



Japan's New Textbook and Security Relations with South Korea

by Tae-hyo Kim

After undergoing several rounds of partial revision, a new middle school textbook was approved by the Japanese government on April 3. Many in Korea - not to mention China - have been angered by the textbook's perspective on the legitimacy of Japan's colonization of Korea, the rationale for Japan's expansion into China and Southeast Asia, comfort women, the Nanjing Massacre, etc. In the eyes of Koreans and Chinese, the textbook writers' manipulation of history is not confined to the early part of the 20th century. According to the new textbook, from ancient times Japan was already a more civilized country than its neighbors and the Shilla and Baekje kingdoms even paid tribute to Japan, which is the opposite of what actually happened. The description of the Pacific War is also full of misinterpretations, such as it is Japan who was victimized through the horrible conflict, and it is the Japanese people who should be at the forefront of "pacifism" to keep other countries from experiencing future versions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Students learning from this textbook might be confused about the causes of and aggressors in the Second World War. Former comfort women expressed their outrage in front of the Japanese embassy. The Korean government announced that relations between Korea and Japan are under severe strain, and the mass media is urging Korea to reconsider the decision to open its cultural market to Japan.

How ironic to read the following reports on the day the textbook was approved: young Japanese women generally choose Korean women as their aesthetic ideal, and it is Korean facial features that are in greatest demand for cosmetic surgery at Japanese hospitals. Japanese women take holidays in Korea to enjoy mud pack massages and are said to prefer "hot-tempered Korean guys." It is an even greater paradox that many Korean children learn Japanese simply to enjoy Japanese computer games and cartoons. Each sector of society has its own logic. So does the ROK-Japan security relationship. The ROK and Japan face a strategic necessity to cooperate with each other in spite of their lingering historical legacy. North Korea is still the most immediate security concern for Japan and this makes it imperative for Japan to cooperate with South Korea. On the other hand, Japan's support of U.S. military operations in a Korean contingency will enhance ROK's fighting capability. The United States also welcomes ROK-Japanese cooperation because should the Korean-Japanese military cooperation become more reliable and routine, the ROK-U.S. alliance will bear less of the burden in maintaining stability in Northeast Asia.

When and how will Japan help South Korea? The 1997 Guidelines for the U.S.-Japan Cooperation identifies three situations: a contingency in Japan, a contingency surrounding Japan, and cooperation in peacetime. If the situation in Korea is

seen as a contingency surrounding Japan, Japan will provide South Korea with security assistance to keep the situation from escalating into Japanese territory. "Contingency surrounding Japan," however, has never been clearly defined geographically or situationally. Although a decision on whether a contingency in the Korean Peninsula is also a contingency surrounding Japan is up to the independent judgment of Japanese and American policymakers, the following two cases seem to be the strongest candidates: (1) North Korea's sudden and partial military provocation against South Korea prolongs and develops into limited war or guerilla warfare; and (2) a full-scale war breaks out between South and North Korea.

There are two ways for Japan to support South Korea. First, U.S. bases in Japan could serve as an advance offense post. The power projection capability of the U.S. Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps in Japan would greatly support their 8th Army in South Korea. Fighters from Kadena, Yokoda, and Misawa can arrive in Korea in just an hour. Ships from Sasebo and Yokosuka, the homeports of the 7th Fleet, can send supplementary soldiers and weapons in a few hours. With an American commitment to a Korean contingency, U.S. bases on Okinawa would become the most active staging centers because they contain about half of the U.S. forces in Japan. From there, five round trips of 50 carriers can supply a force of 17,300 men armed with heavy fire who could carry on combat for up to 30 days. Second, Japan could take a secondary, supporting role, providing not only facilities (airports, ports, SDFs, etc.) for U.S. military operations but also a wide range of logistical support as discussed in the Law for Contingency Surrounding Japan that was approved in May of 1999. If necessary, in and around the contingency area, Japan would be entitled to conduct operations of search and rescue, non-combatant evacuation, and mine-sweeping, all of which could be interpreted as executing the right of collective self-defense.

Japan's assumption of the role of supply base as well as advance offense post during a Korean contingency would significantly improve the fighting capability of the ROK-U.S. combined forces. ROK-U.S.-Japanese trilateral coordination deters North Korea much more effectively than does the ROK-U.S. bilateral cooperation. For the ROK-Japanese coordination to function effectively, a very close working relationship between the two countries is required. A mechanism with open channels of consultation, communication, and cooperation is desirable; intelligence and information-sharing needs to be strengthened as well. An agreement should also be arrived regarding sovereignty-related issues between ROK and Japan. For example, ROK might allow the SDF to come in and evacuate their civilians and, in exchange, request Japan's humanitarian treatment of refugees flowing into Japanese territory.

At the moment, the South Korean government seems keen on practicality. Despite the public's reaction, the government is separating the issue of the textbook from Korea's security policy

toward Japan. The temporary recall of the South Korea ambassador to Japan represents a minor set back in relations and speaks to the depth of public sentiment in the ROK. Despite China suspicions about the ROK-U.S.-Japanese security partnership, South Korea has been promoting security ties with Japan. Indeed, South Korea and Japan share a common security interest, as both countries want to avoid North Korean aggression. However, no one can be sure how long the Pyongyang's leadership will remain cohesive. With its "muddle-through strategy," North Korea will not be able to attract international assistance indefinitely and unconditionally. If the North Korean threat were to diminish substantially and South Korea were to become able to deal with it independently, it would be unjustifiable to sustain such a cooperation between the ROK and Japan. In other words, the underlying rationale for the ROK-Japanese security cooperation would weaken with the decreasing possibility of full-scale war.

In that circumstance, South Korea would have two options. The first is to modify its security relations with Japan to cope with newly arising non-conventional issues such as the protection of Sea Lanes of Communications, environmental and ecological problems, piracy, maintaining a stable supply of natural resources, ethnic conflicts, illegal migration and refugees, etc. In this scenario, Japan's security ties with the U.S. would reinforce South Korea in fostering peace and stability in Northeast Asia. The second option is for South Korea to cut down the pace and degree of its security cooperation with Japan and build up instead an abiding friendship with China and Russia. This would create a more flexible Korean foreign policy, leaving ROK-Japanese security relations less exploited in the ROK-U.S.-Japan triangle. On the other hand, Japan is going to need stronger security ties with Korea as time goes by. China is growing fast, both militarily and economically. Japan and China will compete for regional leadership, and Japan wants Korea to commit firmly to the alliance of the U.S. and Japan.

What if Korea (or a unified Korea) and Japan are unable to come to terms with their history and the year 2030 arrives? Middle school students in Korea and Japan will be in their mid-forties by then, taking influential roles in national foreign policy. The more schools choose this new history textbook now, the wider the perception gap will be between Japanese and Korean policymakers thirty years from now.

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