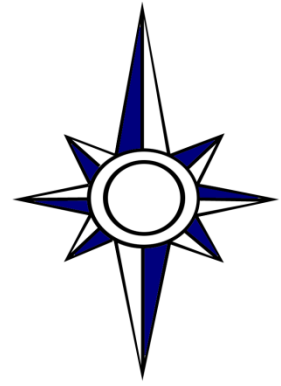


Comparative Connections

A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations



Japan-Korea Relations: The Art of Politics and the Politics of Art

David Kang, University of Southern California
Jiun Bang, University of Southern California

At the end of 2014, there were both stern warnings but also cautious optimism for what 2015 held in store for Japan and South Korea in anticipation of the 50th anniversary in June of the restoration of diplomatic relations and the upcoming 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. The early months of 2015 did not bring any new explosive point of contention to the surface, but issues such as talks on comfort women/sex slaves and territorial sovereignty over Dokdo/Takeshima remained the focus of relations. The most visible manifestation came with Prime Minister Abe's visit to the US in late April. Clearly playing to his audience, he reassured Americans but disappointed Koreans. While governments were fine-tuning their art of politics, a group of nongovernmental actors – academics, large corporations, and the art community – got swept away by the politicization of bilateral relations.

Academics, corporate actors, and the politics of art

News surfaced in mid-January with the release of a statement that New York-based publisher, McGraw Hill Education, had rejected requests by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) through its New York Consulate General in November 2014 to make revisions to the text regarding comfort women in a book titled *Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past* co-authored by Jerry H. Bentley and Herbert Ziegler. With the benefit of hindsight, we now know there were hints of what was to come much earlier: during a [press conference](#) by Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio on Nov. 18, 2014, a reporter from *Asahi Shimbun* asked about reports of a request by the Japanese government to an embassy in the US to a certain publisher. Kishida confirmed that he had “heard a request was made” but did not have details at hand. It was not until January that the story really took off with the [Wall Street Journal](#) (Jan. 15, 2015) reporting that a meeting had taken place in December 2014 between Japanese officials and representatives from McGraw-Hill, while the [New York Times](#) (Jan. 29, 2015) highlighted Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's remarks during a parliamentary session where he stated that he was “shocked” at the textbook and that “this kind of textbook is being used in the United States, as we did not protest the things we should have, or we failed to correct the things we should have.”

Round two began in earnest in March, with the [news](#) that a group of 19 Japanese historians and academics planned to send a letter to McGraw-Hill to take issue with eight particular phrases regarding comfort women/sex slaves in the aforementioned textbook. Hata Ikuhiko, who is part of the group of 19 and an emeritus professor at Nihon University, has been a long proponent of the cause, as evidenced by his 20-page piece in 2007 titled “[No Organized or Forced Recruitment: Misconceptions About Comfort Women and The Japanese Military](#),” published by

the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact in Tokyo. His basic stance is summed up well by a particular paragraph where he states:

The comfort women issue is a political problem raised by forces (both domestic and foreign) with multiple, diverse agendas. If we were to describe it in Clausewitz's terms, we would call it the "continuation of politics by other means." For that very reason, the absence of bloodshed notwithstanding, the facts have been shoved aside. Instead, what we have is political power games that employ just about every known devious tactic, from cajoling and coercion to deception and trickery.

We see a similar concern (but in less ominous language) for the unwanted "contamination" of history by politics from the other side in a [letter](#) submitted by Alexis Dudden (University of Connecticut) and signed by 19 other academics, to the March issue of *Perspectives on History* – a news magazine of the American Historical Association (AHA). While the letter does express "dismay" at recent actions by the Japanese government, it would seem incomplete to simply treat the letter as one denouncing Tokyo on charges of historical revisionism. The letter states that "we recognize that the Japanese government is not alone in seeking to narrate history in its own interest," and proceeds to cite the US and its actions to obscure accounts of African-American slavery and Russia's law criminalizing what the Kremlin sees as false information of Soviet activities during World War II. A part that did not get cited in enough of the media was the sentence that "the Japanese government, however, is now directly targeting the work of historians both at home and *abroad*" [emphasis added]. Knowingly or unknowingly, the feeling of unease aimed at the McGraw-Hill vs. Japan case may stem from an instinctive apprehension we get when governments try to enforce their jurisdiction beyond their borders.

"Influence" was a common theme during the first months of 2015. Around the same time the Dudden letter gained media attention, it was revealed that the Japanese government had budgeted over \$15 million to fund Japan studies at nine universities abroad, including Georgetown University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). [Some](#) framed this effort as "part of a "soft power" push to counter the growing influence of China and South Korea," while some [Korean sources](#) preferred to label it as "stealth lobbying." [The Hoya](#), Georgetown's student newspaper, confirmed that the Japanese government was considering donating \$5 million to the Walsh School of Foreign Service to fund an endowed chair in Japanese studies, but that the decision was not finalized as of March 31, 2015. There are, of course, precedents. There was immense [debate](#) in 1997 when the Turkish government approached UCLA as one of six universities to establish an endowed chair of Ottoman and Turkish history. There was visible uproar from the Armenian community, which suspected political propaganda as the driver behind the offer and accused the Turkish government of historical revisionism. In the end, the \$1 million offer was turned down by a narrow vote of 18-17 by the department faculty on the grounds that the terms of the gift could compromise academic freedom.

In 2015, we see similar dynamics at work between Japan and South Korea. An [article](#) in Korea's *JoongAng Daily* responded to news of the Japanese government funding Japan studies abroad by using the following phrases: "lobbying to change history," "spending money to deny history," and "waging a "war of money" by bringing history disputes with Asian neighbors to the United States." One could argue that this issue may remain a relatively straight-forward case involving academic scholarship, but the more likely scenario is that it will become a greater point of

contention than the McGraw-Hill affair, not only because it is ongoing and it will have long-lasting effects (once the funds are distributed), but also because it has all the makings of a drama: politics and (large sums of) money.

There were also plans for Korean funding in the US for the purpose of shaping perceptions. The [Los Angeles Times](#) reported in March that the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) had sealed a 10-year deal with Hyundai, which marked the “longest corporate sponsorship in its [LACMA] history.” Among other things, there will be three exhibitions rolling out in 2018 that include a show on Korean calligraphy and exhibitions on 20th century and contemporary Korean art. This comes on the heels of Hyundai Motor sealing an 11-year exclusive partnership in 2014 with the Tate Modern Art Museum in London, representing the museum’s longest contract in its history. Aside from the most immediate question regarding the politics behind donors (which also applies to the case of funding universities), this also raises some questions about the identity of corporations, especially given the discourse on Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and their reputedly global character. Another art scene that placed the Japan-Korea politics directly on display was Gallery Furuto in Nerima Ward, Tokyo. An interesting [article](#) (“Self-Censorship is Biggest Threat to Free Speech in Japan,” by Yoshida Reiji and Nagata Kazuaki) in the Jan. 22 *The Japan Times*, discussed an exhibition at Gallery Furuto that showcased work that had formerly been rejected or removed by other exhibition organizers in Japan. Among these is a sculpture by Kim Seo-kyung and Kim Eun-sung of a girl dressed in traditional Korean garb sitting in a chair (the prototype for the controversial bronze comfort women/sex slaves statue in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul), and photos of former comfort women/sex slaves taken by photographer Ahn Se-hong. The relationship between politics and art was not really picked up by the media (with the exception of *The Japan Times*), but it is definitely an area worth keeping in mind, especially given its potential to *heal* rather than *hurt* Japan-Korea relations.

Yet another interesting development involving corporate actors was the announcement by [YBM Sisa.com](#), a South Korean provider of online and offline educational services that its subsidiary, YBM Japan, had inked a deal with Mitsui Fudosan Co., Ltd., to open an “English Village” in Osaka starting in the fall. The plans for the 4,870 sq. meter facility would be the first “Korean-style English Village in Japan.” The company reported that they hoped to attract roughly half a million people annually, and raise ¥2 billion (almost \$17 million). In [2006](#), when Oxford University announced that it would not admit any new students for its Korea studies program that had been set up under the auspices of the Korea Foundation due to a lack of funds, YBM Sisa matched the funds from the Korea Foundation and donated 1.5 billion won (roughly \$1.4 million); it also has an arrangement with Harvard University, going all the way back to 1997 with Min Sunshik – president of YBM – [donating](#) \$500,000 to the endowment of the Harvard University Korea Institute. More poignant regarding the “English Village” though, is the question of what it means for South Korea to be running an “English village” in Japan, and whether this may simply become another shameless plug for *Hallyu* or the “Korean Wave.”

Learning the art of politics

There are some well-known ironies of life – you are rarely taught how to teach, and yet you are expected to become a (brilliant) teacher; there is no class on *doing* politics and yet politicians

somehow fashion their whole career out of doing it. There are many ways that any semblance of even a formal curriculum (or a manual) on how to maneuver through politics could quickly go wrong, however savvy or effective: Machiavelli's *The Prince* comes to mind. The fact that it is easy to do but hard to master is perhaps why politics often seem so messy and unproductive – everyone is continually grappling with the art of politics and this is especially true for Japan-Korea relations.

There were several notable meetings between Tokyo and Seoul. The sixth and seventh round of bilateral talks concerning comfort women/sex slaves headed by Ihara Junichi and Lee Sang-deok took place on Jan. 19 (Tokyo) and March 16 (Seoul), respectively. A foreign ministers meeting between Kishida Fumio and counterpart Yun Byung-se took place in Seoul on March 21, the first such meeting since Kishida was appointed. Issues ranged from trilateral cooperation involving China, agreement to keep North Korea's status as a nonnuclear weapons state, the tightening of Japanese marine product imports, and resolution of the controversy surrounding comfort women/sex slaves. The meeting seemed more like an "ice-breaker" to get things going for the 50th anniversary of normalization of relations – as evidenced by the goodie bag that Kishida presented Yun, which included a wooden spoon (*Shamoji*) from his birthplace of Hiroshima that brandished a 50th anniversary logo, and a stamp that is scheduled for release in commemoration of the anniversary. (The large size of the rice paddle can be admired [here](#).) Meanwhile, according to the [Mainichi Shimbun](#), a nongovernmental consultative group between Japan and Korea held its first meeting in Tokyo on March 22. The group includes former Japanese Prime Ministers Fukuda Yasuo and Mori Yoshiro and former Korean Prime Ministers Lee Hong-koo and Gong Ro-myung. The focus seemed to be on reviving the spirit of relations more than substantive problem-solving.

All the well-wishing and goodwill surrounding the anniversary, however, could not prevent familiar bilateral issues from remaining on auto-pilot. On Jan. 21, South Korea summoned the Japanese military attaché at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul to protest Japanese claims to Dokdo/Takeshima in the Korean language translation of the Japan 2014 Defense White Paper. (The Seoul government supposedly also received [flack](#) for taking a full week to take any action after receiving the translated version on Jan. 13, demonstrating the art of juggling both domestic and foreign audiences.) There was another summons in response to the Takeshima Day ceremony on Feb. 22 in Shimane Prefecture. In swift response to the release of the outcome of the review of middle-school textbooks by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology on April 6 – which emphasized Japan's sovereignty over disputed territory and a softening of its wartime aggression – Seoul summoned Japanese Ambassador Bessho Koro to protest. Japan released its Diplomatic Blue Book the next day, which prompted South Korea to summon Kanasugi Kenji, a minister at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, over Japan's claims to Dokdo/Takeshima and the framing of comfort women/sex slaves. The back-to-back incidents had [some](#) in Korea branding the Korean government's "quiet diplomacy" with Japan as ineffective. There was also a rather odd incident reported by [The Korea Times](#) of an announcement made by Seo Kyoung-duk (known for his efforts in promoting Korea's territorial sovereignty over Dokdo) that he will host a "hole-in-one" golf challenge on the contested islets, as part of the 70th anniversary of South Korea's independence from Japan. Seo reportedly stated that "If the golf event is publicized, the world will know about the islets." The risk is that this will more widely propagate the stereotype of the "golf-loving Korean."

The general diplomatic climate did not encourage progress. The two countries [announced](#) in February that they will let their 14-year-old currency swap arrangement expire on Feb. 23. According to a South Korean official, the main reason behind the lapse was simply the lack of need, given the ample stock of foreign-exchange reserves, thereby thwarting any speculations about the impact of politics on economic and financial affairs. Obviously, this alone did not hurt relations, but [bilateral trade](#) also declined for the third straight year in 2014. Based on a report by the Korea International Trade Association (KITA), bilateral trade came to \$85.95 billion last year (a 9.2 percent decrease from 2013), and South Korea's exports to Japan fell by 7.2 percent with imports also shrinking by 10.4 percent to \$53.77 billion. Added to this was the 24.8 percent decline, compared to same time last year, in Japanese tourists (at 142,587) to South Korea in January, which even the estimated [1,400 Japanese attendees](#) of the "Korea-Japan Friendship Event" to promote cultural exchange and tourism will not fix. Meanwhile, the number of travelers from Korea to Japan increased 40.1 percent to 358,000 in March, recording the highest number for the five months running (Dec. 2014: 270,903; Jan. 2015: 358,100; Feb. 2015: 321,600). (Figures are from the [Japan National Tourism Organization](#).) Therefore, it would be misleading to take only the flow in one direction as a signal of the health of bilateral relations.

The art of the spoken and written word is critical to politics and there were two especially poignant incidents that illustrated this. During an [interview](#) by David Ignatius (*Washington Post*) with Prime Minister Abe in March, there was a question regarding historical revisionism; Abe stated that "on the question of comfort women, when my thought goes to these people, who have been victimized by human trafficking and gone through immeasurable pain and suffering beyond description, my heart aches." In a March 26 [opinion piece](#), Ignatius quoted an aide to Abe claiming that the reference to "trafficking" was the first time that Abe had done so in a public manner. Meanwhile, the same phrase was decidedly troubling for [some](#) in Korea who viewed the words as being hollow, and expressing "no remorse, contrition or apology in "my heart aches," as it is "a mere expression of emotion."

The written word was at the center of some confusion when the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) revised its description of South Korea on its website as "an important neighboring country that shares basic values, such as freedom, democracy and a market economy, with Japan," to a more [minimalist version](#) of "the most important neighboring country for Japan." (The [English website](#) simply reads "Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) are most important neighbors to each other," updated March 5, 2015). The 2015 Diplomatic Bluebook released by Japan in April also left out any reference to "shared fundamental values," which further questioned Japan's motivation behind the change. The [Asahi Shimbun](#) called this move "an apparent criticism of Seoul's judicial system," referring to the indictment of the *Sankei Shimbun's* former bureau chief, Kato Tatsuya, on charges of defaming the South Korean president (see previous issue of *Comparative Connections* for a refresher). In March, [The Korea Times](#) reported that the new Seoul bureau chief for *Sankei* had still not been issued a press card from the Korean Culture and Information Service (KCIS) for foreign correspondents, despite having applied for it after arriving in Seoul in September 2014. What makes the "retaliation" (if it is one) suspect though is that Japan is going through its own domestic ordeal with Uemura Takashi, a former *Asahi Shimbun* reporter and currently an adjunct lecturer at Hokusei Gakuen University in Sapporo, filing a libel suit against Bungeishunju Ltd., and Nishioka Tsutomu, a

professor at Tokyo Christian University, for erroneously claiming that Uemura had fabricated stories about comfort women/sex slaves (One can read more about Uemura's travails [here](#).) The [Japan Times](#) reported that Uemura was seeking ¥16.5 million in damages from the major publisher and the scholar of Korean studies.

No system is perfect, so the danger of becoming those people living in glass houses throwing rocks always exists. What was missing from the quiet announcement about Japan's revised description of bilateral relations was probably transparency, both in the process and the final decision. Hence, we (the public) are left with only speculations about what may have prompted the change, which only increases the risk of that void becoming politicized or empowering those who would prefer to fill that void with xenophobic rhetoric rather than healthy debate. If anything, these incidents will hopefully demonstrate the need to be more reflexive, and motivate both countries into *action* rather than words (either spoken or written), which may cut down on the room for misinterpretation or exchange of "sweet nothings."

The stark contrast in reporting by US and South Korean media on PM Abe's visit to the US was unmistakable but somewhat predictable. Although the US media seemed to play up the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the US-Japan alliance that were mentioned during PM Abe's speech to Congress on April 29, most of the major outlets ([The Wall Street Journal](#), [Washington Post](#), and [Reuters](#)) still raised the issue of Japan's contrition for its aggression during World War II and the treatment of comfort women/sex slaves. The sentiment within South Korea could be summed up as one of disappointment and slight indignation. The disappointment stemmed from the lack of an apology regarding the comfort women/sex slaves, and the generality of Abe's statement that "armed conflicts have always made women suffer the most." (As evidence of the level of emotion this issue has in South Korea, a member of the ruling Saenuri Party, Kim Jong-hoon, had actually flown into Washington ahead of the planned speech in protest of Abe.) Part of the indignation was also attributable Abe's visits to the National World War II Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Holocaust Museum to pay respects to history and note the atrocities of war, which (at least in the eyes of the Korean public) did not translate into his speech in Congress. This left the South Korean public to feel catharsis by capitalizing on Joseph Choi, a student at Harvard University, who confronted Abe during his 9-minute lecture at the Kennedy School on April 27 by raising a question on Japan's denial regarding sexual slavery. Some Koreans felt that the US was not completely immune to the indignation, as news surfaced of the lavish treatment that Abe received during the state dinner (the full menu with accompanying descriptions is available [here](#)), which included *Dassai*, Asahi Shuzo's signature *Junmai Daiginjo*, a pure-rice sake (market price of roughly \$300) and the first roll-out of the new Obama State China Service.

Making three "right" turns on North Korea?

By the end of 2014, there was a feeling that Tokyo had made a few "right" turns on relations with North Korea: the first in May 2014, when bilateral talks placed the Japanese abductees issue on the table; the second coming in July with the easing of some sanctions against the North and Pyongyang's decision to reopen the investigation into the abductees. After just two though, it seemed like Tokyo was getting that impending sick feeling that it might just be back where it started. Therefore, holding out on the third turn, Japanese Foreign Minister Kishida announced

on March 30 that Japan would extend sanctions that were set to expire in April for another two years. Those sanctions include barring North Korea's ships from entering Japanese ports for non-humanitarian activities, placing limits on trade, and restricting flights to and from the countries. The title of an April 1 article in the [Asahi Shimbun](#) sums up the mood well: "Japan Draws a Blank in Latest Secret Talks with North Korea on Abduction Issue." The article reported that the two countries had held unofficial talks in Dalian, China from Feb. 28 to March 1, to discuss the Japanese abductee issue, with not much "show and tell" from Pyongyang and certainly, no hints of any preliminary report on the reinvestigation in sight.

Meanwhile, it was [reported](#) on March 2, that North Korea had fired two short-range missiles off its east coast a couple hours before the annual military exercises between South Korea and the US. Japan swiftly lodged a protest with the North, citing that the missile launches not only posed "aviation and navigation safety" problems, but also constituted an infringement of United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions that ban the country from utilizing ballistic missile technology for launching projectiles. Tokyo must be wondering how to balance condemnation with aspirations for progress on the abductee issue, and whether there may come a time when Japan will have to clearly prioritize a domestic issue (abductees) over a multilateral one (denuclearization).

Outlook for the coming months

It is too early to tell how and whether Abe's visit to the US will have an impact on Japan-Korea relations. The Korean government is already planning a number of reactions to Japan's diplomatic and institutional initiatives, particularly those in the US. There is increasing pressure on President Park Geun-hye to make some speech or gesture that is conciliatory to PM Abe, if only because the expectations for Abe's visit were so low that he exceeded them easily. On Japan's part, Abe is clearly planning to continue his diplomatic initiatives, and will most likely continue to push for a wider and stronger Japanese foreign policy presence.

Chronology of Japan-Korea Relations January – April 2015

Jan. 15, 2015: Members of the Korea-Japan Parliamentarians' Union, including Seo Cheong-won, a senior council member of the Saenuri Party, visit Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo.

Jan. 6, 2015: *Korea Times* reports that Seo Kyoung-duk, well-known in Korea for his activities regarding Dokdo/Takeshima, announced plans for a golf tournament on the disputed territory.

Jan. 9, 2015: *Japan Times* reports that Uemura Takashi, a former *Asahi Shimbun* reporter and currently an adjunct lecturer at Hokusei Gakuen University in Sapporo, has filed a libel suit against Bungeishunju Ltd. and Nishioka Tsutomu, a professor at Tokyo Christian University, for erroneously claiming that Uemura had fabricated stories about comfort women/sex slaves.

Jan. 10, 2015: *Asahi Shimbun* reports that Tokyo-based publisher Suken Shuppan applied to Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, to have the terms

“comfort women” and “forcibly taken away” removed from its high school textbooks, a request that was approved by the ministry in December 2014.

Jan. 19, 2015: Sixth round of talks on comfort women/sex slaves between Japan and South Korea take place in Tokyo.

Jan. 15, 2015: *Wall Street Journal* reports that McGraw-Hill rejected requests by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) through its New York Consulate General in November 2014 to revise the text regarding “comfort women” in a book titled *Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past*.

Jan. 21, 2015: Seoul summons the military attaché at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul to lodge a protest against Japan’s claims to Dokdo/Takeshima in its Korean-language version of Japan’s Defense White Paper.

Jan. 27, 2015: Ulleung County chief Choi Su-il signs a memorandum of understanding with *Korean Broadcasting System (KBS)* to set up a radio transmitter for *KBS FM* on Dokdo.

Feb. 3, 2015: Seoul’s Mayor Park Won-soon and Tokyo’s Gov. Masuzoe Yoichi sign an agreement at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government office to boost bilateral exchanges.

Feb. 13, 2015: During a meeting with Nikai Toshihiro, a top executive in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), President Park Geun-hye urges Japan to resolve the issue regarding comfort women/sex slaves.

Feb. 16, 2015: Japan and South Korea agree to let their \$10 billion currency swap deal expire. The 14-year-old currency swap arrangement expires on Feb. 23, as scheduled.

Feb. 22, 2015: Seoul denounces Tokyo for sending an official representative to commemorate Takeshima Day, which was first designated by Shimane Prefecture in 2005.

Feb. 27, 2015: Protests are held in South Korea aimed at the US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman and her [remarks](#) at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace that were interpreted as saying that the US was “siding” with Japan and its view of history.

March 1, 2015: In her Independence Movement Day address, President Park calls on Japan to atone for its actions during its colonial rule on the Korean Peninsula.

March 2, 2015: North Korea fires two short-range missiles off its eastern coast, drawing a protest from Japan.

March 9, 2015: At the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women in New York, South Korea’s Gender Equality and Family Minister Kim Hee-jung urges Japan to deal with the issue regarding the comfort women/sex slaves.

March 11, 2015: The 10th Trilateral Senior Foreign Affairs Officials Consultation is held in Seoul, chaired by Deputy Minister for Political Affairs Lee Kyung-soo. Japan's delegation is led by Deputy Minister Sugiyama Shinsuke and China's is led by Vice Minister Liu Zhenmin.

March 12, 2015: *Reuters* reports the Japanese government budgeted over \$15 million to fund Japan studies at nine universities abroad, including Georgetown University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

March 16, 2015: Seventh round of talks between Korea's Lee Sang-deok and Japan's Ihara Junichi on comfort women/sex slaves, takes place in Seoul.

March 16, 2015: *Yonhap News* reports that South Korea demanded the US include a reference to Dokdo on a map on its consular affairs bureau website, citing that the islets are clearly marked on a similar map for Japan.

March 16, 2015: Korean Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs announce that Hosaka Yuji, naturalized Korean scholar of Japanese descent and current head of the Dokdo Research Institute at Sejong University, has been appointed one of five nonstanding executives of the Independence Hall of Korea.

March 18, 2015: Citing a new report released by the Korea International Trade Association (KITA), *Yonhap News* highlights the third consecutive decline in bilateral trade between South Korea and Japan, which came to \$85.95 billion in 2014, down 9.2 percent from the year before.

March 19, 2015: As a continuation of developments concerning McGraw-Hill, a group of 19 Japanese historians and scholars headed by Hata Ikuhiko announces plans to file a protest with the US publisher over the 2011 textbook, claiming that the book contains factual errors on the issue of the comfort women/sex slaves.

March 21, 2015: Japan's Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio meets South Korean counterpart Yun Byung-se in Seoul, marking the first visit by Kishida since assuming his post in December 2012.

March 21, 2015: The foreign ministers of China, Japan, and South Korea meet in Seoul, marking the first trilateral meeting in three years.

March 22, 2015: A group of leaders from Japan and South Korea hold their inaugural meeting in Tokyo, to discuss ways to improve bilateral relations.

March 24, 2015: A letter submitted by Alexis Dudden (University of Connecticut) and signed by 19 other academics is published in the March issue of *Perspectives on History*. The letter responds to the efforts by Japan to sway McGraw-Hill in revising one of their textbooks.

April 1, 2015: *Asahi Shimbun* reports that Japan held unofficial talks with North Korea in Dalian, China on Feb. 28 and March 1, 2015 to discuss the Japanese abductee issue.

April 6, 2015: Seoul summons Japanese Ambassador Bessho Koro to protest the outcome of the review of middle-school textbooks by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

April 7, 2015: Japan releases its Diplomatic Blue Book, prompting South Korea to summon Kanasugi Kenji, a minister at the Japanese Embassy, over Japan's claims to Dokdo/Takeshima and the framing of comfort women/sex slaves.

April 14, 2015: Foreign-affairs and defense officials from Japan and South Korea meet in Seoul for bilateral talks, the first of its kind since 2009.

April 16-17, 2015: US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs David Shear, ROK Deputy Minister for Defense Policy Yoo Jeh-seung, and Japanese Vice Minister of Defense for International Affairs Tokuchi Hideshi lead their respective delegations in trilateral security talks in Washington.

April 21, 2015: *The Wall Street Journal* reports that the South Korean government has hired a public relations firm in Washington to make sure that South Korea's side of the story is being told ahead of Japanese PM Abe's speech to the US Congress.

April 21, 2015: A group of South Koreans who were forced into labor during World War II files a class-action lawsuit with the Seoul Central District Court against Japanese firms for unpaid wages and damages for hard labor.

April 23, 2015: *Hankyoreh* reports the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan and the Japanese National Movement for Resolving the Issue of the Military Comfort Women asked the Japanese government to acknowledge the truth and make reparations to comfort women/sex slaves, without having to admit legal responsibility.

April 29, 2015: Prime Minister Abe gives a speech at a joint meeting of the House and the Senate at the US Congress, with his wife Abe Akie and US Ambassador to Japan Caroline Kennedy in the House gallery.