

# The Structure of Impasse: The Complexity of Japan's “North Korean Issues”

Norihito Kubota

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## Executive Summary

In this paper, the structure of the Japanese “North Korean Issues” will be scrutinized. In order to understand the present impasse, a brief history of Japan–North Korea relations, as well as each specific issue stemming from the relationship, will be presented. In this regard the Cabinet Office conducts opinion polls every year and introduced questions about North Korean issues in 2000. According to the results of these polls, the top three North Korean related issues are abductions, nuclear development, and the missile issue. Although the concern over nuclear development has been growing, these concerns have been stable throughout.

After the Second World War, the Japanese government chose to establish diplomatic relations only with Western countries; the so-called “separate peace.” As a result, diplomatic normalization with North Korea had low priority during the Cold War. In the 1980s, several incidents (the Fujisan-maru incident, the Rangoon bombing, the Zu-Dan-go incident, the bombing of a KAL airliner) worsened the relations between the two countries. Normalizing their diplomatic relations was not considered seriously throughout the Cold War because of the low threat perception by the Japanese; according to opinion surveys conducted in 1979 by the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, as few as 12.1 percent thought that North Korea was a threat.

After the end of the Cold War, Japan started to consider normalization of relations with North Korea and has made four attempts to normalize diplomatic relations. However, disagreements over history, North Korea’s missile launches, the discovery of North Korean covert operation vessels, the abduction issue and North Korea’s nuclear development have prevented the Japanese government from proceeding toward normalization. Among the North Korean issues, the missile and nuclear development programs have had a longer impact on Japanese normalization attempts than the abduction issue. At first, Japan did not respond firmly to the North Korean missile and nuclear development. Japan changed its attitude in August 1998 when North Korea launched a missile over Japan. When North Korea launched seven ballistic missiles toward the Sea of Japan in July 2006, Japan reacted strongly. The major result has been the introduction of missile defense systems in Japan. However, there are still problems to be overcome in this

regard. First, since the PAC 3 missile has a range of only 20 km, the center of the Tokyo metropolitan area is outside the range of these air defense bases. Second, the SM3 block 1, which has been introduced by the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), lacks the capability to distinguish real warheads from decoy missiles. Although a new missile defense system has been developed with the cooperation of the United States, Japan and the U.S. have different motivations for missile defense.

The Japanese stance toward the North Korean development of nuclear weapon has been calmer than that towards its missile development. It is because (1) Japan is skeptical as to whether North Korea actually has the capability of launching nuclear weapons; (2) Japan, as well as other countries, would not like to recognize North Korea as a nuclear power; and (3) Japan had no option to counter that move. Furthermore, Japan will not play an active role on the nuclear issue without a comprehensive solution to the abduction issue. The Japanese have low expectations regarding the successfulness of the Six-Party Talks.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, some Japanese disappeared under strange circumstances in or outside of Japan. Although North Korea denied involvement at first, on September 17, 2002, it admitted that it had conducted abductions. The negotiations over the abduction issue have served to heighten distrust and there are many reasons why Japan focuses on the abduction issue. At the public opinion level, sympathy for the victims, frustrated nationalism, a wider definition of terrorism, and domestically, the role played by the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea (NARKN) succeeded in galvanizing public opinion. The Japanese became skeptical of negotiations because of widespread public mistrust of the bureaucracy, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). At the level of international negotiations, since North Korea repeatedly changed its position, Japan expects that the more it insists, the greater the probability that victims will be returned.

With the disagreement over facts, a lack of reliable information, meaningful methods, and an appropriate forum to discuss the issue, the abduction issue is hard to resolve. There are few actions that Japan can take unilaterally to bring about a solution to the North Korean issues. After the nuclear test in 2006, Japan placed all North Korean ships under an embargo. However, these measures of economic sanctions did not go further than expressing



Japan's strong protest against the abductions. Since Japanese trade with North Korea is eight percent of North Korean total trade, economic sanctions have a limited impact on North Korea. According to opinion surveys, many Japanese support a strengthening of the economic sanctions, but half of respondents are pessimistic about their effect. The Japanese government is self-critical that it has given rice aid six times to North Korea before 2002, totaling 1.2 million tons. Japan has tried to place the North Korean issues on the agenda of the Six-Party Talks. However, it meant that (1) Japan could disturb the pace of negotiations on the nuclear issue; (2) it provides a pretext for North Korea to boycott the talks; and (3) it increases the number of hurdles to reaching an agreement on the nuclear issue. This "Catch-22" situation has influenced U.S.-Japan relations, with Japan coming to rely on the U.S. more and more. Meanwhile, there have been discrepancies between the U.S. and Japanese approaches towards North Korea and over the priority of issues. The U.S.-Japan relationship has been complicated by U.S.-Korea relations, in which South Korea has tried to extract a more conciliatory policy from the U.S. Furthermore, although China can have a strong influence on the resolution of the North Korean issues, historical and territorial issues prevent the Japanese population from fully supporting China.

The history of the negotiations over normalization, the character of each issue, and the relationship with other related countries combine to make the North Korean issues complex. In the foreseeable future, the situation will not change easily. The Japanese have become accustomed to living with uneasiness and uncertainty in regard to the situation in North Korea and pessimism prevails in Japanese society. Japan as well as most East Asian countries is in the process of learning how to behave strategically, and how to control their emotions in order to achieve broader national interests and regional security.

# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

On October 26, 2009, Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio described his policy towards North Korea in his policy speech at the 173rd ordinary session of the Diet. He declared that “Japan will address the issues surrounding North Korea in close cooperation with other relevant countries in order to bring about a comprehensive resolution of all outstanding issues including the abduction, nuclear, and missile issues and in turn the normalization of diplomatic relations based on such a resolution.” He also pledged to use all conceivable means to resolve the abduction issue at the earliest possible date<sup>2</sup> under the newly created headquarters for the abduction issue.<sup>3</sup> When we compare his policy with the policies pursued by previous governments, we find continuity rather than change.

To establish diplomatic relations with North Korea (the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, DPRK)<sup>4</sup> has been included on the agenda of Japanese diplomacy since the end of the Cold War. In spite of several attempts, both countries have failed to normalize diplomatic relations. Moreover, during the course of attempts to normalize relations, they have become more and more problematic, and nowadays many Japanese are aware of what constitutes the “North Korean issues.” In this paper, the structure of these “North Korean issues”<sup>5</sup> will be scrutinized. Even though Japan saw

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<sup>1</sup> A preliminary version of this report was presented at the North Korean Research Group, University of Toronto, Canada and the Institute for Security and Development Policy, Stockholm. Analyses and views within are the author’s, and they neither represent the official view of the Japanese government, nor that of any organization the author belongs to.

<sup>2</sup> Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, “Dai-173-kai kokkai ni okeru Hatoyama naikaku sōridaijin shoshin hyōmei enzetsu” [Policy speech by Prime Minister Hatoyama at the 173rd ordinary session of the Diet], <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/hatoyama/statement/200910/26syosin.html> (accessed May 24, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, “Dai-173-kai kokkai ni okeru Hatoyama naikaku sōridaijin shoshin hyōmei enzetsu” [Policy speech by Prime Minister Hatoyama at the 173rd session of the Diet], <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/hatoyama/statement/200910/26syosin.html> (accessed May 24, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> In this paper, the word North Korea is used. It is solely because the Japanese government and the media use the word in common.

<sup>5</sup> In this report, the word “issue” refers to each problem between Japan and North Korea, e.g. “nuclear issue” and “abduction issue.” When it is used in plural, it refers

a change of government from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) as the result of the general election held on August 30, 2009, the Japanese policy toward the North Korean issues has not changed. The policy vis-à-vis North Korea presented by Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio in his policy speech was almost identical to that of his predecessor Asō Tarō.<sup>6</sup> The stability of the policy pursued by the government, despite the change of government, can be contrasted with the policies of the United States and South Korea, which have shifted considerably in recent years. The stable structure of Japanese public opinion on the North Korean issues lies behind this situation.

The configuration of these issues, the history of negotiations, the way that the North Korean issues have been politicized, as well as regional dynamics, make it difficult for the Japanese government to step forward and resolve these issues. Although some analysts claim that Japanese diplomacy is too focused on the abduction issue, no thorough examination has been made regarding why Japan focuses on the abduction issue and why it has difficulties to accept a more conciliatory policy. To understand the present "impasse," the history of Japanese–North Korean relations as well as each issue should be investigated. This article is not intended to explain the cause of the "impasse."<sup>7</sup> These issues make it vital to evaluate the information on North Korea, especially the intentions of the North Korean government. Since this information is not only difficult to access but also difficult to evaluate, the focus in this report will be on the views of the Japanese. The questions asked are how do the Japanese perceive North Korea and the North Korean issues given the limited interaction between the two coun-

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to the group of problems which are interconnected with each other, i.e. "North Korean issues."

<sup>6</sup> Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, "Dai-170-kai kokkai ni okeru Asō naikaku sōridaijin shoshin hyōmei enzetsu" [Policy speech by Prime Minister Asō at the 170 ordinary session of the Diet], <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/asospeech/2008/09/29housin.html> (accessed May 25, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to evaluate the causal effect of public opinion on foreign policy. In some cases, the government arouses public opinion while in other cases, public opinion encourages the government to take certain action in foreign policy. Besides, in order to understand the mechanism of public opinion, the roles of the media also have to be investigated. For distinction of "CNN effect" and "rally-round-flag effect," see Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

tries, and how does this perception influence Japanese diplomacy towards North Korea and East Asia?

This report consists of seven sections. First, the results on the North Korean issues in public opinion polls published by the Cabinet Office will be presented. Secondly, the history of normalization after the Cold War will be presented. Thirdly, the missile issue and the nuclear issue will be discussed, followed by, fourthly, a detailed discussion of the abduction issue. Fifthly, the effect of economic sanctions and inducement will be analyzed. Sixthly, the impact of North Korean issues on regional dynamics will be discussed, and followed by concluding remarks.

# What are Japan's North Korean Issues?

## About the Opinion Polls

The Cabinet Office started the survey on Japanese foreign policy thirty five years ago and has produced one every year. Although questions such as "How do you feel about the United States?" have been asked every time, the topics have varied from year to year, reflecting changes in the diplomatic situation. For instance, in 2001 respondents were asked whether the government should ratify the Kyoto Protocol, without the cooperation of the United States. The poll usually surveys 3000 people, randomly selected from the population of men and women over 20 years old. The surveys are done through individual interviews and the response rate is usually about 70 percent. They provide data starting from 1975 and can be found on the Internet.<sup>8</sup>

It was only in 2000 that the Cabinet Office started to ask questions related to North Korea. There are two reasons why the government had not included questions on North Korea before. Most important was that Japan and North Korea did not have diplomatic relations. Since these surveys ask about "diplomatic relations," inclusion of North Korea in the survey could have been regarded as an act of recognition which was seen as problematic. Another reason is that North Korea did not attract the attention of the Japan during the Cold War. This point will be dealt with in detail below.

The respondents are shown a list of issues that are seen as being related to North Korea (see Table 1). Although the Cabinet Office adds, deletes, or changes alternatives of what are considered minor issues, major issues which will be discussed below have been included in all surveys. The respondents are asked to choose issues they are interested in. They can select as many issues as they think are important.

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<sup>8</sup> Cabinet Office, "Gaikō ni kansuru yoron chōsa" [Opinion polls on diplomacy], <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/index-gai.html> (accessed April 9, 2010).

**Table 1. “North Korean issues” presented to respondents (2002)**

Political regime	Refugee
Relations between North and South	Food aid
Diplomatic normalization	Japanese married to North Koreans
Abductions	Tourism
Unidentified ships	Economic exchange
Nuclear development	Cultural exchange
Missile launch	Sports exchange
Narcotics trafficking	Other
“Compensation for Past “	Indifferent / I don’t know

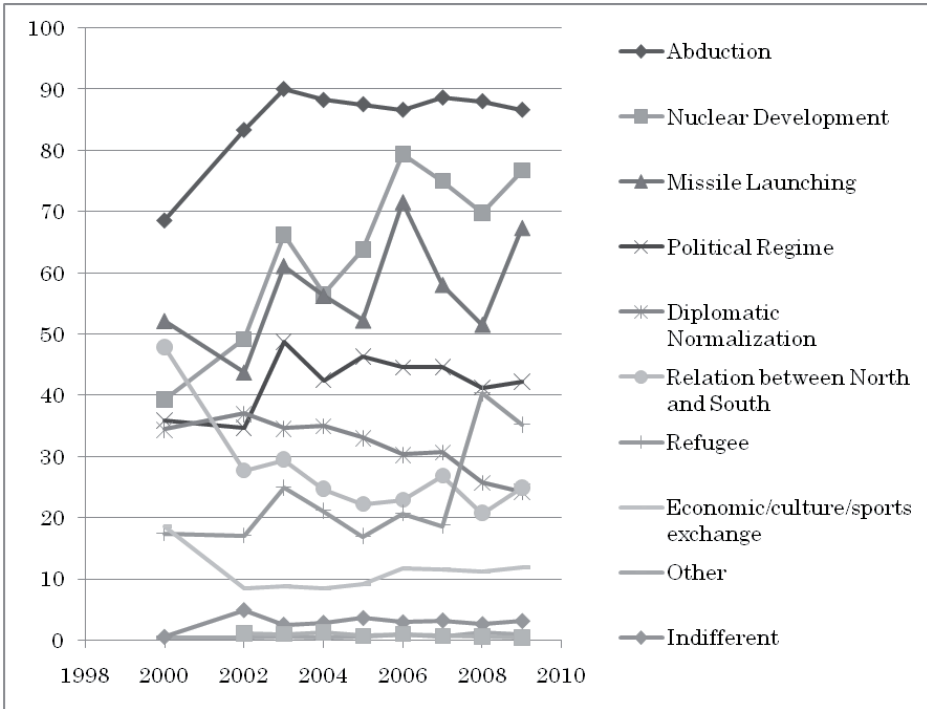
Note: Alternatives may change from year to year.

Source: Cabinet Office, “Shitsumonhyō” [Questionnaire], 2002, <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/h14/h14-gaikou/3.html> (accessed April 12, 2010).

Figure 1 shows the annual opinion poll results about concerns related to North Korea from which observations can be made. First, the abduction issue scores highest in every survey. Although North Korea refused until 2002 to admit that they had abducted Japanese, many Japanese believed that abductions had taken place. Secondly, attention on nuclear development has been growing. The Japanese concern over North Korea’s nuclear development reached its peak in 2006, after North Korea announced a nuclear test on October 9.<sup>9</sup> However, concern over abductions was still greater. According to the results of these surveys, the three top issues for Japanese are abductions, nuclear development, and the missile issue.

<sup>9</sup> The survey in 2006 was taken on from October 15, during which North Korea announced a nuclear test (October 9, 2006).

Figure 1. Opinion Polls Taken by the Cabinet Office



Source: Cabinet Office, "Gaikō ni kansuru yoron chōsa" [Opinion polls on diplomacy], 2000–2009, <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/index-gai.html> (accessed April 12, 2010).

# The History of Normalization of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and North Korea

## Relations during the Cold War

Japanese colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula was initiated in the early twentieth century and ended after the surrender of the Japanese government at the end of the Second World War. This division resulted in the establishment of two countries on the peninsula in 1948. During 1945–52, Japan was occupied by the Allied Powers. The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 had a deep impact on the subsequent course of action of Japan's Government. During the Korean War, Japan provided military bases for troops of the UN Forces under U.S. command. In 1951, Japan concluded the San Francisco Peace Treaty with 48 countries and signed the Japan–U.S. Mutual Security Treaty. Although some Japanese insisted that Japan should conclude an overall peace treaty, which would also include countries belonging to the Communist bloc, the Japanese government chose to sign a peace treaty only with countries in the Western bloc; an arrangement that was called “a separate peace.” As a result, diplomatic normalization with North Korea had low priority during the Cold War. Furthermore, the outbreak of the Korean War made the United States accelerate its policy shift towards Japan from disarmament to rearmament which was started in the late 1940s, and in 1954 Japan's Self-Defense Forces were established. The Korean War also increased the U.S. demand for Japanese supplies and services, which gave a boost to Japan's industrial development. These changes contributed to strengthening Japan's position as a Western country, and made it difficult for the Japanese government to normalize its diplomatic relations with North Korea, which was a country in the Communist bloc.<sup>10</sup>

Although *détente* in the 1970s improved the relationship between Japan and North Korea in economic areas, several incidents worsened their relations in the 1980s. First, a major incident occurred in 1983, when a North Korean soldier deserted and was found on the Japanese trading

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<sup>10</sup> Japan and South Korea concluded the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea in June 1965. The treaty recognizes that “the Government of the Republic of Korea is the only lawful government in Korea.”



ship, *Fujisan-maru*, which was on its way to Japan. The captain of the ship handed over the soldier to Japan's Maritime Security Agency, although the North Korean government demanded his extradition to North Korea. When the ship returned to North Korea, the North Korean authorities arrested the ship's captain and chief engineer and sentenced them to be "civilized" for fifteen years. It took seven years until they could return to Japan.

The second incident also took place in 1983. The Rangoon bombing was an assassination attempt against then President of South Korea, Chun Doo-hwan. Although the attempt to kill the president failed, the explosion killed 21 and wounded 46. The government of Myanmar declared that the attempt was planned and executed by the North Korean Government. Recognizing the incident as a case of state-sponsored terrorism by North Korea, the Japanese government imposed economic sanctions against North Korea and banned travels by Japanese public officials to North Korea.<sup>11</sup>

The third incident occurred in January 1987, when a North Korean resource ship with eleven on board was found adrift off the coast of Fukui, Japan. The people on board sought asylum in a third country. The Japanese government sent them to Taiwan before they were sent to South Korea the same day.

The fourth major incident is the bombing of a KAL airliner. Korean Air Flight 858 en route from Abu Dhabi to Bangkok exploded on November 29, 1987. Two persons who had disembarked at Abu Dhabi had used false Japanese passports and were arrested as suspects. Although one of them committed suicide after the arrest, the other admitted that they had acted on the orders of the North Korean Government. This led to an even greater strengthening of sanctions against North Korea.

As Akaha Tsuneo has observed, the normalization of diplomatic relations was not considered seriously by Japan during the Cold War.<sup>12</sup> It reflects the threat perception of prevailing at that time in Japan and according to an opinion survey conducted by the *Yomiuri Shimbun* in 1979, few Japanese

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<sup>11</sup> "Statement of the chief cabinet secretary on the Rangoon incident," in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Gaikō seisho: Waga gaikō no kinkyō* [Diplomatic bluebook] (Tokyo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1984), pp. 428–9.

<sup>12</sup> Tsuneo Akaha, "Japanese Policy toward the North Korean Problem: Balancing Bilateralism and Multilateralism," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3–4 (2007), p. 298.

thought that North Korea constituted a threat.<sup>13</sup> Respondents were asked to select country (countries), if any, they thought posed threat(s) to Japan. Compared to the high recognition of the threat from the Soviet Union (78.9 per cent), the score for North Korea was low (12.1 per cent) and was lower than that of either the United States (20.6 per cent) or the People's Republic of China (16.9 per cent). Hostility between the superpowers took over East Asian regional dynamics. Paradoxically, as will be seen below, the fact that Japanese did not see North Korea as a threat during the Cold War is one of the reasons why Japanese are furious about the abduction issue.

#### Four Attempts at Normalization after the Cold War

After the Cold War, Japan began to consider normalizing relations with North Korea.<sup>14</sup> The attempts made so far to normalize relations have been pursued during four rounds of negotiations.<sup>15</sup> The first round started in 1990. The key actors were two politicians, Kanemaru Shin and Tanabe Makoto. Kanemaru was the Vice Chairman of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Tanabe was the Vice Chairman of the leading opposition party, the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ). They visited North Korea and reached an agreement on a joint declaration and, furthermore, recommended that Japan and North Korea negotiate to establish diplomatic relations "as soon as possible." However, this attempt failed since both governments could not materialize the agreement among three political parties into an agreement between governments.<sup>16</sup> It is because the agreement included the wording that Japan "formally apologizes altogether and must compensate" for not only the "misfortune and hardship" covering its thirty-six years of colonial rule, but also for the "suffering inflicted on the people of *Choson* for some forty-five years since," and "there is but one *Choson*" —the former aroused severe criticism in Japan and the latter, within Korea.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> "Anzen hoshō" [Security], *Yomiuri Shimibun*, June 4, 1979.

<sup>14</sup> During the Cold War, there were two unsuccessful attempts to normalize the relationship. See Victor D. Cha, "Japan's Engagement Dilemmas with North Korea," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2001), p. 551.

<sup>15</sup> Twelve formal negotiation tables had been set until 2003. See Hideki Matsumoto, "Nitchō kokkō seijōka kōshō no keii to Chōsen hantō o meguru saikin no dōkō" [Normalization negotiations between Japan and North Korea and recent trends on the Korean Peninsula], *Reference*, (2003).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32–34.

<sup>17</sup> Masao Okonogi "Japan's Policy toward North Korea: Diplomatic Normalization

The second attempt took place in 1994, when the United States and North Korea reached an agreement on nuclear development. In early 1995, a delegation led by Watanabe Michio, a leading LDP member of the Diet, visited North Korea and reached an agreement that official talks between Japan and North Korea would be resumed. This time, however, the parties failed to reach an agreement on normalization. Several obstacles to this can be identified: it was the mourning period of late Kim Il-sung, harsh objections were raised by South Korea, there were disagreements between Japan and North Korea on the return of Japanese who were married to North Koreans<sup>18</sup> and disagreement on the abductions inquiry (North Korea called it "missing persons"). Nevertheless, the launch of a ballistic missile in 1998, which North Korea insisted was an artificial satellite, delivered the final blow to this second round. In March 1999, two suspicious boats were spotted in Japanese territorial waters off of the Noto peninsula, later fleeing from the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force. It is believed that these ships were North Korean covert operation vessels.

The third round of normalization negotiations took place when Kim Dae-jung became president of South Korea in 1999. His "Sunshine Policy" towards North Korea and agreement between the United States and North Korea on ballistic missiles created a favorable international environment. Japan's former Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi visited North Korea in December and an agreement was reached that the intergovernmental consultation on normalization should be resumed. However, it did not result in any substantial progress. This round ended when the new U.S. President George W. Bush called North Korea a member of the "axis of evil". At this time Japan adopted a hard-line policy against North Korea. In December 2001, another suspicious boat was found in the East China Sea and the encounter escalated into a battle between the Japanese Coast Guard and the vessel, which ended the sinking of that boat and when it was hauled out of

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Talks and the Nuclear Inspection Issue," Doug Joong Kim, ed., *Foreign Relations of North Korea during Kim il-Sung's Last Days* (Seoul: The Sejong Institute, 1994), p. 202.

<sup>18</sup> Return of Japanese-born spouses of North Koreans: just after the Second World War, there were many Koreans living in Japanese territory. Through the "return project" initiated by the Japanese government, some of them "returned" to Korea. 1828 women who were married with North Koreans traveled to North Korea and they have never returned to Japan.

the water by Japan, it was found to have the same double-door characteristic of other North Korean spy ships.

The fourth and most recent round started in 2002, when Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō made a surprise visit to Pyongyang on September 17. Koizumi and North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il released "The Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration," which re-opened the consultation for normalization "through the settlement of the unfortunate past and the outstanding issues of concern."<sup>19</sup> This time North Korea admitted for the first time that it had abducted Japanese. Five victims of abduction returned to Japan a month later.

In 2004, Koizumi visited North Korea again and five families of abduction victims came to Japan. However, the return of these victims revealed that more victims might be found in North Korea. This stiffened the Japanese government's attitude against North Korea. The current relations between the two countries are in stalemate mainly due to the disagreement on the abduction issue. In addition, the relations between the United States and North Korea worsened when U.S. Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly visited Pyongyang in early October 2002, and it was revealed that North Korea had secretly developed highly enriched uranium for use in nuclear weapons.

To sum up, negotiations on normalization started in a conciliatory manner in the early 1990s. Disagreement over historical issues, missile launches, suspicious boats, and the abduction issue prevented the two countries from normalizing relations. The failure of the conciliatory policy to normalize and resolve outstanding issues hardened Japanese public opinion against North Korea.

### **Fundamental Disagreement over Normalization**

Although the main stumbling-blocks for the normalization negotiations are "the North Korean issues," there are four fundamental disagreements between Japan and North Korea over normalization. First, both disagree on whether North Korean jurisdiction is limited to north of the 38th parallel or

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<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan "Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration," [http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n\\_korea/pmv0209/pyongyang.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0209/pyongyang.html) (accessed June 13, 2010).

the whole Korean Peninsula. Second, there are conflicting interpretations of colonial history, especially over legality of the annexation treaty of 1910. Third, there is disagreement over the validity of the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951. Fourth, it has to be negotiated as to how much and to what extent Japan has to compensate the North for past events; whether monetary compensation should come instead of economic assistance and whether it should cover Japan's colonial rule, Japan's support to the United States during the Korean War, and Japan's recognition of South Korea, etc.

# Missile Crises and Nuclear Development

Since many researchers focus on the abduction issue, the Japanese perception of the missile issue and nuclear development are sometimes overlooked. Among the North Korean issues, the missile and nuclear development have had a longer impact on Japanese attempts at normalization than the abduction issue. This section focuses on how these issues have been perceived publicly.

## Short History of the Missile and Nuclear Issues

At first Japan did not respond firmly to North Korean missile and nuclear development. The North Korean nuclear crisis of 1993–94 made Japanese policymakers recognize the importance of arms control and non-proliferation in Northeast Asia. In May 1993, North Korea conducted a missile test, which was said to demonstrate the capability of its medium range ballistic missile Rodong 1 to the Iranians who were planning to purchase the missile in exchange for oil. Japanese and U.S. officials waited a few days before disclosing the launch of the missile. However, Japan changed its attitude in August 1998 when North Korea launched a missile over Japan. According to the official announcement by North Korea, this was not a missile test but the launching of an artificial satellite named Kwangmyongsong. However, no one could find the existence of such a satellite, not even the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). The fact that the object flew over Japanese territory made Japanese insecure. Japan announced unilateral sanctions against North Korea and stopped charter flights, humanitarian aid, and financial contributions to the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). Furthermore, in order to provide early warnings of such missile launches in the future, the Japanese government decided to launch its own information-gathering satellites.

Just after Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang in 2002, it was revealed that North Korea had been carrying out a program to produce high enriched uranium which escalated and became the Second Nuclear Crisis. During this process, the Six-Party Talks were started and Japan became a participant however, because of their insistence that the abduction issue

should be included on the agenda Japan could not play a significant role in the process.

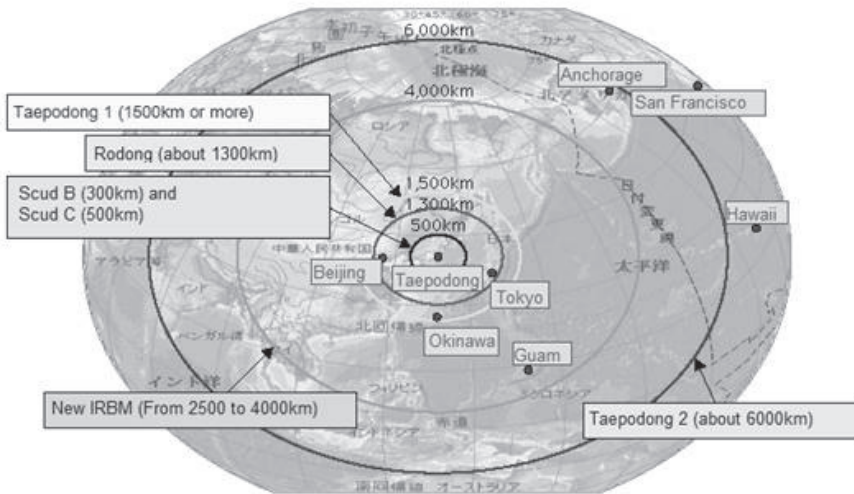
The reaction to the next missile launch four years later was typical. In July 2006, North Korea launched seven ballistic missiles toward the Sea of Japan. Japan again took a strong position against North Korea. The Japanese government announced unilateral economic sanctions against North Korea, banning the entrance into Japan of North Korean officials and the entrance of the ship, *Mangyongbong 92*, into Japanese harbors. Japan also brought the issue to the United Nations Security Council. As a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Japan submitted a draft resolution condemning the missile launch, referring to Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. The draft resolution was amended and was adopted unanimously. The resolution was said to be the first where Japan took the initiative in the Security Council. On October 9, 2006, North Korea announced that they carried out a nuclear test. Japan again declared unilateral economic sanctions on October 11, and on October 14 the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution on economic sanctions.

### **Difficulties on the Missile Issue**

Figure 2, which is taken from the 2009 white paper of the Japanese Ministry of Defense, shows the range of missiles that North Korea is said to be developing. Because North Korea possesses shorter-range missiles and field artillery that can reach all of South Korea, the new missiles are thought to target Japan and the United States. There are three types of missiles said to have the capacity to reach over 1000 km. The one with the shortest range is the Medium Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM) *Rodong*, which is said to reach 1300 km. *Taepodong-1* is an intermediate range ballistic missile that covers 1500 km. Moreover, *Taepodong-2* is estimated to be an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM), which reaches about 6000 km, and capable of reaching as far as Alaska, although a launch test conducted on July 5, 2006 is said to have failed. *Rodong* and *Taepodong-1* were aimed at reaching the Japanese islands and *Taepodong-2* the United States. Whether these missiles are powerful enough to carry a nuclear warhead is unknown, because the development status of the North Korean nuclear program is also largely unknown. As for short-range missiles, North Korea is estimated to have several hundred Scud missiles that can reach all of South Korea. Furthermore, due

to the geographical proximity of Seoul, North Korea can attack the South Korean capital with field artillery. In 1994, during talks between North and South Korea, a North Korean delegate made it clear to a South Korean delegate that they could make Seoul a sea of fire, stalling the talks. Therefore, the development of medium to long-range missiles is more serious to Japan and the United States than to South Korea which can be reached by shorter-range missiles.

**Figure 2. Range of North Korean Missiles**



Source: Ministry of Defense, Japan, *Bōei hakusho* [Defense of Japan, 2009] (Tokyo: Gyōsei, 2009), p. 38 (translation and modification by author).

The major result of North Korean missile development is the introduction of missile defense systems in Japan. The Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) have introduced Patriot Advanced Capability 3 Surface-Air Missile (PAC 3) and Standard Missile 3 (SM-3). PAC 3 was developed to intercept ballistic missiles at the terminal phase and SM-3 was invented to intercept at the mid-course phase. However, these developments did not ameliorate the situation and in 2007, the JSDF started to deploy PAC 3 to Iruma Base, which is the closest base of the Japan Air Self-Defense Forces (JASDF) to Tokyo. Since then, PAC3 has been deployed in other air defense missile groups



in the Tokyo Metropolitan area. In total, Japan has 32 PAC3 missiles in the Greater Tokyo Area.<sup>20</sup> However, since PAC 3 has a range of only 20 km, the center of the Metropolitan area is out of the range of these air defense bases. Thus, in order to defend this area, the PAC3 system must be moved into the Metropolitan area.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the introduction of advanced intelligence systems such as information-gathering satellites in order to identify the sign of launching missiles has been initiated. The situation is more complicated for SM3 block 1 missiles. SM3 block 1 which was introduced in July 2007 to the destroyer Kongō of the JMSDF lacks the capability to distinguish real warheads from faked, decoy missiles. Therefore, development was initiated on a new missile system, block 2. This development was originally intended for the development of missiles which can intercept longer-range missiles, such as those capable of covering the distance from North Korea to the United States. Thus, some have questioned whether it is reasonable to use the Japanese budget for the security of the United States, although the introduction of the block 2 is inevitable, since the whole intercept missile system relies on the U.S. military.

There is also a difference of Japanese and U.S. motivations over the development of missile defense. U.S. concerns are not only over North Korean missile development but also over that of China, although few Japanese care about Chinese missiles.<sup>22</sup> The difference influences the multilateral talks on the missile issue. Although Japan will support the initiative to establish a multilateral missile control regime, it has a weaker rationale for developing a missile defense.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> There is a plan to deploy 32 PAC 3s each to other metropolitan areas of Japan, such as Osaka, Nagoya, Northern Kyushu, as well as Aomori which has an important U.S. air base.

<sup>21</sup> As an exercise, JASDF deployed PAC 3 system to Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden on April 25, 2010. See Yomiuri Online, "Tōkyō, Shinjuku gyoen ni geigeki missile" [Intercept missiles in Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden, Tokyo], <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/national/news/20100426-OYT1T00077.htm> (accessed April 27, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> There is a certain anxiety about the rapid increase in military expenditure and especially over the modernization of PLA's Navy and Air Force. However, Chinese missile development has so far not concerned the Japanese.

<sup>23</sup> Akaha, "Japanese Policy toward the North Korean Problem," p. 315.

## The Nuclear Issue

Despite Japan's long non-nuclear tradition, the response to North Korea's development of nuclear weapon was calmer than that of its non-nuclear missiles. Though Japan declared economic sanctions against the country after its alleged nuclear test in 2006, the Japanese government announced that the test was a failure. This calm attitude can be explained in several ways. First, it is doubtful whether North Korea has carriers for nuclear weapons. It is not certain that the country has the advanced technologies that enable the country to miniaturize nuclear warheads so that they can be loaded on missiles. Secondly, Japan as well as other countries would not like to recognize North Korea as a nuclear power under the NPT regime. Thirdly, Japan had no option to counter that movement. Some analysts abroad worry about Japanese nuclearization, but that is not seriously considered. This can be confirmed by interactions among China, the United States and Japan in 2003.<sup>24</sup> At that time, China was a reluctant mediator on the North Korean issue, but also worried that the North Korean development of nuclear weapon could result in an arms buildup among neighboring countries, especially Japanese acquisition of nuclear weapons and missile defense systems, as well as triggering a U.S. surgical strike on North Korea that could destabilize Northeast Asia. Based on this anxiety, two U.S. officials Richard Cheney and John Bolton, who wanted a larger Chinese commitment, warned the Chinese Government by hinting of a possible Japanese nuclearization, if the negotiation over the nuclear issue did not succeed.

The Japanese government was perplexed. Having experienced the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese government has consistently struck to Japan's three non-nuclear principles: Japan shall neither possess nor manufacture nuclear weapons, nor shall it permit their introduction into Japanese territory. Japanese security policy has been formulated on the basis of Japan's security alliance with the United States and been based on U.S. extended deterrence, and an overwhelming majority of Japanese have never felt the necessity for Japan to develop nuclear weapons. Thus, it was "beyond its comprehension" when the United States publicly warned of the danger of a possible Japanese nuclear armament and warned

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<sup>24</sup> Yoichi Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question: A Chronicle of the Second Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), pp. 304–5.

China in particular. This question was settled when the U.S. government stopped using the "domino theory," when two U.S. officials, Richard Armitage and Michael Green, who were in charge of U.S. policy toward Japan issued outspoken criticism over the lack of persuasive logic.

### **Low Expectancy on Missile and Nuclear Issues**

Many Japanese thought that the Six-Party Talks should be used as "leverage for solving the abduction issue" . Although denuclearization is important for the Japanese, as we saw in the previous section, Japan will not play any active role on the nuclear issue without "a comprehensive solution of the results of the abduction issue." Thus, the Japanese have a low expectation of the results of the Six-Party Talks. According to a poll published by the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, the Japanese are more pessimistic about denuclearization than people in South Korea (Table 2).

**Table 2. Comparison between Japan and ROK on the Expectations of Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula**

	Japan	ROK
<b>Yes</b>	4.3	2.0
<b>Rather Yes</b>	10.5	38.7
<b>Rather No</b>	30.7	54.4
<b>No</b>	51.0	3.5
<b>N/A</b>	3.5	1.4

Source: "Nitchūkan kyōdō chōsa" [Cooperative survey in Japan, China and South Korea], *Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 22, 24 and October 4, 2007.

# The Abduction Issue

Many researchers argue that the abduction issue is an anomaly for Japanese diplomacy. Large efforts have been made to include this agenda in the Six-Party Talks, which sometimes disturb the discussion of the nuclear issue. However, there are several reasons why Japan focuses on the abduction issue.

## A Short History of the Abduction Issue

In the 1970s and 80s, some Japanese disappeared suddenly under strange circumstances inside or outside of Japan. Through investigations by Japanese authorities and testimonies given by North Korean agents who have defected, it was found out that it was very likely that, that these were cases of abductions conducted by North Korea. The Japanese government published a list of Japanese citizens believed to have been abducted by North Korea, and in 1997 the issue received a great deal of public attention in Japan. Although North Korea denied at first that it was involved, it admitted later that it had conducted these abductions during the meeting between Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō and the chairman of the National Defense Commission Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang on September 17, 2002.

The purposes of the abductions can be categorized into three types. The first type is identity theft through which North Korean agents acquire a Japanese passport so that they can move freely around the world. The second type is acquisition of human resources. Victims are used for the training of North Korean agents, especially in language education. The third type is recruitment by the Yodo-gō group. The Yodo-gō group is a left-wing group, which hijacked a Japanese airplane in 1970. They wanted to expand their group by recruiting these victims as they intended to go to North Korea for the purpose of "world revolution," and eventually succeeded.

Following the first summit meeting between North Korea and Japan, a Japanese investigative team was dispatched to North Korea and resulted in the return of five victims, two couples and one woman who was married to a U.S. soldier who had deserted the U.S. Army during the Korean War. At this point, the Japanese realized that the investigation made by North

Korea was not reliable. For example, North Korea submitted "remains of dead victims" to Japan, but DNA of different people were detected from the remains that had been submitted. In 2004, North Korea admitted that certificates of the dead, which had been submitted to Japan, were roughly drafted upon the visit of the Japanese delegation in 2002. Meanwhile, North Korea accused the Japanese government of breaking the promise that "the return of five victims would be temporary and they would be returned again after a few weeks." The relations between North Korea and Japan worsened as a result.

The problem for Japan shifted to the remaining families of the five former abductees in North Korea. It took one and half year to resolve this problem. After the second Japan–North Korea summit in May 2004, the families of the former abductees also came to Japan. However, disagreements remain over how many Japanese have been abducted, and whether other victims are still alive in North Korea. As of May 2010, the Japanese government has officially identified 17 victims in 12 cases as cases of abduction.<sup>25</sup> Japan is also skeptical about the claim by North Korea that eight victims are dead.<sup>26</sup>

### **Japanese Political Reactions**

Various reactions could be observed in Japan. The backlash of public opinion created a bipartisan political movement against North Korea, and one opposition party, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), was even self-critical.<sup>27</sup> Several supporting groups have been established, including the Association of the Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea (AFVKN), the Parliamentarian League for Early Repatriation of Japanese Citizens Kidnapped by North Korea, the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kid-

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<sup>25</sup> Secretariat of the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue, "Individual Cases – 17 Abductees Identified by the Government of Japan," <http://www.rachi.go.jp/en/ratimondai/jian.html> (accessed April 29, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> See Government's Headquarters for the Abduction Issue, "Points of Contention with the North Korean Position," <http://www.rachi.go.jp/en/mondaiten/index.html> (accessed May 3, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Executive Board Meeting of National Federation of Social Democratic Party, "Kitachōsen rachi jiken ni tsuite," [On the abduction by North Korea], <http://www5.sdp.or.jp/central/timebeing02/kitatyousen1017.html> (accessed May 3, 2010).

napped by North Korea (NARKN), and the Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea (COMJAN).<sup>28</sup>

The Japanese government took several actions regarding the abduction issue. As domestic measures, the law to address the abduction issue and other North Korean human rights violations passed in the Diet in 2006, and the government established the Headquarters for the Abduction Issues. As international measures, the government repeatedly demanded that North Korea resolve the issue. It also appealed to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and to countries that also are suspected to have abduction victims.

However, these actions did not have any significant effect on the resolution of abduction issue. In general, the issue did not receive much attention by Chinese and South Koreans. According to a South Korean poll, only 17 percent of the respondents were concerned over the abduction issue.<sup>29</sup> Chinese officials tend to see the developments over the abduction issue as strategic actions by the Japanese Government as a means to acquire nuclear weapons. Japan's sticking to the abduction issue is, according to a Chinese official, to prevent the nuclear issue from being settled and to justify Japan's possession of nuclear weapons.<sup>30</sup>

### Why Japan Focuses on the Abduction Issue

Although the number of the Japanese victims of abductions is rather small compared to South Koreans, and although one may wonder why nuclear and missile issues are not taken as serious as the abduction issue, there are

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<sup>28</sup> The public opinion, however, has not been monolithic. There was a great debate among public opinion after the second summit meeting. Prime Minister Koizumi could not bring home other victims or additional information about them, although some families of victims came to Japan. Some members of the AFVKN criticized the Prime Minister for being "no more than an errand boy." After the scene was broadcast on TV, waves of protest from viewers hit the office of the AFVKN, criticizing them for having no words of thanks to the Prime Minister, while some people countered that to criticize the AFVKN was unpatriotic. See Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, p. 56.

<sup>29</sup> "Nitchūkan kyōdō chōsa" [Cooperative survey in Japan, China and South Korea], *Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 22, 24 and October 4, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, p. 302. Compared to these two countries, people in the United States pay more attention to the abduction issue. According to a poll conducted by Gallup in 2007, 61.1 percent of the respondents think it important for the Japanese and U.S. governments to cooperate in order to resolve the abduction issue.

many domestic, international, and public opinion related reasons behind the Japanese focus on the abduction issue.

The simplest explanation from the level of public opinion is that the issue is unacceptable emotionally. For instance, abductions took place during the Cold War when few Japanese saw North Korea as a threat. Thus, Japan cannot accept the irrationality of these incidents. Besides, two abductees in particular, who were reported to be dead, were very young women when they were abducted and the Japanese feel sympathy for them and their families. Furthermore, the abduction of Japanese on Japanese territory is regarded as an infringement of Japanese sovereignty.

There are other public sentiments that can be described as an emerging assertive nationalism and counterattack in moral politics.<sup>31</sup>

Since the end of the Second World War, one of the main issues of international relations in East Asia has been Japanese "immorality" during the war and the colonization of East Asian countries in the early twentieth century. Yet, some younger Japanese feel weary of this constant Japan bashing and demand more dignity for Japan resulting in the growth of nationalism. The abduction issue has become a means of venting Japanese frustration over moral politics in East Asian international relations.

Furthermore, although it is not a main cause, an expanded definition of terrorism that has been adopted justified Japan's focus on the abduction issue. Many Japanese describe abduction as terrorism, although it does not fit the standard definition of terrorism: terrifying to make a policy shift of government with threat of or using of various forces.<sup>32</sup>

The abduction issue is easier to understand than other North Korean issues. On one hand, to understand the serious nature of the missile and nuclear development, possible counter-measures, resolution of the issue, and verification of the dissolution of weapons require the help of specialists. On the other, abductions seem to be simplified into a "yes/no" question,

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<sup>31</sup> As for the emerging nationalism at the grass-roots level, see Eiji Oguma and Yōko Ueno, *"Iyashi" no nashonarizumu: Kusa no ne hoshu undō no jisshō kenkyū* [Nationalism as "healing": an empirical analysis of conservative movements at the grass-roots level] (Tokyo: Keiō gijuku daigaku shuppankai, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Researchers of terrorism criticize this widespread description of the abductions as being equal to terrorism. See Masashi Nishihara and Naofumi Miyasaka, "Nihon no terotaisaku: Hokkaidō Tōyako G8 samitto ni mukete" [Japanese counter-terrorism policy: preparing for the Hokkaidō Tōyako G8 Summit] (2008), p. 12, [http://www.rips.or.jp/from\\_rips/pdf/hokkaido\\_g8.pdf](http://www.rips.or.jp/from_rips/pdf/hokkaido_g8.pdf) (accessed May 10, 2010).

although DNA tests of the victims requires professional knowledge.<sup>33</sup> There are also other reasons that explain the Japanese reaction to the abduction issue at the level of the domestic politics.

First, the organization and mobilization strategy was successful. NARKN and politicians acted side by side to arouse public opinion by using blue ribbon pin badges, movies, and collection of signatures.<sup>34</sup> Second, there has been a change in societal relations. Prime Minister Koizumi was elected into office supported by public opinion. He used the phrase “break the LDP from within” during his campaign for party presidency. His style of mobilizing public opinion was called “theatrical politics.” This increased the effect that public sentiment had on foreign policy.

This pattern of politico-bureaucratic collusion was severely criticized as old-fashioned and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) faced harsh criticism. The fourth attempt of normalization was led by MOFA. However, just before the 2001 Japan–North Korea summit meeting, Foreign Minister Tanaka Makiko resigned because she could not control officials in her ministry calling it the “abode of demons.” This distrust spread and the MOFA official Tanaka Hitoshi, who was in charge of normalization with North Korea, was criticized for his overly conciliatory stance. A right-wing group set an explosive device at his home accusing him of a “traitorous act.” (Governor Ishihara Shintarō of Tokyo commented that Tanaka got just what he deserved.) Therefore, a conciliatory policy on the abduction issue tends to be regarded as against Japanese demands. This tendency was amplified because political parties which had taken a conciliatory position vis-à-vis North Korea, had denied the abduction issue before 2002 and thus the Japanese public did not trust their conciliatory position.

There are two ways to explain the international level of negotiation. One explanation is derived from a cognitive approach. At a glance, Japanese behavior seems to lack balance, sticking to the abduction issue and minor

<sup>33</sup> An article in *Nature* criticized the political usage of the DNA-test by the Japanese government. See David Cyranoski, “DNA Is Burning Issue as Japan and Korea Clash over Kidnaps,” *Nature*, Vol. 433, No. 7025 (2005), p. 445, Editorial, “Politics Versus Reality,” *Nature*, Vol. 434, No. 7031 (2005), p. 257.

<sup>34</sup> National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea, “Anata ni mo dekiru koto” [What you can do], <http://www.sukuukai.jp/index.php?itemid=1126> (accessed June 15, 2010), National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea, “Shūkai jōhō” [Information on public meeting], <http://www.sukuukai.jp/syuukai.php> (accessed June 15, 2010).



concerns over other issues and normalization. If Japan does not proceed towards normalization it will continue being harassed by North Korean missile launches and nuclear tests. The Japanese government has suffered from a certain loss of population and credibility in foreign policy among the people. In order to cover these losses, the government accepts the state of non-normalization.<sup>35</sup>

The other explanation is derived from an analysis of international interaction. This approach focuses on the path-dependent nature of the negotiations. The crucial fact there are still disagreements over the veracity of the information, and North Korea has admitted that some of the information was false. This has made Japan more skeptical about the intentions of North Korea. Although some correct information was submitted to Japan after several negotiation rounds, this raised the Japanese expectation that the more pressure it put on North Korea, the more conciliatory its behavior will become and the possibility increases that more abductees will be returned. These reasons support each other in a complementary manner. Thus, although the abduction issue can be regarded as a smaller problem than the problem of the nuclear and missiles, Japan has persisted in resolving the abduction issue. This posture is not likely to change in the near future.<sup>36</sup>

### **Expectancy of Resolution**

Since the late 1990s, Japanese have paid much attention to the abductions perpetrated by North Korea. The Japanese government has placed high priority on the resolution of the abduction issue during the normalization negotiations with North Korea.<sup>37</sup> At this moment, the abduction issue seems

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<sup>35</sup> In the cognitive approach, however, there is one theory that explains risk-taking behavior in order to cover a certain small loss. See Barbara Farnham, ed., *Avoiding Losses/Taking Risks: Prospect Theory and International Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

<sup>36</sup> Both the LDP and the DPJ have almost the same stance on the abduction issue. There were a few political debates between both parties on the abduction issue during the 2007 election campaign.

<sup>37</sup> Cabinet Meeting for Negotiations to Normalize Diplomatic Relations between Japan and North Korea, "Nitchō kokkō seijōka kōshō ni kansuru kihon hōshin" [Basic principles for the negotiations over normalizing the diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea], <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/nittyo/kettei/021009kihon.html> (Tokyo: Cabinet Office, 2002) (accessed May 13, 2010).

hard to resolve, however. First, Japan and North Korea do not agree on facts. Both countries deny the information supplied by the other. Even if North Korea agreed that 17 abductions have been conducted and that Japan officially recognizes as victims, there is another list of abductions that are also highly suspected to be perpetrated by North Korean agents.<sup>38</sup>

Secondly, objective information cannot be accessed in order to judge objectively what is going on. Although the Japanese Government received some information from the intelligence services of other countries, the only concrete information that Japanese can obtain is the statements made by exiled former North Korean agents like An Myong-jin and returned victims. Because the North Korean Government controlled the movement of victims during their “stay” in North Korea, returned victims hardly know anything about other victims.

Thirdly, Japan has few means to induce North Korean cooperation. Although Japan placed economic sanctions on North Korea, these sanctions were put in place as the result of either a missile launch or a nuclear test, and are not aimed at the abduction issue. Furthermore, that there is little interdependence between North Korea and Japan limits the effect of economic sanctions, as will be described below. Fourthly, Japan has to appeal to other countries and international forums. There is no international forum about this issue, however, and Japan has undertaken an issue-linkage strategy at the Six-Party Talks. Meanwhile, other countries are not so eager to resolve the abduction issue compared to the issue of nuclear disarmament. The latter two difficulties will be discussed in detail in the next two sections.

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<sup>38</sup> Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea, “Shissōsha list” [List of missing people], <http://www.listserver.sakura.ne.jp/cgi-bin/list/list3.cgi?mode=list2> (accessed May 13, 2010).

## Economic Sanctions and Economic Assistance

Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō emphasized the importance of both dialogue and pressure in the negotiations with North Korea. Unfortunately, however, there are few actions that Japan can take unilaterally. Here, the effect of economic sanctions and inducement will be examined.

### Economic Sanctions

Placing economic sanctions on North Korea gave rise to heated debate in Japanese politics. At first, the Japanese Government carefully avoided the use of the term economic sanctions, since the North Korean government has insisted that any economic sanctions are regarded as acts of war. Instead, the Japanese Government tried to use “informal economic sanctions.” First, the Diet legislated that all foreign ships coming to Japan must have liability insurance against environmental damage (Act on Liability, Oil and Pollution Damage) because North Korean ships, in general, do not obtain “liability insurance,” the legislation put North Korean ships under a de facto embargo. Originally, this legislation was proposed after an incident when the North Korean cargo ship, Chilsong-go, ran ashore on the Japanese coast on December 5, 2002.<sup>39</sup> The local government had to bear the cost of the removal of the oil spill and the wreckage. Although the local government requested North Korean compensation, they did not receive any response from the North Korean government. Secondly, the Japanese government terminated preferential tax status of the facilities owned by Organization of North Korean Residents in Japan. After the North Korean nuclear test in 2006, however, Japan put an embargo on all North Korean ships. Now, formal economic sanctions are in place on North Korea.

These economic sanctions did not fully reflect the strong Japanese protest against the abductions. Since Japanese trade with North Korea com-

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<sup>39</sup> Kashima Port and Airport Construction, “Kitachōsenseki kamotsusen ‘Chilsong-go’ zashō ni tomonau abura ryūshutsu” [Oil spill caused by the grounding accident of North Korean ship ‘Chilsong-go’], <http://www.pa.ktr.mlit.go.jp/kashima/topics/01.html> (accessed May 3, 2010).

prises only eight percent of North Korean total trade,<sup>40</sup> economic sanctions have a very limited impact on North Korea. Simultaneously, the economic sanctions gave North Korea a pretext to boycott the Six-Party Talks. If Japan really wants the economic sanctions to have an effect, they have to be put in place by universal international bodies like the United Nations or at least involves other major countries like South Korea, China, Russia and the United States. In order to do that, Japan may at least have to sacrifice something in exchange of their cooperation. So far, however, Japan has neither had any intention nor preparation for such a deal. According to the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 88 percent of respondents supported strengthened economic sanctions. However, half of them (46 percent) were pessimistic about the effects of the sanctions.<sup>41</sup>

### Economic Assistance

Few positive strategies can be utilized as a complement to economic sanctions. One possibility is economic cooperation in exchange. According to the Pyongyang Declaration, Japan will provide economic assistance to North Korea after normalization. When Japan and South Korea normalized relations in 1965, Japan provided South Korea with a total of US\$500 million (US\$300 million in grants and US\$200 million in loan aid) as economic assistance. In the same manner, humanitarian aid is minimal. Without a comprehensive settlement of the abduction issue, Japan will not provide aid. The Japanese government is self-critical that it has donated rice six times totaling 1.2 million tons prior to 2002.<sup>42</sup>

As we have examined above, neither unilateral economic sanctions nor inducement are possible and effective options for Japan under the present conditions. For the resolution of the North Korean issues, Japan has to

<sup>40</sup> Mitsuhiro Mimura, "Tai-Kitachōsen keizaiseisai no kōka to kadai" [Effects and agenda for economic sanctions against North Korea], *ERINA Jōhō*, No. EJ-0603 (2006), p. 2, <http://www.erina.or.jp/jp/Research/ej/pdf/Ej0603.pdf> (accessed May 5, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Yomiuri online, "Kitachōsen e no seisai 'tsuyomerubeki' 88%," [88% support strengthening economic sanctions], *Yomiuri Shimbun*, June 7, 2009, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/politics/news/20090607-OYT1T00782.htm> (accessed May 13, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> This does not mean Japan opposes or disturbs humanitarian assistance from the international community. The directive for sanctions by the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Trade are carefully phrased so that humanitarian assistance can be delivered smoothly.

tackle it together with other countries, especially the four members of the Six-Party Talks, South Korea, the United States, China and Russia.

## Effects on U.S.–Japan Relations and Regional Dynamics

The North Korean issues which Japanese are strongly concerned about are mainly bilateral issues between Japan and North Korea. Missile development has bred uneasiness among Japanese. The abduction issue, despite the fact that more South Koreans than Japanese have been abducted, has been an issue solely in Japan. Meanwhile, with the low level of interdependence between Japan and North Korea, it is difficult for them to exert political power on the other. Understanding that these bilateral issues between Japan and North Korea cannot be solved bilaterally, Japan began to bring these issues to multilateral fora, such as the Six-Party Talks. The talks have their origin in the Three-Party Talks between the United States, North Korea, and China, which started after the North Korean withdrawal from IAEA/NPT regime in January 2003. These talks expanded into the Six-Party Talks in August 2003. There have been six rounds of talks up to 2008 when North Korea declared that they had successfully carried out a nuclear experiment.

Since the Six-Party Talks is the only forum in which Japan can conduct meaningful negotiations with North Korea, Japan tried to include the Japanese North Korean issues in the agenda of the Six-Party Talks, which meant that: (1) Japan may disturb the pace of the negotiations on the nuclear issue; (2) it gives North Korea a pretext for boycotting these negotiations; and (3) it increases the number of hurdles to the successful conclusion of an agreement on the nuclear issue. At the same time, Japan worries that the other North Korean issues are left unsolved if the Six-Party Talks are able to resolve the nuclear issue

This “Catch-22” situation has influenced U.S.–Japan relations. Japan has regarded the United States as the only country that can and will put effective pressure on North Korea. Thus, Japan came to rely more and more on the U.S.–. According to an opinion poll from February 2006, about two thirds of respondents agreed that the Japan– U.S. alliance contributes to the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>43</sup> Prime Minister Koizumi

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<sup>43</sup> The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation, “Yomiuri Shimbun – Gallup, Inc. December 2009 Japan-U.S. Joint Public Opinion Poll,” <http://www.mansfieldfdn.org/>

said at the outbreak of the Iraq War in 2003 that "the U.S.–Japan alliance functions as a strong deterrent against any country which is ready to attack Japan. Japan should not forget about it."<sup>44</sup> The most controversial measure taken by Japan was the dispatch of SDF personnel to Iraq in 2004. It was said that the prime minister decided to dispatch troops after a request from the U.S. of "boots on the ground." Although there is no official statement on the bargaining of sending troops to Iraq, Japanese tacitly accepted the strengthening of the U.S.–Japan alliance through the dispatch of GSDF and ASDF to Iraq. The two visits of Prime Minister Koizumi to Pyongyang did not agree with the U.S. isolation policy towards North Korea. These summit meetings were initiated solely by the Japanese and North Korean governments. The second nuclear crisis broke out just one month after his first summit. If Japan had coordinated well with the United States at that time, Koizumi's visit would have been delayed or cancelled. One of the reasons why North Korea accepted the normalization initiative by the Japanese Government was that the United States was so antagonistic towards North Korea and that it feared for its survival. North Korea wanted Japan to be a mediator between the US and North Korea.

However, after the summit meeting and when Japanese public opinion hardened, discrepancies between Japan and the United States frustrated Japan. In October 2008, the United States announced that North Korea had been eliminated from the State Sponsored Terrorism List, when North Korea submitted their nuclear development plan. In responding to questions in the Diet, Prime Minister Asō Tarō said that "I said clearly that we were dissatisfied with the elimination."<sup>45</sup> The families of abductees have sent petitions to the United States in favor of continued sanctions and negotiations on the nuclear issue in parallel with negotiations on the abduction issue.

Moreover, U.S.–Japan relations are influenced by U.S.–Korea relations. When Japan decided to send SDF to Iraq, South Korea pursued its conciliatory policy (the Sunshine Policy). The Roh Mun-hyong government decided to contribute to Operation Iraqi Freedom in order to soften the U.S. attitude towards North Korea. Japan and South Korea compete to achieve more favorable policy of the United States. It is important for the

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polls/2009/poll-09-30.htm (accessed June 8, 2010).

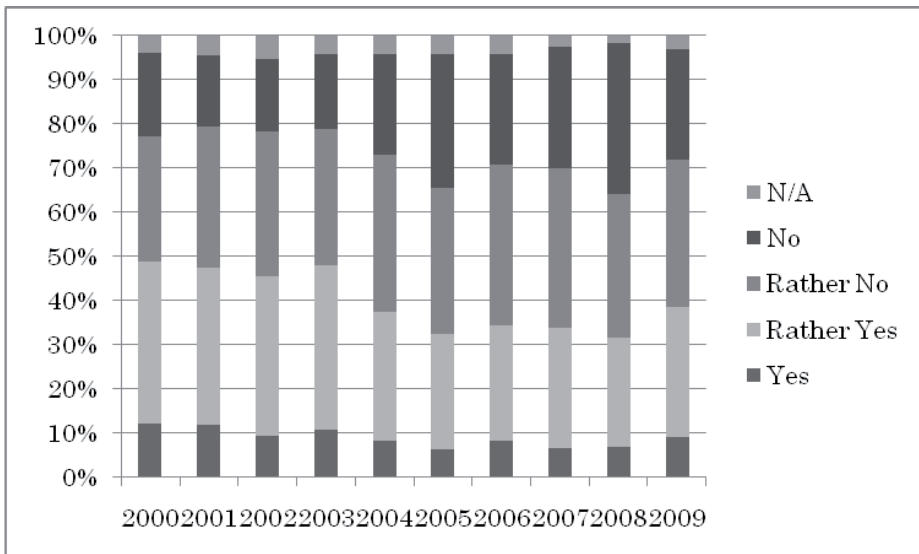
<sup>44</sup> Mataka Kamiya, "A Disillusioned Japan Confronts North Korea," *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2003) p. 21.

<sup>45</sup> The Upper House Budget Committee, October 14, 2008.

Japanese government to keep pace with the normalization developments of the United States and South Korea. As Victor Cha has pointed out, there has been a correlation between the engagement by the United States and South Korea on the one hand, and enmity between Japan and North Korea on the other. The more the relationship between North Korea and the U.S. and South Korea improve, the less attractive it is for North Korea to improve its relationship with Japan.<sup>46</sup>

As the chair country in the Six-Party Talks and as a country with strong ties to North Korea, China can have a strong influence on the resolution of the North Korean issue. Despite the economic interdependence between Japan and China, historical and territorial issues prevent the Japanese from being fully supportive of China. According to opinion surveys conducted by the Cabinet Office, about two thirds of respondents do not feel any friendship with China (Figure 3) and about three-quarters view the relations with China as progressing poorly (Figure 4).<sup>47</sup>

**Figure 3. Do you feel a sense of friendship towards China?**



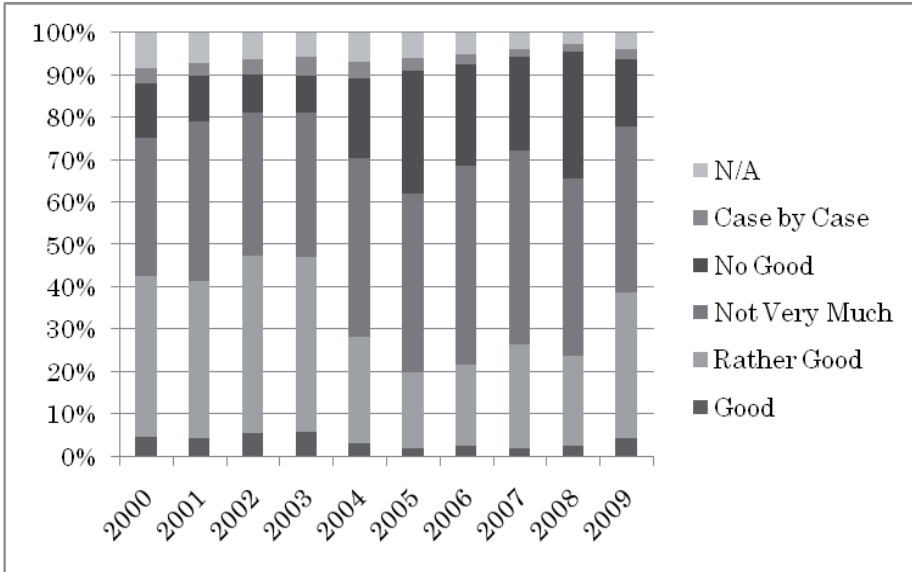
Source: Cabinet Office, "Gaikō ni kansuru yoron chōsa" [Opinion polls on diplomacy], 2000–2009, <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/index-gai.html> (accessed April 12, 2010)

<sup>46</sup> Cha, "Japan's Engagement Dilemmas with North Korea," p. 558.

<sup>47</sup> The results of the other three countries are presented in the Appendix.



Figure 4 How Do You Think About China–Japan Relations?



Source: Cabinet Office, "Gaikō ni kansuru yoron chōsa" [Opinion polls on diplomacy], 2000–2009, <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/index-gai.html> (accessed April 12, 2010)

Following the second nuclear test by North Korea in 2009, the Six-Party Talks were suspended. As of mid-2010, the nuclear issue, the missile issue, and the abduction issue do not show any signs of reaching a resolution. This decreases the anxiety of Japanese that the North Korean issues are left behind in the negotiations, despite the fact that the overall situation is deteriorating. This situation ironically shows the structure of impasse regarding Japan's North Korean issues.

## Concluding Remarks

This report has tried to describe the structure of the impasse of Japan's "North Korean issues." Since 2000, the Japanese perception of the North Korean issues, that is, the abduction, missile and nuclear issues, has not changed. The low level of threat perception during the Cold War strengthened the Japanese sense of uneasiness regarding North Korea during the post-Cold War era. Japan's initial conciliatory approach in the early 1990s and its humanitarian and economic assistance to North Korea did not result in normalization of diplomatic relations, which has justified the uncompromising policy in the 2000s.

The nature of the issues also makes it difficult for Japan to keep pace with other countries participating in the Six-Party Talks. While the main concern for the other countries is the nuclear issue, Japan's main problem areas are the missile and abduction as well as the nuclear issue. Following the policy of the Koizumi administration, successive governments have said that there will be no normalization of relations and no economic assistance to North Korea until the nuclear, missile and abduction issues are resolved.<sup>48</sup>

Lacking effective methods to deal with these issues bilaterally, Japan has expended a great deal of effort to include them on the agenda of the Six-Party Talks. Through this process, the United States has exercised a large degree of influence on Japanese policymaking such as the missile defense program, or the dispatch of SDF to Iraq. Although Japan maintains good relations with South Korea, Japan sometimes has been trapped in a competition with South Korea for more favorably relations with the United States. This complex mechanism has also contributed to the impasse on the "North Korean issues."

In the foreseeable future, this situation will not easily change. The fact that North Korea has acted provocatively on many past occasions but has not attacked Japan directly has led the Japanese to think that the North can be deterred if the current situation continues. This does not mean Japan will take a hawkish approach towards North Korea, as the final report of the Task Force on Foreign Relations for Prime Minister Koizumi maintained,

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<sup>48</sup> Kamiya, "A Disillusioned Japan Confronts North Korea."

the overall objective of Japan's North Korea policy is not to overthrow Kim Jong-Il's regime but to persuade Pyongyang to cease harmful external actions and to initiate gradual reform of its domestic political and economic system.<sup>49</sup> Yet, by strengthening its alliance with the United States, Japan can live with the current unresolved situation for an indefinite period.<sup>50</sup> Thus, North Korea is a source of uneasiness but it does not need to be eliminated by force. The Japanese have become accustomed to living with the uneasiness and the uncertainty of the situation in North Korea and pessimism on North Korean issues prevails. Normalizing of relations with North Korea was planned by Prime Minister Koizumi as the "finishing touch to the process of normalization with other Asian countries." Ironically, however, the fourth attempt at normalization accompanied by nuclear crisis management in the Six-Party Talks, ended in a widening gap between the Japanese approach towards North Korea and that of South Korea and China. Arousal of nationalism in this region promoted mutual frustration. Thus, Yoichi Funabashi has observed that Japan's attempt to "enter Asia" has unintentionally led to a drive to "depart from Asia."<sup>51</sup>

In March 2010, the AFVKN decided to eliminate as a member Hasuike Tōru, the older brother of one of the victims of abduction. Although he used to be the Vice-President of the AFVKN, he had begun to propose more conciliatory approaches towards North Korea.<sup>52</sup> This shows how difficult it is for Japan to take another approach toward North Korea than it is pursuing at present. Japan, as well as most of other East Asian countries, is in the process of learning how to behave strategically in order to achieve their national interest, and how to control their emotions in order to attain regional security.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> David C. Kang, "Japan: U.S. Partner or Focused on Abductees?" *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (2005), pp. 114–5.

<sup>51</sup> Funabashi, *The Peninsula Question*, p. 472.

<sup>52</sup> Yomiuri online, "Rachihigaisha kazokukai, Hasuike Tōru-san kyōseitakai e" [AFVKN decides to expel Tōru Hasuike], *Yomiuri online*, March 28, 2010, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/national/news/20100328-OYT1T00603.htm> (accessed May 24, 2010).

# Appendix: Opinion Polls

The following figures show the results of Cabinet Office opinion polls on bilateral relations with the United States, Russia, China, and South Korea.<sup>53</sup> The figure displayed on the left hand side shows the result for the question “Do you feel a sense of friendship towards [the country]?” and on the right shows the result of the question “How do you think about relations with [the country]?”

## United States

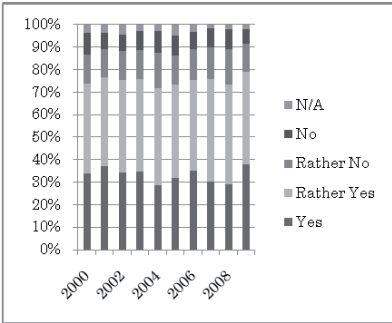


Figure A-1: Do you feel a sense of friendship towards the U.S.?

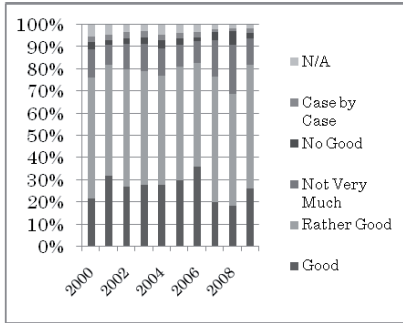


Figure A-2: How do you think about relations with the U.S.?

## Russia

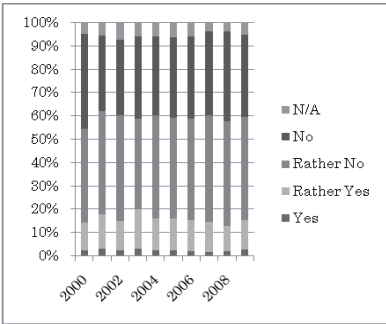


Figure A-3: Do you feel a sense of friendship towards Russia?

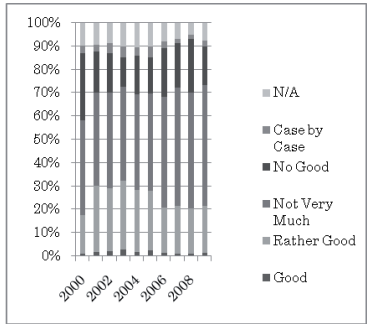


Figure A-4: How do you think about relations with Russia?

<sup>53</sup> Cabinet Office, “Shitsumonhyō”[Questionnaire], 2002, <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/h14/h14-gaikou/3.html> (accessed April 12, 2010).

**China**

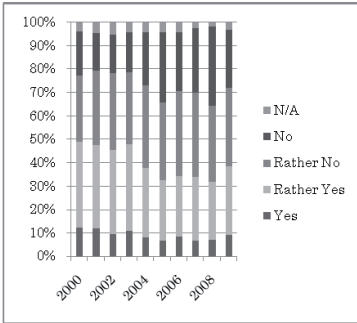


Figure A-5: Do you feel a sense of friendship towards China?

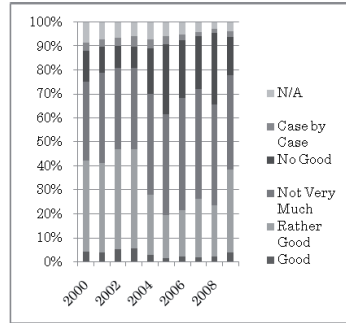


Figure A-6: How do you think about relations with China?

**South Korea**

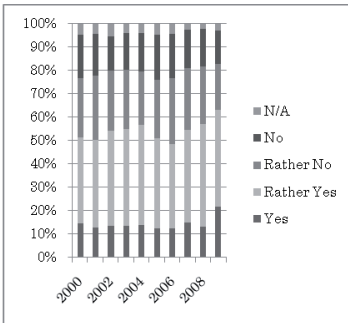


Figure A-5: Do you feel a sense of friendship towards the Republic of Korea?

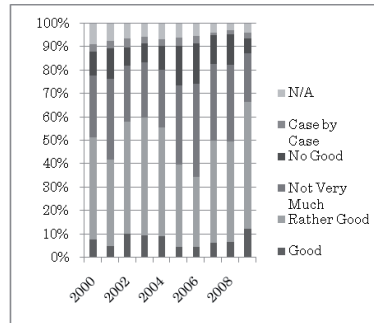


Figure A-6: How do you think about relations with the Republic of Korea?

## About the Author

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