

PRESENTATION

Unraveling Japan-South Korea Relations: An Empirical Analysis

Jung Kim, Ph.D.*

Assistant Professor
University of North Korean Studies

Introduction

Scholars have produced a substantial number of studies on Japan-South Korea relations. Among others, Glosserman and Snyder (2015), Lee and Kimiya (2015), Kim and Abe (2015), Lee and Isozaki (2015), Kimura (2014), Dudden (2008), and Lind (2008) represent a subset of the most recent notable contributions to the literature that have a wide audience in the field. To complement these decent research outputs, in this article, I attempt to appraise the evolution of Japan-South Korea relations, placing the case in cross-national and time-

* Jung Kim is assistant professor of political science, University of North Korean Studies and director for planning at the Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyungnam University in Seoul. He earned his doctoral degree in political science from Yale University and worked as senior research fellow at East Asia Institute.

serial context with comparable empirical data. Specifically, I trace the evolution of Japan-South Korea relations, focusing on two interconnected questions: (1) whether Japan-South Korea relations are going through the worst stage; and (2) why Japan-South Korea relations have evolved as they have.

In the next section, I attempt to assess Japan-South Korea relations with emphasis on descriptive inference. I conduct a comparative empirical study to examine the validity of the claim that we are going through the worst period of Japan-South Korea relations. I close this section, showing that Japan-South Korea relations are uniquely deteriorating compared to other Asia-Pacific bilateral relations and unprecedentedly worsening compared to other temporal periods of both nations.

The penultimate section deals with what best accounts for the worst Japan-South Korea relations. Decomposing the factors that shape Japan-South Korea relations into international and domestic ones, I uncover the uneven development in the distribution of material and ideational powers surrounding Japan and South Korea. On the balance of material powers, structural symmetry that characterizes Japan-South Korea relations perplexes Japanese and elevate South Korean in terms of national pride. On the balance of ideational powers, structural asymmetry that characterizes Japan-South Korea relations makes the two nations diverge in dealing with the rise of China and historical reconciliation issues. On top of this, I find that strategic situations that shape the policy choices of political elites differ between the two countries. In Japan where conservatization of political elites has continued, it is hard for political leaders to send sincere apologetic remembrance to South Koreans due to the lack of political pressure from progressives. In South Korea

where polarization of political elites has proceeded, it is difficult for conservative (progressive) political leaders to receive strategic apologetic remembrance from Japanese due to anticipated backlash from progressive (conservative) oppositions. I conclude this article with the finding that this worst period of Japan-South Korea relations is attributable to international factors that make the two nations diverge in dealing with the critical issues and domestic factors that make it difficult to send and receive apologetic remembrance each other.

Are we going through the worst period of Japan–South Korea relations?

Following Katzenstein and Keohane (2007: 12), I view anti-Japanese (or anti-South Korean) sentiment as a “psychological tendency to hold negative views of Japan (or South Korea) and of Japanese (or South Korean) society in general.” The simplest way to view anti-Japanese (or anti-South Korean) sentiment is as measured by results of public opinion polls that express negative views toward Japan (or South Korea) or toward Japanese (or South Koreans).

Table 1 How Asia-Pacific Publics See Japan and South Korea

	<i>Japan</i>		<i>South Korea</i>	
	2008	2015	2008	2015
Australia	17	10	19	25
China	69	81	29	41
India	-	16	-	19
Indonesia	14	13	30	27
Japan	30	15	40	75

Malaysia	-	9	-	21
Pakistan	19	15	28	20
Philippines	-	12	-	23
South Korea	51	73	<u>7</u>	17
United States	11	18	25	31
Vietnam	-	8	-	8
Median	19	15	28	23
Lower Quartile	15.5	12.25	22	20.25
Upper Quartile	40.5	17	29.5	29
Lower Boundary of Outlier Range	-22	5.125	10.75	7.125
Upper Boundary of Outlier Range	78	24.125	40.75	42.125
Lower Boundary of Far Out Range	-59.5	-2	-0.5	-6
Upper Boundary of Far Out Range	115.5	31.25	52	55.25

Source: Pew Research Center (2015).

Notes: Underlined bold font indicates outliers and shaded bold font indicates far-outs.

Let us first consider whether we are going through the worst Japan-South Korea relations with a cross-national perspective. The question is: are current Japan-South Korea relations unique in their sourness in the region compared to other bilateral relations? To answer this query, I conduct an empirical exploration with cross-national public opinion data.

Table 1 compares negative views on Japan and South Korea by respondents of eleven Asia-Pacific nations to the Pew Research Center's polls in 2008 and 2015. Columns *Japan* and *South Korea* show the percentage of respondents who have somewhat unfavorable and very unfavorable opinion of Japan and South Korea, respectively.

For starters, in 2008, most of the neighbors send relatively low levels of negative signals toward Japan and South Korea with the median

values of 19 and 28, respectively. No countries can be classified as “outlier” or “far out” nations with regard to anti-Japanese (or anti-South Korean) sentiment.¹ For Japan, while the responses of South Korea and China are outside of the interquartile range, they are still not outside of the outlier range. For South Korea, whereas the responses of Japan and Indonesia get out of the interquartile range, they are still far from being outliers. In other words, in 2008, both nations live in the comfort zone in terms of anti-Japanese (or anti-South Korean) sentiment among the Asia-Pacific publics.

Second, in 2015, while most Asia-Pacific countries show even lower levels of unfavorable attitudes toward Japan and South Korea as indicated in the values of median that drop to 15 and 23, respectively, there emerge clear “far out” nations in regard to anti-Japanese (or anti-South Korean) sentiment. For Japan, China with the score of 81 and South Korea with the score of 73 go beyond the upper boundary of “far out” range. For South Korea, Japan with the score of 75 breaks the upper boundary of “far out” range. It is notable that the proportion of respondents who say “unfavorable” toward Japan (or South Korea) among other neighbors never exceeds 50 percent. To put it differently, in 2015, the attitudes of Japanese (or South Koreans) toward South Korea (or Japan) is leaning exceptionally to the negative side compared to those of other neighboring countries.

In sum, from Table 1 that shows cross-national comparison of unfavorability of Japan and South Korea among Asia-Pacific publics

1 If Q_1 and Q_3 are the lower and upper quartiles respectively, then one could define an outlier to be any observation outside the range:

$$[Q_1 - k(Q_3 - Q_1), Q_3 + k(Q_3 - Q_1)]$$

for some nonnegative constant k , where $k = 1.5$ indicates an “outlier,” and $k = 3$ indicates data that is “far out.” See Gailmard (2014: 21-32).

in 2008 and 2015, it is clear that Japan-South Korea relations are getting worse and worse in the hearts and minds of the people in both nations and their bitterness are exceptional in the Asia-Pacific region.

Next, consider whether we are going through the worst period of Japan-South Korea relations longitudinally. The question is: are current Japan-South Korea relations distinctive in their bitterness in the bilateral history? For answering the inquiry, I conduct an empirical exploration with time-series public opinion data.

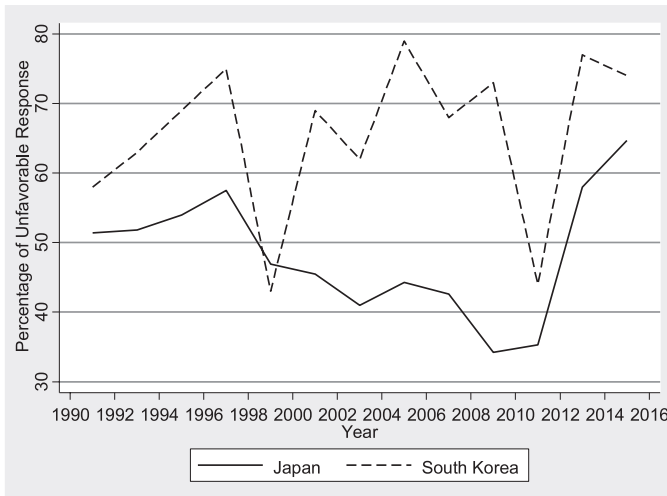
Figure 1 illustrates the longitudinal percentage changes of respondents of Japanese (or South Korean) who show “unfavorable” attitudes to South Korea (or Japan) from 1991 until 2015 in alternate years. I use public opinion data produced by Japan’s Cabinet Office for Japanese responses and those by Asahi Shimbun-Donga Ilbo, Gallup Korea, and Pew Research Center for South Korean responses.²

First, in the side of Japan, it seems that there are three distinctive temporal orders with regard to anti-South Korean sentiment. During the 1990s, a majority of Japanese send negative signals to South Korea with the highest unfavorability score of 57.5 in 1997. Since 1999 when the score falls below 50, anti-South Korean sentiment among the Japanese public steadily fades away during the 2000s and takes the lowest unfavorability score of 34.2 in 2009. After 2011 with the score of 35.3, anti-South Korean sentiment of the Japanese people suddenly surges in 2013 with the score of 58 and reaches all time high in 2015 with the score of 64.7. It might not be a coincidence that President Lee Myung-bak visited Dokdo (Takeshima) in 2012 and anti-South Korean sentiment of Japanese swelled in 2013. In a nutshell, while

² For details of the data, see Appendix.

up until 2011 there had been a solid downturn in anti-South Korean sentiment among the Japanese public, the trend is overturned making Japan-South Korea relations the worst over the recent twenty-five years on the Japanese Archipelago.

Figure 1 How Japanese and South Korea Publics See Each Other



Sources: Japan’s Cabinet Office (2016) for Japanese unfavorability toward South Korea; for South Korean unfavorability toward Japan, Isozaki (2015) for the 1995 and 1999 data; Pew Research Center (2015) for the 2013 data; and Gallup Korea (2015) for the 1991, 1993, 1997, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2015 data.

Second, in the side of South Korea, the patterns of anti-Japanese sentiment are more volatile and unstable. During the recent twenty-five years, there are only two times that respondents who say “unfavorable” to Japan fall short of a majority: the score of 43 in 1999 and 44 in 2011. These exceptions might have something to do with the facts that the South Korean government officially opened the markets for Japanese entertainment industries in 1999 and the Great East

Japan earthquake occurred in 2011. Before the 2010s, anti-Japanese sentiment moves in series of zigzags, going beyond the score of 70 in 1997, 2005, and 2009 and then falling below 70 each time. What makes the 2010s distinctive in the history of anti-Japanese sentiment of South Koreans is that the unfavorability scores pass 70 and stays there. In sum, among the South Korean public, while anti-Japanese sentiment had bobbed up and down up until 2011, it resolutely gathers momentum to an unprecedented extent, making Japan-South Korean relations poorest in the last two decades on the Korean Peninsula.

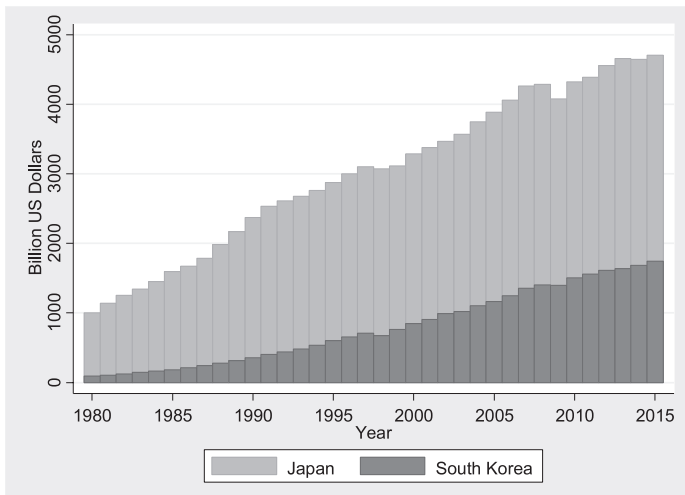
In sum, are we going through the worst period of Japan-South Korea relations? With an eye on cross-national comparison, the answer would be the affirmative: According to a 2015 international poll, 73 percent of South Koreans view Japan unfavorably, making South Korea, after China, the country with the second most negative perception of Japan in the Asia-Pacific region. Likewise, 75 percent of Japanese show disapproving attitude toward South Korea, making Japan the nation with the most negative perception of South Korea in Asia-Pacific neighboring countries.

With a view from historical perspective, the answer appears affirmative: According to 2015 domestic polls, 64.7 percent of Japanese look unfavorably at South Korea, making 2015 the year that records the highest anti-South Korean sentiment in the last two decades of its history. Likewise, 74 percent of South Korean reveal their unfavorability toward Japan, making 2015 the year that marks one of the highest anti-Japanese sentiment during the recent twenty-five years of its history.

Why have Japan–South Korea relations been getting worse?

As it is confirmed that we are going through the worst period of Japan-South Korea relations, it seems natural to raise a question: Why have Japan-South Korea relations been getting worse?

Figure 2 GDP of Japan and South Korea, 1980–2015



Source: OECD (2016).

To answer the question, I propose an explanation that contains international and domestic factors in shaping the relations between Japan and South Korea. Let us first consider international factors that contribute to worsening Japan-South Korea relations. There are two structural factors: (1) the distribution of material powers that is characterized by convergence to a balance and symmetry between the two countries; and (2) the distribution of ideational powers that is characterized by divergence from a balance and asymmetry between

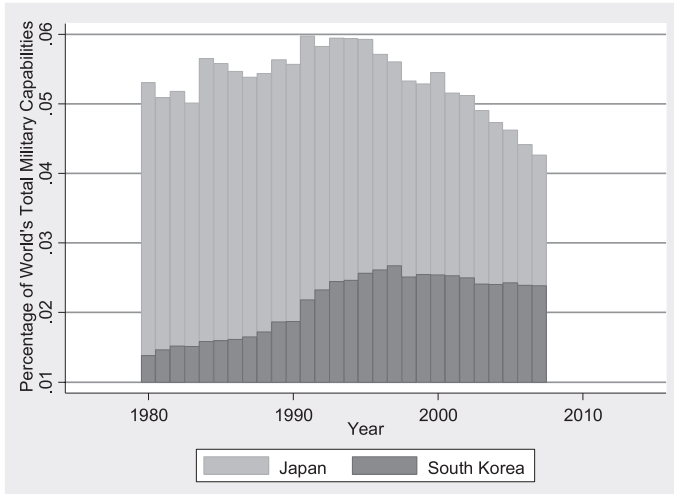
the two nations.

For starters, disparity in hard powers between Japan and South Korea has dwindled. Three indicators of hard powers are introduced: (1) Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of economic powers; (2) Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) as a measure of military powers; and (3) GDP per capita as a measure of social powers.

Figure 2 displays the longitudinal changes of GDP of both nations from 1980 until 2015. In 1980, the size of Japanese economy was larger than that of South Korea by a factor of eleven. At that time, while Japan's GDP was about a trillion US dollars, South Korea's GDP is about 90 billion US dollars. The gap of economic powers between the two countries fell to a factor of five in 1995 when Japan's GDP was 2.9 trillion US dollars while South Korea's GDP was 600 billion US dollars. Since 2009 when the gap declined to a factor of less than three, the economic power disparity continues to shrink up until 2015 when Japan's GDP with 4.7 trillion US dollars is larger than South Korea's GDP with 1.7 trillion US dollars by a factor of 2.7. During the recent twenty-five years, while Japan has developed its economy by a factor of 4.7, South Korea has grown its economy by a factor of nineteen. The economic-power gap between the two countries has certainly decreased.

Military power disparity between Japan and South Korea from 1980 until 2007 is illustrated in Figure 3. As a composite index of six indicators including iron and steel production, military expenditures, military personnel, primary energy consumption, total population, and urban population, CINC measures the percentage proportion

Figure 3 Military Capabilities of Japan and South Korea, 1980–2007

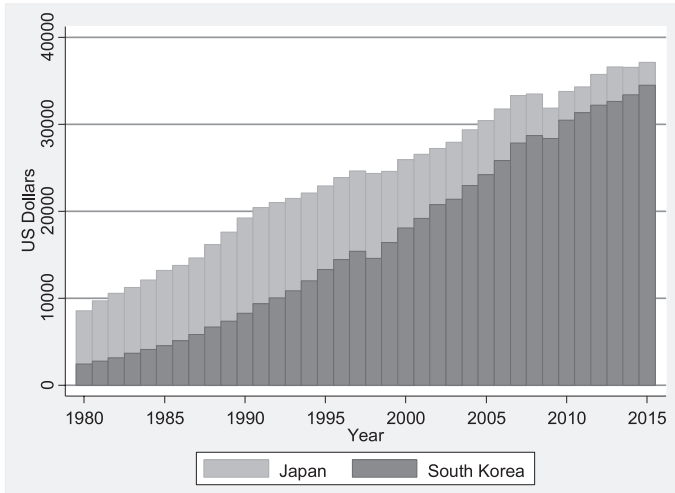


Source: Correlates of War Project (2016).

of a nation's military powers to a world total military powers.³ In 1980, Japan's military capability was greater than South Korea's by a factor of 3.8. The former secured about 5.3 percent of world military powers while the latter had about 1.4 percent. The gap declined to a factor of less than three in 1990 when Japan contained 5.6 percent and South Korea 1.9 percent and to a factor of less than two in 2004 when the former had 4.7 percent and the latter 2.4 percent. In 2007, the gap is about a factor of 1.8 in which Japan holds 4.3 percent and South Korea 2.4 percent. During the recent two decades, the disparity between the two countries in terms of military powers has evidently declined as Japan has expanded its military capability by a factor of 0.8 and South Korea by a factor of 1.7.

³ For more details, see Correlates of War Project (2016).

Figure 4 GDP per capita of Japan and South Korea, 1980–2015



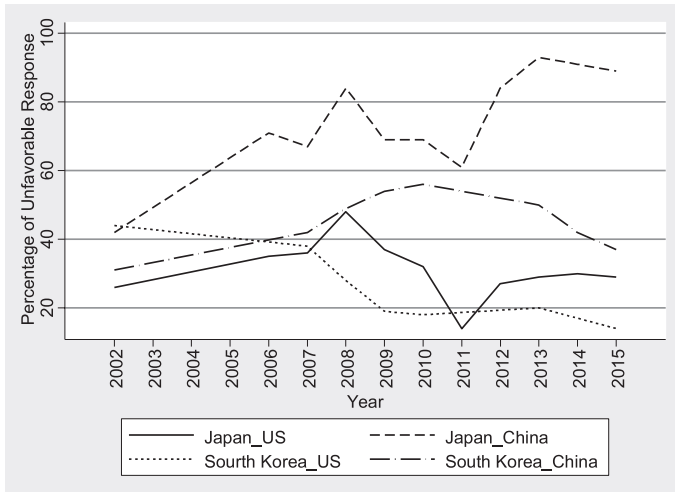
Source: OECD (2016).

Figure 4 shows time-serial changes in GDP per capita of the two countries from 1980 and 2015. In 1980, Japanese were richer than South Koreans by a factor of 3.6. GDP per capita of Japan was more than 8,500 US dollars while that of South Korea was about 2,400 US dollars. The gap dwindled to a factor of less than two in 1993 when Japan's GDP per capita was more than 210,000 US dollars and South Korea's about 110,000. In 2015, GDP per capita of both nations is virtually the same: 37,121 US dollars for Japan and 34,502 US dollars for South Korea. There is only 7.5 percent differential between the two. For the recent twenty-five years, Japanese have raised their income by a factor of 4.3 and South Koreans by a factor of 14.4. In terms of social powers, South Koreans have nearly caught up to the Japanese.

In a nutshell, as shown in changes in economic, military, and social balance of powers between the two countries, power asymmetry that

had characterized Japan-South Korea relations is being replaced by power symmetry that could make Japanese disturbed and South Koreans exalted.

Figure 5 How Japan and South Korea See the United States and China, 2002–2015



Source: Pew Research Center (2016).

Unlike the distribution of material powers that converge to a balance, the distribution of ideational powers diverges from a balance between Japan and South Korea. Among others, this is clear in the threat perception of China’s rise and America’s decline between the two nations.

Figure 5 illustrates how Japanese and South Koreans see the United States and China from 2002 until 2015. The unfavorability of Japanese toward the United States was upward up until 2008 and then declined and slightly surged until 2015. In particular, since 2012 it has stably stayed around a score of 30 percent. The unfavorability of South Koreans toward the United States steadily decreased from 2002 and

never went beyond a score of 20 percent since 2009. In both nations, anti-Americanism seems out of the question in the public sphere. That is to say, they converge on the solid foundation with the United States as an alliance partner.

The unfavorability of both nations toward China diverges, however. In both Japan and South Korea, it increased around 2010 when the negative perception of the publics of the two nations converged around the score of 60 percent. Since then, the two countries started to diverge: Anti-Chinese sentiment in Japan has dramatically increased from 61 percent in 2011 to 89 percent in 2015 whereas anti-Chinese sentiment in South Korea has vividly dwindled from 56 percent in 2010 to 37 percent in 2015. In other words, today a majority of Japanese are highly suspicious while a majority of South Koreans are fairly comfortable with the rise of China. This asymmetric perception of the Chinese threat between the two countries is surely an alarming ideational factor in shaping Japan-South Korea relations. In a situation where most Japanese see China as a near-enemy and most South Koreans see China as a near-friend, it is highly unlikely to have a healthy relationship between the two nations.

The asymmetric perception of China's threat between Japan and South Korea reflects the asymmetric perception of Japan's apology between them. Table 2 shows how Chinese, Japanese, and South Koreans think about Japan's apology for its military actions during the 1930s and 1940s. In 2008, 76 percent of Chinese and 96 percent of South Koreans believed that Japan did not apologize sufficiently while 41 percent of Japanese agreed with them. In 2013, 78 percent of Chinese and 98 percent of South Koreans think that Japan did not apologize sufficiently whereas 28 percent of Japanese share that opinion. To put it another way, virtually all South Koreans and

four-fifths of the Chinese see that Japan's apology is not sufficient while three-fifths of the Japanese people ponder that its apology is sufficient. This huge chasm in historical remembrance is another crucial factor that shapes Japan-South Korea relations in a negative direction.

Table 2 How China, Japan, and South Korea Think about Japan's Apology

	2008			2013		
	Apologized sufficiently	Not apologized sufficiently	No apology necessary	Apologized sufficiently	Not apologized sufficiently	No apology necessary
China	8	76	2	4	78	2
Japan	42	41	10	48	28	15
South Korea	1	96	1	1	98	1

Source: Pew Research Center (2013).

Table 3 How Japanese and South Korean Publics and Experts See Each Other

	Japanese Public	South Korean Public	Japanese Experts	South Korean Experts
2013	37.3	76.6	27.5	28.8
2014	54.4	70.9	44.2	36.8
2015	52.4	72.5	43.2	36.4

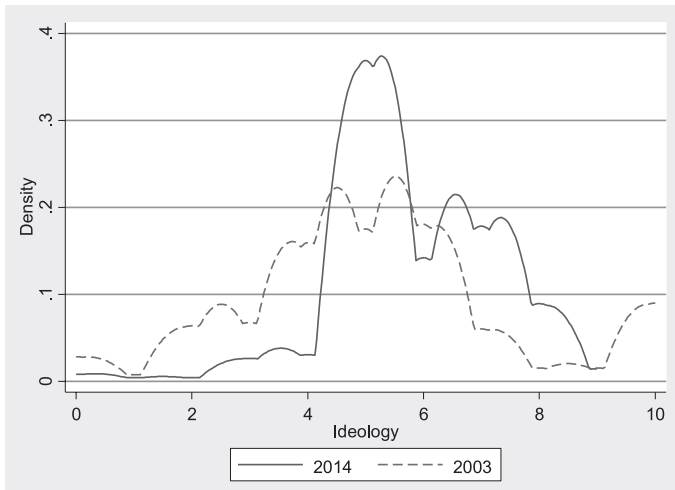
Source: Genron NPO and East Asia Institute (2015).

The marked divergence in how to perceive China's rise and historical remembrance between the two countries affects divergence in opinions between the publics and the experts of both nations (see Table 3). It is notable that anti-Japanese sentiment of South Koreans is higher than anti-South Korean sentiment of Japanese among the publics while anti-South Korean sentiment of Japanese is higher than anti-Japanese sentiment of South Korean among the

experts. For instance, between the two publics, 72 percent of South Koreans reveal unfavorable attitude toward Japan while 52 percent of Japanese disclose the same attitude toward South Korea. Among the experts, however, 36 percent of South Koreans show negative perception of Japan whereas 43 percent of Japanese express the same perception of South Korea in 2015. It appears that Japanese experts are more sensitive to divergence in the rise of China and historical remembrance issues than South Korean ones.

The reason that we observe differences in responses to ideational distribution of powers between Japanese and South Korean experts seems to originate from the broad transformation of political elites in both nations. This leads to domestic factors that shape Japan-South Korean relations.

Figure 6 Ideological Distributions of Japanese National Diet Members in 2003 and 2014

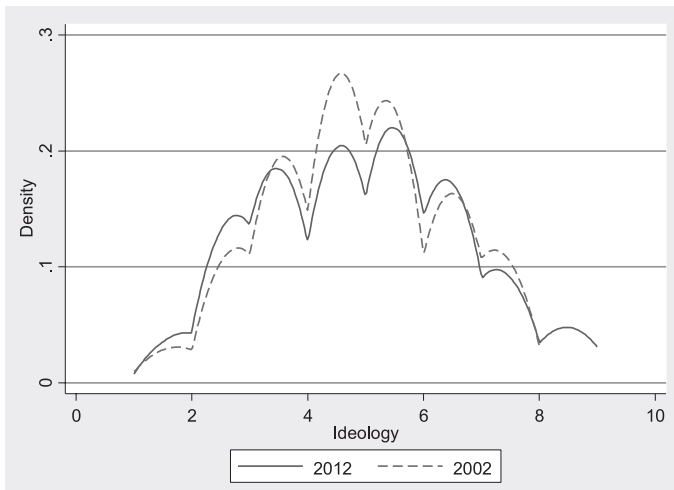


Source: Taniguchi and Asahi Shimbun (2016).

Figure 6 displays the ideological distribution of the House of

Representatives members of Japan's National Diet in 2003 and 2014. On one-dimensional policy space, 0 represent the most progressive and 10 represents the most conservative. In 2003, among 456 members, the value of mean is 5.23 and the value of standard deviation is 2.38. In 2014, among 427 members, the value of mean is 5.78 and the value of standard deviation is 1.45. Between 2003 and 2014, the center of gravity among political elites assuredly moves in the conservative direction as progressives thin out and conservatives thicken. This change implies that dominant political elites in Japan have little incentive to send apologetic remembrance toward South Korea since there is little capability for progressives to provoke backlash against conservatives' unapologetic remembrance. Due to conservatization of Japanese political elites, it will be difficult to receive apologetic remembrance from the Japanese government.

Figure 7 Ideological Distributions of South Korean National Assembly Members in 2002 and 2012



Source: Korean Association of Party Studies and Joongang Ilbo (2016).

Figure 7 exhibits ideological distribution of the South Korean National Assembly members in 2002 and 2012. On one-dimensional policy space, 0 represent the most progressive and 10 represents the most conservative. In 2002, among 238 members, the value of mean is 4.90 and the value of standard deviation is 1.56. In 2012, among 223 members, the value of mean is 5.00 and the value of standard deviation is 1.80. Between 2002 and 2012, the center of gravity among political elites stays around 5 constantly and both progressives and conservatives thicken. This change implies that dominant political elites in South Korea have little capacity to accept signals from Japan since there are plenty of incentives for progressives as well as conservatives to incite backlash against Japan's remembrance. Due to polarization of South Korean political elites, it will be hard to accept any sort of remembrance signal, be it apologetic or unapologetic, for the South Korean government.

In sum, the distribution of material powers between Japan and South Korea is characterized by convergence and symmetry while the distribution of ideational powers between them is described by divergence and asymmetry. These international changes mirror domestic transformations in which conservatization of Japanese political elites and polarization of South Korean political elites raise the bar for historical reconciliation between the two nations.

Conclusion

This article has discussed whether we are going through the worst period of Japan-South Korea relations. It found that Japan-South Korea relations are uniquely flagging cross-nationally and unprecedentedly waning historically. The reduction in gaps in terms

of economic, military, and social powers between the two countries is a set of international factors that confuse Japanese and elevate South Koreans. The increasing dissimilarity in dealing with the rise of China and historical reconciliation issues is another set of international factors that make Japan-South Korea relations complicated. The conservatization of Japanese political elites lessens the incentives to send sincere apologetic remembrance to South Koreans. The polarization of South Korean political elites diminishes the capability to accept strategic apologetic remembrance from Japanese. It seems that Japan-South Korea relations is at a stalemate.

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Appendix How Japanese and South Korean Publics See Each Other

	Asahi Shimbun-Donga Ilbo		Japan's Cabinet Office	Gallup Korea	Pew Research Center	
	Japan	South Korea	Japan	South Korea	Japan	South Korea
1984	19	39	47.1	-	-	-
1988	21	51	42.9	-	-	-
1990	23	66	50.8	-	-	-
1991	-	-	51.4	58	-	-
1993	-	-	51.8	63	-	-
1995	21	69	54	-	-	-
1997	17	65	57.5	75	-	-
1999	12	43	46.9	-	-	-
2001	15	57	45.5	69	-	-
2003	-	-	41	62	-	-
2005	22	63	44.3	79	-	-
2006	-	-	47.1	-	43	-
2007	-	-	42.6	68	-	72
2008	-	-	40.9	-	40	51
2009	-	-	34.2	73	-	-
2011	-	-	35.3	44	-	-
2012	17	50	59	-	-	-
2013	-	-	58	-	-	77
2014	-	-	66.4	-	-	77
2015	-	-	64.7	74	75	73

Sources: Isozaki (2015) for Asahi Shimbun-Donga Ilbo surveys; Japan's Cabinet Office (2016) for Japan's Cabinet Office surveys; Gallup Korea (2015) for Gallup Korea surveys; Pew Research Center (2015) for Pew Research Center surveys.