



Japan-Korea Relations:

Sorry Seems the Hardest Word (unless you're a CEO)*

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In international negotiation, people use the term “ripeness” to describe when the time is right for reaching agreement. That may be the result of active efforts on the part of the actors, but it could also be generated by that sense of “something in the air” in anticipation of important dates. Just as one feels compelled not to fight on important anniversaries, it has become the norm for countries to at least try to avoid undermining the spirit of bilateral celebrations. The general mood enveloping both Japan and Korea – in anticipation of the 50th anniversary of normalization of relations on June 22 – was to accentuate areas where progress was being made while marginalizing issues that are predictably controversial. This translated into some compromise on Japan’s pursuit of gaining inscription for several sites on UNESCO’s World Heritage List, a few exchanges of cultural artifacts, and bilateral talks and meetings on the sidelines of major international conferences. The general mood, however, was decidedly anticlimactic as the 70th anniversary of Korea’s independence from Japanese colonial rule or the defeat by Japan in World War II were not so much an occasion to celebrate how much each country had accomplished, but a reality check on how much the two had yet to achieve, particularly the lack of South Korean closure with its grievances toward Japan. This “glass half empty” sentiment prevented any one event to stand out as a hallmark of bilateral cooperation over the summer.

Playing nice

While there was no heightened sense of bilateral cooperation or any special occasions, it may be uplifting to start with positive developments. For one, in a *Washington Post* [interview](#) posted on June 11, 2015, President Park Geun-hye remarked that “There has been considerable progress on the issue of the comfort women, and we are in the final stage of our negotiations. So I think we can expect to look forward to a very meaningful 50th anniversary of the normalization of our diplomatic ties.” When asked to elaborate on the progress, she simply stated that “Obviously, because these are behind-the-scenes discussions, I would be remiss to disclose the elements of the discussions.” So while it was difficult to gauge exactly how close to fruition this deal was or what either of the countries was gaining for what it was potentially giving up, it seemed like things were moving forward. Unfortunately, while Park cited the current number of comfort women/sex slaves survivors at 52 in her interview, by early July, the count fell quickly to 48, after Kim Dal-seon (91) and Kim Oi-hwan (80) passed away on June 11, followed by Kim Yeon-hee (83) on June 24, and Choi Geum-seon (89) on July 5.

* This article is extracted from *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Sept. 2015. Preferred citation: David Kang and Jiun Bang, “Japan-Korea Relations: Sorry Seems the Hardest Word (unless you’re a CEO),” *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Sept. 2015, pp. 133-146.

Leading up to the anniversary, a Japan-South Korea Foreign Ministers Meeting was held in Tokyo on June 21, marking Yun Byung-se's first visit to Japan. Items on the agenda included increasing people-to-people exchanges and expanding security and economic cooperation. A Japan-Korea Future Dialogue was held on the same day in Tokyo, sponsored by Japan's Genron NPO and the East Asia Institute. The one-day dialogue featured Ogura Kazuo, the former Japanese ambassador to France, South Korea, and Vietnam, and Shin Kak-soo, the former South Korean ambassador to Israel and Japan. On June 22, the actual 50th anniversary of normalization of diplomatic relations, President Park and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo attended separate events at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul and the Korean Embassy in Tokyo, respectively.

Also in June, Bunka Gakuen University in Tokyo signed a memorandum of understanding with the South Korean government commemorating a donation of the traditional attire worn by Princess Deokhye, the daughter of King Gojong (1852-1919) and the last princess of Korea's Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910). So, while the princess was sent to Japan as a gesture of goodwill and later married Sō Takeyuki, a Japanese aristocrat from the clan of Tsushima (never mind that the princess, suffering from dementia, ran away and her husband decided to divorce her), her clothes were being sent back to Korea in an effort to improve bilateral ties. Speaking of Tsushima (known as Daemado in Korea), in July, South Korea returned one of two Korean Buddha statues that were stolen by a group of South Korean thieves from separate shrines in Tsushima back in October 2012. The returned statue had been at the center of [controversy](#) for a couple years, making its repatriation a welcome move for Japan. Meanwhile, the second sculpture is still claimed by Buseok Temple in Korea's southwestern city of Seosan, which has placed a temporary injunction to prevent its return to Japan on grounds that the artifact may have been illegally stolen by Japan during the late Goryeo period (918-1392). Complications persist.

On lighter (but still positive) news, the eighth Japanese-Korean parliamentarians' soccer game took place on June 13 at the Seoul World Cup Stadium, marking a resumption of these friendly matches after a nine-year hiatus. The event brought together 21 Japanese lawmakers and 22 Koreans, including Ichiro Aizawa, a Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Lower House member, and Kim Moo-sung, the leader of the ruling Saenuri Party (and a possible contender for the 2017 presidential elections).

In news of a different kind of celebrity, *Kyodo News* reported that more than 100 fans – mostly Japanese women – traveled to Seoul on news that the South Korean actor Bae Yong-joon (also known as Yon-sama) was getting married. Bae is known for his roles in Korean dramas, especially *Winter Sonata* (2002), that have been part of what has been dubbed as the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*). According to reports, his company, Keyeast Entertainment, provided meal coupons for fans that could be used at the hotel where the wedding was being held. Recall that Alexis Dudden in her book, *Troubled Apologies among Japan, Korea, and the United States* (Columbia University Press, 2008), quotes an online critic as saying “It's not an exaggeration to say that *Winter Sonata* has done more politically for South Korea and Japan than the [2002] FIFA World Cup,” (p. 48). Yon-sama may have outshone the politicians (and soccer) again.

Peeling away the layers behind the UNESCO inscription

Although much of the media buzz centered on South Korean protests against Japan's campaign to have its sites inscribed in the World Heritage List, *both* countries had submitted their

respective nominations to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in July; it just so happened that Seoul's discontent with Tokyo's move overshadowed Korea's own campaign to have its sites inscribed. Further, despite the flurry of activity from May to July, Tokyo had formally submitted its recommendations, consisting of 23 nominated components across 11 sites within 8 discrete areas, under what it called the "Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution: Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding, and Coal Mining," to the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) on Jan. 14, 2014. On March 12, 2015, ICOMOS approved the report submitted by Japan and endorsed all 23 facilities, which paved the way for endorsement by the World Heritage Committee. Finally on July 5, 2015 at the 39th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Bonn, Germany, a decision was made to inscribe the 23 facilities. While Tokyo's campaign was to gain recognition of these sites for their role in the industrial revolution in Japan, Seoul's main problem was that at least seven of these nominated sites had employed nearly 60,000 Koreans that were forced into labor during Japan's colonial rule. There are five aspects of this controversy that are worth mentioning.

First, it seemed like Seoul made little effort to engage Tokyo on the matter (either publicly or behind-the-scene) until this summer despite the clear contours of Japan's plans in January 2014. In May 2015, Choi Jong-moon, the South Korean ambassador for cultural and UNESCO affairs, met Shimmi Jun, director-general for cultural affairs at Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Tokyo to discuss Korea's concerns, with the second round of talks on the issue occurring in Seoul on June 9, 2015. So whether there was some delayed reaction on the part of Seoul due to wishful thinking (that perhaps Japan would fold) or the reality of limited resources prevented less pressing matters from coming to the fore, there was quite a bit of time for Korea to plan and evaluate its actions to carefully counter Japan's moves if needed.

Second, the idea that there was a breakthrough in negotiations was short-lived. To address Korea's concerns, the [statement](#) by the Japanese delegation at the 39th Session of the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO declared that "Japan is prepared to take measures that allow an understanding that there were a large number of Koreans and others who were brought against their will and forced to work under harsh conditions in the 1940s at some of the sites, and that, during World War II, the Government of Japan also implemented its policy of requisition." Of course, in the written statement under note 5, it also states that "The Government of Japan has repeatedly made it clear that this statement by the Japanese delegation does not acknowledge that there was illegal "forced labour," and this point has been clearly conveyed to the Korean side." It may have dawned on the Korean side that it may not be worth trying to decipher the subtle nuance between "forced to work" and "forced laborer" once Japan's Foreign Ministry released the following [statement](#): "There is no change whatsoever to the position that the issues relating to property and claims between Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK), including the issue of requisitioned workers from the Korean Peninsula, have been settled completely and finally by the Claims Settlement and Economic Co-operation Agreement of 1965, which was concluded on the occasion of the normalization of the relationship between Japan and the ROK."

If the message was spelled out any clearer, it would become an entry in a dictionary. Lest Korea forgot, the overarching goal for Japan was to have its sites inscribed in the World Heritage List, not resolve the issue involving those who were 'forced to work' for Japanese companies during World War II. The next point further reinforces this reality.

Third, the interesting part that has not yet received much attention is contained in the 354-page final [report](#) (“Evaluations of Nominations of Cultural and Mixed Properties ICOMOS report for the World Heritage Committee 39th ordinary session, Bonn, June-July 2015). To be fair, the report is an extensive catalogue of sites from around the world. For Japan and its “Sites of Japan’s Meiji Industrial Revolution,” the report states (p. 99) that “The private companies Mitsubishi, Nippon and Miike Port Logistics Corporation have entered into agreements with the Cabinet Secretariat to protect, conserve and manage their relevant components. This will largely be achieved with the implementation of the relevant conservation management plans and in accordance with relevant legislation.”

The report continues (p. 100) that “The Japanese Government has established a tax incentive scheme to encourage private companies to fund the conservation and management of component parts. In the case of Nippon Steel for the components at the Imperial Steel Works (Area 8) it is estimated that it will receive approximately ¥100K/year.” So, ironically, some of the actors that are at the center of the controversy involving reparations for “forced labor” such that Mitsubishi and Nippon Steel, are now in charge of (and getting incentives for) the conservation and management of sites that are accused of being “tainted” by their involvement in “forced labor.” Another variable to consider is China, especially given the latest [report](#) by *Japan News* on July 24, that Mitsubishi Materials was preparing to offer an apology and compensation of 100,000 yuan (¥2 million or roughly \$16,000) for each of the 3,765 Chinese victims that were forced to work for its wartime predecessor Mitsubishi Mining Co. and its subcontractors. It would be hard for Koreans to not feel like they were being intentionally sidelined if its neighbor is able to cut such a deal with Japan.

Fourth, the final report should also give Japan pause. The main rationale that Japan put forward in placing the “Sites of Japan’s Meiji Industrial Revolution” on the World Heritage List hinged on emphasizing not simply what these designated sites represented in terms of Japan’s industrial achievement, but also the (first) successful transfer of industrialization from the West to a non-Western nation and the latter’s active adaptation of Western technology. Although perhaps meant to instill a sense of awe and pride in how Japan successfully industrialized, the way that the report (p. 92) presents its evaluation for approval actually sounds rather sociological: “The case is well made for Japan being seen as the first non-Western country to industrialise. It is thus unique in Asia and needs to be seen in that context.... Worldwide newly industrialised countries include Brazil, Mexico and South Africa. The historical, social and economic context for Japan’s emergence as an industrial nation are therefore completely different from elsewhere in Asia, and in comparison to countries worldwide.” This raises some intriguing questions about what it means for Japan to be *completely different* from all other nations, to the extent that it prevents any attempts at comparability or generalizability.

Finally, the South Korean campaign of having “Baekje Historic Areas” (eight sites in Gongju and Buyeo, Chungcheongnam-do Iksan, Jeolla Province) inscribed in the World Heritage List also needs to be parsed. The “Baekje Historic Areas” was included in the tentative list on Jan. 11, 2010, its report received by the World Heritage Centre on Jan. 28, 2014, and approved by ICOMOS on March 12, 2015, paving the way for its final inclusion in the July session. The international body approved South Korea’s nomination with the understanding that these sites

displayed the interchange between the ancient East Asian kingdoms in China, Japan, and Korea, especially regarding construction techniques and diffusion of Buddhism. Donald Kirk in a [commentary](#) in *Forbes* suggested that there may be a domestic political explanation behind Jeolla Province's campaign: "such recognition helps to *balance the score* with other Korean World Heritage sites, including the Changdeokgung Palace complex in central Seoul and the temples and palaces of Gyeongju, center of the Silla kingdom of southeastern Korea that conquered Baekjae [emphasis added]." The proposed budget for the 2015-2019 Management Plan for the "Baekjae Historic Areas" is \$63,258,000, with the following breakdown in funding source: state allocations (70 percent), provincial government (15 percent), and local government (15 percent) (p. 118). If Jeolla Province is getting both recognition and money from the central government, it is hard to ignore the argument that something purportedly externally-oriented (UNESCO designation and/or countering Japan) may have a heavy internal/domestic component (regional politics).

The hard knock life of CEOs (and what it means to be Japanese or Korean)

The UNESCO inscription ordeal poses the question: what does it mean for Japan to be an outlier in Asia? In other words, what makes Japan, Japan? South Korea was struggling with that same question around the same period, but in a negative way: stressing its identity by creating as much distance and space as possible from being Japanese. Despite all the talk about globalization, it may be that at least in the context of bilateral relations, tensions often magnify the quality of nationality, both for people and companies.

May to August was a difficult time for a handful of leaders and/or their companies. In May, the Japanese police arrested three men, including the son of the head of the pro-Pyongyang General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (*Chongryon*), on suspicion of illegally importing matsutake mushrooms from North Korea. Takada Shigehisa, head of the Japanese supplier, Takada, which supplies air bags to companies like Toyota and Nissan, had to [apologize](#) in what is viewed as the largest automobile safety recall in history. Toyota was in "[damage control](#)" with President Toyoda Akio apologizing after its new communications chief, Julie Hamp, was arrested on suspicion of illegally bringing pain killers into Japan, while the chief executive of Toshiba Corp., Tanaka Hisao, resigned in July over an [accounting scandal](#).

The South Korean public was much more interested in the apologies of two other companies and their respective heads. The first involved an apology by *Fuji TV* after heavy criticism for intentionally manipulating the subtitles in a segment titled, "why Koreans hate the Japanese so much" in a program that was aired on June 5 ahead of the 50th anniversary of the normalization of ties. Apparently, when contacted by the *Japan Times*, *Fuji TV* denied any allegations of malice or fabrication, citing issues of human error during the editing process. Yet many netizens were at a loss as to how one could confuse a South Korean female as saying: "[Korea's] culture is really diverse. A lot of foreigners seem to visit [our country]", with what was actually said: "I hate [Japan]. Because it tormented Korea" (broadcasted subtitles).

The second incident involved Mitsubishi Materials Corporation. On July 19, 2015, at the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, a ceremony was held where senior executive officer Kimura Hikaru bowed in apology for the mistreatment of American prisoners of war during World War

II – the first time a Japanese company did so. This was less than a week after Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., appealed a ruling by Gwangju High Court in Korea, which had ordered the company to compensate the plaintiffs that were forced into labor during Japan’s colonial rule. The apology by Mitsubishi Materials immediately prompted [some](#) in Korea to question why South Korea was being left out.

Earlier in June, the *Asahi Shimbun* and the *Dong-A Ilbo* released the results of a joint [survey](#) that found roughly 90 percent of the respondents (86 in Japan, and 90 in Korea) judging the bilateral relationship to be in bad shape. A more interesting [poll](#) was released in May by Genron NP and the East Asia Institute (EAI), which claimed that the number one reason for South Korea’s negative impressions of Japan was “Japan’s lack of remorse for historical invasions” (74 percent), while the top reason for the positive impressions toward Japan was because the “Japanese people are kind and earnest” (63.9 percent). Though not fleshed out, the seeming contradiction is most likely attributable to the discrepancy between how people view the general populace as opposed to the government. Another remarkable finding was how the labels “nationalistic” and “militaristic” were more often associated with each country than the quality of being “democratic.”

The issue of nationality really made headlines in August, when news surfaced of the ongoing brawl for control within the conglomerate Lotte between two brothers, Shin Dong-bin (60) and Shin Dong-joo (61), wherein the younger brother ousted the 92-year-old father and founder, Shin Kyuk-ho. The Korean media, however, was giving as much (if not more) weight to how the feuding had exposed just how Japanese the Lotte Group is. There was almost a sense of betrayal by the public, which was taken by the fact that the brothers were more comfortable and capable of speaking Japanese than Korean, and that both had retained Japanese citizenship until they no longer qualified to serve in the Korean military given their age, at which point they picked up Korean citizenship. If this incident proves anything, it is that language and (in the case of men) military service are critical components of what defines a Korean.

So CEOs were in trouble. The silver lining may be that Chey Tae-won, the chairman of South Korea’s third-largest conglomerate, SK Group, was granted a pardon on the occasion of the anniversary of Korea’s independence from Japan.

Not “an” apology, but “the” apology

Amidst all the apologies by business leaders, there was also a push by various coalitions to extract an apology from Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, or to at least to make bold moves toward addressing Japan’s past of colonial rule and wartime aggression. In May, an “[Open Letter in Support of Historians in Japan](#)” signed by almost 200 scholars was reportedly mailed directly to Abe’s residence. In June, a group of 281 scholars and historians released a [statement](#) that underscored the importance of the Japanese government in resolving the “atonement projects” for South Korean victims of Japan’s wartime aggression. In July, during a meeting in the US between South Korean Representative Kim Moo-sung, the head of the Saenuri Party, and Sen. John McCain, the head of the Senate Armed Forces Committee, it was [reported](#) that Kim stressed the need for Japan to apologize and that “McCain reportedly told his visitors that he emphasizes the same message whenever he meets with Japanese officials, and that he plans to continue to

encourage Tokyo to apologize.” According to the [JoongAng Daily](#), over 500 scholars had issued a joint statement urging Abe to issue a sincere apology for Japan’s wartime aggressions in light of the 70th anniversary. At around the same time, on July 13, two South Korean “comfort women/sex slaves” filed a defamation suit against Japanese figures (including Prime Minister Abe and Emperor Akihito) and companies (such as Toyota, Nippon Steel, Mitsubishi, and *Sankei Shimbun*) in a federal court in San Francisco, demanding compensation and an apology for being labeled as “prostitutes.” Even South Korean President Park’s younger sister, Park Geun-ryeong made [headlines](#) for her “pro-Japanese” remarks, when she said that “(Japan) including the Japanese emperor already made apologies to South Korea four times and it is wrong to ask continually,” during a recent interview with a Japanese video-sharing website, *Niconico*.

The unequivocal apology that South Korea wanted, of course, was not given in Prime Minister Abe’s [statement](#) in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. Since its release, there have been many solid analyses of its content (including [PacNet](#)), so there will only be a brief mention here. Needless to say, thinking back to Public Speaking 101, one should never forget the most important element of any successful speech or statement: *who is your audience?* Who was the intended (not the perceived) audience of the statement really?

One has to wonder if the constant pressuring will not interfere with the desired level of “sincerity” (however measured) requested in the apology. In a slightly different way, Japan too, was trying hard to persuade North Korea to make progress on the matter of the Japanese abductees. In May, Yamatani Eriko, the Japanese minister in charge of the abduction issue announced that Tokyo was rallying support at the United Nations to turn up the pressure on Pyongyang to release information regarding the abductees. In June, [news](#) surfaced that the Japanese government had rejected a report drafted by North Korea during negotiations in the spring, on grounds that it did not have information regarding the 12 Japanese abductees in question. The Japanese Foreign Ministry expressed its displeasure at the North’s delay in producing a report of its reinvestigation into the abduction issue, and sent a notification through diplomatic channels in Beijing. Having received virtually nothing since the special committee into the abduction issue was launched by Pyongyang nearly a year ago, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) called for reinstating sanctions that were initially lifted in exchange for the reinvestigation. Nevertheless, Tokyo is sticking to the negotiation path (for now), by utilizing channels such as the ASEAN Regional Forum in Kuala Lumpur, to arrange a meeting between Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio and North Korean counterpart Ri Su Yong.

Autumn 2015

After the drama and attention paid to the ultimately anticlimactic set of speeches and statements made to commemorate the 70th anniversary of this or the 50th anniversary of that, the coming months may prove to be quieter. North and South Korea recently weathered their latest crisis, and neither appears set to introduce any new or innovative policies or proposals to Japan. President Park will visit the United States and China, while Prime Minister Abe appears to be more focused on dealing with domestic economic issues than on foreign policy. If the global economy is moving into “correction” territory, led by a slowdown in China’s economy, leaders and publics in both Korea and Japan may be focused more on business than politics as 2015

draws to a close, although there is always the possibility that yet another issue will draw attention again to their unresolved relationship.

Chronology of Japan-Korea Relations

May – August 2015

May 3, 2015: Meeting on the sidelines of the Asian Development Bank annual meeting, the 18th ASEAN Plus Three Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting (AFMGM + 3) is held in Baku, Azerbaijan, bringing China, Japan, and South Korea together to discuss issues of regional financial cooperation.

May 4, 2015: Japanese government announces that the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) has recommended Japan's "Sites of the Meiji Industrial Revolution" as a candidate to be listed on the World Heritage List.

May 5, 2015: Statement signed by nearly 200 scholars expresses a "shared concern for the way that the history of Japan and East Asia is studied and commemorated." The statement is a result of an open forum held at the Association for Asian Studies annual meeting in Chicago in March.

May 5, 2015: *The Japan Times* reports that Yamatani Eriko, Japan's minister in charge of the abduction issue, is seeking "specific actions" from the global community at the UN symposium on human rights in levying pressure against North Korea to make progress on the issue of the Japanese abductees.

May 9, 2015: North Korea announces the successful firing of a ballistic missile from a submarine. The test follows remarks by Japanese Defense Minister Nakatani Gen at the US-Japan Security Consultative Committee (2+2) meeting in New York on April 27 that Japan would retaliate against the North if it launches a missile attack on the US.

May 12, 2015: South Korean National Assembly passes a resolution condemning Japan's efforts to designate its "Sites of the Meiji Industrial Revolution" on UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage List.

May 12, 2015: Japanese police arrest three men for illegally importing matsutake mushrooms from North Korea. One is the son of the leader of the pro-Pyongyang General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon).

May 12-13, 2015: Seventh round of negotiations on a trilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) among China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea is held in Seoul.

May 13-14, 2015: Japan-Korea Economic Association hosts a meeting in Seoul, bringing some 300 business leaders together to discuss ways to boost bilateral economic cooperation.

May 14, 2015: South Korea announces it is conducting a two-day military drill near the waters of Dokdo/Takeshima, involving the South Korean Navy and the Coast Guard.

May 15, 2015: Third China-Japan-ROK Counterterrorism Consultation is held in Beijing.

May 21, 2015: Japanese government files a complaint against South Korea at the World Trade Organization (WTO), challenging Seoul's import bans and testing restrictions on Japanese food after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

May 21, 2015: Sixth bilateral meeting on economic and financial cooperation takes place in Tokyo, marking a resumption of such talks since the last meeting in Korea in November 2012.

May 22, 2015: Choi Jong-moon, South Korea's ambassador for cultural and UNESCO affairs, meets Shimmi Jun, Japan's director-general for cultural affairs, in Tokyo to relay Korea's concerns regarding Tokyo's efforts to designate its sites on the World Heritage List.

May 23-24, 2015: Japan and South Korea hold trade talks on the sidelines of the APEC meeting in Boracay, Philippines. The talks mark the first of its kind since April 2013.

May 26-27, 2015: Japan, South Korea, and the US hold trilateral talks regarding North Korea's nuclear program in Seoul.

May 28, 2015: Genron NPO and the East Asia Institute (EAI) release the results of their third Japan-South Korea joint public opinion poll.

May 29-31, 2015: Japan and South Korea hold their first bilateral defense talks in more than four years, on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.

June 1, 2015: Six-member Japanese delegation of the Japan-South Korea "Wise Man Group" visits Cheong Wa Dae, and meets President Park Geun-hye. The group was launched in March and held its first session in Tokyo, with the aim of exploring ways to improve Seoul-Tokyo ties.

June 2, 2015: Kyoto district public prosecutor's office indicts Ho Jong-do, the second son of the Chongryon chairman, and Kim Yong-jak, president of a food trading company in Tokyo affiliated with Chongryon, for smuggling in matsutake mushrooms into Japan from North Korea.

June 8, 2015: *Asahi Shimbun* reports that a group of 281 scholars including Wada Haruki, professor emeritus of the University of Tokyo and former executive director of the Asian Women's Fund, issued a statement urging the Japanese government to resolve the "comfort women/sex slaves" issue and other historical matters causing friction between Japan and Korea.

June 9, 2015: Second round of talks to discuss South Korea's concerns regarding Japan's designation of sites on the World Heritage List is held in Seoul.

June 9, 2015: Former Japanese Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi and former Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei share their thoughts at the Japan National Press Club in Tokyo, urging Prime Minister Abe to honor the spirit of the 1995 Murayama statement.

June 11, 2015: Ihara Junichi, director-general of the Japan Foreign Ministry Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, meets South Korean counterpart Lee Sang-deok for the eighth round of talks on “comfort women/sex slaves” in Tokyo.

June 11, 2015: In an interview with the *Washington Post*, President Park Geun-hye says that “considerable progress” has been made with Japan on the “comfort women/sex slaves” issue.

June 16, 2015: *The Japan Times* reports that the Japanese government had rejected a report drafted by North Korea during negotiations in the spring, on grounds that it did not have information regarding the 12 Japanese abductees in question.

June 18, 2015: Report released by the Korea International Trade Association (KITA) shows South Korea’s trade dependence on Japan as lowest on record, with Japan accounting for 7.6 percent of Korea’s total volume of imports and exports during the period of January to May.

June 20, 2015: *The Asahi Shimbun* releases findings of its joint survey with *Dong-A Ilbo* on Japan-South Korea bilateral relations, which shows about 86 percent of respondents in Japan expressing a pessimistic view, and roughly 90 percent with similar sentiments in South Korea.

June 21, 2015: Third Japan-Korea Future Dialogue hosted by Genron NPO and EAI takes place in Tokyo, one day ahead of the 50th anniversary of the normalization of bilateral ties.

June 21, 2015: Japan-South Korea Foreign Ministers meeting is held in Tokyo, marking Yun Byung-se’s first visit to Japan.

June 22, 2015: Prime Minister Abe attends an event to mark the 50th anniversary of the normalization of bilateral relations in Tokyo, while President Park does the same at a separate event held by the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.

June 22, 2015: South Korea’s Gwangju High Court upholds a ruling that orders Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., to pay compensation to five South Korean plaintiffs on grounds of forced labor during Japan’s occupation of the Korean peninsula.

June 22, 2015: Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea.

June 24, 2015: Bunka Gakuen University in Tokyo signs a memorandum of understanding with the South Korean government commemorating a donation of the traditional garment worn by Princess Deokhye, the daughter of King Gojong (1852-1919) and the last princess of Korea’s Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910).

June 29, 2015: *Fuji TV* apologizes after heavy criticism for intentionally manipulating subtitles in a segment titled, “why Koreans hate the Japanese so much” in a program aired on June 5.

July 3, 2015: *Japan Foreign Press Center* lists a good [summary](#) of recent editorials in Japan of the current state of Japan-South Korea bilateral relations.

July 3, 2015: Japanese Foreign Ministry criticizes North Korea for its delay in releasing its report on the reinvestigation into the Japanese abductees.

July 5, 2015: At the 39th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Bonn, Germany, a decision is made to inscribe the 23 facilities put forth by Japan on the World Heritage List.

July 6, 2015: [Editorial](#) in *Asahi Shimbun* calls for a new game plan in dealing with North Korea.

July 6, 2015: Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide says that while Koreans were forced to work at the sites listed on the World Heritage List, they were not "forced laborers."

July 13, 2015: Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., appeals South Korean court ruling in June, stipulating the company must pay compensation to five former South Korean employees that were forced into labor during Japan's colonial rule. The case will now go to the Supreme Court.

July 15-17, 2015: Meeting between Japan and South Korea's intelligence bureau chiefs occurs in Seoul, amidst speculations about a potential military information sharing agreement.

July 17, 2015: South Korea returns one of two Korean Buddha statues to Japan, stolen by South Korean thieves from separate shrines in Tsushima, Nagasaki Prefecture in October 2012.

July 17, 2015: Chief of the Joint Staff of the Japan Self-Defense Forces Adm. Kawano Katsutoshi states that Japan's role would be to provide "logistical support" in a contingency on the Korean Peninsula.

July 20-24, 2015: Eighth round of trilateral FTA negotiations among China, Japan, and South Korea takes place in Beijing, China.

July 21, 2015: Japanese Cabinet adopts its annual defense [white paper](#), which claims Dokdo/Takeshima as part of Japan's territorial sovereignty. South Korean government summons Kanasugi Kenji, minister and deputy chief of mission at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, to protest.

July 21, 2015: *Yonhap News* reports that the South Korean government has ruled out the possibility of forging a General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), citing Defense Ministry spokesperson Kim Min-seok as saying that "there are no discussions on GSOMIA or Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement nor any moves to do so."

July 23, 2015: During his nine-day visit to the US, Kim Moo-sung, chairperson of the ruling Saenuri Party tells US leaders that Prime Minister Abe must not backtrack from previous statements of apology. Kim also meets US House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi, who urges Abe to make a clearer statement on Japan's involvement in the sexual enslavement of women.

July 28, 2015: Senior diplomats from Japan, South Korea, and the US gather in Tokyo to discuss North Korea's nuclear program.

July 29, 2015: South Korean actor Bae Yong-joon gets married, prompting some 200 of his fans (many of whom flew from Japan) to line up outside the venue to catch a glimpse of the actor.

July 29, 2015: Two former “comfort women/sex slaves” file a defamation suit in a federal court in San Francisco against the Japanese government, the late Emperor Hirohito, former Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke, and seven companies, including Mitsui and Mitsubishi.

July 29, 2015: *The Korea Herald* reports that a group of 524 intellectuals issued a joint statement urging the government in Tokyo to face up to its past wartime atrocities and uphold previous statements about Japan’s aggression and colonial rule.

July 30, 2015: *Yomiuri Shimbun* reports that the LDP has sent a written proposal to Prime Minister Abe, calling on him to “restore Japan’s honor and trust by eradicating misperceptions overseas about the so-called comfort women issue,” and to “make forthright counterarguments to groundless criticism of Japan on this issue.”

July 30, 2015: President Park’s sister, Park Geun-ryeong is criticized for saying that “(Japan) including the Japanese emperor already made apologies to South Korea four times and it is wrong to ask continually,” during an interview with a Japanese video-sharing website, *Niconico*.

Aug. 3, 2015: President Park meets Okada Katsuya, the head of Japan’s Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), at Cheong Wa Dae in Seoul.

Aug. 6, 2015: The 16th ASEAN+3 Foreign Ministers Meeting is held in Kuala Lumpur.

Aug. 6, 2015: Japan’s Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio meets North Korean counterpart Ri Su Yong on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Kuala Lumpur.

Aug. 12, 2015: Former Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio kneels before a memorial at Seodaemun Prison History Hall in Seoul and apologizes for Japan’s wartime aggression.

Aug. 12, 2015: South Korean man sets himself on fire during a protest calling on Japan to apologize for its enslavement of “comfort women/sex slaves.”

Aug. 14, 2015: Prime Minister Abe releases a [statement](#) in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Aug. 15, 2015: President Park gives a commemorative [address](#) on the 70th anniversary of Korea’s liberation. She appeals to the Japanese government “to match with consistent and sincere actions its declaration that the view of history articulated by its previous cabinets will be upheld,” and in particular, “hope the Japanese government resolves the issue of “comfort women” victims of the Japanese Imperial Army in a speedy and proper way.”

Aug. 15, 2015: Three Japanese Cabinet ministers visit Yasukuni Shrine to pay their respects. In separate visits, 66 Japanese lawmakers also pay their respects. Prime Minister Abe sends a monetary offering without a physical visit.

Aug. 15, 2015: Emperor Akihito gives a [speech](#) at a memorial ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of Japan's defeat in World War II, voicing "deep remorse over the last war," and adding that "I earnestly hope that the ravages of war will never be repeated."

August 26, 2015: The 1,193rd weekly demonstration in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul is held. The demonstration includes a ceremony for Choi Hyun-yeol, who died after self-immolation on Aug. 12.