



Japan-Korea Relations:

Is the US a “Wingman” or “Third Wheel”?

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For the last few years, it has been popular for Japan-Korea watchers to ask about the possibility of a “reset” in their relations. The best timing for this may be 2015, given that it marks the 70th anniversary of Korea’s liberation from Japan and the 50th anniversary of the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan-Republic of Korea that normalized relations. As if to refute the idea that there might be any lull before a storm, Tokyo and Seoul rang in the New Year not with bells and whistles but a promotional video for Korea’s claim to Dokdo/Takeshima that went viral on *YouTube*. This may have set the tone for the months to follow. A major theme for the early months of 2014 was the role of the US – both as a setting and an actor – in issues ranging from the naming of the East Sea/Sea of Japan to getting the two heads of state in the same room.

The proxy war (of words): lobbying within the US

Books have been written (and hotly contested) about the strength of the Israel lobby (see Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007) in US decision-making, but the degree to which Japan or Korea may successfully inform US legislative action has only recently gained attention. The main point of contention for Tokyo and Seoul focused on the naming of the body of water that lies west of Japan and to the east of both Koreas.

The battle started in January, when the Education and Health Committee of the Virginia State Senate unanimously approved a bill calling for local public schools to use both East Sea and Sea of Japan in their textbooks. This relatively curt [bill](#), which does not affect any textbooks approved by the Board of Education prior to July 1, 2014, states that “all textbooks approved by the Board of Education pursuant to [22.1-238](#) of the Code of Virginia, when referring to the Sea of Japan, shall note that it is also referred to as the East Sea.” The Virginia House of Delegates approved the bill in early February, with Gov. Terry McAuliffe signing the bill into law in early April. There were similar efforts in Georgia, where the Senate passed a resolution ([SR 798](#)) on Jan. 27 that included a phrase that the Korean Peninsula was “bound by its East and West Seas.” Incidentally, on the same day, a resolution ([HR1162](#)) was adopted in the Georgia House of Representatives that noted the 40th anniversary of the Consulate General of Japan in the Southeast and invited the Consul General to be recognized by the House of Representatives. This went unnoticed due to the coverage of the recognition that He Beom Kim, the Consul General for Korea, received in the Senate resolution. A similar bill ([S6570](#)) that would require the use of dual labels in all new textbooks was introduced in the New York Senate Committee, while the New Jersey Assembly introduced bill [A2478](#) on Feb. 10, which requires the body of water between Korean Peninsula and Japan be called “East Sea” for all governmental purposes.

There are two interesting angles to this story. First, is it just a numbers game? On one level, the sheer number of the immigrant population (code: constituents) residing in a particular area has been cited several times in the media as a critical reason behind the success of the Korean lobbying. A *New York Times* [article](#) that dubbed the ongoing contention between Japan and Korea a “hydrographic kerfuffle” stated that “with about 100,000 Koreans in New York City and 25,000 Japanese, it might be obvious what side two local legislators [State Sen. Toby Ann Stavisky of Flushing and Assemblyman Edward Braunstein of Bayside] are embracing.” A *Korea Times* [article](#) quoted Professor Shin Yul at Myongji University in Korea as claiming that “First and foremost, the number of Korean-Americans is much bigger than that of Japanese-Americans at 1.7 million versus 1.3 million. Hence, the Korean side holds stronger voting power.” Looking at US Census [data](#) of 2010, Virginia, New York, and New Jersey are indeed, all within the top 10 states with the largest Asian alone or in-combination populations (with the 10 states actually representing almost three-fourths of the total Asian population in the US). It is true that there are a little over 1.7 million people that identify in some way as Korean and 1.3 million as Japanese in the US, but it is the breakdown that makes for a more fascinating tale. At the most macro level, the Census divides the Asian population into two large categories of “Asian alone” and “Asian in combination with one or more other races” (and an aggregate sum of the two under “detailed Asian group alone or in any combination”). Then each category is further bifurcated into those that are relatively homogenous in identity and those that are less so, as per the table below.

Detailed group	Asian alone		Asian in combination with one or more other races		TOTAL
	One detailed Asian group reported	Two or more detailed Asian groups reported	One detailed Asian group reported	Two or more detailed Asian groups reported	
Japanese	763,325	78,499	368,094	94,368	1,304,286
	(-1.2)		(55.9)		(13.5)
Korean	1,423,784	39,690	216,288	27,060	1,706,822
	(33.1)		(88.6)		(38.9)

2010 U.S. Census Data

The figures in the parentheses indicate the percent change in the population from 2000 to 2010. A nuanced examination reveals that not only is the growth of Korean-Americans more than double that of Japanese-Americans, but that it is relatively homogenous with an overwhelmingly large number classifying themselves as one detailed Asian group. While this might seem like good news for the Korean lobby, it would be difficult to translate these raw numbers into the degree of effectiveness in lobbying without further information. Moreover, one could argue that the cross-cutting appeal of Japanese identity apparently can work against Korean lobbying.

Just as we cannot squeeze out weighty implications from a couple numbers, it is also dangerous to assume that tracing the heritage or affinities of various US politicians to either Japan or Korea may give us an idea as to which way the wind may blow. This kind of one-dimensional thinking is extremely seductive bait for nationalists that want to reinforce an “us” vs. “them” mentality.

For instance, Japanese-American Mike Honda (D-CA) received criticism for his involvement in introducing [H.R. 121](#) at the 110th Congress (passed in July 2007) that called for redress of the comfort women/sex slaves issue. He also supported the document attached to the Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2014 ([H.R.3547](#)), which became law in January 2014, that urged Secretary of State John Kerry to encourage Tokyo to address the sexual enslavement issue as laid out in H.R. 121. Subsequently, he wrote a separate [letter](#) on the same topic to Kerry in February 2014. Lest the increasing efforts at lobbying dissolve into a witch hunt of US elites with certain Asian descent not displaying sufficient “patriotic” ideals, we need to think carefully about the unintended consequences of greater activism in the US and what that means for Japan and Korea relations.

The second interesting angle regarding the so-called “East Sea movement” is to focus on what had *changed*. What is significant is not so much that these bills passed, but what changed since the last time they were put forth and rejected. A similar bill calling for the use of dual names for the body of water was sponsored and introduced by David Marsden (D-VA) to the education panel of the Senate of Virginia in 2011, but voted down in January 2012 by a vote of 8-7. A similar fate occurred when New York’s Democratic Sen. Toby Ann Stavisky asked the City Department of Education back in 2012 to begin using textbooks that included both names. As a *Washington Post* [article](#) suggests, the case in 2014 was certainly not an easy one, with the Embassy of Japan hiring four McGuireWoods lobbyists to thwart the Virginia bill. It would be premature to generalize on the power of the Korean lobbying in the US, especially with less successful attempts at persuasion like the unintentionally comical bulgogi ad featuring Choo Shin-soo (a Korean outfielder for the Texas Rangers baseball team in the US) in the print edition of the *New York Times* in March 2014, which earned a lot of flak for its generally obscure message. Japan also received negative coverage in a mid-April news item that the Chicago-based law firm Mayer Brown had filed a civil lawsuit on behalf of two Japanese-Americans and a corporation that claimed that they would suffer “irreparable injury” from “feelings of exclusion, discomfort, and anger” if the comfort women/sex slaves memorial in Glendale, California was not removed (a case that *Forbes* described as “what is surely one of the most controversial civil suits ever filed in the United States.”)

There were also instances of the US taking a more proactive role, wanting its two allies to mend ties. In March, US Ambassador to Japan Caroline Kennedy, during her first *NHK* television interview since becoming ambassador in November 2013, expressed clear US interest in helping mend ties between Tokyo and Seoul. During Secretary of State Kerry’s two-day trip to Seoul in February, urging Japan and South Korea to get along was a clear theme alongside other familiar issues such as North Korea’s denuclearization. The height of US brokering came with the trilateral meeting on March 25, after the Nuclear Security Summit in the Hague – the first direct face-to-face for Japan’s Prime Minister Abe and Korea’s President Park since they entered office in 2012 and 2013, respectively. Nevertheless, the *Asahi Shimbun* reported that according to sources, the two leaders did not touch the issue of a bilateral summit, and that “at the start of the trilateral meeting, a smiling Abe spoke to Park in Korean, but Park maintained a stern look,” which was also the atmosphere conveyed by [other news reports](#). This general mood summed up the first months of 2014.

A mixed grade on economics

“Political problems don’t affect economic and cultural ties as much as we think.... This year will mark the 10th of its kind, and I would love to see the Korea-Japan festival continuing more than 100 years.” Takasugi Nobuya, former chairman and CEO of Fuji Xerox Korea and former president of the Seoul Japan Club (SJC), made this remark in an [interview](#) with the *Korea Times* in February 2014. Despite his view that “doing business creates a win-win situation” (which has been a popular take on Toyko-Seoul economic relations), there was both positive and negative news on the economic front that may complicate overall bilateral relations.

In March, the Korea International Trade Association (KITA) announced that the Export Similarity Index (ESI, which captures the countries’ export overlap) between Japan and South Korea was point-501 for 2013 – marking the first time that the ESI went over the point-five threshold, suggesting that at least half the key export items of the two countries are similar. Auto parts grew at the fastest pace among Korea’s export items, jumping from point-386 in ESI with Japan in 2007, to point-46 in 2011, and finally point-56 in 2013. As a point of comparison, KITA indicated that the South Korea-China ESI stood at point-377. With the April 1 implementation of the [consumption tax hike](#) from 5 to 8 percent in Japan, some are concerned this will lead to greater export competition between the two countries as foreign markets become a lifeline for Japanese businesses.

Partners Toshiba of Japan and SanDisk of the US separately filed civil lawsuits against SK Hynix of South Korea for damages from alleged theft of sensitive information regarding flash memory chip technology. The lawsuit by Toshiba was filed with the Tokyo District Court on March 13, the same day that the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department arrested Sugita Yoshitaka, a former engineer at SanDisk and Hynix who is suspected of having passed on data from his former employer to the latter. Back in 2004, Toshiba filed a patent infringement suit against Hynix (at the time one of many legal cases cited by the *New York Times* that contributed to Japan’s “[art of the lawsuit](#)”), but it has been [pointed out](#) in the 2014 incident that it is rare for industrial espionage to result in a criminal case. Since it was not until 2007 that the 2004 lawsuit was resolved through a cross-licensing agreement, there may be unabated friction between the two companies for some time.

The economic picture is further complicated when factoring in the role of China. At the beginning of the New Year, there was [speculation](#) in Japan that South Korea may surpass Japan in trade with China in value terms within the next three years. One of the reasons for this prediction was that “unlike Japan, it [South Korea] has little diplomatic friction with Beijing.” The article quoted a former high-ranking Chinese Commerce Ministry official as stating that “the Sino-Korean FTA comes first [before a three-way trade pact including Japan]” to demonstrate the waning importance of Japan as a trade partner for China. Anxiety might have been heightened after South Korea inked a free trade deal with Canada on March 11, which would mean further competition with lowered tariff barriers for South Korean imports into Canada. Despite [optimistic reports](#) that South Korea’s export volume growth was the third fastest among the top 10 exporting countries in the world in 2013, there were also concerns from Koreans about falling behind Japan in investment and market share in China. [Yonhap News](#) cited a report that calculated the total investment by Japanese companies in China over the 10-year period from

2004-2013 as \$52.9 billion, which is roughly 1.5 times greater than South Korea with \$36.15 billion. The concerns by Tokyo and Seoul over each other's economic performance demonstrate the multidimensional nature of economic issues and mutual sensitivity toward China.

Amidst all the competition there was also good news regarding cooperation. Following their Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in November 2013, Japan's Yokohama Rubber and Korea's Kumho Tire announced that they inked a "master technological alliance agreement" in February 2014. Under the agreement, the two companies will engage in joint research and development (R&D) and discuss a licensing and technology exchange pact. Given the reputation and performance of the individual tire makers, the agreement is expected to bring mutually beneficial results by giving the two manufacturers a greater competitive edge over their rivals in the global market.

Japan as South Korea's mirror?

It has been said that Japan is South Korea's mirror: the two are on parallel tracks when it comes to developments within the respective societies. In theory, this should foster centripetal dynamics and bring the two closer together. A familiar example here is the low birth rate in both Japan and South Korea. According to the World Bank database, based on 2012 records, Japan's fertility rate is 1.4 and Korea's is 1.3. Coupled with pressures to lower the unemployment rate, Japan and South Korea are each other's optimal destination for immigration and emigration. Upon news in March that Japan had revisited the idea of extending the limit that "technical interns" (*ginō jissūsei*) can stay in Japan from three to five years, [Yonhap News](#) reported on the latest job fair in Osaka and the efforts by the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) and their "k-move" event that is aimed to help Koreans find jobs abroad. A similar [event](#) occurred in January when KOTRA hosted its own job fair in Seoul, which invited 25 Japanese companies including Dentsu, a dominant advertising and public relations company headquartered in Tokyo. As an interesting counter-argument, a strongly worded piece in the [Japan Times](#) raised concerns about the potential for increasing exploitation of workers due to labor shortages ahead of the 2020 Olympics in Japan. The article goes on to state that "cheap foreign workers have become the go-to objects of exploitation, particularly for jobs that even young Japanese workers don't want to do. The problem was that the bosses need more than three years of exploitation, so in its infinite wisdom, the LDP [Liberal Democratic Party] has come out with a plan to extend the period to five years, all the while careful to note that they must return to their home country after that period."

The treatment of foreigners has been a visible yet sensitive issue for both Japan and South Korea. The [Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013](#) released by the US State Department in February 2014 cited discrimination against ethnic Koreans in Japan despite steady improvements, singling out domestic clashes involving the Japanese right-wing group Citizens against Special Privileges for Zainichi (ethnic Koreans and Chinese) in 2013. The country report on South Korea also listed instances of societal discrimination against defectors from North Korea as well as ethnic and racial minorities. In this sense, perhaps the two countries are not that far from being each other's mirror.

If in theory, similarities should facilitate greater cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul, in practice, there are strong centrifugal dynamics at work, pulling the two apart. The *Asahi Shimbun* ran an [article](#) on Feb. 12 that discussed the growing popularity of anti-Chinese and anti-Korean books as a genre in the Japanese publishing industry. Supposedly, book stores like Sanseido have designated corners for displaying such books, and by the second month of the year, three titles in the genre have made it to the top 10 list for nonfiction paperbacks as consolidated by Tohan Corp., a Japanese publishing distributor. “Bokanron” (published by Sankei Shimbun Shuppan and transliterated into “a theory of stupid Korea”) has kept its position in the top 10 for seven consecutive weeks. The article also quotes an official with Sankei Shimbun Shuppan, who says that “The series ‘Manga Ken Kan Ryu’ (Hating the Korean wave) has sold 1 million copies since first coming out in 2005.” Apparently, a similar trend has hit weekly magazines like *Shukan Bunshun* and *Shukan Post*. Regarding these sensational stories that are critical of China and South Korea, a reporter for one of these weeklies said that “we cannot stop because it sells.” It is unfortunate to think that there is considerable profit to be made from selling hate. If anything, this should add greater impetus for the governments in Tokyo and Seoul to increase collaboration to marginalize such provocative framing.

Ending the silent treatment

Relations between Japan and North Korea made steps in the direction of what could be called progress. The start of the year seemed very much like a continuation of the status quo: an [editorial](#) in the *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)* equated Prime Minister Abe’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine and attempts to revise the Japanese constitution to acts carried out by Adolf Hitler. Between February and March, there were reports of North Korea firing four short-range missiles into the sea off its eastern coast, test-firing 18 rockets that flew about 70 km (or 43 miles) over the Sea of Japan/East Sea, as well as test-firing two medium-range ballistic missiles from a site north of Pyongyang in late March. Tokyo reinforced the idea that economic sanctions will remain in place against Pyongyang and aid withheld without resolution of the abduction issue. At one point, it was reported that Japan’s Defense Minister Onodera Itsunori had issued an order in effect April 3-25 for the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) to shoot down any North Korean ballistic missiles that may harm or damage Japanese territory. There was speculation that Onodera had delayed a public announcement regarding the order to prevent throwing cold water on the negotiations between Tokyo and Pyongyang that were held at the North Korean Embassy in Beijing at the end of March – the first formal talks in more than a year. Similar speculation followed the slight delay in Japan’s confirmation of and subsequent protest of North Korea’s test-firing of short-range missiles on March 3, as there were informal talks ongoing between the Red Cross officials from the two countries in Shenyang, China.

In fact, there was a fair amount of interaction between the two countries during the first months of 2014. Just two weeks after the first meeting in Shenyang, a second round of talks kicked off on March 19 in Shenyang, with Red Cross officials from both countries as well as Foreign Ministry officials including Ono Keiichi, director of the Japan’s Northeast Asian Division, and Ryu Song-il, head of the North Korea’s Japanese affairs section. After the talks, Ono told reporters that the two countries had agreed to resume formal inter-governmental talks. Around the same time, the media reported that Japan’s Foreign Ministry announced that the parents of Megumi Yokota (who was abducted in 1977 at age 13 and subsequently died in 1994) were

allowed to meet Megumi's daughter, Kim Eun-gyong (now 26), for the first time in Ulan Bator, Mongolia. This was supposedly a goodwill gesture by the North. Given the degree to which Megumi is viewed as a symbol of the unresolved abduction issue between Pyongyang and Tokyo, the secret reunion was that a much welcome gesture.

At the end of March, officials from Japan and North Korea met in Beijing for their first formal bilateral meeting since November 2012, bringing together Ihara Junichi, director general of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau at Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and Song Il Ho, North Korea's ambassador for talks on normalization with Japan. The agenda focused on gaining cooperation from North Korea on fulfilling its promise to reinvestigate the North's abduction of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and '80s. Soon thereafter, the [Nikkei](#) reported that unofficial negotiations between the North and Japan in Shanghai on April 5-6 led to a more conciliatory North Korea that was willing to reinvestigate the abductions. In response, Japan indicated its interest in considering the easing of sanctions against the North. Although one could charge that there was nothing concrete that came out of the multiple interactions, diplomacy was not held hostage to the long-running stalemate.

The coming summer months

President Obama's visit to Tokyo and Seoul this April has been cautiously defined as a success, but it appears that little has changed between the US allies. While in Tokyo, Obama conspicuously avoided mentioning sensitive issues such as the comfort women. Once he got to Seoul, however, he loudly and eloquently supported full consideration of the comfort women/sex slave dispute, calling it a "human rights issue." In attempting to please everyone, both sides were able to take what they wished to hear from Obama's visit. As Peter Drysdale [observed](#), "With President Obama undertaking to defend the status quo on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, Prime Minister Abe explicitly rationalising his Yasukuni visit in Obama's presence, and no clear outcome on TPP, there was awkwardly unrequited progress on the US-Japan security relationship." But substantively, both Park and Abe appear to be less interested than ever in finding a diplomatic way forward to get relations between their two countries back on track. If North Korea does proceed with another nuclear test, South Korea and Japan may find some issues over which they agree, but a major diplomatic breakthrough appears distant.

Chronology of Japan-Korea Relations January – April 2014

Jan. 1, 2014: South Korean Foreign Ministry unveils its new promotional video on Dokdo.

Jan. 15, 2014: Document attached to US Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2014 urges US secretary of state to encourage Japanese government to address the comfort women/sex slave issue, as per Resolution 121 that passed the House of Representatives in July 2007.

Jan. 19, 2014: Joint South Korea-China memorial honoring Ahn Jung-geun, a revered South Korean independence activist who assassinated Japan's Governor General of Korea Itō Hirobumi, is unveiled at a Harbin railway station in China.

Jan. 23, 2014: Virginia State Senate approves a bill that calls for new textbooks for schools to identify the waters between Japan and South Korea as the “East Sea” in addition to its current designation as “Sea of Japan.”

Jan. 25, 2014: At a news conference on his first day at the job, Chairman Momii Katsuto of the Japanese public broadcaster NHK asserts that “every country” had some form of institutionalized wartime brothel similar to Japan’s “comfort women.” The chairman was called to appear before the Diet on Jan. 31, subsequently apologizing for his inappropriate comments.

Jan. 28, 2014: Senate in the US state of Georgia unanimously passes a resolution describing the Korean Peninsula as “bound by its East and West Seas.” Another bill passes on March 3 – Senate Resolution 941 that urges Congress to increase the number of visas awarded to Korean citizens in specialty industries.

Jan. 28, 2014: Seoul government denounces Tokyo’s claims to Dokdo/Takeshima in its new teaching manuals for Japanese textbooks for middle and high schools, demanding that Japan withdraw the manuals.

Jan. 31, 2014: South Korea protests remarks by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo that Japan is considering taking the territorial dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Feb. 5, 2014: Editorial in the *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)* equates PM Abe’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine and attempts to revise the Japanese constitution to acts by Adolf Hitler.

Feb. 6, 2014: Virginia’s House of Delegates votes 81 to 15 to mandate the inclusion of both “Sea of Japan” and “East Sea” in all textbooks approved by the Board of Education after July 1.

Feb. 11, 2014: Former Japanese Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi visits Seoul, and meets three South Korean women forced into sexual slavery for Japanese soldiers during World War II.

Feb. 18, 2014: Ihara Junichi, director general of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau at the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) meets South Korean counterpart, Lee Sang-deok, director general of Northeast Asian Affairs Bureau.

March 3, 2014: According to *The Mainichi*, Ono Keiichi, director of the Northeast Asia Division of Japan’s MOFA, and Ryu Song-il, chief of the North Korean MOFA’s Japanese Affairs section, hold informal talks on the sidelines of the Red Cross meeting in Shenyang, China. They reportedly discuss North Korea’s abduction of Japanese nationals in the ‘70s and ‘80s and Pyongyang’s nuclear weapons and missile programs.

March 3, 2014: North Korea fires two short-range missiles off its eastern coast – the second such launch within the span of a week. Japan lodges a formal protest with North Korea.

March 4-7, 2014: Trade representatives from China, Japan, and South Korea meet in Seoul for the fourth round of the trilateral free trade agreement (FTA) talks. The talks are aimed at basic guidelines on tariff reduction, opening service trade, and other issues related to investment.

March 6-7, 2014: Officials from China, Japan, and South Korea take part in a two-day Table Top Exercise (TTX) in Tokyo, aimed at strengthening capacity to deal with humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Participants are from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China, Emergency Management Office of China's State Council; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Cabinet Office of Japan, and; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and National Emergency Management of South Korea.

March 10-21, 2014: The 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women is held at United Nations headquarters in New York. China's *People's Daily* reports that the Chinese envoy urged Japan to acknowledge its role in recruiting sex slaves during World War II and make formal apologies for its deeds.

March 12, 2014: Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Saiki Akitaka arrives in Seoul to meet counterpart, Cho Tae-yong. *Chosun Ilbo* reports that Saiki's visit was cut short once it was clear that the two sides would not come to a conclusion about a future summit. South Korean MOFA releases a statement that Seoul has no intention of holding a bilateral summit without an "understandable" resolution of Japan's wartime actions.

March 13, 2014: Senate Judiciary Committee of the state of New York passes a bill that would require the dual-labeling of Sea of Japan and East Sea in the state's school textbooks.

March 13, 2014: Partners Toshiba of Japan and SanDisk of the US separately file civil lawsuits against South Korea's SK Hynix for damages from alleged theft of sensitive information regarding their flash memory chip technology.

March 14, 2014: PM Abe announces that his government will not revise the Kono Statement, a landmark 1993 apology to those women that were forced to serve in wartime military brothels.

March 16, 2014: Japanese MOFA announces that the parents of Megumi Yokota (who was abducted at 13 from Japan in 1977 and subsequently died in 1994) were allowed to meet with Megumi's daughter, Kim Eun-gyong (now 26), for the first time in Ulan Bator, Mongolia.

March 16, 2014: South Korean Ministry of National Defense announces that North Korea test-fired 25 short-range rockets off its east coast into open water.

March 18, 2014: *Kyodo News* states that Furuya Keiji, Japanese Cabinet minister in charge of the North Korean abduction issue, announced that Japan has no intention of lifting economic sanctions or resuming aid to the North without the return of Japanese nationals abducted by the North Korean regime.

March 19, 2014: Korea International Trade Association (KITA) releases a report that describes the competition between Japan and South Korea on exports as being at an all-time high, based on the Export Similarity Index (ESI).

March 19-20, 2014: Director of the Northeast Asia Division of Japan's MOFA Ono Keiichi and North Korean counterpart Ryu Song-il meet for informal talks on the sidelines of the Red Cross meeting in Shenyang, China. As a follow-up to the previous session on March 3, a key agenda was whether to resume formal negotiations at the senior level between the two countries.

March 25, 2014: US plays intermediary in bringing together President Park Geun-hye and PM Abe for their first face-to-face meeting on the sidelines of the Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague. The three leaders reaffirm the necessity of cooperation in confronting North Korea's ongoing provocations.

March 26, 2014: Pyongyang test-fires two intermediate-range ballistic missiles from a site north of Pyongyang into the sea off its eastern coast.

March 30-31, 2014: Ihara Junichi, director general of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, and Song Il-ho, North Korean ambassador in charge of normalization of relations with Japan, meet in Beijing.

April 1, 2014: Japan announces that it has eased its self-imposed arms export ban for the first time in nearly 50 years. *The Japan Times* reports that South Korea immediately called for "the maximum level of transparency" from Japan in implementing the new guidelines.

April 3, 2014: Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe signs the "East Sea bill" into law. The bill, requiring all new public school textbooks to use a dual-naming system for the body of water between Japan and South Korea, will take effect from July 2.

April 4, 2014: South Korea's First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Cho Tae-yong summons Japan's Ambassador to Seoul Bessho Koro to protest new Japanese elementary school textbooks that describe Dokdo/Takeshima as part of Japan's "sovereign territory."

April 5, 2014: *Yomiuri Shimbun* reports that Japanese Defense Minister Onodera Itsunori has ordered a Maritime Self-Defense Force (SDF) destroyer to the Sea of Japan to shoot down any incoming ballistic missiles launched by North Korea. A day later, the US announces that it will deploy two additional *Aegis* destroyers to Japan by 2017 to strength overall missile defenses against North Korea's provocations.

April 5-6, 2014: *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* reports agreement was reached between Tokyo and Pyongyang in unofficial negotiations in Beijing with Japan agreeing to consider reducing some sanctions against North Korea and Pyongyang indicating that it will review the case of abductions of Japanese nationals.

April 7, 2014: A trilateral meeting is hosted by the US, bringing together Ihara Junichi, the Japanese director general of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, Hwang Joon-kook, the

South Korean special representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security affairs, and Glyn Davies, the US special representative for North Korea policy. A main item on the agenda is facilitating cooperation to counter North Korean provocations.

April 11, 2014: *Kyodo News* reports that an Osaka-based citizens' group has filed a lawsuit with the Osaka District Court, asserting that PM Abe's visit to Yasukuni Shrine last December violated their constitutional right to "live in peace," and that his visit worsened Japan's relations with neighboring countries.

April 15, 2014: China-ROK-Japan International Forum for the Trilateral Cooperation 2014 is held in Seoul.

April 18, 2014: In response to the sinking of a ferry off the Coast of Jindo Island in South Korea on April 16, Defense Minister Onodera announces that Japanese divers and minesweepers are ready to be dispatched as needed. According to *Yomiuri Shimbun*, PM Abe also sent a message to President Park on April 17 expressing condolences for the tragedy and indicating willingness to assist in any way possible.

April 21, 2014: *Japan Times* reports that a lawsuit has been filed with the Tokyo District Court against the Japanese government and Yasukuni Shrine, claiming that PM Abe's visit in December of 2013 violated the constitutional principle of separation of state and religion.

April 22, 2014: *Japan Times* reports that a total of 149 Japanese lawmakers including two Cabinet ministers visited the Yasukuni Shrine on the morning of April 22, prompting protests from both Seoul and Beijing.

April 22, 2014: China-ROK-Japan Northeast Asia Trilateral Forum, sponsored by *Xinhua*, *JoongAng Ilbo*, and *Nikkei*, opens in Jiangsu province, China.

April 25, 2014: During his Asia trip at a press conference in Seoul with President Park, President Obama describes Japan's wartime system of sexual slavery as "a terrible and egregious violation of human rights." According to *Kyodo News*, Prime Minister Abe said that although he is pained to think about what those women went through, that the issue should not be politicized.

April 28-29, 2014: PRC Vice Environment Minister Li Ganjie, and ROK and Japanese Environment Ministers Yoon Seong-kyu and Ishihara Nobuteru hold 16th trilateral Environment Ministers Meeting in Daegu, Korea.