

50th Anniversary of the Normalization of Relations between South Korea and Japan

Misunderstandings in the Mutual Perceptions of Citizens from South Korea and Japan and Finding Solutions for Improving Relations

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“Misunderstandings in the Mutual Perceptions of Citizens from South Korea and Japan and Finding Solutions for Improving Relations”

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[50th Anniversary of the Normalization of Relations between South Korea and Japan]

Misunderstandings in the Mutual Perceptions of Citizens from South Korea and Japan and Finding Solutions for Improving Relations

*An Analysis of the Third Survey on Mutual Perceptions
of Both Korea and Japan Conducted by EAI and Genron NPO*

Han Wool Jeong (Chief of EAI Public Opinion Research Unit)

**50th Anniversary of the Normalization of Relations between South Korea and Japan,
Frigid ROK-Japan Relations**

Negative Perceptions of Each Other are Increasing in Both South Korea and Japan

- **Korean People's Negative Image of Japan: 2013, 76.6% → 2014, 70.9% → 2015, 72.5%**
- **Japanese People's Negative Image of Korea: 2013, 37.3% → 2014, 54.4% → 2015, 52.4%**

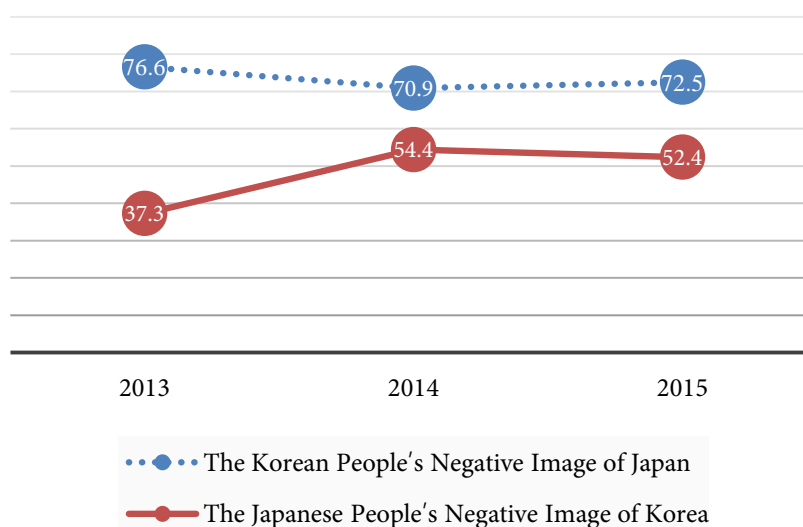
The 50th anniversary of the normalization of relations between South Korea (Korea) and Japan should be meaningful year, but the state of the relationship between the two countries is no longer simply frustrating, it is troubling. Results from recent studies carried out in both countries at the same time show that the feelings of citizens in both countries have deteriorated severely. The results from the survey jointly conducted by the East Asia Institute of Korea and Genron NPO of Japan on the perceptions of citizens in both countries show that only 15.7% of Koreans perceive Japan as “favorable” or “relatively favorable” while 72.5% of Koreans view Japan as “unfavorable” or “relatively unfavorable.” In Japan as well, the percentage of respondents perceiving Korea as “favorable” was only 23.8% while over half of respondents felt Korea was “unfavorable” at 52.4%. This is a significant increase given that in 2013 only 37.3% of respondents in Japan answered that their impression of Korea was “unfavorable” as shown in Figure 1. The *Wall Street Journal*, while citing this survey, declared relations between the two countries to be “icy.” A survey conducted jointly by the *JoongAng Daily* and the *Nikkei Asian Review* during a similar time period found a analogous pattern. The percentage of Koreans that felt the current state of ROK-Japan relations was “relatively unfavorable” or “unfavorable” was 79%, while 55% of Japanese respondents felt the same way. Only 3% of Koreans and 6% of Japanese felt that relations were “favorable” (this includes the 1% of Japanese respondents who felt relations were “favorable”). A recent survey conducted in cooperation between the *Yomiuri Shimbun* and the *Korea Times* found that 85% of Koreans and 73% of Japanese felt that “they could not trust each other.”

The majority of media outlets in both countries featured survey results that showed the abysmal state of ROK-Japan relations and focused on the icy emotions of the citizens in each country. The dark side of the relationship has constantly adorned the news headlines. Of course the truth is that feelings of



the citizens of both countries are far worse than they have ever been before, but reconfirming the negative perceptions of both populations towards the other through depersonalized numbers is not very meaningful. In fact, these surveys can act as a means of amplifying dormant feelings of antagonism held by citizens in each country. Instead, now is the time to take a step forward. Actually, if one were to examine the results of the survey carefully, while being careful of the dark underside of the relationship, it is possible to find some hidden positive messages that may provide clues towards solving the current problems between the two countries.

[Figure 1] Percentage with a Negative Image of the Counterpart Country: “Relatively Unfavorable” + “Very Unfavorable”



*Source: East Asia Institute (EAI) and Genron NPO (2013-2015).

The Reason for the Vicious Cycle of Anti-Japanese and Anti-Korean Sentiment

■ Historical Tension and the Conflict between National Identities Are the Main Causes

-Koreans: “Japan Does Not Properly Reflect on Its Wrongdoings” 74.0%, “Dokdo Issue” 69.3%

-Japanese: “Korea Continues to Harp on Historical Issues” 74.6%, “Dokdo Issue” 36.5%, “Korea Leaders Are to Blame” 28.1%

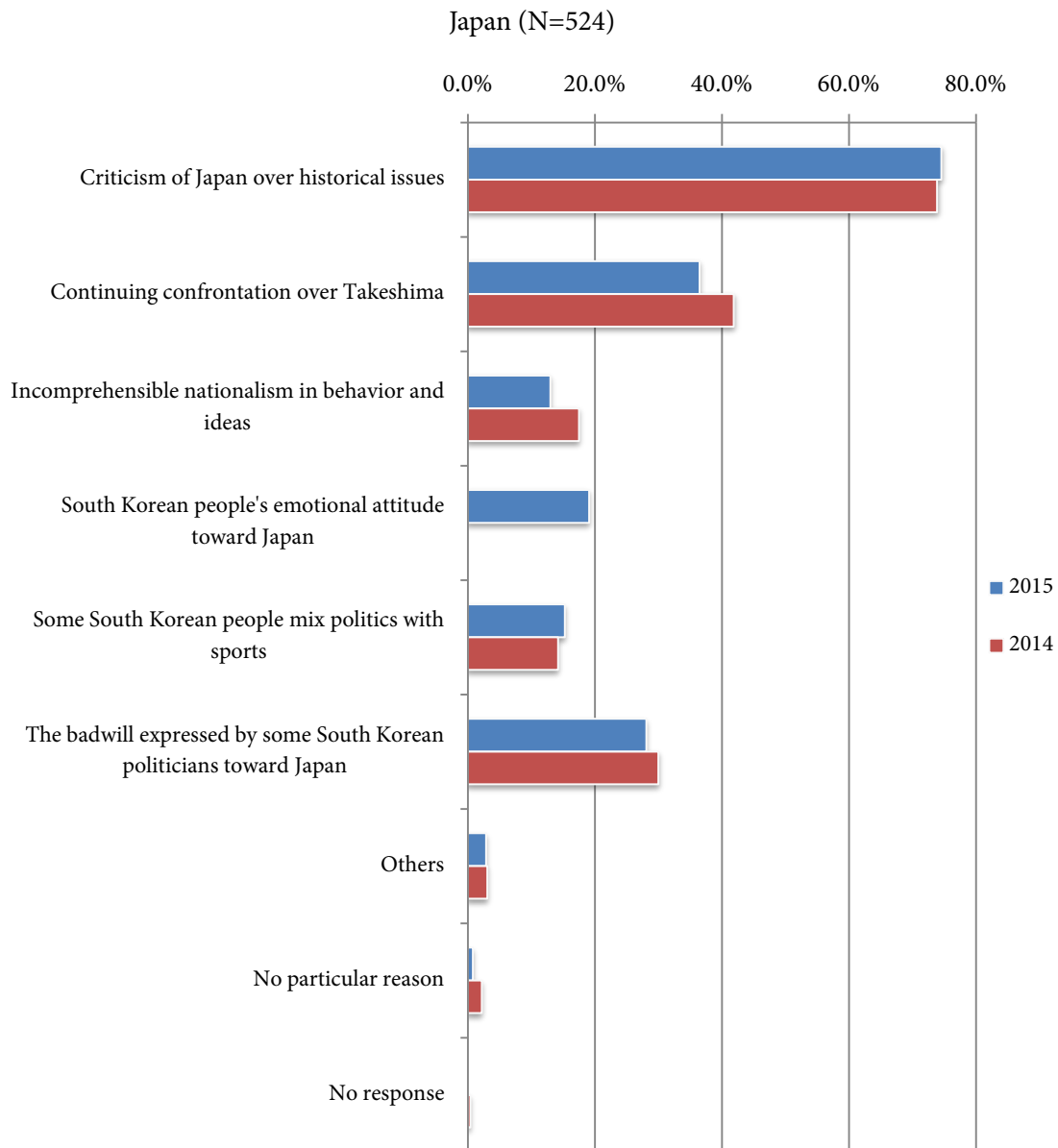
Respondents to this survey who had a negative impression of the other country were asked to choose two reasons for their negative impression, and at first sight the results confirm the pessimistic outlook of the mutual perceptions of both countries. Koreans overwhelmingly listed Japan’s failure to properly reflect on its history of plundering Korea (74.0%) and the Dokdo issue (69.3%). On the other hand, 74.6% of Japanese respondents pointed towards Korea’s continued criticism of historical issues, 36.5% selected the Dokdo issue, and 28.1% blamed the remarks and actions of Korean political leaders as the reason for their negative impression.

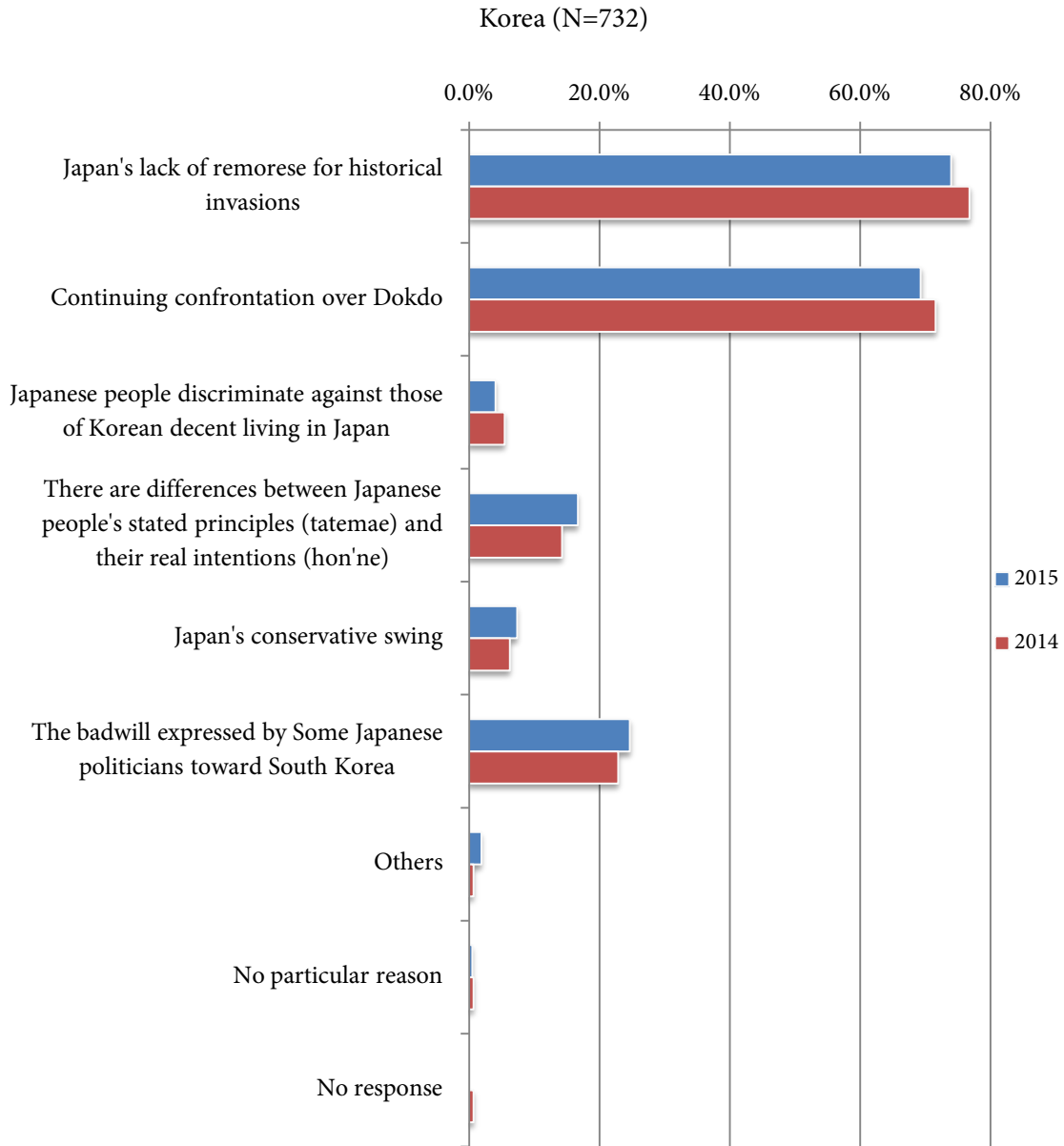
With Korean citizens continued overwhelming emphasis on issues regarding territorial sovereignty and the need for Japanese reflection on its history, the Japanese are becoming increasingly tired of what seems to be Koreans’ innate anti-Japanese DNA regardless of how many times Japan offers an



apology for past transgressions against the Korean people. Inversely, with the majority of Japanese citing excessive anti-Japanese sentiment from the Koreans as the cause of their animosity, this in turn causes a further diffusion of doubt amongst Koreans regarding the Japanese lack of will towards honestly reflecting on history issues. This is to say that the public opinion in both Korea and Japan is having an active escalating effect. And the cause of this escalating distrust between the citizens of both countries is that the media and government officials from both countries emphasize only the negative aspects of public opinion in both countries. However, if the data from both countries is analyzed, one can find that there are some misunderstandings about the actual public opinion. These misunderstandings are having a negative impact on public sentiment in both countries. Defining these misunderstandings and clearing the air is the first step towards resolving the existing problems in the ROK-Japan relationship.

[Figure 2] Reasons Negative Impressions of Counterpart Country





*Only those who had negative sentiments towards the other country answered this question.

*Source: Source: East Asia Institute (EAI) and Genron NPO (2014-2015).



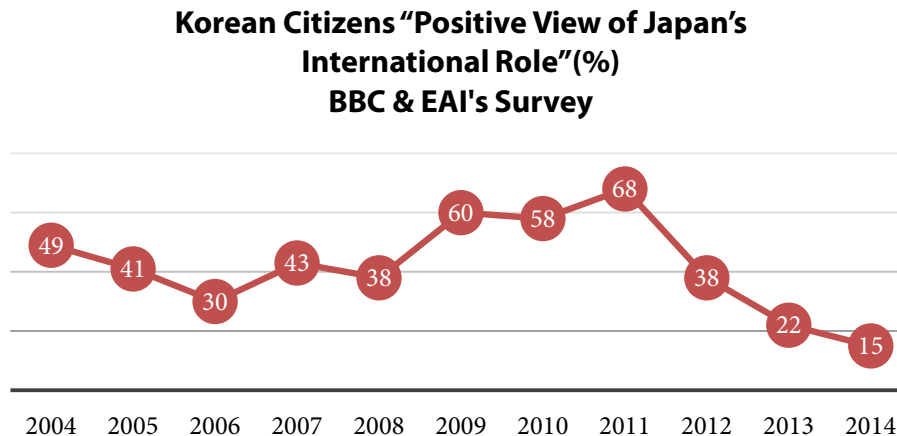
Misunderstandings of Public Opinion in Korea and Japan

Misunderstanding 1. Do Koreans Really Have Anti-Japanese DNA in Their Blood?

- **The Rise and Fall of “Koreans’ Friendly Appraisal” of Japan’s International Role before and after the Abe Administration**
- **2004, 49% → 2006, 30% → 2009, 60% → 2011, 68% → 2014, 15%, Change Is Based on the Attitude of the Administration**

First, there is a common misconception among many Japanese, and even among many Koreans, that it is in Koreans’ DNA to deeply resent the Japanese people, but this is not true. Koreans’ anti-Japanese sentiment is not constant and is instead a variable that changes according to the efforts of each country’s government and civil society. Let us take a look at the results of international surveys conducted every year since 2004 by the BBC World Service, GlobeScan, and the East Asia Institute (EAI).

[Figure 3] The Percentage of Korean Citizens Who View Japan’s International Role Positively



*Source: BBC World Service, GlobeScan, and East Asia Institute (EAI).

Up to 2006, which included the Koizumi and Abe administrations, issues such as politicians’ visits to shrines commemorating those who died during World War II, including some war criminals, and the approval of amended history textbooks by the board of education were constantly aggravating the relationship, and the appraisal of Japan’s international role by Korean citizens continuously dropped. However there was a sharp rise in positive assessment of Japan’s role beginning with the agreement to start a “new age of cooperation” in 2007 by Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo and continued through 2009 during the period marked by the accession of Prime Ministers Yukio and Naoto from the Democratic Party of Japan who signaled their intention to uphold the Murayama Statement. In the 2011 survey it can be seen that the level of positive perceptions of Japan had strengthened to such a high level that 68% of Korean respondents had a positive view of Japan’s international role. But with the return of Prime Minister Abe, questions about Japan’s belief towards amending history and talk of an increased military role for Japan in the world began to swirl and along with this trend negative appraisals from Koreans regarding Japan returned in force. That Korean citizens’ anti-Japanese



sentiments are related to changing situations is a good thing, and this shows that the Korean people's attitude is a variable that fluctuates based on the efforts put forth by both governments and the changes in the surrounding situations.

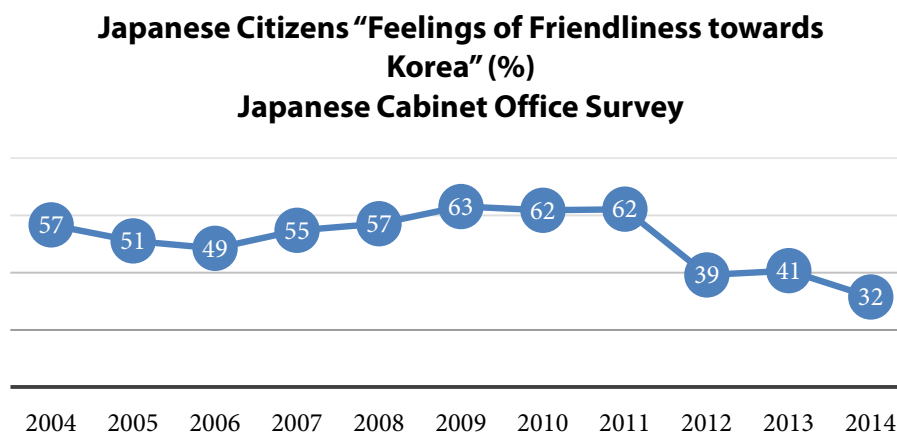
Misunderstanding 2. Do Japanese Citizens Really not Have It in Their DNA to Self-Reflect?

- Sharp Drop in Good Feelings Following President Lee Myung-bak's Visit to Dokdo
- "Close with Korea" 2004, 57% → 2006, 49% → 2009, 63% → 2011, 62% → 2014, 32%

There is also a growing perception among Koreans that Japanese people have forgotten about the need for reflection on the Abe administration's conservative swing which supports historical revisionism and that they have grown tired of apology demands by the Korean people, and instead busily shift blame onto the Korean people's anti-Japanese sentiments. The truth however is that the Japanese people are not indifferent towards Korea and there is a growing demand for reflection on their own past. If we take a look at the percentage of Japanese citizens that expressed that they felt a sense of closeness with Korea during the survey on perceptions of foreign countries produced by the Japanese government each year, you can see that from 2004 to 2011 over half the Japanese respondents stated they had friendly feelings towards Korea. But with the visit to Dokdo by President Lee Myung-bak during the early part of 2012, the image of Korea in Japan began to deteriorate quickly (See Figure 4).

- Japanese Citizens' Approval Level of Prime Minister Abe's Visit to Yasukuni 2013, 47.8% → 2014, 43.0% → 2015, 41.3%

[Figure 4] The Percentage of Japanese who are Friendly towards Korea (%)



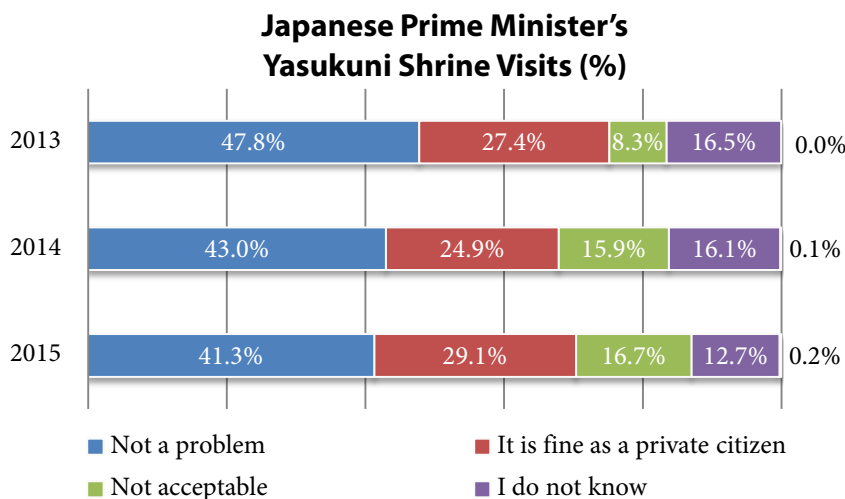
*Source: Japanese Cabinet Office Survey on Foreign Perceptions (2004-2014).

Even though negative perceptions of Korea are increasing, attention should also be given to growing number of Japanese citizens that are calling for some self-reflection on their history. When the Japanese citizens were asked about Prime Minister Abe's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, in 2013 47.8% of respondents stated that "visiting Yasukuni is not a problem" while this year that number has decreased to 41.3%. In addition, the number of people stating that "visiting Yasukuni is absolutely unacceptable" has doubled in two years from 8.3% in 2013 to 16.7% in 2015. The number stating that it is "all right to



visit Yasukuni as a private citizen” is 29.1%. Therefore it can be said that there is a growing number of people who are completely against or who have reservations about Abe’s policy of visiting Yasukuni (See Figure 5). It is especially worth noting that in a survey of Japanese intellectuals in 2014, the number of respondents who answered that “visiting Yasukuni is absolutely unacceptable” was 52.6%, indicating a high level of dissent against Prime Minister Abe’s visits to Yasukuni.

[Figure 5] The Japanese People’s Changing Perceptions of Prime Minister Abe’s Yasukuni Shrine Visits(%)



*Source: Genron NPO (2015).

Finding Solutions for the ROK-Japan Relationship in Public Opinion

The Search for Cooler Minds in Both Countries, Citizens from Both Countries Are Concerned and See the Need for Improvement

■ **“The ROK-Japan Relations Is Important” Korea, 87.4%, Japan, 65.3%**

In this survey large majorities in both countries agreed that the ROK-Japan relationship was important (“Important” + “Relatively Important”) with 87.4% of Koreans and 65.3% of Japanese citizens expressing this opinion (See Figure 6). On the Korean side, seven out of ten people are concerned about the deterioration in the emotions between the citizens of Korea and Japan with 26.4% agreeing with the statement “this is an undesirable situation is not desirable, I have concerns,” and 40.8% agreeing with the statement “this situation is a problem and it needs to be resolved.” In Japan, 29.0% of respondents answered that “this is an undesirable situation is not desirable, I have concerns,” and 38.8% of respondents stated that, “this situation is a problem and it needs to be resolved.”

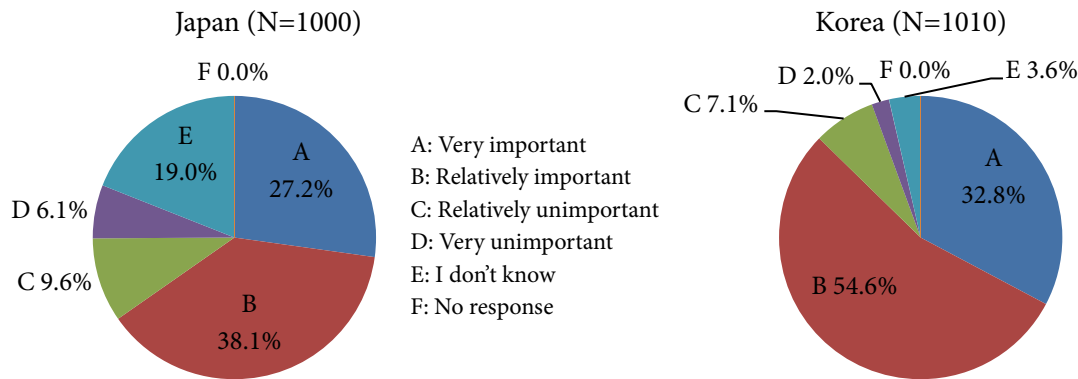
■ **The Deterioration of the People’s Perceptions Is “a Cause for Concern or a Situation That Needs to be Improved” Korea, 67.2%, Japan, 67.8%**

It is encouraging that many are concerned about the poor state of mutual public opinion including those with positive views of the relationship between Korea and Japan, but even those with a negative attitude are concerned as well. In fact, among Koreans who had an unfavorable impression of Japan,



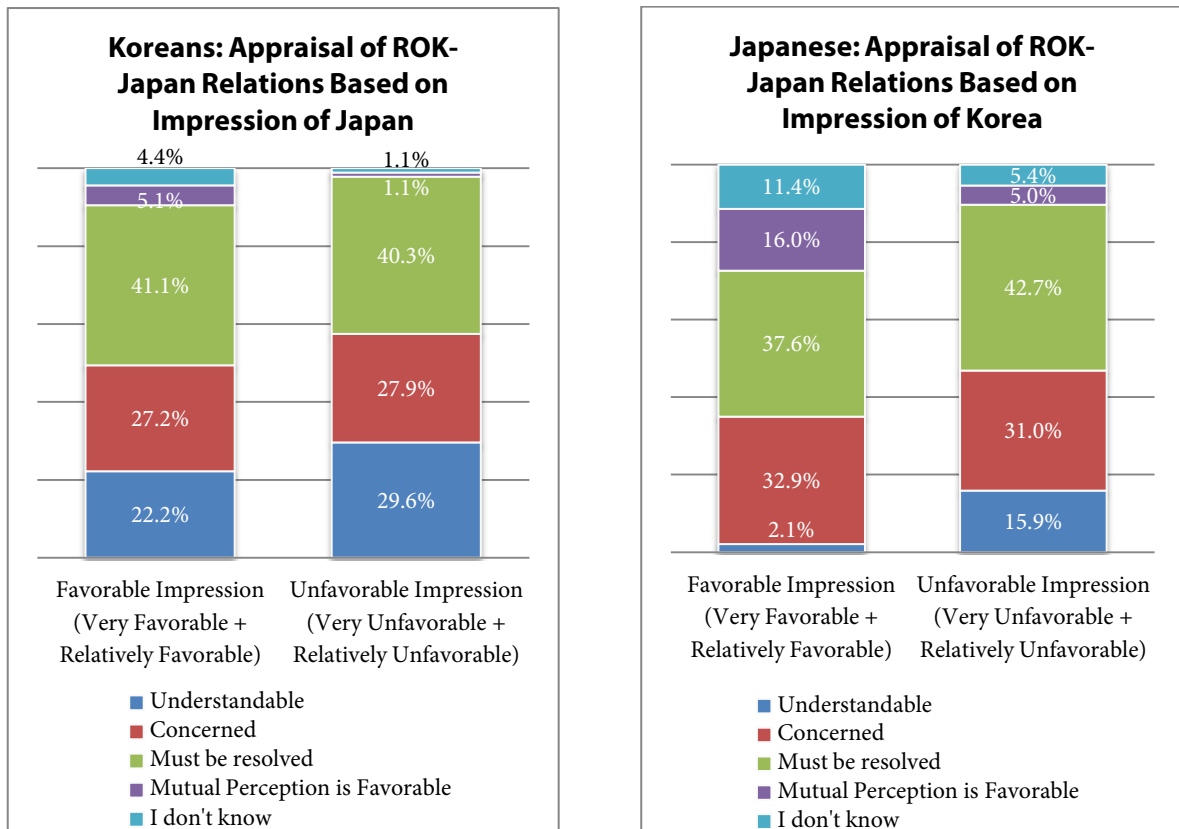
68.2% are concerned or think relations must be improved (27.9% “have concerns” + 40.3% “believe the current situation needs to be resolved”). Also, among Japanese respondents who had an unfavorable impression of Korea, 73.7% felt concerned about the present situation or felt the need for improvement (31.0% “have concerns” + 42.7% “believe the current situation needs to be resolved”). These feelings of concern are public sentiments of both the Japanese and Korean people and something that should be noted and cited as a reason for action (See Figure 7).

[Figure 6] Importance of Korea-Japan Relations



*Source: East Asia Institute and Genron NPO, “The 3rd Korean-Japanese Mutual Perception Survey” (2015).

[Figure 7] An Appraisal of the Emotions of Both Countries’ Citizens Based on the Differences in the Way They Perceive the Other Country



*Source: East Asia Institute (EAI) and Genron NPO, “The 3rd Korean-Japanese Mutual Perception Survey” (2015).



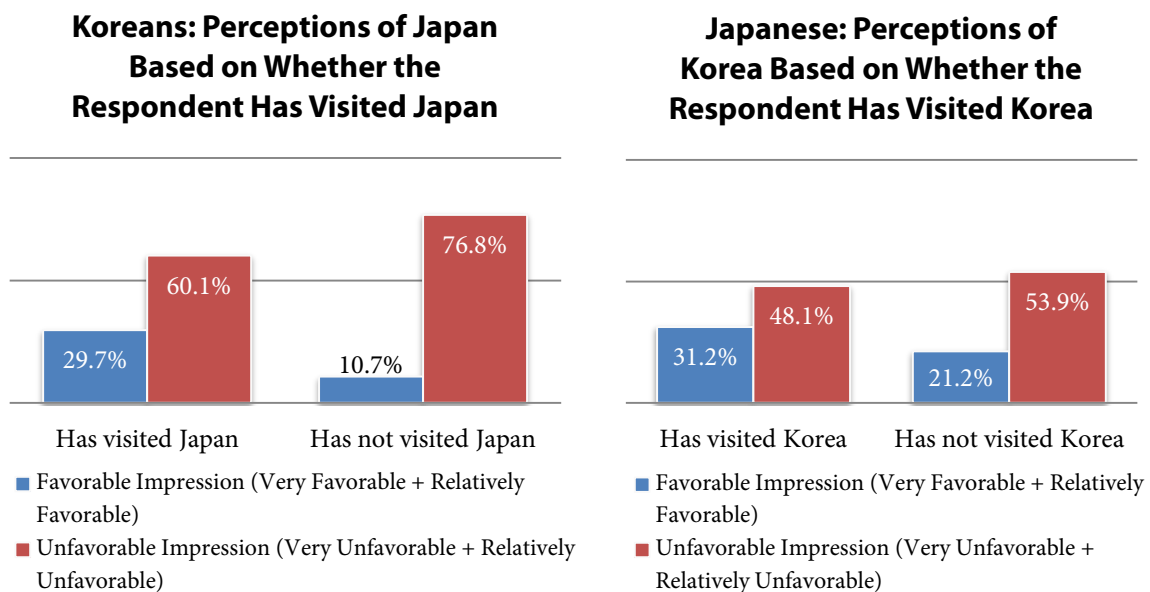
When It Comes to Mutual Perception, an Increase in Exchanges Results in More Friendly Attitudes

- **Boost Private Exchanges between Korea and Japan → Mutual Friendly Sentiment Will Rise**
- **Visiting China Does Not Equal a Rise in Friendly Feelings towards China**

While looking through the results of the survey conducted by EAI and Genron NPO, a fact that leaps off the page is that a pattern can be found in which, at least in the case of ROK-Japan relations, as citizens from both countries participate in more exchanges and come into more contact with each other, mutual positive attitudes increase. Not only on a personal level, but as any two countries increase exchanges and contact with each other, it is possible for positive attitudes to be strengthened. But on the other hand there are cases in which attitudes could take a turn for the worse or exchanges could not produce any results either way. For instance, unlike the ROK-Japan relationship in which the amount of contact and number of exchanges results in a strengthening of mutual perceptions of friendliness, this survey found that whether or not Koreans engage in exchanges or close contact with China does not exert much influence on Koreans' perceptions of China.

[Figure 8] divides up the citizens of both Korea and Japan according to whether or not the respondent has visited the other country and compares their impressions on the other country. Among Koreans who have visited Japan before, 29.7% stated that, “they have a good impression of Japan,” while 60.1% said, “they have a poor impression of Japan.” For those Koreans who had not visited Japan before, 10.7% have a positive impression of Japan and 76.8% have a negative impression. Japanese citizens responses were similar. For those Japanese respondents who have visited Korea before, 31.2% reported having a positive impression of Korea, while only 21.2% of respondents who have not visited Korea reported the same.

[Figure 8] The Differences in Perception of the Counterpart Country Based on Whether the Respondent Has Visited the Counterpart Country

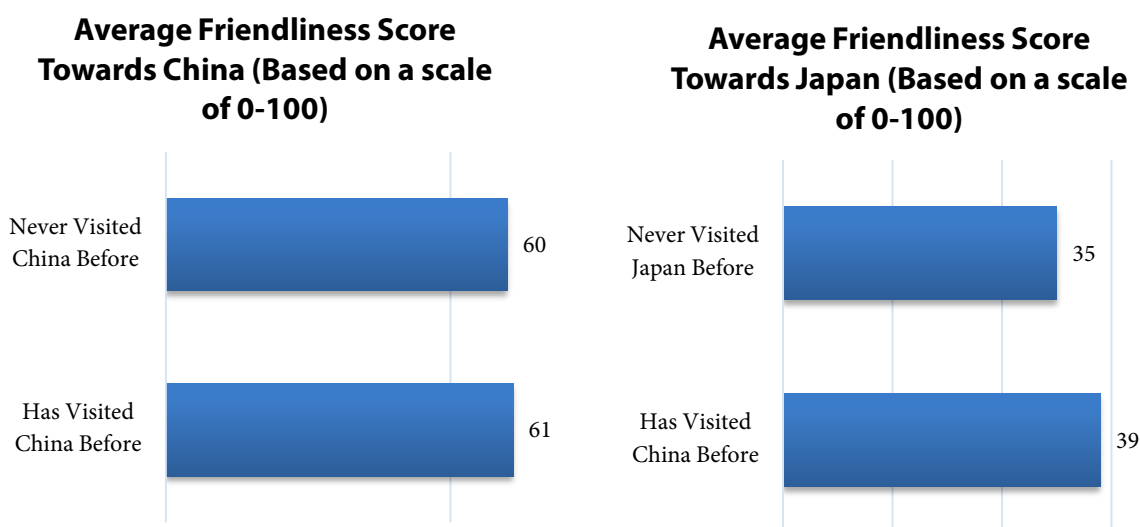


*Source: East Asia Institute (EAI) and Genron NPO, “The 3rd Korean-Japanese Mutual Perception Survey” (2015).



However, the survey results indicated that visiting China did not have much influence on whether Koreans felt more affection for China or not (See Figure 9). If we take a look at the scores measuring the average level of friendliness felt towards other countries on a scale of 0 to 100, respondents who had visited China had an average score of 61 and those who had not visited China had an average score of 60, a difference which is statistically insignificant. On the other hand, as described above, the average score of Koreans who had visited Japan before was 39 and for Koreans who had not visited Japan before the average score was 35. This difference was verified as being statistically significant according to a t-test. In conclusion, what we can see here is that, unlike the ROK-China relationship, mutual perceptions within the ROK-Japan relationship can be strengthened by widening the scope of exchanges between the people of both countries.

[Figure 9] A Comparison of Koreans' Average Friendliness Scores Based on Whether the Respondent Has Visited China and Japan (Based on a scale of 0-100)



*According to a t-test, the difference in the average friendliness scores based on whether the respondent visited Japan or not is statistically significant.

*Source: East Asia Institute (EAI) and Genron NPO, "The 3rd Korean-Japanese Mutual Perception Survey" (2015).

Friendly Attitudes Are Stronger in the Younger Generations

■ The Younger the Respondent, the Better the Impression

- Korea: "Good Impression of Japan," Those in their 20s - 25.7%, 30s - 19.4%, 40s - 15.2%, 50s - 12.6%, 60s - 7.6%
- Japan: "Good Impression of Korea," Those in their 20s - 31.2%, 30s - 26.7%, 40s - 24.3%, 50s - 20.7%, 60s - 20.7%

There is cause for optimism when looking for solutions to the Korea-Japan perception problem and that is that the younger generations of both countries have stronger positive attitudes. In Korea, 25.7% of respondents in their 20s, 19.4% of those in their 30s, 15.2% for respondents in their 40s, 12.6% for respondents in their 50s, and 7.6% for respondents in their 60s had "a good impression of Japan." A



similar pattern is found in Japan where 31.2%, or 3 out of every 10 respondents in their 20s had “a good impression of Korea,” and 26.7% in their 30s, 24.3% in their 40s, and 20.7% of respondents in their 50s and 60s felt the same. Those in older generations that have firsthand experience with tensions in the ROK-Japan relationship have much weaker impressions of each other, and there is a clear pattern of younger generations having a more positive view of the other country (See Figure 10).

■ **Those in Their 20s and 30s Are Growing Apart on Historical Revisionism (and Their Opinions towards Abe’s Visits to Yasukuni)**

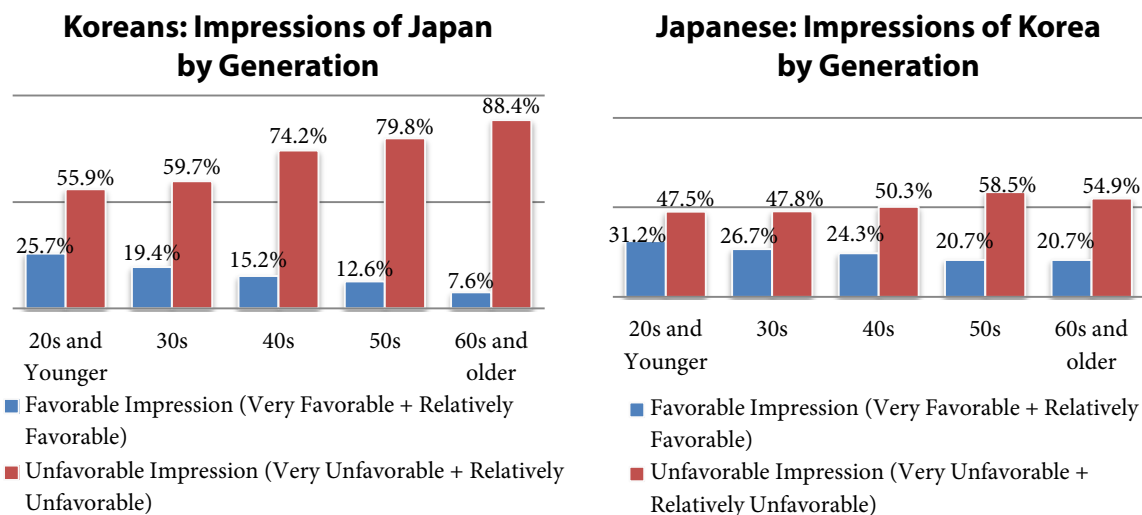
-6 out of 10 Koreans are against the visits to Yasukuni, 4 out of 10 Japanese have no problem with the visits

■ **Within the Younger Generations of Both Countries There Are Many That Are not Concerned with History and Have No Position on Abe’s Visits to Yasukuni**

- Koreans who “do not know” 20s - 16.2%, 30s - 9.4%, 40s - 9.2%, 50s - 6.6%, 60s - 8.4%
- Japanese who “do not know” 20s - 28.4%, 30s - 19.3%, 40s - 10.7%, 50s - 8.1%, 60s - 6.7%

It is hard not to notice that the generation in their 20s and 30s lack a sharp historical consciousness compared to those in their 40s and 50s. In Korea, while those in their 60s or older found Abe’s shrine visits to be unacceptable by a rate of almost 10% higher (74.2%) than the other generations, most of those in their 20s to 50s adhered to a mindset of rejecting Abe’s shrine visits in any capacity, public or private, at a rate of about 60~65%, with an extreme minority feeling the shrine visits were no cause for concern. In Japan, on the other hand, there is even support from all generations for the visits as 39.0% of those in their 20s, 44.1% of those in their 30s, and 45.8% of those in their 40s agreed with the statement “Abe’s visits to Yasukuni are no problem.” That those in their 50s (21.5%) and those in their 60s (23.3%) were relatively more likely to agree with the statement “Visiting shrines is completely unacceptable” than the younger generations in their 20s and 30s is cause for concern. And it can be seen that there is a tendency in both countries among the younger generations to defer judgment by selecting the “I don’t know” response compared to the older generations in their 50s and 60s (See Figure 11).

[Figure 10] Differences in Impressions of the Other Country by Generation

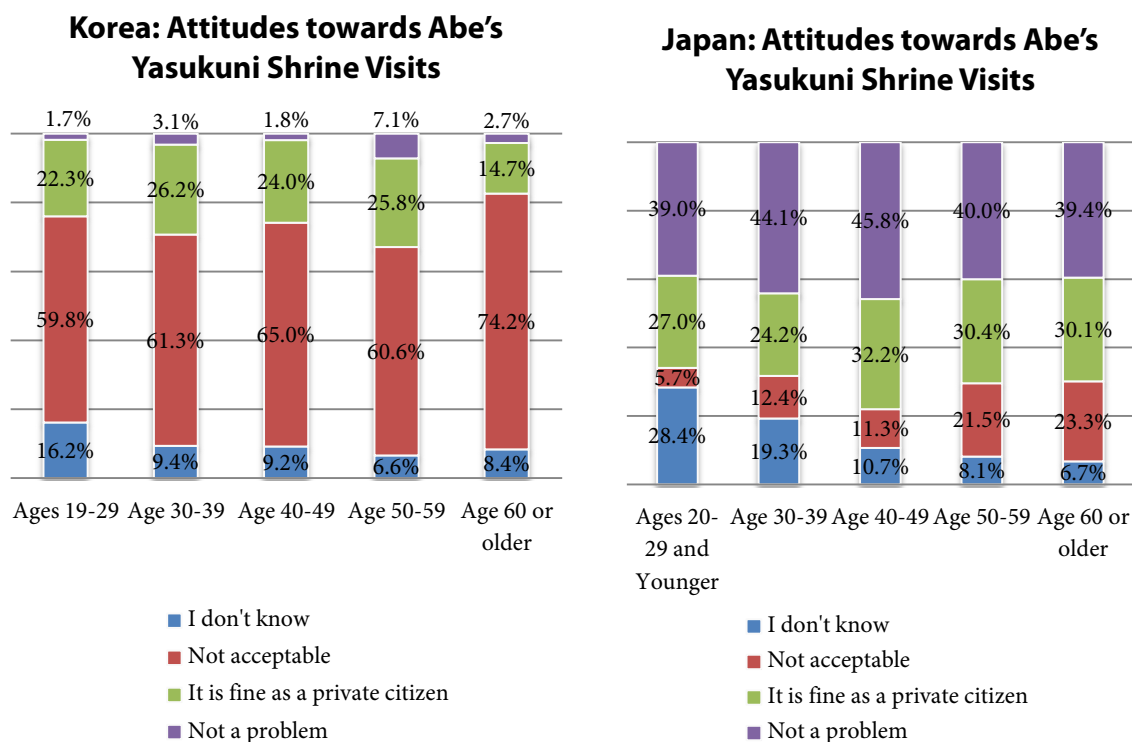


*Those who responded “I don’t know” were not included.

*Source: East Asia Institute (EAI) and Genron NPO, “The 3rd Korean-Japanese Mutual Perception Survey” (2015).



[Figure 11] Attitude towards Prime Minister Abe's Yasukuni Shrine Visits: Korea-Japan Survey



*Source: East Asia Institute (EAI) and Genron NPO, "The 3rd Korean-Japanese Mutual Perception Survey" (2015).

Finding Solutions for Korea-Japan Relations: Determination Is Needed to Solve This Problem

For the last few years, Korea and Japan having been butting heads with each other. The biggest reason that the two have been unable to find a clue as to how to resolve the situation is that issues such as history textbooks and the comfort women problem which ignite the Korean people's national identity and consciousness are suppressing even the possibility of exchange or cooperation. If only the anger and sources of conflict that create deep perception differences between the people of both countries are highlighted, resolving the frigid relations between Korea and Japan will be difficult. The ROK-Japan relationship is not comprised of only history, it includes real political, economic, military, and security interests. Although currently floundering, if there is an obvious need for cultural exchanges between the two countries, then cooperation on future challenges such as energy and the environment is also urgently needed. Flexible approaches should be considered where problems such as the history issues that are difficult to solve in the short-term are actively separated away from issues where joint ground can be reached.

Recently, as ROK-Japan relations have deteriorated, only the conflict between the people of both countries and news that ignites negativity is being magnified through the government and the media. But the citizens of both countries have emphasized the importance of the ROK-Japan relationship themselves, and it has been confirmed that they are calling for solutions to be found to the current situation. This implies that the people of both countries' sense of balance is operating correctly. Emphasizing the gloomy aspects of the ROK-Japan relationship by defining the problems and their



level of seriousness is no longer useful and this type of discussion can trigger further deterioration in the relationship. From this point forward, in all the interactions between the countries including public opinion polls, media reports, and in both public and private exchanges, the starting point should be a search for solutions instead of the magnification of the existing tensions. Finally, we need to pull together the people's perceptions as they search for cooler minds, and we wish to emphasize the united voices of the people of both countries who are calling for more effort in order to find a solution that will improve mutual relations during the 50th anniversary of the normalization of ROK-Japan relations. ■



Summary of “The Third South Korea-Japan Joint Public Opinion Survey in 2015”

The East Asia Institute (EAI), a South Korean private think tank, and Genron NPO, a Japanese registered nonprofit, conducted a mutual perceptions survey of citizens of South Korea and Japan between April and May 2015. The poll aimed to bridge differences and increase mutual understanding between citizens of the two countries. Both organizations plan on publishing and utilizing the poll results as a starting point for the 3rd Korea-Japan Future Dialogue, scheduled to be held June 20-21, 2015, as has been done during past meetings of the conference which was established with the purpose of improving Korea-Japan relations.

The Korean public opinion survey, which ran from April 17 to May 8, was conducted through face-to-face interviews with men and women over 19 years of age from all parts of the country. The breakdown of the highest level education completed by the 1,010 survey respondents whose answers were deemed valid is as follows: 7.8 percent reported completing elementary school, 7.1 percent completed middle school, 37.4 percent completed high school, 11.4 percent are currently enrolled in college or completed some college (junior college and vocational colleges included), 35 percent completed college, and one percent of respondents have a graduate degree. The Japanese public opinion survey was conducted by leaving surveys with men and women over the age of 18 (excluding high school students) to be completed freely and where collected later on from April 9 through April 30. There were 1,000 survey respondents whose answers were deemed valid. The highest level of education attained among respondents corresponded to 9.9 percent completing elementary and middle school, 45.5 percent completing high school, 18.3 percent completing a post secondary short course of study or junior college, 23.2 percent completing college and 1.2 percent having a graduate degree.

In addition to the opinion survey, EAI and Genron NPO carried out a survey among intellectuals from both countries. The survey spanned from early April to late May. On the Korean side, 300 people replied to an online survey, which was distributed to EAI members and others associated with EAI. On the Japanese side, a survey was distributed to around 6,000 people -- scholars who have participated in past Genron NPO forums and surveys -- of which 634 people replied. [Korean survey sponsor: Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies (KFAS)]

“The Third Korean-Japanese Public Opinion Survey” Tokyo International Press Conference

The “3rd Korean-Japanese Public Opinion Survey,” which targeted both Korea and Japanese citizens, was announced on May 29th at 2PM at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan (FCCJ). Around 50 domestic and foreign correspondents competing to cover the 2015 poll results participated in the press conference and enthusiastically took part in the question and answer session that followed the presentation. A summary of major findings, primary data tables and the Korea-Japan mutual perceptions report were distributed at the press conference. All documents are available for download on the EAI and Genron NPO homepages. Detailed coverage of the contents of the press conference is available through various U.S., Chinese, Japanese, Korean and other international news outlets, including *The Wall Street Journal*, Japan’s NHK, TBS, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, and Korea’s KBS and SBS broadcasts, as well as other major media outlets. ■

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- This *Opinion Review* is based on the results of the “The Third Korean-Japanese Public Opinion Survey” which was conducted jointly by EAI and Genron NPO and funded by the Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies. The results of the survey and this opinion review were used as part of the “3rd Korea-Japan Future Dialogue” which was held in Tokyo, Japan on June 22, 2015. The PDF document of this article can also be viewed via the EAI website by the wider public. Any citation or quotation is prohibited without prior permission of the author and the EAI.
- The “Korean-Japanese Public Opinion Survey” was first conducted in 2013 and established to enable regular monitoring of public opinion, national sentiments, and opinions of leaders annually, and aims to discuss ways for cooperation to improve Korea-Japan relations. [[Korea-Japan Public Opinion Survey](#)].
- This opinion review and other EAI reports can be found on our website, [[EAI Issue Briefings](#)]. The contents of this article do not necessarily reflect the views of the East Asia Institute.
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