

Japan-Korea Relations:

The World Cup and Sports Diplomacy

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The story of the quarter was Japan's re-engagement with the two Koreas on several levels. For Seoul-Tokyo relations, the World Cup soccer matches overshadowed important, but quiet, efforts at resuming bilateral security dialogue. For Tokyo-Pyongyang relations, baby steps toward resuming long-suspended normalization talks appear to have been made. Finally, the impact of the World Cup and sports diplomacy on Japan-South Korea relations is not to be underestimated.

Though the 2002 Cup did not mark modernity for either already-modern country, the Cup's success was in no small part a function of the fact that it was hosted by two of the more advanced, market-savvy, globalized, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, open-society countries in Asia. This not only gave the games a luster not easily tarnished, but it also is a lasting image for Japan-South Korea cooperation. Not bad for a null outcome.

Japan-ROK Relations: Re-engagement, Part I

In case you've been vacationing on the moon (or in North Korea), the big story in Seoul-Tokyo relations this past quarter was the World Cup. The overall impact of Seoul and Tokyo's co-hosting of the event is discussed at length below. What deserves mention here as a tangible positive externality of the matches was the signing of an extradition treaty between the two countries. Long overdue, but directly a function of the increased travel anticipated for the matches, the treaty requires both countries to extradite any nationals involved in serious criminal activity (i.e., carrying a prison sentence of more than one year). As much as some Koreans might hate to admit, this treaty attests to the difference in quality bilateral relations with Japan (and with the United States) have vis-à-vis all other foreign relationships. The treaty with Japan is the only one of its kind that South Korea has with another country (except the U.S.).

The excitement over the upsets and Cinderella stories of the World Cup matches overshadowed quiet, but important steps in Japan-ROK security re-engagement. As readers will recall, much of the interaction between Seoul and Tokyo on political-military issues suffered as a result of the history textbook and Yasukuni Shrine controversies in 2001. Only in the last quarter or two had relations in this aspect been returning to normal. Meetings between Japan Defense Agency head Nakatani Gen and ROK Prime

Minister Lee Han-dong and National Defense Minister Kim Dong-shin on April 20 continued this path to normalcy. Japanese officials explained a set of Japanese bills on military emergencies submitted to the Diet for approval to which Defense Minister Kim responded with understanding and gratitude. The two sides also agreed to continue sharing intelligence to ensure an incident-free World Cup. Most important, there was explicit recognition of a need to restore their fledgling military dialogue suspended last year, and in this vein, the two defense ministers agreed in principle to resume defense exchanges and to hold a second joint navy search and rescue drill (most likely in September).

Seoul-Tokyo relations could have been better this quarter, skeptics might argue given the World Cup, but they could also have been much worse. The relationship appeared to weather a sleight-of-hand by Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro who sought to pre-empt controversy over another visit to Yasukuni this August by actually going in April. Criticism from Seoul was measurably muted. The two governments also managed to handle the DPRK asylum-seeker controversy in Shenyang, China well (although the two were not at the core of the dispute). A quiet quarter in Japan-South Korea relations, in this track, is not necessarily a bad thing.

Japan-DPRK Relations: Re-engagement, Part II

Japan's re-engagement with North Korea this past quarter took place on a number of fronts. Although the more publicized event was the dispute over DPRK political asylum-seekers rushing the Japanese consulate in Shenyang, China, perhaps the more important event was the restarting of Japan-North Korea Red Cross talks. Suspended since March, the talks (April 29-30) produced a commitment by the DPRK to resume searches for missing Japanese nationals that Tokyo claims have been abducted. The two sides also agreed to a fourth round of home visits this summer for Japanese spouses living in North Korea.

In the broader scheme of things, why are these relatively unassuming Red Cross talks important? First, the issue of home visits for Japanese spouses is widely perceived as a significant goodwill-building measure in Japan-DPRK relations. In the prelude to normalization talks in 1997, for example, three rounds of visits were held (before they were stopped in September 2000). Second, any serious progress in Japan-DPRK normalization dialogue, effectively suspended since the winter of 2000, is contingent on Pyongyang adequately addressing the abductions issue. Tokyo maintains there are at least 11 confirmed cases of Japanese nationals abducted to North Korea for espionage training in 1977 and 1983 in addition to some 49 other possible cases. The North abruptly curtailed any discussion of the issue at the end of 2001 in reaction to legal actions taken by Japanese police authorities over financial scandals involving the pro-North Korea residents association in Japan. Though hints were made by DPRK officials in the last quarter about a revisiting of the issue, the Red Cross talks produced the first formal commitment by Pyongyang.

One can only surmise as to why the enigmatic North Korean leadership decided to re-

open dialogue with Japan. In part this could be attributed to the very clear message that has been sent by the Koizumi government since taking office. Koizumi held up the abductions issue as a precondition to dialogue. The Diet followed suit with resolutions supporting this position. Whether this is a function of political acumen by Koizumi or the absence of any palpable public support for restarting normalization talks with the DPRK (which gives the government a lot of room to lay out preconditions) is anyone's guess. Perhaps the most important factor explaining DPRK behavior is food. As explained in last quarter's column, the World Food Program estimates show the North running out of food by July given the drop in contributions this year. The biggest non-giver coincidentally has been Japan. Who says the North Koreans aren't pragmatic?

There was talk in the run-up to the Red Cross talks of the North expelling Japanese Red Army terrorists that have had safe haven in North Korea since hijackings in 1970. Though this did not emerge as part of the Red Cross meetings, it is indeed a significant issue as this would have ramifications (at least in a U.S.-DPRK context) for North Korea's classification as a terrorist country.

Tokyo's other major interactions with Pyongyang this past quarter all took place via Beijing. The Japanese Coast Guard undertook investigations of the alleged DPRK ship that sank when it violated Japanese waters at the end of 2001. Divers did not begin the operation until Japan obtained the consent of the Chinese government – in whose waters the ship sat at the bottom of the East China Sea. Beijing granted Tokyo's requests and the investigations took place without incident.

The two governments, however, were not so lucky in May when five North Korean asylum-seekers rushed the Japanese consulate in Shenyang. PRC armed police intervened, entering the consulate grounds and forcibly removing the individuals. The incident was captured on film (thanks to planning by South Korean nongovernmental organization (NGO) groups in Beijing) and made the front page of newspapers globally, raising consciousness about the plight of DPRK refugees in China. Tokyo protested the unauthorized entrance of the Chinese police on sovereign Japanese territory (i.e., the consulate grounds). The Chinese countered by embarrassing the Japanese with information showing no resistance by Japanese diplomats to the police intervention; moreover, Japanese media reports later stated that embassy staff had been instructed to call PRC police in cases of forced entry. In the end, the five DPRK nationals were released from detainment and sent to a third country (the Philippines) for eventual asylum in South Korea. As other columns this quarter show, this event was not isolated to Japan-DPRK relations: a rash of attempted defections by DPRK nationals through consulates and embassies in China took place, undoubtedly orchestrated with the help of individuals and NGOs operating in China.

The World Cup, Sports, and Japan-Korea Relations

With the World Cup now a recent memory, how much did Japan and the ROK's co-hosting of the event affect relations? Did it take the close but distant neighbors to a new level of cooperation? Did it merely provide a temporary reprieve from the traditional

animosities harbored on both sides? Or did it just provide another opportunity for Seoul and Tokyo to bicker?

Answering this question requires a larger look at the role that sporting events have played in international relations in Asia. At one level, such events have become symbols of globalization and “glocalization” (local resistance to globalization) forces at play in Asia. Watching any of the World Cup games on the tube (except when the host teams played), one could barely distinguish what part of the world these matches took place given the plethora of English-language global advertising panel boards surrounding the soccer pitches. So the message becomes: “Global Asia.” At the same time though, these games serve as intense megaphones for nationalism and even jingoism. You would have thought, for example, that “Korea Team Fighting” was fighting the entire world (which resonates with the anti-foreign strain in Korean conceptions of national identity)! So the message becomes: “Not Global Asia, but Glocal Asia.” But then, as Ralph Cossa and Jane Skanderup appropriately noted, the importation of foreign coaches (Hiddink in South Korea; Troussier in Japan; Milutinovic in China) has been pointed to as the key variable in the success of Asian teams, which has in turn fueled parochialism (see “The World Cup: Promoting Globalization?,” *PacNet* 22.) Go figure.

In a separate vein, in Asia sports have served as an important validation of development in many Asian countries. All of the major developing countries in East Asia aspired to host a major international sporting event – in particular, the Olympics – as an expression of their “arrival” on the global stage. The 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games was in many ways Japan’s “coming out” party as a world player, much the same way the 1988 Seoul Olympiad marked South Korea’s place 24 years later. One could imagine similar aspirations when Beijing hosts the games in 2008. For Asia, the sporting event becomes a mark of modernity.

Sporting events have also become the means by which Asian countries grease the wheels of diplomacy and engagement. The visit by the U.S. national table tennis team to Beijing in the early 1970s was a high-profile, low-politics event that gauged American public openness to greater dialogue with China. This “ping-pong diplomacy” was important in the sequence of events that led to Nixon’s eventual visit to Beijing and Sino-U.S. *rapprochement* in February 1972. A less well-known but even more effective case of sports engagement was that between South Korea and China in the early 1990s. Participation in athletic competitions hosted by each country provided a useful means by which to express goodwill and an interest in expanding growing economic relations from the 1980s. China’s decision to participate in the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympics in South Korea (despite North Korean protests) was greatly appreciated by Seoul as it made these games among the most well-attended in recent history. Seoul reciprocated by strongly supporting the 1990 Asian Games held in Beijing. (Seoul sent a high-level delegation led by a close relative of President Chun to the Games; provided \$15 million in advertising revenue; and made other substantial donations to facilitate Beijing’s successful staging of the event.) This was particularly significant for China as it sought to establish a degree of normality amid the international ostracism in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre. In total these were significant goodwill-

and transparency-building events that enabled the normalization of relations in 1992.

So how does the 2002 World Cup rate given this framework? The Cup matches were not without their fair share of episodic political statements (e.g., the South Korean team's version of the "Ohno" after scoring a goal against the United States). As an instrument of engagement, there were also attempts by the South Koreans and Japanese to offer co-hosting privileges of some matches to the North Koreans, but to no avail. But in terms of Japan-ROK bilateral interaction, the Cup had little major impact: it didn't help relations, but did not hurt them either. A pessimist might find this null outcome to be yet another exasperating example of how Japanese and Koreans made lemons out of lemonade, allowing their historical bickering to get in the way of a golden opportunity to take their relationship to the next level. Instead, the two countries competed so vigorously for the rights to host that they frightened FIFA officials into choosing neither solely; then after that, they virtually ignored each other as co-hosts (see "South Korea and Japan: High Time These Neighbors Put Future Before Past," *PacNet* 22A).

Optimists, on the other hand, find nothing particularly disappointing in the null outcome. After all, to argue that the World Cup should have spurred South Korea and Japan to a new level in relations overestimates the power of sports as a variable in international relations. As described, sports may help facilitate relations between states, but they rarely act as a driver alone in redefining relations (e.g., a war).

It is true that sibling rivalry between the co-hosts was evident as they bid for the Cup, but so what? Seoul and Tokyo competed just as fiercely to host the Olympics in 1988 (don't all bidders?), but in the end, Japanese enjoyed the Seoul Olympic games more than any other Asian country as they vicariously relived their own 1964 "coming out" party through the Koreans. Similarly, after their national team was eliminated, the overwhelming team favorite among Japanese was the Cinderella South Korean team. Polls showed as high as 60 percent of Japanese rooted for Korea's advancing to the Cup final. By contrast, only 37 percent supported the Koizumi government.

Policy wonks will tell you that the Cup did serve an important purpose for bilateral relations by laying down a marker in advance that gave policymakers in both Seoul and Tokyo the incentive to patch up relations after a bad year in 2001 (see "Values After Victory: The Future of U.S.-Japan-Korea Relations," *Comparative Connections* Special Annual Issue, July 2002). However, the longer-term impact remains to be seen. In the end, I think when South Korea President Kim Dae-jung and Koizumi meet at the July 1 summit, they will look back with satisfaction on the first World Cup ever in Asia as one of the most exciting and competitive in recent history, without terrorist or hooligan incidents. Though the 2002 Cup did not mark modernity for either already modern country, the Cup's success was in no small part a function of the fact that it was hosted by two of the more advanced, market-savvy, globalized, open-society countries in Asia. This not only gave the games a luster not easily tarnished, but it also is a lasting image for Japan-South Korea cooperation. Not bad for a null outcome.

Chronology of Japan-Korea Relations April-June 2002¹

April 1, 2002: Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi announces that he would “persistently and repeatedly” try to establish diplomatic ties between Japan and the DPRK. Koizumi urged Pyongyang to cooperate in cases of Japanese citizens suspected of having been abducted by the DPRK.

April 8, 2002: Japan and the ROK sign a criminal extradition pact to take effect before the 2002 World Cup finals begin May 31.

April 9, 2002: Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) meeting in Tokyo in the aftermath of ROK special envoy Lim Dong-won’s mission to Pyongyang to restart inter-Korean dialogue.

April 10, 2002: ROK Foreign Minister Choi Sung-hong expresses concern over “distorted” Japanese textbooks reportedly approved this week by the Japanese education ministry for use in high schools, which refer to the disputed Tokdo/Takeshima islets as belonging to Japan.

April 10, 2002: The World Food Program announces that North Korea will suffer a severe food crisis by the middle of the year. Japan, the biggest food donor last year with a contribution of 500,000 tons, has withheld food aid due to public opposition.

April 11, 2002: Japan’s Parliament passes a resolution urging the government to take a “resolute stance” against the DPRK on the abductions issue.

April 11, 2002: *Tokyo Shimbun* reports that a senior Japanese Foreign Ministry official predicts an imminent restarting of Red Cross talks with the DPRK. The Red Cross talks have been suspended since March 2002.

April 12, 2002: PM Koizumi says that he will seek the PRC’s help in settling allegations that the DPRK abducted Japanese citizens.

April 17, 2002: Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda Yasuo announces that the Japanese Red Cross is seeking talks with the DPRK later this month on the issue of abducted Japanese nationals.

April 18, 2002: Japan and the DPRK announce Red Cross talks in Beijing scheduled for April 29 and 30. It will be the first meeting between the two countries since the March 2000, the last Red Cross meeting.

1. Compiled with research assistance from Eupil Muhn.

April 20, 2002: Japan's Defense Agency head Gen Nakatani meets with ROK Prime Minister Lee Han-dong and National Defense Minister Kim Dong-shin to explain legislation recently submitted to the Diet to prepare Japan for a military emergency.

April 21, 2002: PM Koizumi visits Yasukuni Shrine.

April 22, 2002: Panel for the preparation of a joint history research committee holds inaugural meeting in Seoul.

April 22, 2002: At celebrations marking the 25th anniversary of the ROK-Japan Friendship Association, PM Koizumi pledges concerted efforts to promote relations between the ROK and Japan in light of the upcoming 2002 FIFA World Cup soccer finals.

April 25, 2002: The DPRK Foreign Ministry strongly condemns Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni Shrine.

April 29, 2002: A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan states that the PRC will supervise Japan's investigation of the alleged sunken DPRK ship in the East China Sea.

April 30, 2002: Japan-DPRK Red Cross talks end. The DPRK agrees to resume searches for missing Japanese whom Tokyo alleges were kidnapped by the DPRK. The two sides also agreed to a fourth round of home visits by Japanese spouses living in the DPRK this summer.

May 1, 2002: The Japan Coast Guard begins an underwater survey of a suspected DPRK spy ship that sank in the East China Sea.

May 4, 2002: Jon Jong-hyok, secretary general of the (North) Korean Atomic Bomb Victims Association for Anti-Nuclear Peace, says he will ask Japan for help to build a hospital to treat A-bomb survivors now residing in North Korea.

May 8, 2002: PRC police intervene in an attempt by DPRK citizens who rushed the Japanese consulate in Shenyang.

May 9, 2002: The ROK Ministry of Justice announces that from May 15 to July 15, South Koreans traveling to Japan will be able to get a 30-day visa on entry and not have to pre-apply at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.

May 9, 2002: Japan lodges protests with the PRC over the police's entering the Japanese mission in Shenyang without authorization to remove two North Koreans.

May 13, 2002: ROK announces it is willing to grant refuge to the five DPRK asylum-seekers detained by the PRC police at a Japanese consulate.

May 14, 2002: In a meeting between Masaaki Ono, chief of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's consular and immigration department and his PRC counterpart, the PRC refuses to hand over the five DPRK citizens it detained from the Japanese consulate in Shenyang.

May 14, 2002: Japanese media reports reveal that the staff at the Japanese consulate in Shenyang were under standing orders from the ambassador to seek PRC police help in expelling any unauthorized introducers.

May 22, 2002: The five DPRK asylum-seeker removed from the Japanese consulate in Shenyang leave Beijing via the Philippines for asylum in the ROK.

May 29, 2002: Japanese Prince Takamado, along with his wife, Princess Hisako, arrive in the ROK to attend the May 31 World Cup opening ceremony in Seoul, the first official visit to the ROK by a member of the Japanese Imperial family since World War II.

May 29, 2002: Japanese Diet unanimously approves extradition treaty with the ROK.

May 31, 2002: PM Koizumi attends World Cup opening ceremony in Seoul, meets President Kim Dae-jung.

June 2, 2002: JDA chief Nakatani proposes new forum of Asia-Pacific defense ministers that could meet regularly to discuss regional security issues.

June 2, 2002: ROK civic groups hold protests over controversial remarks Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda stating that Japan could in theory reconsider its three nonnuclear principles.

June 7, 2002: North Korean Central News Agency releases statement criticizing controversial remarks by Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda on Japan's nonnuclear principles.

June 10, 2002: ROK presidential spokeswoman congratulates Japan on its team's first World Cup soccer victory against Russia.

June 11, 2002: DPRK Agricultural Minister Kim Chang-sik condemns Japan at UN World Food Summit for withholding food aid.

June 17, 2002: TCOG meeting in San Francisco.

June 23, 2002: Japanese private fact-finding delegation with regard to atomic bomb survivors leaves for the DPRK.

June 25, 2002: Japanese Coast Guard ships guard site in the East China Sea as operations begin to raise the sunken alleged DPRK ship.

June 30, 2002: ROK President Kim Dae-jung attends World Cup finals in Yokohama, Japan; they are followed by a two-day summit with Prime Minister Koizumi.