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Japan-Korea Relations Revisited

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Hong Kong

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DISTANT NEIGHBOURS ? : JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS REVISITED*

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Abstract

Japan's relations with the two Koreas have remained complicated and controversial, as recent anti-Japanese protests in South Korea demonstrate. This paper discusses the progress in bringing reconciliation between Japan and South Korea through an examination of four elements in the bilateral relationship: the historical legacies, the economic competition, the security imperatives (including the relationship with North Korea), and the flows of popular culture and people. It argues that the slowly improving bilateral Japan-South Korea relationship, to which growing economic interdependence, heightened interest in popular culture, and shared beliefs in peace and stability in North-east Asia all contribute, is nonetheless still subject to strong emotional surges and responses to perceived slights on both sides. The recent upsurge in tension, primarily over how Japan views its past, suggests that reconciliation will continue to be a slow and even contradictory process.

Twelve years ago I published a book on Japan's relations with the two Koreas in which I took as a sub-title 'From Antagonism to Adjustment'. One of the justifications for that sub-title was my belief that at the time - just after the end of the Cold War - the changes and uncertainties in the international order were mirrored by transitional but nonetheless beneficial processes in the triangular relations between North and South Korea and between those two countries

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and Japan. While I was broadly optimistic about the processes of reconciliation apparent at the time in all three relationships around the triangle, I did add the caveat that ‘emotional legacies, ideological remnants, economic competition, and differing national security perspectives’ would continue to influence the complex inter-relationships (Bridges 1993: 173).

This year, 2005, is a particularly appropriate year to review the state of Korea-Japan relations. This June sees the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea through the Basic Treaty and the event is being celebrated by a large number of events in both countries as well as by exchanges of visits by senior politicians (and, just possibly, by the Japanese Crown Prince and Princess going to South Korea). However, this year also sees in August the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War (the end of the Japanese occupation of Korea) and in November the hundredth anniversary of the Japan-Korea treaty which paved the way for that colonial occupation.

In this particular paper, I wish to focus primarily on the Japan-South Korea relationship, although clearly that cannot be considered in isolation from the two countries’ relations with North Korea. I will examine the state of relations under four broad headings: historical legacies, economic power, security imperatives, and what might loosely and rather flippantly be described as ‘people power’ and then discuss how these underlying elements and more recent developments contribute to or hinder the process of reconciliation between Koreans and Japanese.

Legacies of history

For both the Japanese and the Koreans, whether living in the North or the South, the past has a strong influence on how the present is perceived. Memories of the harsh Japanese colonial period act as an emotional backdrop to Japan’s involvement in contemporary Korean affairs. It took twenty years after the end of the Second World War for Japan to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea and it has still not recognised the North. The relevance of history to

today's relationships continues to be evident, as shown most recently in the popular and governmental reactions in South Korea to Japanese actions over the outstanding territorial issue and Japanese history textbooks.

Historical consciousness in the two countries involves 'emotions and perceptions and images in the whole population of Japan and South Korea, which may not necessarily be correct', but are nonetheless widely felt (Ducke 2002, p. 31). On the South Korean side, the negative images of Japan are strongly based on and, arguably, help to contribute to the construction of Korean self-identity through the opposition to and contrast with Japan. On the Japanese side, a lingering superiority complex intermingles with, at least until the past decade or so, a degree of indifference about the neighbouring Koreans (one survey in the early 1990s showed that 20% of Japanese did not even realise that Korea had been a Japanese colony (Ducke 2002, p. 41)).

Three issues seem to have become a measure of the pervasiveness of historical legacies in this bilateral relationship: apologies, territorial disputes and compensation. According to Lily Feldman, 'apology for historical wrongs...is a prerequisite for fundamental departure' (Feldman 1999, p. 335); Suzanne Choi and Roman David in their analysis of forgiveness and apology also note a tendency across much of the literature to reach a similar conclusion (Choi and David 2004). Certainly, Koreans have long argued for proper apologies from the Japanese side - and the German example is often cited favourably by comparison - while the Japanese tend to feel that these criticisms are unjustified and even counter-productive. Nonetheless, the Japanese government has been more willing since the early 1990s to issue apologetic statements (see the verbal comments by prime ministers Hosokawa Morihiro and Murayama Tomiichi during 1993-95 and, most importantly, the written apology by Obuchi Keizo in 1998). These conciliatory gestures have not prevented certain Japanese right-wing politicians, including sometimes those in cabinet positions, from making occasional so-called 'reckless remarks' about the colonial period. However, at least the Japanese government has reacted more sensitively to these episodes by

apologising and sacking offending ministers (Ducke 2002, pp. 35-38). Nonetheless, linked to this apology issue is also South Korean disquiet over current prime minister Koizumi Junichiro's repeated visits to the Yasukuni shrine (and his refusal to discontinue them) and periodic revisions to Japanese history textbooks, of which the most recent occurred in the spring of 2005 (on the background to the history textbooks disputes with Korea see Lee 1985: pp. 141-164).

South Korea and Japan have a long-standing territorial dispute over two tiny rock islands known as Tokdo in Korean and Takeshima in Japanese. Both sides parade various historical and legal justifications for their respective claims, the South Koreans maintain a maritime guard unit there, and rather ritualistically the Japanese make annual diplomatic protests and the South Korean side responds in kind. While it is a long-simmering dispute, over the past five decades it has tended to become prominent only when tension has entered the relationship for some other reason (Bridges 1993, pp. 65-66). Therefore, it is unusual that this year it seems that it is the raising of the Japanese profile over this claim, primarily through the nearby Japanese prefecture of Shimane's designation of a 'Takeshima Day', which is helping to bring some tension back into the bilateral relationship.

More consistently contentious in recent years, however, has been the issue of compensation for the victims of Japanese wartime policies, in particular the so-called 'comfort women'. The 1965 Basic Treaty saw South Korea giving up all compensation claims in return for Japanese economic assistance, but the 'comfort women', whose plight only began to be publicly acknowledged by Japanese veterans and surviving women in the late 1980s, were not specifically covered. The Japanese government, no doubt wary of setting precedents, has refused to accept governmental responsibility but has instead made some movement forward by encouraging Japanese companies to set up an 'Asian Women Fund' to disburse some financial compensation. Efforts by former 'comfort women' to use the courts to gain compensation have been comparatively unsuccessful, the most recent court case finally failing in November

2004 after a 13-year legal process (Ducke 2002, pp. 56-67; Lewis 2002, pp. 1261-28). Yet, in December 2004, when for the first time a Japanese cabinet official met former 'comfort women', an apology was specifically made. However, in contrast to past Korean governments' low-key approach to all aspects of the compensation issue, in March this year South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun resurrected the compensation issue, arguing that: 'We need to bring to light the historical truth, apologise and reflect, pay compensation should there be things that need to be compensated, and reconcile' (*Chosun Ilbo*, English internet edition, 1 March 2005). Unification Minister Chung Dong-yong then followed up by specifically calling on Japan to compensate those victims not covered by the 1965 treaty (*Korea Times*, 17 March 2005).

How far do these historical issues interact with the broader relationship? Two recent periods can be considered important. The first relates to 1998, the first year of the Kim Dae-jung administration. Leaders of countries, especially when visiting other countries, are often tempted to indulge in the rhetoric of proclaiming a 'new era' in relations. This kind of rhetoric has been seen in the case of Korea-Japan relations too - and not infrequently the follow-up has been less than substantial - yet, officials and academics that I interviewed in both Seoul and Tokyo last autumn did comment on the significance of the attitude and policies of Kim Dae-jung. Kim altered the dynamics of the Japan-South Korea relationship in two important ways, one relating to the historical past and the other to the relationship with North Korea (which will be dealt with separately later on).

Kim did try hard to translate some of the oft-repeated rhetoric of improving the bilateral relationship into reality. By progressively lifting the bans on many items of Japanese popular culture and also on certain Japanese manufactured goods, as well as by using the opportunity of his visit to Japan in October 1998 to show a willingness to put aside the habit of continually referring to the legacies of the past and to think more about the future potentialities, Kim propagated a more positive view of Japan than many of his immediate predecessors (Lewis 2002, pp.120-126). His approach

was reciprocated by the Japanese, who proved willing to give him a form of written apology on his visit; a concession which was not accorded to the more abrasive Chinese President Jiang Zemin on his visit to Japan one month later. The second period, relating to the events of this year, will be discussed later.

Economic power

Deep economic links have been established between Japan and South Korea, but over the past four decades issues such as trade imbalances, tariffs and market access restrictions, aid and technology transfer have often become politicised. Undoubtedly, part of the reason for this lies in the highly complementary nature of the two economies; both export manufactured goods, import energy and raw materials, and have had highly protected agricultural sectors.

Trade between South Korea and Japan increased significantly in the second half of the 1980s and this increasing trend has broadly continued during the 1990s, although the prolonged recession in Japan since the early 1990s and the 1997-98 financial crisis in South Korea have undoubtedly impacted on and slowed down this growth. Total bilateral trade has grown from US \$ 33.3 billion in 1991 to \$43.1 billion in 2001 and to \$67.8 billion in 2004. Japan has been an important investor in South Korea, ranking behind the United States and the European Union as the third largest investor in South Korea, with an accumulated US\$ 13.3 billion by the end of 2003, with the investment roughly equally in the manufacturing and the service sectors. South Korea has been much less active in investing in Japan (according to South Korean figures investing only \$989 million by the end of 2003), mostly in the trading sector (*China Daily*, 25 February 2005). By way of comparison, it should be noted that in only just over a decade, the cumulative total of South Korean investment in China has exceeded \$14 billion.

There has continued to be one important structural issue relating to bilateral trade, the trade imbalance which has been continuously in Japan's favour. This, of course, has in large part reflected the

structural differences in the two economies. The trade balance was \$8.5 billion in Japan's favour in 1991 and had grown to \$13 billion by 1997 before dropping drastically to \$4.6 billion in 1998 when the financial crisis severely cut back South Korean imports from everywhere, including Japan. South Korean sensitivities to this imbalance have been reflected in the habit, at least until the mid-1980s, of citing the trade deficit in cumulative terms since 1965, restrictions on imports of certain Japanese products (for many years Seoul was the only Asian capital city with none of the ubiquitous Japanese cars), and frequent complaints to the Japanese about the need for better access to the Japanese market for Korean products.

Nonetheless, in recent years some of the heat seems to have come out of the trade issues and the overall health of the economic relationship can be considered to be a positive development in Korea-Japan relations, or as Lee Jung-hoon and Moon Chung-in argue, 'South Korea's economic calculus has been radically shifting from a confrontational posture to a more cooperative one' (Lee and Moon 2002, p.160). While Koreans remain unhappy about the once again rising trade deficits (by 2004 the gap had grown again to \$ 24 billion) the figures appear less politically sensitive. In accordance with the requirements of the World Trade Organisation, the South Korean restrictions on various Japanese products, which had been in force since the late 1970s under an import diversification programme, have been progressively dismantled and by mid-1999 had been completely removed (Cheong 2004, p.223).

Two elements, in particular, can be seen as contributing to this feeling of more positive economic interdependence. Firstly, is the extent to which South Korean and Japanese companies, previously fierce rivals, have come to cooperate and collaborate even in some areas of high technology. Up to the 1990s technology transfer was seen as a one-way street from Japan to South Korea, but with the Koreans often complaining about Japanese reticence to transfer the latest technologies. Recently, however, the prolonged recession in Japan has meant that Japanese companies, increasingly concerned about the costs of staying competitive, have become much more willing to collaborate on an equal basis with South Korean

companies in areas such as semi-conductor development. For example, in December 2004 Sony signed a cross-licensing agreement with Samsung Electronics to share patents across product lines. In addition, South Korean companies are even beating their Japanese counterparts to orders from Japanese companies, such as the order for 8 ships placed by Nippon Yusen with Hyundai Heavy Industries late last year (*South China Morning Post*, 8 November 2004)

Secondly, belatedly following on what has become a growing trend around the Asian Pacific region, especially for certain South-east Asian countries, Japan and South Korea are moving towards a free trade agreement (FTA). In contrast to the emphasis placed on globalization by the Kim Dae-jung administration, the Roh administration has demonstrated a strong interest in regional linkages. Although the Roh government managed to conclude its first ever FTA with Chile (which finally came into force, after overcoming considerable domestic resistance from Korean farmers, in April 2004), it was more interested to develop such arrangements with its Asian neighbours, including Japan. Japan, too, had been rather slow off the mark in negotiating FTAs and its first one, with Singapore, was only concluded in January 2002.

Studies on the costs and benefits of a Korea-Japan FTA, carried out bilaterally by think-tanks, business organisations and eventually government officials, started in the late 1990s and were generally favourable towards such an agreement, but not until December 2003 did formal governmental-level negotiations begin. The Korean government does expect that in the short-run there would be a further increase in the trade deficit with Japan on the entry into force of a FTA, but that in the longer-term the cooperative benefits would be greater (Cheong 2004, pp. 228-234). Although business organisations are supportive in general, clearly certain sectors in each country are concerned about the specific impact on them. On the Korean side, the car industry and the smaller and medium-sized electronics components-makers are worried about a flood of Japanese products coming in, while on the Japanese side the worry is more about the competitive agricultural and fishery products coming

in from Korea (*Nihon keizai shimbun*, 1 March 2004). Nonetheless, both governments do seem committed to developing this FTA, with a target date of the end of 2005, but disagreements over agricultural trade issues had brought the negotiations almost to a standstill by early 2005 and recent tensions in other aspects of the relationship do not bode well for early progress. Nonetheless, conclusion of the FTA remains an objective for both sides' officials and businessmen.

Security imperatives

At the height of the Cold War, the United States had hopes that its two allies, South Korea and Japan, could work together in an anti-communist bloc, but, although as Victor Cha has argued a form of 'quasi-alliance' emerged between these two countries, mutual antipathies and differing perspectives handicapped the degree of political and security cooperation (Cha 1999). South Korea was preoccupied, understandably, with the North Korean threat, whereas the Japanese worried more about the Soviet threat. In the post-Cold War world, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of concerns over suspected North Korean nuclear weapon development brought the Japanese closer to South Korean perspectives on the importance of managing North Korea.

Yet, despite all the efforts to coordinate policies between South Korea, Japan and the United States over the North Korean issue, it has to be said that there have still been subtle differences in approaches and perspectives between the South Koreans and the Japanese through both of the nuclear crises of 1993-94 and 2002 to present. In the first North Korean nuclear crisis in 1993-94, South Korea's Kim Young-sam administration was the more inconsistent in its policies, being particularly sensitive to being excluded from US-North Korea negotiations. Japan, on the other hand, expressed concern over the nuclear issue but stressed its inability to do anything to assist (and showed its marked reluctance to consider any action such as sanctions) (Ducke 2002, pp. 143-149). Nonetheless, both countries were relieved that a diplomatic deal (the October 1994 Agreed Framework) rather than war had solved the crisis, both agreed to participate in the funding and management of the Korean

Energy Development Organisation (KEDO), and, with Japanese ministerial statements becoming blunter about the North Korean ‘threat’, they appeared to be closer to similar strategic perceptions.

This strategic closeness was to be reinforced, when, as a logical extension of his ‘sunshine policy’, the incoming Kim Dae-jung not only expressed no reservations about Japan developing closer links with North Korea but even positively welcomed such a tendency. President Roh Tae Woo, back in 1988, had announced a policy in which he expressed support for any improvement in the North’s relations with countries friendly to the South, but in practice the South Koreans had continued to watch with extreme caution any Japanese moves in the North’s direction. Kim Dae-jung adopted a much more relaxed approach. Not that there was much change immediately after Kim took up office, for Japan-North Korean normalisation negotiations had been on hold since 1992 as a result of disputes over a number of issues and, indeed, official Japanese views only hardened as a result of a North Korean missile test in 1998, in which a Taepodong missile flew over Japanese territory, and spy ship incursions in 1999. This meant that as Kim explored ways to ‘warm up’ North Korea, culminating in the historic summit in Pyongyang in June 2000, and the Clinton administration also toyed with better relations with the North, Japan seemed to be lagging well behind (a brief flurry of contacts with the North in mid-2000 soon petered out).

Let us consider the two-pronged approach of ‘pressure’ or containment and ‘dialogue’ or engagement towards North Korea which all the three ‘allies’ have employed to varying degrees since the early 1990s (Kim, Tadokoro and Bridges 2003). Both Kim Dae-jung and his successor Roh have put much greater emphasis on the engagement mode. In contrast to the engagement policy of Clinton in his second administration (it should be remembered that in 1994 he was actually very close to a military strike against North Korean facilities), Bush has put more emphasis on containment, albeit using pressure in a multilateral context. For Japan since 1992, when normalisation talks with the North collapsed, the balance has been tilted towards containment, though never far enough to

contemplate serious sanctions. Despite the high profile visits to Pyongyang in September 2002 and May 2004 by prime minister Koizumi, which brought partial but ultimately frustrating progress on the particular stumbling-block of the kidnapped Japanese citizens, the engagement mode has remained subordinate to the containment imperative (Hughes 2002; Izumi 2004). The Japanese government's hands have been tied by the strength of public opinion in Japan, which is strongly anti-North Korean, whereas in South Korea there is much more of a split in public opinion over the desirability or otherwise of conciliation towards the North, so allowing the Roh administration more flexibility. In addition, there is rather limited support for the Japanese case over the kidnapped Japanese amongst South Koreans with memories of those many Koreans that disappeared under Japanese rule.

Yet, despite the apparent divergences between the current Japanese rhetorical hard line and the more conciliatory approach of the Roh administration towards the North, there may be some underlying similarity in their thinking, not least in their shared reluctance to use armed force to resolve the North Korean issue. Given the Japanese aversion to military action and even caution - though this caution has been losing efficacy recently - over economic sanctions on the Korean peninsula, it seems that both Japan and South Korea prefer a 'changed regime' rather than a 'regime change' in the North (Konishi 2004).

'People power'

The above term does not imply the sense associated with the popular movement for democracy in the Philippines in the mid-1980s, but rather the concept of formal and informal institutional linkages discussed by Feldman (1999), in order to consider the ways in which the flows of people and popular culture and interactions between organisations have been impacting on the bilateral relationship.

After the South Korean government loosened restrictions on overseas travel in 1987, the numbers of South Koreans visiting Japan increased steadily, from 809,000 in 1989 to 1.4 million in 2003 and

1.56 million last year. Similarly Japanese visitors to South Korea also increased steadily from the mid-1980s, passed the million mark for the first time in 1989 and rising to 1.8 million in 2003 and 2.43 million last year (an increase of around 35% in one year alone). Regular shuttle flights go between Kinpo and Haneda airports and 23 Japanese cities have direct air-links with South Korean counterparts. Events such as the co-hosted football World Cup in 2002 undoubtedly contributed to the exchange of peoples. In the 1980s and even into the 1990s a high proportion of the Japanese visitors were middle-aged men, presumably either businessmen or participants in 'sex tours', but the most recent trend, inspired by the attraction of visiting the sites of popular Korean dramas, has been for a marked increase in the numbers of Japanese women, especially middle-aged women.

Both governments have been slowly loosening visa restrictions to help these flows of people. South Koreans are being given visa-free access from March-September this year to encourage visitors to the Aichi World Expo, with the possibility that this concession may be extended (*Japan Times*, 5 June 2004; *Chosun Ilbo*, 28 March 2005). South Korea currently allows Japanese visa-free entry for up to 30 days and is considering extending this period.

The popular interactions have been mostly demonstrably affected by the qualitative jump in popular culture flows in recent years. The Korean TV drama series 'Winter Sonata' has been aired four times on Japanese TV in the past 3 years and within the first year after it was aired the first time in Japan, NHK, the Japanese state broadcaster managed to sell 150,000 DVDs and videos, a million copies of the novel and 300,000 guidebooks for the drama. 'Yon-sama' became the 'word of the year' in Japan in 2004 and the drama's star was even honoured with a snow sculpture of himself at the Sapporo Snow Festival in February 2005. In the leading Japanese film magazine, *Kinema Jumbo*, four of the top ten foreign films in Japan last year were Korean (*Chosun Ilbo* internet edition, 7 January 2005).

Important also are the increased number of formal and informal linkages between the two countries, through exchanges and contacts between students, academics, non-governmental organisations, media organisations, and sports and cultural bodies. These lead to a slow but steady thickening of the bilateral relationship. To give a few examples, firstly a survey in December 2004 showed Korean had overtaken German and French in terms of popularity as a foreign language taught in Japanese high schools (*Chosun Ilbo* internet edition, 9 January 2005), secondly, Seoul National University announced the setting up of its first ever Japan studies centre (*Nihon keizai shimbun*, 14 April 2004), and, thirdly, sumo wrestling tournaments in Seoul and Pusan in February 2004 proved immensely popular (*Korea Times*, 23 November 2004). However, the current bilateral political disputes may interrupt at least some of these exchanges for a short while.

Two steps forward and one step back?

The analysis above suggests a slowly improving bilateral relationship, albeit one which is still subject to strong emotional surges and responses to perceived slights on both sides. But does that mean that real reconciliation is occurring?

Recent literature on the concept of reconciliation suggests that a mixture of moral imperative and pragmatic interest is crucial to developing new and constructive relationships between former enemies. According to the framework developed by Feldman, the exact mix and consequent progress (or lack of progress) in reconciliation seems to revolve around four variables: the confrontation with the past, the degree of institutionalized transformation, the skill of political leaders, and the configuration of the international environment (Feldman 1999, pp. 334-37).

Looking at these four variables, it has to be said that the history-related issues, on which South Korea clearly has moral leverage, remain potent in the relationship. History has been painful and demanding in the case of Korea-Japan relations and, as the recent flare-up suggests, the process of reconciliation in this aspect is

by no means complete. Japan's efforts to come to terms with its past, at first begrudging but recently more forthcoming, have remained problematic in both countries - seen as not sufficient in South Korea and seen in Japan as bowing too much to South Korean demands.

Secondly, the slow but steady process of institutionalisation of governmental, business and societal networks and contacts has proceeded positively, despite occasional hiccups. Ministers from both countries meet increasingly regularly, as do officials from different ministries and agencies. Even exchanges and consultations amongst defence-related officials, long taboo, have become more evident since the late 1990s (Lee and Moon 2002, p.150). Links between politicians have long been in place, although generational change, particularly on the South Korean side, make these personal linkages occasionally intermittent. From the early 1990s Japanese prime ministers and South Korean presidents began to meet more frequently and with less fan-fare, and since 2002 there have been regular six-monthly informal working (or 'no necktie') summits in alternate countries. The two major business organisations, Japan's Keidanren and South Korea's Federation of Korean Industries, have frequent meetings and, for example, since 2001 they have lobbied together for the conclusion of a bilateral FTA. The growing economic interdependence, no longer such a one-sided economic power equation, provides positive influences. Non-governmental organisations in both countries too have extended their contacts in recent years, aided no doubt by the strong interest in using the internet in both populations. The heightened interest in the popular culture and tourist sites of the other country also acts in a beneficial manner (in one recent survey of Japanese who admitted that their views of South Korea had improved in recent years, 80% pointed to Korean films and dramas as a reason. *Nihon keizai shimbun*, 20 December 2004)

Thirdly, leaders do make a difference. The positive role of Kim Dae-jung was discussed earlier, but what about the second period, namely this year? Is President Roh now willing to risk reversing these positive developments? Roh was careful in his remarks on 1st March to reaffirm the position which he had adopted since

becoming president, namely that the past history would not be made a 'diplomatic issue' with Japan, but he seemed to be implying that he was expecting some kind of voluntary gesture from the Japanese (*Korea Herald*, 2 March 2005). His remarks might better be analysed in the light of the domestic political situation, where Roh has already been conducting a campaign to review Korea's modern history during both the colonial period and the postwar authoritarian dictatorships (*Korea Herald*, 6 November 2004). Although this campaign actually led at an early stage to the resignation of the leader of the ruling Uri Party (*South China Morning Post*, 20 August 2004), it seemed more likely that it was intended to discomfort the opposition Grand National Party, which is led by the daughter of former military strongman Park Chung-hee, during whose rule the Basic Treaty with Japan was concluded. A more short-term objective may have been to gain political mileage before a number of tricky by-elections, which the Uri party needed to win in order to restore its recently-lost wafer-thin majority in the National Assembly, in late April (although the Uri failed to win even one, so the anti-Japanese campaign's impact was minimal in that sense). Nonetheless, it is too simplistic to say that domestic political considerations account solely for this new approach, since Roh's comments certainly have had resonance with many Koreans.

On the Japanese side, Koizumi's approach also has had an impact on bilateral relations. Koizumi is nothing if not a nationalist and, while his primary focus has been on domestic economic restructuring, he has also wanted to push Japan into a more activist role in international relations. It is perhaps ironic, therefore, that despite his two path-breaking visits to Pyongyang in September 2002 and May 2004, Japan has been forced back into a stalemate position on relations with North Korea because of the kidnapped Japanese issue and that, at the same time, part of his domestic agenda - a desire to regularly honour Japanese war dead at the Yasukuni shrine - has helped to constrain more dynamic relations with South Korea.

The Japanese had been watching warily Roh's historical review campaign since last year, not wishing to intervene but aware that it could easily overflow into anti-Japanism; Japanese officials also

tried to play down Roh's 1st March remarks as being a 'message' to his domestic audience (*Nihon keizai shimbun*, 5 March 2005). The Japanese Foreign Ministry has found itself in a difficult position over the Shimane prefectural government's decision to designate 'Takeshima Day', being constitutionally limited in what it can do to dissuade local politicians from such actions and being forced to call for calm on both sides for the sake of the broader Japan-South Korean partnership in North-east Asia (*Japan Times*, 17 March 2005, *Nihon keizai shimbun*, 17 March 2005). Although President Roh did talk of his willingness to risk a 'diplomatic war', he has also made it clear that he does not want to go as far as cutting off relations with Japan and, indeed, since Koizumi's speech at the Asia-Africa Summit in Jakarta on 22 April 2005 in which he expressed his 'deep remorse and heartfelt apology' for Japan's past actions, South Korean official statements have adopted a calmer tone. Now the ball is in Koizumi's court; if he does not visit Yasukuni shrine in the near future, then relations can be set back on a more even keel.

Finally, the changing international context. Since the end of the Cold War, a shared belief in peace and stability in North-east Asia has been drawing the two countries closer together. As discussed above, there are subtle differences of approach, particularly between the Roh and Koizumi administrations, in dealing with North Korea, but also apparent is a basic agreement that force is not the way to end the current impasse over the nuclear crisis. Both countries also appreciate the need to consult over the economic and military rise of China and the tendency of the Americans, particularly under the Bush administration, to act in ways which are occasionally unsettling to their Asian allies. While strains in the US-South Korean relationship have been more marked than in the US-Japanese relationship in recent years, the trilateral coordination with regard to KEDO and other aspects of the North Korean issue, plus the involvement of Japan and South Korea in the six-party talks, do provide further opportunities for interaction on political and security issues which cannot be handled so comfortably on a bilateral basis. Indeed, through participation in trilateral and multilateral formats,

Japan is probably now more actively involved in Korean security issues than at any time in the last six decades.

As Caroline Rose, in her study of Sino-Japanese relations has argued, reconciliation 'is a future-oriented, joint endeavour between the victims and perpetrators, but one that is lengthy, complex and prone to failure' (Rose 2005, p. 21). There is likely to be no easy path to full reconciliation in Japan-Korean relations, but it is to be hoped that the two countries can steadily work through these bilateral problems and in turn provide a contribution to the larger problem of a structured and stable peace framework for North-east Asia. The four variables of reconciliation discussed above provide a mixed picture in the case of Japan-South Korean relations. Some such as the growing institutionalisation of bilateral linkages and the changing international environment can enhance reconciliation, whereas others such as the leaders' personalities and policies and the regular resuscitation of historical problems slow down the process. President Roh intends to receive Koizumi in Seoul on 20 June at one of their regular half-yearly meetings. If both he and Koizumi are prepared to once again look forward, then hopefully this can be the first step towards returning to the road of reconciliation.

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