

# Japan and Korea : A Turbulent History

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**International Relations 163**

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**03 / 24 / 99**

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### **Introduction**

Both Koreans and Japanese people call each other that the countries are very close geographically each other but they are very distant from in many respects. Japan had an on-and-off history of territorial ambition in Korea that went back many centuries. Polls during the postwar period in Japan and South Korea showed that the people of each nation had a profound dislike of the other country and people. The two countries have a long history of hostility. Admiral Sun-sin Lee, whose armor-plated boats eventually defeated the Japanese navy's damaging attacks in the 1590s, was South Korea's most revered national hero. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture's adoption in the 1980s of revised textbook-guidelines, softening the language used to describe Japan's aggression during world War II, inspired outrage in South Korea as well as in other Asian countries.

Today, Japan is one of four major powers along with the United States, Russia, and China that have important security interests on the Korean Peninsula<sup>1</sup>. However, Japan's involvement in political, economic and security issues on the Korean Peninsula is more limited than that of the other three powers. Japan's relations with North Korea and South Korea has a legacy of bitterness stemming from harsh Japanese colonial rule over Korea from 1910 to 1945.

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## **Prehistory to the 16th Century**

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Yamato Court maintained close relations with the Korean kingdom of Paekche, from which Buddhism, Confucianism, and Chinese characters were transmitted to Japan, and was also in contact with the kingdoms Koguryo and Silla, which lay to the north and east of Paekche, respectively. Formal relations with Silla, which had established undisputed control over the peninsula by 676, ceased in 779, but trade between Korea and Japan thrived, continuing into the period that followed the overthrow of Silla and the establishment of Koryo in 918. However, the Mongol invasions of Korea during 1231 to 1259 and the subsequent Mongol invasions of Japan during 1274 to 1281 rendered trade impossible, and the wake of this turmoil bands of pirates, largely Japanese, made an increasing number of attacks on coastal areas of China and Korea. In 1404 Japan was permitted by Ming Dynasty of China to become a tributary nation-and thus to enjoy the fruits of trade-on the condition that Muromachi Shougunate suppress the pirates:

An eventual consequences of this development was the establishment of relations between Japan and the Yi Dynasty permitted trade and conducted diplomatic relation with Japan<sup>2</sup>.

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### **Invasions of Korea and Korean Embassies to Edo**

The invasions of Korea in 1592 and 1597 were executed by Toyotomi Hideyoshi,

who in 1590 had established control over all of Japan, in order to extend his power to Korea and China. The campaigns, which ended in defeat at the hands of a combined force of Koreans and Ming Chinese, contributed to the collapse of the Toyotomi's power. For Korea, however, the consequences were widespread desolation and the removal to Japan of some 50,000 to 60,000 of its citizens as well as many books and copper movable type.

Hideyoshi's successor as suzerain and founder of the Tokugawa shogunate, Tokugawa Ieyasu, who wished to resume trade, initiated negotiations with Korea on a basis of equality. In 1607 formal relations were restored and a mission of several hundred Koreans was received and feted at Edo(Tokyo)<sup>3</sup>:

A total of 11 such embassies arrived in Edo during the Edo period(1600-1868), providing an important diplomatic contact during this era of Japanese national seclusion. In 1618 the So family of Tsushima reopened the trade station, or Japanese residence, at Pusan, and Japanese exports included silver, copper, ginseng, and Chinese silks.

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### **Meiji Restoration to the Annexation of Korea**

Following the opening of Japan by the Western powers and the resumption in 1868 of direct imperial rule, the nation swiftly embarked upon a new era of development as a modern capitalist state<sup>4</sup>. Korea, however, maintained a policy of seclusion and sank an armed US commercial ship that in 1866 sailed up the Taedong River to the vicinity of

Pyongyang, and fired on French and US naval fleets that entered the mouth of the Han River near the capital city of Seoul. The Meiji government divided into camps for and against the military conquest of Korea. In 1875 a Japanese warship, dispatched for the ostensible purpose of surveying the Korean coast, was fired upon by a Korean shore battery when it entered the mouth of the Han River; on the pretext of gaining satisfaction for this insult, a fleet of six naval vessels was sent early in the following year to force the signing of the Treaty of Kanghwa, which provided for the opening of three Korean ports, the appointment to each of a Japanese consul with extraterritorial jurisdiction over Japanese nationals, and exemption from customs duties.

Kwamura explains that although Japan had thus succeeded in gaining a march on the Western powers by concluding an unequal treaty with Korea, rivalry with China was inevitable<sup>5</sup>. In the wake of the Kapsin Political Coup of 1884, Japan and China agreed to withdraw their troops from Korea; however, in the spring of 1894 the Tonghak Rebellion broke out, and the Korean government called on the Chinese for military assistance. Japan too sent an expeditionary force,

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which clashed with the Chinese in July 1894, leading to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895.

Victory in that war and in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 enabled Japan to stem the influence in Korea of China and Russia, and under threat of military force, to gain affirmation by Korea of Japanese ascendancy through the Korean-Japanese convections. The signing in November of the Korean-Japanese Convention of 1905 gave Japan full administrative control over Korea's foreign affairs, thus making it a protectorate, and provided for establishment of the Office of Resident General in Korea. Another convention

was signed in July 1907, just five days after the forced abdication of King Kojong of Korea, and gave comprehensive administrative power over Korean domestic affairs to the resident general. This was followed on 1 August by the disbanding of the Korean army. Elements of the army rose against the Japanese but were suppressed; anti-Japanese guerrilla activity broke out throughout the country and persisted into 1914.

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### **Colonial Period**

Authority over the military, the judiciary, the legislature, and the civil administration was vested in the government general of Korea, presided over by a governor-general appointed by the Japanese emperor. Regulations issued by the government general, which was essentially a military government presided over by an army general or navy admiral, were enforced by a Japanese military police force, which assumed the duties of the regular police and was charged not only with the enforcement of criminal law but also that of public health regulations and the use of the Japanese language. Under the Education Law of Korea of August 1911, Japanese was made the primary language of Korean schools.

The call by president Woodrow Wilson of the United States for the self-determination of nations, and the death of King Kojong in January 1919, contributed to the formation of a movement for independence. On 1 March 1919, while the Paris Peace Conference was in session, a declaration of independence was read in Seoul to a cheering audience of 5,000, who were joined by tens of thousands of others as they marched through the city. The movement spread through out the country, involving as many as 2 million participants and issuing in numerous violent confrontations with the Japanese police and military. In April 1919 the provisional government of Korea was founded by Korean patriots in Shanghai as a government-in-exile.

Following the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937 to 1945, efforts

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were stepped up to assimilate Koreans. Worship at Shinto shrines was enforced and the principles of Japanese emperor worship were introduced into the curriculum of Korean schools. In 1940 all Koreans were forced to assume Japanese names. Between 1939 and 1945 some 1.2 million Koreans were transported to Japan to perform forced labor, and toward the end of Second World War Koreans were made subject to military conscription.

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### **1945-1952**

On 15 August 1945 Emperor Showa (Hirohito) announced Japan's surrender and its acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration, putting into effect the Cairo Declaration, under which the independence of Korea was established. However, under an agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union the peninsula was occupied by Soviet forces north of the 38th parallel and by US troops south of that line. This resulted in the founding in August 1948 of the Republic of Korea under President Syngman Rhee in the south, and the founding during the following month of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea under Kim Il-sung in the north.

With the invasion of South Korea by North Korea on 25 June 1950, war broke out between the two Korean states, and forces of the United Nations, chiefly US troops, sided with South Korea while China sided with North Korea. After three years and several phases of intense fighting an armistice was signed on 27 July 1953, restoring a line near the 38th parallel as the border between the two Koreas. As discussed by Smith (p. 266. 1998), throughout the war Japan served as the chief military benefitted immensely by the

expenditure of some US \$2.4 billion to US \$3.6 billion for goods and services.

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### **Relations with South Korea, 1952-**

In 1962 President Park Chong-Hui of South Korea announced the commencement of a five-year economic plan, and in order to fund the plan, resolution of the issue of Japanese war reparation became an urgent priority. Although the United States continued to urge the normalization of relations, opposition by groups in South Korea claiming that the treaty would open the way for a new era of Korean political and economic dependency on Japan contributed to the delay of negotiations. On 29 February 1965, however, Japan and South Korea agreed that the treaty to be signed would declare void all treaties and agreements signed on or before 22 August 1910. Japan also confirmed UN Resolution 195, which specified that South Korea was the only lawful government of Korea<sup>6</sup>. The Korea-Japan Treaty of 1965 and supplementary agreements were signed on 22 June. Japan agreed to provide to South Korea US \$800 million in economic assistance. It was also agreed that Koreans in Japan who had been living there prior to the Second World War would be given permanent resident status. The one remaining unresolved issue was that of territorial rights to the island Takeshima in the Sea of Japan. As a result of the treaty political and economic relations rapidly improved. The Japanese were responsible for the initial economic modernization of Korea. Following the annexation of Korea in 1910, Japan thrust a modern blend of industrial capitalism onto a feudal agrarian society. By the end of the colonial period, Japan had built an extensive infrastructure of roads, railroads, ports,

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electrical power, and government buildings that facilitated both the modernization of Korea's economy and Japan's control over the modernization process. In some respects, South Korean patterns of development after the early 1960s closely followed the methodology introduced by the Japanese fifty years earlier -industrialization form above using a strong bureaucracy that formulated and implemented economic policies<sup>7</sup>.

The Rapid development of South Korea's economy in the 1970s contributed greatly to the establishment of stable and close economic relations with Japan. Nevertheless a series of unfortunate incidents that marred diplomatic relations between the two countries indicated that there remained considerable mistrust and hostility due to Japan's pre-World War colonial ambitions. Prominent among these issues were the kidnapping and removal to Seoul in 1971 of opposition leader Kim Dae-jung, ironically, who is the present president of South Korea, by agents of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, the attempted assassination in 1974 of President Park Chong-Hui by a Korean resident of Japan, and the so-called Textbook Issue, in which China and South Korea formally objected in August 1982 to what they alleged were distortions of fact introduced at the insistence of the Japanese government into passages in history textbooks dealing with Japan's pre-World War activities in Asia.

The government of Nakasone Yasuhiro, formed in November 1982, placed a high priority on the improvement of relations with South Korea, and in January 1983 Prime Minister Nakasone visited South Korea, where he announced the start

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of new era in relations between the two countries and promised US \$4 billion in economic

aid. During a visit to Japan in September 1984 President Chon Du-hwan of Korea was received by Emperor Showa, who, in reference to prewar Japanese aggression against Korea, expressed "sincere regret" for the "unfortunate past."<sup>8</sup> However, the effectiveness of Prime Minister Nakasone's diplomacy vis-a-vis South Korea, which was based on his personal relationship with President Chon, was seriously prejudiced by mounting criticism in South Korea of the Chon regime. Relations worsened when in September 1986 Japanese minister of education Fujio Masayuki, whose ministry had approved revisions in Japanese history textbooks, cause a furor by declaring that Korea was in part responsible for its annexation in 1910 by Japan. The education minister resigned and Prime Minister Nakasone immediately went to South Korea to tender an apology. In 1990 changes in procedure relation to fingerprinting of identification card that resident aliens are required to possess and amelioration of restrictions on the civil rights of Koreans residing in Japan, led to the improvement of South Korea-Japan relations. In an audience in May 1990, Emperor Akihito Expressed to South Korean president Roh Tae-u his "deep regret" for the "suffering" the Korean people had been forced to endure during the period of Japanese colonial rule.

The steady improvement in diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan has been accompanied by the expansion of trade relations, and in 1990 South Korea was Japan's third largest trading partner, while Japan was South Korea's second largest. In that year Japan's exports to South Korea totaled US \$17.5

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billion and its imports US \$ 11.7 billion. Japan accounted for 26.6 percent of South Korea's total imports and 19.5 percent of its exports, while South Korea accounted for 5.0 percent of total Japanese imports and 6.1 percent of exports. In the same year some 653,000 South Korean tourists and businessmen visited Japan and 1.37 million Japanese visited South Korea.

Although Asian countries have overcome the situation of continuing depreciation of currencies by their own efforts of economic reforms as well as international supports,

their real economies are still in serious situation. Japan has announced the world's largest assistance measures to support Asian economics and its steadily implementing them<sup>10</sup>.

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### **Relations with North Korea, 1952-**

Following the restoration of its independence Japan had no contact with North Korea until the late 1950s. However, many Koreans residing Japan expressed a desire to be repatriated to North Korea and negotiations were initiated through the mediation of the International Red Cross. Despite strong opposition by South Korea an agreement was signed in August 1959, and 88,611 Koreans had been repatriated to North Korea by December 1967.

Japan's foreign policy concerning the Korean peninsula has been to honor the spirit of its agreements with the United States and South Korea and to take no action vis-a-vis

North Korea that would contradict that policy. However, it is hoped that a consequence of the rapprochement between the East and the West in the late 1980s and early 1990s will be an improvement in relations with North Korea. In September 1990 Kanemaru Shin, a former secretary-general of the Japanese Liberal democratic Party (LDP), visited North Korea bearing a letter of apology for Japan's pre-World War activities in Korea from Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki in his capacity as president of the LDP, and in November preliminary negotiations were initiated toward the reestablishment of diplomatic relations. The normalization of relations with North Korea is one of Japan's greatest unresolved diplomatic problems of the post-World War period<sup>11</sup>.

The importance of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to Japan is primarily geopolitical: its proximity to China, the Soviet Union, and Japan, and its

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significance for the United States, which has strong political, economic, and military ties with the Republic of Korea. In the modern era, the Korean peninsula has been directly involved in several wars in which Japan has participated. Both the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 were sparked by clashes of interests over Korea. After the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, the Korean peninsula served as the corridor for the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and China proper in the 1930s. Thus, Japan perceives the stability of the Korean peninsula as essential to its own security<sup>12</sup>. Japan's definition of a stable Korea would doubtless include both preventing the communization of the entire peninsula under North Korean leadership and ensuring that neither Moscow nor Beijing become the dominant power in the area<sup>13</sup>.

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### **Koreans in Japan**

The presence of a large ethnic minority of Koreans in Japan, most of whom are legally aliens, is mainly a legacy of Japanese colonialism. When Japan annexed Korea in 1910, there were only about 2,500 Koreans in Japan. However, during World War I, Koreans were brought to Japan as forced laborers, many to the coal or gold mines, to solve the wartime manpower shortage. At the end of World War II, there were more than 2 million, many of whom were repatriated after Japan's surrender. In 1990 approximately 688,000 Koreans resided in Japan, constituting the largest ethnic minority<sup>14</sup>. About 90 percent of this population consists of Japanese-born, second- and third-generation Koreans, many of whom have never been to Korea nor learned to speak Korean. Birth in Japan does not legally assure Japanese citizenship, unless one parent is a Japanese national.

During the colonial period Koreans had been granted Japanese nationality, but the Japanese government disenfranchised them in 1952 and declared them aliens, excluded from the benefits reserved for Japanese citizens. Koreans remaining in Japan endured

economic hardship as a result, suffering uncertain livelihood as day laborers or worker in the service and entertainment industries. Recently the number of Koreans entering professional and clerical positions is increasing, but as before they must confront the reality of discrimination in the workplace.

Smith says, "In many ways the lives of Koreans in Japan resemble those of the outcast *burakumin*<sup>15</sup>." There is a long list of things the Koreans cannot do in

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Japan. They cannot expect to attend a major university or work at a leading corporation. They pay taxes as if they were citizens, but they cannot vote, stand for public office, or support a political party. Nor can a Korean, even a third- or fourth-generation Korean who has never been to Korea, carry a Japanese passport. For many years Koreans were periodically fingerprinted as aliens, even though they were resident in Japan.

In 1982 the Japanese government granted permanent resident status to Koreans who had lived in Japan prior to the end of World War II, and to their children. In 1991, this right was extended to third-generation Koreans in Japan as well. Since the late 1970s the Japanese government has made considerable progress toward guaranteeing Korean residents access to the same social security benefits enjoyed by Japanese citizens. Smith explains, "As of January 1993, Korean and other permanent residents were no longer required to be fingerprinted as a part of Alien Registration procedures, a concession to prolonged protests against this requirement<sup>16</sup>." Such improvements in their legal status, however, have not eliminated the discrimination many Koreans in Japan still face in their daily lives.

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### **Conclusion**

The turbulent history of relations between Japan and the Korean peninsula apparently existed over many years. Contact between peoples of the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago existed before the dawn of history and continued, sometimes in a friendly fashion, until the 19th century. Following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, however, Japan extended its influence over the Korean peninsula, and from 1910 to 1945 Korea was a colony of Japan. Korea did not escape the Japanese grip until 1945, when Japan lay prostrate under the Allied victory that brought World War to a close. The colonial experience that shaped postwar Korea was intense and bitter. It brought development and underdevelopment, agrarian growth and depended tenacy, industrialization and extraordinary dislocation, and political mobilization and deactivation. It also spawned a new role for the central state, new sets of Korean political leaders, communism and nationalism, and armed resistance and treacherous collaboration. Above all, it left deep fissures and conflicts that have gnawed at the Korean national identity ever since.

Since the 1960s Japan has conducted friendly relations with the Republic of Korea, and economic ties between the two countries have grown steadily close. However, Japan had not established diplomatic relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Korean Peninsula is still the most important to Japan who is determined to continue to

support for their economic recovery, economic structural reforms, and assistance to the  
worldly

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influential.

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