

# Why Are the Issues of “ Historical Perceptions ” between Japan and South Korea Persisting?<sup>i</sup>

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## Introduction

It has been 65 years since the surrender of Japan brought World War II to a close. The countries of Northeast Asia are now experiencing a wide range of debates on the ways history is perceived. The debates originally started with Japan's actions in the modern era, but they have expanded to include discussions on ancient relations among East Asian countries, including the ones between Korea and Japan.

Why are such historical debates emerging in this region? In search of the answer, it must be realized primarily that the arguments of today are not about history itself but are concerned with “ the perceptions of history. ” Before discussing this subject, three points should be borne in mind. First, there are differences between “ the past, ” “ history, ” and “ the perception of history. ” The past, needless to say, is the period of time that existed in the opposite direction of the future, against the flow of time. It is also evident that the past consists of an infinite number of facts that could be endlessly divided and dissected. Of course, as long as the past remains the past, it is impossible to change what has occurred. Nevertheless, if narratives about the past change from time to time, it means that it is not the past but something about the present that has been modified.

As properly pointed out by Max Weber, who is considered to be the founder of modern sociology, history is a unique constellation of facts assembled from the infinite material provided by the past and selected intentionally or unconsciously by individuals or members of a particular group based on their values or perspectives. In other words, history under this concept is hugely influenced by the choices of certain individuals or groups seeking to describe history as more than just a collection of facts from the past.

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History in many cases takes a certain form of “narrative,” and thus it is constructed by the appropriate facts that are selected from the past according to the narrative line. For example, the sentence “It was 6 August, 1945 in Japan when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima” provides a correct fact but does not represent “correct history.” This is because, by selecting some from the various facts, anyone can construct histories, each of which has a different message even though they are all correct facts ( Meyer and Weber, 1965 )

“Historical perceptions” are the standards that people use when they choose some facts from an infinite constellation of facts from the past. Therefore, history is, in fact, a production of a historical perception, not the other way around. Of course, determining a particular fact from the past may influence the way we perceive history and lead to a modified description of history. However, it should be noted that the process of selecting a fact from the past can be done only based on a certain perception of people as the fact would otherwise never gain a particular level of awareness.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, historical perceptions are not determined by the past but by the interests of the people living today and the situation surrounding such interests. If a historical issue that used to be less significant draws more attention today, it obviously means that something in the present, not the past itself, has changed. This indicates that “the facts in the present” are sometimes more important than those in the past in the debates over historical perceptions.

## Chapter 1. Research Question and Interpretation

Why are debates over historical perceptions continuing today in Northeast Asian countries after more than six decades since the end of World War II? The main purpose of this article is to consider this question with a focus on relations between Japan and South Korea. The reason for taking up the Japan-South Korea relationship is as follows.

As is widely known, there used to be hopeful discourses about historical issues in both Japan and South Korea that, although the old generations of people in the two countries, both rulers and subjects, failed to create a common perception of history between them, when the new generations of people, who did not experience the

Imperial Period, emerged and freely communicated with each other, the issues concerning historical perceptions between the two countries would be solved naturally.

Today, Japan and South Korea have an enormous number of economic and social exchanges, but the realities in the two countries appear to be totally different from such expectations. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, although the debates over historical perceptions in the two countries were once settled after the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1965, these issues suddenly resurged in the 1980s and seem to have been becoming more serious since then. Such a tendency continued even after the South Korean TV drama “ Winter Sonata ” became a smash hit and the starring South Korean actor Bae Yong Joon became a national hero in Japan. In 2005, under the Koizumi administration, relations between the two countries became tense over “ Takeshima/Dokdo Day ” and further developed into an explosive situation.

Why, then, did the optimistic beliefs of the two countries go wide of the mark? My interpretation is that, contrary to general opinion, those who know what happened in the past and are responsible for such events were not given the opportunities to solve the problems. Because they did not face the issues at the appropriate time, they missed the opportunities socially, economically, and politically. As a result, the issues remained unsolved when the new generations appeared. This hypothetical process can be divided into four stages.

First, it was impossible for the two countries to share a common perception of history because there was no direct governmental or private communication between the two countries during the decolonization process of Korea in 1945, and this lack of communication continued. In 1965 the governments of Japan and South Korea finally agreed to conclude the annexation treaty to normalize their diplomatic relations, but the treaty purposefully ignored the issues relating to historical perceptions between the two countries.

In the second stage, while the wartime generations in Japan and South Korea have given up efforts to share a common perception of history and are wasting their time, the “ new generations ” whose parents were also born after the war have become the majorities in the two societies. The new generations of people soon started “ rediscovering history, ” which is a history they did not experience. As a result,

“rediscovery of history” intensified the disputes over differences in historical perceptions between the two countries, and they have been in conflict ever since.

Thirdly, the relativization of Japan-South Korea relations was behind the practices of “historical rediscovery” during the 1980s. The economic growth of South Korea, the movement toward the end of the Cold War, and economic and social globalization all contributed to the relativization of relations. “The “old generations” of the two countries treated “the past” with great caution, giving consideration to the importance of Japan-South Korean relations. However, the relationship between the two countries became less important for the new generations of the 1980s, which allowed these new generations in both countries to frankly discuss their past. Yet, easy discussions did not lead to the creation of a common perception of history, but they rather developed into a source of considerable controversy between Japan and South Korea.

Finally, this situation further worsened after the year 2000. The major reason for this deterioration was that politics that served as a brake to some extent in the disputes fell into lame-duck status. The loss of the political elite’s prestige and the eventual emergence of populist politics in the two countries were behind this, and as a result, politics became dependent on unstable individual popularities and turned into so-called “nationalistic populist” ones. Not surprisingly, such situations in the two countries combined with the situations surrounding the disputes over the differences in historical perceptions between them (Kimura, 2007)

Then, how does the interpretation correctly reflect the realities of Japan and South Korea? This question will be analyzed in detail in the following chapters, based on various data.

## Chapter 2. The Unique Decolonization Process in Korea and Prioritization of “the Present” over “the Past”

In studying the issues of historical perceptions between Japan and South Korea, the first thing to note is that decolonization in Korea differed from the general decolonization process in other regions of the world. In the case of Korea, it was not the local people but the defeat of Japan that brought about the independence of Korea.

This unique process of decolonization is striking, compared to the decolonization

in the former colonies of France and England, for example. The normal decolonization process is as follows: first, resistance movements emerge and a colonial power tries to suppress them; when the colonial power eventually finds it impossible to contain these movements any longer, the power starts to negotiate with the colony and to discuss the negotiation of a treaty for ending the colonial rule. If the colony has a greater advantage, the conditions under the treaty will be more favorable to the interests of the colony. On the other hand, if the colonial power still has substantial control over the colony, the treaty will be negotiated in a way that protects the interests of the colonial power. During this negotiation process, both sides can usually achieve a common understanding to some extent regarding the days of colonial rule.

However, the decolonization in Korea did not generate a situation such as the one mentioned above, because Japan's defeat by the Allied Powers forcibly withdrew Japan from the Peninsula, and the country did not have to deal directly with the Korean people. This means that both Japan and South Korea were deprived of their opportunities to seriously discuss the issues of the past at the most important stage of the decolonization process. As a result, some Japanese people continued to consider Korea as their colony even after the independence of Korea, while some South Korean people missed their opportunities to tell Japan how much they detested its rule.

Of course, this does not mean that Japan and South Korea have never had any forum to discuss their past. Nonetheless, from 1945 to the 1950s the two countries, which had been strongly pressured to normalize their diplomatic relations by the United States during the Cold War, placed more emphasis on present strategic and economic issues and did not pay enough attention to the issues of the past. In 1953, during the third diplomatic normalization talks, for example, Japanese chief representative Kan'ichiro Kubota made the so-called “ Kubota Statement, ” which expressed his positive view of Japanese rule on the Korean Peninsula ( Kokkai Gijiroku Kensaku Sisutemu ) On the other hand, in 1959 the Syngman Rhee regime of South Korea attempted to use the fourth diplomatic normalization talks as a cover in order to stop Japan from returning *zainichi* Koreans ( Koreans residing in Japan ) to North Korea ( Yu Jin-o, 1978 ). Such attitudes of the two countries had common characteristics in that they placed less significance on restoring relations between them than on seeking their individual interests; Japan cared more about its official

position regarding its colonial rule, while South Korea was more concerned with relations with North Korea during the talks.

The attitudes of the two countries, which stressed “ the present ” rather than “ the past, ” resulted in the conclusion of the Annexation Treaty in 1965, 20 years after the end of World War II. Under this treaty, the South Korean government chose to receive a grant loan of three hundred million yen, three hundred million yen in loan aid, and a private loan of more than three hundred million yen, instead of abandoning all their rights of claim against Japan. The government of Japan explained these loans as “ a celebratory cash contribution to its independence and development assistance, ” while the government of South Korea explained to its people that it was “ asset, compensation for abandoning its right of claim against Japan, and economic assistance. ” Neither of the governments protested or refuted each other’s explanations. This means that Japan and South Korea decided to achieve diplomatic normalization by acquiescing to each other’s differences in explanation without intervening with each other’s statements ( Ohta, 2003 )

However, acquiescence to each other’s historical perceptions on a government level did not lead to mutual respect on the popular level. Wasting their time and sticking to their own perceptions, the two countries failed to overcome the differences in historical perceptions. The 1965 normalization of diplomatic relations reduced the importance of “ the past, ” which should have been addressed, because it facilitated interactions between the two countries without challenging their issues about the past. There was “ the old generation’s ” way of thinking that if “ the present ” was going well, it did not have to be disrupted by unnecessary discussion about the past.

It is important to note, however, that the issues about the past were only postponed in this way. Therefore, one “ myth ” was invented in both Japan and South Korea as follows: because “ the past ” is too great an issue to deal with for the “ old generations, ” who directly experienced colonial rule and World War II, they could not solve the issues, so when the “ new generations, ” who are unrelated to “ the past, ” appear and actively and directly interact with each other over their nationality, the issues relating to “ the past ” will be solved naturally.

### Chapter 3. The Emergence of the “ New Generations ” and the Intensified Disputes over the Past

Japan and South Korea, whose relations started in an unusual way with decolonization in 1945, concluded the Annexation Treaty in 1965 and normalized their diplomatic relations without solving the issues about historical perceptions between them. The “ old generations ” of Japanese and South Koreans, who had not been granted the opportunities to share a common perception of history shortly after the end of World War II, even missed the precious period of the normalization talks to resolve the issues. In this regard, the belief that “ if the new generations of Japanese and South Koreans, who do not have first-hand experience of the colonial period, actively communicated with each other, the issues relating to ‘ the past ’ would be naturally solved ” can be interpreted to mean that the old generations of people, who had abandoned and failed to solve the problems, shifted their responsibilities and expectations onto the new generations.

However, such discourses about the “ new generations ” also contained pure expectations that because they are unconnected to various facts in the past, they can freely discuss anything they like regardless of their nationalities. In other words, there was an optimistic view that as the past was not “ the past ” per se, but the reality which the old generations of Japanese and South Koreans had personally experienced, it was difficult for the old generations to compromise with each other, and that since “ the past ” was the time period that the new generations did not experience, they could have constructive and free discussions.

How have the changing times and the emergence of the new generations altered the discussions over historical perceptions in Japan and South Korea? This chapter starts with a review in this regard, drawing on detailed data.

In order to illustrate the transition of the discussions, this chapter presents the number of newspaper articles published in Japan and South Korea that are related to the issues of “ historical perceptions. ” There are two major reasons for choosing this media: the first reason is that it provides stable numbers of constant data over a relatively long period of time, and the second reason is that I believe the newspaper articles reflect the transition of the interests of the readers, if only to a certain extent.

The Japanese and South Korean newspapers that were selected for this discussion

meet three criteria: 1 ) they are among the major newspapers in the two countries after World War II; 2 ) among such major papers, they are especially sensitive to the issues concerning “ historical perceptions ”; and 3 ) they maintain a relatively well-organized database available for the entire period after World War II. The newspapers selected are Asahi Shimbun of Japan and Chosun-Ilbo of South Korea. As is well known, Asahi Shimbun has actively covered the issues relating to “ the past ” between Japan and South Korea from the most liberal viewpoint among major Japanese newspapers. Conservative Chosun-Ilbo, on the other hand, has been especially known for its anti-Japan viewpoint. The databases of the two newspapers cover the period from 1945 to today, and they are appropriate for use in counting the number of articles published on this topic.

Due to the differences in the databases, Table 1 displays the numbers of Asahi Shimbun articles found by search words relating to the issues about the country’s past, while Tables 2 shows the numbers of Chosun-Ilbo articles that contain both the word “ Japan ” and other words related to “ the past. ” ( Because the phrases “ pro-Japanese collaborators ” and “ independence movement ” imply a connection with

Table 1: Number of articles in Asahi Shimbun ( Japan ) on South Korea and North Korea and historical disputes

	Korea ( <i>Kankoku</i> )	<i>Korea</i> ( <i>Chosen</i> )	Tokyo Trial	Yasukuni	War Criminal	War Crime	Responsibility of War
1945-49	299	1123	1005	65	418	1265	1122
1950-54	2998	8444	5	37	737	227	800
1955-59	2203	1909	0	42	329	1	361
1960-64	4944	1011	2	25	57	0	16
1965-69	3687	1925	3	81	58	19	1
1970-74	4791	2351	0	156	33	10	23
1975-79	5588	1917	6	94	79	3	10
1980-84	4669	1692	16	241	66	0	17
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1985-89	14799	7376	124	1481	548	137	824
1990-94	23039	17441	136	597	513	236	1347
1995-99	30224	18804	202	754	778	572	949
2000-04	39450	28179	174	3282	1192	463	592
2005-09	32597	20858	358	4522	1265	315	576

Source: <https://database.asahi.com> ( last visited on February 4, 2011 )

For Asahi Shimbun Articles through 1984, the figures on the table show the number of articles sorted by keywords and article items from the newspaper’s database that included the search words. For articles after 1985, the figures represent the actual number of articles that contain the search words. In Japanese, there are two words ‘ Kankoku ’ and ‘ Chosen ’ meaning Korea, hence the two numbers are shown on this table. Please note that the newspaper has local editions, and each local edition has local pages. The figures also include the articles in the local editions.

Table 2: Number of articles in Chosun Ilbo (South Korea) on Japan and historical disputes

	Japan + Textbook	Comfort woman	Volunteer labor corps	Yasukuni	Shinto Shrine + Worship	Japan + Dokdo/ Takeshima	Japanese Collaborator	Japan + Compensation
1945-49	0	0	2	0	0	0	31	47
1950-54	0	0	0	0	0	22	1	13
1955-59	2	0	0	0	0	9	0	24
1960-64	0	0	0	0	0	31	2	22
1965-69	2	0	0	0	0	26	1	5
1970-74	2	0	0	6	1	5	0	6
1975-79	2	1	0	1	2	43	1	5
1980-84	118	0	5	1	10	13	0	4
1985-89	54	0	4	2	11	11	2	4
1990-94	6	87	156	3	16	2	5	7
1995-99	15	269	38	11	31	24	11	6
2000-04	22	127	20	47	90	16	11	3
2005-09	24	127	11	94	44	91	29	7

Source: DB Chosun, <http://db.chosun.com/DBmain.html> ( last visited on February 4, 2011 )

The figures on the table show the number of articles sorted by article items from the newspaper’s database that included the search words.

Japan, articles containing them were included in the count.) It should be noted that for Asahi Shimbun, the data before 1984 and after 1985 were gathered in different ways: articles between 1945 and 1984 were selected by keywords in the database and in the subject line, while articles after 1985 were selected when the text contained the keywords.

The statistics in the two tables conclusively disprove the popular belief that generational change brings milder discussions over differences in historical perceptions. Rather, it is more apparent that the number of arguments over the past increased as the new generations emerged and the old generations disappeared. This trend became particularly evident in Japan after the 1980s and in Korea after the 1990s, which indicates that the conflict over history is becoming more serious, rather than moving toward resolution.

It is worth noting that increasing arguments about history over time do not exclusively happen between Japan and South Korea. As can be seen in the case of the Tokyo War Crimes Trials in Japan and the case of pro-Japan collaborators in South Korea, discussions over history intensified domestically as well as internationally after the 1980s ( Kimura, 2007 )

So why did the popular belief not hold true? Of course, some people try to explain it from the perspective of Japan’s alleged “ swing to the right.” However, at least in

Japan, it is difficult to say that circumstances surrounding discourses leaned to the right after the 1980s. For example, Japanese history textbooks published after the 1980s have hardly changed in comparison to the ones published before the 1980s, which means that the time of increase in arguments over historical perceptions did not coincide with Japan's "swing to the right."

#### Chapter 4. "Rediscovery of History" in History Textbooks

This chapter examines in more detail the reason behind this phenomenon. Table 3 shows the changes in the descriptions of Japan's expansionist period in a junior and senior high school history textbooks that were published by Tokyo Shoseki Co., Osaka Shoseki Co., and Jikkyo Shuppan Co., Japan's leading publishers of school textbooks (Kimura, 2007). The numbers in the table indicate that the amount of content dealing with Japan's colonial rule over Korea has increased over the years and has come to be described in more detail. This represents a different reality from what has been presumed to be true regarding the debates over historical perceptions between Japan and South Korea. It means that the changes in "subjective perceptions" of people living today play a more important role than the past itself or "objective perceptions" in the debates over history.

What has created such a situation? The first explanation is that it is part of the process of rediscovering history, accompanied by a typical generational transition. A distinct example of this process can be found in the debates over comfort women, which is an issue that quickly drew renewed attention in South Korea during the 1990s and developed as a symbol of the disputes between Japan and South Korea over their different perceptions of history. However, it is probably more notable that this issue of comfort women attracted little attention in South Korea before the 1990s. This may explain why many of the related arguments among South Koreans confused the *teishintai*, the "female workers' brigade" with comfort women (Yun, 2005: 296-298). This proves that, at least for the new generation of South Koreans at that time, historical facts had become somewhat obscure, and they felt obliged to "rediscover" each historical event. Needless to say, this does not mean that the old generation of South Koreans did not know the difference between comfort women and the *teishintai*. Obviously, many former South Korean Presidents and other high-profile politicians of

Table 3 Description of History Textbooks

Tokyo Shoseki ( Senior High )	1978	1983	1990	1993	1996	2000	2004
Protocol Signed Between Japan and Korea of 1904							
First Japan-Korean Convention	A	B	B	B	B	A	A
Second Japan-Korean Convention		B	A	A	A	B	A
Third Japan-Korean Convention			B		B		
Hague Secret Emissary Affair		B	B	B	B	B	A
Residents-General	B	A	A	A	A	A	A
An Jung-Geun							A
Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Governor-General of Korea		A	A	A	A	A	A
Land Investigation and Reformation		B	B	B	B	B	A
March 1st Movement	B	B	A	A	B	A	A
Kōminka Movement			B	B	B	B	A
Sōshi-Kaimei			B	B	B	B	A
Righteous Armies Protests			B	B	B	A	A
Great Kantō Earthquake						A	
Comfort women						B	A
Forced Labor							A
A: Gothic Description, B: Normal Description							

Source: Jeong Nami, ‘ Nikkannrekisi-Kyodokenkyu ’: Igi to Tenbo ’, Master Thesis of Kobe University, 2005, p.72.

the old generation had served in the military during the Japanese colonial rule and had witnessed the wartime mobilization of Korean people by Japanese Governors-General. Nevertheless, the fact that they did not bring up these issues as diplomatic demands and the fact that the media avoided covering these issues demonstrates that South Korea’s old generation was reluctant to discuss them despite their first-hand knowledge of the events.

A similar tendency can also be found in the debates over pro-Japanese collaborators in South Korea. As seen in the story of Shin Ik-hee, who allegedly said to Chang deok-soo that “ anyone who remained ( in Korea ) is a Japanese collaborator ” upon his return to Korea from Chongqing in 1945, a touch of the detail of the Japanese colonial rule could possibly bring about unpredictable effects on Koreans living in the present at that time. It should be noted how difficult it was to live without any connection to the government of the Japanese Governors-General during the colonial era.

The same could be said about the Japanese old generation. As typically seen in the arguments over the Tokyo War Crime Trials, except for a few dissidents imprisoned throughout the war, the majority of Japanese people did not voice strong

opposition to the country's involvement in a series of wars such as the invasion of Manchuria, the Japan-China war, and the Pacific War. There was a compelling situation at that time that could be ironically described as "anyone who remained out of prison was a war collaborator," to borrow the words of Shin Ik-hee.

This is why most people of the old generation in Japan who experienced the wars were unwilling to refer to the Tokyo War Crimes Trials and the debates over war criminals. This is also true about the debates over Class A war criminals. Because there were Class B and Class C war criminals between Class A war criminals and ordinary citizens, the Japanese public had mixed feelings about the punishment imposed on Class B and Class C war criminals, who had been charged with simply following the orders of their superiors (Yomiuri Shimbun Osaka Shakaibu, 1986). In fact, the Japanese Parliament approved the resolutions demanding the release of war criminals three times, two of which were unanimous approvals that were even given by the Social Democratic Party Japan (SDPJ) and the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). In this sense, this experience of Japan and South Korea differs from that of Germany, which used Nazi Party membership as an important standard for defining war criminals. The case of Japan and South Korea is more similar to the case of France, which could not properly deal with collaborators working under the German military invaders and the Vichy regime (Werth, 1966).

In any case, the silence of the old generations regarding "problems that could have come back to haunt them" increased the shock of the new generations upon their discovery of newly learned facts. To be fair, the reasons behind the reluctance of the old generations to talk about the past were not entirely due to their intention of evading their responsibilities. In the case of history textbooks, for instance, the old generation of South Koreans, who had been forced to study with Japanese textbooks during the colonial period, in fact considered the absence of Japan's regret over its occupation of Korea in Japanese textbooks as natural (Kim, 1995: 31-33).

However, for the new generation of South Koreans, who believed every single word in their textbooks without a shadow of doubt, it was simply shocking to find descriptions of the same events in Japanese textbooks different from what they had learned in school. Similarly, it must have been unbelievable and unacceptable to the new generation of South Koreans that the founders of prestigious schools, including

Korea University and Yonsei University - glorified by their statues on campus - were actually accused of “ collaborationist activities ” at a time when all Koreans should have stood up to fight for their nation. Thus, they found that because the history they had learned in school had many holes, they were determined to put more efforts into rediscovering history in order to patch those holes.

A similar process took place in Japan as well. Ever since the 1980s, there has been a significant increase in descriptions of Japan’s occupation of Korea in Japan’s history textbooks. For the new generation educated with these textbooks, it was shocking to learn that the historians of both countries agreed that Korea had experienced growth in its gross domestic product during the colonial period ( see, for example, An, 2001 ) This shock obviously led the new generation to reach a simple conclusion that Japan had done some good things in the Korean Peninsula, which developed into a base of anti-Korean sentiment in Japan.

It is important to recognize that the generational transition prevented the old generations from clearing up the historical issues relating to the period they had lived through, which finally led the new generation to rediscover a limited range of historical facts of which they were sure that their predecessors were aware. Needless to say, such rediscoveries tend to be fragmentary and sensational, and further widen the gap between the ways the two countries perceive history. The old generations, who are assumed to have first-hand knowledge about the reality of the past, are attacked by the oversimplified historical perspectives of the new generations, and they are about to fade out in front of our eyes without telling us their experiences.

In this way, the emergence of the new generations who lack the knowledge of the reality of the past has turned history into nothing more than just simple and sensational events.

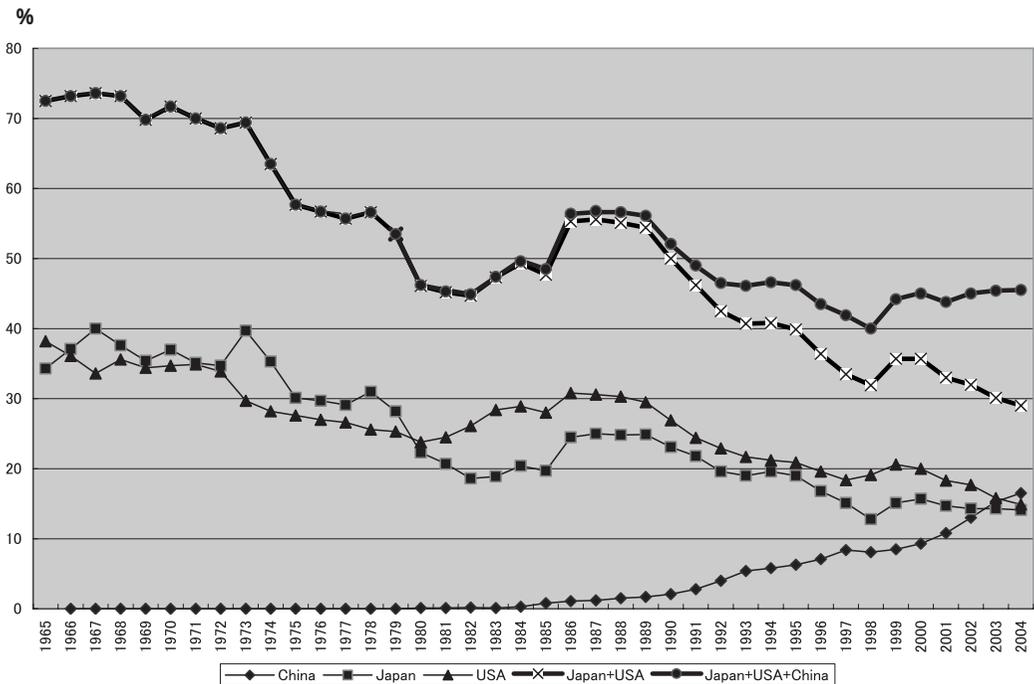
## Chapter 5. Relativization of Japan-South Korea Relations

This chapter examines interactions between Japan and South Korea, which serves as the premise for the belief that “ if the new generations of people disconnected from the past were to strengthen the level of mutual exchanges, all of the problems regarding the past would naturally be resolved ” ( Kimura, 2007 ) In the first place, have mutual exchanges between Japan and South Korea become more active?

As often pointed out by the media, the movements of people, commodities, and money between Japan and South Korea have become significantly more active than ever. For example, if we see the changes in trade volume between Japan and South Korea after the normalization of their diplomatic relations in 1965; the numbers clearly indicate that exchanges between Japan and South Korea have increased.

However, it should be kept in mind that the degree of importance of one country cannot be measured by the absolute number of exchanges between each other, but it should be determined by the relative number and quality of exchanges.

As Graph 1 indicates, since the 1970s the exchanges between South Korea and other countries have grown faster than those between South Korea and Japan and than those between South Korea and the United States. Nevertheless, relativization of economic and social exchanges between South Korea and the United States did not decrease the strategic importance of the United States to South Korea, because South Korea faces threats from North Korea. Yet, the relativization of economic and social



Source: Korea National Statistical Office, <http://www.nso.go.kr/> ( last visited March 3, 2011 ) The graph shows the percentage of share of the trade.

Graph 1: Share of Major Countries on Trade with ROK

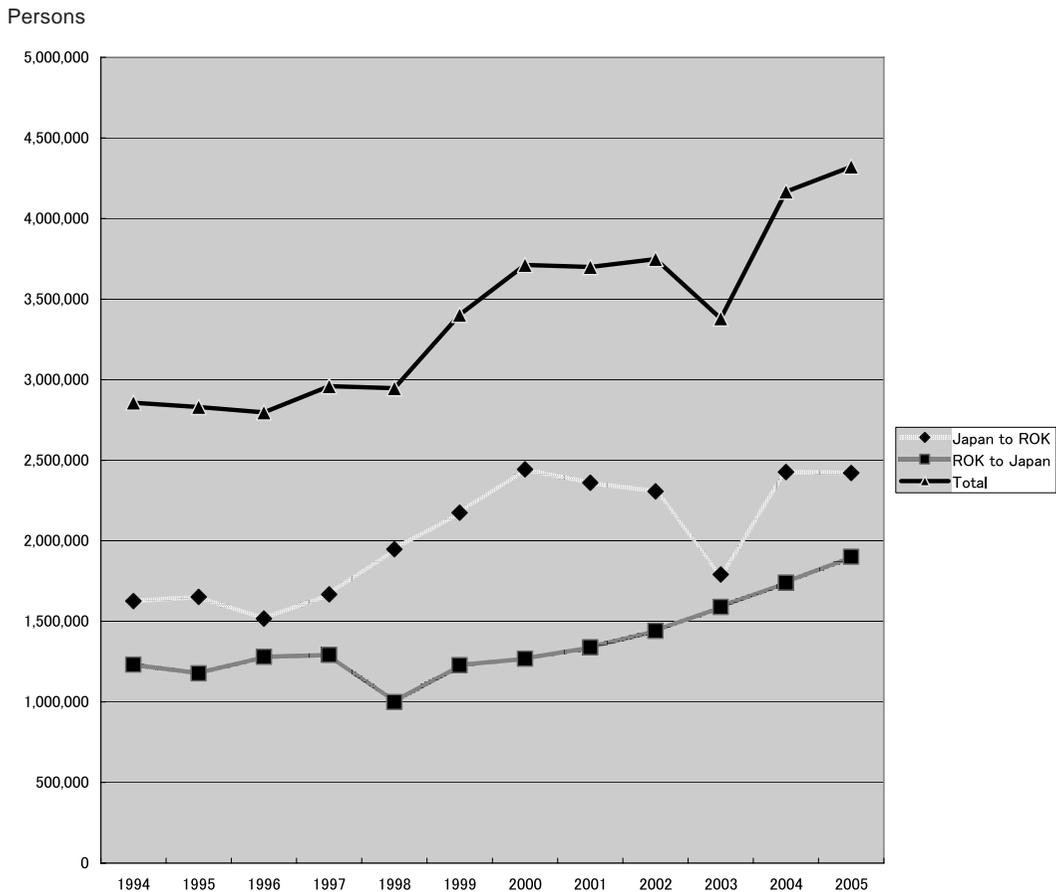
importance caused immediate damage to Japan, which is not allied with South Korea and cannot intervene militarily in the Korean Peninsula due to the restriction imposed by its Constitution and due to South Korean public sentiment.

Three reasons can be found behind the relativizing importance of Japan for South Korea. The first reason is the economic growth of South Korea and the country's rise in international stature due to its economic growth. South Korean economic growth, starting in the 1960s, encouraged South Korean companies to go all over the world, which, as a result, lowered the degree of the country's economic dependence on Japan and the United States. In addition, in the 1980s, when the Cold War was moving toward its end, it became possible for South Korea to have contact with other countries, including China, which it had not previously been allowed to interact with. This tendency increased when more choices in the world were made available to South Korea by the economic and social globalization in the 1990s.

The same is true in Japan. Although vigorous exchanges between Japan and South Korea have often been reported, it cannot be said that South Korea's importance to Japan is increasing, at least in terms of trade in commodities and human capital. As Graph 2 shows, not only the relative proportion of trade with South Korea but also the number of Japanese travelers to South Korea, which peaked in 2000, are not increasing despite the Korea-Japan FIFA World Cup and the Hallyu ( Korean wave ) which denotes the increasing popularity of South Korean pop culture in Japan. This means that the increase in exchanges of human capital, commodities, and money is relativized by the further increase in exchanges between South Korea and other countries in the world.

In summary, the relations between Japan and South Korea, which used to be very close as neighboring countries, have been relativized by economic and social globalization, which rapidly advanced in the 1990s. The status of a neighboring country used to secure a certain degree of importance economically and socially, as well as in terms of security. However, the current situation has completely changed. Globalization has given both countries more options and has inevitably decreased the value of each to the other.

As described above, the relations between Japan and South Korea today are different from what people generally understand. Under the current situation,



Source: Korea National Statistical Office, <http://www.nso.go.kr/> ( last visited March 3, 2011 )  
The graph shows the number of travelers between two countries.

Graph 2: Tourists Visits between Japan and South Korea

“ gradual decrease in mutual importance and careless discussions on historical perception ” are happening instead of “ mutual exchange generating mutual understanding. ” In fact, as seen in Table 4, Japanese people consider India as a more economically important state than South Korea, according to the 2007 survey of Japanese, South Korean, and Chinese people, by Yomiuri Shimbun, a major Japanese newspaper, along with South Korean Hankook-Ilbo and Chinese Liaowang Dongfeng Zhoukan.

This phenomenon clearly shows that the wave of Korean TV drama, which was especially significant in 2004, barely contributed to encouraging Japanese people to set

Table 4 : Which countries or areas do you think are important for economic development of your country? ( In Japan and South Korea, up to three. In China, no limitation. )

Year	Japan			South Korea			China	
	96	06	07	96	06	07	96	07
1 . Japan	Own Country			75.9	81.9	78.3	71.9	38.1
2 . China	49.4	63.0	62.6	60.2	90.9	87.7	Own Country	
3 . Korea	21.8	20.2	17.4	Own Country			13.1	26.4
4 . Thailand	1.3	3.4	2.4	2.2	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.5
5 . Malaysia	1.4	1.6	0.7	0.9	0.2	0.5	2.1	4.6
6 . Indonesia	2.0	3.6	2.2	1.2	0.7	1.2	0.4	3.6
7 . Philippines	0.9	2.0	1.0	2.0	0.5	1.3	0.9	1.9
8 . Singapore	1.7	3.7	2.4	4.2	0.4	1.7	12.6	10.8
9 . Vietnam	2.3	2.9	3.5	1.3	1.2	3.3	1.1	2.7
10 . ASEAN	19.3	13.7	11.8	7.4	4.4	3.1	2.3	17.7
11 . India	1.0	10.8	20.1	2.0	2.9	4.5	0.5	6.6
12 . Russia	3.8	2.6	4.9	3.5	2.3	3.3	8.8	34.8
13 . Australia	5.5	6.1	6.8	2.6	1.4	2.0	5.0	9.9
14 . United States	65.6	68.4	67.4	80.1	90.7	91.4	77.1	78.9
15 . United Kingdom	4.0	5.0	3.1	3.9	1.1	1.0	11.2	13.0
16 . France	2.9	3.2	1.7	1.8	0.2	0.6	5.3	13.6
17 . Germany	2.6	2.5	2.1	5.0	0.6	0.4	14.0	16.3
18 . EU	13.7	8.9	11.6	13.7	7.7	9.9	15.0	62.8
19 . Middle East	5.3	7.2	9.4	6.9	2.9	2.7	2.2	11.4
20 . Hong Kong	2.5	1.9	1.1	2.5	0.5	0.3	30.8	33.6
21 . Taiwan	3.2	3.1	2.2	6.4	0.2	0.2	11.9	19.3
22 . Others	0.0	0.3	0.4	0.2	1.2	0.7	0.3	1.7
23 . Nothing	7.3	3.5	3.4	1.9	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.0
23 . No Answer	6.9	4.1	3.7	0.1	0.5	0.0	1.4	0.0

Source: Yomiuri Newspaper. Data: Asked in August and September 2007, by Yomiuri Newspaper ( Japan ) Hankook-Ilbo ( South Korea ) and Chinese Liaowang Dongfeng Zhoukan ( China )

a high value on South Korea. The same survey indicates that, in spite of the great inflow of Japanese pop culture, the importance of Japan for Chinese people has decreased by half in the last 10 years, and it is now in the same league as Russia. In this sense, it could be said that Northeast Asia today is more in a process of dissolution than integration. Together with the movement of rediscovery of history and oblivion of the past, this can be interpreted as creating a situation where critical discussions about one another can easily occur.

Such a situation makes it difficult for Japan and South Korea to share a common “ historical perception ” and to develop the relationship between them into multilateral cooperative relationships in the region. This is clear when compared to the European Union ( EU ) As the EU developed from the European Economic Community ( EEC ) economically complementary relationships with neighboring countries were regionally crucial to the integration of Western Europe. In addition, it is noteworthy that these Western European countries set up their common potential enemy in terms of security

outside of Europe, namely the Soviet Union, during the Cold War. ASEAN, which was formed against the backdrop of the Vietnamese War, also had its potential enemy outside of its region. In those days of a less globalized world, the presence of neighboring countries was enormously important both economically and politically. Therefore, each government was able to build smooth cooperative relations.

Nevertheless, the situation of Northeast Asia, as in Japan and South Korea today, differs greatly from that of Europe and that of Southeast Asia, as seen in Table 5. It is well known that South Korean people share anti-Japan sentiment caused by the disputes relating to “historical perceptions.” In Japan, likewise, a negative public opinion about South Korea, the so-called “Kenkan-Ron,” is attracting a lot of attention from the Japanese people. Furthermore, in 2005, South Korean President Noh Moo-hyun strongly suggested to U.S. President George W. Bush that the alliance between South Korea and the United States set up Japan as its potential enemy. The above-mentioned survey by Yomiuri Shimbun indicates that the South Korean public has a strong suspicion about Japan and China, and so does the Japanese public about China. The case of the relations between Eastern European countries of the EU and Russia clearly exemplifies the difficulty of building regional cooperative relations in a situation where countries in the same region consider each other as potential enemies. The

Table 5 : Which countries or areas do you think can be a possible threat to your security?  
(No limits)

Year	Japan				South Korea				China
	02	05	06	07	02	05	06	07	07
1 . Japan	Own Country				43.8	57.2	55.2	37.5	78.2
2 . South Korea	6.0	6.2	10.9	5.8	Own Country				12.3
3 . United States	18.8	14.9	17.6	19.7	36.9	31.4	32.0	29.5	75.2
4 . China	23.5	40.3	44.0	46.1	23.6	22.6	36.0	46.6	Own Country
5 . ASEAN	2.1	0.7	0.5	0.9	0.4	0.2	0.5	0.9	4.9
6 . EU	1.3	1.0	0.5	1.0	1.0	0.8	0.2	3.3	8.1
7 . Russia	15.9	9.9	12.7	24.3	12.5	6.5	6.0	10.3	28.7
8 . Taiwan	1.3	0.7	0.5	0.8	1.5	0.3	0.4	0.6	36.6
9 . North Korea	62.4	81.9	77.7	73.6	71.5	64.3	59.1	71.0	9.7
10 . India	No Choice		2.9	4.0	No Choice		0.2	1.4	35.1
11 . Middle East	16.4	8.2	7.8	11.8	2.2	2.6	2.8	11.4	7.1
12 . Oceania	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.2	---	0.1	0.1	0.0	1.2
13 . Africa	No Choice		0.3	0.2	No Choice		0.2	0.6	1.7
14 . Latin America	No Choice		0.8	0.4	No Choice		0.1	1.3	1.3
15 . Others	0.2	---	0.2	0.1	---	---	---	---	1.3
16 . Nothing	14.1	6.5	4.3	6.3	5.5	2.9	1.3	2.2	1.6
17 . No Answer	4.8	2.0	3.3	3.0	1.2	0.2	0.3	0.5	1.1

Source: Yomiuri Newspaper. Data: Asked in August and September 2007, by Yomiuri News Paper (Japan) Hankook-Ilbo (South Korea) and Chinese Liaowang Dongfeng Zhoukan (China)

delay in building regional cooperative relations between Japan and South Korea and among the countries of Northeast Asia stems not only from the issues related to the past but also from this structural factor. Furthermore, the issues about the past are greatly influenced by such a structural factor.

## Chapter 6. Nationalistic Populism and Its Effect

To begin with, let me summarize below what has been argued in the previous chapters.

Due to its unique process, the decolonization of Korea deprived the Japanese and South Korean peoples of opportunities to talk about two events in the past, the colonial rule and World War II, so as to have a common perception of history. Japan and South Korea, which had avoided facing the issues about the past, finally concluded the Japan-South Korea Annexation Treaty in 1965.

In this way, the old generations of people, who had experienced “ the past, ” wasted precious time. Later, in the 1980s, the new generations, who did not personally experience events in the past, became the center of society instead of the old generations, and began “ rediscovering history. ” As a consequence, the issues concerning “ historical perceptions, ” which the old generations avoided challenging, came to draw people’s attention in both Japan and South Korea, and the number of disputes between the two countries over the issues rose.

There was another background to this situation: the relativization of relations between Japan and South Korea, a phenomenon that rapidly advanced after the end of the 1970s. As a result, the importance of Japan to South Korea and vice versa drastically declined, which generated the situation where both governments could treat one another.

Although conflicts between the two countries had been kept to a minimum through the efforts of some political elites in the two countries by the middle of the 1990s, since 2000 the conflicts have been gradually escalating. A series of disputes over “ historical perceptions, ” such as Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit to Yasukuni, the issue of Takeshima/Dokdo, and history book issues, reached their peak in 2005, and Japan and South Korea finally faced the volatile situation of the sea around Takeshima/Dokdo.

Why have the issues of historical perceptions worsened since the year 2000? As stated above, I argued the lack of political leadership, which was expected to take a crucial role in minimizing the issues, as a possible answer to the question. It is the crumbling trust in political leadership and the social elite that is behind the scenes.

In order to prove this interpretation, the following part considers the degrees of public confidence in the governments of Japan and South Korea, based on the data from World Value Survey (see Tables 6 and 7) The data is from one of the most reliable sources, and it can be used to globally compare Japan's and South Korea's situations with the situations of other countries. As clearly indicated in the tables, in Japan and South Korea the level of public confidence in the governments and political parties of the two countries, respectively, is strikingly lower than that in most other countries. It goes without saying that this data should be used only as a guide, as it is greatly influenced by the degree of expectation of each government and political parties and by the degree of democratization in the respective countries.

However, as one can see in Tables 6 and 7, compiled by the data from World Wide Survey, the confidence of the peoples of Japan and South Korea in their respective governments, political parties, and parliaments is distinguishably lower than that in their countries' other social institutions such as corporate companies, civic groups, the police, and the military, suggesting that the statistics tell more than just

Table 6 : Confidence in Government

1	Vietnam [ 2001 ]	97.9	20	Turkey [ 2001 ]	46.4
2	China [ 2001 ]	96.7	21	Puerto Rico [ 2001 ]	44.5
3	Bangladesh [ 2002 ]	87.3	22	Spain [ 2000 ]	44.2
4	Jordan [ 2001 ]	84.3	23	Canada [ 2000 ]	42.3
5	Tanzania. United Republic Of [ 2001 ]	82.9	24	Iraq [ 2004 ]	39.7
6	Uganda [ 2001 ]	77.8	25	Pakistan [ 2001 ]	39.0
7	Iran ( Islamic Republic of ) [ 2000 ]	68.5	26	United States [ 1999 ]	37.8
8	South Africa [ 2001 ]	60.8	27	Republic of Moldova [ 2002 ]	37.5
9	Egypt [ 2000 ]	60.8	28	Mexico [ 2000 ]	37.1
10	Morocco [ 2001 ]	60.7	29	Kyrgyzstan [ 2003 ]	35.1
11	Albania [ 2002 ]	58.0	30	Montenegro [ 2001 ]	34.0
12	Chile [ 2000 ]	57.6	31	Serbia [ 2001 ]	31.3
13	India [ 2001 ]	56.2	32	Republic of Korea [ 2001 ]	30.3
14	Venezuela [ 2000 ]	56.0	33	Bosnia and Herzegovina [ 2001 ]	29.5
15	Morocco [ 2001 ]	55.7	34	Japan [ 2000 ]	27.1
16	Algeria [ 2002 ]	54.0	35	Peru [ 2001 ]	19.5
17	Indonesia [ 2001 ]	52.4	36	Argentina [ 1999 ]	19.4
18	Philippines [ 2001 ]	51.0	37	Macedonia. Republic of [ 2001 ]	10.9
19	Nigeria [ 2000 ]	48.1			%

Source: World Values Survey, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/> ( last visited January 19, 2008 )

Table 7 : Confidence in Political Parties

1	China [ 2001 ]	92.8	20	Kyrgyzstan [ 2003 ]	25.7
2	Vietnam [ 2001 ]	91.6	21	Mexico [ 2000 ]	24.6
3	Bangladesh [ 2002 ]	79.0	22	Republic of Moldova [ 2002 ]	24.0
4	Tanzania, United Republic of [ 2001 ]	59.3	23	Canada [ 2000 ]	23.1
5	Egypt [ 2000 ]	50.7	24	United States [ 1999 ]	22.6
6	Philippines [ 2001 ]	45.8	25	Venezuela [ 2000 ]	20.1
7	Nigeria [ 2000 ]	44.2	26	Puerto Rico [ 2001 ]	19.8
8	South Africa [ 2001 ]	44.2	27	Morocco [ 2001 ]	19.6
9	Uganda [ 2001 ]	40.9	28	Algeria [ 2002 ]	19.0
10	Iran, Islamic Republic of [ 2000 ]	34.4	29	Japan [ 2000 ]	18.2
11	India [ 2001 ]	33.5	30	Morocco [ 2001 ]	18.0
12	Indonesia [ 2001 ]	33.1	31	Serbia [ 2001 ]	14.6
13	Albania [ 2002 ]	29.4	32	Bosnia and Herzegovina [ 2001 ]	14.5
14	Turkey [ 2001 ]	29.1	33	Republic of Korea [ 2001 ]	10.8
15	Jordan [ 2001 ]	28.4	34	Macedonia, Republic of [ 2001 ]	9.5
16	Pakistan [ 2001 ]	27.9	35	Peru [ 2001 ]	7.9
17	Chile [ 2000 ]	27.7	36	Argentina [ 1999 ]	7.3
18	Spain [ 2000 ]	27.3			%
19	Montenegro [ 2001 ]	25.9			

Source: World Values Survey, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/> ( last visited January 18, 2008 )

numbers.

Why have the people of Japan and South Korea lost trust in their political elites? To answer this question, it must be noted that the elites who went through certain paths of social ascendance in the two countries have generally enjoyed high levels of authority and taken credit for their countries ’ rapid economic growth, which was explained as “ appropriate political leadership from the top.” In other words, it was believed that those who graduated from Tokyo University or Seoul National University became bureaucrats, quickly ascended through the ranks of political elites, and helped achieve economic growth in their countries.

However, the slowing economic growth and the financial crisis of the 1990s caused distrust not only in economic structures but also in political elites among the peoples of the two countries ( Ohtake, 2001 ) The decline in public confidence also spread to universities, bureaucratic systems, and politicians as a whole, whose agencies are now exposed to international competition. It used to be good enough for Tokyo University and Seoul National University to simply secure the highest position in the hierarchy in their respective countries. However, people today view these schools and the graduates of these schools in a completely different light. People are more interested in how these schools measure up compared to other top schools of the world, and they

are seriously concerned about the abilities of individual graduates of the schools. The political elites lost their authority in the globalizing world, and the *raison d'être* of the agencies to which they belong was also called into question, which severely damaged the political and economic systems in Japan and South Korea. Furthermore, this phenomenon was made apparent by the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and Japan's stagnant economy.

As a result, since 2002 relatively young political leaders who do not have any experience as bureaucrats and who are backed by their individual popularity rather than by the traditional political organizations have appeared one after the other in Northeast Asian countries. The emergence of Japan's Junichiro Koizumi in 2001 and South Korea's Roh Moo-hyun in 2002 as the leaders of their countries was the result of the traditional elites' decline and political transformation in these two countries. In response to declining political party approval ratings in Northeast Asian countries, political parties in each country decided to choose individuals who had higher popularity than did their political parties themselves in order to securely win the coming elections ( Hirano, 2005; Yamada, 2005 ).

Nevertheless, the problem is that their populist political styles also got stuck in the early stage. It is true that, by criticizing the traditional elites, populist leaders at first succeeded in gaining enthusiastic support from the public. However, these new leaders shared a common serious problem in that none of them had a grand design for how to actually reform their societies.

Thus, the reform policies of the populist leaders were nothing more than a collection of patchwork, as seen in the case of Koizumi in 2005, who succeeded in adopting the curious logic of masking a mere postal reform as an important agenda item that the people of Japan longed for ( Ohtake, 2006 ) It did not take long for voters to realize this fact, and the public approval ratings of the leaders have sharply dropped since then.

Of course, there are clear reasons behind all this. In today's globalizing world, the economic policies of each country are forced to be similar, as there is no option other than going toward a free market economy. It has become impossible to achieve the high growth rates of the past when income levels have reached a certain level, and there is no magic way to overcome this situation. It is hard to find a new model for a

political system in a country where the process of democratization has been completed. Neo-liberal policies are fueling nationalism in each country, causing a widening gap between the center and the periphery and between the rich and the poor. Using public finances or low-interest rate policies as a means to ease these disparities will obviously lead to bigger budget deficits.

It is important to note that the days of “ populism with popularity, ” which peaked around 2003 when “ reform-minded ” political leaders maintained high approval ratings, have been shifting to a period of “ populism without popularity, ” where no political leaders enjoy popularity among their people. Thus, political leaders of Japan and South Korea who faced difficulties in gaining approval from their people began turning to nationalistic discourses as a solution.

Structures surrounding Japan and South Korea have greatly altered, and mutual importance has declined; while the old generations wasted their time, the new generations started “ revising their history ” and escalated the debates about historical perceptions. Politicians with weak political ground in one country attack the other country with nationalistic discourses by employing the achievements from the practices of “ historical revision. ” Considering these circumstances, relations between Japan and South Korea seem to have reached the point where they are difficult to mend.

## Conclusion

This article mainly argues three points about the issues relating to “ the past ” in Northeast Asia today, focusing especially on the debates between Japan and South Korea.

First of all, the situation today is completely different from the belief that “ the past ” would be settled when “ the new generations of people ” took over from “ the old generations of people. ” Rather, today’s new generations “ rediscover the history ” in order to revise “ the outdated historical perceptions, ” which excluded what “ old generations of people ” did not or could not talk about after World War II. As a result, the debates over “ historical perceptions ” are overheated.

It should not be forgotten that the discussions of the new generations are often one-dimensional compared to those of the old generations who lived through what is

now called the past. The new generations also tend to have a strong obsession with individualized perspectives rather than seeking a comprehensive understanding of the social realities of the past. As a result, these tendencies seem to strengthen public impressions in both Japan and South Korea that the counterpart is distorting history. Enough attention should be paid to “historical perceptions of the other counterpart” as well as to the shared perception of the two countries about the past. It is important to understand and admit that we are all losing our memory of “the past” and often understand events in an over-simplified way.

The second point is that Northeast Asian countries have a rocky road ahead in terms of “mutual exchanges.” Contrary to popular belief, mutual importance among Northeast Asian countries is decreasing, with the exception of the growing importance of China’s rapidly expanding economy, to Japan and South Korea. Northeast Asian countries also consider one another as their potential enemies when drawing up their security strategies. Under this situation, arguments over the past have resulted in a careless provocation of nationalism in each country.

Thirdly, together with the arrival of the age of “populism without popularity” or of the “absence of the ruling elites,” the current situation is tempting the political leaders of each country to rely on nationalist rhetoric to boost their public approval ratings. Koizumi’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine on 15 August, 2006, is, for example, interpreted more as a political strategy than a representation of his beliefs. Koizumi, once noted for his liberal stance on diplomatic issues, promised visits to Yasukuni during his 2001 campaign for the Liberal Democratic Party’s presidential election, countering his rival Ryutaro Hashimoto, who had strong backing from Japanese war veterans. In South Korea, President Roh Moo-hyun curiously mentioned potential military threats by Japan during the launching ceremony of the country’s first Aegis-equipped destroyer, and also purposefully gave the new amphibious landing ship the nationalistic name of “Dokdo.” These examples typically show the Japanese and South Korean political leaders’ rough handling of the sensitive issues between the two countries.

Mutual importance declined in the societies of Japan and South Korea; people put the past out of their minds; they criticize each other over a past that they did not personally experience by over-simplified “rediscovery” of history; and political leaders

treat the sensitive issues of both countries roughly in order to gain popularity. Considering these circumstances, it is difficult to expect a bright future for Japan-South Korea relations.

Nevertheless, two things should be borne in mind. One is that relations among the Northeast Asian countries are still significant. It is certain that relations among the Northeast Asian countries are becoming more relativized in the globalizing world. When China’s economic growth slows down, the tendency of relativization will be even more significant. However, relations among the Northeast Asian countries have great importance as compared, for example, to those with European countries. It is necessary to seriously consider what we can do for the future rather than continuing these practices of mutual contempt.

The second thing to be remembered is that, despite the uncertainty in the region of Northeast Asia that is sometimes pointed out, the region has successfully avoided war for more than half a century since the end of the Korean War in 1953 and has enjoyed rapid economic growth rarely seen in other regions of the world. Although the word “ futuristic ” is often emphasized, it is only by learning from the past that the way toward the future can be paved. It is, of course, important to discuss the unfortunate events of the past, but at the same time it is also crucial to pay attention to another kind of past so that we can build a foundation for a friendly future relationship among the Northeast Asian countries.

#### Note

- i This paper is written based on the following paper, Kan Kimura, “ Popyurizumu no naka no rekishi ninshiki: Nikkan no jirei wo chushinni ”, *Leviathan*, vol. 42, 2008.

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