



**Japan-Korea Relations:
Same Dance, Different Floor**

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The two highlights in Japan-Korea relations during this quarter are Prime Minister Kan Naoto's apology to South Korea for Japan's colonial rule, and the appointment of Kim Jong-un, as vice chairman of the Workers' Party Central Military Commission and military general in the Korean People's Army. While these developments hold the promise to potentially change the security landscape of Northeast Asia, Prime Minister Kan's first full quarter in office reveals that Japan's North Korea policy is likely to continue along the lines of previous Japanese administrations, at least for now: an unfavorable attitude coupled with hostility and inaction. Pyongyang's attitude toward Tokyo, too, changed little and remained more or less *predictable* – it denounced Prime Minister Kan for apologizing only to South Korea, criticized Japan for “shamelessly” wanting a permanent seat at the UN Security Council, and demanded compensation for all of Japan's past wrongdoings. Japan-South Korea relations appear to be moving closer, although whether Kan's apology will truly change anything remains to be seen.

Japan keeping a watchful eye on North Korea's succession

At the quarter's end, the Japanese government remained noncommittal but is apparently paying close attention to the North Korea's power transition dynamics for signs of whether there is any possible impact on the North's stance on either the abduction issue or its nuclear and missile programs. The Japanese media closely followed news about Kim Jong-un's appointment as a vice chairman of the Central Military Commission in the Workers' Party, which took place a day before the party's conference selecting “supreme leadership body.” With no prior military title, little is known about Kim Jong-un, but his new position means that he is responsible for directing North Korea's army and for formulating the party's military policies. Along with Kim Jong-il's sister Kim Kyong-hui's promotion to a Central Committee's Political Bureau member and her husband Jang Song-taek's nomination to the number two position on the National Defense Commission, it appears that a hereditary power transfer may be underway in Pyongyang. The Japanese government made no immediate official comment, but Prime Minister Kan said on Sept. 28 that Japan will “carefully monitor the situation inside North Korea.”

Kim Hyon-hui and the abduction issue

Amid the prolonged stalemate on the abduction issue, former North Korean agent Kim Hyon-hui made a four-day headline-making visit to Japan. Kim is the sole surviving bomber responsible for the 1987 bombing of Korean Air passenger flight 858, and had received Japanese language training in North Korea from abduction victim Taguchi Yaeko. The Japanese government

arranged meetings between families of the abductees and Kim, who claimed to have information about abduction victim Yokota Megumi. Reportedly her visit did not result in any new information, but Chief Cabinet Secretary Sengoku Yoshito said that the visit was “meaningful,” because it “has helped many people in the country to develop a strong indignation and interest regarding the abduction issue, which represents a violation of human rights and national sovereignty.” Japan’s Justice Minister Chiba Keiko issued a special permit for her visit because Japanese law prohibits foreigners convicted of crimes and sent to prison for more than a year from entering the country. Opposition lawmakers have criticized the government spending for her visit, which included a government-chartered airplane, helicopter, and the use of former Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio’s summer house in Karuizawa, where she met the families of the abductees. It is reported that the South Korean government requested the tight security measures for Kim due to concerns of a possible North Korean terrorist attack.

Watching changes in the North Korean leadership, the families of those Japanese nationals abducted by North Korea urged the government to be more proactive, saying that “the current North Korean move offers a chance to get the abductees back.” Working-level bilateral negotiations between Tokyo and Pyongyang on the abductee issue were last held in August 2008; there has been little progress since then. Tokyo and Pyongyang have been at odds with each other over the fate of the abductees. North Korea admitted for the first time in September 2002 that it had abducted 13 Japanese nationals and returned five of them. Pyongyang claimed that the rest had already passed away, but Tokyo has been investigating and collecting evidence to show that there were more abductees and that some of them might still be alive. Most recently, Nakai Hiroshi, Japan’s state minister in charge of the abduction issue, said that the Japanese government received information that an abduction victim named Taguchi was alive five years ago in Pyongyang. North Korea has claimed that Taguchi died in 1986 in a car accident.

Pyongyang: Tokyo is unfair

Prime Minister Kan’s Aug. 10 statement of apology, which acknowledged for the first time the forceful nature of Japan’s annexation of Korea in 1910, drew criticism from North Korea as “nothing but a cynical ploy to evade the responsibility for the crime of aggression.” Kan’s apology, issued ahead of the Aug. 29 centenary of Japan’s annexation of Korea, did not include North Korea, which prompted Pyongyang to criticize Japan for “wanting to keep the division of the peninsula.” According to the Aug. 13 *Japan Times*, a group of North Koreans who were victims and relatives of deceased victims of Japan’s colonial rule sent a letter to Japan to demand an “immediate apology and compensation” for their sufferings. Song Il-ho, ambassador in charge of normalization talks with Japan, said in an interview on Aug. 13 that Kan’s statement “retreats” from the Murayama statement of 1995 and that it gave “a sense of disappointment and resentment to all [North] Koreans.” But he added that “the DPJ-led government in Japan can start improving relations with Pyongyang by removing sanctions that the previous LDP-led governments have imposed.”

Japan’s 2010 Defense White Paper said that North Korea’s nuclear programs and missile activities are an “extremely destabilizing factor” in Northeast Asia and pose “grave dangers” to Japan’s national security. In response, the Korean *Central News Agency* claimed on Sept. 23 that Tokyo is trumpeting “the non-existent nuclear threat” from the North to disguise its own nuclear

issue. Regarding the description of the Dokdo/Takeshima islets as part of Japanese territory, the North claimed that Japan's move is "a pretext for staging a comeback to Korea."

Japan-South Korea relations: swimming through history

Aug. 29, the day that marked the 100th anniversary of Japan's annexation of Korea, did not mark a Japanese imperial visit to Seoul as South Korean President Lee Myung-bak had once hoped. However, the two countries did make an important step forward as Prime Minister Kan, with Cabinet endorsement, officially expressed the "feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology for the tremendous damage and suffering brought on by colonial rule" to South Korea.

Three things make this apology noteworthy. First is the fact that it was directed solely to South Korea, with an acknowledgement for the first time that the annexation was forced. In 1995, then Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi offered a more general official apology for Japan's aggression in Asia during World War II. Although Kan's apology largely echoed Murayama's 1995 statement, it was considered a more honest statement. Prime Minister Kan said, "As shown in their acts of strong resistance, such as the March 1 Independence Movement, Koreans were deprived of their nation and culture by a colonial rule that was against their will." In response, South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman Kim Young-Sun said that Seoul recognized and welcomed Japan's attempt to be honest about facing its past mistakes.

Second, given how inflamed historical issues between the two countries have become in the past, it is worth noting that Seoul and Tokyo have handled the 100th anniversary of the annexation quite well and without damaging bilateral ties. Behind Japan's gesture of apology and South Korea's relatively calm acceptance lay the political will on both sides needed to improve bilateral relations amid a rapidly changing security environment in Northeast Asia.

Third, despite the view among some conservative Japanese politicians that Japan should stop "apology diplomacy," there was also greater political will on the part of the Japanese government to strengthen its working relationship with the Lee administration in order to accomplish its foreign policy goals. In contrast to former Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine while at the same time officially accepting the 1995 Murayama apology, all 17 members of the Kan Cabinet decided against paying a visit to the Shrine on Aug. 15 of this year. The DPJ-led Kan administration appears to accept that Japan cannot strengthen ties with Seoul while ignoring historical issues. In an editorial on Aug. 12, the *Japan Times* made a similar point by claiming that those politicians who oppose Prime Minister Kan's apology should remember that "without showing remorse for its Asia-Pacific wars and colonial rule, Japan cannot gain the trust of its Asian neighbors."

South Korean official and public reaction to Prime Minister Kan's apology was overall positive, emphasizing in particular Kan's acknowledgement of the forceful nature of annexation, and viewing Kan's apology as a step forward from the 1995 Murayama statement. However, two reactions were consistent across the South Korean media and from the South Korean government. The first was a call for Japan to put its words into actions. For example, South Korean daily *Kyunghyang Sinmun* pointed out in its Aug. 10 editorial that Japan's behavior did not significantly change after the 1995 apology, referring to former Prime Minister Koizumi's

visits to the Yasukuni Shrine and the history textbook issue that took place afterward. A second reaction was that the apology was not “sufficient” in that it failed to mention thorny issues such as the so-called comfort women, and did not explicitly recognize the illegality of the annexation.

In fact, on Aug. 29, several hundred South Koreans rallied in Tapgol Park in Seoul under the name of “Memory of independence, future of the next 100 years,” demanding “an honest and concrete apology from the Japanese emperor to the victims and sufferers of colonial rule.” But as reported in Japan’s daily *Asahi Shimbun* on Aug. 31, there are people in South Korea – especially among the younger generations – who believe Kan’s apology was good even if its contents were not entirely as South Korean wishes.

Japan taking a backseat to China?

Another important aspect of the apology was the timing and the international context in which Prime Minister Kan made it. It seems more apparent than ever that both in Japan and South Korea there is a growing sense that Japan is lagging behind China’s military and economic – but perhaps not diplomatic – clout in Asia. As was noted around the world, this quarter marked China surpassing Japan as the world’s second largest economy. Japan’s 2010 Defense White Paper, the first under the DPJ-led government, expressed Tokyo’s increasing concern about not just China’s lack of transparency in its national defense policies but also about the overall future use of China’s expanding military power, including its naval activities. According to a report by Prime Minister Kan’s advisory panel, Japan’s Cold War-era defense policy – including its three non-nuclear principles – is no longer efficient, and the Self-Defense Forces need to enhance their capabilities to respond to contingencies. Broadly speaking, Prime Minister Kan’s apology can be understood as growing out of the overall Japanese foreign policy under these circumstances; it is meant to reaffirm the importance of its alliance with the US and build closer cooperation with South Korea.

Against the backdrop of its dealings with Beijing over the sinking of the South Korean naval ship *Cheonan*, Seoul is closely following the rising tensions between Tokyo and Beijing over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The underlying shifts in the balance of power between Japan and China appear to have become more visible during this quarter in the eyes of South Koreans due to the assertive and abrupt manner in which China handled the latest territorial dispute with Japan. South Korea’s major daily *Joongang Ilbo* on Oct. 1 editorialized that “Japan is increasingly taking a backseat to China,” listing Japan’s declining demographic trend, economic doldrums, and the diplomatic row with China as indicators.

In sum, although Japan’s description of the Dokdo/Takeshima islets as part of Japanese territory in its Defense White Paper triggered “regrets” and protests from Seoul, the quarter’s overall bilateral relations remained positive. Regarding North Korea’s nuclear program, on Sept. 22 Japanese Foreign Minister Maehara Seiji and acting South Korean Foreign Minister Shin Kak-Soo agreed that Pyongyang had to first take concrete actions before there was any chance of resuming the Six-Party Talks. This joint stance came despite North Korea’s call for the resumption of the Talks, which Beijing supported. Earlier in July, then Foreign Minister Okada Katusya expressed hope that Japan and South Korea could expand ties beyond politics, economics, and culture to include defense cooperation as well. Another positive note was that

Japan handed over colonial-era records of some 5,600 Koreans who died during forced labor at Japanese firms and mines.

Economic relations

In the larger context of the ongoing competition and interdependence between the Japanese and South Korean economies, signs of Japan's continuing economic stagnation were in stark contrast to South Korea's being the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) country with the fastest economic recovery from the global financial crisis. For the first time in six years, Japan's Central Bank decided to sell its own currency to stem the *yen's* rise against the US dollar this quarter. While Japanese Finance Minister Noda Yoshiko said that the government would take further steps as it monitored the market, there were concerns that the measures may not work because Japan sold *yen* unilaterally. Economic recovery in the ROK was at least partly attributed to the *won's* fall in 2008, which benefited South Korean exporters.

Political leadership and South Korea's experience in the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis were possible contributing factors to the differing economic performances between Japan and South Korea in responding to the global economic crisis. The Aug. 5 *Yomiuri Shimbun* carried an interview with Choi Kyung-Hwan, South Korea's knowledge economy minister. He said that behind South Korea's economic performance in the past few years was the structural adjustment made after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, which helped solve the problem of excessive competitiveness and the debt problems in various industrial sectors. Choi added that President Lee's leadership and business background were also positive contributing factors.

At the same time that Japan's lost its position as the world's number two economy to China, South Korea's economic interdependence with China is rising to new heights. According to South Korea's Central Bank, between January and August this year, South Korean exports to China made up of 25.1 percent of the country's total overseas shipments, up from 23.4 percent the previous year. During the same period, South Korea's trade with China accounted for 21.1 percent of total trade, up from 20.5 percent in 2009, bringing a \$29.4 billion trade surplus to South Korea.

Society and culture

Political tension and hostility at the governmental level between Japan and North Korea have affected Japan's treatment of ethnic North Koreans living in Japan for quite some time. This quarter, according to a report by Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, there were no local governments that exempted pro-North Korean General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (the *Chongryon*) from paying property taxes on their facilities. Previously, the group had enjoyed exemption from property taxes due to its function and quasi-diplomatic status representing North Korea in Japan. But, worsening bilateral relations coupled with negative Japanese public sentiment over the abduction issue, in 2007, prompted Japan's Supreme Court to declare that providing tax privilege to the organization was illegal. According to the Aug. 13 *Asahi Shimbun*, there are now 94 local governments that do not reduce property taxes for the organization, while 30 provide a partial exemption. The remaining six local governments are reviewing their policy.

A similar situation exists with tuition waivers for pro-North Korean schools in Japan. Currently, those schools receive the same tuition waivers as schools for Japanese, despite still strong opposition from some lawmakers in Japan. The law was enacted in April to provide a tuition waiver for Japan's public high schools, while providing 118,800 to 237,600 *yen* annually to those who go to private and other schools. The Education Ministry decided to include pro-Pyongyang high schools after concluding that those schools have similar curricula to other Japanese schools. But some lawmakers, including Nakai Hiroshi, state minister in charge of abduction issues, are opposed to the inclusion due to the unresolved abduction issue between Tokyo and Pyongyang.

The issue of granting suffrage to permanent residents in Japan's for local elections received attention in the run-up to the July 11 Upper House election. The ruling DPJ advocates granting voting rights to permanent residents living in Japan, while conservative politicians in LDP and small parties oppose the idea. The July 3 *Japan Times* ran a story about a citizens group led by Hiroyasu Inoue from the city of Kariya as a case of opposition to foreigner voting rights: he fears that it would "threaten Japanese traditions and national security." The conservative political parties Sunrise Party of Japan and People's New Party also oppose the idea, while Japanese Communist Party and Social Democratic Party advocate it.

According to an OECD report, among its 28 member countries, Japan spent the least on education in the year 2007. At the same time, the Japanese government is trying to encourage students to study abroad by providing financial assistance. Concerned with Japanese students' "inward-looking" attitude, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology decided to launch a "short visit" program with a budget of 1.7 billion yen that aims to send 7,000 students overseas in fiscal year 2011.

The coming quarter

The coming quarter may provide some movement in North Korea-Japan relations. Although it is unlikely that newly anointed and eventual leader "Young General Kim Jong-un" may assert himself in policymaking right away, the mere fact of his imminent rise could lead both Japan and South Korea to reevaluate policies toward the North. It is also possible that North Korea could move its foreign policy in some new direction to help Kim Jong-un solidify his role in the ruling hierarchy. However, the most likely path for the next few months – if not years – is for Kim Jong-un to keep his head down, build internal support for his rule, and avoid attempting to involve himself in any major way with foreign policy decisions.

Chronology of Japan-Korea Relations July - September 2010

July 11, 2010: Prime Minister Kan Naoto's ruling coalition loses a majority in the Upper House of the Diet following elections.

July 13, 2010: Japan's Foreign Minister Okada Katsuya "recognizes that Korean pride was deeply bruised when they lost their country" in his written interview with South Korean daily *Dong-A Ilbo*.

July 20-23, 2010: Kim Hyon-hui, the sole surviving bomber of the 1987 Korean Air passenger flight, makes a four-day visit to Japan to meet the families of those abducted by North Korea.

July 22, 2010: Nakai Hiroshi, Japan's state minister in charge of abduction issues, says that abduction victim Taguchi Yaeko was alive and well in Pyongyang six years ago. Pyongyang previously claimed that she died in 1986 in a car accident.

July 23, 2010: Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Sengoku Yoshito says Kim Hyon-hui's visit was "meaningful."

July 27, 2010: Prime Minister's Advisory Council on National Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era completes its report.

Aug. 6, 2010: Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Sengoku Yoshito says that Japan needs to remove impediments to future-oriented bilateral relations with Seoul from a humanitarian standpoint.

Aug. 10, 2010: The Korean reunification index of the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies at Seoul National University shows that the feasibility of the integration of the two Koreas in the areas of politics, economics, society, and culture declined in 2009 for a second straight year.

Aug. 10, 2010: Prime Minister Kan apologizes to South Korea for Japan's colonial rule of Korea. Japan acknowledges for the first time the forceful nature of the annexation in 1910.

Aug. 11, 2010: The Japanese government releases the property tax collection practices of facilities for pro-North Korea General Association of Korean Residents in Japan.

Aug. 11, 2010: North Korea criticizes Prime Minister Kan for apologizing only to South Korea and for failing to settle the past.

Aug. 12, 2010: A group of North Korean victims and the families of the deceased victims of Japan's colonial rule send a letter to Japan to demand immediate apology and compensation.

Aug. 13, 2010: North Korea's ambassador for normalization talks with Japan, Song Il-ho, says that Prime Minister Kan's apology statement was "disappointing."

Aug. 15, 2010: South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak proposes a unification tax during his speech commemorating the 65th anniversary of Liberation Day.

Aug. 26, 2010: Japan sends the South Korean government the records of those who died during forced labor at Japanese companies and mines during its colonial rule of Korea.

Aug. 28, 2010: Japan's Foreign Minister Okada Katsuya tells his Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi that the Six-Party Talks cannot easily be resumed "considering the feelings of South Korean and the South Korean government's position."

Aug. 29, 2010: The 100th anniversary of Japan's annexation of Korea.

Sept. 7, 2010: Japan's Agriculture Ministry announces that Japan is lifting a ban on South Korean poultry imports.

Sept. 10, 2010: Japan's Defense White Paper emphasizes the importance of US military deterrence and expresses concerns over China's increasing military power.

Sept. 10, 2010: South Korea expresses "deep regret" over Japan's Defense White Paper's description of the Dokdo/Takeshima islets as part of Japanese territory.

Sept. 14, 2010: Kan Naoto is reelected head of the Democratic Party of Japan.

Sept. 15, 2010: The Bank of Japan sells *yen* as currency trading opens in Tokyo.

Sept. 22, 2010: Japanese Foreign Minister Maehara Seiji and acting South Korean Foreign Minister Shin Kak-Soo agree that North Korea has to show concrete action before the resumption of the Six-Party Talks.

Sept. 27-28, 2010: Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing meet to discuss details of setting up a permanent secretariat for trilateral cooperation.

Sept. 28, 2010: North Korea holds a political conference and Kim Jong-un is appointed as vice chairman of the Central Military Committee of the Workers' Party.

Sept. 29, 2010: Families of Japanese nationals abducted by North Korea urge the Japanese government to take more proactive actions to make a breakthrough in the abduction issue.

Sept. 29, 2010: Japan's Foreign Minister Maehara Seiji says that Japan is closing monitoring developments regarding North Korea's leadership transition.