

ASAN REPORT

In Troubled Waters: Truths and Misunderstandings about Korea-Japan Relations

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About

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Executive Summary

This year marks the 50th anniversary of normalized relations between the Republic of Korea and Japan. The anniversary, however, fails to reflect just how toxic the relationship has become. Recently, Korea-Japan relations has been plagued by a string of missed opportunities for the two countries to narrow their differences on an array of issues. On June 22, President Park Geun-hye and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo tried to reverse that trend by attending embassy events at their respective capitals to celebrate the anniversary. Despite many considering this to be a diplomatic breakthrough, an improvement of relations in the long-run still appears elusive. While the anniversary events laid the groundwork for the first summit meeting between these two heads of state, they failed to shed light on the most important question: how can the two countries overcome their differences on history issues? Given these developments, this report aims to gauge how Koreans view Japan today and how they foresee Korea-Japan relations taking shape.

Recent public opinion surveys by the Asan Institute show that Koreans have taken a noticeably pragmatic view of Korea-Japan relations. They understand that disputes over history are unlikely to disappear any time soon. At the same time, they acknowledge the importance of Korea-Japan cooperation moving forward. They appear convinced that history issues and Korea-Japan cooperation should be mutually exclusive.

The survey results also confirm that Koreans possess a generally negative perception of Japan. Many associated Japan with the “Fukushima nuclear crisis” (31.3%), “militarism and colonization of Korea” (24.1%), and “politicians such as Prime Minister Abe Shinzo” (22.6%). On a scale of 0 to 10 (0=very unfriendly;

10=very friendly), they felt less friendly toward the Japanese (3.74) than they did toward the Chinese (5.06) and the Americans (5.82). When asked to rate their favorability of Japanese products (0=least favorable; 10=most favorable), respondents were most favorable toward Japanese cuisine (4.41) followed by tourism (4.14), industrial products (3.87), and pop culture (2.71). Interestingly, Koreans in their 20s were significantly more favorable toward Japan than older Koreans. The likely explanation is that those in their 20s lack memories of the colonial period and do not remember Japan’s heyday as an economic superpower. As a result, they appear less threatened by Japan’s recent posturing.

According to surveys conducted in June, Koreans were significantly less favorable toward the Japanese Prime Minister than toward Japan as a country. On the same scale as the aforementioned favorability ratings, Prime Minister Abe received a score of 1.36 while Japan scored 2.91. The favorability rating of the Japanese people was 3.74. Prime Minister Abe’s nationalistic tendencies appeared to have strongly influenced his ratings. Specifically, the designation of Takeshima Day as a government sponsored day, visits to the Yasukuni Shrine by Japanese politicians including the Prime Minister himself, and provocative statements over comfort women issues have undoubtedly lowered his favorability ratings to one of the worst among regional leaders as assessed by Koreans.

Koreans were also pessimistic in their current and future assessments of Korea-Japan relations. More than 80% of respondents stated that relations has worsened since President Park and Prime Minister Abe were elected as leaders. About 70% were convinced that relations will not improve. Additionally, the majority of Koreans identified the nature of the relationship as competitive rather than cooperative with 70% stating as such.

Koreans showed considerable concerns for Japan’s recent shift to the right (wor-

ried: 72.8%; not worried: 11.7%). This shift has gained traction in Japan as conservative leaders continue to hold office. 37.3% and 36.1% of respondents pointed to “distortion of history in textbooks” and “territorial dispute over Dokdo,” respectively, as major concerns. In addition, more Koreans have begun to look at comfort women as a major issue with 19.8% stating as such. This particular finding appears to have been aided by an increasing number of Koreans in their 20s who have expressed great interest in human rights issues. This confirms the critical role that the comfort women issue will play in the future with regards to relations between Korea and Japan.

Despite the bleak assessment of Korea-Japan relations, there was noticeable public support for improved relations vis-à-vis a summit meeting between the two leaders. 56.3% of Koreans agreed that a summit meeting should take place even if Prime Minister Abe fails to convey a message of sincere apology in August when he is expected to make a speech commemorating the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. 38.5% opposed.

What explains this seemingly contradictory pattern? One explanation is that there is a general agreement (65.2%) for a decoupling of history issues from Korea-Japan relations. While 88% of Koreans agreed that the Prime Minister should offer a sincere apology in August, 82.6% also admitted that Japan is unlikely to do so. Only 11.6% stated that there were more politicians who were remorseful for Japan’s past than those who were not. 30.0% said the same about the Japanese public.

These survey results indicate that Koreans have become increasingly pragmatic in their assessment of Korea-Japan relations. While they show support for cooperation between Korea and Japan, they are also determined to deal with sensitive issues, including those related to history. There appears to be some understand-

ing that history disputes will remain a constant factor when dealing with Japan.

As such, there is a growing need for the two governments to approach the diplomatic deadlock in a realistic and pragmatic manner. Accepting the fact that both sides need each other regardless of the history issues appears to be the first step. Judging by the survey results, the Korean public today appears fully aware of this fact.

Introduction

Since the elections of President Park Geun-hye and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, Korea-Japan relations has reached a virtual standstill. For two countries that share a complex and often troubled history, controversies have been par for the course. Prime Minister Abe's public favorability ratings have plummeted in Korea and there is a growing sense of "Korea fatigue" within the Japanese public. More importantly, the two heads of state have yet to greet each other in a bilateral summit meeting. President Park's multiple summit meetings with President Barack Obama and President Xi Jinping accentuate just how serious the diplomatic stalemate between Korea and Japan has become.

Recently, both sides have begun to invest diplomatic capitals to prevent the situation from worsening. For example, on June 22, the two leaders celebrated the 50th anniversary of normalized relations between the two countries by attending embassy events in their respective capitals. Their statements following the anniversary affirmed that both countries were fully aware of the dangers associated with the current stalemate and raised hope that the two countries may be turning the corner.¹

A day prior to the anniversary, the foreign ministers of the two countries met in Tokyo to discuss Japan's push to win the designation of UNESCO world heritage sites, which Korea had resisted since some of the designated locations were known for using Koreans as forced laborers. The mere fact that the two countries were willing to talk out their differences was seen by many as a breakthrough.

1. Song Sang-Ho, "Park, Abe stress forward-looking partnership," *The Korea Herald*, June 22, 2015, available at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150622001189>.

Soon thereafter, Japan agreed to acknowledge that some of the laborers who worked at the sites were indeed Koreans. In exchange, Korea supported Japan's proposal to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

Despite these conciliatory gestures, the more realistic assessment has been that these efforts come too little, too late. According to this assessment, these moves can only be understood as a quick fix to a larger problem centered on history issues. If relations are to truly improve, both sides must resolve the history issues, which is an unlikely prospect for either country given what is at stake. This became ever so evident in the UNESCO case when Japan later stirred controversy over the term "forced labor" and denied that Koreans working in these sites had been *forced* by Japan. It resulted in another foiled opportunity for the two sides to make amends.

Within such a framework, many see the two leaders' attendance at the anniversary events as a means to prevent the relationship from worsening, rather than a genuine effort to make a diplomatic breakthrough. Even if a summit were to take place in the near future, the sensitivity associated with history issues will likely prevent both sides from reaching a consensus. Prime Minister Abe's unwillingness to directly address these issues makes this even more likely.

It appears that the current stalemate has no easy answer and the road to improved relations remains difficult, if not impossible. With the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II approaching, Korea and Japan are now at another crossroads. And with Prime Minister Abe set to deliver a statement in August, all eyes are on the content of the statement and how it will impact the future of the Korea-Japan relations.

At this critical juncture, it is important to understand the Korean public's senti-

ment toward Japan. In particular, how do Koreans interpret the events currently taking place? Specifically, how do they view Japan, its leadership, and its relationship with their country? This report is an attempt to answer these questions and, concurrently, analyze Korea's attitude toward a possible Korea-Japan summit. By doing so, we examine where Korea and Japan stand with regard to the two countries' past, present, and future.

A Country Named Japan

Impressions of Japan

How do Koreans perceive and understand Japan, a country that shares a distinct history with Korea? The answer to this question is complex and multifaceted. As such, we asked Koreans a series of questions to gauge how they view Japan, its culture, and its current leader. First, we asked them what they associated most with Japan. The answers were mostly negative. 31.3% of respondents associated Japan with the 2011 Fukushima nuclear crisis and natural disasters such as earthquakes. 24.1% linked Japan with militarism during World War II and its colonization of Korea. Another 22.6% thought of politicians such as Prime Minister Abe.²

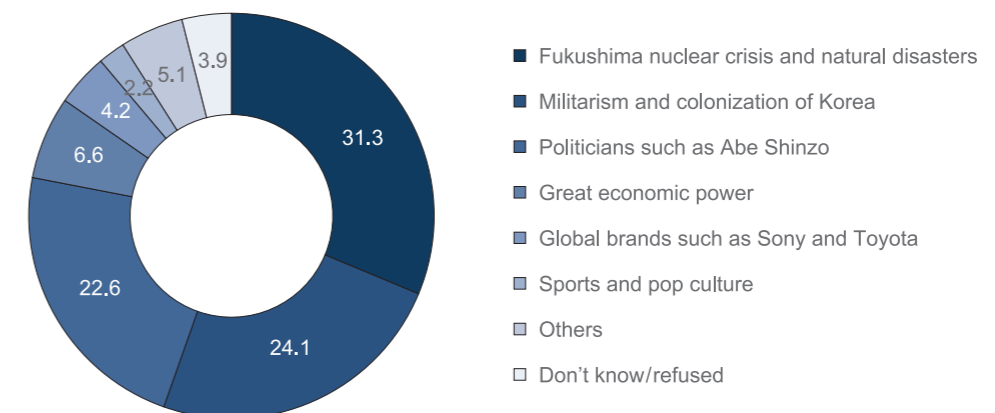
The results show that Koreans' perception of Japan is strongly influenced by their country's history with Japan. Since being elected, Prime Minister Abe has

2. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's recent favorability ratings (0=least favorable; 10=most favorable) have been between 0 and 1. His abysmal ratings have been, at times, worse than North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's. For the leadership favorability ratings, please see Kim Jiyoung, John J. Lee, and Kang Chungku, "Measuring a Giant: South Korean Perceptions of the United States," (*Asan Report*, April 2015).

been one of Koreans' least favorite leaders and has become the face of what many consider to be a revisionist movement that seeks to distort history. Insensitive comments made by Japanese politicians, their visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, the initiative to alter Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, and the pursuit of the right to collective self-defense have contributed to growing concerns of Japan's move to the right. This concern was well reflected in the survey results as 46.7% of Koreans associated Japan with colonization, militarism, and Prime Minister Abe (and his revisionist policies).

Concurrently, only a minority of Koreans associated Japan with "great economic power" (6.6%), "global brands such as Sony and Toyota" (4.2%), and "sports and pop culture" (2.2%). The fact that Japan no longer commands the same level of economic authority in the region and in the world appeared to have influenced their impressions of Japan.

Figure 1. Impressions of Japan³ (%)



3. Asan Poll (June 5-6, 2015).

Table 1. Impressions of Japan by Age⁴ (%)

	Fukushima nuclear crisis and natural disasters	Militarism and colonization of Korea	Politicians such as Abe Shinzo	Great economic power	Global brands such as Sony and Toyota	Sports and pop culture
Total	31.3	24.1	22.6	6.6	4.2	2.2
20s	44.9	19.7	10.5	4.8	7.8	4.7
30s	43.5	15.8	21.2	4.8	5.3	3.0
40s	30.4	27.3	26.2	8.6	2.5	0.9
50s	24.6	27.7	28.3	8.1	3.3	0.4
60+	17.2	28.3	25.1	6.3	2.8	2.1

When we analyze the results by age, clear differences can be seen. Koreans in their 20s associated Japan most with the Fukushima nuclear disaster and natural disasters (44.9%). 19.7% of this particular age group also answered “militarism and colonization of Korea,” while only 10.5% remembered Japan for its politicians. Koreans in their 30s showed a similar attitude toward Japan. 43.5% and 15.8% of them answered “Fukushima nuclear crisis and natural disasters” and “militarism and colonization of Korea,” respectively. However, the number of those who linked Japan with Japanese politicians doubled (21.2%) compared to those in their 20s.

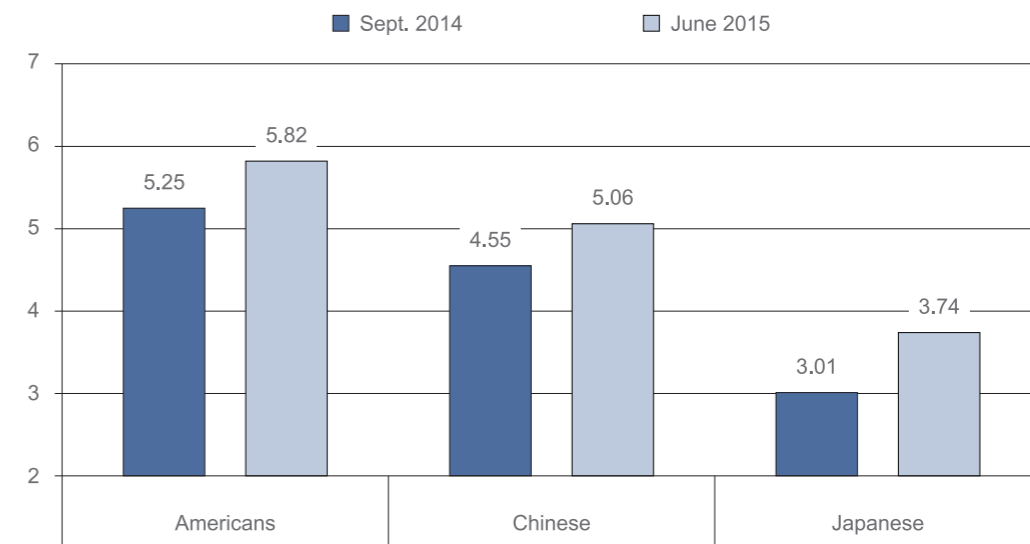
Among the age groups, more Koreans in their 40s (8.6%) and 50s (8.1%) identified Japan as a great economic power. This is most likely explained by the fact that Japan was one of the world’s greatest economic powers during their youths. On the other hand, only 4.8% of Koreans in their 20s and 30s answered the same.

4. This particular chart does not include numbers of those who answered “others” and “don’t know/refused.”

Those who were 60 and older were most sensitive to Japan’s colonization and history issues. They least identified Japan with the Fukushima nuclear crisis and natural disasters but most with Japan’s militarism and colonization of Korea.

Japanese and Their Culture

Respondents were asked to rate their friendliness toward the Japanese (0=very unfriendly; 10=very friendly). As the ratings below show, more Koreans this year felt friendly toward the Japanese compared to last year (2014: 3.01; 2015: 3.74). While this year’s number was still significantly lower than the ratings for the Americans and the Chinese, its increase over the past year was the highest of the three (Japanese: 0.73; Americans: 0.57; Chinese: 0.51).

Figure 2. Friendliness toward the Japanese⁵ (scale: 0-10)

5. Asan Poll (Sept. 7-10, 2014; June 9-10, 2015).

This change is worth noting since ROK-Japan relations dating back to last year has not improved, if at all. One likely explanation is that Koreans do not necessarily correlate ROK-Japan relations with their feelings toward the Japanese people.

Table 2. Friendliness toward Neighbors by Age (scale: 0-10)

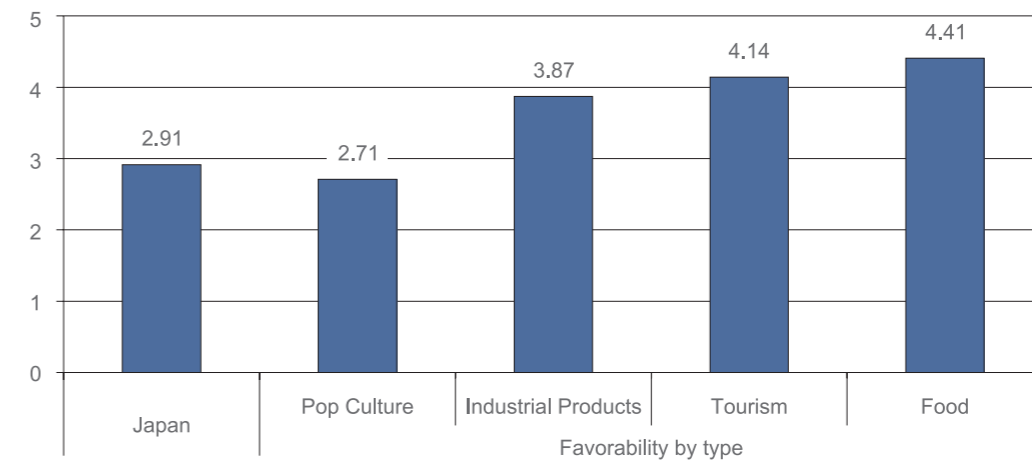
	Japanese	Americans	Chinese
Total	3.74	5.82	5.06
20s	5.10	5.73	4.78
30s	4.77	5.3	4.91
40s	3.76	5.53	4.86
50s	3.12	5.96	5.47
60+	2.30	6.51	5.25

Results were particularly interesting when examined by age. As Table 2 shows, the level of friendliness toward the Japanese was greater for younger Koreans. In particular, the rating of those in their 20s (5.10) was higher than the mid-point (5.0) and even higher than their friendliness toward the Chinese (4.78). The numbers for older Koreans, especially those in their 40s, 50s, and 60 and older cohorts, were significantly lower than their younger counterparts. Their ratings were also significantly lower when compared to ratings of all age cohorts with regard to other neighbors, mainly the United States and China. In a way, these results were expected since those who possessed “fresh” memories of Japan’s occupation of Korea were expected to possess negative perceptions of Japan.

Next, we asked Koreans to rate their favorability of Japanese products (0=do not favor at all; 10=very much favor). These products included Japan’s pop culture, industrial products, tourism, and cuisine. What Koreans favored most was Jap-

anese cuisine (4.41) followed by tourism (4.14) and industrial products (3.87). Compared to Japan’s country favorability rating (2.91), Koreans were much in favor of certain Japanese products, especially Japanese cuisine and tourism. However, products such as movies, music, and TV shows were favored less.

Figure 3. Favorability of Japan and Its Products⁶ (scale: 0-10)



When examined by age, younger Koreans in general were more accepting of Japanese products than their older counterparts. For example, Koreans in their 20s were more favorable toward all Japanese products compared to other age groups. Their favorability of Japanese food was especially high (5.55). On the other hand, older Koreans were less favorable toward all of these products. As Table 3 shows, these results reveal a remarkable consistency among the age cohorts: older implies less favorability toward Japanese products.

6. Asan Poll (June 1-2, 2015 [favorability of Japan]; June 5-6, 2015 [favorability of Japanese products]). Favorability of Japan is measured by the Asan Institute’s monthly polls which ask Koreans to rate their favorability of neighboring countries including the US, China, Japan, Russia, and North Korea.

Table 3. Favorability of Japanese Products by Age (scale: 0-10)

	Food	Tourism	Industrial Products	Pop Culture
Total	4.41	4.14	3.87	2.71
20s	5.55	4.68	4.75	4.02
30s	4.81	4.53	4.26	3.07
40s	4.27	4.17	3.84	2.29
50s	4.11	4.15	3.57	2.18
60+	3.35	3.27	3.11	2.11

Previous public opinion surveys results published by the Asan Institute have already pointed out the generally negative attitude of the Korean population toward Japan. However, the most recent survey results showed that younger Koreans, especially those in their 20s, were more favorable toward Japan. Understandably, Koreans who were 60 and older were least favorable toward Japan. As mentioned earlier, this is likely the result of generations of Koreans being exposed to different experiences of Japan. The attitude among the Korean youth toward Japan is particularly worth noting. Their memories of Japan's colonization of Korea appear to be more factual than emotional, which has enabled them to separate history from their assessment of Japan as a country. In addition, not having witnessed Japan's economic power at its peak during the 1980s and 1990s has given them less fear of Japan as an economic superpower. As a result, they appear to be less threatened by Japan.

Favorability Ratings of Japan and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo

The worsening of Korea-Japan relations has had a negative impact on Koreans' favorability rating of Japan as a country (0=not favorable; 10=very favorable).⁷

According to survey results, Japan (2.91) has challenged North Korea (2.34) for Koreans' least favored country on a consistent basis.

Even worse, Prime Minister Abe's favorability ratings were significantly lower than Japan's.⁸ As Figure 4 shows, Prime Minister Abe's rating reached its lowest (0.99) in January 2014. While the numbers improved in the following months, his ratings have been consistently lower than Japan's. This shows that Koreans' negative assessment of Japan's leader is not necessarily commensurate with their assessment of Japan as a country.

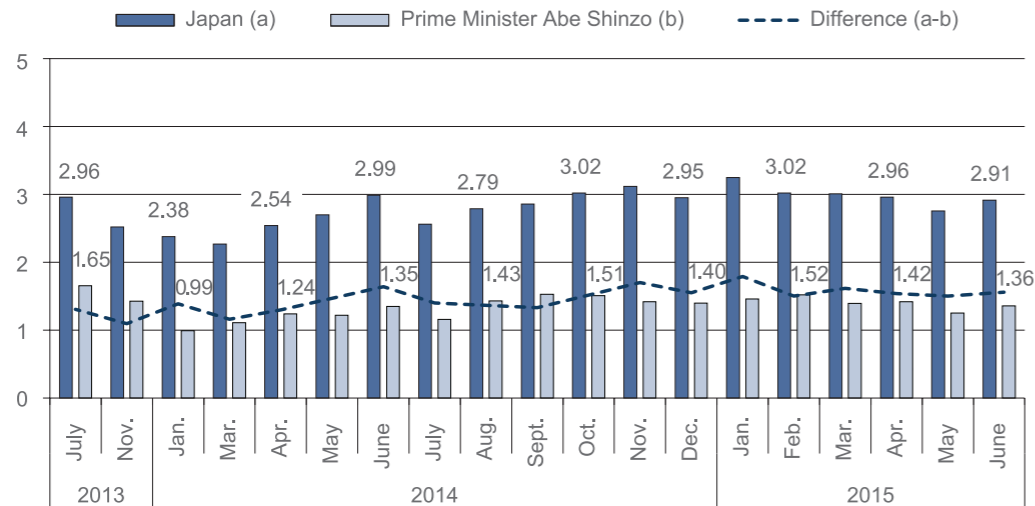
For example, when Prime Minister Abe visited the Yasukuni Shrine, his rating in January 2014 dipped by 0.43 compared to the previous month. This drop was the sharpest in three years. In the same period, Japan's ratings also dropped but only by a small margin (0.14). Again, this may imply that Koreans' assessment of Prime Minister Abe may not proportionately affect their view of Japan as a country.

The difference in favorability between Prime Minister Abe (a) and Japan (b) reached its peak in January 2015 (a-b=1.79). So far, both sides have shown unwillingness to accommodate the other. Therefore, it is difficult to expect Koreans' opinion of Prime Minister Abe improving any time soon.

7. In our most recent survey (June 2015), the US (5.94) was the most favored country followed by China (5.04), Russia (4.05), Japan (2.91), and North Korea (2.34). Koreans' favorability ratings of neighboring countries have been reported in previous Asan Reports. For the most recent report, please see Kim Jiyoung, John J. Lee, and Kang Chungku, "Measuring a Giant: South Korean Perceptions of the United States," (*Asan Report*, April 2015).

8. According to the June 2015 survey, leadership favorability ratings were as follows: President Barack Obama (6.00), President Xi Jinping (5.05), President Vladimir Putin (3.54), Prime Minister Abe Shinzo (1.36), and Kim Jong-un (1.01).

Figure 4. Favorability: Japan vs. Abe⁹ (scale: 0-10)



These results show that growing anti-Japan sentiments in Korea are mostly caused by Prime Minister Abe’s actions and less by Japan and the Japanese people. In the minds of Koreans, the Prime Minister’s nationalistic and aggressive gestures toward history issues are responsible for the current predicament.

Perceptions of Korea-Japan Relations

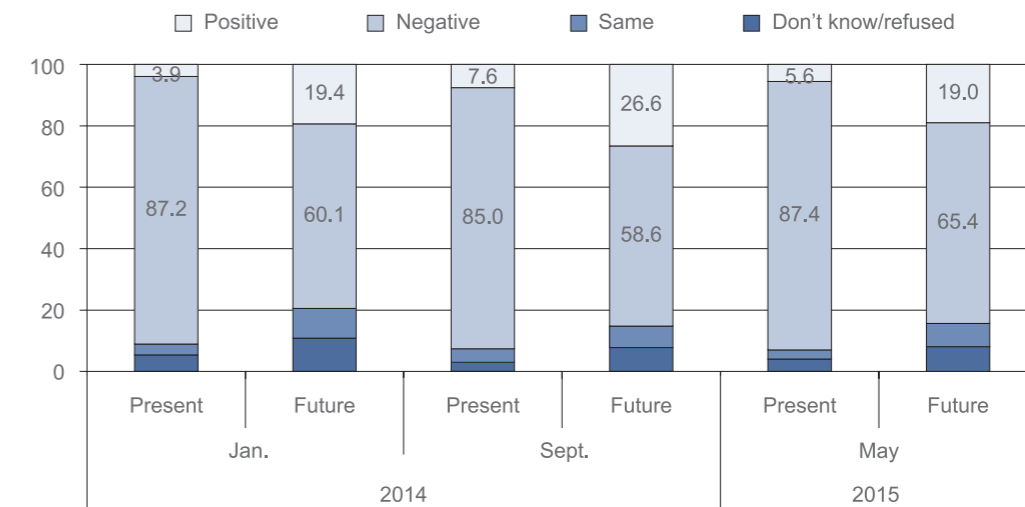
The majority Koreans were in agreement that Korea-Japan relations has worsened since President Park and Prime Minister Abe were elected. In the three surveys conducted between January 2013 and May 2015, more than 80% of Koreans agreed that relations has worsened. The numbers in January and September 2014 were 87.2% and 85.0%, respectively. In May 2015, the number reached 87.4%. Only 3.9% in January 2014 and 5.6% in May 2015 answered that relations

9. Asan Poll (July 2013-June 2015).

between the two countries has improved.

The surveys also asked how they foresee the bilateral relationship developing. Unsurprisingly, many expressed doubt that it will improve any time soon. In January 2014, the number of those who were skeptical of improved Korea-Japan relations was 60.1%. In May 2015, the number rose slightly to 65.4%. 7.5% of respondents also agreed that the relationship will remain as dreadful as it has been for the past few years. Overall, 72.9% of respondents were pessimistic regarding the state of Korea-Japan relations. On the other hand, 19.4% of Koreans in January 2014 stated that the relationship will improve. While this number increased to 26.6% in September 2014, the number regressed back to 19.0% this year.

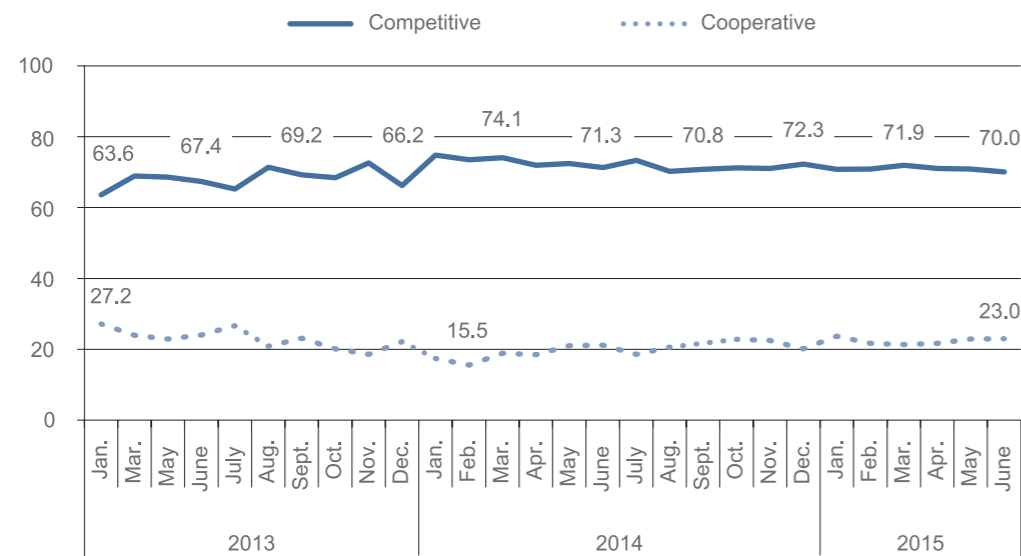
Figure 5. Evaluating Korea-Japan Relations¹⁰ (%)



10. Asan Poll (Jan. 4-6, 2014; Sept. 28-30, 2014; May 18-20, 2015).

Koreans also believe that the nature of the relationship is competitive rather than cooperative. In January 2013, 63.6% of respondents answered that the relationship was competitive. This number rose to 70.0% in June 2015. On the other hand, those who saw the relationship as cooperative constituted a minority. The lowest number was registered in February 2014 when 15.5% identified the relationship as such. The highest was in January 2013 (27.2%). This year, the percentage has remained in the 20s, reaching 23.0% in June. These draw stark contrast to the number for China. 50-60% of Koreans identified Korea-China relations as cooperative (lowest: 47.5%; highest: 65.1%).¹¹

Figure 6. Perceptions of Korea-Japan Relations: Competitive vs. Cooperative¹² (%)



11. Kim Jiyeon, John J. Lee, and Kang Chungku, "Measuring a Giant: South Korean Perceptions of the United States," (Asan Report, April 2015).

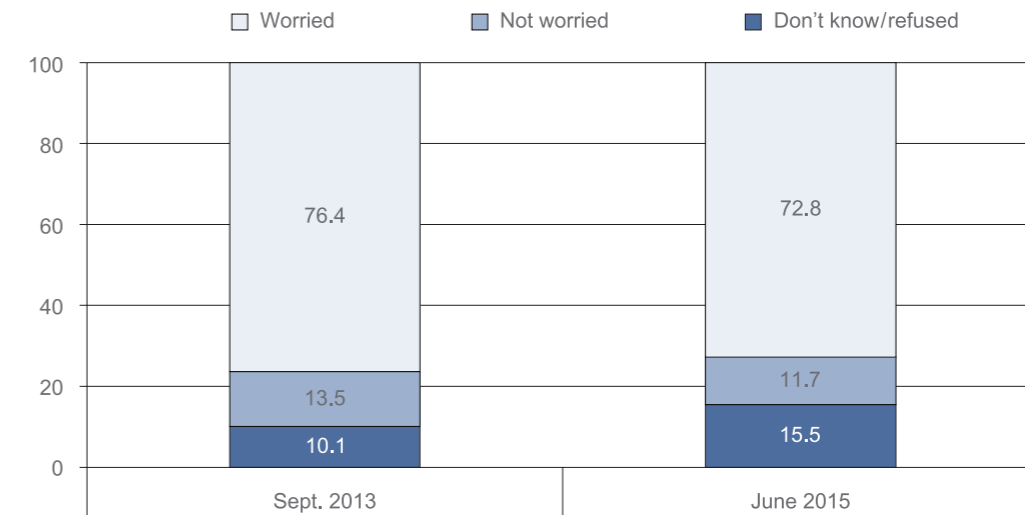
12. Asan Poll (Jan. 2013-June 2015).

Korea-Japan Relations and History Issues

Japan's Shift to the Right

Much of the recent dispute between Korea and Japan has stemmed from the two countries' different interpretations of history. The continuation of conservative leaderships in power, exemplified by the current Prime Minister, has added fuel to the fire. Also, the undeniable sense of insecurity among Japanese regarding Japan's current standings in the world and in the region, and the emergence of a post-war generation have contributed to a lax attitude toward history issues and have turned the Japanese public into an increasingly conservative group. Koreans, for obvious reasons, have expressed concerns about this recent trend. In two public opinion surveys conducted since the Prime Minister was elected

Figure 7. Japan's Shift to the Right¹³ (%)



13. Asan Poll (Aug. 30-Sept. 1, 2013; June 5-6, 2015).

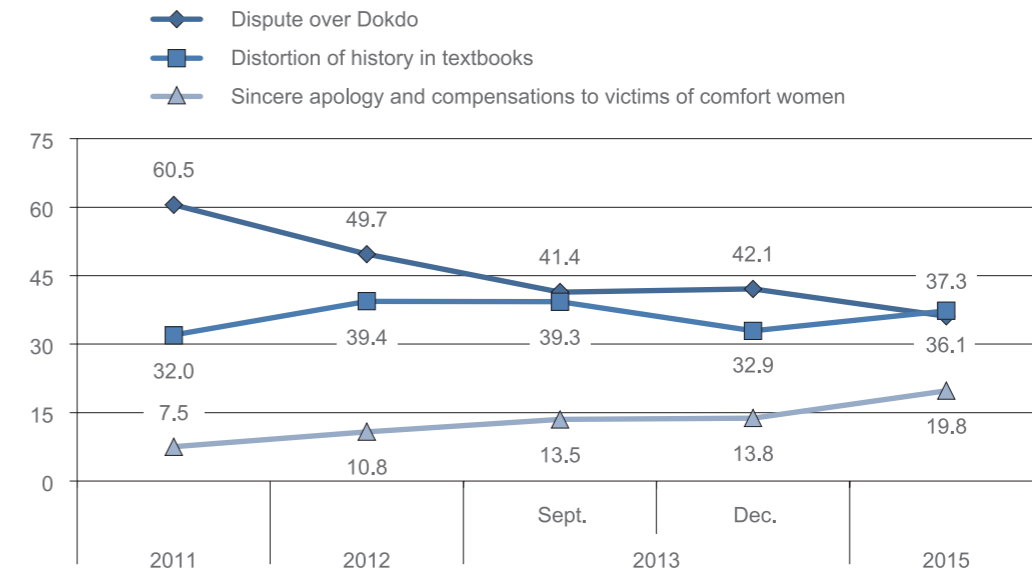
in September 2012, the majority of Koreans expressed concerns about Japan's shift to the right. 76.4% in September 2013 and 72.8% in June 2015 expressed those concerns.

When they were asked to identify the major obstacles to the bilateral relationship, many pointed to the dispute over Dokdo (37.3%) and distortion of history vis-à-vis history textbooks (36.1%). The attention to Dokdo, however, appears to be declining as the number dropped sharply since 2011, when an overwhelming 60.5% of Koreans identified it as the biggest obstacle.

On the other hand, attention to history textbook issues has been rather consistent with 35% responding in both 2011 and 2015 as the biggest obstacle to improved Korea-Japan relations. One issue that has recently gained much traction is the comfort women issue. In 2011, only 7.5% identified it as an obstacle to the bilateral relations. However, in 2015, this number jumped to 19.8%. This is most likely the byproduct of the highly publicized spats between the two governments regarding Japan's sincere apology and compensations to victims of comfort women. The media has played a particularly active role in promoting the issue as the centerpiece of the bilateral relationship. Survey results show that younger Koreans, especially those in their 20s, possess great interests in the comfort women issue despite their generally more favorable attitude toward Japan. If Korea-Japan relations are to improve in the future, dealing with the comfort women issue appears to be an important priority.

Korea-Japan relations reached a turning point in 1965 when the two countries signed the Treaty on Basic Relations. While this particular treaty established formal diplomatic ties between the two, there was a plethora of issues that were not addressed. At the time of the treaty, South Korea was in desperate need of financial aid to undertake its economic reform and was forced to overlook these

Figure 8. Obstacles to Improved Korea-Japan Relations¹⁴ (%)



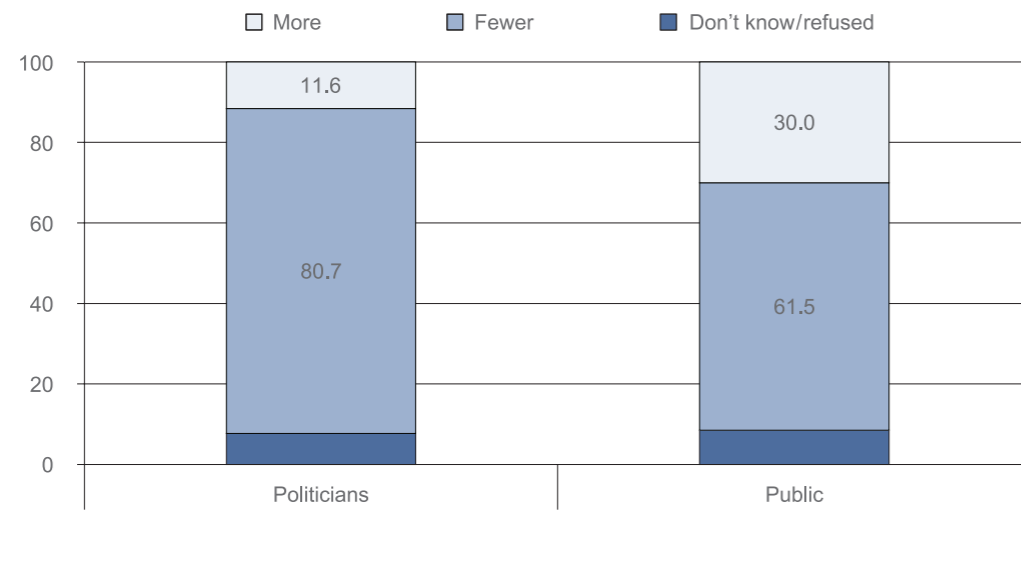
issues for short-term gains. Also, South Korea simply did not possess the diplomatic leverage needed at the time to negotiate a process of reconciliation with Japan. The United States, for strategic purposes, encouraged Korea to pursue a quick and easy way of improving ties with Japan. As a result, Korea-Japan relations has continued without ever having to reconcile over important history issues. Barring occasional flare-ups, the two countries have been able to manage the relationship in the past. However, these flare-ups have become increasingly visible as of late and it appears likely that history issues will continue to dictate Korea-Japan relations.

14. Asan Poll (Aug. 30-Sept. 1, 2013; Dec. 29-31, 2013; June 9-10, 2015). The 2011 and 2012 results came from the Asan Institute's annual surveys.

Different Perceptions of History

One of the most challenging aspect of the bilateral relationship is the difference in perceptions between the two countries regarding history issues. For example, according to a public opinion survey by *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 81% of Japanese felt that their former prime ministers' apologies were enough to resolve these issues. Only 15% stated the opposite.¹⁵ On the other hand, Koreans have demanded more from Japan, referring to the lack of sincerity and consistency in Japanese apologies. These sentiments were evident as only 11.6% of Koreans stated that there were more Japanese politicians who were remorseful for their country's past than those who were not. 30.0% said the same about the Japanese public.¹⁶

Figure 9. Portion of Japanese Remorseful for Japan's Past: Politicians vs. the Public¹⁷ (%)



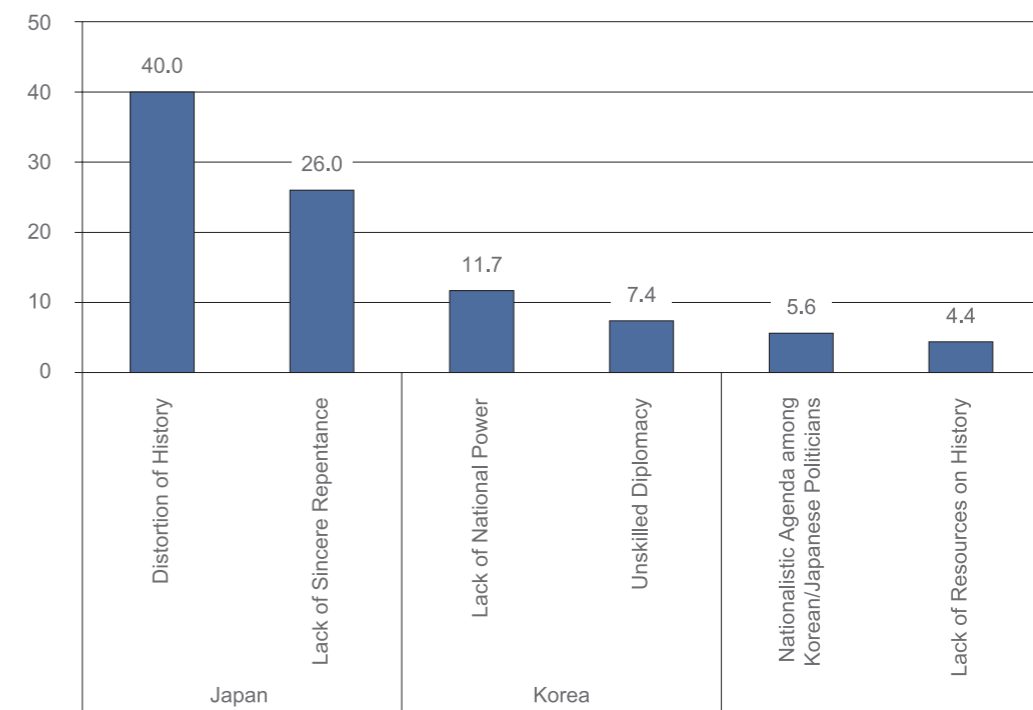
15. "70 years after WWII / Poll: 81% regard Japan as 'peace-loving nation,'" *Yomiuri Shimbun*, April 1, 2015, available at <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0001958156>.

16. In addition, 82.6% of Koreans believed that Japan will not offer a sincere apology in the future as opposed to 12.2% who thought otherwise.

The fact that Koreans believe fewer Japanese politicians are remorseful for history issues suggests an interesting role that politics has played in the current situation. The likely explanation is that provocative actions by Japanese politicians and their portrayal by the Korean media have influenced the way Koreans view Japanese politicians. This emphasizes the important role that Japanese politicians have in addressing history issues in the future.

Of course, many Koreans placed the blame on Japan for worsening relations between the two countries. This was especially the case with regard to history

Figure 10. Causes of Korea-Japan History Disputes¹⁸ (%)



17. Asan Poll (June 5-6, 2015).

18. Asan Poll (June 5-6, 2015).

issues with 66.0% of respondents saying as such. When asked to identify the cause(s) of disputes between the two countries on history issues, 40.0% and 26.0% pointed to Japan's distortion of history and lack of sincere repentance, respectively. Among those who blamed Korea, 11.7% pointed to Korea's lack of national power and another 7.4% to Korea's unskilled diplomacy as causes. Other reasons included nationalistic agenda among Korean/Japanese politicians (5.6%) and a lack of resources on history (4.4%).

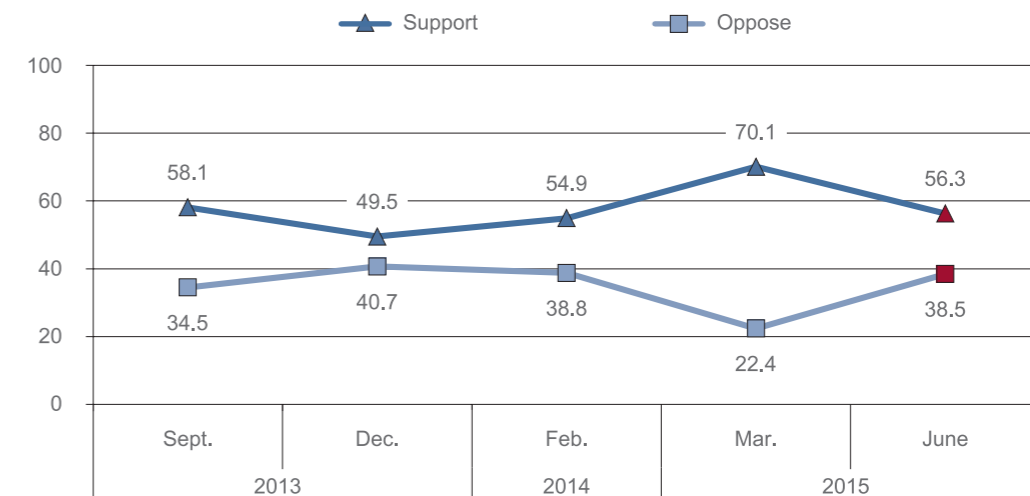
Future of Korea-Japan Relations

Normalizing Korea-Japan Relations and Disputes over History

The worsening of Korea-Japan relations is best represented by the fact that a summit meeting between President Park and Prime Minister Abe has yet to take place. The large fanfare over President Park's summit meetings with Presidents Obama and Xi have only emphasized just how toxic Korea-Japan relations has become. In light of these events, we asked Koreans about the prospects of a future meeting between the two leaders. According to this year's June survey, 56.3% of Koreans agreed that a Korea-Japan summit meeting should take place even if Prime Minister Abe's speech commemorating the end of World War II in August does not include a sincere apology on history issues. 38.5% opposed a summit. These results do not come as a surprise since over half of Koreans have consistently insisted on a summit meeting in the past, with the only exception coming in late 2013 when Prime Minister Abe visited the Yasukuni Shrine (49.5% supported a summit then).

If Koreans believed that many Japanese, including politicians, were not remorseful for Japan's past sins and were concerned about Japan's move to the right,

Figure 11. Korea-Japan Summit¹⁹ (%)

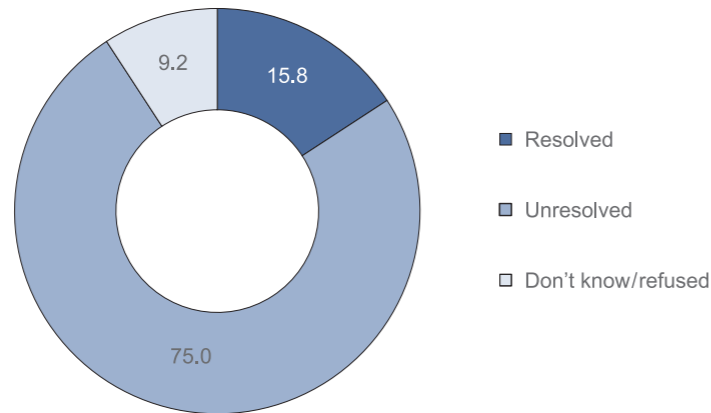


why was there such widespread support for a summit meeting to take place? According to the 2014 survey results, 50.9% of Koreans reasoned that a summit must take place in order for the two governments to resolve history issues.²⁰ This year, however, the responses showed that Koreans were decidedly more realistic in terms of what a summit could and could not achieve. Almost 75% of respondents were skeptical that history issues will be resolved even though many stated that a summit meeting could provide an opportunity to do so. Only 15.8% of respondents stated that improved relations would lead to the resolution of history issues. Many Koreans appear to perceive the Korea-Japan summit and

19. Asan Poll (June 9-10, 2015). The survey conducted in March 2015 asked respondents whether a Korea-Japan summit meeting was necessary. Previous surveys asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed to a summit meeting.

20. Asan Poll (Feb. 23-25, 2014). Other reasons included "to reduce economic loss," (19.5%), "to strengthen cooperation with the United States," (10.0%), "to prevent North Korean provocations," (6.0%), and "to check the rise of China" (4.7%).

Figure 12. Korea-Japan Relations and Its Impact on Resolution of History Issues²¹ (%)



history issues as two different types of problems.

Koreans were equally pessimistic about the chances of Japan offering a sincere apology on history issues. An overwhelming 88.0% of respondents agreed that Prime Minister Abe’s speech in August commemorating 70th anniversary of the end of World War II should include a sincere apology. However, only 12.2% projected that Japan will offer one. 82.6% speculated that Japan will not apologize. These results show that as much as Koreans would like for Japan to offer the apology to mend relations, they are equally pessimistic about their chances. This pessimism is especially prevalent among young Koreans, which is important given that they will become future leaders that will bear the responsibilities to move the relationship forward.

Many Koreans believed that history issues must be on the agenda should President Park and Prime Minister Abe hold a summit meeting. Once again, however,

21. Asan Poll (June 5-6, 2015).

Table 4. Japan’s Repentance and Apology Regarding History²² (%)

Event	Opinion	%
Abe’s Commemoration Speech in August	Should apologize and show signs of repentance	88.0
	Should not include an apology	5.0
	Don’t know/refused	7.0
Japan will offer an apology in the future	Yes	12.2
	No	82.6
	Don’t know/refused	5.2

they had tempered expectations as they believed that improved relations will not lead to the resolution of history issues. One possible explanation is that while Koreans are fully aware of the importance of improved relations with their neighbor, they are simply fatigued by what they consider to be an insincere attitude toward history and possess a deeply rooted distrust toward Japan.

Obstacles to Korea-Japan Relations

While Korea-Japan relations has been thawed since President Park and Prime Minister Abe became leaders, there have been recent efforts by the two governments to make amends. The aforementioned visit to the Japanese embassy by President Park to commemorate the 50th anniversary of normalized relations between Korea and Japan provided a sign that perhaps not all hope was lost. Many also interpreted it as a sign that a summit meeting between President Park and Prime Minister Abe would be forthcoming. Given the public’s desire for the

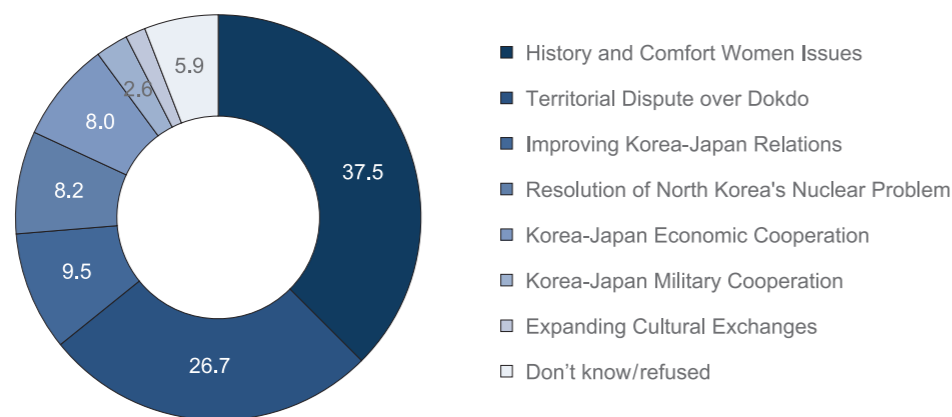
22. Asan Poll (June 5-6, 2015; June 9-10, 2015).

meeting to take place, it appears that there is much to gain for President Park.

As such, we asked Koreans to identify the issues that two leaders must discuss should a summit take place. 37.5% and 26.7% of respondents identified history/comfort women issues and territorial dispute over Dokdo, respectively, as the two most important topics. Given that both issues are considered history issues, the results show just how much Koreans consider history to be an important aspect of the bilateral relationship.

Other issues included the normalization of Korea-Japan relations (9.5%), the resolution of North Korea's nuclear problem (8.2%), and Korea-Japan economic cooperation (8.0%). Only 2.6% and 1.6% of respondents identified Korea-Japan military cooperation and cultural exchanges, respectively, as important issues to be discussed. Again, these results emphasize the importance of history issues in the bilateral relationship. For President Park, who has on a number of

Figure 13. Korea-Japan Summit Agenda²³ (%)



23. Asan Poll (June 9-10, 2015).

occasions demanded that the Prime Minister alter his stance on history issues, this public sentiment only adds to her already difficult negotiations with Japan.

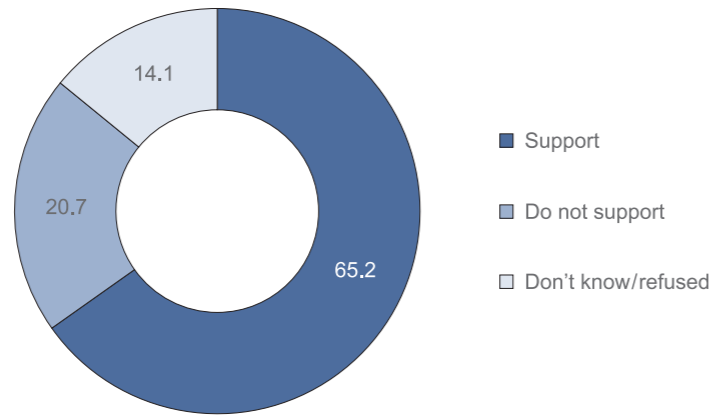
Limited Korea-Japan Cooperation

In a somewhat contradictory manner, Koreans desire a summit meeting between President Park and Prime Minister Abe to address history issues while fully understanding the unlikelihood of the meeting ending in success. After all, Koreans appear to favor an improvement of relations rather than expecting tangible results on history issues. As such, we asked them if they support a two-track approach in which history issues and future Korea-Japan cooperation are tackled separately. In response, 65.2% supported such an approach while 20.7% stated the opposite. This supports the idea of removing history issues from the bilateral discussion given the lack of progress toward a resolution.

Without having to deal with history, the two countries can address other issues such as improving economic cooperation between the two countries. According to survey results, 8.0% agreed that economic cooperation should be addressed at the summit meeting. Given that 37.7% of respondents believe that Japan has a positive influence on Korea's economy, there is much to be discussed.²⁴

24. 27.7% said Japan does not influence Korea's economy while 26.2% stated that Japan has a negative influence on Korea's economy.

Figure 14. Separating History Issues from Korea-Japan Cooperation²⁵ (%)



However, Koreans showed concerns regarding the two countries' cooperation on security issues. Given the two countries' sensitive history, many Koreans voiced concerns about Japan's possible militarization and its impact on the regional security architecture. 52.4% of respondents stated that Japan has a negative influence on Korea's security. An additional 25.9% said Japan has no influence on Korea's security while only 13.8% described the influence as positive.

When asked about the possibility of cooperation on security issues between the two countries, about half of Koreans (40.6%) voiced their support. Among them, 22.9% pointed to the North Korean threat and 17.7% to the rise of China as grounds for cooperation. On the other hand, 40.1% stated that military cooperation was not necessary. 28.9% of those who opposed security cooperation expressed concerns about Japan's possible militarization and 11.2% stated that cooperation on military issues had nothing to do with Korea's security.

25. Asan Poll (June 5-6, 2015).

Table 5. Korea-Japan Security Cooperation²⁶ (%)

		Proportion	Accumulated
Necessary	Respond to North Korean threat	22.9	40.6
	Check China's rise	17.7	
Unnecessary	Concerned about Japan's militarization	28.9	40.1
	Irrelevant to our security	11.2	
Don't know/refused		19.3	

Respondents were equally concerned about Japan's security role in the region. 27.4% of respondents stated that they would discontinue their support for a Korean politician up for election if he/she supports military cooperation with Japan. 28.6% said that would reconsider their choice. 20.8% stated that they would continue to support the candidate regardless of his/her stance toward Korea-Japan military cooperation.

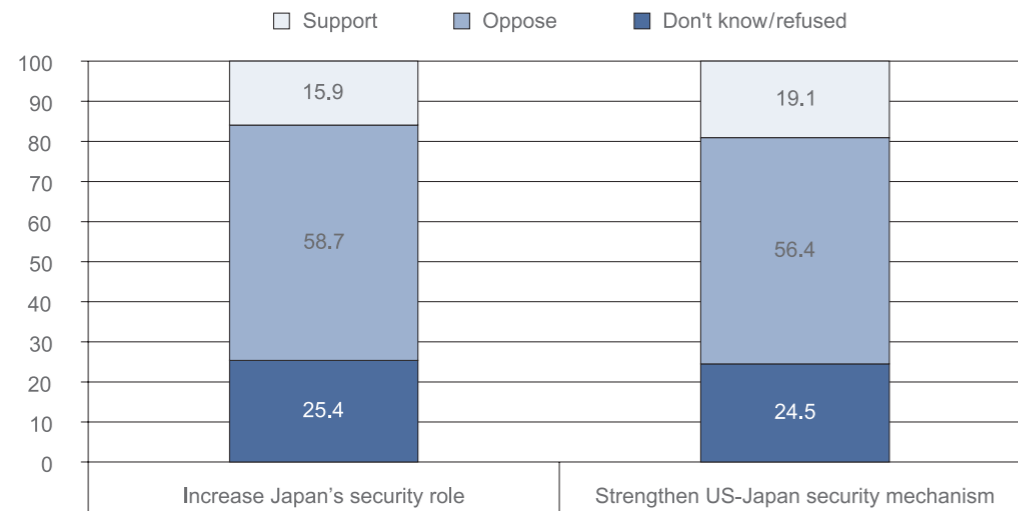
More than half of respondents (56.0%) expressed concerns about their countries' cooperation with Japan in military affairs. When asked about Korea's cooperation with Japan on economic issues, their reactions were more favorable. Specifically, 35.2% said they would maintain support for a candidate if the candidate supports economic cooperation. On the other hand, 25.6% answered that they would reconsider their support and 18.1% said they would change their votes.

When asked if they agree or disagree with Japan's growing security role in the region, the majority expressed deep concerns and skepticism. 58.7% said Japan's

26. Asan Poll (June 9-10, 2015).

military role in the region should be limited while 15.9% stated the opposite. 56.4% also disapproved of strengthening the US-Japan security architecture in the region (19.1% approved). These concerns likely stem from the widely held perception that increasing military role for Japan could lead to militarism, to which Koreans have shown great sensitivity in the past. Even with the involvement of the US and the growing influence of China in the region, Koreans remained pessimistic about Japan's security role.

Figure 15. Japan's Military Role²⁷ (%)



Overall, Koreans appeared to consider Japan as an important economic partner that South Korean must mend fences with, even by putting on hold their bitter disputes over history for the time being. This is due to the realization among Koreans that Japan's sincere apology for history issues is not forthcoming. They also showed a great degree of reluctance to engage with Japan on military issues.

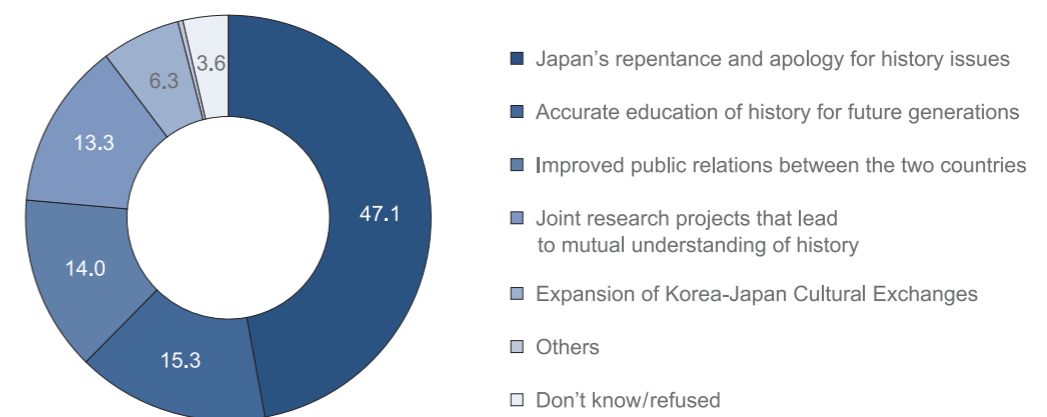
27. Asan Poll (June 5-6, 2015; June 9-10, 2015).

We do not believe that Koreans truly consider Japan's increased military role as a threat to their national security. Rather, it is a sensitive reaction given their history with Japan.

Improving Korea-Japan Relations

As mentioned throughout this report, the resolution of history issues remains the biggest obstacle for Korea and Japan. When asked about the ways in which relations could improve in the future, 47.1% of Koreans identified Japan's repentance and apology as the most important step. Respondents also identified "accurate history education for future generations" (15.3%), "improved public relations" (14.0%), "joint research projects that could lead to mutual understanding of history" (13.3%), and "expansion of Korea-Japan cultural exchanges" (6.3%) as ways to improve bilateral relationship. While Japan has recently expressed fatigue over Korea's insistence on its apology for history issues, Koreans remain

Figure 16. Improving Korea-Japan Relations²⁸ (%)



28. Asan Poll (June 9-10, 2015).

adamant that resolving these issues is the only mechanism that could bring about a fundamental change in the relationship.

Overall, there is general support for a two-track diplomacy, which would allow the two countries to first deal with issues that are deemed more urgent. However, this support is based on a short-term calculation. In the long-run, the resolution of history issues remains the key to a meaningful improvement of relations.

Conclusion

Defining Korea-Japan relations has never been an easy task. When faced with urgent issues, Koreans have expressed their desire for the two governments to increase cooperation. At the same time, they have urged Japan to take the initiative and resolve the history issues that have plagued the two countries' relationship for the past sixty years. History issues have always been the stumbling block to improved relations between the two. This report has shown that the patterns continues to this day.

One aspect that may be different than in the past is that younger Koreans appear less hostile toward Japan. This can be attributed to their lack of memories of the colonial period. They also do not remember the 1980s and 1990s when Japan wielded significant economic power. This, in turn, has turned Japan into a less feared country. This finding is worth paying attention to since members of this generation will soon become the mainstream of the Korean society.

While the majority of Koreans support a summit between President Park and Prime Minister Abe, they have become more accepting of the fact that Japan is

unlikely to apologize with sincerity. As such, it appears that they have come to desire the next best thing: to leave the sensitive issues aside and cooperate on a superficial level as to not offend each other and not enflame the situation.

The synergy that could result from Korea-Japan cooperation could have a profound impact in the region. This is significant given the consistent threat posed by North Korea and the implications arising from China's rise. Improving relations with Japan would also strengthen the United States' cooperation mechanism in Northeast Asia. However, even if the current conditions do not require Korea and Japan to cooperate, Korea has nothing to lose by strategically cooperating with Japan. Survey results indicate that this is something that the Korean public is fully aware of.

With the two leaders attending the 50th anniversary events at embassies in their respective countries, there has been a growing sense of hope that Korea-Japan relations could finally see daylight. However, the sensitivity associated with history issues guarantees that a fundamental improvement in relations between Korea and Japan is highly unlikely. This is especially the case in the short-term.

However, there are a number of areas in which Korea and Japan could cooperate. Economic cooperation, cultural and people-to-people exchanges, and security cooperation within the US framework are important options to consider. At this current juncture, the best move for Korea would be to free itself of the misunderstanding that history issues can somehow be resolved and accept the truth that both countries need each other. Now is the time to undertake a polished and sophisticated diplomacy that can help Korea through troubled waters.

Survey Methodology

Asan Annual Surveys

2011

Sample size: 2,000 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 2.2\%$ at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: Mixed-Mode Survey employing RDD for mobile and landline telephones
Period: August 26 - October 4, 2011
Organization: EmBrain

2012

Sample size: 1,500 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 2.5\%$ at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones and online survey
Period: September 24 - November 1, 2014
Organization: Media Research

Asan Poll

Sample size: 1,000 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 3.1\%$ at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones
Period: See report for specific dates of surveys cited
Organization: Research & Research

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R E P O R T

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by **Kim Jiyeon, John J. Lee, Kang Chungku**

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