repeated transactions rather than by a single meeting between leaders, although good summits may prove pivotal in enhancing ties.

After Park was elected, Abe intimated that he might come to the inauguration ceremony. Special envoy Nukaga also suggested this, but Korean public opinion had shifted toward viewing the dispatch of envoys to big powers or invitations to national leaders to the inauguration as a sorry reminder of the discredited practice of faithfully paying respect to powerful countries, *sadae*.²⁹ Park's pre-election mission to the United States was called a policy consultation team, not a special envoy. The preparatory committee on the inauguration ceremony did not officially invite any political leader to the ceremony on February 25. Abe showed his dissatisfaction by saying that he would not go to the inauguration ceremony unless he was invited.³⁰ It was around this time that he made a final decision to visit Washington D.C. on February 21-23.

It is unclear whether it is coincidental, but the Abe cabinet dispatched Shimajiri, deputy vice minister for the cabinet office in charge of territorial affairs, to the ceremony celebrating Takeshima Day on February 22, 2013. Considering that the LDP had promised to hold the Takeshima Day event as a national convention hosted by the central government, dispatching Shimajiri to the event was a sign of downgrading. It did not nominate an official representative to attend the event, though Diet member Koizumi, son of the former prime minister, volunteered to attend. This gave the territorial controversy a relatively low profile, but by dispatching a government official to the event Japan contradicted the previous news release that the cabinet would skip the Takeshima Day event in 2013. Korean media did not accept the dispatch of Shimajiri as a sign that Japan tried to minimize the political impact of Takeshima Day, reporting instead that Abe had picked high-ranking Shimajiri to represent the government. It overlapped with the news that, in mid-February, the Cabinet Office established an organization solely devoted to territorial issues, upgraded from a task force team in charge of the Takeshima controversy. With these developments, it, at least, appeared that the territorial controversies were being given greater priority rather than being toned down. A remark by Mizoguchi Zenbei, governor of Shimane prefecture, at a Takeshima Day event in Tokyo eloquently expressed the point by saying that the Japanese government fully accepted our request to establish a central government organization in charge of territorial affairs and also dispatched a government representative for the first time, raising the profile of Takeshima.³¹ To this claim, Park did not respond, but a MOFAT spokesperson made it clear that no territorial dispute exists between Korea and Japan and that Dokdo is fully and effectively controlled by Korea. The issue was overshadowed, however, by North Korea's third nuclear test on February 12, 2013 and ensuing security concerns. Also, the abortive nomination of a prime minister diverted public attention for some time.

Though many Japanese politicians, including former prime minister Mori and vice prime minister Aso, participated in the inauguration ceremony, their presence was not fully reported to the Korean media. At a meeting with Aso, Park is reported to have said, "In order to build a sincere friendly relationship between Korea and Japan, we have to understand the past history straightforwardly (without distortion), strive to cure the scars of the past, and understand the pains of the victimized in a heartfelt manner."³² Park is fully aware that the territorial controversy and "comfort women" issue are the main barriers to amelioration of bilateral ties, as she emphasizes the need for Japan to act and take responsibility. She noted that trust is the basis for reconciliation and cooperation and that history is a mirror for self-reflection and the key to a hopeful future. After a reminder that statuses as aggressor and victim would never change even after thousands of years, Park urged Japan to make a positive change.³³ However, her point was not to keep dredging up the history issue. She argued that history issues should never be passed to the next generation. Instead, the leaders of our generation need the courage to address and resolve these issues.

UNRESOLVED CONTRADICTIONS AND POLITICAL DILEMMAS

The bilateral relationship depends not only on the chemistry of the two political leaders but also on the compatibility of the national strategic identities of each administration.³⁴ Whether Abe's strategy can be compatible with Park's is the question.

Park uses the concept of “trust” when she refers to diplomacy with neighboring countries, including North Korea. She calls her strategy toward North Korea a “trust process on the Korean Peninsula.” As long as trust can be built, many things can be accomplished, she argues, but without trust she is unwilling to go forward with assistance or unilaterally to take the initiative. Her logic is based on the idea of strategic interaction. Second, this concept puts emphasis on the process, not the outcome. Trust cannot be born at a single stroke. Step-by-step policy implementation and reappraisal are important rather than some rhetoric of peace. Actions rather than words matters here. Third, trust should be built in a bottom-up fashion; accumulated experiences of cooperation breed trust between the two parties. In other words, a summit meeting can be a facilitator of trust building, but it is not a last resort.

This conception of trust can also be applied to Park’s diplomacy toward Japan. Both parties should agree upon the contents and process of trust building before they work with each other on a grand scheme of collaboration. This can be a piecemeal approach, but responsible actions and sincere commitments may be more important than incomprehensible rhetoric. The hurdle for enhancing ties between Korea and Japan is addressing the “comfort women” issue, which is imminent because of the life expectancy of the aged victims. This does not necessarily mean that Japan should take a unilateral initiative to resolve this case, but Japan is expected to show sincere and heartfelt handling of the issue. What is worrisome in this respect is Japan’s right wing attempt to revise the Kono statement, in which the Japanese government acknowledged military engagement in mobilizing these women as well as expressed its sincere apology to the victims. If the Abe cabinet defers from revisiting this issue, breeding trust between the two leaders is more likely. Yet, if it broaches this issue insensitive to South Korean opinion, especially considering that Park is a female president who is emotionally sympathetic to the victims, the result could be another downward spiral in relations, making trust building inconceivable.

If one takes a close look at Abe’s national strategy, it remains to be seen whether he is seriously interested in improving ties with South Korea. His diplomatic priority is strengthening alliance ties with the United States. Considering China’s increasingly assertive maritime actions, Abe’s intention to hold the alliance relationship tight is quite understandable. However, there is a missing link in this conception. South Korea is another pivotal alliance partner, together with Japan, in America’s global and regional strategy. The United States does not want to see frictions between its two core allies. Furthermore, if relations between the two are troubled, the U.S. strategic scheme in East Asia cannot be smoothly implemented. Whether Abe can embrace South Korea as an integral part of American strategy in the region is a challenge that, for the moment, he does not appear to take into account. For him, the United States and South Korea are alternatives rather than a combination. Abe trumpets the theme of a group of countries with similar systems and values cooperating regionally and in global society, citing values such as democratic politics, a market economy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. If these are the primary criteria for cooperation, South Korea should definitely be embraced as an essential part of this collective, especially in the Asia-Pacific. Nobody questions the quality of South Korea as a country that fits these criteria. However, Abe does not explicitly advocate that South Korea be an integral part of his regional strategy.³⁵ Between South Korea and Japan, confrontational issues such as a territorial dispute, the “comfort women” issue, Yasukuni shrine visits, and textbook reviews,

are associated with a values gap. All are critical elements of another pillar of his political agenda, national identity politics.

Abe wants Japan to have an independent national identity based on a sense of pride and esteem.³⁶ In his eyes and those of his right wing associates, South Korea is a troubling partner that tries to push Japan into a corner to extract further apologies and financial compensation. Abe insistently argues that Japan should be a country that can say “no” to its neighboring countries when the latter ask it to apologize more. He also thinks that Japanese pride should never be undercut, even when the issues at stake are wartime wrongdoings. For him, Japan is a beautiful country to be fully appreciated by the Japanese people.³⁷ As a result, in Abe’s foreign policy scheme, the Korean question may be an incomprehensible dilemma and not-easily-solvable contradiction. This is one reason why Abe is hesitant toward South Korea.

In Abe’s diplomatic scheme, how to locate South Korea in a strategic competition between Japan and China remains utterly ambiguous. For Abe, China is a country that increasingly poses a security and diplomatic challenge to Japan. On the one hand, when Japan wants to take a realistic stance to cope with the security challenges posed by China, South Korean cooperation is desperately needed. Even when Japan wants to develop collaborative ties with China, South Korea can facilitate cooperation and serve as a bridge that can address thorny questions in a milder way. On the other hand, Abe prefers an autonomous strategy in dealing with China without embracing South Korea at this stage. This might be because he regards South Korea as increasingly playing the game in the Chinese court.³⁸ However, the fact of the matter is that, except on issues related to historical and territorial controversies, South Korea’s stance mostly overlaps with Japan’s approach. The main reason for distrusting South Korea for Abe, even more than for other Japanese leaders in recent years, seems to be the obsession with Japan’s national identity in opposition to the perceived Korean national identity.

A number of Japanese articles recall the historical legacy of Abe’s grandfather, Kishi Nobusuke, and Park’s father, Park Chung-hee, in normalizing the relationship between South Korea and Japan in 1965 on the basis of good personal relations. Ironically, Park may be at a disadvantage in that she is a second-generation politician whose father is widely remembered as the authoritarian, pro-Japanese president of South Korea. In fact, during her presidential campaign, she had to apologize to the opposition-associated civil groups for the cruel repression during her father’s days. Extreme leftists in South Korea in the Liberal Progressive Party refer to Park Chung-hee’s old Japanese name to criticize her family legacy. Though that kind of emotionally charged criticism did not win wide support from the electorate, what should be remembered is the fact that anti-Japanese feeling still runs deep. Accordingly, regardless of her personal convictions or diplomatic strategy, Park’s background may work as a liability rather than an asset. She may remain quite cautious in handling the Japan question, given negative responses from the public.

CONCLUSION

As North Korean belligerence intensified in the first months of the Abe-Park tandem in office, U.S. interest in solidifying the alliance triangle was unmistakable.³⁹ To the extent possible, U.S. diplomacy will pressure Abe to use maximum restraint in touching the most sensitive nerves in South Korean identity, while urging Park to show maximum tolerance in reacting to any affront

perceived by the Korean people. In a personal relationship fraught with historical meaning, these two heirs to legacies dating back half a century face the pivotal period when the balance between national identities and national interests will be decided in facing North Korean assertiveness and China's new claims to regional leadership. Abe's preoccupation with identity goals and Park's initial pursuit of "trust" suggest an uneasy fit between two distinct agendas. In the face of a more dangerous security environment, Abe seems to be backtracking on some of his identity agenda, and Park is recognizing that alliance trust is first among her priorities. These cautious responses offer some hope for bilateral relations, but prospects remain high for more bilateral "shocks" with no breakthrough in sight toward putting South Korean-Japanese relations on a steady path forward.

ENDNOTES

1. On the foreign policy direction toward Japan under Lee Myong-bak, see Park Cheol Hee, "*Sae jongbu e baraneun daeil oegyo jongchaek banghyang*," *Oegyo*, Vol. 85 (April 2008), pp. 29-38.
2. In "A Letter to the People," Roh Moo-hyun took a hard-line stance, declaring a diplomatic war with Japan. *Yonhap News*, March 24, 2005.
3. Roh had a summit with Koizumi on November 18, 2005 during the APEC meeting in Pusan, Korea, but he did not meet Koizumi after that. Roh welcomed new Prime Minister Abe on October 9, 2006, but after this, they met only at multilateral settings.
4. Hatoyama's wife Miyuki made kimchi together with Korean first lady Kim Oksook on October 9, 2009, when Hatoyama visited Seoul in his first foreign travel after assuming his position. Miyuki's comment, "please give me rice together with kimchi" became wildly popular in Korea. *Donga ilbo*, October 10, 2009. A spokesman of the Korean Foreign Ministry, Kin Young Sun, delivered a welcome message to the Kan Declaration on August 10, 2010. *Donga Ilbo*, August 11, 2010.
5. The Tokyo High Court of Justice found on August 30, 1999, that the Japanese Diet has no responsibility to legislate on compensating comfort women. *Yonhap News*, August 30, 1999. On March 25, 2003, the Japanese Highest Court of Justice decided that a legal suit by a Korean "comfort woman" would not proceed further.
6. The Korean Constitutional Court found on August 30, 2011, that the Korean government, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, did not fulfill its duty to resolve the rights of compensation claimed by comfort women according to Article 3 of the Korea-Japan normalization treaty in 1965. Non-action was the reason why the government side lost the suit. *Donga ilbo*, August 31, 2011.
7. Noda said at a summit in Kyoto that the "comfort women" issue had been fully and completely resolved by the normalization treaty in 1965. *Yonhap News*, December 18, 2011.
8. Author's interviews with high-ranking Japanese foreign ministry officials in Seoul on January 13, 2012; in Seoul on March 23, 2012; and in Tokyo on April 25, 2012.
9. Author's interview with Japanese foreign ministry official on April 23, 2012.
10. *Yonhap News*, July 6, 2012.
11. Dae-song Hyun, "The Dokdo-Takeshima Issue: Its Origin and the Current Situation," in Dae-song Hyun, ed. *The Historical Perceptions of Korea and Japan* (Seoul: Nanam, 2008), pp. 37-92.
12. The Japanese Foreign Ministry ordered its officials not to use Korean Airlines for a month starting from July 18, 2011, after the Korean Airlines test flight of the A-380 over Dokdo on June 16, 2011. *Seoul Daily*, July 15, 2011.
13. *Yonhap News*, August 1, 2011.
14. An official at the president's office said that they would temporarily stop and review the project thoroughly, adding that the research facility could harm the natural environment of Dokdo, designated as one of the natural treasures of Korea. *Kookmin ilbo*, August 14, 2012.
15. For an intensive interview with Japan specialists as to the effects of the president's remark about the Japanese emperor, see *Hankyoreh News*, August 22, 2012.

16. The 20th Korea-Japan Forum scheduled in Fukuoka from August 29 was cancelled on August 18. *Yonhap News*, August 18, 2012.
17. *Donga ilbo*, August 23, 2012.
18. According to a survey by Mikyoung Kim at Hiroshima Peace Institute, 67 percent of the Japanese respondents said that Takeshima belongs to Japan. *Yonhap News*, January 3, 2013.
19. One report had Abe reconsidering bringing the Dokdo/Takeshima issue to the ICJ, noting it had been under discussion from the previous year. *Asahi shimbun*, January 9, 2013.
20. At the UN General Assembly, Noda mentioned the importance of the rule of law for peacefully resolving international disputes. *Donga ilbo*, September 25, 2012.
21. Cheol Hee Park, “*Il Jamindang ukyonghwa neun jachungsoo*,” *Munhwa ilbo*, November 23, 2012; Chang Soo Jin, “*Ilbon susuroreul hachineun Abe kongyak*,” *Chosun ilbo*, November 25, 2012; Wondeok Lee, “*Ilseodo yokpung matkedoel Abe eui Jamindang*,” *Donga ilbo*, November 27, 2012.
22. Cheol Hee Park, “*Abe naegak eui chulbom kwa Dongbuka jongse*,” *Oegyo*, Vol. 104 (January 2013), pp. 57-64.
23. *Yomiuri shimbun*, January 4, 2013.
24. Cheol Hee Park, “*Putting Old Liquor in a New Bottle: Abe’s Security Strategy toward Asia*,” a paper delivered at Korea National Defense University, April 11, 2013.
25. Daniel Twining, “*America’s Grand Design in Asia*,” *The Washington Quarterly* Vol. 30, No. 3 (Summer 2007), pp. 79-94.
26. 82 percent of voters in their 50s supported Park. *Joongang ilbo*, February 15, 2013.
27. *Hankook ilbo*, January 5, 2013.
28. *Yonhap News*, January 21, 2013.
29. Joon Woo Park, “*Sagang oegyoreul pogihal ttaega doitta*,” *Donga ilbo*, January 3, 2013.
30. *Nihon keizai shimbun*, January 22, 2013.
31. *Chosun ilbo*, February 23, 2013.
32. *Aju Economy*, February 25, 2013.
33. *Donga ilbo*, March 1, 2013.
34. Cheol Hee Park, “*Abe oegyo samdae mosun sae haepopeul*,” *Seoul Daily*, February 15, 2013.
35. In a speech at CSIS during his visit to Washington, Abe mentioned South Korea together with Australia for the first time. www.kantei.go.jp.
36. Abe Shinzo, *Atarashii kuni e* (Tokyo: Bungei shunju, 2013).
37. Abe Shinzo, *Utsukushii Kuni e* (Tokyo: Bungei shunju, 2006).
38. Xi’s China is applying a charm offensive, thinking that South Korea is a swing state between the United States and China. Sunny Lee, “*Will China’s Soft-power Strategy on South Korea Succeed?*” *PacNet*, No. 23, April 8, 2013.
39. Michael Green, “*Hanmiga Bukhaek wihyuphe hwaksilhi daechoharyomyon*,” *Joongang ilbo*, April 20, 2013.



ASIA'S UNCERTAIN FUTURE: KOREA, CHINA'S AGGRESSIVENESS, AND NEW LEADERSHIP

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: GILBERT ROZMAN, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

■ Bilateral Competition and Cooperation Under New Leadership

The United States and China
Robert Sutter

China and Russia
Sergey Radchenko

South Korea and Japan
Cheol Hee Park

South Korea and the U.S.
Scott Snyder

■ CJK Economic Trilateralism: The Prospects and Perils of a New FTA

The Chinese Perspective
Scott Harold

The South Korean Perspective
Chang Jae Lee

The Japanese Perspective
T. J. Pempel

The U.S. Perspective
Claude Barfield

■ China's National Identity and the Sino-U.S. National Identity Gap: Views from Four Countries

The Debate Inside China
William Callahan

The View from Japan
Ming Wan

The View from South Korea
See Won Byun

The View from Russia
Gilbert Rozman

■ Prospects and Challenges for Korean Reunification

Competing Regional Interests and Reunification
John Park

South Korea's Unification Policy and Prospects
Ho Yeol Yoo

**Understanding Peaceful Reunification:
Its Dynamics and Challenges**
Abraham Kim