

Japanese-South Korean Relations Under the Second Abe Government, 2012-2014

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine recent Japanese-South Korean relations, with an emphasis on the analysis of major issues which have strained Tokyo-Seoul relations since the inauguration of the second Abe government in December 2012. It is a major contention of this article that the souring of recent Japanese-South Korean relations would be attributed largely to the Abe government's revisionist view of wartime history and partly to its attempt to nullify the "Kono Statement" of 1993, which admitted and apologized for Japan's guilt in the forceful recruitment of the "comfort women" before and during World War II, and the 1995 "Murayama statement" in which then-Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi expressed deep remorse and apologized to the victims of Japanese colonialism and militarism before and during World War II. Unless the Abe government discards its revisionist view of wartime history and agrees to abide by these landmark apologies, it will be difficult for Japan to develop close cooperation or partnership with South Korea.

Key words: Japan, Shinzo Abe, Kono Statement, Murayama Statement, Comfort Women, South Korea, Japanese-Korean relations

I. The inauguration of the second Abe Shinzo government, in December 2012, aroused uneasiness among many South Koreans, because Korean-Japanese relations had been exacerbated during his first tenure as prime minister in 2006-2007, when he attempted to nullify Japan's apology concerning the comfort women, an apology issued in 1993 by then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei.¹ Although Abe failed in his attempt to nullify the Kono Statement, he did not give up his plan to revise it. Later, in his election campaign for the presidency of the

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 2012, Abe declared his intention to revise the two landmark apologies for Japan's wrongdoings before and during World War II issued by the Japanese government: (1) the Kono Statement of 1993 on the comfort women issue; and (2) the Murayama statement of 1995, which apologized for the damages done by the Japanese military before and during World War II and during its colonial rule over neighboring countries.² Abe also declared his intention to strengthen the campaign to bolster Japan's claim to Dokdo/Takeshima, the island whose ownership has long been contested between Japan and Korea, by upgrading the "Takeshima Day" from a prefectural event to a nationally-sponsored one.

Such statements on the part of Abe disturbed many South Koreans who have retained deep-seated suspicion and antipathy toward Japan, for they do not think Japan has sincerely atoned for its past mistakes or compensated fully for its past wrongdoings. They have rejected Japanese leaders' frequent contentions that Japan has already offered more than enough apologies to Korea and that any compensation issues stemming from Japan's colonial rule were ultimately settled in the Japanese-ROK basic relations treaty in 1965.

The purpose of this article is to examine recent Japanese-South Korean relations, with a focus on analyzing major issues which have strained Tokyo-Seoul relations since the inauguration of the Abe government in December 2012. It is a major contention of this article that the souring of recent Japanese-South Korean relations should be attributed partly to the Abe government's revisionist view of wartime history and partly to its unwillingness to honor the "Kono Statement" of 1993, which admitted and apologized for Japan's guilt in the forceful recruitment of the "comfort women" before and during World War II, and the 1995 "Murayama statement", in which then-Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi expressed deep remorse and apologies to the victims of Japanese colonialism and militarism. Unless the Abe government discards its revisionist view of wartime history and agrees to vigorously endorse these two important statements, it will be difficult for Japan to develop close cooperation or partnership with South Korea.

II. The inauguration of the Abe government in December 2012 heralded the beginning of a more autonomous, nationalistic Japanese foreign policy. Unlike many of his predecessors, who had tended to be passive in dealing with foreign policy issues, Abe indicated strongly his

intention to enhance Japan's role in international politics by revitalizing Japan's economy (e.g., the "Abenomics"), strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance, and building up Japan's military capabilities by removing legal constraints on Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF), either through a more liberal interpretation of Japan's right to collective self-defense or via the outright amendment of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution. In addition, he wanted to instill patriotism and pride in the growing generation by teaching Japan's past achievements and rejecting what he and many other nationalists had termed the "masochistic" interpretation on Japan's recent history, especially the critical narrative of imperial Japan's aggression before and during World War II.

Following his appointment as prime minister, Abe chose many hawkish nationalists – those who had denied Japan's guilt or wrongdoing before and during the war – as members of his cabinet. Abe's selection clearly reflected not only his leaning to a revisionist view of history but also his close ties with far-right nationalist groups. Like himself, the majority of the members of his cabinet were members of far-right nationalist groups called the "Group of Diet Members for Consideration of Japan's Future and History Education" as well as the "Discussion Group of the *Nippon Kaigi* Diet Members." The *Nippon Kaigi* is regarded as the "biggest right-wing organization" in Japan.³ Also, a majority of the cabinet members belonged to the *League for Going to Worship Together at Yasukuni*.⁴ Some (e.g., Minister of Administrative Reform Inada Tomomi) had denied openly that the 1937 "Nanjing massacre" ever took place, while others, like Minister of Education Shimomura Hakubun, wanted to overturn the verdict of the Tokyo war crimes trials by the Allied powers after WWII.

In early 2013, Abe launched important foreign policy initiatives toward the U.S. and South Korea. In an official visit to Washington in February, Abe impressed many U. S. officials with his "Japan Is Back" speech, in which he emphasized Japan's desire to play a greater role in international politics by strengthening Japan's ties with the U.S., enhancing its defense capabilities, and revitalizing Japan's economy through "Abenomics."

Abe also attempted to improve Japan's relations with South Korea. In the beginning of January, he dispatched Nukaga Fukushiro as a special envoy to meet with President-elect Park Geun-hye. At the meeting, Nukaga delivered Abe's letter, in which the Japanese leader promised to work closely with South Korea. Abe also praised South Korea as "a very

important neighboring country” that shares the values of democracy and a market economy.⁵ While appreciating Abe’s friendly diplomatic gesture, Park made it clear to Abe’s envoy that South Korea’s cooperation would depend on Japanese policies regarding sensitive historical and territorial issues between the two countries.

In the spring of 2013, Japanese-South Korean relations began to deteriorate rapidly, as Abe’s revisionist view of history irritated the Park government, which was seeking from Japan a more full-throated acknowledgement and apology for Japan’s pre-1945 actions in Korea. In so doing, Seoul was linking the improvement of South Korean-Japanese relations to history-related issues. Seoul made it clear to Tokyo that unless Japan admitted its past mistakes and pledged not to repeat the same mistakes, it would be difficult for South Korea to build a genuine partnership with Japan.

However, the Abe government was more concerned with restoring Japanese pride and self-confidence by erasing signs of what right-wing nationalists regarded as “self-flagellation” or a “masochistic” view of Japan’s wartime history in history textbooks. Neither Abe nor Park was willing to be seen as compromising with the other, given the array of domestic forces behind each. Abe had to maintain a hawkish nationalist stance in order to cope with the pressure from Japan’s extreme right (e.g., the Restoration Party) which was advocating an unabashed historical revisionism denying any guilt or responsibility in its wartime history. For her part, Park had to shore up her credentials as a nationalist leader who would stand up against Japan, partly because of her family background as a daughter of the late President Park Chung-hee, often depicted as a pro-Japanese leader by left-wing elements in South Korea.

A new diplomatic row between Tokyo and Seoul was triggered in the spring of 2013 by Abe’s attempts to reject charges of Japanese aggression before and during WWII. In testimony before the Budget Committee of the Japanese House of Councillors on April 22, he indicated that he was not going to uphold former Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi’s 1995 apology for Japan’s war guilt. After 1995, that apology was upheld by every Japanese cabinet (including the first Abe government, from 2006 to 2007) and was widely regarded as Japan’s landmark apology for its wars of aggression and colonial rule in Asia. In his testimony, Abe stated that he did not accept the Murayama statement in its entirety, for there were some parts with which he did not agree.⁶ In fact, he questioned “whether Japan had committed

aggression” against anyone during the war.⁷

On the next day, when questioned by another member of the Upper House Budget Committee about Japanese aggression in China and elsewhere in Asia in the pre-1945 period, Abe evaded the question by insisting that the definition of “aggression” in general had yet to be “firmly determined” by the academic or international community.⁸ According to Abe, what is described as aggression “can be viewed differently,” depending on the point of view of individual countries.⁹ Although Abe did not elaborate, it was clear that he was presenting a revisionist view of history, advocated by many hawkish Japanese nationalists who maintain that Japan’s wars in the 1930s and 1940s were self-defensive in nature, not aggressive.¹⁰ In a sense, as Yoshida Reiji of the *Japan Times* put it, Abe had finally revealed “shades of his true color” as a “right-leaning historical revisionist.”¹¹ Moreover, according to the chief of the LDP’s policy affairs research council, Abe also refused to accept the verdict of the Allied powers’ military tribunal in Tokyo, which had found 27 out of 28 Japanese wartime leaders guilty of war crimes.¹²

Abe’s statements caused a stir in South Korea, China, and elsewhere in Asia, while raising concerns within the U.S. government as well. His denial of Japan’s guilt and responsibility for aggression especially angered Koreans, given Japanese actions in Korea during the colonial rule of the peninsula from 1910 to 1945. On April 29, the South Korean National Assembly adopted a resolution denouncing Deputy Prime Minister Aso Taro’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine and Abe’s revisionist view of history. In the wake of Abe’s revisionist statement, many feared that Abe would retract the earlier apologies issued by Murayama Tomiichi (in 1995) and Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei (in 1993).¹³

Meanwhile, in the spring of 2013, a number of conservative and right-wing Japanese politicians made inflammatory statements denying Japan’s responsibility for wartime atrocities, including the “Nanjing massacre” of 1937; they also rejected Japan’s responsibility for the recruitment and retention of “comfort women.” Some radical nationalist politicians, such as Kawamura Takashi, Mayor of Nagoya, attempted to whitewash Japan’s responsibility for the “Nanjing massacre” by contending that it did not take place, but was instead fabricated by the Chinese.¹⁴ Following Kawamura’s inflammatory statement, which naturally infuriated the Chinese, Hashimoto Toru, Mayor of Osaka, declared that Japan was not the only country which had used either

comfort women or prostitutes for its soldiers during wartime. He declared that the “comfort women” system, which is believed to have forced some 200,000 Asian women into sexual servitude, had been “necessary” to maintain “discipline” in the Japanese military.¹⁵ Furthermore, Hashimoto contended that the system was commonly used by other countries as well; therefore, Japan should not be singled out. Hashimoto was denounced severely by Chinese and Koreans for making such an irresponsible statement.

Against this background, any hope for an early Japanese-South Korean summit was quickly dashed. When over 170 LDP Diet members, including several members of the Abe cabinet, visited the Yasukuni Shrine toward the end of April, South Korea expressed its displeasure by canceling its foreign minister’s visit to Tokyo for a scheduled meeting with his Japanese counterpart. Moreover, in deviating from the long-kept diplomatic pecking order, South Korean President Park Geun-hye chose in June 2013 to visit China first, rather than Japan, as the newly elected ROK president.

III. The ruling LDP’s victory in the Upper House (Sanfgiin) elections in July 2013 assured the Abe government’s control of both houses of the Diet, in coalition with the New Komeito Party, for the first time in decades. Following this victory, it was clear that Abe would continue to seek constitutional revision to bolster Japan’s military capability. He also increased Japan’s defense budget. At the same time, the government stepped up its efforts for educational reforms intended to promote patriotism among Japan’s youth. Abe also sought to strengthen the security alliance with the U.S. Apparently, these policy measures were adopted largely to counterbalance the rising power of China and to contain North Korea’s nuclear threat. However, South Korea was uneasy about the implications of Japan’s efforts to upgrade its military capability, because the Abe government rejected charges of its past wrongdoings and militaristic actions. Seoul was clearly apprehensive about Abe’s plan to amend Article 9 of the Japanese constitution (which concerns the renunciation of war as a sovereign right), which might permit Japan’s full-fledged rearmament. Such a military build-up or full-scale rearmament could pose a threat to Japan’s neighbors, including South Korea, if undertaken by Japanese leaders with a revisionist view of history.

In connection with the 68th anniversary of Japan's surrender to the Allied powers, South Koreans nervously watched to see whether Japanese leaders would visit the Yasukuni Shrine on August 15, 2013. On the eve of the anniversary, Seoul sent a clear message to the Abe government that it would oppose any such visits. Abe left the issue of shrine visitation to individual cabinet members, while withdrawing himself.¹⁶ However, Seoul was unhappy with Abe's August 15th speech, delivered in commemoration of the anniversary of Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allied powers. In the speech, Abe deviated from the long-observed practice of his predecessors by failing to express explicitly his contrition or remorse for Japan's wartime aggression. Nor did he make any statement reaffirming Tokyo's pledge to never make war again.¹⁷

For the annual autumn festival in October, Abe again refrained from a visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. However, his conciliatory gesture was not taken seriously by his domestic and foreign critics, since he expressed his "regret" for not visiting the shrine, while more than 160 LDP Diet members did.¹⁸ Apparently, Abe was avoiding the shrine visit because Japan was engaged in negotiations with Seoul and Beijing for convening a trilateral summit. On November 7, a meeting of vice ministerial officials from Japan, South Korea, and China was held in Seoul to discuss the possibility of such a trilateral meeting.¹⁹ However, these negotiations were brought to a standstill shortly thereafter as a result of the rising tensions between Japan and China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and China's unilateral issuance of the "Air Defense Identification Zone" (ADIZ) over South China Sea, an area that covered the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

Under the strong urging of the United States, Japanese and Korean diplomats continued bilateral discussions to explore the possibility of holding a summit between Abe and Park, possibly on the sidelines of the Davos conference in Switzerland in January 2014. However, that bilateral meeting did not materialize, due to Tokyo's unwillingness to accept Seoul's conditions. According to the *Asahi Shimbun*, those conditions included demands that Abe promise to abide by Japan's past apologies for its wartime actions. Seoul also called for Abe to issue a letter of apology to former comfort women, and for the Japanese government to provide assistance to those women for reasons other than humanitarian support.²⁰ However, Tokyo was not amenable to such conditions.

IV. Any prospect for a summit between Tokyo and Seoul was dashed with Abe's surprise visit to the Yasukuni Shrine on December 26, infuriating many Koreans and Chinese who had been victimized by the Japanese military before and during the Second World War. South Korea, like China, had repeatedly expressed anger in the past over Japanese leaders' visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, where 14 of the Japanese leaders convicted as "Class-A war criminals" by the Allied military tribunal in Tokyo after WWII are honored along with over 2.4 million who died in battle. Seoul and Beijing are especially sensitive about visits to the shrine by incumbent Japanese prime ministers. For many Koreans and Chinese, Yasukuni remains a symbol of Japanese militarism and military atrocities. South Korea and China also regard it as a "symbol of Tokyo's unrepentance" and a source of its "misguided view of its warmongering past."²¹ Abe is one of the few incumbent postwar Japanese prime ministers who have paid homage to the Yasukuni Shrine, and the first leader in office to do so since 2006.

Abe defended his visit to Yasukuni by stating that it was not an "act to worship war criminals," but the shrine visit was intended "to report to the souls of war dead on the progress made this year" under his government and "to convey" his "resolve that people never again suffer the horrors of war."²² He added that he had "no intention to hurt the feelings of the Chinese or Korean people."²³ However, to the Koreans and the Chinese, Abe's pilgrimage to Yasukuni implied not only paying homage to the souls of 2.4 million war dead, but also to the 14 Class-A war criminals who were convicted and punished for their war crimes by the Allied powers' military tribunal after WWII. Even Japanese emperors Hirohito and Akihito stopped visiting the Yasukuni Shrine after 1978, when the 14 Class-A war criminals were added to those honored at the shrine.

South Korea termed the visit a "deplorable" and "anachronistic act" that damaged ties between the two countries. A spokesman for the Park government declared that the ROK government "cannot help but feel outraged" by Abe's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine," which "glorifies Japan's past colonial rule and war of aggression and enshrines its war criminals" in defiance of the warnings of neighboring countries.²⁴ He went on to say that "The visit . . . clearly demonstrates his erroneous understanding of history," damaging "fundamentals, not only relations between Korea and Japan" but also the stability in Northeast Asia.²⁵ Many Koreans also regarded Abe's visit as an act justifying Japan's war

of aggression. The South Korean foreign ministry summoned the Japanese ambassador to South Korea to protest the visit. Meanwhile, Beijing also swiftly denounced the shrine visit as a “brazen” act. The United States, which welcomed Abe’s more proactive defense and economic policies, was unhappy with his historical revisionism; it also expressed “disappointment,” for “Japan’s leadership has taken an action that will exacerbate tensions with Japan’s neighbors.”²⁶

In the wake of Abe’s Yasukuni visit, South Korea decided to cancel the vice-ministerial-level talks with Japan which had been scheduled for January 2014. It also became evident that Abe’s image has been tarnished as a result of his decision. In the aftermath of his shrine visit, several influential U.S. media outlets (e.g., the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, etc.) began to criticize openly Abe’s insensitive behavior.²⁷

Following Abe’s December 26 visit, South Korean government leaders expressed their doubts about whether the Japanese leader would abide by Japan’s past apologies. “I hope to move towards a future-oriented relationship with Japan on [a] correct understanding of history,” President Park said in her interview with CNN in January 2014. Furthermore, Park urged the Abe government to honor the past apologies. According to Park, Korean-Japanese relations had progressed over the years “because Japanese political leaders have clearly stated through” these two statements “their correct understanding of history.”²⁸ Park harshly rebuked the current Japanese leadership for displaying no repentance over its past brutalities during the colonial rule of Korea, specifically those involving the comfort women.

V. In the early spring of 2014, Japanese-South Korean relations hit rock bottom when the Abe government decided to reexamine the evidence used in the drafting of the Kono Statement of 1993. On February 28, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide announced the Abe government’s decision to “reexamine” its validity. For this purpose, a team of investigators was to be formed within the government to scrutinize the evidence, especially the testimonies of 16 former Korean comfort women, which had been used in drafting the Kono Statement.²⁹ In that document, then-Chief Cabinet Secretary KonoYohei had acknowledged for the first time that the Japanese imperial military had been involved, directly or indirectly, in coercing those “comfort women” to provide sex to Japanese soldiers during World War II.³⁰ Suga did not

say whether the planned investigation would lead to the nullification, modification, or retraction of the Kono Statement.

In the wake of Suga's announcement, many Koreans regarded the Abe government's reexamination plan as a clear attempt to whitewash Japan's responsibility in the comfort women issue. At the same time, the Abe government's proposed review undermined Koreans' trust in past Japanese apologies. Like a revolving door, the apology offered by one Japanese government might be denied or nullified shortly thereafter by a successor government in Tokyo, a vicious cycle which might be repeated indefinitely.

Obviously, the Abe government's decision to review the Kono Statement was designed partly to cope with pressures from the far right in Japan and partly to cope with the rising international criticism of Japan's inaction in dealing with the flagrant violation of women's rights. Abe felt the need to deflect pressure from the ultra far right, such as the Restoration Party, which was attempting to expand its support base by arguing that the Kono Statement should be scrapped. In their view, there was insufficient evidence to support it. In making such a demand, they utilized the testimony of Ishihara Nobuhiro, who helped draft the 1993 apology. According to Ishihara, the apology had been drafted mainly based on the testimony of 16 former comfort women, even though no documents were found to support their stories.³¹

In addition to the domestic pressure from Abe's supporters and allies on the far right, the government also had to cope with growing criticism from abroad. For example, the U.S. House of Representatives attached a clause to the 2014 appropriations bill passed in January, urging the U.S. government to call on Japan to implement House Resolution 101, adopted in 2007, which called for Japan to offer apologies on the comfort women issue.³² Japan's image was also tarnished by the erection of a statute in commemoration of the comfort women by the city of Glendale, California – the attached plaque clearly charged Japan with responsibility for forcing these women into sexual servitude. South Korea also stepped up its anti-Japanese campaign by distributing various materials to foreign audiences, including videos and pamphlets critical of Japan's violation of fundamental women's rights in the comfort women case.

By such actions, the Park government was showing that it viewed the Abe government's attempts to retract or water-down Japan's past apologies on the comfort women issues as clear proof of Japan's unwillingness to atone for its wrongdoings. Under the circumstances,

Park refused to meet with Abe until Japan showed more contrition on the issue. In fact, she made it clear that unless and until the Abe government promised to abide by the Murayama and Kono Statements, there would be no summit between South Korea and Japan.

On March 1, in a nationally televised speech on the anniversary of the 1919 Korean uprising against Japanese colonial rule, Park urged Abe to be honest and courageous enough to face his country's history of aggression in the early 20th century, especially its enslavement of Asian women in Imperial Army brothels. "True courage lies not in denying the past but in looking squarely at the history as it was and teaching growing generations the correct history,"³³ she noted, referring to Japan's often brutal colonization of Korea from 1910 to 1945. She added: "The more one denies the history of the past, the more wretched and more isolated one gets."³⁴ Presumably, her view reflected feelings of many South Koreans. Park also focused on the urgent need for Japan to resolve long-running grievances over the former sex slaves, who have long been campaigning to win compensation from Tokyo. Park said time was running out because only 55 of the 237 South Korean women who had spoken out about their painful experiences were still alive.³⁵

The Abe government's decision to revise the Kono Statement was denounced by a group of well-known Japanese scholars and specialists on the comfort women controversy. On March 7, Yoshimi Yoshiaki (of Chuo University), Hayashi Hirohumi (of Kanto Gakuin University), and Nishino Rumiko (co-chair of an anti-war and anti-violence against women research center) held a joint press conference in Tokyo, denouncing the Abe government's attempt to "destroy the Kono Statement." According to them, Japan was the "only country" in the world that used "coercion" in recruiting comfort women for its soldiers; and the Abe government's attempts to discredit the Kono Statement would not succeed, given the existence of over several hundred different documents recording Japan's official involvement in the recruitment of the comfort women and the operation of the "comfort stations."³⁶ In a related move, Hayashi and others launched a "signature drive" campaign to enlist the support of intellectuals for "the preservation and development of the Kono Statement" in Japan. Over 1,300 scholars and other intellectuals were reported to have signed a "joint declaration" that criticized the Abe government's plan.³⁷

It should be pointed out that the Kono Statement was not based exclusively on the testimonies of the 16 former comfort women.³⁸

Rather, it was supported by several hundred Japanese government documents and other testimony collected by the Allied powers during and after WWII.³⁹ Thus, any reexamination of the Kono Statement would require not only the reexamination of the 16 former comfort women's testimony but also much other testimony and documents, including some of the more recently discovered documents pertaining to the Japanese military's direct involvement in the raping and forced recruitment and retention of a number of Dutch young women in the "comfort stations" in Indonesia from 1944 until the end of war.⁴⁰

VI. Meanwhile, the territorial dispute over Dokdo (Takeshima in Japanese) was also exacerbating the already-strained bilateral relations between Japan and South Korea. The territorial dispute has been a major source of tensions between the two countries since the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951, which is silent on the ownership of the island. Although Japan has contended that it incorporated the Liancourt Rocks as a *terra nullius* (island without owner) in Japan's Shimane prefecture in 1905, South Korea has maintained that it was a Korean island, not a *terra nullius*, one which was illegally usurped by Japan in violation of international law.⁴¹

Following Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allied powers in August 1945, Dokdo was excluded from Japan's governmental jurisdiction on January 29, 1946, by directive of the Supreme Commander for the Allied powers (SCAPIN No. 677) and was returned to Korea along with the Korean Peninsula and its offshore islands. By June 1946, all Japanese and their ships were banned from approaching within 12 miles of the island by SCAPIN No. 1033. On August 15, 1948, the U.S. Military Government in South Korea transferred its full jurisdiction over South Korea, including Dokdo, to the newly elected Republic of Korea (ROK) which had been established through the U.N.-supervised elections. On December 12, 1948, the U. N. General Assembly recognized the legitimacy of the Republic.

Since neither the Allied powers, nor SCAP rescinded, or revised the original decision (SCAPIN No. 677) on the return of Dokdo to Korea, and, since there was no provision in the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951 which stated otherwise, South Korea came to understand that the island legally belonged to Korea. By 1954, South Korea established its effective control over Dokdo and has controlled the island ever since. However, Japan has disputed South Korea's territorial claim, saying that

it belongs to Japan because Japan did not renounce it in the 1951 peace treaty. To be sure, it was not Japan but the Allied powers that had the ultimate authority to define the scope of Japanese territory. When Japan's attempt to recapture Dokdo by enlisting the U.S. to help (including invocation of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty) was rejected by U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in December 1953,⁴² Japan proposed to South Korea in 1954 and again in 1962 that the dispute be referred to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). However, South Korea rejected Japan's proposal on the ground that the island belonged to Korea, and thus there was no territorial dispute between Seoul and Tokyo.

Whatever grievances Japan might have had with South Korea on territorial and other issues, Japan established diplomatic relations with South Korea by signing the Japanese-South Korean Basic Relations Treaty of 1965, in spite of the fact that it did not contain any discussion of Dokdo. As a result, many legal experts believe that Japan had acquiesced to Korea's control of the island at that time.⁴³

In 2005, Japan's Shimane prefecture declared "Takeshima Day" to highlight their territorial claim to the island. This action severely strained Japanese-South Korean relations. In an attempt to demonstrate South Korea's jurisdiction over the island, President Lee Myung-bak visited Dokdo in the summer of 2012, triggering strong protests from the Japanese government. Japan then stepped up its campaign to assert its sovereignty over Dokdo, contending that South Korea was "occupying illegally Takeshima, a Japanese island." These developments further exacerbated already tense relations between Japan and South Korea.

Following the inauguration of the Abe government, the dispute over Dokdo has escalated. In an attempt to strengthen the Japanese position in the controversy, the Abe government decided to revise Japanese high school textbooks, so as to include the claim that Dokdo/Takeshima is a Japanese island. Furthermore, in the summer of 2013, other Japanese government publications, such as the "Defense White Article," emphasized Japanese ownership of the island.⁴⁴ Seoul strongly objected to such claims, urging Japan to delete the passage and refrain from making such a claim in the future.

In January 2014, Japan opened a new front in its territorial dispute with South Korea, as the country's education ministry instructed teachers of Japanese junior and senior high schools to describe the contested island as an integral part of Japanese territory. On January 28, Japan's

Education Minister Shimomura Hakubun announced that the ministry had revised the teaching manual for teachers to make it clear that Dokdo/Takeshima belongs to Japan. The new manual stated that “Takeshima is Japan’s inherent territory” which has been “illegally occupied by South Korea.”⁴⁵ Earlier in January, the Education Ministry had revised textbook screening guidelines for the same purpose. Immediately, South Korea denounced the adoption of the new study guidelines, charging that they clearly show that “Japan is repeating” the bad habit of distorting history and indulging in nostalgia for imperialism. The government spokesman added that Japan was attempting to repeat lies and falsehood in teaching new generations. He demanded that Tokyo withdraw the proposed new teaching guidelines immediately.⁴⁶

Tensions between Seoul and Tokyo were heightened further toward the end of January 2014, as Abe told the Japanese Upper House that he was “reviewing and preparing”⁴⁷ to raise the Dokdo/Takeshima issue unilaterally at the ICJ. The Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs denounced Abe’s remarks, saying that “there is no dispute to be settled in regard to the Dokdo islets.” On February 22, the situation was exacerbated further as the Abe government sent Kameoka Tamiyoshi, a parliamentary secretary, from the Cabinet Office to attend the Shimane prefecture’s annual “Takeshima Day” ceremony. This decision was in line with Abe’s 2012 campaign promise to upgrade the “Takeshima Day” from an annual prefectural event to a national one.⁴⁸ According to Abe’s chief lieutenant, Suga Yoshihide, “Takeshima is an integral part of our country” and Kameoka’s attendance at the ceremony was aimed at “stressing [the] Japanese stance on the issue.”⁴⁹

In protest, South Koreans staged protests outside the Japanese embassy, demanding that Japan scrap “Takeshima Day” and stop attempts to encroach upon South Korea’s territory. Protesters also demanded Japan’s apologies for its past wrongdoings and an end to its leaders’ visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. Aggravating Korean feelings, on February 27, Prime Minister Abe declared his intention to take the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute to the ICJ.

VII. In the meantime, the deterioration in Japanese-South Korean relations aroused much concern on the part of the Obama administration, which desired to build close trilateral cooperation among the U.S. and its two important East Asian allies. Several high ranking U.S. officials have urged both Seoul and Tokyo to overcome the unfortunate past between

the two governments and to work together to cope with the challenge of North Korea's nuclear weapons program. For this purpose, the Obama administration aimed to hold a trilateral summit on the sidelines of the 2014 Nuclear Summit Conference in The Hague, Netherlands, on March 24-25.

On March 12, in an attempt to discuss the possibility of such a trilateral summit, the Abe government dispatched Foreign Vice-Minister Saiki Akitaka to Seoul. In his talks with his South Korean counterpart, Kim Kyu-Hyun, Saiki expressed Japan's interest in improving bilateral relations with South Korea and holding a trilateral summit. However, Kim's reply was non-committal, saying that Japan must adopt a correct and proper understanding of history-related issues, including the comfort women issue, for "[Japan's] correct understanding of the history-related issues is the key to the [improvement] of bilateral relations."⁵⁰

On the day of Saiki's visit to Seoul, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga again denied the involvement of the Japanese government and military in the forceful recruitment of the comfort women. Furthermore, he declared that his government was going to "reexamine" the evidence used in the drafting of the Kono Statement.⁵¹ Nevertheless, he indicated the Abe government's intention to abide by the 1993 statement. Thus, Suga was making, in reality, contradictory comments which added confusion to the Japanese position. While emphasizing an intention to adhere to the Kono Statement, Suga simultaneously questioned the validity of the core element of that statement: that the Japanese government used "coercion" in the recruitment of the comfort women. The Park government urged Japanese leaders to refrain from making contradictory comments.⁵² At the same time, it indicated that it had no intention of holding a summit meeting between Seoul and Tokyo unless and until the Abe government adhered unconditionally to both the Kono and Murayama statements.

As it became quite evident that the Park government would not agree to a summit with Japan without conditions, the Abe government decided to drop its plan to revise or retract the Kono Statement. In his testimony before the Upper House's Budget Committee on March 14, Abe declared that his government would not retract its 1993 apology for forcing women into sexual slavery in military brothels during the war. "I'm not thinking about revising [the statement] under my Cabinet."⁵³ Abe also reaffirmed his intention to uphold the Murayama statement of 1995. It was the first time since taking office in December 2012 that Abe had explicitly stated that his government would uphold the 1993 apology as

well as the Murayama statement of 1995. Abe's unequivocal statement was preceded one day earlier by Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide's statement that, regardless of the outcome of the reexamination of the process involved in the drafting of the 1993 statement, there would be no revision of the Kono Statement.⁵⁴ These statements by the top leaders of the Abe government seemingly ended the controversy, at least for a time.

South Korean President Park welcomed Abe's assurance that his government would not retract but would instead uphold Japan's 1993 apology and the Murayama Statement of 1995.⁵⁵ Park was quoted by a presidential spokesman as expressing hope that Abe's remarks would herald the start of stronger relations between South Korea and Japan, as well as between other Northeast Asian countries.⁵⁶ However, there was no indication as to whether Abe's decision will lead to a summit between South Korea and Japan, either in a bilateral or trilateral context.

On March 20, both Tokyo and Seoul announced their willingness to participate in the trilateral summit with the United States on the sidelines of the 2014 Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague. The initiative for the trilateral summit was taken by the Obama administration. At the trilateral summit, on March 25, Abe and Park held their first official meeting. Together with President Obama, they primarily discussed the security situation in East Asia in general and the challenge of North Korea's nuclear threat in particular. They agreed to hold trilateral assistant vice-ministerial-level talks on defense and security issues in Washington, D.C. on April 17-18. However, there was no discussion concerning the history-related issues between Japan and South Korea.

Following the trilateral summit in The Hague, Japan and South Korea began exploring the possibility of holding a bilateral summit. To pave the way, bureau director-level talks were expected to occur soon. As a condition for a bilateral summit, the Park government was seeking a tangible gesture of goodwill from the Abe government on the comfort women issue, including a possible letter of apology from Prime Minister Abe to the surviving comfort women.⁵⁷ However, it is not clear whether Japan is amenable to Seoul's request.

VIII. From the foregoing analysis, a few basic conclusions can be drawn. First, Japanese-South Korean relations have been strained in the recent past, largely due to the Abe government's revisionist view of history, which tries to whitewash Japan's responsibility for military

aggression and atrocities committed before and during WWII.

To bolster Japan's positive image, Abe has attempted to deny Japan's military aggression and atrocities committed against Japan's neighbors in the process of its empire building from 1894 to 1945. His attempt to deny Japan's wrongdoings before and during WWII (under the pretext that the definition of aggression is yet to be "firmly determined") has been viewed as totally unacceptable by many Koreans who have witnessed the brutal colonial rule under the Japanese from 1910 to 1945. Clearly, Koreans have wondered if South Korea can develop ties of close cooperation or partnership with Japan under a revisionist leadership, such as the Abe government.

Second, Abe's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine on December 26, 2013 also strained Japan's relations with South Korea. Although Abe justified his visit to the shrine for the purpose of making a pledge not to take Japan into another war, many South Koreans have wondered why he should make such a pledge at the Yasukuni Shrine, which is regarded as the symbol of Japanese militarism, instead of the peace park in Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Many Japanese prime ministers have avoided paying homage at the Yasukuni Shrine, because it honors, in addition to 2.4 million souls of war dead, 14 "Class-A war criminals" who were convicted and punished by the Allied powers' Far Eastern war tribunal. Abe's insensitive visit to the war shrine has been criticized not only by Seoul, Beijing, and other capitals but also by Washington, which has expressed its "disappointment." In order to prevent friction with its neighbors, Abe should refrain from visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, unless and until the 14 Class-A war criminals are removed from the shrine.

Third, it is also quite clear that Japanese-South Korean relations were strained largely because of the Abe government's attempt to retract or revise Japan's apologies issued by Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi in 1995 on Japan's wartime aggression and those of Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei on the comfort women in 1993. Such an attempt has not only worsened Japanese-South Korean relations but has also eroded South Korea's trust in the Abe government. It was incredible to many South Koreans that Abe would attempt to nullify the Kono Statement, which has been upheld by his predecessors since 1993, under the pretext of "reexamining" the evidence. When it became evident that such a move was seriously undermining the foundation of Japanese-South Korean relations, Abe decided to drop the controversial plan and to uphold the 1993 statement. However, in view of the defiant

statements issued by some influential far-right politicians in Japan, which either deviate or defy the Abe decision,⁵⁸ it is premature to conclude that the entire controversy has been settled.

Fourth, Japanese-Korean relations have also been strained by the territorial dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima. Both sides believe they have legitimate rights over the island, and neither side is willing to compromise or yield on the issue. Since the territorial dispute has become such an emotional and symbolic issue to the nationalists on both sides of the Strait of Tsushima, if it is not handled carefully it could seriously undermine the bilateral relationship between Tokyo and Seoul. South Korea regained the lost island from Japan's control from the Allied powers, in accordance with several important wartime agreements (e.g., the Cairo Declaration of 1943 and the Potsdam Declaration of 1945) and directives of the SCAP (e.g., SCAPIN No. 677 in 1946) during the Allied occupation of Japan. Seoul is convinced that it has established its sovereignty over Dokdo legitimately in the postwar period. At the same time, Japan's claim to Dokdo is regarded by Seoul as an attempt to encroach on the Korean territory, an action much like what Imperial Japan did in 1905, which led to the total annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910. In view of South Korea's effective control of the island, Japan will not be able to take it over via any means short of an all-out war with South Korea. Under such circumstances, it bodes ill for the future of Japanese-South Korean relations that Japan has decided to teach Japan's growing generations in accordance with the highly emotional and questionable guidelines that "Takeshima is an inherent Japanese island, which South Korea is occupying illegally." Such a curriculum could plant seeds of conflict and enmity between the Japanese and Koreans, making it more difficult for the two neighboring nations to reconcile or live peacefully with each other.

Fifth, the Abe government aspires to play a greater political role in international affairs by bolstering Japan's defense capability, increasing its defense budget, and amending Article 9 of the Japanese constitution. However, South Korea has been less than supportive of Tokyo's move, because it does not believe that Japan has fully repented for its militaristic past. Until such time as Japan has done so, Seoul prefers that Japan make its international contributions primarily through economic and other non-military means. In order to win Seoul's understanding and support for Tokyo's aspirations, the Abe government should win the trust of South Koreans regarding Japan's peaceful intentions. And the first and

most important step to winning the trust of the Korean people is to admit candidly Japan's past mistakes, instead of trying to hide or distort them. When the Abe government adopts such a candid approach, it will be possible for Japan and South Korea to overcome the perception gaps on the "unfortunate past" and develop "future-oriented" relations for the promotion of peace, prosperity, and security in the region.

Notes:

¹ For a detailed analysis, see Hong Nack Kim, "Korea-Japan Relations under the Roh Moo-hyun Government, 2003-2007," *Korea and World Affairs* (Winter 2007): pp.476-480.

² In his interview with the *Sankei Shimbun* on August 28, 2012, he stated that if the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) returned to power, he would "review" the Kono Statement and the Murayama Statement. In addition, he also expressed his intention to review the "Miyazawa Statement" on history textbooks in 1992, in which then-Prime Minister Miyazawa stated that "Japan should pay due attention to criticism by neighboring countries on some descriptions in Japanese textbooks." See Muneo Narusawa, "Abe Shinzo, A Far-Right Denier of History," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 11, Issue 1, No. 1 (January 14, 2013): p. 3, available at: <http://japanfocus.org/-Narusawa-Muneo/3879>. Abe reiterated his intention to revise the Murayama Statement in his interview with the *Sankei Shimbun* on December 30, 2012, while his Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide indicated that the Abe government's intention to revise the Kono Statement of 1993. *Sankei Shimbun*, December 31, 2012. See *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 2012.

³ Out of 19 members of the Abe cabinet, nine belonged to the "Group of Diet Members for Consideration of Japan's Future and History Education," while 13 belonged to the "Discussion Group of the *Nippon Kaigi* Diet Members." See Narusawa, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

⁴ Fourteen members of the Abe Cabinet belonged to the parliamentary group for worshipping at Yasukuni.

Clarissa Tan, "Shinzo Abe's Shrine Visit is a Sign of a New, Hawkish Japan," *The Spectator*, December 26, 2013.

⁵ Youngshik Bong, "ROK and US Views on the Foreign Policy of the Abe Administration," *The Asian Forum*, November 6, 2013, p. 4.

⁶ Reiji Yoshida, "Buoyant Abe's true colors emerging," *Japan Times*, April 26, 2013.

⁷ Kirk Spitzer, "Sorry, But Japan Still Can't Get the War Right," *Time*, May 20, 2013, available at: <http://nation.time.com/2013/05/20/sorry-butjapan-still-cant-get-the-war-right>.

⁸ *Asahi Shimbun* (Evening Edition), April 23, 2013. See also *Japan Times*, April 26, 2013.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Reiji Yoshida, "Buoyant Abe's True Colors Emerging," *Japan Times*, April 26, 2013. As Professor Akio Takahara pointed out, Abe "is a historical revisionist at heart" who is pursuing "his new nationalism." See Simon Tisdall, *The Guardian*, December 16, 2013, available at: <http://www.theguardian.co/world/2013/dec/16/shinzo-abe-japan-pm>. See also Noah Kristula-Green, "Japan's Dangerous World War II Attitude," *U. S. News and World Report*, May 14, 2013.

¹² In his book entitled *Utsukushii Kuni e (Towards a Beautiful Japan)*, Abe refused to accept the verdict of the Far Eastern War Tribunal in Tokyo, which tried and convicted the Class-A war criminals, because these Japanese wartime leaders were tried and convicted by the Allied powers on the basis of the new legal norms introduced retroactively after WWII, such as "crimes against the humanity" and "crimes against the international peace." He also refused to accept the demand that the Japanese Prime Minister should not pay homage to the Yasukuni Shrine." See Abe Shinzo, *Utsukushii Kuni e* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 2006), pp.69-71.

¹³ For a detailed analysis of the Abe government's view on the Murayama Statement (1995) and the Kono Statement (1993), see Wada Haruki, "Abe shusho ni totte no rekishi ninshiki mondai," *Sedkai*, September 2013, pp. 74-83.

¹⁴ Adam Westlake, "Nagoya's Mayor Kawamura Continues to Deny Nanjing Massacre," *The Japan Daily Press*, April 2, 2013.

¹⁵ "Osaka's Toru Hashimoto Says 'Comfort Women' were Necessary Part of War," *The Japan Daily Press*, May 13, 2013. See also, Zachary Keck, "Osaka Mayor Hashimoto Calls Comfort Women 'Necessary',"

Diplomat, May 15, 2013. For a detailed analysis of the Hashimoto Statement on the comfort women, see Yoshimi Yoshiaki, "Nippongun 'ianfu' mondai saiko: Hashimoto hatsugen o dou miruka," *Sekai*, August 2013, pp. 44-53.

¹⁶ *Donga Ilbo*, August 7, 2013.

¹⁷ Bong, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁸ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁹ *Asahi Shimbun*, November 7, 2013.

²⁰ *Asahi Shimbun*, January 28, 2014.

²¹ “Japanese PM Shinzo Abe’s Yasukuni War Shrine Visit Stokes Tensions,” *The Australian*, December 26, 2013.

²² “China and S. Korea Angered by Abe Visit to WW2 shrine,” *Irish Times*, December 26, 2013.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ “Statement by the Korean government in Connection with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s Visit to Yasukuni Shrine,” issued by the ROK Government Spokesperson, Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism Yoo Jinryong, on December 26, 2013, see www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Policies/view?articled=116619.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ George Nishiyama, “Abe Visit to Controversial Japanese Shrine Draws Rare U.S. Criticism,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 26, 2013, available at: <http://online.wsj.com/news/SB10001424052702304483804579281103015121712>. See also *Irish Times*, December 26, 2013.

²⁷ For example, see the editorials of the *New York Times*, such as “Mr. Abe’s Dangerous Revisionism,” March 2, 2014; and “Risky Nationalism in Japan,” December 28, 2013. In the case of the *Washington Post*, it criticized Prime Minister Abe’s revisionism in the spring of 2013. For example, see its editorial of April 26, 2013, entitled “Shinzo Abe’s Inability to Face History.”

²⁸ Seongki Yoo, “South Korean President Doubts about Abe’s Commitment to Past Apology,” *Xinhua News*, January 14, 2014, available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2014-01/14c_133044207.html.

²⁹ Martin Fackler, “Japan to Revisit Apology to Wartime Sex Slaves,” *New York Times*, February 28, 2014.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ For the testimony of Ishihara Nobuo, former Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary under the Miyazawa government in 1993, before the Japanese Lower House Budget Committee on February 20, 2014, see *Dong-A Ilbo*, February 21, 2014.

³² In the document, the U.S. House of Representatives urged the Secretary of States to encourage the government of Japan to address the issues raised by the House of Representatives in the 2007 resolution on the comfort women issue.

For details, see *Korea Times*, January 16, 2014. According to Dennis Halpin, the 2007 congressional resolution (H. Res.101) was adopted upon the recommendation of the House Foreign Relations Committee, which had investigated large volumes of documentary evidence, including a confidential document compiled and issued by General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters in Tokyo on November 15, 1945. The secret document contained the testimonies of Korean and Chinese comfort women, who were interviewed by the U. S. military intelligence officers in Burma and China during WWII. For details, see Dennis Halpin, "MacArthur Document Reports Imperial Japanese Military's 'Sanctions' of Comfort Women Brothels, *Policy Brief*, August 15, 2013 (Washington, D.C.: U.S.-Korea Institute, SAIS, the Johns Hopkins University): pp. 1-2.

³³ Sang-Hun Choe, "South Korea Assails Japan on Wartime Brothels," *New York Times*, March 1, 2014.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Hankook Ilbo*, March 8, 2014.

³⁷ *Hankook Ilbo*, March 13, 2014.

³⁸ Yoshimi Yoshiaki, "Nippongun 'ianfu' mondai saiko: Hashimoto hatsugen o dou miruka," *Sekai*, August 2013, pp. 44-53, esp. 45-52.

³⁹ For a detailed analysis of documents and testimonies compiled and collected by the governments of Japan, the United States, the Netherlands, South Korea, China, and the Philippines, see Larry Nicksch, "Japanese Military's 'Comfort Women' System," ([U. S.] Congressional Research Service Memorandum), April 3, 2007, pp 7-12, available at: http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Japanese_military's_%22comfort_women%22,System.

⁴⁰ According to the 1994 Dutch government's "Report of a Study of Dutch Governments on the Forced Prostitution of Dutch Women in the Dutch East Indies during the Japanese Occupation," numerous Dutch women from internment camps under the Japanese army's supervision in Indonesia were "compelled" to serve as comfort women. A number of Japanese army officers were convicted of crimes committed against these Dutch women by the Dutch War Crimes Tribunals. See *Ibid.*, p.11. See also, "Documents from the Japanese government indicate the Abe administration had dismissed evidence," *War History Online*, June 24, 2013, available at: <http://warhistoryonline.com/war-articles/documents-from-the-japanese-government-indicate-the-abe-administration-had-dismissed-evidence.html>. The Japanese officer in charge was

executed, while eleven military officials were sentenced to imprisonment by the Dutch court in Batavia, Indonesia after the war. See *ibid.*

⁴¹ For a detailed analysis on the Japanese-South Korean territorial dispute, see Hong Nack Kim, "The U.S. and the Territorial Dispute on Dokdo/Takeshima between Japan and Korea, 1945-1954," *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2009): pp. 97-126, esp. pp. 99-100. See also Seichu Naito, "Takeshima wa Nihon koyu ryodo ka," *Sekai*, June 2005, pp. 59-60.

⁴² Kim, *Op.cit.*, pp. 117-118.

⁴³ Seokwoo Lee and Jon M. Van Dyke, "The 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty and Its Relevance to the Sovereignty over Dokdo," *Chinese Journal of International Law* (2010): pp. 756, 761.

⁴⁴ *Korea Times*, July 9, 2013. See also Paul Kallener-Umezu, "Japan's Blunt Stance Riles China, S. Korea," *Defense News*, July 14, 2013, available at: <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20130714/DEFREGO03/307140002/Japan-s-Blunt-Stance-Riles-China-S.Korea>.

⁴⁵ *Sankei Shimbun*, January 2014.

⁴⁶ Mari Yamaguchi, "Japan to Teach Territorial Claims in Schools," *AP*, January 28, 2014.

⁴⁷ *Hankook Ilbo*, February 2, 2014. See also, "Korea: Abe's Proposal 'Meaningless,'" *Joonagn Ilbo*, February 3, 2014, available at: <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/new/article.aspx?aid=2984346>.

⁴⁸ *Hankook Ilbo*, February 23, 2014.

⁴⁹ "Japan Holds Rally Over Disputed Islands with South Korea," *Australian Network News*, February 23, 2014.

⁵⁰ *Hankook Ilbo*, March 12, 2014.

⁵¹ *Chosun Ilbo*, March 13, 2014.

⁵² "South Korea Urges Japan to Stop Contradictory Remarks on 'Comfort Women,'" *Global Times*, March 13, 2014.

⁵³ *Japan Times*, March 14, 2014.

⁵⁴ Martin Fackler, "Japan Stands by Apology to Its Wartime Sex Slaves," *New York Times*, March 15, 2014.

⁵⁵ *Japan Times*, March 15, 2014. See also, *Hankook Ilbo*, March 15, 2014.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Hankook Ilbo*, March 18, 2014.

⁵⁸ For example, Hagiuda Koichi, special assistant to LDP President Abe Shinzo, told reporters on March 24 that “It would not be unusual for the government to issue a new political statement if new findings emerge” out of the ongoing reexamination of the evidence on the comfort women. See *Chosun Ilbo*, March 24, 2014. However, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide reaffirmed the Abe government’s decision not to revise the Kono Statement, characterizing Hagiuda’s statement as merely a personal view. See “Japan has no Plans for New ‘Comfort Women’ Statement, Suga says,” *Bloomberg News*, March 24, 2014 available at: <http://businessweek.com/news/2014-03-24/japan-has-no-plans-for-new-comfort-women-statement-suga-says>. A few days later, Shimomura Hakubun, Minister of Education, told a parliamentary meeting that the Kono and Murayama Statements do not constitute a “unified government view”, since they were not adopted by the Japanese Diet. Shimomura’s remarks were condemned immediately by the South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman, who said such remarks “should not be repeated.” See *Chosun Ilbo*, March 28, 2014. A few days later, Shimomura “corrected” his mistakes by saying that the Murayama Statement was approved officially by the Japanese government. As for the Kono Statement, Ishihara Nobuo, then-deputy Chief cabinet secretary, who was involved in the drafting of the Kono Statement, declared at a press conference in February 2014 that the Kono Statement reflected the general view of the [Miyazawa] government, even though it was not officially approved by the Miyazawa cabinet. See *Asahi Shimbun* [digital], April 8, 2014.