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| Laura Zhou | Features | Southern China Morning Post | 23 December, 2019 | Hong Kong | Japan-South Korea tensions could dash China’s hopes for a trade deal | China will strengthen its influence in East Asia by mediating a bitter dispute between Japan and South Korea when their leaders arrive in Beijing on Monday, diplomatic observers said.  Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Moon Jae-in are expected to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping separately in the capital before flying to Chengdu, in southwestern Sichuan province, where the visitors would join Premier Li Keqiang for an annual trilateral summit the following day, the Chinese foreign ministry said on Thursday.  This would be the eighth summit since 2008 after postponements caused by years of historical and territorial disputes despite the countries’ geographical proximity, similar cultures and close economic ties.  It will come at a time when Tokyo and Seoul – the most important US allies in Asia – are locked in a bitter feud over history and trade that showed no sign of being settled soon.  While the United States has kept its distance from the dispute, Beijing, increasingly seen as a strategic rival by Washington, was eager to mediate, observers said.  Despite its historical grievances against Japan, Beijing has been reluctant to take sides since last November, when a South Korean court awarded damages against Japanese companies for using forced labour during the second world war.  The Japanese government, which accused Seoul of not complying with export security regulations, took the disagreement into the economic sphere by putting export controls on raw materials vital to South Korea’s semiconductor industry in the summer.  China hopes to profit as US relationship with Japan and South Korea frays  “China doesn’t take a side in the dispute but [can] allow the two countries to resolve the dispute through diplomatic means,” said Cai Liang, a research fellow at the Shanghai Institutes for International  By registering, you agree to our T&C and Privacy Policy  “China is willing to offer a platform, and the trilateral summit itself is such a platform, which involves a lot of diplomatic manoeuvres by China,” Cai said.  According to Japanese and South Korean governments, Abe and Moon were expected to meet on the sidelines of the summit in Chengdu, which would be their first formal meeting since September 2018.  China is attempting to bring Japan and South Korea together when relations between the neighbours are at a low point. Photo AP  China is attempting to bring Japan and South Korea together when relations between the neighbours are at a low point. Photo AP  He Ping, an associate professor in political economy at Fudan University in Shanghai, said Beijing may bring the neighbours’ important roles in the global technology supply chain to bear in discussions, particularly against the backdrop of growing global economic headwinds.  “The trade disputes between Japan and South Korea are not simply about bilateral trade, but have an important impact on countries including China because of the regional production chain and global value chain,” He said.  Beijing could also encourage the two to play a bigger role in regional and global free trade, he said.  Fears of further economic contraction have increased in China, Japan and South Korea, now the first, second and fourth largest economies in Asia respectively, according to International Monetary Fund figures for 2018.  South Korea’s decision to stay in intelligence pact with Japan helps US contain China, analysts say  According to official figures, exports from Japan and South Korea both slipped for a 12th month in a row in November, partly as a result of declining shipments to their bigger neighbour. Also last month, China reported a fall in exports for a fourth consecutive month because of the pressure of its 17-month long trade dispute with the US.  In Beijing on Thursday, Li Chenggang, assistant minister of commerce, said one of the key agenda items for the three leaders’ summit was to “inject more political impetus in a bid to make a practical breakthrough” in negotiations for a trilateral free-trade agreement (FTA), which Li said would be in line with their common interest in the face of a “complicated global economic environment”.  Beijing regards a trade pact with Japan and South Korea as an important part of its efforts to push regional economic integration forward and diversify its markets in the face of a growing sentiment against free trade led by US President Donald Trump’s more aggressive trade policy.  And the incentive to strike a deal for a market of close to 1.6 billion people, the combined populations of the three countries, has run high since the Trump administration, which had long accused Beijing of unfair trading practices and intellectual property theft, put punitive tariffs on US$3.4 billion of Chinese exports, prompting Beijing to retaliate with more tariffs.  Observers said that Beijing may want to wrap up negotiations with its neighbours before the November 2020 US presidential elections to avoid further uncertainty in relations between the world’s two largest economies.  Next year “could be a turning point because of the US presidential election and, if the deal could be reached before the end of next year, it could reduce the uncertainties over the trade war”, Cai said.  But Cai and He agreed that there would still be a long way for Beijing, Tokyo and Seoul to go to reach a deal, partly because of the tensions between Japan and South Korea.  Seoul slams Japan’s ‘flag of hatred’, as it calls for ban of Rising Sun flag at 2020 Tokyo Olympics  According to Chinese state media, a 16th round of negotiations between the three wrapped up in Seoul last month, when the parties discussed trade in goods and services, investment, competition, e-commerce, intellectual property rights, government procurement and rules of origin.  A three-way FTA would aim to reduce tariffs on around 92 per cent of tradeable goods, making it one of the biggest multilateral free trade deals China has negotiated.  Masahiro Kawai, a professor at Tokyo University, said such an agreement could also pave the way for Beijing and Seoul to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which involves 11 Asia-Pacific countries including Japan, Australia and Vietnam, but not the US.  China was excluded from the pact when it was first drafted in 2015 and Beijing saw it as part of then US President Barack Obama’s “pivot to Asia” policy to counter Chinese influence.  “Japan would certainly want more market opening in China for high-value added manufacturing and services sectors, and [South] Korea for automobile sectors and higher-level trade and investment rules on investment liberalisation and protection, IPR [intellectual property rights] protection, e-commerce,” Kawai said.  “If the three countries can agree on a high-level China-Japan-South Korea FTA, it would make Korea ready to join the CPTPP and make it easier for China to begin discussions for joining the CPTPP.” |
| PARK SU-RYON, LEE HO-JEONG | News Analysis | Korea Joongang Daily | September 25, 2019 | South Korea | Korea and Japan business agree: show must go on | Mikio Sasaki, Japan-Korea Economic Association chairman, expressed concerns about Korean consumer boycott of Japanese products and said that diplomatic and economic relations should be restored.  Sasaki’s Korean counterpart Kim Yoon, head of the Korea-Japan Economic Association, agreed. He said that the swift restoration of relations is vital.  “Businesses does not look into the past but to the future, and reality over ideology,” Kim said.  On Tuesday and Wednesday, some 300 businessmen from Korea and Japan, including representatives from Samsung, Korean Air, Posco, Toyota and Sumitomo, gathered at Lotte Hotel in downtown Seoul, where they held their annual conference.  The atmosphere was heavy due to the ongoing political and diplomatic tension between the leaders of the countries, which has spilled over into business since July.  “Despite the adamant position held by the Japanese government, the Japanese businessmen that visited Seoul showed strong will to continue corporate transactions between the two countries, separating it from politics and diplomacy,” said an official who attended the conference on the condition of anonymity.  Kim, who is also the chairman of Samyang Holdings, said Korea and Japan as neighbors have to co-exist through deep understanding of each other while competing and cooperating.  “There are paramount issues that we need to solve together, and as such communication and cooperation are desperately needed,” Kim said.  Sohn Kyung-shik, chairman of the Korea Employers Federation, stressed that the trade dispute between the countries will only harm both.  “The trade dispute between Korea and Japan will only damage trust built between companies over a very long period,” Sohn said. “It will make global supply chain uncertain.  “We have to face the reality that prosperity and security for both countries can only be guaranteed when strong cooperation not only economically but also in securities is maintained.”  Sasaki, who is currently serving as a senior advisor to Mitsubishi Corp, said the boycott by Korean consumers will affect not only to Japanese companies but also Korean companies as well as Korean employees work at the Japanese companies.  “I feel the desperate need to repair the political and diplomatic relationship considering that economy and politics and diplomacy are the two wheels of a vehicle,” Sasaki said. “The businessmen will work to protect the relationships built over 50 years from crumbling.”  Korean Trade Minister Yoo Myung-hee, who attended the conference, said even when the relationship between the two countries faces difficulty, exchange and cooperation should continue.  “I am worried about the recent boycott campaign casting a shadow over the economic activities of Japanese companies,” said Yasumasa Nagamine, Japanese ambassador to Korea.  “I hope this conference will offer an opportunity to strengthen the cooperation between the two countries.”  The conference has been held every year since 1969, after the two countries normalized relationship in 1965. This year’s conference was supposed to be held in May, but at the request of Japanese members, the date was moved.  Jeremy Zook, associate director on sovereign ratings at Fitch, on Tuesday said that the two biggest threats Korea faces currently are the ongoing trade dispute between the U.S. and China as well as tensions with Tokyo.  “Korea’s economic outlook in particular is one of the most negatively impacted globally from the escalation of the U.S.-China tensions,” Zook said. “Our analysis shows that the latest round of tariffs imposed by the U.S. from Sept. 1 onwards will take nearly 0.5 percentage points off Korea’s growth rate absent a Korean government policy response.”  Fitch is forecasting this year’s growth at 2 percent and 2.3 percent for next year.  “Korea and Japan removing each other from their respective ‘whitelists’ of trusted trade partners is a further headwind for growth by disrupting supply chains and creating greater uncertainty for Korean firms.”  The analyst said the rising tensions between the two countries will weigh on business sentiment  However, Zook said the impact tensions with Japan will have on the Korean economy is at this point uncertain.  “It depends on how cumbersome the export review process becomes, the ability of Korean firms to find alternative suppliers and the duration of the dispute,” Zook said.  “More broadly, however, we believe that rising tensions between Japan and Korea will likely weigh on business confidence and investment moving forward.”  The Fitch analyst added that a significant escalation of tensions between the two countries will cause further negative consequences if some export items are not approved.  At of this point, Korean companies are receiving all of their inputs they order from Japanese suppliers. The only difference from the past is that the processes has become more complicated.  It will also be costly for Korean companies to search out alternative suppliers that could replace their Japanese business partners.  “The forecast is tilted towards the downside,” Zook said. |
| KIM SANG-JIN, OH WON-SEOK AND LEE SUNG-EUN | News Analysis | Korea Joongang Daily | September 26, 2019 | South Korea | Solutions to Japan friction sought at seminar | To solve the Seoul-Tokyo diplomatic spat, Hong Seok-hyun, the chairman of the Korea Peace Foundation, suggested the South Korean government declare it won’t ask Japan for compensation for its forced labor victims during World War II - and in return, the Japanese government should offer a sincere apology for its illegal colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula and for forcing Koreans to toll at factories and mines.  Hong was speaking Wednesday at the Korea Press Center in Jung District, central Seoul, during a seminar hosted by the Korea Peace Foundation to discuss bilateral issues with scholars and experts from both countries.  In a keynote speech, Hong said he was “deeply sad” the two nations’ relations were in their “worst state” and that the situation was so dangerous that one more added issue of conflict could totally “break” the relationship.  In order to fix this, Hong said the South Korean government should announce it won’t ask for compensation that the Supreme Court ordered two Japanese companies to pay forced labor victims. Seoul should tell Tokyo that it “won’t necessarily receive” the money if doing so would put Japan in a “difficult” position.  In return, Hong said, the Japanese government should clearly apologize and repent for its illegal colonization of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945 and for forcing Koreans into labor.  “Both governments should send a clear message to South Koreans through some sort of an agreement like the Korea-Japan partnership declaration signed between Kim Dae-jung and Obuchi,” Hong said, referring to a 1998 joint declaration signed by former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and former Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi.  A part of that declaration read that Obuchi “expressed his deep remorse and heartfelt apology” for the “tremendous damage and suffering” to the people of South Korea by its colonial rule.  “The leaders of the two countries should reach a big agreement” amongst themselves, said Hong. “The [South Korean] Supreme Court ruled Japanese companies must compensate [South Korean labor victims], but it goes against the [1965] Korea-Japan treaty, which was a promise made through international law,” said Hong. If the South Korean government generously says it doesn’t need the compensation, then it can no longer be “dragged around” by Japan and solve the dispute “by its own will,” which would lead to a halt of the ongoing “game of chicken.”  The Korea Peace Foundation chairman said if Seoul and Tokyo manage to resolve their spat, Japan could be able to participate in the Korean Peninsula denuclearization peace process, too.  “[Japanese] Prime Minister Shinzo Abe can fulfill his long-cherished wish of establishing diplomatic ties with North Korea and solve the issue of Japanese abductees in the North.”  Park Cheol-hee, a professor at Seoul National University’s Graduate School of International Studies, said during the seminar that Seoul must increase communication with Tokyo on various levels to prevent the dispute from worsening.  Park accused Tokyo of “stalemating progress” in bilateral dialogue by outright refusing to abide by the South Korean Supreme Court rulings, even as the South left open the possibility of South Korean companies paying the victims alongside Japanese companies through a special economic fund.  Masao Okonogi, emeritus professor at Keio University and an expert in Korean studies, claimed Japan “would have tried its best to play its part” in the forced labor issue if the South Korean Supreme Court asked the “concerned parties” to resolve the issue on their own from a humanitarian perspective, as Japanese courts previously suggested.  Seoul’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Blue House have said on numerous occasions that they must respect the Supreme Court rulings “as a democracy that upholds the separation of powers.”  Tadashi Kimiya, a professor of South Korean politics and diplomacy at the University of Tokyo, urged the South Korean Supreme Court to delay its procedures to liquidate assets of Japanese companies after they refused to abide by its rulings.  Kimiya said the procedures should be postponed until after Seoul and Tokyo devise a “roadmap” to solve the forced labor issue, stressing that if the assets are forcibly liquidated, both nations will likely enter an “economic war.”  Former South Korean Prime Minister Lee Hong-koo said the two countries must start discussions on the forced labor issue at least by October, given the expiration date of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia), which falls in late November.  In August, Seoul announced it will not renew the bilateral intelligence-sharing pact, which was first signed in November 2016 and is renewed annually unless one side informs the other 90 days in advance of its plans to end the deal. With that call, the Gsomia is set to expire on Nov. 23 unless Seoul reverses its stance. |
| Lee Jong-wha | Opinion | Korea Joongang Daily | September 19, 2019 | South Korea | A game of chicken | Last week, I went to a bank to exchange Korean won for Japanese yen before going to Japan to attend a conference. The teller asked me if I was sure about visiting Japan at such a sensitive time. Economists I met at the conference jokingly asked if it was okay for me to visit Japan when Korea-Japan relations were so bad. I am worried the discord would spread to people-to-people exchanges in general.  The movie “Rebel Without a Cause” starring James Dean features a game of chicken. As cars race towards a cliff, whoever jumps out last wins. In another variation of the game, two cars race towards each other, and the one that turns away first loses. If neither wants to lose, the cars will crash — and both drivers will be injured.  The Korea-Japan spat resembles a game of chicken. Last year, the Supreme Court of Korea ruled that victims of wartime forced labor have the right to claim compensation, and while Japan initially demanded to bring the case to third-party arbitration according to the 1965 Basic Treaty, Tokyo ended up putting export restrictions on materials used to make semiconductors and displays as retaliation. On Aug. 28, Japan removed Korea from its so-called white list of trading partners that get preferential treatment for exports. Korea brought Japan’s unfair export regulations to the World Trade Organization and responded by also removing Japan from its own white list on Sept. 18. The General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) between Korean and Japan is not to be extended as well. Disputes over history are expanding to economic and military affairs. I don’t know how the situation will be when Gsomia ends at the end of November and assets in Korea of Japanese companies responsible for forced labor are liquidated next year.  Korea-Japan discord is already affecting economic exchanges between the two countries. Coinciding with a slowdown in global economic growth, Korea’s export to Japan in August decreased by 6.2 percent from the same period a year earlier. Imports from Japan also decreased. Imports of Japanese cars went down by 57 percent and beer imports decreased 95 percent compared to the same month last year. The number of Korean tourists to Japan declined, and some Japanese companies decide to leave Korea.  Korea and Japan are geographically close and their industrial structures are closely intertwined. Both countries enjoy benefits from trade and investment. Korea is Japan’s fourth largest export market, and Japan is Korea’s fifth largest export market. In the global supply chain, Korea and Japan play very important roles. In terms of the world’s biggest exporters, Japan is the fourth and Korea is fifth, after China, the United States and Germany.  With China and the United States engaged in a trade war, the world is watching the trade dispute between Korea and Japan with worry. Korea and Japan have had leading roles in free trade on the global stage. But now the two countries are going against the international trade order and hurting the global economy with punitive trade retaliations. Japan is more responsible for starting the retaliations, but Korea cannot avoid criticism for fanning the dispute.  There is still a big gap in economic power between Korea and Japan. Korea’s GDP is one-third Japan’s. Japan is still dominant over Korea in science and technology and international politics. Korea is not so weak that it must submit to Japan’s unfair demands, but Korea may suffer greater economic damage if bad retaliations continue. With signs of a global economic slump, risks for Korea’s economy have grown. If geopolitical uncertainty in Northeast Asia grows due to the Korea-Japan dispute, it could negatively affect security.  President Moon Jae-in said at an economic advisory meeting in August that trade retaliation is a game in which everyone loses and no one wins. He is right. Rather than continuing retaliatory measures, solutions need to be found in negotiations. It would be best to find solutions to the forced labor issue, which is the root of the row, and retract all trade and diplomatic retaliations. While Japan needs to be persuaded to compensate the forced labor victims, Korea can seek a way to ask for accountability without asking for Japan’s monetary compensation based on “higher moral ground.”  It would be best if leaders of the two countries sit face to face to find solutions. At this juncture, both countries believe nothing will be resolved even if they meet. But if politicians, economic groups and experts from the two countries make efforts, the two leaders can meet and seek solutions.  If you wait until the last moment in a game of chicken, you may win the game — but lose your life. In “Rebel Without a Cause,” a strap on a jacket sleeve gets caught, and the driver goes over the cliff with the car. The Korean government needs to prepare appropriate exit strategies while responding to Japan’s unfairness. I hope a reversal can be made within the year. |
| SHIM KYU-SEOK | News Analysis | Korea Joongang Daily | September 5, 2019 | South Korea | Defense chief uses forum to take aim at Tokyo | Korea’s defense chief on Thursday took an apparent jab at Japan at an annual international security forum in Seoul attended by hundreds of officials and experts.  In his keynote address for the Seoul Defense Dialogue (SDD) 2019, Minister of National Defense Jeong Kyeong-doo said there were “concerning movements around the Korean Peninsula” by one country that was “trying to maximize its interests by fomenting security clashes with a neighbor.”  Although he didn’t mention Japan by name, the remark is believed to reference Tokyo’s recent economic measures toward Korea - actions that Jeong said were part of an “intensifying competition” among regional powers to pursue agendas focused on narrow interests rather than mutual gain.  This year’s SDD, which kicked off on Wednesday and is set to continue until today, was the largest since the event first launched in 2012 as a vice ministerial-level forum to build security cooperation and foster dialogue in the Asia-Pacific region.  Hundreds of defense officials and experts from a total of 56 countries and five international organizations took part, including the commander of the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK), Gen. Robert Abrams, who attended the forum for the first time.  While he did not take questions, Abrams’ presence at the event appeared to be aimed at allaying concerns of a growing rift in the U.S.-Korea alliance as a result of Seoul’s decision to withdraw from a military intelligence-sharing agreement, known of the General Security of Military Information Agreement, or Gsomia, with Japan over differences in security perceptions.  Yet noted was the absence of U.S. ambassador to Korea Harry Harris, who skipped the forum to attend another security conference in the Maldives on Tuesday and Wednesday. After Korea’s Foreign Ministry requested that he refrain from making public comments on Gsomia on Aug. 28, Harris made his dissatisfaction with Seoul apparent by canceling all his public appearances in the country over the last week.  Unsurprisingly, the ongoing Korea-Japan row, which escalated from an initial dispute on historical issues to encompass economic and security dimensions over the last two months, stood as the highlight of Thursday’s session as former and current security officials from the two countries clashed in full view.  As an apparent response to Jeong’s speech, former Japanese Defense Minister Satoshi Morimoto said it was a “disappointing” development that the Korean government chose not to renew Gsomia amid a persistent threat from Pyongyang, adding Seoul wrongly linked the decision with Japan’s imposition of more stringent export controls of key industrial materials to Korea and its removal of Seoul from a list of preferred trade partners.  To this, Korean Vice Defense Minister Park Jae-min stressed that it was Japan that first cited security concerns with Korean export controls to justify its trade restrictions, saying that Seoul’s decision on Gsomia was reached with a determination that it was inappropriate to share sensitive military information with a country that did not trust it.  Park, however, appeared to leave open the door for a future settlement on the intelligence-sharing pact with Japan, saying it remained active until November and that the Korean government could “reconsider” scrapping the deal if Tokyo withdraws its trade restrictions on Korea.  For Seoul’s defense officials however, the SDD forum presented other lucrative opportunities to demonstrate the country’s stature as a major global arms manufacturer.  Among the number of minister-level talks that took place on the event’s sidelines, Jeong’s discussions with Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh stood out as particularly important for Seoul in light of India’s continued interest in buying Korean-made weapons to augment its massive military.  As the world’s second-largest arms importer, India in May selected to import Korean arms maker Hanwha’s K-30 Biho short-range self-propelled anti-aircraft systems in a $2.66 billion deal after a fierce bidding process with Russian competitors. This decision was protested by Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu, who claimed the Indians did not properly test K-30 Biho in a deliberate attempt to sideline Moscow, its largest arms provider.  With Russia redoubling its efforts to get New Delhi to reevaluate its import decision and the budget issues in India preventing the purchase from going ahead, Jeong was expected to focus his attention on persuading Singh to push forward with the deal. |
| The Sankei Shimbun | Editorial | Japan Forward | January 20, 2021 | Japan | Japan Should Stop Engaging Until South Korea Learns to Follow the Rules | Sovereign immunity is a bedrock principle of international law, which South Korea trampled upon when a local court ruled that Japan should compensate former ‘comfort women.’  The Sankei ShimbunPublished 3 weeks ago on January 20, 2021By The Sankei Shimbun  ~~  Pursuit of Clean Oceans Driven by Locals in Ishikawa  The February edition of the monthly magazine Bungei Shunju carries a roundtable discussion among opinion leaders entitled, “The Coldest Winter in Japan-South Korea Relations.”  One of the participants is Liberal Democratic Party Diet member Minoru Kiuchi, who formerly was a diplomat responsible for South Korea within the Foreign Ministry’s Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau.  Kiuchi likens the current state of bilateral relations to a soccer match in which the administration of South Korean President Moon Jae In “has bought off the referees and repeatedly fouls.”  In fact, one of those “referees” — the Seoul Central District Court — has just committed another flagrant foul.  On January 8, the court handed down a ruling awarding ₩100 million KRW (around ￥9.5 million JPY or $91,400 USD) to each of 12 plaintiffs. They are former “comfort women” (ianfu) who had sued the Japanese government. The court ordered the Japanese government itself to pay this compensation.  Sovereign immunity, in other words the assumption that a nation state is not subject to the jurisdiction of courts in another country, is a bedrock principle of international law. Even experts in South Korea were taken aback by the court decision that flies in the face of this established legal principle.  To begin with, the decision is not based on facts. There is no evidence of the “criminal acts against humanity” the court alleges took place. And clearly its contention that the “comfort women have not received an official apology or compensation” is false.  An article by Ruriko Kubota, senior staff writer at The Sankei Shimbun Tokyo headquarters, carried in the same issue of Bungei Shunju, was even more disheartening. She describes how a network of Japanese women living in Germany has supported the South Korean citizens’ group that has erected a statue of a comfort woman in central Berlin.  The decision issued by the Seoul Central Court read just like the explanations engraved in the pedestals of statues of comfort women that have been erected in various cities worldwide: “The Japanese military forcibly took countless young girls and women from the Asia-Pacific region and made them sex slaves.”  The popularization of this simplistic formula that “comfort women” equals “sex slaves” has without a doubt done much to swell the ranks of anti-Japanese groups overseas.  Returning to Mr. Kiuchi’s analogy of a soccer game mentioned earlier, it no longer makes sense to continue playing. As he puts it, “Japan should leave the field until the other side changes its attitude.”  Nevertheless, even if Japan leaves the field, the fight against the fabrications of history and denigration of Japan will continue.  Author: The Sankei Shimbun |
| Katsuhiro Kuroda, Sankei Shimbun | Opinion | Japan Forward | December 8, 2020 | Japan | To Set Issues Straight, Japan’s Best Bet is to Talk Directly to the South Korean Public | South Korea’s bizarre level of concern over radiation issues linked to the Fukushima nuclear accident is not exclusively down to anti-Japanese sentiment.  In recent years, South Korea’s younger generations have become increasingly concerned about issues such as food safety, environmental pollution, and health — which partly explains the country’s heightened sensitivity over radiation.  For example, there was uproar recently when radioactive radon was detected in domestically produced beds in South Korea. Tens of thousands of beds were subsequently thrown on the scrap heap and left out in the open — a photo of which is still very clear in my mind.  When Japan is involved, though, an anti-Japanese mood of “disgraceful Japan” tends to rise to the surface. In particular, if the case is Fukushima-related, some people in South Korea seemingly regard that as a weakness, and use it as a point from which to verbally attack Japan.  For example, South Korean media and citizen groups have spread rumors about the Tokyo Olympics being the “Radioactive Olympics,” based on the fact that Olympic baseball will take place in Fukushima and food from the prefecture will feature in the Olympic Village.  Recently, there has been a South Korean backlash against Japan’s plans over the release of effluents from Fukushima into the ocean. The media, citizen groups, and the government have taken the issue to Japan, claiming that ocean currents will carry these effluents to South Korea and inflict radioactive harm.  The radical environmental organization Greenpeace has been fanning the flames on this issue, but South Korea is the only nation that is openly critical of Japan.  In response to South Korea’s claims, Japan has attempted to put forward constructive counterarguments, and the embassy of Japan in Seoul recently held a news conference for the South Korean media.  After the conference, some sections of the media wrote malicious headlines about the Fukushima effluent situation. However, the majority went with headlines such as “Only South Korea is Anti.”  The news conference was possibly the first time that Japan was able to convey the Japanese government’s stance — including plans accepted by the international community — to the South Korean public. The effectiveness of the conference was arguably the embassy of Japan in Seoul’s first major “hit.”  Under the leadership of ex-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the Japanese government tried hard to convey its policies and stance to the international community, but it stepped back from South Korea on certain issues on the grounds of “not wanting to stoke anti-Japanese sentiment.”  This is reminiscent of an incident in 2005.  In that particular year, the then-ambassador to South Korea, Toshiyuki Takano, stated that Takeshima belonged to Japan at a gathering of foreign correspondents in Seoul. Takano’s statement triggered a backlash across South Korea’s public and private sectors, with comments such as, “Japan’s ambassador is delusional in the middle of Seoul.”  Subsequently, the Japanese embassy toned down its stance, stating, “We will not be making any specific comments about territorial rights going forward.”  There are several issues that involve both Japan and South Korea: Takeshima, textbooks, comfort women, wartime labor, UNESCO world heritage, the name of the Sea of Japan, the Rising Sun flag. However, Japan has rarely expressed its stance in a proactive manner on South Korean soil to the South Korean public.  Japan must not be afraid. The country should appeal directly to the South Korean public by using tools such as the media. It is time for Japan to put an end to stepping around South Korea. |
| Ruriko Kubota | News Analysis | Japan Forward | November 11, 2020 | Japan | His Work Refuted, Korean Novelist Jo Jung-rae Suggests Witch Hunt for ‘Japan Sympathizers’ | The feud has escalated between South Korean novelist Jo Jung-rae and a group of academics who refuted his anti-Japan work.  Jo Jung-rae, one of the foremost novelists in South Korea, has made claims that Japan “massacred’ between three million and four million Koreans during the era of Japanese imperialism. His anti-Japan novels are imbued with a level of hatred most Japanese would have a hard time imagining.  A group of academics including Lee Young-hoon, former Seoul National University professor and author of Anti-Japan Tribalism (Bungei Shunju Ltd, in Japanese and Korean, 2019), a bestseller in both Japan and South Korea, has responded, calling Jo an “insane and hateful novelist.”  The feud worsened when Jo recently attacked Lee by calling him a “new type of traitor.”  South Korean authors of ‘Anti-Japan Tribalism’ challenge author of hate-filled novels  Counterattacks from the Lee Young-hoon Faction    It all started on October 12 when Jo, at a reception to commemorate his own 50-year literary career, called Lee Young-hoon “a liar,” adding that he was “a betrayer of the people and a new type of traitor to the country.”  In his most representative anti-Japanese novel Arirang (Iwanami Shoten, Japanese and Korean, Vol. 1, 1994), a 12-volume series selling 3.5 million copies, Jo describes in graphic detail scenes of Japanese police officers brutally killing Koreans — accounts that completely have no factual ground. At the October 12 reception, Jo declared that the scenes were “objective and historically accurate descriptions based on precise materials, largely consisting of materials issued by the National Institute of Korean History and books written by people with forward-thinking awareness.”  In response, one of the authors of Anti-Japan Tribalism, the historian Ju Ik-jong, director of the Syngman Rhee School where Lee Young-Hoon is president, released a video on the Syngman Rhee YouTube channel entitled, “Jo Jung-rae: The emergence of a fascist — lies and insanity.”  The counterattacks had begun.  In one of his novels, Jo wrote: “In 1944, Japan forced Korean laborers to build an airport on the Chishima Islands. After it was completed, 4,000 of them were locked inside an air raid shelter and slaughtered.”  The counterattacks addressed this story, producing detailed records of persons from the Korean peninsula working in Hokkaido around the same time, including an itemized statement for retirement money, letters that proved allowances made for persons who died or were injured in accidents, and a payment slip for an artificial arm.  In the video, Ju Ik-jong asserts: “These materials were kept by the persons concerned or their families for over 60 years, and have been submitted to the Korean government. Laborers worked in the coal mines, received retirement money, and returned to their homes. Why would Japan need to massacre 4,000 Korean laborers in the first place?”  Ju goes on to demand that Jo “take responsibility for his criticisms of Lee.”  Original materials documenting pay of wartime Korean workers in Japan  These historical materials are stored in a collection of photographs of a government agency established under the Prime Minister’s Office of the Roh Moo-hyun administration.  For instance, an itemized statement of the retirement money paid to a Korean laborer who retired from the coal mines in November 1944 shows a record of ¥608 JPY, a figure 10 times the ¥60 JPY salary of a Korean bank worker at the time. If a worker died in a coal mine accident, family members could be brought over from Korea for the funeral.  There was also a letter stating: “I am sending the allowance for bereaved family, group life insurance and retirement money. Please send back a receipt.”  There was a written notice to a laborer who had lost his right hand, reading “1,200 yen will be paid as an allowance for an artificial hand. If this amount is insufficient, you should claim the actual cost.”    Jo’s Huge Popularity in South Korea    Lee’s response to Jo’s “traitor of the people” accusation is as follows:  Jo’s accusations came right out of his inner psychological world and are nothing particularly new. The history of anti-Japan tribalism is depicted in detail in Jo’s novels. I criticized Jo in a 2007 paper entitled, “Jo Jung-rae — historical novelist of hatred and an air of madness.”  Until now, he has ignored me. His remarks coming now just go to show that the anti-Japan (historical viewpoint) stance in his books has become less and less compelling.  Aside from Arirang, Jo has recorded phenomenal sales totaling 14 million copies of his epic novels, such as The Taebaek Mountains (Haenaem publishers, available in English, 2001). There are three literature museums in South Korea dedicated to Jo’s works, including the Arirang Literature Museum (Jeollabuk Province), that are popular destinations for school field trips.  Jo’s anti-Japan historical views are said to have predominated in history and literary societies. Lee addresses this point as follows  Jo’s “Arirang” was praised for its literary value and has had great commercial success. South Korea’s literary society had all the volumes translated into French in hopes of it getting the Nobel Prize in Literature. But the huge number of pure fabrications make it impossible to call it a historical novel. This type of tribalism will not be chosen for an international literature award. But it has had a major impact in Korea.  ‘Anti-Japan Tribalism,’  Where is the Controversy Headed?  At the October 12 reception, Jo labeled South Koreans who had studied abroad in Japan as “Japan sympathizers,” and called for “the conviction of 1.5 million Japan sympathizers.”  Waves of criticism ensued on social media sites, calling Jo’s remarks “outdated nationalism.” They pointed out that President Moon Jae In’s daughter had studied in Japan, and challenged him to name “just who these 1.5 million Japan sympathizers are.”  Jo made his counterarguments on a radio program, continuing his tirade on “Japan sympathizers” over a period of several days.  However, this battle of words did not extend to any criticism or examination of the veracity of Jo’s fabricated claims of a history of brutal killings by the Japanese.  Ju Ik-jong explained the likely reason for the silence, noting:  In South Korea, criticizing an anti-Japan stance is taboo. Opposition is strong and also pervades the media. You can write, “Jo Jung-rae’s tribalism” vs. “Lee Young-hoon’s revisionism,” but you wouldn’t enter into a discussion of historical facts. That’s the limit to which the South Korean media would go. They lack the courage. |
| Katsuhiro Kuroda, Sankei Shimbun | Features | Japan Forward | October 2, 2020 | Japan | For a Country of Rising Int’l Stature, South Korea is Woefully Stuck in Anti-Japan | South Korea is being rocked hard by the exposure of alleged “military service-related irregularities” involving the son of Justice Minister Choo Mi Ae.  The son of the justice minister, a political bigwig, might have allegedly received special treatment during his compulsory military service several years ago. Among others, he was reportedly given more leave time than he was entitled to by riding on his mother’s coattails.  In South Korea, allegations about wrongdoing by the privileged regarding military service and school entrance exams are blistering offenses in the public eye. The administration of President Moon Jae In has now been put on the defensive in the face of the scandalous allegations, for which Defense Minister Suh Wook has been used as a scapegoat to bear the brunt of the criticism independently from the justice minister.  When the defense minister responded to questions about the incident in a recent session of the National Assembly, newspapers captured and published a photo of the memo he had picked up. The photo showed a small ballpoint pen along with the memo, according to the daily JoongAhg Ilbo (Central Daily News, September 16). The ballpoint pen was produced by Mitsubishi Pencil Co. and made in Japan.  I felt concerned about the photo simply because former Justice Minister Cho Kuk, then a key figure in the government, was brought to task about this time in 2019 for the reason that he used a Japanese-made ballpoint pen during a news conference while being lambasted by the public for alleged “entrance exam wrongdoings” involving his daughter.  The Moon administration was bogged down last year in the mire over alleged irregularities involving Cho Kuk, the justice minister at that time. Moon’s government narrowly managed to weather the crisis with the resignation of Cho Kuk. What played a role in helping the Moon administration ride out of the storm was a string of anti-Japanese campaigns carried out both by government and private sectors, including boycotts of Japanese-made products in retaliation for Japan’s tightening of export procedures for materials used in the manufacture of semiconductors.  Slogans calling for “Boycott Japan” and “No Abe” were especially conspicuous in gatherings of Moon supporters, while the slogan of “Don’t be deceived by the Moon administration’s agitation under the guise of anti-Japan rhetoric” was often seen at meetings held in protests against the Moon government.  This time, Defense Minister Suh was probably unaware that he was using a ballpoint pen that was made in Japan. He was presumably using the pen simply because his aides had provided it. Obviously, that was not important. Japanese-made ballpoint pens are highly popular in South Korea because of their smooth glide that influences the ease of use when writing. Generally the use of a single ballpoint pen does not bring out sentiments of nationalism and patriotism.  Regarding last year’s “Boycott Japan” campaigns mounted by both public and private sectors, some South Korean media described the drives as “selective approaches to boycott of Japanese products” by South Korean citizens, meaning that the boycotts did not cover those Japanese goods that would otherwise have been unavailable to South Korean consumers. The description seems likely.  Reflecting back again on the anti-Japanese boycotts, it seems that few countries in today’s world bother to instigate a boycott against a wide range of daily necessities and services, including overseas travel, in a move against a foreign country simply because of diplomatic conflict. South Korea has been making a point of boasting of its economic development and advances to overseas markets, citing such things as Korean pop music and Academy Award recipients, as well as Samsung and Hyundai Motor Co. products. In the face of this, the boycott of Japanese goods and services was really stupid.  When it comes to relations with Japan, South Koreans are apt to put down themselves, losing track of their dignity and rising national presence in the international community. After having been around South Koreans for years, I acutely feel that the South Korean education system and media should put their efforts into spreading international sensitivities better suited to realities of South Korea in the contemporary world, rather than staying stuck in the easy way out of anti-Japanese patriotism focused on the wartime past.  Speaking of alternatives, for Koreans, there is no substitute for travel to Japan which is cheap, satisfying, and convenient. In 2020, we may have the coronavirus infection problem, but I frequently hear South Koreans express their expectations for early resumption of tourism in Japan. The long mid-autumn holidays were held from the end of September to October 2, but this year it seems that many South Koreans are simply becoming stressed. |
| Dr. Earl H. Kinmonth | Opinion | Japan Forward | January 28, 2020 | Japan | First, A Flag. Now, A Moustache. What Will South Koreans Whinge About Next? | In the last two months of 2019, two South Korean complaints — allegedly based on the period during which Korea was under Japanese control (1910-1945) — attracted international attention, until Carlos Ghosn grabbed foreign media eyes by jumping bail in Japan and fleeing to Beirut.  One complaint garnered foreign sympathy, most notably in the form of an opinion piece by Alexis Dudden, professor of history at the University of Connecticut, published in The Guardian under the title “Japan’s rising sun flag has a history of horror. It must be banned at the Tokyo Olympics.”  The other complaint was aimed at the moustache worn by Harry Harris, the United States ambassador to South Korea, which some Koreans claimed reminded them of the same history: Japanese control over Korea.  Both complaints reappeared again in January, but the two storylines received contrasting responses. The flag story, aimed exclusively at Japan, was taken as a largely legitimate Korean grievance. Complaints about the U.S. ambassador’s moustache, on the other hand, were seen as ridiculous, even racist.  An Opening Worthy of the Onion    Imagine if, at the opening ceremony of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, the stadium were filled to capacity with fans waving the American Confederate flag. A similarly hurtful scene could become reality at the Tokyo Games next summer, if the Japanese “rising sun” flag is on display.  Her statement as phrased first demonstrates that she does not know what “an American Confederate flag” is. The Confederacy did not have a single official flag. At least three different designs were in common use. This is then coupled to an analogy that makes no sense whatsoever.  The war between the Union and the Confederacy was basically an internal U.S. matter. Confederate flags and the many monuments to Confederate military leaders sprinkled around the U.S. have some meaning in terms of the domestic U.S. debate over slavery and its pervasive influence on contemporary American society. But without advisories, most foreign visitors to a 2028 Los Angeles (LA) Olympics would not recognize a Confederate flag if someone waved one in their face.  Dudden argues that the Rising Sun Flag is not Japan’s national flag, but rather a war flag, and because it is “used to make a particular political statement in Japan today,” it should be banned.  But, in fact, most uses of the flag are not political. As is noted in the article itself, the flag is widely used for completely innocuous purposes. And, if flags used for political purposes are to be banned, that would logically require most national flags to be banned.  There is also a small matter of our Constitution: Article 21. Freedom of assembly and association as well as speech, press and all other forms of expression are guaranteed. On what legal grounds would the Japanese government ban the Rising Sun flag? There is nothing in the Constitution that mandates that the Japanese government cater to the alleged sensitivities of Koreans, Americans, or anyone else.  In the U.S., display of Confederate flags or derivative designs faces the same issue. The U.S. Supreme Court has said that prohibitions violate the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution, although you have no right to insist that a state government put such a design on your vanity auto license plates. Monuments to the Confederacy are common in parts of the U.S., and major U.S. military posts are named for Confederate military leaders.  Dudden seems to think that Japan has Korean-style “freedom of expression,” where you can be arrested for writing about what is being said on social media, as Seoul did to former Sankei Shimbun Seoul Bureau chief Tatsuya Kato, reporter, or taken to court like the scholar Park Yu Ha for writing an academic book that discredits some of the widely-believed Korean mythology surrounding the comfort women.  And, what about the case where someone waves the flag used by the Asahi Shimbun, the favorite newspaper of domestic and foreign liberals and leftists? It is strikingly similar to the Rising Sun flag. [PHOTO 1] Indeed, foreign nationals have been known to comment about “Japan’s war flag” on cars and buildings, when in fact they were looking at the Asahi Shimbun flag.  Japan’s Rising Sun Flag  For it’s part, as of this writing, the IOC has said that it sees no problem with the Rising Sun flag. That has also been the case with FIFA. It removed an Instagram photo of Japanese fans waving the Rising Sun Flag, but has otherwise done nothing.  The Japanese government might want to appeal to Japanese fans for self-restraint on this issue, but there would seem to be little or no grounds for a ban with the force of law. Self-restraint was in fact called for in 2008, for the Peking Olympics.  Who is Offended?  According to Dudden, “South Korea is not the only country where the flag causes offense.” She goes on to admonish the IOC to “educate itself before concerns and calls to boycott the games spread to China, Singapore, the Philippines, or Myanmar, where millions of people suffered similar violence under the rising sun symbol.”  This is stunning in terms of its lack of logic. The IOC does not control what the people of China, Singapore, the Philippines, or Myanmar do, nor does it control their governments.  Moreover, China has in fact welcomed a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense warship flying the rising sun flag. The Philippines has welcomed a Japanese naval flotilla. Myanmar (aka Burma) was one of the Asian countries where the idea that Japan was fighting a war to liberate Asia found a receptive audience.  Forced Labor and Cannibalism    Possibly sensing that her argument to this point is weak, Dudden launches into a laundry list of factoids that in some vague way are apparently intended to justify banning the rising sun flag, including a bizarre reference to (alleged) Japanese cannibalism.  Similarly unrelated are her false claims about an alleged lack of “reparations for any of those who were enslaved and imprisoned” by the Japanese. The 1965 settlement between Japan and South Korea did in fact include money that was intended to cover payments to individuals. That the South Korean government used the settlement funds provided by Japan for industrial investment is not the responsibility of Japan.  In the case of China, Japan provided substantial direct and indirect aid that was reparations in all but name. This is described in some detail in China and Japan Facing History by Ezra Vogel (Harvard University Press, 2019) and numerous other sources.  Drawing a Moustache on History  Shortly after the Guardian published Dudden’s screed, British newspapers, including the Daily Mail, the Independent, and the Telegraph, reported yet another South Korean whinge: the moustache sported by retired U.S. admiral in charge of the Pacific Command, now U.S. Ambassador to Seoul Harry Harris. South Koreans have complained that it reminds them of moustaches worn by Japanese military officers during the era in which Korea was part of Japan.  The moustache story sprang to life in mid-January, with stories in a wide range of English language news media, including CNN, the Sydney Morning Herald, the Guardian, and Stars & Stripes.  Most articles noted there might be an element of racism in the Korean complaints. Harry Harris was born to a Japanese mother and an American father in Yokosuka, Japan. Even some Korean commentators noted the racial aspect of Korean complaints, and went on to quote the observation by Harris: “There are many Korean independence leaders that have moustaches, but no one seems to focus on that.”  In fact, one of South Korea’s most revered independence fighters sported a moustache — An (Ahn) Jung-geun, who in 1909 assassinated Hirobumi Ito, former resident-general of Korea and four times prime minister, in protest against the pending annexation of Korea. Seoul now honors him on a postage stamp that, if anything, makes his moustache an even more prominent feature.  Another famous, or more properly infamous, Korean with a moustache is Hong Sa-ik (1889-1946), who was executed by the American military for his alleged role in atrocities committed against prisoners of war by prison guards under his command. He was one of a number of Korean volunteers who rose to the rank of general in the Imperial Japanese Army.  Racism aside, the real issue with the Ambassador’s moustache may be that it reminds South Koreans of their collaboration with the Japanese.  As for shaving his moustache to placate South Korean snowflakes (my words, not his), Harris has said, “I’m not sure — you would have to convince me that somehow the moustache is viewed in a way that hurts our relationship.”  I would suggest doing nothing, but if he thinks he must do something, he should adopt the moustache style associated with Salvador Dali. No Japanese governors of Korea, and no heroes of the Korean independence struggle, had anything comparable.  Conclusion    As an historian, Dudden should know that Seoul’s opposition to the Rising Sun flag is very recent. References are hard to find before 2009. Complaints started to appear only after a 2012 incident in which the alleged rising sun design on Japanese soccer uniforms was raised in the context of a controversial decision against a South Korean player.  In other words, South Korean opposition to the display of the Rising Sun Flag has essentially no relation to what Japan did during the 35 years it controlled Korea (1910-1945), and everything to do with contemporary South Korean politics and nationalism.  So too for South Korean whinging about Ambassador Harris. A detailed commentary on this issue by a Korean journalist writing in Japanese notes that the moustache issue flared up after Ambassador Harris expressed U.S. displeasure with President Moon Jae-in for his granting of blanket permission for any and all tourism to North Korea, something that is essentially sanction busting. |
| Archie Miyamoto | Opinion | Japan Forward | September 15, 2019 | Japan | Why Can’t South Korea Say Who’s Using High-tech Chemicals Bought from Japan? | There is a basic misunderstanding about the current trade friction between Japan and South Korea. Many see Japan’s refusal to sell South Korea three types of high-tech chemicals and the removal of South Korea from Japan’s white list of privileged trading nations as a form of retaliation for Seoul’s seizure of assets of Japanese corporations in a dispute over payments to wartime laborers.  The real issue, however, is the refusal of South Korea to provide accountability about the end users of increasing purchases of strategic materials.  South Korea has managed to change the narrative, blaming Japan for utilizing its economic advantage supposedly in retribution for political differences.  Why did Japan allow the issue to be changed from its suspected South Korean violation of the United Nations Boycott of North Korea to payment for World War II-mobilized laborers? How is it that an international security issue was suddenly characterized as economic retribution for reparations demanded by Seoul for Koreans mobilized during WWII?  Many are still unaware of the true reason for Japan’s concern about suspicious South Korean purchases of materials that can be used in the production of weapons. The fact is, there was a dramatic increase in the amount of strategic material purchased by South Korea after President Moon Jae In assumed the presidency.  The Moon administration itself may be unaware of any illegal shipments, but it has ignored Japan’s request for end-use confirmation to ensure Japan’s sale of the materials complies with international sanctions, which Seoul has resisted. This places the full blame on South Korea, not Japan.  It is my understanding that one of the items, hydrogen fluoride, which is used as etching gas for semiconductors, can also be used for nuclear enrichment. Japan’s repeated statements that there is a security issue that requires verification has fallen on deaf ears.  In all of this, the United States has taken a neutral stance, leaving the two parties, Japan and South Korea, to work out “historical issues.”  A Very Serious Problem for the World, Not Just Japan    However, the unverified end-use is not solely a problem for Japan. It is a very serious problem for the world. For Japan to have continued allowing unrestricted shipments of listed materials to South Korea would make Japan complicit in any part of it which is traded to North Korea. The U.S. cannot fail to see this point.  Another point needs to be made clear: Japan has not refused to sell the strategic items to South Korea for legitimate use. Sales are taking place when proper end-users are verified.  Although this issue seriously impacts on the U.S. national interest, perhaps present American concern for apologies for past and ongoing racial injustice has fogged our minds so that many feel sympathetic to Koreans who have marked themselves as “victims.”  Koreans are masters at playing the victimization card against Japan. Throughout its long history, Korea has been invaded and exploited many, many times, mostly by China. Yet, Koreans have a victimization complex only with Japan and make comments about Japan owing an apology at every opportunity.  The true facts of the 35 years the Korean peninsula was annexed to Japan are immaterial to them and to this issue. The actions South Koreans take as a result of their false perception of history does matter, however.  There is no other former colony in the world with such a victimization complex.  Vietnam, a part of former Indo-China which was under Japanese military occupation during WWII, recently showed its appreciation to the Emperor of Japan and the former Japanese soldiers who remained after WWII and assisted Vietnam in its war for independence from France.  In Indonesia, the thousand or so Japanese soldiers who remained and died assisting Indonesians in the war for independence from the Netherlands are interred at the Kalibata Heroes Cemetery in South Java.  Taiwan was under the control of Japan a decade longer than Korea, and yet, according to one survey, Japan is the country most admired by the Taiwanese people. The Taiwanese remember both the good and the bad of past occurrences, but they focus on the present and the future.  It is long past time for South Koreans to overcome their anti-Japan sentiments and victimization complex. Individually, of course, many have already done so. There are also many South Koreans who never hated the Japanese.  The South Korean perception of history disseminated by interest groups and the media, however, has been shaped to fit the political objective of the moment. Facts and past events have been changed as needed. Japanese today don’t spend time arguing that the annexation of the Korea Peninsula by Japan was proper or justified.  At the same time, the security threats facing Japan from external enemies then have changed, but not by much. Japan fought China, and then Russia, to evict those powers from the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria.  As an ironic aside, Count Hirobumi Ito — the Japanese statesman who opposed the annexation of Korea and whose adopted daughter Bae Jung-ja was Korean — was assassinated in 1909 by a Korean, Ahn Jung-gun. Today, the assassin Ahn is regarded as a national hero by South Koreans and even has a South Korean submarine named after him. The Chinese, who are masters at influencing other nations, have erected a statue honoring Ahn in Harbin, where the assassination took place, to play on Korean sentiments.  Count Ito didn’t think so highly of Ahn, however. As he lay dying, he said, “The dumb fool!” Count Ito was probably right. Ahn had assassinated the most influential Japanese friend Koreans had.    ‘Hate Fixation’ and Korea’s Errors in Dealing with the U.S.  With South Koreans, the hate for Japan seem to override reason. Politicians on both the left and right use this sentiment to unify their supporters. South Koreans are taught to hate Japan from childhood. This is encouraged by the government because hate for Japan seems to be an effective tool for holding the country together.  Hate for Japan will also spell their doom.  Almost every other word from South Koreans is about how Japan owes Koreans apologies. The recent president of South Korea, Park Geun-hye, said Japan owes apologies for a thousand years. This fixation on hate of Japan will result in South Korea making great errors in dealing with an ally of Japan, the United States of America.  It’s problems with Japan aside, one thing is certain: South Korea is not moving closer to the United States. Because of this “hate fixation” with Japan, South Korea has recently made a number of serious errors in its dealings with the United States.  Among Seoul’s mistakes was the cancellation of the intelligence exchange agreement with Japan, GSOMIA (General Security of Military Intelligence Information Agreement). Instant exchanges of intelligence are essential between South Korea and Japan to accurately track missiles launched from North Korea in a timely manner. South Korea’s cancellation of the agreement took place in spite of U.S. objections.  The other mistake Seoul made was to summon the U.S. ambassador to South Korea to admonish him against making comments on the GSOMIA cancellation, telling him this is strictly an internal Korean affair. Is tracking North Korean missiles strictly an internal affair when there are some 30,000 American troops in Korea and countless more in Japan?  Adding to this were South Korea’s recent military exercises on the disputed island of Dokto/Takeshima aimed at agitating Japan. These too were a slap in the face of the United States, which has been making a sincere effort to reduce tensions between Japan and South Korea.  It is past time for South Korea to take heed. The U.S. is not Japan. Japan is slow to anger and quick to forgive. The U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense have reacted to these arrogant acts by refusing to attend scheduled meetings in Seoul with Korean groups. South Korea may be unaware that President Donald Trump’s unpredictable nature should be their primary concern. It is their decision, and theirs alone now. Whatever President Trump does, he cannot be blamed for what happens to South Korea.  South Koreans should pray that my prediction proves false. My prediction? I say, “The Korean culture of falsifying history to suit political ends will seal their doom.”  Nor am I the only one to have said this. Bak Yeong Cheol said something similar in his book, Gojunen no Kaiko (Fifty Years of Recollections, Tokyo Osaka Yago Shoten publishers, 1929, in Japanese).  Speaking as a Korean, Mr. Bak said, “We have no one to blame but ourselves for the situation we find ourselves today.” And that was 90 years ago! |
| Duncan Bartlett | News Analysis | Japan Forward | August 18, 2020 | Japan | South Korea’s President Moon Tells Japan ‘Let’s Talk about History’ but Does He Mean It? | The President of South Korea Moon Jae In made some striking promises during his big televised speech to mark Liberation Day on August 15.  Tokyo During COVID-19: Green Space, Rise of Telework Bring New Lifestyle Opportunities    His main pledge was to work towards a peaceful reunification between South and North Korea, despite the fact that North Korea used explosives to blow up their joint liaison office in June. Since then, a united Korea has seemed a very distant dream.  Mr. Moon also said he is working toward creating an economically thriving Korean Republic “brimming with individual freedom and equality”. This ambition presents his left wing administration with an enormous challenge. Despite South Korea’s success in tackling coronavirus, its economy recently suffered its worst contraction in more than two decades, and social divisions run deep.  Talking to Japan    Mr. Moon made an important commitment in terms of international relations. He said he is ready for talks aimed at a reconciliation with Japan and that he wishes to establish “a bridge for friendship and future cooperation between the peoples of our two countries”.  To me, this sounds encouraging. After all, nearly all the South Korean and Japanese people I meet would love to see a better relationship between their nations. Japan could learn much from the South Koreans when it comes to tracing the spread of COVID-19.  Businesses have made it clear they want no further politically motivated trade disputes. A smooth trading relationship in East Asia is also important to other nations. For example, Britain struck a provisional free trade agreement with South Korea last year and is close to reaching a similar deal with Japan. The United Kingdom therefore wants to be friends with both countries.  For the United States, a rift between Japan and South Korea threatens to upset the delicate security balance in the Indo-Pacific region. The American defense secretary, Mark Esper, has called on the countries to resolve their differences and maintain trilateral security cooperation with the U.S.  Mr. Esper said during a trip to Asia last year: “My message to them was, look, I understand the historical issues, but we have far greater concerns that involve Pyongyang and Beijing.” He concluded by saying “We have to move forward.”  Obstacle to Detente    So is the way now open for detente between South Korea and Japan?  Listening to Mr. Moon’s speech carefully, I fear not. There is a major obstacle which stands in the way of his plan to patch things up with Japan.  It all comes down to what he said about the role of the supreme court in South Korea. That court has ruled that Japanese companies, such as Nippon Steel, should pay money to Korea in relation to the colonial era, which ended 75 years ago.  In his speech, Mr. Moon insisted that in South Korea, it is the supreme court which “has the highest legal authority and executory power” in the land. In other words, the buck stops with the court and not with the office of the president.  The government of Japan has made it clear it sees no legal reason why any Japanese company should cooperate with the ruling of the supreme court in Seoul. Nippon Steel has robustly challenged the court’s plan to liquidate its assets in South Korea. Tokyo says financial issues relating to the colonial period were settled decades ago.  By siding against Japan, the supreme court has placed a huge barrier in the path towards better international relations. Mr. Moon has not shown the political will to overcome it.  Let us suppose that the government of Japan sends a ministerial delegation to talk with Mr. Moon and his government. Even if negotiations go well, how could any deal be struck without the supreme court agreeing to it? I cannot see any viable basis for discussion here.  I’m sure it frustrates the diplomats on both sides to know that under present conditions, talks between South Korea and Japan would be a waste of time. Yet, if the Japanese side declines the talks, despite Mr. Moon’s claim he’s “ready” to talk to them, the South Koreans will surely blame Tokyo for the impasse.  The Message from Japan  I noticed that the speech by Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 15 carefully avoided any mention of South Korea. He vowed never to repeat the tragedy of war, while on the same day Emperor Naruhito expressed “deep remorse” over Japan’s wartime past.  Mr. Abe said: “Over the last 75 years since the end of the war, our country has consistently valued peace. Under the banner of proactive contribution to peace, Japan is determined to play an even greater role in resolving the challenges the world faces, working together with the international community.”  The Japanese government was cautious with regard to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, where Japan remembers its war dead. Some members of the cabinet went to the site. If Mr. Abe had joined them, it would certainly have raised the tension with South Korea, so he sent a ceremonial gift instead.  It would be wrong to see either Mr. Abe or Mr. Moon as authoritarian rulers who can do as they wish without repercussions, domestically or internationally. They are the elected heads of complex democracies and require the support of the public and the media to survive. Both are struggling in the opinion polls at the moment, particularly as the coronavirus situation in Asia worsens.  Noisy Protests    Emotions are running especially high in South Korea. There were huge anti-government street protests in Seoul over the weekend, despite police concerns that these could lead to the further spread of COVID-19.  Police say more than 20,000 people participated in the marches. The demonstrators included far-right groups, who shouted “President Out” and denounced the recent sexual abuse cases involving members of the ruling political party.  Meanwhile, the Korea Confederation of Trade Unions held a separate protest with around 2,000 workers, calling for closer ties with North Korea and a halt to the joint exercises between the South Korea army and the United States.  In Tokyo, there were small but noisy demonstrations, organized by far right groups who scorn the Japanese government. Although they represent the views of only a tiny minority of Japanese people, they nevertheless gain international attention and are eager to speak to foreign reporters. When their inflammatory comments are reported abroad, they inevitably stoke up anti-Japanese feelings.  In Search of a Solution  So how can we move forward from here?  In my view, it would be wise for the Japanese to keep the diplomatic channels open to South Korea. A forceful but discreet effort is needed to counter the extremism which is a threat to the interests of both countries.  I am pleased that Mr. Moon has spoken about a vision for the future which sees Japan and South Korea as partners and friends. But in order to make history and bring his vision to reality, he will need to see past the restrictive legal system in Seoul, which is doing a disservice to his government and marring relations with a peace-seeking Asian neighbor. |
| Aldric Hama | Features—book review | Japan Forward | April 1, 2020 | Japan | ‘The Burden of the Past: Problems of Historical Perception in Japan-Korea Relations’ by Kan Kimura | Many in South Korea blame the strain in relations between Korea and Japan on Japan’s alleged lack of contrition for its past. The current bone of contention is compensation for Koreans mobilized for the Japanese war effort.  Until recently, the comfort women issue riled peninsular activists. But what are all of these things really about, and how and why do they become headline-grabbing issues in the first place?  Kimura gives us what has been missing in the historical debate: the context of a particular bout of Japan-Korea tension, and an analysis of the events that led to a seemingly routine bureaucratic procedure — textbook review — becoming an international incident.  From History to History Wars    For Kimura, such incidents do not flare up without warning. Instead, Kimura says that certain preconditions must be fulfilled in order for a “historical perception dispute” to arise:  There must be multiple actors who attach meaning to the event.  Those actors must have different perceptions of the same event.  The multiple actors must recognize the existence of sufficient benefit to stir them to action.  What is clear from Kimura’s analysis is that history wars, surprisingly, are not substantially related to actual history. The Burden of the Past uses the comfort women and Japanese history textbook issues as case studies, but readers will likely be left with the impression that other historical perception disputes also have little to do with colonial era history per se.  In other words, so-called contentious histories do “not map directly to the era of colonial rule” and are not the result of an alleged ancient antagonism between the two countries. Nor can they be explained by simplistic narratives, such as Korean democratization of the late 1980s and early 1990s and Japan’s alleged “tilt to the right” during the 1980s.    The Importance of Context    What matters more than history, Kimura states, is context. The stages he proposes are “shaped” by social, political, international, and economic circumstances at the time.  Take the comfort women dispute, for example, which gained traction in Korea in the late 1980s, when Marxist class-struggle attitudes, along with social and political liberalization, began to be embraced by the South Korean masses. Popular South Korean thinking at the time was that the ruling class was merely a “puppet of Japan and U.S. giant capital,” which had no interest in serving the “interests of the Korean people.”  Kimura explains that Korean sex workers were viewed as the “ultimate embodiment of oppression and exploitation of the South Korean people,” as their “exploiters” were mostly foreigners — American soldiers and Japanese “sex tourists.” Thus, “South Korean women came to view the comfort women issue as part of their own issue,” and as one more grievance against the Japanese as well as the South Korean “ruling elites.”  This is not about history, then, but about contemporary geopolitics and economic ideology. It is important to remember that at the time, before the end of the Cold War, bilateral relations between Japanese and South Korean ruling elites were good. Japan had a national security interest in supporting South Korea as a frontline state against communism, and South Korean elites were overseeing the capitalist miracle on the Han.  Without this context, provided in abundance in The Burden of the Past, it is impossible to truly understand the disagreements between Japan and South Korea over historical issues.  New Realities in Northeast Asia    With the end of the Cold War, the Japanese government no longer placed a high priority on active cooperation with South Korea.  Domestically, because of a considerable loss of public confidence in the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan and electoral defeats at the hands of the Japan Socialist Party, the LDP lost their “ability to control the domestic discourse.” This paved the way for South Koreans to amplify and distort the talking points of their fellow travelers in Japan. The groundwork for the “history dispute” over the comfort women was in place.  Within South Korea, by the same token, President Roh Tae Woo and his ruling coalition were in a precarious position. Roh won the presidential election of 1987 with only about one-third of the vote in a four-way contest. His support in the National Assembly rested on the Democratic Liberal Party (DLP), an unstable coalition headed by rivaling personalities.  In 1992, following Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa’s state visit to Seoul, both the South Korean ruling and opposition parties voiced their support for comfort women “apologies and compensation.” One could surmise that both were merely pandering to the Korean people for votes for the upcoming general and presidential elections. The opposition, though, was in a better position to utilize the comfort women issue as a means to lash out at Japan and discredit the DLP, as leading personalities within the party had been associated with the South Korean government at the time of establishing the 1965 agreement normalizing relations with Japan.  This 1965 agreement “completely and finally resolved” the issue of compensation to Koreans during the Japanese colonial era, such that no new claims could be made, including by comfort women. No treaty, however, can put a stop to politics, and so the comfort women issue, separated from historical reality, became a pawn in political machinations in both South Korea and Japan.  Activists Take Advantage of Discord    South Korean and Japanese media and activists saw an opportunity in this fraying of elite control. In 1991, activists sued the Japanese government on behalf of Korean comfort women for compensation and an apology.  But why file suit for something that happened some 50 years in the past? The answer in part was that, before South Korean political liberalization, disputes of historical perception were pushed into the background by the ruling elites of both Japan and South Korea, on the understanding that such disputes were to be settled after tackling more pressing economic and security matters.  The changing economic fortunes of South Korea also impinged upon the historical perception dispute. This in turn helped fulfill Kimura’s third condition, that “multiple actors must recognize the existence of sufficient benefit to stir them to action.”  Japan had been a key trade partner for the ROK since the end of World War II, but Japan’s importance to South Korea diminished from the late 1970s. The collapse of Communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s further eroded Japan’s economic importance to South Korea, as China and former Communist nations were targeted for Korean exports. As a result, Japan could not effectively utilize its economic strength to obtain South Korea’s political cooperation.  For example, during the ROK-Japan trade dispute of 1992, South Korea sought a reduction in the trade deficit on terms that were impossible for Japan to accept. Japan rebuffed the South Korean demands. It is possible, Kimura argues, that the South Korean ruling elite saw the potential benefit in using the emerging popular support for the comfort women issue as a cudgel to force Japan to make trade concessions and as a signal to voters that the ruling party was doing everything it could in the name of Korean dignity and honor.  Soon after the Miyazawa state visit to Seoul in January 1992, the South Korean government demanded that Japan open “a full investigation” of the comfort women issue and “take steps including appropriate compensation.” As Kimura notes, however, the South Korean government phrased its demands in non-legal terms, a tacit recognition that demands for compensation were forbidden by the 1965 Japan-Korea normalization treaty.  Thus, a confluence of several events, rather than just one, brought the comfort women to the foreground.  From Apologies to Fact-Based Dialogue    Understanding the cause of disputes involving historical perception is necessary in order to formulate possible solutions, as alluded to earlier. But how one manages to formulate a solution is not entirely clear from the current book. Perhaps preventative measures to keep historical perception disputes from crossing all three of Kimura’s conditional thresholds could be instituted. Economic incentives for politicizing history could be zeroed out, for example, such that costs greatly exceed any perceived benefit.  What has proven to be least effective, however, is apologies. In order to move forward in true partnership, Japan and South Korea must learn the “history of their history”. Both sides must ground ongoing dialogue in context-rich facts about the past and come to understand the many ways in which the past has been used to score short-term advantage in present debates. |
| Chizuko T. Allen | Features—book review | Japan Foward | March 2, 2020 | Japan | ‘Anti-Japan Tribalism: The Root of the Japan-Korea Crisis’ | Since its publication in November 2019, the book Han-nichi shuzoku shugi: Nikkan kiki no kongen or Anti-Japan Tribalism: The Root of the Japan-Korea Crisis (Bungeishunjū) has quickly become a bestseller. As of the date of this article, it has sold approximately 400,000 copies.  This is the Japanese edition of the book under the same title in Korean, Pan-Il chongjok chuŭi, with a slightly different subtitle: “The Root of the Crisis of the Republic of Korea.” It is authored by six South Korean scholars led by Lee Young-hoon. Lee is a former professor of economics at Seoul National University and current president of the Naksungdae Institute of Economic Research in South Korea.  Since its July 2019 publication, the Korean edition has sold 110,000 copies, a huge number for a scholarly book in South Korea, making it a social phenomenon. The book encompasses many critical issues in modern Japan-Korean relations, ranging from Japan’s colonial policies in 1910-1945, to wartime Japan’s mobilization of Korean men and women, to the 1965 Japan-South Korea normalization treaty, to South Korea’s territorial claim of Tokdo or Takeshima.  Although I have spent years studying Korean history, reading about the extent of anti-Japanese distortions in Korean history narratives, as exposed in this book, was an eye-opening experience.  Taking On the History Lies Propagated in Post-war Novels  Lee begins his chapters by introducing the award-winning and bestselling historical novel, Arirang, authored by Jo Jung-rae in the 1990s.  The novel graphically depicts Japanese policemen’s summary executions of Korean farmers who resisted the authorities’ confiscation of land, and comments that 4,000 such executions took place during the Japanese land survey of Korea in 1910-1918. The novel’s portrayal of Japan’s brutality was widely circulated through creating movies, monuments, and even a French version.  Jo Jung-rae was not alone, however. Beginning in the 1980s, Sin Yong-ha, a renowned South Korean historian and sociologist, claimed that the Japanese land surveyors had driven Koreans out of farmland by holding “a surveying instrument in one hand and a pistol in the other.”  South Korean public schools have taught students that the Japanese colonial government used the land survey to plunder 40% of Korea’s agricultural land.  All these accounts were fabrications. In the 1990s, after his careful study of primary sources, Lee began publishing his findings that the Japanese colonial government had always operated according to the law and never conducted summary executions.  South Korean society and academia did not receive his criticism well, and many called him “pro-Japanese” — an insult in South Korea.  Another prevalent lie propagated in South Korea is about Japan’s plunder of Korean rice that allegedly caused food shortage in Korea. The book’s coauthor Kim Nag-nyeon, a professor of economics at Tongguk University in Seoul, points out that Koreans in fact exported rice to Japan proper for large profit, and imported cheap Manchurian grains for domestic consumption. He adds that the modern Japanese legal system, firmly transplanted in colonial Korea, protected property rights for all, and the Korean economy continued to grow until 1945.  Correcting the Record on Korean Wartime Laborers    Even more publicized today are the lies concerning Korean laborers in wartime Japan.  As seen in South Korea’s Supreme Court order of 2018, Koreans believe that wartime Japan, from 1937 to 1945, conscripted Korean men to labor in dangerous Japanese coal mines and construction sites for little or no wages. In reality, as discussed by Lee U-yeon, the book’s coauthor and researcher at the Naksungdae Institute of Economic Research, Japan’s better wages and employment opportunities attracted 100,000 to 200,000 Korean workers each year through the 1930s and the early 1940s. Moreover, there was little wage discrimination during the war, when Japanese companies were in need of Korean workers.  Koreans were conscripted for only eight months from the autumn of 1944 to the spring of 1945. Besides, the postwar Japanese government’s grant of $300 million USD to the South Korean government, following the signing of the 1965 normalization treaty, included compensations for damages received by wartime Korean workers, as pointed out by Ju Ik-jong, another coauthor of the book.  Addressing the Comfort Women Issue    The most damaging distortions of Korean history of the colonial era concern “comfort women,” wartime prostitutes who serviced the Japanese military abroad.  According to the Korean master narrative, imperial Japan forced 200,000 to 300,000 women, largely from Korea, to work as “comfort women” under brutal conditions. But Lee Young-hoon thoroughly refutes this myth through his in-depth research.  He traces the history of Korean “comfort women” all the way back to the Chosǒn dynasty (1392-1910), when women of the lowest social class were assigned to sex work for government officials and foreign guests, while upper-class women were required to maintain Confucian chastity. Ironically, the “sage king” Sejong (r. 1418-1450) introduced an early version of “comfort stations” that serviced military men at frontiers and remote locations, and this system lasted till the end of the 19th century.  When the Japanese took over Korea, they abolished the class system, but transplanted the Japanese licensed prostitution system, modeled after European precedents, in Korea in 1917. As the Korean economy grew in the 1920s and 1930s, the licensed prostitution employed an increasing number of young Korean women to cater to Korean customers.  Korean recruiters and brothel owners often paid advance money to heads of households, usually fathers, so their daughters worked under contract to pay off the debt. Korean brothels prospered in China and Manchuria, and many of them became “comfort stations” to service Japanese military men exclusively, upon the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937.  Concluding that the Japanese “comfort stations” were extensions of the licensed prostitution operated in Japan and colonial Korea, Lee rejects the notion of “comfort women” as sex slaves, on the basis of women’s freedom to send money home and retire or move upon the completion of their contract.  Lee estimates the total number of Imperial Japan’s “comfort women” to be around 18,000, based on the numbers of troops and contraceptives issued. He thinks that Korean women numbered approximately 3,600, a fraction of the inflated figures widely publicized today.  Importantly, Lee argues that Korean “comfort women” did not disappear in 1945 because the South Korean government placed their women in brothels dedicated to Korean and U.S. soldiers beginning in the Korean War. And they were called “comfort women” all the way to the 1980s.  These “comfort women,” as well as other prostitutes in South Korea, were bound by debt and exploited under conditions worse than their predecessors. Lee’s study points to hypocrisy in feminists and human rights activists who turn a blind eye to tragedies of many women within the Korean peninsula.  Fundamental Problems in Korean Nationalism    After decades of fighting with Korean nationalist narratives full of lies and distortions, Lee concludes that something is fundamentally wrong in Korean nationalism.  Scholars outside of Korea have regarded Korean nationalism as “ethnic nationalism,” sustained by the belief in common ancestry and bloodline, since the Stanford University sociologist Gi-Wook Shin’s 2006 publication. Lee’s quest goes much deeper.  According to Lee, Korean nationalism denies autonomy to individuals and forces them to submit to powerful leaders, who promote unchanging hostility to the neighboring state of Japan. He calls this nationalism “tribalism” to set it apart from nationalism in the West, where individuals’ independence and freedom are respected.    Korean tribalism, according to Lee, is reinforced by the Korean people’s worldview, which is deeply rooted in indigenous beliefs such as geomancy and shamanism.  Geomancy, a pseudo-science of Chinese origin, has come to facilitate the Korean people’s attachment to the land, by presuming flows of energy through mountain ranges. Even more important is Korean shamanism that has constituted the substratum of the Korean psyche, despite the dominance of Neo-Confucianism in the Chosǒn dynasty and the popularity of Christianity and Buddhism in present-day South Korea.  According to Lee, Korean shamanism is materialistic and rationalizes dishonesty because it upholds no absolute god, no clear distinction between good and evil, and no heaven and hell for the dead. In the world of shamanism, the spirits of the dead retain their lifetime status, such as the rich, the powerful, or the poor, and hover in this world to cause harm to the living.  Following nationwide attempts to counter North Korean assaults and achieve industrialization from the 1950s to the early 1980s, South Koreans found the freedom to pursue material gains. Beginning in the 1980’s, this freedom extended to the creation of stories about their past that were favorable to their anti-Japan tribalism identity. It was from this period that the statues of Korean “comfort women,” who were allegedly defiled by barbarous Japanese troops, became an inviolable totem. At the same time, anti-Japanese activists, endowed with the authority of shamans, dominated South Korea’s relationship with Japan.    Conclusion    While this book enlightens many Koreans and Japanese, it infuriates those who subscribe to the stories inspired by anti-Japanese tribalism.  No comprehensive criticism of the book has emerged so far, although some reacted with political slander and reiteration of their views, such as insistence upon holding the Japanese government responsible for the mobilization of Korean men and women for the Pacific War.  What we need is a broad discussion of anti-Japanese tribalism and its many consequences, which, according to the authors, are threatening to destroy South Korea. Researchers in the two countries and beyond should also explore North Korea’s direct and indirect impact on the rise of anti-Japan tribalism. |
| Takao Harakawa | News Analysis | Japan Forward | January 23, 2020 | Japan | South Korea Ramps Up Anti-Japan Propaganda Ahead of 2020 Tokyo Olympics | Anticipation is building for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, which take place in the approaching summer. Yet, once again, political propaganda aimed at building up anti-Japan sentiment has appeared in South Korea, trying to link the oncoming Olympiad to the 2011 nuclear accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power complex of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO).  On the afternoon of January 6, three posters that featured the official emblem of the Tokyo Olympics, along with a string of characters reading “Tokyo 2020” and Japan’s “Hinomaru” national flag, respectively, were pasted up on the fence surrounding the planned construction site for the Japanese embassy in Seoul. Each poster depicted a person clad in white protective gear running, carrying what appeared to be a torch.    According to South Korea’s Yonhap News Agency, the posters were intended as a “parody” of the Summer Olympics torch relay, meant to conjure up a scene of radioactive material being transported from the damaged TEPCO nuclear facility.      Who is Behind the Disinformation?    An entity called VANK (Voluntary Agency Network of Korea), a self-professed “cyber diplomacy” group, has taken responsibility for the posters.    The South Korean group has been engaged in anti-Japanese activities for years, including the uploading of videos to YouTube that insist the Rising Sun Flag of Japan is a “war crimes” flag. The private sector group has also urged government websites and publishers of school textbooks and maps in various countries to unilaterally re-designate the Sea of Japan, which lies between Japan and the Korean Peninsula, as the “East Sea.”    VANK founder-president Park Gitae said his organization had “created the parody posters to pray for the safety of participating Olympic athletes and spectators, along with Japan successfully holding the Olympics.” However, a VANK official explained to South Korea’s Yonhap News Agency that the group pasted up the posters “with the aim of raising an alarm,” highlighting the “safety problem of Fukushima’s radioactivity.”    Their clear intent is to link “radiation contamination” to the Tokyo Olympics to demean Japan’s international image.    The posters in question were removed as of January 8. Nevertheless, VANK has continued to spread photos of the posters and photos of so-called “postal stamps” and “coins” with similar designs through social networking sites and other media.        South Korea’s Radioactive Contaminants    Regarding the issue of “radioactivity,” the South Korean government obstinately pressed the issue of contaminated water at Fukushima No. 1 nuclear complex in various international forums in 2019. It seems to be part of the country’s effort to incite anti-Japan sentiment through the repeated use of inflammatory words and rumors.    With this in mind, at a summit with South Korean President Moon Jae In in late 2019, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told the South Korean president, “Our country has been transparent in providing the international community, including South Korea, with information relevant to the radioactivity issue, and our posture on this is certain to remain unchanged.”    In addition, mindful of the Moon administration’s continuing ban on food imports from Japan since the nuclear accident, the Prime Minister pointed out in the talks with Moon, “The quantity of radioactive substances in treated water from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power complex is less than one-hundredth of that found in effluents from a major nuclear power facility in South Korea.”    The Prime Minister prodded Seoul to deal with the issue “based on scientifically sound grounds,” according to diplomatic sources knowledgeable about Tokyo-Seoul relations.    The amount of treated water (after treating radioactive contaminants) at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear complex has continued to increase. But the groundwater pumped up from a group of wells near the reactor buildings is discharged into the sea only after the treatment has brought down the water’s radioactivity well below the permissible level strictly set by the government.    According to data made public by the government subcommittee studying the issue, the quantity of tritium released from the Fukushima nuclear complex’s subdrain system stood at about 130 billion becquerels per year in 2016.    Meanwhile, the amount of tritium discharged in the form of liquids by the Wolseong Nuclear Power Plant, one of South Korea’s topmost nuclear facilities, has been known to have reached approximately 17 trillion becquerels during the same year — about 130 times more than the radioactive substances released by TEPCO’s Fukushima nuclear facility.      Facts Speak for Themselves    Prime Minister Abe’s reference to “less than one-hundredth” of effluents from the major nuclear power facility in South Korea in his talks with President Moon was brought up in a low-key, understated fashion.    President Moon did not take issue with the Prime Minister’s remark, according to diplomatic sources in Tokyo and Seoul familiar with the two countries’ relations.    The embassy of Japan in South Korea has tackled the public misinformation by publishing radioactivity readings in microsieverts per hour for the Japanese cities of Fukushima and Iwaki (both in Fukushima prefecture) and Tokyo, as well as Seoul. The radioactivity measurement readings on January 7, for example, stood at 0.131 in Fukushima, 0.060 in Iwaki, 0.037 in Tokyo, and 0.151 in Seoul. The figures show that the radiation level in Seoul was about four times as high as that in Tokyo.    Scientifically, the radioactivity readings in all four cities are well below the levels of concern for human health. But if, as the VANK official alleges, Tokyo faces a “safety problem of radioactivity,” then he should be intellectually honest enough to admit that the radioactivity problem in Seoul is about four times more serious.    Japan, for its part, should continue to counter these arguments with the facts, logically and scientifically. |
| Tsutomu Nishioka | Opinion | Japan Forward | December 27, 2019 | Japan | Japan Activists Incite Koreans to Sue Based on Lies About Forced Labor | Despite the 1965 Agreement and payments to mobilized laborers, anti-Japan activists, including Japanese lawyers and extremist labor union members, have traveled to South Korea since the 1990s, looking for plaintiffs, encouraging them to sue Japanese companies and agreeing to bear the expenses.  South Korean statue to Mobilized Korean Laborers Gets it Wrong – they moved for jobs, they weren’t forced  Gunkanjima, where many wartime jobs were held by Japanese, Koreans and others  Actual Korean labor photos show different story from South Korea’s claims of forced labor  Despite the 1965 Agreement and payments to mobilized laborers, anti-Japan activists, including Japanese lawyers and extremist labor union members, have traveled to South Korea since the 1990s, looking for plaintiffs, encouraging them to sue Japanese companies and agreeing to bear the expenses. Lawsuits were filed in Japan, demanding reparations from Nippon Steel and Sumitomo Metal Corporation, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, and Nachi-Fujikoshi.    In these cases, the Japanese courts ruled against plaintiffs and the activists promoting them. Nevertheless, the activists and supporters continued their activities, persistently holding demonstrations at the headquarters of Japanese companies and criticizing the companies in the local media.  Settlements That ‘Settle’ Nothing    Bending to the pressure of demonstrators, Nachi-Fujikoshi agreed in 2000 to an out-of-court settlement of the case against it. The company ended up paying a sum of over ¥30 million JPY to three plaintiffs, five former colleagues, and the Association for Pacific War Victims and Bereaved Families, whose president was Kim Gyeong Suk.  This did not resolve the matter, however. As soon as the out-of-court settlement was paid, another new plaintiff appeared from South Korea, and Nachi-Fujikoshi was sued again.  When at First You Don’t Succeed, Try Another Court    Meanwhile, in all court cases in Japan where the companies refused to settle out of court, the companies won. Nevertheless, activists and their plaintiffs did not give up, taking their cases next to the South Korean courts.    The plaintiffs also lost in the South Korean trial courts in their lawsuits against the companies Nippon Steel and Sumitomo Metal Corporation, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, and Nachi-Fujikoshi. They appealed, however, and in May 2012 the South Korean Supreme Court abruptly reversed the lower court decisions and sent the cases back for further hearings, in violation of both international law and common sense.    The South Korean Supreme Court’s ruling was based on the theory that Japan’s annexation of Korea was illegal. It declared that “grounds for Japanese rulings were premised on the legality of Japanese colonial rule of the Korean peninsula and Korean people.”    The court added its view that “forced labor itself during Japanese imperial occupation was illegal and in direct conflict with the core values of the Constitution of South Korea.” The ruling claimed decisions by the Japanese courts “violated the good public morals and social order of South Korea,” and thus, the South Korean courts did not have to recognize their validity.    On that extraordinary basis, the high court ruled against the Japanese companies, which then filed an appeal again.    As one would expect, the Chief Justice and several other justices of the Supreme Court, along with then-president Park Geun Hye and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, felt that issuing a final judgment on the case would shake the foundations of Japan-Korea relations, and would not be in South Korea’s national interest. Thus, they attempted to coordinate behind closed doors.    But in the face of public opinion tainted by anti-Japan discrimination in the mass media, they lacked the courage to overturn the 2012 ruling. The trial dragged on.      Activist ‘Justice’ Under the Moon Administration    Immediately after President Moon Jae In took office in May 2017, he took the exceptional step of appointing Kim Myeong Soo, a well-known left-wing district court judge, as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Chief Justice Kim then promptly initiated a criminal investigation into the actions of his predecessors who had delayed finalizing the 2012 ruling.    The former justices who had headed the Supreme Court under the previous administration were then arrested. The previous chief justice was targeted as a suspect, even having his private vehicle searched.    By August 2018, Chief Justice Kim had appointed new justices to the Supreme Court and held a comfortable majority. The Supreme Court then sent the Nippon Steel and Sumitomo Metal Corporation case back to the South Korean superior court for trial in accordance with the findings of the Supreme Court’s ruling. Likewise, the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries trial was sent back for trial in September that year.    The Moon Jae-in administration has continued to implement policies that arouse anti-Japanese sentiment without consideration of their bilateral obligations under international law or the diplomatic consequences of their actions.    This is the reason why rulings that violate international law and common sense have been handed down one after another in succession. The Japanese companies lost their cases in October and November 2018.  Conclusion    Japan’s mobilization of Korean wartime laborers was legal by Japanese and international standards, not an inhumane criminal act as it has sometimes been misconstrued. Mobilized workers were hired by private companies on two-year contracts and paid wages on a par with those of Japanese. Tales of forced or slave labor are lies invented well after the war.    Likewise, all individual claims for unpaid wages and compensation for deaths were properly settled under the 1965 Agreement. The Korean government has already implemented compensation for individuals based on the 1965 Agreement on two separate occasions.    Present-day Japan-Korea relations must be approached on the basis of this fundamental reality. Yet, unfortunately, these facts are not well-known in the international community. It is my hope that this essay will contribute to awareness of the basic facts of this issue. |
| Editorial Board, The Sankei Shimbun | Editorial | Japan Forward | November 25, 2019 | Japan | It’s Time to Put Japan-U.S.-South Korea Cooperation on a Firmer Footing | On November 22, South Korea officially notified Japan that it was holding off on the termination of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) which it had announced in August.  The arrangement, which includes sharing intelligence on North Korea, was scheduled to become inoperative at midnight of November 22. The last-minute reprieve means the agreement has been automatically extended for one year.    Seoul also agreed to suspend procedures in the appeal of its complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO) concerning Japan’s stiffened export controls on shipments of sensitive materials to South Korea, which the Japanese government imposed out of national security concerns. Instead, the two governments will engage in a policy dialogue.  “Cooperation between Japan and South Korea, as well as among our two nations plus the United States, is of the utmost importance,” Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Friday, November 22, after the South Korean decision was announced. “South Korea seems to have made its decision from a strategic point of view,” he added.    It was certainly proper for the government of President Moon Jae In to rescind its foolish decision to scrap GSOMIA. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the move by the Moon administration to terminate the intelligence-sharing mechanism has inflicted serious damage on trilateral security cooperation among Japan, the United States, and South Korea, and indeed on the U.S.-South Korea alliance itself.  Pyongyang has ignored calls to denuclearize and continues to launch ballistic missiles. In the meantime, China arrogantly continues its naval expansion. And Russia is stepping up its military activity in the Far East.    Repairing the Damage to the Alliances    Rebuilding effective security cooperation among Japan, the United States, and South Korea, as well as the Washington-Seoul alliance, is a matter of great urgency.    In order for this reconstruction process to be effective, President Moon himself must reflect deeply on his erroneous stance of emphasizing emotional anti-Japanese rhetoric above protection of the security of his own country and the Northeast Asian region. Instead, he should shift to championing true cooperation with Japan and the United States.    The Moon administration had previously taken the position that it would terminate GSOMIA unless Japan removed the more stringent curbs it had imposed on the export of sensitive items to South Korea, emphasizing that it was a bilateral Japan-South Korea issue only. In fact, Chung Eui Yong, director of South Korea’s National Security Office, had gone so far as to say, “This has nothing to do with the United States-South Korea alliance.”    The truth, however, is that GSOMIA plays a vital role in strengthening the deterrence roles played by the respective alliances of Japan and the United States, and of the U.S. and South Korea. The absence of a mechanism for sharing military information between Japan and South Korea would have created obstacles, hindering the force readiness posture of the U.S. military in the event of a crisis in the Northeast Asia region.  This is why Washington strongly pressed the Moon administration to reverse its position on withdrawal from GSOMIA, arguing that eliminating bilateral Japan-South Korea information sharing arrangement would only please Pyongyang, Beijing, and Moscow.    Seoul Must Quickly Resolve Its Violation of International Law    The tightened controls on the export of certain sensitive materials from Japan was necessary in order to prevent them from being diverted for uses prohibited under international law. The existence of these protections is not something that is negotiable.    If Seoul is dissatisfied with the status quo, it should welcome a policy dialogue to explain the measures it proposes to remedy the deficiencies within it current export regime.  As Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi has pointed out, the greatest issue outstanding between Japan and South Korea is the decision of a South Korean court on the “forced laborers” question, which clearly runs counter to international law. The Moon administration needs to quickly resolve this problem. |
| Yasushi Tomiyama | Opinion | Japan Forward | September 20, 2019 | Japan | Japan Needs to Explain to the U.S. Its Policy on South Korea Better | The United States government has taken a definite position of strongly criticizing South Korean President Moon Jae In for his decision to terminate the agreement with Japan known as GSOMIA, the General Security of Military Information Agreement. The action expands Seoul’s disputes with Tokyo into the military and security field.  Tokyo During COVID-19: Green Space, Rise of Telework Bring New Lifestyle Opportunities    At the same time in the U.S., the Trump administration and congressional leaders may not yet sufficiently understand Japan’s concerns behind the deteriorating bilateral relationship with South Korea. The government in Tokyo must make a greater effort to deepen Washington’s understanding of Japan’s position.      Washington Objects to Seoul’s Termination of GSOMIA    “We are deeply disappointed and concerned,” U.S. State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said, conveying an official response by the Trump administration to Seoul’s decision to end GSOMIA.    The pact has been useful in facilitating the sharing of information between Japan and South Korea, primarily on matters such as North Korea’s military movements. The South Korean decision would result in an “increased risk to U.S. forces,” Ortagus said.    Randall Schriver, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, said in a speech, “We are concerned it may reflect serious misapprehension on the part of the Moon administration regarding the serious security challenges we face in Northeast Asia.” He called on Seoul to withdraw the decision.    At the recent Group of Seven summit in France, U.S. President Donald Trump branded Moon as unreliable. According to multiple Japanese media reports, he quoted North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as describing Moon as a liar, and questioned why such person became president. Trump might have indicated that he would not forgive anyone for making a decision that poses a danger to U.S. forces.    In a press release, U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Eliot L. Engel, a Democrat from New York, said that he was “deeply concerned” about Seoul’s decision to terminate GSOMIA.    “It is irresponsible to allow the escalating tensions to hinder practical national security-oriented cooperation,” he said, condemning Moon for the decision.        U.S. Doesn’t Understand Japan’s Toughened Export Controls    However, it should be noted that the U.S. does not necessarily side with Japan over the broader issues making up the Japan-South Korea dispute.    Washington has remained neutral over Japan’s exclusion of South Korea from a list of countries subject to preferential treatments regarding export control, which has led South Korea to take corresponding action against Japan.    Schriver said that the Japanese and South Korean measures to strengthen export control against each other might have been “politically motivated.” “I think our preference would be that they, in fact, do remove one another and return to a more normal trading relationship,” he said.    Tokyo has explained that its decision to toughen export control came because Seoul refused to hold bilateral talks on appropriate export control measures and has provided an inadequate explanation of the end user in some cases.    Tokyo said the decision was not a countermeasure or retaliatory action against the Moon administration’s inaction on South Korean Supreme Court rulings ordering Japanese companies to compensate former South Korean workers for their wartime labor in Japan, despite the issue having been settled in the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco.    Schriver’s mention of possible political motivation suggests there is a failure of effective communication of Tokyo’s explanation throughout the Trump administration.    “It is disappointing to see that the Japanese government has chosen to retaliate against South Korea using trade actions,” Engel said in his earlier statement, indicating that he too took the Japanese export control action as an act of retaliation.    The Japanese embassy in Washington needs to be more shrewd and coherent in explaining the government’s position so that the Trump administration and the U.S. Congress fully understand the reasons for Japan’s action. |
| Robert D. Eldridge, PhD | Opinion | Japan Forward | August 22, 2019 | Japan | Japan-Korea Relations Should Overcome History | I first began thinking about writing this commentary six months ago. In the interim, however, Japan-South Korean relations have plummeted to their lowest levels since the first half of the 1950s, when the Republic of Korea seized the Takeshima Islands. Daily, the bottom continues to fall out.  During these months, relations between the two countries have deteriorated even further due to the handling by the South Korean government of the October 2018 Supreme Court’s decision to uphold a lower court’s decision on wartime “forced labor.” The October 2018 tension was followed by a Republic of Korea warship locking its radar on a Japanese patrol plane in December and the unsuccessful conclusion of discussions over that potentially dangerous incident.    The situation was further worsened due to South Korean appeals to the World Trade Organization to support its restrictions on seafood and agricultural imports from the Tohoku region as a result of the Fukushima nuclear reactor accident, and Japan’s decision to restrict high-tech exports to South Korea.    The latter country has started a tourism boycott of Japan as well, and there are references to ending cooperation in intelligence and other military matters. Further, the ROK government announced removing Japan from its most favored export partners list.    Is This An Alliance?    All of these actions place the United States, the ally of both of those countries, in a highly difficult situation in Northeast Asia. Things are so bad that U.S. President Donald J. Trump lamented: “South Korea and Japan are fighting all the time. They’ve got to get along because it puts us in a bad position…. They’re supposed to be allies.”    When the president of the United States has to make comments like these, it is time for Japan and the Republic of Korea to do something different.    Ending the Perpetuation of Hatred    For Japan and the Republic of Korea to continue to fight over World War II, from which much of the sentiment behind the above frictions arise, undermines regional security. But even worse, this continuous fighting over history perpetuates unforgiveness and lingering hatred, and shackles future generations of Koreans and Japanese with a history they can’t change and keeps them from achieving a bright and prosperous future they deserve.    This is not to say we forget history and learn nothing from it. We must never forget and never repeat the horrific acts of others who made devastating decisions that inflicted pain and suffering upon millions of people. War is the most horrific of all human events — it dehumanizes all participants. None of the countries or its peoples are completely innocent — this includes the United States, Japan, and, yes, Korea.    I recently wrote “Why Not a Joint Ceremony at Sea to Remember the Battle of Okinawa?” for JAPAN Forward, noting how the United States and Japan have both sought to overcome history, commemorating events together that the bitter enemies 74 years ago would have found impossible to believe.    Most symbolic, in 2016, U.S. President Barack Obama visited Hiroshima and embraced former victims of the atomic bomb, and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe paid an official visit to Pearl Harbor.    To me, however, the quiet side-trip at that time of Prime Minister Abe and his delegation to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), the agency responsible for locating and identifying missing U.S. personnel from past conflicts, nearby was the most significant part of his trip. It suggested an emphasis of Prime Minister Abe and his team to truly address the recovery of Japanese remains.  Cooperation and Recovery    With its motivated staff, DPAA has been increasingly helping allies and former enemies identify and locate their own missing, providing educational, technical, and financial support for them.    This cooperation is especially important in the Indo-Pacific region, where 75% of the 82,000 American service members missing from previous conflicts are. For example, the United States has used DPAA and its predecessor organizations to successfully collaborate with former adversaries, such as Vietnam and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (i.e., North Korea), to recover American remains, but also build confidence with those nations.    This was likely the reason the POW/MIA mission was included in the agreement signed between President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-un during their Singapore summit in June 2018.    Of note, the United States and the Republic of Korea have been recovering Korean War remains in South Korea through bilateral efforts for many years. Their cooperation and experience have certainly informed multilateral personnel accounting efforts.    Long overdue cooperation between the United States and Japan has begun in recent years, too. This is especially important because Japan, which has an estimated 1.12 million still missing, has failed to proactively use DNA testing and other scientific methodology in identifying remains (emphasizing volume over quality), or invest properly in such projects and expert personnel, which has been the subject of critical news reports recently here in Japan.    Another reason this cooperation is important is that the warriors of both countries died in heated battle together at the same site. So, not only have the United States and Japan been moving beyond history, but they are also working together on identifying remains of each other’s precious lost personnel.      The Broader Importance of Working Together    Historians and forensic specialists are aware that, in addition to the remains of American and other U.S. allies, there also are the remains of Korean (which includes both North and South) and Formosan conscripts and laborers that are collocated and commingled with the Japanese war dead still missing on battlefields throughout the Pacific.    For this reason, it is essential that Japan and at the minimum, the Republic of Korea, work together to improve the recovery and identification process in a way that no single country can do by itself. This bilateral cooperation can lead to trilateral and quadrilateral cooperation too, which is also necessary in this and other matters.    Last year at this time, DPAA Director Kelly McKeague stated at Chidorigafuchi, the national memorial for the unidentified remains of Japanese soldiers and sailors, “There is no greater way for former enemies to show their friendship than to help each other in recovering their fallen soldiers, identifying them, and returning them to their families and nations.”    If this is true, then it is even more true when soldiers, such as Japanese, Korean, and Formosan, fought on the same side and in the same places.      A Way to Begin the Healing    Most readers probably know, or at least sense, that things between Japan and the Republic of Korea will unfortunately get worse before they get better. Cooperation in gathering and identifying remains of their fallen loved ones may be a way to begin the healing process (as well as to promote further cooperation between Japan and Taiwan).    At the minimum, it needs to happen once the healing begins. Hopefully, this process will start soon, as we are coming up on the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. Finding and identifying the remains of all who died, regardless of country of origin, will help bring closure to many families on both sides of the conflict who have never fully been at peace.    Rather than fighting over history, Korea and Japan should be overcoming history. If the United States and Japan can do it, Korea and Japan should be able to do it as well. |
| Sotetsu LEE | Opinion | Japan Forward | August 21, 2019 | Japan | The First Step Towards Normal Relations is Removing Japan’s Special Treatment of South Korea | President Moon Jae In clearly adopted a defiant stance in response to the Japanese government’s decision to delist South Korea from the list of Group A countries (“white countries”) subject to minimum controls regarding the export of sensitive materials and goods.  Pursuit of Clean Oceans Driven by Locals in Ishikawa    Upon Japan’s decision, Moon declared: “Japan, the perpetrator in this case, rather than showing remorse, is running around raising a ruckus. We won’t stand idly by and let them get away with it.”    Here Moon was up to his old tricks, not giving any specific reasons for why the revision to Japanese regulations were wrong. His statement was nothing more than an emotional appeal, with Japan ipso facto the “perpetrator.”    President Moon evoked the memory of Korean national hero Admiral Yi Sun-sin, whose naval forces wreaked havoc among Japanese samurai invaders sent by warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi during the late 16th century. He wished to create the impression that he too would resist to the end against Japanese intimidation.    The anti-Japan refrain was quickly picked up by members of the power establishment, including public servants and leaders of the ruling Democratic Party of Korea.    Influential Seoul University law professor and former Senior Presidential Secretary for Civil Affairs Cho Kuk (Cho resigned from the latter position on July 26) has been posting anti-Japanese diatribes on his Facebook page nearly daily.    Cho has been trying to get people take sides in the controversy. On August 18, he posted, for example: “In this situation, it is not a question of progressive or conservative, leftwing or rightwing, rather it is whether you are a patriot or serving the interests of the enemy.”    He also wrote: “South Koreans who reject, criticize, distort or cast aspersions upon the decision of the Supreme Court [ordering Japanese companies to pay compensation to Korean former laborers] should naturally be considered ‘pro-Japanese elements.’”      Moon Administration Ignoring the Facts    South Korea’s exclusion from the “white list” does not mean that Japanese companies can no longer sell items in question to that country.    The South Korean government seemed incapable of rationally addressing Japan’s concerns about several previous cases in which sensitive items exported to South Korea ended up in unknown destinations. Therefore, Japan is simply requiring Korean companies buying sensitive materials to “declare” where the materials will end up and for what purpose they will be used.    These are the exact same regulations that are applied to similar exports to China, Taiwan, and the ASEAN countries. Be that as it may, the Moon administration has demanded that it should continue to receive special treatment.    President Moon asserted that the new measures “are designed to cripple the growth of the South Korean economy.” He also seemed to be threatening Japan when he makes statements like: “Japan’s intent in that regard (interfering with South Korea’s growth) will never succeed. Let me warn Japan that in the end damage to the Japanese economy is sure to be greater.”        Proposals for Building Normal Relations    As things stand, if it is to build normal relations with South Korea, Japan needs to start by taking the following three steps:    Japan should not submit to dredging up the past. By that I do not mean that the past should be forgotten. My point is that the reason Seoul-Tokyo relations have been on the rocks since President Moon took office is that Japan has become ensnared in Moon’s gambit to make everything about the “past.” So, in cases where past history should have been considered settled, Japan now finds itself wallowing in a historical swamp.    Last February President Moon stated, “Wiping away every tinge of pro-Japanism is the first step on the road to creating a just country.” This statement alone is ample evidence of Moon’s distorted perception of history.    Moon is, in effect, saying that having friendly feelings towards Japan is inherently “unjust.” Does that mean that the postwar friendship between South Korea and Japan based on shared democratic values has meant absolutely nothing?    We have to conclude that Moon views prewar Japan and postwar Japan as one and the same, or he has jumbled them up in his mind. Therefore, he seems determined to purge anything that to him might resemble a “pro-Japan” stance.    As a result, he appears prepared to make pariahs of his many countrymen who have not sought to dwell on the past but instead want to deal with Japan as it is today, by labeling them “pro-Japanese.”    Moon has in this fashion up until now done all he can to use “past history” as a means to whip up anti-Japan sentiment among the Korean people by not just legitimizing it, but by equating “anti-Japan” with “justice.”    Isn’t it time for Moon and company to get over their practice of using Japan bashing for political purposes?    Quarrels are inevitable. Up until now, when Seoul has gotten into any kind of dispute with Tokyo, it has not argued in terms of the actual relationship, but instead has sought to play the history issue card and take on the role of “victim” to appeal to international public opinion.    That holds true for the current export regulations controversy, as it first tried to enlist Washington as a mediator. Failing at that, Seoul then appealed to the World Trade Organization, even though that organization had nothing to do with the matter at hand. Next, it complained about Japan’s “unreasonableness” at a working level meeting of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.    In other words, Seoul is doing everything it can to enlist international support wherever it can find it. That being so, as things now stand, the Moon government shows no inclination whatsoever to deal with actual bilateral relations and address Japan’s concerns.    Still, Japan should not give up in its efforts to get the relationship back on a realistic track.    Seoul does not merit any kind of special treatment. After the war, there was a period when, out of a sense of atonement for its past actions, Japan viewed South Korea in an especially favorable way.    Many Japanese business leaders tried to help South Korea’s economy develop. If it had not been for such cooperation from Japan for South Korea’s steel, motor vehicle, electronics, and semiconductor sectors, the miraculous development of the South Korean economy might never have been possible. Japan should not be shy in pointing this out when arguing its position.    Unfortunately, South Korea can no longer be a “special country” for Japan. One reason for that is because the South Korean economy has grown to be as big as it is today.    It can’t be denied that the special treatment shown towards Seoul in the past has created a structure of dependence in bilateral relations.    It is only if Japan-South Korea ties become a truly mature, normal bilateral relationship that we can eliminate this structure of dependence. Isn’t the removal of Seoul from the list of “white countries” the first step towards achieving that goal? |
| Archie Miyamoto | Opinion | Japan Forward | July 30, 2019 | Japan | At the Crossroads: Can South Korea Survive Without Japan? | On July 3, 2019, Japan halted the unrestricted export to South Korea of three high-tech materials essential for the production of semiconductors and display panels. This will impact severely on Korean makers.  Tokyo During COVID-19: Green Space, Rise of Telework Bring New Lifestyle Opportunities    Japan also plans to remove South Korea from the white list of countries extended preferential export treatment. This could affect over a thousand other items.    To understand why this is taking place, it is necessary to go back in time over 100 years.      The Background of Korea-Japan Relations    In 1910, Korea was annexed by Japan in a mutual Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty. The Japanese call it a benevolent unification, Koreans refer to the period as the most brutal colonization in history.    Whether Korea was “annexed” or “colonized” by Japan, it was not an equal unification of two countries. And the fact that there was no military invasion and that the royal family of Korea became members of Japan’s royal family does not make it less so — Japan controlled Korea.    Call it what you will, but there are a number of contradictions and unsubstantiated allegations in the Korean version of this period. The Korean version of history has caused hate and resentment by Koreans against Japan, which are the root causes of the present crisis.    Evidence of Acceptance and Respect for Koreans    Japan’s treatment of Koreans differed from how European nations governed their colonies. Japan’s policy was to unite Korea with Japan as one nation, even to the extent of encouraging Koreans to assume Japanese names, doing away with the distinction between the two races. Koreans consider this to be genocide.    A glaring difference from European powers was that a significant number of Koreans became officers in the Imperial Japanese Army. Seven were general officers. In no Western nation has any individual from a colony risen to the rank of general and commanded troops of the occupying power.    One of the Koreans was Hong Sa-ik, a lieutenant general in the Imperial Japanese Army. He entered the Imperial Japanese Military Academy soon after annexation and graduated as a lieutenant in 1914. He commanded a Japanese brigade in China as a major general and was promoted to lieutenant general in the Philippines.    There were four Korean lieutenant generals and three major generals who were Korean. Some sources say there were nine Korean generals. There were many Imperial Army officers of lesser rank who were Koreans. A number of them later held high positions in the South Korean government and military.    The first 10 chiefs of staff of the South Korean Army were former Japanese officers. Others include former President Park Chung-hee; Prime Minister Chung Il-kwon (1964-1970); Provost Marshal General (later defense minister) Won Yong-dok; and South Korean generals Park Sun-yup and Kim Suk-won. There were many others.    Whether Koreans who served in Japan’s military were or were not traitors or collaborators is not the point. The fact is, immediately after annexing Korea, Japan was accepting Koreans into its armed forces as officers commanding Japanese troops.      Sand Beneath the Comfort Women Story    This is hardly the treatment of a brutalized colony.    Yet, Koreans believe that 200,000 women, mostly Koreans, were abducted by this same Army as sex slaves. How could this be possible? Collaborators or not, these Korean officers were outstanding men.    In addition, there were thousands of Koreans serving in the Imperial Japanese Army. For Japan to abduct Korean women as sex slaves would have been the height of stupidity, inviting mutiny and even civil war.    No Korean would remain silent when their young women were being abducted as sex slaves. Koreans are not cowards.    As a matter of fact, other than the uncorroborated statements of former comfort women, there is not a single documented case of forced recruitment by the Japanese of Korean comfort women.    In the last few years, a number of books have been published in English, citing primary source evidence, refuting earlier books on the subject vilifying Japan. For those interested, the most comprehensive book on Japan’s comfort women system is Comfort Women and Sex in the Battle Zone by Dr. Hata Ikuhiko of Japan (Hamilton Books, 2018). The book was originally published in Japanese in 1999. It was updated and translated into English by Dr. Jason M. Morgan in 2018.    This is a comprehensive book providing exhaustive details about the comfort women system and the controversies surrounding this issue. No serious commentator on the comfort women issue should be without this book. It is available on Amazon.      Treaties and Agreements Between Korea and Japan    All claims by the Republic of Korea (South Korea) against Japan were settled between the two countries in 1965 with the signing of the “Treaty of Basic Relations Between Japan and the Republic of Korea.” South Korea and Japan confirmed that the problem concerning people’s rights and the interests of the two contracting partners and their people and claims between the two have been settled “completely and finally.”    South Korea agreed to demand no further compensation, either at the government or individual level. There was further agreement that any future issue would be referred for arbitration.    In 1977, and again in 1983, Seiji Yoshida wrote a fictional account of himself as a Japanese soldier being involved in the rounding up of comfort women in Korea. This was accepted as gospel and his account added great momentum to the South Korean attack against Japan.    By the time the truth emerged that the account was fictional, the damage had been done. It had been published by a major Japanese newspaper and not only Koreans, but Americans, and even the United Nations were taken in. Some say the Kono Statement by then-chief Cabinet secretary Yohei Kono formally admitting to forced recruitment of Korean comfort women resulted from Yoshida’s fictitious account. Many Koreans still accept Yoshida’s account as factual.    Since all issues had been settled in the 1965 Agreement, in 1995, Japan set up the Asian Women’s Fund, a government sponsored civilian-operated funding campaign to provide funds to former comfort women. About $5 million USD was donated by the Japanese citizens and $40 million USD by the government of Japan.    This failed to settle matters and, in 2015, Japan and South Korea reached a formal agreement resolving the matter “finally and irreversibly.”    Recently, the President of South Korea arbitrarily decided to revoke this treaty.      Fool me once… fool me twice… fool me thrice….    Aside from the comfort women issue, South Koreans have been clamoring for settlement of payments to laborers mobilized during WWII to work in Japan’s factories.    This issue had been settled between Japan and the Republic of Korea in the 1965 treaty. However, in 2018, the Supreme Court of South Korea ruled that nation-to-nation international agreements have no legal impact on claims by individual citizens and ruled in favor of Korean citizens suing Japanese companies for reparations.    Japan ignored the ruling and the government of the Republic of Korea has allowed South Korean individuals with grievances to seize the assets of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Nachi-Fujikoshi Corp., and Nippon Steel.    Japan has asked that the matter be referred for arbitration, as stipulated in the 1965 Agreement. South Korea, however, refuses arbitration and refuses to halt the seizure of Japanese assets.    South Korea has proposed another country-to-country agreement, but Japan refuses to take the bait. Japan considers any treaty with South Korea as worthless. Fool me once, fool me twice, fool me thrice….      Falsified History Fostering Resentment and Hatred    With the seizure of assets of Japanese firms in South Korea, Japan’s patience has run out. The immediate problem is for South Korea to resolve this issue before its high-tech industries, which rely heavily on Japan, are forced to cease operating.    Emotional outbursts and boycotting Japanese goods will only make matters worse. Other restrictions by Japan will soon follow.    South Korea will encounter serious economic problems if it isolates itself from Japan. Japan too will suffer, but Japan can survive without Korea.    The basic cause of these issues is the Korean culture of fostering hate and resentment against Japan. Seoul has refused to accept Japan’s hand of friendship which has been extended since South Korea came into being.    Without Japan’s past economic assistance, South Korea would not be where it is today. Without Japan’s future assistance, can South Korea survive? Two nations, so close in so many ways and yet so distant!    There is a saying, “Any nation that falsifies its history is doomed!” Will South Korea be next?’ |
| JAPAN Forward | News Analysis | Japan Forward | July 29, 2019 | Japan | Kono: Japan Export Controls for Security Purposes, Not Countermeasures Against South Korea | On July 20, Foreign Minister KONO Taro posted on his private blog an article on “Japan-South Korea Relations,” where he offers his thoughts on the state of the bilateral relationship. In the article, he notes that the relationship is currently “facing thorny issues.” Specifically, he writes, the controversy over the issue of former civilian workers from the Korean Peninsula when it was under Japanese control has reached the point where it is “the question of whether or not promises between sovereign states will be kept.” He also explains that Japan’s new controls on the export of certain sensitive products to South Korea have nothing whatsoever to do with the above-mentioned issue, and that they definitely are not intended as “retaliatory countermeasures.”  Japan-South Korea relations are currently facing thorny issues, including the one of former civilian workers from the Korean Peninsula to Japan.    The crux of the issue is the question of whether or not promises between sovereign states will be kept.    The judgments of South Korea’s Supreme Court on this matter are not just a domestic issue for South Korea. If promises at the government-to-government level are broken due to such domestic issue, then it would make the building of stable international relations impossible.    In [June] 1965, after 14 years of tortuous negotiations, Japan and the Republic of Korea signed a treaty under which Tokyo agreed to engage in economic cooperation with Seoul in the form of over ¥300 million JPY in grants and another ¥200 million JPY. [Article 2] of the agreement also clearly stipulates that issues concerning the problem of property, rights, and interests of the two parties and their nationals (including juridical persons) are “settled completely and finally.”    The eight-item “Outline of the Claims of the Republic of Korea against Japan” that the South Korean side presented to the Japanese side during the negotiations included “accrued wages of the requisitioned Korean[s]” as well as “compensation of damages by war to the requisitioned Korean[s].”    Moreover, “Agreed Minutes to the Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Cooperation” make it clear that any claim falling within the scope of the eight items are included in the problems concerning property, rights, and interests as well as concerning the claims that had been “settled completely and finally.” The record is crystal clear despite what anyone may claim.    Furthermore, during the treaty negotiations, the Korean side’s demands for compensation included everyone who might have been requisitioned workers, and it was explained that this was meant to compensate for psychological and physical suffering that such workers had been subjected to.    In response, the Japanese side proposed that payments should be made to individuals, but the Korean side in turn said that since the claims were being made on a government-to-government basis, payments within South Korea itself should be made through domestic arrangements.    Later, in August 2005, the South Korean government stated that the ¥300 million JPY in grants Japan had provided under the claims agreement had included compensation for victims of “forced labor” as part of funds for compensation for “the historical fact of suffering.” In effect, the South Korean government thereby agreed that it had a moral responsibility to spend an adequate amount of the grant aid in order to provide victims of “forced labor” with relief.    That, in a nutshell, is the background to this issue. What is happening now is that after 50 years Seoul is unilaterally overturning the pledges made by our two governments, pledges that formed the legal basis for the normalization of relations between our two nations.    It is my strong hope that the South Korean side will approach this issue from the standpoint of international law and bilateral state-to-state relations, and respond in a manner appropriate for a responsible member of international society.    Convinced as I am that the South Korean people need to be aware of this historical background, I explained all of this in a written interview published in the South Korean press.    At the same time, Japan referred the dispute to arbitration as provided for in [Article 3 of] the Agreement, so as to solve the dispute in accordance with international law. We therefore asked the South Korean government to fulfill its obligations under the Agreement by agreeing to arbitration. However, the South Korean side refused, which in effect constituted another violation of international law.    We admittedly have a bilateral issue in this regard.    However, the issue of former civilian workers from the Korean Peninsula has absolutely nothing to do with the recent update by Japan of its controls on certain exports. That is because the Japanese export control authority is applying such update solely from the standpoint of security.    The recent re-evaluation concerning materials and technologies was conducted based on sensitive criteria as to whether or not the items in question can be diverted to military uses. Indeed, it is the duty of authorities in every country to apply appropriate controls to such exports.    Even though South Korea’s export control system could not really be judged totally adequate, after 2004 Japan had treated South Korea as a “white country,” meaning that procedures were simplified as compared to normal export screening.    That was to be based on a relationship of trust between the authorities in our two countries, where a continuous consultation between them is held and the Japanese authorities can apply the simplified procedures adequately.    Nevertheless, in the past three years the South Korean side has paid no heed to requests from the Japanese side, and there have been several inappropriate cases concerning the application of export controls involving South Korea.    For that reason, Japan had no choice but to conclude that it could no longer maintain procedures for exports to South Korea for such items that were more simplified than the standard rules. So, at that point we decided that we needed to reconsider the procedures applied to exports to South Korea.    In any case, this reconsideration is solely based on concerns about export controls. For that reason, no one should make the mistake of concluding that the changes are in any way “retaliatory countermeasures” connected to the issue of civilian workers from the Korean Peninsula. |
| Takahiro Namura | Opinion | Japan Forward | July 23, 2019 | Japan | When Some Korean Intellectuals Exaggerate, Distort History with Japan | There was “no racial discrimination concerning wages” against conscripted workers from the Korean peninsula during the wartime, according to Dr. Lee Woo-youn, 52, a research fellow at Korea’s Naksungdae Institute of Economic Research.  Pursuit of Clean Oceans Driven by Locals in Ishikawa    Lee spoke on the issue at a symposium at the United Nations Office in Geneva on July 2.    We wanted to know more, and sent Dr. Lee an interview request. He sat down with the Sankei Shimbun and shared his view and the results of his research work.    “The fundamental principle of Korea-Japan relations that must be upheld” is the 1965 agreement between Japan and South Korea, resolving all issues between the two and settling all issues of claims, according to Dr. Lee.    He told us, the final judgment of South Korea’s highest court on October 30, 2018, put South Korea at odds with the 1965 agreement by ordering a Japanese company to pay reparations in a lawsuit brought against the company by so-called conscripted workers. The case is a cause of increasing tension in the Japan-Korea relationship, along with South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s call for Japan to abide by the court’s decision.    Lee further pointed out that the judicial branch of government and the Moon administration are under the misconception that the mobilization of labor during wartime was “forced labor” or “slave labor.”    “In the backdrop is an emotional ‘anti-Japanese’ racism that sees Japan as the enemy, no matter what,” Lee continued.    ‘Intellectuals that Distort History are Irresponsible’    Lee explained that “a fundamental problem with the distorted historical viewpoint “of certain academics, journalists, and ‘conscience intellectuals’ in Japan” who have influenced the historical awareness of Korean people. “They assert that Korean laborers were forced to work without pay, or that they were paid a much lower salary than Japanese people due to racial discrimination — but this is an outright lie,” Lee said, based on his research results.    “The irresponsible words and deeds of Korean intellectuals who exaggerate and distort history have resulted in misunderstanding among most people,” Lee argued, “and this needs to stop.”    Likewise, he admonished Japanese people who readily make apologies to South Korea surrounding historical issues. “These are needless acts of sympathy that do more harm than good to Korea-Japan relations,” Lee said.    Lee, who serves as a spokesman of the “Group Against Anti-Japanese Doctrine,” also has tackled the issue of unrelated photographs of victims in Korean textbooks depicting people who are not Koreans.    He is against erecting statues of comfort women and conscripted workers. Although he has been harassed and his work obstructed, Lee said, “I want to restore history based on the truth of Korea and Japan and thereby contribute to good neighborly relations between the two neighbors.” |
| Hideo Tamura | News Analysis | Japan Forward | July 10, 2019 | Japan | Japan Beefs Up Export Controls to Counter South Korea’s Political Manoeuvring | Japan’s action slapping export restrictions on trade with South Korea earlier in July brought to mind images of Abashiri Bangaichi (The Walls of Abashiri Prison). It is a Japanese film series starring movie legend Ken Takakura, who played a man who demonstrates patience and tolerance, and then more patience over a long time, before finally launching into a counterattack.  On July 1, the Japanese government took South Korea off the list of countries friendly to Japan and entitled to exemptions from complicated export procedures on the part of Japanese exporters.    Effective July 4, Japanese exports to South Korea of three high-tech items have been subject to tangled, time-consuming permission procedures. These are fluorinated polyimide, the material used in organic electroluminescent (EL) displays for such products as televisions and smartphones, and resists and etching gases (high-purity hydrogen fluoride) that are essential in the manufacturing of semiconductors.    Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry cited the export curbs as a precaution taken because of the “lack of dialogue over a fixed period between Japan and South Korea on trade controls involving national security.”    However, the truth is that Japan decided on the action as a de facto countermeasure due to the perception that no progress is in sight on resolving the issue of Japan’s so-called wartime era “forced recruitment” of laborers from the Korean Peninsula, as reported in the July 1 morning edition of The Sankei Shimbun.  Japan’s global market share of the three products is particularly high. Japanese production accounts for about 90% of the world share of fluorinated polyimide and resists, and about 70% of etching gas.    It is rumored that the toughening of export regulations against South Korea could deal a serious blow to production activities of leading South Korean manufacturers, such as Samsung Electronics Co. a semiconductor giant, and LG Electronics, which is a leader in the manufacturing of flat-screen, high-definition TVs. South Korea, for its part, is reported to be considering its own countermeasures.    Some analysts might well call the situation the breakout of a Japan-South Korea high-tech trade war, though it is small in scale compared to the trade war between the United States and China. The export restrictions have drawn fire from South Korea, which called Japan’s move an “act of trampling international free trade rules.”    The Nihon Keizai Shimbun’s July 2 editorial raised concerns that the export-curbing step could harm the reputation from abroad of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s administration, which has been seen as a standard-bearer of free trade.      A Predominantly Political Issue for Seoul    The reality of international trade today is that it is not black or white. In its trade with Japan, South Korea has long placed restrictions on the import of home appliances, automobiles, and semiconductors with the aim of nourishing its own domestic industries. At the same time, Seoul is on record as depending on imports from Japan for parts and materials that cannot be procured through domestic technologies.    Japan, in light of the special relationship with South Korea, effectively acquiesced in this bilateral trade relationship, which has been unilaterally advantageous to Seoul. It was a politically-motivated calculation.    Over the years, South Korean industries have gradually caught up with Japanese technologically. In particular, South Korea’s world market shares have surpassed Japan in sectors such as TVs and automobiles, as well as semiconductors and smartphones. The quality of a limited number of South Korean parts and materials, however, still lags behind Japan.    Faced with South Korea’s negligence in honoring bilateral treaty commitments on the comfort women issue as well as the wartime recruitment of South Korean laborers, Japan had no other choice but to act. In doing so, it struck at one of the few weak points in Seoul’s trade relations with Tokyo.    The graph shows year-on-year changes in South Korea’s dependence on Japanese imports, broken down by all imports and imports of semiconductors from Japan. It demonstrates that South Korea’s trade dependence on Japan has dropped sharply over the past 20 years, with both overall imports and semiconductors from Japan now reduced to less than 10% of South Korea’s imports from all sources.    This means South Korea does not need to rely on imports from Japan as it did before, including in the semiconductor sector. In the process, successive South Korean administrations have ceased worrying about aggravating relations with Japan by recirculating history issues.    At the same time, South Korea has been deepening its reliance on China in trade. The result is that Seoul has made a point of abasing itself when it comes to ties to Beijing.    On the other hand, in the eyes of South Korea, relations with Japan have become nothing more than a tool for political maneuvering.    The Japanese side has just begun to fight back. |
| Shimpei Okuhara | Opinion | Japan Forward | May 11, 2019 | Japan | ‘Forced Labor’ Photo Disseminated by South Korean Media is Actually Postwar Photo of a Japanese Coal Miner | South Korean media have been promoting a photograph of a man working in a coal mine, alleging it shows a Korean conscripted to work under horrendous conditions on “Gunkanjima” (Hashima island in Nagasaki Prefecture) during the war.  However, on April 3, the photographer who took the controversial photograph debunked the claim and confirmed to the Sankei Shimbun that his photo actually shows a Japanese coal miner in a different location.  Pursuit of Clean Oceans Driven by Locals in Ishikawa    The photograph has been widely disseminated in the South Korean media and by activists as alleged documentary evidence to back up claims of extensive use of Korean forced labor during World War II. The photographer, however, says he took the photo at a coal mine in Fukuoka Prefecture in 1961, long after the war was over.    The photo shows a shirtless coal miner lying flat in a claustrophobically narrow, low-roofed coal seam. He is using a pickaxe to chip away at the coalface. It was taken by well-known photographer Koichi Saito (84), who is an honorary member of the Japan Professional Photographers Society.    According to Saito, he snapped the photo of the miner in question when on a photojournalism trip through the extensive Chikuho coalfield in Fukuoka Prefecture in the summer of 1961. It was carried in the October 19 issue of the now discontinued weekly magazine Shin Shukan, and other media outlets.    Saito strongly affirms that the photo was taken 16 years after the end of the war and that the man in question “was Japanese.”    Many Korean media organizations and books have used this particular photograph as alleged evidence that Koreans were subjected to forced labor on Gunkanjima. A panel is devoted to it, for example, at the National Museum of Forced Mobilization under Japanese Occupation in Pusan, which was established to buttress South Korea’s contention that Korean laborers who were mobilized by the Japanese authorities during the war were mistreated.    Just last year, the December 16 online edition of the influential South Korean daily Chosun Ilbo carried this same photograph to illustrate an article on forced deportation of workers from Korea to work in Japan. The caption read “Korean Engaged in Coal Mining.”    In all of these cases, the photo was used without Saito’s permission.    Saito discovered that his photo was being used in a manner that perverted the facts after the release of the South Korean movie “Gunkanjima” (The Battleship Island) in July 2017, an action film depicting an uprising by exploited Korean laborers working on the island. An acquaintance informed him about it.    “My photo shows a Japanese hard at work,” Saito says. “The South Koreans have used it as they like to advance their own arguments. What’s the use of even protesting?”    Professor Munehiro Miwa, who teaches business and economic history at Kyushu University, has done considerable work on the conscripted labor issue.    “The South Korean side starts with the image that the Korean workers brought to Japan were forced to work under atrocious conditions,” he explains. “So, based on that premise, without adequately verifying its background, they probably jumped at the chance to use it (the photograph).”    The photograph has been used as “proof” in the ongoing controversy between South Korea and Japan over the “deportation for forced labor.” However, it should be noted that on March 21, South Korea’s Ministry of Education admitted the true origin of the coal miner photograph, confirming that it was actually a photo of a Japanese worker. At the same time, the Ministry also signaled that it was ready to revise primary school textbooks that use the photograph as an illustration of “forced labor.”    An article carried in the April 12, 2017 morning edition of the Sankei Shimbun rebutted many of the South Korean charges about the conditions Korean workers labored under on Gunkanjima. The same article revealed that the photo of the mine worker in question had been carried in a book titled A Pictorial History of Chikuho Over a Century (Kyodo Shuppansha, 2006).  The accompanying caption in the book stated that the photograph portrayed what mining was like in the middle of the Meiji Period (1868-1912). Later reporting clarified that the photographer was Koichi Saito and the photo dated from 1961. |
| Tsutomu Nishioka | News Analysis | Japan Forward | January 19, 2021 | Japan | Unjust South Korean Court Ruling on Comfort Women | Another awful court ruling has come down in South Korea. On January 8, the Seoul District Court ordered Japan to pay 100 million KRW (about $90,000 USD) to each of 12 former comfort women for pain and suffering.  International law provides for the principle of sovereign immunity, which means that any sovereign state is immune from the jurisdiction of any foreign court. The principle constitutes the basis of diplomatic relations, where states respect each other’s sovereignty. Nevertheless, the Seoul District Court claimed that the comfort women system represents an anti-humanitarian crime to which the sovereign immunity principle cannot be applied.  Double Mistakes Regarding Historical Awareness  The ruling claimed that the comfort women system represents an anti humanitarian criminal act that was implemented deliberately, systematically and extensively by the Japanese Empire, ran counter to international norms, and was enforced against Korean plaintiffs on the Korean Peninsula occupied illegally by the Japanese Empire.  The claim includes double mistakes and is unacceptable.  First, the comfort women system was part of then legal public prostitution systems. This fact has recently been academically certified even by South Korean scholars based on numerous historical documents.  Second, Japan’s rule of the Korean Peninsula was legal, conducted within the framework of then- international law, and different from any illegal occupation.    Origin of the Historical Errors  In fact, however, the two historical mistakes originated in Japan. In the early 1990s, anti-Japanese groups represented by the Asahi Shimbun newspaper and lawyer Kenichi Takagi spread a lie. They said that a public system created to mobilize female workers for the war effort during World War II was used for recruiting Korean comfort women.  They gathered plaintiffs in South Korea and filed lawsuits in Japan. A fake rumor that 200,000 comfort women were coercively recruited as sex slaves was disseminated around that time.  Since the 1980s, Haruki Wada (now a professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo) and anti-Japanese scholars in Japan devised a theory that Japan’s rule of Korea was unlawful, and continued a campaign to have the Japanese government admit the theory. Then, the theory spilled over into South Korea.  To criticize the latest ruling, therefore, we must not only assert the principle of international law on sovereign immunity, but also rebut the two lies originating from Japan. In 2018, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs put Japanese and English versions of a rebuttal against the theory of coercive recruitment of 200,000 sex slaves on its website. In November 2020, it added a Korean language version.  RELATED READ: Comfort Women: Were They Prostitutes or Sex Slaves?  Weak Studies and Message Delivery on Comfort Women  But studies supporting public relations by the Japanese government have been very weak. A total of 47 studies on the comfort women issue have been done with financial support from the education ministry, but none of them pointed to mistakes of the “coercive recruitment of 200,000 sex slaves” theory. The Japan Institute of International Affairs, an affiliate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, created a Territory and History Center in 2017 to promote research and send international messages on historical awareness and other issues in 2017, but the Center has not handled the comfort women issue.  I and like-minded scholars founded a small organization named the Historical Awareness Research Committee in September 2016 for the purpose of promoting studies and improving public relations to protect Japan’s and our ancestors’ honor. South Korea also sees the emergence of courageous persons of good sense who study historical facts and counter anti-Japanese groups.  The time has come for all of us to think hard about developing arrangements to strengthen international public relations on the realities of the comfort women system. |
| Mizuki Okada | Features—book review | Japan Forward | March 26, 2019 | Japan | Naoki Hyakuta’s Bestseller Tells Us the Real Reason Japan Should Apologize to South Korea | Japanese author Naoki Hyakuta has just published a new book, Now is the Time to Apologize to South Korea, Then Say Farewell.  This paperback book, which came out on March 1 from Asukashinsha Publishing, is already a bestseller in Japan. Why has it achieved such popularity while the relationship between Japan and South Korea continues to sour?    This pocket book achieved good sales quickly, reaching number two on the bestseller list by March 2, a day after it came out, according to a search at the Yaesu Book Center’s parent store.    On Amazon Japan’s book review site, the book has maintained its top position in the category of South and North Korean geographic and regional studies as of Sunday, March 24.    This book follows Hyakuta’s earlier volume on the subject, Now is the Time to Apologize to South Korea, also published by Asukashinsha Publishing in June 2017. Two years later, his new book points out that Koreans did not ask for modernization of the Korean peninsula by the Japanese government during the time of Japan’s annexation of Korea. Mr. Hyakuta calls it “extensive backseat driving,” and the Japanese should “apologize for that.”    He exposits examples of “backseat driving” by the then-governor general of Korea, such as construction of railways, improvement of roadways, dam building, and the diffusion of education throughout the country, among other development policies carried out during the annexation years.    This new pocket book also touches on current areas of friction, including recent developments concerning the comfort women issue, requisitions made of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Japan by the chairman of South Korea’s Congress on the issue of Korean women who were so-called comfort women, and the South Korean Navy’s radar lock-on of Japanese Self-Defense Force aircraft. In explaining his thesis concerning these disputes, he brings up the point, “the major cause is South Korea’s lying.”    At the same time, he says, “Japan is responsible.” This is because, as he emphasizes, in spite of Japan’s 35-year-annexation of the peninsula, Japan never taught Koreans the morals of what is important to become responsible citizens.    Moreover, in spite of South Korea’s repeated lying since its independence, the Japanese government has not scolded or corrected South Korea. This, he says, again demonstrates “the Japanese government’s accountability.”    Amazon Japan’s website selling the pocket book includes many comments on various aspects from readers. Here are a few of them:    “I can comprehend very well how much Japanese ancestors had taken efforts for the Korean peninsula and South and North Koreans.” This kind of feedback that shows understanding of issues surpasses 100 entries.    “You would ridicule sarcastic writing by Mr. Hyakuta. However, for Korea watchers, there is nothing new but already-known things.” This commentator evaluated the book as a three on the five-star scale, dropping in such neutral feedback.    Customer reviews of the book on the Amazon site’s five-star scale, as of Sunday, March 24, ranged in distribution as follows: five stars – 85%, four stars – 9%, three stars – 3%, two stars – 0% and one star – 3%.    As the relationship between Japan and South Korea worsens, there is no small number of people who pick up the hottest book to deepen their understanding of both countries and their relationship, or to seek answers as to why Japan is repeatedly required to apologize to South Korea.    Mr. Hyakuta notes in the book’s “Afterword” that he is considering whether to make translations into both English and Korean (Hangul). If he does, he suggests he may upload those onto free websites. |
| Tsutomu Nishioka | Opinion | Japan Forward | February 8, 2019 | Japan | A Rebuttal to President Moon’s Claims on Wartime Korean Workers in Japan | South Korean President Moon Jae In, in his New Year press conference on January 10, made a remark that cannot be shrugged off about wartime Korean workers in Japan. I take this opportunity to rebut his remark.  Pursuit of Clean Oceans Driven by Locals in Ishikawa    President Moon said: “Problems that the treaty (the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea) apparently failed to resolve have surfaced gradually. These are not problems that the ROK government has created.”    The remark indicated that President Moon thinks Japan is responsible for resolving the wartime Korean workers problem.    But the agreement accompanying the basic Japan-South Korea treaty specifies bilateral claims as resolved. Considering this specific agreement and the principle that international law overrides domestic law, including judicial rulings, compensation for wartime Korean workers is South Korea’s domestic problem.    During the period of Roh Moo Hyun administration, which Moon Jae In joined as secretary to the then-president, a public-private joint committee concluded that funds for compensation for wartime Korean workers were included in the $300 million USD in grant aid that South Korea received from Japan through the claims agreement. This clarified the South Korean position that South Korean government was responsible for additional compensation for wartime workers mobilized by Japan.    In his New Year remark, President Moon thus reversed the South Korean government’s conclusion — one in which he himself was involved 14 years ago.      Unacceptable Blame on Japan    Taking up the principle of separation of powers at the press conference, President Moon also said, “The administration must respect the decision of the judicial branch, and Japan, even if being dissatisfied with the decision, must recognize that the administration has no other choice.”    The remark amounted to anti-Japan blame that cannot be accepted either.    Before the unreasonable rulings by the South Korean Supreme Court, Japan’s Supreme Court had already made a final decision turning down a suit by the same South Korean plaintiffs.    When the Japanese legislative branch ratified the 1965 treaty and claims agreement, it enacted a law nullifying South Koreans’ claims to Japanese citizens (including corporations). Under Japanese legal order, therefore, the South Korean plaintiffs’ current move to seize a Japanese company’s assets amounts to infringement of private property rights, or theft.    The Japanese government abides by Japan’s judicial decisions as a matter of course. If proxies for the South Korean plaintiffs visit Japan, Japanese police under Japanese legal order are responsible for interrogating them as criminals.    The Japanese company in question, if leaving the infringement of its property rights untouched, may be held responsible by its shareholders for the loss.      South Korea Destroyed Bilateral Relations    The South Korean Supreme Court has ruled that, as approval of a Japanese ruling “runs counter to South Korea’s good morals and other public order,” it cannot approve the Japanese ruling or certify its validity in South Korea.    The South Korean court then dismissed the Japanese court ruling as going against South Korean public order and morals. This puts the two countries into an abnormal situation where Japanese legal order is confronting squarely a subsequent South Korean legal order.    Countries conclude treaties to settle past events and avoid such confrontations. Nevertheless, the South Korean judicial branch has deviated from this path and made abnormal rulings running counter to an international treaty. Moreover, President Moon has been defiantly urging Japan to abide by South Korea’s abnormal rulings.    I would like to emphasize that Japan’s public and private sectors should resolutely argue that it is South Korea, not Japan, that has destroyed normal bilateral relations. |
| Japan Times, Editorial board |  | Japan Times | August 28, 2019 | Japan | Japan-South Korea relations: Where did it all go wrong? | The Argument is a feature dedicated to promoting dialogue and deeper understanding on contentious issues by introducing various viewpoints.  More than half a century has passed since the normalization of Japan-South Korea ties in 1965. Ahead of the 55th anniversary in 2020, the relationship between the two countries has hit rock bottom.  In addition to historical issues, tensions have spilled over into economic and national security matters. As animosity between the two governments grows, friendly ties between the Asian democracies have also taken a hit, with South Korean consumers boycotting Japanese products, and some tourists rethinking their vacation plans.  The two neighbors have had a tumultuous relationship for hundreds of years, but had enjoyed more amicable ties in recent years until the relationship went south last fall.  Last fall, the South Korean Supreme Court made a series of rulings ordering Japanese companies to compensate Korean wartime laborers. Tokyo balked at the decisions, arguing that the compensation issue had been settled under the 1965 Japan-Korea Basic Treaty and the claims settlement agreement.  In November, Seoul disbanded the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation, which was established under a 2015 bilateral agreement to pay compensation to former “comfort women” who suffered under Japan’s wartime military brothel system. Japan argued that Seoul’s actions violated the agreement and trampled on the spirit of reconciliation.  Then in December, a South Korean destroyer beamed an anti-aircraft radar on a Maritime Self-Defense Force reconnaissance plane, further heightening tensions.  South Korean President Moon Jae-in walks past Prime Minister Shinzo Abe prior to a group photo session at the Group of 20 summit in Osaka in June. | BLOOMBERG  South Korean President Moon Jae-in walks past Prime Minister Shinzo Abe prior to a group photo session at the Group of 20 summit in Osaka in June. | BLOOMBERG  Mutual trust has continued to deteriorate.  South Korean President Moon Jae-in said he would respect the court’s decision in spite of pleas from Tokyo to honor the 1965 agreement. South Korean National Assembly Speaker Moon Hee-sang, meanwhile, demanded that then-Emperor Akihito personally apologize to comfort women.  Just when the situation seemed to hit rock bottom, things got even messier in July, when Tokyo took measures to strengthen its export controls of key semiconductor materials to South Korea, and later announced its decision to remove its third-largest trading partner from its “whitelist” of countries that get preferential treatment in trade. In response, South Korea pulled out of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).  The international community, including the U.S. government, has watched the deterioration of bilateral relations in disbelief.  With no end in sight, what is at the root of the abysmal relations, and who is the “culprit” of the deep freeze in ties — Tokyo or Seoul?  Is the trust in postwar Japan-South Korea relations gone? Will the tension last? Two experts gave their views for this feature compiled by senior editor Masahiko Fukada. |
| Ri Sotetsu | Opinion | Japan Times | August 28, 2019 | Japan | Moon's anti-Japanese policy at the root of fractured relations | South Korean President Moon Jae-in, whose distorted perception of Japan has led to the current deterioration in bilateral ties, has stepped up his administration’s harsh anti-Japanese policy since Tokyo decided to implement stricter export controls on its neighbor.  Moon falsely believes that Japan is an “assailant” that shows no remorse for its colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula. From his perspective, Moon cannot let this assailant again hurt Korea — this time economically.  Moon’s biased, unfounded beliefs are directed at the very foundation of modern Japan-South Korea relations. After the end of Tokyo’s 1910-1945 colonial rule and through a series of twists and turns, the two countries eventually inked a 1965 treaty establishing diplomatic relations and agreeing to the final settlement of problems in regard to property, claims and economic cooperation.  Though a trained lawyer, Moon denies the legitimacy of the treaty and agreement not from a legal standpoint, but from a political one. Seen through the eyes of leftist politicians like him, it’s a treaty tainted by the compromises of pro-Japanese military strongman Park Chung-hee.  Moon has denied all things related to Park, while also targeting the country’s first president, anti-communist Syngman Rhee, and other conservative governments that were not democratically elected, labeling them long-standing evils.  Why? Because Moon thinks that unlike North Korea — which fought against the Japanese — the conservatives in the South after the war developed the country’s wealth and power through its alliance with pro-Japanese collaborators — rendering it illegitimate.  From Moon’s perspective, only leftist governments led by Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun were legitimate. Moon wants to rewrite the treaty signed by conservative forces, and ultimately blow up Japan-South Korea relations, whose foundation rests on the pact.  But even the president cannot invalidate a treaty. As a lawyer, Moon knows this, so he is instead employing a strategy to besmirch the treaty by reviving the wartime labor and “comfort women” issues.  Foreign Minister Taro Kono had every right to criticize South Korea by saying that Seoul’s decision to do so would “upend the postwar world order.”  And when considering the chronology of events, it’s clear that South Korea has been the cause of the current state of conflict.  Last fall, the country’s Supreme Court ruled that some Japanese companies must pay damages for Korean wartime laborers. Japan, however, argues that compensation for the workers was settled by the 1965 agreement, which states that there are three steps for solving a conflict when one erupts.  This January, in accordance with the agreement, Japan requested diplomatic arbitration between the two. After South Korea failed to respond to this request, Japan asked to set up an arbitration committee in May. After South Korea again ignored the request, Japan called for third-party arbitration in June. But once again, Seoul did not respond by the July 18 deadline.  In short, Japan has attempted to solve the conflict based on the rule of law, while South Korea has rejected each attempt to do so.  Meanwhile, Japan took gradual steps in response: stricter export controls of semiconductor materials on July 1 and an Aug. 2 decision to scrub South Korea from its so-called whitelist of countries entitled to receive preferential treatment in trade.  It’s understandable that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s distrust and anger toward Moon have accumulated. But it’s wrong to regard the stricter export controls as an act of “retaliation against Moon.”  When Japanese companies export dual-use supplies that can be diverted for military use, the Japanese authorities have a simplified export procedure to expedite shipping to reliable, whitelist countries.  On the other hand, materials should not be sent to untrustworthy countries if they can be diverted for the development of weapons of mass destruction. As part of the new rules, exporters are requested to confirm their exports’ final destinations and usage.  But this is a security measure, not a retaliatory move.  It should be noted that after Japan announced the stricter export controls on July 1, Moon floated the idea of countermeasures at the Blue House just a week later.  Then there was a week of silence.  Moon was likely considering the possibility of a more moderate solution via diplomatic channels. But, looking ahead to April’s election for the South’s national assembly, that path was ruled out, and instead he sought to boost his approval ratings in the poll’s run-up.  This was proven to be the case with the revelation of a report issued on July 30 by the ruling Democratic Party of Korea’s Institute for Democracy think tank. The report, entitled “Public Opinion on Korea-Japan Conflict,” was secretly distributed among members of Moon’s ruling party, according to reports in South Korean media. The report concluded that, through public opinion analysis, anti-Japan attitudes would lead to an election win.  Since then, the ruling party has doubled down on its anti-Japanese stance, with Moon accusing Japan of being impudent immediately after the South’s removal from the whitelist. Senior South Korean officials have posted severe criticism of Japan on Facebook, while ruling party lawmakers exploited the Fukushima nuclear disaster, making claims that they had gotten “nosebleeds when going to Japan” and calling for the “boycotting of the Tokyo Olympics.”  Moon’s distorted ideology and his goal of victory in the April election have combined to intensify the anti-Japan policy emanating from Seoul.  Contrary to this, based on my experience during frequent visits to the country, public opinion in South Korea of Moon’s anti-Japan push has remained relatively subdued.  Citizens’ boycotts against Japanese products have also been overblown in the media. Considering the bilateral trade structure, South Korean companies would suffer more from a prolonged bilateral spat than Japanese firms.  It must also be said that Moon emerged victorious in the 2017 presidential election in part because of the scandal surrounding ousted President Park Geun-hye and the ensuing division of conservative forces. In essence, even though Moon won, his victory does not mean he has a mandate to pursue an anti-Japanese agenda.  The anti-Japan policy is bad for South Korea, but Moon simply cannot get along with Tokyo.  Thus, now is the time for Japan to cut off bad practices in relations with South Korea. In the postwar era, Tokyo has never strongly asserted its will against Seoul, which has raised numerous historical issues. Instead, it has pampered South Korea, giving it “special treatment,” including putting the country — the only one in Asia — on its whitelist in 2003.  Japan should take this opportunity to begin treating South Korea as an “ordinary country,” rather than a special one. |
| KAN KIMURA | Opinion | Japan Times | Jun 10, 2020 | Japan | 'Comfort women': Time’s up for activist leadership | The "comfort women" issue has emerged as the single most divisive aspect in Japan’s wartime past. One action group in South Korea, the epicenter of the issue, has played an outsized role in bringing the dispute to the forefront of international awareness.  This group is the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. This council was formed through 16 groups related to women’s issues in South Korea in November 1990 as the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, and in 2016, it effectively merged with its affiliate, the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance, giving the organization its current form.  Yet the group is now being rocked by its own internal strife. The problem began on May 7, when former comfort woman Lee Yong-soo spoke out, saying that she and other comfort women had been fooled and used by the council. Lee Yong-soo, along with Kim Bok-dong, who died in January last year, were the most active in working with the council’s activities, among the few elderly surviving women who suffered under Japan's wartime military brothel system.  They were, in other words, the face of the council, and consequently the response to their allegation was huge. As a result, the council has become the target of growing suspicions in South Korea, and the organization that until recently had driven the comfort women issue in South Korea and globally has suffered serious damage.  What happened? In fact, it is not well known, but since the era of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted, the organization has actually had no real “members.” The official explanation is that this is because it has always been an alliance of women’s action organizations, but it is clear that in reality the council is more than a simple alliance, given that it has an office and undertook a range of activities both in South Korea and abroad under the name of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted.  In 2016, the organization became a legally incorporated foundation. This occurred when the Korean Council for the Women Drafted was incorporated into The Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, a legally incorporated foundation that was formed under the Korean Council for the Women Drafted. This Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance was formed in opposition to the Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement, and it qualified as a legally incorporated foundation so that it could engage in independent fundraising activities.  In other words, the current Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance became a foundation by merging with a council of the same name that was in effect a “subsidiary” of the “parent company,” the Korean Council for the Women Drafted.  According to the articles of association, as listed on the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance’s own website, while this legally incorporated foundation has a governing board, it doesn’t have any members. While there are “supporters,” a status attained through donations, they are naturally not constituent members of the organization, but are no more than patrons who have no voice in the organization’s operations. In other words, this organization, despite its high domestic and international profile, is an extremely closed organization that is not open to new members.  So why has the comfort women issue, something of considerable interest to all South Koreans, been led by this closed organization? For an answer, we must go back to the 1990s, when the Korean Council for the Women Drafted, the predecessor to this organization, was formed. At the time, comfort women had yet to attract much attention, and the Korean Council for the Women Drafted was formed as an organization of a relatively small number of action groups. Because of the nature of the issue, it was difficult for the women concerned to share their own stories, and so a small number of activists campaigned on their behalf.  The Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance then inherited this “closed” approach, in contrast to one that might be called ideological and progressive. It is sometimes misunderstood, but the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance is not an organization made up of comfort women. This council is simply a support group. It acts as a representative for comfort women because of the difficulty of the women themselves traditionally had in speaking out.  But South Korea, and indeed the international community, has matured, and there is widespread understanding of the comfort women issue. Now, women can speak out on their own, and we are able to listen directly to what they have to say. In other words, there is no need for a few activists to lead a movement on their behalf.  A movement run by people other than the former comfort women themselves will inevitably result in friction between the women and the activists who deign to speak for them. To return this movement to its original form, the rights to lead must be taken from the same number of activists and returned to those who were actually involved in the issue.  In other words, we can say that a movement that has been led by a few activists has completed its historical mission, and it is now time for it to end. Viewed in this way, the situation surrounding the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance in the South Korea of today should also be seen as reflecting the continuing development of South Korean civil society. |
| LEE YOUNG-CHAE | Commentary | Japan Times | August 28, 2019 | Japan | Tokyo's decision to bring dispute into economic arena ruined ties | No matter how many historical or political issues exist between Japan and South Korea, friendly relations were maintained through economic ties, but such ties were severely harmed when Japan imposed trade restrictions on South Korea in July.  With Tokyo’s economic retaliation against political issues, the postwar bilateral framework has been shaken at its core.  Japan removed South Korea from its “whitelist” of trading partners on grounds that there was “a loss of trust” and “national security concerns,” but Tokyo hasn’t shown any examples to back up such claims.  South Korea has not received such criticism from any other country. Japan ignored the last 15 years of amicable economic ties and unilaterally terminated it.  Historically, Japan exploited the Korean Peninsula during its 35-year colonial rule, making South Korea sensitive to any Japanese aggression. It therefore regards Tokyo’s decision to target semiconductors — vitally important to the nation’s economy — as an assault along the same lines as its colonial rule.  It is also strange that Japan criticizes South Korea for not renewing the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) while at the same time it blames South Korea for “a loss of trust and national security concerns.” At the very least, Japan should put South Korea back on its whitelist.  As a result, South Koreans are angry, with many saying that Japan refuses to repent for its evil history and that Japan is eager to colonize Korea again. They are boycotting Japanese goods and services, and the movement has spread across generations and regions against different sectors, including beer, cosmetics and tourism.  There are three political reasons why Japan imposed trade restrictions and antagonized South Korea.  First, it is a retaliation against wartime forced labor issues.  Last fall, the South Korean Supreme Court ruled that individual claims against Japanese companies during the war are still valid, and ordered the companies to pay damages. The Japanese government argued that the 1965 Japan-Korea Basic Treaty and the claims agreement settled the issue.  Following World War II, however, Japan did not deny individual claims could be settled with other countries. When it signed a peace treaty with Washington in 1951 and agreed with Moscow to a joint declaration to solve the issue of claims between countries, Tokyo affirmed the right of Japanese war victims of the atomic bombings and Siberian detention to claim individual damages against the U.S. and the Soviet Union. And after Tokyo established diplomatic relations with China in 1972, Japanese companies eventually paid damages for Chinese wartime forced labor.  The 1965 treaty was signed under American pressure to unite the West during the Cold War. No one in Japan or South Korea thought that the treaty alone would solve the problem of its decades long colonial rule.  Japan established the Asian Women’s Fund in 1995 and the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation in 2015 to pay compensation to former “comfort women.” This fact alone means their individual claims are valid.  Although the basic treaty may have solved compensation issues on a nation to nation level, it does not cover compensation for individuals.  If the treaty denies individual claims, it may be illegal and invalid from the standpoint of today’s global human rights law.  This problem highlights the differences between Japan and South Korea regarding the relationship between the state and its people.  Japan insists that issues are resolved once a treaty is signed and the Japanese people always obey its government’s decisions.  On the other hand, if South Korea’s government forges a treaty that does not reflect the people’s will, South Koreans will strongly demand a revision.  For example, in 2008, then-President Lee Myung-bak agreed to a South Korea-U.S. free trade agreement that would have liberalized imports of American beef. South Koreans then held large-scale candlelight protests to prevent the agreement from taking effect.  To make up for the deficiencies of the basic treaty, Japan must recognize the individual’s rights from a humanitarian perspective.  South Korea is trying to protect human rights and human security. Japan, on the other hand, wants to defend outdated international laws that may have been effective during the Cold War but have now become an obsolete form of imperialism that only defends the rights of powerful countries. The international community won’t support Japan, which retaliated economically against South Korea, a country that respects international human rights law.  The second reason why Japan set out to regulate its trade is its frustration from being excluded from the Korean Peninsula peace process.  At the end of June, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe failed to achieve any landmark goals at the G20 summit in Osaka. By contrast, South Korean President Moon Jae-in later had a trilateral meeting with the U.S. and North Korea.  Abe maintains his power by exploiting the “North Korea threat.” Peace on the peninsula was something that was annoying for Abe before the House of Councilors election on July 21. He therefore sought to rally conservative votes through economic retaliation against South Korea.  Finally, the third reason for Japan’s provocation of South Korea stems from Abe’s desire to amend the Constitution. In the election, maintaining a two-thirds supermajority in the House of Councilors was necessary for Abe’s ruling coalition to begin a motion for constitutional amendment.  He failed, but is still keen to change the top law. That’s why Abe is targeting South Korea as a foil for gathering conservatives, including from opposition parties.  As for Moon, he doesn’t have an anti-Japan policy. In fact, he hadn’t even placed any priority on Japan.  What Moon wanted to do was to put the domestic economy and the Korean peace process first and solve the wartime labor issue only through civil cases.  But then came Abe’s assault, and public opinion has united to take a tougher line against Tokyo, and conservatives are afraid to be called “pro-imperialist Japan.”  Abe and Moon, and their clashing political views, will be unable to improve the relationship between Japan and South Korea. The only option for the two governments is to manage the situation so it doesn’t get any worse. |
| JoongAng Ilbo | Editorial | JoongAng Ilbo | August 23, 2019 | Korea | After Gsomia | South Korea’s choice to break up a mutual military intelligence pact with Japan is worrisome for multiple reasons. The move could provoke Tokyo, which has lately slightly softened toward Seoul, and shake up the traditional tripartite security alliance among South Korea, Japan and the United States.  In a National Security Council meeting, Seoul concluded that upholding the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) could no longer meet national interests when there had been “grave changes” in security cooperation between the two countries after Japan removed Korea from a so-called white list of trusted trade partners, said Kim Yu-geon, first deputy director of the presidential National Security Office in a press briefing. The reasoning that countries that have lost trust in one another cannot expect to share sensitive military intelligence is not entirely wrong. Still, the move cannot be wise for national strategy.  The pact with Japan has been helpful on the security front. The two governments shared information over 29 times since the pact went into effect in 2016. Tokyo handed over satellite images of movements in North Korea while Seoul shared the information it received from spies and others. Even at times of strained relations since the first Supreme Court ruling ordering a Japanese company to pay individuals wartime reparations in October last year, the two countries shared military intelligence seven times. Defense Minister Jeong Kyeong-doo in a parliamentary hearing on Aug. 21 admitted to the “strategic value” of Gsomia. What the country can gain from sacrificing the important security pact is unclear.  Tensions are bound to re-escalate. The freeze showed slight signs of thawing after President Moon Jae-in in an Aug. 15 Liberation Day address gave a reconciliatory overture. Tokyo has since granted permission for a shipment of chemicals under export curbs to a South Korean entity and pledged commitment to the military intelligence pact. Yoshihide Suga, Japanese chief cabinet secretary, said it was important to “cooperate” with South Korea to suggest that the security relationship should not be affected by an ongoing row. Seoul’s breakup could splash cold water on any kind of recovery in the bilateral relationship. Does Seoul want to stay on hostile terms with Tokyo forever?  Moreover, Seoul walking out of the military pact can seriously impair our tripartite security alliance and also our relationship with Washington. The U.S government repeatedly said it wanted Gsomia to stay. U.S. President Donald Trump made it clear that the United States wished to see its two closest Asian allies stay amicable, especially on security grounds.  Washington has been displeased about Seoul’s lack of enthusiasm about its so-called Indo-Pacific strategy. It could think Seoul is going solo on security affairs by walking out of the military pact with Tokyo. If it cannot retract its decision to nullify Gsomia, it must at least come up with fast actions to restore the confidence of Washington and Tokyo. |
| Japan Times | Editorial | Japan Times | November 25, 2019 | Japan | GSOMIA survives but big questions remain | South Korea decided Friday not to let lapse the bilateral military information sharing agreement with Japan. The unexpected move, which came only hours before the pact was to have been terminated, was greeted with relief in Tokyo and Washington. It is an important recognition of the value of that agreement.  Significantly, however, Seoul has emphasized that the move is “provisional” — much depends on discussions between the two governments on the broader state of bilateral relations, in particular, Japan’s readiness to restore South Korea to its “white list” of countries with which it trades. And while both governments insist otherwise, that, in turn, rests on their ability to resolve contentious historical issues that continue to poison ties.  Seoul said three months ago that it would not renew the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a pact concluded with Japan three years ago that allows the two countries to exchange confidential information on security threats, most notably those posed by North Korea. For all the controversy it has generated, GSOMIA is a routine and basic document that merely outlines the form by which such exchanges should occur. Many militaries have them and they are not usually the subject of dispute.  Seoul’s decision followed the removal of South Korea from Japan’s “white list” of countries for which prior approval for the export of sensitive products was not required. Officially Tokyo acted out of concern that Seoul did not have a proper export controls regime and as a result, sensitive products were not subject to sufficient scrutiny before being exported. But many believed that the decision reflected anger over the South Korean top court rulings ordering Japanese firms to pay damages for their use of Koreans for wartime labor, an issue that Japan insists was settled under the terms of the agreements concluded when ties were normalize in 1965.  This tit-for tat, hopscotching from one issue to another allows both countries to say they are not responding in kind while permitting each to claim that it is the truly aggrieved party. The result is a piling up of grievances that threatens to do real damage to the national interest of each country.  GSOMIA may be a basic document, but it plays a vital security role. Japan and South Korea are integral to each other’s defense and the efficient and effective exchange of information between them is the foundation of their cooperation. The claim that they can use alternative means or go through the U.S. to communicate is dangerous. In a crisis, there is no time to lose and there is the risk of playing a game of telephone — with resulting misunderstandings — in a critical moment.  Equally important is the symbolic value of the agreement. GSOMIA is a demonstration of the will of the two governments to work together and a sign that they truly understand and share priorities. Allowing GSOMIA to lapse would expose a rift between the two countries that adversaries would be too happy to exploit. And a deterioration of defense relations with Japan at the very moment that Seoul signed an agreement to promote closer security relations with China, as occurred last week at a regional defense ministers meeting in Bangkok, would confirm for many that South Korea is loosening ties with the U.S.-created and -led regional security order and moving closer to Beijing.  Pressure from Washington played a big role in South Korea’s last-minute decision, with a parade of U.S. officials pushing Seoul to reverse course. That is ironic given the claim that Seoul put GSOMIA on the table to get U.S. attention in its larger dispute with Japan. If that is correct, then the tactic backfired. Significantly, South Korea insists that suspension is “provisional” and that GSOMIA could be terminated “at any time.” Seoul still seeks movement by Japan on the export controls issue; Japanese officials dismiss a linkage between the two. Still, there appears to be some progress. Seoul said that it was halting a dispute settlement procedure at the World Trade Organization because the two governments agreed to resume long-suspended talks on export controls and both sides promised to make them “meaningful.”  Resumption of the talks constitutes a second step; their successful conclusion would be a third. But the real problem is a shared understanding of the history of Japanese colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula and the meaning and legal impact of the 1965 treaty that normalized relations between the two countries. Japan argues that an accord accompanying the treaty settled all claims against Japanese entities stemming from the colonial rule; South Korea disagrees. Seoul should accept the validity of that accord, a move that would actually open the door to a settlement of those grievances. It requires creative diplomacy and courage. Last week’s GSOMIA decision suggests that there is still hope for a solution. |
| KUNI MIYAKE | Commentary | Japan Times | November 25, 2019 | Japan | Was Seoul's decision on GSOMIA strategic? | “**GSOMIA saved: Seoul to stay in deal for now” was the front page headline of The Japan Times’ Nov. 23** edition. South Korea’s Blue House announced the night before that it will reverse course on its earlier decision to end a key intelligence-sharing pact with Japan — just hours before the expected expiry of the deal, said the article.  Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said he believed South Korea’s decision was a “strategic” one in view of the North Korean threat. Conservative pundits in Tokyo claimed a “perfect victory” and exulted that Seoul, “being forced to tentatively retreat,” “surrendered at the last moment” in its “diplomatic implosion.”  Abe would have been right in calling South Korea’s decision a strategic one if it had been spontaneous. Strategic decisions, however, are not something forced to make. Similarly, it cannot be deemed a “perfect victory” for Japan, because Seoul’s decision was so tactical that the issue will continue to haunt us.  Incidentally, for the South Koreans, the General Security of Military Information Agreement was not “saved.” It was wise and sensible of this newspaper to change the headline to “GSOMIA survives” for its online version. Also, Seoul did not “reverse course,” either. As Yonhap News Agency reported, Seoul just decided to “conditionally suspend,” not to “reverse,” the termination of the pact.  peace or war, it must be a spontaneous outcome of deep thoughts. In this sense, the South Korean move was hardly strategic and never a victory for Japan.  Seoul’s decision was a result of political and diplomatic compromise. It tried to justify a concession to Japan or the U.S. while wooing Washington to reduce its host nation support. Such a halfway measure may not survive the next dispute with Tokyo or Washington.  5. Another “art of the deal”  Although Seoul’s decision to suspend the termination of GSOMIA may not solve the bilateral disputes in the long run, the Japanese, South Korean and probably American diplomats involved showed great negotiating skills. It was truly another “art of the deal,” which Trump has claimed he masters.  It is ironic to say that their success was made in part because Trump was not involved and never tweeted about this delicate dispute between the two most important U.S. allies in East Asia. The Japanese and South Korean officials may have to thank the U.S. president for being indifferent to this issue.  6. Tokyo must be prepared for the worse  This is not the end of the dispute. Rather, it is just a beginning of another new round in a boxing match. Tokyo was lucky this time to make the best use of the U.S. pressure on Seoul. The next time, however, Japan may not be able to repeat it, if the dispute over the former wartime laborers from the Korean Peninsula further deteriorates.  While giving in to the South Korean rhetoric is out of question, resolute and uncompromising measures will not put sensitive bilateral issues on hold. The only solution would be to “agree to disagree” as we did until the 1990s. Have we forgotten that skill, or do the South Koreans simply don’t even want to agree to disagree?  Most carpingly, while the Japan-South Korea GSOMIA was the front page lead of The Japan Times, the simultaneously delivered New York Times print edition didn’t carry any GSOMIA-related news at all. Only Japanese, Koreans, some Chinese and American Asia hands seemed to be interested in this issue.   * Fault-finding, however, is not my objective here. All I want is for the read    ers to have as accurate and objective knowledge as possible about this South Korean decision. It was just a tactical suspension of the effect of notifying Japan of the termination of GSOMIA, period. The following is my latest take on our enduring bilateral tragedy.  1. GSOMIA is essentially a Seoul-Washington issue  Some anti-Seoul hardliners in Tokyo claim that this diplomatic victory was a result of Japan’s resolute attitude vis-a-vis South Korea. Maybe so, but the most effective was, of course, the pressure from Washington. The flood of visits by the defense secretary and other high-ranking U.S. officials seemed to have cornered Seoul.  Ultimately, GSOMIA is not a simple Japan-South Korea issue. It is an indispensable joint to make the U.S.-South Korea-Japan trilateral security arrangements work in the event of armed contingencies. If it were just another Tokyo-Seoul dispute, South Koreans would not and maybe could not have made such a difficult compromise.  2. Tokyo-Seoul ties have never been good  This is not the first time for Washington to work behind the scenes to facilitate almost unreachable agreements between Japan and South Korea. As early as in 1951, at the request from South Korean President Syngman Rhee, the United States started mediations between Tokyo and Seoul that culminated in the 1965 basic relations treaty.  More recently, the “foreign ministers’ joint announcement” of December 2015 on the issue of “comfort women” and the conclusion of the Japan-South Korea GSOMIA in November 2016 could not have been agreed upon without explicit or implicit U.S. mediation groundwork.  3. Moon daydreams while Trump tweets  The U.S. mediation efforts this time must have been much more difficult than before. It is partly because South Korean President Moon Jae-in, a left-wing liberal nationalist, does not believe in the security alliance with the U.S., while his U.S. counterpart is tweeting day and night on issues other than GSOMIA.  Washington could have easily avoided exerting the bitter and unprecedented last-minute pressure on this querulous U.S. ally if U.S. President Donald Trump had personally focused and ordered systematic mediation on this issue much earlier, as many of his predecessors had done.  4. Seoul’s decision was by no means strategic  If a strategy is the science and art of employing political, economic, psychological and military forces of a nation to afford the maximum support to adopted policies |
| REIJI YOSHIDA AND JESSE JOHNSON | Commentary | Japan Times | November 23, 2019 | Japan | GSOMIA lives, but what's next for Japan and South Korea ties? | Tokyo and Seoul may be breathing sighs of relief — even if it is just for the time being — after Friday’s surprise announcement by South Korea to retain a key intelligence-sharing pact. But the issue at the heart of strained bilateral ties — wartime labor — remains far from being resolved.  And experts point out that bilateral relations still face a rocky road ahead in overcoming the two sides’ long-standing antagonism over history.  Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi appears to be well aware of the bleak prospect of a full detente. When he faced reporters Friday night, he did so without any hint of a smile.  “The current biggest and most fundamental issue is that concerning former laborers from the Korean Peninsula. We’d like to keep demanding that South Korea eliminate the situation that violates international law as soon as possible,” Motegi said.  Motegi said South Korea probably made the decision after considering the security situation and the importance of military cooperation with Japan and the United States.  On Friday, just hours before the expected expiry of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), South Korea said it would reverse its earlier decision to scrap the pact.  At the same time, the two sides agreed to resume talks between senior officials over stricter export measures Japan imposed on South Korea earlier this year.  Hideki Okuzono, associate professor of Korean studies at the University of Shizuoka, said Japan and South Korea avoided the worst-case scenario of a further escalation of their diplomatic row.  But the neighbors still need to tackle two tough issues: Japan’s export control measures covering key items for South Korea, and the wartime labor compensation issue, Okuzono said.  “Negotiations on those issues will start from now,” he said.  Bilateral ties flared anew late last year when South Korea’s Supreme Court ordered Japanese firms to pay compensation for wartime forced labor despite a 1965 pact that was concluded to settle all post-colonial compensation issues.  Japan introduced the new export control measures in July and, despite Tokyo’s denials, the move has been widely regarded as retaliation for Seoul’s inaction on the wartime labor issue.  The dispute escalated in August when Seoul announced its plan to scrap GSOMIA.  In the hours after Friday’s surprise announcement, there appeared to be conflicting views of what caused the pact to be removed from the chopping block.  South Korea claimed the decision was made after concessions from the Japanese side in agreeing to talks in their months long fight over the export control measures.  Tokyo, on the other hand, said it was merely because Seoul dropped a case against them at the World Trade Organization.  Motegi and other Japanese officials have repeatedly emphasized that GSOMIA and the export control measures are separate issues.  But despite the discrepancies, it was ultimately a decision based on the strategic and security situation in the region, said Andrew Yeo, an assistant professor of politics at Catholic University in Washington.  “The (GSOMIA) announcement was intended to address this (security) issue and create more space for bilateral — and trilateral — relations to move forward, or at least not take further steps backwards, not to resolve some of the bigger issues surrounding Japan-ROK relations,” Yeo said, using the acronym for South Korea’s formal name, the Republic of Korea.  “But without addressing deeper issues of historical contention, the GSOMIA decision remains a temporary patch to staunch a wound,” he said. “Nevertheless, sometimes you have to stop the bleeding first before you can mend wounds.”  The U.S. was also behind the push to save GSOMIA, apparently fearing the loss of the pact could change the power balance in the region and weaken the trilateral military and diplomatic cooperation between Japan, South Korea and the U.S. against North Korea, China and Russia.  “My message to (Japan and South Korea) was, ‘Look, I understand the historical issues. I understand the recent items that prompted it, but we have far greater concerns … that involve Pyongyang and Beijing,'” U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper told reporters Thursday in Vietnam.  GSOMIA has allowed Tokyo and Seoul to share sensitive military secrets since it was signed in 2016, including those concerning Pyongyang’s ballistic missiles and nuclear programs.  The pact has also streamlined trilateral communications between the two countries and the U.S., as Washington has a similar agreement with both Tokyo and Seoul.  The U.S. effort to keep GSOMIA alive appears to have played a big role in changing South Korea’s mind. President Moon Jae-in started warming up to Japan only after senior U.S. officials publicly started calling on Seoul to reverse course on scrapping the pact.  Mintaro Oba, a former U.S. State Department official who worked on issues affecting the Koreas, called those moves “a function of South Korean regret and American desperation.”  “South Korea’s decision to leave GSOMIA was an epic miscalculation, one that wrongly assumed Washington wouldn’t react as negatively as it did and that GSOMIA withdrawal could give Seoul leverage versus Japan,” Oba said.  Ongoing South Korean talks with the U.S. over military cost-sharing may have also played a part in the decision, with the thought of further antagonizing Washington likely weighing heavily on Moon’s mind.  Seoul and Washington have held several rounds of heated talks on how much the South pays for having U.S. forces stationed there. The White House has reportedly demanded Seoul cough up $5 billion annually in hosting costs — a fivefold increase — prompting the latest round of talks to break down.  “While the two issues may not have been directly linked, it’s not helpful to walk into a room with U.S. negotiators who already think South Korea is not being a constructive ally,” Oba said. |
| SARAH KIM | News Analysis | Korea Joongang Daily | August 27, 2019 | SouthKorea | Decision to leave Gsomia is blasted in Washington | U.S. congressmen from across the ideological spectrum are blasting the South Korean government’s decision to terminate its bilateral intelligence-sharing pact with Japan, adding to criticism of the move by the U.S. State Department and the Pentagon.  Rep. Eliot Engel, chairman of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a statement issued Saturday, “I am deeply concerned by President Moon Jae-in’s decision to terminate the General Security of Military Information Agreement.”  He described the bilateral pact, also known as Gsomia, as “a hard-sought and important agreement that contributes to a shared understanding of regional security threats between U.S. allies.”  This was a rare criticism of the Moon administration by name.  Engel, a Democrat from New York, called the decision “particularly troubling,” pointing out that “the justification for exiting the agreement indicates a failure to compartmentalize longstanding historical issues between Seoul and Tokyo.”  He added, “it is irresponsible to allow the escalating tensions to hinder practical national security-oriented cooperation that impacts not just Korea and Japan but the entire region.”  The lawmaker did not specifically mention that Seoul was responding to export regulations taken by Tokyo, widely seen as retaliation for South Korean Supreme Court rulings last year ordering Japanese companies to compensate victims of forced labor during World War II. Japan earlier this month announced it would remove South Korea from a so-called white list of preferred trading partners today, citing security concerns. South Korea in turn decided not to renew the Gsomia with Japan last Thursday, giving an advance notice of 90 days.  Engel, a longtime vocal supporter of the South Korea-U.S. alliance in Congress, said, “Seoul’s decision undermines regional security” at a time when the two countries along with Japan should be “working together to counter North Korea’s provocative ballistic missile tests.”  The bilateral Gsomia usually has been used to share information between Seoul and Tokyo about North Korea’s weapons tests.  Washington, which has a separate three-way military information-sharing agreement with Seoul and Tokyo, has encouraged trilateral security cooperation in the region.  Engel urged “the leadership in both countries to work together to resolve their differences and to ensure that the economic and security order is strengthened.”  He said that it is “crucial” that Washington’s “allies continue to coordinate to ensure the peace and stability of Northeast Asia.”  Rep. Michael McCaul, a Republican from Texas, in a post on the Republican’s House Foreign Affairs Committee Twitter account Thursday also wrote that he is “disappointed that the future of intelligence sharing” between Seoul and Tokyo “has been thrown into doubt by South Korea’s decision to withdraw from” the Gsomia.  McCaul said that “North Korea remains an imminent threat” and that “democracies must work together and help protect one another.”  On Sunday, Morgan Ortagus, a spokesperson for the U.S. State Department, tweeted that Washington is “deeply disappointed and concerned” about the termination of the Gsomia.  Seoul’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said it closely conferred with Washington on the decision.  A senior South Korean Foreign Ministry official said Tuesday, about the U.S. State Department’s remarks on the Gsomia termination, “we have continued to closely and exhaustively communicate on our situation.”  South Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon said Tuesday, on the government’s decision to terminate the Gsomia, “As the Japanese government has cited damage in trust over security concerns as the reason for the removal of Korea from its white list of countries that receive preferential export treatment, sharing our military information [with Japan] is not in accordance to our national interests.”  The bilateral Gsomia was signed in November 2016 and is set to expire on Nov. 23. Thus, there are three months left for the Gsomia to end without renewal.  Seoul can continue to share intelligence with Tokyo through the Trilateral Information Sharing Arrangement (TISA), with Washington serving as an intermediary, an agreement that was signed in December 2014.  Lee said Monday in a parliamentary meeting that it would be “desirable” for the government to reconsider a military information-sharing pact with Tokyo should Japan withdraw its export restrictions on South Korea.  Analysts have voiced concern that Seoul walking away from the Gsomia could have an impact on other security issues and alliance matters with Washington. They also point out that the TISA cannot completely stand in for the Gsomia. U.S. President Donald Trump on the sidelines of a G7 meeting in France Sunday called South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises a “total waste of money.” |
| JoongAng Ilbo | Editorial | Korea Joongang Daily | August 28, 2019 | South Korea | A sad reality | After criticizing the Moon Jae-in administration’s decision to scrap the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) with Japan, the United States went so far as to find fault with South Korea’s military exercise to defend the Dokdo islets from external threats. On Tuesday, a State Department spokesperson said that the drill in the East Sea was not productive in resolving issues involving security in Northeast Asia. The statement reflects a U.S. attempt to take Japan’s side after South Korea’s unilateral decision to abandon the Gsomia. Though Japan has consistently complained about the exercise since 1996, the United States has kept a neutral position. But it has turned negative toward the defense drill.  The shift follows South Korea’s decision to abandon the agreement after Japan’s economic retaliations for our Supreme Court’s rulings on wartime forced labor, despite Washington’s pleas not to. In fact, the United States has been ratcheting up its criticism of withdrawal from the military intelligence-sharing pact. Shortly after South Korea’s decision last Thursday to withdraw from the Gsomia, the State Department expressed strong concerns and disappointment. Three days later, it even raised the issue of increased threats to the safety of U.S. Forces Korea.  The U.S. Congress is also weighing in. Rep. Eliot Engel articulated his concerns as chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. “I am deeply concerned by President Moon Jae-in’s decision to terminate the General Security of Military Information Agreement,” he said. Rep. Michael McCaul, a Republican from Texas, said he was “disappointed that the future of intelligence sharing” between Seoul and Tokyo “has been thrown into doubt by South Korea’s decision to withdraw from” the Gsomia.  Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe are like soulmates. Before having a bilateral summit on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in France, Trump said, “As long as he’s prime minister and as long as I’m president, I think we’re always on the same page.”  If such a trust gap continues, South Korea could be dropped from the traditional trilateral security cooperation among Seoul, Washington and Tokyo. In return for South Korea’s decision to discard Gsomia, Washington may present higher bills — such as a call to send Korean troops to the Strait of Hormuz. Future conflict between Korea and Japan will center on trade. The Moon administration must avert a further deterioration of the alliance. |
| SER MYO-JA | News Analysis | Korea Joongang Daily | August 5, 2019 | South  Korea | Moon sees inter-Korean opportunity in trade war | President Moon Jae-in vowed Monday to overcome trade problems with Japan through inter-Korean economic cooperation.  In a meeting with senior presidential secretaries, Moon said the trade war with Japan should be used as an opportunity.  “We must not stop at merely overcoming Japan’s trade retaliation but proceed further to adopt an even wider perspective and summon an unshakable resolve that will help us surpass the Japanese economy,” Moon said.  “The recent incident [of Japan’s economic retaliations] reaffirmed our sense of the urgent need to create a peace-driven economy,” Moon said, referring to his stated vision of prosperity for both Koreas based on eased military tensions. “The Japanese economy holds advantages over the Korean economy in terms of its size and the size of the domestic consumer market. The realization of a peace economy through inter-Korean economic cooperation will allow us to immediately catch up with Japan’s advantages.”  Moon said this vision of a peace-driven economy must not be abandoned even when inter-Korean relations or North Korea-U.S. relations go through periods of strain.  “Since there have been many years of confrontation and distrust, this will only become reality when we recover mutual trust through persistent efforts,” Moon said.  “When the two Koreas make concerted efforts with the confidence that a peace economy will open up a unique future of opportunities for us, we will be able to achieve denuclearization and peace on the Korean Peninsula and bring about common prosperity upon this foundation,” Moon said.  It remained unclear how Moon’s administration will restart inter-Korean economic cooperation projects in the face of international sanctions and the Kim Jong-un regime’s recent resumption of military provocations. The North recently carried out three missile tests within eight days - and bluntly said they were a message to the South.  A prominent North Korea expert, Professor Kim Keun-sik of Kyungnam University, expressed skepticism about Moon’s campaign.  “The president said a peace economy with the North is critical for victory in an economic war against Japan,” Kim said in a posting on Facebook. “The idea is just so random.”  He said Pyongyang even turned down Seoul’s offer of humanitarian aid of rice while firing missiles and issuing insults at Moon. “We wonder when and how a peace economy with Kim Jong-un is possible,” he said.  Rep. Jun Hee-kyung, spokeswoman of the conservative main opposition Liberty Korea Party, also criticized Moon’s idea. “Japan’s economic retaliations are the reality in front of us, but the president’s countermeasure is the fantasy with North Korea’s Kim Jong-un that he always dreams about.”  On Monday, Moon did not refrain from condemning Japan, although his language was toned down from last week.  He said the Shinzo Abe administration is hurting the people of both countries despite their efforts to overcome a bitter history. He said the international community is critical of Japan’s recent moves against a free trade order.  “Japan must realize that economic power alone cannot make it a global leader,” Moon said.  “Korea will raise its stature as a peaceful nation and a cultural powerhouse and usher in a new future as an economic force on the foundation of a moral high ground and a mature democracy,” Moon said.  Moon also said the recently passed supplementary budget as well as next year’s budget will focus on policies designed to outstrip Japan.  He said the country’s new growth engines such as 5G technology, system semiconductors, hydrogen-powered automobiles and bio-health industries are going strong, and his foreign affairs policies have diversified South Korea’s trade partners.  “I believe that stepping up innovative growth in this manner and expanding our economic sphere will be the fundamental solution,” he said.  “Japan will never succeed in impeding our economic drive,” Moon said.  “Rather, it will only serve to inspire us to fortify our resolve to become an economic powerhouse.”  Blue House Chief of Policy Kim Sang-jo said Monday that he will soon meet with vice chairmen of five top conglomerates to discuss countermeasures to Japan’s move last week to remove South Korea from a so-called white list of trusted trade partners.  Kim is reportedly meeting executives of Samsung, Hyundai Motor, SK, LG and Lotte groups, and the meeting will likely take place on Thursday.  Meanwhile, a senior presidential aide said Monday that a trilateral summit among the leaders of South Korea, China and Japan is being discussed among the three countries.  “It is a routine summit, and we are currently coordinating the schedule,” the official said.  Japanese and Chinese media reported Sunday that Seoul, Beijing and Tokyo are discussing a plan to hold the annual trilateral summit in China in December. The meeting is attended by the South Korean president, Japanese prime minister and Chinese premier. The last meeting took place in Tokyo in May 2018. |
| Seo Seung-Wook | Opinion | Korea Joongang Daily | August 2, 2019 | Japan | Komeito’s comments | “Japanese people are disappointed. It is because of the dissatisfaction that Korea does not keep promises between governments when administrations change. At the time of discussing the comfort women agreement, the Korean government and assemblymen asked for Komeito’s help. I remember asking if they had the determination to keep it when agreement is made. But this is what happened. The ball to resolve the issue is in the court of the Blue House in Korea.”  Komeito, which forms a coalition with the Liberal Democratic Party, is a “peace party” emphasizing peace with neighbors. But chairman Natsuo Yamaguchi made sour remarks to the Korean assemblymen visiting the party headquarters on July 31. The cold meeting with Komeito must have been more shocking than Liberal Democratic Party’s refusal to meet at all.  The Komeito held a detailed briefing on the conversation with the Korean delegation. “Yamaguchi’s comments were so heavy that there was not a single laugh for 70 minutes. Faces became a bit relaxed for the photo shoot.” Komeito’s attitude is in the context of anti-Korean sentiment in Japan. Now that Komeito has turned its back, diplomatic communications between Korea and Japan are at their worst in years.  But Korea’s diplomatic position relative to Japan feels like it is regressing. While it is somewhat improved since Ambassador to Japan Nam Gwan-pyo took the office, there is a long way to go. The news that a Korean consul general working in Japan is under investigation for sexually harassing a female employee shocked me. In the middle of the diplomatic war against Japan, the alleged misdeed happened at the frontline of the battle with the enemy. As they say, an enemy’s misfortune is one’s happiness.  Japanese media preyed on it and played it big. The justice ministry and police ask what happened, whether it happened in the consulate or what he was like.  It does not end there. The response to Japan’s sudden announcement on the tightened screening on Korean seafood, such as halibut, was quite a sight. While it was a prelude to the latest export ban, the core diplomatic line was to say that it shouldn’t be defined as a retaliation when they didn’t say it was retaliation.  Then, they became angry and asked to refrain from criticizing the government and causing internal discord as it is most important to extinguish the fire first.  In the fierce diplomatic war, what could be a greater sin than incompetence and negligence?  A more strict yardstick should be applied to these people than the efforts to eradicate the deep-rooted evil practices that the current administration is devoted to. |
| Kim Dong-ho | Opinion | Korea Joongang Daily | July 31, 2019 | South  Korea | Blasts from the past | “In our society, the word ‘reds’ is still being used to vilify and attack political rivals,” President Moon Jae-in said on March 1, during a national address to commemorate the centennial of the March 1 Independence Movement. He later said that it was “very regretful” how Tokyo was cunningly using historical issues to gain political points on its home turf. Moon’s former senior secretary for civil affairs, Cho Kuk, claimed that some Korean politicians and media outlets were siding with the Japanese government in criticizing the Korean government and Supreme Court.  So Moon’s logic is that if a person denounces his hard-line policy toward Tokyo or expresses doubt about where it’s heading, he or she is definitely pro-Japanese.  Let me rephrase his comment a bit. “In our society, the word ‘pro-Japanese’ is still being used to vilify and attack political rivals.” Swapping “reds” with “pro-Japanese” seems to make perfect sense. This shows the reality. Currently in Korea, if people voice their opposition to government policies, they’re disparagingly called pro-Japanese. Even worse, they’re called tochakwaegu, “native collaborators with Japan,” a phrase that was used a century ago.  Tochakwaegu goes back to 1908. The Korea Daily News, a local newspaper, used the term “towae,” an abbreviation of “tochakwaegu.” In an article in 1910, the paper defined “towae” as “someone who looked Korean but had the intestines of a Japanese person, or in short, someone like a goblin.” A towae, the newspaper wrote, acts in the following way: someone who signs several treaties with Japan to gain “vain honor,” and through those treaties, secretly gains profit; someone who instigates for Japan with preposterous words while hiding their sinister plan; someone who rapes women in suburban areas and steals their fortunes while relying on Japanese soldiers; and someone who spreads venom in the hearts of other people by lying to them when they talk bitterly about Japan’s wrongful actions.  Today, if a Korean shows even the slightest bit of discomfort about the Moon administration, they’re straight-out called a tochakwaegu. I wonder if people who actually call others by this moniker somehow feel relieved about bashing Tokyo. But what is pro-Japanese anyway in the 21st century? We live in a world where the number of Koreans going to Japan and Japanese coming to Korea in a single year adds up to 10 million. Some young Koreans go crazy over Japanese sweets and know more about sake (Japanese rice wine) than makgeolli (Korean rice wine). Can we really label these Koreans tochakwaegu? Can such Koreans gain anything by being pro-Japanese as they might have a century ago?  There’s no doubt that Japan should reflect upon its wrongful past. And the Japanese government must stop its shameful economic retaliations against Korea. But we should spare some time to think about our actions, too. It was Korea that disbanded the reconciliation and healing foundation aimed at compensating Korean women for their forced sexual slavery by the imperial Japanese Army, which had been agreed to by both the Japanese and Korean governments in a 2015 agreement “finalizing” the comfort women issue. It was also Korea that caused bilateral ties to fray recently by refusing to deal in any way with Supreme Court rulings that took issue with the 1965 Korea-Japan claims agreement.  Moon’s approval rate is soaring as Korea is caught up in an anti-Japanese movement. His anti-market policies have turned Korea’s private sector economy into a complete wasteland, and the Korean government did not issue even the most customary statement warning China and Russia not to fly into Korea’s sovereign airspace or air defense identification zone as if it is some sort of a public play ground. It seems that the Moon administration cares about nothing but the simmering anti-Japanese sentiment within Korean borders.  Korea is no longer the weak country it was a century ago. It’s not a superpower, but it is a mid-sized country that’s the world’s sixth-largest exporter and 12th-largest economy. It’s about time Korea showed its broad-mindedness. Until when should we play silly word games? We must break out of this mindset and look to the future through a restrained response. I hope Moon comes up with something future-oriented in his speech for National Liberation Day on Aug. 15. |
| JoongAng Ilbo | News Analysis | Korea Joongang Daily | July 30, 2019 | South Korea | Prepare for the worst | Japan may be preparing to drop Korea from a list of countries eligible for preferential treatment in trade at a cabinet meeting on Friday. If Tokyo really makes that decision, the current row will go beyond the realm of a trade dispute and bring about a collapse in bilateral relations. Japan’s restrictions on three key export items starting July 4 could not be justified. Tokyo must withdraw a reckless action that can critically shake the global supply chain.  Our government must exert all diplomatic efforts possible, including persuading Tokyo to delay Friday’s cabinet meeting. It’s possible something can be done on the sidelines of the Asean Regional Forum in Bangkok, which opens on Thursday. In a press briefing Tuesday, ruling Democratic Party Chairman Rep. Lee Hae-chan stressed the need to coexist with our neighbor despite historical grudges. We welcome his remarks given all the hawkish reactions from the ruling party, including the threat to scrap the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) — a bilateral military intelligence-sharing agreement — with Japan. The Moon Jae-in administration must not give up diplomatic efforts, which are the only way to avoid a catastrophe.  At the same time, the government must brace for the worst possibility. If Korea is removed from the list, 1,115 strategic items shipped to Korea will have to receive permission from Tokyo from next month. The repercussions will go far beyond Japan’s earlier restrictions on three key materials needed to produce semiconductors and displays.  Japan’s move is aimed at attacking Korea’s mainstay industries through export control, as most of the restrictions target the main engines of our economic growth, including potentially rewarding businesses like hydrogen vehicles. Our chemical and precision machine industries, which heavily rely on Japan, will be the next targets. The government’s rallying cry to raise the competitiveness of our basic industries is pointless. It must do its best to reduce our dependence on Japan for technology.  But we should be wary of some who blame big companies for the crisis. Even President Moon said our conglomerates resorted to Japan’s cooperation after dismissing our ability to produce key industrial materials on our own. In the global supply chain, any company would capitalize on a competitive advantage — particularly when a slight difference in quality is directly linked to the competitiveness of final products. Instead of blaming big companies, the government and the private sector must join hands to foster the competitiveness of our basic industries. |
| Jung Kyo-sik | Commentary | Korea Joongang Daily | July 30, 2019 | South Korea | Anybody to mediate? | The expansion of the trade war is imminent as Japan is about to exclude Korea from a list of countries eligible for preferential treatment in trade. Korea has made efforts to persuade the United States to intervene. A delegation of the government, National Assembly and civilians visited Washington D.C. Trade minister Yoo Myung-hee, Kim Hyun-chong, second deputy chief of the Blue House National Security Office, a National Assembly delegation that includes former speaker of the National Assembly Rep. Chung Se-gyun, and civilian groups such as the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy contacted the U.S. government, Congress and think tanks. They had the same conclusion: The United States cannot intervene or become a mediator, and they only hoped the two countries would work it out.  Marc Knapper, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Korea and Japan at the State Department’s Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, revealed his thoughts to the Korean lawmakers in a meeting last Thursday. He said he heard from the Japanese government and companies about the discord between Korea and Japan and that he also understood Korea’s position. He added that the best the United States could do was to create an environment for the two countries to talk, as siding with one could hurt the alliance. It means that the United States’ role was limited to urging Korea and Japan to talk or prepare an environment for dialogue, since U.S. President Donald Trump likes both President Moon Jae-in and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, as he has said before.  One lawmaker claims no asked the U.S. to mediate and added what the U.S. wanted from the Korea-Japan discord seemed to be the relocation of Samsung Electronics or Hyundai Motors factories to the United States.  It seems an unlikely worry that the U.S. would take advantage of the crisis between the allies. The site selection for a semiconductor factory could take at least 10 years. Rather, those who are familiar with the Korea-Japan discord, like Knapper, have a fixed mindset that intervening in the row won’t lead to good outcomes as it’s a tricky issue. As U.S. concerns about Korea-Japan relations have been conveyed through various channels since earlier this year, U.S. politicians seemed tired from the aggravation of the discord.  In the end, Korea needs to stand up against Japan’s escalated offensive. If Japan goes ahead with excluding Korea from the preferential list, Korea needs to make plans for the expected $20 billion losses annually. As Moon has made it clear, it is inevitable to diversify imports and localize productions to escape from dependency on Japan. Emotional responses cannot deal with the reality. It is also up to Korea to make a political determination to fundamentally resolve the situation. |
| Lee Ha-kyung | Opinion | Korea Joongang Daily | July 30, 2019 | SouthKorea | Abe’s real game | Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s economic retaliations are nasty. Because he was angry about the wartime forced labor issue, he put knives into the hearts of Samsung and SK Hynix. Although he said the retaliations were for national security reasons, it is not convincing. Japan has started a countdown to remove Korea from a so-called “white list” of countries eligible for preferential treatment in trade. Wise Japanese leaders issued statements warning that the plan is a “hostile act because it can hit Korea critically.”  Japan’s export restrictions against Korea are a classic example of words and actions that don’t match. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine and blocked Ukrainian products from being exported to other countries through the territory, claiming that the exports could include military goods. Ukraine took the case to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2016. On April 5, 2019, the WTO’s dispute settlement panel ruled in favor of Russia based on Article 21 of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which allows security exceptions for trade-restricting measures in the traffic in arms, ammunition and implements of war and other goods and materials that could supply a military establishment.  In an opinion submitted to the WTO on Nov. 8, 2017, Japan said GATT’s Article 21 is a special clause intended to protect important national interests and the discretion of a country that invokes it must be recognized. At the same time, Japan said the discretion should “not be unbounded and must be exercised with extreme caution.”  Professor Lee Jae-min of Seoul National University Graduate School of Law, an expert in trade disputes, said Japan seems to have failed to check and clarify the grounds for its security exemptions, so the statement will eventually hinder its case in any future WTO ruling.  After the United States stopped oil exports in 1941, Japan carried out the Pearl Harbor attack and kicked off the Pacific War. It knows the danger of export controls. And yet, it carried out the reckless measure against Korea, shaking the foundations of not only Korea-Japan relations but also security cooperation in Northeast Asia. It is not a coincidence that North Korea, China and Russia have recently conducted a series of provocations.  Although U.S. and European media and think tanks are criticizing Japan, Abe does not care. He must have something he believes in. “National Security Advisor Shotaro Yachi and Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga both think that export restrictions against Korea are too much,” according to a source who is close to a key aide to Abe. “But no one can say that to Abe. Abe wants to push forward the constitutional amendment in time with the Tokyo Olympics next year to realize the dream that Japan will become a normal country that can start a war.  “Abe wants to make a strong Japan by taking the opportunity to hit Korea because the Japanese people’s sentiment toward Korea is so bad,” he continued. “The United States also sees Korea as a potential competitor in the fourth industrial revolution and in 5G technology, so it won’t likely stop Abe.”  Now the picture is clearer. The Japanese people’s anti-Korea sentiment and the tacit approval of the United States are Abe’s weapons. Actually, the United States is ignoring Korea’s desperate requests for help to mediate the trade row. It is unrealistic to expect the United States to help Korea.  So, the only option is calming the Japanese people’s anti-Korea sentiments. Only then can we stop Abe’s reckless moves. We would have higher ground in the WTO, but a ruling takes years, and a tsunami of economic retaliations is already here. The Japanese people said they are angry because Korea did not keep its promise. They said Korea scrapped the comfort women settlement agreement unilaterally and is now harassing Japanese companies on the issue of forced labor, which was settled with the 1965 Basic Treaty to address all claims. They suspect that Korea is trying to scrap the 1965 agreement altogether. It is not true, but that is the Japanese people’s idea.  We need to ease the anger of the Japanese public. We must refrain from provocative actions and words. The more we provoke Japan, the more we will fuel anti-Korea sentiment and help Abe. We need to calm our own anger and search for a diplomatic resolution. We should find a realistic solution while respecting the Supreme Court’s ruling that the Japanese companies are responsible for compensating the victims and at the same time maintaining the compromise of the 1965 agreement, which left the illegality of colonial rule intentionally ambiguous. It is fortunate that Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon recently said, “We should not worsen the situation any further and find a resolution through diplomacy.”  Kim Gu, a legendary independence fighter during the colonial period, said after liberation that Korea needs pro-Japanese people who are helpful to the country. “If we have none, we should create them,” Kim was quoted by Choi Seo-myeon, an authority in modern history, in an interview with Shindonga.  In a statement to the nation on the outcome of the normalization talks with Japan in 1965, former President Park Chung Hee said Japan was a “mortal enemy” but “we need to hold its hands for today and future.” Korea was able to become a strong economy from a poor country thanks to such flexibility.  Dividing the people between anti-Japan or pro-Japan is anachronistic. We can criticize Japan’s reckless actions, but we must maintain an open-minded attitude to befriend a good Japan. That is the sure way to protect our national interests. |
| Sarak Kim | News Analysis | Korea Joongang Daily | July 29, 2020 | SouthKorea | 'Comfort woman' statue riles Japan and Abe in particular | A pair of statues of a man bowing contritely before a girl symbolizing Japan’s wartime sexual slavery victims is making waves amid speculation that the kneeling figure represents Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.    The bronze statues, entitled “A Heartfelt Apology,” are installed in the privately operated Korea Botanic Garden in Pyeongchang County, Gangwon. They started getting publicity in Korean media reports earlier this week.    Japan has reacted sensitively, warning if it the kneeling man indeed represents Abe, it could have serious repercussions on bilateral relations.    Addressing media reports that the kneeling man resembles Abe, Yoshihide Suga, the Japanese cabinet secretary, said in a press briefing Tuesday that while he has not verified such reports, this would “not be allowed under international courtesy.”    Suga added, “If the reports are true, I believe this could decisively effect Korea-Japan relations.”    Tokyo has protested the installation of bronze statues representing the tens of thousands of young women and girls who were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military before and during World War II, euphemistically referred to as comfort women. Japan has called for the removal of the original statue, the so-called Peace Monument, in front of the former Japanese Embassy in central Seoul and a similar statue installed near its consulate in Busan.    Seoul’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded with restraint on the matter, saying that it will refrain from remarking on private events unrelated to the government.    Kim In-chul, spokesman of the Foreign Ministry, said in a press briefing Tuesday on Suga’s remarks, “As the Japanese side said, there is a need for international comity,” referring to the legally nonbinding diplomatic practice of courtesy. “We believe in the need to consider international courtesy for a foreign leader, regardless of the country.”    Japanese media outlets, including the Sankei Shimbun, reported on the statues Tuesday, saying the male statue represented Abe, and conservative commentators on TV criticized Korea Wednesday.    Yasuhide Nakayama, a lower house lawmaker and chairman of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's foreign affairs committee, was reported in Japanese media Wednesday as having said in a press conference the previous day that the statue installation represented “abnormal behavior” and questioned if the Korean government shouldn’t “bear some kind of supervisory responsibility.”    However, Kim Chang-ryeol, the head of the Korea Botanic Garden, told reporters Tuesday that the bronze monument was not specifically created with Prime Minister Abe in mind and more widely represented the desire for “a person holding responsibility to sincerely apologize.” But Kim acknowledged that such a responsible person could be Abe or another Japanese leader.    The statues were made in 2016, but the garden remained closed due to a fire and reopened only recently in June.    The botanical garden intended to hold an unveiling ceremony for the monument on Aug. 10, but the event was canceled amid the controversy regarding the statues.    However, the operator of the garden has no plan to remove the statues.    “As I have said many times, I have never said that the statue is Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe,” Kim Chang-ryeol told the JoongAng Ilbo on Wednesday. “Before you can get rid of the statues, you will have to get rid of me first.”    Kim pointed out that this was a statue on private grounds.    He said “it does not make sense” for the Japanese government to request the removal of the statues, adding their installation in his garden “is a private matter that the government and external agencies shouldn’t interfere.”    Korea and Japan attempted to settle the so-called comfort women issue through a 2015 agreement.    On Dec. 28, 2015, a controversial deal aimed at “finally and irreversibly” resolving the wartime sexual slavery issue was struck between Japan’s current Abe administration and the Park Geun-hye government, which included an apology from Tokyo and a 1-billion-yen ($9.5-million) fund for the victims. Some victims and civic groups criticized the agreement for its failure to recognize Japan’s legal responsibility for its war crimes and also Tokyo’s calls for the removal of the comfort women statue in front of the Japanese Embassy.    The Moon Jae-in administration has since called the agreement “flawed” and scrapped the Tokyo-funded Reconciliation and Healing Foundation, but has stopped short of overturning the deal.    The two countries have faced deteriorated bilateral ties over historical issues, including compensation of forced labor victims, and Japan’s export restrictions on Korea. |
| Lee Byong-chul | Commentary | Korea Joongang Daily | February 23, 2014 | SouthKorea | Abe’s dangerous game | The Japanese government is taking formal steps to re-examine a statement acknowledging the operation of military brothels that forced sexual slavery on Asian women recruited mostly from Korea during World War II.  In August 1993, the Tokyo government issued a statement on one of the most incendiary historical spats between Japan and other Asian countries in the name of then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono after extensive study of the issue. It concluded that the Japanese military was “directly or indirectly” involved in running so-called comfort stations and women were recruited “against their own will through coaxing and coercion.” It then offered “sincere apologies and remorse” to those who suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds.  During parliamentary questioning on Feb. 20, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said the government will re-examine the testimonies of the victims, euphemistically known as comfort women, who were the basis of the 1993 statement. The statement, drawn up after a three-year investigation and interviews with 16 comfort women in South Korea, requires “further review on the academic level,” said Suga. His comment came after Japanese leader Shinzo Abe - who in 2007, during a previous term as prime minister, had insisted there was “no proof” of coercion and involvement of the military in recruiting the women - said in a recent Diet meeting that the international accusations about comfort women was “serious slander” against the Japanese government. Abe said he plans to come up with a defense based on factual evidence to refute wrongful claims on the issue.  Critics mostly from the far right claim that there is no documented proof and the testimonies are ambiguous. The nationalistic Japan Restoration Party declared it will launch a popular campaign to revise the Kono Statement. But it is outrageous that the government plans to ride on the extreme rightist movement and deny a formal study and statement by the government. It says it will bring in specialists to question victims about the crimes against humanity it had committed. Together with the Murayama Statement, which first acknowledged and apologized for invasions and colonization, the Kono Statement has been pivotal in buttressing Korea-Japan relations. Abe wants to break the pillars that have sustained bilateral relations. The contradictory prime minister who despite his nationalistic agenda maintains he respects earlier historical views is pushing the stakes too high and must check himself before he ruins the Korea-Japan relationship beyond repair. |
| Kim Dong-ho | Opinion | Korea Joongang Daily | May 11, 2020 | SouthKorea | The real game starts now | Katsuhiro Kuroda, a former Seoul bureau chief for Japan’s Sankei Shimbun, had no ill designs in the writing of his 2006 book “The Korea that can Never Escape from Japan.” As the title made clear, its theme was Korea’s heavy economic reliance on Japan. He was not exaggerating. Korea has become an advanced nation in many regards, but has not reached Japan’s level in technology.    However, dramatic transformations are in the making. What looked impossible is taking place now. Korea was mostly a copycat of Japan in key industrial areas of shipbuilding, steelmaking, automobile and semiconductors.    The turnaround in chipmaking has been the most staggering of all. In the early days, engineers from Samsung Electronics managed to finagle invitations to Japanese factories. On their tours, they paid close attention to what they saw, especially of Japanese chip designs. As soon as they returned to their hotel rooms, they committed to paper everything they could remember from their factory tours.    Japan was not overly stingy in sharing its advanced technology with Korea. Posco could never have achieved its steelmaking standards if not for the capital and technology assistance from Japan. Japan was eager to help Korea as it felt indebted to Koreans for their sufferings from the colonial period, said an official from the Japanese foreign ministry.    In this way, Korea benefited from the Japanese tutoring and set the foundations for its rapid economic development. In terms of coping with the new coronavirus pandemic, Japan has not been able to match Korea. That shows how much Korea has matured in its industrial and medical infrastructure.    The 1988 Seoul Summer Olympic Games were a turning point for the Korean economy. Korea showed the results of its remarkable advances across the board. Nevertheless, it suffered a chronic trade deficit with Japan. The trade deficit with Japan topped $30 billion a year at the time. In his 1988 book entitled “Collapse of South Korea,” Naoki Komuro, a famous commentator, compared the Korean economy to cormorants, which have to vomit fish after swallowing them to please their owner. (The idea is that Korea’s exports benefit Japan due to its high reliance on materials, parts and equipment from Japan.)    Korea’s accumulated trade deficit with Japan reached $623.7 billion last year from the point the two countries normalized ties and trade in 1965.  But the trade deficit with Japan last year hit a 16-year low of $19.2 billion. Imports from Japan fell 12.9 percent on year to $47.6 billion. At the same time, Japan’s share of Korea’s imports slipped to 9.5 percent from 10.2 percent. Korea’s exports to Japan also fell 6.9 percent to $28.4 billion, which means Korea lessened its reliance on Japan in both imports and exports.    That was the result of a trade war Japan waged against Korea. Last July, Tokyo curbed exports of key materials for semiconductors and displays — hydrogen fluoride, fluorinated polyimide and photoresists — to Korea. Goldman Sachs worried about a disruption in the global supply chain for chipmaking. But that did not happen.    The Korean chip and display industries did not collapse when supplies stopped from Japan. Korea has been successfully weaning itself off Japan and achieved self-sufficiency to some extent. Such independence is a near miracle.    David Ricardo, a British economist, argued that it made more sense for England to import wine from Portugal. Portuguese wine was better. The same applied to England’s export of textiles to Portugal, he said. Each country has its own competitive advantages in natural resources, technology and labor.    Since choices of local companies are restricted under the usual industrial structures, competitive superiority should be considered in trading, as Ricardo argued. In the same vein, East Asian economies have completed the global supply chain — with Japan providing key materials and components for industrial production, Korea making the intermediary products, and China assembling them into finished goods. Each economy has its own strength in certain areas. Harvard Business School Professor Michael Porter had a different theory of competitive advantage. He claimed that just because a company is a market leader now, doesn’t mean it will be forever. Korean enterprises showed how they could make it.  Ricardo could not have taken individual corporate capabilities into account in his days of the 18-19th centuries. But companies in the 20th and 21st century have built their own capabilities and overcome limitations on home ground. By recruiting talents at home and abroad, Samsung Electronics internalized technologies needed to achieve a competitive edge. It outpaced Japan in chip production and groomed a supply chain at home. There are numerous semiconductor equipment makers trading publicly in Korea, including SoulBrain. Local equipment makers total 38, integrated circuit makers 19, 3D NAND flash memory producers 15 and smartphone-related suppliers 37.    The Diplomat, an online journal in the United States, found that the overall damage from Japanese export restrictions on Korean chipmakers last year was limited.    The export restrictions only accelerated Korean self-sufficiency. The government pledged a 2.1-trillion-won ($1.7 billion) investment to groom IT materials and equipment makers. It set up a national committee to promote the sector at home and diversify imports away from Japan. SoulBrain has begun mass-production of hydrofluoric acid with a purity level of 99.9999999999 percent, which used to be only possible in Japan.    Foreign capital has also been zeroing in on the burgeoning materials activities in Korea. Lam Research, a global manufacturer of semiconductor equipment in the United States, moved its research and development center to Korea. DuPont is building a new 60-billion-won factory to produce photoresists in Korea. The Moon Jae-in administration has fast-tracked its permission procedure for chemical materials production in Korea and allowed overtime to remove regulations on the manufacturing front. The Materials Act — revised for the first time in 20 years to promote the field — has been effective since April 1.    Japan has been taken aback by our backlash. Koreans traveling to Japan halved in the latter half of last year as Koreans voluntarily boycotted anything related to Japan in reaction to its trade restrictions. Anything made-in-Japan, including Toyotas, Uniqlo t-shirts and Asahi Beer, was hard-hit. Tokyo has recently been restraining its actions and rhetoric. Its retaliatory moves only exposed its weakness and Korea’s strengths. Korea must not waste itself in self-indulgence and nationalism, but use its newfound confidence to move forward. |
| John Power | Commentary | Southern China Morning Post | May 20, 2020 | Hong Kong | The ‘comfort women’ of South Korea: pawns in a political game?" | "For three decades, South Korea’s Lee Yong-soo campaigned for Japan to atone for its imperial past. One of thousands of “comfort women” coerced into working in brothels for Japanese soldiers during World War II, Lee, 91, joined a rally every Wednesday outside Tokyo’s embassy in Seoul, come rain or shine, to demand a sincere apology and compensation from Japan . Then, in an ironic twist, the veteran campaigner levelled accusations of exploitation at figures much closer to home: the leadership of South Korea’s largest advocacy group established to ensure the welfare of surviving comfort women and seek restitution from Japan, which colonised the Korean peninsula from 1910-1945 . At a shock press conference this month, Lee accused the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (Korean Council) of misappropriating public donations and exploiting the surviving women for political ends. Lee announced she would no longer attend the weekly rallies, which typically draw large numbers of supporters, particularly students, as they taught the younger generations “hatred” when South Koreans and Japanese should befriend each other and resolve outstanding issues together. “Wednesday demonstrations must be put to an end,” Lee said at the May 7 press conference, according to a report in the Joongang newspaper, while stressing she would continue to press Japan for a sincere apology. “It helps no one. You don’t even know where the contributions of the participants are being spent.” The Korean Council and its former chief, ruling party lawmaker-elect Yoon Mee-hyang, have strongly denied any wrongdoing, insisting all donations have been spent supporting victims and advocacy and the group’s finances are transparent and audited regularly. Amid a flurry of subsequent reports in conservative media about her financial dealings and facing investigation by prosecutors, Yoon, who is affiliated with President Moon Jae-in’s centre-left Democratic Party, has claimed to be a victim of a “political offensive”. Yoon and the Korean Council did not respond to requests for comment. On Tuesday, the House of Sharing, another organisation for former comfort women, came under scrutiny after a group of employees accused the shelter of mishandling donations and failing to live up to its mission by forcing survivors to cover their own medical fees and other expenses. The rare public discord over the handling of South Korea’s most sensitive grievance with Japan has accentuated concerns – often whispered until now – that comfort women have been used as pawns in support of a nationalistic and politically convenient narrative upheld with ferocious social pressure and even legal sanction. Can Korea handle the truth about Japan’s ‘comfort women’? “In Korea we have the anti-communist right and the anti-colonial left, and both factions use testimonies from socially weak groups to demonise their enemies,” said Joseph Yi, an associate professor of political science at Hanyang University in Seoul. “They target socially weak groups who are kind of rejected by South Korean society and they pick a few members of these groups and they publicise the most dramatic stories against their enemy, whether it is North Korea or Japan.” South Koreans hold bitter memories of Japanese colonisation, often expressing more favourable attitudes toward nuclear-armed, dictatorial North Korea than Japan in opinion surveys. More than any other issue, Tokyo’s perceived failure to properly atone for forcing Korean women into sexual servitude has strained relations between the East Asian neighbours. Although estimates vary wildly and the extent of the Japanese government’s involvement is disputed, some historians believe up to 200,000 Korean women were forced into prostitution during the war, often under the pretext of being offered employment. The issue is especially emotionally fraught due to the lack of time for a resolution, with only 19 of the 240 women who originally registered as victims of Japan’s wartime prostitution still left alive. Against this backdrop, both South Korea and Japan had often exploited nationalistic fervour at home for “the sake of domestic politics”, said a former South Korean diplomat who spent several years stationed in Tokyo. “In Korea, the issues of history closely linked to national identity are easy targets to gain a rallying effect, while the anti-Korean sentiment has had the effect of drawing the support of radical right-wingers in Japan,” said the former diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity. “I do think that both Korea and Japan are equally responsible for the current soured relationship.” Can Japan lay its ‘comfort women’ ghosts to rest? Moon, whose side of the aisle has traditionally been more wary of Japan, has often criticised Tokyo for not resolving the comfort women issue and pressed it to find a “genuine resolution”. Tokyo has insisted that it has repeatedly apologised and offered restitution and that all claims arising from its colonial rule were settled anyway with a 1965 normalisation treaty under which Seoul received some US$500 million in grants and loans. Japan’s past efforts to settle the issue exposed latent divisions among activists and survivors much as Lee’s allegations are doing now. In 2015, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and former South Korean president Park Geun-hye signed a landmark deal under which the Japanese leader offered his “sincere apologies and remorse” and pledged 1 billion yen (US$9.2 million) in state funds to a South Korean-administered fund for survivors. Although 34 of 47 surviving women accepted payments at the time, the deal faced a backlash from some victims and activists for taking place in secret and not including the women in the process. Moon dissolved the fund last year, after calling the deal flawed and a “political agreement that excludes victims and the public”. In the 1990s, the Korean Council campaigned against the Asian Women’s Fund (AWF), established by Tokyo to provide compensation and a signed apology to survivors, on the grounds it evaded the government’s legal responsibility, although more than 60 former comfort women decided to accept the restitution. After campaigning by the Korean Council, the South Korean government offered compensation payments to survivors on the condition they did not accept money from the Japanese fund. In 2004, 33 former comfort women issued a statement publicly accusing the Korean Council of shaming and humiliating women who had accepted money from the AFW and disavowing its hardline stance on Japan. “In the past two decades, many former comfort women and some academics have criticised the Korean Council and the dominant, anti-Japan paradigm in South Korea,” said Yi. “However, most mainstream media and civic organisations either ignore such alternative voices or demand that they be punished.” Challenging the prevailing view or historical record can be legally as well as socially risky in South Korea, where the law does not consider truth an absolute defence against defamation – a broadly-defined offence punishable by up to seven years in jail. In 2017, Park Yu-ha, a professor at Sejong University, was fined 10 million won (US$8,000) after a Seoul court ruled she had inflicted “mental stress” on surviving comfort women through her book Comfort Women of the Empire . The book argued that while women had been beaten and abused, Korean as well as Japanese private recruiters had lured many of them to the brothels and some had enjoyed loving relationships with Japanese soldiers. “Generally speaking, any criticism of so-called anti-Japan activists has been politically taboo in South Korea and thus their organisations have been sanctuarised,” said An Junseong, a visiting professor at Yonsei University in Seoul. “In that context, Lee’s press conference was a big surprise.” Kang Sung-hyun, a scholar on the comfort women at Sungkonghoe University, said Lee’s allegations had shocked South Koreans, but were now being used as political fodder by conservative critics of Yoon and groups like the Korean Council. Professor fined for book about ‘comfort women’, proving the truth is still dangerous “Nobody can really know yet what grandmother Lee Yong-soo really intended or meant with her remarks at the press conference,” said Kang. “The victims and the people around them are conscious that they are leaving us one by one and don’t have much time. Lee Yong-soo is healthy but she is over 90 years old. How must she feel about the Abe government’s adherence to a hardline stance and revisionist history and the Moon government’s ultimately hollow words?” Kang stressed that the movement to get justice for the comfort women should not be seen through a narrow political lens. Since her press conference sent shock waves through political activist circles, Lee, who could not be reached for comment, has shown no signs of wavering in her campaign against her one-time allies. In an interview with the Joongang newspaper last week, the veteran activist was unapologetic: “I said what I had to say, and I will no longer be used.” |
| JoongAng Ilbo | Editorial | Korea Joongang Daily | July 29, 2019 | SouthKorea | Diplomatic solution is key | Nearly a month has passed since Japan embarked on economic retaliations for the Korean Supreme Court’s rulings on wartime forced labor. In the meantime, the discord has deepened, as seen in Tokyo’s refusal to negotiate and average Koreans’ boycott of Japanese products. On Friday, Japan may remove Korea from a so-called “white list” of 27 countries eligible for preferential treatment in trade. The Sankei Shimbun reported that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will avoid a face-to-face meeting with President Moon Jae-in on the sidelines of multilateral meetings coming up, including the United Nations General Assembly meeting in September, unless Seoul shows a “constructive reaction” to the issue.  In such a tense situation, Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha’s telephone conversation last Friday with Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono offers a glimmer of hope. As both foreign ministers are attending the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) in Bangkok starting on Friday, they could help resolve the diplomatic row if they have a bilateral meeting on the sidelines. As we can hardly look forward to a summit between Moon and Abe or the dispatch of a special envoy in the near future, a face-to-face meeting between the foreign ministers could hopefully turn the tide.  First of all, both sides should take a step back. On Japan’s part, it must cancel a plan to remove Korea from the list of countries eligible for special treatment in trade or at least postpone it. Japanese media reported that Tokyo will make the decision in a cabinet meeting on Friday, which coincides with the opening day of the ARF in Bangkok. If the Abe government decides to strip Korea of its preferential trade status, it will only fuel anti-Japanese sentiment among Koreans. If Japan takes that path, even a foreign ministers’ meeting could hardly help.  The Moon administration also must take a forward-looking approach to the row instead of reiterating that it cannot meddle in a judicial ruling. Eight months after the court’s ruling, Seoul proposed to resolve the conflict over compensation for forced workers during World War II through donations from companies involved. Tokyo rejected that idea.  It is not easy to find a solution that includes both the Supreme Court rulings and Tokyo’s position that the problem was addressed through the 1965 Basic Treaty. Nevertheless, both countries must cut through the Gordian knot. The two foreign ministers must have a meeting on the sidelines of the ARF to find a solution before it is too late. |
| The Japan News | Editorial | The Japan News | August 05, 2019 | Japan | Negotiation files reinforce Japanese govt arguments against Seoul | Amid the accelerating deterioration of Japan-South Korea relations, the Japanese government is intensifying its arguments against the South Korean Supreme Court ruling involving former requisitioned workers that triggered the current situation.  The Japanese Foreign Ministry has cited records from negotiations between the two countries on the Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Cooperation and insists that it is clear the ROK court ruling violates the bilateral agreement and contravenes international law.  The agreement, which was concluded in 1965, stipulates that the issue of compensation claims has been “completely and finally resolved.”  However, the South Korean Supreme Court ruled in October last year that the right for compensation for former requisitioned workers was not considered to be covered by the agreement, based mainly on the unfairness of Japanese colonial rule, and ordered a Japanese company to pay compensation.  As the South Korean government is not honoring the agreement and has also been increasingly critical of Japan’s measures to strengthen export controls, the Japanese Foreign Ministry decided to disclose on July 29 records from negotiations that clarify the position of the South Korean side at the time the agreement was reached.  According to the records, Seoul presented an eight-point outline of claims against Japan during negotiations. Repayment and compensation for the requisitioned South Korean workers were among some of the claims. All eight items were recognized in the agreement, providing the basis for the $300 million in grant aid paid by the Japanese government.  According to records from negotiations that took place on May 10, 1961, a South Korean representative said that it was only natural to demand substantial compensation for the mental and physical sufferings that were inflicted by forcible mobilization, in relation to compensation for damages incurred by requisitioned workers.  It is clear that South Korea has been seeking a way to justify claims for money that the ROK court ruled were not covered by the agreement.  The records also confirm Tokyo asked Seoul whether it would seek compensation for individual former requisitioned workers. Seoul replied that the claim would be made as a state and that it would make domestic payments to the extent necessary as a domestic measure.  In addition to the records of the negotiations, the Japanese Foreign Ministry has unveiled a translation of documents released by the South Korean government on the discussions of a joint committee between the public and private sectors, which was established in 2005 under the then Roh Moo-hyun administration. The committee had determined regarding the $300 million Japan paid under the agreement, that comprehensive consideration was given to the right of the claim to be made by the South Korean government as a state. It also determined that careful consideration was given to the fact that the funds were intended to resolve the issue of damages to compensate for the forced mobilization [of former requisitioned workers], among other issues.  In fact, the Roh administration concluded that it would be difficult to ask for additional compensation from Japan, and provided additional assistance to former requisitioned workers on behalf of the South Korean government.  At the time, President Moon Jae-in was a civil affairs secretary of the Blue House and a member of the committee.  The documents had been available in the past through information disclosure requests. However, the Foreign Ministry decided to publicize them to provide accurate information about the issue.  “The precedents of the International Court of Justice and other entities show that the history of the drafting of international treaties can be to a great extent referred to,” said a senior Foreign Ministry official. |
| Do Je-hae | Commentary | Korea Times | September 15, 2020 | SouthKorea | How can Moon mend frayed ties with Japan under Suga? | Questions are being asked as to whether the leadership change in Japan this week will provide a significant impetus for improving bilateral relations between Korea and Japan, following Yoshihide Suga's election as ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leader, Monday.  But prospects appear dim for any visible change in the strained Seoul-Tokyo ties, which under outgoing Prime Minister Shinzo Abe plummeted to their worst levels since the 1965 normalization of diplomatic relations.  The prime minister-designate has announced that he will inherit Abe's foreign policies. Regarding relations with South Korea, he has repeated Abe's position that the 1965 treaty, under which Japan claims a complete and final settlement of colonial era-related reparations, must be the basis of bilateral relations.  With negative prospects for South Korea-Japan ties even under a new leadership in Tokyo, experts are underlining the need for Seoul to take the initiative in restoring bilateral trust. For this, they say one of the first things it must do is to clear the uncertainty over a bilateral military information sharing pact, the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), signed in 2016.  "Deputy National Security Adviser Kim Hyun-chong attempted to cancel a bilateral intelligence sharing pact with Japan," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University, told The Korea Times. "That needlessly damaged Seoul's credibility, not only in Tokyo, but also in Washington, Pyongyang and Beijing. Rather than hold GSOMIA at risk, the Moon Jae-in administration should expand security cooperation with an essential neighbor and fellow U.S. ally. Rather than escalate legal battles or demonize Tokyo, Seoul should encourage civil society dialogues. Fueling trade disputes with wartime history is counterproductive to reconciliation, not to mention harmful to economies recovering from the global pandemic."  Seoul withdrew from its earlier stance to discontinue the GSOMIA in November 2019, following strong opposition from Washington, which said it was "disappointed" by the announcement. Washington sees the GSOMIA as a critical component of trilateral security cooperation, particularly in the wake of continued threats from North Korea and China's rise in the region.  Newly elected head of Liberal Democratic Party Yoshihide Suga poses for photos following his press conference at its headquarters after the party's leadership election in Tokyo Monday, Sept. 14. AP-Yonhap  President Moon Jae-in speaks during a meeting at Cheong Wa Dae, Monday, Sept. 14. Yonhap  There has been no response from Japan to Moon's proposal for resuming talks during his speech to mark Liberation Day, Aug. 15. This is mainly because the two countries are still poles apart on the issue of compensation for Koreans who were forced to work for Japanese companies during Japan's 1910-45 occupation of Korea. Seoul says the October 2018 Supreme Court ruling that ordered Japanese firms to compensate the Korean plaintiffs must be implemented, but Tokyo has refused to adhere to the ruling and insists that the 1965 treaty resolved all compensation issues.  "Suga is likely to respond favorably to South Korean efforts at repairing economic and security ties, if Seoul moves first on closing the gap between domestic court rulings and existing international agreements," Easley added.  Despite the ongoing row over historical issues, some insiders suggest the need for Korean policymakers to adopt a more forward-looking approach to Japan with the view that it is in Korea's interests to be good friends with Japan amid the complex geopolitical situation involving the U.S, China and North Korea.  "It is South Korea that will suffer most by disregarding Japan, which is a very important partner," a diplomatic source told The Korea Times. "The deterioration of Korea-Japan relations affects our relations with the U.S. as well as China in a very negative way. The worsening of bilateral relations damages both countries, but we are the one more negatively affected. We need a stern response to what Japan is doing wrong. But to tackle our geopolitical reality, we need a cool-headed approach to advance our national interest." |
| SATOSHI SUGIYAMA | NewsAnalysis | Japan Times | Jul 4, 2019 | Japan | Frustrated with South Korea, Japan greenlights curbs on smartphone and semiconductor supplies | Japanese measures to impose tighter export regulations on three chemicals vital to South Korea’s manufacturing sector formally went into effect on Thursday, raising the prospects of the two countries sliding into a protracted conflict — though the severity of the measure’s economic impacts remains unclear.  The enhanced licensing requirements applied by the trade ministry to Japan’s third largest trading partner restrict exports of three chemicals that are integral components in the manufacture of high-tech products such as semiconductors, smartphones and television displays.  South Korea’s economic policy chief said Thursday he would not rule out direct countermeasures against Japan if Tokyo maintains its restrictions on the exports for an extended period.  “Implementing corresponding measures against Japan cannot be ruled out, because it will take a long time for the World Trade Organization to produce a conclusion,” said Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki in a radio broadcast.  Under Japan’s revised controls, exporters must apply for permission to ship fluorinated polyimide, resists and hydrogen fluoride individually for each contract, which could take up to 90 days. The move effectively strips South Korea of its status as the beneficiary of an expedited export process. Previously export permissions were generally granted for three year periods.  Japan looks to turn up the heat on South Korea with stricter export controls on more items  South Korea eyes investing ¥91.8 billion annually in chip supply chain after Japanese export curbs  Japan defends tighter export controls amid South Korea wartime labor row  Japan’s decision to apply the controls hints at exasperation in Tokyo over what it sees as sluggish responses by Seoul to its attempts to resolve wartime labor issues.  The Japanese government simultaneously kicked off a public consultation period, giving people an opportunity to voice their views on further stripping South Korea of its “white country” status, which would raise additional barriers to the transfer of technology.  All of the measures currently applied or proposed stop short of an embargo or an export quota, and at this stage the extent to which the controls will impact commerce between the two countries remains unclear.  Japan’s share of the global market for those three chemicals is large, especially in the case of hydrogen fluoride for which the nation holds a market share of between 80 and 90 percent, according to the Nikkei business daily. The chemicals are currently shipped to South Korean electronic giants such as Samsung Electronics Co. and SK Hynix Inc.  “In the short term, if the stockpile runs out, there may be some effects,” said Junichi Sugawara, senior research officer at Mizuho Research Institute. In the long term, though, Japanese exporters “may be affected negatively” if South Korea finds alternatives that can be substituted for those chemicals, he added.  The tightened restrictions are not an unprecedented move, said Masahiko Hosokawa, a former trade ministry official and now a professor at Chubu University. South Korea became eligible for the expedited process in 2004 — meaning that until 2003 export licenses had to be issued individually.  “The change is simply going back to a process that had been done until 2003,” Hosokawa said. “From now on, Japan will treat South Korea in the exact same way the European Union treats South Korea.”  An individual export license is within the bounds of international rules and is not an extraordinary measure, Hosokawa added.  Asked about concerns that the revised controls would hurt the South Korean economy, Hosokawa flatly denied the argument, saying that under the new and proposed measures South Korea would simply be subject to regulations based on international rules, like other countries not listed as “white countries,” and that only exports ﻿﻿ deemed inappropriate would be rejected.  Those chemicals could be diverted for military use, Hosokawa said, so it is important for Japan to make sure South Korea handles the export controls thoroughly.  “As long as South Korea follows the rules, there will be no issues with obtaining export permission,” he said.  Although no details were provided, trade minister Hiroshige Seko claimed this week that the trade ministry has found cases where certain materials exported to South Korea have been handled inappropriately.  Yuka Fukunaga, an expert in international economic law at Waseda University, cautioned that if the number of rejected export requests goes up as a result of the measures, it could be considered in practice as an export ban.  A trade ministry official stressed that the intention was neither a ban nor harming companies.  Either way, South Korea has denounced the tightened regulations, and local media report that Seoul is considering raising a complaint against Japan at the World Trade Organization.  Relations between the two countries have been strained over historical issues, most recently over South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese companies to pay compensation for wartime forced labor. Japan has pushed back by saying the issue of reparations was resolved under a 1965 agreement.  After the companies involved refused to compensate, lawyers representing the former laborers seized the firms’ assets. In response, the Japanese government asked South Korea to participate in bilateral talks to settle the dispute, and urged the country to provide a satisfactory solution by the Group of 20 summit set to be convened in late June. South Korea did not respond to the request for talks or comply with the demand for the issue to be resolved by the summit, Japan says.  “At this point, I don’t think those measures would violate WTO rules,” said Sugawara from Mizuho Research Institute, referring to the export restrictions on the three chemicals. “But rather the issue is political,” he added.  “Japan has asked South Korea for talks and intervention over wartime labor, but South Korea has refused to do this. I think Japan would justify those measures as unavoidable.”  Seko told reporters Tuesday that the decision was not a retaliatory measure against Seoul, but instead is a consequence of an erosion of trust.  “South Korea has repeatedly taken actions rejecting the amicable and cooperative relationship the two countries have built,” Seko said. “The Japanese government can’t help but state that Japan and South Korea’s relationship of trust, including in the field of export control and regulation, has been significantly undermined.”  But Yoo Myung-hee, South Korea’s trade minister, warned Thursday that the newly imposed export limits on high-tech materials would pose a “huge threat” to the global economy and disrupt the global supply chain.  Yoo called for the withdrawal of the measures and bilateral talks to discuss the broader issue of export controls, South Korea’s trade ministry said in a statement.  Staff writer Reiji Yoshida and Reuters contributed to this story.  In a time of both misinformation and too much information,quality journalism is more crucial than ever.  Harvard astronomer argues that alien vessel paid us a visit  This artist's impression shows the first-known interstellar object to visit the solar system, 'Oumuamua, which was discovered on October 2017.  Japan is moving closer to vaccinations: Here's how the rollout will work  A healthcare worker holds an empty syringe during a vaccination simulation in Kawasaki in January.  Japan extends travel restrictions and tightens quarantine measures  A waiting area at Narita Airport in Chiba Prefecture. With the latest extension of the state of emergency, foreign travelers looking to enter Japan will have to wait at least another month, as a total ban on new entries will remain in place through March 7.  Marijuana law reform in Japan contingent on the message  Japanese authorities have demonstrated a strong resistance to trends in other countries to decriminalize and even commercialize the drug's medicinal and recreational consumption.  After a year of anxiety, what can we expect from the Year of the Ox in 2021? |
| NORIYUKI SUZUKI | News Analysis | Japan Times | Dec 25, 2019 | Japan | Abe-Moon talks and Seoul's donation plan could lead to improved ties, observers say | For Japan and South Korea, the resumption of top-level dialogue in and of itself is a major step forward.  Meeting for their first official talks in about 15 months, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Moon Jae-in sent one main message: They will prevent the bilateral situation from spiraling out of control.  That comes as a relief to diplomats who had, until recently, feared the worst of the dispute was yet to come for the Asian neighbors, due to disagreements over compensation for wartime forced labor and Japan’s tightening of export controls.  But Japan and South Korea remain in a state of “mutual distrust” and a return to what Abe has described as a “healthy relationship” won’t be easy, experts say. Continued dialogue can only boost their chances of rebuilding bridges.  “What we’ve seen over the past year are Tokyo and Seoul making their own cases heard, and hoping that the other side would acquiesce. If they stick to an ‘all or nothing’ mentality, they will never meet halfway,” said Hideki Okuzono, an associate professor of South Korean politics and diplomacy at the University of Shizuoka.  “The summit was important in that it signaled some improvement in ties between leaders who had harbored mistrust,” Okuzono said.  In an atmosphere that was “tense at times but not hostile,” about a third of the 45-minute meeting Tuesday in Chengdu, southwestern China, was spent on the contentious issue of compensation for wartime labor, according to a senior Japanese government official. The dispute had sent bilateral ties to their worst state in years.  But Abe and Moon failed to bridge differences in their basic position and no new proposals were made for resolving the issues, sparked by South Korean court rulings a year ago that ordered Japanese firms to provide compensation for wartime forced labor during the 1910-1945 colonization of the Korean Peninsula.  Japan has consistently argued that the ball is in South Korea’s court and that Seoul has to come up with steps to turn the situation around, based on Tokyo’s view that the compensation issue was settled under a 1965 bilateral accord that has been breached by the court orders.  A turning point came when South Korea decided not to terminate a military intelligence sharing pact in late November, leading to some softening in Japan’s stance. It was Abe himself who announced arrangements were being made for his meeting with Moon.  That was followed by the submission of a bill in the South Korean parliament to seek “voluntary” donations from citizens and businesses from the two countries, to be used as compensation.  Since details of that plan emerged, Japanese government officials have refrained from commenting and have instead largely taken a wait-and-see stance — a change from June when Tokyo rejected outright Seoul’s proposal to create a fund with participation by Japanese firms named in the lawsuits in mind.  Tuesday’s meeting was an opportunity for Abe and Moon to clear up uncertainty or doubt over how they will be able to find a solution to the wartime labor issue, although neither side broached the topic of the South Korean bill, according to a Japanese government source.  Japan is apparently concerned about whether the bill will be compatible with the 1965 agreement regarding the right to seek compensation, and how much Moon and his government will be committed to the initiative.  The envisaged plan is seen as the most viable so far but its feasibility is still in doubt due to domestic opposition in South Korea.  There is no “panacea” for repairing ties, said Okuzono. South Korea’s donation plan may not be perfect but appears to have been carefully thought out so as not to cross Japan’s “red line,” he added.  However, skepticism runs deep in Japan after seeing the Moon administration’s disbandment, earlier this year, of a Japan-funded foundation set up under a 2015 bilateral accord to support former “comfort women.”  The term comfort women is a euphemism used to refer to women who provided sex, including those who did so against their will, for Japanese troops before and during World War II.  “It is a proposal by South Korea, who unilaterally disbanded the foundation,” said Fumio Kishida, policy chief of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party who was foreign minister at the time of the agreement, adding, “I wonder how convincing it can be.”  In November, the General Security of Military Information Agreement between Japan and South Korea was saved amid U.S. pressure, and tensions have somewhat eased over trade.  Those issues should not have been linked to the dispute over compensation for wartime labor, said Yasuyo Sakata, a professor of East Asian security at Kanda University of International Studies.  The first priority is to “untie each knot,” Sakata said.  “Wartime labor is a deep-rooted issue that cannot be solved so easily,” she said. “What needs to be done at the least is to prevent it from getting worse and worse, and control damage.”  As the summit kicked off, Abe and Moon touched on the importance of ties between their respective countries. Moon, whose administration has maintained that the judicial decisions should be respected, said the nations are inseparable despite the difficulties they are now experiencing.  “Japan and South Korea will need to get over it,” Okuzono said. Referring to the South Korean bill to resolve the wartime labor issue, he said, “The plan can serve as a starting point for discussion.” |
| Nobuha Endo and Yujiro Okabe | Commentary | The  Japan Times | August 22, 2019 | Japan | Way forward still unclear for Japan, S. Korea | Foreign Minister Taro Kono and his South Korean counterpart Kang Kyung-wha confirmed at their meeting in Beijing on Wednesday that they should resolve their differences through dialogue to prevent the current situation from deteriorating further.  But it will not be easy for both sides to compromise, and mutually acceptable ways to resolve pressing disputes have yet to emerge.  The bilateral relationship has been worsened by the South Korean Supreme Court rulings that ordered some Japanese companies to pay compensation for former requisitioned workers, and Japan’s tightened export controls on shipments of some goods to South Korea. It was the first meeting in about three weeks between Kono and Kang.  Kono, who greeted Kang outside the room where they held the meeting, smiled as they shook hands, but Kang’s expression remained unchanged from beginning to end. Even when Kono spoke to Kang in English, she did not reply. After the meeting, Kang left the venue with a stern face as if she was avoiding questions from reporters.  Kono, for his part, repeatedly emphasized, “We share a belief that the [requisitioned workers] issue must be resolved,” and indicated his policy of seeking to continue communicating with the South Korean side through diplomatic authorities.  A senior official of the South Korean government also said, “Even if there is no concrete progress on the details, it is important to earnestly restore dialogue on issues including the export controls.”  ROK approach in spotlight  The Japanese side had been closely watching for any signs of change in the South Korean side’s approach at this meeting. This was because a slightly softer line toward Japan was observed on the South Korean side, such as in President Moon Jae-in’s speech on Aug. 15 in which he refrained from criticizing Japan and called for dialogue with Tokyo.  According to a source accompanying Kono, the South Korean side did not single out Japan for criticism during the trilateral meeting between Kono, Kang and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held before the bilateral Japan-South Korea meeting. Earlier this month, during a meeting of foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and other nations, the South Korean foreign minister had repeatedly blasted Japan.  “The tone clearly changed this time,” the source said.  The Japanese government will implement Wednesday a Cabinet order to remove South Korea from the so-called white list of countries that can receive preferential treatment for streamlined export procedures. However Japan is also trying to restrain its actions, and it will grant approval for a second shipment to South Korea of materials used to produce semiconductors since export controls on these items were tightened in July.  Putting the brakes on  It appears South Korea’s main focus at the latest round of talks was also to put the brakes on the increasingly intense wrangling.  According to a Japan-South Korea diplomatic source, the South Korean side is considering a new proposal designed to settle the requisitioned labor issue, and is carefully trying to figure out a suitable time to present the proposal.  Analysts believe that the Moon administration is concerned about the bigger-than-expected slowdown in the domestic economy caused by Japan’s tighter export controls and other factors, which could work against him in next year’s general election.  On Wednesday, Kim Sang-jo, chief policy secretary for the South Korean president, said the enthronement ceremony of the Emperor on Oct. 22 would be the “most important point,” as it is expected to be attended by a senior South Korean government official.  “Both nations will strategically seek out ways [to resolve their problems] before then,” he said.  Once that occasion has passed and as the year-end approaches, it is possible that legal procedures could start under which the assets of Japanese companies that lost in the South Korean court cases will be turned into cash for compensation to former requisitioned workers. Should the situation develop to the stage where Japanese companies’ assets are forcibly sold off, the Japanese government would have no option but to take retaliatory measures. A flare-up of the antagonism between Japan and South Korea would be unavoidable.  Moon upending earlier positions  Previous South Korean governments have agreed with the Japanese side’s position that the issue of compensation for former South Korean requisitioned workers was fully resolved by the 1965 Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Cooperation between the two countries. But the Moon administration respects a South Korean Supreme Court ruling in October 2018 that concluded the issue was “not resolved,” to the extent that Moon effectively revised previous governments’ interpretations of this position. This is likely a nod to his left-wing supporters who take a tough line on Japan over historical issues. |
| Choi He-suk | News Analysis | Eleven media | JULY 23, 2019 | Myanmar | South Korea-Japan rift likely to be protracted | South Korean ruling party chief says Tokyo undermining Moon administration. The latest rocky patch in South Korea-Japan relations appears likely to continue for some time, with neither side willing to make concessions.  The Seoul-Tokyo relations have hit a new low following Tokyo’s decision to apply standard conditions on exporting key industrial materials to South Korea, thereby increasing the import process to up to 90 days.  Japan claims that the changes, which slow the importing of materials such as fluorinated polyimides, were made in in response to Seoul’s failure to ensure that potentially dangerous materials do not flow into North Korea.  However, South Korea considers the changes to be retribution for a Supreme Court ruling that found in favor of those forced into labor for Japanese firms between 1938 and 1945.  While some in Korea had interpreted Japan’s move as a ploy to consolidate conservative support ahead of Sunday’s elections, Abe does not appear likely to soften his stance despite the election win.  On Sunday, Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party and coalition partner Komeito took 71 of the available 124 seats in the upper house election.  “Unless Korea brings a proper answer to responses that violate the Claims Settlement Agreement, constructive discussions will not be possible,” Abe said in an interview with Asahi TV on Sunday.  Abe was referring to the 1965 Korea-Japan agreement under which Japan provided financial and material aid to South Korea in compensation for its occupation of the peninsula in the first half of the 20th century. The South Korean Supreme Court, however, has ruled in recent years that the agreement does not nullify an individual’s rights to seek reparations for wrongs suffered under Japanese occupation.  Abe also reiterated that the trade measures are not retributive, and that Japan is only managing “security related trade.” The Japanese prime minister also claimed that Seoul has been rejecting Tokyo’s calls for related negotiations for three years.  He added that Tokyo will respond to Seoul once a “proper relationship of trust” is established, implying that Korea has broken the trust between the two. Seoul’s presidential office on Monday hit back at the comments, questioning the Japanese government’s reasoning behind its measures.  “(The South Korean government) has continuously suggested taking a two-track approach, separating the past and the future in Korea-Japan relations,” Cheong Wa Dae spokesperson Ko Min-jung said Monday. She said that Seoul has responded to Japan’s claims regarding industrial materials imported from Japan leaking into North Korea, as well as to issues Tokyo has raised over the Supreme Court’s rulings on forced labor cases.  “(Japan) has raised security issues, and then historical issues, and the security issue again. Today, (Abe) again referred to historical issues, but I think (Japan) should observe the line (in diplomatic relations),” Ko said, adding that the two countries working together is in the best interests of the Korean and Japanese people.  Ko’s comment echoes those from deputy national security adviser Kim Hyun-chong’s statement Friday, in which he said that Japan switching back and forth between the two issues makes it “very difficult to figure out exactly what Japan’s position is.”  South Korean officials including President Moon Jae-in have raised a number of possibilities behind Japan’s actions.  Speaking at a meeting with his aides on July 15, Moon raised the possibility of the actions being aimed at hampering South Korea’s economic growth. Saying the measures are aimed at the country’s semiconductors industry, Moon said they are “tantamount to blocking our economy’s growth.”  As Korea and Japan continue to draw a parallel, the possibility of Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon taking a bigger role in the issue has been gaining some attention.  The idea of Lee being sent to Japan as a special envoy was raised in the political arena, including from veteran lawmaker Rep. Park Jie-won of the minor opposition Party for Democracy and Peace. Just hours after returning to Korea from an overseas trip Monday, Lee met with Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha and chief of the staff for policy Kim Sang-jo to discuss related issues, further fueling speculations he will play a more direct role. Cheong Wa Dae, however, repeated that while it is open to all measures, including sending a special envoy to Japan, any steps will be carefully considered.  South Korea’s ruling Democratic Party of Korea is taking a harder line, branding Japan’s actions as an “economic invasion,” and going as far to say that Japan could be seeking a change of government in South Korea.  “(Japan’s) economic invasion of Korea will begin in earnest,” Democratic Party Chairman Rep. Lee Hae-chan said Monday, citing Sunday’s Japan’s election results.  “The government, the party and the people must have extraordinary determination in responding to Japan’s tyranny that is destabilizing even (regional) security order,” he said, saying that Japan is expected to take further measures in late July or early August.  On Friday, Lee claimed that Japan’s moves can only be interpreted as an attempt at undermining the Moon administration, citing a report by the Asahi Shimbun daily.  The article had quoted a Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry official as saying that trade curbing measures will stay in place as long as the Moon Jae-in administration remains in power. |
| The Japan Times | News Analysis | The Japan Times | August 24, 2019 | Japan | ROK’s decision on GSOMIA damages security cooperation with Japan, U.S. | It can be said that this is a senseless move that could shake trilateral security cooperation among Japan, the United States and South Korea at a time when North Korea is continuing its nuclear and missile development.  The South Korean government has decided to scrap the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a pact to protect military intelligence between Japan and South Korea. As a reason for the decision, South Korea cited Japan’s step to remove it from the list of countries eligible for preferential treatment in the form of simplified export controls.  Japan took that step as South Korea’s trade control management system and its operations were inadequate. Seoul should first try to improve its management system.  The South Korean side also stressed that Japan did not respond even after South Korean President Moon Jae-in called for dialogue in his speech on Aug. 15. Moon has not presented any concrete measures on the issue of South Korean former wartime requisitioned workers, which is at the root of the bilateral feud. South Korea’s claims are hard to understand.  The GSOMIA is designed to allow allies and friendly nations to share as classified materials information on countries hostile to them. A framework under which countries cooperate to analyze images and codes, among other things, is essential.  Keep contact with Seoul  The Japanese and South Korean governments are said to have exchanged information in about 30 cases since they concluded the pact in November 2016. The South Korean military detects signs of a missile launch by North Korea. An Aegis-equipped destroyer of the Maritime Self-Defense Force analyzes the trajectory of and distance flown by the missile in the Sea of Japan.  The two countries also shared information about a new type of short-range missile that North Korea has fired on successive occasions since July.  The termination of the pact will make it difficult for South Korea to obtain Japan’s data directly. Short-range missiles can reach South Korea. It is a major threat. Is it reasonable for South Korea to take measures on its own initiative that would reduce the deterrence capability of its military?  The United States has urged South Korea to maintain the pact. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed disappointment and showed unusual dissatisfaction with South Korea, a U.S. ally, apparently out of concern that the disarray among Japan, the United States and South Korea could widen.  It is North Korea and China that will benefit from the pact being scrapped. By sending the wrong message — that the functions of the U.S.-led alliance may decline — the situation in East Asia could become unstable.  It should be no surprise that Foreign Minister Taro Kono lodged a protest with South Korea, saying, “It is a completely misjudged response in terms of the regional security environment.”  Japan needs to minimize the impact of the pact’s termination. It is imperative for the Self-Defense Forces to keep up deterrence by strengthening cooperation with the U.S. military.  The Japanese government should maintain communication with Seoul and continue to have multilayered dialogue. It must analyze the security environment in Asia calmly and stress the importance of maintaining Tokyo-Washington-Seoul cooperation. |
| ERICH PARPART | Opinion | Bangkok Post | August 12, 2019 | Thailand | Time for a Seoul-Tokyo peace pact | I love kimchi and I love ramen. I love the bushido way of life and Japanese humility, and I love South Koreans' resilience and devotion to education that helped them lift their country from poverty after World War II to become an Asian economic powerhouse. And in my opinion, both South Koreans and Japanese are among the nicest people in the world.  So watching the current trade conflict between Japan and Korea is like seeing your best friends fighting. You don't want anyone to win or lose, you just want them to shake hands and make up.  That's why I welcomed the news last Thursday that Japan had approved exports to South Korea of a key material used in making computer chips. Maybe the two sides are ready to talk, I thought. Besides, I am looking to replace my five-year-old phone and I don't want to see the prices driven up by supply-chain problems.  As a gaijin (outsider in Japanese) or waegukin (foreigner in Korean), I will never understand the deeply rooted hatred that some Japanese and Koreans might have for one another. But wounds can heal if both sides decide to patch things up together with mutual respect in mind.  When Hiroshige Seko, Japan's minister of economy, trade and industry, said Tokyo had approved some applications for materials required by South Korean companies including Samsung Electronics, it was the first step in improving bilateral relations. "Maybe Japanese businesses have talked some sense into their politicians," said one of my colleagues and I agree.  Resorting to trade restrictions and bullying, as China and the US have been doing, is so out of character for Japan, one of the few free trade champions left in this increasingly protectionist world. The last thing Asia needs right now, after all the turmoil Washington and Beijing have caused, is for two of its top economies to stop trading with each other. Nothing good can come from that.  At the same time, North Korea is using this opportunity to flex its muscles against the South and the US as Seoul is preoccupied with this newfound trade tension. This tells me that the North is never going to give up its nuclear capability and is simply using Donald Trump to gain more international attention. President Trump, meanwhile, keeps dangling promises of denuclearisation as a way to divert attention from the growing problems he has back home.  But resolving trade tension between South Korea and Japan will be complicated. Much will depend on whether Seoul pursues further efforts to obtain compensation for forced labour and sex slavery during the Japanese occupation from 1910-45. The South Korean Supreme Court has already made one compensation order -- angrily disputed by Japan -- and hundreds more could follow.  What Japanese occupiers did during World War II was atrocious and will remain embedded forever in the national consciousness of every country that was affected, including Thailand. But South Korea has its own dark past. It has never recognised the plight of the Lai Dai Han -- the tens of thousands of children who were the product of rapes committed by South Korean soldiers who fought in Vietnam.  If you keep picking at a wound, the healing process will just take longer. Erecting comfort woman statues in front of Japanese embassies and consulates in Korea and other countries was certainly a step in the wrong direction on the road to reconciliation. But bullying South Korea with trade curbs is equally unhelpful.  Keep in mind that Japan and South Korea formally settled the issue of forced labour and sex slavery with a treaty in 1965, when Japan paid a huge sum of money to help develop the South's economy. And in 1998, then-president Kim Dae-jung accepted the apology of his Japanese counterpart, the late Keizo Obuchi, in the hope that their successors could move forward together.  "Japan and South Korea are neighbours, and we have many difficult issues because of that," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said last October at an event in Tokyo to commemorate the 1998 joint declaration. "Political leaders need to make big decisions in order to overcome these issues."  Maybe Mr Abe might want to listen to his own words again, and maybe it is time for president Moon Jae-in to listen to South Korean businesses as well. Their friends all across Asia will thank them for rising to the occasion in the name of peace. |
| Bangkok Post | News Analysis | Bangkok Post | August 23, 2019 | Thailand | Five things to know about Japan-South Korea intel-sharing pact | Under the pact the two US allies directly share military secrets, particularly over North Korea's nuclear and missile capacity  Under the pact the two US allies directly share military secrets, particularly over North Korea's nuclear and missile capacity  TOKYO - South Korea's decision to scrap a key intelligence-sharing pact with Japan has far-reaching geopolitical implications and shows the two neighbours are still struggling to come to terms with a bloody history.  Here are five things to know about the decision:  To general surprise, South Korea announced late Thursday it would not renew a pact with Japan to share military intelligence, called the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).  Myanmar dialogue  Myanmar army walks back 'coup' talk  UN, embassies fret over Myanmar coup talk  Under the pact, originally signed in 2016, the two US allies directly share military secrets, particularly over North Korea's nuclear and missile capacity.  Seoul said it was no longer in its national interest to continue sharing confidential information with its neighbour during a sharp deterioration in ties. Tokyo said it would "strongly" protest the move and urged South Korea to reconsider.  - Why is it important? -  Japan's Defence Minister Takeshi Iwaya said the pact was vital for regional security, pointing in particular to the nuclear and missile threat from North Korea.  "During the series of North Korean missile launches, there was a thorough and careful exchange of information between both sides," Iwaya told reporters Friday.  Scrapping the pact would only make bilateral defence cooperation harder, he said.  Without the agreement, both militaries may find it more difficult to track missile launches from the regime in Pyongyang, said Tobias Harris, an analyst at the Teneo consultancy.  Harris noted that Seoul's move came "just as North Korea has ramped up tests of short-range ballistic missiles."  Some analysts have played down the move, however, noting the United States previously coordinated the flow of sensitive information between the pair and this practice would simply resume.  - What is the regional and global impact? -  South Korea's decision shows trust between the two countries has "crumbled", the left-leaning Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun said, adding that it would only benefit Washington's regional rivals.  "Discord between Japan, the US, and South Korea might be welcomed by China, Russia and North Korea," the paper said.  "They might seize the opportunity and drive further wedges" between the three allies.  Harris said the move was "also a blow to the United States, which has looked to its allies to help shore up its position in a rapidly changing Asia."  "The widening rift not only could complicate efforts to respond to North Korea if the diplomatic process breaks down... but could also hinder future efforts to strengthen coordination between the US and other democracies in the region," Harris said.  It is a "significant step in the deterioration of South Korea's relationship with Japan" and indicates a "broad shift" in how the two countries see their regional role, added the analyst.  - How did it come to this? -  Bitter memories of Japan's brutal colonialisation of Korea between 1910 and 1945 have long cast a dark cloud over bilateral relations.  Japan says a 1965 treaty that normalised relations with a significant financial contribution effectively settled all reparation claims.  In past months, a string of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to compensate forced labour victims has infuriated Japan.  And bilateral ties went into tailspin in July after Tokyo said Seoul was not properly handling sensitive imports and took the country off a list of nations that enjoyed streamlined export control procedures.  This enraged South Korea, which hit back with similar moves targeting Japan, before cancelling the intelligence-sharing pact.  - What happens next? -  Bilateral ties are unlikely to come out of the deep freeze in the near future, said Harris, bracing for "reduced levels of trade, investment, and tourism, and enduring mistrust over history, national security, and territorial issues."  Anti-Japan sentiment continues to grow in South Korea, with protests and boycotts of Japanese goods and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe may come under domestic pressure to retaliate.  The US appeared to be taken by surprise, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo using the unusually strong term "disappointed," noted Choi Kang, vice-president of the Asan Institute of Policy Studies, a private think tank in Seoul.  "But there is also the sentiment that the Trump administration didn't do enough as a mediator to help the two sides find a middle ground," said Choi.  "The US can propose three-way talks in seeking to find a compromise but it will be a long time," added the analyst. |
| KAVI CHONGKITTAVORN | Opinion | Bangkok Post | August 20, 2019 | Thailand | Time for Japan and S Korea to end spat | Japan and South Korea must stop their tit-for-tat measures before their worsening relations reach the point of no return. The ongoing spat between Asian's two economic giants has sent chills down the spines of regional leaders, who are very concerned that it could spiral out of control and break down the longstanding spirit of East Asian community-building. If that happens, the post-war stability and prosperity of the past seven decades would quickly disappear. Difficult as it is, now is the time to mend fences.  In his speech last week to commemorate Korea's independence from Japan's 1910-45 rule, President Moon Jae-in softened his anti-Japanese rhetoric, repeating that his country would be happy to join hands with Tokyo if it opts for dialogue and cooperation. His much-needed remarks opened a new but narrow window for the two nemeses to meet and have a dialogue so that a serious solution can be worked out. But some groundworks are needed.  First, both Foreign Minister Taro Kono and his South Korean counterpart, Kang Kyung-wha, must establish a comfort level between them; otherwise it would be difficult for the two sides to have a meaningful dialogue. When they met in Bangkok on Aug 2 during the Asean annual meeting, it was a bad time as Japan had announced Seoul's removal from the whitelist of countries with preferential trade treatment. Therefore, it was essentially a photo opportunity. At the time, Japan and South Korea wanted to show to the international community, in particular Asean, that they were still on talking terms. It was not a pleasant sight as Mr Kono's and Ms Hwa's facial expressions were not friendly at all.  From the Asean perspective, it was the first time that there has been such a row between Asean's key dialogue partners within the Asean plus three (APT) conference. Throughout the past decades, the APT has served as a neutral and fertile ground for China, Japan and South Korea to discuss their mutual concerns and reconcile their differences. Through Asean, the region's three economic powers have been able to join hands and work together on important areas of cooperation such as energy security, natural gas development, human resource development and others. Lest we forget, Asean also helped launched the so-called Tripartite Cooperation Secretariat in 2009.  Second, before the scheduled tripartite meeting in Beijing between the foreign ministers of China, Japan and South Korea, this week, there must be some positive signals coming from Tokyo and Seoul to lay the groundwork for their dialogue. Last week, Japan approved the first shipment of high-tech material to South Korea since the imposition of export curbs last month. Tokyo should continue to demonstrate such friendly gestures without expanding the current list.  In a similar vein, Seoul also sends a signal that its recent notification to take out Japan from the list of trust trading partner would be a subject of further negotiation. Most importantly is the status of General Security of Military Information Agreement, or GSOMIA, which will expire soon. Under all circumstances, it must continue albeit Seoul's strong indications that it will be annulled. The agreement, which highlighted the mutual confidence of security cooperation between the two top US allies must be kept intact. Since November 2016, Japan and South Korea have benefited from sharing information about North Korea's missile and nuclear threat. The deadline for renewal is Aug 24; therefore Seoul needs to act fast.  Third, all stakeholders in Japan and South Korea must get together to discuss ways and means to reconcile the past and work out the future. Media in both countries have a crucial role to play. Judging from past reports, media outlets in both countries have supported their governments' actions and sometimes applaud retaliatory measures. However, on Thursday, the Asahi Shimbun and Tokyo Shimbun came out with a strong editorial urging Japan to own up to its wartime history.  Indeed, Japan and South Korean civil society leaders, including academics, are powerful influencers when historical lessons and ties are being discussed. As they can take a proactive role in shaping the narratives of the past and ongoing dialogues, especially when they were discussing about the overall national historical experience and traumas. They need to create a conducive environment for the policymakers to revisit their decisions.  Finally, Japan and South Korea must realise that if the dispute continues, it will be a lose-lose proposition for both, especially when it comes to their common objective of reining in and denuclearising North Korea. At this juncture, Japan-South Korea solidarity is utmost imperative and required to strengthen the international sanctions against Pyongyang. As US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un try to prepare for their fourth meeting, the continued conflict would further weaken Japan's and South Korea's bargaining power on issues related peace and security in the Korean Peninsula.  In a related development, one caveat is in order. The deterioration of Japan-South Korea relations including security cooperation would eventually lead to further destabilisation of the whole Indo-Pacific region. In the long haul, their adversarial stance would encourage the hawkish elements in both countries to increase defence spending and engage in arms race. Furthermore, failure to induce North Korea's to denuclearise will provide incentives for Japan and South Korea to seek nuclear capacity of their own as a way to protect themselves.  When President Moon Jae-in visits Thailand in early September, the Asean chair must impress on him that a trusting and firm relationship with Japan is a prerequisite for further stability, economic development and integration in East Asia.  Any breakdown of Japan-South Korea ties, especially trade links, would be disastrous for the region. It would have an economic domino effect that could disrupt the nearly concluded negotiation of the world's largest free-trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), as well as other numerous APT and Asean-led cooperative schemes.  That would be the end of the Asian Century as we know it. |
| The Straits Times | News Analysis | The Straits Times | September 3, 2019 | Singapore | K-pop and kimchi: Tokyo's 'Little Seoul' shrugs off Japan-South Korea spat | In the "Little Seoul" area of Tokyo, Japanese shoppers flock to get their fix of K-pop and Korean face cream, seemingly shrugging off a deep freeze in Japan-South Korean ties.  Visitors to Shin-Okubo could be forgiven for thinking they had stumbled into a district in Seoul, with rows of restaurants serving kimchi and music shops selling the latest K-pop hits from BTS and Wanna One.  And in contrast to South Korea where anger over a deterioration in bilateral ties has sparked consumer boycotts of Japanese goods, it seems it takes more than a political spat to put off avid fans of Korean products.  "I love everything, K-pop, the food, the clothes. I would also like the two countries to make up," said Ms Anna Kaneko, a 19-year-old student making one of her regular trips to Shin-Okubo with a friend.  The latest row is deeply rooted in the bloody history between the two countries, particularly Tokyo's occupation of the Korean peninsula as a colonial ruler, during which hundreds of thousands were forced to go to Japan as labour and women were forced into brothels as wartime sex slaves.  Koreans remaining in Japan after Tokyo's defeat in World War II suffered discrimination and hardship, and several exist to this day in a grey zone in terms of citizenship.  The diplomatic friction has culminated in tit-for-tat trade restrictions and the scrapping of a military information-sharing pact between the two - alarming the United States which has security treaties with both.  Mr Bae Cheo-leun, who runs an organisation bringing together South Koreans in Japan, admitted that a few years ago, "hate speech" against Koreans could be heard in the streets around Shin-Okubo, but this has not been the case during the most recent row.  "The young Japanese K-pop fans who come to this district have a deep love for South Korean culture," added Mr Bae, who accuses politicians on both sides of whipping up "nationalist sentiment".  Ms Kim Heun-hee, a Korean teacher who also runs a cultural cafe in Shin-Okubo, pointed to a difference in attitude between South Koreans living in Japan and those based in their homeland.  "The feeling in South Korea is very severe against Japan now, so some people think it must be dangerous for South Koreans to be in Japan," said Ms Kim.  "On the other hand, Japanese people in Shin-Okubo don't want to talk about South Korea so much. Japanese people don't have much interest in politics but many people also seem to be reluctant to respond heatedly to the political difficulties."  Many South Koreans have taken up a "No Japan" campaign to boycott Japanese products, ranging from beer, clothes and cosmetics to cigarettes, but there has been little apparent retaliation from consumers in the other direction.  South Korean culture has spread globally in recent years, led by the huge success of K-pop stars such as Psy - whose 2012 hit Gangnam Style became the first video to top one billion views on YouTube - and BTS, which finally topped charts in the US and Britain earlier this year.  A particular craze among young Japanese women is for Korean cosmetics such as exfoliating creams, anti-acne masks or stick-on false nails.  But while there seems to be little public anger in Japan at South Korea, there is also scant expectation that the situation will improve any time soon.  South Korean journalist Park Jin-hwan said: "Tensions including historical issues and economic issues between the two countries will remain for a long time. I think Japan and South Korea are now entering a period like the Cold War."  So long as both sides have contrasting interpretations of the 1965 peace treaty that normalised diplomatic relations between the pair, political tensions will endure, added Mr Park.  Japan's Peach Aviation to cut three South Korean routes  Mr Bae said ties between Seoul and Tokyo were "the worst since World War II" but sees hope for the future on the streets of Shin-Okubo.  "Today, I got off at Shin-Okubo station and I saw the town so busy with young people enjoying South Korean food and culture. These young people accept good as well as bad things about South Korea," he said.  "I have high hopes that people like them will respect culture no matter how sour the political situation gets." |
| YUTA ABE AND JUNICHI TOYOURA/ ANN | News Analysis | Eleven media | AUGUST 2, 2019 | Myanmar | Japan, South korea foreign ministers fail to make progress | Foreign Minister Taro Kono met his South Korean counterpart Kang Kyung-wha in Bangkok, but the two were unable to make progress on issues as lawsuits concerning South Koreans and the Japanese government’s policy.    Foreign Minister Taro Kono met his South Korean counterpart Kang Kyung-wha in Bangkok for about one hour Thursday, but the two were unable to make progress on such issues as lawsuits concerning South Koreans who were wartime requisitioned workers, and the Japanese government’s tightening control of exports to South Korea.  There is a wide gap between the two countries’ views on these matters.  This is the first time that Kono and Kang have spoken face-to-face, though they have talked on the telephone, since the July 18 deadline for arbitration procedures under the 1965 bilateral agreement on the settlement of problems concerning property and economic cooperation. South Korea failed to meet the deadline to accept arbitration.  The Japanese government has asked South Korea to rectify its violation of international law, even after the period for arbitration procedures has expired. According to the Japanese and South Korean governments, Kono again asked the South Korean side to come up with measures. |
| TAN HUI YEE/ANN | News Analysis | Eleven media | AUGUST 2, 2019 | Myanmar | South Korea, Japan ministers' talks fail to ease trade, political row | South Korea's Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha warned that Seoul could retaliate if Tokyo proceeded today to remove it from "white list".  South Korea's Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha met Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono yesterday on the sidelines of the Asean meetings in Bangkok amid a growing trade and political row between the two countries.  But the meeting failed to ease tensions and instead resulted in Dr Kang warning that Seoul could retaliate if Tokyo proceeded today to remove her country from a "white list" subject to minimum trade restrictions, according to Reuters.  Dr Kang told reporters after the bilateral meeting in Bangkok: "As Japan cited security reasons for its trade restrictions, I said we will have no option but to review the various frameworks of security cooperation with Japan if the Cabinet decision comes tomorrow."  South Korea's Supreme Court last year ordered two Japanese firms to compensate victims of forced labour during World War II. Japan has protested, arguing the issue of compensation had been settled five decades ago.  Early last month, Japan restricted the export to South Korea of materials used for making semi-conductors, citing doubts over Seoul's ability to control the re-export of items that could be converted to weapons.  Seoul has cast Tokyo's decision as retaliation for its court ruling on forced labour.  During yesterday's hour-long meeting, Mr Kono asked Dr Kang "to rectify the situation which is in violation of international law", said the Japanese Foreign Ministry's deputy press secretary, Mr Jun Saito.  "They had a very candid exchange of information," he added.  The two countries host important bases for United States troops in the region. A spiralling row could unravel an intelligence-sharing arrangement they have with the US aimed at countering nuclear-armed North Korea's missile threats.  Denuclearisation talks between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un collapsed in February in Hanoi, but hopes that they would be revived grew after Mr Trump stepped briefly into North Korea in June via the demilitarised zone separating the two Koreas.  Yet, Pyongyang test-fired two missiles last week and again this week, likely as a warning against US and South Korean military exercises.  Both Dr Kang and Mr Kono are due to meet US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo together today in another attempt to bring down temperatures.  "We're very hopeful that those two countries will together themselves find a path forward, a way to ease the tension that has resumed over the past 10 weeks," Mr Pompeo said yesterday. |
| Walter Sim | News Analysis | The Straits Times | August 2, 2019 | Singapore | Japan removes South Korea from white list: Q&A on this list of 'trusted' trading partners | Japan will strike South Korea off its white list of trusted export destinations with effect from Aug 28, Trade Minister Hiroshige Seko said on Friday (Aug 2).  Here is a Question and Answer on trade white lists:  WHAT IS A TRADE WHITE LIST?  Different jurisdictions have different trade procedures. Not every territory adopts a trade white list, and may screen exports and grant licences on the basis of other criteria.  But those that adopt some form of a trade white list - like the European Union (EU), Australia and Japan - use it as an export control mechanism for "dual-use items", to guard against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.  Such dual-use items - defined as goods, software and technology that can be used for both civilian and military applications - may be used in everyday items like cars, smartphones and telephones, but in the wrong hands can be tapped for nefarious purposes.  Examples of such items include carbon fibres, titanium alloys, and gyroscopes.  Countries placed on a trade white list are ascertained to have taken strict export control measures to stop the re-routing or the smuggling of these components to a third country.  WHAT DOES BEING ON THE WHITE LIST MEAN?  In Japan's case, companies that export "dual-use items" to nations on the white list may apply for bulk licences that are valid for multiple transactions over three years, thus effectively fast-tracking the customs procedure.  The removal, which will be effective Aug 28, will have wider implications beyond the stricter export controls that choke off supplies of three high-tech materials - fluorinated polyimides, photoresists and hydrogen fluoride (etching gas) - that took  Japan to strike South Korea off white list of trusted trade partners, Seoul announces reciprocal action  Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry says that the standard processing period is up to 90 days from the filing of an application, though generally, licences are granted within two to three weeks.  This has sparked concerns in South Korea over delays of shipments of parts that are vital to its semiconductor and technology industry.  However, Japan Foreign Trade Council chairman Kuniharu Nakamura last month dismissed concerns, saying companies can still apply for permission in a more timely manner.  WHO IS ON JAPAN'S TRADE WHITE LIST?  Japan says a continuous review of its export control system - and its white list - is necessary for effective control over sensitive substances and technology from a security point of view.  This, it says, is fully compatible with the free trade regime - including World Trade Organisation rules, which do not bar countries from acting on security concerns.  South Korea was added to Japan's list in 2004, and has been the only Asian country on the list since. But on Aug 28, it will become the first nation ever to lose its place.  The other 26 countries on Japan's list are: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States.  What this means is that territories that are not on the list, like China, India, Taiwan and Singapore, go through normal customs procedures when importing "dual-use" items from Japan.  WHO IS ON OTHER WHITE LISTS WORLDWIDE?  The EU and Australia maintain their own lists of nations that can enjoy relaxed requirements. On the EU's list are Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and the US.  Australia's list is identical to Japan's, but without Argentina and South Korea.  Countries like Singapore and the US, meanwhile, do not adopt such a special trade white list.  In Singapore's case, companies dealing with dual-use items can apply for bulk permits if they meet four criteria: first, be a registered trade with the Singapore Customs; second, have good compliance records; third, achieve at least an "enhanced" band under the Trade Facilitation & Integrated Risk-based System; and fourth, implement effective internal compliance.  The US reviews each application on the basis of the kinds and quantities of items to be shipped; their military or civilian uses; the unrestricted availability abroad of the items; the country of destination; who the end-users in the country of destination are; and the intended purpose.  WHY HAS JAPAN TAKEN SUCH A STEP NOW?  Japan has accused South Korea of rebuffing its repeated attempts over three years to hold bilateral trade expert talks so as to address Tokyo's security concerns.  This has significantly undermined trust, Japan said, stressing that the move to remove South Korea from its white list has nothing to do with differences on other issues like wartime labour and an ongoing territorial spat.  Seoul, however, sees the trade measure as a political tit-for-tat manoeuvre, arguing that there appears to be no other trigger and calling for more evidence from Japan that it has been negligent on its export controls. |
| The Straits Times | News Analysis | The Straits Times | August 23, 2019 | Singapore | South Korea to terminate intelligence-sharing pact with Japan amid history feud | South Korea said on Thursday it will terminate an intelligence-sharing pact with Japan, prompting a protest from Tokyo and deepening a decades-old row over history that has hit trade and undercut security cooperation over North Korea.  With the decision not to extend the pact, the political and trade disputes between South Korea and Japan now extend into some of the most sensitive national security issues in the region.  The arrangement was designed to share sensitive information on the threat posed by North Korea's missile and nuclear activities, and the decision to end it comes after North Korea launched a series of short-range ballistic missiles in protest against what it sees as military build-ups in South Korea and Japan.  The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) was due to be automatically renewed on Saturday, unless either side decided to cancel it. The decision was announced after an hour-long discussion within the presidential National Security Council (NSC). South Korean President Moon Jae-in approved it.  Japan created a "grave change" in the environment for bilateral security cooperation by removing South Korea's fast-track export status, said Kim You-geun, a deputy director of the National Security Council. Japan cited security concerns without providing specific evidence for its decision on South Korea's trade status.  "Under this situation, we have determined that it would not serve our national interest to maintain an agreement we signed with the aim of exchanging military information which is sensitive to security," Kim told a news conference.  South Korea would deliver a formal notice to Japan within the due date, Kim said.  Tokyo on Thursday summoned the South Korean ambassador to Japan Nam Gwan Pyo to protest against Seoul’s decision, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono said.  Kono lambasted the decision, calling the move “extremely regrettable”, and said that it “completely misreads the security situation in North-east Asia”.  Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga had told a news conference before the announcement that Japan believed it should cooperate with South Korea “where cooperation is necessary” despite the recent strain in ties.  This week the foreign ministers of the two countries met outside Beijing and promised to keep talking, but failed to reach any substantive agreements.  REGIONAL REPERCUSSIONS  The South Korean decision is likely to be met with dismay in the United States, which fears weakened security cooperation.  Intelligence sharing is key to developing a common defence policy and strategy, and all three countries are safer when they work together, Pentagon spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Dave Eastburn said. “We encourage Japan and Korea to work together to resolve their differences,” he said in a statement. “I hope they can do this quickly.”  South Korea's won currency extended losses against the dollar in offshore non-deliverable forward trade, falling by some 0.4% against the dollar in just five minutes after the announcement, on concerns that trade disputes with Japan could prolong.  South Korea's foreign minister, Kang Kyung-wha, emphasised that the decision to end the intelligence pact was a result of a lack of trust in Japan. "We will continue to strengthen cooperation with the United States and develop the alliance," she told reporters in Seoul.  South Korea’s defence ministry said that regardless of the end of GSOMIA, it would maintain a “stable” joint defence posture based on a robust alliance with the United States.  South Korea had informed the United States that it would not be extending the deal shortly before the announcement, one Blue House official said.  One Western military source said the intelligence-sharing was sometimes limited, but nevertheless an important area of cooperation in the face of threats from North Korea.  GSOMIA facilitated the sharing of information on North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats, which remain despite a series of summits and negotiations with North Korea, said Cho Tae-yong, a former South Korean national security adviser who worked on the deal when it was first signed.  "Ending GSOMIA is not only the wrong card to play to press Japan, but it is just not helpful for our security," he said.  Shin Beom-chul, a senior fellow at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul, agreed. "It is a decision from which there's a lot more for us to lose than to gain," he said. "It would increase our own security concerns and inflict diplomatic isolation upon ourselves by destroying the foundation of trilateral security cooperation with the United States."  The US envoy on North Korea, Stephen Biegun, raised the issue during a meeting with South Korea's deputy national security adviser, Kim Hyun-chong, before the NSC gathering.  The decision also comes as China and Russia have been more assertive in the region, flying their first joint military air patrol together in July, which triggered an international incident with South Korea and Japan.  BITTER HISTORY  Prior to signing the agreement in 2016, under US pressure, South Korea and Japan shared intelligence through the United States. South Korea went ahead with the deal at the time despite opposition from some political parties and a large section of the public, who remain bitter over Japan's actions during its colonial rule of Korea from 1910 until the end of World War Two.  A 2012 attempt to seal the deal fell apart in the face of domestic opposition in South Korea toward military cooperation with Japan. Relations between the two US allies are seen at their lowest since they normalised ties in 1965, plagued by bitterness over Japan's occupation, which included the use of South Korean forced labour at some Japanese firms.  South Korea had warned it could reconsider the GSOMIA after Japan imposed export curbs on some materials vital to South Korean chipmakers and stripped South Korea of fast-track export status.  South Korea called the Japanese action retaliation for a South Korean Supreme Court order for Japanese companies to compensate some of their wartime forced labourers last October. Japan condemned the ruling, saying the matter was resolved by a 1965 treaty normalising ties.  Japan cited unspecified security reasons for the export controls. |
| The Straits Times | Commentary | The Straits Times | August 9, 2019 | Singapore | Seoul and Tokyo's trade war puts military pact at stake | South Korea has threatened to end a military intelligence sharing agreement with Japan as their tensions escalate over export controls.  The agreement is a symbol of the countries' trilateral security cooperation with their ally, the United States.  Tensions erupted after Japan tightened export controls on key materials for South Korea's semiconductor industry and decided to downgrade South Korea's trade status.  Seoul accuses Tokyo of weaponising trade to retaliate over political rows stemming from their wartime history.  Seoul is seen trying to pressure Washington into mediating the dispute between its allies.  Japan says it wants to keep the agreement, whose renewal deadline is coming up on Aug 24.  A look at the military agreement between Seoul and Tokyo tested by a toxic relationship:  THE AGREEMENT  The General Security of Military Information Agreement, or GSOMIA, went into effect in November 2016 as the two neighbours agreed to step up cooperation in the face of North Korea's nuclear and missile threat.  It is automatically extended annually unless either side notifies the other of its intention to terminate in a 90-day prior notice. The deadline falls on Aug 24.  The agreement took years of discussion and a near-collapse. Any military cooperation with Japan is difficult due to strong resentment against Japanese brutality during its 1910-1945 colonisation of the Korean Peninsula.  South Korea and Japan can still share intelligence through the 2014 three-way intelligence pact via Washington, but that one is limited to North Korea's nuclear and missile programme. GSOMIA allows Seoul and Tokyo to share a broader range of information directly and more quickly.  South Korean boycott could spread to Japanese luxury cars  South Korean military officials say information gathered by Japan's intelligence satellites, radars, patrol aircraft and other high-tech systems were crucial for analysing North Korea's missile tests and activities of its submarines, which could soon be equipped with missile-launch systems.  Japan also benefits from South Korean military radars positioned to detect North Korean launches sooner and Seoul's information gathered from spies, defectors from North Korea.  In 2012, Japan and South Korea backed off from an intelligence-sharing pact less than an hour before a planned signing after Seoul succumbed to political outcry at home.  THE ROW  Tokyo says it wants to keep the agreement despite difficult relations with Seoul.  South Korea says Japan's trade curbs have forced it to review whether it could continue to send sensitive military information to a country that questions its reliability as a security partner.  Japan said tighter export controls are needed as South Korea's trade controls are weak, but they earlier linked the export controls to South Korea court rulings ordering Japanese companies to compensate victims of wartime forced labour.  Some lawmakers also suggested South Korea may have allowed sensitive materials to reach North Korea. That enraged many in South Korea, triggering boycotts and protest marches, and lawmakers demanded their government to end the intelligence-sharing agreement.  Recent surveys indicate more South Koreans were in support of scrapping the agreement.  Japan's Defence Minister Takeshi Iwaya told reporters on Wednesday that he and visiting US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper agreed on South Korea's importance in dealing with North Korea.  Mr Noh Young-min, chief of staff to President Moon Jae-in, said Seoul will make a "comprehensive judgment based on national interest" before the Aug 24 deadline.  Even if South Korea keeps the agreement, threatening to end it might have been a mistake as it would affect long-term trust, said Dr Du Hyeogn Cha, a visiting scholar at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies.  "Instead of making a strong request for US mediation based on goodwill, (Seoul) is attempting to hold the United States hostage, saying 'things can become frustrating for you too'," said Dr Cha, an ex-intelligence secretary to former South Korean President Lee Myung-bak.  THE RISK  A senior Japanese official close to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive matter, said Japan could probably live without the agreement because it has been utilised less than expected and that Tokyo can get information from Washington.  The pact doesn't obligate Seoul and Tokyo to share information and exchanges apparently slowed as relations deteriorated amid nuclear negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang.  There have been 48 exchanges of military intelligence over the three years since the agreement took effect, with each side contributing information 24 times, South Korean lawmaker Ha Tae-kyung said, citing data he obtained from Seoul's Defence Ministry.  Mr Ha said 19 of Japan's cases came in 2017, during a provocative run in North Korean weapons tests.  Japan says they communicated some 30 times over the past three years, including only once in 2018 when North Korea's missile threat subsided.  Some analysts say a scrapped deal would threaten to erase a decade of US effort to link its separate alliances with South Korea and Japan to deal with North Korea and China's growing influence.  "The South Korea-US alliance will run into trouble," said Mr Moon Seong Mook, a former South Korean military official and current analyst for Seoul-based Korea Research Institute for National Strategy.  "A link for security cooperation between Seoul, Washington and Tokyo will be broken."  Scrapping of the intelligence-sharing agreement with Tokyo could make it harder for each of the two neighbours to respond to actions from China and Russia, including their joint bomber patrol over waters between South Korea and Japan last month, which experts say was likely designed to test security cooperation between the US allies.  Japanese experts, however, see emboldened South Korea as signalling its shift away from the US-led trilateral cooperation as the US presence in the region wanes.  "South Korea under the Moon administration appears to be not as enthusiastic about the trilateral cooperation with Japan and the US as South Korea used to be in the past," Dr Junya Nishino, a Korea expert at Keio University, recently said on a TV talk show.  "President Moon thinks the current framework is a legacy of the Cold War era and should be changed." |
| The Straits Times | News Analysis | The Straits Times | JUNE 12, 2019 | Singapore | Japanese view of South Korea falls to record low | The proportion of Japanese with a positive view of neighbouring South Korea fell to a record low of 20 per cent, an annual poll showed, amid anger over a series of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese companies to pay compensation in colonial-era forced labour cases.  More than 60 per cent of those polled in both nations saw the state of the bilateral relationship as "bad." Nevertheless, the proportion of South Korean respondents with a positive view of Japan climbed to 31.7 per cent, the highest since think tanks in the two countries began conducting their annual poll in 2013. The latest results were released Wednesday.  Relations between the neighbours have plunged in the past year due to conflict over Japan's 1910-1945 colonisation of the Korean Peninsula, with the most prominent recent flash point being compensation cases for Koreans conscripted to work for Japan's imperial war machine.  The friction has undermined cooperation between the two US allies amid missile and nuclear threats from North Korea.  Japan says all claims relating to the colonial period were settled under a 1965 treaty that normalised ties. South Korean President Moon Jae-in has said the treaty doesn't prevent Koreans from suing Japanese firms and the decisions of the courts should be respected.  The face-to-face interview survey, conducted by Genron NPO in Japan and the East Asia Institute in South Korea, found the Japanese were increasingly likely to say that ties with South Korea weren't important, while more than 80 per cent of South Koreans said they saw Japan as an important partner.  Both sides had negative views of the other's leader - Moon and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe have each scored political points at home by taking a tough stand against their neighbour.  About 80 per cent of South Koreans had a bad or very bad impression of Abe, up slightly on the previous year, the survey said. The proportion of Japanese with a negative view of Moon doubled from last year to more than 50 per cent.  One reason for the less negative impression of Japan among South Koreans may be direct experience. The survey found that 42 per cent of South Koreans had visited Japan, while only 22.5 per cent of Japanese had visited South Korea. |
| Karyn NISHIMURA | Commentary | Katsu News | September 3, 2019 | Japan | Visitors to Tokyo's 'little Seoul' are often seeking the latest K-pop sensations | In the "little Seoul" area of Tokyo, Japanese shoppers flock to get their fix of K-pop and Korean face cream, seemingly shrugging off a deep freeze in Japan-South Korean ties.  Visitors to Shin-Okubo could be forgiven for thinking they had stumbled into a district in Seoul, with rows of restaurants serving kimchi and music shops selling the latest K-pop hits from BTS or Wanna One.  And in contrast to South Korea where anger over a deterioration in bilateral ties has sparked consumer boycotts of Japanese goods, it seems it takes more than a political spat to put off avid fans of Korean products.  "I love everything, K-pop, the food, the clothes. I would also like the two countries to make up," said Anna Kaneko, a 19-year-old student making one of her regular trips to Shin-Okubo with a friend.  The latest row is deeply rooted in the bloody history between the two, particularly Tokyo's occupation of the peninsula as a colony, during which hundreds of thousands were forced to come to Japan as labour and women forced into brothels as wartime sex slaves.  Koreans remaining in Japan after Tokyo's defeat in World War II suffered discrimination and hardship and several exist to this day in a grey zone in terms of citizenship.  The diplomatic friction has culminated in tit-for-tat trade restrictions and the scrapping of a military information-sharing pact between the two -- alarming the United States which has security treaties with both.  Bae Cheo-leun, who runs an organisation bringing together South Koreans in Japan, admitted that a few years ago "hate speech" against Koreans could be heard in the streets around Shin-Okubo but this has not been the case during the most recent row.  "There was a law brought in to prevent it which has proved effective, even though there is no real punishment," Bae told AFP.  "The young Japanese K-pop fans who come to this district have a deep love for South Korean culture," added Bae, who accuses politicians on both sides of whipping up "nationalist sentiment."  - 'NO Japan protests -  Kim Heun-hee, a Korean teacher who also runs a cultural cafe in Shin-Okubo, pointed to a difference in attitude between South Koreans living in Japan and those based in their homeland.  "The feeling in South Korea is very severe against Japan now, so some people think it must be dangerous for South Koreans to be in Japan," said Kim.  "On the other hand, Japanese people in Shin-Okubo don't want to talk about South Korea so much. Japanese people don't have much interest in politics but many people also seem to be reluctant to respond heatedly to the political difficulties."  Many South Koreans have taken up a "NO Japan" boycott campaign of Japanese products, ranging from beer, clothes and cosmetics to cigarettes, but there has been little apparent retaliation from consumers in the other direction.  South Korean culture has spread globally in recent years, led by the huge success of K-pop stars such as Psy -- whose 2012 hit "Gangnam Style" became the first video to top one billion views on YouTube -- and BTS, which finally topped charts in the US and Britain earlier this year.  A particular craze among young Japanese women is for Korean cosmetics such as exfoliating creams, anti-acne masks or stick-on false nails.  But while there seems to be little public anger in Japan at South Korea, there is also scant expectation that the situation will improve any time soon.  South Korean journalist Park Jin-hwan said that "tensions including historical issues and economic issues between the two countries will remain for a long time. I think Japan and South Korea are now entering a period like the Cold War."  So long as both sides have contrasting interpretations of the 1965 peace treaty that normalised diplomatic relations between the pair, political tensions will endure, added Park.  Bae said ties between Seoul and Tokyo were "the worst since World War II" but sees hope for the future on the streets of Shin-Okubo.  "Today I got off at Shin-Okubo station and I saw the town so busy with young people enjoying South Korean food and culture. These young people accept good as well as bad things about South Korea," Bae said.  "I have high hopes that people like them will respect culture no matter how sour the political situation gets." |
| The Straits Times | News Analysis | The Straits Times | August 9, 2019 | Singapore | US Defence Secretary Mark Esper visits South Korea as region faces myriad challenges | US Defence Secretary Mark Esper will meet with senior South Korean leaders on Friday (Aug 9), amid a series of regional challenges ranging from tensions between Seoul and Tokyo to how much of the cost South Korea should pay for American troops stationed there.  Esper, on his first international trip since being confirmed as defence secretary, arrived in South Korea on Thursday evening amid an escalating feud between Seoul and Tokyo, both US allies.  If the issue comes up in his meetings in Seoul, Esper is likely to reiterate that the two countries should reduce tensions and focus on the challenges posed by North Korea and China.  South Korea has said it was exploring all options in a bitter trade dispute with Japan, including scrapping an intelligence sharing pact.  The accord, the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), facilitates three-way intelligence gathering with Washington, which is crucial in fending off North Korea's nuclear and missile threats. The deal is automatically renewed annually on Aug 24.  Esper arrived in Seoul a day after President Donald Trump said South Korea agreed to "pay a lot more" to shoulder costs required for the upkeep of 28,500 US troops in South Korea and that talks are under way to discuss the issue.  But a spokesman at South Korea's foreign ministry told reporters on Thursday that the negotiations have not yet begun.  The trip comes after North Korea recently carried out a series of missile tests.  A spokeswoman at South Korea's defense ministry said on Thursday that South Korean Defence Minister Jeong Kyeong-doo and Esper will discuss a number of issues, including the security situation on the Korean peninsula, coordinate policy to foster denuclearisation and lasting peace, and discuss key alliance issues.  On Tuesday, Esper said the United States would not overreact to the short-range missile launches by North Korea and would keep the door open to talks with Pyongyang. He also added that, despite complaints by North Korea, there was no plan to alter future joint military drills with Seoul.  South Korea is Esper's last stop on a trip that has also included visits to Australia, Japan and Mongolia. |
| The Straits Times | Commentary | The Straits Times | November 22, 2019 | Singapore | 5 things to know about the Japan-South Korea intel-sharing pact | South Korea's decision on Friday (Nov 22) to "conditionally" extend a key intelligence-sharing pact with Japan will come as a huge relief to the United States, which was deeply troubled by the diplomatic spat between its two main allies in the region.  Here are five things to know about the decision:  What happened?  With just hours to go until it was due to run out, South Korea announced it would suspend the expiry of a pact with Japan called the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia).  Under the pact, originally signed in 2016, the two directly share military secrets, particularly over North Korea's nuclear and missile capacity.  In August, following a sharp deterioration in ties, Seoul said it was no longer in its national interest to continue sharing confidential information with its neighbour.  At the time, Tokyo "strongly" protested against the move and urged South Korea to reconsider.  Why is it important?  Sharing intelligence between the two US allies is especially vital at a time when unpredictable and nuclear-armed North Korea appears to be sabre rattling amid a deadlock in talks with Washington.  Tokyo has said that during missile launches, there is a "thorough and careful exchange of information between both sides" that would otherwise be lost.  Analysts say that without the agreement, both militaries may find it more difficult to track missile launches from the regime in Pyongyang.  Scrapping the pact would have been "a huge setback for one of the pillars of East Asia's security that Japan, South Korea and the United States have established", said Mr Kenichiro Sasae, former vice-minister for foreign affairs, negotiator, and ambassador to the US.  Other experts have played down the move, however, noting the United States previously coordinated the flow of sensitive information between the pair anyway, and this would simply have resumed.  What is the regional and global impact?  The US had pleaded with Japan and South Korea not to allow a deterioration in ties to affect the military-sharing pact, with officials as senior as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urging the pair to bury the hatchet.  US officials admit privately that the spat between the two complicated diplomacy in the region - including with North Korea over its nuclear programme.  Defence Secretary Mark Esper said on a recent trip to Asia that the only beneficiaries from the pact being scrapped would be North Korea and China, and urged the two allies to "sit down and work through their differences".  How did it come to this?  Bitter memories of Japan's brutal colonialisation of Korea between 1910 and 1945 have long cast a dark cloud over bilateral relations.  Japan says a 1965 treaty that normalised relations with a significant financial contribution effectively settled all reparation claims.  But in past months, a string of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to compensate forced labour victims infuriated Japan.  Bilateral ties went further into tailspin in July after Tokyo said Seoul was not properly handling sensitive imports, and took the country off a list of nations that enjoyed streamlined export control procedures.  This enraged South Korea, which hit back with similar moves targeting Japan, before cancelling the intelligence-sharing pact.  What happens next?  Bilateral ties are unlikely to come out of the deep freeze in the near future, said Mr Sasae, but should still be seen as positive over the longer term.  "The current situation is extremely deplorable and extremely regrettable... but the Japan-South Korea relationship has been expanding when seen in a historical perspective," he said.  Anti-Japan sentiment continues to grow in South Korea, however, with protests and boycotts of Japanese goods and a dramatic drop in South Korean tourists visiting Japan. |
| Da-Sol Goh | News Analysis | Asia Times | SEPTEMBER 16, 2019 | Hong Kong | Anti-Korean sentiment thriving in Japan | In September 1923, the Great Kanto Earthquake devastated parts of Greater Tokyo, claiming hundreds of thousands of lives. The disaster caused chaos, followed by groundless rumors that ethnic Koreans had poisoned local water supplies to kill Japanese, and had taken advantage of the post-quake confusion to plot crimes.  After newspapers reported the false rumors, vigilantes murdered ethnic Koreans. Meanwhile Japanese officials sat idle as more than 6,000 Koreans were massacred.  But this was not the only time fake news has led to anti-Korean sentiment in Japan. More than seven decades after Korean independence, anti-Korean feelings continue to thrive across Japan.  In 2014, the Osaka High Court upheld a lower-court ruling on Zaitokukai, a far-right group, which was ordered to pay 12.26 million yen (US$113,700) in damages for hate speech targeting a school for ethnic Koreans in Kyoto. After the High Court ruling, the United Nations Human Rights Commission said the Japanese government should prohibit hate speech, especially that stemming from racial discrimination, noting that vitriol against Koreans was getting serious across the country. Indeed, anti-Korean tirades have become rampant in Tsuruhashi district in Osaka, a region home to Koreans, and Shin-Okubo in Tokyo.  In May 2016, Japan passed the Hate Speech Act to curb racial discrimination. Even so, anti-Korean rhetoric is still rife, particularly after the escalation of a trade war between South Korea and Japan. As Seoul and Tokyo have been playing hardball with each other amid the trade spat, some extremists are stirring up anti-Korean sentiment yet again.  Extremists in Japan have been circulating more content that expresses hatred of Korea, playing down one of its brutal wartime crimes: They have mocked survivors of sex slaves who were coerced into forced sex by the Japanese imperialist military. Extremists have said these so-called “comfort women” were prostitutes who tried to make money from the sex industry.  DHC, a Japanese cosmetics brand, has taunted South Koreans’ boycott of Japanese products and ethnic Koreans in Japan, on its Internet channel DHC Television. Right-wing commentators on the channel have referred to Koreans as joshenjing, a pejorative term. Moreover, they distorted history by claiming that Korea had been incapable of creating a writing system, so Japan created the Hangul alphabet for them. Even after DHC Korea in Seoul apologized to South Korean customers for the slur, the company’s headquarters in Japan hasn’t admitted fault.  Newspapers are also spreading hatred of Koreans. Some media have published sensational articles that demonize Sough Korea, referring to the country as an “annoying neighbor.” Fretting over the rise of anti-Korean media, some Japanese civic groups have recently urged news outlets to maintain impartiality, adding that some hateful news reports risk abusing the human rights of ethnic Koreans.  Since the colonial era, racial discrimination has fed the hatred of Korea, and such sentiment still shows no sign of disappearing, particularly among right-wingers. Whatever their cause, anti-Korean sentiment in Japan just makes relationship between South Korea and Japan even worse. |
| ANDREW SALMON | Commentary | Asia Times | JANUARY 15, 2021 | Hong Kong | Japan-Korea comfort women controversy re-erupts | As one of the most emotive legacies of the Pacific War raised its head in a Seoul court, Japan-South Korea relations have once again been placed on a collision course with no off-ramp in sight.  A Seoul court on January 8 ordered the Japanese government to pay compensation of almost $100,000 each to 12 “comfort women.” Judgment in a separate case, bought by 20 comfort women, was meant to be reached on January 13 but has been delayed.  On the surface, it may appear to be a simple case of victimhood and long-delayed justice – particularly given that similar suits filed in Japanese courts in the 1990s and 2000s had failed.  But there is nuance. The situation pits Korea’s simmering historical grievances against Japan’s insistence that the court judgments breach prior bilateral agreements and ignore compensation previously paid.  Seoul has tried to calm matters.  In an unusual move, South Korean President Moon Jae-in met Japan’s departing ambassador Koji Tomita on Thursday, suggesting it was time for relations to shift into a future-oriented gear. And South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-hwa implored her Japanese counterpart, Toshimitsu Motegi, not to react excessively in a 20-minute phone call.  But Seoul’s ambassador to Tokyo was called in for a talking to after the judgment, and all indications are that Tokyo’s patience is fraying. According to Kyodo News on Thursday, Tokyo is mulling various responses, including delaying the dispatch of a new ambassador or even taking the case to the International Court of Justice.  “The ruling is absolutely unthinkable in terms of international law and bilateral relations and has resulted in an abnormal situation,” said Japan’s Press Secretary Tomoyuki Yoshida.  This issue makes waves far beyond academia and courts.  While Japan’s 1910-1945 colonial occupation of the Korean peninsula ended more than 75 years ago, historical disputes are at the forefront of bilateral relations, casting long shadows over strategic, political and economic ties.  The intractable situation exasperates US policymakers. South Korea and Japan are democracies with separate US alliances facing off against North Korea and China. But their historical squabbles obviate tri-lateralism.  The recent Korean court cases are largely symbolic. No South Korean court can force Japanese governmental compliance, and only one of the women who was part of the 12-person lawsuit remains alive. However, it is a humiliation for Japan.  Citing separation of political and judicial powers, Seoul can reasonably argue non-responsibility.  However, the key drivers of the comfort women issue, including the two lawsuits, are a pair of NGOs that lobby for justice for comfort women and which have shot down Japan’s past efforts to atone and compensate.  And there is direct link between the activists and the government. A former head of the most active NGO was last year granted a National Assembly seat by Moon’s Democratic Party of Korea.  Who is right? Who is wrong?  The historical remembrance-apologies-compensation brouhaha is a tangled web.  There is no doubt that Korea was the victim of Japanese imperialism, and Korean activists have raised historical grievances in domestic and global forums  Many Koreans, and overseas Koreans, point to the refusal by some in the Japanese government and on the right to accept any responsibility for colonial-era atrocities, or even accept that they occurred. Politicians continue to pay respects at Tokyo’s controversial Yasukuni Shrine, where war criminals are enshrined. Textbooks largely whitewash Japan’s wartime brutalities.  In today’s post-colonial world, these are powerful messages. In the court of international public opinion, Korea is winning. But Japan, too, has a case – albeit an under-reported and less emotive one.  Scores of apologies – from emperors, prime ministers and cabinet secretaries – have been delivered. Compensation has been offered by Tokyo – only to be refused or frozen. And agreements between the governments have been ignored or abrogated by South Korea’s courts and government.  Neither side accepts nuances surrounding the history of the issue.  Many Koreans insist that the victims of the comfort women system – a network of military brothels deployed across the Japanese imperium – were predominantly Korean. They assert that they were not prostitutes, but were innocents coerced, tricked or forced into the brothels, making them “sex slaves.”  Moreover, as the exclusive clients of the comfort stations were Japanese troops, Koreans demand that Tokyo bears governmental responsibility.  Conversely, many Japanese insist that a considerable proportion of comfort women were Japanese, and that the comfort women were paid prostitutes on contracts, not sex slaves. Moreover, they stress that private brothel operators – including Koreans – were responsible for recruiting the girls, thus absolving Imperial forces of moral or financial obligation.  Then there is the issue of veracity.  Koreans insist that oral and written testimony delivered by surviving comfort women since the early 1990s, when a newly democratized Korean society was reassessing historical issues, proves their position.  Japanese shoot back that Allied documentation from the war years on comfort women makes virtually no mention of forced service, and point to shifting narratives among some survivors.  Japan strikes back  Japan largely endured Korea’s jabs from the early 1990s, when the comfort woman issue first entered the international limelight after advocacy by Japanese and Korean human rights organizations, until 2018.  That year, a Korean court seized assets of Japanese companies invested in Korea to compensate wartime forced laborers. A furious Tokyo insisted that the judgment undercut a 1965 treaty under which Japan had paid hundreds of millions of dollars in grants and aid to settle colonial-era issues – including forced labor.  Exasperated, Tokyo slowed exports of three key chemicals used by Korea’s semiconductor industry and downgraded Korea’s favored-nation trade status.  Seoul responded in kind, while furious citizens and NGOs demonstrated and launched boycotts of Japanese products. Koreans saw the villain as conservative Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, an internationalist who sought to improve Japan’s image globally, but who was painted as an ultra-nationalist, particularly given the role his grandfather, who was accused of war crimes, played out in the wartime exploitation of Manchuria.  Certainly, Abe was not well disposed towards Moon – for the forced labor brouhaha had been predated by a comfort woman imbroglio in which Abe alleged bad faith.  In 2015, a bilateral agreement was reached between Abe and then-South Korean President Park Geun-hye. Under it, Abe’s foreign minister offered Abe’s “most sincere apologies and remorse to all the women who underwent immeasurable and painful experiences and suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.”  Financial compensation of 1 billion yen (approximately $8.3 million) was paid by Tokyo to surviving comfort women. Both governments agreed that the issue was “finally and irreversibly” solved. In return, Seoul undertook to negotiate with a civic group to remove a comfort woman statue standing outside Tokyo’s embassy in Seoul.  Tokyo’s apology and the compensation were accepted by 34 out of 45 living victims. However, the remainder, led by a high-profile NGO, furiously opposed the deal on the grounds that the victims had not been consulted. Meanwhile, not only had the Seoul statue not been moved, another one had been erected outside the Japanese consulate in Busan.  After the scandal-struck Park administration was replaced by the current Moon administration in 2017, Seoul repudiated the deal and froze the Japanese compensation funds, infuriating Tokyo.  There were yet more issues. In 2018, Tokyo angrily alleged that a South Korean destroyer had illuminated a Japanese aircraft with its target radar. And in 2019, Seoul demanded a Japanese vessel at a South Korean naval review either strike its “Rising Sun” ensign – which Koreans consider a symbol of oppression – or depart. It departed.  All this generated anger among Japan’s populace.  “A lot of the frustration that I see in Japan was directed more at the Japanese government than at the Korean side, especially the conservatives,” said Jason Morgan, an American professor who teaches history and international relations at Japan’s Reitaku University. “They could not understand why Japan had to keep taking punches. “  Politicians reacted. In 2019, Abe’s Foreign Affairs Minister Taro Kono interrupted the South Korean ambassador, telling him that Seoul’s position on the forced labor issues was “totally unacceptable” and “extremely impertinent.”  A video clip of the scene went viral across Japan. “I think people were happy that someone was speaking up,” said Morgan.  A picture of former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe behind a statue of a teenage girl symbolizing comfort women. Photo: Jung Yeon-je/AFP  Who is really pushing the issue?  While the target of the lawsuits is the Japanese government, the Korean government can deny involvement. A firewall exists between the judiciary and the administration and unlike some nations, there is no mechanism for political leadership to overrule or ameliorate a court decision on diplomatic grounds.  However, sitting governments can, in fact, influence the judiciary through the Ministry of Justice. Two justice ministers resigned last year in a battle against the prosecution. But equally, The recent cases prove that the judiciary can push back.  But arguably, it is neither the government nor courts that have been the most influential players in the comfort women issue. That honor goes to civic groups.  Korean NGOs, over the years, have been tremendously successful at raising awareness of the comfort women and other Japanese wartime atrocities globally.  They have taken survivors on global speaking tours, and have assisted ethnic Koreans living in Australia, Germany and the United States to raise comfort women statues in those countries – to the embarrassment of Japan.  The recent court cases involve two high-profile NGOs.  The 12 cases were sponsored by Naneun-ae Jib (“House of Sharing”) and the 20-woman case is being assisted by Jeongeuiyeon (“The Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan”) – formerly Jeongdaehyeop, ( “The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Sexual Slavery by Japan”), founded in 1990.  The Korean Council takes a particularly strong stance. In the early 1990s, it opposed the “Asia Women’s Fund,” a Japanese joint government-business initiative that offered compensation to surviving comfort women and a signed letter of apology from the sitting Japanese prime minister. The Korean Council’s intervention – which insisted that it should be the Japanese government rather than private business that paid compensation – killed that deal.  The group would subsequently become the key opponent of the 2015 Abe-Park deal, which was subsequently quashed by the Moon government. But it ran into legal flak last year when a high-profile comfort woman, Lee Yong-soo, publicly broke with it.  Lee alleged financial misdemeanors at the NGO, said that it had taken advantage of elderly survivors, and accused it of fomenting hatred among Korean and Japanese youth. (School children were regular attendees at the weekly demonstrations organized by the Korean Council outside Seoul’s Japanese embassy.)  The Korean Council was affiliated with a shelter for surviving comfort women, Pyeongwha-ae Jib (“House of Peace”). The manager of the house committed suicide last June amid investigations into Lee’s allegations.  A key figure in the controversy is Yoon Mee-hyang, who headed the Korean Council and who has been, since the early 1990s, probably the most active figure in comfort women advocacy. Yoon, though investigated by both prosecutors and right-wing media during the 2020 scandal, was not found guilty of any illegality.  What is clear, however, is Yoon’s links to the Moon administration.  By the time last year’s scandal broke, Yoon had left the NGO to take up a new position as a sitting lawmaker of Moon’s Democratic Party of Korea. It granted her a proportional representation seat after 2020’s April general election.  As an advocate of victimhood, Yoon is well positioned.  “The Moon government has prioritized the rights of victims,” a presidential advisor told Asia Times. Relatedly, it has made the eradication of “deep-seated evils” a principle of its policy.  This principle extends beyond crimes committed solely by Imperial Japan. Moon, a former human rights lawyer, has formally apologized for atrocities committed by authoritarian South Korean governments of yore – such as the pre-Korean War Jeju Island Massacre, in which thousands of civilians were killed during a counter-insurgency campaign against leftist guerillas.  Two former conservative presidents are also serving jail terms for corruption and abuse of power committed in-office.  “The Japanese keep trying to do something [to resolve historical issues] but Korean society doesn’t feel it’s enough or appropriate,” said Lim Eun-jung, an international relations scholar at Korea’s Kongju National University. “But there are a lot of wounded hearts and we Koreans pursue justice over international politics.”  There is precious little common ground for Seoul and Tokyo to stand upon.  “One of the major priorities for the Japanese government in foreign policy since World War II is respect for international law, and Japan felt shocked and humiliated,” Lim said. “Our counter-argument is that general trends are changing and this was a serious crime against humanity.”  So while Japan cites binding agreements, Korean courts cite the primacy of supra-national humanitarian principles over local law. This is frustrating for many Japanese, even those who admire Koreana such as cuisine, music, film and TV dramas, Morgan said.  “People are saying, well, something bad was done and we apologized and gave money and now it has come back,” he said. “They are thinking that the court system in Korea is not entirely on the level. Why do they want to keep re-litigating this?”  Lim, a Japan specialist, sees little hope of a breakthrough.  “There is no hope for restoring relations, I cannot be that optimistic,” she said. “Political leaders need to take risks and face challenges, but they don’t seem to have a strong will to break through this situation.”  “I just don’t see it changing unless there is a grand reset with Biden coming in,” added Morgan. “But short term, I can’t see how this can get solved.” |
| ANDREW SALMON | Commentary | Asia Times | AUGUST 5, 2020 | Hong Kong | Japan, Korea step back from brink of trade Armageddon | Japan and South Korea braced and held their breaths on Tuesday – then slowly exhaled, as a much-feared trade war between the world’s 3rd and 12th-largest economies failed to ignite.  August 4 was the date on which a Korean court in the town of Pohang, in southeastern Korea, was mandated to start the liquidation of Japanese companies assets seized in October 2018. The asset liquidation did not commence, with Japanese news reports stating that the company in question, Nippon Steel, was appealing the seizure.  While an appeal does not end the issue, it will likely take months to work through, granting breathing time for a resolution that would obviate a trade conflict between two major manufacturing economies.  The non-move by Korea and the very belated legal move by the Japanese company suggest that both parties seek to de-escalate – good news for a global economy that is already creaking under massive pressure from Covid-19 and is also facing the specter of a China-US decoupling.  Though the assets in question – shares of a joint venture between Nippon Steel and local steel maker POSCO – are worth a mere 973 million won ($813,000), Tokyo has taken an exceptionally strong stance on the matter.  Asia Times heard from a senior business figure with top-level contacts in both Korea and Japan in February, that were Korea to squeeze the trigger of asset liquidation, Tokyo would massively retaliate with industrial and financial sanctions. Japanese officials have strongly warned Korea not to cross the red line, and the South Korean press on Monday was rife with speculation about what form Japan’s retaliation to an asset liquidation might take.  Some guesses include restrictions on exports of capital goods to Korean firms, many of which are reliant upon Japanese components; Japanese financial firms’ withdrawal from Korean stock markets; and visa restrictions on Korean citizens.  Intractable issue  The casus belli dates back to October 2018, when Korean courts seized financial assets of Nippon Steel – which at that time was named Nippon Steel and Sumimoto Metal – and Mitsubishi Heavy in South Korea. The assets were confiscated in order to pay damages to South Korean laborers who had been forced to work in Japan during the Pacific War, and who had filed suit in Korean courts.  Japan’s position is that the forced labor issue was settled via a 1965 treaty which had held firm for over half a century. Under that treaty, Tokyo and Seoul opened diplomatic relations, while Japan paid some $800 million in grants and loans in compensation for its colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula from 1910-1945. Documents made public in 2007 in South Korea showed that the amounts due to forced laborers had been exhaustively negotiated.  However, while Tokyo in 1965 paid the monies directly to the Seoul government, Seoul did not pay anything to the victims. Instead, it used the Japanese cash as economic development capital.  Though the judiciary, as part of the Korean state, is party to the 1965 treaty, the presiding judge in 2018 cited supra-national human rights standards for his judgement, and awarded damages to the Korean litigants regardless of the treaty.  Further complicating matters, many in today’s democratic South Korea question the bona fides of the 1965 South Korea government, which was led by an ex-general who had seized power via coup d’etat and ruled with harsh authoritarianism.  Japan’s Shinzo Abe administration, which had earlier seen South Korea’s Moon Jae-in’s government unilaterally dismantle a 2015 bilateral agreement designed to solve the long-running “comfort women” issue, accused Korea of being “untrustworthy” and of disrespecting international law.  Last year, Tokyo slowed exports of key chemicals needed by the Korean semiconductor industry and removed Korea from a list of privileged trade partners. Seoul responded by removing Japan from its trade “white list” while the Korean public boycotted Japanese products, retail outlets and travel. Meanwhile, Korean semiconductor firms diversified their supply chains.  That issue has now largely settled down. However, Tokyo’s 2019 action, which jolted Korea, is believed to be a shot across the bows compared to the real broadside it could unleash if the assets are liquidated.  What next?  Some prominent members of Moon’s Democratic Party have moved to defuse the crisis.  Former prime minister and likely 2022 presidential candidate Lee Nak-yon is believed to have negotiated behind the scenes. And former National Assembly Speaker Moon Hee-sang proposed a solution which did not proceed, largely due to disinterest from the presidential Blue House, a source told Asia Times.  “A joint fund, that would not be compulsory on the Japanese side, could have saved face for both Japan and Korea, and was the most ideal solution,” a senior, retired South Korean diplomatic official with extensive contacts in Tokyo, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Asia Times. “I sounded out some Japanese in government and business and they were mostly agreeable, but it was sort of refused by the Blue House.”  While Tokyo has made clear its uncompromising stance, it is not entirely clear which direction Seoul will move in next.  Though many right wingers accuse President Moon of being a hard leftist, a communist or even a North Korean stooge, his course in international affairs has been marked by prudence rather than recklessness.  Despite his enthusiasm for inter-Korean exchange, he has not broken any international sanctions on North Korea. He also reversed a controversial decision to dissolve a bilateral intelligence-sharing pact between Seoul and Tokyo.  The latter U-turn is believed to have been made under US pressure. It is not known whether that was the case with Tuesday’s non-action on the asset liquidation.  Still, there is little common ground for Moon and Abe to stand on and both may have a cause for nationalist grandstanding. Moon’s political position was strengthened after his party handily won April’s legislative elections, but real estate and economic problems are now cutting into his ratings. Abe’s popularity ratings have fallen to the 30s amid the Covid pandemic in Japan.  So, risks simmer.  “Drawing out the legal process on seized corporate assets provides more time for a political compromise, but South Korean governments facing declining domestic support tend to fall back on patriotism against Japanese colonial atrocities,” said Leif-Eric Easley, an associate professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University. “Moreover, Tokyo’s incomplete atonement precludes recognition of contemporary policy mistakes in Seoul.”  He warned multiple bilateral issues – Korea’s referral of Japan to the WTO, and the Democratic Party’s appointment of a controversial activist who has shot down Tokyo’s attempts to resolve the “comfort women” issue as a sitting lawmaker; Japan’s opposition to Korea joining the upcoming G7 meeting, and its refusal to support a Korean candidate for WTO leadership – present a combustible situation.  This may particularly be the case on August 15 this year – the 75th anniversary of Imperial Japan’s Pacific War defeat and Korea’s liberation.  “I’m not reassured,” the academic said. “I remain very concerned about Korea-Japan relations.” |
| ANDREW SALMON | Commentary | Asia Times | JUNE 4, 2020 | Hong Kong | Japan-Korea trade war looms over forced labor | A simmering ember of the Pacific War may be about to ignite a trade war between Japan and South Korea, 75 years after Tokyo’s surrender.  A court in South Korea on Thursday ordered the beginning of legal procedures to liquidate the assets of a Japanese company which refused to compensate forced laborers from the war, when Korea was a Japanese colony.  Asia Times has learned from two sources close to the Japanese government that the liquidation of those holdings is a “red line” for Tokyo.  If the line is crossed, Tokyo will retaliate against Seoul with economic countermeasures that range from the industrial to the financial, Asia Times understands.  The measures would massively outweigh the diplomatic-trade spat that led many to dub 2019 the worst-ever year in terms of relations between the two Northeast Asian democracies.  Thursday’s decision coincides with surprise developments in another issue that has long divided the two countries and won international attention: “comfort women” – the aging survivors of Japan’s sordid military brothels.  The historical-diplomatic-legal-economic struggle between Japan and Korea has immense ramifications for the region and beyond. Asia Times lays out the key facets of this complex but important controversy in a Q&A below.  What started this?  The wartime labor compensation issue has been a razor-edged wedge between the two countries since 2018, when a court in Pohang, southeastern Korea, seized assets from Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd and Japan’s Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corp.  The assets from the latter are shares in a joint venture between the Japanese firm and Korean steelmaker POSCO. They are worth approximately US$800,000.  Following the Korean move, in 2019, Tokyo added new bureaucratic procedures that slowed the export of three key chemicals essential for Korea’s flagship semiconductor industry, and removed South Korea from a list of favored trading partners.  Seoul responded by removing Japan from its own trade “white list” while angry Korean consumers boycotted Japanese consumer goods and travel to Japan.  However, the Korean chip industry was not hard hit. The dispute occurred at a low point of the semiconductor super-cycle, meaning manufacturers had ample inventory and were able to secure related products from other suppliers while developing some of their own.  Moreover, Japanese supplies of the three chemicals were slowed, but not halted – enabling production to continue.  Latterly, South Korea, under heavy US pressure, withdrew plans to leave a trilateral intelligence sharing agreement.  As a result the dispute fizzled and an uneasy calm descended. By the time Covid-19 hit East Asia, it had dropped far off media radars.  It seems a piffling amount of cash to spark a trade war between trillion-dollar-plus economies. Why the brouhaha?  Bigger issues are at stake than money. For both countries, this is about principle.  For South Korea, it is long-overdue justice for victims of Japanese imperialism. For Japan, it is an issue of prior treaties and bilateral trust. For both countries, it is a trial in the global court of public opinion.  What is Korea’s argument?  The South Korean position is that then-colonial laborers were forced to work for Japanese companies without compensation, often under hideous conditions, and should, at long last, be paid.  Koreans are taught that Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945) was the darkest period of their history, with the worst crimes being committed against “comfort women” as well as forced laborers. Anti-Japanese content is prominent in mass media, film and TV. Polls have even shown that prime ministers of democratic Japan are less popular among the South Korean public than the leaders of totalitarian North Korea.  Current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, widely seen as a hardcore nationalist and wartime revisionist – his own grandfather was a leader in Japan’s rapacious wartime governance of Manchuria – is reviled.  Many Koreans believe that today’s Japanese are either ignorant of their grandparents’ wartime atrocities or simply refuse to acknowledge them. They say Japan has never apologized or compensated – or has not apologized sincerely or not compensated enough – and that Japan seeks to remilitarize.  What is Japan’s position?  The Japanese position is that the wartime labor compensation issue was long ago settled. When the two countries normalized diplomatic relations in 1965, a major economic package of grants and soft loans, totaling $800 million, was paid from Tokyo to Seoul as colonial-era compensation. Pre-treaty negotiations included highly detailed talks on the amount to be paid to every laborer.  Following the 2018 Korean court ruling, Japan demanded international arbitration on the basis of the 1965 treaty. Korea refused.  Given that the current Korean government had previously nullified a 2015 Seoul-Tokyo deal to end the “comfort women” dispute between the two countries, Japan’s Shinzo Abe administration has called Korea’s Moon Jae-in administration “untrustworthy.”  Many Japanese believe that although emperors, prime ministers and cabinet secretaries have apologized to Korea, Koreans will never be satisfied and that Japan has already paid adequate compensation, and Koreans exaggerate or falsify their colonial-era suffering to shame Japan.  Why don’t Koreans respect the 1965 treaty?  Seoul was, at the time of the 1965 treaty, led by President Park Chung-hee, who had served as an officer in the Imperial Japanese Army – making him a traitor in the eyes of many Koreans.  Park had seized power in a coup and suppressed democratic activity – but was also the architect of Korean industrialization. In that role, he did not use the Japanese money to compensate victims, but as seed capital for economic development.  Today’s South Korea is led by the leftist Moon government which succeeded the administration of Park Geun-hye – Park’s Sr’s daughter. In 2017, she was impeached on charges of corruption and abuse of power following massive people power protests in 2016.  Many in the current administration, and their supporters, revile both Parks and their political legacies. Many also consider right-wing politicians and certain big business interests to be descendants of colonial collaborators.  Moreover, Japan was a major investor in and economic tutor to authoritarian Korea from the 1960s-1980s. It was only in the 1990s that then-democratic Korea was confident enough to question the past relationship and stand up to Japan.  Meanwhile, Japanese believe that they compensated Korea in 1965 in a treaty that held for decades, and owe nothing further. Case closed.  Did the South Korean court ignore the 1965 agreement?  While the Korean court system is part of the Korean state and so beholden to the 1965 state-to-state treaty, the judge in 2018 invoked supra-national humanitarian norms as the basis for his judgment.  Meanwhile, the Moon administration’s position is that, due to a constitutional separation of power between government and judiciary, it is powerless to alter the 2018 court decision.  Historically, however, Seoul governments have had significant influence over the judiciary via the Ministry of Justice, and the current government is engaged in a major struggle to reform the prosecution.  This is happening amid highly unusual developments in the comfort women issue, correct?  Indeed. The latest move on the forced labor front coincides with a seismic shock shaking the community advocating for surviving comfort women – another huge thorn in the side of Seoul-Tokyo relations.  The former head of the highly influential NGO the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery of Japan, Yoon Mi-hyang, is currently taking massive fire for alleged corruption.  Her accuser? None other than Lee Yong-soo, a 91-year-old ex-comfort woman and arguably the highest-profile survivor of Japan’s military brothels. Lee accuses Yoon of taking advantage of the comfort women and of sowing hatred between Japan and Korea.  Under Yoon’s leadership, the Council worked with great success to raise awareness of comfort women internationally – and with equal success to invalidate initiatives designed to settle the issue between the two countries.  The Council was the key mover in abrogating Tokyo’s Asian Women’s Fund in the 1990s, complaining that the monies came from Japanese firms and the public, not the government.  Although the majority of then-living comfort women accepted it, the Council fiercely opposed the agreement between Park and Abe in 2015, under which the Japanese leader apologized to the comfort women and offered compensation that was delivered in 2016.  Subsequently, the Moon administration followed the lead of the NGO, rather than that of most comfort women, unilaterally nullifying the agreement and freezing the fund, angering the Abe administration.  A recent move by Yoon has made things embarrassing for the current government. As of April’s legislative elections she clearly declared her political colors when she left the Council and joined Moon’s ruling Democratic Party as a lawmaker.  Needless to say, Korea’s right-wing press has had a field day.  When is Armageddon?  Japan’s chief cabinet secretary said Tokyo would “use every option on the table” to protect Japanese investments. However, the Korean court has left open a window of opportunity.  The Japanese corporate defendant has – under orders from Tokyo – declined to accept the notice of damages from the Korean court. On Thursday, it was announced that the court will consider the papers served as of August 4, whether the Japanese company accepts them or not.  That looks to be the date when the asset liquidation begins, the line is crossed, and Japan retaliates.  Why is this important?  Politically, Japan and Korea are democratic neighbors with separate alliances with the United States. But history – and the related issues of interpretations, apologies and compensation – bedevils bilateral relations.  Due to this, Washington has failed to forge a trilateral alliance in Northeast Asia to counter China, North Korea and Russia.  Economically, a “decoupling” between China and the United States looks increasingly inevitable – raising incredibly complex supply chain and relationship challenges for companies worldwide. In yet another risk for the global economy, a 2018-2019 bilateral dispute looks set to reignite more fiercely than ever.  Who will win?  G3 Japan’s economy (GDP: $5.1 trillion in 2019) far outweighs G11 South Korea’s (GDP: $1.63 trillion). And last year, Washington took Tokyo’s side after Seoul threatened to void a trilateral intelligence-sharing agreement.  However, South Koreans may be willing to endure more pain. They are, generally, more emotionally invested in anti-Japanese sentiment than Japanese are in anti-Korean sentiment.  Can this dire situation be forestalled?  With the United States embroiled in domestic chaos and with President Donald Trump focused on the November election, the obvious middleman arbiter between Japan and South Korea is absent.  That leaves it up to Seoul and Tokyo to compromise and reach an agreement. On current form, neither Abe nor Moon looks likely to budge. |
| YUTA ABE AND YUYA YOKOBORI/ANN | Commentary | Eleven media | AUGUST 4, 2019 | Myanmar | Decision to end preferential status for South Korea fuels trade spat | Friday’s decision by the Japanese government to take further export control measures against South Korea has prompted fierce opposition from the South Korean government.  The trade dispute was caused primarily by Seoul’s violation of international law in relation to lawsuits about South Korean former wartime requisitioned workers.  An effort by the United States, which is an ally of both Japan and South Korea, to calm the dispute has not immediately moved the needle toward reconciliation between the two countries.  “I don’t know what [South Korean Foreign] Minister Kang Kyung-wha based her criticism [against Japan] on,” Foreign Minister Taro Kono said at a foreign ministers’ meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Japan, the United States and South Korea in Bangkok on Friday.  His comment was in response to Kang’s strong criticism at the beginning of the meeting of Japan’s tightening control of exports to South Korea as being done “in a unilateral and arbitrary way.”  Kono continued by saying, “It is Japan’s role in the international community to effectively implement export controls.”  He also claimed that Japan’s decision to remove South Korea’s so-called white list status was made as part of its export controls only for security purposes. It was rare for Japan to exchange fierce criticism with South Korea at an international meeting.  The Japanese government has announced the renaming of the aforementioned list of trading partners qualified for simplified export procedures as “Group A.”  Japan’s explanation delayed  Tokyo’s position is that it is not an extraordinary move to exclude Seoul from the list of Group A nations. The European Union also does not regard South Korea as a trading partner that can receive preferential treatment.  However, there are not a few who consider Japan’s stance against South Korea as a “retaliatory measure.”  The Washington Post reported on the issue online Friday with the headline “Japan-South Korea dispute escalates as both sides downgrade trade ties.”  The story also introduced some experts who accused Tokyo of “using trade as a political weapon.”  Japan’s measures for strengthening export controls against South Korea were led by the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry.  The Foreign Ministry, which is in charge of briefing the international community and foreign media, was excluded from the initial decision-making process and discussions on the issue.  Compared with South Korea, whose government unites to denounce Japan’s measures as “unjustifiable,” a Foreign Ministry official said, “Japan’s explanation seemed to be very delayed.”  Limit of U.S. patience  The United States, which has taken a wait-and-see attitude toward the dispute, attempted to ease the tension between the two countries at the strong request of South Korea.  Washington apparently fears that if the confrontation intensifies, it could pose a threat to security in Northeast Asia. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday urged the two nations to seek a compromise at a foreign ministers’ meeting among Japan, the United States and South Korea.  However, the Tokyo-Seoul confrontation stems from the South Korean government’s failure to concretely address its country’s court rulings regarding the issue of wartime requisitioned workers that would overturn the 1965 Japan-South Korea agreement on the settlement of problems concerning property and claims and on economic cooperation.  A Japanese government source said: “Even if the United States serves as the go-between, Japan will not change its position. Because Japan changing its attitude would send the wrong message to South Korea.”  There are mountains of problems between the two countries, including lingering issues about comfort women, the Takeshima islands and an incident in which the South Korean Navy directed fire-control radar at a Maritime Self-Defense Force plane.  Seoul mulls countermeasures  By Junichi Toyoura / Yomiuri Shimbun Correspondent  The administration of South Korean President Moon Jae-in will play up Japan’s move to remove its neighbor’s fast-track export status with the United States and other foreign partners until the measure is enforced on Aug. 28, with the aim of mounting pressure on Tokyo to withdraw the decision, according to sources close to talks among Japan, the United States and South Korea.  Seoul will take countermeasures when Tokyo eventually removes it from the so-called Group A list of trading partners qualified for simplified export procedures.  As one highly possible option, the South Korean government is mulling abandoning the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a framework for the two neighbors to share information on North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs. The agreement is up for annual renewal in late August.  If South Korea decides not to extend the agreement, the move will likely trigger a backlash from the United States as it means Seoul would disrupt cooperation among the three countries against North Korea.  However, Seoul believes this could work to prompt the United States to call for Japan not to remove its neighbor from its fast-track export status, the sources said.  “We will step up safety measures starting with areas such as tourism, food and waste,” said Hong Nam-ki, South Korean deputy prime minister and economy and finance minister, during a press conference on Friday.  According to the sources, the South Korean government is considering an option to expand its import bans on fishery products from Fukushima and seven other prefectures.  Another plan has emerged to boycott next year’s Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics as part of efforts to reduce the number of South Korean tourists to Japan, which reached about 7.5 million last year. |
| JAPAN NEWS | News Analysis | Eleven media | AUGUST 6, 2019 | Myanmar | South Korean firms suddenly scrambling | It's been one month since the Japanese government tightened controls on exports to South Korea of three items, including hydrogen fluorides used in semiconductor production.  Sunday marked one month since the Japanese government tightened controls on exports to South Korea of three items, including hydrogen fluorides used in semiconductor production.  So far, there has been no noticeable impact on production or corporate performance in either Japan or South Korea, yet South Korean firms are moving to increase their stocks of the three products and diversify their suppliers. Meanwhile, some Japanese companies are becoming increasingly concerned about the future.  Big market share  “[The export controls] are being carefully explained to companies. I don’t think very many firms are anxious or worried,” said Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshige Seko at a press conference during a visit to Beijing on Saturday.  The three items are hydrogen fluorides used to clean semiconductors, photoresists applied to semiconductor boards, and fluorinated polyimides used in organic EL (electroluminescence) panels. Japanese firms hold large shares of global production for each of these items.  Some can be obtained from foreign competitors. However, high-purity hydrogen fluoride, for example, is considered to be only available from Japanese companies, and thus the impact on South Korean companies seeking to develop and produce high-performance semiconductors could be significant.  Sense of crisis  “If the export restrictions persist, we can’t rule out the possibility that production will be disrupted,” an executive of SK Hynix Inc., a major South Korean semiconductor maker, said during a conference call for analysts on July 25.  In addition to adjusting their use of the export-controlled items, South Korean firms are also seeking to obtain as much stock as possible and to broaden their supplier base to include non-Japanese firms.  The website of South Korean newspaper JoongAng Ilbo reported that Samsung Electronics Co. wrote to partner companies in July asking them to “secure a safe stock for at least 90 days by the end of July, no matter the cost.”  “Hydrogen fluoride is time-consuming to produce and difficult to transport. It may be hard for South Korean companies to find alternatives,” said Yasuo Imanaka, chief analyst at Rakuten Securities Economic Research Institute.  90-day review  Meanwhile, Japanese chemical makers that have been selling the three items to South Korean firms are applying for export permits from the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry so they can continue trading.  “It’s our role to obey the law as we respond to customers’ needs. If there are procedures to go through, we will do so seriously,” said Japan Petrochemical Industry Association Chairman Kohei Morikawa at a press conference July 18. Morikawa is also president of Showa Denko K.K.  While his firm manufactures hydrogen fluoride, Morikawa said there “has not been any major confusion at this stage.”  The ministry has been reviewing the applications it has received from companies, but as this usually takes about 90 days, no company has received an export permit yet.  “Are they really going to allow it?” an executive of a chemical maker that is going through the process wondered anxiously.  Semiconductors produced by South Korean firms are widely used in electronic devices manufactured by Japanese companies. Sony Corp., which uses South Korean parts, said it has enough to meet sales for the current year, but Sony Director Hiroki Totoki warned, “It’s not a foregone conclusion that the impact will be minor.”  ‘No effect’ on Japan  On Friday, the South Korean government announced it would begin proceedings to remove Japan from a group of countries eligible for simplified export procedures. If this occurs, exports to Japan of items that could be diverted to military use would require a separate permit application for each contract, in principle.  The move is a response to a Japanese Cabinet decision to remove South Korea from a group of countries that receive preferential treatment. A Japanese government source said it would “not have a major impact.”  Trade between the two countries primarily involves raw materials being exported from Japan and finished products being imported from South Korea. While Japan imports semiconductors from Korea, “They can also be procured from Taiwan. There are few items for which there are no substitutes,” said a Japanese government source.  Even if companies need to apply for individual licenses, exports would likely be allowed if there are no problems with how the item would be used. |
| TODD CROWELL | Commentary | Asia Times | FEBRUARY, 9, 2019 | Hong Kong | Thinking the unthinkable: A Japan-Korea clash | A South Korean nuclear physicist harbors a secret admiration for North Korea’s leader and hates the Japanese, who worked his father to death in a mine during World War II. He defects to the North, where he helps to build a Korean atomic bomb – which is tested on Tokyo.  That is the plot of an ultra-nationalist, pan-Korea thriller by Kim Jin-myung. The Rose of Sharon Blooms Again – the Rose of Sharon is the Korean national flower – has sold three million copies since its publication in 1993, making it one of South Korea’s biggest selling novels ever.  Subsequently made into a film, the story was a fantasy for ultra-nationalists on both sides of the Korea Strait.  Any scenario pre-supposing a war between Japan and Korea appears unthinkable. But while a kinetic clash between the democratic neighbors is by no means inevitable or likely, it is not unthinkable.  Current relations are at a nadir. In late December, Tokyo claimed that a South Korean destroyer locked its tracking radar on a patrol aircraft of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force in the Sea of Japan, which, incidentally, Koreans call the East Sea; in international forums, Seoul is pushing for the name to be changed.  Seoul strongly denied that its destroyer did that, and complained that the Japanese aircraft flew dangerously low while interfering with an ongoing search and rescue operation. Both sides sought to buttress their positions with multi-lingual videos posted on YouTube.  The drama revived memories of a similar incident in the East China Sea in 2013 when a Chinese frigate locked its radar onto a Japanese destroyer and a helicopter. There were fears that the incident could have precipitated a shooting war.  In an editorial, the conservative Sankei Shimbun, one of Japan’s five “national” newspapers, called on Seoul to apologize, asking: “Does the [South] Korean Navy not even know the distinction between enemies or allies? Or, has it decided to regard Japan as an enemy?”  General Suh Wook, a spokesman for the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff, was in no mood to downplay the controversy, when he addressed the issue of Japanese aircraft buzzing vessels: “Our military will respond strongly, based on our response rules.”  An accidental conflict arising out of an incident such as the lock-on controversy is conceivable, but “would have to be a helluva screw-up,” said Brad Glosserman, a visiting professor at Tama University in Tokyo.  Could relations worsen further? Let us consider some scenarios.  Scenario One  South Korea issues a new defense white paper, which, for the first time mentions Japan as a security threat, while dropping that designation for North Korea. Tokyo vehemently protests. Seoul rebuffs the protest and says that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is unreliable compared with Kim Jong Un. Tokyo withdraws its ambassador.  In October, Tokyo withdrew from an international fleet review hosted by South Korea after Seoul demanded that its ship not display “wartime” flags, even though the rising sun design has been Japan’s naval ensign since 1889.  In November, Seoul unilaterally dissolved the Japan-funded Reconciliation and Healing Foundation, designed to provide Tokyo’s compensation to surviving “comfort women”. The foundation was the centerpiece of a 2015 bilateral deal that was supposed to lay the emotive wartime issue permanently to rest on a government-to-government level.  Yet another row arose when the Supreme Court of South Korea ruled that families of Koreans forced to work in Japanese factories or coal mines during the war had rights to compensation from companies that employed them as unpaid labor. Japan’s position is that the 1965 agreement that normalized relations between the two countries specifically ordained that all issues of compensation or war reparations had been settled for all time. That position was rejected by the court.  A map showing the Dokdo / Takeshima Islets. Image: VOA  Scenario Two  Japanese right-wing nationalists sneak into Korea and blow up bronze statues of ‘comfort women’ in front of the consulates in Seoul and Busan that are meant to shame Japanese. Tens of thousands march to condemn Japan, while a mysterious fire breaks out in the Yasukuni Shrine. Tokyo says the incidents are connected.  The next step for the plaintiffs will be to seize assets from Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corp. in South Korea. If that goes ahead, Tokyo may retaliate by seizing Korean assets in Japan or possibly levying tariff hikes on imports from South Korea.  Economic retaliation could spiral out of control. For the moment, Japan has said it will invoke a third-party arbitration clause in the 1965 agreement. If that happens, it will be the first time such talks concerning the 1965 agreement have ever convened.  Meanwhile, a territorial dispute – competing claims for the Dokdo (Korean) or Takeshima (Japanese) Islets between the two countries – continue to roil relations.  Scenario Three  Right-wing elements in the National Assembly revive the long-dormant Korean claim to Tsushima, a large island in the Korea Strait, known in Korean as Daemado. In 1948, the government of the then-newly created South Korea claimed the island. American occupiers brushed the claim aside. Tokyo reinforces a 350-man army garrison there and orders a halt to all Korean land purchases.  Tokyo claims the Dokdo/Takeshima islets but does not patrol the waters or engage in related operations. From time to time, Korean VIPs, including even the president, are flown out to the Dokdo. Tokyo usually issues a protest, but the Japanese ambassador has on occasion been recalled.  Korea is prepared to repel any attack. The islets, unlike the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (the subject of a dispute between Beijing and Tokyo), are garrisoned by an armed police detachment, which would discourage any kind of commando operation or incursion by nationalists.  Seoul recently completed a new “forward deployed” naval base on the island of Ulleungdo – the closest Korean territory to the islets, which is large enough to accommodate guided missile destroyers and even Korea’s 15,000-ton amphibious assault ship, named – you guessed it – Dokdo.  Vessels based at Ulleungdo can reach Dokdo in two hours. Since 1986 the South Korean navy has staged exercises in waters around Dokdo to practice defending the islets from invasion. From whom, Seoul does not say.  Scenario Four  The annual Liberation Day parade in South Korea on March 1 turns into a riot as hyper-nationalists try to burn down Japanese enterprises. The president orders the Japanese out of the country “for their own safety.” Tokyo cuts diplomatic relations.  For two decades South Korea has been expanding and modernizing its navy well beyond the needs for coastal defense with the goal of creating a blue-water force that can roam the high seas.  Unlike China’s navy, Tokyo has yet to look on this buildup as a threat. “But present in the background of most South Korean military development is a desire to keep up with the Japanese and, ideally, someday teach [Japan] a lesson as payback for past sins,” says Grant Newsham, a retired Marine Corps officer and a senior research fellow at the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies.  Still, cool heads do not believe that relations could descend to the low of an actual exchange of fire.  “The simple reason that the two countries will not go to war is that both sides rely on the US military presence,” Koichi Nakano, a professor of political science at Sophia University in Tokyo, said. He was referring to the separate alliances that Seoul and Tokyo have with Washington.  “Eventually, the US [would] intervene and scold the two sides to get along.” |
| KIM YON-SE | News Analysis | Eleven media | AUGUST 7, 2019 | Myanmar | South Korea stands to lose more than Japan: poll | This year on Aug. 15, South Koreans will celebrate Liberation Day and mark the 74th anniversary of Korean independence amid a trade war with Japan.  Then on Sept. 18 the nation will commemorate 120 years of railroad history, with some saying Japan initiated the railway construction in 1899 in an attempt to plunder Korea’s resources.  Since its liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, Korea has strived to catch up with its neighbor in a variety of industrial sectors. While Japan is the world’s fourth-largest exporter, Korea isn’t far behind, ranking sixth as of 2018.  But the current trade row, centering on retaliatory measures imposed by Japan after the Korean Supreme Court sided with victims of wartime forced labor against Japanese companies operating in Korea, is aggravating downside risks throughout the Korean economy.  The Japanese currency, which traded at 1,006.21 won per 100 yen five months ago on March 5, surged 14.1 percent to close at 1,148.09 won on Aug. 5. The Korean won has also lost ground to other key currencies such as the US dollar and the euro.  While some Koreans are boycotting Japanese products and tourism, others have called on the Moon Jae-in administration to resolve the dispute through diplomacy.  “Can the government sever diplomatic relations with Japan? As the scenario is illogical, the Moon administration should refrain from further provoking Japan,” one online commenter said. “In addition, the trade war cannot justify the government’s poor economic performance for the past two years.”  Public opinion is split when it comes to Seoul’s countermeasures against Tokyo, local pollsters revealed.  According to a survey released Aug. 3 by SA Consulting, 50.9 percent of the 1,000 Koreans surveyed said they supported the government’s response. A similar number, 45.5 percent, replied that the government wasn’t handling the situation well.  People who disapprove of the government’s response are in the majority among those in their 20s (49.3 percent negative versus 46.2 percent positive) and those in their 60s or older (35.5 percent positive versus 60.2 percent negative).  Critics outnumbered supporters in the areas comprising Sejong, Daejeon and the Chungcheong provinces; Busan, Ulsan and South Gyeongsang Province; and Daegu and North Gyeongsang Province; as well as in the provinces of Jeju and Gangwon.  Concerning the nation’s economic outlook for the second half, only 16.9 percent of the 1,000 respondents predicted an improvement, while 48.1 percent said they expected the economy to worsen further.  The poll also found that President Moon’s approval rating was lowest among men in their 20s at 25 percent. It was next lowest among men in their 60s at 31.7 percent, women in their 60s at 34.6 percent and women in their 50s at 42.3 percent.  Disapproval of Moon was higher than approval in all four demographic groups.  The approval rating for the ruling Democratic Party was also lowest among men in their 20s at 19.2 percent, in sharp contrast to its 59 percent approval rating among women in their 20s.  According to another poll, conducted by Opinion Research Justice and released July 31, 49.9 percent of the 1,000 respondents forecast that Korea would sustain greater losses than Japan as a result of this economic war. That view was shared by 54 percent of the men and 45.9 percent of the women.  Of all the respondents, 25.9 percent said the trade dispute would harm Japan more than Korea and 20.2 said both countries would suffer similar losses.  Opinion was likewise divided on the boycott of products made in Japan -- 42.7 percent said it would aggravate bilateral conflicts, while 47 percent said it would help resolve the dispute. Male respondents were much more evenly split, with 45.9 percent expressing negative views about the boycott and 46.4 percent seeing it as a good thing.  The Opinion Research Justice survey also showed that Moon’s approval rating had fallen below 40 percent. While 39 percent said they supported the president, 41.8 percent voiced disapproval.  “Korea’s GDP scale is the one-third of that of Japan, and the population level is 40 vs. 100. The feud is likely to deal a more serious blow to Korea, to the full range of business sectors,” said a research analyst in Seoul. |
| ANDREW SALMON | Commentary | Asia Times | JULY 16, 2019 | Hong Kong | Be afraid: Japan-Korea history war spirals toward trade war | A long-running history war between Japan and South Korea has burst the boundaries of diplomacy, leaving the world’s third- and 11th-largest economies teetering on the brink of a real, live trade war.  The stakes are stratospheric. The new battle brewing between Washington’s two democratic allies in Northeast Asia threatens seismic consequences not just for the world’s electronics supply chain, but also for regional geopolitics.  Worryingly, both sides look unwilling to de-escalate, while customary mediator Washington stands on the sidelines.  Lighting the fuse  The crisis blew up when Tokyo announced this month that South Korean importers of key Japanese semiconductor and display materials are now required to submit to new, and potentially onerous, 90-day government approval processes.  The decision was taken, ostensibly, on national security grounds – a move that may have been plucked from US President Donald Trump’s playbook. At face value, it looks highly dubious. There is no evidence that Seoul has dispatched the materials to North Korea.  But Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has taken a broader stance: He considers Seoul, overall, an untrustworthy counterparty. Two actions underscore his contention.  Last year, Seoul’s Moon Jae-in administration unilaterally ceased to abide by the terms of a 2015 agreement signed between Tokyo and a previous Seoul administration, via which an apology and compensation was delivered to elderly Korean “comfort women.”  Then, in January, Korea’s Supreme Court ordered the seizure of Japanese firms’ assets to compensate Korean workers forced to labor in wartime Japanese factories. A fuming Tokyo insisted the action breached the terms of a 1965 treaty that it claims dealt with the issue, and in which hundreds of millions of dollars of compensation was paid.  Tokyo demanded third-party arbitration (a clause in the 1965 treaty). Seoul shot back that it cannot overturn a court decision. It refused.  Although Tokyo warned it would not stand idle, and has likely been mulling its move for months, Seoul – which openly dubs Abe’s actions “retaliation” – has been caught wildly off-guard. Panicky Koreans anticipate essential supplies for their flagship electronics industry being not just delayed, but halted altogether.  Dire though they are, current animosities extend well beyond the current administrations.  Close but far  A startling paradox is that individual Japanese and Koreans usually get along perfectly amicably. Their social cultures are similar, and they consume each other’s cuisines and pop cultures with gusto; indeed, Japan is a critical national market for “Korean Wave” acts and shows.  However, Japan has a harsh history of aggression on the peninsula.  Japan devastated Korea in an invasion in the 16th century, and colonized her in the 20th. Beyond the unfairness and exploitation implicit in colonialism, the brutalities of Japanese rule, such as the recruitment of “comfort women” for Japanese military brothels, the recruitment of forced labor and suppression of Korean culture, are well known. Korean-Japanese have also suffered prejudice.  Still, in the years since 1945, it is difficult to point to another other ex-colonial power that has offered more remuneration or apologies to an ex-colonial subject.  In the US-brokered 1965 treaty, diplomatic relations were restored, with Tokyo paying Seoul US$800 million in grants and soft loans – a major portion of Japan’s forex reserves at the time. Seoul, instead of passing along compensation to individual colonial victims, invested the cash in economic development. Regardless, for decades relations were stable.  Only after Korea won democracy in 1987 did pent-up animosities, buried under authoritarian regimes, bubble to the surface. By then, Korea’s economy was self-sufficient enough to wean itself off Japanese capital, partnerships and consultants.  In the 1990s, anti-Japanese-ism replaced anti-communism as the most powerful emotive force in the Korean body politic. Although the 1950-53 Korean War was bloodier and more destructive, the 1910-1945 colonial period is widely painted as the darkest age in Korean history.  In Japan, varied viewpoints of the Pacific War are available (albeit not in textbooks, which whitewash Japanese atrocities) and there is a spectrum of opinion on Japan’s colonial and wartime actions.  But in South Korea no divergence from the narrative is permitted. Only colonialism’s worst aspects are taught in schools and displayed in museums. Popular culture fictionalizes and mythologizes the independence struggle. News media practice self-censorship. Scholars who offer nuance are shouted down – including, in a recent case, by their own undergraduates. Others face court action, fines, redactions and even job loss.  Scores of apologies have been delivered by Japanese emperors, presidents and cabinet secretaries –mostly in recent years. But relations continue to deteriorate as Koreans find constant reasons to dispute apologies, usually on grounds of “insincerity,” or because of related actions – such as revisionist textbook alterations, or politicians’ visits to Tokyo’s Yasukuni, where war criminals are enshrined.  Even so, Tokyo endured Korean prodding for nearly three decades without significantly reacting. Why are things so bad now?  Customarily good relations between the two militaries degraded in recent months after Seoul demanded that a Japanese warship invited to a Korean naval review strike its “rising sun” ensign – a demand never made previously – and a Korean destroyer reportedly tracked Japanese aircraft with its target radar. Seoul’s de facto annulment of the 1965 and 2015 agreements looks like the final straw.  Abe – who himself holds revisionist historical views , and whose grandfather was a corrupt and brutal war profiteer in Manchukuo – appears to have concluded that neither apology nor remuneration works. Hence – with the Osaka Group of Twenty summit safely concluded – he ditched carrot and took up stick.  Moon’s domestic battle: Game on  Tokyo’s aggressive new approach detonated like a bombshell in a Seoul caught wildly off balance by what it dubs Japanese “retaliation.” While Tokyo’s measures have not yet taken effect, the situation is front page, top-of-bulletin news, day in, day out.  Domestically, the situation offers Moon potential pros and cons.  On the plus side, the right-wing opposition has had no choice but to fall in behind him as he takes on the despised Abe. An inflamed public has kick-started Japanese product boycotts. Korean tourist cancellations to Japan are reportedly spiraling.  And if Moon can paint himself as a victim, he will have support: Koreans, in recent years, have evidenced powerful sympathies for victims of political injustices.  On the downside, to give in would be a humiliation. Yet Moon may come under behind-the-scenes pressure from businesses to step back: They look unlikely to be able to diversify necessary components of their leading export items for months, if not years.  Abe’s strategy appears well crafted. Its focus on displays and chips impacts Korea’s biggest sector, and it can be easily calibrated. If relations improve, approval processes can be eased. If relations deteriorate, they can be tightened or halted.  While Japanese companies are also likely to suffer collateral damage – some require Korean components, and they could lose valuable Korean customers – such damage has almost certainly been factored into Tokyo’s calculations.  This leaves Moon – already under pressure amid a stuttering economy that is just one third as large as Japan’s – limited wriggle room. Overseas, too, he is in a quandary.  Moon’s global battle: Any allies?  Seoul has appealed to the World Trade Organization and plans to raise the case at the organization’s general assembly at the end of the month. This may prove a non-starter.  For one thing, Tokyo can argue it has simply changed processes for exports to Korea, not halted them. For another, the WTO ruled in April, for the first time, that national security is grounds for exemption from global trade rules. These are the grounds Abe has invoked.  Globally, South Korea has one ally: the United States. Senior Seoul officials have scurried Stateside for support, but have returned empty handed. Washington – despite dispatching its main East Asia envoy to the region on strategic business – has declined to mediate.  Speaking on condition of anonymity, a senior retired US diplomat with experience of both countries told Asia Times, that “Korea has lost the US” on this issue. The damage to the long-enduring 1965 treaty may infuriate Washington, which has consistently urged Seoul and Tokyo to bury antagonisms and cooperate as US allies.  The ex-diplomat also pointed to a double standard: Seoul is taking Japan to the WTO, but did not do so to China when it sanctioned Korea over its displeasure that a US missile defense system, THAAD, was deployed in-country.  Korea’s PR muscle  Where Korea has a thunderous voice is in the court of international public opinion.  Abe’s move, if followed through, will impact global supplies of electronic products – a message Moon can leverage. Moreover, he has an established playbook at hand. In recent years, in the post-colonial world, Seoul and Korean civic groups have been far more effective at communicating their national position than their bumbling Japanese counterparts.  “Comfort women” statues have been raised globally by civic groups. The South Korean narrative – that there were 200,000 of them; that they were largely Korean; and that they were “sex slaves” kidnapped by Japanese troops – has become the de facto global narrative, although historians may dispute each point.  While the sea between the countries is dubbed “Sea of Japan,” Seoul insists that the preferred Korean term, “East Sea,” be added to atlases worldwide. Even though most languages, including Chinese, Danish, Dutch, English, French, German and Russian call it “Sea of Japan,” this persistent demand has gained some traction in international fora. Tokyo is on the back foot.  Tokyo has customarily been reactive rather than proactive in these PR clashes. Clumsy demands to revise Western history textbooks, or demolish comfort women statues have often backfired.  Moreover, many Japanese who do return fire are hard rightists. Their revisionist, unsympathetic – and sometimes inane – opinions on such issues as the Nanjing Massacre and comfort women win little support abroad, and may reinforce Korea’s position.  What next?  For an alarmed South Korea, clarity is desperately needed – and clarity is expected over the next few weeks.  First, it is unclear whether the Japanese government will, indeed, restrict exports to Korea when Korean firms apply for products. The export process, instead of being halted, may simply be extended. This would create bureaucratic costs, but would not be a game changer.  It is not known if Korea’s Samsung and Hynix – which, combined, supply 70% of the world’s memory chips – have yet applied, but breath is likely to be held when the first 90-day process is initiated.  Second, it is unclear whether Abe’s move is a political play ahead of Sunday’s Upper House elections. This seems unlikely. It looks more like a long-term strategy in which Abe, infuriated by Moon and seeking a more robust military role, is adding South Korea to the list of threats Japan faces from China and North Korea. However, if his move was timed to energize right-wingers, pre-election, Tokyo’s stance could ameliorate next week.  Thirdly, however, Japan has already prepared further escalation. Tokyo has signaled that, in August, Korea could be struck from a “white list” of countries that receive privileged access to Japanese exports. If that happens, other critical Korean sectors – such as autos – will be imperiled.  Worryingly, no exit ramp is apparent.  The leftist Moon administration prioritizes continual historical redress; the rightist Abe administration seeks a future-oriented relationship. Neither side looks likely to back down. Although Moon has talked of a diplomatic solution, he is also mulling retaliation, while Tokyo is primed to upgrade hostilities next month.  Absent an unexpected development or US intervention, deterioration looks likely.  From ripple to tsunami  If a trade war does break out between the Asian economic giants, it will have incalculable effects on fiendishly tangled electronics supply chains worldwide. That would further pressure a global economy already reeling from the Beijing-Washington trade war.  Impacts could extend beyond economics. If the US intervenes, and follows its present inclination to side with Japan, a slighted Korea may shift into China’s orbit.  A related but underreported issue overhanging the Seoul-Washington alliance is an endlessly delayed but inevitable shift of operational wartime control of South Korea troops from US to domestic control. It is supremely unclear how that process – which Seoul considers an issue of sovereignty – will work. Given that some combined command format is essential, and given US reluctance to place troops under foreign generalship, downgraded GI numbers in Korea are possible.  Whereas Beijing is both Seoul’s and Tokyo’s largest trade partner, Tokyo has proven willing to stand up to Beijing on both diplomatic and security fronts. Seoul has not. So could Seoul lean toward Beijing, changing security dynamics in Northeast Asia – just as Turkey’s Russia-ward shift in southern Europe is undermining NATO? It is possible.  One wild card is North Korea. If Pyongyang-Washington rapprochement accelerates and presents Trump with a much-needed diplomatic win, the Seoul relationship may suddenly become valuable. Then, Washington might offer Seoul a more generous hearing than Tokyo.  That is Japan’s nightmare scenario. Tokyo, perennially quavering about “Japan passing” and absent from regional security discussions, would then be left isolated and humiliated by its only real ally – an ally which is already bashing it in bilateral trade discussions.  Viewed through these prisms, the ongoing ripples between Northeast Asia’s “close-but-far” democratic neighbors and US allies could become tsunamis. |
| WILLIAM PESEK | Commentary | Asia Times | JULY 7, 2019 | Hong Kong | Japan vs South Korea a terrible omen for globalization | The most important meeting at last week’s Group of Twenty summit in Osaka is one that didn’t happen: between host Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Moon Jae-in.  Sure, US President Donald Trump’s chat with China’s Xi Jinping was accorded breathless news coverage. The same with Prime Minister Abe’s brief meeting with President Xi, signaling a welcome thaw in relations between Asia’s No 1 and No 2 economies.  But the fact Abe and Moon in essence pretended the other leader wasn’t there is a dreadful omen for the global economy at arguably the worst possible moment.  In Osaka, Abe presented himself as the diplomatic adult in the room. He spearheaded efforts to get 19 other leaders, including America’s protectionist-in-chief, to declare they will “strive to realize a free, fair, non-discriminatory” environment for trade and investment.  Just two days later, Abe pulled a Trump on Korea, tightening controls on exports of semiconductor materials to Asia’s No 4 economy. Abe’s breathtaking about-face made a mockery of the Osaka declaration. Worse, it reminded investors that the global economy finds itself in a steadily darkening place.  One reason: South Korea’s sizable, open economy often serves as a global weathervane. More than 50% of its gross domestic product is tied to trade flows. Korea’s zigs and zags tend to foretell where key economies large and small might head a few months out. And at the moment, Korea is showing telltale signs of strain.  On Wednesday, Seoul downgraded its growth target for 2019 to 2.4-2.5% from 2.6-2.7%. Not an epic change, but the issue is less the what than why the government is lowering its sights. President Moon’s team thinks exports will crater by 5% this year, a clear sign South Korea is getting trumped.  It should worry Abe’s Japan, for example, that South Korea just cut its 2019 inflation projection to 0.9% from a pervious 1.6%. Not deflation, per se, but a harbinger of weakening consumer-price conditions that spell trouble for Japan’s reflation efforts.  The more serious reason: Trump’s tariffs arms race is influencing behavior far beyond Washington. Abe’s going after Korea Inc, says Jeff Kingston, head of Asian studies at Temple University’s Tokyo campus, is an “unhelpful and damaging act right from the Trump bullying playbook.”  Abe’s act is retaliation for Seoul’s handling of a string of lawsuits that wartime Korean laborers won against Japanese companies. Abe, it seems, hoped Moon would intervene and quash the rulings. Abe is miffed, too, that Moon walked away from a 2015 deal to settle the controversy over Korean women forced to work in wartime Japanese brothels.  Had Abe and Moon met in Osaka, they might have realized that both their economies are collateral damage as Trump and Xi trade barbs. They might have discussed ways to survive the financial storm. That could include moves to lower bilateral trade barriers, deepen currency-swap arrangements, link bond and stock markets and mull collective uses for a combined US$1.7 trillion of foreign-exchange reserves.  If only Abe and Moon had talked, they might have compared notes on ways to run out the clock on Trump. On the surface, Abe is Trump’s best friend on the world stage, while Moon is an easy-going geopolitical partner. Below it, officials in Tokyo and Seoul pray Americans elect more enlightened and stable leaders come 2020.  If only the leaders of Japan and South Korea had discussed a tag-team approach to reining in Kim Jong Un. Trump’s bizarre “love” affair with the North Korean leader is rewarding Pyongyang’s worst behavior. His all-carrots-no-sticks policy serves Kim’s interests at the expense of Tokyo’s and Seoul’s. Caught up in the headlines – and hopes for a Nobel Peace Prize – Trump is ignoring the short-range missiles that could hit Japan.  Instead, they let parochial matters eclipse the existential crisis on the horizon, one that their actions may intensify. South Korean voters, for example, are demanding that their government boycott any number of Japanese goods, from cars to electronics to beer to cosmetics to entertainment. Petitions are piling up demanding action by the presidential Blue House.  That, of course, would prod Abe’s Japan to retaliate, forcing Moon to follow suit, and vice versa. The resulting Japan-Korea trade war would add to the economic headwinds slamming Asian growth. It also is stellar news for China. The interconnectedness of Japanese and South Korean manufacturing means that any disruptions make Xi’s job easier.  The same goes for the Kim regime. The more two nations seeking to curb Pyongyang’s exploits brawl, the less likely they are to join forces. Trump wins, too. Tokyo and Seoul joining forces on trade or security would complicate the White House’s divide-and-conquer worldview.  Abe’s move to weaponize fluorinated polyimides, used in flexible smartphone displays, as well as the photoresist and high-purity hydrogen fluoride needed to make semiconductors bears Trump’s fingerprints.  Trump has legitimized some terrible behavior around the globe – from Kim to Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. But Abe’s duplicity toward South Korea – G20 free-trade cheerleader one day, Trumpian the next – marks an ominous moment for globalization. In recent days, Trump stepped up the rhetorical attacks on the European Union, the next target of his mercantilist ire. On Japan, too, much to Abe’s surprise. Trump, it seems, is obsessed with a yen he views as too weak.  There is still time for Abe and Moon to join forces – to plot a brighter future instead of obsessing over the past. Yet the events of the last 10 days augur poorly for North Asian cooperation. Or, for that matter, the trajectory of the global economy. |
| BUBHINDAR SINGH | Commentary | Asia Times | OCTOBER 30, 2019 | Hong Kong | Korea-Japan: History is not present in the past | South Korea-Japan bilateral relations are now at probably their lowest point since diplomatic ties were established between the two Northeast Asian countries in 1965.  The latest dispute revolves around the two countries’ different interpretations of their 1965 “Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Cooperation.” This article aims to unpack the divergent positions of the two governments on various issues related to the 1965 Agreement, as well as offer plausible reasons behind these differences based on an explanation of domestic politics.  Past vs present  From Japan’s perspective, the 1965 Agreement meant that all problems concerning claims between the two countries and their nationals were confirmed to be “settled completely and finally.” Japan had given US$300 million in grants and $200 million in loans to South Korea as a result of the 1965 Agreement.  However, from South Korea’s perspective at the present time, the 1965 Agreement did not include the right of South Korean forced laborers to claim compensation for psychological suffering against Japanese companies during Japanese colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula. A 2018 South Korean Supreme Court ruling concluded that South Korean forced laborers are still able to seek individual compensation from Japanese companies.  Not surprisingly, Japan sees this Supreme Court ruling as a clear violation of the 1965 Agreement. In Japan’s view, not only has South Korea unilaterally abrogated the pledges made by the two governments from the 1965 Agreement, but South Korea has also breached international law.  In Tokyo’s memory of events, it had been willing to make payments to South Korean individuals during the negotiations for the 1965 Agreement, but South Korea had asserted that it was putting forward the claims as a state – which would have meant that the South Korean government would have been responsible for payments made to its affected citizens.  South Korea obviously sees things differently. From its current perspective, the South Korean government’s acknowledgement of the South Korean Supreme Court’s decision did not mean that the government had abrogated the 1965 Agreement.  The Seoul government views the current bad state of bilateral relations as Japan’s fault, because, in Seoul’s view, Japan’s export restrictions to South Korea, which kick-started the deterioration of the bilateral relations, are actually meant to punish South Korea for its Supreme Court ruling. South Korea’s view is that these two issues should not be linked and that Japan is merely using the ruling as an excuse to disrupt the South Korea’s semiconductors industry.  In the ensuing escalation, both Japan and South Korea took what in their own eyes were justified responses to the other’s unjustified actions.  South Korea decided not to renew a military intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan known as the “General Security of Military Information Agreement” (GSOMIA) because, it argued, it cannot trust Japan to handle such sensitive intelligence when Japan itself does not trust South Korea.  Japan’s view is that South Korea has linked the GSOMIA decision to Japan’s update of its licensing polices and procedure for exports – wrongly so, since these two issues are completely unrelated.  Plausible reasons  Many reasons have been cited to explain the present dismal state of Japan-South Korea relations. It is clear that perceptions of the 1965 Agreement have evolved since the time it was signed, particularly over the past few decades.  What is important to note is that the 1965 Agreement was signed by a South Korean authoritarian government led by then-President Park Chung-hee. At that time, South Korea was still recovering from the devastation of the Korean War and its primary focus was rapid economic development.  Japan asserts that the South Korean government at that time was responsible for using the grants and loans given to it for any and all payments and distributions within South Korea.  Japan’s view is that the South Korea government should have distributed the payments to forced laborers, but did not do so, instead spending the money on economic development.  Japan is therefore displeased that even though the compensation figures had been carefully calculated by both governments at that time (as shown by documents released during the Roh Moo-hyun administration), South Korea continues to ask for compensation for its forced laborers.  Since then, South Korea has also experienced the 1987 democratization. This significant development, together with the emergence of the post-Cold War normative structure that lifted the lid on questioning historical issues, resulted in the “return of history” to South Korean domestic politics, which affected relations with Japan.  This was especially the case with progressive governments in South Korea in the post-Cold War period – such as the present Moon Jae-in government – which have led efforts to undo what was done or agreed upon in the past by conservative South Korean governments with Japan.  Some in South Korea still consider the Park Chung-hee administration to have been an illegitimate one and argue that agreements signed by the Park administration should likewise be considered illegitimate.  These clashing interpretations of history in fact follow a discernible trend. Whenever there is a progressive government in power, the questioning of history tends to be higher compared with periods when conservative governments are in power.  Currently, with a conservative government in Japan and a progressive government in South Korea, it is no coincidence that bilateral relations have dipped significantly due to clashes over historical issues.  Dim prospects  While the bilateral relationship is hamstrung by the history dispute, the strategic uncertainties faced by the two countries have worsened. North Korea has resumed missile tests, and hopes of an agreement between the US and North Korea are uncertain.  China’s strategic rise and maritime assertiveness are a strategic concern to both Japan and South Korea. This situation is made worse by the increasing uncertainty of the US commitment to East Asia, with President Donald Trump repeatedly questioning the utility of alliances.  Both states should realize that strong bilateral cooperation is important for stability in East Asia. Cooperation is absolutely critical in addressing the North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile threats – particularly as regards intelligence sharing on North Korean missile flight trajectories.  History is often divisive. This dispute between South Korea and Japan shows that history is not present in the past and it is in fact something that continues to be viewed through different lenses at various junctions of a state’s own evolution.  It is unlikely that South Korea and Japan will be able to come to a common interpretation of all aspects of the 1965 Agreement. Neither is it likely that either state will make the first move to reverse any of the decisions it has taken over the past few months on export restrictions or military intelligence-sharing.  This is unfortunate. Seoul and Tokyo should recognize the strategic importance of strong bilateral cooperation to ensure stability in both national and regional security. |
| CHOI HE-SUK | News Analysis | Eleven media | AUGUST 16, 2019 | Myanmar | Moon urges Japan to choose ‘path of dialogue and cooperation’ | President Moon Jae-in said Thursday that Seoul will cooperate with Tokyo if it retracts its recent trade restrictions, stressing the importance of international cooperation and free trade.  “Within the realm of the international division of labor, if any country weaponizes a sector where it has a comparative advantage, the peaceful free trade order will inevitably suffer damages,” Moon said in his Liberation Day speech.  “Better late than never. If Japan chooses the path of dialogue and cooperation, we will gladly join hands. We will strive with Japan to create an East Asia that engages in fair trade and cooperation,” Moon said.  “We have never dwelt on the past. Instead, we continued to engage in security and economic cooperation with Japan,” Moon said, going on to say that Seoul and Tokyo had in the past worked together to “practically assuage the suffering of victims from the Japanese colonial period.”  Saying he hopes the division of labor among different countries will prove to be the key to sustainable growth, Moon said Japan has achieved progress through “the division of labor on the platform of free trade order.”  In his speech, Moon also stressed the need for cooperation among different regions of the Korean Peninsula, including North Korea, and on the international stage, linking his vision for the future of his country to his New Southern Policy and New Northern Policy.  The New Southern Policy aims to strengthen ties with the ASEAN and with other nations to the south and west of the country, while the New Northern Policy is aimed at achieving similar goals with nations to the north of the peninsula.  In his speech, Moon said that while the country has made significant advances since 1945, it has yet to become “a nation that cannot be shaken,” citing a poem written in the year of liberation.  He put forward three objectives for building an unshakable nation: Uphold the free trade order and facilitate equitable cooperation in East Asia, build “a nation that serves as a bridge by taking the lead in promoting peace and prosperity on the continent and out in the ocean,” and establish a peace economy.  “We must turn our country’s geopolitical position into a strength. We must establish a clear goal to take the initiative and not be pushed around by others anymore,” Moon said, explaining his vision of South Korea as a “bridge” between the Eurasian landmass and the ocean.  “The New Northern Policy represents our aspiration to advance into the continent. We will expand the foundation for cooperation not only with China and Russia but also with Central Asia and Europe and lay a cornerstone for multilateral cooperation and security through the East Asian Railroad Community initiative.”  The East Asian Railroad Community initiative is an idea that Moon raised in his Liberation Day speech last year, saying he envisioned a community of nations connected by a rail network that would include the two Koreas as well as China and Russia.  Moon also elaborated on the role his New Southern Policy could play, saying South Korea’s relations with India and with the ASEAN nations would be upgraded to “a level equivalent to those with our major neighboring countries.” From there, he added, they could develop “a cooperative relationship for common prosperity.”  A “peace economy” is Moon’s economic vision for South Korea, and for the peninsula, based on improved inter-Korean relations following the denuclearization of North Korea.  In reiterating his vision for a “peace economy,” Moon also addressed the skepticism over its feasibility. Saying South Korea’s military capabilities outmatch those of the North, Moon stressed that the US should continue to seek dialogue with Pyongyang despite recent developments, adding that the skeptics should not “remain prisoners to ideology.”  US President Donald Trump has downplayed the significance of the North’s recent weapons tests, and said North Korean leader Kim Jong-un offered a “small apology” for the tests in a personal letter.  Going on to say that he would “solidify denuclearization and (establish a) peace regime on the Korean Peninsula” during his term, Moon set out bold goals for inter-Korean relations.  “We will advance dialogue and cooperation so that the seeds sown together with North Korea in the spring of peace will grow into trees of prosperity,” Moon said.  “I pledge to solidify the foundation so that we can successfully host the joint 2032 Seoul-Pyongyang Olympics and stand tall in the world as one Korea by achieving peace and unification by 2045, which will mark the 100th anniversary of liberation.” |
| DANIEL SNEIDER | Commentary | Asia Times | AUGUST 9, 2019 | Hong Kong | Strategic choices in Japan-South Korea rift | The accounts of the deepening disconnect between Japan and South Korea that are now making their way into the pages of major media actually underplay the destructive character of this current crisis. And they fail to explore the strategic choices being made, almost unconsciously, by the leadership in both countries.  The atmosphere in South Korea is particularly poisonous, egged on by the Moon Jae-in administration. The Korean media are filled with accounts of Japanese perfidy, fed by continuous commentary to the same effect from the government. Earlier this week, for example, the lead evening news broadcast on the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS), the flagship TV network, spent the first 20 minutes focused entirely on Japan.  There is a widening movement to boycott Japanese goods that is already hurting sales of everything from beer to cars. Even conservative media that are somewhat critical of Moon’s handling of relations join in the broad narrative that paints all the current woes as the product of a dangerous nationalist Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who is unrepentant about Japan’s colonial and wartime past.  Japanese media are far less breathless but the anti-Korean mood in Japan is undeniable. Opinion polls show about two thirds of Japanese back the tough response to Korea in the form of imposition of tighter controls on exports. While the liberal media call for restraint by Abe and tend to blame both sides for the crisis, conservative media and politicians are now happy to point fingers at the unreliable and provocative Koreans, urging the government to hold to an uncompromising position.  There are small signs that both sides may want to limit the damage being done, particularly in the economic realm. Japan’s trade minister ,Hiroshige Seko, told reporters on Thursday that the government has granted permission for semiconductor materials to be exported for the first time since tightened controls were imposed last month.  In Seoul, Moon seemed to back off from his provocative suggestion that South Korea could compensate for the damage to the economy from the trade war with Japan by improving ties with the North. “In the end, it’s a game without any winner, in which everyone, including Japan, becomes a victim,” he told a meeting of economic advisers. The foreign ministers of both countries are now scheduled to meet again soon.  ‘Far enough’  “I get the sense that both sides are trying to signal each other that things have gone far enough and that it’s time to try to stop making things worse,” says Evans Revere, former US principal deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific.  “Moon’s acknowledgement that both sides are being hurt, the fact that the ROK has not implemented their threat to take Japan off Korea’s white list, Japan’s decision to allow the export of sensitive materials to Korea under the new export review process and Abe’s call for Seoul to adhere to the 1965 normalization agreement seem to suggest that, at a minimum, the two sides are not threatening each other with new actions,” Revere says.  Other American analysts hope that the Japanese moves on export controls have a narrow intent. “The Japanese government doesn’t necessarily want to prevent trade with South Korea or prevent its companies from doing business with ROK firms, but Tokyo did want some additional control over the process,” says James Schoff of the Carnegie Endowment.  “The Abe administration wanted to downgrade South Korea’s ‘status’ as a partner in some way, to express its displeasure with a variety of moves the Moon government has made in the past year or two,” Schoff adds. “At a basic level I think Abe & Co simply don’t believe that South Korea belongs on a special list of its most trusted partners, and this is a way to make that point.”  This could be, as even both Schoff and Revere acknowledge, an overly optimistic reading. There are ample opportunities to escalate tensions. The Koreans are contemplating whether or not to renew the GSOMIA defense intelligence sharing agreement. Talking to reporters yesterday, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga pointedly did not rule out a decision by Abe to visit the controversial Yasukuni Shrine to Japan’s war dead on August 15, the anniversary of the end of World War II.  If both sides refrain from taking further steps, that could at least limit the descent into full-scale conflict for now. “Both sides do not want to make things worse but neither side intends to take any action to improve the situation,” a well-informed Japanese analyst told me. “My guess is that the situation will be frozen at this current level of hostility for the time being.”  Strategic choices  The frozen nature of this conflict reflects underlying strategic choices that both Moon and Abe have made and which will continue to drive them apart. And more deeply, it is a consequence of the dramatic shift of American foreign policy under the nationalist Trump regime.  President Moon and his progressive government are clearly focused on inter-Korean integration over all other relations, and in that context playing the card of anti-Japanese nationalism serves to bind the two Koreas together. The opening created by President Trump’s diplomacy with North Korea is a historic opportunity that has “emboldened and tempted South Korean President Moon Jae-in to prioritize his inter-Korean agenda over ties with the US and Japan,” former Japanese senior diplomat Kuni Miyake wrote this week.  For the Japanese government, the rising threat from China has prompted two seemingly conflicting strategic decisions – to rely even more on the security alliance with the US, despite Trump’s disdain for alliances, and to calm, if not improve, relations with China. In that context, advisors to the prime minister see South Korea, particularly under the Moon administration, as almost irrelevant to Japanese foreign policy.  “About five years ago, when Abe was still fresh in his new administration, he told one of my colleagues that he intended to do something to improve the relationship with Beijing and also that, regarding Seoul, he will simply ignore it,” a senior Japanese editor at a major daily newspaper told me. “In Abe’s mind, China is important enough to invest political capital but Seoul is nothing but a pain in the ass that could harm his image as right-wing leader.”  The attitude of benign neglect toward Seoul prevailed even while Moon moved to dump the 2015 agreement to settle the comfort women issue, reached with the previous conservative Korean government of Park Geun-hye. But the escalations over the forced labor issue forced a harsher response.  “Abe has stepped into a new territory where the South Korea issue has become a high stakes game of either big loss or big win to keep his approval rate high,” the Japanese editor said. “All polls indicate that surprisingly a majority of Japanese people support this bullying action to Seoul and, if Abe puts down his fist without clear sign of win, he will lose too much.”  This is comparable to the period when former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi visited Yasukuni Shrine, sending relations with China and South Korea into the deep freeze. As happened in that case, it may take the end of both Japanese and Korean governments to reverse the situation.  Political calculation  “Abe has made the political calculation to address the new reality by maintaining a relationship with both Washington and Beijing, and at the same time managing his political base by playing tough against Seoul, but it is far from a reasoned strategy,” observes the veteran Japanese journalist. “Abe’s ultimate goal is to stay in power as long as possible, not to maximize the future interest of Japan by sensible diplomacy. Politicians are all prisoners of domestic populism lately and they are fanning populism to appeal to the fragmented sentiments of voters. Abe and Moon are sadly among them.”  This is clearly shaped by the America First stance of the Trump regime. Hopes that the US might intervene effectively to try to bring a halt to the spiraling dispute between its two main security allies in East Asia have proven exaggerated. While senior officials seemed prepared to push both sides toward a ceasefire, instead the messaging from those above them – from national security adviser John Bolton, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Defense Secretary Mark Esper (now in the region) and the president himself – has communicated very different priorities.  Trump wants to pick a fight about how much money South Korea and Japan will contribute to cost-sharing arrangements for US forces based in both countries. Bolton, Pompeo and Esper are eager to drag both countries into the so-called coalition of the willing in the Persian Gulf against Iran. Both countries, especially Japan, are resistant to that siren song. And now there is even a push to deploy ground-based cruise missiles aimed at China – to which there is even greater opposition.  On top of this, there is Trump’s almost casual acceptance of the legitimacy of a string of tests by North Korea of shorter-range ballistic missiles that pose a clear threat to both South Korea and Japan. “His virtual blessing for short-range ballistic missile tests is telling his allies, South Korea and Japan, and American soldiers and expatriates that they are dispensable,” wrote Duyeon Kim in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. “This message reinforces existing security concerns in South Korea and Japan that Washington may not defend its Asian allies at critical moments, especially if US territory becomes vulnerable to a North Korean nuclear attack.”  That effectively renders useless the calls from US officials for Japan, South Korea and the United States to focus on shared security interests such as North Korea and China. Still Abe is compelled to claim success in managing the alliance with the US.  “For Mr Abe, the cordial relationship with Mr Trump is very comforting and has become an objective in itself,” a former senior Japanese foreign ministry official and advisor to prime ministers told me. “But the relationship has not been translated into deeds that benefit Japan. In fact, Abe faces horrendous demands from an unbridled Trump, who has lost sensible advisors like [former defense secretary James] Mattis, such as transforming the US troops into mercenaries of Japan.” The former official added that “Japan’s host nation support is already covering 75% of the necessary cost, but Trump wants Japan to pay five times as much.”  Abe is protected from the political consequences for now by the weakness of the opposition within Japan and the lack of any serious challengers from inside the ruling conservative party. Increasingly, though, he is relying on his form of nationalism, a path already taken by Moon. “The ‘Me First’ movement is contagious,” the former senior official concluded with some sadness, “grappling hold of even a docile and inactive nation like Japan.” |
| ANDREW SALMON | Commentary | Asia Times | OCTOBER 30, 2018 | Hong Kong | History war between Japan and South Korea heats up | After Seoul’s Supreme Court today ordered a Japanese steelmaker to compensate four South Koreans for wartime labor, Tokyo, which insists the issue was settled by a 1965 bilateral treaty and multi-million dollar compensation package, has reacted furiously.  South Korea’s Supreme Court upheld a 2013 lower-court judgment that ordered Nippon Steel and Sumimoto Metal Corp (NSSM) to pay 100 million won ($88,000) each to four former steelworkers who 13 years ago launched a legal claim for compensation and unpaid wages.  The long-running, high-profile lawsuit was launched against NSSM in 2005. Today, 98-year-old Lee Choon-shik is the sole surviving plaintiff. In a top-of-bulletin televised press conference, Lee said, after the judgment, that he was “sad to be alone,” but that, “it is “heartbreaking to see this today.”  Despite the modest sum awarded by the court, the issue has tremendous political significance. In Japan, where the judgment had been awaited with bated breath, reaction was immediate. The company said the verdict was “deeply regrettable” but that it would wait for a government response before responding further.  It did not have to wait long.  Prime Minister Shinzo Abe – widely perceived in Korea as a hard-right nationalist – spoke on the issue before the Diet. He called the decision “impossible under international law” and said that “the government of Japan will handle the situation with firmness.”  Foreign Minister Taro Kono rolled out the big guns. Japan will take “every option under consideration” he said, including taking the issue to the International Court of Justice. For that to happen, South Korea would have to agree, but if Seoul refused, it would hand Japan a moral victory.  “The ruling not only puts a Japanese company at an undue disadvantage, but also shakes the legal foundations of the friendship and cooperation that has existed between Japan and South Korea since 1965 when their ties were normalized,” Kono said in a televised briefing.  He also summoned Seoul’s ambassador to Japan to lodge a complaint, and said his ministry would establish a special office to deal with ever-problematic relations between Japan and South Korea.  Japanese media reported that Japanese officials had tried to call related Korean officials, but the latter had not answered the telephone. Even so, it is not clear what the Seoul government can do, given that there are separation of powers between judiciary and executive.  The big question now hanging over the issue is whether the South Korean court will implement the nuclear option and order a seizure of assets from NSSM to pay the plaintiffs.  Lee Choon-shik, a victim of forced labor by Japan during its colonial rule of the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945, sits in the Supreme Court in Seoul on October 30, 2018. Photo: AFP/Ed Jones  Given the troubled history – and perhaps more importantly, the way history has been so frequently raised as an issue between the two countries – the likelihood of that step cannot be dismissed. Should it be taken, diplomatic – and possibly commercial – relations between Japan and South Korea could plunge to a new low.  But when it comes to Japan-South Korea relations, new lows are constantly plumbed.  Troubled history….  Japan colonized the Korean Peninsula from 1910-1945. During the 1937-45 Pacific War, tens of thousands of Koreans served in the Imperial armed forces – but tens of thousands more worked for Japanese enterprises, both in the Japanese homeland and around the so-called Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, Japan’s wartime imperium.  Among the latter were forced laborers and “comfort women” – Korean women and girls who were in many cases coerced, tricked or trafficked into the military brothels. After Japan was defeated by the Allied powers in 1945, many Korean workers found their wartime scrip worthless.  It was not until 1965 that Seoul and Tokyo opened diplomatic relations. At that time, Tokyo provided Seoul with some $800 million in soft loans and grants. In 2005, documents released by Seoul revealed that during the bilateral discussions surrounding the normalization treaty and the monetary package, Seoul had agreed that there would be no further claims at the national or individual level for compensation from Japan, supporting a contention that Tokyo frequently makes, that the 1965 agreement settled the matter once and for all.  In Seoul, the 1965 agreement was negotiated under the administration of President Park Chung-hee – a former Korean general who started out as a young officer in the wartime Japanese Army, and who was educated at the elite Tokyo Military Academy.  However, Park’s government passed on none of the compensation to wartime victims. Instead, it used it for economic development, contributing to the “Miracle on the Han” – the fast-track process which lifted Korea from poverty-ravaged agrarian backwater to prosperous industrial powerhouse.  Despite his remarkable success on the economic front, Park – who was assassinated in 1979 – is today widely reviled in South Korea for being a Japanese collaborator in his youth, and as an authoritarian who ruthlessly suppressed democracy during his presidency. His daughter, Park Geun-hye, became president in 2013 but is even more despised: she is now serving a 33-year jail term after being impeached in 2017 in a scandal that blended corruption with abuse of power.  Japanese firms were key investors, joint venture partners and contributors of industrial advice in South Korean in the 1960s, ‘70s and ‘80s. South Korea won democracy in 1987, and by the 1990s, was no longer reliant upon Japanese capital or investments. In the 1990s, as South Korea cast off the authoritarian habits of yore, civic groups blossomed and victims of Japanese imperialism – notably comfort women and forced laborers – began speaking up and rallying support.  They found a willing audience.  …troubled historiography  During the colonial era, the Korean population rose and lifespans increased. Japan invested heavily in its colony: education expanded and the country was radically modernized in terms of infrastructure, industry and even popular culture. It experienced virtually no fighting – certainly not on the scale of destruction and killing that would subsequently visit the peninsula during the 1950-53 Korean War.  But Koreans are taught – via education, museum exhibits, media and popular culture – that the colonial era was the darkest period in their national history. Its most exploitative and brutal elements – such as the requirements for Koreans to take Japanese names and to study the Japanese language, the Japanese acquisition of Korean cultural treasures, and of course, the comfort women and forced labor issues, are focused upon, while independence fighters are mythologized.  Although China suffered far more than any other nation at Japanese hands in the 20th century, South Korea has been Japan’s most vocal critic on historical issues. In Korean fora today, even-handed discussion of the colonial period is rare. In an extreme case, in 2014, an elderly Korean man was murdered in a central Seoul park by a man in his 30s for praising Japanese rule.  In international fora, a different dynamic has appeared. Under this, Japan apologizes, compensates or offers to compensate. These gestures are rejected by Korean civic groups. The groups’ complaints are amplified by media – particularly if and when Japanese officials make visits to the controversial Yasukuni War Shrine, talk down wartime atrocities, or when Japanese school textbooks downplay these issues.  The joy of Japan-bashing  The left-leaning Moon Jae-in administration, which took power in 2017, has taken a hard line against Japan on issues related to the past.  It has ceased to observe a 2015 bilateral agreement on the comfort women, which included an Abe apology and compensation – even though a majority of surviving comfort women accepted it at the time. Tokyo insists that the agreement was final and binding; Seoul cites public dissatisfaction.  Seoul also ordered a Japanese warship attending a Korean naval review not to flying its ensign – which resembles the Pacific War-era battle flag – even though the ensign had not been an issue at two previous reviews. That led to the withdrawal of the vessel.  And earlier this month, a group of Korean lawmakers visited Dokdo – a Korea-occupied duo of islets that Japan claims under the name of Takeshima – in a move that predictably infuriated Tokyo.  There is now concern in some Japanese media that the Moon administration might even go so far as to call in to question the entire 1965 agreement.  Experts in Seoul see no likelihood of improvements between Northeast Asia’s democratic neighbors.  “It is unfortunate, but it will impact Korea-Japan relations negatively,” said James Kim of Seoul think tank the Asan Institute. “As if the relations are not soured already.”  Moreover, a key regional arbitrator is no longer taking an interest: the Obama administration sought to keep Seoul and Tokyo engaged in order to present a united front against North Korea, but that no longer appears to be a priority for today’s more tactically-minded Washington.  “The Trump administration’s approach to this region is very different to its predecessor’s: it is taking a bilateral, chimney-stack approach to the two bilateral alliance relations in the region and that means the US has less interest in maintaining ties between Tokyo and Seoul,” Kim said. “It has gone very bad very quickly and for as long as the US maintains that approach to regional dynamics, I don’t see it getting better.”  “We have to separate the government position versus private people’s positions,” said Hong Hyung-taek, executive director of the East Asian Foundation. “The people’s position has been well displayed by continuous protests, while the whole decision-making regarding the opening of relations in 1965 has not been well explained.”  He added that the Korean public tends to be infuriated by Japanese government officials who make offensive remarks about history, while the Japanese government sticks to its positions that all matters have been resolved by government-to-government agreements.  As a result of the latest furor, Hong said, “I don’t know what is going to happen.” |
| WILLIAM PESEK | Commentary | Asia Times | AUGUST 5, 2019 | Hong Kong | Wider risks as Japan weaponizes economic interdependence | “You will get it wrong if you view this only as a trade war.” Those were ominous words from Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso, and arguably the most honest take yet on the Tokyo-Seoul trade war. This, as Aso put it over the weekend, “is turning into various phenomena beyond a mere” dispute about the shipping and arrival of goods. Consider it the economic equivalent of a blood feud that’s about to take the global economy along for the ride.  The ride is just beginning. The question, of course, is how big of a ride, how long, and how damaging it might be for global growth and stability. The honest take – to match Aso’s – is that economists have never before seen a Japan-Korea dustup like this on which to base risk assessments.  Welcome to a new trade war  Deep backdrop matters, too. Japan and South Korea are coming to economic blows – unprecedented ones – as Donald Trump and Xi Jinping brawl in the background. And those hits are growing in intensity. On Friday, US President Trump announced 10% taxes on another $300 billion worth of Chinese goods, on top of the $250 billion he’s already taxing at 25%.  Prime Minister Shinzo Abe chose that same day – last Thursday – to confirm his decision to scratch South Korea from Japan’s “whitelist” of favored economic partners. President Moon Jae-in called it a “selfish, destructive act that will cripple the global supply chain and wreak havoc on the global economy.” Korea responded within hours, striking Japan from its own list.  The fallout in Korea already has analysts revising profits outlooks for names like Samsung Electrics and SK Hynix. Korea has watched exports and gross domestic product slide as the US tariffs bite into Chin’s its No 1 trade partner. Abe’s Trump-like assault on Korea’s export engine will hurt, too. When the Bank of Korea surprised markets last month with an interest-rate cut, it cited Japan’s earlier move to tighten restrictions on exports of materials for making chips and smartphone displays.  It’s harder to discern the damage South Korea’s intensifying #BoycottJapan movement might do to Abe’s economy. It could be bigger than economists think.  What is the damage spectrum?  South Korea is Japan’s third-biggest trading partner on a country-to-country basis, though trade with China and the United States are far more vital to Japan’s all-important export engine. Overseas shipments from Japan to the US are two and a half times as big as Korea’s US$53 billion annually.  But it’s the cumulative effect that matters. Trump is already taxing imports of steel (25%), aluminum (10%) and soon virtually everything sent from China. His White House is also clamping down on side avenues via which Seoul can limit damage – such as exporting metals via Vietnam. Trump is threatening 456% duties on Hanoi.  Trump’s efforts to tackle China already have Japanese exports down for a seventh straight month (and probably an eighth when July data are released). The 6.7% drop in June was a China-slowdown story. China, after all, grew at the slowest annualized pace in 27 years between January and March – 6.2%.  Now you have Korean outlets of some of Japan’s top retail names facing intensifying boycott troubles. Uniqlo, Muji, Daiso, 7-Eleven and other Japan Inc retailers are suffering dwindling shopper-traffic numbers.  We’re not necessarily talking about recession-causing blows here: after all, much of the economic relationship is B2B, not B2C; the latter is more visible and easier to boycott. And within Asia, South Korea is only fourth-biggest supplier of foreign direct investment into Abe’s economy, trailing Taiwan. That suggests that an air of hype could be seeping into debates about how much Korea can hurt Japan.  But again, context matters. A new Reuters poll has Japanese gross domestic product growing at annualized 0.4% at best in the second quarter. With so little room for error, any lost business, or trade, is an economic own-goal. Case in point: a growing backlash against Japanese beer, clothing, anime, J-pop, gaming companies, films and, of course, travel. Carriers from Korean Air to Asiana are reducing Japan-bound flights or turning up smaller planes to service routes to its neighbor. That goes, too, for smaller operators like Jeju Air, Air Busan Eastar Jet and T’way Air.  One reason actions by these smaller carriers potent trouble is where they hit. Since 2012 the yen’s 30% drop enlivened Japanese tourism, an industry Tokyo long neglected. A key push has been getting more foreigners to visit Japan’s less-frequented cities to spread the wealth beyond Tokyo. Many of the routes on which Korea’s low-budget carriers are scaling back involve southwestern cities such as Kumamoto and Oita.  Even before Friday’s “whitelist” action, Abe’s chief cabinet secretary, Yoshihide Suga, said Tokyo would “closely watch the impact on Japanese firms” as it tightens the screws on Korea Inc. One big risk for Japanese exporters, says analyst Eo Gyu-jin of eBEST Investment & Securities, is that “Korean companies contribute to a considerable share of their earnings,” particularly in industrial components.  Moreover, Samsung, SK Hynix and LG Display are pivotal to the global supply chain for DRAM and NAND flash memory drives. They also are key suppliers of smartphone displays and other IT components. Tokyo risks not just corporate blowback at home, but irking other countries as Korea-sourced components become more expensive and scarcer.  But the bilateral blows Abe is landing on South Korea aren’t about economics or business. They are about political calculation. Abe’s coziness with Trump and openness to negotiating with North Korea has right-wingers in a whirl. This constituency, vital to Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party, had been agitating for action against Seoul, particularly since last year’s Supreme Court rulings.  Late last year, judges in Seoul ordered Japanese companies, including Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, to pay reparations to Korean laborers who had been forced to work for them during World War II. That issue had been dealt with in a 1965 deal that opened the way for Japanese firms to do business in South Korea, and had held since.  That decision compounded already seething anger over Moon scrapping his predecessor’s 2015 deal with Abe on Korean women forced to work in wartime Japanese brothels.  ‘Weaponized interdependence’  There is ample blame to go around. Moon is but the latest South Korean leader to find political solace in fanning anti-Japan sentiment. But in retaliating against Moon, Abe is falling into the trap of “weaponized interdependence.”  The reference here is to the work of US-based researchers Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman on how global economic networks shape state coercion. It explores have international supply chains – including those linking Japan and Korea – are devolving from arrangements of efficiency into “choke points” governments can use to “take advantage” of trade partners.  Here, think the Trump administration’s holding China’s Huawei hostage or going after ZTE, which also relies on US semiconductor technology. This gives rise to what Farrell and Newman call “network inequality,” a threat that “is changing the way the world economy works.”  Count the ways, too, that things could get messy when you consider that roughly 80,000 Koreans draw paychecks from Japanese companies in South Korea. Might Japan be courting worker slowdowns or strikes in Korea? Or at the very least, recruitment woes.  Compounding the risks in Northeast Asia, both Abe and Moon have domestic incentives to escalate this weaponization dynamic.  Political pleasures of economic pain  Abe’s one real achievement – the longest expansion since the 1980s – is now getting trumped. Wages have fallen for five straight months, inflation is less than halfway to the 2% target and possible recession looms.  Lashing out at Korea to change the subject is a tried-and-true Liberal Democratic Party strategy. But this is the first time such impulses have gone truly economic – with tangible policies that turn rhetoric into policy. Hence the challenges figuring out the damage to come.  Moon, meanwhile, has lost control of his economic-change narrative. He faces slowing growth, 10%-plus youth unemployment and endless strife (from both sides of the argument) over his minimum-wage hikes. At the same time, his national export engine faces dual impacts – from Trump’s intensifying trade war and Abe’s turn of the economic vice. To make matters worse, Moon’s flagship presidential policy – his hopes for détente with Pyongyang – are being dashed as Trump enables Kim Jong Un’s worst instincts.  In this situation, dialing up anti-Japan emotion has its political uses. When Moon speaks in terms of “we will never again lose to Japan” – a reference to the 1910-1945 colonization of the peninsula – as he told his cabinet on Friday, you know the fight is on. But what if it lasts well into 2020? Or beyond?  And in South Korea, the fight is as much from the ground up as the top-down. Whereas China’s boycotts are government decrees, Korea-versus-Japan is more of a bottom-up movement. It is sustains, it could inflict pain on Abe’s economy. Japan and Korea are already both off balance amid global events.  The trouble for Asia watchers is twofold. One, this brawl is only just getting started. And two, there are few precedents to turn to: Although Seoul and Tokyo have engaged in historical-diplomatic battles for decades, the transition of their combat to the economic space is dangerously new.  Where it goes next, in terms of GDP growth and supply-chain disruptions, is anyone’s guess. |
| TARA O | Commentary | Asia Times | NOVEMBER 22, 2019 | Hong Kong | Can’t let ‘hat strings’ tactic divide Seoul, Tokyo | A landmark agreement allowing the Japanese and South Korean militaries to share intelligence that had been set expire on Saturday has been extended by Seoul at the last moment.  South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s administration, engaged in a highly emotive historical/diplomatic/trade dispute with Japan, had bounced the rift into the security sphere when it announced in August that it would not renew GSOMIA – the General Sharing of Military Intelligence Agreement.  The termination of GSOMIA would have played directly into the hands of Pyongyang as the perfect outcome of North Korea’s gat geun (“hat strings”) tactic, which seeks to lever South Korea away from Japan. The importance of that tactic may be weighed from the fact that it was discussed in front of espionage operatives by no less a personality than North Korea’s founder, Kim Il Sung himself.  Why trilateralism matters  The South Korea-US alliance has defended the former against North Korea for almost 70 years. Separately, the US and Japan are also allies. While South Korea and Japan have no formal defense treaty, so technically are not allies, the two countries’ defense relations are nevertheless important.  Japan plays a crucial role in South Korea’s national defense. In case of contingency or war on the Korean Peninsula, Japan provides seven bases where forces and materials can be gathered before moving onward to Korea.  Beyond these bases, Japan, South Korea and the US produce strategic synergies. They also make a statement, representing liberal democratic freedoms in a region where they face off against China, North Korea and Russia.  North Korea understands the importance of this trilateral relationship. It wants to break it.  The biggest obstacle to Pyongyang’s control of the peninsula is the US military presence in South Korea, and Seoul’s alliance with Washington. Hence North Korea has made direct and indirect efforts to remove US troops from Korea and end the alliance.  For instance, North Korea has continuously demanded an “end of war” declaration and a “peace treaty,” which could lead to a split in the alliance and the withdrawal of the US forces from South Korea.  South of the Demilitarized Zone, too, there have long been calls to remove US troops by various leftist and pro-North Korea organizations. For example on November 18, “Citizens Sovereignty Solidarity,” while holding a march aiming to welcome Kim Jong Un to Seoul, also held up funeral symbols for US Forces in Korea, for the South Korea-US alliance, and for sanctions on North Korea.  Despite a current brouhaha revolving around the cost of US troops in Korea, the majority of the South Korean public has historically supported the alliance.  So what else can North Korea do? Focus on Japan.  It can weaken South Korea–Japan relations by promoting anti-Japan feelings among South Koreans. Those easy-to-ignite feelings are based on ever-simmering historical animosities related to Japan’s colonial rule of the peninsula from 1910-1945.  Kim Il Sung’s gat geun tactic  The gat is a hat Korean men wore during the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910). It has a large brim with two strings under the chin that secure the hat in its place. According to state founder Kim Il Sung’s “gat geun tactic,” one string (geun) represents South Korea’s alliance with the US; the other string represents South Korea’s relations with Japan.  By cutting one string, the hat blows off. Thus by destroying South Korea’s relations with Japan, South Korea itself crumbles – that is how Kim describes the gat geun tactic.  Kim first used the term “gat geun tactic” in 1969, when he gave a speech at Kim Jong Il Political University, which trains espionage agents and operatives. Kim emphasized the tactic again in 1972 during a graduation ceremony at Kim Il Sung Political University, which trains political officers, who are later are assigned to monitor the North Korean military.  The late Hwang Jang Yop, the most senior North Korean figure to defect to South Korea and formerly a close associate of Kim, said that Pyongyang makes full use of the gat-geun tactic to weaken the South Korea-US alliance and Japan-South Korea relations as part of its “united front” tactics.  A reproduction of a traditional Korean interior scene – complete with a Korean gentleman wearing a gat. Photo: Wikipedia Commons  Moon’s mad maneuver  So why did Seoul’s Moon Jae-in administration announce that it would not renew the GSOMIA with Japan – especially when Moon went to Thailand in October to sign an intel-sharing agreement with that nation?  From the perspective of security vis-a-vis North Korea, it makes little sense to sign an intelligence-sharing pact with Thailand, but end the existing one with Japan.  Moon’s Blue House has tried to claim that the US understands South Korea’s decision to end GSOMIA with Japan, and National Assemblyman Lee Hae-chan of Moon’s Democratic Party of Korea said, “Even with no GSOMIA, [South Korea]-US alliance relations remain firm, and in fact are even more important.”  However, a number of US officials, using unusually blunt, public language, said there was no seeking of US understanding. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed his “disappointment,” and the Pentagon expressed “strong concern.”  More recently, US Defense Secretary Mark Esper and US Ambassador to Korea Harry Harris have both made clear they strongly favor maintaining GSOMIA.  Some within South Korea are also wary of killing GSOMIA.  It has been reported that the Ministry of National Defense was against the Blue House decision. And a group known as Korea Retired Generals and Admirals Defending the Nation, or KORGAD, condemned the “bungled GSOMIA decision and the undiplomatic behavior … deliberately perpetrated by the ill-motivated Moon administration, thus not reflecting the will of most South Korean people.”  Former senior foreign-service officers also made a public statement, referring to GSOMIA as an “indispensable fulcrum of the security cooperation between Korea, US and Japan.” They added, “As for our relations with Japan, our two states are now on the verge of belligerency after the Moon government violated or terminated the 1965 Claims Settlement Agreement, the 2015 Korea-Japan ‘Comfort Women’ Agreement, and most recently, the 2016 GSOMIA. The termination of GSOMIA and the violation of the Treaty on Basic Relations between the Republic of Korea and Japan will undoubtedly undermine the cooperative relations among Korea, the US and Japan, and cripple the Korea-US alliance.”  Both groups called for the Moon administration to renew GSOMIA.  Playing to China, playing to North Korea  Weakening South Korea’s relations with Japan suits both North Korea and China.  It falls fully in line with North Korea’s gat geun tactic. It is also in line with the “Three Nos” that Seoul unwisely promised Beijing in 2017: No further deployment of the US THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) system; no further US missiles defenses on South Korean soil; and no trilateral security alliance among Japan, South Korea and the US.  Nixing GSOMIA would have benefited neither South Korea’s national security nor its national interest. South Korea should not fall prey to North Korea’s gat geun tactic by weakening ties with Japan. A trilateral, liberal democratic partnership of Japan, South Korea and the US should work together as a bedrock of regional security.  Fortunately, a fracture in that bedrock appears to have been avoided with the news that GSOMIA remains in play. |
| TOM COYNER | Commentary | Asia Times | MARCH 16, 2020 | Hong Kong | A tale of two ex-colonies: Korea and Taiwan | Anyone who has spent time in Northeast Asia will be struck by differences in perspectives among the region’s three democracies and economic powerhouses – Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.  The differences in the attitudes of Taiwanese and Koreans towards their Japanese colonial pasts are particularly striking.  Taiwan’s attitudes toward Japan range from ambivalence to positive. Korea has a hostile attitude towards Japan that is at least partially reciprocated by Japan’s attitudes towards its vexing neighbor.  These differences largely stem from history, and resultant self identities.  National identities  Taiwanese self-awareness is more complicated. For most of history, the island was largely ruled by competing indigenous tribes. While the Chinese long recognized the large island some 100 miles off of their coast, it was of minor concern. Only when Western powers arrived did Beijing take notice. From then on, a Taiwanese identity can be traced. But it’s convoluted.  In 1648, the Dutch attempted to establish a settlement in what is now Tainan. The location was already infamous – the Yanshui River sandbars created a labyrinth in which pirates and smugglers hid. The Dutch colony featured two forts from where profitable trade was conducted with Manila, major Chinese ports and Nagasaki.  By 1644, the Qing Dynasty was established across China. It sent an overwhelming military force and closed down the Dutch. From that point forward, Chinese emperors were remarkably inconsistent in Taiwan policy.  In 1724, Emperor Yongzheng established local administrative districts and removed immigration bans, issuing permits and land grants. Many Chinese moved to Taiwan, sparking conflict with indigenous tribes. Subsequently, Emperor Qinlong neglected Taiwan. This cycle continued until 1895 when the Qing dynasty ceded the island to Japan following the First Sino-Japanese War.  For the first time, Taiwanese were permanently ruled by a competent government. The Japanese developed the island’s infrastructure and introduced public education. Sensitive to world opinion, they attempted to be model colonialists.  Even so, Taiwan rice and sugar was exported to the metropole, and Taiwan served as a base for Japanese invasions of Southeast Asia and the Pacific during World War II. More than 80,000 Taiwanese were conscripted into the Japanese army during World War II and about 30,000 died.  In 1949, after losing mainland China in the Chinese Civil War, the Republic of China government under the Kuomingtang (KMT) withdrew to Taiwan, where KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek declared martial law. During the immediate postwar period, the KMT administration was repressive and corrupt compared with the previous Japanese rule, leading to local discontent. Anti-mainlander violence flared. Tens of thousands of Taiwanese were killed or arrested.  In Taiwan, while most people were Han Chinese, their sense of affiliation was diverse among the regions of China from which they came. This meant affiliation to an offshore location that few had opportunities to travel to. The indigenous tribes became almost insignificant minorities. As such, it was relatively easy for the Japanese to practice consistent, professional rule. The Japanese had demonstrated themselves to be the best rulers to date, and the notion of being part of a better-managed empire held attractions for many Taiwanese.  ‘Nippon Daiso.’ In Taiwan, the discount store proudly advertises its Japanese heritage. Not so in Korea. Photo: Tom Coyner  Nationalist identity  Japan’s experience in Korea was more problematic.  Korea’s Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) had been the third long-lasting dynasty of a unified peninsula. There was little doubt among Koreans who they were. China was the larger, more sophisticated neighbor while Japan was the lesser, cruder nation to which Korea had passed down Confucianism, Buddhism and Sinic culture.  But Japan was also powerful and Korea had required China to help battle the Japanese during the Imjin War (1592-1598).  Joseon, for all its faults, provided stable governance and a sense of national identity. When the Japanese asserted full colonial control in 1910, there was revulsion. While Japan developed infrastructure, including public education, Japanese colonialists faced a different set of challenges compared to Taiwan.  A strong xenophobic tradition against Chinese, Mongols and Japanese continued. The Japanese education system justified colonization by demeaning the accomplishments of Joseon. The Japanese pointed out the inferiorities of Korean culture and reminded their colonized subjects how much better off they were in the Japanese Empire. Some Koreans accepted or pretended to accept this, while others plotted various liberation schemes.  Uprising against Japan  Contrast each nation’s uprising against the Japanese. Taiwan briefly established the Republic of Formosa, which was proclaimed on May 23, 1895, and extinguished on October 21, when the Republican capital, Tainan, was taken by Japanese forces. Today, this is taught in Taiwanese textbooks, but there is no special annual commemoration.  In Korea, a major national holiday commemorates and re-enacts the March 1st Movement of 1919. On that day, a declaration of independence was read and the printed proclamation was widely distributed nationwide. During the following six weeks, approximately 2 million Koreans participated in the more than 1,500 demonstrations.  Koreans claim more than 7,500 people were killed, 15,500 wounded and 46,000 arrested, but the Japanese recorded drastically smaller numbers. Today, Korean textbooks highlight the uprising as a hallmark of Korean nationalism.  The March 1 national holiday commemorates the struggle against Japanese colonialism and the Korean national identity. Photo: Tom Coyner  A researcher at the Taiwan National Museum told Asia Times that attitudes toward Japan are “complicated,” depending on family background. Families who arrived during the late 1940s with the KMT remain somewhat hostile toward Japan, as much of the first half of the 20th century involved fighting both Chinese communists and Japanese imperialists. Many young people from non-KMT families, however, have a casual attitude about the colonial period.  They enjoy retrospective reproductions of the Japanese era, such as Tainan’s trendy Hayashi Department Store. Store muzak is popular Japanese marches from the 1930s, sales clerks wear the era’s uniforms, many goods mimic Japanese colonial motifs and a faux Shinto shrine sits on the roof. Elsewhere in Taiwan, a few Shinto shrines are preserved as historical and architectural monuments rather than places of worship.  No such structures survive in Korea.  In Taiwan, Japanese chain retailers openly advertise as being Japanese and the biggest department stores in Taipei are Shin Kong Mitsukoshi. In Seoul, the original big department store, Mitsukoshi, has long been re-branded Shinsegae, with many younger Koreans ignorant of its origins.  In both nations, Daiso discount stores blossom. In Korea, few shoppers recognize the stores as being Japanese, whereas Taiwanese branches advertise their Japanese pedigree. One can find Japanese goods on the shelves in Korea as well as Taiwan – but noticeably more in Taiwan. In Korea, consumer boycotts of Japanese products are not uncommon, but this is not so in Taiwan.  Colonial-style shopping experiences at the Hayashi Department Store in Tainan. Photo: Tom Coyner  Identity politics  Speaking broadly, the difference in attitudes comes down to inherent national identities.  Korea has an ancient, proud culture but is an insecure entity due to its position among larger, more powerful neighbors. Repeatedly, Koreans struggled to preserve their identity and the Japanese were – unnervingly – almost successful in amalgamating Korea, and that process was only terminated by Japan’s World War II defeat. From 1945, the Koreans eagerly assumed the educational system and revamped the curriculum to promote national pride.  The Taiwanese were largely part of a larger Chinese entity with less concern about identity. Settlers were often frustrated by the lack of interest from the mainland, so became more independent in trade and agriculture. When the Japanese withdrew in 1945, many regarded the era as the end of relatively good governance.  When the Nationalists arrived, they were confounded by how Japanese the local population had become. Under the KMT, the public school system fostered greater Chinese nationalism than ever before. However, the Taiwanese, who unquestionably thought of themselves as being Han Chinese, never felt threatened by, or were at least apathetic about, Japanese influences.  As a result, Taiwanese self-identity is complicated and varies greatly among families. In contrast, Koreans remain hugely nationalistic and continue to be unified, yet defensive, about the matter.  Will Korea ever move past its grudge with Japan? One long-term Korea observer suggested it will – but obstacles need to be overcome.  First, the country needs to be reunified. The jockeying between the two Koreas is often the cause for attacking Japan – and other countries. Second, a unified Korea needs to establish a more stable and confident geopolitical presence.  These conditions, however, may be long in coming. |
| DA-SOL GOH | Opinion | Asia Times | JUNE 27, 2019 | Hong Kong | Japan must apologize for wartime forced labor | South Korea and Japan have had strained relationship in recent decades, due to Japan’s brutal crimes against Koreans during the colonial era. Among many other atrocities, Koreans are particularly incensed by the sex-slave and forced-labor issues of the 1940s. While civic groups hold “Wednesday demonstrations” outside the Japanese Embassy every week to demand that Japan sincerely offer apologies for the “comfort women” issue, fewer people have focused on the forced-labor issue.  During World War II, Japanese companies sold weapons for the Japanese imperialist armies. Some of them forcibly mobilized men from Korea and China for forced labor in the mass production of weapons.  On Hashima Island off Japan, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries engaged in deep-sea mining. There, Koreans were forced to mine coal under harsh conditions: the mine was too narrow to walk through; its humidity was 95% on average and temperature was over 30 degrees Celsius. Above all, the mine was vulnerable to explosions, so some men worked at the cost of their lives. While Japan exploited Korean workers, it didn’t pay them, just providing squalid rooms for them.  In 2012, the South Korean government estimated that more than 500 Korean workers were subjected to forced labor on Hashima in 1944 alone. A civic group in Japan has said that roughly 122 Koreans lost their lives there, after finding the official documents that recorded the identifications of the dead.  The Japanese government, however, is hiding its shameful history. It has registered Hashima Island on the UNESCO World Heritage List, introducing it as a tourism spot. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which belatedly noticed the forced-labor issue, has recommended that Japan educate visitors to Hashima on its tragic history. However, Japan doesn’t mention forced labor, sticking to an “I don’t care” attitude.  Japan asserts that the forced-labor issue has been long resolved, citing compensation paid when Seoul and Tokyo established diplomatic relations in 1965. At that time, Tokyo offered US$800 million in grants and soft loans, which Seoul used as seed money for its economic takeoff, rather than paying it to victims.  But Japan hasn’t ever offered an apology to victims. For Koreans, all the Japanese government has done is try to silence victims by giving money to its Korean counterpart. Unlike its attitude toward Korea, Japan has atoned for its wartime atrocities in China, and has also apologized for its treatment of American prisoners of war. Even after these apologies, however, Mitsubishi just said that “the forced-labor issue in Korea is different from that of China,” rather than offering an apology to Korean victims.  In Korea, victims of forced labor have sued Japanese companies that were involved in forced labor. Victims have sought compensation from Japanese companies, but what they genuinely want is a sincere apology from the Japanese government, not just money.  Many victims have already died. Japan is wrong to hide its crimes, claiming that it has reconciled the forced-labor issue.  Japan has compensated the South Korean government for its past misdeeds, but it hasn’t made any apology to individual victims. Moreover, it tries to prettify its wartime crimes, including forced labor. That’s why both victims and the Korean government officials argue that Japan has yet to repent sincerely for its human-rights abuses.  Yukio Hatoyama, a former prime minister of Japan, recently called for the country’s current leader, Shinzo Abe, to atone for his nation’s past wrongdoings. The agreements in 1965 and 2015, as the former PM has said, don’t mean that victims cannot individually seek compensation, including apologies for the use of forced labor. |
| NAM SANG-GU | Opinion | Asia Times | JUNE 28, 2020 | Hong Kong | Tokyo’s history whitewash is insult to UNESCO | At a time when statues representing histories of slavery, racism and colonialism are being toppled across the United States and worldwide, Japan is moving in the opposite direction.  It has – this very month – opened a new historical center that completely ignores historical crimes. These crimes are widely known: The mobilization of countless Chinese, Koreans and Allied prisoners of war to work as forced labor during World War II.  It’s a shame. The opening of Japan’s industrial heritage center in mid-June should have been cause for celebration, for it details how the country created an industrial base – the first Asian nation to do so and a global benchmark for modernization.  Instead, it demonstrates that Tokyo is attempting to whitewash its aggressions in the first half of the 20th century. And remarkably, this whitewash negates promises made to a major UN body.  Meiji and UNESCO  On July 5, 2015, 23 sites of Japan’s Meiji Industrial Revolution related to iron, steel, shipbuilding and coal mining were designated World Heritage Sites by the World Heritage Committee (WHC) of UNESCO.  At the time, the WHC recommended that Japan prepare “an interpretive strategy” to enable a full understanding of the history of each site. Tokyo accepted this advice and pledged to take measures “to enable the understanding that a large number of Koreans and others were mobilized against their will and forced to work.”  What the Japanese government acknowledged at the time was hardly the fruit of new research. The material is, in fact, included in textbooks for elementary, middle and high school students in Japan.  In the five years since making its pledge, however, the Japanese government has reneged on its promise.  Though Japanese school textbooks (pictured) acknowledge wartime forced labor, recent Japanese industrial sites recognized by UNESCO do not. Photo: Northeast Asian History Foundation  The dark side of development  Visitors to each of the 23 Meiji sites, when perusing informational signage, will learn that Japan borrowed the concept of industrial revolution from the West to lay the foundation for its modernization. The success of that strategy made Japan a beacon, for it was the first non-Western country to achieve world-class industrialization.  What visitors will not learn about is Japan’s mobilization of forced laborers during the Pacific War (1937-1945).  Nor will they learn that Japan’s industrialization enabled wars of aggression. Japan used shipbuilding technologies to create battleships, and leveraged its iron and steel-making know-how to make artillery. This power enabled Japan to colonize Korea and Taiwan; it subsequently used it to invade much of China and almost all of Southeast Asia before being defeated by the Allies in 1945.  During the war years, damage was colossal; millions died.  In 1955, the Japanese government released a prime minister’s statement apologizing for and reflecting upon Japan’s aggressions in the region. Incumbent Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has said he would carry on the statement.  But since the 23 Meiji industrial sites were designated UNESCO World Heritage sites, however, Japan has stealthily changed its attitude toward its recent history: from remorse over past wrongdoings to pride.  In mid-June, the Industrial Heritage Information Center opened. It’s exhibits show nothing about how Japan mobilized workers from Korea, China and other countries, as well as prisoners of war from Allied nations captured in Southeast Asia, and forced them to work at coal mines under harsh conditions and on near-starvation rations.  In fact, the center’s only related information is in testimonies related to Hashima Island – an iconic island that resembles a battleship, and was used as a location in the 007 film “Skyfall,” which was the site of coal mines during the war years – that deny any discrimination against non-Japanese workers.  Signage on Hashima Island makes no mention of forced labor. Photo: Nam Sang-gu  Japan defies posterity  Yet, the facts related to forced labor are readily available. Not only are they included in Japanese school textbooks, but testimonies from witnesses have been published and victims have filed lawsuits against Japanese companies.  So why has Japan broken its word? In 2015, the WHC’s 21 member countries all paid careful attention to Japan’s attitude on this issue.  Five years later, however, they seem to have lost interest. Such indifference is what enabled Japan to shift its stance.  The UN was established in response to the devastation caused by the two world wars and to prevent recurrences. The UNESCO World Heritage system was set up to preserve heritage as common assets of humankind.  Because Japan’s industrial facilities are designated UNESCO World Heritage, they cannot become tools to beautify Japan’s history. Were this to be permitted, it would undermine UNESCO’s mission.  The history of Japan’s industrial heritage must be written in full, not in part. And if it is to be granted UNSECO status, it must be remembered collectively. If the Japanese government fails to keep its word, UNESCO must require it to do so.  That is the demand of history. But it is also the demand of the zeitgeist, which makes clear that the voices of historical victims must be heard, not ignored or erased. |
| JAKE ADELSTEIN | Commentary | Asia Times | AUGUST 2, 2019 | Hong Kong | Japan-Korean relations slip to a new low | Tokyo on Friday revoked South Korea’s preferential status as a trade partner for the purchase of dual-use materials vital to Korean industry, driving bilateral relations to their lowest ebb in recent memory and raising questions over the grounds for the Japanese action.  Seoul-Tokyo relations have not been rosy since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe took power in 2012 – partly due to his support from Japan’s far-right, which itself utilizes anti-Korean sentiment. Since leftist Moon Jae-in took power in Seoul in 2017, the relationship has worsened further.  Last year, Moon struck down a “final and irreversible” agreement that was struck by his predecessor Park Geun-hye and Abe over “comfort women.” Last October, South Korea’s Supreme Court ruled that Japan’s steelmakers had to pay compensation to South Koreans who were victims of wartime forced labor.  Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party views the issue of compensation as having been settled under a 1965 bilateral agreement and compensation package.  The United States has expressed concerns that the deepening divide between its two major Asian allies could impact its ability to deal with threats from North Korea.  Is Tokyo’s action groundless?  South Korea is the first country ever to lose its position on Japan’s “white list” of preferred export destinations, gaining the status in 2004. Japanese companies will now need to obtain case-by-case approval from Japan’s trade ministry before exporting to Korea.  According to the Asahi Shimbun, that could result in months of processing paperwork for every export. Friday’s decision follows a July 4 move that required Korean firms to gain individual licenses to import crucial materials used to manufacture semiconductors and display panels for smartphones and TVs.  Seoul has criticized Tokyo’s action, calling them retaliation for its court rulings. Tokyo insists the measure addressed security concerns, claiming there were “improper incidents” surrounding exports to South Korea. It has not given details, but the claims are probably not completely without merit. Some information has leaked out.  Former government official, economist and author Noriya Usami argues on his blog that China is procuring materials from South Korea to build their own high-tech industries. He points out that South Korea has a poor record of tracking materials exported to that country and notes that there are materials China seeks which Japan limits exports of.  So, he writes, China seems to be procuring them from South Korea in a roundabout fashion.  On a TV program on July 4, Kōichi Hagiuda, a Deputy Chief Cabinet member, argued vaguely that restrictions on exports to South Korea were necessary because in the past, shipments were unaccounted for.  Then, on July 5, on conservative Fuji Television, an unnamed ruling party member was reported to have said that large amounts of fluorine products shipped to Korea, which could be used to make chemical weapons, had not been properly accounted for by Seoul.  However, Abe has made guarded remarks indicating that the trade measures are responses to Seoul’s refusal to interfere with the court decisions.  While seemingly agitated in a debate broadcast on Fuji Television on July 7, Abe said: “Concerning the conscripted labor problem. If [Korea] is a country that can’t uphold an agreement, then, of course, we can’t be sure they are conducting proper management of trade [from a national security perspective].”  Disavowing the past  In Japan, there’s capital to be gained in exploiting prejudice, conspiracy theories and “Yamato Supremacism” during elections.  Even conservative paper the Nikkei, in a front page article, conceded that the timing of the first export restrictions appeared political. On July 26 it wrote: “METI announced the restrictions three days before the Upper House elections, on July 1 … Abe avoided the topic during his stump speeches during the campaign, but many feel this put wind in the sails of [his] Liberal Democratic Party.”  A surprising number of people in Japan don’t seem to know much about atrocities committed by Japan during the Pacific War. In 1991’s Inventing Japan, author William Chapman writes: “For the average Japanese [who had not grown up in wartime], Japanese atrocities were the rumors of war. The facts of the war, those that they knew to be true, were all on the other side. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki … the war only made sense if Japan were a victim.”  The group of right-wing nationalists, Shinto cultists, likely racists and historical revisionists that form Nippon Kaigi – and Abe’s hardcore case – have sought to rewrite Japanese history and textbooks for decades. It is they who rescued Abe from political limbo after his unsuccessful first time as prime minister. The majority of his cabinet ministers belong to the group.  Abe has personal reasons for disavowing Japan’s dark past. His grandfather, Kishi Nobusuke, was arrested as a war criminal in 1945. He had served as Japan’s Minister of Munitions during the war and been a war profiteer.  Early in his political career, Abe cast doubts on the sufferings of Korean “comfort women” used by the Japanese military and has sought to influence and change history textbooks, eliminating mention of Japan’s worst actions.  In recent years, his cabinet has virtually ensured that no textbook mentioning Japan’s annexation of Korea or its colonial misdeeds can be approved.  ‘Hate Korea’  Abe has benefitted politically by tapping into a long-simmering prejudice against Korea, Koreans and the Zainichi – Japan’s ethnic Koreans. There’s even a word for it – Kenkan (嫌韓) (literally “Hate Korea”), but usually translated as “anti-Korean sentiment.”  The internet helped give a voice to this often mute prejudice. The publication of the best-selling comic book Kenkanryu (Anti-Korean Boom) in 2005 showed that anti-Koreanism could make money.  It argued, dubiously, that Korea cheated during the World Cup and Korea’s current success was only due to Japanese colonialism. Sequels followed. Today, you can walk into any bookstore in Japan and find anti-Korean books or “special features” lambasting Koreans in major and minor magazines.  Though he rarely indulges in racism, Abe lets his underlings say things he cannot say himself. In 2014, he appointed to the head of the National Public Safety Commission a member of Nippon Kaigi, Eriko Yamatani, who was closely associated with Zaitoku-kai, a hate-speech group that targets Korean-Japanese.  In a now-infamous press conference, she refused to disavow the racist conspiracy theories of the group.  A plea for kindness  But not all Japanese despise Koreans. In fact, much of the “hate Korea” prejudice was a kneejerk response to the huge popularity of hallyu – the Korean wave of pop culture that first hit Japan in the late 1990s.  Amid the current dire relations between Seoul and Tokyo, a moving letter from an 89-year-old Japanese Buddhist priest was published in the leftist Asahi Shimbun on March 19.  In the letter, he recounts the colonial-era slurs used against Koreans and remembers watching a Korean mother holding her crying child after she had been bullied by Japanese teenagers. “Why do you make fun of us? We have noses, we have mouths, where are we different?” the woman asked him at the time.  He then linked that recall to the present.  “I can’t help but see traces of that mistaken feeling of superiority we had over the Koreans at that time,” he wrote. “Is it because Korea isn’t the USA that we feel like building conflict, fanning anti-Korean fervor and using it for political ends?”  Adding a note of empathy, he continued: “The people who discriminated against others may forget it, but those who were subject to that discrimination never forget. I wish that Shinzo Abe, the government and the LDP would keep this in mind, and work to deepen friendship between Japan and our neighbor Korea.” |
| MITCH SHIN | Commentary | Asia Times | JULY 19, 2019 | Hong Kong | For Koreans, a must-win battle has begun | Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed his opinion that tightening export controls on the Republic of Korea was in accordance with World Trade Organization rules. In this situation, the National Assembly of Korea is not coping effectively with the Japanese government’s provocation.  At the same time, the opposition Liberty Korea Party is criticizing President Moon Jae-in on a daily basis. How long have you been listening to the typical rhetoric on freedom of speech from the LKP’s leaders? It reminds people of the biased media reportage on the military dictatorship in the 1980s.  The reason South Korea has divided its governance system into three branches is to prevent the monopoly of power as in a military dictatorship and allow liberal democracy in which public opinion is reflected in reality. In this situation, when Japan is threatening the Korean semiconductor industry, which is one of the country’s major industries, it is a common wish and common sense that the National Assembly should cooperate with the Blue House to solve the problem. However, despite the fact that it an extraordinary session of the National Assembly was convened in June, the LKP is refusing even to propose a resolution to oppose the Japanese government’s export regulation. Whom is it representing?  Read: As trade war counts down, Seoul offers olive branch to Tokyo  The Japanese government’s recent decision might have been foreseen. There are plenty of issues that Abe wishes would go away, from the Tokyo-funded foundation to support Korean victims of Japanese, called the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation, to the recent Supreme Court decision against Japanese companies that used Korean forced labor during the colonial period. In 2015, Park Geun-hye’s administration concluded an agreement with the Japanese government on compensating “comfort women,” but it did not fully reflect the opinions of the victims, and Abe is embarrassed by the sudden change of Blue House’s behavior under Moon, Park’s successor.  The desire of the surviving comfort women who were victimized during Japanese colonial rule is a sincere apology and proper compensation, as everyone knows. Abe, however, kept refusing to apologize, complaining that the victims’ statements were not true, and that Park had received 1 billion yen (US$9.2 million) in compensation for the comfort women. But the fact is that even after 70 years of independence from Japan, Park’s administration failed to represent them, and it is also true that Abe is looking forward to the return of a conservative regime in Korea.  Moon’s recent response and attitude toward Japan deserve praise from Koreans. Seoul should never play the Japanese government’s political games and negotiate in the ways Tokyo prefers. Everyone should join together under the name of Korea and respond to the behavior of the Japanese government. And it will not only be the politicians who should play an important role in this situation. The role of the media is also very important.  Recently, the issue of the newspaper Chosun Ilbo’s tone has been raised. It is not easy to raise the issue of media coverage in political circles, as politicians must be careful not to do anything that appears to violate the freedom of the press. However, Ko Min-jung, a spokeswoman for Blue House, unexpectedly raised the issue of articles in the Chosun Ilbo ‘s Japanese edition publicly.  She criticized articles and columns in the Japanese editions of the Chosun Ilbo and JoongAng Ilbo dealing with the economic conflict between Korea and Japan. “I would like to ask if this really reflects the voices of our people,” Ko said during a briefing at the Blue House on Wednesday.  She said the Chosun Ilbo deleted some articles in its Japanese edition after public criticism by the Blue House. The English-language Korea JoongAng Daily, however, editorialized that Ko’s perspective was perplexing and questioned why the press must stay patriotic during times of crisis.  Chosun Ilbo’s articles are frequently cited by the foreign press when reporting on the export-control problems between South Korea and Japan. To cite an article found in a newspaper with the greatest number of subscribers in Korea is a natural judgment. But can the Chosun Ilbo claim that its reporting on this issue is worthy of its status as the No 1 newspaper in South Korea? The Chosun Ilbo should not be aiming for at pro-Japanese coverage based on an unconditional anti-Korean perspective.  It is not surprising that lawmakers are not performing their duties properly while the ruling and opposition parties are fighting each other in the National Assembly. Lawmakers need to be spending their time passing bills that lead to dramatic improvements in the people’s lives. If they keep behaving in this way, the 20th National Assembly will go down in history as failing to live up to the spirit of the people who demonstrated Korean democracy to the international community in the Candlelight Revolution.  The kind of people who brought down a corrupt regime with the Candlelight Revolution have recently decided not to buy Japanese items and have canceled trips to Japan. The internal disputes that arise from ideological differences should now be over. The Blue House, the National Assembly, the press, and the economic community all need to respond to the Abe’s actions, and take long-term measures. South Korea is in the middle of a fight from which it should never back down. |
| ANDREW SALMON | Commentary | Asia Times | JULY 29, 2020 | Hong Kong | Tokyo goes ape over new ‘comfort woman’ statue | Statues are much in the news lately. Across the West, many are tumbling, but in the East, a newly erected work of art is pouring new fuel on the ever-fiery flames of Japanese-Korean animosity.  In South Korea, statues of “comfort women” – who served in Japanese wartime military brothels, many under compulsion or coercion – are commonplace: They are seen on iconic mountaintops, in downtown shopping districts, at public transport stops – they have even taken up seats in buses.  Now a new one is winning attention for its creative, and arguably provocative, concept.  Established in a botanical garden in Pyeongchang, scene of 2018’s Winter Olympics, the creative work depicts a man who bears a striking resemblance to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on his hands and knees, bowing before a seated young comfort woman.  Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga spluttered at its mention in Tokyo on Tuesday. He told reporters that the statue was “unacceptable” and would “decisively affect” bilateral relations.  This is ludicrous talk.  The offending statue is owned by a private citizen in a private space. It is not an official project. South Korean is democratic, and artistic expression is, while not completely unfettered – pornography and pro-North Korean content are censored, for example – largely free.  Moreover, strident demands that national leaders must not be lampooned sounds like the kind of language that emanates from authoritarian regimes, not democratic polities.  One hopes it was also uninformed talk, for it is unclear how well briefed Suga was.  “While we have yet to confirm this, it would be unacceptable under international courtesy,” the cabinet secretary said.  South Korean media have confirmed, with photos, that the statue exists, while Seoul’s Foreign Ministry released a lukewarm statement on the importance of courtesy toward foreign leaders.  Still, one can sympathize with the uncontrollable jerks that Japanese officials’ knees suffer whenever South Korea is mentioned.  This is particularly so since 2017, when the current Moon Jae-in government took office.  History wars  While Japan was unquestionably the historical aggressor on the peninsula in the days of imperialism and the Pacific War, Tokyo has since offered multiple apologies, from emperors, prime ministers and cabinet secretaries on down. It has also paid hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation to repair ties.  This writer knows of no other ex-colonial power that has been so apologetic to, or remunerative toward, an ex-colonial possession.  Still, in South Korea, repeated assertions of national victimhood are made with table-thumping passion and rarely questioned. Japanese apologies are roundly dismissed as “insincere.”  The years 1910-1945, the period when Japan controlled the peninsula, is painted in far darker hues than another recent historical tragedy, the Korean War. That was a more destructive affair in terms of both life and property, and one for which the instigator, North Korea, has never apologized or offered compensation.  The Holocaust does not feature on the Korean national curriculum, but that does not stop Koreans from comparing Japanese colonization – an exploitative and sometimes brutal, but hardly genocidal occupation – to the Nazis’ mass slaughter of Europe’s Jews.  Current Prime Minister Abe is widely despised as a right-wing militant nationalist and his grandfather was a war criminal noted for brutal activities in Japan’s Manchurian puppet state of Manchukuo during the Pacific War. But Abe himself, in recent years, has toned down his nationalism.  While he seeks to remove legal fetters on the Japan Self-Defense Forces, constitutional revision looks practically impossible and he has not visited the controversial Yasukuni Shrine since 2013.  He has also pried open the Japanese economy to heretofore unprecedented levels for imported goods, labor and tourists, while also championing the multilateral Trans-Pacific Partnership free-trade deal after its abandonment by US President Donald Trump and signed another free-trade deal with the European Union.  These are the actions of a globalist, not a nationalist.  Granted, Abe’s ruling Liberal Democratic Party is a curious political beast. Though a grouping of right-wing elements, it encompasses a spectrum of views wide enough to keep true hard-right forces in check. Many Koreans, however, consider it to be hard right and revisionist.  Moon goes into battle  Moon hails from the center-left Democratic Party of Korea. Since taking office in 2017, he has prioritized relations with North Korea, with minimal success, but has managed the Covid-19 crisis adroitly.  He has also taken to putting the boot into Japan on every front.  In 2015, Abe and Moon’s predecessor Park Geun-hye signed a deal to end the comfort-women problem that has plagued bilateral ties since the 1990s. It included an apology from Abe and compensation. In return, Seoul authorities pledged to discuss the removal of a comfort-woman statue erected by activists on a public road outside the Japanese Embassy. (Not only did the original statue remain in situ, another statue appeared outside the Japanese Consulate in Busan.)  Although the majority of then-living comfort women accepted the 2015 deal, a vocal minority, affiliated to a non-governmental organization, resisted. Moon’s government, on coming to office, took the latter’s side and unilaterally quashed the deal, freezing the Japanese funds.  But Moon was just getting started. Citing historical sensitivities, Seoul ordered a Japanese destroyer invited to a Korean naval review to strike its “Rising Sun” ensign. (Despite that ensign having been aired in a previous Korean naval review, and despite China, the prime victim of Japan’s 1930s-40s militarism, raising no issue with it.) In a subsequent naval incident, a Korean destroyer on the high seas “painted” a Japanese reconnaissance aircraft with its target radar without explanation.  Most damagingly, Korean courts seized Japanese corporate assets in order to award damages to Koreans forced to labor in Japan in wartime. This, despite the fact that Seoul and Tokyo had signed a treaty in 1965 that included hundreds of millions of dollars in Japanese compensation after the payment for the laborers had been calculated to the last dollar.  (Seoul, at the time, took the Japanese monies but did not award them to the victims; instead, it used the cash as startup capital for economic development.)  Last year, Tokyo demanded negotiations on the basis of the 1965 deal. Seoul refused. With two bilateral agreements – 2015 and 1965 – de facto overturned under Moon in just two years, Abe took offense.  Tokyo had previously had a habit of rolling with Seoul’s blows, but in 2019, it showed its teeth, slowing (but not halting) the export of three key chemicals used in South Korean semiconductor manufacturing. Then it removed Korea from a list of preferred trade partners.  Seoul responded in kind, and the Korean public boycotted Japanese products and visits to Japan.  Most recently, after April’s legislative election, Moon’s party took on, as a new lawmaker, the head of the very comfort-women NGO that had sabotaged two Japanese attempts to resolve the problem: the Asian Women’s Fund of the 1990s, and the Abe-Park 2015 agreement.  (One of the NGOs’ star comfort women has since acrimoniously broken ties with the group, and accused it of fomenting Korea-Japan animosities. The NGO also stands accused of financial malfeasance.)  Common ground …  Yet remarkably, Japanese and South Koreans – when politics and history are taken off the table – have multiple commonalities and shared interests.  The two countries have similar lifestyles and enjoy each others’ cultures. BTS is huge in Japan; Japanese anime boasts legions of fans across Korea. Superb Korean restaurants in Tokyo are mirrored by fine Japanese restaurants in Seoul.  While their economies compete head to head in many sectors – autos, electronic devices, steel, petrochemicals – they are in other ways complementary. South Korea was until recently the No 2 source of tourists for Japan; Japanese components are critical elements in Korean supply chains.  Both are Northeast Asian liberal democracies facing off against authoritarian regimes in North Korea and China.  Both have (separate) US alliances underwriting their security. Washington has, for decades, been frustrated by a dearth of trilateral military cooperation that obviates economy of effort.  And both have attendant problems with those alliances. How to manage Trumpian demands for fivefold increases in stationed GIs’ cost-sharing burdens? How to balance strategic partnerships with Washington with economic ties to Beijing – the top trade partner for both Seoul and Tokyo?  In short, recognition of common interest and/or a combined voice on all these matters would assist both countries in multiple spheres: tourism, trade, diplomacy, strategy and politics.  Currently, though, nothing of the sort looks likely.  … uncommon emotions  Despite American pleas, Abe and Moon look too invested in enmity to reboot relations in the near term.  Some light glimmers over a distant horizon. Abe is likely to depart office in 2021; Moon exits his single-term presidency in 2022.  Meanwhile, the region looks set for major turmoil over the next two years. We may reasonably anticipate ongoing health, travel and trade fallout from Covid-19; a widening of the already gaping chasm dividing Beijing from Washington; and continued and reinforced regional power projection by Beijing.  Given the motivating force of shared interest and the additional volume of combined voice, one may reasonably hope that governments in Seoul and Tokyo, after the departures of their current bosses, might mull stark realities, shelve shrill nationalisms and aim for a win-win.  If so, they could thaw current bilateral ice and heat up bilateral links – through the levels of pragmatic ties to friendly relations to possibly (gasp!) an alliance of some sort.  Alas, that is no sure thing. By all means, raise a glass of soju or sake in hope – but don’t bet your won or your yen on rationality trumping emotion.  On August 4, Korean courts are set to begin the liquidation of Japanese firms’ assets to pay the forced laborers. Tokyo has warned that is a red line.  In other words, things are going to get worse before they get better. |
| CHOI JI-WON | News Analysis | Eleven media | AUGUST 18, 2019 | Myanmar | Views of South Koreans on boycotting Japanese products  NEWS | People in Korea have shown mixed reactions to deepening boycotts of Japanese products prompted by Tokyo’s sudden export controls of high-tech materials to South Korea.  In a Realmeter survey of 506 respondents, 54.6 percent were in support of the boycott campaign.  On Thursday, “NoNo Japan,” an online community displaying consumer brands and products originating from Japan, was temporarily inaccessible due to heavy traffic. “I’m aware that many are boycotting Japanese products,” said Lee Min-youn, a 22-year-old college student. “In support of the movement, I’m also not using them. I even try to avoid going to Japanese restaurants when I go out to eat.”  Lee’s decision to boycott Japanese food could have a significant impact, considering the popularity of the cuisine here. According to data from the Fair Trade Commission, the number of Japanese restaurant brands increased from 89 in 2015 to 154 in 2017, marking an increase of 73 percent in two years.  Cho Yong-sik, 50, said he had stopped drinking Japanese beer in protest of Japan’s move, commenting, “I now think twice when it comes to things related to Japan.” According to Cho, who had seen several boycotts against Japan in the past, the most recent campaign shows a different aspect.  “The past boycotts weren’t effective because the society at the time wasn’t as democratic as now,” Cho said. “But this time no one is forcing others to boycott. Everyone is acting voluntarily.” Cho said that even his middle school daughter is taking part, consuming Korean sweets instead of Japanese, which she had enjoyed more. However, not everyone is welcoming the boycott. Some did not support the protest against the neighboring country, or were even unaware of such a movement.  “The people don’t need to fight. They’re acting too hastily by holding a boycott now,” a man in his 70s, who wished to remain anonymous, said. “The two countries should find solutions diplomatically. The leaders must talk.”  A couple of college students in their 20s, who also did not wish to reveal their identities, said they had heard of such social activities but were not joining the boycott. “None of my school friends are boycotting or talking about the issue,” one said. Nonetheless, the boycott campaign has started to show some effects in the last few days, especially on the tourism industry.  Both Hana Tour and Modu Tour, the nation’s two biggest travel agencies, said their reservation rates have dropped by more than 50 percent during the last three weeks compared to same period last year. Charter flights from Gimpo Airport in Seoul and Izumo Airport in Japan’s Shimane prefecture, provided by Korea Express Air, have been canceled from July 12 through July 25.  Several Japanese cities topped the list of favorite destinations for travel last year. Korean tourists accounted for almost a quarter of total foreign travelers to visit Japan in 2018.  “I personally view Japan in a friendly way. I’ve traveled to Japan several times. I especially love its unique, peaceful atmosphere,” college student Lee said.  “Some people (who are against the boycott) say the government and the people should be seen separately. However, the anti-Korean protests (in Japan) are already widespread, and it’s not really easy to differentiate the people from the government,” she added. |
| ANDREW SALMON & LEE SHIN-HYUNG | Commentary | Asia Times | AUGUST 8, 2011 | Hong Kong | Japan steps back from South Korean trade war | The Japanese government has permitted the export to South Korea of a key chemical required for semiconductor manufacturing – the first approval granted since Tokyo tightened export restrictions on three strategic materials on July 4.  Last month’s move raised fears about production stoppages impacting the global electronics supply chain and plunged Seoul-Tokyo relations into what was seen as their worst crisis since diplomatic relations were established in 1965.  It was unclear whether Thursday’s development would cool the  Commenting on the move, Hiroshige Seko, Japan’s trade minister, said Japan “will not misuse” its export curbs. The release of the material was confirmed by South Korea Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon during an inter-agency meeting on Thursday morning, according to Yonhap news agency.  But Lee offered no information on the supply of two other key materials, fluorinated polyimides and hydrogen fluoride. According to Japanese media, a Japanese company which applied to export hydrogen fluoride to a South Korean partner in mid-July was still awaiting approval.  “The biggest burden on the economy is uncertainty,” Lee said, calling the Japanese export restrictions “unjustifiable.” Still, he said he was determined to resolve the ongoing issue diplomatically.  President Moon Jae-in remained hard line when he referenced the situation during a subsequent address to a policy advisory body, the Citizens Economic Advisory Council.  “We have to see how far Japan will go with this,” Moon said, according to a text of his speech sent to foreign reporters. “But it has taken just one action so far, and this is not good for our economy or our people.”  Noting that each country has core economic competencies, he warned Japan against “weaponizing” its leading-edge sectors. “Eventually, Japan will lose international credibility and Japanese companies will suffer from loss of demand,” he said, adding that there could be “no winner.”  However in what may signal the start of a cycle of de-escalation, Seoul announced later on Thursday that it would hold off on dropping Japan from a list of preferred export destinations, according to an un-sourced report from the semi-official Yonhap news agency.  Control or embargo?  When Tokyo placed export controls on three potentially dual-use materials last month, it was widely assumed in South Korea that the move was a de facto embargo on goods needed by its flagship industrial sector, electronics.  A source familiar with the Japanese position assured Asia Times last week that Tokyo’s action was, in fact, simply the imposition of export controls over potentially dual-use materials. Thursday’s move by Tokyo would appear to confirm that.  Yet even if the Japanese curbs allow shipments to move, a 90-day approval process will continue to place a major red tape burden on companies, and sources in Korea urged caution.  “Japan’s approval to export photoresist seems to be a move to justify its claim that [export restrictions are] not a measure to ban exports,” Kim Kyu-pan, a senior researcher at the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, told Asia Times. “Japan’s move needs to be monitored further.  “We cannot guarantee that imports of strategic materials from Japan will come smoothly in the future. There is still a lot of uncertainty, but Japan has not resolved this uncertainty. We have to wait and see more of Japan’s moves.”  Seoul’s analysis of Japan’s imposition of export controls – which was referenced in Moon’s speech on Thursday morning – is that they are retaliation against a South Korean Supreme Court decision to seize the assets of Japanese firms operating in South Korea in order to compensate wartime forced laborers.  Tokyo’s position is that the forced labor issue had been resolved in 1965, when a diplomatic relations treaty was signed and a related financial compensation package delivered.  The dispute over the legal decision remains unresolved and with only one of the three key materials so far released, it was not clear whether public anger would be assuaged.  Emotions are expected to peak in Seoul with a major demonstration called on August 15. That was the date of Japan’s World War II surrender, which ended three and a half decades of Japanese colonial rule over the Korean peninsula.  Industrial vulnerabilities  Regardless of motive, Tokyo’s action exposed vulnerabilities in South Korean firms’ heavy dependencies on Japanese suppliers.  Seoul has since announced a major financial package to help companies self-source the necessary materials and has also announced plans to assist companies source them from exporters outside Japan. The efficacy of these measures – particularly when it comes to filling gaps in short-term supply – is murky.  Affected companies – notably leading semiconductor manufacturers Samsung and SK Hynix – have kept tight-lipped about their efforts to find non-Japanese sources of the materials, though Samsung has announced it was not cutting back on production.  Seoul was further infuriated last Friday when Tokyo expanded its export curbs beyond the three chemicals by announcing the removal of South Korea from a “white list” of trusted export destinations for more than 1,000 products. Seoul retaliated the same day, announcing the upcoming removing Japan from its own white list. That step was delayed Thursday, according to the Yonhap report.  The tit for tat actions have worried observers, who fear a trade war could be pending between the two Northeast Asia manufacturing powerhouses and US allies. |
| MIKE HONDA, LILLIAN SING & JULIE TANG | Commentary | Asia Times | JUNE 1, 2020 | Hong Kong | Never forget sexual slavery as part of Japan’s WWII history | “Comfort women” is a euphemistic term for the hundreds of thousands of girls and women who were kidnapped and sexually enslaved by the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II. From 1931-1945, Japanese military forced young women from more than 13 countries into sexual slavery for the “comfort” of its soldiers.  For the first time, in 1991, a former Korean “comfort woman,” Kim Hak-sun overcame a lifetime of shame to speak up publicly about her personal experience of sexual enslavement by the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces. Her testimony shocked the world.  This was the first time in modern history that a government had been accused of systematic implementation sexual violence and sex trafficking. Many more victims followed Kim’s courageous example and revealed their stories and experiences to the world.  Their testimonies helped move the world community to declare that using sexual violence as a weapon of war constitutes a crime against humanity for which governments must be held accountable.  In 2007 the US Congress passed House Resolution 121, which urged the Japanese government to “formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces’ coercion of young women into sexual slavery.”  The Japanese government heavily lobbied against the resolution, arguing it was Japan-bashing propaganda, rather than an important human-rights issue of institutional sexual violence against women during wartime.  So that the atrocities these women suffered would not be forgotten, a multi-ethnic non-profit organization consisting of more than 38 groups called the Comfort Women Justice Coalition (CWJC) was established in San Francisco in 2015 with the purpose of installing a memorial in US and to demand justice for the “comfort women” victims.  Lee Yong-soo, a former “comfort woman” from South Korea, came forward to give these movements in the US a tremendous boost. Grandma Lee, as Americans fondly called her, personally testified before the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 2015 in support of a resolution to allow a public memorial to be built in that California city, as she did in 2007 before the US Congress.  Her testimonies were crucial in getting both the necessary resolutions successfully passed. She put a real face to the issue, became the soul of the movement, and was the living testimony of what happened to the “comfort women.”  Her message was that the history of the “comfort women” should not be forgotten, and the government of Japan must issue a sincere, unequivocal and legal apology and pay reparations to the victims. Her goal was to educate the world on the history of the “comfort women.”  On May 9 this year, Grandma Lee made news again. She accused the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (JDH) and its former head, Yoon Mi-hyang, of financial impropriety over funds that were donated for the benefit of surviving “comfort women.”  She also accused the organization of straying from the goals and purposes of the movement by focusing too much on demonstrations and not on education, especially for Korean and Japanese youth.  It is never easy to speak up when one sees wrongs and injustices. Grandma Lee is very courageous to do so. She has nothing to gain from doing this. We understand South Korean prosecutors are already conducting an investigation into the allegations. We urge the investigation be full and thorough without any political considerations.  However, we are also concerned that Japan under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is attempting to use this financial irregularity to dishonor our righteous fight for justice for all “comfort women” victims and survivors.  The media in Japan are reporting on the financial scandal in Korea as if to discredit the movement and argue that the peace monuments around the world should be dismantled.  Japan continues to deny its role in the “comfort women” atrocity, refuses to teach its young people the history of this issue and claims it has been resolved.  The victims and the peace-memorial communities continue to insist on a sincere and official apology from Japan, one that needs to be ratified by the Japanese Diet.  Instead, Japan’s official efforts to block memorials from being built and objections to inclusion of “comfort women” documents in the UNESCO registry of records is an admission that Japan is not ready to face its history and atone for its war crimes against the “comfort women.”  The grandmas who started this movement have urged us to pursue justice and fight sexual exploitation everywhere. Grandma Lee reminded us the job is still unfinished. Let’s pay attention to her message and work in solidarity to restore justice and honor for the “comfort women” victims and survivors.  Mike Honda is a former congressman from California and author of HR 121, 2007. Lillian Sing and Julie Tang are both former judges from San Francisco who retired to build the San Francisco Comfort Women Memorial and have co-chaired the Comfort Women Justice Coalition since 2015. |
| NORIYUKI SUZUKI | News Analysis | Japan Times | December 25, 2019 | Japan | Abe-Moon talks and Seoul's donation plan could lead to improved ties, observers say | For Japan and South Korea, the resumption of top-level dialogue in and of itself is a major step forward.  Meeting for their first official talks in about 15 months, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Moon Jae-in sent one main message: They will prevent the bilateral situation from spiraling out of control.  That comes as a relief to diplomats who had, until recently, feared the worst of the dispute was yet to come for the Asian neighbors, due to disagreements over compensation for wartime forced labor and Japan’s tightening of export controls.  But Japan and South Korea remain in a state of “mutual distrust” and a return to what Abe has described as a “healthy relationship” won’t be easy, experts say. Continued dialogue can only boost their chances of rebuilding bridges.  “What we’ve seen over the past year are Tokyo and Seoul making their own cases heard, and hoping that the other side would acquiesce. If they stick to an ‘all or nothing’ mentality, they will never meet halfway,” said Hideki Okuzono, an associate professor of South Korean politics and diplomacy at the University of Shizuoka.  “The summit was important in that it signaled some improvement in ties between leaders who had harbored mistrust,” Okuzono said.  In an atmosphere that was “tense at times but not hostile,” about a third of the 45-minute meeting Tuesday in Chengdu, southwestern China, was spent on the contentious issue of compensation for wartime labor, according to a senior Japanese government official. The dispute had sent bilateral ties to their worst state in years.  But Abe and Moon failed to bridge differences in their basic position and no new proposals were made for resolving the issues, sparked by South Korean court rulings a year ago that ordered Japanese firms to provide compensation for wartime forced labor during the 1910-1945 colonization of the Korean Peninsula.  Japan has consistently argued that the ball is in South Korea’s court and that Seoul has to come up with steps to turn the situation around, based on Tokyo’s view that the compensation issue was settled under a 1965 bilateral accord that has been breached by the court orders.  A turning point came when South Korea decided not to terminate a military intelligence sharing pact in late November, leading to some softening in Japan’s stance. It was Abe himself who announced arrangements were being made for his meeting with Moon.  That was followed by the submission of a bill in the South Korean parliament to seek “voluntary” donations from citizens and businesses from the two countries, to be used as compensation.  Since details of that plan emerged, Japanese government officials have refrained from commenting and have instead largely taken a wait-and-see stance — a change from June when Tokyo rejected outright Seoul’s proposal to create a fund with participation by Japanese firms named in the lawsuits in mind.  Tuesday’s meeting was an opportunity for Abe and Moon to clear up uncertainty or doubt over how they will be able to find a solution to the wartime labor issue, although neither side broached the topic of the South Korean bill, according to a Japanese government source.  Japan is apparently concerned about whether the bill will be compatible with the 1965 agreement regarding the right to seek compensation, and how much Moon and his government will be committed to the initiative.  The envisaged plan is seen as the most viable so far but its feasibility is still in doubt due to domestic opposition in South Korea.  There is no “panacea” for repairing ties, said Okuzono. South Korea’s donation plan may not be perfect but appears to have been carefully thought out so as not to cross Japan’s “red line,” he added.  However, skepticism runs deep in Japan after seeing the Moon administration’s disbandment, earlier this year, of a Japan-funded foundation set up under a 2015 bilateral accord to support former “comfort women.”  The term comfort women is a euphemism used to refer to women who provided sex, including those who did so against their will, for Japanese troops before and during World War II.  “It is a proposal by South Korea, who unilaterally disbanded the foundation,” said Fumio Kishida, policy chief of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party who was foreign minister at the time of the agreement, adding, “I wonder how convincing it can be.”  In November, the General Security of Military Information Agreement between Japan and South Korea was saved amid U.S. pressure, and tensions have somewhat eased over trade.  Those issues should not have been linked to the dispute over compensation for wartime labor, said Yasuyo Sakata, a professor of East Asian security at Kanda University of International Studies.  The first priority is to “untie each knot,” Sakata said.  “Wartime labor is a deep-rooted issue that cannot be solved so easily,” she said. “What needs to be done at the least is to prevent it from getting worse and worse, and control damage.”  As the summit kicked off, Abe and Moon touched on the importance of ties between their respective countries. Moon, whose administration has maintained that the judicial decisions should be respected, said the nations are inseparable despite the difficulties they are now experiencing.  “Japan and South Korea will need to get over it,” Okuzono said. Referring to the South Korean bill to resolve the wartime labor issue, he said, “The plan can serve as a starting point for discussion.” |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | March, 3 2021 | South Korea | Japan should compromise to mend ties with Korea | President Moon Jae-in has made a conciliatory gesture toward Japan to mend soured ties with Tokyo. In a nationally televised speech marking the March 1 Independence Movement Day, he said that Korea was ready to discuss strengthening cooperation with Japan. However, it is hard to expect a breakthrough any time soon because the Asian neighbor shows no signs of compromise over historical issues.  Moon has reaffirmed a two-track approach in forging a future-oriented partnership with Tokyo while trying to resolve longstanding disputes over wartime atrocities committed by the former colonial power. "The only obstacle we have to overcome is that, sometimes, issues of the past cannot be separated from those of the future as they are intermingled with each other. This has impeded forward-looking development," he said.  Now the question is how to overcome such an obstacle. Moon said his government will always pursue "wise solutions" based on a victim-centered approach, vowing to restore the honor and dignity of victims of Japan's wartime atrocities such as forced labor and sex slavery. Yet he stopped short of specifying what those solutions are. What's clear is that he wants to resume talks with Japan to improve bilateral ties.  Moon's conciliatory move marks a meaningful change in his firm stance over Japan's past misdeeds. Seoul-Tokyo ties began to fray when the Moon administration tried to discredit the 2015 deal with the then nationalist Shinzo Abe government to resolve the thorny issue of "comfort women," who had been coerced into sex slavery for frontline Japanese troops from 1932 to the end of World War II. In 2018, the Supreme Court ordered Japanese firms to pay compensation to surviving South Korean victims of wartime forced labor, deteriorating ties.  The compensation ruling prompted Tokyo to limit the exports of key industrial materials necessary for Korean companies to make semiconductors and display panels. It also excluded Korea from its list of favored trading partners. The situation has aggravated further since a local court ordered the Japanese government last month to pay compensation to sex slavery victims.  The history-related issues cannot be resolved as long as Japan keeps refusing to acknowledge its crimes against humanity. It is irrational to claim that all reparations claims arising from Japan's 1910-45 colonial rule of Korea were settled by the 1965 treaty that normalized diplomatic relations between the two countries. Tokyo should sincerely apologize and pay compensation to the surviving victims of sex slavery and forced labor.  Now the Yoshihide Suga administration should positively respond to President Moon's offer for dialogue. It must take a flexible attitude toward finding a negotiated solution. Japan also needs to understand how crucial it is to have better ties with Korea to enhance bilateral cooperation and mutual prosperity. A Seoul-Tokyo partnership is also required to achieve North Korea's denuclearization and promote peace and stability in Northeast Asia. That's why U.S. President Joe Biden is actively pushing for trilateral cooperation with its two Asian allies.  Yet it is still difficult for Seoul and Tokyo to leave their fraught history behind once and for all, and move forward toward true reconciliation. Both sides should first make genuine efforts to restore mutual trust to better understand each other. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | September9, 2020 | South Korea | Moon-Suga phone talks: Seoul, Tokyo should move toward future-oriented ties | The phone talks Thursday between President Moon Jae-in and Japanese Prime Minister Yashihide Suga have drawn attention as they came amid expectations for the two countries to find a breakthrough in the worst-ever bilateral relations. Moon, describing Japan as a close friend for Korea, stressed the need for the two nations to find an optimal solution to the soured relations.  In response, Suga expressed hope for the two nations to set up future-oriented relations by tackling current difficulties resulting from sensitive history-related issues. The conversation came nine months after Moon met former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe last December in Chengdu, China, during the trilateral summit among neighboring countries.  Moon and Suga focused on wartime forced labor, agreeing on the need to resolve the matter through close consultations. Suga stressed at a press briefing after the phone talks that he would maintain Japan's stances and continue to ask Seoul to present appropriate measures to tackle the issue.  It is improper for Suga to try to blame Seoul with regard to the deteriorated relations without mentioning Japan's responsibility. While taking office, Suga declared he would inherit the policies of his predecessor Abe in foreign affairs. Abe had been the target of criticism for his pursuit of making Japan a nation that can wage war with other countries by revising the postwar constitution.  Japan has triggered public uproar in Korea by curbing exports of key industrial materials to Korean firms in apparent retaliation against the Korean Supreme Court's ruling ordering Japanese firms to pay compensation to surviving South Korean victims of wartime forced labor. Bilateral relations will likely worsen unless Seoul and Tokyo compromise.  Suga is known as a pragmatic leader in comparison with Abe, who had adopted a nationalist agenda. For instance, Suga dissuaded Abe from visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, dedicated to war criminals and others, in 2013. We expect Moon and Suga to continue to have candid dialogue.  The international order faces growing uncertainty amid signs of a new Cold War between the United States and China. Given this, Seoul and Tokyo will suffer setbacks should they continue to work against each other. It is high time for them to explore ways of cooperating to forge beneficial relations. |
| Eleven media | News Analysis | Eleven media | AUGUST 21, 2019 | Myanmar | Seoul takes time mulling renewal of military intel-sharing pact with Japan | Nearly six decades have passed since South Korea and Japan signed a treaty to normalize diplomatic ties in 1965, but their relationship has been fraught since then with continued bitterness over the history of Korea’s colonization.  Now, as the relationship of the “frenemies” hits a new low with a budding trade war, Seoul has hinted at scrapping a military intel-sharing pact with Tokyo.  But while South Koreans are unified in denouncing Japan’s increased controls on exports to South Korea, opinions are split over whether it is appropriate to use the military information-sharing agreement to hit back at Japan.  While some raise concerns that withdrawing from the bilateral agreement would spread the conflict to the security realm, opponents argue it is not right to share confidential military information with a country that does not trust Korea.  The General Security of Military Information Agreement, the military agreement between Seoul and Tokyo, was first signed in November 2016 as part of efforts to bolster military ties.  It was encouraged by the United States, which seeks a strong bond with its Asian allies to guarantee security operations in the region against possible threats and pressure from North Korea and China.  With GSOMIA, Seoul and Tokyo agreed to exchange confidential military information of similar levels at each other’s request, although they are not mandated to provide requested information if they choose not to.  While not much has been revealed about the information the two countries exchange, South Korea is said to provide information including human-source intelligence, signals intelligence and imagery intelligence. Japan’s major intelligence assets are six satellites, six Aegis destroyers and 110 maritime patrol planes.  As of July 31 this year, information has been swapped 26 times since the agreement was forged -- once in 2016, 19 times in 2017, twice in 2018 and four times this year. The spike in information exchanges in 2017 is said to be due to the series of North Korean nuclear and missile provocations amid tense relations.  Panels speak at a parliamentary conference held by Rep. Kang Byung-won of the ruling Democratic Party of Korea. (Yonhap)  But with Japan’s July 4 measures imposing restrictions on exports to South Korea of key industrial materials, Seoul has mulled options to respond. On July 18, presidential director of national security Chung Eui-yong said the government may review renewing the information-sharing pact, “depending on the situations.”  Seoul’s Defense Ministry also said such consideration is needed, for Japan “raises issues of lack of trust with (Korea) and security-related problems.”  The agreement, which is set to automatically renew annually, can be scrapped when one side chooses to end it 90 days before the end of the one-year period.  Japan has said it wants to keep the GSOMIA.  With this year’s deadline slated for Saturday, Cheong Wa Dae appears to be taking a “strategically ambiguous” stance, weighing options until the last minute.  “Better late than never: If Japan chooses the path of dialogue and cooperation, we will gladly join hands,” Moon Jae-in said Thursday, in his Liberation Day address commemorating the end of Japan’s colonial ruling of the Korean Peninsula in 1945.  Moon’s remark appears to indicate a toned down posture, acknowledging the possibilities of resolution as the trilateral meeting of foreign ministers of South Korea, Japan and China is scheduled from Tuesday to Thursday in Beijing.  Bilateral trust vs. Regional alliance  While keeping his distance from affirming on any decision, the deputy chief of Cheong Wa Dae’s National Security Office Kim Hyun-chong stressed that South Korea also needs to strengthen its own power to depend less on other countries, economy- and defense-wise.  “(Boosting national defense) is to bolster the South Korea-US alliance. China has more than 30 reconnaissance satellites and Japan has eight, but we have none,” Kim said in a local radio interview on Aug. 12, adding that Korea should also launch five or 25 reconnaissance satellites.  Deputy chief of Cheong Wa Dae’s National Security Office Kim Hyun-chong (Yonhap)  Agreeing to the presidential official, many ruling lawmakers and left-leaning faction support abolishment of GSOMIA, believing that it does not make any sense to share confidential information with Japan, which “threatens“ Korea’s security.  ”Japan lays claim to (South Korea’s) Dokdo Islets as its territory and it removes Korea from its trade whitelist, but it wants to keep GSOMIA? I believe that is just contradictory,“ four-term lawmaker Rep. Song Young-gil of the ruling Democratic Party of Korea said in a parliamentary conference on GSOMIA.  Rep. Song also raised concerns that Japan attempts to strengthen US-Japan relations, while weakening US-Korea ties.  The opponents of GSOMIA also question the efficiency of the agreement itself, claiming that there are other kinds of treaties and deals that would allow exchanging of information when needed.  ”With the increasing tension, GSOMIA has gotten more attention than it should. While the information exchanged can come as useful for both sides, Korea has other ways to acquire information,“ Kim Young-jun, a professor at the Korea National Defense University said.  South Korea and Japan set the ground to exchange information when they signed the Trilateral Information-Sharing Arrangement separately with the United States in late December 2014. Via TISA, Seoul and Tokyo would have access to each others’ military information on North Korean issues shared with the United States.  But conservatives and experts supporting GSOMIA argue that the bilateral military agreement is a complex issue that involves security alliance with the United States in the region.  ”The United States wants to firm up trilateral security cooperation with South Korea and Japan to keep North Korea and China in check,“ Park Won-gon, a professor of international politics at Handong Global University said.  ”If South Korea breaks GSOMIA, the US would see Seoul taking a move that is expanding the economic conflict (with Japan) to the security realm, harming Washington’s strategic interests,“ Park said.  Park also pointed out that South Korea maintains an intel-sharing agreement with Russia, even though its warplane intruded into Korea’s airspace recently without permission.  Shin Beom-chul, a senior research fellow at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, says the South Korean government would risk taking on a heavy burden in many agendas if it chooses to abolish GSOMIA, as the United States backs the deal.  The United States has refrained from actively intervening in the dispute, but has expressed its support for GSOMIA.  “The ROK-Japan GSOMIA is an important tool in our shared efforts to maintain peace and security in the region and achieve the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea,” the US Department of State official told Voice of America after the topic was raised on July 18.  “The United States fully supports the ROK-Japan GSOMIA, which demonstrates the maturity of the bilateral defense relationship and improves our ability to coordinate trilaterally.”  The public sentiment in South Korea, where the movement boycotting Japanese product has set in, appears to be leaning toward abolishing the bilateral pact with Japan.  According to local pollster Realmeter on Aug. 7, 47.7 percent of the 502 respondents supported South Korea withdrawing from GSOMIA, while 39.3 percent opposed, and 13 percent said they did not know.    Keeping away from emotional backlash  The Moon Jae-in administration still has time to make the decision until the deadline on Saturday, calculating the possible consequences and effects. As the National Security Council meeting is to be held Thursday, the final decision is likely to be made there.  Seoul’s Defense Minister Jeong Kyeong-doo also said he was carefully reviewing options on the GSOMIA, as it is more of a matter of a relationship with the allies, than its utility.  ”Instead of abolishing GSOMIA, I believe it would be a better plan for South Korea to renew the agreement and declare it will not exchange any more information with Japan,“ Cho Sung-ryul, senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Strategy said in a conference held by Rep. Kang Byung-won of the ruling Democratic Party of Korea.  Cho also raised the possibility of Japan taking military-related actions to fire back, such as banning Seoul from using the seven UN-designated bases located in its territory. The rear bases are to provide logistical support in the event of an emergency on the Korean Peninsula. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | November 24, 2019 | South Korea | No end to GSOMIA row: Nothing can be resolved unless Japan changes | The Moon Jae-in administration's decision, Friday, to suspend "conditionally" the termination of a military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan has brought a sigh of relief from Washington and Tokyo.  We view this as a de facto renewal of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) although some South Korean officials insisted Seoul can abandon the pact at any time if the ensuing negotiations with Japan over its export curbs on Korea fall through.  This could be Seoul's "humiliating" defeat in a diplomatic battle with Tokyo ― as well as Washington ― over the GSOMIA as some critics describe. However, it was rather a strategic decision by Moon to maintain the status quo in the face of grave challenges at home and abroad.  Most of all, the general election scheduled for next April could have been a major factor for Moon in reversing his earlier decision to kill the GSOMIA. It has become evident that the GSOMIA is not mere a bilateral military agreement between South Korea and Japan, but a vital part of the U.S. regional security strategy. Moon and his aides simply could not be sure of what consequences they would face if they went ahead with the previous decision. Because the issue had become an acute diplomatic problem between Seoul and Washington, as seen from a series of surprise visits to Seoul by senior U.S. officials in the lead-up to the expiration date, there were worries that South Korea's abandonment of the GSOMIA could create a "perfect storm" for the country's alliance with the U.S., which is already being challenged on multiple fronts.  It is not hard to imagine how such a disaster, if realized, would affect voter sentiment ahead of the crucial election. Moon and his liberal party would have considered the possible catastrophic results the GSOMIA termination could bring about to them. In a way, it was a realistic choice to suspend the pact, while leaving the possibility open that it can end it unless Japan scraps its export curbs. That means, if the party wins the election, there could be a different story.  The possible resumption of nuclear disarmament talks between North Korea and the U.S. may also have affected the South's decision. The Moon administration needs to collaborate with the U.S. to help it produce tangible results in talks with the North.  Cheong Wa Dae said behind the decision was Japan's expression of willingness to reconsider its export restrictions on Seoul. It also decided to suspend all legal procedures over the Japanese export curbs at the World Trade Organization. In addition, South Korean and Japanese officials confirmed that the two countries were discussing the possibility of a meeting between their leaders as early as next month.  On the surface, Seoul has stepped back in the row with Japan to pave the way for a compromise. However, there are few signs that the Shinzo Abe administration has changed its adamant position on South Korea. According to Japanese media reports, officials there denied Korea's claims that Japan was willing to scrap export restrictions on its neighbor. Rather, some reports described Seoul's decision as Japan's "diplomatic victory."  The U.S. State Department said Seoul's decision sent a positive message that "like-minded allies" can work through bilateral disputes, encouraging them to continue sincere discussions. But this is only willful ignorance of reality. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | November, 14, 2019 | South Korea | GSOMIA and alliance: Stronger ties impossible without mutual respect | South Korea's senior security officials and diplomats, including Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha, are reportedly preparing to visit Washington next week before and after the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan, expires at midnight Nov. 22.  Their visits are to seek U.S. understanding that ending the GSOMIA was an inevitable choice by Seoul as a sovereign nation in the context of its present relations with Tokyo, and to reaffirm its commitment to the U.S. alliance.  It is not hard to imagine how frustrating the expiration is for Washington, which has described the GSOMIA as a symbol of its security cooperation with the two Asian allies. As the crucial date is approaching, there has been immense pressure from the U.S. on South Korea to reverse its decision not to renew the deal. But it appears that the Moon Jae-in administration is standing firm on this. Seoul is likely to discard the deal as planned unless Japan acts first to scrap its unilateral export restrictions on South Korea.  This is obviously not typical of South Korea, which has been "docile" to the U.S., sometimes putting U.S. interests before its own in handling foreign and security affairs. So there seems to be little argument that the termination of the GSOMIA could be a historic incident that determines the future of this country. It will also have serious ramifications for Seoul's future relations with Washington and Tokyo ― as well as Beijing.  The question is whether Seoul is ready to face the possible consequences.  In fact, the spirit of the Seoul-Washington alliance has been tarnished considerably in recent years since U.S. President Donald Trump took office. There have been many incidents that raise questions as to if he respects Seoul as an ally. He has hurt the pride of South Korea, its leader and people, repeatedly.  So when U.S. Forces Korea Commander Gen. Robert Abrams told reporters Tuesday that terminating the GSOMIA could send the wrong message that the U.S. alliances with South Korea and Japan are not strong enough to ensure security in the region, it seemed to be a willful ignorance of reality. Basically, the GSOMIA, which is only three years old, is a bilateral pact between Seoul and Tokyo, and Seoul now doesn't see it necessary to keep it. Japan described South Korea as a potential risk to its security when it imposed the export restrictions. Is it strange then for Seoul to regard sharing military intelligence with Tokyo as a potential danger to its security?  Abrams said the signing of the GSOMIA gave a clear message to the region that South Korea and Japan had put aside their historical differences and put at the forefront the stability and security of the region.  No. That is not true. Such a deal as the GSOMIA is only a trick as long as the history war between Korea and Japan continues. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | November 4, 2019 | South Korea | US siding with Japan: GSOMIA case reveals how tricky 3-way security ties are | U.S. diplomats are increasingly voicing concerns about South Korea's decision to terminate the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a military intelligence-sharing pact it signed with Japan in 2016.  With the pact scheduled to expire Nov. 23, U.S. diplomats have suggested that Seoul reverse its decision not to renew the deal, describing it as a symbol of trilateral security cooperation among Washington, Seoul and Tokyo.  It is regrettable to see the U.S. siding with Japan in an acute diplomatic issue between its two Asian allies. Given it was a decision South Korea made as a sovereign nation to protect its national interest in the context of the present relations with Japan amid a rising conflict over historical issues, few Koreans may believe the U.S. is acting fairly in dealing with the allies over this problem. Simply put, the decision was based on Seoul's conclusion that extending the GSOMIA was not in the national interest at the moment. It reflected the South's judgment that bilateral security cooperation with Japan was not possible ― and only tricky ― as long as it remains unrepentant about what it did to Koreans during the 1910-45 colonial period.  Seeing recent remarks from U.S. diplomats, however, they appears to have the impression that the South's decision was biased, impulsive and short-sighted. It seems as if they were ignorant of South Korea's sovereign rights. In particular, they have increasingly used Japanese media to express their discomfort toward the South's decision and call for its retraction. This is not good.  Marc Knapper, U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for Korea and Japan, said in a recent interview with Japan's Nihon Keizai Shimbun that Seoul should retain the GSOMIA despite its soured relations with Japan. He said only China, Russia and North Korea are happy with the situation, describing the pact as an important tool for trilateral security cooperation in times of crisis.  Joseph Young, charge d'affaires ad interim at the U.S. Embassy in Japan, also told Japan's Yomiuri Shimbun recently that the U.S. has delivered its position to South Korea that ending the intelligence pact would have an impact on U.S. security interests, suggesting that the South should reverse its decision.  The quotes were published ahead of top U.S. diplomat for Asia David Stilwell's planned visit to Seoul Tuesday. During his stay in Japan last week, Stilwell urged South Korea to reconsider its GSOMIA decision, saying it was beneficial to both Seoul and Tokyo. However, he made it clear that Washington did not intend to intervene in the row between Seoul and Tokyo, giving the de facto cold shoulder to Seoul, which has been seeking U.S. mediation in the friction with Japan.  On Tuesday, President Moon Jae-in and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had a brief one-on-one meeting in Bangkok in a "very serious and friendly" mood on the sidelines of the ongoing ASEAN forum, according to Cheong Wa Dae. Moon reportedly proposed high-level consultations between Seoul and Tokyo to resolve pressing bilateral issues, including Seoul's plan to end the GSOMIA and Tokyo's export curbs on Seoul.  Japan should not avoid holding dialogue with South Korea. About three weeks are left until the GSOMIA expires. How the two countries handle this crucial period may affect their future relations ― and the direction of the U.S.-led three-way security partnership. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | October 27, 2019 | South Korea | Inapt GSOMIA remarks: It is good for Seoul to maintain strategic flexibility | David Stilwell, the top U.S. diplomat for East Asia, has indicated that he will ask South Korea to reconsider its decision in August to terminate the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a military intelligence-sharing pact it signed with Japan in 2016.  Speaking to reporters in Tokyo, Saturday, Stilwell, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said the pact was beneficial to the U.S. and its two Asian allies as well. According to Japanese media, he made it clear that Washington did not intend to mediate in the friction between Seoul and Tokyo, but did want Seoul to reverse its decision to end the GSOMIA.  The deal is scheduled to expire on Nov. 23 following Seoul's decision not to renew it in August. This came after Japan unilaterally restricted exports of key industrial materials to South Korea, citing potential security risks the exports posed to Japan. The Japanese measure was in apparent retaliation against the South Korean Supreme Court's ruling in October last year that ordered Japanese firms to compensate surviving South Korean victims of wartime forced labor.  Tokyo was Stilwell's first stop on his Asian trip. He will also visit Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea and China. He plans to visit Seoul on Nov. 5 for talks with security officials and senior diplomats, which may be centered on the planned expiration of the GSOMIA and North Korea.  It is understandable for the U.S. to want to preserve the GSOMIA, given the significance of the pact for its trilateral alliance with Japan and South Korea. U.S. officials did not conceal their disappointment when the Moon Jae-in administration decided to terminate the pact. Purportedly, the pact is to boost security cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo to counter threats from North Korea jointly. However, it is rather being understood to be part of a broader U.S. security strategy aimed at China.  Stilwell's remarks in Tokyo, if the Japanese reports are true, give mixed feelings to South Koreans. It is quite disappointing to see him apparently side with Japan in the ongoing dispute with South Korea. He looked rather indifferent to what caused Seoul to decide to terminate the deal. In a way, he seemed to be telling Seoul to undo this decision or face the consequences.  But from Seoul's perspective, it was strange to keep sharing military intelligence with Japan, which portrayed South Korea as a security risk when it imposed export restrictions.  The importance of Stilwell's Seoul visit next month cannot be emphasized enough considering the plight of Seoul's relations with Washington and Tokyo, as well as Beijing. Stilwell should have been more careful about mentioning the GSOMIA if he understood South Korea's position.  The South has maintained strategic ambiguity about reversing the GSOMIA decision, which is a step in the right direction to protect its interests. But it will have to make the final decision in a few weeks before the pact expires.  What is certain is that the matter is linked to how Seoul and Tokyo will iron out their differences over fundamental issues, and find an exit from the ongoing trade friction.  Seoul should do its best to reach out to Tokyo and normalize bilateral ties before it makes any decision. Last week, President Moon sent a letter via Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. In the letter, Moon expressed hope for an early resolution of pending problems.  The ball is now in Japan's court. Japan should show sincere efforts to resolve the dispute over GSOMIA and, by extension, put bilateral relations back on track. |
| NOBUHA ENDO AND YUJIRO OKABE | Commentary | Eleven media | AUGUST 23, 2019 | Myanmar | Way forward still unclear for Japan, S. Korea | Foreign Minister Taro Kono and his South Korean counterpart Kang Kyung-wha confirmed at their meeting in Beijing on Wednesday that they should resolve their differences through dialogue to prevent the current situation from deteriorating further.  But it will not be easy for both sides to compromise, and mutually acceptable ways to resolve pressing disputes have yet to emerge.  The bilateral relationship has been worsened by the South Korean Supreme Court rulings that ordered some Japanese companies to pay compensation for former requisitioned workers, and Japan’s tightened export controls on shipments of some goods to South Korea. It was the first meeting in about three weeks between Kono and Kang.  Kono, who greeted Kang outside the room where they held the meeting, smiled as they shook hands, but Kang’s expression remained unchanged from beginning to end. Even when Kono spoke to Kang in English, she did not reply. After the meeting, Kang left the venue with a stern face as if she was avoiding questions from reporters.  Kono, for his part, repeatedly emphasized, “We share a belief that the [requisitioned workers] issue must be resolved,” and indicated his policy of seeking to continue communicating with the South Korean side through diplomatic authorities.  A senior official of the South Korean government also said, “Even if there is no concrete progress on the details, it is important to earnestly restore dialogue on issues including the export controls.”  ROK approach in spotlight  The Japanese side had been closely watching for any signs of change in the South Korean side’s approach at this meeting. This was because a slightly softer line toward Japan was observed on the South Korean side, such as in President Moon Jae-in’s speech on Aug. 15 in which he refrained from criticizing Japan and called for dialogue with Tokyo.  According to a source accompanying Kono, the South Korean side did not single out Japan for criticism during the trilateral meeting between Kono, Kang and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held before the bilateral Japan-South Korea meeting. Earlier this month, during a meeting of foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and other nations, the South Korean foreign minister had repeatedly blasted Japan.  “The tone clearly changed this time,” the source said.  The Japanese government will implement Wednesday a Cabinet order to remove South Korea from the so-called white list of countries that can receive preferential treatment for streamlined export procedures. However Japan is also trying to restrain its actions, and it will grant approval for a second shipment to South Korea of materials used to produce semiconductors since export controls on these items were tightened in July.  Putting the brakes on  It appears South Korea’s main focus at the latest round of talks was also to put the brakes on the increasingly intense wrangling.  According to a Japan-South Korea diplomatic source, the South Korean side is considering a new proposal designed to settle the requisitioned labor issue, and is carefully trying to figure out a suitable time to present the proposal.  Analysts believe that the Moon administration is concerned about the bigger-than-expected slowdown in the domestic economy caused by Japan’s tighter export controls and other factors, which could work against him in next year’s general election.  On Wednesday, Kim Sang-jo, chief policy secretary for the South Korean president, said the enthronement ceremony of the Emperor on Oct. 22 would be the “most important point,” as it is expected to be attended by a senior South Korean government official.  “Both nations will strategically seek out ways [to resolve their problems] before then,” he said.  Once that occasion has passed and as the year-end approaches, it is possible that legal procedures could start under which the assets of Japanese companies that lost in the South Korean court cases will be turned into cash for compensation to former requisitioned workers. Should the situation develop to the stage where Japanese companies’ assets are forcibly sold off, the Japanese government would have no option but to take retaliatory measures. A flare-up of the antagonism between Japan and South Korea would be unavoidable.  Moon upending earlier positions  Previous South Korean governments have agreed with the Japanese side’s position that the issue of compensation for former South Korean requisitioned workers was fully resolved by the 1965 Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Cooperation between the two countries. But the Moon administration respects a South Korean Supreme Court ruling in October 2018 that concluded the issue was “not resolved,” to the extent that Moon effectively revised previous governments’ interpretations of this position. This is likely a nod to his left-wing supporters who take a tough line on Japan over historical issues. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | October 13, 2019 | South Korea | No more playing chicken: Seoul, Tokyo should not miss opportunity to mend fences | South Korean and Japanese negotiators met in Geneva, Friday, to find a solution to the dispute over Seoul's complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO) about Tokyo's "unilateral" export restrictions.  The negotiators failed to reach an agreement, but agreed to meet again for further talks.  Chief South Korean delegate Chung Hae-kwan said the additional talks may take place before Nov. 10, and if there is no deal in the next talks, South Korea would ask the WTO to establish a panel for dispute settlement. Then it may take years for the WTO to settle this problem.  It is not good for Seoul and Tokyo to drag out the dispute amid increasing uncertainties over the global economy. This is all the more so because the bilateral trade dispute began due to their differences over historical issues, although Tokyo has denied any link between its trade measures and the perennial rows with Seoul over what Japan did to Koreans during its 1910-45 occupation of the Korean Peninsula.  There should be an early political deal to end the ongoing trade dispute and bring bilateral relations back to normal.  During a press conference ahead of the Geneva talks, the Japanese delegation claimed it was inappropriate for South Korea to bring the dispute to the WTO for "political" reasons. But few doubt that Japan's export restrictions on three key industrial materials ― fluorine polyimide, photoresist and hydrogen fluoride ― in July were in retaliation to the South Korean Supreme Court's ruling that ordered companies compensate surviving South Korean victims of Japan's forced labor during World War II.  Seoul and Tokyo need "truce" talks now. For this, they first should have frank discussions and avoid blaming each for the deadlock in relations. No more playing chicken. The recent talks in Geneva should be the first step in finding a solution to the ongoing row.  One other encouraging sign for a turnaround in bilateral ties is South Korea's decision to send Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon as chief delegate for the enthronement ceremony for Japan's new Emperor Naruhito.  Lee's office said Sunday he would visit Tokyo for three days from Oct. 22, without disclosing details. Lee will attend the coronation on the first day of his visit, and then stay in Tokyo for two more days. This means that Lee, as President Moon Jae-in's de facto special envoy, may hold talks with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and other politicians and senior officials. If things go well, Moon and Abe will be able to meet.  Cheong Wa Dae has been cautious about mentioning Japan in recent weeks. But Lee's attendance at the ceremony for the emperor could be interpreted as Seoul's offering of an "olive branch" to Tokyo because he has been relatively friendly to Japan, and Japan has little antipathy toward him. When he was a journalist, Lee stayed in Tokyo for years as a correspondent in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and he speaks Japanese fluently. The fact that Lee is one of the leading potential candidates for South Korea's next presidency may also have affected Japan's decision to have him at the ceremony.  Lee's Tokyo trip is a crucial opportunity for Seoul and Tokyo to mend fences. It should not be missed. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | September 11, 2019 | South Korea | Bringing Japan to WTO: Seoul should prove Tokyo violates free trade rules | South Korea has decided to file a complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO) against Japan for its discriminatory trade measures. The decision comes 69 days after Tokyo imposed export restrictions on three key materials which are crucial for Korean companies making semiconductors and display panels.  For Seoul, it is inevitable to initiate a legal battle with Tokyo which has refused to resolve the problem through dialogue and compromise. In this regard, bringing the ongoing trade dispute to the WTO is a step in the right direction. It is aimed at publicizing the unilateral and illegitimate nature of Japan's action and finding a solution through the international trade body.  Announcing the decision Wednesday, Trade Minister Yoo Myung-hee said "Japan's measures were a discriminatory act directly targeting South Korea." She sent a clear message that Tokyo's export restrictions violate WTO rules which are based on the spirit of free and fair trade.  In addition, Yoo also described Japan's move as "politically motivated" following the South Korean Supreme Court's rulings ordering Japanese firms to compensate surviving Korean victims of forced labor during Japan's 1910-45 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula. In other words, Tokyo's action is none other than economic retaliation against the rulings.  In many respects, the Shinzo Abe administration is weaponizing trade for political purposes, even though it has denied this. Prime Minister Abe, his Cabinet ministers and other officials have repeatedly said Japan has taken the export curbs because of its "damaged trust" in Korea. This implies that the trade measure was taken in retaliation against the forced labor rulings.  Another point of contention is the Japanese government's argument for "national security." Tokyo has insisted that it has imposed export curbs due to security concerns, claiming that some dual-purpose materials, which can be diverted to military use, were funneled into North Korea through South Korean firms. But Japan has yet to provide any evidence to prove its claim.  There is a strong possibility that Japan is violating article 11 of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) which bans regulations on export volumes unless the products have a serious impact on national security. Such regulations can only be acceptable in exceptional cases including war or similar military conflicts.  In conclusion, Japan's trade measure cannot be justified because it is highly likely a breach of WTO rules and obligations. The measure is not in line with a ban on any discriminatory act against any member countries, especially for favored trade partners. It also runs against a ban on restricting trade for political reasons.  The government should make thorough preparations to prove that the neighboring country's trade action lacks legitimacy. It also needs to engage in active diplomacy to create a favorable atmosphere to confront Japan in the WTO.  We urge Japan to retract its export curbs and put Korea back on its "whitelist" of trusted trade partners. Most of all, the two countries need to resolve the trade row soon diplomatically. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | September 9, 2019 | South Korea | Voice of conscience: Abe should listen to Japanese citizens and intellectuals | Rallies condemning acts to stoke anti-Korean sentiments are happening in Japan one after another. On Sunday, hundreds of Japanese citizens held a rally in downtown Tokyo to condemn acts inciting hatred against South Korea. During the rally, the participants denounced some Japanese media outlets directing anger and disgust at South Korea, and called for solidarity among the civic groups of the neighboring countries. There was a similar rally in Osaka on the same day.  Nearly 10,000 people have joined a signature-collection campaign demanding the removal of Japan's export restrictions on South Korea. In late August, some 350 Japanese organized a rally titled "Is South Korea the Enemy?" in Tokyo. They denounced Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for dividing citizens of Seoul and Tokyo and turning them against each other.  It's a relief to find that Japan's civil society remains intact when it comes to conscience, despite the Japanese government's ill-advised rightward movement. There is every reason to have high hopes for a better relationship between our two countries.  Germany apologized for the suffering it inflicted on Poland during World War II, once again. Speaking at a ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of the start of WWII, Sept. 1, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said, "I bow in mourning to the suffering of the victims. I ask for forgiveness for Germany's historical debt. I affirm our lasting responsibility."  While Germany, a WWII aggressor nation like Japan, has been reflecting on the past sincerely, Japan has taken a different path. The Abe administration should be ashamed for denying clear historical facts and taking retaliatory measures against South Korea, its colonization victim, apparently over the wartime forced labor issue.  The first step South Korea and Japan can take toward peace and prosperity is certain. Prime Minister Abe should listen to Japan's conscientious citizens and intellectuals who are calling for a halt to the demonizing of South Korea, and resolve the conflict through dialogue. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | August 23, 2019 | South Korea | Abe's provocation backfires: Dwindling Korean visitors deals blow to Japan's tourism industry | The state-funded tourism agencies of Korea and Japan have released their industrial statistics for July. Market watchers have been paying attention to the changes in tourism trends amid the escalating conflict between the two countries over history and trade.  According to the Korea Tourism Organization and the Japan National Tourism Organization Wednesday, the number of Korean visitors to Japan in July fell 7.6 percent from the same month in 2018. In contrast, Japanese visitors to Korea jumped 19.2 percent over the same period. Fewer Koreans visited Japan last month compared with a year ago but the fall was less steep than expected, and the surge in the number of Japanese visitors to Korea was also unexpected.  In August, however, the dwindling pace is likely to worsen. An industry watcher said there will be almost no new reservations. A large tour agency confirmed this, reporting the number of trip reservations for Japan in August and September has dropped by nearly 80 percent year-on-year.  In contrast, the number of foreign visitors to Korea has been on a steady rise. A total of 1,448,067 foreigners visited the nation in July, up 15.4 percent from a year earlier. Chinese visitors showed a hefty 25.6 percent growth and the 19.2 percent rise in Japanese visitors was also 3.8 percentage points higher than the overall average increase rate. This data shows Japanese people are not very sensitive to political issues like their country's diplomatic dispute with Korea.  The tourism industry data also indicated the widespread speculation that Tokyo's economic retaliation against Korea would bring about considerable damage to Japan was right. The tourism statistics may not explain everything, but the Japanese government should realize Korea is no longer as easy a prey as it was thought to be. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism has also decided to implement measures to reinvigorate the domestic tourism industry by, for example, better meeting diversified demands from foreign tourists. We hope the industry will make the most of the present opportunity to upgrade itself one level higher. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | August 16, 2019 | South Korea | Historical amnesia: Abe keeps refusing to admit wartime atrocities | Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe still refuses to acknowledge or apologize for atrocities his country committed during World War II. His refusal has continued since his 2012 inauguration. It is disappointing for the nationalist leader to mark Japan's surrender without expressing any regret for its shameful past. He has no intention of reflecting on the aggressions and various types of brutalities inflicted by Japanese imperialists and colonialists.  This year is no exception. Marking the 74th anniversary of the end of WWII, Abe did not use any apologetic words or admit his country's disgraceful history. From the beginning, it was impossible to expect him to feel any compunction about what Japan did to Asian nations and others in the first half of the 20th century.  Regrettably, however, Abe made a long list of damage inflicted on Japan and its people. On his list are U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His only aim is apparently to paint his country as the victim of the bombings, while ignoring what led America to drop the atomic bombs on the two Japanese cities. It is no exaggeration to say that Abe and other right-wing politicians are suffering from historical amnesia.  Abe has refrained from visiting Yasukuni Shrine, which honors Japan's war dead including 14 Class A war criminals, since his 2013 visit which triggered strong protests from Korea and China. But he sent a ritual offering to the war dead Thursday. Although he made the offering in his capacity as a private citizen, Abe invited the ire of South Koreans. Some 50 right-wing lawmakers of Japan's ruling and opposition parties visited the shrine to pay respects to the war dead.  That's why the Seoul government expressed "deep concerns" over Abe's offering. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement that reads: "The government expresses deep concerns over responsible leaders of the Japanese government and parliament sending offerings and paying respects again at the Yasukuni Shrine that glorifies Japan's past colonial plunder and war of invasion and enshrines war criminals."  Abe is in contrast to Emperor Naruhito who expressed "deep remorse" over Japan's wartime misdeeds. The new emperor, who acceded to the throne in May, made a speech similar to one delivered by his father, Emperor Akihito, in 2015 on the 70th anniversary of Japan's defeat. He said, "Reflecting on our past and bearing in mind the feelings of deep remorse, I earnestly hope that the ravages of war will never be repeated."  Abe should have listened carefully to Emperor Naruhito's words of deep remorse. He should not forget the untold pains and sorrows Japan inflicted on many Asians, including victims of wartime sex slavery and forced labor. At least, he should not deny such atrocities despite his refusal to apologize for them. Abe and his government must remember the past in order to avoid the repetition of Japan's fraught history. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | August 12, 2019 | South Korea | Deep-rooted legacy: 'Boycott Japan' shows collective will of Koreans to overcome past | The Boycott Japan consumer movement is gaining momentum in South Korea despite Japan's apparent move to step back from the ongoing bilateral trade dispute.  The latest target of the campaign was Kolmar Korea, a major cosmetics and healthcare goods manufacturer established in 1990 as a joint venture with Japan's Nihon Kolmar. Korean consumers attacked the firm after it became known that its Chairman Yoon Dong-han shared a controversial YouTube video representing the extreme views of the Japanese far-right with about 700 employees at a monthly company meeting recently.  In the video, a man harshly criticizes South Korean President Moon Jae-in's response to Japan's export restrictions, saying, "The fact that Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe didn't punch President Moon in his face by now proves that Abe is a great leader." The video finishes with a curse on South Korea. "Women in Venezuela sell sex only for $7. South Korea will soon become like Venezuela."  The company said Yoon played this video to employees to discuss how Seoul should cope with Tokyo, and it did not represent Yoon's personal views. But it is simply not understandable how Yoon picked such a video to play at a company meeting even considering the firm's deep ties to Nihon Kolmar. When established, Kolmar Korea was 49 percent owned by the Japanese company which still holds a 12.4 percent stake in Kolmar Korea. An executive of Nihon Kolmar, Yoshihide Kanzaki, is also a member of the Kolmar Korea board, according to CEO Score, a corporate analysis site.  As the controversy escalated, Yoon finally offered to resign as chairman, Sunday. However, his resignation will not affect the family control on Kolmar Korea, because his son, CEO Yoon Sang-hyun, is effectively controlling the firm.  What added fuel to the anti-Japan sentiment here was Japanese beauty firm DHC Corp.'s broadcasting of hate speech against Koreans through its affiliated television network. DHC Television aired a talk show recently in which panelists made false claims that Korea's unique writing system, Hangeul, was created by the Japanese, and made disrespectful remarks about the girl statue symbolizing "comfort women," victims of wartime sex slavery during the Japanese occupation of Korea.  One panelist even asked, "Is it okay to publicly expose my penis in the name of modern art?"  DHC Chairman Yoshiaki Yoshida is known in South Korea for supporting ultra-right politicians and having disparaging views toward ethnic Koreans in Japan.  The Boycott Japan movement is now spreading widely from cosmetics, food, beverages and clothing to vehicles and tourism. In fact, emotional reactions from citizens are making the Seoul-Tokyo trade row more complicated.  However, as seen in the cases of Kolmar Korea and DHC, the legacy of Japan's 1910-45 occupation of Korea is deep-rooted not only in South Korea, but also in Japan. The Boycott Japan movement is criticized by some for targeting specific Japanese products and firms, making it more difficult for Korea and Japan to find solutions to the ongoing trade row.  But it should rather be understood as reflecting Koreans' collective will to overcome the legacy of colonialism and lay the foundation for more future-oriented relations between the two countries in a true sense. |
| THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN | Commentary | Eleven media | AUGUST 25, 2019 | Myanmar | ROK’s decision on GSOMIA damages security cooperation with Japan, U.S. | It can be said that this is a senseless move that could shake trilateral security cooperation among Japan, the United States and South Korea at a time when North Korea is continuing its nuclear and missile development.  The South Korean government has decided to scrap the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a pact to protect military intelligence between Japan and South Korea. As a reason for the decision, South Korea cited Japan’s step to remove it from the list of countries eligible for preferential treatment in the form of simplified export controls.  Japan took that step as South Korea’s trade control management system and its operations were inadequate. Seoul should first try to improve its management system.  The South Korean side also stressed that Japan did not respond even after South Korean President Moon Jae-in called for dialogue in his speech on Aug. 15. Moon has not presented any concrete measures on the issue of South Korean former wartime requisitioned workers, which is at the root of the bilateral feud. South Korea’s claims are hard to understand.  The GSOMIA is designed to allow allies and friendly nations to share as classified materials information on countries hostile to them. A framework under which countries cooperate to analyze images and codes, among other things, is essential.  Keep contact with Seoul  The Japanese and South Korean governments are said to have exchanged information in about 30 cases since they concluded the pact in November 2016. The South Korean military detects signs of a missile launch by North Korea. An Aegis-equipped destroyer of the Maritime Self-Defense Force analyzes the trajectory of and distance flown by the missile in the Sea of Japan.  The two countries also shared information about a new type of short-range missile that North Korea has fired on successive occasions since July.  The termination of the pact will make it difficult for South Korea to obtain Japan’s data directly. Short-range missiles can reach South Korea. It is a major threat. Is it reasonable for South Korea to take measures on its own initiative that would reduce the deterrence capability of its military?  The United States has urged South Korea to maintain the pact. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed disappointment and showed unusual dissatisfaction with South Korea, a U.S. ally, apparently out of concern that the disarray among Japan, the United States and South Korea could widen.  It is North Korea and China that will benefit from the pact being scrapped. By sending the wrong message — that the functions of the U.S.-led alliance may decline — the situation in East Asia could become unstable.  It should be no surprise that Foreign Minister Taro Kono lodged a protest with South Korea, saying, “It is a completely misjudged response in terms of the regional security environment.”  Japan needs to minimize the impact of the pact’s termination. It is imperative for the Self-Defense Forces to keep up deterrence by strengthening cooperation with the U.S. military.  The Japanese government should maintain communication with Seoul and continue to have multilayered dialogue. It must analyze the security environment in Asia calmly and stress the importance of maintaining Tokyo-Washington-Seoul cooperation. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | August 9, 2019 | South Korea | Regulatory reform: Easing administrative red tape is for nation's economic future | Japan's economic retaliation against Korea is re-emphasizing the need for regulatory reform in all industrial fields, beginning with parts and materials. The renovation of regulations has always been a national task, but calls are growing anew for the country to achieve technological self-reliance and promote related sectors.  The ruling Democratic Party of Korea (DPK) also stressed the need for reducing administrative red tape during a meeting with the government on Thursday. "Now is the time to change regulatory mindsets fundamentally," Rep. Choi Un-yeol said while proposing to shift to a comprehensive regulatory system as in many industrial countries. Instead of drastically relaxing regulations, the nation can plug the loophole by introducing a punitive compensation system to punish violators, Choi added.  For businesses to cope proactively with a rapidly changing external environment, the government should not excessively meddle in corporate moves. Even if the government eases regulations, it would be useless if bureaucrats do so after the "golden time" is over. That also explains why the government began to implement the "deregulation sandbox" and designate "regulation-free zones" earlier the year, opening the way for businesses to move ahead.  The governing party's forward-looking views on regulatory reform are welcome at a time like now when bad economic news is pouring in both from home and abroad. The government needs to adjust unnecessary or excessive regulations, such as those on chemical material management and the 52-hour workweek. Regrettably, however, there were dissenting views within the ruling party to the calls for deregulation. Rep. Han Cheong-ae, for example, said, "There are concerns about the government's going too far in easing regulations related to people's safety, health and the environment."  Relaxing all regulations cannot, of course, be an eventual solution. Nor can the nation do so. The government has only to ease unnecessary rules within a reasonable range. If some businesses use the deregulation as opportunities to pursue self-interests, the government can sternly punish them after the fact. The punitive compensation system, as proposed by Rep. Choi, also can be a way to keep selfish businesses in check. Regulatory reform is a goal that needs to be attained by all means for the nation's economic future. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | August 8, 2019 | South Korea | Industrial independence: Restoring R&D pipeline is urgent to localize parts and materials | After Japan removed Korea from its list of countries with preferential treatment in trade, calls are mounting here for localizing essential parts and materials. Industry experts are placing top priority on the local production of next-generation materials in this regard.  More specifically, they stress the need for state-funded institutes to restore their function of researching and developing practicable technology, as well as to serve as a test bed.  To beat Japan, domestic companies should not only localize existing materials, which are difficult to secure due to Japan's export restrictions against Korea, but also develop futuristic materials ahead of their Japanese rivals. This is the era of technology war.  Major countries are tightening their hold on competitors not militarily but economically. It is, of course, imperative to overcome the current predicament, but no less crucial is to secure technology to develop next-generation materials by looking a few decades ahead.  It is most urgent to re-establish the R&D pipeline in this process. Currently, the pipelines linking universities, research institutes and businesses are not working properly. Universities should research source technologies, state-run think tanks ought to put them to practical use, and companies need to focus on commercializing them.  In reality, however, government-financed think tanks are not playing their role appropriately while small- and medium-sized enterprises are suffering from the lack of joint research facilities to test new materials.  Research institutes should be changed to do their job of connecting academia to industry. At present, these research bodies are not allowed to conduct studies that support businesses directly. That should change. Also necessary is a joint test bed in which SMEs can try out commercialized technology.  The government needs to gather the facilities scattered throughout the country in one place and allow smaller companies to experiment with parts, materials and equipment there.  Japan has created the ongoing crisis, but Korea should solve its chronic problems independently. To foster the nation's material and parts sectors to a global level, the government should enhance the role of research institutes and strengthen the links between its industrial and science-technology policies. Large businesses for their part also ought to stop dominating suppliers and take the lead in creating a win-win industrial ecosystem. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | August 7, 2019 | South Korea | Contradictory remarks: Abe hit for weaponizing trade for forced labor issue | Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has angered South Koreans by putting the blame on Seoul for the escalating bilateral trade conflict. On Tuesday, Abe said Korea is breaking an international accord by infringing upon a reparation agreement between the two countries.  His apparently wanted to accuse Korea of violating the 1965 treaty that normalized bilateral diplomatic ties. He and his government have already maintained that the treaty settled all reparation issues over Japan's 1910-45 occupation of Korea.  Based on such a position, the nationalist Abe government has strongly protested last year's rulings by the South Korean Supreme Court ordering Japanese firms to pay compensation to surviving Korean victims of forced labor during World War II. It has repeatedly called on the Moon Jae-in administration to take action against the rulings one way or another.  After attending the 74th commemoration of the U.S.' atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Abe said the bigger problem is a matter of trust regarding keeping promises between countries. He certainly meant that Seoul damaged trust with Tokyo through the court rulings on the forced labor issue.  Such remarks should not come as a surprise as they are nothing new. Yet they came four days after the Japanese government decided to remove Korea from its "whitelist" of 27 countries eligible for preferential treatment in trade. The irrational and unilateral measure followed Japan's July 4 imposition of export restrictions on three high-tech materials crucial for Korean firms to make semiconductors and display panels.  Abe may be free to hold Korea accountable for triggering Japan's trade measures. But he should realize that his remarks are proving that Japan is enacting export curbs against its Asian neighbor in apparent reprisal for the historical issues related to wartime force labor.  Tokyo has so far denied its action has anything to do with the court rulings. It has argued its trade measures are just designed to better manage its export control regime of strategic goods, citing security reasons. However, what Abe said clearly indicated that his administration is weaponizing trade as a means of retaliating over historical and diplomatic disputes.  In this sense, Abe and his policymakers are making contradictory and inconsistent remarks. Their goal is unequivocally to justify Japan's economic retaliation. They are putting more pressure on Seoul to take a step toward undoing the forced labor rulings. They have no regard for the separation of the three powers ― the legislative, judicial and executive branches.  On Wednesday, Japan promulgated a revised bill to strip Korea of its favored trading partner status. The bill is to take effect Aug. 28, making it difficult for Korean companies to purchase up to 1,120 Japanese goods, including materials, parts and equipment.  We urge Tokyo to return to return to dialogue to find a diplomatic solution. Japan should retract all export curbs targeting Korea immediately. No one can win a trade war of any kind. |
| THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN | News Analysis | Eleven media | AUGUST 27, 2019 | Myanmar | Poll finds 72% see need for Japan-S. Korea security cooperation | Seventy-two percent of people who responded to a weekend survey by The Yomiuri Shimbun said they agreed with the need for Japan and South Korea to cooperate over security, far exceeding those who did not agree, at 19 percent.  The nationwide telephone survey was conducted from Friday to Sunday. The 1,067 respondents of voting age comprise 537 fixed-line phone users from 960 households confirmed to have at least one voter and 530 out of 1,232 cell-phone users who answered their phone.  In the poll, 83 percent of respondents said they don’t understand why the South Korean government decided to scrap the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) between Japan and South Korea.  As for the government’s decision to remove South Korea from the so-called white list of nations that qualify for simplified procedures for exports, 65 percent supported the move, opposed to 23 percent who did not.  Japan and South Korea have been at odds over wartime requisitioned workers and other issues. Asked to choose the closest opinion over the future of bilateral relations between the two countries, 64 percent chose “It can’t be helped that relations won’t improve as long as South Korea continues to make unacceptable claims,” down by 8 percentage points from 72 percent in the poll in February. Those who opted for “Japan should also think of reaching out to South Korea to improve the relations” went up from 22 percent in February to 29 percent.  Among respondents 30 years old or younger, 56 percent chose the “It can’t be helped” option while 42 percent picked the “reaching out to” option, meaning more than 40 percent desire a flexible response by the government.  The approval rating of the Cabinet was 58 percent, up by 5 percentage points from the previous survey on July 22 and 23. Thirty percent did not support the Cabinet, down from 36 percent last time.  The Cabinet’s foreign and security policies were approved by 54 percent, up from 47 percent in the poll on July 4 and 5, and 45 percent approved the Cabinet’s economic policy, up from 38 percent in the July poll.  Forty-two percent said they approved of the agreement by the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, the Democratic Party for the People and other opposition parties to form a unified group in both Diet houses, while 39 percent said they disapproved.  The Liberal Democratic Party won the highest support among political parties at 41 percent, up from 40 percent last time, followed by the CDPJ at 7 percent, down from 12 percent. People who supported no particular party accounted for 37 percent, up from 27 percent in the July 22-23 poll.  The poll also found that 95 percent of the respondents said there should be a harsher punishment for reckless drivers who suddenly drive too close to other vehicles or cuts them off, while 3 percent said they don’t think so. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | August 6, 2019 | South Korea | Market jitters: Countermeasures needed to ensure financial stability | South Korea's stock markets plunged to a three-year low on Monday, hit by a set of unfavorable factors, such as the escalating U.S.-China trade dispute, Japan's expanding export restrictions against South Korea and North Korea's missile launches.  The tech-heavy Kosdaq dived 7.5 percent ― the sharpest fall in 12 years, prompting investors to halt the program trading of shares briefly for the first time since June 2016.  The benchmark Korea Composite Stock Price Index (KOSPI) also plummeted, and the Korean won fell sharply against the U.S. dollar. The market jitters came amid growing concerns about economic fundamentals marked by growth potential and corporate performances, adversely affecting economic players' mentalities.  We hope the market crash was a temporary jolt caused by simultaneous events. Financial authorities should take swift countermeasures, given the characteristics of the capital and currency markets dominated by psychological factors and prone to sink into a vicious circle.  Korea, of course, is not the only nation suffering from financial jitters. Regional or global financial instability, however, should be no reason for Korean officials to remain complacent or negligent.  If the market unrest lasts long, it will amplify negative views about the Korean economy and have discordant effects, not least because the domestic capital and currency markets serve as windows through which global investors watch the Korean economy.  It will not be easy for the government to control all these unfavorable factors affecting the foreign exchange and stock markets. U.S. protectionism and Northeast Asian security issues cannot be solved only by South Korea's reasoning and viewpoints. Nor can Seoul expect its diplomatic conflicts with Tokyo to cool down anytime soon.  All these point to troubles facing financial officials in Seoul. They should work out measures to prevent any further escalation of financial unrest while simultaneously managing adverse external factors.  In the longer term, Korea needs to restructure its economy so it is not so easily influenced by outside events. In this regard, we give high marks to the government's policy of providing extensive support for companies that localize essential parts and materials in the face of the worsening trade war with Japan. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | August 5, 2019 | South Korea | Reduce reliance on Japan: Time to beef up materials, parts industries | The Moon Jae-in administration has decided to nurture the country's materials, parts and equipment industries as part of efforts to reduce their undue dependence on Japanese imports. The decision is a step in the right direction to tackle Japan's expanding trade restrictions against South Korea.  On Monday, Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy Sung Yun-mo announced a plan to boost local production of 100 key strategic items to ensure a stable supply by 2024. The industry ministry promised support such as budget, finance, tax incentives and deregulation for domestic businesses.  The plan calls for finding alternative suppliers of 20 core items in other countries such as the U.S. and China within a year. It also requires a stable supply of the remaining 80 items within five years. Those items include three high-tech materials essential for the production of semiconductors and display panels, on which Japan imposed export restrictions early last month. On Aug. 2, Japan expanded its export curbs by removing Korea from its list of countries eligible for preferential treatment in trade.  The escalating trade dispute with Japan shows how Korea and its companies have relied too excessively on imports of Japanese materials, parts and components and equipment. Simply put, the country has had no other choice but to import such items in order to produce and export memory chips, TV sets, cars, ships and other goods for economic growth.  In other words, Korea has made its industries and economy vulnerable to external factors due to its heavy dependence on Japan. As seen in the ongoing flare-up of conflicts over historical issues such as Japan's wartime forced labor, Korea runs the risk of economic retaliation from the former colonial power.  Therefore, it is imperative for Korea to reduce its excessive reliance on the world's third-largest economy. This is not only necessary for the country's sustainable growth, but also for national security.  This structural problem has caused Korea to suffer an accumulated trade deficit of $604 billion (708 trillion won) with Japan since the countries normalized diplomatic ties in 1965. Bilateral economic cooperation has been based on comparative advantages and international division of labor and production.  But Korea has had to pay the price. The more it wants to export, the more it has to import from Japan. This has left Korea with a huge trade deficit, while fattening the pockets of Japan and its companies. This now has to be changed to rectify the shortfall and put Korea on an equal footing with Japan.  For this reason, Japan's expanding trade curbs should serve as an opportunity for Korea to push for industrial restructuring to improve competitiveness. The nation also needs to boost cooperation between family-run conglomerates and small and medium enterprises to localize materials, parts and equipment. The sooner, the better. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | August 8, 2019 | South Korea | 'Peace statue' out of sight: Japan should not suppress freedom of expression | Japan has invited the ire of Koreans by stifling freedom of expression in relation to a statue of a girl symbolizing victims of wartime sex slavery. This comes as Seoul-Tokyo relations are at the worst level in decades.  The statue has been closed off to the public at an international art festival in Aichi Prefecture. The "Statue of Peace," created by two South Korean artists, had been on display at the Aichi Triennale. The decision to remove the statue from view was made three days after Thursday's opening under pressure from the Japanese government and right-wing civic groups.  On Saturday, Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga and Aichi Prefecture Governor Hideki Omura told the event's organizers to halt the exhibition of the statue. Nagoya Mayor Takashi Kawamura also demanded the statue be removed, saying the statue did not have to be displayed at a venue funded with taxpayers' money.  Organizers told reporters they would close the section due largely to growing safety concerns. Many emails, phone calls and faxes reportedly threatened public safety at the Triennale.  It is lamentable that Japan has escalated the ongoing crisis, prompted by the unfortunate past encompassing the neighboring countries, beyond trade and culture. Japan is certainly going too far, and the international community may well hit out at Japan's apparent censorship of the event. In a joint statement, curators of the art festival denounced the notification to remove the statue as the "biggest postwar censorship" and "historic violence."  Tokyo can have grievances about court rulings in Seoul over wartime forced labor and the South Korean government's indifference to what has irritated Japan. Nonetheless, Japan's move to suppress free expression raises questions about whether Japan is truly a democracy. On the heels of this censorship brouhaha, Japan must ramp up efforts to prevent the current conflict from spilling into other areas. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | August 8, 2019 | South Korea | Overcome Japan: Seoul must take corresponding steps quickly | After Japan tightened export restrictions on South Korea, Friday, by removing it from a list of countries enjoying simplified export procedures for a broad range of industrial materials, the country is considering corresponding measures in all sectors with a deep sense of crisis.  Japan's unilateral steps will have serious ramifications for bilateral relations, and the future of the two countries. For Seoul, this is viewed as the biggest challenge from Tokyo since its occupation of Korea ended in 1945 following its defeat in World War II.  Given Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Japan is taking steps to rewrite his country's pacifist Constitution to enable the Japanese military to participate in overseas conflicts, and apparently using tensions with Seoul to achieve that goal, it is hard to expect Japan to change its course anytime soon. We should rather brace for Japan's next measures because this could only be the beginning of Abe's deliberate "Korea bashing" linked to his political ambitions.  Industry-wise, however, the Japanese measures will surely cause problems for domestic enterprises and a possible disruption of their supply of goods to global markets. In the long term, however, the ongoing dispute can be an opportunity for Korea Inc. to reduce its reliance on Japan in terms of imports of key industrial materials and become a more resilient, diversified economy.  That, of course, does not mean the Japanese measures are justifiable. Tokyo has begun a trade war without cause against Seoul in apparent retaliation against the Korean Supreme Court's ruling that Japanese firms must pay compensation to Korean workers forced to work for them during World War II. Japan cited possible security risks as the prime reason for its export restrictions on South Korea, but has not provided persuasive proof.  On Friday, the National Assembly passed a 5.83 trillion-won ($4.9 billion) supplementary budget to support the government's efforts to prop up the slowing economy and tackle Japan's export curbs against Seoul. The budget bill included 273 billion won set aside to tackle the Japanese measures.  According to the Financial Services Commission, Korean firms damaged by the Japanese measures will get fresh loans of 6 trillion won. They will also get a one-year extension of maturity for any outstanding loans and export payment guarantees affected by the restrictions.  In a sense, Japan's export restrictions will serve as a "growing pain" for the South Korean economy. President Moon Jae-in was right when he vowed full support for localizing key industrial materials and technologies that the country has imported from Japan, and to diversify import sources for these materials.  It is time for Korea to nurture the country's materials and parts industries, which are relatively weak given its economic size. Also, Korean firms should find alternative suppliers of the restricted goods from China, Russia and other countries. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | August 2, 2019 | South Korea | Stop trade war: Japan hit for taking reckless, dangerous action against Korea | South Korea and Japan have crossed a point of no return after the Shinzo Abe government decided to expand its export restriction measures against its Asian neighbor. On Friday, Tokyo approved a bill to remove Korea from its list of favored trade partners. This irrational and unilateral move has brought already frayed bilateral ties to the worst level since the two countries normalized diplomatic ties in 1965.  The delisting will certainly deal a severe blow to Korean industries and the economy as local firms will have difficulty in securing around 1,120 dual-use items, including industrial materials, parts and components and equipment. The measure came after Tokyo imposed export curbs on three high-tech materials July 4 which Korean companies need to produce semiconductors and displays.  It is no exaggeration to say Japan has declared an all-out trade war against Korea. If the measure is implemented Aug. 28 as scheduled, South Korea will be deprived of its preferential trade status. This may mean the country will face a virtual economic blockade although Japan claims the deprival is only a step designed to improve its export management system of strategic items.  First of all, Japan's expanded export restrictions against Korea are in clear violation of the spirit of free trade. They are also a direct challenge to the rules-based international trade order. Worse, they are feared to disrupt the global value and supply chains, triggering serious damage not only to Korea, but also other economies such as the U.S., China and the European Union.  Besides, the Japanese action is in total disregard of economic cooperation with Korea. By stripping South Korea of its trusted partner status, Tokyo apparently wants to change its relations with Seoul from an economic partner to a "rival." Abe and his policymakers are certainly seeking to prevent their Asian neighbor from catching up with the world's third-largest economy.  What's more serious is that Japan is trying to weaponize trade to retaliate against Korea over historical and diplomatic issues. Japan's trade measures are clearly in response to last year's rulings by the South Korean Supreme Court that ordered Japanese firms ― Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries ― to pay compensation to Korean victims of forced labor during World War II. Japan has denied that its actions have anything to do with the rulings. But its measures show that they are nothing more than economic retaliation against Korea over the forced labor issue.  The trade friction between the two countries is expected to get worse as the Moon Jae-in administration is threatening to take countermeasures against Japan. These measures might include the revocation of a bilateral military intelligence-sharing pact, known as the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). This action, if taken, could jeopardize security cooperation between the two countries to deal with North Korea's nuclear and missile threats. It could also risk undermining three-way security collaboration among Seoul, Tokyo and Washington.  President Moon immediately warned that Japan will face severe consequences for its "reckless" decision. He blamed Tokyo for posing a grave challenge to bilateral ties. Japan should pay heed to such a warning and return to the negotiating table in order to solve the problem diplomatically. We urge Tokyo to end its trade war. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | August 14, 2019 | South Korea | Lessons for Japan: Tragedy will repeat if past remains unresolved | Tomorrow is the 74th anniversary of Korea's liberation from the 1910-45 Japanese occupation. This is also the day Imperial Japan surrendered unconditionally, ending World War II.  On the eve of the Liberation Day, there was a symbolic event showing how long Japan has been ignorant of the Korean colonization victims and its wartime past.  Former South Korean "comfort women," victims of wartime sex slavery by the Japanese military, held their 1,400th weekly rally near the Japanese embassy in Seoul, demanding a sincere apology from the Japanese government. There were also rallies in support of the victims in 34 cities from 10 countries worldwide. In honor of them, President Moon Jae-in vowed to strengthen international cooperation to seek a proper resolution of this issue.  The Wednesday demonstration, which began in January 1992, was already listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's longest rally on a single theme in March 2002 when the 500th event was held. The record has since been renewed every Wednesday.  Their demands are simple. They want the Japanese government to acknowledge the wartime sex slavery and apologize. Japan, however, has never shown repentance in a true sense. "Enough is enough" is Japan's usual reaction to such demands for apology now. The Korean sex slavery victims are often treated as "prostitutes" by Japanese far-right figures in public speeches and media interviews.  Sex slavery is only one of the wrongdoings Japan committed on Koreans during the colonial era. In 2015, the governments of South Korea and Japan signed a political deal to conclude this case "finally and irreversibly" despite some victims' objections. The current South Korean government under President Moon discarded it in light of the victims and demanded a new deal that can satisfy them most of all.  As such, the legacy of the unresolved past is still haunting the relations of the two countries. Distorted views of history are prevalent in Japan's mainstream society. The problem has become even more serious under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose grandfather Nobusuke Kishi was a Class-A war criminal but later pardoned to become Japan's prime minister.  The root cause of the Korea-Japan bilateral disputes over history is lack of proper resolution of Japan's shameful past. The wrongdoings it committed in many countries have been forgotten and ignored. Basically, Japan sees Korea through the window of distorted history.  South Korea cannot avoid responsibility for what Japan is today. Seoul signed a diplomatic treaty with Tokyo in 1965 without proper considerations of the harm Japan did to Korea and the Korean people. It is notable that Japan cited the treaty as an excuse to avoid responsibility for the comfort women and other problems in conflict, including the conscription of Koreans for forced labor in Japanese firms during World War II.  The ongoing trade row between the two countries should be understood in this context. This is basically a history war, not a trade war. The Abe government started it in apparent retaliation of the South Korean court's ruling last October that ordered Japanese firms to compensate surviving South Korean victims of forced labor. It came more than five years after a lower court's ruling was made in favor of the victims. It has been revealed that the previous Park Geun-hye administration and then-Supreme Court chief Yang Sung-tae exerted influence to delay the forced labor ruling at the request of Japan. This case is now under investigation.  Japan should face up to history. This has become a cliche, but we have to repeat it because it has refused to learn lessons from its shameful past. The tragedy should not be repeated in the future. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | August 2, 2019 | South Korea | Stop trade war: Japan hit for taking reckless, dangerous action against Korea | South Korea and Japan have crossed a point of no return after the Shinzo Abe government decided to expand its export restriction measures against its Asian neighbor. On Friday, Tokyo approved a bill to remove Korea from its list of favored trade partners. This irrational and unilateral move has brought already frayed bilateral ties to the worst level since the two countries normalized diplomatic ties in 1965.  The delisting will certainly deal a severe blow to Korean industries and the economy as local firms will have difficulty in securing around 1,120 dual-use items, including industrial materials, parts and components and equipment. The measure came after Tokyo imposed export curbs on three high-tech materials July 4 which Korean companies need to produce semiconductors and displays.  It is no exaggeration to say Japan has declared an all-out trade war against Korea. If the measure is implemented Aug. 28 as scheduled, South Korea will be deprived of its preferential trade status. This may mean the country will face a virtual economic blockade although Japan claims the deprival is only a step designed to improve its export management system of strategic items.  First of all, Japan's expanded export restrictions against Korea are in clear violation of the spirit of free trade. They are also a direct challenge to the rules-based international trade order. Worse, they are feared to disrupt the global value and supply chains, triggering serious damage not only to Korea, but also other economies such as the U.S., China and the European Union.  Besides, the Japanese action is in total disregard of economic cooperation with Korea. By stripping South Korea of its trusted partner status, Tokyo apparently wants to change its relations with Seoul from an economic partner to a "rival." Abe and his policymakers are certainly seeking to prevent their Asian neighbor from catching up with the world's third-largest economy.  What's more serious is that Japan is trying to weaponize trade to retaliate against Korea over historical and diplomatic issues. Japan's trade measures are clearly in response to last year's rulings by the South Korean Supreme Court that ordered Japanese firms ― Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries ― to pay compensation to Korean victims of forced labor during World War II. Japan has denied that its actions have anything to do with the rulings. But its measures show that they are nothing more than economic retaliation against Korea over the forced labor issue.  The trade friction between the two countries is expected to get worse as the Moon Jae-in administration is threatening to take countermeasures against Japan. These measures might include the revocation of a bilateral military intelligence-sharing pact, known as the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). This action, if taken, could jeopardize security cooperation between the two countries to deal with North Korea's nuclear and missile threats. It could also risk undermining three-way security collaboration among Seoul, Tokyo and Washington.  President Moon immediately warned that Japan will face severe consequences for its "reckless" decision. He blamed Tokyo for posing a grave challenge to bilateral ties. Japan should pay heed to such a warning and return to the negotiating table in order to solve the problem diplomatically. We urge Tokyo to end its trade war. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | August 1, 2019 | South Korea | Avoid worst-case scenario: Korea, Japan should not give up diplomatic efforts | South Korea and Japan risk heading for an all-out trade war. The prospects for a negotiated solution look dim because the two countries failed to narrow their differences during their foreign ministers' meeting Thursday.  The ministers met in Bangkok on the sidelines of the annual ministerial talks of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The meeting came a day before the Shinzo Abe administration is expected to decide whether to remove South Korea from its "whitelist" of 27 countries entitled to preferential trade treatment.  Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha asked her Japanese counterpart, Taro Kono, to refrain from depriving Korea of this trade status. She also called on Japan to retract its export restrictions on three high-tech materials which Korean companies need to make semiconductors and displays.  Regrettably, however, Kono reportedly reaffirmed Japan's position that the Abe government will press ahead with the delisting of Korea. More precisely, the Japanese side has no intention of solving the trade row through dialogue and compromise. It is dismaying to see Tokyo continue to refuse to find a diplomatic solution since it enacted the export restriction measures on July 4.  The ministers' meeting only confirmed that both countries agreed to disagree. Tokyo started the trade spat with Seoul in apparent retaliation for last year's rulings by the South Korean Supreme Court that ordered Japanese firms to pay compensation to surviving South Korean victims forced to work for them during World War II.  The Abe administration has tried to justify its export curbs, denying that they are retaliatory measures against the forced labor issue. Now it is in the process of intensifying its trade row by threatening to remove Korea from the whitelist.  As Minister Kang told Kono, the delisting of Korea could have grave ramifications on bilateral trade and diplomatic relations. This move, if taken, may run the risk of destroying global value and supply chains. Other economies such as the U.S., China and the European Union are also likely to suffer damage from Japan's irrational and unilateral action.  It will be inevitable for the Moon Jae-in administration to take "corresponding measures" against the neighboring country if Tokyo decides to strip Korea of its preferential trade status. Such measures might include the revocation of a military information-sharing pact with Japan, a move that could jeopardize security cooperation between the two countries. This could also undermine U.S.-Korea-Japan collaboration in coping with North Korea's nuclear and missile threats and curbing a rising China.  That's why Washington is trying to help its two Asian allies defuse their tensions and patch up their soured ties. The U.S. has reportedly called on Seoul and Tokyo to consider signing a "standstill" agreement to give them more time to solve their issues through negotiations.  U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will get together with Kang and Kono on Friday to mediate in the intensifying Korea-Japan friction. We hope the three-way meeting will open the way for the two countries to avoid the worst-case scenario. Still the best way is, no doubt, to make diplomatic efforts to iron out differences and rebuild mutual trust. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | August 15, 2019 | South Korea | Dialogue overtures: Japan should respond positively to Moon's speech | President Moon Jae-in has expressed his hope that South Korea will resolve the ongoing trade spat with Japan through dialogue. Marking the 74th National Liberation Day on Thursday, he said the county will "gladly join hands" with Japan for East Asian prosperity if it chooses dialogue and cooperation to end the dispute.  Moon appeared to take a moderate stance on Japan's export curbs on Korea. This was in contrast to earlier anticipation that he might use strong words to call on Tokyo to retract its unilateral and irrational trade measures against Seoul. His soft tone could reflect his perception that it would be better to find a diplomatic resolution than escalate the problem.  The President has so far played hardball with Japan's apparent economic retaliation over the wartime forced labor issue. He has even threatened to take countermeasures against Tokyo without caving in to Japanese pressure to undo the Supreme Court's decisions ordering Japanese firms to pay compensation to surviving South Korean victims of forced labor during World War II.  It is fortunate to see that Moon has yet to give up diplomatic efforts to tackle the problem which has sent Seoul-Tokyo ties to their worst level since their 1965 diplomatic normalization. Both countries will have more to lose than gain from the escalating trade war no matter what its cause.  In this context, it is worth noting what Moon said in his address. "Better late than never: If Japan chooses the path of dialogue and cooperation, we will gladly join hands," he said. Moon added that Korea will strive to create an East Asia with Japan that engages in fair trade and cooperation. Like it or not, the two countries are Asian neighbors although they shared disgraced history in the first half of the 20th century.  The South Korean leader stressed the need to overcome the past and move toward the future together. He said, "We hope that Japan will play a leading role together in facilitating peace and prosperity in East Asia, while it contemplates a past that brought misfortune to its neighboring countries." However, Moon did not forget to call on the Shinzo Abe administration to stop using trade as a weapon.  Now the question is whether Japan will accept Moon's apparent dialogue overtures. Skepticism still prevails that the nationalist Abe government may continue to take a hardline position against Seoul unless the latter makes some concessions. But no one can totally rule out the possibility of both sides coming to terms with each other one way or another.  A foreign ministers' meeting between South Korea, Japan and China is likely to be held in Beijing next week. Some diplomatic experts expect that the meeting, if held, will serve as a forum for South Korean and Japanese foreign ministers to discuss how to tackle the bilateral trade dispute.  Most of all, it is important for the two sides to keep diplomatic channels open. We hope Korea and Japan will narrow their differences on historical and trade issues to restore mutual trust and build a future-oriented partnership. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | July 30, 2019 | South Korea | Cutting chip outpour: Economy should be put on crisis management mode | SK hynix has decided to reduce its production of memory chips. The decision by the world's second-largest semiconductor maker is aimed at weathering the continuous price drops resulting from a supply glut through an output cut. SK will curtail the production of DRAMs from the fourth quarter of this year.  SK had a 25.8 percent of the global DRAM market share in 2018, following Samsung's 43.9 percent and surpassing Micron's 23 percent. SK's operating profit plunged 89 percent to 637.6 billion won ($538.5 million) in the second quarter of this year from the same period in 2018. The company's output cut is the first in 11 years since 2008 when the global semiconductor market froze because of the worldwide financial crisis.  The pre-emptive move is inevitable, but the reduced production is likely to continue for some time. Global IT firms' demand for computer chips is falling, in part due to U.S. sanctions on China's telecom equipment maker Huawei. For Korean companies, there is an additional stumbling block ― Japan's export restrictions on essential materials for the manufacture of semiconductors and display panels.  Industry experts are watching whether Samsung Electronics will follow the example of its smaller competitor. Again, the most significant variable is Japan's export curbs. Samsung may put up with the supply cut for the time being. If a stable supply of critical materials is not ensured, however, a production bottleneck is likely to lead to an output cut.  If that worst-case scenario becomes a reality, it will deal a fatal blow to the Korean economy. Last year, semiconductors accounted for 20.9 percent of the nation's exports and 7.8 percent of its gross domestic product. The collapse of the semiconductor industry will lead to an overall economic setback, starting with a fall in exports, investment and employment and ending with a dive in economic growth.  A crisis is looming for Korea Inc. Businesses have already entered into emergency operation amid the aggravating environment. The government needs to take extraordinary countermeasures. Mid- to long-term measures, such as industrial restructuring, finding new growth engines and localizing essential parts and components, won't do. The government itself should embark on crisis management of the national economy. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | July 26, 2019 | South Korea | Set aside emotions: North Korean missiles give reality check for Seoul, Tokyo | The foreign ministers of South Korea and Japan had talks over the phone for about 20 minutes, Friday ― their first conversation since Tokyo restricted exports of three key industrial materials to Seoul on July 4.  This, hopefully, will be a meaningful first step to normalize dialogue channels between the two countries, and find a diplomatic solution to the ongoing trade row.  We note that the telephone talks came a day after North Korea fired two missiles into the East Sea. The South Korean military said after an overnight analysis that they were a new type of short-range ballistic missile similar to Russia's Iskander, and flew about 600 kilometers before landing in the sea. The flight distance is enough to hit the U.S. naval base at Sasebo and the U.S. airbase on Iwakuni, both in southwestern Japan.  Pyongyang's latest missile launch is apparently serving as a wake-up call for both Seoul and Tokyo. It is still early to predict whether relations will be restored anytime soon, but one thing looks quite clear. They at least share a common interest over the North's provocative actions.  Concerns have been raised that the Seoul-Tokyo trade dispute will affect their security cooperation as well. As Japan was moving to toughen export restrictions on South Korea, the latter hinted at the possibility that it would discard the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a bilateral intelligence-sharing pact signed in 2016 to jointly counter threats from North Korea.  But the North Korean missiles provided a chance for a reality check.  During the phone talks, Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha and her Japanese counterpart Taro Kono discussed the missile launches and Japan's export control measures.  They shared the common view that close cooperation among South Korea, Japan and the United States is crucial in tackling Pyongyang, the foreign ministry said.  But what is needed first is to restore trust between Seoul and Tokyo. And this is impossible without resolving the trade row.  Kang urged Kono to remove the export restrictions for the three key materials needed to produce semiconductors and displays, South Korea's top export items. Kang also warned of Japan's move to take South Korea off its "whitelist" of countries enjoying preferential treatment in export procedures, saying the delisting, if implemented, will aggravate tensions.  Given the proposed measure may affect exports of over 1,000 items to South Korea, we regard it as a de facto declaration of a full-scale trade war. It would surely push the situation to the point of no return.  So South Korea and Japan should sit back and see what is best for them in the face of North Korea. They need strategic thinking, not emotions, at the moment. They should reach out to each other to mend fences. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | July 23, 2019 | South Korea | Battle at WTO: International cooperation is key to overcoming Japan | The World Trade Organization (WTO) General Council meeting has been opened to review trade disputes, including the one between South Korea and Japan over the latter's recent export restrictions.  Depending on the results of the meeting, which will run until Wednesday, Seoul plans to decide whether to file a complaint with the WTO against the Japanese measure.  The prospects for a resolution in the immediate future appear to be slim given Japan's steadfast position on this case. Rather, we should be prepared for the possibility that the dispute could lead to a full-scale trade war. As some analysts here put it, Japan's "economic invasion" may have already begun.  Tokyo is moving to remove Seoul from a whitelist of nations granted preferential export procedures for over 1,000 items, in addition to the already-implemented measure to restrict shipments of three key materials crucial for the production of semiconductors and displays. If Japan delists South Korea, it will be a de facto declaration of an all-out trade war.  But we do not need to panic. A crisis always provides an opportunity. Korean firms are already taking steps to find alternative non-Japanese sellers of the restricted goods and localize production of components and materials that the country has imported from Japan. In the long term, this could be an opportunity to reduce economic reliance on Japan and diversify import sources of key industrial materials. Korea needs to actively reach out to other countries, including China and Russia, to find alternative suppliers for the affected goods.  Most of all, the Japanese move has prompted efforts to nurture the country's materials and parts industries, which are relatively weak given Korea's economic size. Looking at the bright side of the current situation, President Moon Jae-in vowed full support, Monday, for the localization of key components and technologies, and the diversification of import sources. This is a step in the right direction.  To make this strategy successful, the key is to secure international support. The WTO meeting will be the first chance to share a proper understanding of what is happening between Korea and Japan with member nations. Japan, as well, will make its case that the export restrictions on South Korea did not violate WTO rules.  Deputy Trade Minister Kim Seung-ho, who is leading the South Korean team to the meeting, said the Japanese restrictions of the three materials do not comply with WTO rules, and could disrupt global supply chains. "Japan will be violating more trade rules should it expand its export curbs to other areas," he said.  The point is how the WTO members will view Japan's claims that South Korea has poorly controlled strategic materials that can be diverted for military purposes, and this could be a threat to its security. However, it has not provided any concrete evidence to support its claims, nor accepted Seoul's proposal for an international inspection of the maintenance systems of not only South Korea, but also Japan.  The WTO meeting is the beginning of what could be a long diplomatic battle over the trade issue. The WTO upheld Seoul's import restrictions recently on Japanese seafood following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. This came about four years after Japan lodged a complaint with the WTO against Korea's seafood import ban. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | July 19, 2019 | South Korea | Point of no return: Seoul, Tokyo should avoid head-on clash | South Korea and Japan appear to be approaching the point of no return in their confrontation over wartime forced labor and the ensuing trade row. Concerns are growing over the developments, which could put both sides on a head-on collision course.  Japan is escalating tensions by threatening to take further retaliatory measures against Seoul after imposing export restrictions on three key materials needed for Korean firms to make semiconductors and display panels. Korea is also determined to take tit-for-tat action, although it is calling for a diplomatic resolution.  On Friday, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono summoned South Korean Ambassador to Japan Nam Gwan-pyo to lodge a complaint about Seoul's rejection of Tokyo's demand to establish a third-party arbitration panel. The move came a day after the Japan-imposed deadline for Korea to respond to its June 19 request to set up the panel to discuss the forced labor issue.  Japan's next moves might include taking the thorny historical issue to the International Court of Justice, to which Korea is strongly opposed. A more realistic and powerful option is for Tokyo to remove Korea from the "white list" of countries entitled to preferential trade treatment.  The Shinzo Abe administration has already vowed to take that option in apparent retaliation against rulings by the South Korean Supreme Court last year that ordered Japanese firms to pay compensation to Koreans forced into labor during World War II. Japan has protested against the rulings, claiming that all reparations issues arising from its 1910-45 colonial rule of Korea were settled by a 1965 bilateral treaty that normalized diplomatic ties.  However, Seoul rejected the Japanese claim, with the court allowing Korean victims to seize the firms' Korean assets. The issue has plunged bilateral ties to the worst level since 1965. As the situation stands now, both sides cannot restore their relations to normal.  If Japan excludes Korea from the list of preferential trade countries, it would cause much more far-reaching damage to Korean industries and economy. It could also go beyond the trade spat because the delisting implies that Tokyo no longer regards Seoul as its ally. Furthermore, Japan's move may jeopardize trilateral cooperation with the U.S. in defense and security in Northeast Asia.  That is why the Moon Jae-in administration is going all-out to prevent the Abe government from expanding its trade retaliation against Korea. On Thursday, Moon and the heads of five ruling and opposition parties agreed to launch a bipartisan task force to tackle Tokyo's use of trade as a political weapon.  One notable measure under consideration is a possible revocation of a military information-sharing pact with Japan. A senior presidential official said Seoul will review whether to renew the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). But such a step should not be taken because it could pose a security threat not only to both countries, but also the U.S.  The trade feud must be solved through dialogue and compromise as President Moon has stressed. Prime Minister Abe had better retract the export curbs and refrain from dropping Korea from the white list. Most of all, the two leaders must hold a summit sooner rather than later to find a diplomatic solution. They should not cross the point of no return. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | July 19, 2019 | South Korea | Localization drive: Substituting imports with domestic products is easier said than done | Korea's top economic policymaker has expressed determination to localize essential materials, parts and equipment as soon as possible.  "To cope with Japan's export restrictions, the government will work out measures to strengthen the competitiveness of key materials, parts and equipment this month, and give speed to their localization," Minister of Economy and Finance Hong Nam-ki said Thursday.  Successive Korean governments have pushed for localizing such core items since the 1980s, but failed to produce satisfactory results. Such failures were not just because the nation was lacking in technology and R&D investment, but because Korean businesses found it more economical to buy these products from foreign suppliers rather than struggling to develop them.  But these businesses can no longer rely on this international division of the production system with Japan's export controls. The ongoing trade dispute should serve as an opportunity for Korean companies to wake up to the harsh reality. If Japan excludes Korea from its "white list" of countries with preferential treatment concerning exports of up to 1,100 core materials and parts, Korean businesses will find it hard to procure them.  All this shows this country must use this occasion to establish a domestic supply system of raw materials and components by all means.  At stake is whether Korean companies can make ongoing R&D investments and commercialize the developed technologies with speed. This goal will be difficult to accomplish if left to individual companies. The government, large businesses and their small and midsize suppliers will have to make concerted efforts. The government made the mistake of curtailing R&D spending for semiconductors from 136 billion won ($115.4 million) in 2009 to little more than 10 billion won in 2016.  That was a foolish, shortsighted move.  Had the nation kept expanding its investment, Korean businesses might have reduced their reliance considerably on Japanese suppliers. The government can ill afford to repeat such a trial and error.  This time around, policymakers should push for the localization drive with perseverance. When it comes to localizing materials and parts, an ounce of practice is worth a pound of theory. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | July 16, 2019 | South Korea | No emotional reaction: Anti-Japan sentiment cannot help resolve dispute | President Moon Jae-in's strong rhetoric against Japan on Monday reflected his firm determination not to yield to the neighboring country's apparent economic retaliation over wartime forced labor issues. Moon appeared to deliver a strong message to Tokyo that the Shinzo Abe administration cannot win a trade war.  What's notable is that President Moon has begun to play hardball with Japan, a shift from his initial low-key response to the country's export restrictions imposed against Korea. This was evident when he told a weekly meeting of senior presidential officials: "I warn in advance that the Japanese economy will suffer greater damage in the end." It was unusual for the head of state to use such a strong, undiplomatic word as "warn."  Moon also criticized Japan for taking "very unwise measures" which go against history, calling for their retraction. He must have felt the need for the harsh rhetoric to firmly stand up against the Japanese trade pressure. His hardened position is in contrast to Seoul's earlier position that it would play it cool and refrain from any emotional reaction.  It is understandable for Moon to become hardline toward Japan's unilateral and irrational moves to weaponize trade for political purposes. His government has so far called for a diplomatic resolution. Regrettably, however, Tokyo has refused to hold any consultations with Seoul. In this situation, Moon seemingly wanted to put pressure on Japan to come forward for negotiations to solve the problem diplomatically.  Another reason for the shift in Moon's stance could be his efforts to drum up public support for his fight against Japan's export curbs on three key materials needed for Korean firms to make semiconductors and display panels. Last Friday, Moon even said Admiral Yi Sun-sin repelled a Japanese fleet with only 12 ships during the 1592-98 Japanese invasions of Korea. He apparently tried to appeal to the people to unite in the face of the mounting trade spat.  Yet Moon's shift to a hardline position could run the risk of showing an emotional reaction to the Japanese measures. It could also spark anti-Japan sentiment among South Koreans, some of whom have already started boycotting Japanese products. This might incite anti-Korea sentiment in Tokyo. If this situation becomes aggravated, the Moon administration stands little chance of finding a diplomatic solution. Japan continues to up the ante by vowing to remove Korea from its "white list" of countries entitled to preferential trade treatment.  Moon and his aides should also refrain from put rhetoric and emotion before a rational and viable solution. They must come up with detailed and refined measures to cope with Japan's economic retaliation. For this, they need to prove how illegitimate it is for Japan to wage a trade war against Korea. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | July 14, 2019 | South Korea | A turn for the worse: Japan should not remove Korea from 'white list' | The ongoing trade dispute between South Korea and Japan is expected to take a turn for the worse. This is because the Japanese government is determined to remove Korea from a list of countries entitled to preferential treatment for trade.  The removal, if implemented, could deal a far worse blow to the Korean economy than Japan's initial step against Seoul ― export restrictions on three key materials needed to produce semiconductors and display panels. It is regrettable that Japan has made no secret of its plan to start a trade war with Korea.  During a meeting between officials of both sides in charge of managing strategic materials Friday, Japan revealed its plan to remove Korea from the so-called white list. This means Korea cannot enjoy a fast, simplified process of getting supplies of up to 1,100 products such as high-tech materials, electronics parts, IT equipment and machine tools from Japan.  This unilateral measure might do incalculable damage to domestic industries across the board. Because Japanese firms will have to get permission from their government whenever they export strategic goods to Korea, the delisting of Korea can be seen as a virtual trade embargo.  The Korea Economic Research Institute (KERI) predicted that Korea will suffer a 2.2 percent decline in its gross domestic product (GDP) if the country suffers a 30 percent shortage of semiconductor materials. It estimated that Korea's GDP will plunge 3.1 percent if the nation responds to Japan's export curbs by restricting exports of Korean-made memory chips and their parts to Japan. In that case, Japan's GDP might drop 1.8 percent.  As seen in the KERI analysis, Korea will inevitably sustain far more extensive damage from the dispute than Japan. Nevertheless, Tokyo should not try to use trade as a means to retaliate against its neighbor for political purposes. The two economies have become heavily interdependent on each other. Thus, the escalating trade spat will be destructive for both sides. Moreover, the trade friction will have an adverse impact on the world economy by undermining the global supply chain.  That is why Seoul and Tokyo should try to find a diplomatic solution. It is disappointing to see Japan refusing to resolve the problem through dialogue. Even its officials showed arrogance and made unilateral claims during their working-level meeting with their Korean counterparts in Tokyo, Friday.  Japan's economic retaliation is apparently in direct response to a ruling by the South Korean Supreme Court last October that ordered Japanese firms to compensate Korean victims of forced labor during World War II. Tokyo also cited allegations that South Korea violated U.N. sanctions against North Korea by transferring Japanese strategic materials such as hydrogen fluoride to the North.  But such allegations are groundless. On the contrary, the U.N. panel of experts reported that Japan exported some strategic items and luxury goods to North Korea over the past years in violation of U.N. sanctions. Those items included commercial radar antennas used by the North for the production of an anti-ship missile in 2015.  Japan should stop making false claims to justify its export curbs. It must retract its retaliatory steps and should not drop Korea from the white list. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and other Japanese leaders had better learn how to get along with the country's former colony. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | July 15, 2019 | South Korea | One voice against Japan: Proposed meeting should lay foundation for national unity | Main opposition Liberty Korea Party (LKP) Chairman Hwang Kyo-ahn proposed "any form of dialogue" with President Moon Jae-in, Monday, to discuss countermeasures to the economic retaliation recently imposed by Japan against a Supreme Court ruling made here.  Ruling Democratic Party of Korea Chairman Lee Hae-chan welcomed Hwang's proposal immediately, indicating future talks may include leaders of not only the LKP but also other major political parties.  It is good for Hwang to drop his earlier demand for a one-on-one meeting with Moon and be more open to multilateral dialogue, when forming a united political front matters more than ever as the nation faces unprecedented economic pressure from Japan, which some call Japan's "economic infiltration."  Hwang, however, imposed several conditions for the meeting, some of which are quite inappropriate.  Hwang was right when he asked Moon to send a special envoy to Japan as well as the United States without hesitation to pave the way for a diplomatic solution to the trade conflict. He urged Japan to lift its "unconvincing, irrational" export restrictions immediately, saying they would do more harm than good to Japan's own economy, as well.  Absurdly, however, the LKP leader demanded Moon dismiss Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha and presidential aides for diplomatic affairs, saying they should take responsibility for Japan's measures.  But we all know they are not the ones to blame over what is happening between Korea and Japan. They cannot be responsible for the Japanese action without cause. Moreover this is not the right time to consider a reshuffle of the diplomatic team while Japan is stepping up "Korea bashing" without showing any signs of accepting overtures for dialogue.  If Moon dismisses them now, it can send the wrong signal to Japan as well as the international community. The root cause of the current deadlock is not the Korean diplomats' faults, but Japan's lack of repentance about wrongdoings it committed during its colonial occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945. This fact should never be overlooked in handling history issues with Japan.  So it is time to give pep talks to Korean diplomats, rather than joining in bashing them.  President Moon indicated last week that Japan's export curbs could be prolonged, asking affected Korean firms to prepare for all possibilities. He also instructed his administration to draw up a contingency plan against the "politically motivated" measures by Japan.  It is clear that it is up to Japan, not Korea, to bring bilateral relations back to normal. The relationships could be restored temporarily, but fundamental issues stemming from colonial rule will remain unresolved unless Japan faces up to its history.  For its part, the Moon administration will have to push for international cooperation to cope with the Japanese action and find reasonable solutions to the ongoing row. The proposed meeting between Moon and party leaders will hopefully be an opportunity to bring political forces together for national unity in the face of Japan's economic retaliation. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | July 8, 2019 | South Korea | Going too far: Abe should not make false claims over retaliation | Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe must have gone too far in defending Tokyo's export restrictions against South Korea over wartime forced labor issues. On Sunday, he insinuated the retaliatory measure has to do with international sanctions imposed on North Korea over its nuclear and missile tests. He seemed to call into question Seoul's efforts to abide by the sanctions.  Appearing at a campaign debate program of Fuji TV ahead of the upper house election set for late this month, Abe said it is clear to him that the South does not honor promises with other countries. So he said it is natural for him to assume Seoul will not observe trade restrictions against the North.  To paraphrase what he said, Abe was apparently trying to raise the possibility of South Korea violating sanctions against the North. Why was he doing this? It is possibly because the South's Supreme Court ruled last year that Japanese firms should pay compensation to Koreans forced into labor during the 1910-45 Japanese colonial rule on the peninsula.  For his part, Abe has already argued that the ruling violated the 1965 treaty that normalized diplomatic ties between the two countries. His position is that all indemnity claims over damages arising from the occupation period were settled by the treaty. However, that is a far cry from Seoul's stance that individual claims have yet to be settled.  Nevertheless, it is absurd for Abe to link the export restrictions to sanctions against the North. When Japan started to implement its measure against the South last Thursday, Abe vaguely cited two reasons: Japan's trust with South Korea was broken and an improper incident took place over export management.  Now he has made it clear that his export restrictions are in retaliation against the forced labor ruling. During the TV debate, Abe refused to elaborate on the incident. However, it is clear that he mentioned the incident in an apparent bid to raise an allegation that Seoul might not comply with sanctions against Pyongyang.  The allegation followed a claim Friday by Japan's Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Koichi Hagiuda that there are fears that chemical materials, which can be diverted for military purposes, might be sent to North Korea. He appeared to signal that some strategic materials could end up in the North through the South.  It is nonsense to make such a claim. There is no evidence that Seoul has violated the international sanctions to help North Korea, although President Moon Jae-in once called for sanctions relief to facilitate the North's denuclearization.  Taken overall, Abe and his nationalist government seem to have found a lame excuse to justify economic retaliation against South Korea. Tokyo should not attempt to use trade as a weapon to resolve its diplomatic dispute with Seoul. It is a dangerous means to do harm to not only Japan, but also its neighbor and the world. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | July 5, 2019 | South Korea | Abe's trade war: Japan and Korea should find diplomatic solution | Japan and Korea should find diplomatic solution  Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has pulled the trigger on a trade war against South Korea in an apparent retaliation over a diplomatic dispute related to wartime forced labor. On Thursday, Tokyo took its first step: tightening regulations on exports of three key materials Korean firms need to manufacture memory chips and display panels.  We have no choice but to express grave concern about Japan's move aimed at restricting such exports to Korea. The measure is expected to deal a severe setback to the local semiconductor industry whose exports account for 20 percent of Korea's total exports. This could hit the slumping economy harder.  Worse, Seoul and Tokyo might plunge into an all-out trade war as the Moon Jae-in administration is threatening to take "corresponding measures" against Japan. The government plans to file a complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO) against Japan. Although it is the right step for Korea, bringing the case to the WTO could lead to more Japanese retaliatory steps.  The Moon government has come to take a more hardline stance against the issue amid rising criticism for doing little to cope with Japan's retaliation. Nevertheless, Seoul now has very limited options such as finding alternative suppliers and pushing for local production of the affected materials. But no one can rule out the possibility of retaliating against Japan in kind.  In that case, the two countries are likely to sustain irrevocable damage from a tit-for-tat confrontation just as seen in the U.S.-China tariff war. That's why they should refrain from aggravating the situation and try to resolve the problem diplomatically.  We call on Abe to retract the export restriction immediately. He should not justify the measure under the name of national security interest just as Trump did to impose punitive tariffs on steel imports from Japan and other countries. It is wrong for him to weaponize trade for political reasons. He must realize that Japan's move is not in line with free trade principles. It is a sheer violation of WTO rules.  The nationalist Japanese leader has come under fire for trying to stoke anti-Korea sentiment to rally right-wing supporters behind him and his party ahead of the upper house election set for late this month. He appears to think he could win the poll by taking a hardline position on Korea. Further he might seek to revise the postwar peace constitution to make Japan a normal country that can wage war against other countries.  In many respects, Abe's trade war against Korea is self-destructive. It will no doubt boomerang against Japan as the two economies are heavily interdependent on each other. It is also feared to destroy the global supply chain of memory chips, possibly hurting not only Japanese importers, but also global IT giants such as Apple, Qualcomm and Intel.  This explains why Abe should end his economic retaliation before it is too late. He and President Moon need to work together to find a diplomatic solution to a ruling by South Korea's top court last October that a Japanese steel firm should pay compensation for Koreans forced into labor during Japan's colonial rule. No one can win a trade war whatsoever. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | July 4, 2019 | South Korea | Abe's absurd assertions: Tokyo should stop economic retaliation for political reason | Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has insisted his government's export restrictions on semiconductor materials to Korea conform to World Trade Organization rules and do not breach free trade principles. "The Korean government has altered the measures it had implemented based on trust between nations," Abe said in an interview with the Yomiuri Shimbun, Tuesday. "Our move is in line with WTO rules. This has nothing to do with free trade."  This is impossible for us to understand. The Japanese leader cited the issue of trust, acknowledging the recent step is of a retaliatory nature against the Korean Supreme Court's ruling here in favor of Koreans forced to work as laborers before and during World War II. It is unseemly for Tokyo to have violated the WTO rule that bans economic retaliation for political reasons, and then make untenable assertions. Despite a strong backlash, Japan began to implement the retaliatory step Thursday by tightening regulations on exports of three key materials Korean firms need to make memory chips and display panels.  One can see how unreasonable the recent Japanese move was from the reactions of the Japanese news media. The Nihon Keizai Shimbun, in an editorial Tuesday, said, "We have a strong suspicion that the latest step came from the idea to use trade policy as a tool of international politics." Noting that it is a scheme used by the Trump administration and China, the newspaper emphasized that Tokyo had drawn a line separating it from such behavior.  In 2010 when Beijing restricted the export of rare earth materials to Japan after the two countries clashed over the Senkaku (or Diaoyu) Islands, Tokyo brought Beijing to the WTO, claiming the latter was engaging in unfair trade retaliation. Do Japanese officials think their latest move is any different from the Chinese step nine years ago? The Abe administration should bear in mind that the withdrawal of the retaliatory move as early as possible is the only way to regain trust at home and abroad.  Korean politicians should also engage in a bipartisanship approach to cope with the diplomatic friction. Rep. Na Kyung-won, floor leader of the main opposition Liberty Korea Party (LKP), said she would push for a meeting with the two countries' parliamentarians. Na and her party ought to move cautiously so as not to cause internal division in the face of an external threat. Now they need to refrain from criticizing the Moon Jae-in administration for a lack of diplomatic effort to solve the dispute with Japan. The rival parties should work together to settle the matter. |
| Korea Times, | Editorial | Korea Times | July 1, 2019 | South Korea | Economic retaliation: Japan's move aggravates ties with Korea further | The already-soured relationship between Seoul and Tokyo is feared to aggravate further as Japan is taking what appears to be economic retaliation against South Korea. It is appalling to see the two countries' diplomatic row heading for a debacle that could destroy their economic partnership.  On Monday, the Japanese government announced a plan to strengthen regulations on the export of three types of materials and chemicals to Korea starting Thursday. The plan could deal a crippling blow to Korean chip and display makers because they are heavily dependent on those items to manufacture semiconductors and smartphones.  One of the chemicals is fluorine polyimide needed to manufacture flexible organic light-emitting diode (OLED) displays. The others are resist and etching gas used to produce semiconductors. If the restrictive measure is implemented, Korean IT giants such as Samsung Electronics, SK hynix and LG Display may find it difficult to secure those materials and chemicals, 70 percent to 90 percent of which come from Japan.  Some experts say the Japanese action is tantamount to an export ban. The export restriction comes after Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe hosted the G20 summit in Osaka last week. He shook hands with South Korean President Moon Jae-in for only eight seconds and refused overtures for a bilateral summit. The retaliatory measure is not in line with his pitch for free trade during the gathering.  Japan's economic retaliation is certainly in response to a ruling by South Korea's Supreme Court last October that ordered Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corp. to compensate four Koreans mobilized into forced labor during Japan's 1910-45 colonial rule of the peninsula. Since then, the nationalist Abe government has strongly protested the ruling, saying that all individual compensation claims to colonial-era damages were settled under the 1965 basic treaty that normalized diplomatic relations between Seoul and Tokyo.  Japan has already threatened to retaliate against Korea if the court allows the forced labor victims to seize the Japanese firm's assets to get the compensation. It is regrettable that Abe has started to put the threat into action ahead of a parliamentary election set for late July. He might be using the measure to win the poll, without making any effort to mend ties with Seoul.  Now the problem is that the two countries run the risk of being thrown into a tit-for-tat fight as Seoul is also threatening to take similar measures against Tokyo. No one can rule out the possibility of a trade war between the two sides.  We urge both Korea and Japan to refrain from resorting to retaliation. They should try to find a negotiated solution. For this, they need to have talks to discuss how to settle historical issues including forced labor and wartime sex slavery. Moon and Abe had better hold a summit sooner than later to leave the disgraced past behind and move toward a better future. |
| JUNG PAK AND ETHAN JEWELL | Commentary | Eleven media | SEPTEMBER 13, 2019 | Myanmar | South Korea and Japan have more in common than they think | Ties between South Korea and Japan are in a free-fall.  With South Korea’s decision to scrap the 2016 military intelligence sharing agreement with Japan, the two sides have dramatically aggravated their fraught relationship. Bilateral ties had never been great, but in the past several weeks, a trade spat has snowballed into a confrontation that apparently has yet to reach rock bottom. Last month, Tokyo decided to remove South Korea from its list of favored trading partners, which includes the United States, Germany, France, and two dozen other countries, placing export curbs on industrial and high-tech products. This sparked a reciprocal move from Seoul, sending ripples of fear about the potentially destabilizing and detrimental effect of these moves.  The rhetoric from the leadership in the two capitals has exacerbated the degraded relationship, whipping up nationalist fervor among the populace, leaving little space for compromise. Of the 1965 treaty that established diplomatic relations, Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe stated that South Korea has unilaterally “violated the treaty that served as the basis for us to normalize ties,” and South Korean president Moon Jae-in declared, “We will never again lose to Japan,” invoking Japan’s colonization of the Korean Peninsula from 1910–1945. Of the General Security of Military Information Agreement that Seoul recently decided to exit, the Blue House said that the pact did not comport with Seoul’s national interest, while protesters outside the Japanese Embassy cheered when the news was announced.  Moon’s comment underscores the lingering history of issues that have become increasingly toxic, seeping into the economic and security realms of the present. During World War II, Japan conscripted Korean women—possibly as many as two hundred thousand—to “serve” in military brothels. Questions regarding proper reparations to the victims of sexual exploitation, as well as for other conscripted Koreans laborers, have hampered bilateral relations ever since. Though many hoped a 2015 agreement between then-South Korean president Park Geun-hye and Prime Minister Abe would resolve the comfort women issue “finally and irreversibly,” President Moon later dissolved a joint fund that was set up with the Japanese government in 2018 to compensate the surviving comfort women. Shortly after, the South Korean Supreme Court ordered the seizure of certain Japanese companies’ assets to compensate victims of wartime forced labor, casting doubt on the legitimacy of the 1965 normalization treaty and reigniting the history disputes dramatically unfolding today.    As tensions between the United States’ two closest allies in East Asia threaten to boil over, former U.S. policymakers, such as Evan Medeiros and Victor Cha, have sounded the alarm on the negative effects on alliance relationships and policy coordination. They have provided prudent suggestions to stanch the bleeding, including quiet intervention by President Donald Trump and a suspensionof the implementation of the retaliatory trade actions to allow for the two sides to cool off and investigate their respective complaints.  While negotiation and engagement at the leader level are critical, both sides also should be reminded about their convergence of interests and potential ways that the two countries could—and should—cooperate to confront their present and future challenges.  FROM VICTIMIZATION TO WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT  The wartime sex slavery issue is at the core of the historical disputes, with South Korea framing the “comfort women” as victims and the Japanese as aggressors who have not properly atoned for their wrongdoing. But there is an opportunity to turn a narrative of victimhood and grievance toward one of empowerment and support.  At home, both leaders have made efforts to show their support for women. A self-described feminist, Moon has pledged to bridge the pay gap and increase women’s representation in the cabinet. Abe has called for increasing female participation in the labor force to create “a society where women shine,” introduced the concept of “womenomics” to connect economic growth with women’s empowerment, and vowed to curb sexual violence against women.  Still, these moves are insufficiently addressing the problem: Japan and South Korea have the highest gender pay gap (24.5 percent and 34.6 percent) among countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. As far as political representation goes, women make up only 10 percent of the Japanese Diet, while women make up 17 percent of the South Korean National Assembly.  Given the leaders’ stated commitments to advancing the status of women, the two sides should support governmental, multilateral, and civil-society programs and initiatives designed to empower the women they claim they want to help and increase general awareness about wartime violence against women. Such actions would show that their concern for women is not merely political opportunism and sloganeering. To accomplish this, Jennifer Lind, a political scientist who specializes in East Asian affairs, has long suggested that constructing a shared and non-accusative narrative, initiating multilateral inquiries into violence against women, and cooperating on textbook initiatives are promising approaches for reconciliation. Such programs should include international scholars, historians, activists, and women leaders to quarantine the issue from politicization and to pursue meaningful progress on reconciliation and real improvements for women in both countries.  A LOOMING DEMOGRAPHIC TIME BOMB  Japan and South Korea also share a unique domestic issue: super-aging societies.  Simply put, women aren’t having enough babies; a fertility rate of 2.1 is considered necessary to maintain stable population numbers. In Japan, the fertility rate is 1.45; in South Korea, it’s an even more dismal 0.98. A major study conducted by the South Korean government in 2014 concluded that the country faces “natural extinction” by the year 2750 if the then-birth rate of 1.19 did not rise, a study that has obvious parallels in Japan.  Meanwhile, high life expectancy in both countries means that elderly people make up a progressively larger proportion of the population over time. Projections by the United Nations show Japan’s population of 126 million shrinking by 40 percent by 2080. Korea’s population of 51 million could also shrink by 40 percent, potentially reaching pre-Korean War levels (18 million) if corrective action isn’t taken in the near future. The aging problem in Japan has led to the sale of adult diapers surpassing that of baby diapers. And in South Korea, some universities have begun offering classes on dating and relationships to help combat falling marriage and fertility rates. Even then, a recent survey found that only 68 percent of female South Korean college students intend to marry, with most respondents citing “dual burdens at home and work” as the biggest obstacles to raising children.  For both countries, the impending population collapse is a threat to economic productivity, growth, social stability, and national defense. One possible answer—liberalizing immigration policies—is unpopular in largely homogeneous Japan and South Korea, while government efforts to increase fertility rates have proven to be expensive and ineffective. For these reasons, economists have formulated an array of policy options such as implementing phased retirement schemes, allocating funds to childcare facilities, raising the ages for retirement and pension eligibility, and even investing in artificial intelligence to meet caregiving needs.  Regardless of the specific policy solutions implemented, sharing know-how and innovative technological solutions may help Japan and South Korea realize there’s much to be gained from cooperation—and together they might potentially shape global approaches to aging populations.  POWERFUL ECONOMIES WITH ROOM TO INTEGRATE AND THRIVE  For all the historical rancor between the two over the past decades, Japan and South Korea have enjoyed massive economic growth. Japan is the world’s third-largest economy, with a GDP per capita of $39,286. South Korea, the world’s 11th largest economy, has slowly caught up with its neighbor over the past two decades, reaching a GDP per capita of $31,362. At the same time, both countries have fostered entertainment industries worth billions that have projected South Korean and Japanese cultural influence far and wide.  On the people-to-people level, South Korea sends more tourists to Japan than any nation except for China, while South Korea’s tourism industry (worth $71.4 billion) benefits from Japanese tourists, whose numbers are exceeded only by those from China. Finally, Japanese suppliers and South Korea’s tech industry have become increasingly interdependent, with a sizeable chunk (43.9 percent) of South Korea’s hydrogen fluoride—necessary component in electronics—coming from Japanese firms alone this year.  There is room for improvement. For one, even though both boast robust electronics industries and are geographical neighbors, only 4.5 percent of South Korean exports were bound for Japan in 2017. At the same time, only 7.8 percent of Japanese exports were bound for South Korea. Indeed, many of these gaps can be explained by China’s growing economy, which attracts investment from South Korean and Japanese firms. Still, increasing economic integration, such as through a potential South Korea-Japan-China Free Trade Agreement (which has been in the works since 2013, making little progress) could generate nearly $16.3 billion in joint economic benefits in the first decade alone, according to a report by the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy.  Furthermore, both leaders have real reasons to reverse course. In June 2019, Abe stood before world leaders at the G20 summits in Osaka, where he stressed the importance of free trade in a rules-based international system. Such a statement now stands in stark contrast to his government’s confrontation with South Korea, risking the health of Japanese companies and his country’s reputation as a global economic leader. Meanwhile, South Korea’s economy recently contracted for the first time since the global financial crisis, coinciding with double-digit youth unemployment and some of the lowest happiness levels in the world. It would be in South Korea’s interest to seek ways to combat stagnation and spur growth at home, rather than doubling down on a costly trade war with Japan. Given the damage to the economic foundations of the relationship created by both governments’ actions, however, it would be difficult to get back to status quo ante.  CONFRONTING COMMON SECURITY CHALLENGES  The trade dispute between Japan and South Korea also has implications for regional security.  North Korea’s Kim Jong Un appears committed to advancing his military capabilities, eroding the sanctions regime, and weakening the U.S. alliance relationships with South Korea and Japan. The North’s actions in recent months—brazenly conducting multiple missile and weapons tests, showing off a potentially nuclear-capable submarine, hurling invective at Moon and Abe, and refusing to engage in nuclear negotiations with Washington—are obvious and urgent reminders for Seoul and Tokyo get along. Letting the current trade row get in the way of progress on North Korea, which gladly exploits such fissures in regional ties, presents a real security risk to Japan, South Korea, and to the stability of the East Asian region.  Finally, Japan and South Korea shouldn’t lose sight of countering China’s growing influence and aggressiveness in the region. They don’t have to look too far back in history to see examples of Beijing’s willingness to use its clout to punish its neighbors. In 2017, Beijing targeted a range of South Korean industries to punish Seoul’s decision to deploy a U.S. missile defense system; the South’s tourism industry alone suffered a loss of nearly $8 billion. But when Russian and Chinese bombers last month flew over the disputed islets that Tokyo calls Takeshima and Seoul calls Dokdo, Japan and South Korea squabbled over who had the right to issue warnings to the intruders, rather than persuasively countering the provocative move. Seoul’s jettisoning of the intelligence-sharing agreement this week has weakened the security relationship shared by the two countries. Chinese leaders have made it clear that they are willing to use coercion to drive a wedge between Washington and its allies in East Asia—to the detriment of the economic and security environment for Seoul and Tokyo—and it would behoove Moon and Abe to separate problems of the past from the challenges of the present.  The tension surrounding the past is unlikely to go away anytime soon. Additionally, it will be difficult for either country to recover from the trust they lost due to their recent actions. And even if Moon and Abe temporarily reconcile, grievances and underlying tensions undoubtedly will resurface. But to mitigate the impact of these all-too-frequent flare-ups, so easily manipulated by opportunistic politicians, both countries must focus on their shared interests, challenges, and values. They must enable problem-solvers at the local, national, governmental and nongovernmental levels. This would go a long way toward building an infrastructure—and attendant habits—of cooperation. |
| Korea Times | Editorial | Korea Times | July 10, 2019 | South Korea | Let diplomacy work: Korea, Japan should try to restore mutual trust | President Moon Jae-in has called on Japan to lift its export restrictions against South Korea, expressing his willingness to resolve the rising trade standoff diplomatically. But he has also blamed the neighboring country for taking the retaliatory measure to damage the Korean economy for political purposes.  The call was made during a meeting with top executives of Korea's 30 largest business groups which Moon presided over at Cheong Wa Dae, Wednesday, to discuss countermeasures against Japan's moves. The President and the business leaders exchanged ideas on how to minimize the fallout from the export curbs.  Moon assured the executives that the government was doing its best to seek a diplomatic resolution to the trade dispute. It goes without saying that the best way is to find a solution through dialogue. Now we hope Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will respond positively to Moon's call to prevent the situation from worsening.  However, it is regrettable that Tokyo is showing no signs of backpedaling on the economic retaliation. According to media reports, the Japanese government is considering expanding the export restrictions, currently on three materials needed for making semiconductors and display screens, to include other items in a bid to pressure more Korean firms.  Against this backdrop, President Moon did not forget to warn Japan not to head toward a "dead end" with "politically motivated" export restrictions. This warning came after he threaten to take "corresponding measures" if Tokyo ups the ante. Moon also dismissed as groundless Japan's allegations that South Korea violated international sanctions on North Korea by transferring strategic materials such as hydrogen fluoride to the North.  Yet the trade confrontation is likely to drag on for a longer period of time because Japan shows no interest in compromise. That's why President Moon has called for the government and businesses to create an "emergency response system" to cope with the trade impasse with the world's third-largest economy. Moon has also floated the idea of reducing Korea's excessive reliance on Japanese imports by diversifying its supply channels and expanding domestic production of high-tech materials and parts.  But those steps will not work immediately as they will take time. Therefore, the Moon administration should double down on its diplomatic efforts to persuade Japan to retract the export curbs and resolve the problem via dialogue and compromise. For this, the government must restore its diplomacy with Japan which has been weakened since Moon's inauguration.  Most of all, it is important for Seoul and Tokyo to restore mutual trust which has been damaged due to a ruling by the South Korean Supreme Court that Japanese firms should compensate Korean victims of forced labor during Japan's 1910-45 colonial period. It remains to be seen whether the two sides can let diplomacy prevail over a trade war. |
| Sandip Kumar Mishra | Commmentary | Korea Times | August 25, 2019 | August 25, 2019 | Is end of GSOMIA a calculated move by Korea? | South Korea decided to terminate its General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Japan last Thursday. The decision came nearly three years after both countries signed the agreement in 2016 after six years of negotiations.  The accord was about sharing military intelligence, particularly over North Korean nuclear and missile activities. Japan strongly protested South Korea's decision and has urged Seoul to reconsider it.  It's unfortunate that the recent dispute between South Korea and Japan has spilled over from thorny historical issues to the economic and security domains. It has been stated that the move would have negative implications not only for trilateral cooperation of South Korea with Japan and the U.S. on the issues pertaining to regional security relations but also for the U.S.-South Korean alliance.  Seoul tried to calm critics by revealing that the National Security Councils of South Korea and the U.S. talked about the issue nine times by telephone. South Korea claims that the U.S. "understands" its position. However, it's also a fact that the U.S. has openly expressed its "strong concern" and "disappointment" at the South Korean move.  The move is being criticized because South Korea and Japan in the current phase of their disputes have been trying to convince the U.S. that the other party is unreasonable and Japan by citing South Korean action would appear more convincing.  Seoul is also under attack because when Donald Trump is determined to make an American alliance "transactional," the South Korean move might enrage Trump further. In negotiations between the U.S. and South Korea on defense cost-sharing last year, somehow the U.S. officials were able to save the deal by raising Seoul's contribution by a relatively high 8.2 percent for this year. But in upcoming talks, the U.S. might be more stringent and ask the South to make a full cost payment.  The South Korean government is aware of all these possibilities and it might have taken a calculated risk to strengthen its position in the regional security equations through this move.  First and foremost, the move is targeted against Japan's uncompromising measures which are aimed at punishing South Korea economically for historical disputes.  Japan has also been at best non-cooperative and at worst a spoiler in South Korea's dealings with North Korea. Seoul was unhappy with Japan's behavior. South Korea's step is meant to send a strong warning to Japan against its weaponization of trade.  Second, the Moon Jae-in administration has been trying to establish connections with North Korea through its policy of engagement since the very beginning. In the process, South Korea seeks to achieve two important goals ― improvements in inter-Korea relations and the denuclearization of the North.  The task of denuclearization is an issue between the U.S. and North Korea. So, South Korea would like to focus more on the inter-Korean connection. If there is a drift away from the South Korea-Japan relations, it might give impetus to more inter-Korean connection.  In a recent statement, Moon indicated this when he said that Seoul's cooperation with Pyongyang would be able to compensate any loss arising from Japan's export restrictions.  Third and arguably the most important message of South Korea's step to abrogate GSOMIA is to the U.S., which has been avoiding taking a reasonable stand and mediating in the dispute between its two Asian allies.  South Korea is also dissatisfied that the U.S. has been largely silent or even supportive of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's move to change the postwar peace constitution to make Japan a "normal" country that can wage wars with other nations.  It can be inferred that South Korea would like to draw American attention to Japan's apparent economic retaliation by withdrawing from GSOMIA.  The argument that the U.S.-South Korea alliance would weaken appears to neglect the fact that already, there has been an erosion of trust between the two countries. U.S. President Donald Trump appears to have no regard for mutuality of the U.S.-South Korea alliance by asking for bigger defense cost-sharing from South Korea every year.  During a recent visit to Seoul by U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton, the U.S. reportedly requested South Korea to pay $5 billion for the stationing of American troops in the South. Seoul's move out of GSOMIA might send a clear message to the U.S. that even though quite remote, opting out of an agreement is also an option.  When, the U.S. has been involved in a prolonged contest with China, such a message might lead Trump to rethink about his unilateral quest for monetary benefits at the cost of trusted allies and alliances.  Overall, South Korea's move appears to be calculated to send some signals to Japan and North Korea as well. However, the move should be cautiously made and should be open to modification.  The move is not to wreck the boat but to shake it a bit to get all the passengers to realize their common destiny. There is a possibility that if good sense prevails, a compromise or alternate mechanism of cooperation might be articulated soon between South Korea and Japan with the overt or covert mediation of the U.S. |
| Oh Young-jin | Opinion | Korea Times | August 23, 2019 | South Korea | GSOMIA decision: Moon Jae-in's nuclear option | Not long after President Roh Moo-hyun took office in 2003, he gathered presidential aides and discussed how to lead and govern the nation.  There was near-consensus against Roh's visit to the United States, espoused by former activists among the Roh aides who saw the U.S. as a supporter of the previous dictatorships they fought against. They were the so-called "386 generation" ― born in the 1960s, attending college in the 1980s and aged in their 30s. They belonged to the age when Korea was getting wealthy and starting to assert its national identity.  Their objection to Roh's U.S. visit was based on their wish to break the tradition of a newly elected president visiting Washington as his first overseas destination to gain America's recognition. But a few experienced hands who insisted on the importance of the ROK-U.S. alliance torpedoed their effort.  Ironically, those young cadres of Roh and the president himself were still cautious about going into the uncharted realm beyond the alliance's boundaries. In May, Roh made his first visit to the U.S. and met President George W. Bush. It set a pattern for Roh to protect the alliance by even alienating his support base in pushing for a free trade agreement with the U.S. and sending troops to the Middle East, as requested.  Fast-track to the incumbent President Moon Jae-in. Roh was his mentor and he served him in the presidential office. Now Moon is in the spotlight for his unexpected decision Thursday to scrap the country's three-year-old pact with Japan ― the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).  Cheong Wa Dae's decision was a surprise as it came despite the U.S.'s open objections. The pact was established at U.S. urging to strengthen the trilateral alliance against North Korea's nuclear and long-range missile activities and, more importantly, to keep China at bay.  A presidential aide said Japan snubbed Moon's proposal for dialogue during the recent anniversary of the Aug. 15 day of liberation from Japan's 36-year colonial rule. Earlier, Japan slapped export restrictions on key items for semiconductor production and dropped Korea from the list of preferential trading partners in retaliation for the Supreme Court's November ruling to allow Korea's former forced laborers to seek compensation from big Japanese firms that participated in its war effort.  Japan claims that all bills for Japan's occupation of Korea were settled by the payment of hundreds of millions of dollars in grants and restitution in the 1965 Basic Treaty. Korea believes Japan should remain perpetually in debt and argues that the treaty doesn't address some of its activities, such as conscription of young girls as sex slaves, or "comfort women," for Japanese Army brothels.  Scrapping the GSOMIA will not have a big effect militarily because it served as a bridge of low-level intelligence and most intelligence needs can be satisfied by the U.S. But symbolically, it is nothing short of a "nuclear option" as it defied Washington's wish at a critical moment when the U.S. is facing a growing challenge from China in their power struggle. How it will affect the alliance is something that is worth another column. Perhaps more important is why the Moon administration made the decision.  It is the combination of four factors ― remorse and reflection, on one hand, and confidence and determination on the other. The first set dates from the Roh era on which those of the 386 generation look back, thinking of their mistake in not being more forceful with their agenda, domestic and diplomatic. In the following 10 years, they reflected on that era, promising themselves never to let go another chance to implement that agenda.  The second set of factors is from the toppling of the Park Geun-hye administration through mass candlelight protests, on which Moon rode to his presidency. In the process, the administration's conservative opposition has been reduced to a mere shadow of its former self. Even at the worst time for Moon, marred by a hostile North Korea and scandals engulfing his top aides, such as justice minister nominee Cho Kuk, few would think of the Liberty Korea Party, the main opposition, and Bareun Party, the conservative opposition, as alternatives to Moon's ruling Democratic Party of Korea.  A look at the participants in the National Security Office meeting presided over by Chung Eui-yong, Moon's top security aide, does not reveal these elements in play before the GSOMIA decision. But the movers and shakers that led the move were hidden in plain sight, as it was more the action of working-level presidential aides and others outside Cheong Wa Dae that have inherited Roh's zeitgeist.  Some argue openly ― and more wonder ― whether the GSOMIA decision is aimed at diverting public attention from the scandal involving the justice minister-to-be regarding a mushrooming body of allegations of unethical, if not illegal, activities involving his daughter, himself and other family members. The revelations are shocking, dumb-founding and despicable to the point that his nomination deserves an immediate withdrawal.  But speculation appears quite plausible that Moon ditched the military pact to save his apostle, whom he depends on solely to achieve one of his key presidential agenda items ― reforming the prosecutors, an influential group notorious for colluding with power at a given time and thereby hindering the development of the nation's democracy.  However, it is speculation that lacks evidence so can't be substantiated. A more correct way of looking at it is that the Moon administration decided on the GSOMIA termination because it judged it to be the best and right decision in the given situation.  They decided to kill the pact, the decision-makers knowing that any deviation on Cho's nomination meant a potentially irreparable setback to the administration's governance itself for the rest of its term. In other words, like any presidential decision on a key issue, killing GSOMIA is open to a lot of different interpretations but with few provable.  And the truth is up for grabs, depending on the outcome of the duel between the administration's supporters and detractors. If the Cho Kuk saga is put back on the main public agenda and his candidacy nixed, the detractors can claim that the GSOMIA scrapping was for public diversion and they stopped it. If Cho becomes justice minister, supporters may claim that killing the pact and Cho were two separate issues. So it is very much the victor's point of view that will prevail until it is debunked.  By this time next week, I am not sure whether these issues will remain controversial given the public's short attention span. But Moon has many more battles to fight and wars to wage in his campaign to clean up past ills and enable the nation to make a fresh start. Who's next? |
| Stephen Costello | Opinion | Korea Times | August 14, 2019 | South Korea | Downgrading Korea-Japan cooperation is not winning strategy | WASHINGTON ― President Moon Jae-in suggested Aug. 5 that South Korean economic growth based on expanded North-South development could help overcome new trade restrictions by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.  Predictably, this statement has been met with ridicule, derision and alarm by many commentators. If Moon's timing and his specific point about Japan seem impractical or naive, his frustration and his long-term strategic points are easier to understand.  The Abe administration's public reasoning for announcing the new restrictions ― that it relates to distrust of South Korea's exports of sensitive materials to North Korea ― is difficult to believe.  As multiple experts have pointed out, Abe's move is more likely political. It is generally understood to be a reaction to South Korean court rulings and Cheong Wa Dae actions asserting Japan's liability for wartime forced labor from South Koreans.  Since Abe was elected prime minister, technical arrangements for settling the sex slavery and forced labor issues with Korea have been inextricably tied up with, and inseparable from, his political and ideological drive to deny or minimize Japan's responsibility for its actions in the 1930s and 1940s. His supporters' bullying and attacking journalists, academics and artists in support of that denial has regularly made news during his term.  At the same time, the two agreements Abe refers to as settling the issue were signed by Park Chung-hee in 1965 and his daughter Park Geun-hye in 2015. The former Park led a dictatorial regime, and the later Park was impeached and is now in jail.  Koreans have worked hard to drag their democracy into the 21st century, and many see the trade-offs that were part of both agreements as lacking legitimacy. In this climate, cool heads and respect for both historical realities and current and future potentials are needed in Tokyo and Seoul.  For President Moon, pressure has been mounting from his U.S. ally over North Korea policy and costs for military basing, from his North Korean neighbors over sanctions, missiles and military exercises, from his Chinese neighbors over the THAAD antimissile system and airspace violations.  Now conflicts with Japan have become urgent at the same time they are highly symbolic. On Aug. 15 Moon will deliver a much-anticipated speech commemorating Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule. He has reasons to be frustrated.  It is also important to remember Moon's often-stated longer-term strategic goals. Along with two previous progressive presidents, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, Moon has long understood that the goal of parallel North Korean denuclearization and North-South economic cooperation is a larger and stronger peninsular economy. This is just as important as the political and security advantages that would accrue from durable agreements.  Moreover, the two Koreas are in a position to leverage their cooperation to the great advantage of China and Russia, through the linking of rail, road, communications and energy channels up the east and west coasts. Those links seem more possible now than ever, since the Moon-Kim Jong-un meeting 16 months ago and the many subsequent North-South meetings and agreements.  Less-discussed but just as economically logical is the Korea-Japan bridge/tunnel that has been studied by groups in the Japanese Diet and the Korean National Assembly for the past 30 years. Feasibility studies and engineering advances make the project highly practical today.  Political will remains the major impediment for both governments. When this project gets started, it will instantly multiply the value of all work on the East and West coast links, since having land access to the world's third-largest economy will greatly impact the two Koreas, China and Russia.  Obviously, downgrading economic cooperation between Korea and Japan is not a winning strategy in view of the common investments both will need to make in coming years.  It would be a mistake to confuse Prime Minister Abe with the Japanese state, or to assume the public supports him in his view of history. Indications are that he is not. While administrations must deal with their counterparts, a degree of sophistication in Korea's approach to Japan is absolutely necessary.  Professor David Leheny of Waseda University wrote in the Los Angeles Times recently that Japanese nostalgia is for economic growth and technological leadership, not wartime conquests. Particularly in view of the U.S. backing away from its alliance responsibilities, Japan is destined to be a closer security partner with Korea in coming years.  Many commentators will now write about South Korea's slide into the arms of the Chinese and the North Koreans, without appreciating Seoul's democratic and soft power strength. And they may also write about Japan's destiny as the lone U.S. military bastion in an imagined standoff with India against the communists.  As foolish as some of these speculations are, the behavior of U.S. President Donald Trump, his secretaries and others has encouraged them through incoherent and counterproductive policies and statements.  But like Prime Minister Abe, Trump's policies are not popular, and he is not the U.S. system. He will be gone soon enough. Both the Korea-U.S. alliance and the Korea-Japan relationship are based on fundamental common interests that will not change in the foreseeable future.  It would be best if President Moon can publicly and forcefully put a stop to spiraling anti-Japan sentiments and boycotts, even if the political retaliation from the Abe administration is painful. His instinct to ground all Korean actions in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and international authority is the right one. Bilateral diplomacy should commence quickly, and a solution to funding reparations to individuals should be found.  In terms of leading the next steps forward, Korea may feel rather lonely, considering the realities in other capitals right now. But that is not entirely a bad thing. Initiatives that address one crisis can reinforce those that address another. It may be that Korea is both well-placed and well-equipped to point the way forward. |
| Eleven media | Editorial | Eleven media | NOVEMBER 25, 2019 | Myanmar | Step forward | South Korea’s decision last week to suspend the planned termination of a military information-sharing accord with Japan has provided room for negotiations to settle a longstanding bilateral feud that has spread from history to the trade and security spheres.  In an announcement made just six hours before the pact was due to expire at midnight Friday, Seoul said it would put off the effectuation of its earlier notice of termination, as long as discussions are held on withdrawing Japan’s export curbs against Korea. Seoul also decided to temporarily halt the process of its World Trade Organization petition against Tokyo’s export restrictions.  In response, Tokyo agreed to resume working-level talks with Seoul on the export controls it imposed in July in apparent reprisal for a ruling by the top court here ordering Japanese firms to compensate Koreans forced to work for them during Japan’s 1910-45 colonial rule of the peninsula. Tokyo has argued all reparation issues with Korea were settled by a 1965 accord that normalized bilateral ties.  Seoul stressed the temporary nature of its suspension of its notice of termination, saying that notice could be “reactivated” anytime.  But its move marked a clear retreat from its previous stance that it would terminate the General Security of Military Information Agreement unless Japan reversed the export curbs as well as its subsequent action of dropping Korea from its whitelist of preferred trading partners.  It is not guaranteed that Tokyo will agree to retract those restrictions at the upcoming talks, even if the forced labor issue remains unsettled.  Seoul seems to have been compelled to step back as a result of unprecedented pressure from the US to retain the accord with Tokyo.  US officials have made it clear that the termination of GSOMIA would undermine its security interests in the region. Washington regards the accord signed in 2016 under its auspices as a crucial tool of trilateral security cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo. The three-way security collaboration carries further strategic importance for US President Donald Trump’s administration as a key component of its Indo-Pacific strategy, designed to contain China’s rising power in the region.  The possible fallout from the decision to terminate the accord with Tokyo would have been too much for Seoul to withstand. It would have further toughened the stance of the Trump administration, which has already increased pressure on Korea on multiple fronts, including defense cost-sharing and trade.  It was unreasonable and unjustifiable for Tokyo to impose trade restrictions over historical wrangling.  In responding to Tokyo’s economic retaliation, however, Seoul made a mistake by putting a sensitive security matter at stake. President Moon Jae-in and his aides may have hoped that their decision not to extend the pact with Tokyo would prompt Washington to step in to help resolve the dispute between its key Asian allies. But the Trump administration has stayed largely out of the fray between Seoul and Tokyo, while having pressed Korea to retain the accord.  Given Washington’s stern stance, it would be difficult for Seoul to move again to terminate the accord even if Tokyo drags its feet on withdrawing its export curbs.  What is needed to put bilateral ties back on track is to fundamentally settle the forced labor issue.  Japan rejected a proposal by Korea in June to establish a joint compensation fund with contributions from companies in both countries. During his visit to Tokyo early this month, Korea’s parliamentary speaker, Moon Hee-sang, suggested that ordinary citizens in the two nations be invited to contribute to the envisioned fund. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe gave neither a positive response nor a negative one when a Japanese lawmaker conveyed the idea to him. This raises cautious hopes of a breakthrough.  If necessary, the Seoul government may need to consider playing a role in launching the proposed fund.  Foreign ministers from Korea and Japan agreed Saturday to coordinate efforts to set up a summit between Moon and Abe on the margins of their planned trilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Chengdu, China, late next month.  Progress in discussions on the forced labor issue would enable the first Moon-Abe summit in more than a year. Even without progress, the two leaders need to be active about sitting down with each other to create impetus for the restoration of cooperative ties between their countries.  When announcing its decision to put off the GSOMIA expiry, Seoul affirmed its two-track approach of seeking to bolster a forward-looking partnership while dealing separately with issues concerning history. It should do so, and learn a lesson from its miscalculated judgment. |
| Gwynne Dyer | Opinion | Korea Times | August 13, 2019 | South Korea | Korea and Japan: history wars | Nation-states, like four-year-olds, find it very hard to admit they are in the wrong and apologize. Adult intervention often helps, but all Japan and South Korea have is U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (who tried and failed to mediate early this month in Bangkok). So the trade war between the two grows and festers.  There are obvious similarities with the trade war that Donald Trump is waging against China, with Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe playing the Trump role: blustering bully with no clear game plan. Like the Trump trade war, too, the Japan-South Korea confrontation threatens to destabilize both East Asian security arrangements and the global market.  Yet the confrontation between Tokyo and Seoul is not really about trade at all. It's about the difficult history of relations between an ex-imperial power, Japan, and its former colony, Korea.  Japan is existentially in the wrong in this relationship, because it colonized Korea in 1910 and ruled it, sometimes with great brutality, until it was defeated in World War II in 1945. But Tokyo doesn't like to be reminded of all that, and claims that it discharged whatever moral debt it owed when it paid $500 million to Seoul in 1965.  Koreans take a different view, of course, but the truth is that the victims of Japan's wartime behavior were sold out by their own government. $500 million was a lot of money, more than the South Korean government's entire annual budget. The newly installed military-led regime in South Korea needed the money and accepted Japan's terms.  Almost all the money went to building up South Korea's new export industries. Japan offered to pay compensation directly to Korean individuals who had suffered forced labor and other injustices during WWII, but Seoul preferred to take a lump sum (and spend almost all the money on development). Many of the victims got little or nothing.  The resentment this caused was easily diverted onto Japan, which had driven a hard bargain and failed to accompany the compensation with an apology. Anti-Japanese hostility occasionally boiled over in notorious cases like the "comfort women" (young Korean women who had been abducted to serve as sexual slaves for the Japanese army), but it is always bubbling away underneath.  Fast forward to last October, when South Korea's Supreme Court ruled that the lump-sum, government-to-government deal of 1965 did not cover damages for the mental anguish of individual wartime laborers. Subsequent rulings have authorized South Korean individuals to claim compensation from the Japanese industries that used their labor by forced legal sales of those companies' assets in South Korea  South Korean President Moon Jae-in did not seek this ruling from the Supreme Court, which is entirely independent. The court was clearly stretching the law almost to breaking point, but in practical political terms he could not disown it.  Japan, on the other hand, was horrified by the ruling. Accepting it would open the door to huge claims for compensation from people who had suffered "mental anguish" from the Japanese occupation in all the other countries Japan invaded between 1937 and 1945. It also felt betrayed: Half a century ago it had paid out a lot of money to extinguish any further claims like these.  There has never been much love lost between Japanese and Koreans, but the two countries have almost always managed to keep important issues like trade and national security separate from the emotional flare-ups that make the relationship so fraught. Last month, however, Prime Minister Abe completely lost the plot. He began imposing restrictions on Japanese exports to South Korea.  They are relatively minor restrictions. Three classes of chemicals essential to making semiconductors that South Korea buys from Japan now require export licenses. A minor bureaucratic hurdle, unless Japan stops approving the licenses (which it has not done).  More recently Japan has removed South Korea from its "whitelist" of countries that are allowed to buy goods that can be diverted for military use with minimal restrictions. Again, no big deal. Just another little hurdle to cross, meant to rebuke and annoy South Korea, not to cause serious injury.  But it has been very successful in annoying South Koreans, who have spontaneously organized a quite effective boycott of Japanese-made goods.  And petty though its origins may be, this confrontation is now raising the prospect that these long established trading partners, both closely allied to the United States and both anxious about China's rise and the threat of North Korea, are going to have a real trade war. Which, with help from the bigger trade war Donald Trump started with China, may be enough to tip the world economy into a deep recession. |
| Amanda Price | Opinion | Korea Times | August 10, 2019 | South Korea | Abe, Moon and the ancient wisdom of bamboo | Two weeks ago, I wrote about the feud between South Korea and Japan and the impact that it would have on a generation of young people born into peace and alliances.  While I expected the feud would continue for some time, I did not expect it would escalate to its present level.  The melee is now threatening to become the most dangerous clash between Korea and Japan since the end of World War II.  Some see this as the culmination of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's dogged refusal to fully acknowledge Japan's criminal past and his unwillingness to compensate those who suffered as a result.  Others see this as an overreaction by President Moon Jae-in who, in comparison to his treatment of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, has been strangely quick to paint Abe as an arch villain set on destroying the ROK.  For the citizens of Japan and South Korea, regardless of what position they hold, the middle ground is shrinking.  Though politicians on either side would not admit it, their attitudes have leached their way into the hearts of everyday citizens who are under tacit orders to choose sides. Anger has received state sanctioning.  There will be no winners in this war. Innocent people and businesses just hoping to make an honest living will be hurt while politicians fight for values and votes.  If this war is ended through the intervention of a greater global power, in the eyes of the world that power will be given the credit, and Japan and South Korea, both young democracies, will look even younger.  If it is remotely possible for a winner to be identified, it is without doubt the serial human rights abuser and murderer, the dictator demi-god Kim Jong-un.  If Kim acknowledged such a thing as Christmas, the feud between South Korea and Japan would be like all of his Christmases come at once.  'The bamboo that bends is stronger than the Oak that resists' an ancient proverb that Prime Minister Abe and President Moon may not be familiar with. Unsplash  "The bamboo that bends is stronger than the oak that resists" ― an ancient proverb that Prime Minister Abe and President Moon may not be familiar with. Unsplash  But this bizarre notion is not the only irrational thing to emerge from this feud.  Moon's unbridled indignation has now led him to the dictator's door, asking for an economic harmony that will wipe away Japan's smug superiority in "one burst."  The fact that Kim is the leader of the world's most repressed nation, where death camps, persecution of dissidents and minority groups are everyday events, does not seem to matter.  That Kim, at regular intervals, threatens South Korea's national security, or that he publicly condemns and ridicules Moon appears immaterial.  Moon has invited the bloodthirsty dictator of an anti-Western rogue regime to be his partner against injustice. Despite the bromance, Kim continues to launch missiles, with the explicit message that his regime is ready at any moment to go to war.  By contrast, Abe is not a threat to anyone's national security. His administration does not run death camps, does not execute people at will, nor do they shoot their own citizens as they cross the border.  Nonetheless, for Abe, whose approval rating in South Korea is lower than that of the Northern dictator, there is nothing but scorn, derision and abject contempt.  For the homicidal Kim there are welcome mats, children with flowers and unconcealed affection.  'The bamboo that bends is stronger than the Oak that resists' an ancient proverb that Prime Minister Abe and President Moon may not be familiar with. Unsplash  Though few politicians would admit it, anti-Japanese and anti-Korean sentiment has been both fanned and upheld by both governments. Korea Times file  And, somehow, that is all meant to make sense.  You see, no matter which way you turn your head, there is something very wrong with a free and democratic nation looking to a repressed and tyrannical regime to help it fight a trade war with another free and democratic nation.  But while watching all this unfold, and realizing the ensuing damage, Abe decides that keeping face is more important than acknowledging the reality of Japan's past and its far-reaching consequences.  Abe and his administration are blowing smoke in South Korea's face and doing it deliberately.  Abe is mistaken to regard his resolute stand as resilience and fortitude. He is not representing Japanese culture, but an era that should no longer exist. If Abe was acting according to culture, then we would remember the ancient Japanese wisdom that, "the bamboo that bends is stronger than the oak that resists."  And so, two highly intelligent leaders, with records proving their aptitude and ability in the political arena, are incapable of arriving at solutions that are staring everyone else in the face.  Abe will not budge, forcing his citizens to be stuck in a mire that is made to define them, and Moon will not slow down, pushing his citizens toward a cliff that leads nowhere.  The behavior of the Japanese government and the reactions of the Moon administration fly in the face of reason. For apart from the enmity that is rising like magma through every new crack in society, both leaders have forgotten that their most immediate attention is needed at home.  As elected democratic leaders, Abe and Moon's first priority is to represent and serve their own people, including the everyday citizens who do not have the time to unravel the subtext of these political games.  While all the attention is on the battle fronts of trade wars, South Korean and Japanese citizens struggle with real-life concerns.  'The bamboo that bends is stronger than the Oak that resists' an ancient proverb that Prime Minister Abe and President Moon may not be familiar with. Unsplash  In a 2016 poll, Kim Jong-un, the dictator of a brutally repressive regime, came out with a higher approval rating in South Korea than Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, a democratic leader of the free world. Korea Times file  Included in the commonalities between Japan and South Korea are urgent social issues occurring in their own backyards.  Each nation is being shaken by a generation of young adults who are becoming increasingly disinterested in their nation's culture, and even in its continuation.  Citizens of both nations are struggling with major downturns in the economy, class discrimination and disparity in the workforce.  The breakdown of the family unit, discrimination against women and single mothers, high levels of depression among the younger generation, a culture of enforced work addiction that is literally killing people, and a massive increase in dementia sufferers, coupled with an equal decrease in carers, are just a few of the issues that Japan and South Korea share.  Further to these, in a survey by Seoul University, Japan and South Korea received rankings of first and second among OECD countries as nations with the highest occurrence of inequality and unfaithfulness between husbands and wives.  When families are in crisis but trade and historical grievances are more important, it is time for a reality check.  History has a place, but it should not displace people.  But if world history was laid out before both leaders, then Japan and South Korea would realize that they are not the only two nations who have a dark history.  They would also realize that darkness is not exclusive to one nation.  A quick glance at history would remind them that, at different times, both nations have done terrible things.  'The bamboo that bends is stronger than the Oak that resists' an ancient proverb that Prime Minister Abe and President Moon may not be familiar with. Unsplash  A South Korean official hinted that South Korea may review its military information-sharing agreement (GSOMIA) with Japan. Withholding vital military information has the potential to put innocent Japanese men, women and children at risk. Publicizing that "hint" so Japan's enemy, North Korea, knows about it puts them further at risk. Yet this endangerment is called "trade retaliation."  While the Japanese government must realize that pain has no time limits, the South Korean government must accept the same truth.  The victims of Japan's colonial occupation are not the only victims waiting for compensation.  Less than 35 years ago, thousands of South Koreans were tortured, raped and brutalized under the South Korean state-sponsored program called "Brothers Home" in Busan. In the decades preceding, South Koreans participated in numerous brutal massacres against their own countrymen.  What we learn from this is that absolutely no one has a monopoly on evil, not in the past, not in the present, nor in the future. We also learn that we cannot be selective about which evil we revile and which evil we ignore.  Abe and Moon, however, both have the power to end this current evil, and in doing so demonstrate that someone else's wrongdoings do not define who we are.  Neither leader stands blameless. Both leaders are deflecting attention from issues that are more pressing, and both leaders are hoping no one will notice.  There is still reason to hope that Abe and Moon will bring this feud to an end.  If only they remember the ancient wisdom of bamboo. |
| Oh Young-jin | Opinion | Korea Times | August 9, 2019 | South Korea | We Koreans are emotional and rational | Amid heightened tension after Japan's retaliatory trade sanctions against Korea, I met some foreigners who observed that Koreans are "emotional" compared with Japan's reputed exterior calmness and purposefulness.  Even some domestic media outlets editorialized a cautionary tale against an "emotional" approach to Japan.  The foreigners' definition of emotional likely indicates that Koreans are irrational and unrestrained, while the Koreans' definition means something opposed to measured and deliberate.  Are Koreans emotional? True. Are they irrational? No. Let's rationally analyze the irrational epithet further.  Emotional with rational reasons  The current Korea-Japan trade row was triggered by Japan's export restrictions that hinder Korea's bread-and-butter industries such as semiconductor production. Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Korea was untrustworthy so didn't deserve the privilege of being exempt from case-by-case approval on key export items.  The virtual embargo followed the Supreme Court's decision that enabled Korean forced laborers to seek compensation from Japanese firms that withheld their proper wages during Japan's Second World War effort. Abe said the issue of compensation was covered by the 1965 Basic Treaty.  Abe, the descendant of a Class-A war criminal recognized by the Allied tribunal, has repeatedly said Japan does not need to apologize to Korea anymore and it is time to move on.  Millions of Koreans lived under Japan's rule of terror, with their identity denied. Many who were mobilized for Japan's war effort as soldiers and workers were killed, maimed or otherwise did not return home.  Koreans even had their spoons and chopsticks taken away to make guns and bullets as part of Japan's war effort. And women and girls were kidnapped to serve as sex slaves for Japanese Imperial Army soldiers.  Abe is acting as if Korea should keep quiet because he wrote a check he think enough to cover the damage. Besides, where does the 1965 treaty give total immunity to Japan as claimed by Abe for what misdeeds it committed against Korea? The Korean judiciary's ruling highlighted these remaining issues but Abe took retaliatory action in violation of the very basic tenet of free trade.  So we are emotional in a sense that we won't forget what Japan did to us and will keep reminding Japan of being a perpetrator of crimes against humanity.  Perhaps some Western sympathizers find it easy to accept Abe's denial of history because their countries shared the same past as a colonial power. Other colonial victim countries then may take the Korean example and get emotional about their past to see if anything is amiss in their settlements.  Coping mechanism  Koreans are seen crying, yelling, red-faced and in other emotional states. For instance, South-North family reunions are where "floods of tears" are shed by family members who have been separated for decades since the 1950-53 Korean War. It is no wonder, because often these intermittent gatherings are the last chance to see relatives.  The two Koreas have been in a technical state of war since the 1953 armistice, with millions of soldiers pointing their guns at each other. Making matters worse, the North has become a nuclear weapons state, which adds to safety concerns.  The Korean Peninsula has been a constant flashpoint where big-power interests clash. At the turn of the 20th century, the Joseon Kingdom was absorbed by Japan after it beat the Qing Dynasty and the Russian Empire and cut a deal with the U.S. Now, a repeat of it is taking place with different twists and turns.  So Koreans have not just suffered from occasional traumatic experiences, rather, their entire modern existence is one of an unending trauma. This gives rise to their quick emotional outbursts as a kind of coping mechanism.  Candlelight revolution  Korea's 2016 candlelight vigil would be hard to repeat in other countries. First, it involved millions of people protesting for many weeks without much violence. Second, it achieved a peaceful revolution to force a corrupt leader to step down.  But it has history. Korea's candlelight vigils started when two girls were crushed to death by U.S. armored vehicles, moving to protests against the impeachment of the late President Roh Moo-hyun and cresting with people protesting President Lee Myung-bak's decision to resume the import of U.S. beef despite health concerns. Then came the 2016 vigil that caused Park Geun-hye's dethroning.  These candlelight vigils represent the confluence of national emotion that interestingly played a key role in determining the direction of Korea's democracy and making it mature ― an example of mature emotion or emotional maturity.  2002 World Cup  Tens of thousands of Koreans, together with many foreign visitors, enjoyed and celebrated the World Cup Korea hosted with Japan. This paved the way for large-scale street festivals that were dubbed a "sea of reds" because of the jerseys the self-styled "Red Devil" Korean football supporters wore in a scene that has rarely been seen in other parts of the world.  It showed the potential and strength of Koreans when they are emotionally connected. This connection is being displayed and is likely to strengthen the unity of the nation if the Korea-Japan trade row escalates. So next time when you ― both Koreans and foreigners ― call Koreans emotional, please do so while bearing in mind that we have some reasons to be so and for us, it is not really a bad or negative thing. |
| Na Jeong-ju | Opinion | Korea Times | August 8, 2019 | South Korea | GSOMIA for US | There were interesting remarks from two senior aides to President Moon Jae-in during their meeting with Korean lawmakers, Tuesday, about whether the nation should pull out of a bilateral military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan.  The subject did not draw much media attention on the day, overshadowed by the U.S. decision to designate China as a currency manipulator and another North Korean missile test. But some views expressed by the two aides ― National Security Office (NSO) chief Chung Eui-yong and Moon's Chief of Staff Noh Young-min ― were quite sensitive. This was all the more so because they are the most trusted policy advisers for Moon and can exert influence in forming the country's security and defense policies.  To understand what they said, we need to know the context first.  Seoul is now considering discarding the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), signed in 2016 at the request of the United States, as an option in the ongoing trade war Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Japan began.  Japan unilaterally restricted exports of key industrial materials to South Korea in apparent retaliation against the South Korean top court's ruling last October that ordered Japanese firms to pay compensation to South Korean victims of forced labor during World War II. Tokyo has denied the connection between the economic measures and the court's ruling. Seoul filed a petition with the World Trade Organization over the Japanese measure.  Japanese officials first cited the South's possible diversion of the imported strategic materials to provide them to North Korea as the key reason for its export restriction. Later they changed their words, vaguely saying exports of strategic materials to South Korea can be a possible security risk to Japan, without providing any concrete evidence. However, Tokyo maintained Seoul should not abandon the military pact because it is crucial for bilateral security cooperation.  In Tuesday's meeting with lawmakers, NSO chief Chung, speaking about the effects of Japan's economic retaliation, pointed out Japan's contradictory stance on the trade measures and the GSOMIA.  "Japan is strengthening the export control system against South Korea citing a security problem, but at the same time, however, wants us to keep the GSOMIA for security cooperation," Chung said. "They are making cases that are contradictory to each other."  He suggested South Korea may discard the pact, saying there should be a careful review of whether keeping the military pact is useful for the country in the context of the "present" relations with Japan.  Chief of Staff Noh said he has strong doubts about whether it is right to continue sharing military intelligence with Japan, which doesn't regard South Korea as a security partner.  "We must make a decision at some point," Noh said. "This is a matter in which we should consider many things. Ultimately, we will have to make a decision based on the best interests of our nation."  Actually, South Korea's biggest concern in this matter is not Japan, but the United States. Washington showed efforts to mediate in the trade dispute between Seoul and Tokyo, but did virtually nothing to stop Japan. It has stayed neutral about Japan's export restrictions, but expressed concerns about South Korea's warning that it can pull out of the GSOMIA.  The ostensible purpose of the pact is to boost security cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo through Washington to jointly counter threats from North Korea. It was signed in 2016 at the height of the North Korean missile and nuclear threats. But it should rather be understood as a part of a broader U.S. security strategy aimed at China and Russia.  In this sense, the GSOMIA and the deployment of the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile system in South Korea are not separate things. Furthermore, the U.S. is attempting to deploy its mid-range missiles in the region, possibly in South Korea or Japan, after withdrawing from a bilateral anti-missile treaty with Russia last week.  If South Korea discards the GSOMIA, it will seriously hurt U.S. strategic interests in the region. In a way, that would be a decision that could determine the future of this country.  But allies cannot share strategic interests in all problems. As Noh noted, Moon and Cheong Wa Dae will have to act in the best interests of our nation, not the U.S., and make a wise decision. |
| Choi Sung-jin | Opinion | Korea Times | August 7, 2019 | South Korea | Second - and real – independence | Last Friday, the Kakao Talk group chat of my elementary school friends got quite rowdy. It was right after Japan announced the removal of South Korea from the "whitelist" of countries that receive preferential treatment in trade.  I hope my friends will forgive my transcription of part of their conversations on this page without seeking their consent.  Friend A: Japan finally disclosed its real intention to reconquer Korea! The only way to beat Japan is to solve all our problems independently without relying on them. This is time for all Koreans to unite. President Moon Jae-in's strong pushback relieved my grudge somewhat.  Friend B: Japan is wrong, of course. However, the Moon administration is also to blame for messing this up by doing nothing about the Supreme Court's ruling on Japanese companies compensating surviving South Korean victims of wartime forced labor. I am a political conservative and dislike leftist President Moon and his foreign policy, particularly his betting all on pleasing North Korea and creating unnecessary troubles with Japan.  Friend C: How can anyone speak in favor of Japan and its lousy leader Abe while criticizing our President when we have entered into war with the unrepentant aggressor? If you keep defending Japan, I am leaving this group chat.  Friend D: As the manager of our club, I propose not to post political opinions through here so as not to break our friendship.  Similar clashes and efforts to reconcile them were made in the chat rooms of my high school classmates and college buddies, too. I guess the situation might largely be the same as other alumni associations.  All this shows how issues involving Japan divide Koreans, even among Best Friends Forever (BFFs). I did not take part in their talks in part because of my slow texting tempo on mobile devices and because taking one side would change little while only hurting the feelings of friends on the other side. After all, people in their 60s will not, or cannot, alter their views or likings by listening to others, however close they may be personally.  Nevertheless, this is an issue no grown-up Koreans can avoid, be they ranking officials or college students. President Moon appears set to use the ongoing conflict with Japan as an opportunity for Korea to get rid of undue Japanese influence and stand on its own. "We will never again lose to Japan," Moon said, calling for "second independence."  One might take issue with whether it is strategically wise for Moon himself to spearhead what could appear to be emotional warfare. Moon's repeated vows to overcome Japan made a sharp contrast to the calculated silence of his Japanese counterpart, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Not a few Koreans were also stunned and angered by Japan's vice foreign minister who publicly criticized the Korean President, in a glaring example of diplomatic discourtesy.  In a similar vein, Cho Kuk, former senior presidential secretary for civil affairs, came under fire for allegedly inciting anti-Japan sentiment and denouncing the critics of the government's hawkish policy toward Japan and lumping them together with pro-Japanese collaborators. Cho, Moon's apparent pick for next justice minister, he is stepping up his anti-Japan campaign on his social media accounts.  Strategy and tactics aside, however, President Moon and his legal aides are doing what any Koreans should do. It has long become apparent what Abe and Japan's ultra-rightists have in mind ― to restore Japan's past glory and keep Korea as its secondary partner forever.  Of course, Koreans should not become emotional but remain level-headed in working out long-term strategies and specific action plans to win the all-out economic and diplomatic war against Japan. Maintaining a calm and reasonable stance and sitting on the fence are two different things, however.  As the diplomatic adage goes, politics should stop at the border. Faced with external threats, the whole nation needs to unite as one, transcending their political differences. As I see some right-wing politicians and journalists go, however, I can't help but wonder whether I am in Korea or Japan now.  Some ultra-right groups here are out of the question. These extreme rightists hate what they see as the leftist ― slightly left of center, more correctly ― President and his administration so much that nothings matter for them if only they can make the incumbent government collapse. These are the people who will welcome the return of Japanese troops to the Korean Peninsula in the case of military conflicts here.  No less dangerous, even riskier for their logical sophistry, are moderate critics who call for compromise with Japan ― or virtual surrender to the latter ― by accepting Tokyo's demands. These self-styled intellectuals think they know Japan well, have a good command of the economy and are familiar with international politics.  They claim indignation solves nothing, urging people to accept reality as it is. Commenting on the government's plan to localize essential industrial parts, materials and equipment, these skeptics say ambition without ability ends up as a costly fiasco. They advise survival instead of self-esteem.  It was these groups of slavish defeatists who argued more than 100 years ago that an international laggard like Korea must instead be annexed by advanced Japan to modernize itself quickly. However, Korea cannot go along with a Japan ruled by extreme Japan-first ideologues like Abe, who would not even admit the coercive nature of sex slavery and forced labor and want to return to their imperial days and casting away the universal values of democracy and human rights.  Unity should come ahead of methodology in coping with a resurgent Japan. If there were no self-sacrificing independence fighters under the government-in-exile, Korea might not have been able to make even a modest claim to its independence.  A Japanese spiritual leader, when leaving Korea in 1945, predicted Koreans would be fighting among themselves forever as the result of Japanese colonization. Koreans must prove him wrong. They ought to gain the second ― and genuine ― independence from Japan in every way possible. |
| Lee Seong-hyon | Opinion | Korea Times | August 6, 2019 | South Korea | US in Korea-Japan discord | Acrimonious emotions toward each other remain high in both South Korea and Japan, leaving much uncertainty for the future trajectory of the bilateral relationship. Pessimism runs deep because the current deadlock is also part of deeply embedded issues of history and territory, to which there is no easy solution.  What is overlooked in the debate is the fact that Seoul and Tokyo feel ambiguous toward each other's strategic values. Both countries see each other as a less important security partner compared to Washington. They also see each other as a less important economic partner compared to Beijing. Prioritizing their relations with Washington for security and Beijing for the economy, and mulling over their own hedging strategy between the two superpowers, Seoul and Tokyo are simply not sure just how important the other side is. Thus, both sides are locked in a wait-and-see mentality of how much damage the other side can tolerate by cold-shouldering each other.  This explains why it is so hard to find diplomatic zeal in Seoul and Tokyo to seek a solution. This underlying psychology persists and dampens political will. Left unattended, the relationship has already been pummeled by hardline voices on both sides.  In fact, relational defeatism is so great that even an argument such as "only time will solve the problem" is suggested as a solution. The danger of this logic is that both sides can settle for a strategy of waiting for the other side to concede first. There is no reason to believe that time will run its healing course and salvage the relationship, which is at its lowest since the two countries normalized relations in 1965. The relationship will drift further apart without active intervention. But how?  The current deadlock between Japan and South Korea should be approached from multiple tracks. However, it should be also acknowledged that the most effective solution would be for the initiative to come from the United States. As the treaty ally of both Asian countries, Washington should be more actively engaged in fostering the Seoul-Tokyo relationship.  Former U.S. President Barack Obama's hosting of a meeting between Shinzo Abe and his then Korean counterpart Park Geun-hye in 2014, in The Hague was a stellar case in point. The clever arrangement was a product of three months of intense behind-the-scenes American diplomacy. The culturally smart diplomatic move was well appreciated by opinion circles in both Seoul and Tokyo.  "The diplomacy of northeast Asia is a little like junior prom: Cathy won't sit with Jamie, but maybe she would if Sally comes over and sits with them," Michael Green, a former director for Asian affairs at the White House with responsibility covering Japan and Korea, deftly observed. And it gives a glimmer of hope that the estranged Asian neighbors can surprisingly be forthcoming when they are assured that they can "save face," by maintaining the facade that they do a certain act because they are cordially invited to do so.  For instance, Park Geun-hye did not intentionally plan to adopt a manifestly hardline posture with Japan in the manner we now know. As a matter of fact, she was keen to improve relations with Japan after she was sworn in at the outset of her presidency, especially because her predecessor Lee Myung-bak had turbulent ties with Japan and she could "correct" it.  "She was waiting for a cue from the Japanese side that she could act along to improve ties," a former senior aide to Park told me. Apparently, it didn't materialize. Rather, the situation got worse with Abe's visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine in the same year Park was sworn in. The episode highlights the importance of sending clear messages and showing clearer intentions.  There are many challenges, especially in the short- and medium―term as emotions remain high on both sides, in particular in public opinion. Political elites on both sides will be tempted to exploit it, instead of calming it down.  Against the backdrop, a constructive intervention by Washington stands to play a vital role in managing the regional relationship and promoting dialogue between Tokyo and Seoul.  In its endeavor, Washington has to intervene "visibly," not behind the scenes, to send an unambiguous signal that the improvement in South Korea-Japan relations is in line with the strategic interests of the United States. In other words, it should publicly demonstrate that it is committed to advancing relations between the America's allies while taking significant diplomatic risks. |
| Kim Rahn | Opinion | Korea Times | August 21, 2019 | South Korea | History should not be repeated | In Korea the boycott of Japanese products and services, as well as trips to the country, has continued for over a month in protest against the Shinzo Abe administration's trade restrictions.  Protests against the Japanese government and boycotts of Japanese companies have happened in the past when there were disputes over history, but this time it seems the movement is stronger than ever and is unlikely to die down soon.  Uniqlo, which has become one of the major targets of the boycott campaign, has seen its sales drop by 70 percent. Japanese beers such as Asahi and Sapporo have been cleared from the shelves at supermarkets. With decreasing demand, Korean carriers have suspended operations or reduced capacity to Japanese cities on 63 flights.  The Korean government is also keeping a firm stance, setting a long-term plan to nurture materials technologies so Korean companies can reduce their reliance on Japanese ones.  As a journalist who has to keep up with latest news and monitor other reports in the media, I watch the evening news on TV almost every day. Spending time with me in the living room, my 10-year-old daughter also watches some of the news programs ― or rather, she is forced to watch them; she wants to watch cartoons. When something catches her attention, she asks me about the topic and I try to explain it as easily as possible.  With every other news item being related to the boycott movement, she asked me why people are doing it. I said: "Japan did bad things to Koreans when it colonized the country (she learned from school that Japan occupied Korea). So Korea wants Japan to apologize and compensate the victims, but Japan refuses and instead restricted exports to Korea. So Koreans are angry and trying not to buy Japanese products."  I don't think she can understand all the decades-long disputes over history, and the economic impact the boycott is bringing to the affected Japanese firms and the country's tourism industry.  But what this situation implies to her is: Japan is a bad country that did something bad to Koreans, so we should not travel to Japan or buy Japanese goods.  I really don't want her to grow up hating Japan. I hope the hatred and conflicts over history will not continue into the next generation.  My grandparents' and parents' generations directly suffered from the colonial rule. My generation has witnessed the conflicts between the two countries be temporarily resolved before re-emerging repeatedly, and is well aware that some victims' wounds have not been healed because we were told about the suffering directly by the former generations.  If conflicts are not solved completely and are repeated, children who grow up experiencing this kind of situation will gradually and naturally believe that Japan is not a good neighbor. And it will also mean Japan will still refuse to recognize its past wrongdoing and apologize.  It won't do any good for such hatred, wounds and grudges to be transmitted to the next generation. Hatred and conflicts need to stop and end with my generation. And the only way of resolving it permanently might be Japan's change of attitude. I hope I can tell my daughter and other young children: "Japan did bad things to Koreans in the past, but it later apologized and Koreans accepted the apology, and now they are good friends." |
| Park Moo-jong | Opinion | Korea Times | July 25, 2019 | South Korea | Abe grows worse: | Four years ago, I wrote a column titled "Abe's absurd, abnormal remarks" after Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe desperately distorted historical facts about Korea-Japan relations in an apparent bid to win the support of far right-wingers.  I'd like to quote the last paragraphs of the column as Abe has started a trade war with South Korea: Abba Eban (1915-2002), an Israeli diplomat, said in a London speech in 1970, "History teaches that men and nations behave wisely once they have exhausted all other alternatives."  "Germany proves this. Unless Abe stops his absurd and abnormal behavior, he will only lose the confidence of other countries in the long run. Japan should take lessons from history as Germany did."  Four years have passed. But regrettably, nothing has changed. Rather, Abe who has been in power since 2012 has grown worse. His words and deeds remind me of something the late French President Charles de Gaulle's said: "He (politician) is surprised to be taken at his word, since he never believes what he says."  Japan, under the prolonged leadership of Abe, was, for the first time, the chair of the G20 summit held in Osaka for two days from June 28. During a press conference at the close of the meeting, Abe reiterated his previous commitment to send out a strong message to the world in support of "free, fair and nondiscriminatory trade."  Abe also said that during the two-day summit, representative leaders were able to confirm the basic principles of "free trade," and that they had pledged to use "all policy tools" to support the global economy.  Abe made the "right" remarks like teaching a grandma to suck eggs just two days before he came up with an unfair and discriminatory policy of restricting exports to South Korea, a G20 member, of three materials critical to manufacturing semiconductors and smartphone displays.  The quite different words of Abe begs the question: "Is Abe Janus-faced?" He looks like a bull in a china shop when he handles matters related to South Korea at least.  Abe's officials ridiculously claim that the measure was intended to prevent high-tech materials from flowing into North Korea. Yet, everybody knows that Abe is retaliating against the recent South Korean Supreme Court's decision awarding damages to Koreans forced to work for Japanese companies during Japan's 1910-45 colonial rule of Korea. They are hiding the sky with their palms.  It is easily understandable why most foreign media outlets are critical of Tokyo's unfair and discriminatory measure against Seoul. It is a fact that Japan is a signature country enjoying prosperity thanks to the celebration of "free trade."  Japan was defeated in the Pacific Theater during World War II that it started with an air attack on Hawaii's Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. What helped Japan make a surprising economic leap to become a leading global economy was the unexpected special procurement demands of the 1950-53 Korean War and its entry into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1955.  To recall, the United States even accepted economic losses in order to prevent Japan's rearmament. GATT, signed under the U.S. initiative in 1947 removed tariff barriers and trade restrictions, became a stepping stone for Japan's postwar economic growth.  Undoubtedly, Japan is the greatest beneficiary of the free trade system, built by U.S. sacrifice.  Since the normalization of diplomatic relations between Seoul and Tokyo in 1965, Japan has been enjoying an enormous surplus from its trade with South Korea, an eventual cash cow for Japan. Over the past 53 years since 1965, South Korea has never recorded a trade surplus with the total deficit amounting to $604.6 billion.  There is no way for Abe, a seasoned politician steering one of the leading countries on this planet, not to know the simple fact that he has chosen what will eventually be a lose-lose game this time. He was desperate to secure enough Upper House seats to revise the Constitution to make Japan a "normal country" that could start a war. His ruling camp won the election Sunday, but failed to secure enough seats to help Abe's life-long dream come true.  However, he is likely to push ahead with his scheme. An international consensus is necessary to have Abe give up his bid for constitutional revision. And what is "most" important is the unity of our people in countering Abe's foolish trade war. It is our misfortune to have such a person as the leader of our neighboring country.  We should not forget a lesson from history: Internal splits in the Joseon Kingdom (1392-1910) were responsible for the Japanese invasion in 1592 and their occupation of the peninsula in 1910. There should be no feud in the political circle, among others, in tackling the latest emergency provoked by Abe who has never changed. |
| Choi Sung-jin | Opinion | Korea Times | July 23, 2019 | South Korea | Japan's third invasion | Last Sunday, a movie channel reran, perhaps for about the 10th time, "Roaring Currents," a 2014 film on how Admiral Yi Sun-sin rescued the Joseon Kingdom from Japanese invasion (1592-98). With little else to do, I watched again the collective struggle of the unparalleled military leader, his soldiers and civilians in repelling the aggressors.  Even before the sense of victory dissipated, however, I muttered to myself, "What were the ancestors' heroic efforts for?" Japan reinvaded Korea ― more systematically ― and finally annexed it about 310 years later when leadership here lost its people's support.  The following morning, I was going to work by subway. The train during the commute was quiet with most burying their faces in their smartphones or dozing off. Then a couple of young Japanese ladies got aboard and began to chatter loudly, and not a few heads turned.  Usually, I would have quieted them down, as I have done to Korean and American girls a few times before. However, I refrained from doing so, not because I could not speak Japanese, but because doing so would appear rather emotional at a diplomatically sensitive time between the two countries.  That is probably close to what many Koreans are experiencing now watching Japan's diplomatic provocations ― feeling angered but suppressing their emotions. Nothing spoke for me better than some North Korean media outlets in rebuking the Japanese government.  "The South Korean Supreme Court's ruling, which called for Japan to compensate the victims of forced labor during the Japanese occupation, was more than justified. Tokyo's export controls are shameless acts like the thief turning on the master with a club," said Meari (Echo), the North's government mouthpiece targeting the international audience. "Regarding the imperishable crimes Japan committed against the Korean people ― sex slavery, forced labor and genocide ― Tokyo will not be able to repay fully even if it sells off the entire archipelago."  The recent move by Japan's Shinzo Abe cabinet is less an economic retaliation than a political gambit to put South Korea under Japanese control by holding in its hand the key to the latter's economy. In other words, Tokyo wants to "fix" South Korea, once and for all, to prevent the neighboring country with a rapidly expanding economy and culture from daring to challenge its former colonial ruler. Japan's third invasion ― economic and diplomatic ― has begun.  Abe says the Korean top court's ruling violated international law, in reference to the 1965 Basic Treaty which Japan alleges settled all compensation issues, including individuals' claims to compensation. Korea's top legal experts saw it differently, and there are also conflicting views over the issue among international experts.  Seoul may leave it to the third-party arbitration or go to the International Court of Justice as Tokyo demands ― but not before Tokyo agrees to seek a diplomatic solution, including the withdrawal of export curbs and a pledge not to repeat economic retaliation for political reasons. Abe should ponder why many influential international media outlets are criticizing Tokyo's economic retaliation and calling for it to end.  No international treaties can be eternal and should be amended if the call of the times changes. The world was still smarting from the remnants of imperialism and fascism in 1948 when the allies shaped the Pacific postwar international order in San Francisco. In 1965, too, Korea was governed by a general-turned-dictator who had only economic growth and his continuous grip on power in mind.  Now, South Korea is one of the most vibrant democracies in Asia which places human rights above all else, while Japan has been under a one-party rule for nearly seven decades. The Supreme Court's decision is more about humanism than nationalism. Abe took issue with Seoul breaking international promises, but I have never heard the Japanese leader level that accusation at the Donald Trump administration, which withdrew from many international treaties, whether they were about climate change or global trade.  Faced with the third Japanese invasion, this country's political leaders are split ― as they were more than a century ago. The conservative opponents of the liberal Moon Jae-in administration accuse their President more than they censure his Japanese counterpart.  First, they criticize Moon for doing nothing to prepare for looming economic retaliation by Japan. The conservatives quote the Japanese government officials who said they have 1,000 items on their retaliatory list. If Seoul had taken some moves, Tokyo could have attacked elsewhere.  Second, the conservative politicians and media say Seoul is too unprepared to push back. Some conservatives say reason should come before emotion, and Korea should strengthen national power first. The pro-Japanese traitors did precisely the same thing 100 years ago, saying Joseon was not prepared enough to hit back Japan's moves to annex it.  After the forced occupation, these collaborators never tried to build Joseon's strength but remained complacent with the power and wealth Japan gave to them in exchange for their loyalty to the colonialists.  Third, the defeatists say Korea is still no match for Japan, whose economic and military powers are at least three times larger than Korea's. That may be true. Again, the situation was far worse a century ago, but had one-third of Koreans fought back against Japan's attempts, the island country could not have swallowed this peninsula. Afghanistan, Chechnya and Vietnam fought and are still struggling with invaders 100 times more powerful than them.  What stopped Koreans from doing so was the ruling class at the time ― the king who thought the country was his private property and aristocrats bent on squeezing out their people while fighting against each other and resorting to external power to maintain their influence and wealth. Can one find any differences, with South Korean political leaders, especially conservative ones, today?  Some describe the current situation as a mixed blessing that can reduce, if not remove, economic reliance on Japan. All these diagnoses are right and desirable, but only if the nation, especially its leaders, can unite as one and pull their wisdom together to shape a century-long strategy and work out phased diplomatic and economic action plans.  Conservative oppositionists in particular should wake up and put their nation ahead of themselves just even for once. Otherwise, Admiral Yi will be turning in his grave. |
| Troy Stangarone | Opinion | Korea Times | July 22, 2019 | South Korea | Japan risks harm to world trade | When I started this column a year ago, I touched upon the importance of international trade rules for South Korea's economic future.  While we still often think of trade in terms of lowering tariff barriers, the rules and norms that allow goods and services to flow freely and predictably are increasingly important. Unfortunately, adherence to those rules have grown weaker over the past year and the current standoff with Japan is symptomatic of a worrying trend.  With some exceptions states have largely refrained from using national security exemptions to restrict trade in recent decades, but over the past year national security has increasingly been viewed as a way to impose tariffs or restrict trade in the pursuit of other objectives.  Regrettably, the United States which has led the way in developing the current rules-based system that allowed more nations to prosper than at perhaps any time in human history has been leading the way in utilizing questionable national security rationales to achieve other objectives. Not surprisingly, Japan is learning from the United States.  Japan's decision to restrict critical exports needed for South Korea's electronics industry bears a striking resemblance to the U.S. decision to place Huawei on the Entity List over security concerns related to its development of 5G networks. Even the rationales for the decisions are muddled by the messaging from both the United States and Japan.  When the U.S. decision on Huawei was first put in place, U.S. firms sought to find legal ways to continue to supply the Chinese firm given its importance to their business.  In the case of Micron, the strongest competitor for memory chip production to Samsung and SK hynix, Huawei accounted for 13 percent of Micron's revenue in the first and second quarter. Huawei was also a significant purchaser from other less well known U.S. tech firms such as Inphi and Qorvo.  While the Trump administration has since relaxed some of the restrictions on Huawei, its founder Ren Zhengfei has indicated that the U.S. action has further incentivized its own efforts to lessen its dependence on U.S. firms. In the short-run, U.S. firms may see benefits but in the long-run will face greater Chinese competition.  In the case of Samsung, SK hynix, and LG Display, a similar dynamic is at play with efforts to find ways for their Japanese counterparts to continue to supply them, but also a strong incentive to lessen their dependence on Japanese suppliers.  There is also a national security dimension. Samsung is the world's fourth-largest suppliers of network equipment and has significantly invested in 5G. In light of U.S. security concerns over Huawei, a concern that Japan shares, it is surprising that Tokyo would take an action that might damage one of the few firms that could help build out secure 5G networks globally.  Japan's decision isn't merely confined to the dispute between Seoul and Tokyo. In an interconnected world, these moves reverberate out, especially in the highly interconnected electronics industry.  Many of the world's electronics supply chains run the East and Southeast Asia and semiconductors are a key component. Because of South Korea's dominate position in the memory chip sector, it tends to be the largest or next largest source of semiconductors for countries in the region.  Any disruption in supply due to Japan's action means that countries further down the supply chain will feel the effects of a chip shortage in their production and could see a commensurate effect on economic growth.  In the short and perhaps medium term, Japan will be able to apply economic pressure on South Korea. But over time, South Korean firms will seek more dependable suppliers just as Huawei has indicated that it needs to become more dependent on Chinese suppliers.  A reduction of interdependence will likely insulate firms from these types of pressures in the future, but at the cost of efficiencies that have developed over time as supply chains expanded. This could lead to increased costs and implications for South Korea's own economic future.  Throughout its economic development, one of South Korea's greatest economic strengths has been its openness to international trade, but as Japan's actions have brought to the forefront how interconnectedness can be used against South Korea. Turning its back on international trade will only make South Korea poorer, but it likely will need to foster domestic growth to counter the current international uncertainties.  In the long run, the international system may be able to accommodate the damage that has been done to international trade rules, but the more they are eroded the more difficult it will be to return to a point where national security exemptions are only used for national security.  Despite the current tensions, strengthening the WTO and ensuring that these tactics are used less frequently is a common interest that South Korea and Japan share. |
| Amanda Price | Opinion | Korea Times | July 21, 2019 | South Korea | A feud for the ages | The dispute between South Korea and Japan has broken its banks, and the rising waters are eroding paths that once allowed nations to meet half way.  As the flood waters swell, to wide-spread international bewilderment, neither side appears to be willing to open the release gates, reduce the pressure and avert disaster.  If the debris-filled waters were not enough of a threat, the mud, thrown liberally from one side to another, is creating the potential for a slide from which neither side may recover.  For decades, the animosity between the governments of the island nation and the governments of the Korean Peninsula was limited to thorny verbal quips, backhanded compliments and subtle, but deliberate snubs.  But now this ongoing dispute has become a full-scale, bare-knuckle fight. The rule book has been torn up and punches below the belt are permitted. If the present winds prevail, more than just political blood is likely to be spilt.  These may seem overly dramatic, but national and international experts are cautioning that this standoff may lead Korea and Japan to a situation in which both sides will lose.  One-time South Korean ambassador to Japan, Shin Kak-soo, warned that "irreparable damage" would result from this situation, pointing out that "this profound rift" could be "heralding a very dangerous and vicious cycle of escalation."  This sentiment has been expressed time and time again, with Daniel Sneider, a lecturer of international policy at Stanford, claiming the present events are a road to "warfare," replete with dangers.  The Council on Foreign Relations questioned whether all bridges were now burnt between Seoul and Tokyo, suggesting that "their animosity" may now be "more meaningful than their affinity."  The feud between the governments of Korea and Japan is largely seen through the prism of history. While politicians are looking back at what they cannot change, a young generation looks forward to what they can change. These two perspectives are required if this feud is to be resolved. /Yonhap  Japan and Korea are surrounded by thousands of small islands. One of the smaller of these thousands of islands, the Dokdo islets have become a symbol of the feud between Japan and Korea. / Courtesy of the North Gyeongsang Province Government  What we have delicately referred to as "tension between Japan and Korea" has evolved into a barely cloaked feud.  A feud is not a fight. A fight can be over when both sides agree, or one side wins. Feuds, by contrast, are seldom won and are only over when prolonged hostilities, and the resultant damage, have become unendurable.  Feuds, unlike fights, censor opinion and forbid disagreement. Each side must hold unwaveringly to its own truth, even when that truth may not entirely be true. The great English poet John Milton identified this stifling of free thought when he said, "Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience."  The South Korean government leads the populace towards an opinion, whereas the Japanese government withholds information necessary for opinions to be made. Both are a form of coercion that the free-thinking Milton would have condemned.  But while a deluge of articles and reports readily discuss the diplomatic fallout and risks to trade, little attention is given to how this feud will affect the next generation.  If the Japanese and Korean governments do indeed begin to find their "animosity" more important than their "affinity," then more is at stake than just trade relations.  Just as children are the real victims of divorce, the real victims in this feud are the generation of young people born into peace.  This is the generation that did not colonize anyone, who did not force anyone into indentured servitude, nor try to rewrite history. This generation did not renege on agreements, freeze companies' assets nor bicker endlessly over trade, treaties or small rocky islets.  They are not, nor ever have been, victimizers or victims. They gain nothing from this feud, but potentially will lose a relationship that would provide them with opportunity and an ally.  Yet despite their innocence and the fact that decisions that are made are out of their control, the feud will fall on their shoulders, either to resolve or to continue. The feud is likely to be their inheritance.  But this is the nature of feuds. They serve the purposes of the ruling elite, while prolonging pain for the masses. They are politically driven, but contain a poison that is passed down to the next generation, and then the one after that.  In Korea, the younger generation is reminded of Japan's criminal wrongs on a daily basis. Without question, this is a history that has value in remembrance, but students are not taught about the Japan that has changed. They are not taught the value of the bonds forged when enemies become friends.  Through history books, school excursions, serial dramas and movies, a generation of Koreans learn an incomplete history where one side is entirely good, and one side is unquestionably bad.  For students in Japan, their historical knowledge is deliberately obfuscated by a government determined to save face. They hear anti-Korean sentiment through carefully constructed broadcasts where context is missing. The terrible wrongs done by their forefathers are vague and incomplete stories. Young Japanese know that their nations once did appalling things, but those "things" are far away events they need know nothing about.  The feud between the governments of Korea and Japan is largely seen through the prism of history. While politicians are looking back at what they cannot change, a young generation looks forward to what they can change. These two perspectives are required if this feud is to be resolved. /Yonhap  This photo went viral during the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics as it symbolized hope for the future of Korea and Japan, two nations with so much to gain by an alliance, but even more to gain by being friends. /Korea Times file  And all the while, the political machine, stoked by political players, keeps the fire of indignation burning.  Professor of international studies at Dongseo University Brian Myers, told a BBC journalist, "The governments of both countries are responsible for systematically whipping up animosity towards each other … I don't believe this animosity would still be existing at the pitch it is at today, 70 years after liberation, if the governments on both sides of the East Sea didn't have an interest in keeping it going."  If there is truth in this assertion, then it is a shame that Abe and Moon should carry to the grave because it is not their generation that they are condemning, but the generation that must one day deal with the mess left behind.  And while many people who are concerned for the young would find them reason enough to end this feud, Japan and Korea's strongest ally does not.  Under normal circumstances, the American president does not shy away from fights, but on this occasion he is happy to recline in the VIP box and just watch as the feud plays out.  Taking a leaf from Bill Clinton's book, who vetoed the U.N.'s decision to intervene in what became the Rwandan genocide, Trump has decided that involvement is not in his best interest.  The shameful behavior of governments refusing to consider the impact this feud will have on the younger generation, is indefensible.  With the prospect of an Asian divorce looming, someone, somewhere, somehow must think of the children. Are their futures of so little consequence? Are they not reason enough to look beyond political agendas, to express remorse, and to allow the past to become the back story, not the only story?  Is there no room for redemption, if only for the futures of those who had no part in the past?  Unless the generation of lawmakers in both nations begin to look to the innocent, to those not yet infected with hate and bigotry, and realize that they are reason enough to end hostilities, then this feud will destroy more than an alliance.  No reason, historical or political, can justify that. |
| Oh Young-jin | Opinion | Korea Times | July 19, 2019 | South Korea | Moon, Abe, do some art! | There are some myths as Korea and Japan are locked in a trade dispute triggered by the latter's virtual embargo on essential items for Korea's bread-and-butter industry of semiconductor manufacturing. Here are three.  1) Japan's export curbs caught the Moon Jae-in government off guard.  Many factors indicate this may have been the case because, above all, there had been no efforts to stock up on those items following Tokyo's announcement. Broadly, it appears correct that the government had anticipated a reaction one way or another from Japan after the Supreme Court ruled that Japanese firms mobilized for their country's war efforts owed Korean workers compensation. There are indications that efforts were made to delay the ruling under the previous Park Geun-hye administration because of the potential damage to the already soured bilateral relationship.  The Moon government has been consistent in dealing resolutely with Japan's aggressive act. President Moon first called on Japan to drop its plan and warned Abe about the consequences. This consistency was due to the guiding principle of the Moon administration to liquidate past ills, many of which it sees as stemming from Japan's 45-year imperial rule of Korea. Moon is among those who want the distortions brought by collaboration and cooperation during that era that affect today's Korea straightened out.  Whether Moon's effort will succeed or not is not clear because such past efforts have failed or backfired. But the chance is that Moon will not deviate as was the case with the effort of the late President Kim Young-sam. This means that the Moon-Abe duel will continue for some time if the Japanese prime minister is as prepared to do as reports say he is.  2) Korea's current situation is a carbon copy of the jam Joseon Kingdom was in at the turn of 20th century before being absorbed by Japan.  Similarities do exist primarily because the cast of players in Korea's tragic saga is very much in the game. But differences between now and then are much greater. Joseon was called the "hermit kingdom" for its self-imposed isolation, relying on any big power that came its way. Now Korea is among the world's leading economies, being No. 1 producer of semiconductors for instance ― Samsung Electronics and SK hynix ― in the world that are indispensable to smartphones, TVs and internet of things (IOT) items. Hyundai Motor is among the world's leading carmakers.  Already, it is strongly argued that Japan's provocative act, if Korea retaliates and the dispute escalates, would hurt the global value chains affecting production of many important items for which Korea provides parts. Decades of globalization has made the world's economy so interdependent that a problem with the economy of Korea's size can surely be contagious and adversely affect the rest of the world.  That is why Japan's move is doubly deplorable because it comes against the background of the U.S.-China trade war that has kept the world in suspense for months.  Often, some skeptics point out that Korea's 1997 currency crisis started when Japan pulled its money out in retaliation for the Kim Young-sam's government's hardline policy against Japan. But this storyline should be updated because Korea's reliance on Japan has been reduced further. Rather a competing storyline is that Japan's motive is much the same as that of the U.S. in its fight against China, trying to prevent Korea's rise that could be exponentially strengthened if peace prevails on the Korean Peninsula.  The bottom line is that we should learn from history, not succumbing to the Toynbeean concept of "history repeats itself."  3) The U.S. will support Japan over Korea.  The U.S. under President Donald Trump would find it difficult to intervene and tell Japan to stop its embargo because that is exactly what Trump is doing with China in the ongoing trade war. Abe has invested a lot to buy Trump's friendship. An isolationist Trump would find no "financial incentives" to step in. Trump does not share the old definition of alliance as his predecessors did with Korea or Europe.  But if he does not, the chance is that his handlers would see an important role for Korea in keeping down the rise of China in the U.S. effort to maintain its global hegemony. Besides, the full-blown, protracted slugfest between Tokyo and Seoul could overshadow Trump's quest for the Nobel Peace Prize for officially ending the war with North Korea and establishing lasting peace on the peninsula.  Now, here is one football analogy. FIFA rankings have Korea No. 37, nine steps down from the No. 28 Japan. In its 78 national team matches, Korea has won 41, while Japan has 14, with 23 draws. The reason for this discrepancy between the rankings and their match results is the Korean spirit ―\_ "We can lose anybody but Japan." The moral is that by fighting each other, they have a lot to lose and on the flip side of it, they would gain a lot by cooperating. As things stand now, it may look impossible for the two to make up. But do they not say that the art of impossible is diplomacy? Let's do some art. |
| Donald Kirk | Opinion | Korea Times | July 18, 2019 | South Korea | South Korea versus Japan | TOKYO ― Korean and Japanese relations have plunged to their lowest depths since the Korean War, and there's apparently no reconciliation in sight. The governments in Seoul and Tokyo are engaged in a game of dare and double-dare in which each tries to out-threaten the other with hurtful measures and harmful results.  The Japanese, banning the export of vital, chemical ingredients for semiconductors manufactured by Korean electronics giants such as Samsung, clearly think they are hitting South Koreans where it hurts.  They go on claiming some of these chemicals are making their way into North Korea while South Korea's President Moon Jae-in pursues what Japan's arch-conservative Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sees as a dangerous policy of appeasement with a regime that's never going to relinquish its nuclear warheads and the missiles that could send them hurtling at Japan.  There is, moreover, much more behind Japan's de facto ban.  What a great way, the Japanese are convinced, to go after those Koreans after all the stuff they've been doing to us over the years. Most recently, the Japanese are aggrieved by Korean court decisions ordering immense Japanese companies such as Nippon Steel and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries to compensate aging Koreans who were forced to work for them as slave labor in the darkest days of Japanese domination during World War II.  The individual sums ordered by the Korean Supreme Court were small change for these behemoths, less than $100,000 each, but the Japanese go back to the agreement reached with South Korea's dictatorial President Park Chung-hee in 1965 under which the Republic of Korea and Japan formed diplomatic relations.  A critical element was that the nation whose 35 years of rule over Korea only ended with its defeat 20 years earlier would extend grants and loans totaling $800 million. That figure would amount to about $6.4 billion today, which seemed like a pretty hefty sum at the time.  Entrusted with this windfall from the nation in whose army he had once served as a lieutenant in Manchuria, Park could dispose of the funds as he saw fit. Sure, he might pay off hundreds of thousands of Koreans enslaved under the Japanese, including comfort women and factory workers. Then again, he might invest in infrastructural projects needed to build up an economy recovering from the devastation of the Korean War on top of decades of exploitation by the Japanese colonialists.  As far as the Japanese are concerned, the deal was a deal. No way, they say, can the Koreans go back on what was signed and sealed even if the Korean president at the time was a tyrant who saw the demands of victims of Japanese rule as distinctly secondary, if not irrelevant. No telling, says Japan, what the Korean courts will do next. Expropriating Japanese assets, taking over Japanese investment ― such options are always possible under Korean policy buttressed by court decisions.  If such concerns seem understandable, they also reflect a distinct sense of superiority among the Japanese who see their economy, their own rise from terrible defeat in the "Pacific War," their record as a one-time imperial power, as justification for demonstrating the righteousness of their position.  Beyond placing restraints on vital exports needed for Korean-made semiconductors, a product on which the Korean economy relies to excess for success, the Japanese hint darkly at much more they might do to show who holds the power. Among other things, why not constraints on exports of high-tech gadgetry needed for the machines with which Korean factories spin out heavy-duty products ranging from motor vehicles to ships to computers?  In the end, both sides suffer. Yes, as President Moon has said, Korea can look elsewhere for what it must have to make and sell its products. Korea may not be able to trust China, revealed as a calculating bully by kicking out Korean companies and cancelling tour groups in retaliation for Korean acceptance of THAAD, the facility installed by the U.S. army for Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, but Korea has other places to turn.  How about Russia, whose President Vladimir Putin is eager to improve relations with South as well as North Korea? And then there's Taiwan, the capitalist island enclave that remains aloof and apart from the Chinese mainland despite Beijing's incessant claims and threats.  Japan and Korea, however, really do need each other. Over nearly 80 years since the Japanese surrender, and 66 years since the end of the Korean War, they've built up a network of ties, industrial, financial and cultural that go far beyond current differences.  Both will suffer from the ongoing impasse. No one knows where or how this dispute will end, but one thing is certain: North Korea's Kim Jong-un, while luring the South from the U.S. alliance and undermining Japan's relationship with the U.S.,must love seeing Japan and South Korea at each other's throats . |
| Oh Young-jin | Opinion | Korea Times | July 12, 2019 | South Korea | On Japan, retreat is no option for Moon | President Moon Jae-in has shown no sign that a compromise is an option in Japan's embargo on key items that can halt Korea's semiconductor making, the nation's bread-and-butter industry.  Moon faces growing pressure from Samsung Electronics, the world's largest chip maker for which Japanese technology is pivotal for production, and other industrialists who fear a greater impact if Tokyo increases sanctions.  Several opinion leaders fault Moon for what they argue is his ham-fisted handling of the aftermath of the Supreme Court ruling that ordered Japanese firms to pay compensation to Koreans who were mobilized for materiel production during the Second World War.  Moon could succumb to these pressures but only at the risk of turning his regime into a political zombie. And history shows the more he stands pat, the greater the chance the nation rallies around him.  The issues with Japan ― compensation for forced laborers and comfort women, or sex slaves, under Japan's imperial army ― are integral to the Moon regime's foundation ― the liquidation of past ills.  This purge campaign primarily targets the past two conservative regimes led by Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye with fervor exceeding George W. Bush's ABC (anything but Clinton) and Donald Trump's "de-Obamazation."  Moon has made clear that the campaign's purpose is to set history straight once and for all, tackling in a broad stroke all the wrongs that took place during Japan's 45-year occupation and liberation from it in the lead-up to the nation's foundation.  As the part of the clean-up effort, the Korea-Japan December 2015 agreement on comfort women during the Park administration has been gutted and made ineffective.  The Moon administration sat idly when a move started to seize the assets of Japanese firms when they refused to compensate forced-labor victims, as ordered by the court.  Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose grandfather was a member of the Tojo war cabinet and spared from extreme punishment following the war, has grabbed the chance to raise the issue of trust and press the Moon government into a corner with the trade embargo.  Moon has warned Japan to stop provocative acts, preparing for a dragged-out standoff, placating the industrialists, sending his emissary to the United States for mediation and feeling out the possibility of a negotiated solution.  The chance is that Moon will not and cannot reverse the course so dramatically. If he did, his progressive supporters would take it as an act of betrayal and turn their back on him.  Moon learned a lesson the hard way when he worked for his mentor and friend, the late President Roh Moo-hyun. Roh alienated his support base by pushing for the free trade agreement with the U.S., long considered part of the conservative agenda.  Sales of imported Japanese beers have dropped drastically following Tokyo's retaliatory trade action. Yonhap  Members of civic groups protest in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul over its trade sanctions. Yonhap  Roh never recovered from it, giving Lee Myung-bak a landslide victory to succeed him, despite Lee's flawed character and suspicions about his integrity.  But Moon's hard-line approach also has come with some political dividends.  Hwang Kyo-ahn, leader of the gadfly Liberty Korea Party, the main conservative opposition, volunteered a truce with Moon, arguing it was not because any of his grievances with the President were settled but because Japan's provocations required him to stand behind the leader.  Hwang knows the explosive potential of Japan-related issues, which could make or break his political ambition.  Moon knows that anyone who moves away from a united front would risk being seen as collaborator or traitor and cast off.  Lee Myung-bak made a presidential trip to Dokdo, Korea's easternmost islets that Japan lays claim to, to escape his political plight, virtually forsaking Japanese diplomacy. Park Geun-hye warmed ties with China to make up for the frosty relationship with Tokyo.  If the standoff with Japan, the chance is that fewer detractors will stand up to Moon, which means there would be a lower chance of an early settlement.  Koreans on Japan and China  I am often asked by foreigners why Korea is easily provoked by Japan while being more tolerant of China. For instance, China has retaliated against Korea for allowing the U.S. to station its anti-missile Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missiles on its soil.  Beijing stopped sending tourists to Korea and put pressure on Korean firms in China, having some pack up and leave for home. But there has been little public show of indignation. The sentiment is more of a concern than resentment shown on the fly to Japan for a slight provocation.  I would say it is related to the unhappy memories of Japan's occupation at the turn of the 20th century. But then, the Chinese supported North Korea in the 1950-53 Korean War that killed or maimed millions of Koreans. And it also has been a key supporter keeping the North afloat since, standing in the way of unification.  Another possible explanation is that Korea had long served as a midpoint transmitting advanced culture from China to Japan, an experience that induced its people to look down on Japan. Japan used to pay tribute to Korea. Maybe that piece of history is affecting Koreans' collective consciousness. |
| GO TATEISHI / YOMIURI SHIMBUN CORRESPONDENT | News Analysis | Eleven media | JANUARY 9, 2021 | Myanmar | S. Korean court orders Japan to compensate former ‘comfort women’ | The Seoul Central District Court on Friday ordered the Japanese government to pay damages in full to 12 former “comfort women,” the first such ruling that has been reached in a lawsuit filed by former comfort women in South Korea against Japan.  The women are each claiming 100 million won (about ¥9.5 million) in compensation.  The court decision contradicts Japan’s stance that postwar compensation issues between the two countries were “settled completely and finally” under the 1965 Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Cooperation.  The latest court decision will inevitably further rupture the bilateral relationship — which is already said to be “the worst it has been since the end of World War II” due to a series of issues including those involving former requisitioned workers from the Korean Peninsula.  The Japanese government has refused to participate in the trial because of the principle of “sovereign immunity” under international law, which holds that a sovereign state cannot be sued before the courts of another sovereign state without its consent.  Whether a South Korean court would accept the principle of sovereign immunity was the main focus of the trial.  The comfort women issue involved “systematic and inhumane criminal acts carried out by the Japanese government,” according to the district court ruling, which also stated that “sovereign immunity cannot be applied.”  The court ordered the full compensation out of consideration for “the unimaginable mental and physical suffering suffered by the plaintiffs.”  The lawsuit was triggered in 2013 when former comfort women filed for mediation. At that time, Japan did not accept the mediation on the grounds of the 1965 agreement, and the case moved to litigation in 2016.  Seven of the plaintiffs have already died.  On Wednesday, another ruling filed by 20 people, including former comfort women, is scheduled to be handed down against the Japanese government, leaving open the possibility that there will be a series of court decisions granting compensation.    In 2015, the Japanese government reached an agreement with the conservative administration of then South Korean President Park Geun-hye, confirming that the issue of comfort women had been “finally and irreversibly” resolved.” However, the left-wing administration of President Moon Jae-in, which was inaugurated in 2017, effectively scrapped the agreement, claiming it did “not reflect the will of the victims.”  A Japanese company lost a lawsuit filed by requisitioned workers in South Korea, and plaintiffs are proceeding with the seizure and sale of assets held by the company in the country.  The Moon administration, claiming it “respects justice,” has not responded proactively, causing a further deterioration in the Japan-Korea relationship. |
| Ahn Sung-mi | Commentary | The Korea Herald | February 28, 2021 | South Korea | Can international court resolve ‘comfort women’ issue? | The “comfort women” issue has come to the fore again in the lingering feud between Seoul and Tokyo. The two neighbors were seen locking horns at the United Nations Human Rights Council last week; separately, a South Korean victim of Japanese military sexual slavery pleaded with Seoul and Tokyo to take the thorny issue to the International Court of Justice for a resolution.  Lee Yong-soo, one of the survivors, called for the matter to be settled in the UN’s highest court while the remaining victims are still alive.  “There’s not much time,” the 92-year-old said at a press conference last week. “I plead with the government to hold Japan accountable under international law. I hope the two countries can resolve the issue permanently in the international court and live in peace with each other.”  In January a Korean court ordered the Japanese government to pay damages to a group of Korean survivors for the mental distress and financial losses they suffered as a result of Japan’s wartime atrocities. Tokyo, however, dismissed the ruling -- as it had dismissed past lawsuits against the country over wartime crimes -- and accused Seoul of violating its sovereign immunity, a principle of international law that prevents one country from being sued by another without its consent.  Lee’s plea for the case to be heard in The Hague appears to be a last-ditch effort to put an end to the decadeslong conflict, as it has become clear that the issue cannot be resolved through diplomatic talks or domestic court proceedings.  Japan has shown some interest in putting its wartime dispute with Seoul on the table at the world court, as it believes the international court would side with Tokyo and accept its “sovereign immunity” claim, pointing to a 2012 case between Germany and Italy.  The world court in 2012 rejected an Italian Supreme Court ruling that Germany must compensate Italians who were forced into labor during World War II, saying the ruling violated Germany’s national sovereignty.  But taking the case to the world court would require consent from both Seoul and Tokyo. Experts say it is unlikely that Seoul would pursue an international tribunal at this time, considering the “low-key” approach it has taken on historical issues in a bid to mend ties with Tokyo.  “In order for the ICJ trial to take place, the two countries need to come to an agreement. But this looks less feasible at this time,” said Lee Won-deok, an expert on Japan at Seoul’s Kookmin University. “The South Korean government has been focusing on improving relations with Japan and it would try to avoid creating another source of contention. Japan would also prefer not to publicize the comfort women issue on the international stage.”  Reflecting Seoul’s dilemma, Korea’s Foreign Ministry said it would “carefully” review whether to take the issue to the international court, and would listen to the opinions of more victims.  Even if both Seoul and Tokyo were to proceed with an international court case, it would be difficult for the two sides to agree on what the court should judge, the professor said.  “Korea will want to stress the issue as a matter of wartime sexual violence and victims’ human rights perspective, while Japan will assert the primacy of sovereign immunity and underline all wartime compensation issues were settled through the past bilateral accords,” he said.  Japan maintains a firm stance that all claims related to its 1910-45 colonial rule of Korea were settled under a 1965 pact that normalized bilateral relations between the two countries. It also asserts that the 2015 agreement on the sex slavery issue resolved the matter “finally and irreversibly.”  Others suggest that taking the sex slavery issue to the international court could put pressure on Seoul to settle other outstanding issues there as well -- such as the use of forced labor in Japan’s factories during World War II, or which country rightfully owns Dokdo, a pair of rocky islets in the body of water between the two countries. Japan has sought to take these two cases to the world court, but Seoul has rejected those requests.  Those who favor a world court case are aware that an international tribunal might well side with Tokyo and accept its “sovereignty immunity” argument. But, they say, it could help publicize the issue and gain the international court’s recognition that the military brothel system was a war crime that violated international law.  “The motives of the comfort women are not financial reparations from the Japanese government, but an apology and acknowledgment of responsibility over the past, and to provide (correct) history education,” said Shin Hee-seok, an international law expert at Yonsei University, who is helping the victims bring the case to the world court, adding that such goals are hard to attain through the domestic legal process.  “No matter what kind of ruling the ICJ decides, it will have to judge whether the comfort women system was in violation of international law, and the testimonies of the victims would remain on the record,” he said. That in itself would be meaningful for the survivors, he added. |
| Lee Ji-yoon | Opinion | The Korea Herald | March 9, 2021 | South Korea | When will Japan end its open hostility toward South Korea? | South Korea-Japan ties long strained over wartime history are showing few signs of recovery, with Seoul’s new Tokyo envoy facing almost open hostility from local authorities.  According to diplomatic sources Tuesday, Korea’s new ambassador to Japan, Kang Chang-il, has yet to meet with Japanese leaders, a rarity in light of diplomatic protocol.  Kang arrived in Japan on Jan. 22 and started work on Feb. 14 after a two-week quarantine. But his request for a courtesy visit to the prime minister or the foreign minister has received no response over the past month.  His predecessor Nam Gwan-pyo met with then-Foreign Minister Taro Kono just four days after his arrival.    President Moon Jae-in and Ambassador to Japan Kang Chang-il pose for a photo after an appointment ceremony at Cheong Wa Dae on Jan. 14. (Cheong Wa Dae)  President Moon Jae-in and Ambassador to Japan Kang Chang-il pose for a photo after an appointment ceremony at Cheong Wa Dae on Jan. 14. (Cheong Wa Dae)  Japan’s Yomiuri Shimbun called the cold reception a “countermeasure” against Korea, saying Seoul is reluctant to mend bilateral ties.  “The Japanese government has no intention to meet the new ambassador until Korea comes up with a new acceptable proposal to solve sex slavery and forced labor issues,” the paper reported Monday, citing an unnamed Foreign Ministry source.  A first phone call between Korea’s newly appointed Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong and his Japanese counterpart, Toshimitsu Motegi, has also been delayed for more than a month -- possibly for the same reason.  Japan’s open hostility toward Korea has continued despite President Moon Jae-in’s budding efforts to achieve rapprochement.  In November, the president named the former four-term lawmaker with the ruling Democratic Party of Korea as the country’s top envoy to Tokyo. Kang is known for his expertise on Japan-related issues, having led the Korea-Japan Parliamentarians’ Union for years.  His appointment was seen as a reflection of the president’s willingness to resolve outstanding issues between the two neighboring countries upon the inauguration of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga in September.  Moon’s rhetoric on Japan has also changed dramatically in recent months. The president, who had maintained a hard-line stance on historical issues, has hinted at a more flexible approach, saying Korea is ready to talk with Japan anytime to promote stronger cooperation and that disputes over history should be addressed separately.  The reconciliatory overtures come as US President Joe Biden stresses the importance of trilateral cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo in the face of an assertive China and a defiant North Korea.  Moon has also sought Japan’s cooperation in creating fresh opportunities to reengage with North Korea, amid expectations that the Tokyo Olympics, slated for July, could set the mood for the resumption of dialogue with Pyongyang.  But Japan is not officially responding to the overtures, giving the cold shoulder to top diplomats from Seoul.  Yukio Hatoyama, who served as Japanese prime minister from 2009-2010, criticized the Suga administration’s lack of will and energy in dealing with the prolonged feud with Korea and other neighboring countries.  “For now, Suga’s top priority is COVID-19 and Tokyo Olympics only. But his mishandling of the issues is driving down his approval ratings,” he said Monday in a radio interview with Seoul’s TBS.  “Rather than making efforts to resolve the strained ties with Korea, the government and the ultra-rightists could use a sense of hostility toward Korea as a way of regaining approval,” he added, stressing that many Japanese people still feel close to Korea.  Japan has claimed that historical issues, including its apology and responsibility, have already been settled under a 1965 treaty signed between the two countries. But Korean survivors of its colonial atrocities have continued their legal fights.  A series of court rulings in favor of Korean victims have led to vehement protests by Japan but the Korean government has maintained its “victim-centric” principles that the government should not intervene in the legal lawsuits waged by individuals.  Over the years of hostility, the decades-old rivalry has plummeted to one of the lowest ebbs, spilling over into the trade and security realms now.  Experts say Japan is asking Korea to compromise -- for example, by equally sharing the burden of compensating wartime victims from a humanitarian perspective. The idea was proposed by former Assembly Speaker Moon Hee-sang last year but met with criticism for blurring Japan’s responsibility.  “For now, any new proposal from Korea, not reconciliatory gesture or rhetoric, would help resume the stalled talks, opening room for US mediation,” said Shin Beom-chul, director of the Center for Diplomacy and Security at the Korea Research Institute for National Strategy.  “But with a compromised deal, Moon could risk losing his political capital, considering the sensitivity of the Japanese issue here. It would be a tough decision for him.” |
| Korea Herald, | Editorial | The Korea Herald | January 12, 2021 | South Korea | Historical barriers: Court ruling on sex slaves complicates efforts to mend ties between Seoul and Tokyo | Efforts to build forward-looking relations between Seoul and Tokyo have been held back by issues related to Japan’s 1910-45 colonization of the Korean Peninsula.  In a move set to further strain bilateral ties, a court here last week delivered a landmark ruling ordering Tokyo to make reparations to South Korean women forced into wartime sexual slavery for Japanese soldiers. The ruling comes amid rising tensions between the two countries over an ongoing legal process here to seize and liquidate South Korea-based assets of Japanese firms to compensate victims of forced labor during the colonial era.  Tokyo argues that the sexual slavery issue was settled by a 2015 deal with Seoul, while the forced labor issue has also been resolved by a 1965 treaty to normalize bilateral relations.  Soon after the ruling, Japan’s Foreign Ministry summoned South Korea’s Ambassador Nam Gwan-Pyo to file a protest and stressed that Tokyo could never accept the court’s decision.  Tokyo in particular noted the ruling was in violation of a principle of international law that stipulates a sovereign government cannot be subject to trial in another country.  In handing down the ruling, however, the Seoul Central District Court said the case filed by 12 of former sex slaves -- euphemistically called “comfort women” -- should be exempted from the principle as it involved a crime against humanity that violates internationally obligatory norms.  The latest court decision may prompt a series of other compensation lawsuits against the Japanese government, further straining Seoul-Tokyo ties already beset by issues stemming from the unfortunate history shared between them.  Japan imposed curbs on exports of high-tech materials to South Korea in 2019 in an apparent reprisal for the 2018 ruling by the Supreme Court here that ordered Japanese firms to compensate victims forced to work for them during colonial rule. If Seoul takes legal steps to enforce Friday’s ruling, Tokyo is certain to make a more serious and far-reaching response.  The ruling is expected to complicate Seoul’s recent efforts to mend ties with Tokyo by sending top government and ruling party officials for talks with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and others in Tokyo.  The move was seen as motivated to enlist Tokyo’s support for Seoul’s efforts to forge an environment for reengagement with Pyongyang particularly on the occasion of the Tokyo Olympics scheduled for later this year. It also came amid the need to prepare for the incoming US administration’s possible bid to bring its two key Asian allies closer together to cope with growing military threats from North Korea and an increasingly assertive China. US President-elect Joe Biden, who will be sworn in on Jan. 20, has pledged to strengthen solidarity with America’s democratic allies to enhance Washington’s interests and tackle a set of global challenges.  Seoul and Tokyo need to strive to contain tensions between them from further escalating, while continuing to seek fundamental measures to put the unfortunate history behind them.  Japan should make a more sincere atonement for and pay more heed to demands from the victims of sexual slavery and forced labor.  South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s administration is also urged to step up efforts to work out political and diplomatic solutions to prolonged disputes with Tokyo over historical issues.  It has backpedaled on the implementation of the 2015 deal that the predecessor Park Geun-hye government concluded with Tokyo to settle the comfort women issue on grounds that it did not properly reflect the opinions of the victims. Under the accord, Tokyo offered 1 billion yen ($9.6 million) to a foundation to support the victims and said that it “felt strongly” about its responsibility for the “issue involving the Japanese military that has left deep scars on the honor and dignity of many women.”  The Moon administration has also remained inactive on resolving the forced labor issue, saying only it should respect the judicial judgment.  Observers note repeated calls for compensation and apology seem to have further strengthened the position of Japan’s hawkish right-wing politicians, weakening its conscientious voices.  Now is the time the Moon government should come forward to put forth solutions to build forward-looking ties no longer tethered to historical disputes. |
| Korea Herald, | Editorial | The Korea Herald | June 17, 2020 | South Korea | Keep the promise  Japan conceals Battleship Island slave labor, breaks oath to honor victims at info center | The Japanese government has reportedly concealed historical facts on wartime forced labor at its newly opened information center.  When 23 industrial sites of the Meiji-era (1868-1912) were registered on the UNESCO’s World Heritage list in 2015, Tokyo promised to establish an information center to honor the victims, recognizing “Koreans and others who were brought against their will to work under harsh conditions in the 1940s at some of the sites.”  Among the registered sites is the notorious Hashima Island, also known as Battleship Island, where many Koreans endured forced labor like slaves -- a reason why South Korea had opposed the designation.  Articles on exhibition at the Industrial Heritage Information Centre in Shinjuku, Tokyo, which opened to the public on Monday, reportedly focused on showing off achievements of industrialization in the areas of iron, steel and coal mining.  The center gave short shrift to the suffering of Korean victims. Rather it is said to exhibit testimonies by former residents in the island who deny the slave labor and discrimination against Korean laborers.  Tokyo argues it has kept its promise to honor the victims, citing the text of the promise on display at the center. This is absurd. Japan broke its promise to the international community. Its behavior of hiding historical facts is as good as betraying trust shown by the international community.  Appropriately, the Korean government called in Japanese Ambassador Koji Tomita, hours after the center opened, to express regret and urge Tokyo to take sincere follow-up steps to honor forced labor victims.  Battleship Island is a historic site where Korean victims of compulsory labor had to endure a horrible life. It is a 6.3-hectare island -- 480 meters long and 160 meters wide and 1.2 km in circumference -- known for its undersea coal mines.  Its most notable features are the concrete apartment blocks and the surrounding sea wall. Its official name is Hashima Island but is known as Battleship Island for resembling a battleship. The mines were closed in 1974 and all the residents departed soon after.  Five years have passed since the island was formally approved as a UNESCO World Heritage Site as part of Japan’s sites of the Meiji Industrial Revolution. But Japan’s publicity regarding the island, shown in a museum or in video played by ferries to the island, is said to highlight only positive aspects of the island’s history. They do not show the entire related history, ignoring recommendations made by the World Heritage Committee when the sites were registered.  Japan’s attempts to cover up parts of history are as futile as sticking its head in the sand. There are undeniable historical materials. Furthermore, survivors have told the truth vividly. Most of the laborers drafted to the undersea coal mines were Korean or Chinese. They mined coal under harsh conditions 600-700 meters under the sea and were mistreated. Japanese residents on the island lived a comfortable life high above the ground.  About 800 Koreans were commandeered to the mines from 1939-1945, and reportedly 134 of them died on the island. Korean victims are said to have called the site as “Hell Island” where no one could get out alive. About 33,000 Koreans are estimated to have been forcibly mobilized to industrial sites including coal mines, steel works and a shipyard in the latter days of Japan’s colonial rule of Korea.  Despite these stark historical facts, the Japanese government avoids reflecting on its history and resolving issues based on self-examination. Instead, it appears engrossed in shirking responsibility and whitewashing its history.  A site being registered as world heritage means that the venue is worth preserving as a universal asset for humankind, not as a place for the self-rationalization of the related country or region. In this sense, Japan must keep its words sincerely to honor the victims and follow the World Heritage Committee’s recommendation that it come up with ways to allow an understanding of the “full history” of each site. |
| Korea Herald | Editorial | The Korea Herald | May 14, 2020 | South Korea | Uncover truth  Accounting suspicions hit group for victims of Japan’s wartime sex slavery | An advocacy group for Korean victims of Japan’s wartime sex slavery is mired in suspicions that it may have misappropriated donations.  The Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan denied allegations by Lee Yong-soo, a 92-year-old victim of the slavery.  But it refused to disclose details of donation expenditures, despite Lee’s revelations of its opaque use of money. Lee dropped a bombshell when she said she had been deceived by the council and that she has been in the dark about where donations were used.  If the council is open and honorable, there is no reason to refuse to disclose expenditures in detail.  Rather, it countered, saying, “Which civic group on earth discloses details of donations and expenditures?”  It is doubtful whether it has any common sense. Is transparency the life of nongovernmental organizations?  According to the council’s account data posted on the National Tax Service, expenditures paid to the victims amounted to merely 4.3 percent and 5.8 percent of its donation income in 2018 and 2019, respectively.  In 2018, the council spent 33.39 million won ($27,000) on a fund-raising project in a beerhouse. However, the beerhouse reportedly received 9.72 million won in sales and donated 5.42 million won left after subtracting 4.3 million won in actual expenses from the sales.  That means that the council exaggerated the expenditure by nearly 700 percent. It explained that it had recorded the total expenditures on similar events held in 2018 under the same account, titled beerhouse. Few would understand this way of accounting.  According to its 2019 expenditure data, the council reported about 11.7 million won as expenses paid to a funeral service company, but the company is said to have offered the service free of charge for the victims for years.  These suspicions naturally call into question the money spent privately by Yoon Mi-hyang, the previous president of the council.  Yoon and her husband are estimated to earn about 50 million won together a year by inference from their income tax filings.  Her daughter currently majors in piano at a US state university whose annual tuition is said to reach $40,000 for non-US citizens. It’s generally thought to cost 70 million won to 80 million won a year, including living expenses, for a Korean to study at the university.  Yoon said in an interview that her daughter chose a US university because it offered a full scholarship. After news media noted that US state universities seldom offer scholarships to foreign undergraduates, Yoon changed her story.  She said she raised the expenses from compensation and damages her husband had received for serving a jail term on charges of violating the National Security Law and being found partially not guilty in a retrial. Is this explanation reliable?  The Kim Bok Dong Scholarship was awarded to children of social and labor activists this year. The scholarship was launched in honor of the late Kim Bok Dong, another victim, who donated 50 million won to the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, the predecessor of the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. Kim hoped the scholarship fund would benefit “students attending schools founded by Korean residents in Japan after Korea gained independence from Japan’s colonial occupation.”  The scholarship was given to students attending such schools in Japan, as Kim wished. She died in January 2019. Then the council reportedly expanded the scholarship in March 2019 and created a separate scholarship only for “children of Korean social activists.”  Last year, two students belonging to the progressive group of university students, whose members scaled the wall of the US ambassador’s residence, were among recipients of the scholarship.  The council says it followed Kim’s wish, but it remains mum about related documents, such as her will or suspicions surrounding the scholarship.  It begrudged the raising of suspicions. “People are harsh on us. Why aren’t they making similar demands to companies?” the council said, “We hope people will look back upon their behavior of degrading us and hurting activists.”  The supreme virtues of nonprofit civic groups are morality and transparency. Before complaining against people and news media, it must look back on whether it used the historical issue politically or for personal gains of its activists. Yoon won a proportional representation seat of the National Assembly as a candidate of the ruling party’s sister party in April.  If the council and Yoon want to keep their sincerity from being tainted, the best way is for them to reveal the truth transparently. |
| Korea Herald | Editorial | The Korea Herald | November 17, 2019 | South Korea | Risky bet  GSOMIA decision doomed to hurt Korea’s security; Questionable if follow-up steps are in place | In response to Tokyo’s export curbs against South Korea, President Moon Jae-in’s administration decided to terminate its military intelligence sharing pact with Japan. But Japan has not flinched yet and a crisis in the alliance with the US looms large.  US Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley visited Seoul last week for the annual Security Consultative Meeting with South Korea. It is rare for both US defense secretary and JCS chief to visit Korea together for the meeting.  The General Security of Military Information Agreement was not on SCM agenda, but the US urged South Korea not to end the deal during the meeting. Cheong Wa Dae said Esper raised the issue when he met with Moon. This shows the agreement matters a lot to the US as well as to Korea and Japan.  In a meeting with Esper at Cheong Wa Dae on Friday, Moon expressed an intent to reconsider abandoning the deal if Japan retracts export restrictions. The accord is scheduled to expire at midnight on Nov. 22 unless there is a change in Korea-Japan relations over the issue.  At a news conference earlier in the day with South Korean Defense Minister Jeong Kyeong-doo after the SCM, Esper said that “GSOMIA is an important tool by which South Korea, the US and Japan share effective information, particularly in times of war.” He also said that “the only ones who benefit from the expiration of GSOMIA and continued friction between Seoul and Tokyo are Pyongyang and Beijing.”  This was a message that the deal concerns security interests not only of South Korea and Japan but also of the US. But Moon effectively rejected Esper’s demand by sending the ball into Japan’s court.  In August, Washington reacted strongly to Seoul’s decision on the agreement, using words such as “disappointment” and “strong concern.” For the first time, it also raised issues with Korea’s military drills around its easternmost islets also claimed by Japan.  Meanwhile, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s administration looks intransigent. It argues export curbs should be treated differently from the pact, and has reportedly conveyed to the US its position not to respond to Seoul’s proposal that it retract export measures in exchange with Seoul renewing the agreement.  Tokyo tightened export controls against Korea after the Supreme Court in Seoul ruled in 2018 that Japanese firms compensate Korean victims of forced labor during Japan’s colonial rule. Tokyo argues all reparation issues were settled under a 1965 accord that normalized South Korea-Japan relations. To solve GSOMIA conflicts from the root, the issue of the ruling must be resolved. Seoul must not shun this problem just because the ruling came amid Moon’s drive to fight judicial evils of the past governments.  Foreign and defense ministries are said to have opposed scrapping the deal, but Cheong Wa Dae decided to withdraw it. The decision fueled anti-Japanese sentiment. Moon supporters led a boycott of Japanese products, condemning critics of the decision as collaborators with Japanese invaders. Moon and ruling party lawmakers fostered jingoism. Now, they are quiet about the boycott, waiting for signals from Tokyo that will justify them if they reconsider the GSOMIA decision.  Washington officials and defense experts have noted that the agreement is a key part of triangle security cooperation among the US, South Korea and Japan and that it is important particularly to South Korea’s security. If the deal is scrapped, Seoul will likely face a big aftermath in the form of a reeling US alliance and its weakened surveillance of North Korea.  However, it is questionable if the government can handle the aftereffect. Under the agreement, Seoul could obtain information quickly and efficiently from Japanese military assets including surveillance satellites that it does not have. How can South Korea reconnoiter North Korean submarines with its ground radars? Cheong Wa Dae keeps mum about such questions.  Discarding the pact will certainly put Korea in harm’s way. Using the deal as a negotiating chip was a self-injurious and risky bet. Exiting the deal can be viewed in the US as a declaration of Seoul neglecting its alliance.  Chief of the National Security Office defended the decision to abandon the agreement, saying it is a matter of Korea and Japan and that it had nothing to do with the US alliance. It is doubtful if Cheong Wa Dae made the GSOMIA decision based on the accurate understanding of the accord. |
| Korea Herald | Editorial | The Korea Herald | November 6, 2019 | South Korea | GSOMIA miscalculation  Seoul squeezed between US, Japan over decision to end military pact with Tokyo | South Korea now finds itself being squeezed between the US and Japan over its decision not to extend a military-information sharing accord with Tokyo, which is scheduled to expire late this month.  This is certainly not the situation President Moon Jae-in’s government in Seoul anticipated when it made the decision in August amid an escalating feud with Tokyo over the issue of compensating Koreans forced to work for Japanese companies during Japan’s 1910-45 colonial rule of the peninsula.  At the time, Moon and his security aides apparently hoped the move would prompt the US to intervene to help settle the simmering row between its key Asian allies.  Seoul has since suggested it would be willing to reconsider the decision if Tokyo withdrew its measures to toughen control on exports of tech-related materials to South Korea and drop the country from its whitelist of preferred trading partners.  But against its expectations, Washington has largely stayed out of the Seoul-Tokyo discord, while urging the Moon government to maintain the military pact with Japan.  US officials have made it clear that they may help facilitate talks between South Korea and Japan, but would not play a role as “mediator or referee.” At the same time, they have cautioned that Seoul’s decision to scrap the intelligence-sharing accord would have a negative impact on US security interests by undermining efforts to cope with military threats from North Korea and other regional challenges.  Washington has considered the General Security of Military Information Agreement signed in 2016 under its auspices as a key tool for its trilateral defense cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo. The three-way collaboration is also seen as a crucial part of Washington’s broader Indo-Pacific strategy designed to counter China’s rising power in the region.  As a matter of course, Seoul’s termination of the accord with Tokyo would further irk US President Donald Trump’s administration, which has been increasing pressure on South Korea on multiple fronts, including defense costs and trade. It seems to be no coincidence that senior US officials handling security, economic and defense cost-sharing issues with Seoul gathered here this week for consultations with their local counterparts.  The increasing pressure from the US may be behind South Korea’s recent efforts to win a breakthrough in its strained ties with Japan, which Seoul hopes would give cause for retracting its decision not to extend the GSOMIA.  Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon stressed Seoul’s readiness to improve bilateral relations when he met Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and other officials in Tokyo last month during his trip there to attend Emperor Naruhito’s enthronement ceremony.  Moon and Abe held an 11-minute one-on-one “conversation” on the sidelines of a regional summit in Bangkok on Monday at Moon’s impromptu request. During their first meeting in more than a year, the two leaders agreed that Seoul-Tokyo ties were of importance and reaffirmed the principle of resolving pending bilateral issues through dialogue, according to Seoul officials. Moon himself on Tuesday described the meeting as “meaningful,” hoping it could be a starting point of dialogue for mending frayed ties between Seoul and Tokyo.  What troubles South Korea is the Abe administration’s intransigent stance that it will not step back unless the forced labor issue comes to an end based on its argument that all reparation issues were settled under a 1965 accord that normalized Seoul-Tokyo relations. Tokyo’s trade restrictions on Seoul came as an apparent reprisal for last year’s ruling by the Supreme Court here that ordered Japanese firms to compensate Korean victims of forced labor.  It was an ill-conceived move for the Moon administration to counter Tokyo’s trade curbs over a historical dispute by placing a security pact at stake. Its latest efforts to redress ties with Tokyo stand in sharp contrast to its misleading attempt to fan anti-Japanese sentiment here in the summer. The Moon government should be held responsible for making too little of a sensitive security matter, if the attempt, as some critics suggest, was motivated to deflect attention from a scandal involving one of Moon’s close associates.  Given Washington’s firm stance, it could hardly be an option for Seoul to justify the eventual termination of the information-sharing accord by highlighting Tokyo’s intransigent attitude.  It needs to go beyond proposing to raise a joint compensation fund with contributions from Japanese and South Korean firms. Seoul’s new approach might call for additional donations from the South Korean government and ordinary citizens in both nations.  Japan is also advised to be more flexible to give South Korea room for retracting the decision regarding the GSOMIA.  If Tokyo continues to be uncompromising, the Moon administration might have to pay for its inconsiderate and miscalculated move. |
| Korea Herald | Editorial | The Korea Herald | October 21, 2019 | South Korea | Messenger’s role  PM Lee’s visit to Tokyo should set the stage for South Korea-Japan summit | The momentum for easing the strained ties between South Korea and Japan is building ahead of Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon’s planned trip to Tokyo this week.  During his three-day visit starting Tuesday, Lee is scheduled to meet with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe after attending Japanese Emperor Naruhito’s enthronement ceremony. It will be the first high-level meeting in more than a year between the two neighboring nations that are embroiled in a long-running feud that has spread from historical discord to diplomatic, trade and security ties.  In an interview with a Japanese daily last week, Lee said President Moon Jae-in believes the wartime forced labor issue should not stand in the way of promoting future-oriented relations between South Korea and Japan. Lee is expected to deliver a letter from Moon to Abe, which is expected to express a commitment to improving the frayed bilateral ties.  In October last year, Seoul’s top court made a ruling ordering Japanese firms to compensate Korean victims of forced labor during Japan’s 1910-45 colonial rule of the peninsula.  In an apparent retaliation for the ruling, which contradicts Tokyo’s position that all reparation issues with Seoul were settled by a 1965 pact that normalized bilateral ties, Abe’s administration in July imposed curbs on exports of key industrial materials to South Korea. Tokyo went further and dropped Seoul from its white list of preferred trade partners.  Seoul countered Tokyo’s moves by removing Japan from its own white list and decided not to extend a bilateral military information-sharing agreement that is set to expire in late November.  In a separate interview with a Japanese news agency last week, Lee suggested Seoul could reconsider its decision regarding the accord if Tokyo withdrew the export restrictions.  Days before Lee’s interviews with Japanese news outlets, Abe said in a parliamentary session that it was necessary to maintain dialogue with South Korea, which he described as an “important neighboring country.”  Given the difference in the positions of Seoul and Tokyo over the forced labor issue, it would be too much to expect Lee’s visit to make tangible accomplishments in improving soured relations. But it could, and should, serve as an occasion to set the stage for a summit between Moon and Abe, who last met in September last year. Lee himself last week expressed hopes of playing a “messenger role” between the two leaders.  Moon and Abe need to meet soon to affirm their will to settle disputes between the two countries, giving impetus to working-level efforts to find diplomatic solutions. Their meeting may be set up on the sidelines of some of the regional summit talks set to be held in the coming months, including the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conference hosted by Chile in mid-November.  Seoul and Tokyo have held each other responsible for the worsening bilateral ties. But both sides have little time to avoid their ongoing disputes causing more severe consequences.  The prolonged trade restrictions against each other would inflict increasing damages on not only the economies of the two countries but also the global supply chains in high-tech sectors.  The expiration of the General Security of Military Information Agreement, signed in 2016 under the auspices of the US, would weaken the trilateral security cooperation among Seoul, Tokyo and Washington against persistent nuclear and ballistic missile threats from North Korea.  President Moon’s administration appears to be worried that the termination of the accord would irk Washington, which has repeatedly called on Seoul to reconsider the decision urgently. Such concern may be the main factor behind Seoul’s active stance on mending its frayed ties with Tokyo.  But Abe’s government has so far shown no signs of accepting Seoul’s proposal to extend the GSOMIA in return for Tokyo’s withdrawal of export curbs. It is expected to withdraw retaliatory measures only when the forced labor issue is settled in the direction of suiting its position.  Given the sensitivity of the issue, the South Korean court is advised to consider further delaying legal steps to liquidate assets here of Japanese firms that have refused to comply with the order to compensate forced labor victims. For its part, Tokyo needs to reconsider its objection to Seoul’s suggestion that companies from both nations raise a joint fund for the compensation scheme. The South Korean government could contribute to the fund if the measure helps reach a compromise with Japan.  As some observers note, the Moon administration could use what it sees as Tokyo’s intransigent stance to deflect or alleviate Washington’s anger at the eventual termination of the military information-sharing accord. |
| Korea Herald, | Editorial | The Korea Herald | August 7, 2019 | South Korea | Stop politicizing  Politicians should not exploit conflict with Japan | Japan is primarily to blame for starting a trade war with South Korea over historical disputes, and for the consequent escalation of tension between the two countries. This, however, should not warrant excessive, reckless and emotive responses from our side.  In view of the degree of Japan’s provocation -- unprecedented economic retaliation in the form of export curbs -- the rise of anti-Japanese public sentiment in South Korea may be inevitable. The campaign to boycott Japanese goods and refrain from traveling to Japan is gaining momentum, with some sensible people advising caution to prevent it from turning into a hate movement.  The problem is that politicians -- from President Moon Jae-in down to lawmakers within the ruling and opposition parties -- are fanning the flames of anti-Japanese sentiment to take advantage of it for their own political gain.  Of course it is important for political leaders, not least the chief executive, to stand firm against Japan’s provocation and boost public confidence in overcoming it. But it is one thing to call for national unity and criticize Japan’s provocative acts; it is another to incite excessive, emotive anti-Japan sentiment.  One of Moon’s first reactions to Japan’s decision to remove South Korea from the whitelist of countries with preferential export treatment was to say South Korea “will not lose to Japan ever again.”  He also cited the case of Adm. Yi Sun-shin, who with only a dozen vessels defeated far larger Japanese fleets during the Japanese invasion of Korea in the 16th century. One of Moon’s former aides, Cho Kuk, mentioned the “bamboo spears” used by participants in an anti-establishment, anti-Japanese peasant movement in the late 19th century.  Another statement from Moon also indicated what is on his mind: tying the current crisis in relations with Japan to his appeasement policy toward North Korea. Moon said in a recent meeting with his top aides at Cheong Wa Dae that economic cooperation with North Korea could strengthen the national economy so much that it would be possible to overtake Japan.  Indeed, a unified Korea would have a far stronger economy than either side has now, but is it realistic to talk about synergy from the integration of the two Koreas’ economies at a time when the government, businesses and the public are urgently required to pull together to minimize the impending impact of Japan’s export curbs? Also, look at the spate of missiles fired by the North in recent weeks, which Pyongyang clearly called a warning to the South.  In tune with the Moon administration, ruling party members are busy fanning nationalist, anti-Japanese sentiment, believing that it will help their party win public support, especially ahead of the parliamentary elections scheduled for next April.  Rep. Choi Jae-sung, head of the ruling Democratic Party’s special panel formed to tackle what the party calls Japan’s “economic aggression,” said the Seoul government should consider a ban on travel to Tokyo, mentioning fear of radioactive materials in the city. He also hinted at linking the radioactivity scare -- which stems from the 2011 meltdown of the nuclear power plant in Fukushima -- to the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo.  Another senior ruling party lawmaker, Rep. Sul Hoon, publicly demanded at the party’s Executive Council meeting that the government discontinue an agreement to share security intelligence with Japan in retaliation for the export curbs. He suggested that the Seoul government notify Tokyo of the decision on Aug. 15, the anniversary of Japan’s surrender in World War II and the end of its colonial rule of Korea. It is sad to see a fourth-term lawmaker tackle the issue in such a sentimental way.  When it comes to excessive politicizing of the conflict with Japan, the main opposition Liberty Korea Party is not blameless either.  The party found fault with President Moon for eating raw fish -- which is popular at Japanese restaurants -- at a restaurant in Busan recently and with Prime Minister Lee Hae-chan for purportedly drinking Japanese rice wine sake at a restaurant in Seoul. What Lee drank turned out to be a Korean liquor similar to sake, and the opposition party drew public backlash for using anti-Japanese sentiment to attack its opponents.  With the impact of the South Korea-Japan trade war looming large, the US and China are engaged in increasingly fierce trade and currency disputes. The recent statement by the US Treasury Department designating China as a currency manipulator has already begun battering the global economy and the South Korean economy.  This is another reason South Korean political parties should refrain from excessive politicization of the current conflict with Japan. Instead, they should join forces to prod the South Korean and Japanese governments to come to the negotiation table as soon as possible. |
| Korea Herald, | Editorial | The Korea Herald | August 6, 2019 | South Korea | Cool-headed approach  Measured response, policy shift needed to cope with Japan’s trade restrictions | To cope with Japan’s trade retaliation against South Korea amid drawn-out historical disputes between the two countries, President Moon Jae-in’s administration has put forward a set of response measures.  Japan last week decided to remove South Korea from a list of nations given preferential trade treatment, an apparent reprisal for a ruling by the South Korean Supreme Court in October awarding damages to South Korean victims of wartime forced labor. In July, Tokyo had imposed tighter regulations on exports to South Korea of hi-tech materials used to make semiconductors and flexible displays.  A package of measures disclosed by the Moon government Monday calls for, among other things, spending 7.8 trillion won ($6.4 billion) over the next seven years to nurture the country’s parts, materials and equipment sectors.  Efforts will be focused on securing a stable supply of 100 key strategic items in the coming five years by diversifying suppliers abroad and helping domestic firms acquire foreign rivals that possess advanced technology, in addition to promoting localized production. The government plans to ensure stable supplies of 20 such materials within a year.  In separate endeavors, the government is pushing for the early implementation of an extra budget that was passed by the parliament last week, allocating 273.2 billion won for measures to address Japan’s recent moves.  Surely, Seoul needs to mobilize all immediate means to reduce the impact on South Korean companies of Tokyo’s retaliatory steps.  But it would be a miscalculation to think that such stopgap measures can enable the country to overcome Tokyo’s trade retaliation altogether.  If Tokyo’s decision to strike South Korea off the whitelist of trading partners eligible for preferential treatment takes effect Aug. 28 as expected, Japanese exporters will need individual authorization, rather than fast-track approval, to export about 1,120 dual-use items to South Korea. It is feared that the restrictions will cause significant delays and disruptions in imports from Japan.  In particular, key items essential for the development of new industries, including lithium-ion batteries, carbon fiber and engineering equipment, are likely to be the targets of Japan’s expanded export controls.  It seems reasonable to conclude that Tokyo’s intentions may go further than reprisal over the forced labor issue and that its ulterior aim may be to undermine South Korea’s hi-tech industries, which are catching up with their Japanese competitors.  What Seoul needs to do is to deliver a measured response to Tokyo’s trade retaliation, which has come under increasing international criticism, and change or discard misguided policies that have dampened corporate vitality.  True, the toughened restrictions could also negatively affect some Japanese companies, as they might lose South Korean buyers.  But it seems likely that the South Korean economy will be hit harder by an escalation of tit-for-tat measures between the two countries.  Japan is in a position where it will have less difficulty finding alternative providers.  Moreover, it is far from guaranteed that Seoul’s plans to enhance localized production will go as smoothly as expected. Many South Korean firms could suffer severe losses before such efforts ever come to fruition.  At a nationally televised Cabinet meeting last week, Moon said Tokyo’s moves presented obstacles for the South Korean economy, but vowed “we will not lose to Japan ever again.”  If he truly wants to turn his rhetoric into reality, he should now focus on finding a diplomatic solution to the escalating row with Japan. This would reduce the fallout for South Korean companies, which are already struggling to cope with deteriorating conditions at home and abroad.  At the same time, his administration should make a fundamental shift from the ill-conceived policies that have increased burdens on companies. The South Korean economy will grow more sluggish, even aside from the stand-off with Japan, if the Moon government continues to adhere to its anti-corporate stance.  The government has pledged to ease safety and environmental regulations and apply the shorter workweek more flexibly to help facilitate the development of hi-tech parts and materials. Such measures should be expanded to a broader scope of industrial sectors on a permanent basis.  The Moon administration also needs to cut corporate taxes, curb steep wage hikes and resist excessive demands from labor groups to help boost corporate competitiveness and restore market vitality. Reckless spending on inefficient welfare and employment programs should be reconsidered, and part of the funds could be channeled into investments that would be more conducive to revitalizing the economy.  Turing a blind eye to Pyongyang’s renewed provocations, Moon said Monday that building what he called a “peace economy” through inter-Korean cooperation would be a way to counter external pressures such as Japan’s trade restrictions. But sticking to big concepts instead of focusing on concrete tasks will do nothing to help South Korea catch up with Japan economically. |
| Korea Herald, | Editorial | The Korea Herald | August 4, 2019 | South Korea | Economic war  Let the world recognize illegitimacy of Japan’s unilateral actions | The unprecedented economic war Japan started against South Korea has taken relations between the two countries to the worst level since 1965, when they normalized official ties in an agreement to put the 1910-45 colonial period behind them. It is highly likely that the war may still escalate and continue for some time.  All considered, the Japanese government must be condemned for starting the war by putting export curbs on materials needed for chips and displays last month, and then deciding to rid South Korea of the preferential export control treatment given to countries on its whitelist. There are many solid reasons to condemn the unilateral action.  First of all, it is wrong for Japan to resort to economic retaliation as a means to pressure Korea over historical issues like forced labor during its colonial rule of the peninsula.  Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and other Japanese officials had already indicated -- at times even in unequivocal words -- that the Korean top court’s ruling that ordered Japanese firms to compensate Korean victims of forced labor in Japan led them to take the retaliatory action. It is simply comical that they now insist it had nothing to do with the issue.  Secondly, Japan’s export curbs targeting Korea, in citation of security, run counter to the global free trade order on which the Japanese economy has thrived. It is ironic that the Abe administration began restricting exports to Korea shortly after the prime minister hosted the annual G-20 summit in Osaka, where he emphasized the importance of free, fair and indiscriminative trade.  Impact from the Japanese action will go beyond the two countries and it will damage the global trade order and the international value chain. This woe coming on the heels of an escalating trade conflict between the US and China has already started to affect some financial markets.  Japan’s rejection of the Korean proposal to hold diplomatic negotiations on both the export control and forced labor issues as well as a mediation effort by the US also clearly deserving of criticism. Tokyo should heed the call to come to the negotiation table.  On the security side, the economic war between the two neighbors could not come at a worse time, as they are key players, along with the US, in efforts to denuclearize North Korea and maintain peace and stability in the region, in which China and Russia are trying to exert greater influence.  All these issues combine to pose grave challenges to South Koreans. Political leadership -- the Moon Jae-in administration -- must stand at the forefront of the nation’s efforts to overcome the challenges with resoluteness and prudence.  It was right that Moon stood firm and publicly condemned and warned the Abe administration. Stating that South Korea is not what it used to be, he said Japan too would suffer, vowing to take “corresponding” measures step by step.  The Seoul government promptly announced it would likewise remove Japan from its own whitelist, on which 29 countries benefit from preferential export controls. It is inevitable for the Seoul government to at least take such a corresponding action.  Also important is to arouse international attention to the illegitimacy of the Japanese government’s actions. The most urgent task is to accelerate scrutiny by the World Trade Organization.  Statements made by the Singaporean and Chinese foreign ministers in a recent regional ministerial forum held in Bangkok also remind us of the importance of letting the world fairly understand the imprudence and preposterousness of the Japanese actions.  After the South Korean and Japanese foreign ministers exchanged statements on the export curbs, Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said that Japan -- instead of dropping any country from its white list -- should add to the list for the sake of trust, economic interdependence and co-prosperity.  Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi indicated his support for the Singaporean minister’s suggestion, saying that regional issues should be settled through “goodwill and trust.” Wang also called on the regional countries to uphold free trade and facilitate regional economic integration.  These indicate that sensible members of the international community will stand behind Korea at least pertaining to the two Japanese actions taken to restrict exports of Japanese strategic goods to South Korea. That could be a very effective weapon to win over the war that has just started. |
| Korea Herald | Editorial | The Korea Herald | July 31, 2019 | South Korea | Revive communication  Kang-Kono talks expected on sidelines of ARF; chauvinism can only worsen problem | Conflict between South Korea and Japan surrounding Tokyo’s export restrictions on high-tech materials is worsening rather than subsiding.  The Japanese government is expected to pass a bill at a Cabinet meeting Friday, removing Korea from a so-called “whitelist” of 27 trusted trade partners.  If the Cabinet approves the bill, it will likely take effect late this month or thereabouts.  If Korea is removed from the list, Japanese exporters of 1,115 strategic items will have to get permission from their government whenever they ship those items to Korea. The impact of this measure will be far stronger than that of the existing export controls, which affect just three materials needed to make semiconductors and display panels.  According to Japanese news media, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is unlikely to meet Korean President Moon Jae-in during the UN General Assembly in September unless Seoul takes steps to address Tokyo’s concerns over World War II-era forced labor cases and other issues.  Tokyo has effectively admitted that it is retaliating for the recent Korean Supreme Court rulings on wartime forced labor cases.  In the international community, voices have been growing against Japan’s ill-founded and unjustifiable retaliatory moves, but Tokyo seems obdurate.  If Korea is taken off the whitelist, most of its industries will suffer. That is as good as a national emergency. The Korean government will likely take strong countermeasures.  Continuing this course toward a head-on collision would ruin bilateral relations and further darken prospects for a diplomatic solution. Tokyo must not cross the Rubicon.  In this situation, it is noteworthy that the door for diplomatic dialogue is ajar.  Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha and her Japanese counterpart, Taro Kono, are scheduled to attend the Association of South East Asian Nations Regional Forum in Bangkok on Friday. Reportedly, there is a good chance they could hold bilateral talks on the sidelines of the forum a day earlier.  If they meet, it will be the first face-to-face encounter between the two top diplomats since the trade dispute began early last month.  Their talks, if realized, would be a small first step toward resolving the problem. Though it is hard to expect remarkable progress, a meeting would be meaningful in that it could lead to follow-up talks.  It is important for both sides to reach a consensus that the situation cannot be left as is.  The point is to start negotiations as quickly as possible.  Given that the conflicts arose from the Korean Supreme Court rulings awarding damages to victims of forced labor, Seoul needs to figure out creative and bold solutions that respect the rulings and at the same time prevent its ties with Japan from coming to a catastrophic end.  A rigid interpretation of the judicial rulings could make it difficult to work out a flexible and proactive proposal.  The current conflicts ought to be approached with an open mind and flexible thinking.  The ongoing boycott of Japanese products has been gaining momentum, and it may help the Korean government stand firm against Japan.  But reprisals tend to breed more reprisals, big or small.  Efforts are needed to avoid confrontation and find a way to ease the strained relations. That is diplomacy.  Even if the space for diplomacy has grown narrower, both countries must make efforts to put their animosity aside and make reciprocal concessions through dialogue.  Any act that instigates anti-Japanese or anti-Korean chauvinism and stigmatizes those with different opinions as traitors would only worsen the problem.  About a month has passed since Japan imposed its export restrictions.  Criticism, rather than dialogue, and emotion, rather than reason, have dominated the two nations. There were even politically motivated incidents.  But moderate voices calling on both nations to solve the problem through diplomacy, not confrontation, have been gaining momentum.  Both countries need to make the most of diplomatic events like the upcoming forum to open up opportunities for dialogue.  With cool heads and with eyes looking ahead to the future, they must try harder to find a way to resolve the conflicts. |
| Korea Herald | Editorial | The Korea Herald | July 22, 2019 | South Korea | Prudence matters  Diplomacy, not emotional reactions, should take center stage in Korea-Japan feud | Tensions are escalating between South Korea and Japan over historical issues that have led to an unprecedented trade row. Judging from the latest developments, if left uncontrolled, the feud could cause irrecoverable damage to bilateral relations between the two countries.  The most urgent thing is that Japan -- which unilaterally imposed export curbs on some high-tech materials used by Korean tech firms -- should refrain from taking the additional retaliatory measures it had threatened.  Also important is that both sides -- including political leaders, media and the public -- remain calm, and not try to fan hostilities toward one other, leaving the diplomats to sort it out.  The core cause of the dispute, of course, is Japan’s one-sided action to tie historical issues -- like sex slavery and forced labor -- to export controls, which could inflict serious damage to the Korean economy.  It is not hard to imagine what motives are behind the rightist nationalist administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. It may be under the impression that it is time to take a strong stand and show that Japan can no longer be rebuked and swayed by historical issues raised by Korea.  Abe and his lieutenants who have not concealed their dislike for Korea might also want to check the neighboring country’s ever-growing global influence, and not least its economic power.  It is also obvious that the Japanese side wants to use the dispute to win what it sees as a “self-pride war.” In a working-level meeting between the two sides earlier this month, Japanese officials received their Korean counterparts in a place that looked more like a storage room for unused furniture than a conference room.  The hosts did not offer to shake hands or exchange business cards. The two Japanese officials wore short-sleeved shirts, compared to their Korean guests formally dressed in dark business suits.  Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono also exhibited -- obviously intentionally -- high-handedness when he summoned Korean Ambassador Nam Gwan-pyo on Friday. Apparently mindful of TV cameras, Kono, who did not wear a necktie, had a grim face and even interrupted Nam when his comments were being translated. Kono said the Seoul government was “rude” to reject Tokyo’s proposal to refer the forced labor issue to an arbitration panel. That certainly was not appropriate language to be used by a minister speaking to a foreign envoy.  These episodes illustrate the Japanese government’s attitude toward the issue and the Korean government. Most of all, it wants to maximize the impact of the dispute in favor of its rightist administration, and show its people that it has the upper hand. It is bolstering anti-Korean sentiment for political purposes.  Some Japanese media, politicians and opinion leaders are joining forces. One conservative TV journalist even argued that impeaching President Moon Jae-in is the only way to save Korea-Japan relations.  It is obvious that the public here would be upset by the growing Korea-bashing campaign. More people are joining boycotts of Japanese goods, and the number of people traveling to Japan, previously a favorite destination, is plummeting.  As the current dispute was provoked by Japan’s unilateral export curbs, the heightening of anti-Japanese sentiment in Korea is unavoidable, but there should also be calls for calm and restraint.  Most worrisome is that some ill-advised senior administration officials and ruling party members -- apparently in order to rally their traditional supporters -- are fanning anti-Japanese feelings indiscriminately.  Cho Kuk, one of President Moon’s most trusted aides, is using his social media posts to fuel the flames. He called the current feud an “economic war” and said Moon is doing his utmost to tackle it as the commander-in-chief. His comments are in line with the ruling party’s opinion, which referred to the Japanese move as “economic aggression.”  Cho also said it not important whether you are a progressive or a conservative. It a matter of being a patriot or abetting an enemy, he said. It never is sensible for a top presidential aide to label a neighboring country an enemy and say only those who support the government’s arguments are patriots.  Last Friday, a 78-year-old Korean man died after setting his car on fire near the building that houses the Japanese Embassy in what his relatives and police said was a protest against Japan. His father-in-law was said to be one of the victims of forced labor during Japan’s colonial rule.  Most mainstream Korean media did not give prominent coverage of the tragic incident. The same prudence is required of political leaders and the public in both countries. The current crisis in Korea-Japan relations must be contained and the first step is to start diplomatic talks, with each side refraining from more provocative actions. |
| Korea Herald | Editorial | The Korea Herald | July 21, 2019 | South Korea | Dangerous spillover:  Seoul-Tokyo discord should not damage security cooperation | The escalating row over Japan’s export curbs on South Korea should be prevented from spilling over into the realm of security cooperation.  It would not serve the interests of both countries if the unraveling of their security ties, encouraged by the US, results in undermining international efforts toward denuclearizing North Korea.  In this regard, the US needs to assume a more active mediating role to help resolve the spat between its two key Asian allies over the issue of compensating Koreans forced to work for Japanese companies during Japan’s 1910-45 colonial rule of the peninsula.  Seoul has suggested that a bilateral accord on sharing military information could be at risk of being discarded if Tokyo takes further retaliatory steps beyond tightening regulations on exports of high-tech materials to South Korea early this month.  The General Security of Military Information Agreement signed in 2016 under the auspices of the US enables the two sides to share confidential military information in order to better cope with nuclear and missile threats from Pyongyang.  The accord is automatically renewed every year unless either side expresses its intent to rescind it 90 days ahead of the end of its extendable one-year period.  The military intelligence-sharing pact is seen as a rare symbol of trust between Seoul and Tokyo and a key platform for trilateral security cooperation involving the US.  In what could be viewed as a signal that the escalating row with Japan could affect the agreement, South Korea’s top presidential security adviser, Chung Eui-yong, said last week that Seoul could review whether to renew it, “depending on the situation.”  Another senior aide to President Moon Jae-in came forward later to reiterate Seoul’s readiness to get tougher by saying that whether to extend the pact or not is among “all options” that it would consider in response to Tokyo’s actions down the road.  Japan has warned that it could take additional retaliatory measures against Korea’s refusal to accept its demand for forming an arbitration panel involving members from third-party countries to settle the issue of forced labor compensation.  Last October’s ruling by the Supreme Court here that ordered Japanese companies to pay compensation to Korean victims angered Tokyo, which claims all reparation issues with Seoul have been resolved under a 1965 accord that normalized bilateral relations. Japan’s curbs on exports of high-tech materials to Korea was seen as the initial pressure on Seoul to conform to its stance, though it has insisted the measure was taken out of concerns over what it sees as Seoul’s lax attitude toward sanctions against Pyongyang.  To defuse the escalating spat with Japan, South Korea has been hoping that the US will mediate between the two countries.  Seoul officials’ mention of a possible termination of the military accord with Tokyo could be meant to call for active US engagement.  The US would take any move to jeopardize the pact seriously, which it regards as a key institutional tool for trilateral security cooperation with its two Asian allies in countering nuclear threats from North Korea and keeping an assertive China in check.  The US State Department said last week it “fully” supported the Seoul-Tokyo accord on sharing military intelligence, describing it as an “important tool in our shared efforts to maintain peace and security in the region and achieve the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea.”  Should Seoul choose to terminate the agreement, it would have to make a decision by Aug. 23. As observers note, it may find it hard to go so far as to scrap the pact over objections from Washington.  A disruption in the tripartite cooperation would hamper efforts to dismantle North Korea’s nuclear arsenal.  It would also harm South Korea’s national interests if it is isolated from a new regional security framework being built by Washington and Tokyo.  In his first comments on the South Korea-Japan confrontation, US President Donald Trump said Friday he was willing to help resolve it if the two countries needed him.  It seems hard to view his remarks as guaranteeing immediate US involvement. Trump pointed out he preferred Seoul and Tokyo resolving what he defined as their “trade dispute” by themselves. Japan also appears to want the US to step aside from its simmering spat with South Korea.  Washington should no longer put off assuming a mediating role to help prevent the ongoing dispute between Seoul and Tokyo from further eroding the foundation of the tripartite security cooperation. Any further delay would strengthen the impression that it has acquiesced to Tokyo’s pressure on Seoul. |
| Korea Herald | Editorial | The Korea Herald | July 17, 2019 | South Korea | Be frank:  Japan should not gloss over motive for export curbs | Japan is taking steps to remove South Korea from a list of countries being provided preferential export treatment for Japanese-made strategic goods. Tokyo may well stop the move because it lacks legitimacy and would only further worsen the situation.  If the Japanese government pushes ahead with the plan, the removal of South Korea from the 27-country whitelist would take effect in mid-August.  There is no doubt that the new export control, following curbs already imposed on three key materials for producing chips and displays, would batter Korean industries.  A report from the Korea Strategic Trade Institute said that at least 1,100 items would be affected. Experts noted that the exact scope of the negative effect to the Korean economy is hard to predict because Japan could arbitrarily apply the regulations.  As President Moon Jae-in aptly warned, any such situation would damage the Japanese economy as well. Relevant Japanese firms will face losses and those who rely on Korean suppliers will suffer too.  Besides, if Japan does take Korea off the whitelist, the Seoul government, as Moon warned, would not be able to sit idle. What Korea has endured so far in Japan’s unilateral action on three high-tech materials is enough to warrant a case with the World Trade Organization.  But additional Japanese actions will most likely force Seoul to take similar economic retaliation, which would worsen the situation and cause mutual damage to both countries’ economies. Regional and global economies would suffer, since the two major Asian economies have many global companies.  The Japanese plan to remove South Korea from the whitelist concerning the exports of strategic goods lacks legitimacy. In the initial stage, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that the top Korean court’s ruling that ordered Japanese companies to compensate victims of Korean forced labor during the colonial period damaged trust between the two countries. He made it clear that his government was imposing export curbs on the three materials because it did not have confidence in the way the Korean government was managing them.  Then Abe tried to link the export controls to North Korea, calling on South Korea to faithfully abide by the UN-led international sanctions on the North’s nuclear and missile provocations. In tandem with the prime minister, Japanese politicians and media raised allegations -- without convincing evidence -- that some Japan-made materials were sneaked into the North via South Korea.  There is no doubt that the Abe administration wants to justify its restriction of exports of strategic goods to South Korea by raising the possibility of illegal transfer of them to North Korea.  The irony, however, is that reports show that it was Japan, not South Korea, which is more vulnerable to funneling banned materials and goods into North Korea.  Most authoritative reports came from the UN panel of experts, which tracked illegal shipments to North Korea. Its reports for 2010 through 2019 showed that Japan exported strategic items and luxury goods to North Korea over the past several years in violation of the UN-led sanctions.  According to the 10 reports, sensitive equipment, materials and luxury goods that made their way from Japan to North Korea included commercial radar antennas, which were installed in North Korean naval vessels and anti-ship missiles.  The UN panel also said that banned parts made by Japanese firms were found in a North Korean unmanned aerial vehicle whose wreckage was found in South Korea. Indeed, South Korean authorities recovered Japanese-made engines, cameras and batteries from two North Korean unmanned spy aircraft that crashed in the South in 2013 and 2014.  The UN reports showed that Japan also exported banned luxury goods to North Korea mostly between 2008 and 2009, including luxury sedans, cigarettes, alcohol, pianos and cosmetics.  Media reports on the UN’s findings followed allegations by Rep. Ha Tae-keung that Japanese authorities uncovered similar cases of banned items having been transferred to North Korea.  Japan has kept silent on the UN reports and the Korean lawmaker’s statement. Some officials have only said that allegations involving North Korea had been raised by the media.  Then on Tuesday, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said that his government was not restricting exports to South Korea in reprisal for the forced labor issue. This also contradicts what Abe had said. Japan ought to be frank or find more reasonable ground for its exports controls. If not, it should ditch the plan to bump South Korea from the whitelist. |
| Korea Herald, | Editorial | The Korea Herald | July 14, 2019 | South Korea | Too farfetched:  Japan’s linking of export curbs to security not reasonable | One good way to resolve a bilateral dispute is to leave the issue to the judgement of an independent third party. This could be applied to both individuals and nations.  It is against this backdrop that the Seoul government asked the World Trade Organization to look into Japan’s recent decision to impose export curbs on three key industrial materials bound for South Korea.  In the same vein, the South Korean government called for a probe by a third-party panel on Japan’s allegations that some Japanese materials that could be used to produce weapons made their way to North Korea through South Korean firms.  As the allegations -- which lack evidence -- faced a backlash, the Japanese government took one step back, saying that it did not pinpoint North Korea, but kept insisting that South Korea’s export control on materials that can be used for conventional weapons is not being managed well.  In short, Tokyo still wants to justify its decision to restrict exports of three types key chemical materials used in memory chips and displays -- fluorinated polyimides, photoresist and hydrogen fluoride -- by linking the case to security issues. Initially, Japan did not hide what was the main motive for the export restrictions. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and other Japanese officials publicly said they were taking the action since trust between the two countries has been damaged because of historical issues. Commonly cited by the Japanese side was the South Korean top court’s ruling that ordered Japanese companies to compensate for the victims of Korean forced laborers during Japan’s colonial rule of Korea. Also cited was the Seoul government’s decision to revoke a 2015 agreement on the resolution of the issue of military sex slavery during World War II.  As the unilateral action faced criticism at home and abroad, some Japanese officials, politicians and media began raising allegations that South Korea was exporting strategic materials from Japan to North Korea in violation of the four export control regimes and the UN-led sanctions.  Indeed, Abe, while commenting on the export curbs, said that South Korea should stick to international sanctions on North Korea. Some politicians and media also alleged that strategic materials made in Japan were smuggled into North Korea via South Korea.  Those allegations -- some based on past data on the South Korean government’s crackdown on exporters -- lacked concrete evidence of the Seoul government’s involvement and it is not hard to guess why Tokyo made such allegations.  The Japanese side was apparently taking advantage of the Moon Jae-in government’s engagement policy toward North Korea, which sometimes drew criticism that it could cause cracks in the UN-led international sanctions. Japan was one of the harshest critics of moves to relieve sanctions in the absence of substantial progress in denuclearizing the North.  Abe and his lieutenants in the government and the ruling party must have believed that tying the export curbs with North Korea could strengthen domestic support for them as most Japanese people are very sensitive to security threats from North Korea.  In the face of the growing backlash, Japanese government officials who met their South Korean counterparts in Tokyo on Friday, said their government had nothing to do with the allegations involving North Korea. But they still maintained the position that Seoul had problems with controlling exports of sensitive security-related materials.  Then there is no reason for the Japanese government to ignore South Korea’s proposal -- made by President Moon’s senior security aide -- to ask a panel of UN experts or other international bodies to investigate export controls of both South Korea and Japan.  Japan demanded that South Korea respond to its proposal to have a third-party arbitration panel take up the forced labor issue by Thursday this week. It could respond beforehand to Seoul’s offer to conduct an independent investigation on export controls. |
| Korea Herald, | Editorial | The Korea Herald | July 10, 2019 | South Korea | Pro-corporate turn:  Trade spat with Japan should lead Moon administration to rethink policy framework | President Moon Jae-in held a meeting with heads of the country’s top 30 conglomerates on Wednesday to discuss Japan’s restrictions on exports of high-tech materials to South Korea.  The meeting held at Cheong Wa Dae -- the third of its kind since he took office in May 2017 -- came days after two top economic policymakers met with local business leaders to discuss ways to cope with Japan’s export curbs.  Last week, Japan tightened regulations on exports to Korea of three materials essential for the production of semiconductors and display panels.  Tokyo is expected to extend the scope of its export restrictions to increase pressure on Seoul to change its position on the issue of compensating Korean victims of wartime forced labor during Japan’s colonial rule.  Government officials have said they will gather opinions and closely coordinate with local businesses to minimize the potential damage caused by Tokyo’s move.  In fact, the Moon administration has been sitting idle, leaving local firms to bear the brunt of Tokyo’s retaliatory action against its inflexible handling of historical issues between both countries.  Some Korean business leaders, including Lee Jae-yong, vice chairman of Samsung Electronics, the world’s largest chipmaker, have sought to circumvent Tokyo’s export curbs through their personal connections with Japanese firms. Their efforts are set to go nowhere, as Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s government is moving under a sophisticated plan mapped out to press Seoul to change its stance on historical disputes.  On Tuesday, Japan rebuffed a request made by Moon to retract its export restrictions and hold negotiations.  While saying Tokyo has no intention of lifting its export curbs and that the issue was not a matter for negotiations, Japanese Trade Minister Hiroshige Seko indicated working-level contacts might be considered, noting Seoul’s trade officials have been asking for confirmation regarding the toughened regulations.  Presiding over a meeting with his aides on Monday, Moon said his government would be left with no other choice but to take “necessary” action in case Korean firms face “actual losses.”  As many experts note, however, an escalation of tit-for-tat responses could inflict unendurable damage on Korea’s industries, including those that should serve as new growth engines.  The Moon administration is now tasked with working out a flexible compromise to settle the confrontation with Japan, beyond filing a complaint with the World Trade Organization, to prevent Tokyo from expanding its export restrictions to include other key items.  Equally important is that Moon and his aides should realize how local firms are struggling to survive under harsh global competition and rethink their anti-corporate policy framework.  A series of measures taken by the government over the past two years has dampened corporate activity and undermined industrial competitiveness.  It has increased corporate taxes, drawn up bills to weaken managerial stability and imposed excessive regulations on companies for safety and environmental protection reasons.  Its pro-labor stance has led militant unionized workers to stop factory operations and paralyze construction sites across the country. Its inflexible implementation of a shorter workweek has made research and development institutions turn off their lights early in the evening, holding back efforts to boost technological competitiveness.  Moon pledged all possible support for companies to help them bolster global competitiveness in the manufacturing sector by reducing their reliance on imports of core materials.  He hoped that corporations would expand technological development and investment and exert more endeavors to break from the externally dependent industrial structure.  His remarks sound hollow, given it would take many years and in many cases be economically unviable to break out of existing supply chains.  The administration should make a fundamental policy shift and take concrete measures to help bolster corporate activity and competitiveness.  It has to rein in excessive labor demands and dump its income-led growth drive, which has only increased the burden on companies.  The government should also facilitate cooperation with political parties to pass bills designed to accelerate regulatory reforms. It is deplorable that regulatory restrictions have hampered the domestic development and production of key materials used in semiconductors that are now subject to Japan’s export controls.  Moon has to cope with Abe’s attempt to use industrial leverage as a weapon to achieve his political aims. For this, he should take a moment to reflect on the course he has taken since assuming office. |
| Korea Herald | Editorial | The Korea Herald | July 7, 2019 | South Korea | Seek diplomatic solution:  Tit for tat will damage companies in Japan as well as Korea | South Korea and Japan appear poised to escalate tit for tat after Japan tightened its export controls on high-tech materials bound for Korea.  The Japanese government has taken a tough stance, saying it has no mind to revoke the measure targeting Korea’s manufacturers of semiconductors and displays.  The Korean government condemned the export curbs as unreasonable economic retaliation and vowed to take “corresponding measures” unless Japan retracts them. It also plans to take the issue to the World Trade Organization.  President Moon Jae-in will reportedly hold a meeting with chairpersons of top 30 business groups this week. Moon is intent on reflecting their opinions in the government responses to Japan’s economic sanctions.  Given Tokyo’s hard-line stance, however, it is questionable if the government can figure out corresponding measures strong enough to make Japan drop the measure immediately.  We cannot but criticize the Moon administration for letting the situation turn this sour. It has paid little attention to its relations with the Japanese government. Rather, it has fanned anti-Japanese sentiment in a drive to eliminate the pro-Japanese vestige as an evil from the past to be swept away.  Koreans may feel better if the government lands a counterpunch, but expanding tit for tat without retreat or escape routes will only inflict hard-to-recover damage on both sides, as Korea and Japan are economically intertwined.  If they keep exchanging retaliatory measures against each other and conflicts turn into an emotional battle, the situation will get out of control.  The Korean government should be cool-headed. It may feel pressure to take strong countermeasures. But it must not act rashly. Elaborate plans for follow-up actions must be taken into full account. Protracted exchanges of sanctions can turn into trade wars. This must be avoided.  The issue of Japan’s export controls can be best resolved diplomatically. Economic retaliation victimizes companies, but companies are not in any position to solve political or diplomatic problems, nor do they have the power to do so. They are innocent victims of politics. The one who has tied a knot must untie it.  It is hard to deny that the current conflicts are ascribable to the lack of communication and mutual distrust between the leaders of the two countries.  Korean Ambassador to Japan Nam Gwang-pyo said during his visit to a Japanese news media outlet on Thursday that he would try to open a way for a Korea-Japan summit. That comes as a timely remark.  Practically, a better alternative than summit diplomacy is nowhere to be found.  Then it becomes important to find justifications for negotiations. The government must work out proposals acceptable to both sides. Cheong Wa Dae and the Foreign Ministry need to reflect on how the situation has come to this. Japan’s export regulations stem from the Korean court rulings, upheld by the Supreme Court, awarding damages to victims of wartime forced labor.  The Moon administration needs to refrain from insisting there is nothing it can do about a judicial decision, but instead should try to find a creative diplomatic solution -- one that persuades Japan to revoke its export curbs and respects the intent of the court rulings at the same time.  Korea and Japan are closely related in many fields, not least in security and economy. History is one of the most sensitive issues involving the two countries. Korea and Japan cannot live together as enemies. To sustain cooperative relations, it is important to manage history issues lest they turn into an emotional tit for tat. They must not be used politically, either.  The first thing for senior Korean government officials to do is to contact their Japanese counterparts publicly or privately and increase their communications. They should know the exact intent behind the Japanese measure, and find a clue to dialogue.  Naturally this is what the Foreign Ministry should do. If it wants to facilitate the process of dialogue, it would do well to utilize civilian diplomatic channels. It also needs to positively consider asking US President Donald Trump to mediate.  It will serve the interests of both countries to avoid escalating mutual retaliations and solve issues diplomatically. Diplomacy is the only practical way to prevent them from going down the tubes together. |
| Korea Herald, | Editorial | The  Korea Herald | July 4, 2019 | South Korea | Weak point  Japan’s restrictions on exports highlight need to develop basic tech, materials industry | The dispute involving Japan’s restrictions on exports of key industrial materials to South Korea should be tackled diplomatically, as political motives appear to be behind the move taken by the Tokyo government.  But the development should also serve as a reminder to Korean government officials and businesses of the need to reduce the country’s reliance on Japanese technology, materials and component parts.  It is condemnable that Japan has tied trade policy to a political issue like the Korean court’s ruling on victims of forced labor during World War II. However, the move has exposed the vulnerability of the Korean economy to a de facto embargo by the neighboring country.  Regarding the restrictions, the Japanese government has pinpointed three key materials for the production of semiconductors and displays for which South Korean buyers would have difficulty finding alternative sources.  Japanese suppliers account for about 90 percent of global supplies of fluorinated polymides and photoresists, which are used in display manufacturing and chipmaking, respectively. Japanese firms also produce 70 percent of the world’s hydrogen fluoride, which is used to clean chips.  Korean firms like Samsung, SK hynix and LG rely almost entirely on supplies from Japanese partners. Therefore it is almost certain that their production of chips and displays will face setbacks due to shortages of the three key chemicals.  Korean firms will not be the only ones to suffer. Japanese manufacturers that buy Korean-made chips and parts will also face difficulties -- one reason even Japanese media have found fault with the action taken by Prime Minster Shinzo Abe.  Furthermore, the move sets a bad precedent of using trade restrictions to tackle political disputes related to historical issues between the two.  The Nihon Keizai Shimbun said in an editorial that the action aims to exploit trade policy as a political tool -- which has been used by the US and China. “Japan used to draw a line on a move like that,” it said.  The Mainichi Shimbun said Japan’s decision goes against the principle of free trade it has been advocating and that Japan will now face greater distrust from the international community.  International media have also condemned Tokyo’s move. A Financial Times article said that it “exposes Tokyo to allegations of hypocrisy on free trade.”  Meanwhile, countermeasures to be taken by the Seoul government include filing a complaint with the World Trade Organization.  The difficulties faced by Korean firms should provide the country a precious lesson.  It shows yet again that calls by past Korean governments to reduce the reliance on Japanese technology, equipment, parts and materials have gone nowhere.  Data highlights the lopsided situation: South Korea suffered a deficit of $16 billion against Japan in the parts and materials sector, compared to a $39.9 billion surplus with China and a $9.7 billion surplus with the US in 2017.  Major Japanese items South Korea imported last year included semiconductor manufacturing equipment worth $5.2 billion, integrated circuits valued at $2.4 billion and fine chemical materials worth $1.9 billion. Others included discrete semiconductor auto parts, silicon wafers and optical instrument parts.  In some sense, the exchanges show that the two countries -- owing not only to geographical proximity but also differing levels of industrial development -- are in the same economic ecosystem, in which, of course, Japan still has the upper hand.  The unprecedented Japanese action to restrict exports of key materials -- which follows economic retaliation China meted out in response to South Korea’s decision to station a US missile defense system here -- demonstrates that the economic ecosystem involving this country is vulnerable to geopolitics.  This calls for the government and businesses to further strive to make the Korean economy more independent of external factors. The first thing to do is to double efforts to gain technological self-reliance and ensure the stable supply of materials and component parts by diversifying sources. |
| Korea Herald. | Editorial | The Korea Herald | July 2, 2019 | South Korea | Unilateralism hurts  Japan’s politically motivated trade restrictions set bad precedent | The Japanese government’s politically motivated decision to restrict exports of three key industrial materials to South Korea has set a bad precedent. It may cater to some anti-Korean Japanese voters ahead of parliamentary elections, but will cut into Japan’s own national interests in the long run.  The announcement, made by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry on Monday, targeted three high-tech materials on which Korean firms like Samsung, LG and Sk Hynix rely heavily. They are fluorinated polyimide, which is used in smartphone displays; resist, a thin layer used to transfer a circuit pattern to the semiconductor substrate; and high-purity hydrogen fluoride, which is used in the etching process while making semiconductors.  Under the decision, which will take effect Thursday, Japanese suppliers of the three materials would be required to get approval for all shipments to Korean buyers.  Previously, Korea, being one of the 27 countries that was given preferential treatment, had a simplified export process for those materials. The new rule may force Korean companies to wait for about 90 days to get government approval, which could disrupt their production process. In the worst-case scenario, the Japanese government may disapprove some of the shipments.  That could severely damage major Korean tech firms as Japan is the world’s dominant supply of the materials. For instance, Japanese suppliers control about 70 percent of the world market for etching chemicals and 90 percent for resist and fluorinated polyimide.  Besides the restrictions on the three materials, Japanese media reported that Tokyo is considering removing Korea from its “white list” of countries with minimum restrictions on transfer of technology related to national security. Some went on to mention possible visa regulations.  It is apparent that all these moves are related to the strained political ties between the two countries, especially after last October’s Korean court ruling that ordered Japanese companies to compensate Korean victims of forced labor.  The Japanese ministry’s statement did not elaborate, only saying that it was taking the action because “mutual trust has been seriously damaged.” But the retaliation is in line with warnings and threats local politicians and senior government officials had made in reference to the bilateral political ties that have deteriorated to the lowest level in many years due to historical issues.  There are enough reasons the Japanese government’s action should be condemned. Most of all, the move is seen, as reported by many Japanese media outlets, as an attempt by the Shinzo Abe administration to shore up anti-Korea sentiment before the July 21 elections for the upper house.  Granted, such Korea bashing could help the rightist prime minister and his party, but the unfair trade restrictions should encounter international criticism. It is self-contradictory that the trade restriction came only two days after Abe presided over the G-20 summit, where free trade was one of the key issues among leaders of the advanced economies.  The G-20 leaders’ joint statement issued after their two-day meeting in Osaka said they “strive to realize a free, fair, nondiscriminatory, transparent, predictable and stable trade and investment environment.”  The Japanese government’s action against Korea is definitely unfair and discriminatory.  While Japan’s unilateralism in dealing with relations with Seoul is lamentable, the Korean government cannot avoid blame for the worsening situation either. It needed to exert diplomatic efforts to resolve pending issues and prevent further deterioration of relations.  What’s obvious is the way the Seoul government deals with Japan’s apparent economic retaliation should be different from its reaction under similar pressure from China.  Now what it needs to do is to take the case to the World Trade Organization, as Trade Minister Sung Yun-mo promised to do, and draw international attention to Japan’s infringement upon the principle of fair trade. Prime Minister Abe said Tuesday that the Japanese action does not violate the WTO rules, but few would buy what he said.  Some other tit-for-tat actions may be necessary for now, but eventually, both sides should explore ways to overcome the current conflicts through diplomatic negotiations, refraining from taking more hostile actions.  On their part, Korean companies will also have to gear up for growing trade conflicts with major trading countries like the US, China and Japan, and find more diverse ways to secure materials -- as Japan did when China curbed exports of rare-earth metals in 2010 over a territorial dispute -- and diversify their export markets. |
| Korea Herald, | Editorial | The Korea Herald | June 27, 2019 | South Korea | Aborted summit  Seoul, Tokyo should not let ties drift further by engaging in blame game | The relationship between South Korea and Japan has deteriorated to the point that their leaders may skip a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit to be held in Osaka, Japan, on Friday and Saturday.  The drawn-out discord between the neighboring countries over their unfortunate shared history is now leading the two sides to antagonize each other in undiplomatic ways.  South Korea was ready to meet, but Japan did not seem to be in the same state of mind, a Cheong Wa Dae official said Tuesday, confirming that President Moon Jae-in would not meet bilaterally with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the G-20 summit.  The confirmation came after Abe ruled out the possibility of a one-on-one meeting with Moon, saying his schedule as chair of the multilateral forum had already been filled with bilateral talks with other leaders.  It is just beyond reason that the Japanese leader has no time to meet with Moon when he can find the time for 15 rounds of bilateral summits on the sidelines of the multilateral forum. It might have been less insulting if Abe had simply said he did not want to talk with the South Korean president.  The Cheong Wa Dae official countered Abe’s remarks by saying Moon’s schedule had also been filled. This reaction was just as emotional and undiplomatic.  The possibility of Moon-Abe talks being held was virtually eliminated last week, when Tokyo spurned a proposal from Seoul that companies from both countries create a joint fund to compensate victims of Japan’s wartime forced labor.  True, South Korea’s presidential office had initially dismissed the idea raised by some experts late last year as “senseless,” while Japan had expressed willingness to take it into consideration. Nevertheless, it was rude for the Japanese government to turn down a formal proposal from Seoul less than an hour after it had been announced.  In October, South Korea’s Supreme Court ordered Japanese firms to compensate Korean victims of forced labor. The top court recognized the victims’ rights to claim damages individually, dismissing Tokyo’s assertion that all reparation issues were settled under a 1965 accord that normalized ties between the two nations.  Later last year, the Moon administration virtually scrapped a 2015 accord his predecessor had concluded with Tokyo to resolve the issue of wartime sexual slavery, when it decided to dissolve a foundation set up with funding from the Japanese government to support victims.  The rekindled disputes over issues stemming from Japan’s 1910-45 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula were complicated by Tokyo’s allegation in December that a South Korean destroyer had locked its targeting radar on a Japanese surveillance plane.  The aborted meeting between Moon and Abe at the G-20 summit would further exacerbate the strained ties between their countries.  It is regrettable that political leaders on both sides seem to be using inflammatory historical issues to their domestic political advantage at the risk of harming the economic and national security interests of the two countries.  South Korea, in particular, cannot afford to let trade with and investment from Japan continue to decrease amid growing global economic uncertainties, including the escalating trade tensions between the US and China.  As a US official recently noted, the frayed relationship between Seoul and Tokyo would make it hard to ensure success in negotiations with North Korea on dismantling its nuclear arsenal.  It makes little sense that South Korea’s Foreign Ministry excluded cooperation with Japan, while emphasizing close communications with China and Russia, in its recent report to the parliament on ways to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue.  Seoul is expected to come under increased pressure from US President Donald Trump to improve ties with Tokyo during his two-day visit here following the G-20 summit.  South Korea and Japan should not let their relationship drift further by continuing to lay blame on each other.  Speculation has risen that a Moon-Abe summit will be set up after Japan’s Upper House election that is set for July 21, as Abe may feel less need to fan anti-South Korea sentiment among voters.  The two leaders should meet soon to work out any sort of improvement to the chilled relationship between their nations.  A recent survey of South Koreans and Japanese should serve to prod them to move in that direction.  About 83 percent of South Korean respondents and 44 percent of Japanese polled agreed it was necessary to strengthen economic cooperation, among other collaborations, while the negative response stood at only 8.9 percent and 11.5 percent, respectively. |
| Sang Hyun-back | Opinion | The Korea Herald | October 28, 2019 | South Korea | A constructive Korea-Japan relation | Line is a messenger application that nearly all Japanese smartphone users have. The application originally started as a disaster response messenger system after 2011 earthquake. Soon, Line became the most popular application in Japan. One thing about Line that many Japanese probably don’t realize is that Line Corporation is a subsidiary of Naver, the Google of South Korea. Line shows that the relationship between South Korea and Japan is not always a competitive one -- and can be a constructive one.  Relations between Japan and Korea today are at a historical low. Improving them is a difficult task but a necessary one, important to both countries. The economies of South Korea and Japan are complementary, having benefited both nations for decades. The two countries help maintain the liberal international order in East Asia. If the cooperation between them diminishes, it would have a profound regional impact, not just in Korea and Japan. Their bilateral relationship is important for all of Asia, and for the world.  South Korea and Japan are both liberal democracies that value free trade. The two countries benefit from the international liberal order and it behooves them to strengthen the ideal in the Indo-Pacific. Asia, unlike the West, has not embraced the liberal international order. China is still trying to create its own order in Southeast Asia through economic coercion and aggressive policies. Many Southeast Asian countries still are developing and have not become democratic. South Korea and Japan both are promoting a policy to engage with Southeast Asia, for Japan it is the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy and for South Korea it is the Southern Policy. These two policies are complementary to one another and could be improved with more cooperation. South Korea and Japan could help strengthen the liberal order together in the Indo-Pacific by promoting free trade, free and open navigation, and eliminate economic coercion.  In the economic sector, South Korea and Japan working together benefit the entire world. Both countries work closely in energy and resource industries in other countries. Cooperation between Hyundai and Mitsubishi was crucial to the development of Saudi Arabia’s Co-generation plants. There also are additional 50 cases of cooperation on energy, including in geothermal and LNG.  Around the world, many enjoy consumer goods from South Korea and Japan. South Korean companies rely on parts from Japan and vice versa. Many of South Korea’s electronic goods need chemicals from Japan, and many Japanese TV manufacturers require OLED displays made in Korea. Thus, over 300 business leaders, knowing the importance of supply chains in the two nations, tried to stop Japan from removing South Korea from its whitelist.  History disputes between South Korea and Japan lead some in each country to believe it is better to cut off ties with the other. They believe that self-sufficiency should be the goal as relations get worse. However, it is important to remember both South Korea and Japan are highly advanced countries. Replacing the technology in which each country specializes will take considerable time, money and manpower. In addition, issues of China, Russia and North Korea are security issues for both countries. Each country cannot solve these issues alone. The historical disputes are a salient topic. However, both countries must realize there are pressing current issues that require cooperation.  When a new South Korea president or a Japanese prime minister is elected, they talk about looking forward to a future-oriented relationship between the two nations. It is also worthwhile looking back at past accomplishments, to remember why the two countries are so important to each other. Line is just one of the countless examples that shows that South Korea and Japan have made millions of lives better around the world. |
| Kim Myong-sik | Opinion | The Korea Herald | November 6, 2019 | South Korea | A candid proposal for a breakthrough in Korea-Japan relations | This article is based on recent writings by three respectable South Koreans on relations between Korea and Japan that I happened to read last week. The writers were Hwang Kyung-choon, former chief correspondent in Seoul for the Associated Press; Im Jong-kun, former president of the Seoul Kyungje business daily; and poet/essayist Lee Seung-shin, daughter of the late Sohn Ho-yeon, well known in Japan for her devotion to “tanka” short poems.  “The ardent wish that I have is nation and nation without dispute.” (Forgive my clumsy translation!) In her article sent to a literary circle consisting mainly of academics and journalists, Lee quoted the above tanka poem composed by her mother, which former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi recited during his summit with President Roh Moo-hyun at the Blue House in 2005.  Lee feels sore at heart these days amid what must be the worst state of relations between the two neighboring countries, recalling her mother’s lifelong work to promote cultural ties across the Korea Strait. After her mother’s death in 2003, Lee published an anthology from some 2,000 tanka pieces she left and sent them to Japanese leaders. Koizumi probably chose the poem from the book.  Tanka originated in Korea’s Baekje Kingdom (18 BC-660 AD) and has become a major genre in Japanese literature, although it has disappeared here. “Living at the tip of East Asia, I only loved peace” was another short poem that Sohn wrote in the fixed 31-letter form, and the daughter reads it now as one of her mother’s many tanka poems packed with lamentations and yearnings.  From her mother’s diary, Lee Seung-shin found a page she wrote after giving a lecture at her alma mater, Doshisha University in Kyoto, during the school’s 100th anniversary events in 1975. She quoted: “When I finished speaking, a group of Japanese women who were my elementary school classmates in Seoul (before liberation) came forward. They bowed to me, saying they were apologizing for the past Japanese wrongdoings. When I grasped their hands, the lump of grievance melted in my heart.”  “Nation and nation without dispute” is not only the dream of the Korean poet, who wrote in Japanese, but should be the vision of the two peoples who would live and prosper together through the 21st, 31st and 41st centuries, Lee concluded.  Hwang Kyung-choon, 95, was attending Chuo University in Tokyo when he was conscripted into the Japanese army during World War II. He occasionally picks up interesting articles from the Japanese Bungei Shunshu monthly magazine and translates them into Korean to help his younger friends become better informed about how Japanese intellectuals think today.  For the past three consecutive months, the Bungei Shunshu has published special reports on Japanese-Korean relations. In its October edition, the Japanese magazine carried a lengthy article contributed by Moon Chung-in, special national security adviser to President Moon Jae-in, under the title “Premier Abe, why do you regard Korea as a hostile nation?”  The second article was a dialogue between Katsuhiro Kuroda, veteran correspondent in Seoul of the conservative Japanese daily Sankei Shimbun, and Lee Young-hoon, a retired Seoul National University professor who was bitterly criticized by the leftists here, including Cho Kuk, after he published the book “Anti-Japanese Racism.”  The third was another dialogue between two noted Japanese political commentators: Toru Hashimoto, human rights lawyer and former mayor of Osaka City, and Yoichi Masuzoe, international relations scholar and former governor of Tokyo. Hwang opined that they offered valuable guidance on solutions to the current dispute between Seoul and Tokyo. They recalled that the Japanese Supreme Court had previously ruled that the Korea-Japan Claims Settlement Agreement, concluded upon rapprochement, did not deprive Korean laborers of their individual rights to seek compensation from their former employers, according to Hwang’s excerpts.  Masuzoe, who hailed from Fukuoka, was concerned about businesses in the Kyushu area, which are seeing a sharp decline in the number of Korean tourists to the hot springs in Beppu and other places. Hashimoto from Osaka, who said his two boys were humming nonstop the tunes of Korean girl group “Twice,” was also worried about the reduced number of flights from Seoul to Kansai International Airport. They suggested applying the European Union format covering Germany and France to Korea and Japan to ensure smooth ties.  Im Jong-kun, the former publisher of the business daily, said newly enthroned Japanese Emperor Naruhito should be invited to Korea for a visit as soon as possible. He argued that there is no reason why a trip to Korea by the Japanese monarch should be considered unrealistic nowadays, when the Seoul government is so eager to have North Korean chief Kim Jong-un come here for another summit with Moon. He also offered the opinion that “Joko” Akihito may be an alternative to his son on the royal visit that could transcend current issues.  If Shinzo Abe and his Cabinet could not show flexibility for the time being because of domestic politics, the emperor of Japan can do something to ease ties between the two neighboring countries. Im imagines that Naruhito or Akihito might come to Korea and visit the tomb of Baekje King Muryeong in memory of the princess from the royal family who became the mother of Emperor Kammu (reign 781-806). Then at the House of Sharing he could console the survivors of the wartime atrocities with due apologies.  At the enthronement ceremony last month, Naruhito, who is already 59 but rejuvenates the image of Japanese monarch with his cherubic features, said he hoped sincerely “that our country, through our people’s wisdom and unceasing efforts, achieves further development and contributes to the friendship and peace of the international community and the welfare and prosperity of humankind.”  As no executor of power but a symbol of national unity, Naruhito “hopes,” instead of pledging positive efforts, for international peace. But the authors of the three articles I referred to in this column invariably expressed their wish that the ascension to the throne of a new emperor in Japan would turn around the abnormal state of affairs in bilateral relations.  If a visit to the nearest neighbor still is a politically sensitive venture for the new Japanese emperor -- though a sure step to promote international friendship -- intelligent politicians like Hashimoto and Masuzoe may well continue to share their constructive ideas with other Japanese intellectuals to broaden understanding |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | November 17, 2019 | South Korea | Stop this game of chicken | With only five days left before the expiration of the Korea-Japan General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) on Saturday, both Seoul and Tokyo would not budge an inch on their demands from each other. When U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper visited the Blue House on Friday to discuss the issue, President Moon Jae-in told him that Korea can hardly share military information with Japan, who imposed export restrictions on Korea as retaliation for the Supreme Court’s rulings for Japanese companies to compensate Koreans forced to work during World War II. In reaction, Japan reportedly told the United States that it would not back down on its exports bans.  If both sides do not ease up on their standoff, Gsomia will be terminated at 12 a.m. on Nov. 23. If that happens, Korea-Japan relations will deteriorate to its worst-ever level and the Korea-U.S. alliance also will be critically damaged. The costs of the ending of the military information pact will be immense. In a recent Voice of America survey of 20 U.S. experts on Korean Peninsula affairs, 19 insisted that South Korea cancel its decision to sever the Gsomia with Japan. Daniel Sneider, an associate director for research at the Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center at Stanford University, called it a “self-destructive act.”  It is fortunate that both Seoul and Tokyo are trying to find a breakthrough behind the scenes. Following President Moon’s remarks that South Korea can demonstrate flexibility if Japan retracts its export restrictions, the Blue House said, “We still have five days left.” Japan also showed some optimistic signs. Following an easing of its restrictions on fluorinated polyimides and photoresist, Tokyo has lifted a ban on exports of hydrogen fluoride, albeit in a limited way. The three chemicals are essential components for the production of semiconductors and displays in Korea. Tokyo may have taken those conciliatory steps to prepare for a long legal battle at the World Trade Organization. And yet it can be understood as a positive sign in resolving the two countries’ conflict over Gsomia.  Both the Moon Jae-in administration and the Shinzo Abe government must do their best to extend Gsomia by Friday. If they need more time to settle the dispute, they can consider extending the military pact by several more months, because what they need is just to agree to an extension under specified conditions. If both sides continue this game of chicken without any compromise, it only hurts their security cooperation in Northeast Asia.  The role of Uncle Sam as a fair mediator is also very important. The State Department and Pentagon have kept pressure on Seoul while trying to embrace Tokyo in a one-sided manner. If Japan really adheres to its hard-line position thanks to U.S. backing, Korea also cannot help taking a stern position. Both Seoul and Tokyo must take a step back and reach a compromise. We hope the United States does its fare share in helping them strike a deal before it’s too late. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | November 15, 2019 | South Korea | Extend the Gsomia | The simultaneous trip to Seoul by U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley for the 51st Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) draws attention to a mounting security danger on the Korean Peninsula. Gen. Milley even raised the idea of withdrawing the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) — a formerly taboo idea in Washington — whereas some Koreans are calling for the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons. It is fortunate that the two allies agreed to continue security cooperation among Seoul, Washington and Tokyo to cope with North Korean missile and nuclear threats.  Seoul and Washington had many issues to discuss, including determining their fair shares of defense costs, what to do with the Korea-Japan General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) and wrapping up the proposed early transfer of military operational control back to South Korea. For annual defense cost sharing, U.S. President Donald Trump wants Seoul to pay $5 billion, nearly five times the current amount. Gen. Milley linked South Korea’s defense cost sharing to a pullout of the USFK. The standards of the alliance have degenerated into mere dollars and cents, not shared values and trust. Nevertheless, the two countries must negotiate in a fair and reasonable manner.  The crisis in the alliance partly stems from our government’s push to terminate Gsomia with Japan and its attempt to get operational control back as soon as possible. Without such disputes, we could have negotiated with the United States from a better position. If South Korea does not extend Gsomia, the United States will interpret it as a reluctance to join the U.S-led Indo-Pacific strategy. In a press conference shortly after the SCM, Esper underscored the importance of maintaining Gsomia, as its termination will only help Beijing and Pyongyang.  As Esper said, Gsomia carries great significance. To effectively counter attacks by 70 North Korean submarines, information provided by Japan’s maritime patrol aircraft equipped with cutting-edge detection capabilities is essential. If Gsomia is ended, we must get that information via the United States. The same applies to our response to 1,000 ballistic missiles in North Korea, as Japan could provide us information on any suspicious movements thanks to the bilateral pact. As massive reinforcements and logistics support also must come to South Korea through U.S. bases in Japan, a swift exchange of military information is required among the three countries.  But the Moon administration seems to be ignorant of such grave security matters. When two North Koreans allegedly defected to South Korea last week, it repatriated them against their will. The Blue House even refused a proposed meeting between President Moon and the parents of Otto Warmbier, who died six days after his return to the United States after 17 months of detention in North Korea. The government must re-establish its security policy to restore the alliance. That starts with withdrawing the threat to leave Gsomia. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | November 6, 2019 | South Korea | Renew Gsomia | The South Korea-U.S. alliance is at a crossroads. Ahead of their third negotiation for defense cost-sharing and with the deadline for extending South Korea’s General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) with Japan fast approaching on Nov. 22, three high-level U.S. officials handling Korean Peninsula issues visited Seoul together. They included James DeHart, chief negotiator for defense cost-sharing with foreign partners, David Stilwell, assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and Keith Krach, under secretary of state for economic growth, energy security and the environment.  Some security experts say their trip to Seoul is aimed at pressuring South Korea to bear a bigger share of defense costs than before and persuading South Korea to cancel its decision to withdraw from Gsomia with Japan. But other defense analysts link their visit to the need to shore up the South Korea-U.S. alliance. One thing is clear: Their simultaneous trip reflects the graveness of the challenges facing the decades-old alliance.  Cracks in the alliance resulted from policy failures of the Moon Jae-in administration. It tried to use the option of withdrawing from Gsomia to counter Japan’s economic retaliations for our Supreme Court’s rulings last year ordering compensation for forced wartime labor victims. The government ignored the strategic importance of Gsomia because of its inherent anti-Japan feelings and its obsession with North Korea. Although Gsomia is a bilateral pact, it is pivotal for trilateral security cooperation among Seoul, Washington and Tokyo.  A termination of Gsomia will make their joint defense against North Korean missile attacks more difficult. It could even force South Korea to be excluded from U.S. security strategy in Northeast Asia. That’s why security analysts on both sides have raised the possibility of America downsizing or pulling U.S. troops from South Korea. In a recent interview with the Voice of America, Vincent Brooks, former commander of the U.S. Forces Korea and the South Korea-U.S. Combined Forces Command, warned that ending Gsomia will damage the framework of the alliance in Northeast Asia.  The Blue House decided to withdraw from Gsomia despite opposition from the ministers of national defense and foreign affairs. Kim Hyun-chong, deputy national security director in the Blue House, reportedly insisted on withdrawing, and Moon sided with him. Defense Minister Jeong Kyeong-doo stressed the need to maintain Gsomia. Moon must change his mind. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | September 9, 2019 | South Korea | Washington has options | Washington could consider options other than keeping up with the status quo of the military presence on the Korean Peninsula if North Korean denuclearization makes some progress, the U.S. special representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun said at a lecture in the United States. When asked about the possibility of the United States pulling out of South Korea, he stressed that “We’re a long way away from [the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula,]” adding, “[Military] forces are driven by the perception of threat. If we can address the threat, we give ourselves a lot more options.” His comment could sound like nothing more than a textbook theory, but nevertheless comes amid a rift between Seoul and Washington following Korea’s decision to not renew the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) with Japan despite U.S. opposition.  Once tensions subside, militaries won’t necessarily have to conduct exercises throughout the year for war readiness, he said. Even considering that alliance nature can change according to security and geopolitical developments, the North Korean denuclearization process and U.S. military posture in the South are entirely different issues. There has been a longstanding understanding between Seoul and Washington that U.S. military presence is necessary for the balance of power in Northeast Asia and deterrence against regional risks. Biegun’s mention of changes in U.S. military comes before there has been any verification of North Korea’s genuineness or progress in denuclearization. He has also made the comment amid a series of complaints from the U.S. government offices over Seoul’s decision to not renew Gsomia with Tokyo.  Moreover, U.S. President Donald Trump and others have been demanding an increase in Seoul’s share of the cost of maintaining U.S. forces in Korea. The bilateral relationship could further sour if the two sides show differences in their thoughts on the nature of the alliance during negotiations on cost-sharing.  North Korean nuclear and missile threats remain as real as ever despite the dialogue mood since last year. Pyongyang has upped missile threats to the South and could be buying time to draw recognition as a nuclear arms state. South Korea and the United States must demonstrate a strong alliance to deter North Korea from having other thoughts and also to bring Pyongyang to the negotiating table for denuclearization. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | August 23, 2019 | South Korea | After Gsomia | South Korea’s choice to break up a mutual military intelligence pact with Japan is worrisome for multiple reasons. The move could provoke Tokyo, which has lately slightly softened toward Seoul, and shake up the traditional tripartite security alliance among South Korea, Japan and the United States.  In a National Security Council meeting, Seoul concluded that upholding the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) could no longer meet national interests when there had been “grave changes” in security cooperation between the two countries after Japan removed Korea from a so-called white list of trusted trade partners, said Kim Yu-geon, first deputy director of the presidential National Security Office in a press briefing. The reasoning that countries that have lost trust in one another cannot expect to share sensitive military intelligence is not entirely wrong. Still, the move cannot be wise for national strategy.  The pact with Japan has been helpful on the security front. The two governments shared information over 29 times since the pact went into effect in 2016. Tokyo handed over satellite images of movements in North Korea while Seoul shared the information it received from spies and others. Even at times of strained relations since the first Supreme Court ruling ordering a Japanese company to pay individuals wartime reparations in October last year, the two countries shared military intelligence seven times. Defense Minister Jeong Kyeong-doo in a parliamentary hearing on Aug. 21 admitted to the “strategic value” of Gsomia. What the country can gain from sacrificing the important security pact is unclear.  Tensions are bound to re-escalate. The freeze showed slight signs of thawing after President Moon Jae-in in an Aug. 15 Liberation Day address gave a reconciliatory overture. Tokyo has since granted permission for a shipment of chemicals under export curbs to a South Korean entity and pledged commitment to the military intelligence pact. Yoshihide Suga, Japanese chief cabinet secretary, said it was important to “cooperate” with South Korea to suggest that the security relationship should not be affected by an ongoing row. Seoul’s breakup could splash cold water on any kind of recovery in the bilateral relationship. Does Seoul want to stay on hostile terms with Tokyo forever?  Moreover, Seoul walking out of the military pact can seriously impair our tripartite security alliance and also our relationship with Washington. The U.S government repeatedly said it wanted Gsomia to stay. U.S. President Donald Trump made it clear that the United States wished to see its two closest Asian allies stay amicable, especially on security grounds.  Washington has been displeased about Seoul’s lack of enthusiasm about its so-called Indo-Pacific strategy. It could think Seoul is going solo on security affairs by walking out of the military pact with Tokyo. If it cannot retract its decision to nullify Gsomia, it must at least come up with fast actions to restore the confidence of Washington and Tokyo. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | August 9, 2019 | South Korea | Avoiding a catastrophe | Japan is not relenting in its economic retaliations against Korea. The government of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Wednesday gazetted a revised decree on export and trade to remove Korea from a so-called white list of countries eligible for preferential treatment in trade. The move came five days after his cabinet’s decision to delist Korea. Though the government stopped short of specifying additional items being restricted, the gazetting will certainly cause serious problems for Korean companies if they have to get approval for each of the items they import from Japan from Aug. 28, when the new rules take effect.  If Japan trusts individual Korean companies beyond a certain level, they don’t have to get approval for individual items and they are exempted from any requirement for approval up to three years. But the situation will be different if they import “restricted items” for security reasons. In that case, they must receive permission from Japan’s Ministry of Economy and Industry within 90 days — particularly when they import items that can be converted to military purposes. Under such circumstances, more than 1,100 items — including parts for cars and ships — must get individual permissions. It is difficult to find replacements for 87 items immediately as companies depend on Japan for as much as 50 percent of them.  Tokyo is claiming it’s not economically retaliating for diplomatic disagreements. Instead, it has changed its existing system for classifying its trading partners to groups labeled A, B, C, D and downgraded Korea to the B group.  The problem is that Japan can wilfully delay its export procedures — citing any reasons — after Korea has been removed from the white list. That is a big problem for Korean companies heavily relying on Japanese materials, parts and equipment.  The Abe administration must end such outrageous behavior. It must not forget the massive debts it owes to Korea over the past. Japan could rise from the ashes of World War II by adroitly taking advantage of huge demand from the Korean War. If it turns a blind eye to history, breaks the principle of free trade, and resorts to retaliations against Korea, that’s a self-contradictory — and very dangerous — gamble.  The Korean government must respond calmly. It must encourage localization of materials and components. But that cannot be done overnight. The government must also exert all diplomatic efforts to solve the conflict. Otherwise, it will lead to a catastrophe — for both sides. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | August 8, 2019 | South Korea | Boycott the Tokyo Olympics? | Ruling party members have become unrestrained in their response to Japanese trade barriers, demanding to scrap a military intelligence sharing pact and proposing a travel ban to Tokyo and other parts in Japan. The Democratic Party (DP) even moved to campaign to boycott the 2020 Summer Olympics in Japan. Some members have ignored their Chairman Lee Hae-chan who opposed the idea of the party taking political action against sports exchanges.  Rep. Shin Dong-keun, the DP’s chief representative to the National Assembly Culture, Sports and Tourism Committee, plans to table the boycott issue in the next party-government meeting. He has been pitching the idea on social media and his radio talk show. He claims that a boycott will be considered depending on the results of a safety probe into nuclear radioactivity in and around Tokyo.  Rep. Choi Jae-sung, head of the party’s special committee on Japan’s trade restrictions, also urged Tokyo to address radiation concerns before hosting the Summer Olympiad.  The DP leadership has moved to rein in the extreme movements led by hawkish members. Chairman Lee and other senior members expressed concerns about the Olympic boycott campaign and the fiasco of the Jung district office hoisting up “No Japan” banners in downtown streets.  The talk itself is senseless and irresponsible. The ruling party’s reckless anti-Japan campaign could ruin any diplomatic efforts to avoid a full-blown economic war with Japan. The Moon Jae-in administration and the ruling party must act in a more sophisticated and reasonable way in the face of a national crisis.  In fact, neither the government nor the ruling party has any authority to boycott the Olympics. The decision is entirely up to the Korean Sport & Olympic Committee. The International Olympic Committee convention disallows any political involvement. The ruling party has no say in the affair. North Korea and Cuba did not participate in the 1988 Seoul Olympics on purely political grounds. The two gained nothing from their protest.  The Olympics is an international sports event that transcends political, racial and religious differences. Politicians must stop their reckless campaign if they have any respect for the young athletes who have been devoting their lives to be in the next Olympics. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | August 6, 2019 | South Korea | Getting too emotional | Hawks are gaining ground in the ruling Democratic Party (DP). Members are calling for extreme actions ranging from scrapping the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) with Japan to boycotting the 2020 Summer Olympics. The ruling party is fueling the crisis after Japan’s removal of Korea from the so-called white list of countries getting preferential treatment in trade.  Rep. Sul Hoon, a senior lawmaker of the DP, demanded the government immediately nullify the Gsomia with Japan. He argued that Seoul must notify Tokyo of the move on Aug. 15 Liberation Day as a “symbolic message and warning” from the Korean people. It was the first time that the ruling party leadership formally suggested to scrap a military intelligence-sharing agreement with Tokyo.  DP Chairman Lee Hae-chan who had been reserved on security affairs also indicated his support for hard-line measure, saying Gsomia with Japan would be meaningless since Tokyo removed South Korean from its trusted trade partner list on commodities and technologies that can be used for military or commercial purpose. Flagging the possibility of breaking a symbolic military agreement could serve as a means to pressure Tokyo, but at the same time it can shake the longstanding tripartite alliance of Seoul, Tokyo and Washington. The move also suggests the possibility of a row over past issues extending to economic and security realms.  In a radio interview, Rep. Choi Jae-sung, who heads the DP’s special committee on economic retaliation from Japan, recommended the government broaden a travel ban on Japan beyond the areas with radioactive contamination concerns. Last month, he even called for a civilian rebellion against Japan’s “economic invasion.” He has been spearheading a campaign against Japan by suggesting a boycott of the Tokyo Summer Olympics. It is insensible for aides of the president to pose as mudslingers in stirring anti-Japanese sentiment. Vice Chair of the committee, Kim Min-seok, even likened Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Adolf Hitler.  Stock prices and the Korean won’s value have hit the lowest levels since 2016. Many agree Korea must take a stand against Japan’s unfair and bullying ways. But anti-Japanese sentiment must not guide state affairs. Instead of showing fury, the government must present feasible plans to counter Japanese export restrictions. We must demonstrate logical and prudent sternness that can earn support from citizens and the international community. |
| JoongAng Daily | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | August 5, 2019 | South Korea | Meaningless tit-for-tat | The political front remains a sad sight even as the country grapples with an unprecedented national duel with Japan. Rivaling parties have been spending days wrangling over ruling Democratic Party (DP) Chairman Lee Hae-chan’s lunching at a Japanese restaurant and drinking Japanese wine. They are exchanging tasteless statements even in disregard of the perilous economic front after Japan made it official that it would remove South Korea from a so-called white list of trusted trade partners.  Opposition parties are having a field day over Lee’s senseless act. “The fact that the ruling party head dined at a Japanese restaurant was inappropriate and indiscreet,” said the main opposition Liberty Korea Party (LKP). The minor opposition Bareunmirae Party lambasted his “heedless behavior betraying public sentiment.” Even the Peace and Justice Party, which is usually less harsh toward the ruling party, scorned the DP chief for “drinking in daylight.”  The DP also has nothing to be proud of. It claims it is irrational to shun Japanese restaurants run by Koreans that use Korean ingredients. But it was the ruling party that fanned anti-Japanese sentiment in the first place. Many Korean businesses have been hard hit by the spread of a consumer boycott after the Shinzo Abe administration initiated export curbs on Korea-bound chemicals needed for Korea’s mainstay chip industry. Japanese brands and any businesses in relationship with Japan have been suffering dramatic falls in their revenues. Restaurants selling Japanese cuisine have come under target although the food served by Koreans has nothing to do with Japan.  Cho Kuk — who recently resigned as the president’s senior secretary for civil affairs and bluntly called anyone who is critical of strong actions against Japanese export curbs as “Chinilpa,” a derogatory term referring to collaborators with the Japanese during colonial period — criticized the opposition parties for shaming Japanese restaurant owners and staff. His words are contradictory. His self-righteous ways have drawn condemnation, even from his former students at Seoul National University Law School. Students posted a banner opposing his return to the school to teach, telling him to “stay in politics.” |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | August 4, 2019 | South Korea | Diplomacy needed | Korea-Japan relations are in the worst state since normalization of diplomatic ties in 1965. Japan must withdraw its decision to remove Korea from a list of countries eligible for preferential treatment in trade as soon as possible. Though weaponization of trade can serve as a tool to threaten a neighbor, it can also backfire.  Only four hours after Japan’s decision to exclude Korea from the so-called white list, President Moon Jae-in declared a war against Japan. Korean people’s outrage about Japan’s reckless move can be understood. But a state leader must take a calm and strategic approach to every challenge and take it as an opportunity to overcome Japan. That is the responsibility of a head of state. It does not help to encourage anti-Japanese sentiment.  Despite his declaration of a full-fledged war on Japan, a vow alone cannot win the war. Cool-headed and realistic strategies are needed to reduce Korea’s heavy reliance on basic materials and parts needed to produce semiconductors and displays. Despite repeated slogans to achieve technological independence, Korea failed because of its reliance on the more efficient global supply chain. Moreover, domestic production of such essential materials or parts is not possible over a short period of time.  What is most urgent is to minimize shocks to our industries. The government and ruling party have vowed to foster the materials industry, reinforce cooperation between large and small companies, and encourage innovation in our manufacturing sector. But promises can hardly ease the deepening concerns of local businesses. The government must ease the stifling 52-hour workweek along with other policies, including extending tax benefits for local companies.  In an alarming development, Rep. Lee In-young, floor leader of the ruling Democratic Party, stressed the need to check if the Shinzo Abe administration is attempting to revive militarism by collaborating with Koreans friendly with Japan. That’s an overly emotional comment. His remarks do not make any sense today.  Due to its geopolitical situation, Korea must live with Japan. The government must think again before rushing to scrap the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) — a bilateral military intelligence-sharing pact — with Japan. It can serve as a useful card to pressure Japan, but hurt the security cooperation among Seoul, Washington and Tokyo. The longer the economic war lasts, the more damage both countries suffer. Korea and Japan must overcome this crisis through diplomacy. |
| JoongAng Daily | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | August 3, 2019 | South Korea | A national crisis | As expected, Japan removed South Korea from a so-called white list of countries exempted from scrutiny of dual-purpose items and technologies for export on security grounds. The move follows Tokyo’s implementation on July 4 of export curbs on three chemicals used in chip and display production to Korea. President Moon Jae-in vowed tit-for-tat actions. He told a cabinet meeting that the government must incrementally build up sanctions. “If Japan intentionally strikes our economy, it should also bear the consequences,” he said. The two neighboring states have entered their first-ever trade war.  Despite ups and downs, the two countries have developed bilateral ties since normalization of relations in 1965. Economic warfare is a lose-lose situation no matter who bears the greater brunt.  Both governments share blame. The Shinzo Abe administration cannot be excused for resorting to economic sanctions due to disgruntlement over the Korean Supreme Court rulings on wartime forced labor. It is wrong to translate political affairs onto the economic front. Abe is contradicting the “free, fair and indiscriminative trade principles” he extolled during a G-20 summit he hosted in Osaka in June. No matter how Tokyo paints it, the action is undeniably retaliation for the court rulings. The fact that Tokyo insists on reexamination of export controls for security only underscores the contradiction. Tokyo must end the retaliations and try to work out a diplomatic solution.  Seoul also is at fault for turning a blind eye to Tokyo’s fury after the first landmark ruling last October. Many warned that the rightist Japanese government would not sit quietly. But Seoul readied no contingency plans. It must get away from its habit of wishful thinking.  Moon may have further fueled anti-Japanese sentiment through emotional statements after the Japanese government started the new export controls. But there are no measures that can cushion the impact on Korean companies, the people and the economy. He vowed “strong actions in response to Japanese retaliation.” But the government must present feasible plans for action to earn public support.  Seoul also must be more discreet on the security front. Some in the ruling party and government have been calling for suspension of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia). But it cannot be denied that Seoul benefits more from a military intelligence-sharing agreement than Tokyo. Walking out of the deal cannot be smart. The agreement was signed at the request from Washington for a tighter tripartite alliance. If Korea leaves the Gsomia with Japan, its relationship with the U.S. could be damaged.  A full trade war has become unavoidable. This unprecedented setback has come at a time when the economy is weak. Politicians must put aside political differences and help deal with a national crisis. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | August 1, 2019 | South Korea | Hopes pinned on Bangkok meeting | Japan will hold a cabinet meeting this morning to determine whether to remove Korea from a list of countries eligible for preferential treatment in trade. In the afternoon, the foreign ministers of Korea, the United States and Japan will hold a meeting in Bangkok to discuss the U.S. proposal that its two allies stop their diplomatic battle. We hope Seoul and Tokyo find a breakthrough in the trilateral meeting arranged by Washington. Otherwise, the discord over trade and historical issues will not only damage the economies of Korea, Japan and the U.S. but also the global economy.  If Japan takes the dangerous path of dropping Korea from the so-called white list, it will not help anyone. If that really happens, Tokyo will have crossed a point of no return. That could mean the collapse of the seven-decade-old friendship between the two countries since World War II, not to mention a threat to peace and security in Northeast Asia.  Tokyo may think that economic retaliation based on its relative strengths in technology and capital can force Korea to surrender. But Korea is not the country it was decades ago. Japan’s retaliation will trigger huge losses for its own companies, which have been cooperating with their Korean customers in the global value chain. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe must understand that he will face harsh international criticism for defying the principle of free trade and wielding a “sword” against a neighbor.  A meeting Thursday between our Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha and Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono failed. After Kono rejected Kang’s demand for suspension of the removal from the list, Kang reportedly threatened to scrap the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) — a bilateral military intelligence-sharing pact — with Japan. That is a type of a “self-harm” to the Korea-U.S.-Japan alliance, which should be avoided at all costs.  An association of lawmakers from both ruling and opposition parties went to Tokyo to ask for help, but they could not even meet with their Japanese counterparts. With only a day left before D-day, a diplomatic effort by our lawmakers was in vain.  Both countries must find a solution. They should agree to Washington’s proposal that Tokyo postpone its removal of Korea from the list in return for Seoul’s promise to not sell the assets of Japanese companies in Seoul to compensate wartime forced laborers. But before that, Japan must make a rational decision in the cabinet meeting this morning. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 30, 2019 | South Korea | Prepare for the worst | Japan may be preparing to drop Korea from a list of countries eligible for preferential treatment in trade at a cabinet meeting on Friday. If Tokyo really makes that decision, the current row will go beyond the realm of a trade dispute and bring about a collapse in bilateral relations. Japan’s restrictions on three key export items starting July 4 could not be justified. Tokyo must withdraw a reckless action that can critically shake the global supply chain.  Our government must exert all diplomatic efforts possible, including persuading Tokyo to delay Friday’s cabinet meeting. It’s possible something can be done on the sidelines of the Asean Regional Forum in Bangkok, which opens on Thursday. In a press briefing Tuesday, ruling Democratic Party Chairman Rep. Lee Hae-chan stressed the need to coexist with our neighbor despite historical grudges. We welcome his remarks given all the hawkish reactions from the ruling party, including the threat to scrap the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) — a bilateral military intelligence-sharing agreement — with Japan. The Moon Jae-in administration must not give up diplomatic efforts, which are the only way to avoid a catastrophe.  At the same time, the government must brace for the worst possibility. If Korea is removed from the list, 1,115 strategic items shipped to Korea will have to receive permission from Tokyo from next month. The repercussions will go far beyond Japan’s earlier restrictions on three key materials needed to produce semiconductors and displays.  Japan’s move is aimed at attacking Korea’s mainstay industries through export control, as most of the restrictions target the main engines of our economic growth, including potentially rewarding businesses like hydrogen vehicles. Our chemical and precision machine industries, which heavily rely on Japan, will be the next targets. The government’s rallying cry to raise the competitiveness of our basic industries is pointless. It must do its best to reduce our dependence on Japan for technology.  But we should be wary of some who blame big companies for the crisis. Even President Moon said our conglomerates resorted to Japan’s cooperation after dismissing our ability to produce key industrial materials on our own. In the global supply chain, any company would capitalize on a competitive advantage — particularly when a slight difference in quality is directly linked to the competitiveness of final products. Instead of blaming big companies, the government and the private sector must join hands to foster the competitiveness of our basic industries. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 29, 2019 | South Korea | Diplomatic solution is key | Nearly a month has passed since Japan embarked on economic retaliations for the Korean Supreme Court’s rulings on wartime forced labor. In the meantime, the discord has deepened, as seen in Tokyo’s refusal to negotiate and average Koreans’ boycott of Japanese products. On Friday, Japan may remove Korea from a so-called “white list” of 27 countries eligible for preferential treatment in trade. The Sankei Shimbun reported that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will avoid a face-to-face meeting with President Moon Jae-in on the sidelines of multilateral meetings coming up, including the United Nations General Assembly meeting in September, unless Seoul shows a “constructive reaction” to the issue.  In such a tense situation, Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha’s telephone conversation last Friday with Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono offers a glimmer of hope. As both foreign ministers are attending the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) in Bangkok starting on Friday, they could help resolve the diplomatic row if they have a bilateral meeting on the sidelines. As we can hardly look forward to a summit between Moon and Abe or the dispatch of a special envoy in the near future, a face-to-face meeting between the foreign ministers could hopefully turn the tide.  First of all, both sides should take a step back. On Japan’s part, it must cancel a plan to remove Korea from the list of countries eligible for special treatment in trade or at least postpone it. Japanese media reported that Tokyo will make the decision in a cabinet meeting on Friday, which coincides with the opening day of the ARF in Bangkok. If the Abe government decides to strip Korea of its preferential trade status, it will only fuel anti-Japanese sentiment among Koreans. If Japan takes that path, even a foreign ministers’ meeting could hardly help.  The Moon administration also must take a forward-looking approach to the row instead of reiterating that it cannot meddle in a judicial ruling. Eight months after the court’s ruling, Seoul proposed to resolve the conflict over compensation for forced workers during World War II through donations from companies involved. Tokyo rejected that idea.  It is not easy to find a solution that includes both the Supreme Court rulings and Tokyo’s position that the problem was addressed through the 1965 Basic Treaty. Nevertheless, both countries must cut through the Gordian knot. The two foreign ministers must have a meeting on the sidelines of the ARF to find a solution before it is too late. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 29, 2019 | South Korea | The trade war widens | U.S. President Donald Trump has ordered the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to stop allowing richer countries like Korea from enjoying trade benefits under the World Trade Organization (WTO) after they classified themselves or part of their economies as developing economies. Trump’s move is aimed at the WTO’s rules permitting developing economies to set up tariff barriers against some items. He warned that the WTO will fall apart if “the world’s richest countries” continue to insist on such privileges by feigning to be “developing countries.”  Foreign media, including Reuters and the Financial Times, said Trump’s actions target China. In fact, Trump’s memorandum to the USTR largely targets China. But South Korea, Mexico and Turkey are also on the list of countries that have been receiving “inappropriate treatment.”  Korea is alarmed by Trump’s decision and wonders if it translates into a demand for a full-fledged opening of our agricultural market. If Korea loses its status as a “developing country” in the WTO, it cannot impose 513 percent tariffs on rice imports or offer subsidies to farmers. Some analysts even warn of the possibility of Californian rice being imported here at much cheaper prices, destroying our entire agricultural industry.  The Moon Jae-in administration’s reaction is hardly reassuring. In a press release, the Ministry of Agriculture simply said Washington would not force Korea to give up its special benefits. We are dumbfounded at such wishful thinking.  On top of that, Japan is ratcheting up economic retaliations for our Supreme Court’s rulings on wartime forced labor, as seen in Japanese media reports that Tokyo will approve a revision of the law to deprive Korea of its preferential treatment for trade in a cabinet meeting on Friday. If the revision is passed, a whopping 1,000 export items — including materials for electric batteries and carbon fibers needed for the Moon administration’s goal to achieve a so-called hydrogen economy — will be subject to regulations. That’s a second tsunami of export restrictions following earlier ones on materials for semiconductors and displays, which could shake the very foundations of our industrial base.  The government is pushing for a meeting between foreign ministers of Korea and Japan on the sidelines of the Asean Regional Forum in Bangkok later this week. It must find a breakthrough to diplomatically resolve the problem. At the same time, the government must stop trading in groundless optimism if it really wants to reassure the public credibly. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 26, 2019 | South Korea | Time of turmoil | South Korea is being bombarded with challenges on the diplomatic and security fronts. Japan is restricting our trade and a Russian spy aircraft has violated our national airspace. No progress has been made on the denuclearization of North Korea while the inter-Korean relationship shows signs of fissures. Pyongyang has disclosed the development of a submarine capable of being equipped with missiles and tested a new type of short-range missile. North Korea is even threatening South Korean President Moon Jae-in, telling South Korean officials “not to ignore warnings from Pyongyang.”  The developments are startling enough for the Moon administration, which has placed many of its eggs in the North Korea basket. The security challenges have arisen at a time when Seoul has a trade row with Tokyo. In the sky over the Dokdo islets in the East Sea earlier this week, aircraft from China and Russia and a fleet of South Korean fighter jets were engaged in a tense face-off for three hours. North Korea launched two missiles into the East Sea, and Japan has ratcheted up its territorial claims over Dokdo. In a trip to Tokyo, U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton vaguely sided with Tokyo and pressured Seoul to send troops to the Strait of Hormuz to back U.S. engagement in the waters. The global powers are capitalizing on the conflict between Korea and Japan for their own gains.  But so far, our government has been naive and inconsistent. Our maritime borders have become vulnerable to the extent of letting a North Korean boat come in unspotted. The Blue House deleted the term “alliance” from the annual Korea-U.S. joint drill and floated the idea of scrapping a military intelligence sharing agreement with Japan. Even as Russian spy jets penetrated our national airspace, the Blue House has not held a National Security Council meeting.  Crisis control is a key to governance. The Moon administration talks the talk, but doesn’t walk the walk. Our foreign policy direction must stay firm no matter how many times the head of state changes. Based on the Korea-U.S. alliance, Seoul must maintain amicable relations with Tokyo. At the same time, it should strengthen relationships with Beijing and Moscow.  Moon has aides with no expertise in diplomacy in top security and diplomatic positions. As a result, Korea was sandbagged by Japan’s export curbs and got the cold shoulder from the U.S. when it asked for mediation. The government must fill vital posts with professionals in the field so that the commander can cope with turmoil on the external front. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 17, 2019 | South Korea | A need for reason | Today is the deadline for Korea to respond to Japan’s proposal for the establishment of a third-party arbitration committee to settle the deepening discord over the Korean Supreme Court’s ruling on wartime forced labor. The Blue House on Tuesday refused to accept Tokyo’s request and its proposal to resolve the dispute by allowing both sides’ companies and the Korean government to get involved in compensating the five plaintiffs for their forced labor during World War II. The alarming developments suggest no possibility of the row being successfully addressed through dialogue and compromise.  Amid deepening hostilities, Korea’s ruling Democratic Party (DP) has begun to define Japan’s restrictions on three key materials used in Korea for production of semiconductors and displays as an “economic invasion” instead of “economic retaliation.” It is sad that the ruling party is taking such an emotional approach to the issue. That will only make matters worse.  Korea and Japan have long maintained a mutually beneficial economic relation despite the deep historical scars of the past. If the trade dispute escalates for political reasons alone, both countries and people will suffer. If Japan stops supplies of key parts and materials for Korea’s semiconductor industry, Korean companies will have no choice but to produce them on their own or find other suppliers around the world. That translates into losses for Japanese companies.  Samsung Electronics reportedly has already found Chinese suppliers of etching gas — an essential material needed to manufacture semiconductors. A nationwide campaign to boycott Japanese products is spreading fast. That will hurt Japanese companies doing business here. It is the time for both countries to take a deep breath and settle the trade dispute in an open and flexible way.  The Moon Jae-in administration needs to consider other options — including addressing the dispute through third-party arbitration or bringing it to the International Court of Justice. In diplomacy, there cannot be a one-sided victory. The answer lies in compromise through negotiations.  Japan must scrap its overly tough approach. Legally, the Korean Supreme Court’s rulings are convincing even among Japanese lawyers. Yet Tokyo tries to link the issue of compensation to the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations, which declared a complete settlement of all claims for damages during colonial days. As the New York Times pointed out, it is wrong for a country to impose economic retaliation on another for political reasons. Both governments must become rational before it is too late. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 15, 2019 | South Korea | Point of no return | Senior officials in the Moon Jae-in administration are showing dangerously emotional reactions to Japan’s economic retaliation for the Korean Supreme Court’s rulings ordering compensation by Japanese companies for Korean workers forced into labor during World War II. When Choi Jae-sung — chairman of a special committee to deal with Japan’s export ban on key three materials needed to produce semiconductors and displays in Korea — stressed the need to “recruit civilian rebels” to counter Japan’s retaliation, we brushed it off as a personal grudge.  But anti-Japanese comments are spreading out of control. Cho Kuk, President Moon’s senior secretary for civil affairs, on Saturday posted a YouTube link to a song popular during the democracy movement against the military regime in the 1980s on Facebook. A day earlier, Moon reminded citizens of South Jeolla of their proud history and how their ancestors helped Admiral Yi Sun-sin drive out Japanese invaders. Kim Hyun-chong, deputy National Security Adviser, joined the chorus by underscoring the need for the people to unite and overcome the crisis as Koreans did in the past.  But they went too far, even if they represent the deepening public dissatisfaction with Tokyo’s export curbs. We are increasingly concerned about the government’s emotional — not rational — approach. Aren’t these senior officials the very same people who must come up with a strategy to weather this crisis?  Even an opposition lawmaker famous for his pro-Moon approach criticized such rhetoric as “unfit for strategists on the frontline.” The government’s emotional reaction affects the public. If the discord cannot be resolved by diplomacy, all hope is lost. A campaign to boycott Japanese products is spreading fast in Korea and covering nearly all types of Japanese food and beverages. An association of small merchants and owners of mom and pop stores declared their boycott of Japanese products in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.  If the government sticks to its emotional approach, it will incite the public and deepen anti-Korean sentiments in Japan. Rep. Park Jie-won, a former chief of staff to the late president Kim Dae-jung, wrote on Facebook that his boss would not have invited such a crisis as he believed in the power of diplomacy to protect our national interests.  The government must think strategically to find diplomatic options Tokyo can accept as soon as possible. If it doesn’t, it will have crossed the point of no return. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 11, 2019 | South Korea | Where’s the evidence? | Korea-bashing by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has gone too far. During a TV debate on Sunday, Abe said it was natural to believe that South Korea could have broken sanction rules on North Korea, given its trajectory of breaking the inter-government agreement on wartime reparations. A state leader publicly accusing its neighbor of violating international rules should have strong evidence.  Koichi Hagiuda, executive acting secretary-general of the Liberal Democratic Party in the Abe cabinet, said, “We cannot know whereabouts of the chemicals exported to South Korea,” implying that some of the chemicals shipped to South Korea could have ended up in North Korea for weapons development. South Korea imports a huge amount of hydrogen fluoride, one of the three materials under Japan’s export curb. Without specifying the source of his accusation, he said the shipments could have headed to North Korea to make chemical weapons. Seoul vehemently protested the “groundless” claim from Tokyo and its spread of bogus information to build up rationale for its retaliatory moves.  On television, Abe called Korea “a state that does not keep its promises” and urged it to act “according to common sense.” He also ridiculed President Moon Jae-in of having little influence over North Korea. Abe failed to demonstrate the minimum civility towards another country and publicly shamed its neighbor and ally. He was resorting to provoking hostility in the people of the two nations with little regards to resolve the row diplomatically. As Abe represents the worlds’ third largest economy, he must act befitting the power.  His harsh rhetoric may be aimed at silencing the brewing criticism in Japan over his retaliatory actions. By floating the suspicion about a potential behind-the-scene trade between the two Koreas, he could build up the cause for his actions for political gain in the upcoming Upper House election despite apparent damage to Japan’s economy and national dignity as a champion of free trade. He may also be aiming to divide opinions in South Korea by provoking ultra-rightists who are extremely disgruntled by the liberal Moon administration’s over-indulgence with North Korea.  Korea should not tolerate such obnoxious disinformation. Seoul’s credibility is at stake if some in the international community believe the fake news about South Korea shipping chemicals to the North. Seoul must logically confront Tokyo for the grounds of its accusation or demand a formal apology and retraction of the accusation and the irrational export curbs if it is groundless. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 9,  2019 | South Korea | Exploiting nationalism | The Korean industry has been shaken by Japan’s export restrictions on three core materials needed for chip and display production. Lee Jae-yong, vice chairman of Samsung Electronics, has flown to Japan to study Tokyo’s intentions and future moves. President Moon Jae-in rounded up leaders of the top 30 business groups on Wednesday to formulate a joint strategy. Political and business leaders have to unite and share wisdom in times of crisis.  The ruling Democratic Party (DP) belatedly launched a special committee to study the ramifications of the Supreme Court rulings made in October, which ordered Japanese companies to compensate individuals for their forced wartime labor. However, whether the committee is really aimed at helping the government find a solution remains unknown. Rep. Choi Jae-sung, chair of the special committee, said the situation calls for a “civilian rebellion” against a foreign attack. He was more or less encouraging a consumer boycott.  In the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), the people had to raise their own army to fight Japanese invaders because the royal court and the military could not defend them. Korean businesses and citizens today are on their own again and helplessly exposed to attacks from Japan because the government idly sat back and stayed clueless until Tokyo mounted a powerful retaliation. Still, this is no time to resort to public action. Those in power must demonstrate strength and capability to ease the public, not stir them.  Park Beom-gye, a senior lawmaker of the DP, wrote on Facebook that there are still some Koreans who “like Japan” more than necessary. Any critic to the government’s policy on Japan is stigmatized as pro-Japanese by the liberals. There is no need to be over-indulgent with the Japanese, but it is also outdated to believe that being anti-Japanese is patriotic and just. An ideological response will only push Japan farther to the right.  There have been some boycotts and voluntary cancellations of trips to Japan. It is naïve to believe that an emotional response will move Tokyo. Some heated comments from ruling party lawmakers can only fuel the Japanese people’s support for the nationalistic policy. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe may be waiting for a fiery response from Korea for his cabinet to ratchet up retaliatory action. Sensible politicians should ask the public not to get caught up in a diplomatic row. Resorting to nationalism is only falling into a trap. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 7, 2019 | South Korea | Solution urgently needed | The de facto export ban by Japan on three key materials necessary for chip and OLED display manufacturing has begun to take a toll on Korean manufacturers. Japan started restricting Korea’s imports of fluorinated polymide, photoresists and hydrogen fluoride shipments last week. Since then no shipments have been approved. Samsung Electronics and other component makers have told the government that their factories could stop running later this month if they do not receive fresh stocks from Japan.  The government held emergency meetings with businesses over the weekend. Top economic policymakers — Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki and Kim Sang-jo, presidential policy chief — met with heads of Hyundai Motor, SK and LG Group. The heads of Samsung and Lotte Group were away on overseas business trips. President Moon Jae-in has invited chiefs of the top 30 business groups to a meeting on Wednesday. The government and business must work together to counter trade attacks from Japan. Moon must listen to corporate voices to draw up an effective counterattack.  But Seoul doesn’t have too many options. The government has vowed to pour in 6 trillion won ($5.1 billion) to promote the IT materials and parts sector and diversify import lines, but that can’t produce results overnight. Japan, meanwhile, is ready to ratchet up trade barriers. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in a TV debate claimed Seoul cannot be trusted because it is a state that does not abide by inter-government agreement. He complained about Seoul’s disbanding of a peace foundation aimed to compensate comfort women under a 2017 bilateral agreement and Supreme Court rulings last year ordering Japanese companies to compensate individuals for forced labor in colonial times. Tokyo has been arguing wartime and colonial reparations were completely settled by a 1965 treaty.  Japan warned it will removed Korea from the a so-called white list of countries that are allowed free exports. That would mean Korea would be exempted from fast-track supplies of over 1,100 substances needed to make many things. Japan is not expected to yield any time soon. Given their reliance on Japanese suppliers, Korean companies have little options in finding immediate replacements.  What the government needs to do is to settle the diplomatic row with Tokyo. “The crisis has been triggered by political and diplomatic impotence,” said Lee Jong-cheol, Bareunmirae Party spokesman. The government must try to renew dialogue with Tokyo and seek a diplomatic breakthrough. A lengthy conflict will only hurt the citizens and industries of both nations. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 5, 2019 | South Korea | We must reset our diplomacy | Export restrictions from Japan against chip-making materials bound for Korea over a wartime labor row has raised an alarm on the economic front. Tokyo must take back its retaliatory action over past issues. But in the meantime, Korea must come up with immediate solutions so as not to cause manufacturing unrest and corporate damages. Litigation with the World Trade Organization (WTO) could take years.  The government must deal with the looming crisis. The National Security Office (NSO) of the Blue House last month denied that the relationship with Japan was the worst it had ever been. Instead, it claimed bilateral ties had always been rocky. The government stayed casual even as it tried to arrange a separate meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during the G-20 Summit in Osaka last week. The government doubted the host country could be so rude towards its guest. Seoul scrambled till the last minute after receiving no invitation for separate talks, but got nothing more than a photo session with the host.  Korea’s dignity has hit the ground. During the talks on the sidelines of G-20 Summit, Chinese President Xi Jinping called upon President Moon Jae-in to solve the problem of a U.S. antimissile system installed in Korea. Xi brought up the issue once again although Seoul has complied with Beijing’s demands and promised not to bring in more antimissile shields or join a tripartite missile front with the United States and Japan. Xi happily agreed when Abe asked him to visit Tokyo during the cherry blossom season next spring. But Xi kept mum on Moon’s request for a visit to Seoul.  The relationship with Washington also has stayed ceremonious. Moon just got two minutes of U.S. President Donald Trump’s time when he flew to Washington in April. Washington is said to be reluctant to share intelligence with Seoul. Regardless of the showy historic three-way meeting with the two Korean leaders and U.S. president in the truce village of Panmunjom, the denuclearization process remains uncertain, as their approach to solving the North Korean nuclear issue differ.  While the government has been all out in its engagement of Pyongyang, a North Korean vessel stealthily entered South Korean waters without any restrictions. Most people are stunned to learn how insecure South Korean borders have become. Peace cannot be guaranteed just because North Korea vowed nonaggression through a military agreement in September last year. The Blue House is trying to wrap up the issue with an apology from the defense minister and a warning to the NSO. But there should be a thorough investigation into the matter to ease public anxieties over security.  The impotence of chiefs on the security and diplomatic fronts must be re-examined. The foreign and security affairs team, including the NSO head Chung Eui-yong, failed to show any insight, expertise and sense of balance. There are talks of a cabinet reshuffle. The Blue House must replace the foreign and security team with more competent people to restore dignity and help our national interests. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 5, 2019 | South Korea | Listen to the complaints | Park Yong-mann, chairman of the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), wrote on Facebook that the government has become hopeless and helpless due to its wrecked bilateral relationship with Japan.  His frustration explodes on the issue of regulation. “Starting new industries is almost comical as they face a jungle of regulations upon birth. Opportunities in medical and education services are heavily stifled. If you mention deregulation, you are immediately called a public enemy,” he complained.  Regulations remain steadfast, hindering the long-awaited launch of a sharing economy, telemedicine and use of private information for big data services. Businessmen are grumbling about the snail’s pace of removing outdated rules and the fast speed of making new regulations.  The government has suggested it has few options to counter Japan’s economic retaliation. Kim Sang-jo, presidential policy chief, said there is a long list of materials and parts that go into display and chip making. Japan has singled out three top items for the first round of its export restriction, he said. Kim sounded as if the Moon Jae-in administration knew how Tokyo would act. And yet he could not explain what the government had prepared for counteraction or prevention. The only specific plans was to file complaints with the World Trade Organization, a process that could take years.  Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha said the government would have to study the measures, again without a plan. A senior trade and industry ministry official even rebuked people from chip and display companies for not preparing for the situation through their intelligence in Japan.  The government asks companies to invest because sagging investment drags down domestic demand, jobs and economy amid decreasing external demand. But companies are too busy fretting about their survivability with no help from the government. “What can we do against the rush of a tsunami?” sighed Chairman Park as he closed his post. He pleaded politicians to help the economy where it is necessary. The business community is asking for government protection in the diplomatic row over past issues and lifting of regulations so that it can explore new business opportunities. |
| JoongAng Daily | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 4, 2019 | South Korea | Where’s the self-reflection? | Many ask if the government is working in the country’s national interest, given the poor state of its foreign and economic policy. The Japanese government has warned of retaliation against the Korean court rulings on wartime labor issues through various channels from the beginning of the year. Japan’s Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Taro Aso floated the idea of restricting money transfer and visa issues to Koreans long ago.  There are reports that Japan has up to 190 measures it can use against Korea. But our government has stayed nonchalant, repeating noninterference on judiciary matters. It has been of little help on the economic front. The Moon Jae-in administration kept income-growth led policy intact despite the widening tolls on our economy from its market-unfriendly and anti-business actions. The government now admits that growth for this year could be slowed to 2.4 percent.  There has not been any self-reflection or contingency plan. Officials simply came up with excuses and belated actions. There is no sense of urgency either. Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha is at fault for failing to use diplomatic means to prevent such a mishap. When asked about potential Japanese retaliation over the wartime labor row last month, she said the government wouldn’t tolerate it. But after Tokyo announced an export embargo on key materials necessary for chip production, she said the government would have to study measures according to the developments.  Officials at the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy are sadder. Deputy minister Cheong Seung-il and Yoo Jeong-yeol, assistant minister for industry policy, held a meeting with executives from chip and display makers after learning of the export curbs from Japan. The participants said they were appalled when officials asked them why they had not been aware of such a move from their operations and intelligence in Japan.  The government is transferring its responsibility to protect public properties and livelihood to the private sector. All these should have been foreseeable when Tokyo strongly protested the Supreme Court ruling in October last year. An hour before the opening of the Group of 20 summit meeting Osaka, Japan last week, Japan flatly turned down Seoul’s offer of creating a joint fund to compensate individuals for wartime labor. Tokyo wouldn’t accept a compromise when it was already ready to retaliate.  In its second-half economic policy outline, the Ministry of Strategy and Finance has cut this year’s growth estimate to 2.4 to 2.5 percent from 2.7 percent, putting the blame on deteriorated external trade conditions. The government may still be unwilling to let go of its risky policies despite the damages on the domestic economic front from sharp increases in the minimum wage and corporate tax. The government must end to its internal problems first. |
| JoongAng Daily | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 3, 2019 | South Korea | Retaliation backfires | The Japanese government resorting to retaliate against the Korean court rulings on wartime forced labor by regulating exports of three materials essentials for chip-making and organic light-emitting diode display production is mean and childish. Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry revised export control regulations and removed Korea from a list of countries eligible for simplified and fast-track clearance for three items — fluorinated polyimide, used to make OLED displays; photoresists, used for semiconductor fabrication; and hydrogen fluoride (etching gas), which is needed to clean chemical substances in chipmaking.  As a result, the new regulation requires Japanese vendors to seek approval every time they want to ship these materials to Korea. The review process could take up to 90 days, which could seriously disturb Korean chip and display production that makes up the mainstay of Korean exports.  Tokyo has more or less declared a war by targeting the core of Korean exports and industrial production as it is well aware of the weight of semiconductors and displays in Korean economy. The foundation of bilateral relationship could be shaken. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called for “sustainability and development of a free, fair and non-discriminative trade order” in his closing address to the Group of 20 summit in Osaka, Japan on Saturday. Then, he ordered a contradictory retaliatory action on its trade partner in just two days.  Abe claimed that the measure was based on changes in trust between states and that it does not violate the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The non-violation claim under the WTO article allows member countries to file complaints against another member even when they do not violate the rules technically. Seoul must take the issue to the WTO without any hesitance. Japan acts as if it practices fairly according to global standards. But Seoul has proven Tokyo wrong by winning the WTO’s backing for its restrictions on fisheries import from seas near Fukushima.  The de facto embargo is ruinous for Japan, too. In a recent editorial, the Nikkei warned that the trade move to settle the wartime labor row can cause damages to Japanese companies and disrupt the supply chain between the two countries. The action not only hurts Korean companies, but also Japanese companies as Korean manufacturers are their major clients.  Japan must reverse the restrictions immediately to prevent harm for both nations. A tit-for-tat attack could worsen bilateral relationship beyond repair. The Tokyo Summer Olympics are coming up next year. It must withdraw the retaliatory actions and work with Korea to solve the wartime labor issue through diplomatic means. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 2, 2019 | South Korea | Addressing Japan’s retaliation | The Japanese government has decided to regulate Korea-bound shipments of three chemicals crucial in production of semiconductors and displays as a result of “deep injury in mutual trust between the two governments.” Sung Yun-mo, Korea’s trade and industry minister, identified the action as “retaliation” for Korean court rulings on wartime forced labor. Starting Thursday, Japanese exporters of three materials — fluorine polyimide used to make flexible organic light-emitting diode displays, photoresists needed to transfer circuit patterns to chip substrates and etching gas used for semiconductor fabrication — must seek government permission for shipments to Korea. As Japan removed Korea from its preferential list, vendors must gain Tokyo’s approval for every contract — a process that could take up to 90 days.  The move could deal a critical blow to Korean chip and display makers, which generate the bulk of Korean exports. Since they rely mostly on Japanese materials, it won’t be easy to find replacements immediately. Production and shipments could be delayed, hurting not just the companies but also the Korean economy. Korean exports have been falling for months, with the fall widening to double digits — 13.5 percent — in June. Japan aimed straight at the heart of the Korean economy.  The move hardly befits the world’s third largest economy. It was the host to the Group of 20 summit in Osaka, Japan that ended Saturday with a declaration to create a “free, fair, non-discriminative, transparent, predictable and stable trade and investment environment.” The move also could be as harmful to Japanese companies as it could lose their long-time Korean partners and clients. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe could be putting national interests at risk because of his ambition to become the longest-serving Japanese leader by winning the Upper House election later this month.  The Korean government is equally at fault for neglecting the thorny issue until it came to affect its businesses and exports. Tokyo has warned of a retaliatory action since the Korean Supreme Court’s first ruling in October last year, in which it ordered individual compensation for wartime labor. Seoul angered Tokyo by insisting on noninterference in terms of judicial decisions. In March, Taro Aso, Japan’s deputy prime minister and finance minister, warned of retaliatory action, including tariffs, remittance restrictions and visa barriers. Last month, Tokyo announced tougher quarantine checks on Korean fisheries. Yet the government sat idle.  Tokyo’s retaliation may be upped sooner or later. Some are even warning of tariff barriers. Seoul warned it could file a complaint with the World Trade Organization and rebuked the Japanese ambassador in Seoul. Korea must respond to unfair trade actions from Japan. But it must be subtle and clever so as not to cause economic damage from a political and diplomatic standoff. If the contest turns emotional, both countries can hurt.  Japan has attacked Korea’s weakest point. Korea must strengthen material development and diversify trade, but that cannot be achieved in short period. In the meantime, the government must do its best to minimize the damage to Korean companies and economy. It must not take the crisis lightly, insisting on noninterference in business affairs as it did with Beijing’s Terminal High Altitude Area Defense retaliation. |
| JoongAng Daily, | Editorial | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 1, 2019 | South Korea | Tokyo strikes back | Tokyo is about to take retaliatory action against South Korea for Supreme Court rulings demanding Japanese companies compensate individuals forced to work during World War II.  According to a Sankei Shimbun report, the Japanese government will impose restriction on Japanese exports to South Korea of three key materials used in smartphones, displays and semiconductors from July 4.  Tokyo is aiming straight at Korea’s mainstay exports. Japan will stop preferential treatment for the three key materials bound for South Korea, requiring exporters to seek permission every time they ship items to South Korea.  Tokyo has not confirmed the report. But its plausibility is high, given the cold response Tokyo showed to South Korea’s president last week at the Group of 20 (G-20) summit in Osaka, Japan and to a team of Korean lawmakers visiting in May. Underscoring the icy ties, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe greeted Korean President Moon Jae-in with just an eight-second handshake at the G-20 summit.  Damage to Korean companies is inevitable. Tokyo wants to bully its way forward by hurting Korean companies instead of dealing with the matter directly with Seoul.  Some think Tokyo has decided on retaliatory action for political gain ahead of July 21 upper house elections.  But economic retaliation could backfire on Japan. Losing Korean clients, who are the world’s largest in chip and display production, could boomerang on Japanese suppliers. The two countries rely on one another in complicated supply chains.  Over the last decade, companies in the two countries have been engaged in over 100 overseas resource developments. Any fissures in those long-held partnerships would only benefit rivals in other countries.  Business relationships must remain intact regardless of diplomatic friction. The Japanese government must not make a mistake out of shortsightedness. The Korean government must make extra efforts to restore the relationship and protect economic cooperation. |
| Ha Hyun-ock | Opinion | Korea JoongAng Daily | October 7, 2019 | South Korea | A fallout of ‘Gsomia non grata’? | In 2010, the Pakistani government wanted to send a veteran diplomat who had served as ambassador to the United States and India to Saudi Arabia and asked for its agreement, but Saudi Arabia rejected it. Before the Saudi rejection, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain also refused. This diplomat could not get an agrément from Arab countries. Pakistan later found out that his name was vulgar in Arabic and these countries did not want to receive him as a Pakistani ambassador.  “Agrément” refers to seeking agreement of the receiving country before sending a diplomatic mission. It was defined in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 in order to prevent international conflict from a country rejecting an officially appointed diplomat from another country. The person who receives an agrément is called a persona grata. In contrast, a person who did not get an agrément is called a persona non grata.  At the National Assembly Foreign and Unification Committee interpellation session on Oct. 4, the delayed agrément by the U.S. government on Korean Ambassador to the U.S. designee Lee Soo-hyuck became a controversy. Since the designation was announced on Aug. 9, 56 days have passed, and agrément is yet to come. The opposition party claimed that Washington was expressing discontent about Korea’s ending of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia) with Japan in a roundabout way and showed concern about cracks in the alliance.  It is an exaggeration to interpret the delayed agrément as an offshoot of the Moon Jae-in administration’s “Gsomia non grata.” It would be fortunate if only administrative procedure takes time. But it is a different matter if it is another warning sign of Korea-U.S. relations. Rather, I would prefer the ambassador’s name to hinder the agrément. |
| Jung  Hyo-sik | Opinion | Korea JoongAng Daily | August 16, 2019 | South Korea | A one-day outing for the statue | From August 14, the Old Korean Legation in Washington D.C. held a special exhibition of historical materials showing efforts to maintain Korea’s independence 130 years ago. Exhibited were postcards, New Year’s greeting cards and documents from a church. They were found during the fireplace restoration in a second-floor office in April 2016. One of them was a postcard from Danville Military Institute (1890-1939). Lee Chae-yeon, the fourth minister to the United States from 1890 to 1893, visited the school to invite American military instructors to enhance Korea’s military and bought the postcard.  Danville is at the southwestern end of Virginia and takes about 4 and half hours by car to reach today. Lee visited this school because King Gojong secretly ordered him to arrange for the dispatch of 200,000 American troops to drive out Chinese forces for Joseon. First minister Park Jeong-yang had a one-on-one meeting with U.S. President Grover Cleveland but was called back after 11 months due to Qing pressure. Successive ministers Lee Ha-young, Yi Wan-yong and Lee Chae-yeon remained committed to the goal.  Second acting minister Lee Ha-young was almost successful. With the help of the Department of State, he borrowed $2 million with Incheon, Busan and Wonsan Ports as security, and the deployment bill was voted in the Congress and the Senate. However, because of the Monroe Doctrine, the deployment to Korea did not pass. Lee returned the remaining money after spending $160,000 on banquets and lobbying, and the diplomacy ended fruitlessly (“Fifty Years of Diplomacy with the United States” by Moon Il-pyung). Moreover, Lee Ha-young, a Jungchuwon advisor, and Yi Wan-yong, one of the five Eulsa traitors, failed to get help from the United States to maintain Korea’s independence and later became Japanese collaborators, leading the transfer of Korea’s sovereignty to Japan.  On August 15, the statue of the Girl of Peace came to the Old Korea Legation after passing the Japanese Embassy in the United States. It came to Washington, D.C. in November 2016 but a permanent location could not be found. It was kept in storage for 33 months and finally saw the light of day. The statues are installed in four locations: Los Angeles, South Field, Michigan, Brookhaven, Georgia, and Manhattan, New York, but the Japanese government is interfering with the installation in the U.S. capital. The installation committee will seek public locations in Washington, D.C. by the end of the year, and as an alternative, Maryland and other nearby locations will be considered. How about the Old Korea Legation? The place where the loss of national sovereignty was not prevented could be a place to console the victims. It is also meaningful as the legation was restored through efforts of Korean citizens and Korean Americans. |
| Seo  Seung-wook | Opinion | Korea JoongAng Daily | July 16, 2019 | South Korea | Diplomacy with Japan is needed | “Out partner for a diplomatic resolution may not be Japan. Probably not,” said a government official.  On Japan’s export restrictions, President Moon Jae-in said that the government would calmly make efforts to settle the trade dispute diplomatically as cycles of action and retaliation are hardly desirable. I naturally assumed that he meant a diplomatic resolution with Japan. So I asked and was told that the partner for a diplomatic resolution may not be Japan.  In fact, the government moved toward the United States, not Japan. Foreign minister Kang Kyung-wha called U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to talk about the dispute. I find it very hard to believe. That’s not all. Blue House Deputy Director for National Security Kim Hyun-chong visited the United States to seek support from Washington. While the situation was pressing for Korea, U.S. Ambassador to Korea Harry Harris said that it was not yet the time for America to intervene and David Stilwell, assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said that there was no plan to mediate.  Perhaps, the United States is likely to consider the Korea-Japan comfort women agreement in 2015 as a notable case of failed mediation. Former U.S. President Barack Obama visited Seoul after Tokyo in 2014 and said that the women were raped in a shocking way. It was a terrible human rights violation, he added. In 2015, the U.S. Department of State urged the two countries to make an agreement.  However, the agreement fizzled out in the end. Saying that Obama had a high regard for the agreement, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is framing Korea as a country that does not keep its promises. Given his remarks that his best diplomatic accomplishment is being best friends with U.S. President Donald Trump, it is not impossible that Abe already tipped Trump off about the export ban. A recent Mainichi Shimbun column read, “The United States is a contradictory country that violated an international agreement by unilaterally increasing tariffs and yet it is condoned because of its superpower status.” It is strange that Korea is asking the United States to mediate on export restrictions.  Most of all, Moon’s diplomatic efforts should not only be directed to the United States. Export restrictions are a bad idea, but the Korean government should also repent neglecting diplomacy with Japan for eight months after the Supreme Court’s ruling on forced wartime labor. Awaking from the eight-month-long silence, we should more actively talk with Japan. Only then will the international community listen to our voice. |
| Seo Seung-wook | Opinion | Korea JoongAng Daily | November 15, 2018 | South Korea | Japan and Korea can be friends | On Nov. 13, the word “omoni” appeared in a prime-time show on network television in Japan. “Omoni” is the Japanese pronunciation of the Korean word for “mom.” Japanese TBS variety program “The World Unknown to Matsuko,” hosted by cross-dressing TV personality Matsuko Deluxe, featured Korean cooking masters from Shin Okubo Korean Town in Tokyo. The show featured cheese stir-fried spicy chicken, soft tofu soup and assorted pancakes, the most notable Korean dishes in Japan. The highlight was the “Chicken Soup Grandma,” who closed her eatery and returned to Korea three years ago. The program found her in Gangjin, South Jeolla, and the master was invited to the studio with her signature dish.  Host Matsuko has been involved in controversy for belittling K-pop, but that day she was serious. She repeatedly said “it is really tasty” and enjoyed the Korean food. It must have been recorded earlier, but the show was aired at a sensitive time. Popular sentiment in Korea and Japan has been strained by the Supreme Court of Korea’s ruling on forced labor victims by imperial Japan and Japan’s resistance to the ruling, as well as BTS’ “Liberation Day t-shirt” controversy. TBS could have considered cancelling the broadcast, but it was aired as planned.  On the same day, despite the T-shirt controversy, BTS held a concert at Tokyo Dome with 45,000 fans. Japanese fans raved over the band’s performance. Korean people generally assumed that anti-Korean sentiment in Japan would be intense due to various political and cultural issues. However, the success of BTS’ concert and the appearance of Korean cooks on TBS suggest otherwise. Some Japanese may want to crush the Korean Wave, but they don’t represent the entire country.  It would be better to approach civil exchange and communication channels with open minds at this time of political discord. The BTS’ t-shirt controversy initiated by far-right online users spread because of a lack of understanding between the people of the two countries. Koreans lacked understanding of Japanese trauma over atomic bomb, and Japanese did not understand how furious Koreans are at the far-right for spreading anti-Korean sentiment in Japan.  Exchanges between Korea and Japan have peaked recently. Visiting Japan and Japanese restaurants is popular in Korea, and K-pop, Korean cuisine and Korean literature has brought the third Korean Wave to Japan. I hope relations will heal and the two countries will get along soon. |
| Daily Tribune, Articles | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | November 22, 2019 | Philippines | South Korea salvages military pact with Japan at 11th hour | Seoul, South Korea — South Korea decided Friday against scrapping a critical military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan, in a dramatic 11th-hour U-turn that will come as a relief to the United States.  The pact was due to expire at midnight amid a sharp deterioration in ties between the two democracies and market economies that has alarmed Washington as it seeks to curb the threat from nuclear-armed North Korea.  But after a flurry of last-ditch diplomacy, Seoul announced it would “conditionally” suspend the expiry of the agreement with just six hours left on the clock.  Kim You-geun, a national security official at Seoul’s presidential Blue House, confirmed the accord, known as GSOMIA, would not be allowed to lapse at midnight.  “The Japanese government has expressed their understanding,” he said.  He warned, however, that the pact could still “be terminated at any time”.  Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said three-way co-ordination between Tokyo, Seoul and Washington was “extremely important,” adding that he believed South Korea had taken their decision from a “strategic point of view.”  But Defense Minister Taro Kono stressed that it was a temporary measure and urged Seoul to extend the pact “in a firm manner.”  Officials are now scrambling to arrange bilateral talks between Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and South Korean counterpart Kang Kyung-wha on the sidelines of a meeting of G20 foreign ministers in Nagoya.  Seoul had announced the scrapping of the pact in August, as a trade row sparked by historical disputes between the pair spiraled into one of their worst diplomatic spats in years.  Seoul and Tokyo are both major US allies seen as an anchor of stability in a tinderbox region with overbearing China and wayward, nuclear-armed North Korea.  But their relationship is heavily colored by territorial and historical disputes stemming from Japan’s bitterly-resented 35-year colonial rule over the peninsula, including the use of wartime sex slaves and forced labor.  The GSOMIA pact, signed in 2016, enabled the two US allies to share military secrets, particularly over Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile capacity.  The United States had frequently urged its two main allies in the region to bury the hatchet, with officials admitting privately that the poor relations are complicating diplomacy in the region.  Ditching the pact would have been “a huge setback for one of the pillars of East Asia’s security that Japan, South Korea and the United States have established”, said Kenichiro Sasae, a former top Japanese foreign minister official and ambassador to the US.  Defense Secretary Mark Esper said on a recent trip to Asia that the only beneficiaries from the pact being scrapped would be North Korea and China, and urged the two allies to “sit down and work through their differences”.  South Korea had promised to continue sharing secrets via the United States as a third party, but this had raised concerns about efficiency in an emergency situation.  Seoul had renewed the pact every year and its sudden decision to scrap it had come as a surprise as most thought the country would maintain security cooperation with Japan despite the ongoing row.  However, ties between the pair remain in the deep freeze after a string of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to compensate wartime forced labour victims infuriated Japan.  Relations were further hit in July after Tokyo said Seoul was not properly handling sensitive imports and took the country off a list of nations that enjoyed streamlined export control procedures.  This enraged South Korea, which hit back with similar moves, culminating in the decision to end the military pact.  Japan says a 1965 treaty that normalized relations with a significant financial contribution effectively settled all reparation claims from its wartime atrocities.  “The biggest issue and the root problem is the issue related to former laborers from the Korean peninsula,” Motegi told reporters.  “We continue to strongly demand South Korea to remedy as soon as possible the current situation that violates the international law.”  On the trade issue, Japanese trade ministry official Yoichi Iida said the two countries would hold talks “as soon as possible” to resolve their row but insisted this had “nothing to do” with the military pact.  An official from Seoul’s Blue House said in order for GSOMIA to be fully renewed, Tokyo must first put Seoul back on its “white list” of trusted partners, and lift trade restrictions.  While Seoul did not provide a new provisional deadline, the official said South Korea “cannot accept” it if things remain in the current state for too long. |
| Daily Tribune, | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | October 30, 2019 | Philippines | Japan beer exports to S. Korea dive | TOKYO, Japan — Exports of beer from Japan to South Korea fell 99.9 percent year-on-year in September, Japan’s finance ministry said Wednesday, as a boycott spurred by a bilateral dispute drags on.  Relations between South Korea and Japan have fallen to new lows in recent months over long-running tensions on the issue of war-time forced labor.  O  The countries have implemented retaliatory trade restrictions, and in South Korea citizens have called for a boycott of Japanese goods.  Japanese beer had long been a local favorite, topping the import tables since 2010. But in August it fell to 13th place.  Exports to South Korea have slumped significantly in recent months, but the September figures show the trade has now dried up almost entirely.  Just $5,400 worth of beer was shipped to South Korea in September, the finance ministry said, compared to $7.2 million worth in September 2018.  South Korea and Japan are both democracies and US allies, but their relations are heavily affected by Japan’s expansionism in the first half of the 20th century.  The recent deterioration was sparked by several South Korean court rulings demanding Japanese firms pay compensation over the use of forced labor in World War Two.  Japan says all claims related to war-time issues were resolved in an agreement signed when the countries normalized ties.  The dispute has affected other sectors, including tourism, with South Korean visitors to Japan dropping sharply.  But the effect is expected to be balanced at least in part by an influx of tourists visiting Japan for the Rugby World Cup. |
| Daily Tribune, with AFP | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | October 25, 2019 | Philippines | Japan, South Korea deadlocked | TOKYO, Japan (AFP) — Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met his South Korean counterpart Thursday and warned frayed relations should be mended, but appeared to suggest it was Seoul’s responsibility to make that happen.  Bilateral ties between the regional neighbors are at rock-bottom over a dispute related to the use of forced labor during World War Two, with the countries trading retaliatory sanctions.  “The relationship between Japan and South Korea is in now an extremely serious situation, but this important relationship should not be left like this,” Abe said during a meeting with South Korea’s Lee Nak-yon, the foreign ministry in Tokyo said.  But Abe said he wanted “South Korea to keep the promises between the two countries so as to create a catalyst for recovering a healthy Japan-South Korea relationship.”  The brief exchange was the first such high-level meeting since relations between the countries began to sour in the wake of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to compensate wartime laborers.  In July, Japan tightened export controls on three chemicals essential to key products made by South Korean firms including Samsung. Seoul has retaliated with its own trade measures.  Japan says its decision was made on national security grounds, but the move was widely seen as a response to the compensation rulings.  Japan says all reparations claims from its 35-year colonial rule were settled under a 1965 treaty and associated economic agreement made as the countries normalized relations.  Lee, who was in Japan to attend the new Japanese emperor’s formal enthronement ceremony earlier this week, handed a letter from President Moon Jae-in to Abe, the ministry said.  South Korea’s Yonhap news agency, citing a South Korean official, said the letter described Japan as a key partner for regional peace, but stopped short of proposing the two leaders meet. |
| Daily Tribune, with AFP | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | September 17, 2019 | Philippines | Japan beer, tourism suffer in row vs Korea | South Korean imports of Japanese beer slumped almost to zero last month in the face of a consumer boycott sparked by a bitter trade and historical dispute between Seoul and Tokyo, data showed on Monday.  Japanese companies shipped $223,000 worth of beer to South Korea in August, figures from the Korea Trade Statistics Promotion Institute showed, down 97 percent from $7.57 million last year.  Before the trade spat, which has raised concerns over ties between the neighbours, both of them US allies, Japanese beer had long been South Koreans’ favorite alternative to their country’s own brews, according to KTSPI, topping the import tables since 2010.  “Japan’s rank dropped to the 13th place last month,” an official from KTSPI told AFP, adding that beers from China, the Netherlands and Belgium now had the biggest shares of South Korea’s imports.  Seoul and Tokyo have been embroiled in the trade dispute since July, when Japan tightened export controls on three chemicals essential to key products of South Korean tech companies such as Samsung.  The restrictions followed a series of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to pay for forced labor during World War II.  South Koreans have since mounted a widespread boycott of Japanese goods, including beer, cosmetic products and cars, among others.  They were also second only to Chinese as the top visitors to Japan last year, but have increasingly shunned the country since early July.  An average of 12,140 Koreans a day flew to Japan from Incheon airport during last week’s four-day harvest festival, down 39 percent from last year’s holiday, the operator told AFP.  Several South Korean airlines including flag carrier Korean Air have suspended routes to Japan because of falling demand.  Japanese automakers have also seen sales in South Korea slump in recent months.  South Korea and Japan are both democracies and market economies faced with an overbearing China and a nuclear-armed North Korea.  But relations between Tokyo, Beijing, and both Koreas continue to be heavily affected by Japan’s expansionism in the first half of the 20th century, including its colonisation of the peninsula. |
| Daily Tribune, World | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | September 12, 2019 | Philippines | S. Korea cries foul over Japan export curbs | South Korea said Wednesday it will file a complaint to the World Trade Organization (WTO) over Japan’s “politically motivated” export restrictions, upping the ante in an intensifying dispute with the neighbor.  Seoul and Tokyo have been embroiled in the trade and diplomatic spat since Tokyo tightened export controls in early July on three chemicals essential to making memory chips and high-spec displays, key products of South Korean companies such as Samsung and LG.  The restrictions follow a series of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to pay for forced labor during World War II.  The ongoing dispute has also seen the two neighbors remove each other from their “white lists” of trusted trading partners and prompted South Korea not to renew a military intelligence sharing pact.  “Japan’s export curbs on three items are driven by political motivations linked to a Supreme Court ruling over the issue of forced labor,” said Trade Minister Yoo Myung-hee at a press conference.  “Targeting South Korea is … in violation of WTO’s principles banning discriminatory practice.”  With South Korea’s role as a main supplier for memory chips and displays, she said, the curbs have caused “significant uncertainty” in the global economy.  Yoo said South Korea will request a bilateral consultation at the WTO as a first step to resolve the issue.  Tokyo says the move was made necessary by a “loss of trust” in relations with Seoul, but also accuses South Korea of improperly handling exports of sensitive materials from Japan.  But Seoul maintains it is a retaliatory move in response to historical disputes.  South Korea and Japan are both US allies, democracies and market economies faced with an overbearing China and nuclear-armed North Korea.  But relations between Tokyo, Beijing, and both Koreas continue to be heavily affected by Japan’s expansionism in the first half of the 20th century, including its colonization of the peninsula.  Tokyo maintains that all issues of wartime compensation were settled under the 1965 treaty that re-established diplomatic ties, including a package of about $800 million in grants and cheap loans for the former colony.  Seoul rebukes that point and contends the 1965 deal did not absolve individuals’ rights to seek reparations. |
| Daily Tribune, with AFP | Commentary | Daily Tribune | August 16, 2019 | Philippines | S. Korea-Japan dispute resolved soon? | South Korean President Moon Jae-in struck a conciliatory tone towards Japan on Thursday, offering to “join hands” if Tokyo chooses dialogue as relations between the two dip to fresh lows.  Seoul and Tokyo — both of them democracies and market economies — are mired in long-running disputes over Japan’s use of forced labor in the first half of the 20th century.  The two neighbors have been embroiled in a tit-for-tat trade war that saw them remove each other from their lists of trusted trading partners this month, raising concerns over global supply chains.  That came after Tokyo imposed restrictions on exports crucial to tech giants such as Samsung last month, following a series of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to pay for wartime labor.  But Moon sought to dial down the temperature on Thursday, saying Seoul was willing to work with Tokyo to secure “fair trade and cooperation” in the region.  “If Japan chooses the path of dialogue and cooperation, we will gladly join hands,” Moon said in a speech to mark the anniversary of Korea’s liberation from Japan’s 1910-45 rule.  The two neighbors have been embroiled in a tit-for-tat trade war that saw them remove each other from their lists of trusted trading partners.  Dressed in a light blue hanbok, Moon — who earlier this month vowed South Korea will “never be defeated again by Japan” — insisted that Seoul has “not dwelt on the past.”  “Reflecting on the past does not mean clinging to the past but overcoming what happened and moving toward the future,” Moon said.  “We hope that Japan will play a leading role together in facilitating peace and prosperity in East Asia while it contemplates a past that brought misfortune to its neighboring countries.”  At the center of the latest dispute is Japan’s use of forced labor during its 1910-1945 rule of the Korean peninsula — an issue that Tokyo says was settled under the 1965 treaty that re-established diplomatic ties. |
| Daily Tribune, with AFP | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | August 15, 2019 | Philippines | S. Korea seeks dialogue with Japan | South Korean President Moon Jae-in struck a conciliatory tone towards Japan on Thursday, offering to “join hands” if Tokyo chooses dialogue as relations between the two dip to fresh lows.  Seoul and Tokyo — both of them democracies and market economies — are mired in long-running disputes over Japan’s use of forced labor in the first half of the 20th century.  The two neighbors have been embroiled in a tit-for-tat trade war that saw them remove each other from their lists of trusted trading partners this month, raising concerns over global supply chains.  That came after Tokyo imposed restrictions on exports crucial to tech giants such as Samsung last month, following a series of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to pay for wartime labor.  But Moon sought to dial down the temperature on Thursday, saying Seoul was willing to work with Tokyo to secure “fair trade and cooperation” in the region.  “If Japan chooses the path of dialogue and cooperation, we will gladly join hands,” Moon said in a speech to mark the anniversary of Korea’s liberation from Japan’s 1910-45 rule.  Dressed in a light blue hanbok, Moon — who earlier this month vowed South Korea will “never be defeated again by Japan” — insisted that Seoul has “not dwelt on the past.”  “Reflecting on the past does not mean clinging to the past but overcoming what happened and moving toward the future,” said Moon.  “We hope that Japan will play a leading role together in facilitating peace and prosperity in East Asia while it contemplates a past that brought misfortune to its neighboring countries.”  At the center of the latest dispute is Japan’s use of forced labor during its 1910-1945 rule of the Korean peninsula — an issue that Tokyo says was settled under the 1965 treaty that re-established diplomatic ties.  Under the treaty, a package of about $800 million in grants and cheap loans was provided to the former colony in compensation.  The dispute has raised concerns over the possible impact on global supply chains and the potential implications on the security cooperation between the two US allies in the face of North Korean missile tests.  Analysts say that politicians on both sides are seeking to exploit the issue for domestic political purposes. |
| Daily Tribune, with Xinhua | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | August 4, 2019 | Philippines | South Korea falls from Japan’s favor | Japan on Friday decided to remove South Korea from a list of nations entitled to simplified export control procedures, a move that has already triggered a harsh backlash from Seoul and will likely see ties further soured between both countries.  The Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe approved plans to remove South Korea from its “white list” of countries, raising the stakes in a bitter diplomatic row between the two neighbors.  The removal of South Korea from the list will take effect on 28 August following the necessary completion of domestic procedures, Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Hiroshige Seko said.  Seko maintained that the move by Tokyo was not aimed at curbing trade or supposed to damage bilateral ties between both countries, but did point to some perceived “deficiencies” on South Korea’s part.  “Today’s Cabinet decision is a review of the implementation of Japanese export policies in response to some deficiencies in South Korea’s export control system and its application,” Seko said.  “Japan has no intention for this to alter relations with South Korea, and it is not meant as a countermeasure against certain issues,” said Japan’s trade minister.  Observers have noted, however, that bilateral relations have already sunk to new lows in recent times amid an ongoing labor dispute and Japan’s previous tightening of export control regulations, and the latest move by Japan would likely see ties further deteriorate.  Japan, early last month, tightened regulations on its exports to South Korea of three materials vital to producing memory chips and display panels, which are mainstays of the South Korean economy, in a further escalation of sinking ties between both parties.  Seoul has been on the white list since 2004 and has been guaranteed preferential treatment in terms of importing certain products from Japan.  But Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a separate press briefing Friday that Japan will now deal with South Korea the same way it treats other countries in the region, although he maintained that global supply chains would not be affected by South Korea being axed from the white list.  The Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe approved plans to remove South Korea from its “white list” of countries, raising the stakes in a bitter diplomatic row between the two neighbors.  “We don’t believe there would be any impact on global supply chains,” Japan’s top government spokesman said.  Suga previously reiterated that Japan believes that it is an appropriate step from enforcing effective export controls to remove South Korea from the white list.  Japan has a total of 27 countries on its white list, including the United States, Britain, Germany, Australia, New Zealand and Argentina and whitelisted countries can, through simplified procedures, receive products exported from Japan that could be potentially be diverted for military use.  South Korea has been on the list of nations entitled to simplified export control procedures since 2004, which cover a wide range of items, except for food, timber and other goods.  In order to export the products to countries, not on the white list, the countries listed only need to obtain approval from Japan’s trade ministry.  For South Korea, however, this will no longer be the case.  Henceforth, Japanese exporters to South Korea will now be required to ask for the government’s permission each time they export items that are subjected to strict controls, in contrast to previously being granted a three-year permit for sensitive items. |
| Daily Tribune, with AFP | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | September 12, 2019 | Philippines | S. Korea cries foul over Japan export curbs | SEOUL, South Korea (AFP) — South Korea said Wednesday it will file a complaint to the World Trade Organization (WTO) over Japan’s “politically motivated” export restrictions, upping the ante in an intensifying dispute with the neighbor.  Seoul and Tokyo have been embroiled in the trade and diplomatic spat since Tokyo tightened export controls in early July on three chemicals essential to making memory chips and high-spec displays, key products of South Korean companies such as Samsung and LG.  The restrictions follow a series of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to pay for forced labor during World War II.  The ongoing dispute has also seen the two neighbors remove each other from their “white lists” of trusted trading partners and prompted South Korea not to renew a military intelligence sharing pact.  “Japan’s export curbs on three items are driven by political motivations linked to a Supreme Court ruling over the issue of forced labor,” said Trade Minister Yoo Myung-hee at a press conference.  “Targeting South Korea is … in violation of WTO’s principles banning discriminatory practice.”  With South Korea’s role as a main supplier for memory chips and displays, she said, the curbs have caused “significant uncertainty” in the global economy.  Yoo said South Korea will request a bilateral consultation at the WTO as a first step to resolve the issue.  Tokyo says the move was made necessary by a “loss of trust” in relations with Seoul, but also accuses South Korea of improperly handling exports of sensitive materials from Japan.  But Seoul maintains it is a retaliatory move in response to historical disputes.  South Korea and Japan are both US allies, democracies and market economies faced with an overbearing China and nuclear-armed North Korea.  But relations between Tokyo, Beijing, and both Koreas continue to be heavily affected by Japan’s expansionism in the first half of the 20th century, including its colonization of the peninsula.  Tokyo maintains that all issues of wartime compensation were settled under the 1965 treaty that re-established diplomatic ties, including a package of about $800 million in grants and cheap loans for the former colony.  Seoul rebukes that point and contends the 1965 deal did not absolve individuals’ rights to seek reparations. |
| Daily Tribune with AFP | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | September 11, 2019 | Philippines | S.Korea-Japan rift heightens with WTO complaint | South Korea said Wednesday it will file a complaint with the World Trade Organization over Japan’s “politically motivated” export restrictions, upping the ante in an intensifying dispute with the neighbor.  Seoul and Tokyo have been embroiled in the trade and diplomatic spat since Tokyo tightened export controls in early July on three chemicals essential to making memory chips and high-spec displays, key products of South Korean companies such as Samsung and LG.  The restrictions follow a series of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to pay for forced labor during World War II.  The ongoing dispute has also seen the two neighbors remove each other from their “white lists” of trusted trading partners and prompted South Korea not to renew a military intelligence sharing pact.  “Japan’s export curbs on three items are driven by political motivations linked to a Supreme Court ruling over the issue of forced labor,” said Trade Minister Yoo Myung-hee at a press conference.  “Targeting South Korea is … in violation of WTO’s principles banning discriminatory practice.”  With South Korea’s role as a main supplier for memory chips and displays, she said, the curbs have caused “significant uncertainty” in the global economy.  Yoo said South Korea will request a bilateral consultation at the WTO as a first step to resolve the issue.  Tokyo says the move was made necessary by a “loss of trust” in relations with Seoul, but also accuses South Korea of improperly handling exports of sensitive materials from Japan.  But Seoul maintains it is a retaliatory move in response to historical disputes.  South Korea and Japan are both US allies, democracies and market economies faced with an overbearing China and nuclear-armed North Korea.  But relations between Tokyo, Beijing, and both Koreas continue to be heavily affected by Japan’s expansionism in the first half of the 20th century, including its colonization of the peninsula.  Tokyo maintains that all issues of wartime compensation were settled under the 1965 treaty that re-established diplomatic ties, including a package of about $800 million in grants and cheap loans for the former colony.  Seoul rebukes that point and contends the 1965 deal did not absolve individuals’ rights to seek reparations. |
| Daily Tribune with AFP | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | August 25, 2019 | Philippines | South Korea starts defense vs Japan drill | South Korea Sunday began two days of war games to practice defending disputed islands off its east coast against an unlikely attack from Japan, further stoking tensions between the Asian neighbors.  The annual drills come just days after Seoul terminated a military intelligence-sharing pact with Tokyo, with the countries at loggerheads over Japan’s use of forced labour during World War II.  The two-day exercise will involve warships and aircraft, the South Korean navy said in a text message without providing more detail.  The drill — re-named “East Sea territory defense training” — will solidify the military’s resolve to defend the Dokdo islands and the area surrounding the Sea of Japan, the navy said.  Japan criticized the “absolutely unacceptable” drill and “strongly” demanded its suspension.  Tokyo’s foreign ministry said in a statement that the exercise was “extremely regrettable,” adding it had lodged a protest at Seoul via diplomatic channels.  While a Japanese attack is deemed highly unlikely, South Korea first staged the drills in 1986 and has conducted them twice a year — usually in June and December.  The delayed exercise comes as tensions with neighboring Japan continue.  Seoul has controlled the rocky islets in the Sea of Japan since 1945 when Tokyo’s 35-year colonial rule over the Korean peninsula ended.  Tokyo also claims the islands and accuses South Korea of occupying them illegally.  The two nations are both market economies, democracies and US allies, and both are threatened by nuclear-armed North Korea.  But the two neighbors have been embroiled in intensifying trade and diplomatic disputes in recent weeks, following a run of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to pay for forced labor during World War II.  The series of tit-for-tat measures, that began in July after Japan imposed new restrictions on exports crucial to South Korean tech firms, has seen Seoul and Tokyo remove each other from their lists of trusted trade partners.  #Dokdodefense # |
| Daily Tribune with AFP | Commentary | Daily Tribune | August 15, 2019 | Philippines | S. Korea seeks dialogue with Japan | South Korean President Moon Jae-in struck a conciliatory tone towards Japan on Thursday, offering to “join hands” if Tokyo chooses dialogue as relations between the two dip to fresh lows.  Seoul and Tokyo — both of them democracies and market economies — are mired in long-running disputes over Japan’s use of forced labor in the first half of the 20th century.  The two neighbors have been embroiled in a tit-for-tat trade war that saw them remove each other from their lists of trusted trading partners this month, raising concerns over global supply chains.  That came after Tokyo imposed restrictions on exports crucial to tech giants such as Samsung last month, following a series of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to pay for wartime labor.  But Moon sought to dial down the temperature on Thursday, saying Seoul was willing to work with Tokyo to secure “fair trade and cooperation” in the region.  “If Japan chooses the path of dialogue and cooperation, we will gladly join hands,” Moon said in a speech to mark the anniversary of Korea’s liberation from Japan’s 1910-45 rule.  Dressed in a light blue hanbok, Moon — who earlier this month vowed South Korea will “never be defeated again by Japan” — insisted that Seoul has “not dwelt on the past.”  “Reflecting on the past does not mean clinging to the past but overcoming what happened and moving toward the future,” said Moon.  “We hope that Japan will play a leading role together in facilitating peace and prosperity in East Asia while it contemplates a past that brought misfortune to its neighboring countries.”  At the center of the latest dispute is Japan’s use of forced labor during its 1910-1945 rule of the Korean peninsula — an issue that Tokyo says was settled under the 1965 treaty that re-established diplomatic ties.  Under the treaty, a package of about $800 million in grants and cheap loans was provided to the former colony in compensation.  The dispute has raised concerns over the possible impact on global supply chains and the potential implications on the security cooperation between the two US allies in the face of North Korean missile tests.  Analysts say that politicians on both sides are seeking to exploit the issue for domestic political purposes. |
| Daily Tribune, with AFP | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | August 15, 2019 | Philippines | Japan-S.Korea trade war escalates | Japan is “in the dark” as to why South Korea has downgraded Tokyo’s trading status, its trade minister said Tuesday, amid an intensifying trade war between the two neighbors and US allies.  South Korea on Monday created a new category of trading status for Japan, with Trade Minister Sung Yun-mo saying it was “hard to work closely with a country that frequently violates the basic rules.”  South Korea’s list of trade partners was divided into two groups, those who are members of the world’s top four export control agreements and those who are not.  But Seoul said Monday it had created a new category for countries that had signed the four pacts “but operate an export control system that violates international norms.”  Japan is the only country in the new category.  The move left officials in Tokyo bemused.  “After watching the South Korean press conference, we remain completely in the dark as to the grounds on which it claims that Japan’s export control system fails to comply with (international) principles,” tweeted Trade Minister Hiroshige Seko on Tuesday.  South Korea on Monday created a new category of trading status for Japan.  Monday’s move is the latest in a series of tit-for-tat measures between the two neighbors.  On 4 July, Japan tightened its rules on awarding official export permits for South Korea, meaning that screening applications could take up to 90 days.  Japan has also announced it will remove South Korea from a list of favored export partners from 28 August.  South Korea quickly fired back, rescinding Japan’s favored export partner status and saying it would also review a military information agreement.  The dispute has raised concerns over the potential implications for their security cooperation in the face of North Korean missile tests, and the possible impact on global supply chains.  Despite mutual criticism over policies linked to wartime history, both Japan and South Korea insist these measures have been introduced on national security grounds.  South Korea is the fifth-largest importer of Japanese goods, while petroleum products, iron and steel products, and electrical machinery including semiconductors are the major South Korean imports to Japan, according to finance ministry trade data.  “Although the de-listing does not come as a surprise, it nevertheless illustrates that the bilateral tensions between Japan and South Korea show no sign of abating,” said Tobias Harris, an expert at Teneo consultants, in a note on Tuesday. |
| Daily Tribune with Xinhua | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | August 4, 2019 | Philippines | South Korea falls from Japan’s favor | Japan on Friday decided to remove South Korea from a list of nations entitled to simplified export control procedures, a move that has already triggered a harsh backlash from Seoul and will likely see ties further soured between both countries.  The Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe approved plans to remove South Korea from its “white list” of countries, raising the stakes in a bitter diplomatic row between the two neighbors.  The removal of South Korea from the list will take effect on 28 August following the necessary completion of domestic procedures, Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Hiroshige Seko said.  Seko maintained that the move by Tokyo was not aimed at curbing trade or supposed to damage bilateral ties between both countries, but did point to some perceived “deficiencies” on South Korea’s part.  “Today’s Cabinet decision is a review of the implementation of Japanese export policies in response to some deficiencies in South Korea’s export control system and its application,” Seko said.  “Japan has no intention for this to alter relations with South Korea, and it is not meant as a countermeasure against certain issues,” said Japan’s trade minister.  Observers have noted, however, that bilateral relations have already sunk to new lows in recent times amid an ongoing labor dispute and Japan’s previous tightening of export control regulations, and the latest move by Japan would likely see ties further deteriorate.  Japan, early last month, tightened regulations on its exports to South Korea of three materials vital to producing memory chips and display panels, which are mainstays of the South Korean economy, in a further escalation of sinking ties between both parties.  Seoul has been on the white list since 2004 and has been guaranteed preferential treatment in terms of importing certain products from Japan.  But Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a separate press briefing Friday that Japan will now deal with South Korea the same way it treats other countries in the region, although he maintained that global supply chains would not be affected by South Korea being axed from the white list.  The Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe approved plans to remove South Korea from its “white list” of countries, raising the stakes in a bitter diplomatic row between the two neighbors.  “We don’t believe there would be any impact on global supply chains,” Japan’s top government spokesman said.  Suga previously reiterated that Japan believes that it is an appropriate step from enforcing effective export controls to remove South Korea from the white list.  Japan has a total of 27 countries on its white list, including the United States, Britain, Germany, Australia, New Zealand and Argentina and whitelisted countries can, through simplified procedures, receive products exported from Japan that could be potentially be diverted for military use.  South Korea has been on the list of nations entitled to simplified export control procedures since 2004, which cover a wide range of items, except for food, timber and other goods.  In order to export the products to countries, not on the white list, the countries listed only need to obtain approval from Japan’s trade ministry.  For South Korea, however, this will no longer be the case.  Henceforth, Japanese exporters to South Korea will now be required to ask for the government’s permission each time they export items that are subjected to strict controls, in contrast to previously being granted a three-year permit for sensitive items. |
| Daily Tribune with AFP | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | April 22, 2021 | Philippines | SK court dismisses ‘comfort women’ case against Japan | A South Korean court on Wednesday dismissed a case brought by a handful of World War II sex slaves and their families against the Japanese government, saying Tokyo enjoyed “sovereign immunity” over the issue, reports said.  The ruling comes after the same court in January ordered Tokyo to compensate a dozen women forced to serve Japanese troops — euphemistically labelled “comfort women” — marking the first civilian legal victory against Tokyo in South Korea.  The different verdict could pave the way for an improvement in frosty ties between the neighbors, analysts said.  The comfort women question and other issues stemming from Japan’s 20th-century colonial rule over Korea has bedevilled their relations, despite a 1965 treaty which declared claims between them and their nationals had been settled.  Tokyo and Seoul are both major US allies, democracies and market economies, but their rift ­— which has worsened significantly in recent years — presents US President Joe Biden with a foreign policy headache as he seeks to build a common front on China and nuclear-armed North Korea.  The Seoul Central District Court dismissed Wednesday’s case after “reaching the decision that sovereign immunity must be applied to the Japanese government,” Yonhap news agency reported. |
| Daily Tribune with AFP | News Analysis | Daily Tribune | August 14, 2019 | Philippines | Japan-S.Korea trade war escalates | Japan is “in the dark” as to why South Korea has downgraded Tokyo’s trading status, its trade minister said Tuesday, amid an intensifying trade war between the two neighbors and US allies.  South Korea on Monday created a new category of trading status for Japan, with Trade Minister Sung Yun-mo saying it was “hard to work closely with a country that frequently violates the basic rules.”  South Korea’s list of trade partners was divided into two groups, those who are members of the world’s top four export control agreements and those who are not.  But Seoul said Monday it had created a new category for countries that had signed the four pacts “but operate an export control system that violates international norms.”  Japan is the only country in the new category.  The move left officials in Tokyo bemused.  “After watching the South Korean press conference, we remain completely in the dark as to the grounds on which it claims that Japan’s export control system fails to comply with (international) principles,” tweeted Trade Minister Hiroshige Seko on Tuesday.  South Korea on Monday created a new category of trading status for Japan.  Monday’s move is the latest in a series of tit-for-tat measures between the two neighbors.  On 4 July, Japan tightened its rules on awarding official export permits for South Korea, meaning that screening applications could take up to 90 days.  Japan has also announced it will remove South Korea from a list of favored export partners from 28 August.  South Korea quickly fired back, rescinding Japan’s favored export partner status and saying it would also review a military information agreement.  The dispute has raised concerns over the potential implications for their security cooperation in the face of North Korean missile tests, and the possible impact on global supply chains.  Despite mutual criticism over policies linked to wartime history, both Japan and South Korea insist these measures have been introduced on national security grounds.  South Korea is the fifth-largest importer of Japanese goods, while petroleum products, iron and steel products, and electrical machinery including semiconductors are the major South Korean imports to Japan, according to finance ministry trade data.  “Although the de-listing does not come as a surprise, it nevertheless illustrates that the bilateral tensions between Japan and South Korea show no sign of abating,” said Tobias Harris, an expert at Teneo consultants, in a note on Tuesday. |
| Business Mirror with Bloomberg | Commentary | Business Mirror | August 4, 2020 | Philippines | South Korea-Japan Discord Stirs Trump’s China Plans | The US government issued an alert on Monday that a type of malware seen frequently by security researchers in the last decade is tied to the Chinese government, the latest in a series of American warnings about China’s cyber capabilities this summer.  The US Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Department of Defense “identified a malware variant used by Chinese government cyber-actors, which is known as Taidoor,” according to the alert. The purpose of the alert, which contained no information about the prevalence of the malware or who has been targeted, is to “enable network defense and reduce exposure to Chinese government malicious cyber-activity.”  While this type of malware has been used since 2008, the Chinese government continues to leverage it in ongoing espionage to gain intelligence, according to a US Cyber Command official, who requested anonymity as is the agency’s policy.  The cybersecurity firms FireEye Inc. and CrowdStrike have seen Taidoor malware used by multiple China-based groups targeting the US and Asia but have observed a recent decline in its use.  In the past, the malware has hit sectors including law, nuclear power, airlines, engineering, defense industrial base, technology, government and aerospace, according to the cybersecurity firms. It’s commonly sent in spearphishing attacks and used to gain access to systems, said Ben Read, a senior manager of analysis at FireEye.  The government’s decision to publicly connect Taidoor to China comes as President Donald J. Trump plans to order China’s ByteDance Ltd. to divest its ownership of the music-video app TikTok amid a US investigation of potential national security risks. In May, the US warned organizations researching coronavirus of “likely targeting and attempted network compromise” by China. |
| Business Mirror | News Analysis | Business Mirror | December 24, 2019 | Philippines | Japan, South Korea, China Meet Over Trade And Regional Disputes | The leaders of China, Japan and South Korea are holding a trilateral summit in China this week amid feuds over trade, military maneuverings and historical animosities. Most striking has been a complex dispute between Seoul and Tokyo, while Beijing has recently sought to tone down its disagreements with its two neighbors.  Economic cooperation and the North Korean nuclear threat are the main issues binding the Northeast Asian troika. While no major breakthroughs are expected at the meetings, the opportunity for face-to-face discussions between the sometimes-mutual antagonists is alone considered significant. Below is a look at the current state of relations among the three.  Japan-South Korea  Tensions rooted in South Korean resentment over Japan’s 20th-century colonial occupation spiked this year to a level unseen in decades as they traded blows over wartime history, trade and military-to-military cooperation.  The countries managed to strike a fragile truce in November after intervention by the United States, which was concerned about the growing rift between its two key Asian allies. Seoul then walked back a declaration to terminate a bilateral military intelligence-sharing agreement with Tokyo, an important symbol of their three-way security cooperation driven by the nuclear threat from North Korea and China’s growing regional clout.  Tokyo, in turn, agreed to resume discussions with Seoul on their dispute over Japan’s tightened controls on exports of key chemicals used by major South Korean companies to make computer chips and smartphone displays. Japan’s controls were widely seen as retaliation for South Korean court rulings that called for Japanese companies to offer reparations to aging South Korean plaintiffs for their World War II forced labor. Last Friday, Japan announced that it will ease export restrictions on one of the chemicals.  South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will hold a one-on-one meeting on Christmas Eve on the sidelines of the trilateral summit.  ADVERTISEMENT  “Considering the recent difficulties in bilateral relations, holding the meeting itself has a large meaning,” Kim Hyun-chong, deputy chief of South Korea’s presidential National Security Office, said in a briefing in Seoul. “We hope that…the meeting will help keep the momentum of dialogue alive, and provide an opportunity for improvement in South Korea-Japan relations.”  China-South Korea  South Korea’s relations with China, its biggest trading partner, have been strained over Seoul’s decision to host a US antimissile system that Beijing perceives as a security threat.  China says the real purpose of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, system placed in southern South Korea is to peer deep into its territory, rather than to warn of North Korean missile launches.  China retaliated by restricting Chinese tour group visits to South Korea, boycotting South Korean television shows and other cultural products, and wrecking the Chinese business operations of major South Korean retailer Lotte, which provided the land for the missile system.  While Beijing’s fury appears to have subsided, there’s also uneasiness in Seoul over increasing Chinese and Russia air patrols over waters between South Korea and Japan. Experts say those are designed to test the strength of security cooperation between the US allies. |
| Business Mirror with AP | News Analysis | Business Mirror | December 19, 2019 | Philippines | Japan, South Korea Hold Export Talks, Seek Dispute Solution | Senior officials from Japan and South Korea were holding talks on Monday on high-tech exports for the first time since Tokyo tightened controls on South Korean semiconductor parts earlier this year.  The director general level meeting was taking place in Tokyo between Yoichi Iida of Japan’s Trade Control Department and his South Korean counterpart, Lee Ho-hyeon. The two officials shook hands at the beginning of the talks, though they made no opening remarks to the media.  A meeting of this level had not been held in more than three years.  Japan in July tightened trade controls on South Korea materials used in smartphones, television screens and other high-tech products, citing national security concerns. Japan also downgraded South Korea a month later from a list of preferential trade partners.  South Korea has demanded Japan reverse the measures, saying Tokyo has weaponized export controls in retaliation for South Korean court rulings demanding Japanese companies pay compensation to former Korean laborers over their treatment during Japan’s 1910-1945 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula. Tokyo has pressed Seoul to stick with a 1965 agreement in resolving their dispute over wartime Korean laborers, criticizing the court decisions a violation to international law.  Japan’s trade curbs against South Korea have led to subsequent retaliatory measures that spilled into the area of national security, with Seoul threatening to abandon a key military intelligence sharing pact with Tokyo.  ADVERTISEMENT  The pact was saved just hours before its expiration in November, following Washington’s repeated pressure and with Tokyo agreeing to resume export control talks requested by Seoul.  Monday’s talks come a week ahead of a planned summit between the two countries and China.  Japanese and South Korean foreign ministers, Toshimitsu Motegi and Kan Geun-wha, both attending the Asia-Europe Meeting in Madrid, Spain, talked briefly and welcomed their trade officials’ meeting in Tokyo, Japanese officials said. The two sides also agreed to cooperate closely on threats from North Korea and to achieve next week’s summit.  Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said that Japan’s export control measures are part of the country’s international responsibility and that “they are not something that we decide by negotiating with a trade partner.”  “Our policy has been consistent and there is no change to our position,” Suga said, referring to Japan’s position on the wartime compensation issue. “We urge South Korea to act wisely.”  South Korean national assembly speaker Moon Hee-san is seeking to set up a compensation fund for the Korean wartime laborers with an option that allows Japanese companies to chip in donations as a compromise. |
| Business Mirror with AP | News Analysis | Business Mirror | October 25, 2019 | Philippines | Japan, South Korea To Mend Ties After Ice-Breaking Talks | Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean Premier Lee Nak-yon agreed they must work to ease the feud between the two neighbors that has spilled over into trade and security after their highest-level meeting in more than a year.  Both sides issued statements expressing a desire to repair ties after a roughly 20-minute meeting between the two leaders. Lee delivered a letter to Abe from South Korean President Moon Jae-in that, according to the Yonhap News Agency, described Japan as a valuable partner in securing a lasting peace with North Korea and urged efforts to resolve their disputes.  “It’s important that relations must not be left in their current state,” Abe told Lee, describing them as “very severe,” according to a statement from Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Lee urged Abe to continue communications and exchanges, South Korea’s foreign ministry said separately.  The meeting is the most positive signal since South Korean courts issued a series of rulings last year backing the claims of people forced to work for Japanese companies during the country’s 1910 to 1945 occupation of the Korean Peninsula. Japan argues all compensation claims were settled by a 1965 treaty that established ties between the two countries. Moon has said the US-brokered agreement didn’t take into account the emotional suffering of the victims of Japan’s occupation.  The meeting helped set communications back to a more normal channel, but far more action was needed, said Kim Tai-ki, an economics professor at Dankook University, near Seoul. “With the key issue being trust, it will take much longer than top-level photo opportunities for it to actually rebuild,” he said.  There was muted market reaction in both countries. Japan’s benchmark Topix Index maintained a gain of 0.4 percent, while South Korea’s Kospi Index remained little-changed with shares of Samsung Electronics Co. down 0.8 percent.  Abe last met Moon in September 2018 and passed up a chance to meet him for formal talks during Group of 20 events in Osaka in June. They are both expected to attend an Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit in Bangkok at the start of November, which could afford them a chance for direct talks.  Economic worries in Japan and South Korea have mounted as they have both been in the fallout from the trade war between their major partners—the US and China. Consumer spending in Japan is set to cool after Abe hiked the sales tax on October 1 from 8 percent to 10 percent while South Korea’s economy is on track for the smallest expansion since the global financial crisis as trade uncertainties weighed on investment.  Tensions have rapidly escalated, with Japan striking South Korea from a list of trusted export destinations and imposing restrictions on the sale of specialized materials essential to the country’s semiconductor- and display-manufacturing industries. South Korea responded by announcing its withdrawal from an intelligence-sharing pact, as its citizens boycotted Japanese goods and travel.  After largely sitting on the sidelines as tensions reemerged, the Trump administration has recently pushed the two sides to try to work out their differences. The United States has been particularly critical of South Korea’s exit from the intelligence pact, since it’s relying on cooperation between its two closest Asian allies to help counter China and North Korea.  As the meeting started in Tokyo, South Korea’s Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha sent mixed signals by offering support for the discussions and cautioning Japan that it needs to withdraw its export curbs for ties to improve.  The pretext for Lee’s visit was his attendance at Emperor Naruhito’s enthronement ceremony on Tuesday.  Each country is the other’s third-largest trading partner and neither can afford a damaging economic fight as global growth cools. South Korean exports are poised for an 11th monthly decline and semiconductor sales, which account for the largest share of exports, fell 29 percent in the first 20 days of October, according to the Korea Customs Service.  The number of South Koreans visiting Japan dropped by about 58% in September from the year earlier period, data showed. If unresolved, the trend could undercut Abe’s tourism drive ahead of the Tokyo Olympics next year.  “The current dismal situation does not benefit either country,” said Kak Soo Shin, South Korea’s ambassador to Japan from 2011 to 2013. |
| Business Mirror with AP | News Analysis | Business Mirror | November 5, 2019 | Philippines | Abe, Moon Break Ice After Worst Japan-South Korea Fight In Years | South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe agreed in their first meeting in 14 months to ease tensions, according to the South Korean presidential office.  Moon and Abe shared the view that the relationship between South Korea and Japan is important and reaffirmed in principle that issues between the two nations should be resolved via dialogue, the presidential office said in a text message. Abe conveyed Japan’s “basic stance” on bilateral issues in his exchange with Moon, the Tokyo-based Kyodo News agency said separately, citing the Japanese foreign ministry.  The brief, 11-minute meeting at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit in Bangkok came as a long-simmering feud escalated into a trade-and-security dispute, leading to boycotts of Japanese imports and the decision to scrap an intelligence-sharing pact. The encounter followed a breakthrough meeting last month between Abe and South Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon.  Moon proposed high-level talks, if needed while Abe said every effort should be made to resolve the feud, Moon’s office said. Abe last met Moon in September 2018 and passed up a chance to meet him for formal talks during Group of 20 events in Osaka in June.  The remarks were the most positive yet since South Korean courts issued a series of rulings last year backing the claims of Koreans forced to work for Japanese companies during the country’s 1910-1945 occupation of the Korean Peninsula.  Japan subsequently tightened restrictions on exports of key materials used by South Korean semiconductor manufacturers. South Korea responded by moving to withdraw from a military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan. |
| Business Mirror with AP | News Analysis | Business Mirror | August 30, 2019 | Philippines | South Korean Leader Says Japan Dishonest Over Wartime Past | South Korea—South Korean President Moon Jae-in on Thursday berated Japan for carrying out its plan to downgrade South Korea’s trade status and reiterated that Tokyo was weaponizing trade to retaliate over political rows stemming from the countries’ wartime history.  Moon said in a Cabinet meeting that Japan is being dishonest by insisting that its trade curbs weren’t retaliation over historical issues, including South Korean court rulings that called for Japanese companies to offer reparations to aging South Korean plaintiffs for forced labor during World War II.  He said Japan should look “squarely at the past” and that its current actions were aggravating the pain and anger of South Koreans who suffered under Japan’s brutal colonial rule of Korea from 1910 to 1945.  “Japan has yet to even state an honest reason for its economic retaliation…. No matter what excuse it provides as justification, it is clear that the Japanese government has linked historical issues to economic matters,” Moon said.  Later Thursday, the countries’ diplomats are expected to hold working-level meetings in Seoul to discuss the trade row and security issues related to North Korea.  Tokyo’s recent moves to tighten controls on exports to South Korea, where major manufacturers like Samsung heavily rely on materials and parts imported from Japan, have touched off a full-blown diplomatic dispute.  Seoul plans to similarly downgrade Japan’s trade status and terminate a bilateral military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan that symbolized the countries’ three-way security cooperation with the United States in face of North Korea’s nuclear threat and China’s growing influence. Following an angry reaction from Washington, Seoul said this week it could reconsider its decision to end the military agreement, which remains in effect until November, if Japan relists South Korea as a favored trade partner.  Tokyo has justified its trade curbs by raising unspecified security concerns over South Korea’s export controls on sensitive materials that could be used for military purposes and denied Seoul’s accusations that it was retaliating over the history row.  But Japanese government Swpokesman Yoshihide Suga did say on Thursday that the issue surrounding wartime forced laborers was the “biggest problem in bilateral relations.” Japan insists that all compensation matters were settled when the two countries normalized relations under a 1965 treaty and that the South Korean court rulings go against international law.  Suga said Tokyo will continue discussions with Seoul over the issue, but didn’t specifically comment on Moon’s remarks.  Moon said South Korea will employ a variety of measures to minimize the impact of the Japanese trade curbs on its trade-dependent economy.  “We will take this as an opportunity to elevate our economy to a new level by strengthening competitiveness of the manufacturing sector and other industries,” Moon said. “As a sovereign state, we will also resolutely take steps to respond to Japan’s unjust economic retaliation.”  Japan’s downgrading of South Korea’s trade status, which took effect Wednesday, followed a July move to strengthen controls on exports of chemicals South Korean companies use to produce computer chips and displays for smartphones and TVs, which are among South Korea’s key export items.  South Korea’s removal from Tokyo’s trade “white list” means that Japanese companies would need to apply for approval for each technology-related contract for South Korean export, rather than the simpler checks granted a preferential trade partner, which is still the status of the United States and others. |
| Business Mirror with AP | News Analysis | Business Mirror | August 29, 2019 | Philippines | Japan’s Move To Lower South Korea Trade Status Takes Effect | Japan’s downgrading of South Korea’s trade status took effect on Wednesday, a decision that has already set off a series of reactions hurting bilateral relations.  Japanese manufacturers now must apply for approval for each technology-related contract for South Korean export, rather than the simpler checks granted a preferential trade partner, which is still the status of the US and others.  Since Japan announced the decision about two months ago, South Korea decided to similarly downgrade Tokyo’s trade status, which will take effect next month. Seoul has also canceled a deal to share military intelligence with Japan.  South Korea has accused Japan of weaponizing trade because of a separate dispute linked to Japan’s colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945.  Japan denies retaliating and says wartime compensation issues were already settled.  “Relations between Japan and South Korea continue to be in an extremely serious situation because of South Korea’s repeated negative and irrational actions, including the most critical issue of laborers from the Korean Peninsula,” Japanese government spokesman Yoshihide Suga told reporters.  Suga was referring to South Korea’s Supreme Court ruling last year that said the wartime compensation deal, signed in 1965, did not cover individual rights to seek reparations and ordered Japanese companies to compensate victims of forced labor.  Suga said Japan will continue to try to talk to South Korea.  The wrangling has dented what had been a thriving tourism and cultural exchange between the neighboring nations, including Japanese becoming fans of Korean pop music and movies. Some South Koreans are boycotting Japanese goods or joining street protests to denounce Japan.  Hiroshige Seko, minister of economy, trade and industry, said earlier this week that the trade status review was needed for proper checks on exports because of concerns about what could be used for military purposes.  Japan has never specified the security concerns further, or how they originated.  Seko also denounced South Korea’s scrapping the military intelligence agreement, called the General Security of Military Information Agreement, or GSOMIA, arguing the trade decision was not directly related to military cooperation.  The intelligence-sharing agreement remains in effect until November. Japan and South Korea have shared information about North Korea’s missile launches, the latest of which happened on Saturday. AP |
| Business Mirror | News Analysis | Business Mirror | August 25, 2019 | Philippines | Japan’s Leader Says South Korea Canceling Intel Deal Damages Trust | Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Friday said South Korea’s decision to cancel a deal to share military intelligence is damaging mutual trust, and he vowed to work closely with the US for regional peace.  Abe also accused Seoul of not keeping past promises. The military agreement started in 2016.  “We will continue to closely coordinate with the US to ensure regional peace and prosperity, as well as Japan’s security,” he said, ahead of his departure for the Group of Seven summit of industrialized nations in France.  South Korea said it made the decision because Tokyo downgraded South Korea’s preferential trade status, which it said changed the security cooperation between the countries. Seoul says it will downgrade Tokyo as well, a change that would take effect in September.  South Korea accuses Japan of weaponizing trade to punish it over a separate dispute linked to Japan’s brutal colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945. Japan denies any retaliation.  Japan has long claimed all wartime compensation issues were settled when the two countries normalized relations under a 1965 treaty.  But South Korea’s Supreme Court last year ruled that the deal did not cover individual rights to seek reparations and has ordered compensations for victims of forced labor under Japan’s rule.  South Korea’s latest decision on military intelligence came as a surprise to many, and underlined how much the relations had deteriorated.  The US sees both South Korea and Japan as important allies in northern Asia amid the continuing threats from North Korea and China. The Pentagon has expressed “strong concern and disappointment” in the collapse of the agreement.  Despite the ample signs of friendly relations between the people, such as the popularity of K-pop in Japan and of Japanese animation in South Korea, the nations are entangled in a long history that has bred animosity.  “The weight of past history influences current relations,” said Daniel Sneider, lecturer of international policy at Stanford University, noting that generations who never directly experienced the colonial and wartime past can remain affected. |
| Business Mirror with AP | News Analysis | Business Mirror | August 16, 2019 | Philippines | South Korea’s Moon Calls For Talks To End Trade Dispute With Japan | South Korean President Moon Jae-in offered an olive branch to Japan to end an ongoing trade dispute Thursday, saying Seoul will “gladly join hands” if Tokyo wants to talk.  Moon in a nationally televised speech also downplayed the threat posed by North Korea’s recent short-range ballistic launches and expressed hope that Washington and Pyongyang would soon resume nuclear negotiations.  “If a country weaponizes a sector where it has a comparative advantage, the order of peaceful free trade inevitably suffers. A country that accomplished growth first must not kick the ladder away while others are following in its footsteps,” Moon said in reference to Japan.  “If Japan better late than never chooses the path of dialogue and cooperation, we will gladly join hands,” he said.  Moon’s speech at a ceremony marking the 74th anniversary of Korea’s liberation from Japanese rule at the end of World War II came amid heightened public anger and diplomatic fallout over Tokyo’s recent moves to impose trade curbs on South Korea.  Seoul has accused Tokyo of weaponizing trade to target its export-dependent economy and retaliate against South Korean court rulings calling for Japanese companies to offer reparations to South Koreans forced into labor during World War II. Tokyo’s measures struck a nerve in South Korea, where many still harbor resentment over Japan’s ruthless colonial rule from 1910 to 1945.  After threatening stern countermeasures and declaring that South Korea would “never lose” to Japan again, Moon has taken a more conciliatory tone over the past week as there was relief in Seoul that the impact of Japan’s trade measures might not be as bad as initially thought.  There have also been concerns that the government’s nationalistic calls for unity were allowing public anger toward Japan to reach dangerous levels.  Nevertheless, tens of thousands of people were expected join anti-Japan protests planned for Thursday, including an evening candlelit vigil near Seoul’s presidential palace.  Thousands of protesters dressed in raincoats marched in heavy rain toward the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. They carried signs that said “Apologize for War Crimes” and “Compensate Forced Laborers.”  “I have a lot that I want to say, but I can’t,” said an emotional Lee Chun-sik, 95, the only survivor among four plaintiffs who won a landmark compensation case last October against Japan’s Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corp., decades after being forced to work at the company’s steel mills during World War II.  Lee thanked the marchers for taking part.  The trade dispute comes as South Korea’s relations with North Korea worsen. Pyongyang has been ignoring Seoul’s calls for dialogue and in recent weeks test fired a slew of new short-range weapons that potentially threaten the South.  Experts say the North’s recent launches are aimed at building leverage for nuclear talks with the United States, and pressuring Seoul to coax major concessions from Washington on its behalf.  “In spite of a series of worrying actions taken by North Korea recently, the momentum for dialogue remains unshaken,” Moon said.  He called for new negotiations between the Koreas and the US “at the earliest possible date.” |
| Business Mirror with Bloomberg | News Analysis | Business Mirror | August 1, 2019 | Philippines | US Urges Japan, South Korea To Reach Standstill In Trade Spat | Japan and South Korea have both sought for weeks to get the White House on their side in their spiraling trade dispute, with little success. Now, the United States may finally be stepping in.  Secretary of State Michael Pompeo told reporters while en route to an Asian regional conference that he would urge the US’s feuding allies to ease the tensions during meetings with his Japanese and South Korean counterparts. His comments came after a senior US official said in Washington that the Trump administration was urging the two sides to reach a “standstill agreement” to give themselves room to negotiate.  The US has been largely silent for months as a dispute over whether Japan has sufficiently compensated Koreans who suffered under the country’s 1910-1945 occupation of the peninsula has escalated into a trade conflict. Earlier this month, Japan announced restrictions on exports to South Korea of some materials used in the production of memory chips and other components vital for smartphones, laptops and servers at US tech giants such as Amazon.com and Microsoft Corp.  Pompeo said Tuesday that he would discuss the issue while in Bangkok this week for an annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations gathering of foreign ministers. He was scheduled to meet with Japan’s Taro Kono and South Korea’s Kang Kyung-wha individually, as well as together.  “We will encourage them to find a path forward,” Pompeo said. “If we can help them find a good place for each of the two countries, we’ll certainly find that important for the United States.”  The Asian nations in recent weeks have dispatched senior officials to Washington to meet with lawmakers and government officials to plead their case, and they’ve lobbied American media and business executives. Many worry that another Asian trade war—in addition to the US-China conflict—would only further impede the global supply chain and could disrupt the production of the semiconductors and advanced screens that companies rely on to make their smartphones and tablets.  South Korean Trade Minister Yoo Myung-hee last week sought help from the American private sector and Capitol Hill to get the White House involved in a resolution. Japanese officials were in Washington this week to explain their position, people briefed on the plans said.  It could get even uglier if Japan this week decides to remove South Korea from a so-called white list of trusted export destinations. A public comment period on the matter ended last Wednesday and if Tokyo approves the plan as expected Friday, hundreds of products could be affected by the removal of the existing blanket approval.  Cranes, Gyroscopes  On Monday, the South Korean-government-affiliated Korea Strategic Trade Institute briefed local companies, providing a list of dozens of products that could be affected, including titanium alloys, gyroscopes and crane trucks.  Japanese officials say they don’t expect much long-term impact on industry from stricter oversight of exports. Taiwan, which also imports Japanese materials for its tech industry, is not on Japan’s “white list.”  Yoo told reporters Monday that US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross “fully acknowledges” how Japan’s export curbs can affect the global supply chain, and that the US will make an effort for a quick resolution, without further elaborating. A South Korean official said it felt like the US administration and companies shared the country’s concerns with Japan’s move. A spokesman for Ross declined to comment.  According to a person familiar with the matter, Yoo even pitched her US counterparts to include the issue in the bilateral trade talks with Tokyo. Those negotiations are set to resume at the ministerial level between US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Japanese Economy Minister Toshimitsu Motegi later this week.  Seo Jee-yeon, a spokesman for the trade ministry, declined to comment.  Stable relations between Japan and South Korea form a pillar of US influence in Asia — the world’s fastest-growing region where North Korea’s nuclear arms threaten peace and China’s territorial claims disrupt order from the South China Sea to the East China Sea. Both Japan and South Korea host a total of more than 80,000 American troops, while US carriers routinely ply the waters for joint naval operations with the allies.  Wendy Cutler, vice president at the Asia Society Policy Institute, applauded the US move on Tuesday. “It’s encouraging that the administration is finally getting involved,” she said. “A standstill could be a useful first step to deescalate tensions.”  Cutler said an example of the impact of the US influence is when then-President Barack Obama in 2014 organized a three-way meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and then South Korean President Park Geun-hye to improve relations.  Five of the US’s biggest tech industry groups in a letter to the Japanese and Korean trade ministers said the dispute could cause “long-term harm to the companies that operate within and beyond your borders and the workers they employ.”  Trump earlier this month said he got a call from South Korean President Moon Jae-in who asked him to get involved on his behalf.  “I said, how many things do I have to get involved in? Maybe if they would both want me to, I’ll be — it’s like a full-time job, getting involved between Japan and South Korea,” Trump said on July 19. “But if they need me, I’m there, hopefully they can work it out but they do have tension.”  Evan Medeiros, who served in Obama’s National Security Council, in a Washington Post op-ed recounted the quiet intervention by Obama in what he called a low point in the Japan-South Korea relationship. “Washington is the only actor both sides will listen to.” |
| Business Mirror with AP | News Analysis | Business Mirror | August 13, 2019 | Philippines | South Korea To Remove Japan From Trade List | South Korea said on Monday that it has decided to remove Japan from a list of nations receiving preferential treatment in trade, in what was seen as a countermeasure to Tokyo’s recent decision to downgrade Seoul’s trade status amid a diplomatic row.  It wasn’t immediately clear how South Korea’s tightened export controls would impact bilateral trade. Seoul said South Korean companies exporting to Japan will be able to receive exceptions from case-by-case inspections that are normally applied to exports to nations with lower trade status and go through a faster approval process they currently enjoy.  ADVERTISEMENT  South Korean Trade Minister Sung Yun-mo said the government decided to remove Japan from the country’s 29-country “white list,” because it has failed to uphold international principles while managing its export controls on sensitive materials.  Sung and other South Korean officials did not specify what they saw as Japan’s problems in export controls. They say that Seoul will work to minimize negative impact on South Korean exporters and bilateral trade.  Sung said the changes are expected to enter effect sometime in September, following a 20-day period for gathering public opinion on the issue, and further regulatory and legislative reviews. He said Seoul is willing to accept any request by Tokyo for consultation over the issue, during the opinion-gathering period.  South Korea’s announcement came weeks after Japan’s Cabinet approved the removal of South Korea from a list of countries with preferential trade status.  Seoul had vowed retaliation, while accusing Tokyo of weaponizing trade to retaliate over political rows stemming from their wartime history.  Japan’s move came weeks after it imposed stricter controls on certain technology exports to South Korean companies that rely on Japanese materials to produce semiconductors and displays for TVs and smartphones, which are key South Korean export items. |
| Business Mirror with AP | News Analysis | Business Mirror | July 16, 2019 | Philippines | South Korea President Says Tokyo’s Trade Curbs Will Hurt Japan More | South Korea—In his strongest comments yet on a growing trade dispute, South Korea’s president urged Japan on Monday to lift recently tightened controls on high-tech exports to South Korea, which he said threaten to shatter the countries’ economic cooperation and could damage Japan more than South Korea.  The dispute between the two US allies has further soured relations already troubled over Japan’s colonial rule of Korea before the end of World War II.  President Moon Jae-in accused Japan of abusing its leverage in trade to punish South Korea over their historical dispute. South Korea sees the trade curbs as retaliation for South Korean court rulings earlier this year that ordered Japanese corporations to compensate South Korean victims for forced labor during World War II.  South Korea says the strengthened export controls of photoresists and other sensitive materials mainly to manufacture semiconductors and display screens could hurt its export-dependent economy and disrupt global supply chains.  Its government plans to file a complaint with the World Trade Organization and raise the issue at next week’s WTO General Council in Geneva. Trade officials from the countries failed to resolve the dispute in a working-level meeting in Tokyo on Friday.  Moon also said South Korea will use the dispute as an opportunity to reduce its dependence on Japan by strengthening its technology industry and diversifying import sources.  “Japan’s export restrictions have broken the framework of economic cooperation between South Korea and Japan that had continued over a half-century based on mutual dependence,” Moon said in a meeting of senior aides at Seoul’s presidential palace.  “The shattered credibility of cooperation with Japan in the manufacturing industry will inspire our companies to break out of their dependence on Japanese materials, components and equipment and work toward diversifying import sources or localizing the technologies. I warn that, eventually, it will be the Japanese economy that will be damaged more.”  Moon spoke hours after dozens of South Korean small-business owners rallied in Seoul, calling for boycotts of Japanese consumer goods.  The Japanese measures, which went into effect earlier this month, have stoked public anger in South Korea, where many believe Japan still hasn’t fully acknowledged responsibility for atrocities committed during its colonial occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945.  Kim Sung-min, president of the Korea Mart Association, urged shop owners to boycott the distribution of Japanese products until Tokyo apologizes over the trade curbs and withdraws them. Other demonstrators held up signs that read, “Our supermarket does not sell Japanese products.”  Thousands of South Koreans have signed petitions posted by citizens on the presidential office’s websites that called for boycotts of Japanese products and of travel to Japan and for South Korea to skip next year’s Tokyo Summer Olympics. Retailers have also reported modest drops in the sales of Japanese beer.  “We will continue boycotting the consumption and distribution of Japanese products until Japan’s government and the Abe administration apologizes and withdraws its economic retaliation,” Kim said, referring to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. |
| Business Mirror with AP | Commentary | Business Mirror | February 14, 2019 | Philippines | Rivalry Between Koreas, Japan Transcends Sport | As South Korea’s national soccer coach prepared to play Japan in a 1954 World Cup qualifier, President Syngman Rhee, who’d been liberated, with the rest of Korea, from Japan’s brutal colonial rule in 1945, had some advice should the Koreans lose: “Don’t think about coming back alive,” he supposedly told the coach. “Just throw yourself into the Genkai Sea.”  There are sports rivalries, and then there’s Korea versus Japan—an often toxic mix of violent history and politics, with a (un)healthy dose of cultural chauvinism and envy mixed in.  The fierce grudges over historical persecution and a thousand perceived national and cultural slights cannot be untwined from the sports for many Koreans. These swirling emotions are front and center on Wednesday as a combined team of North and South Koreans plays regional power Japan in women’s hockey.  Both have yet to win a game these Olympics. Both desperately want that win to come against their loathed rival.  “It’s not just me. If you’re a Korean, you feel it deep down in your heart that our team must always beat Japan in any sport,” said Choi Young-wook, 49, a South Korean. “It will be deeply satisfying if the joint team defeats them, because Japan doesn’t want the Koreas to be unified again.”  The Koreas share much, not least language and culture, but they’ve also been divided for seven decades and are still in a technical state of war. Just weeks ago, there were real fears of military conflict here. More than any temporary cooperation on the hockey ice, then, it may be their shared hatred of Japan—and the near universal perception that Tokyo has never fully apologized for or acknowledged its colonial evils—that joins them most forcefully.  The last time the Koreas were unified, in fact, was during Japanese rule from 1910 to 1945. The end of WWII saw the division of the peninsula into a US-backed south and Soviet-backed north.  In the South, this history can sometimes feel fresh.  Weekly demonstrations have gone on for more than two decades in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul by an ever-dwindling number of the thousands of Korean women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military during the colonial era. Koreans also like to raise the debt Japan owes mainland Asia (Korea and China) for the large elements of religion, culture and language it borrowed during its formative centuries. All but forgotten in Japan, there are angry memories still here about a hill of sliced-off Korean noses collected during a 16th-century Japanese invasion of the peninsula.  All this and more is in the air as these two hockey teams meet.  In the arena on Wednesday, South Korean cheerleaders in yellow miniskirts bounced to K-pop while North Korean cheerleaders sat in matching red jumpsuits. Fans waved flags that showed a single united Korean Peninsula or the South Korean national flag.  “We really want to beat Japan, even if we have to literally throw our bodies into it,” forward Choi Ji-yeon, a South Korean, said. Defeating Japan would bring “much happiness” to the Korean people because of the “bad things that happened with Japan in the past.”  The animosity has only seemed to increase during the Olympics.  Analyst Joshua Cooper Ramo threw kindling on an already healthy fire when he said during NBC’s coverage of the opening ceremony, speaking of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s attendance, that “every Korean will tell you that Japan is a cultural and technical and economic example that has been so important to their own transformation.”  Some Koreans might grant improvements in infrastructure and other areas during the colonization. But it is difficult to imagine anyone, north or south, putting that on the same level as 35 years of Japanese oppression and the systematic looting of Korean resources and manpower.  Many in Japan and South Korea watched with unease as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and US President Donald J. Trump traded threats of war over the last year, amid a near-constant barrage of weapons testing by the North, which is approaching its goal of an arsenal of nuclear missiles that can reliably target US cities.  Japanese officials have expressed concern during the games at Kim Jong Un’s sister flying south with an invitation to talk, which South Korean President Moon Jae-in is considering. Past conciliatory moves by the Koreas have only allowed North Korea breathing room so it could continue its weapons programs, Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera said this month, according to the Asahi Shimbun. Abe also warned Moon not to fall for North Korea’s “smile diplomacy” because the North remains committed to nuclear weapons.  Japan’s maneuvers have been noticed here.  Kim Seo-jin, a 23-year-old South Korean student, “very much” wants to see the Koreans defeat Japan, in part because of her anger over Abe. “What has Abe ever done for peace?” Kim said. “The Koreas are making huge strides toward peace with the joint team, but all Abe did was make blunt insults about it.”  The Korean team has had some tough games, and Japan is the favorite on Wednesday. Korea lost 8-0 to Switzerland on Saturday, and then 8-0 to Sweden on Monday. After that game, Korean players vowed redemption in their last preliminary round match against Japan.  “If you asked our players three years ago what their goal was for the Olympics, they just wanted to beat Japan,” Sarah Murray, the combined Korean team’s Canadian coach, said after the loss to Sweden. “In addition to the history of the two countries our biggest rival is Japan. They’re the top women’s team in Asia and our players have always been striving to beat Japan.”  Kim Jung-hoon, 44, said that lingering ill feelings over their shared past has made Korea versus Japan a great sports rivalry. And her take on Wednesday’s game? “It’s going to be intense.” |
| Hwang Jae-ho | Opinion | Global Times | December 20, 2019 | China | How can SK end its diplomatic dilemma? | Although South Korea made a last-minute decision to keep in place the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Japan on November 22, the country finds its diplomatic relations "besieged" from all sides.  From a wider perspective, South Korea's diplomatic and security problems lie mainly in ties with the US, China, Japan and North Korea. Seoul and Washington have disputes on the sharing of military cost as well as South Korean participation in the Indo-Pacific Strategy.  Tokyo and Seoul have differences over wartime forced labor issue and Japan's removal of South Korea from its white list of preferred trading partners. Moreover, the Beijing-Seoul relationship has not yet come out of the shadows over the deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense on South Korean soil.  South Korea's diplomatic dilemma is a result of changes in the global pattern, and is a common challenge facing all small and medium-sized countries. The US is the major source of this challenge as can be seen from Washington's Indo-Pacific Strategy which is centered on military partnerships. All the US wants is to realize its own national interests.  US frequent withdrawals from international organizations and treaties, and its petty moves against its allies have put South Korea, a country trying to maintain the original notion of alliance, in distress.  The rise of unilateralism is shaking the concept of alliance, which was previously based on pillars such as ideology. If it continues like this, despite some US political and military elites' efforts to maintain alliances, further alienation between Washington and its allies is inevitable.  In that case, US alliances will be further weakened or even disintegrate, leaving only certain core allies as US "agents."  US allies like South Korea which lay stress on morality have already begun to be squeezed. And as a primary ally of Washington, Tokyo is currently pursuing a "Japan First" policy similar to Washington's "America First." That being said, hidden contradictions are lurking in ties between South Korea and Japan.  Even so, the diplomatic predicaments faced by South Korea cannot be blamed entirely on external factors. South Korean President Moon Jae-in's administration should push forward a more creative foreign policy.  In the long run, the South Korean government has to keep a watchful eye on changes in US foreign policy. The fetters of South Korea's diplomacy lie mainly in its north, and it is thus fundamentally tough for Seoul to be truly independent in diplomacy. Once unforeseen circumstances emerge, South Korea can hardly reject US requests.  If Washington keeps following its current foreign policy, there will be increasing discontent in the international community, and Seoul will be in trouble for being a US ally.  Although South Korea is showing its sincerity to the US as much as possible, it has said "no" in a growing number of cases. If Washington is to build its Indo-Pacific Strategy as a "new NATO," Seoul will by no means take part. And South Korea can hardly accept excessive US demands for the sharing of defense cost. In addition, Seoul will also not budge from its original stance on US desire to increase the deployment of strategic weapons in the Northeast Asian country.  In dealing with Japan, South Korea should also stick to its principles. Since South Korea's top court ruled in November 2018 that Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries must compensate South Korean forced labor during WWII, Tokyo has made clear its strategy to contain Seoul. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's image has taken a beating among South Koreans. Regardless of the renewal of the GSOMIA, Seoul-Tokyo ties will remain strained in the near future. This is an unavoidable pain in reorganizing the regional order and reshaping Japan-South Korea relations.  To get out of the dilemma, South Korea's top priority is to strengthen cooperation with China. Although Seoul has already been aware of Beijing's significance, it has not given enough attention to the country.  It is speculated that after a three-way summit in December between South Korea, China and Japan, President Xi Jinping may visit South Korea in 2020 when the time is ripe. Seoul should be committed to building a new type of bilateral ties with Beijing.  The two sides can achieve a win-win outcome if they join hands to strengthen cooperation and contribute to regional prosperity and peace. If the two countries can establish new partnerships related to not only the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue but also the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative and the South Korea-proposed New Southern Policy, as well as other multilateral platforms, a new type of China-South Korea ties can be built. |
| Global Times with Reuters | News Analysis | Global Times | November 25, 2019 | China | South Korea, Japan in fresh spat over intelligence deal | South Korea and Japan traded fresh barbs on Monday, just days after agreeing to salvage an important intelligence-sharing pact, highlighting the fragile ties between the former wartime foes and allies of the US.  Officials from each side criticized or contradicted comments made by the other side and in media about whether ­Tokyo had apologized over what Seoul said was an inaccurate weekend statement about the agreement.  Under pressure from Washington, South Korea made a last-minute decision on Friday to conditionally maintain the pact, known as GSOMIA, a dramatic about-face amid a months-long feud over history and trade.  GSOMIA, or the General Security of Military Information Agreement, is a key symbol of security cooperation between the two old foes and a trilateral partnership with the US.  Tokyo, for its part, said Seoul made a strategic choice and it hoped to hold trade talks, though it would not immediately restore South Korea's fast-track exporter status.  Officials at Seoul's presidential Blue House said on Sunday they had lodged a protest and received an apology over the Japanese trade ministry's announcement that it will continue enhanced screening on the exports of three core materials used in semiconductors, which they said was "completely different" to what was agreed.  On Monday, the Blue House singled out a report of Japan's Yomiuri newspaper quoting a Japanese foreign ministry official as saying it was "not true" that Tokyo has apologized.  "To clarify once again, we have complained and Japan apologized," senior press secretary Yoon Do-han said in a statement. "Japanese and Korean media are creating a truth game, but we know the truth."  Less than two hours later, Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga contradicted Yoon's remarks, saying the export curbs were "completely unrelated to GSOMIA."  "It is not productive to comment on every remark by South Korea, but it is not true that the Japanese government apologized," Suga told a press briefing.  The feud is rooted in a disagreement over compensation for South Koreans forced to work at Japanese companies during the 1910-45 occupation. After South Korea's Supreme Court ordered compensation last year, some former laborers are seeking to seize local assets of Japanese firms, and Tokyo imposed export controls. |
| Cheng Xiaohe | Commentary | Global Times | September 1, 2019 | China | Demise of GSOMIA deals a blow to US Indo-Pacific Strategy | The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), signed by South Korea and Japan in November 2016, is set to fall apart as Seoul decided not to renew it amid the two nations' heightened historical, trade and security disputes.  Moon Jae-in's government has its own reasons to do so. The agreement has been unpopular in South Korea. As early as in 2012, Lee Myung-bak's government prepared to sign the deal with Japan, but it backed off at the last minute as the domestic opposition grew too strong. When Park Geun-hye gave the green light to the agreement in 2016, nearly 60 percent of Koreans opposed it, among which Moon's Democratic Party was a leading voice. For President Moon, he just undid a move that he and his party once tried to stop but failed.  The agreement certainly helped facilitate intelligence sharing between South Korea and Japan, but Yonhap News Agency quoted a senior South Korean official as saying that "South Korea never used Japan's intelligence in analyzing North Korea's missile launches under the current Moon Jae-in administration." As South Korea seeks good relations with both North Korea and China, the agreement, which mainly targets the two nations, has become less attractive in South Korea's policy toolbox.  Japan has weaponized its trade with South Korea in order to redress the historical dispute, Seoul did not hesitate to reciprocate by picking up a fight in the security field. For South Korea, stopping the renewal of GSOMIA not only is less costly than resorting to trade countermeasures, but it can also force the US to intervene as Washington feels the pain caused with Seoul's withdrawal from security cooperation.  The unraveling of the GSOMIA marks a new low in Seoul-Tokyo relations. Japan strongly protested against South Korea's decision to scrap the agreement. As Soul and Tokyo dig in and prepare for a long-time fight, the spotlight is now on the US, which is the long-time ally of both South Korea and Japan.  Interestingly, even though the measures taken by both South Korea and Japan were directed at each other, their tit-for-tat tussle may produce some consequences the US does not want to bear.  First, the US effort to build strong security ties with South Korea and Japan will be in jeopardy. Since the end of the WWII, the US had painstakingly built a hub-and-spoke alliance system, in which the US alliances with Japan and South Korea constitute the bedrock of US security architecture in Northeast Asia. The alliance system had served US national interests well during the Cold War. In the post-Cold War era, the US continued to reinforce its traditional bilateral alliances and at the same time began to strengthen a horizontal connection between two alliances. As a result of the effort, the US, Japan and Australia introduced trilateral ministerial meetings into their security cooperation. For years, Obama administration had worked to build some trilateral security mechanisms with South Korea and Japan. In addition to the regular three-way policy consultations among themselves, the US government also encouraged Japan and South Korea to share intelligence.  The 2016 GSOMIA not only enabled Seoul and Tokyo to directly exchange sensitive information about North Korea's missile and nuclear weapon program, but also paved the way to upgrade their security cooperation in the future. The demise of the GSOMIA will make their previous work worthless, undermine their capability to track North Korea's development of missile and nuclear weapons and deepen their mutual suspicion that may take years to recover.  Second, the termination of the GSOMIA will bring into serious doubt the US Indo-Pacific strategy. As the Trump administration began to perceive China as a strategic competitor, it adopted the Indo-Pacific Strategy, which is based on a network of strengthened alliances and partnerships that span two regions of the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean. Many analysts criticize the strategy as an empty slogan. The worsening relations between South Korea and Japan will further fuel the criticism. The dispute escalation between two US allies and the absence of a strong intervention by the US reveals America's diminishing leadership in Northeast Asia. If the US has a weak political will to lead or wants to avoid being dragged into allies' brawls, it may struggle to lead a large number of allies and partners in carrying out the Indo-Pacific strategy. Many allies may feel they are not as important as they were.  President Moon asked Trump to get involved in the dispute when they met on June 30 in South Korea. Trump himself expressed his willingness to mediate if both South Korea and Japan wanted him to do so, nonetheless, the Trump administration failed to defuse the tension between the two allies. After South Korea decided to pull out of the GSOMIA, the US government raised its rhetoric, rebutting South Korean government's claim that it had US understanding and registering its strong concern and disappointment. Morgan Ortagus, the spokeswoman of the US State Department, tweeted that the termination will make defending South Korea more complicated and increase the risk to US forces. Randall Schriver, US assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific security affairs, called on the Republic of Korea "to recommit to GSOMIA and to renew that agreement."  Obviously, realizing the grave consequences of the Seoul-Tokyo row, the Trump administration may step up its effort to bring the two allies to the negotiating table. More importantly, both South Korea and Japan have exercised self-restraint. Japanese government granted its first permit for a South Korea-bound shipment of the restricted chemicals in early August. The Blue House once said that it may reconsider its decision to end GSOMIA if Japan abandons its export curbs. With the US vigorous intervention, South Korea and Japan might find a way out of current friction, but it is not easy for both sides to reverse the trend. |
| Global Times, with AFP | News Analysis | Global Times | November 24, 2019 | China | South Korea, Japan agree on summit | Japan and South Korean foreign ministers agreed Saturday to arrange a summit between their leaders next month, seeking to build on a lowering of tensions after Seoul stuck to a key military pact.  Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Moon Jae-in could meet in China next month, their ministers agreed on the sidelines of a G20 meeting in Nagoya, Japan.  The summit would take place on the occasion of the Japan-China-South ­Korea trilateral scheduled for next month, said a Japanese diplomat who declined to give his name.  Ties between the two countries, both key US allies in the region, have hit rock bottom in recent months over trade and Japan's historic wartime atrocities.  This led to Seoul threatening to withdraw from a key military intelligence-sharing pact.  But late Friday, with only six hours until the pact was due to expire, South Korea reversed course and agreed to extend it "conditionally," warning however it could be "terminated" at any moment.  The accord, known as GSOMIA, enabled the two US allies to share military secrets, particularly over Pyongyang's nuclear and missile capacity.  Washington welcomed Seoul's decision but urged the pair to "continue sincere discussions to ensure a lasting solution to historic issues."  The relationship between Japan and South Korea is overshadowed by the 35 years of brutal colonization by the Japanese - including the use of sex slaves and forced labor - that is still bitterly resented today.  Ties began a downward spiral after a series of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to compensate wartime forced labor victims.  This infuriated Tokyo, with Japan insisting the matter was settled in a 1965 treaty normalizing diplomatic relations between the two countries, which included significant reparations.  The historic dispute morphed into a trade spat between the two market economies, as Japan removed South Korea from a so-called white list of countries that enjoyed streamlined export control procedures.  South Korea hit back with similar trade restrictions and a decision to scrap the intelligence-sharing pact, surprising analysts who thought defense ties would be immune from the diplomatic row. |
| Global Times with AFP | Commentary | Global Times | October 24, 2019 | China | Japanese, South Korean PMs meet with relations in deep freeze | Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met his South Korean counterpart on Thursday and warned frayed relations should be mended, but appeared to suggest it was Seoul's responsibility to make that happen.  Bilateral ties between the regional neighbors are at rock bottom over a dispute related to the use of forced labor during World War II, with the countries trading retaliatory sanctions.  "The relationship between Japan and South Korea is now in an extremely serious situation, but this important relationship should not be left like this," Abe said during a meeting with South Korea's Lee Nak-yeon, the foreign ministry in Tokyo said.  But Abe said he wanted "South Korea to keep the promises between the two countries so as to create a catalyst for recovering a healthy Japan-South Korea relationship."  The brief exchange was the first such high-level meeting since relations between the countries began to sour in the wake of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to compensate wartime laborers.  In July, Japan tightened export controls on three chemicals essential to key products made by South Korean firms including Samsung. Seoul has retaliated with its own trade measures. Japan says its decision was made on national security grounds, but the move was widely seen as a response to the compensation rulings.  Japan says all reparations claims from its 35-year colonial rule were settled under a 1965 treaty and associated economic agreement made as the countries normalized relations.  Lee, who was in Japan to attend the new Japanese emperor's formal enthronement ceremony earlier this week, handed a letter from President Moon Jae-in to Abe, the ministry said.  South Korea's Yonhap news agency, citing a South Korean official, said the letter described Japan as a key partner for regional peace, but stopped short of proposing the two leaders meet. |
| Global Times | Editorial | Global Times | September 15, 2019 | China | China can play more active role in mediating Japan-South Korea spat | The brewing spat between Japan and South Korea after Seoul's withdrawal from the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) marks a new low in Seoul-Tokyo relations. What's driving Seoul's decision to withdraw from the pact? Will it cast a shadow on the US alliance system in East Asia? Moon Chung-in (Moon), special advisor for foreign affairs and national security to South Korean President Moon Jae-in and distinguished professor at Yonsei University, shared his insights with Global Times (GT) reporter Li Aixin on these issues during the Third Taihe Civilizations Forum held in Beijing in early September.  GT: What are the main reasons for South Korea's withdrawal from the intelligence-sharing pact with Japan?  Moon: Very simple. In early July, the Japanese government imposed export control against South Korea. In August, Japan demoted South Korea from the list of A-category countries to B-category countries (in trade). Japan took restrictive economic punishment against South Korea. Japan argued that it is imposing economic restrictions because it does not trust South Korea. Our government believes the GSOMIA cannot be implemented if Japan does not trust us. If Japan does not trust us, how can we exchange sensitive military intelligence with them?  GT: Under the backdrop of the GSOMIA collapse and escalating tensions between South Korea and Japan, how do you think US alliance system in East Asia will develop?  Moon: We usually call it the trilateral security cooperation and coordination among Washington, Tokyo and Seoul, because we do not have any military alliance with Japan.  Yes, it was true that in the past, the US intervened to narrow the differences between Seoul and Tokyo. For example, in 2015, when there was a conflict between the two countries over the comfort women issue, the Barack Obama administration intervened and narrowed differences so the two countries could reach an agreement on the issue.  However, the Trump administration did not intervene, and has said that it is a matter between Japan and South Korea. Maybe that is one reason why the conflict between Japan and South Korea became deeper.  GT: Will the move affect the South Korea-US alliance?  Moon: A lot of South Korean conservatives and Washington's mainstream (politicians) argue that South Korea's failure to renew GSOMIA will undermine the alliance. However, we should understand one thing that GMOSIA is between Japan and South Korea. The US has nothing to do with the agreement, even though it was the US which mediated Japan and South Korea to sign the agreement.  Furthermore, we have a Trilateral Information Sharing Arrangement (TISA) that involves US, Japan, and South Korea. So I don't think our decision not to renew the GSOMIA will affect the South Korea-US alliance negatively.  Washington must be very disappointed, because the US always wants Japan and South Korea to have close military cooperation and coordination, including the exchange of military information.  However, our government thinks the South Korea-US alliance is healthy. We have a mechanism to exchange information with Japan through US mediation.  GT: Lately, observers say there might be some friction between South Korea and the US, since President Trump has been pushing for South Korea to pay more for US troops, while South Korea has recently pushed for a prompt return of US military bases in the country. Do you think such friction exists?  Moon: Yes. The overall structure of South Korean-US alliance system remains intact. We have a defense treaty between South Korea and the US. We have a combined forces command between US and South Korea, and we have US troops in South Korea, and there is a relative strong support of US forces in South Korea and the alliance by South Korean people. We have been paying defense costs for US troops in the country. Therefore, from an overall structural point of view, the South Korea-US alliance remains intact.  But there are some pending issues that might need adjustment. For example, the Trump administration has been putting a lot of pressure on South Korea to increase defense costs. Last year, we agreed to pay $1 billion for US forces. Now, the US is demanding that we pay about $5 to $6 billion. That's too much. This will lead to disputes between the US and South Korea.  Another issue is that the US just hinted it might need to set up bases for its intermediate range ballistic missiles in South Korea. But our government officially said no. That could become a future problem.  There's another issue, the so-called return of wartime operational control, which belongs to the US commander in South Korea, to South Korea. So far, everything is going well. But in the process, there could be some difference of opinion between Washington and Seoul. I believe that we will overcome those differences because alliance is a tool for enhancing our national interest.  The US has its national interests. South Korea has its national interests. From time to time, there can be differences in their priorities. Therefore, it is natural for us to have differences in terms of defining national interests. But I think we will adjust to the differences.  GT: Will the differences between South Korea and the US bring Seoul and Pyongyang closer?  Moon: It is important for North Korea and the US to have a more productive negotiation about the nuclear issue. If the US-North Korea relations get better, then there is a great chance for improved inter-Korean relations.  GT: After South Korean President Moon Jae-in assumed office, the crisis on the Korean Peninsula has been eased. But the fundamental problems remain, such as the distrust between Seoul and Pyongyang. After Kim-Trump summits, there have been few improvements on the Korean Peninsula issue. How do you think the situation on Korean Peninsula will further develop? What can relevant parties do to break the current stalemate?  Moon: The Korean Peninsula has gone through a roller-coaster pattern of interactions. 2017 was the year of crisis. 2019 was the year of great hope for peace. This year, we are facing precarious uncertainties. One of the reasons is the failure to reach an agreement in Hanoi between Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-un in February. On June 30, Trump and Kim met in Panmunjom. The two leaders agreed to resume working level talks within two to three weeks.  It was later discovered that the Trump agreed with Kim to suspend a South Korea-US joint military training exercise. But we continued with the exercise on a much smaller scale. North Korea considers this is a hostile activity against Pyongyang.  I think that is one reason why North Korea has not attended working level talks. But there is another factor, if North Korean officers show up at the talks, then North Korean officials should get some tangible outcomes. Apparently, they might have not read any such signs from the US. Therefore, they are not confident that the working level talks will produce very tangible outcomes, and those two reasons might have prevented North Korea from attending the working level talks.  GT: China-Japan-South Korea Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in Beijing. What role do you think can China play in mediating the conflicts between South Korea and Japan?  Moon: China can be an important mediator between Japan and South Korea. Up until now, the US played the role, but it is time for China to play that role, because cooperation among China, Japan, South Korea is extremely important for peace and stability, as well as the common prosperity in Northeast Asia. I hope China will play a more active role in narrowing the difference between Japan and South Korea, and I hope that China would take a more proactive diplomacy in promoting peace, stability, and common prosperity in Northeast Asia.  GT: This year marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. What do you think is the biggest change in China over the past 70 years?  Moon: It's an amazing transformation. Look at Chinese history. You won the war against the Kuomintang. Then you get into the Korean War (1950-53). After that there was a lot of chaos in China. You had a famine, and the Cultural Revolution (1967-77). From 1949 up until 1978 was rather gloomy. However, Deng Xiaoping's adoption of the Four Cardinal Principles in 1979 and the pursuit of reform and opening-up greatly transformed China.  China has gone through enormous transformation. China has become No.2 country in the world in terms of economic power. China is No.1 exporting country in the world. China is No.1 in terms of foreign exchange reserves. Now you're pushing the Belt and Road Initiative. The new China is a completely different China, nobody would have expected that kind of transformation. Therefore, I would say the last 70 years have been the greatest success story for China. Of course, success always brings new challenges.  The current trade conflict with the US might mirror that kind of new challenge. Also you have a lot of domestic problems, including growing inequality in China, environmental problems and resources problems. You have 56 different ethnic groups in China. Unity among diversity has become another big challenge. But as you transformed yourself in the past 70 years, I believe you will overcome those challenges so that you can celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of PRC in 2049. Maybe by then you might be able to achieve the Chinese Dream. |
| Dong Xiangrong | Opinion | Global Times | October 8, 2019 | China | Frictions won’t jolt US-South Korea alliance | It was reported by South Korean media that the Blue House National Security Council decided on August 30 to push actively for an early return of the remaining 26 US military bases in South Korea. Before the Seoul Defense Dialogue kicked off on Wednesday, speculation was running high that Washington may not send a senior official to take part, though the US embassy in Seoul announced at the last minute that US Forces Korea Commander General Robert Abrams would attend the forum.  These moves between Washington and Seoul seem to suggest that the two are at odds with each other. It may be attributed to their divergences on sharing the cost of US military stationed in South Korea and Seoul's decision to scrap the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan. However, this will not shake the US-South Korea alliance.  The approach of US President Donald Trump to dealing with allies is different from his predecessors. Previous US presidents formed or tweaked the US alliance in terms of its allies' strategic value and global strategic deployment. Although Trump also has his global strategic considerations, his focus is on the economic calculation.  There are differences between Seoul and Washington on sharing the US Forces Korea (USFK) costs. Officials of the two countries signed a deal in February 2019, which states South Korea would raise its contribution to 1.04 trillion won ($863 million), a growth of 8.2 percent. South Korean newspaper Joongang Ilbo said Washington will seek $5 billion annual burden-sharing from Seoul. It would be tough for South Korea to bear.  Trump said at a fund-raising event on August 9, "It was easier to get a billion dollars from South Korea than to get $114.13 from a rent-controlled apartment in Brooklyn." His tone is a huge blow to the self-esteem of South Koreans, whose nationalist sentiments are strong.  US-South Korea-Japan relationship is not a complete triangular alliance. The US is an ally of both Northeast Asian countries, while South Korea doesn't have solid ties with Japan. The US intends to form stable triangular relations among the three countries, but it has not been realized so far. The US hopes all its allies, not only Japan and South Korea, in the Asia-Pacific, can have a stable and friendly relationship, contributing to a stable alliance network.  At the outset of the fresh round of Seoul-Tokyo spats, Seoul did not have many cards to deal with the economic challenges posed by Tokyo. Some economic sanctions imposed by Japan on South Korea seem to be aggressive. For example, Japan has imposed restrictions on exports of three chemicals to South Korea, which are used for the latter's pillar semiconductor industry. Japan officially removed South Korea from its "white list" on August 28, which means South Korea will no longer enjoy minimum trade restrictions on sensitive goods including electronic components.  In this context, South Korea has been divided over maintaining sharing of military intelligence with such a hostile country which has also invaded South Korea before.  President Moon Jae-in and his progressive government generally have adopted a tough attitude toward Japan. Therefore, they made a decision to scrap the GSOMIA, which was signed by South Korean conservative government of Park Geun-hye, under US influence.  The US valued the intelligence-sharing pact and constantly expressed "regret" and "disappointment" over South Korea's determination. The GSOMIA allowed information sharing among Japan, South Korea and the US in regard on North Korea's activities in the Northeast Asia. The US is dismayed about the demise of the GSOMIA, worrying the security cooperation in the region would be weakened.  South Korea's push for return of 26 USFK bases has sparked speculation of a rift between the US and South Korea. However, reducing the number of USFK bases would be the general tendency. The US has opened its largest overseas military base in Pyeongtaek, a city 35 kilometers south of Seoul, which can accommodate a considerable number of USFK. Seeking for early return of the remaining USFK bases is consistent with the relocation of US bases to Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek.  In US Asia-Pacific strategy, although not as important as US-Japan alliance, US-South Korea alliance is indispensable. As a pivotal anchor in US Asia-Pacific strategy, South Korea would not be abandoned by the US. Seoul-Washington alliance has still been stable, despite some frictions. |
| Chen Yang | Commentary | Global Times | August 27, 2019 | China | South Korea GSOMIA withdrawal defies US foreign strategy | South Korea announced on August 22 it will terminate its General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Japan. According to a Blue House statement, the agreement does not meet Seoul's "national interests."  Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe denounced the decision the next day and said, "Japan will urge South Korea to recover trust between us, including resolving the matter of violation of the international treaty between Japan and South Korea and hope South Korea will keep their promise."  US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was disappointed with the decision. Although Seoul only announced it would end the agreement, it will impact the stability of Washington-Seoul-Tokyo trilateral relations.  It seems the South Korean government's decision was influenced by the recent Japan-South Korea trade disputes. But such a result had already been foreshadowed when the two sides signed the agreement in 2016. The GSOMIA has been the only military cooperation agreement signed by Japan and South Korea since the two countries normalized ties in 1965.  When allies or countries having close relations exchange confidential military information, a GSOMIA is implemented to prevent security secrets from being leaked to a third country. In other words, having a close relationship is a prerequisite for signing the agreement.  Japan and South Korea were not exactly close in 2016, and the South Korean public opinion was then against the agreement. Yet they inked the pact so the US government could move forward with its Asia-Pacific rebalance strategy.  The announcement from South Korea to end the pact was partly a result of national public opinion. Due to the ongoing trade disputes, anti-Japanese sentiment has increased in South Korea. If the Moon Jae-in administration continues its GSOMIA with Japan, it would create great public opposition and weaken the public support for the cabinet. Besides, Japan and South Korea lack political trust, and signing the GSOMIA was a hasty decision.  Since the end of WWII, there have been constant disputes between Japan and South Korea. But this time, the impact of their disputes is much more significant. During the Junichiro Koizumi administration (2001-2006), Japan-South Korea relations worsened because of Koizumi's statements and actions on historical issues.  There was an uptick in anti-South Korean and anti-Japanese sentiment respectively in Japan and South Korea, but the risks were controllable. Now especially since last week's announcement by Seoul, tension between the two countries has spread from trade to military security, and could move to other areas. This is unprecedented.  On several occasions, the Abe administration had asked South Korea to renew the GSOMIA, but to no avail. There could be a favorable turn in Tokyo-Seoul relations if South Korea continued the agreement. But now, relations may remain to be at a low ebb for some time.  The end of the GSOMIA not only shows that US prestige has declined but also reflects the wavering of US-Japan-South Korea trilateral relations. Before last Thursday, US high-ranking officials had asked South Korea to maintain the overall situation, trying to improve Japan-South Korea ties and protect trilateral stability. However, Seoul still decided to end the agreement. The decision reflects Washington's ability to resolve disputes among allies has weakened.  Japan and South Korea are US allies, yet the two East Asian countries are not allies. Thus, in the trilateral framework, Japan-South Korea relations have always been weak. The US knows it is difficult to force an alliance between Japan and South Korea due to historical and territorial disputes.  Consequently, the US promoted the GSOMIA in 2016 to strengthen the Japan-South Korea relationship and tried to upgrade it to a quasi-alliance, in an attempt to stabilize trilateral relations. But Seoul's recent decision was a blow to trilateral relations and future cooperation.  The signing of the GSOMIA between Japan and South Korea was an attempt to share information on North Korean missiles and other military intelligence, without US transit.  It's an essential component of US foreign policy to interfere with peace and stability throughout East Asia. The possibility that Japan and South Korea would sign a GSOMIA again in the future cannot be excluded. Should that happen, the decision should benefit regional peace and stability and promote the Korean Peninsula peace process, rather than harm the interests of a third party. |
| Global Times with Agency Reports | Commentary | Global Times | August 30, 2019 | China | Culture ministers of China, Japan, S. Korea discuss cooperation | At the 11th China-Japan-South Korea Cultural Ministers' Meeting held Friday, the three ministers of China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) exchanged in-depth views on further promoting practical cooperation in cultural areas.  Chinese Minister of Culture and Tourism Luo Shugang and his South Korean and Japanese counterparts Park Yang-woo and Masahiko Shibayama addressed the meeting. Among the attendees were Chinese ambassador to the ROK Qiu Guohong and Japanese ambassador to the ROK Yasumasa Nagamine.  The three ministers reviewed the progress made since their 10th meeting and jointly signed the Incheon Declaration.  The meeting also designated China's Yangzhou, South Korea's Suncheon and Japan's Kitakyushu as Culture Cities of East Asia 2020. Bilateral culture ministerial meetings were also held on the sidelines of the meeting.  The China-Japan-ROK Cultural Ministers' Meeting is one of the important ministerial meeting mechanisms among China, Japan and the ROK. The meeting offers a good platform for the three ministers to exchange opinions on a regular basis.  With the concerted efforts of the three parties, the previous meetings have played a positive role in strengthening cultural communication and cooperation among the three countries, and this year's 11th meeting will continue to push forward practical cooperation in culture fields among China, Japan and South Korea. |
| Global Times with Agency reports | News Analysis | Global Times | August 28, 2019 | China | Japan to remove S. Korea from trade "whitelist" as planned | Japan's Trade minister Hiroshige Seko said on Tuesday that Japan will remove South Korea from a "whitelist" of nations entitled to simplified export control procedures as planned, a move certain to deepen the rift between the feuding neighbors.  "We will carry out (the plan)," Seko told a press conference, denying that the move is aimed to strike a blow on the South Korean economy.  "This is a domestic decision aimed at implementing the appropriate export controls. It's not meant to impact relations between Japan and South Korea," he added.  The measure is set to take effect at midnight Tuesday, which has already been approved by the cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. It means South Korea will no longer enjoy minimum trade restrictions on sensitive goods including electronic components, and Japanese companies must receive case-by-case approval from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan before such goods can be exported.  Earlier this month, Japan decided to remove South Korea from its "whitelist" of trusted trading partners, after tightening regulations last month on its export to South Korea of three materials vital to produce memory chips and display panels.  South Korea has since taken Japan off of its own "whitelist" of trusted trade partners and announced tighter restrictions for importing coal ash and some waste recycling materials from Japan.  Last week, South Korean government announced the decision to scrap the General Security of Military Information Agreement, or GSOMIA with Japan on exchanging classified military information. |
| Chen Yang | Commentary | Global Times | August 27, 2019 | China | South Korea GSOMIA withdrawal defies US foreign strategy | South Korea announced on August 22 it will terminate its General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Japan. According to a Blue House statement, the agreement does not meet Seoul's "national interests."  Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe denounced the decision the next day and said, "Japan will urge South Korea to recover trust between us, including resolving the matter of violation of the international treaty between Japan and South Korea and hope South Korea will keep their promise."  US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was disappointed with the decision. Although Seoul only announced it would end the agreement, it will impact the stability of Washington-Seoul-Tokyo trilateral relations.  It seems the South Korean government's decision was influenced by the recent Japan-South Korea trade disputes. But such a result had already been foreshadowed when the two sides signed the agreement in 2016. The GSOMIA has been the only military cooperation agreement signed by Japan and South Korea since the two countries normalized ties in 1965.  When allies or countries having close relations exchange confidential military information, a GSOMIA is implemented to prevent security secrets from being leaked to a third country. In other words, having a close relationship is a prerequisite for signing the agreement.  Japan and South Korea were not exactly close in 2016, and the South Korean public opinion was then against the agreement. Yet they inked the pact so the US government could move forward with its Asia-Pacific rebalance strategy.  The announcement from South Korea to end the pact was partly a result of national public opinion. Due to the ongoing trade disputes, anti-Japanese sentiment has increased in South Korea. If the Moon Jae-in administration continues its GSOMIA with Japan, it would create great public opposition and weaken the public support for the cabinet. Besides, Japan and South Korea lack political trust, and signing the GSOMIA was a hasty decision.  Since the end of WWII, there have been constant disputes between Japan and South Korea. But this time, the impact of their disputes is much more significant. During the Junichiro Koizumi administration (2001-2006), Japan-South Korea relations worsened because of Koizumi's statements and actions on historical issues.  There was an uptick in anti-South Korean and anti-Japanese sentiment respectively in Japan and South Korea, but the risks were controllable. Now especially since last week's announcement by Seoul, tension between the two countries has spread from trade to military security, and could move to other areas. This is unprecedented.  On several occasions, the Abe administration had asked South Korea to renew the GSOMIA, but to no avail. There could be a favorable turn in Tokyo-Seoul relations if South Korea continued the agreement. But now, relations may remain to be at a low ebb for some time.  The end of the GSOMIA not only shows that US prestige has declined but also reflects the wavering of US-Japan-South Korea trilateral relations. Before last Thursday, US high-ranking officials had asked South Korea to maintain the overall situation, trying to improve Japan-South Korea ties and protect trilateral stability. However, Seoul still decided to end the agreement. The decision reflects Washington's ability to resolve disputes among allies has weakened.  Japan and South Korea are US allies, yet the two East Asian countries are not allies. Thus, in the trilateral framework, Japan-South Korea relations have always been weak. The US knows it is difficult to force an alliance between Japan and South Korea due to historical and territorial disputes.  Consequently, the US promoted the GSOMIA in 2016 to strengthen the Japan-South Korea relationship and tried to upgrade it to a quasi-alliance, in an attempt to stabilize trilateral relations. But Seoul's recent decision was a blow to trilateral relations and future cooperation.  The signing of the GSOMIA between Japan and South Korea was an attempt to share information on North Korean missiles and other military intelligence, without US transit.  It's an essential component of US foreign policy to interfere with peace and stability throughout East Asia. The possibility that Japan and South Korea would sign a GSOMIA again in the future cannot be excluded. Should that happen, the decision should benefit regional peace and stability and promote the Korean Peninsula peace process, rather than harm the interests of a third party. |
| Global Times editorial | Opinion | Global Times | August 18, 2019 | China | China could play mediator role to help resolve Japan-South Korea trade friction | Tensions between Japan and South Korea have been escalating since July 1. Japan has since placed restrictions on three chemicals critical to South Korea's tech industry. Uncertainty exists within ongoing negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and the China-Japan-South Korea free trade agreement (FTA).  Given the negative impact of the trade spat between Japan and South Korea, voices within academic circles have called for China to play a more active mediation role under the multilateral trade framework to promote regional economic integration in Asia, and withstand potential shocks stemming from global protectionism.  Bilateral disputes should not jeopardize the multilateral framework, but the recent tension between the two Asian countries has overshadowed negotiations on an agreement. South Korea's trade minister addressed the conflict with Japan twice at the recent RCEP trade ministers meeting in Beijing, according to the Japan Times, citing a Japanese representative. So, the RCEP future pact could be affected.  Previously, RCEP negotiations over tariffs between Japan and South Korea had progressed smoothly. Before the trade row, the primary concern was India's reluctance to accept a few terms due to economic gaps with developed countries.  While member countries have reportedly set a target to conclude RCEP negotiations by the end of 2019, it is hard to tell whether they can finish due to trade relations between Japan and South Korea.  In the context of the US-China trade war, there is a rising call among regional countries, especially with ASEAN countries, to finish the negotiations as soon as possible to withstand shocks from global protectionism through RCEP assistance.  If RCEP negotiations conclude this year, a multilateral FTA covering ASEAN countries, China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, and New Zealand will emerge. It would be the largest trading bloc accounting for 48.7 percent of the world's population, 29 percent of its global GDP, and 29 percent of world trade, according to 2013 statistics from the IMF and UNCTAD.  Such expectation and eagerness is justified, but the original RCEP concept was to provide a high-quality and high-standard economic cooperation framework. If it has low-standard qualities, its significance for regional economic integration would be weakened.  The trade spat between Japan and South Korea has not only had a negative impact on RCEP negotiations but could hinder talks for the China-Japan-South Korea FTA. Since it was first proposed in 2002, the FTA agreement has progressed slowly.  Things only began to turn around in May 2018 after the three countries agreed at a summit to speed up talks for a "comprehensive, high-level and reciprocal" FTA between their economies. The combined economic value of China, Japan and South Korea reached $20.95 trillion in 2018, surpassing the size of the EU and approaching the size of the North American Free Tree Agreement (NAFTA). However, because of the Japan-South Korea dispute, the Asian trilateral FTA faces uncertainty.  China has always played an active role in regional economic integration, which is why China could act as a mediator to help Japan and South Korea reach a compromise. The approach of easing their tense relationship under a trilateral FTA framework could be a way to avoid nationalist pressure inside the two countries.  In the long run, there is room for dispute consultation between Japan and South Korea. Despite tensions, good news is still emerging. According to media reports, the Japanese government recently approved its first exports of chipmaking materials to South Korea under the new export restrictions.  Japan hasn't entirely cut off critical material supplies to South Korea, indicating room for mediation. Therefore, China could play a mediator within the trilateral or multilateral framework to promote regional economic integration amid escalating pressure from nationalist trade protectionism. |
| Chen Yang | Opinion | Global Times | August 5, 2019 | China | Chips are down for South Korea-Japan ties | A South Korean protester denounces Japan's cabinet in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul for removing South Korea from a "white list" of countries with preferential trade status, which will hurt South Korean importers. Photo: IC  The Japanese cabinet approved a partial amendment to the Export Trade Control Order on Friday, removing South Korea from a "white list" of trade partners with preferential treatment. The order will be implemented on August 28.  At an emergency cabinet meeting convened on Friday, South Korean President Moon Jae-in emphasized that countermeasures are on the way.  Countries on the "white list" are identified by Japan as its trusted partners in view of national security. They enjoy preferential treatment with simplified procedures when importing strategic technologies and materials from Japan. South Korea was listed in 2004 as the only Asian country, but it is now the first country to be taken off the list. South Korean importers from Japan will face cumbersome inspections, leading to lower efficiency and higher operating costs.  Two rounds of trade sanctions that Tokyo had launched against Seoul have seemingly hit the South Korean economy, but the impact on Japan has also begun to unfold. Since early July, South Korean customers' boycott of Japanese goods has caused a decline in sales of beer, clothing and cosmetics produced in Japan.  A survey by pollster Gallup Korea published on July 26 revealed that 80 percent of respondents were reluctant to purchase goods from Japan. South Koreans' boycott is likely to last for a long time, probably giving rise to a rapid decline in Japanese products' market shares in South Korea and negatively affect Japan's exports to its peninsular neighbor.  The decrease in the number of South Korean tourists will also have an effect on the Japanese economy. South Korea is the second-largest source of tourists to Japan, following China, contributing greatly to the Japanese economy.  But amid soured relations, fewer South Korean tourists are traveling to Japan. Japan's Sankei Shimbun reported that an airport in Tottori prefecture, a county famous for the museum of Detective Conan, which called Gosho Aoyama Manga Factory (Gosho Aoyama is the author of Detective Conan), received 424 South Korean tourists in June but only 211 in July. It is estimated that the number of South Korean tourists will keep dropping, harming tourism in Japan.  Since Japan restricted the export of three semiconductor materials to South Korea on July 4, Seoul has made several attempts to avoid being excluded from the "while list," including sending high-ranking officials and members of parliament to mediate and requesting the US to intervene. But South Korea's restrained response failed to change Japan's mind.  Tokyo's tough attitude against Seoul might be a bid to ensure the ruling party's election victory in July, but its current decision to remove Seoul from the list shows the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe administration's resolve to hammer bilateral ties. And there is no sign of improvement in ties.  With the rise of nationalist sentiment in both countries, the trade dispute will inevitably spread to military and other domains. The stability of the US-Japan-South Korea alliance may be impacted.  The US has played a special role in Japan-South Korea ties since World War II. It was US mediation in 1965 that facilitated the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea. But as Washington's allies, Tokyo and Seoul failed to forge an alliance due to historical and territorial reasons. In 2016, due to the Korean Peninsula nuclear crisis and US mediation, Japan and South Korea signed the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), marking that the bilateral relationship has turned into a quasi-alliance.  In late August, Japan and South Korea need to decide whether to renew the GSOMIA in accordance with relevant regulations. Although the Abe administration has repeatedly asked Seoul to renew the agreement in spite of trade disputes, some in South Korean political circles have called for termination of the deal. South Korean people's dissatisfaction over Japan is also growing.  Given the semblance of stability on the Korean Peninsula and the abated Korean Peninsula nuclear crisis, it is less likely for the two countries to renew GSOMIA. If the agreement, to which the Abe administration attaches great importance, fails to be renewed, Japan will highly likely adopt new tough measures against South Korea. If this is the case, not only the Japan-South Korea quasi-alliance will come to an end, diplomatic relations between the two might even be severed.  It is worth noting that several senior US officials have recently proactively mediated Japan-South Korea disputes, though US President Donald Trump showed little interest. US National Security Advisor John Bolton, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, who will visit the two countries in early August, have all tried to improve Tokyo-Seoul ties.  But judging from Tokyo's decision to jettison Seoul from its trusted trade partners, the Abe administration did not care about Washington's feelings this time. This is a sign that US influence over its allies as well as US prestige are declining. Whether it is an accidental event or a long-term trend might be gauged form future Japan-South Korea relations. |
| Global Times with Agency reports | News Analysis | Global Times | July 9, 2019 | China | Japan, South Korea deepen trade dispute | Japan and South Korea ratcheted up tension on Tuesday in a diplomatic dispute that threatens to disrupt global supply of smartphones and chips, with Seoul denouncing Japanese media reports that it transferred a key chemical to North Korea.  The friction, stemming from the issue of South Koreans forced to work for Japanese firms during World War II, worsened last week when Tokyo said it would tighten curbs on exports of three materials crucial for advanced consumer electronics.  The move could hit tech giants, such as Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix, which supply chips to the likes of Apple and Huawei, and underscores Japan's sway over a vital link of the global supply chain.  In some of the sharpest comments yet, South Korean Industry Minister Sung Yun-mo urged Japan to "stop making groundless claims immediately," an apparent response to a Japanese media report last week.  The report quoted an unidentified senior member of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) as saying that some hydrogen fluoride exported from Japan to South Korea had ultimately been shipped to North Korea.  Hydrogen fluoride, a chemical covered by Tokyo's recent export curbs, can be used in chemical weapons.  Japan has said it has seen "inappropriate instances" of South Korea's export controls, but has not elaborated. |
| Global Times with agency reports | News Analysis | Global Times | July 30, 2019 | China | South Korea braces for Japan decision on trade status | South Korea is bracing for Japan's decision to drop it from a "white list" of countries that enjoy minimum trade restrictions, which could come as soon as Friday, Seoul's foreign minister said.  Japan reined in exports of high-tech materials to South Korea as ties worsened this month, fuelled by a compensation row over South Koreans forced to work in Japan's factories when it occupied the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945.  Media in Japan have said its cabinet could meet as soon as Friday to decide on stripping South Korea of the trade status, a move that Seoul has called a very grave matter that would undermine the two nations' economic and security partnership.  The South Korean government is "preparing for various possible options" if Japan drops Korea from its list, Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha told parliament on Tuesday.  Without detailing the options, she added that if Japan made its decision this week, she expected it to be implemented by late August.  "If we are removed from the white list, we are concerned that relations between the two countries would worsen to uncontrollable levels," Kang added.  Japanese officials were reviewing public comments and steadily working on procedures, but a date had not been set for a cabinet decision, Trade Minister Hiroshige Seko told a news conference on Monday.  Kang said she was highly likely to meet Japanese counterpart Taro Kono and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at a forum of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Bangkok this week, with working-level talks aimed to finalize details.  Asked by lawmakers if the United States had agreed to mediate between its biggest Asian allies, Kang said only that Washington had listened to the positions of both, but it "wouldn't be easy" for the country to openly mediate. |
| Ling Shengli | Opinion | Global Times | July 29, 2019 | China | Can the US mediate successfully in Japan-South Korea trade dispute? | The trade row is raging between Japan and South Korea, two major US allies in Northeast Asia.  Foreign Policy magazine reported July 1 that "Japan announced that it would restrict the export to South Korea of three chemicals that are used to make semiconductors and flat screens - key components of smartphones and other advanced technology," which seriously affected South Korea's economic security. For this reason, South Korea had to seek mediation from the US, hoping to ease the bitter spat with Japan. However, given the complex historical issues and realistic interests between these two countries, it is uncertain whether the US will successfully mediate the trade friction between them. Worse, the deteriorating Tokyo-Seoul relationship will weaken the cohesion of the US alliance in the Asia-Pacific region and affect the implementation of any US regional strategy.  Tension between Japan and South Korea has been lingering for some time. Leaders of these two countries even failed to resolve their conflict during the G20 Summit in Osaka in June. After the summit, Japan escalated the tension through carrying out sanctions against South Korea. From July 10 to 14, Kim Hyun-chong, deputy director of the National Security Office of the Blue House and former minister of the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy of South Korea, visited the US for support. At the request of South Korea, US President Donald Trump said he was ready to help. From July 20 to 24, US National Security Adviser John Bolton visited Japan and South Korea amid rising tension to mediate trade disputes between the two. From July 23 to 27, South Korean Trade Minister Yoo Myung-hee paid a visit to the US to further seek "Washington's support and mediation in Seoul's fight against export controls by Japan," reported The Korea Herald.  Although Japan-South Korea trade friction has little impact on US economic interests, the impact on the US Asia-Pacific strategy should not be underestimated. The US is more worried about the cohesion of its alliance in the region, which will be impacted by deteriorating Japan-South Korea relations. Especially in Northeast Asia, the discord between these two countries will weaken the US presence in this region and influence the implementation of US strategies.  Whether Washington can successfully ease tensions in the economic dispute between two of its biggest allies in Asia is actually an important test of its ability to manage alliances.  If the US succeeds, it shows that Washington's prestige remains unchanged. Otherwise, the prestige among its allies will be in crisis. In the Asia-Pacific region, it is believed that a so-called dual leadership structure has been emerging in recent years - regional countries have been depending on China economically while on the US when it comes to security. The situation also applies to some US allies in the region. It led to the weakening of US management of its allies, especially in the economic field. For instance, US allies, including South Korea and Australia, have joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank regardless of US dissuasion.  That being said, it will be difficult for the US to mediate the trade dispute between Japan and South Korea this time. It will mainly depend on whether Japan and South Korea take the US seriously enough. Otherwise, the US will find it lack strong means to force both sides to make concessions.  Trade frictions involve the interests of industries and people in the countries and the Japan and South Korea's governments face pressures from public opinion on both sides. Even when it comes to the US' own trade frictions with Japan and South Korea, negotiations can take a long time before agreements are reached.  South Korea and Japan are close neighbors and allies of the US, but relations between them have been volatile for a long time. Historical grievances, island disputes and trade frictions have led to insufficient mutual political trust between the two sides. The South Korean government is often forced to adjust its policy toward Japan in response to anti-Japanese sentiment at home. This trade dispute between Japan and South Korea is actually triggered by historical problems and it is difficult to rule out whether those problems will be reemphasized in the future.  South Korea has pinned hope on US mediation, but it's unclear whether Japan will show due respect for the US. If the US fails this time, it will lose trust from its allies. Its own prestige will be largely weakened. Washington's strategic implementation in Northeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region is likely to be greatly compromised. |
| Global Times with agency reports | News Analysis | Global Times | July 24, 2019 | China | Japan rejects S.Korea’s anger over depiction of disputed islands on Olympic map | Japan has rejected a South Korean complaint over an Olympic map that depicts disputed islands as Japanese territory, Tokyo said Wednesday as it marked a year until the 2020 Games.  The map of Japan, on a Tokyo 2020 website illustrating the Olympic torch relay route, depicts the islands known as Dokdo in Korean and Takeshima  in Japanese as about the size of a full stop.  "South Korea, through the Japanese Embassy in South Korea, has lodged a protest on the issue," cabinet secretary Yoshihide Suga told a daily briefing.  "Japan told the South Korean side that the protest is not acceptable given that Japan owns Takeshima and given Japan's position on the Sea of Japan."  The disputed islands are claimed by both countries, and their depiction in maps produced by the two sides has frequently caused tensions.  At the Winter Olympics opening ceremony in Pyeongchang, South Korea in February 2018, the two Koreas marched together behind a unification flag that did not include the islands, after Tokyo denounced the emblem used at a practice event.  Suga at the time said it was "unacceptable" for the flag to depict the disputed territory.  And Tokyo was infuriated when custom-made furniture for a summit between the leaders of North Korea and South Korea featured maps showing the disputed islands as part of Korean territory.  Relations between Japan and South Korea have often been strained by lingering resentment over Japan's 1910-45 occupation of the Korean Peninsula.  And ties have deteriorated in recent months, with Japan putting export restrictions on Seoul after South Korean courts ordered Japanese firms to ­compensate victims of wartime forced labor.  The islands row comes as Tokyo marks the year-to-go countdown ­until the opening ceremony of the 2020 Games, with organizers touting "unprecedented" ticket sales. |
| Zhang Yun | Opinion | Global Times | July 15, 2019 | China | Why US is an onlooker in S.Korea-Japan row | Fraying relations between Japan and South Korea since 2018 have reached a nadir - the lowest point since 1965 when the two countries normalized diplomatic ties. Relations have taken a beating over three sensitive flashpoints - the "comfort women" issue, compensation for South Korean people forced to work for Japanese firms during WWII and a warship radar lock-on incident. Japan has recently tightened restrictions on its export of high-tech materials to South Korea. The Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said that the "relationship of trust [between the two sides] has been markedly damaged."  Undulations in Japan-South Korea relations after the Cold War are not new. But this time the US seems to have no interest in playing peacenik between its two important allies in Northeast Asia. Some believe this can lead to long-term antagonism between the two countries. David Stilwell, the US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, told Japanese media that the US has no plans to mediate the spat, but would only encourage both sides to focus on key regional issues and in particular North Korea.  Theoretically, if Japan, South Korea and the US can form a trilateral alliance to replace the current Japan-US and South Korea-US alliance, the US military presence in East Asia will be buttressed. The three countries will then form a NATO-like collective security structure.  Washington has been stressing that strategic interests are above historical issues and territorial disputes in its relations with Tokyo and Seoul. During the Obama administration, the US used to play the role of mediator between Japan and South Korea. For example, in a bid to strengthen trilateral relations, former US president Barack Obama held a meeting in The Hague in 2014 with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and then South Korean president Park Geun-hye.  But why is the administration of Donald Trump not interested in getting involved in the Japan-South Korea spat? How will this affect the US security structure in Northeast Asia?  First, the Trump administration has broken with previous US policies on North Korea. In opening up a direct dialogue with Pyongyang, Washington has forsaken the tradition of using North Korea to strengthen Japan-South Korea-US cooperation. Trump hoped to make a breakthrough on the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue and scaled down joint military exercises with South Korea.  China, South Korea and Russia are all trying to persuade the US to lift economic sanctions on North Korea, while Japan has been emphasizing the issue of North Korea's abductions of Japanese nationals. Thus Japan and South Korea have different expectations for Washington's policy toward Pyongyang. Therefore, for Washington, intervening in Tokyo-Seoul relations may serve neither side.  The nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula has been the only pivot for political and security cooperation between Japan, South Korea and the US. If such pivot is shaken, there will be fundamental changes in Northeast Asia's security situation. During the latest round of diplomatic flurry on the Korean Peninsula, North Korea has already had direct talks with four out of six members of the Six-Party Talks, leaving Japan behind. This has added to Japan's strategic anxiety. On the one hand, Washington may reassure Tokyo to stabilize their alliance; on the other hand, it may start diplomacy with Pyongyang at the appropriate moment.  Second, the US failed to strengthen Japan-South Korea relations to set up a trilateral alliance. Although the US tried to promote a quasi-trilateral alliance and Tokyo and Seoul reached agreements on intelligence sharing, Japan-South Korea defense cooperation could not be forged because of historical problems, political distrust and territorial disputes. Besides, a trilateral alliance means the integration of the three countries' military. This will trigger strong opposition from North Korea, China and Russia, leading to regional tensions as there has already been much unease in US relations with China and Russia. Hence the best choice for Washington would be to maintain bilateral alliances with both Seoul and Tokyo.  Third, periodic tensions in Japan-South Korea relations occur because of historical issues and the power change in Northeast Asia. Washington cannot do much to help. With China's rise and South Korea's vaulting economic development after the Cold War, South Korea's economy has become more closely linked with that of China although the US and South Korea are still allies. South Korea will have to think more from China's perspective and that of its own, and less from that of US and Japan. For the US, intervening in historical and territorial issues between Japan and South Korea means it has to choose sides. Thus Washington has chosen not to get involved.  This indicates the weakening control of the US on its two Northeast Asian allies. In other words, Japan and South Korea now have more strategic independence. Indeed, this may whip up nationalism in the two countries and affect the situation in the region. The two countries' strategic thinking used to be centered on Washington because of the alliance system. Japan and South Korea lack mutual trust and motivation to develop bilateral relations, and have depended too much on US mediation.  But challenge also leads to creativity and opportunity. For the US, developing a more compatible security structure in Northeast Asia means it can maintain its long-term interests and presence in the region. Meanwhile, it is time for Japan and South Korea to be less dependent on the US and find their way out. |
| Global Times | Commentary | Global Times | July 15, 2019 | China | Tokyo and Seoul can ill afford a standoff as rushing into second trade war looks reckless | A standoff between Tokyo and Seoul points to mutually assured damage. South Korean President Moon Jae-in could take aim at Japanese machinery, equipment and goods as payback for export curbs targeting South Korea's vital chip industry. That casts a shadow over $85 billion of bilateral trade at a time when both economies are already under significant pressure.  South Korea is mulling a tit-for-tat response. Tensions between the neighbors have been simmering since Seoul's Supreme Court last year ordered two Japanese companies to pay individual reparations to forced wartime laborers. The ruling was blasted by Tokyo, which claims the issue was settled in a 1965 treaty. Evidently exasperated, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe hit back with new rules requiring companies to apply for licenses whenever they want to ship certain materials to South Korea.  Moon's options to take revenge are limited. Domestic companies, including the $255 billion Samsung Electronics, rely heavily on Japanese gear, materials and chemicals and they export back much less. The imbalance has resulted in South Korea's persistent trade deficit with Japan, topping $24 billion last year. So any measures risk hurting the local chip and tech sectors, but also the ire of the World Trade Organization.  Even so, Seoul is determined. Speaking to executives from the country's top 30 conglomerates on Wednesday, Moon pledged to increase spending to help firms source parts and materials domestically. Details are scarce but, over the long term, suppliers could lose market share if companies like Samsung, the world's top chips and handset maker, decide to buy elsewhere. Japanese exporters shipped $24 billion worth of capital equipment to South Korea in 2018, customs data shows.  Any escalation will pile on the pressure, however. Both economies are grappling with slowing global demand and the US-China trade war. In July, South Korea slashed its export projections for the year, from growth of 3.1 percent to a 5 percent decline. Earlier this July, Japan reported a worse-than-expected drop in core machinery orders, an indicator of capital spending in the next six to nine months. Rushing into a second trade war looks reckless. |
| China.org | News Analysis | China.org.cn | August 7, 2019 | China | Abe urges S. Korea to uphold pact amid sinking mutual trust | Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday said he wants South Korea to uphold a 1965 bilateral agreement that forms the foundation of modern relations between both countries and that for Seoul to realize that mutual trust is very much at stake.  At a press briefing in Hiroshima, Abe said that the countries' ties are deteriorating and that trust remains the most important issue regarding bilateral agreements.  "When we think about the current Japan-South Korea relationship, the biggest issue we have is of trust, or whether promises made between states are kept," Abe said.  He added that South Korea has "unilaterally" breached the accord that was supposed to finally and irreversibly settle the issue of compensation for wartime laborers during Japan's 1910-1945 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula.  South Korea has "violated the treaty that served as the basis for us to normalize ties," Abe said, urging Seoul to abide by it "first and foremost."  Abe reiterated that Japan's position on the issue and the accord had remained consistent throughout and is based on international law.  South Korea, for its part, however, in a series of court rulings late last year ordered Japanese firms to compensate the victims of wartime labor in a move that rocked ties between both countries.  Japan has claimed the rulings are not in line with international law and run contrary to the foundation of friendly and cooperative relations between the two neighbors since the 1965 normalization of diplomatic ties.  Japan also believes the matter was settled, based on the 1965 accord, which also saw Japan pay 500 million U.S. dollars in financial aid related to the issue of compensation for forced wartime labor.  Tokyo has claimed that Seoul has been reluctant to show willingness to advance talks on the matter through diplomatic channels, with Seoul seemingly, from Tokyo's perspective, disregarding deadlines to name a member to an arbitration panel along with Japan and a third country and, hence, has sought outside arbitration on the issue.  In June, however, South Korea proposed that companies from both countries fund compensation for the plaintiffs, but Japan spurned the proposal for further dialogue on the matter in this direction.  As ties have unraveled between both sides, Japan opted to tighten its export controls on three materials used by South Korea to produce semiconductors and displays for phones and TVs, which are mainstays of South Korea's tech-forward economy and threatened to hurt major companies like Samsung.  Following this, Japan upped the ante earlier this month by removing South Korea from its "white list" of countries entitled to simplified export control procedures.  The move intensified the bitter diplomatic row between the two neighbors.  Experts close to the matter have said that the measures could adversely affect both South Korean manufacturers and Japanese exporters as their supply chains are so closely connected.  Seoul has condemned the move, as reported by local media, and called the move "extremely" reckless and "economic retaliation" over the wartime dispute.  South Korean civic groups have been reported as taking to the streets to protest against Japan's moves, with some South Koreans boycotting Japanese products.  Flights connecting some South Korean cities with Japanese cities have also been suspended amid a flurry of cancellations, local media has reported.  Meanwhile, on Monday the South Korean Defense Ministry said it was reviewing whether to maintain a military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan amid an escalating trade row.  The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) was signed in November 2016 by South Korea and Japan despite strong oppositions from the South Korean people.  Many South Koreans saw the deal with Japan as unacceptable because the Japanese leadership had yet to sincerely apologize for its militaristic history. The Korean Peninsula was colonized by Imperial Japan between 1910 and 1945. |
| Global Times with agency reports | News Analysis | Global Times | July 12, 2019 | China | US seeks to mediate between Japan, S. Korea over export row | The United States is trying to ease the tensions between its two Eastern Asian allies -- Japan and South Korea -- over Tokyo's export restriction of crucial high-tech materials to Seoul, the US Department of State said Thursday.  "Japan and South Korea are, of course, not only friends, they're allies ... we're going to do everything we can to pursue ways to strengthen our relationships between and amongst all three countries, both publicly and behind the scenes," US State Department Spokesperson Morgan Ortagus said at a press briefing.  "Both relationships are incredibly important. We all share, face shared regional challenges and priorities in the Indo-Pacific and around the world, and so we will continue to do that..." Ortagus added.  Last week, Japan tightened restrictions on exports of high-tech materials vital to produce semiconductors and display panels for TVs and smartphones to South Korea, citing "significant damage to the relationship of mutual trust," in response to a court ruling of South Korea over the issue of compensation for South Koreans forced to work for Japanese firms during World War II.  Last month, a South Korean appellate court upheld a lower court's order to a Japanese steelmaker to compensate the South Korean victims of forced labor during World War II.  The Seoul High Court ruled that Nippon Steel Corp. pay 100 million won (86,400 US dollars) in compensation each to the family members of the seven South Korean victims for their wartime forced labor without pay, according to local media reports.  The seven plaintiffs began the compensation suit in 2013, and a Seoul district court ruled in favor of them in 2015. For the past six years, all the plaintiffs passed away because of old age.  Japan, for its part, has claimed the rulings are not in line with international law and run counter to the foundation of friendly and cooperative relations between the two neighbors since the 1965 normalization of diplomatic ties.  It also maintains the matter of compensation for wartime labor was "finally and completely" resolved under the pact.  However, Japan maintained that the tighter export controls were not a retaliatory measure against South Korea, saying that Seoul had failed to show a satisfactory solution to the ongoing wartime labor dispute between both parties.  South Korea has condemned the move by Japan to tighten the export controls of materials and demanded Tokyo withdraw the measure, arguing that it runs counter to the spirit of fair trade.  Earlier on Thursday, the US State Department said that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has spoken by phone on Wednesday with his South Korean counterpart, Kang Kyung-wha, on denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and the state of US-Japan-South Korea ties.  During the phone talks, Kang said Japan's trade restriction moves would cause damage to South Korean companies and have a negative impact on world trade as well as US firms, according to South Korean Foreign Ministry.  South Korea will make efforts for the diplomatic resolution via dialogue with Japan, Kang was quoted as saying.  For his part, Pompeo expressed his "understanding" of South Korea's position, and agreed to continue cooperation to strengthen diplomatic communications between South Korea and the United States and trilaterally among South Korea, the United States and Japan, according to the ministry.  Japan's public broadcaster NHK reported that Japan and South Korea would hold talks in Tokyo on Friday at Seoul's request to discuss the export restrictions, the first of this kind since Japan implemented the measure last week. |
| Global Times with AFP | News Analysis | Global Times | July 9, 2019 | China | Japan, South Korea deepen trade dispute | Japan and South Korea ratcheted up tension on Tuesday in a diplomatic dispute that threatens to disrupt global supply of smartphones and chips, with Seoul denouncing Japanese media reports that it transferred a key chemical to North Korea.  The friction, stemming from the issue of South Koreans forced to work for Japanese firms during World War II, worsened last week when Tokyo said it would tighten curbs on exports of three materials crucial for advanced consumer electronics.  The move could hit tech giants, such as Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix, which supply chips to the likes of Apple and Huawei, and underscores Japan's sway over a vital link of the global supply chain.  In some of the sharpest comments yet, South Korean Industry Minister Sung Yun-mo urged Japan to "stop making groundless claims immediately," an apparent response to a Japanese media report last week.  The report quoted an unidentified senior member of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) as saying that some hydrogen fluoride exported from Japan to South Korea had ultimately been shipped to North Korea.  Hydrogen fluoride, a chemical covered by Tokyo's recent export curbs, can be used in chemical weapons.  Japan has said it has seen "inappropriate instances" of South Korea's export controls, but has not elaborated. |
| Chen Yang | Opinion | Global Times | July 7, 2019 | China | Japan’s curbs on semiconductor material exports to S.Korea will likely worsen ties | Since Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) announced on July 1 that it will tighten export controls against South Korea on three materials needed for manufacturing semiconductors for use in smartphones and televisions, the war of words between Japan and South Korea has heated up again.  The South Korean government summoned the Japanese ambassador to lodge a protest and has been preparing to file a lawsuit in keeping with WTO norms. The Japanese government has taken a firm stance and refuses to yield in the standoff. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on July 3 that sanctions against South Korea are "not at all in violation of the WTO."  Since Japan's announcement of tightening the leash on exports to South Korea came shortly after the G20 summit in Osaka, questions were raised about Japan's promise of promoting a "free and fair trade environment."  The three materials of which Japan has decided to curb exports to South Korea are fluorinated polyimide, photoresist and high-purity hydrogen fluoride. These account for 70 to 90 percent of the international market share. Korean companies like Samsung and LG rely heavily on these materials from Japan. The export controls will inevitably have an impact on large Korean companies.  The standoff may increase the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's chances of winning the Japanese House of Councillors election scheduled on July 21. Anti-Korean sentiment is high in Japanese society. The Abe government's decision to strengthen export controls is meant to pander to Japanese public opinion.  Japan's export curbs seem to have hit the Korean economy, but they will eventually affect the Japanese economy itself. Hence, they may not last long. Japan and South Korea are each other's third-largest trading partners, but in recent years there has been a trade deficit between the two.  Relations between Japan and South Korea haven't been smooth recently. The main cause of weaker ties is the 2018 judgment of a South Korean court on the issue of WWII forced labor by Japanese enterprises.  Afterward, issues like the South Korean government dissolving the Japan-backed Reconciliation and Healing Fund and a radar "lock on" incident involving a Japanese patrol plane and a South Korean warship stem from the forced labor issue.  The key to resolving the stalemate lies in how to deal with the court's judgment of the issue. The essence of the judgment is twofold. First is the objective treatment of history. Second, the respect for judicial verdict. If Japan can look at its history objectively, there would be no lawsuit necessitating the Korean court verdict. Both Japan and South Korea apply the separation of powers within their systems. Whether judicial decisions go with public opinion or not, both societies are known to respect court verdicts. However, some of Japan's current moves make people feel it lacks the respect for judicial decisions. Instead, it uses economic sanctions to retaliate against judicial decisions, which is regrettable.  To solve the current dispute between Japan and South Korea is to objectively treat history and honor judicial decisions. This can become the basis for improving Japan-South Korea relations.  Japan and South Korea are both important neighbors of China. Although the current dispute between Japan and South Korea is bilateral, stable Japan-South Korea relations are undoubtedly beneficial to the prosperity and stability of Northeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region.  Looking back at China-Japan-Korea relations in recent years, we can actually find that the THAAD missile defense system issue has led to a sharp deterioration in China-South Korean relations, and then Japan's moves on historical and territorial issues have hurt ties with both neighbors.  The three countries have geographical and socio-cultural similarities but trilateral relations leave a lot to be desired. Nowadays, China-South Korea relations and China-Japan relations have improved. Now that a "black swan" incident has taken place between Japan and South Korea, it makes people feel that cooperation between China, Japan and South Korea is difficult.  The negotiations for a trilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) began in 2013, but have stalled from time to time due to political and diplomatic spats between the three countries. Hopefully Japan and South Korea can improve relations as soon as possible, especially in the context of the current rise of protectionism on a global scale. Improvement of Japan-South Korea relations will help talks on the China-Japan-South Korea FTA, which will account for 20 percent of global GDP and, more importantly, contribute to the positive development of regional and even international economy. |
| People’s Daily with Xinhua | News Analysis | People’s Daily | November 24, 2019 | China | S. Korea decides to conditionally suspend expiry of GSOMIA with Japan | South Korea's presidential Blue House decided on Friday to conditionally suspend the expiry of a military intelligence-sharing accord with Japan, called the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).  Kim You-geun, first deputy director of the National Security Office (NSO) of the Blue House, said in a televised press briefing that the government decided to suspend the "effectiveness of the GSOMIA expiration" notified three months earlier to Japan.  "Our government made the decision under the premise that (South Korea) can end the effectiveness of the GSOMIA at any time, and Japan expressed understanding on it," said Kim.  South Korea decided in August to terminate the GSOMIA, notifying Japan of its decision.  The decision was made in response to Japan's tighter control in July over its export to South Korea of thee materials, vital to make memory chips and display panels that are the mainstay of the South Korean export.  In August, Japan dropped South Korea off its whitelist of trusted trading partners that are given preferential export procedure. In response, Seoul removed Tokyo from its whitelist of trusted export partners.  The NSO deputy director noted that as long as trade talks between Seoul and Tokyo go on, South Korea will suspend its petition with the World Trade Organization (WTO) against Japan's export curbs.  South Korea lodged the complaint with the WTO against Japan on Sept. 11 for the export restrictions. Since then, the two sides held two rounds of talks in Geneva, Switzerland as part of the dispute settlement process under the WTO rules, but those talks ended without progress.  Seoul claimed that Japan's export curbs came in protest of the South Korean top court's rulings that ordered some of Japanese firms to pay reparation to the South Korean victims who were forced into hard labor without pay during the 1910-45 Japanese colonization of the Korean Peninsula.  The Blue House announcement came just about six hours before the scheduled expiry of the GSOMIA at midnight Saturday.  The deputy director's remarks indicated that South Korea would delay the GSOMIA termination on conditions that Seoul and Tokyo make efforts to resolve the bilateral trade and historical issues.  An unnamed South Korean defense ministry official was quoted by Yonhap news agency as saying the suspended effectiveness of the GSOMIA expiry would keep in place the current military intelligence exchanges between South Korea and Japan.  The official noted that the GSOMIA was expected to contribute to security cooperation and stability in the region and on the Korean Peninsula, anticipating that Japan would positively respond to South Korea's proposal in a bid to completely normalize the military intelligence pact in the near future. |
| People’s Daily with Xinhua | News Analysis | People’s Daily | November 14, 2019 | China | S.Korea to reconsider GSOMIA if Japan scraps export curbs: defense ministry | South Korea will reconsider the termination of the military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan, called the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), if Japan scraps export curbs, Seoul's defense ministry said Thursday.  Choi Hyun-soo, defense ministry spokesperson, told a press briefing that there has been no change in South Korea's position that the country will review various measures, including the GSOMIA, if Japan withdraws its unfair, retaliatory measures, and if friendly relations between Seoul and Tokyo are restored.  Asked about U.S. officials recently calling for the renewal of the Seoul-Tokyo military accord, the spokesperson said the calls were seen as an emphasis for the importance of cooperation among the friendly countries.  The comments came ahead of the scheduled termination on Nov. 23 of the GSOMIA, which was signed in November 2016 by South Korea and Japan to share military intelligence on the nuclear and missile programs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).  South Korea decided in August to scrap the military accord in response to Japan's tightened regulations in July over its export to South Korea of three materials, vital to produce memory chips and display panels that are the mainstay of the South Korean export.  Japan's export curbs came in an apparent protest against the South Korean top court's rulings that ordered some of Japanese companies to pay reparation to the South Korean victims who were forced into hard labor without pay during the 1910-45 Japanese colonization of the Korean Peninsula.  In August, Japan dropped South Korea off its whitelist of trusted trading partners that are given preferential export procedure. In response, Seoul removed Tokyo from its whitelist of trusted export partners. |
| People’s Daily with Xinhua | News Analysis | People’s Daily | August 12, 2019 | China | S. Korea removes Japan from whitelist of trusted export partners | South Korea on Monday decided to remove Japan from its whitelist of trusted export partners after Tokyo's such removal earlier this month.  South Korean Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy Sung Yun-mo told a press briefing that Seoul's export control of strategic materials will be run to meet the basic principle of the international export control system.  Sung said it will be hard to closely cooperate with a country, which violates the basic principle of the international export control system or continues to run the system inappropriately.  Under the revised act on the export and import of strategic materials, Japan was dropped off South Korea's whitelist of trusted export partners that are given preferential export procedure for strategic materials.  It came after Japan took South Korea off its whitelist earlier this month. Japan tightened regulations early last month on its export to South Korea of three materials crucial for manufacturing memory chips and displaying panels.  The Seoul's revised act was slated to take effect next month after the collection of public opinion and the legislation office's deliberation on it for about 20 days.  Sung noted that if the Japanese government calls for consultation during the deliberation period, the Seoul government would be ready to accept it at any time and any place.  Japan permitted the shipment of extreme ultraviolet (EUV) photoresist to South Korea last week, the first approval of a chip material export to South Korea since its tighter export control of such materials in early July.  However, South Korea still saw uncertainties despite Japan's approval.  Japan's export curbs came in protest against the South Korean top court's rulings that ordered some of Japanese companies, including the Nippon Steel and the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries among others, to compensate the South Korean victims who were forced into hard labor without pay during the colonization.  The Korean Peninsula was colonized by Imperial Japan from 1910 to 1945. |
| People’s Daily with Xinhua |  | People’s Daily | August 24, 2019 | China | S.Korea puts blame on Japan for termination of military intelligence-sharing pact | South Korea's presidential Blue House put the blame on Japan Friday for the termination of the military intelligence-sharing pact between the two countries amid the ongoing trade spat and the controversy over historical issues.  Kim Hyun-chong, deputy director of the National Security Office (NSO) of the Blue House, told a press briefing that there was "no longer any justification" to maintain the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) as it was an agreement to exchange sensitive military intelligence based on "a high level of trust."  Seoul decided Thursday to end the GSOMIA, which was signed in November 2016 to share military intelligence on nuclear and missile programs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).  The GSOMIA had been automatically renewed each year in August. If either party wants to scrap the pact, the party will be required to notify the other of its intention 90 days ahead. This year's notification deadline falls on Aug. 24.  Kim said Japan took "unwarranted economic retaliation" against South Korea while claiming that the South Korean top court's ruling on the wartime forced labor victims ran counter to the 1965 treaty and violated international law.  Japan tightened regulations last month on its export to South Korea of three materials vital to manufacture memory chips and display panels, which are the mainstay of the South Korean export.  Earlier this month, Japan dropped South Korea off its whitelist of trusted trading partners that are given preferential export procedure. In response, Seoul took Tokyo off its whitelist of trusted export partners.  Japan's export curbs came in an apparent protest against the South Korean top court's ruling that ordered some of Japanese companies, including Nippon Steel and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries among others, to pay compensations to the South Korean wartime forced labor.  Hundreds of thousands of South Koreans were forced by Imperial Japan into hard labor without pay during World War II. The Korean Peninsula was colonized by Japan from 1910 to 1945.  Japan claimed that the forced labor issue was settled through the 1965 treaty that normalized diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan after the colonial era, but Seoul said the treaty did not involve individuals' right to damages compensation.  Kim said the South Korean government adhered to the position that "crimes against humanity" perpetrated by the Japanese government and its military had not been resolved through the 1965 treaty.  The Blue House official noted that the director general of the treaties bureau of Japan's foreign ministry expressed the view in August 1991 that individual rights to claim damages had not been waived by the 1965 agreement.  The Japanese government demanded that the South Korean administration rectify the top court's ruling, but it was simply unimaginable in the country with the independence of the judiciary and the separation of powers guaranteed, Kim noted.  "Thus far, the leadership in Japan has only resorted to its previous claims without seriously engaging in any dialogue and repeated its demands that (South) Korea must move first to rectify the situation," said Kim.  South Korea sent a high-level envoy to Japan twice in July and attempted in August to engage in consultation with a high-level official of the Japanese Prime Minister's Office through the South Korean ambassador to Japan, but to no avail, according to the Blue House official.  Seoul's trade ministry repeatedly requested consultations to its Japanese counterpart for discussion on trade issues, but those were rebuffed by Japan, while South Korean President Moon Jae-in reached out his hand to Japan through his speech on Aug. 15 for the Liberation Day to mark the peninsula's liberation from the Japanese colonial rule, Kim said.  South Korea informed Japan of the contents of the liberation day speech in advance, but Japan did not show any response, he noted. |
| China.ord | News Analysis | China.org.cn | August 8, 2019 | China | S.Korea's export expected to be hit by global trade dispute, Japan's export curbs | You are here: Business > Trade >  S.Korea's export expected to be hit by global trade dispute, Japan's export curbs  0 Comment(s)Print E-mailXinhua, August 8, 2019  Adjust font size:  South Korea's export is expected to be hit for the time being by the global trade dispute and Japan's export curbs, the country's central bank said Thursday.  The Bank of Korea (BOK) said in its monetary policy report, submitted to the National Assembly, that uncertainties from the global trade spat was forecast to continue for the time being.  It noted that it would be necessary to closely monitor the effects of the global trade friction on the South Korean economy and the global trade conditions.  The report said worry spread about the negative impact of Japan's export restrictions on the South Korean economy, adding that the export curbs were predicted to raise uncertainties surrounding the domestic economy.  Japan removed South Korea last week from its whitelist of trusted trading partners that are given preferential export treatment, after tightening regulations in early July on its export to South Korea of three materials vital to produce memory chips and display panels.  South Korea's export, which accounts for about half of the export-driven economy, kept falling for the eighth straight month through July.  In terms of volume, the country's export dipped at a faster pace by skidding 3.3 percent in May and 7.3 percent in June respectively.  The BOK cautioned that the global trade dispute could have a negative impact on the South Korean export as seen during the 2008 global financial crisis.  The bank noted that it was currently uncertain whether Japan would expand its trade spat with South Korea further, saying it would be needed to closely monitor what would happen and its effect on the South Korean economy.  The BOK lowered its benchmark interest rate by 25 basis points last month to 1.50 percent in a bid to tackle possible negative effects from Japan's export restrictions.  Market watchers saw a possibility for the central bank's further rate cut during the fourth quarter. |
| China.org with Xinhua | News Analysis | China.org.cn | August 14, 2019 | China | S.Korea commemorates memorial day for "comfort women" | The South Korean government and people on Wednesday commemorated the memorial day for the Korean women who were forced into sex slavery for Japan's military brothels during World War II.  The government-led ceremony was held for the second time in central Seoul to mark the date when the late victim of wartime sex servitude, Kim Hak-sun, first publicly testified about her painful memory on Aug. 14, 1991.  The testimony became an opportunity to make Japan's wartime atrocity known to the general public, and other victims followed suit, influenced by her courage. The government designated Aug. 14 as a national commemorative day in 2018.  Hundreds of thousands of Asian women were forced to serve as sex slaves for the Japanese army during World War II, including many from the Korean Peninsula. The victims, euphemistically called "comfort women," were kidnapped, coerced or duped into sex enslavement.  "We are able to honor the comfort women victims thanks to the late grandmother Kim Hak-sun making her first testimony about her story as a victim 28 years ago today. On that day, she broke the long silence of all the victims by saying, 'I am living proof'," South Korean President Moon Jae-in said in a message to the memorial day.  "Grandmothers who could lay open their sorrows and anguish thanks to Kim Hak-sun's courageous decision did not simply stay victims," said Moon, referring to the Wednesday protest rally, attended by ordinary people and the elderly victims.  The 1,400th Wednesday rally, first staged in 1992, was held in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul earlier in the day, demanding the Japanese government's sincere apology and legal reparation for Japan's wartime crime against humanity.  "I have learned that we have no future after forgetting history. I came here because I agree with it ... Abe's apology to comfort women grannies will be an opportunity to stop (confrontational) relations (between South Korea and Japan)," Kim Kyung-hee in her 50s told Xinhua during the Wednesday demonstration.  "Japan must apologize first. It's the same about the forced labor and the comfort women issues. Without apology, the issues will not be resolved," said Im Kuk-pyeong in his 50s.  "The Japanese government did not acknowledge and apologize for historical issues. Furthermore, (Japan) tightened control over export to (South) Korea and removed our country from whitelist. It was Japan's preemptive attack. It is natural that (South) Korean people are enraged and fight against it," said Lee Kyung-seo, an undergraduate in his 20s.  Japan removed South Korea earlier this month from its whitelist of trusted trading partners, which are given preferential export procedure, after tightening regulations last month on its export to South Korea of three materials vital to make memory chips and display panels. In response, South Korea also dropped Japan off its whitelist.  Japan's export curbs came in an apparent protest against the South Korean top court's ruling that ordered some of Japanese companies, including Nippon Steel and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries among others, to pay compensation to the South Korean victims who were forced into hard labor without pay during the colonial era.  "Japan is a country which started World War II, but it has yet to apologize and compensate for the wartime history to (South) Korea," said Lee Soo-min, an undergraduate in her 20s, adding that the South Korean people's anger at the Abe government would be eased only after Japan's sincere apology and compensation. |
| People’s Daily with Xinhua | News Analysis | People’s Daily | August 24, 2019 | China | S.Korea puts blame on Japan for termination of military intelligence-sharing pact | South Korea's presidential Blue House put the blame on Japan Friday for the termination of the military intelligence-sharing pact between the two countries amid the ongoing trade spat and the controversy over historical issues.  Kim Hyun-chong, deputy director of the National Security Office (NSO) of the Blue House, told a press briefing that there was "no longer any justification" to maintain the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) as it was an agreement to exchange sensitive military intelligence based on "a high level of trust."  Seoul decided Thursday to end the GSOMIA, which was signed in November 2016 to share military intelligence on nuclear and missile programs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).  The GSOMIA had been automatically renewed each year in August. If either party wants to scrap the pact, the party will be required to notify the other of its intention 90 days ahead. This year's notification deadline falls on Aug. 24.  Kim said Japan took "unwarranted economic retaliation" against South Korea while claiming that the South Korean top court's ruling on the wartime forced labor victims ran counter to the 1965 treaty and violated international law.  Japan tightened regulations last month on its export to South Korea of three materials vital to manufacture memory chips and display panels, which are the mainstay of the South Korean export.  Earlier this month, Japan dropped South Korea off its whitelist of trusted trading partners that are given preferential export procedure. In response, Seoul took Tokyo off its whitelist of trusted export partners.  Japan's export curbs came in an apparent protest against the South Korean top court's ruling that ordered some of Japanese companies, including Nippon Steel and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries among others, to pay compensations to the South Korean wartime forced labor.  Hundreds of thousands of South Koreans were forced by Imperial Japan into hard labor without pay during World War II. The Korean Peninsula was colonized by Japan from 1910 to 1945.  Japan claimed that the forced labor issue was settled through the 1965 treaty that normalized diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan after the colonial era, but Seoul said the treaty did not involve individuals' right to damages compensation.  Kim said the South Korean government adhered to the position that "crimes against humanity" perpetrated by the Japanese government and its military had not been resolved through the 1965 treaty.  The Blue House official noted that the director general of the treaties bureau of Japan's foreign ministry expressed the view in August 1991 that individual rights to claim damages had not been waived by the 1965 agreement.  The Japanese government demanded that the South Korean administration rectify the top court's ruling, but it was simply unimaginable in the country with the independence of the judiciary and the separation of powers guaranteed, Kim noted.  "Thus far, the leadership in Japan has only resorted to its previous claims without seriously engaging in any dialogue and repeated its demands that (South) Korea must move first to rectify the situation," said Kim.  South Korea sent a high-level envoy to Japan twice in July and attempted in August to engage in consultation with a high-level official of the Japanese Prime Minister's Office through the South Korean ambassador to Japan, but to no avail, according to the Blue House official.  Seoul's trade ministry repeatedly requested consultations to its Japanese counterpart for discussion on trade issues, but those were rebuffed by Japan, while South Korean President Moon Jae-in reached out his hand to Japan through his speech on Aug. 15 for the Liberation Day to mark the peninsula's liberation from the Japanese colonial rule, Kim said.  South Korea informed Japan of the contents of the liberation day speech in advance, but Japan did not show any response, he noted. |
| China Daily | Editorial | China Daily | August 8, 2021 | China | Tokyo and Seoul should think big | Japan has reportedly approved shipments of a high-tech material to the Republic of Korea for the second time since imposing export curbs last month ahead of a meeting between Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono and his ROK counterpart Kang Kyung-wha in Beijing on Wednesday.  The move is being viewed as a positive sign ahead of their talks on Wednesday in which their Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, is expected to mediate. There are hopes that with Beijing's mediation, Tokyo and Seoul will be able to ease their current trade frictions.  In fact, the resumption of trilateral foreign ministers' meeting alone, the first such trilateral gathering in three years, shows the three countries still have a strong political will to strengthen cooperation at the trilateral level even while they may have disputes at the bilateral level.  Seoul regards the export curbs as retaliation over its compensation demands for wartime forced labor, while Tokyo has cited security reasons, claiming some ROK companies were providing sensitive materials to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.  Given the complexity of the historical issues and geopolitics in Northeast Asia, it is not surprising that relations among the three countries should have their ups and downs.  However, having been through all these difficulties and made concerted efforts to mend fences, the three countries now have a better understanding of each other's core interests and major concerns.  As close neighbors, they should not lose sight of the larger picture of multilateral cooperation and not allow bilateral disputes to jeopardize the regional integration efforts, which are due to culminate this year with the completion of negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.  Welcoming his two guests separately on Tuesday, Wang urged them to resolve their current divergences and for the three countries to strengthen their pragmatic cooperation to secure a political solution to the Korean Peninsula issue and uphold multilateralism.  Since China, Japan and the ROK have the pressing task of spearheading regional cooperation, it is to be hoped the leading diplomats from the three countries can consolidate mutual trust and send a positive signal of deepening cooperation in their trilateral meeting in Beijing. |
| China Daily | Editorial | China Daily | July 7, 2019 | China | Quick end to Japan-ROK spat would be welcomed | There seems little doubt it will take some time to end the tense stand-off between Japan and the Republic of Korea because of a recent ROK court ruling concerning wartime forced labor. Tokyo appears determined to go ahead and strip the ROK of its preferential trade status, while Seoul on its part shows no sign of compromising, with public antagonism toward Japan leading to a consumer boycott of Japanese goods.  With Japan enacting broader, stricter control over exports of sensitive materials to the ROK, the consequences of the dispute are becoming increasingly apparent.  The ROK's high-end manufacturing, even its overall economy will be the direct victims. The ROK's high-tech sector relies heavily on Japanese supplies — ROK manufacturers reportedly depend on Japan for 90 percent of their fluorinated polyimides, 90 percent of their photoresists and 40 percent of hydrogen fluoride, three materials used to make semiconductors and displays. However, they in turn are indispensable contributors to the global semiconductor supply chain.  The longer the tensions between Tokyo and Seoul last, the more painful things may get for Chinese high-tech manufacturing enterprises, as China was a major recipient of the $127 billion of memory chips the ROK exported in 2018. So was the US. It too is a potential victim of the spat between Tokyo and Seoul.  China though also has a very high stake in both a friendly Japan-ROK relationship, which is essential for the envisioned China-Japan-ROK free trade pact, and the ambitious Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and it hopes that Seoul and Tokyo will find a way to end the dispute as quickly as possible to keep regional economic integration on track.  That the current Japan-ROK dispute was triggered by the recent ROK court ruling concerning wartime forced labor is a fresh reminder of the weight that the period in history still carries in this corner of Asia. Considering the disruptive role divergences over the countries' recent past plays in their present-day relations, this should also be a reminder that Japan and its wartime victims need to find a way to reach a real understanding and peace. Costly as it is, the present impasse would be worthwhile if it can re-ignite serious contemplation on this critical topic.  Meanwhile, it is in every stakeholder's interest that Tokyo and Seoul look at the bigger picture. The hope is they are both aware of the long-term damage it will do to their respective economies and that of the region, and make moves to settle their dispute soon. |
| Liang Yunxiang | Opinion | China Daily | August 17, 2019 | China | Tokyo-Seoul trade spat adds uncertainty to global economy | Japan and the Republic of Korea, two major economies in Northeast Asia, are locked in a trade conflict. Just one month after the G20 Summit in Osaka, which laid emphasis on global economic development and free trade, the Japanese government announced the removal of the ROK from its "white list" that accords trading partners preferential exports treatment.  In a tit-for-tat, Seoul said on Monday it has decided to remove Tokyo from its own "white list", further straining the already faltering Japan-ROK relations.  In some sense, postwar Japan has always held dear free trade, which is critical to a country built upon trade. Japan and the ROK, both key allies of the United States in East Asia, have similar or the same security interests. Thus despite the frequent discords over history between the two neighbors, they have largely maintained close economic ties and cooperation.  Against this background, it seems a bit baffling that Japan made such a move on the heels of the G20 Summit which promoted free trade. Yet the conflict between the two sides didn't crop up in a day; it is the result of accumulated long-term and irreconcilable contradictions. Even though Japan has ostensibly tightened its export management vis-à-vis the ROK in the name of national security, it is history and the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue that have prompted the high-tech power to try to choke the ROK.  Nearly all conflicts between Tokyo and Seoul are related to wartime history, and there has never been a time when they appeared to be in a position to comprehensively resolve them. In particular, the issue of "comfort women"－women and girls who were forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army before and during World War II－has repeatedly pitched the two countries against each other.  The Shinzo Abe administration holds that compensation has already been paid to the "comfort women", which, people in the ROK say, is not correct.  Besides, a court in Seoul recently ordered some Japanese enterprises to pay damages and apologize for using forced labor during the Japanese occupation of Korea.  Speaking of the peninsula nuclear issue, Tokyo and Seoul share common interests and collaborate on the security front under US mediation. They also have an intelligence sharing pact.  But Japan was almost marginalized in the process that eased tensions on the Korean Peninsula, and helped the leaders of the US and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to hold three meetings. Surprisingly, the Japan-ROK conflict spread to the security field, too, as Japan believes the ROK has overlooked Japan's role in the peace process. For instance, Seoul is mulling scrapping the intelligence sharing pact. Moreover, Washington's efforts to invite Japan Self-Defense Forces to join the UN troops deployed in the ROK have met with strong opposition from Seoul.  These issues have infuriated both the Japanese government and public, prompting the Abe administration to punish the ROK, especially because many ROK companies depend heavily on Japanese high-tech products. Japan's message is that the ROK should not allow strong anti-Japanese sentiments to continue and ignore Japan's importance to the peninsula nuclear issue while benefiting from the Japanese economy.  Yet Tokyo's strategy may not bring Seoul to its knees. Instead, it could intensify anti-Japanese sentiments in the ROK. The deteriorating bilateral relations could impair both economies, although Japan, being stronger and occupying a higher position in the industrial chain, may suffer less than the ROK.  And the reduced economic and security cooperation between Japan and the ROK could have a negative impact on the overall economic development of East Asia, even the whole world. Which will bode ill for the development of trade in the region and add more uncertainty to the already dim global economic prospects in the face of China-US trade spat.  However, a military confrontation between Tokyo and Seoul is unlikely, because their security cooperation has weakened due to mutual aversion, not a clash of real interests. And the fact that any security crisis on the Korean Peninsula or in East Asia will prompt both Tokyo and Seoul to act to safeguard their common interests means the two sides are highly unlikely to engage in a military confrontation. |
| Chen Xinyan | Opinion | China Daily | August 2, 2019 | China | Tokyo-Seoul trade dispute more dangerous than it seems | The meeting between foreign ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea, Taro Kono and Kang Kyung-wha, on Thursday on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum failed to ease the Tokyo-Seoul trade conflict, so all eyes are on a trilateral meeting between Kono, Kang and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday.  As the trade friction between Tokyo and Seoul simmers with Japan restricting the export of three materials essential for making semiconductors and liquid-crystal display panels to the ROK, and Tokyo is expected to remove Seoul from its preferential trade list under "national security" grounds, multiple ROK airlines are reportedly planning to suspend some flights between the two countries.  It remains to be seen whether the intensifying trade conflict that threatens to harm the entire semiconductor industrial chain and involves complicated political and economic factors could be resolved under the World Trade Organization's framework even though the ROK has sought to solicit support at the world trade body.  Compared with the export restrictions, the removal from Japan's "white list" which facilitates bilateral trade would deal a stronger blow to the ROK. Besides, judging by Tokyo's stance and statements, it is quite possible that it would use more tools including increasing the trade restrictions to intensify sanctions against Seoul.  While Seoul is at a disadvantage as the diplomatic negotiations and ROK enterprises' search for replacement of materials have not yet yielded the expected results, the ROK public's campaign to boycott Japanese goods would not be enough to prompt the Shinzo Abe administration to change its stance.  If the conflict worsens, the ROK semiconductor industry would be the first to bear the brunt, with many companies being forced to reduce production, even shut down. Oxford Economics projects a 0.5 percent decline in the ROK's GDP growth in 2019-20 while Goldman Sachs forecasts a decline of $10 billion in the ROK's current account this year if the semiconductor production falls by 10 percent.  Also, some ROK observers have begun to doubt whether the Moon Jae-in government has paid ample attention to the signs of Japan's changing export management method, leading to the deterioration of the political environment in the country. Since the removal of Seoul from Tokyo's "white list" would signify that problems do exist in the ROK's security management, it could harm the ROK's national image worldwide.  Yet the Japan-ROK trade conflict will not leave Japan unscathed. The increasing restrictions on exports to the ROK would also shrink Japan's exports.  Worse, Japanese enterprises, mostly small and medium-sized companies, which supply semiconductor materials will suffer big losses if ROK companies are forced to seek replacements. And without the ROK as a strong partner in the semiconductor industry, Japan will gradually lose its advantages as a high-tech products' supplier because many cutting-edge technologies are developed through close cooperation between suppliers and producers.  The Japan-ROK trade row will have a huge negative impact on East Asian economy, even the global economy, as the measures adopted by the Abe administration could damage the information technology industry's supply chain in the whole of Asia. And apart from further undermining bilateral ties, the trade row will also delay the China-Japan-ROK free trade zone negotiations.  Thanks to the changes in the political and economic landscape, geopolitical and diplomatic conflicts are becoming increasingly evident in economic frictions, especially those in advanced industries.  Although both Japan and the ROK account for a relatively small percentage of each other's trade volume, high-tech-related trade rows will inflict huge damage on regional and global trade which will be hard to mend. Which makes dispassionate dialogue to resolve the conflicts and create a friendly, cooperative atmosphere imperative.  Besides, using export restrictions as a foreign policy strategy could become the new norm in economic conflicts in East Asia, especially because Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry established a new department to centralize the management and control of high-tech trade in April.  As such, Chinese enterprises should learn from the Japan-ROK trade conflict and expedite the development of the high-end electronics industry. |
| Liu Jianna | Opinion | China Daily | July 20, 2019 | China | Japan-ROK row could hurt regional economy | Tokyo vents anger against ROK moves  Japan has restricted the exports of the three products to the ROK mainly to vent its anger against the ROK Supreme Court's ruling last year that Japanese companies must compensate Koreans forced to work in mines and factories and as "comfort women" before and during World War II, ROK President Moon Jae-in's hard-line policy toward Tokyo, and the two countries' conflicting policies on the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue.  Besides, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe wants to portray himself as a strong leader who brooks no nonsense so his ruling Liberal Democratic Party, along with its coalition partner Komeito, can win two-thirds of the seats in the upper house election on Sunday. To some extent, Japan also intends to show the United States that it will respond aggressively to any moves it considers harmful to the country, so that the US stops coercing Japan to compromise its economic interests.  Yet in so doing Tokyo has adopted the US' unilateral strategy of using economic sanctions to resolve non-economic issues. This will harm the ROK as Japan expects, but it will also deal a blow to the regional economy and stability by hindering the progress of the China-Japan-ROK free trade agreement, especially because Seoul is mulling taking countermeasures against Tokyo, which could worsen the situation, and the US is not expected to sincerely mediate between its two allies. |
| Yoo Seungki | Commentary | China.org.cn | August 14, 2019 | China | S.Korean World War II forced labor victim cries out for Japan's apology, reparation | A South Korean granny wept, and sometimes wailed, when she recalled her unforgettable, awful memory when she was a teenager in the 1940s. The memory was full of terror, hunger and anxiety that turned currently into irresistible fury over the Japanese government.  Kim Jeong-ju shared her memory at a press conference with foreign correspondents in Seoul Wednesday, a day before the 74th anniversary of the Liberation Day to mark the liberation of the Korean Peninsula from the 1910-1945 Japanese colonization.  The 88-year-old was forced into hard labor by Imperial Japan when she was a primary school student. She was told by a Japanese school teacher that if she went to Japan, she could meet her elder sister and attend secondary school with the sister.  It did not take long before realizing that she was duped by the teacher. As soon as she arrived at a munition factory of Nachi-Fujikoshi Corp., Kim received a military uniform and slept the first night at a dormitory fenced with barbed wires.  Kim woke up 5:00 a.m. every morning, and went to the factory singing a military song after having a meager breakfast. A slice of bread was given for lunch. She had to stand on two columns of apple boxes to work as she was too short to reach out to machinery.  With extreme hunger, she had to pluck up grass to eat. Suffering from heavy labor and chronic starvation, she saw her hair fall off. The teenager never slept taking off shoes for fear of air strike until she came back to her hometown about three months after the peninsula's liberation.  The awful memory did not belong to Kim alone. Her elder sister was also duped and forced into hard labor without pay at a munition factory of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries during the Pacific War.  "(The Japanese government) says we suffered nothing. I feel very upset. If Japanese people suffered the same, (the Japanese government) shouldn't have said so... I cried so much. I didn't say even to my family when I went for trials in court," said Kim.  The South Korean top court ruled that Japanese companies forcibly conscripting South Korean people during World War II, including Nippon Steel and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries among others, should compensate the victims.  In apparant protest against the South Korean top court's ruling and the similar orders by lower courts, the Japanese government last month tightened regulations on its export to South Korea of three materials vital to produce memory chips and display panels, which are the mainstay of the South Korean export.  Earlier this month, Japan removed South Korea from its whitelist of trusted export partners that are given preferential export procedure. In response, Seoul also dropped Tokyo off its whitelist.  "I lived a life full of sorrow... Japan destroyed my whole life... (Japan) must acknowledge, apologize and compensate... I believe people in Japan, who knows the truth, will help us," said Kim.  Kim expressed her thanks to Japanese people who supported her fight for apology and reparation from the Japanese government. One of them was Hideki Yano, Secretary General of the National Network for Forced Labor, a Japanese civic group taking side with the South Korean forced labor victims.  "(Former Prime Minister of Japan) Murayama acknowledged and apologized for Japan's past war of aggression and its colonization in 1995. If so, (the apology and acknowledgement) should be put in practice with clear government policies. I'm just one of the Japanese people who think so," said Yano.  Yano, who said he was being called by some Japanese netizens as an anti-Japan Japanese, said the historical issues, which should be resolved, should be resolved clearly, calling for the governments of South Korea and Japan to start dialogue to comprehensively settle the issue by involving all of the South Korean victims.  Japan has claimed that the 1965 treaty, which normalized the diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan after the colonial era, settled all colonial-era issues, but the South Korean top court ruled that it did not involve the individuals' right to compensation.  In August 1995, then Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama apologized to Asian neighbors, which had suffered from Japan's colonization, war of aggression and brutalities under its militaristic past.  The current Japanese government under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has sought to deny the imperialist past, so the South Korean victims regarded the denial as the retraction of the apology.  "I really wish to hear even a word of apology (from the Japanese government) and reparation (from the Japanese company)... Before that, I cannot close my eyes even after death," said the 88-year-old Kim.  South Korean historians say as many as 2 million Korean people, including 200,000 victims registered with the South Korean government, were forced into hard labor by Japan during the colonial rule. The number rises higher including forced labor victims from Asian countries |
| Zhou Yongsheng | Commentary | China Daily | November 22, 2019 | China | US-Japan-ROK security alliance losing luster | The security alliance among the United States, Japan and the Republic of Korea suffered a huge blow in August when Seoul decided to withdraw from the General Security of Military Information Agreement following a trade dispute with Tokyo. Officially, the GSOMIA, an intelligence sharing pact, will remain in force until Saturday.  The Japan-ROK trade conflict has its roots in the historical disputes between the two countries, especially the dispute over "comfort women"－women and girls forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army before and during World War II. Japan claims that compensation has already been paid to the "comfort women". But people in the ROK say that is not true. What compounded matters was a Seoul court ruling in July that ordered some Japanese enterprises to pay damages and apologize for using forced labor during the Japanese occupation of Korea.  Complicating the issue further is the US' insistence that Japan and the ROK pay more to the US for the deployment of US forces in the two countries to enhance their security. Washington says Seoul should pay $5 billion for hosting the US troops, which is five times of what the ROK paid this year. Seoul has refused to pay the hiked amount and, instead, asked the US to pay compensation for the damage US troops have caused to the local environment.  Moreover, in August the Japanese government removed the ROK from its "white list", which accords trading partners preferential export treatment, and in a tit-for-tat, the ROK struck off Japan from its "white list" in September, which further strained Japan-ROK relations.  But since Seoul's export regulations had little impact on Tokyo's foreign trade while ROK enterprises suffered because of Japanese export restrictions, especially on materials needed to make semiconductors and display panels, the ROK government decided to not extend the GSOMIA unless Japan revoked the export curbs.  In the dispute between its two most important US allies in Asia, Washington has adopted a stance of non-interference.  These developments suggest Washington's security strategy in Asia will suffer a serious setback, especially because of the scrapping of the intelligence-sharing pact. The two previous US presidents made great efforts to ensure Seoul and Tokyo shared military intelligence in order to develop the trilateral security alliance into a NATO-like mechanism in Northeast Asia, and thus strengthen the US' presence in the region.  To prevent Japan-ROK ties from deteriorating further, senior US defense officials have held talks with the defense ministries of Japan and the ROK. But unlike Japan, the ROK is not ready to compromise its "interests" under pressure.  Though the ROK is at a disadvantage in the trilateral alliance, it can still boost its economy and security. Since the White House attaches great importance to the denuclearization talks with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in which the ROK plays an irreplaceable role, Japan has exercised restraint and expressed its willingness to hold talks with the ROK and partly ease the export restrictions against the ROK. In the meantime, the ROK has taken measures to increase input into independent research and development to overcome the impact of Japan's export restrictions and reduce its dependence on Japanese products.  While the US still regards itself as a significant guarantor of the ROK's security, the latter believes it has not received fair treatment for its contribution to the US' military strategy in East Asia. Yet Washington doesn't seem to have taken Seoul's reaction seriously, as it still insists that the ROK pay more for the deployment of US troops in the country. Given the importance of the security alliance to the ROK, Seoul may make some compromises, but the cracks in US-ROK security ties have become increasingly evident.  As for Japan, the presence of US troops in the country has long been a controversial issue, and Washington asking Tokyo to pay more for their deployment has raised questions on the US-Japan security alliance too.  By putting more pressure on Tokyo and Seoul to further strengthen the trilateral security alliance to serve US interests, Washington has cast a shadow over its relations with its two allies. It might also have forced the ROK to further adjust its diplomatic strategy, especially because Seoul seems to believe Washington is more inclined toward Japan in the Japan-ROK dispute. Which means the US-Japan-ROK security alliance may be in for more trouble. |
| KAVI CHONGKITTAVORN | Opinion | Bangkok Post | August 20, 2019 | Thailand | Time for Japan and S Korea to end spat | Japan and South Korea must stop their tit-for-tat measures before their worsening relations reach the point of no return. The ongoing spat between Asian's two economic giants has sent chills down the spines of regional leaders, who are very concerned that it could spiral out of control and break down the longstanding spirit of East Asian community-building. If that happens, the post-war stability and prosperity of the past seven decades would quickly disappear. Difficult as it is, now is the time to mend fences.  In his speech last week to commemorate Korea's independence from Japan's 1910-45 rule, President Moon Jae-in softened his anti-Japanese rhetoric, repeating that his country would be happy to join hands with Tokyo if it opts for dialogue and cooperation. His much-needed remarks opened a new but narrow window for the two nemeses to meet and have a dialogue so that a serious solution can be worked out. But some groundworks are needed.  First, both Foreign Minister Taro Kono and his South Korean counterpart, Kang Kyung-wha, must establish a comfort level between them; otherwise it would be difficult for the two sides to have a meaningful dialogue. When they met in Bangkok on Aug 2 during the Asean annual meeting, it was a bad time as Japan had announced Seoul's removal from the whitelist of countries with preferential trade treatment. Therefore, it was essentially a photo opportunity. At the time, Japan and South Korea wanted to show to the international community, in particular Asean, that they were still on talking terms. It was not a pleasant sight as Mr Kono's and Ms Hwa's facial expressions were not friendly at all.  From the Asean perspective, it was the first time that there has been such a row between Asean's key dialogue partners within the Asean plus three (APT) conference. Throughout the past decades, the APT has served as a neutral and fertile ground for China, Japan and South Korea to discuss their mutual concerns and reconcile their differences. Through Asean, the region's three economic powers have been able to join hands and work together on important areas of cooperation such as energy security, natural gas development, human resource development and others. Lest we forget, Asean also helped launched the so-called Tripartite Cooperation Secretariat in 2009.  Economic outlook  The more the merrier in Indo-Pacific  Dream state  Second, before the scheduled tripartite meeting in Beijing between the foreign ministers of China, Japan and South Korea, this week, there must be some positive signals coming from Tokyo and Seoul to lay the groundwork for their dialogue. Last week, Japan approved the first shipment of high-tech material to South Korea since the imposition of export curbs last month. Tokyo should continue to demonstrate such friendly gestures without expanding the current list.  In a similar vein, Seoul also sends a signal that its recent notification to take out Japan from the list of trust trading partner would be a subject of further negotiation. Most importantly is the status of General Security of Military Information Agreement, or GSOMIA, which will expire soon. Under all circumstances, it must continue albeit Seoul's strong indications that it will be annulled. The agreement, which highlighted the mutual confidence of security cooperation between the two top US allies must be kept intact. Since November 2016, Japan and South Korea have benefited from sharing information about North Korea's missile and nuclear threat. The deadline for renewal is Aug 24; therefore Seoul needs to act fast.  Third, all stakeholders in Japan and South Korea must get together to discuss ways and means to reconcile the past and work out the future. Media in both countries have a crucial role to play. Judging from past reports, media outlets in both countries have supported their governments' actions and sometimes applaud retaliatory measures. However, on Thursday, the Asahi Shimbun and Tokyo Shimbun came out with a strong editorial urging Japan to own up to its wartime history.  Indeed, Japan and South Korean civil society leaders, including academics, are powerful influencers when historical lessons and ties are being discussed. As they can take a proactive role in shaping the narratives of the past and ongoing dialogues, especially when they were discussing about the overall national historical experience and traumas. They need to create a conducive environment for the policymakers to revisit their decisions.  Finally, Japan and South Korea must realise that if the dispute continues, it will be a lose-lose proposition for both, especially when it comes to their common objective of reining in and denuclearising North Korea. At this juncture, Japan-South Korea solidarity is utmost imperative and required to strengthen the international sanctions against Pyongyang. As US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un try to prepare for their fourth meeting, the continued conflict would further weaken Japan's and South Korea's bargaining power on issues related peace and security in the Korean Peninsula.  In a related development, one caveat is in order. The deterioration of Japan-South Korea relations including security cooperation would eventually lead to further destabilisation of the whole Indo-Pacific region. In the long haul, their adversarial stance would encourage the hawkish elements in both countries to increase defence spending and engage in arms race. Furthermore, failure to induce North Korea's to denuclearise will provide incentives for Japan and South Korea to seek nuclear capacity of their own as a way to protect themselves.  When President Moon Jae-in visits Thailand in early September, the Asean chair must impress on him that a trusting and firm relationship with Japan is a prerequisite for further stability, economic development and integration in East Asia.  Any breakdown of Japan-South Korea ties, especially trade links, would be disastrous for the region. It would have an economic domino effect that could disrupt the nearly concluded negotiation of the world's largest free-trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), as well as other numerous APT and Asean-led cooperative schemes.  That would be the end of the Asian Century as we know it. |
| China.org, with Xinhua | News Analysis | China.org.cn | August 23, 2019 | China | Japan voices concern about mutual trust, security environment after S. Korea scraps intelligence pact | Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Friday urged South Korea to keep its promises after Seoul decided to terminate a key intelligence-sharing pact between the two countries.  "Regrettably, South Korea is continuing to hurt relations of trust," Abe told reporters, adding that Seoul had also unilaterally carried out actions that run contrary to an accord inked between the two countries in 1965 aimed at settling an ongoing wartime labor dispute.  Separately, Japan's Defense Minister Takeshi Iwaya said on Friday that the decision by South Korea was "disappointing" and that he believed that the present security environment had been "completely misread" by South Korea.  Iwaya added that Japan will continue to ask South Korea to "reconsider" its decision not to extend the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) beyond its expiration in November.  His remarks came after Seoul said a day earlier that the intelligence-sharing pact will not be extended owing to Tokyo's tightening of export controls on materials vital to the South Korean technology industry.  It has created a "grave change" in conditions for bilateral security cooperation, Seoul said, as reported by local media.  Japan's Foreign Ministry confirmed Friday that South Korea has officially notified Tokyo that it will terminate the pact between both countries.  The GSOMIA pact between both sides, signed in 2016, has enabled the two neighbors to share military information and has helped both sides to counter potential regional threats.  The severity of Seoul's decision to scrap the pact, from Tokyo's perspective, was reflected in Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono summoning South Korean Ambassador Nam Gwan Pyo to lodge an official protest on Thursday evening.  Abe, in addition, for his part, also told reporters Friday that recent moves by South Korea, including the rulings by South Korean top courts last year ordering Japanese firms to pay compensation to forced laborers during Japan's colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula, had damaged trust between the two countries.  Despite bilateral relations sinking to their lowest level in recent years amid wartime, trade and now military information sharing issues, Abe said Japan had been trying to deal with the situation to maintain relations with South Korea at a functional level "so as not to produce a negative impact on cooperation between Japan, the United States and South Korea in light of the current security situation in Northeast Asia."  "Japan will secure peace and stability in the region by firmly working together with the United States," Abe said, adding that Japan will continue its requests for South Korea to work to restore bilateral trust.  Seoul's decision not to extend the military information sharing pact is the latest move in a tit-for-tat dispute between Tokyo and Seoul that is steadily diminishing ties between both sides.  Japan tightening export controls on key materials imported by South Korea for its semiconductor and display industry following a perceived lack of progress on the wartime labor dispute, and then removing Seoul from a preferential trade list, resulted in Seoul replying with similar trade restrictions and tightening of its on export controls regarding Japan.  The GSOMIA pact, the latest accord to be severed between Tokyo and Seoul, has automatically been renewed annually between both countries since its creation, with the stipulation being if one side is to pull out they are to inform the other in writing, as was the case Friday.  This Saturday would have been the deadline for either side to give written notice of wishing to pull out of the key military intelligence-sharing pact. |
| ERICH PARPART | Opinion | Bangkok Post | August 12, 2019 | Thailand | Time for a Seoul-Tokyo peace pact | I love kimchi and I love ramen. I love the bushido way of life and Japanese humility, and I love South Koreans' resilience and devotion to education that helped them lift their country from poverty after World War II to become an Asian economic powerhouse. And in my opinion, both South Koreans and Japanese are among the nicest people in the world.  So watching the current trade conflict between Japan and Korea is like seeing your best friends fighting. You don't want anyone to win or lose, you just want them to shake hands and make up.  That's why I welcomed the news last Thursday that Japan had approved exports to South Korea of a key material used in making computer chips. Maybe the two sides are ready to talk, I thought. Besides, I am looking to replace my five-year-old phone and I don't want to see the prices driven up by supply-chain problems.  As a gaijin (outsider in Japanese) or waegukin (foreigner in Korean), I will never understand the deeply rooted hatred that some Japanese and Koreans might have for one another. But wounds can heal if both sides decide to patch things up together with mutual respect in mind.  When Hiroshige Seko, Japan's minister of economy, trade and industry, said Tokyo had approved some applications for materials required by South Korean companies including Samsung Electronics, it was the first step in improving bilateral relations. "Maybe Japanese businesses have talked some sense into their politicians," said one of my colleagues and I agree.  Resorting to trade restrictions and bullying, as China and the US have been doing, is so out of character for Japan, one of the few free trade champions left in this increasingly protectionist world. The last thing Asia needs right now, after all the turmoil Washington and Beijing have caused, is for two of its top economies to stop trading with each other. Nothing good can come from that.  At the same time, North Korea is using this opportunity to flex its muscles against the South and the US as Seoul is preoccupied with this newfound trade tension. This tells me that the North is never going to give up its nuclear capability and is simply using Donald Trump to gain more international attention. President Trump, meanwhile, keeps dangling promises of denuclearisation as a way to divert attention from the growing problems he has back home.  But resolving trade tension between South Korea and Japan will be complicated. Much will depend on whether Seoul pursues further efforts to obtain compensation for forced labour and sex slavery during the Japanese occupation from 1910-45. The South Korean Supreme Court has already made one compensation order -- angrily disputed by Japan -- and hundreds more could follow.  What Japanese occupiers did during World War II was atrocious and will remain embedded forever in the national consciousness of every country that was affected, including Thailand. But South Korea has its own dark past. It has never recognised the plight of the Lai Dai Han -- the tens of thousands of children who were the product of rapes committed by South Korean soldiers who fought in Vietnam.  If you keep picking at a wound, the healing process will just take longer. Erecting comfort woman statues in front of Japanese embassies and consulates in Korea and other countries was certainly a step in the wrong direction on the road to reconciliation. But bullying South Korea with trade curbs is equally unhelpful.  Keep in mind that Japan and South Korea formally settled the issue of forced labour and sex slavery with a treaty in 1965, when Japan paid a huge sum of money to help develop the South's economy. And in 1998, then-president Kim Dae-jung accepted the apology of his Japanese counterpart, the late Keizo Obuchi, in the hope that their successors could move forward together.  "Japan and South Korea are neighbours, and we have many difficult issues because of that," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said last October at an event in Tokyo to commemorate the 1998 joint declaration. "Political leaders need to make big decisions in order to overcome these issues."  Maybe Mr Abe might want to listen to his own words again, and maybe it is time for president Moon Jae-in to listen to South Korean businesses as well. Their friends all across Asia will thank them for rising to the occasion in the name of peace. |
| KIM TONG-HYUNG | News Analysis | Taiwan news | January 3, 2021 | Taiwan | South Korea, Japan must look to future to improve ties | South Korea (AP) — South Korean President Moon Jae-in said Monday that his government is eager for talks with Japan to improve relations following years of bitter feuding over historical grievances, adding that those unresolved issues should not stand in the way of developing “future-oriented” ties.  “There have been times where issues of the past weren’t separated from those of the future and became intermingled with each other. This has impeded forward-looking development,” Moon said in a nationally televised speech commemorating the anniversary of a 1919 Korean uprising against Japanese colonial rule.  “The Korean government is always ready to sit down and have talks with the Japanese government,” he said.  South Korea and Japan have been struggling to repair relations that sank to their lowest point in decades in 2019 following South Korean court rulings that ordered Japanese companies to pay reparations to Koreans who were forced to work in their factories during World War II. Those rulings led to further tensions over trade when Japan put export controls on chemicals vital to South Korea’s semiconductor industry.  Another sticking point in relations is the issue of Korean women who were sexually enslaved by Japan’s wartime military, with survivors denouncing the Japanese government for refusing to accept legal responsibility for their slavery.  Japan has insisted that all wartime compensation issues were settled under a 1965 treaty normalizing relations with South Korea and it has reacted angrily to South Korean court rulings saying otherwise. There is a risk for further deterioration of the relationship if South Korean courts eventually order the liquidation of local assets of Japanese companies that have refused to compensate forced laborers.  While Moon said Seoul will continue to support Korean victims of Japanese wartime atrocities, he stressed that the countries “must not let the past hold us back.”  Moon said improved relations would also benefit the three-way cooperation between South Korea, Japan and the United States, which Washington sees as crucial to dealing with regional issues such as North Korea’s nuclear arsenal and China’s increasing economic and military might.  Moon expressed hope that this year’s Olympics in Tokyo could provide a stage to renew international efforts to resolve the nuclear standoff with North Korea.  Seoul has placed much of the blame for bad relations with Tokyo on Japan’s hawkish former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and has hoped that his resignation for health reasons last September could be a diplomatic turning point.  Another notable change came in Washington, where President Joe Biden has signaled a shift from Donald Trump's “America first” approach and his foreign policy team includes major proponents of dealing with North Korea and China through cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo.  Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul, said Moon may have felt that American pressure to reconcile with Japan was coming and he wanted to appear as the “reasonable” ally by offering the first olive branch.  The key now will be whether Japanese Prime Minster Suga Yoshihide responds to Moon's comments with a positive gesture to start a "virtuous cycle,” said Easley. |
| Taiwan news editorial with Deutshe Welle | News Analysis | Taiwan news | February 8, 2021 | Taiwan | Survivor of forced labor in Japan seeks true apology | South Korean courts have judged that Japanese companies must pay compensation to people who were used as forced laborers during World War II.  Japanese leaders insist that the issues have already been dealt with under previous agreements and argue that Japan has expressed adequate remorse.  But those agreements did not involve 92-year-old Yang Geum-deok, who told DW that she is still waiting for a sincere apology from Japan.  In 1944, the 15-year-old Yang was lured into moving to Japan with the promise of a better education. Instead, she worked — unpaid — in a munitions factory as World War II drew to a close.  From promise to nightmare  Yang had been a class leader at her school, excelling in athletics and academics. Her accomplishments did not go unnoticed by Japanese administrators, who offered her a chance for the future her humble family couldn't afford.  "The Japanese principal said I could go to junior high school if I went to Japan. My father said he was lying and would not allow it, but I snuck away. Once in Japan, I never even saw the school door, but was taken straight to Mitsubishi Industries, where I was worked nearly to death. I had wanted to be a teacher."  Between 1937 and 1945, Japan employed millions of forced laborers throughout their occupied territories in Asia, and in mainland Japan as well. Yang worked at the Mitsubishi plant in Nagoya, from June 1944 to October 1945. Estimates suggest more than 500,000 South Koreans were forced laborers in Japan during the war.  In her recent autobiography, Yang describes her experience.  "A bell woke us at 6 a.m. and we went to the camp to work, 8 or 10 hours. They made me paint airplanes. They didn't have a ladder for us, so I used wide planks, climbed up and painted. The pail of paint was too heavy for me, and so to this day one shoulder still hurts."  According to Yale historian R.J. Rummel, 60,000 Koreans died while serving as forced laborers in Japan. Malnutrition was a leading cause.  "We had lunch at noon. They gave us each a ball of rice, but after 5 bites, it was gone, and then we went back to work. I was always hungry," Yang said, adding that some of her school friends died in Nagoya.  As a forced laborer, Yang also experienced the US firebombing of Japanese cities.  "Sometimes we couldn't sleep because of the bombing. We had to spend all night in the air raid shelter, and even when we came out, we could still hear the sounds of bombs over and over. And then, in the morning, we had to go back to work."  Return to Korea  After the war ended, Yang returned to South Korea. She was initially the subject of discrimination, accused of being a sex slave and earning money by selling her body to Japanese soldiers. Today Korea's so-called comfort women are by themselves successfully pursuing compensation from Japan in South Korean courts.  Eventually Yang forged a life in South Korea. She married, had 3 children, divorced, and ran her own business selling dried fish at the village market. But her experience in Japan always gnawed at her.  Japan's apologies and compensation  In 1965, South Korea's military dictatorship accepted an apology and compensation from Japan for its wartime atrocities. The government spent that money on national infrastructure and economic development. It established Pohang Steel and other South Korean industrial giants that enabled the country's remarkable rise as an Asian economic tiger.  But the real victims of Japan's colonial and war crimes received no direct compensation.  Yang and others have refused to let go, campaigning for a sincere apology and direct restitution. South Korea's Supreme Court in 2018 ordered Mitsubishi to pay her and four others nearly $90,000 (€74,800) each. But so far, no money has changed hands, and now Mitsubishi assets in South Korea have been targeted.  History weighs on South Korea-Japan relations  Japan has long said it has dealt with these issues adequately in the past. The first case was the 1965 normalization treaty, which included $500 million, and stated that all claims were settled "completely and finally." At various times, Japanese political leaders have apologized.  But the political use of patriotism continues to weigh on South Korea-Japan relations.  In the early 2000s, Japan's then prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, repeatedly visited the Yasukuni war shrine, where 14 class A war criminals are buried, drawing fury in South Korea.  And later, Shinzo Abe, when he was prime minister between 2012 and 2020, questioned the validity of a previous apology, suggesting that the comfort women were not coerced, inflaming anti-Japan sentiment in South Korea.  For the Japanese leadership, South Korea's dredging up of the past causes considerable consternation.  "All the demands from the South Korean side were irreversibly solved, period," Tomohiko Taniguchi, Keio University Graduate School economics and history professor, told DW.  "You cannot open the door once finally shut. But South Korea continues to try to open the door once every 5, 10, 15 years. It's almost a national pastime," said the former foreign policy speechwriter for Prime Minister Abe.  Japan faces more lawsuits, Yang waits  Since the 2018 judgment in Yang's case, dozens more South Korean forced labor victims and their families have launched lawsuits against Japanese companies. For them, the agreements made between states and their political leaders don't seem to mean much.  For Yang Geum-deok, who has already won her suit, the financial compensation she still awaits is not really the point.  "Money isn't important anymore. It's the insult, the humiliation. They didn't see Koreans as human beings. Even though they said they would pay us back our wages, I don't want it. I am too old now. I only want to hear their apology before I die." |
| Taiwan news editorial with AP | News Analysis | Taiwan news | July 29, 2020 | Taiwan | Trade dispute panel set up for South Korea-Japan case | World Trade Organization members have established a dispute panel to consider and rule on a complaint by South Korea against Japanese export restrictions on key components for items like South Korean semiconductors and mobile phone and television displays.  In what was largely a formality under WTO rules, its Dispute Settlement Body assented to the request from South Korea despite Japanese claims that the export restrictions are needed for national security.  The move Wednesday sets off what is likely to be months of preparations and talks before a decision is reached.  Even then, Japan could play the clock and appeal any decision against it to the WTO’s top arbitrators - the Appellate Body - which is no longer taking new cases because the U.S. has blocked appointments to it. |
| KIM TONG-HYUNG | Commentary | Taiwan news | July 28, 2021 | Taiwan | New statues stoke sensitivity between South Korea, Japan | A pair of new statues in South Korea of a man kneeling in front of a girl symbolizing victims of sexual slavery by Japan’s wartime military is the latest subject of diplomatic sensitivity between the countries, with Tokyo’s government spokesperson questioning whether the male figure represents the Japanese prime minister.  Kim Chang-ryeol, owner of a botanic garden in the mountain town of Pyeongchang, told The Associated Press on Tuesday that he canceled an unveiling ceremony for the bronze statues that was to take place on Aug. 10 because of what he described as unwanted controversy.  Kim said that the statues were his idea, but that he didn’t specifically intend the male figure to be Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Since his inauguration in 2012, Abe has stoked anger among South Koreans over his nationalistic stance on Japan’s wartime past and his demands that South Korea remove similar statues symbolizing sexual slavery victims in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul and other sites.  But the statues at Kim’s garden drew criticism among some South Koreans too, who described them as tacky or excessively provocative on social media. Kim defended the statues, saying they reflect his wish for the countries to resolve their conflicts over history. He didn’t expect the statues to trigger political debates.  “The man could be Abe and also couldn’t be Abe,” said Kim, who will continue to keep the statue at his garden. “The man represents anyone in a position of responsibility who could sincerely apologize to the victims of sexual slavery, now or in the future. It could even be the girl’s father. ... That’s why I named the statues ‘Eternal Atonement.’’’  Relations between South Korea and Japan sank to their lowest point in decades last year as they allowed their decades-long dispute over wartime history to spill over on issues regarding trade and military cooperation.  During a briefing in Tokyo, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said it would be unacceptable under "international courtesy” if the statues' male figure did indeed represent Abe.  “I think such a thing is unforgivable under international courtesy," Suga said.  Disputes over sex slaves are a legacy of Japan’s 1910-45 colonial occupation of the Korean Peninsula. Historians say tens of thousands of women from around Asia, many of them Korean, were sent to front-line military brothels to provide sex to Japanese soldiers during World War II.  Under South Korea’s previous conservative government, the countries attempted to settle their decades-long dispute over sexual slavery in 2015 when they reached an agreement for Tokyo to fund 1 billion yen ($9 million) to a Seoul-based foundation to help support victims.  The deal was hugely unpopular in South Korea, where many people criticized their government for settling for far too less and accused Tokyo of attempting to silence the victims with money. The liberal government of current South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who took office in 2017, took steps to dissolve the foundation, saying that the deal lacked legitimacy because officials failed to properly communicate with victims before reaching it. |
| Zin Kao | Commentary | Taiwan news | July 4, 2021 | Taiwan | South Korea to take measures against Japan’s export restrictions, including appealing to WTO | The South Korea government announced that it is working on countermeasures, including but not limited to a World Trade Organization (WTO) case against Japan’s export restrictions on semiconductor and display materials, which took effect on Thursday (July 4).  Minister of Economy and Finance Hong Nam-ki (洪楠基) denounced the export restrictions as “blunt economic retaliation” against a Korean court's decision to order Japanese firms to compensate South Koreans forced into labor during World War Two, NHK reports.  “If Japan does not withdraw the restrictions, [South Korea] will take various appropriate countermeasures,” Hong said on Thursday. “A WTO case takes quite a long time, so it will not be our only alternative,” he added.  South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha (康京和) also denounced the restriction as “unreasonable and contrary to common sense” on Wednesday (July 3), the Yonhap News Agency reports. “Japan has damaged its own international credibility with its latest measure and damaged the economic relations that the two countries have maintained for a long time,” she added.  Seko Hiroshige (世耕弘成), the Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry, responded on Wednesday that it is only natural for a country to manage exports of materials that could be used to produce firearms, according to NHK. “Of course [Japan is] not considering a withdrawal at all,” he added.  Seko reemphasized that the restrictions are not a retaliatory measure, but that the government is merely reevaluating the mutual trust between the two countries. When asked if it would hurt Japanese companies who rely on South Korean-made semiconductors and monitors, Seko only responded that the ministry would "keep a close watch" on the situation.  The materials subject to the export restrictions include fluorinated polyimide, hydrogen fluoride, and resists, which are widely used in the manufacture of chips and displays and are nearly monopolized by Japan.  The Japanese government announced on Monday (July 1) that it would remove South Korea from its “white list,” meaning that the country would no longer enjoy preferential treatment on exports. Although Japan has repeatedly claimed that this does not equate to a sanction, it can in effect control the supply of the materials by prolonging bureaucratic procedures, writes Nikkei News.  The relationship between the two countries is at its historic lowest point since the end of the Second World War, in part due to the quarrel over South Korea's Supreme Court ruling. Japan insists that any obligation of compensation has been settled “completely, and finally” under a 1965 bilateral agreement.  Japan has proposed setting up a three-country arbitration panel under the 1965 agreement, a proposal the Korean government has ignored. Earlier this month, Minister of Trade, Industry, and Energy Sung Yun-mo (成允模) denounced Japan’s continuous efforts to force President Moon Jae-in's administration to meddle with judicial rulings. |
| China Post editorial with AP | News Analysis | China Post | March 1, 2021 | Taiwan | South Korea, Japan must look to future to improve ties | South Korean President Moon Jae-in said Monday that his government is eager for talks with Japan to improve relations following years of bitter feuding over historical grievances, adding that those unresolved issues should not stand in the way of developing “future-oriented” ties.  “There have been times where issues of the past weren’t separated from those of the future and became intermingled with each other. This has impeded forward-looking development,” Moon said in a nationally televised speech commemorating the anniversary of a 1919 Korean uprising against Japanese colonial rule.  “The Korean government is always ready to sit down and have talks with the Japanese government,” he said.  South Korea and Japan have been struggling to repair relations that sank to their lowest point in decades in 2019 following South Korean court rulings that ordered Japanese companies to pay reparations to Koreans who were forced to work in their factories during World War II. Those rulings led to further tensions over trade when Japan put export controls on chemicals vital to South Korea’s semiconductor industry.  Another sticking point in relations is the issue of Korean women who were sexually enslaved by Japan’s wartime military, with survivors denouncing the Japanese government for refusing to accept legal responsibility for their slavery.  Japan has insisted that all wartime compensation issues were settled under a 1965 treaty normalizing relations with South Korea and it has reacted angrily to South Korean court rulings saying otherwise. There is a risk for further deterioration of the relationship if South Korean courts eventually order the liquidation of local assets of Japanese companies that have refused to compensate forced laborers.  While Moon said Seoul will continue to support Korean victims of Japanese wartime atrocities, he stressed that the countries “must not let the past hold us back.”  Moon said improved relations would also benefit the three-way cooperation between South Korea, Japan and the United States, which Washington sees as crucial to dealing with regional issues such as North Korea’s nuclear arsenal and China’s increasing economic and military might.  Moon expressed hope that this year’s Olympics in Tokyo could provide a stage to renew international efforts to resolve the nuclear standoff with North Korea.  Seoul has placed much of the blame for bad relations with Tokyo on Japan’s hawkish former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and has hoped that his resignation for health reasons last September could be a diplomatic turning point.  Another notable change came in Washington, where President Joe Biden has signaled a shift from Donald Trump’s “America first” approach and his foreign policy team includes major proponents of dealing with North Korea and China through cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo.  Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul, said Moon may have felt that American pressure to reconcile with Japan was coming and he wanted to appear as the “reasonable” ally by offering the first olive branch.  The key now will be whether Japanese Prime Minster Suga Yoshihide responds to Moon’s comments with a positive gesture to start a “virtuous cycle,” said Easley. |
| China.org with Xinhua | News Analysis | China.org.cn | August 23, 2019 | China | S.Korea puts blame on Japan for termination of military intelligence-sharing pact | South Korea's presidential Blue House put the blame on Japan Friday for the termination of the military intelligence-sharing pact between the two countries amid the ongoing trade spat and the controversy over historical issues.  Kim Hyun-chong, deputy director of the National Security Office (NSO) of the Blue House, told a press briefing that there was "no longer any justification" to maintain the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) as it was an agreement to exchange sensitive military intelligence based on "a high level of trust."  Seoul decided Thursday to end the GSOMIA, which was signed in November 2016 to share military intelligence on nuclear and missile programs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).  The GSOMIA had been automatically renewed each year in August. If either party wants to scrap the pact, the party will be required to notify the other of its intention 90 days ahead. This year's notification deadline falls on Aug. 24.  Kim said Japan took "unwarranted economic retaliation" against South Korea while claiming that the South Korean top court's ruling on the wartime forced labor victims ran counter to the 1965 treaty and violated international law.  Japan tightened regulations last month on its export to South Korea of three materials vital to manufacture memory chips and display panels, which are the mainstay of the South Korean export.  Earlier this month, Japan dropped South Korea off its whitelist of trusted trading partners that are given preferential export procedure. In response, Seoul took Tokyo off its whitelist of trusted export partners.  Japan's export curbs came in an apparent protest against the South Korean top court's ruling that ordered some of Japanese companies, including Nippon Steel and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries among others, to pay compensations to the South Korean wartime forced labor.  Hundreds of thousands of South Koreans were forced by Imperial Japan into hard labor without pay during World War II. The Korean Peninsula was colonized by Japan from 1910 to 1945.  Japan claimed that the forced labor issue was settled through the 1965 treaty that normalized diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan after the colonial era, but Seoul said the treaty did not involve individuals' right to damages compensation.  Kim said the South Korean government adhered to the position that "crimes against humanity" perpetrated by the Japanese government and its military had not been resolved through the 1965 treaty.  The Blue House official noted that the director general of the treaties bureau of Japan's foreign ministry expressed the view in August 1991 that individual rights to claim damages had not been waived by the 1965 agreement.  The Japanese government demanded that the South Korean administration rectify the top court's ruling, but it was simply unimaginable in the country with the independence of the judiciary and the separation of powers guaranteed, Kim noted.  "Thus far, the leadership in Japan has only resorted to its previous claims without seriously engaging in any dialogue and repeated its demands that (South) Korea must move first to rectify the situation," said Kim.  South Korea sent a high-level envoy to Japan twice in July and attempted in August to engage in consultation with a high-level official of the Japanese Prime Minister's Office through the South Korean ambassador to Japan, but to no avail, according to the Blue House official.  Seoul's trade ministry repeatedly requested consultations to its Japanese counterpart for discussion on trade issues, but those were rebuffed by Japan, while South Korean President Moon Jae-in reached out his hand to Japan through his speech on Aug. 15 for the Liberation Day to mark the peninsula's liberation from the Japanese colonial rule, Kim said.  South Korea informed Japan of the contents of the liberation day speech in advance, but Japan did not show any response, he noted. |
| China Post editorial with AP | News Analysis | China Post | January 18, 2021 | Taiwan | Japan urges South Korea to drop wartime compensation demands | Japan’s foreign minister accused South Korea on Monday of worsening already strained ties by making “illegal” demands for compensation for the sexual abuse of Korean women and use of forced laborers during World War II.  Toshimitsu Motegi, in a diplomatic policy speech in parliament, said a recent South Korean court ruling ordering Japan to compensate 12 South Korean women who were sexually abused in Japanese military brothels during the war was “an abnormal development absolutely unthinkable under international law and bilateral relations.”  “We strongly urge South Korea to correct the violation of international law as soon as possible” and restore healthy relations, Motegi said.  The Seoul Central District Court ruled on Jan. 8 that the Japanese government must give 100 million won ($91,360) to each of 12 elderly women who filed lawsuits in 2013 over their wartime suffering as “comfort women.”  They were among tens of thousands of women across Japanese-occupied Asia and the Pacific who were sent to front-line Japanese army brothels.  The ruling worsened tensions between the two countries, whose relations had already plunged to the lowest level in decades over earlier South Korean rulings on Japan’s actions during its 1910-1945 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula.  South Korea’s Supreme Court in 2018 ordered Japanese companies to provide reparations to some South Koreans who were forced to work in their factories during the war.  我是廣告 請繼續往下閱讀  The dispute over forced labor escalated into a trade dispute and prompted South Korea to threaten to scrap a 2016 military intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan, a key component of their regional defense cooperation with the United States.  Japan has protested the court rulings, saying all wartime compensation issues were settled under a 1965 treaty normalizing relations in which Japan provided $500 million in economic assistance.  Motegi called South Korea “an important neighbor” and said its cooperation with Japan and the United States was “indispensable for regional security,” including the response to North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs.  Japan, under a 1995 semi-governmental Asian Women’s Fund, offered payments and apology letters to certified victims of its wartime sexual abuse from five countries, settling disputes with all but South Korea.  In 2015, the then governments of South Korea and Japan reached what was supposed to be a final and irreversible deal to settle the issue with a new fund set up by the Japanese government, but the current South Korean administration of President Moon Jae-in dissolved it, saying the deal was reached without proper consultation with the victims. |
| Keita Ikeda | News Analysis | China Post | December 26, 2019 | Taiwan | No progress at Japan-S. Korea summit | Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Moon Jae-in held summit talks Tuesday for the first time in about 15 months and agreed to continue discussions.  Athough the meeting appears to have halted the deterioration in relations between their two countries, Abe and Moon were unable to close the gap in their positions on court rulings regarding former requisitioned workers from the Korean Peninsula, highlighting the difficulty of resolving the issue.  Getting Nowhere  “I want to improve the valuable Japan-South Korea relationship,” Abe said frankly after shaking hands with Moon at the beginning of the meeting. Moon responded that even if things have been strained for a while, Japan and South Korea can never be far from each other.  Prior to the talks, the two leaders spent about three hours together at a Japan-China-South Korea summit meeting and other related events. “The atmosphere between the two leaders became relaxed naturally,” a source who was present said.  However, once the bilateral meeting began, they had difficult exchanges over the former requisitioned workers and other issues, in what was described as a “tense atmosphere” by a senior Japanese government official who attended the meeting.  Regarding the former requisitioned workers, Abe urged South Korea to create opportunities as a nation to return to a healthy Japan-South Korea relationship. Moon agreed a swift resolution is needed, but did not provide any specific ideas for solutions.  On South Korea’s concern over Japan’s tightening of export controls, both sides merely repeated their previous stances. |
| China Post editorial with The Japan News | News Analysis | China Post | August 26, 2019 | Taiwan | Japan to stay calm over S. Korea’s decision on GSOMIA | The Japanese government has taken the position of watching the situation and not taking countermeasures for now against South Korea for scrapping the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Japan.  The Japanese government has taken the position of watching the situation and not taking countermeasures for now against South Korea following Seoul’s official notification that it is scrapping the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Japan.  “In terms of regional security, cooperation among Japan and South Korea — or Japan, the United States and South Korea — remains important.” Defense Minister Takeshi Iwaya told reporters at the ministry on Friday, strongly urging South Korea to “rethink and respond wisely.”  A senior Japanese government official said: “No countermeasures are being taken. We’ll take a wait-and-see approach.”  The government is exercising self-restraint because it believes that it is not necessary for Japan to take any new steps against South Korea, as Seoul’s decision has been criticized by the United States. Tokyo will continue to urge the government in Seoul to deal with the issue of South Korean former wartime requisitioned workers.  The government believes that it can take measures against North Korea by further strengthening Japan-U.S. cooperation and that the South Korean decision to scrap the GSOMIA will have only a limited impact on Japan’s national security.  Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was to hold talks with U.S. President Donald Trump in France, where the Group of Seven summit started on Saturday, to again discuss cooperation on North Korea. Regarding North Korea’s launches of short-range ballistic missiles, a senior defense ministry official said, “By sharing information with the U.S., we will handle the situation in such a way to avoid any impact being felt [by the termination of GSOMIA].”  我是廣告 請繼續往下閱讀  Much criticism of South Korea’s decision came from the Japanese ruling camp.  “If North Korea mistakenly takes South Korea’s decision as a message, it may affect the U.S. denuclearization efforts,” Liberal Democratic Party Secretary General Toshihiro Nikai said in his statement.  Fumio Kishida, LDP Policy Research Council chairman, said, “It is very regrettable, as some one who was strongly aware of its importance.”  Kishida was involved in concluding the GSOMIA when he was foreign minister.  Fukushiro Nukaga, chairman of the Japan-Korea Parliamentarians’ Union, spoke by phone with Kang Chang-il, head of the South Korea-Japan Parliamentarians’ League, and told him that the decision was hard to understand. Nukaga said to Kang, “The Korean government should create an environment in which it can make appropriate decisions.”  The union decided to postpone a joint general meeting with its South Korean counterparts that was scheduled for Sept. 18 to 19 in Tokyo. |
| China Post editorial with The Korean Herald | Editorial | China Post | August 6, 2019 | Taiwan | South Korea stands to lose more than Japan | This year on Aug. 15, South Koreans will celebrate Liberation Day and mark the 74th anniversary of Korean independence amid a trade war with Japan.  Then on Sept. 18 the nation will commemorate 120 years of railroad history, with some saying Japan initiated the railway construction in 1899 in an attempt to plunder Korea’s resources.  Since its liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, Korea has strived to catch up with its neighbor in a variety of industrial sectors. While Japan is the world’s fourth-largest exporter, Korea isn’t far behind, ranking sixth as of 2018.  But the current trade row, centering on retaliatory measures imposed by Japan after the Korean Supreme Court sided with victims of wartime forced labor against Japanese companies operating in Korea, is aggravating downside risks throughout the Korean economy.  The Japanese currency, which traded at 1,006.21 won per 100 yen five months ago on March 5, surged 14.1 percent to close at 1,148.09 won on Aug. 5. The Korean won has also lost ground to other key currencies such as the US dollar and the euro.  While some Koreans are boycotting Japanese products and tourism, others have called on the Moon Jae-in administration to resolve the dispute through diplomacy.  “Can the government sever diplomatic relations with Japan? As the scenario is illogical, the Moon administration should refrain from further provoking Japan,” one online commenter said. “In addition, the trade war cannot justify the government’s poor economic performance for the past two years.”  Public opinion is split when it comes to Seoul’s countermeasures against Tokyo, local pollsters revealed.  According to a survey released Aug. 3 by SA Consulting, 50.9 percent of the 1,000 Koreans surveyed said they supported the government’s response. A similar number, 45.5 percent, replied that the government wasn’t handling the situation well.  People who disapprove of the government’s response are in the majority among those in their 20s (49.3 percent negative versus 46.2 percent positive) and those in their 60s or older (35.5 percent positive versus 60.2 percent negative).  我是廣告 請繼續往下閱讀  Critics outnumbered supporters in the areas comprising Sejong, Daejeon and the Chungcheong provinces; Busan, Ulsan and South Gyeongsang Province; and Daegu and North Gyeongsang Province; as well as in the provinces of Jeju and Gangwon.  Concerning the nation’s economic outlook for the second half, only 16.9 percent of the 1,000 respondents predicted an improvement, while 48.1 percent said they expected the economy to worsen further.  The poll also found that President Moon’s approval rating was lowest among men in their 20s at 25 percent. It was next lowest among men in their 60s at 31.7 percent, women in their 60s at 34.6 percent and women in their 50s at 42.3 percent.  Disapproval of Moon was higher than approval in all four demographic groups.  The approval rating for the ruling Democratic Party was also lowest among men in their 20s at 19.2 percent, in sharp contrast to its 59 percent approval rating among women in their 20s.  According to another poll, conducted by Opinion Research Justice and released July 31, 49.9 percent of the 1,000 respondents forecast that Korea would sustain greater losses than Japan as a result of this economic war. That view was shared by 54 percent of the men and 45.9 percent of the women.  Of all the respondents, 25.9 percent said the trade dispute would harm Japan more than Korea and 20.2 said both countries would suffer similar losses.  Opinion was likewise divided on the boycott of products made in Japan — 42.7 percent said it would aggravate bilateral conflicts, while 47 percent said it would help resolve the dispute. Male respondents were much more evenly split, with 45.9 percent expressing negative views about the boycott and 46.4 percent seeing it as a good thing.  The Opinion Research Justice survey also showed that Moon’s approval rating had fallen below 40 percent. While 39 percent said they supported the president, 41.8 percent voiced disapproval.  “Korea’s GDP scale is the one-third of that of Japan, and the population level is 40 vs. 100. The feud is likely to deal a more serious blow to Korea, to the full range of business sectors,” said a research analyst in Seoul. |
| China Post with AP | News Analysis | China Post | July 11, 2019 | Taiwan | Tensions over history, North keep Japan, South Korea at odds | Japan and South Korea, two major U.S. allies, are again at odds, this time over Tokyo’s decision to tighten controls on exports of sensitive materials that are mainly used in computer chips and display screens used in TVs and smartphones. The tensions reflect animosities that have persisted for decades.  WHAT JAPAN SAYS: As of July 4, the Japanese government tightened the approval process for shipments of photoresists and other sensitive materials. They are now subject to a case-by-case approval process that can take up to 90 days because Japan’s trade ministry said the countries’ “relationship of trust,” including export controls, had been “significantly undermined.” It also said it had found some sensitive items were shipped to South Korea “with inadequate management by companies.” Earlier, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and other officials cited South Korea’s stance on compensation for forcing Koreans to work as laborers before and during World War II as a sign it could not be trusted. Officials continue to hint at problems without providing specifics. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his conservative aides have hinted at possible South Korean illegal transfers of sensitive materials to North Korea, and they now say South Korea has failed to respond to requests for talks about problems with export controls.  WHAT SOUTH KOREA SAYS: In Seoul, President Moon Jae-in on Wednesday said his government was committed to resolving the matter diplomatically and urged Japan to refrain from pushing the situation to a “dead-end street.” He spoke after South Korean officials urged Japan to drop the plan to further tighten export controls on fluorinated polyimide, resist, and hydrogen fluoride and related technologies, telling a World Trade Organization meeting in Geneva that the Japanese measures would affect electronics products worldwide. South Korean officials say controls on chemicals subject to the tightened rules have not been violated.  THE BACKDROP: Japan and South Korea, both important hosts for U.S. military bases in East Asia, have been bickering for years over a territorial dispute and over South Korean demands for more contrition and compensation from Japan for its use of forced labor and recruitment of Korean women for military brothels during the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula in the early 20th century. The two sides squabbled in December over a South Korean warship’s alleged radar lock on to a Japanese patrol aircraft. That raised suspicions in Japan because a North Korean boat was next to the South Korean warship at the time. The latest flare-up followed South Korean court rulings ordering major Japanese corporation Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corp. to compensate South Korean plaintiffs for forced labor during World War II. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries has refused a South Korean Supreme Court order to compensate 10 Koreans for forced labor. Japan insists all compensation issues were settled when the two countries normalized relations under the 1965 treaty. Japan says South Korea is violating an international pledge.  我是廣告 請繼續往下閱讀  IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS OF JAPAN’S TIGHTER CONTROLS: Japan is a major supplier of materials used to make the computer chips that run most devices, including Apple iPhones and laptop computers. Analysts say that given a slowdown in demand for smartphones and for semiconductors overall, South Korean chipmakers Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix both have sufficient supplies of the materials for now. The greater fear is that Japan might expand the export controls to more products, increasing the potential for disruptions to regional and global supply chains.  UNANSWERED QUESTIONS: Japanese officials have not specified which companies they suspect of having mismanaged exports of sensitive materials. South Korea’s trade ministry acknowledged Wednesday that from 2015 to March 2019 the government detected 156 cases of unauthorized exports of sensitive materials that could be used for military purposes. It was responding to a report by the Japanese network Fuji TV that cited government data. It said illegal shipments included thermos-cameras, carbon fibers, zirconium and sodium cyanide, among other items, and went to countries like China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran, Syria, Turkey and Sri Lanka. The ministry said exposure of the cases shows South Korea’s monitoring system is working and that it’s more transparent than Japan’s. It was unclear if any cases involved Japanese imports or were the main reason for Japan’s decision to impose stricter controls on exports to South Korea.  POTENTIAL FOR RESOLVING THE ISSUES: Bridging the rift between the two countries appears to be a challenge. Many South Koreans believe Japan still hasn’t fully acknowledged responsibility for atrocities committed during its 1910-45 colonial occupation of Korea. They question the legitimacy of agreements struck by past governments. Thousands of South Koreans have signed petitions posted on the presidential office’s website that call for boycotting Japanese products and travel to Japan. Japanese have been seeking to put their wartime legacy behind them. That is especially true of Abe and his ultra-conservative backers in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, who have been for years trying to whitewash Japan’s embarrassing wartime past and are now busy campaigning for a July 21 election for the Upper House of Parliament. |
| China Post editorial with AP | Commentary | China Post | March 1, 2021 | Taiwan | South Korea, Japan must look to future to improve ties | South Korean President Moon Jae-in said Monday that his government is eager for talks with Japan to improve relations following years of bitter feuding over historical grievances, adding that those unresolved issues should not stand in the way of developing “future-oriented” ties.  “There have been times where issues of the past weren’t separated from those of the future and became intermingled with each other. This has impeded forward-looking development,” Moon said in a nationally televised speech commemorating the anniversary of a 1919 Korean uprising against Japanese colonial rule.  “The Korean government is always ready to sit down and have talks with the Japanese government,” he said.  South Korea and Japan have been struggling to repair relations that sank to their lowest point in decades in 2019 following South Korean court rulings that ordered Japanese companies to pay reparations to Koreans who were forced to work in their factories during World War II. Those rulings led to further tensions over trade when Japan put export controls on chemicals vital to South Korea’s semiconductor industry.  Another sticking point in relations is the issue of Korean women who were sexually enslaved by Japan’s wartime military, with survivors denouncing the Japanese government for refusing to accept legal responsibility for their slavery.  Japan has insisted that all wartime compensation issues were settled under a 1965 treaty normalizing relations with South Korea and it has reacted angrily to South Korean court rulings saying otherwise. There is a risk for further deterioration of the relationship if South Korean courts eventually order the liquidation of local assets of Japanese companies that have refused to compensate forced laborers.  我是廣告 請繼續往下閱讀  While Moon said Seoul will continue to support Korean victims of Japanese wartime atrocities, he stressed that the countries “must not let the past hold us back.”  Moon said improved relations would also benefit the three-way cooperation between South Korea, Japan and the United States, which Washington sees as crucial to dealing with regional issues such as North Korea’s nuclear arsenal and China’s increasing economic and military might.  Moon expressed hope that this year’s Olympics in Tokyo could provide a stage to renew international efforts to resolve the nuclear standoff with North Korea.  Seoul has placed much of the blame for bad relations with Tokyo on Japan’s hawkish former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and has hoped that his resignation for health reasons last September could be a diplomatic turning point.  Another notable change came in Washington, where President Joe Biden has signaled a shift from Donald Trump’s “America first” approach and his foreign policy team includes major proponents of dealing with North Korea and China through cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo.  Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul, said Moon may have felt that American pressure to reconcile with Japan was coming and he wanted to appear as the “reasonable” ally by offering the first olive branch.  The key now will be whether Japanese Prime Minster Suga Yoshihide responds to Moon’s comments with a positive gesture to start a “virtuous cycle,” said Easley. |
| The Epoch Times | News Analysis | The Epoch Times | August 23, 2019 | Taiwan | South Korea Cancels Japan Intelligence Deal Amid Trade Dispute | South Korea that focused on classified information about North Korea, a surprise announcement that is likely to set back U.S. efforts to bolster security cooperation with two of its most important allies in the Asian region.</p>  <p>South Korea attributed the decision to its bitter trade dispute with Japan, which has plunged the two countries&#8217; relations to their lowest point since they established diplomatic ties in 1965. Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono called the decision &#8220;extremely regrettable&#8221; and summoned the South Korean ambassador to protest the linking of trade and security issues.</p>  <p>Many experts had predicted that South Korea would be unlikely to spike the 3-year-old intelligence-sharing deal for the sake of its relations with the United States. South Korea has been seeking U.S. help in resolving the trade dispute, and Seoul and Washington have also been working together to restart stalled talks on stripping North Korea of its nuclear weapons.</p>  <p>South Korea&#8217;s presidential office said it terminated the intelligence deal because Japan&#8217;s recent decision to downgrade South Korea&#8217;s trade status caused a &#8220;grave&#8221; change in security cooperation between the countries.</p>  <p>&#8220;Under this situation, the government has determined that maintaining the agreement, which was signed for the purpose of exchanging sensitive military intelligence on security, does not serve our national interests,&#8221; Kim You-geun, the deputy director of South Korea&#8217;s presidential national security office, said in a nationally televised statement.</p>  <p>He said South Korea would formally notify Japan of its decision before Aug. 24, the deadline for an extension of the pact for another year.</p>  <p>Japanese Foreign Minister Kono said in a statement that the decision &#8220;was an action that completely misjudged the current security environment in the region and is extremely regrettable.&#8221;</p>  <p>He said South Korea&#8217;s linking of trade and security was &#8220;absolutely unacceptable, and we firmly protest to the South Korean government.&#8221;</p>  <p>Since early last month, Japan has imposed stricter controls on exports to South Korea of three chemicals essential for manufacturing semiconductors and display screens — key export items for South Korea — and decided to remove South Korea from a list of countries granted preferential trade status.</p>  <p>The Japanese trade curbs triggered an outburst of anti-Japan sentiment in South Korea. Many South Korean citizens rallied in the streets, canceled planned holiday trips to Japan and launched widespread boycotts of Japanese beer, clothes, and other products. The South Korean government, for its part, decided to downgrade Japan&#8217;s trade status.</p>  <p>The Pentagon on Aug.15 expressed &#8220;strong concern and disappointment&#8221; in the collapse of the agreement.</p>  <p>&#8220;We strongly believe that the integrity of our mutual defense and security ties must persist despite frictions in other areas&#8221; of the South Korea-Japan relationship, said Lt. Col. Dave Eastburn, a Pentagon spokesman. We l continue to pursue bilateral and trilateral defense and security cooperation where possible. On Aug. 21, the top U.S. envoy on North Korea, Stephen Biegun, told reporters in Seoul that he appreciated what he called strong and continued cooperation between the U.S., South Korea, and Japan.&#8221; The intelligence deal went into effect in 2016, reportedly at the strong urging of the United States, which wants to boost three-day security cooperation to better cope with North Korea’s nuclear threat and a rising China. The United States stations a total of 80,000 troops in the two Asian countries, the core of America military presence in the Asia-Pacific region.  Experts said the deal enabled a quicker exchange of information between Seoul and Tokyo, because they had previously exchanged intelligence via the United States. In 2012, the countries nearly forged a similar deal but it was scrapped at the last minute following a vehement backlash in South Korea.  However, it is unclear how effective the deal has been for both countries, especially on intelligence on North Korea, one of the world’s most secretive countries. But there has been a general consensus that South Korea needed information gathered by Japanese satellites and other high-tech systems, while Japan enjoyed signal, voice and human intelligence from South Korea.  South Korea’s Defense Ministry said in a statement Aug. 22 that it will try to maintain a stable and perfect combined security posture&#8221; with the United States regardless of the termination of the intelligence deal. It called the South Korean-U.S. alliance powerful.  South Korean government and ruling party officials have publicly questioned how Seoul could share intelligence with a country that questioned Seoul’s handling of sensitive materials imported from Japan. Without providing concrete evidence, some Japanese officials including Prime Minister Shinzo Abe have suggested that some critical Japanese materials with potential military applications exported to South Korea may have reached North Korea. Seoul flatly denies that.  The fate of the deal had divided people in South Korea. Some argued that South Korea should do whatever it could to inflict pain on Japan, and that just floating the idea of ending the intelligence deal could force the United States to persuade Japan to lift its trade curbs. But some stressed that the deal’s cancellation would impair relations with the United States at a time when South Korea faces many security challenges including the stalemated North Korean nuclear talks. government has lobbied hard to facilitate talks between the U.S. and North Korea on the nuclear crisis. But the diplomacy has remained largely stalemated for months, and North Korea now says it wont go through South Korea to talk to the United States. The North recently test-fired a series of short-range missiles and other weapons capable of striking much of South Korea.  Last month, a Russian military plane allegedly violated South Korean airspace in the first such trespassing by a foreign warplane since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War. Russian and Chinese warplanes allegedly also made a highly unusual joint entrance to South Korea’s air defense identification zone, in what analysts said was an attempt to see how the Seoul-Washington-Tokyo security cooperation worked.</p>  <p>South Korea&#8217;s main conservative opposition party accused the Moon government of confusing &#8220;genuine courage&#8221; with &#8220;foolhardy courage.&#8221; The Liberty Korea Party said security coordination with Washington and Japan needed to be solidified in the face of strengthening cooperation among Russia, China, and North Korea.We would have lots of things to lose from the deal&#8217;s termination,&#8221; said analyst Go Myong-Hyun of the Seoul-based Asan Institute for Policy Studies. If the U.S. turned its back on South Korea, we would be completely isolated in Northeast Asia. On Aug. 22 evening, about 30 anti-Tokyo activists gathered near the Japanese Embassy in Seoul to welcome the intelligence deal’s termination. Jubilant participants held placards that read &#8220;The scrapping of the South Korea-Japan deal is a people’s victory. |
| Olivia Li | Commentary | The Epoch Times | August 23, 2019 | Taiwan | US Worried that Trade Dispute Between Japan and South Korea May Benefit China and North Korea | U.S. President Donald Trump said on July 19 that he would help resolve <a href="https://www.theepochtimes.com/t-tensions">tensions</a> between South Korea and Japan if asked. Previously, a Japanese media outlet quoted a U.S. official as saying that Washington is worried that the conflict between Japan and South Korea may play into the hands of China and North Korea.</p>  <p>The trade row between the two neighboring countries stems from a South Korean court decision ordering Japanese companies to compensate victims of forced labor during Japan’s colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula between 1910 and 1945.</p>  <p>South Korea’s attorney in the case announced on July 16 that if Japanese companies, such as Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, did not respond to the compensation verdict, South Korea would seize their mortgaged assets to compensate the victims.</p>  <p>In response, Japan&#8217;s foreign minister Taro Kono said Tokyo will take &#8220;necessary measures&#8221; against South Korea if interests of Japanese companies are harmed.</p>  <p>U.S. Assistant Secretary of State David Stilwell visited South Korea on July 17. After meeting with South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha, Stilwell told reporters that the United States places a “great priority on strengthening” its relations with South Korea and Japan, the Associated Press reported.</p>  <p>“Fundamentally ROK [the Republic of Korea] and Japan must resolve the sensitive matters and we hope that the resolution happens soon,” Stilwell said. “The United States is a close friend and ally to both. We will do what we can to support their efforts to resolve this.”</p>  <p>Following President Trump’s July 19 comments that he would help resolve tensions between the two countries if their state leaders needed him to do so, National Security Adviser John Bolton left for Japan and South Korea on July 20.</p>  <h2>Tensions in the Asia-Pacific</h2>  <p>Tensions in the area have been high for years, with North Korea being a constant flashpoint and China claiming sovereignty over scores of uninhabited islands.</p>  <p>Japanese media outlet Toyo Keizai Online published an article on July 17 titled, “China must be secretly overjoyed as Japan-South Korea relationship worsens.” It quoted a U.S. official as saying that Japan and South Korea both face “domestic pressures that would not allow concessions,” and that China and North Korea “must be happy to see the dissolution of cooperation between Japan and South Korea, which previously served to strengthen safeguards in the Asia-Pacific.”</p>  <p>This official also hinted that the United States would soon get involved in helping to mediate disputes between the two countries.</p>  <h2>Deeply Rooted Historic Dispute</h2>  <p>According to a poll by Japanese media Shukan Bunshun, 81.3 percent support Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s export restriction to South Korea.</p>  <p>In addition, the majority of those polled believe that South Korea’s demands and policies toward Japan—such as seeking compensation for victims of forced labor, the dissolution of the “Comfort Women” foundation, and a South Korean destroyer directing fire-control radar at Japanese fighters—are going to an extreme and have seriously damaged relations between the two countries.</p>  <p>Another poll from Sankei Shimbun, one of Japan’s five leading national newspapers, showed similar results—the majority of Japanese support the Abe administration’s sanctions on South Korea.</p>  <p>According to these two Japanese media, as July 21 was an election date for Japanese House of Councillors, Abe would likely stick to tough policies toward South Korea in order to win the election.</p>  <p>On the other hand, South Korean President Moon Jae-in has been facing criticism from both the opposition party and the public, following the failure of his diplomatic policies with North Korea. Moon’s recent nationalist measures against Japan have helped him regain approval ratings significantly.</p>  <p>According to a July 18 report by JoongAng Ilbo, one of the three biggest newspapers in South Korea, Moon’s approval rating has been restored to over 50 percent after he showed a strong stance when responding to Japan’s export restrictions.</p>  <p>Regarding possible U.S. mediation involvement, the Toyo Keizai Online report quoted a Japanese foreign affairs official as saying that, &#8220;Even if the Americans make great efforts at mediation, it’s expected that there will be no immediate results, as it takes time to resolve the historic conflicts between the two countries.”</p>  <p>At the same time, however, this official stressed that U.S. mediation might at least “prevent the situation from further deteriorating.” He explained that Moon very much depends on the United States to solve the troubles with North Korea.</p>  <p>And as far as Japan goes, U.S.-Japanese trade negotiations are about to begin. Therefore, both Japan and South Korea need to pay respect to the United States.</p>  <p><em>Epoch Time reporter Zhao Bin contributed to this report. |
| Zhang Zhouxiang | Opinion | China Daily | August 15, 2019 | China | Japan still has time to atone for crime | Japan still has time to atone for crime  It should be noted that these women suffered more than constant rape. According to historical materials, they were shut in cage-like cells, and any hint of disobeying an order would lead to harsh penalties, even death.  From 1931 to 1945, the Japanese army opened thousands of "comfort stations" that housed about 400,000 women from China, Korea and Southeast Asia. At least half of the victims were Chinese. Only one-fourth of the "comfort women" survived the war.  As soon as the war ended, the victims and their families began suing the Japanese government for compensation and an apology, but it was not until the 1990s that the Japanese government started investigations and admitted the facts in the Kono Statement issued in 1993. However, later governments have since buried the statement.  Further, the Japanese government has never apologized to the comfort women or their families, let alone paid the victims any compensation. In fact its strategy is clear: It hopes to delay and stall until all the victims are dead. The number of "comfort women" who are still alive is about 14 in China and about 20 in the Republic of Korea. World War II ended 74 years ago and most of these victims are now in their 90s.  But the Japanese government is wrong if it thinks their deaths will put an end to the matter. Even when all the victims are dead, the historical facts would still exist. They can never be changed. In the face of the testimonies of "comfort women" that survived, other evidence and records, no one will be able to deny what happened even after the last victim dies.  Aug 14, the date before the Japanese surrender, has already been designated Comfort Women's Day. When the last victim dies, the Japanese government will lose the opportunity of repairing its image, and it will be permanently recorded in history as a government that dared not face up to its past.  There is not much time left for Japan to apologize to some of the victims. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo should do so while he can. |
| China Daily editorial | Opinion | China Daily | August 5, 2019 | China | Japan should not use trade to settle historical issues | Editor's note: With tensions rising between Japan and the Republic of Korea, the two countries' foreign ministers held a bilateral meeting on Thursday, and took part in a trilateral meeting with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, on Friday on the sidelines of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand. Xiakedao, a WeChat account owned by People's Daily Overseas Edition, comments:  Apparently, the two meetings have not helped de-escalate the situation between the two neighbors, as the Japanese government announced on Friday it has decided to remove the ROK from its "white list", which grants countries on the list simplified trade procedures with Japan. The decision will come into effect on Aug 28.  Japan stopped exports of three kinds of important materials used for semiconductors and displays to the ROK on July 4, saying it was concerned some ROK companies were exporting the products to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which was a threat to Japan's national security. The ROK then launched diplomatic protests, saying the export controls violated free trade principles, and it vowed to sue Japan through the World Trade Organization framework.  In fact, Tokyo is using the issue to take revenge for the ROK claiming compensation for Korean laborers who were forced to work for Japanese enterprises during Japan's war of aggression, in the hope that Seoul will compromise on the historical issues.  Japan thought the issue of forced labor had been settled when they established diplomatic relations in 1965. Likewise, the issue of "comfort women", women forced to be sex slaves of the Imperial Japanese Army, is another flash point, as Tokyo thinks the problem has been settled once for all, while Seoul does not.  It is worrisome that Japan has, for the first time, learned to transplant the United States' export control tactics to resolve its historical disputes with its neighbor, forcing the ROK to swallow its political appeals.  Worse, Tokyo feels no qualms about pouring dirty water on Pyongyang without providing any concrete evidence to justify its claims.  It has been a consensus of all stakeholders in the region, including Tokyo, that the historical disputes revolving around the war crimes that Japan committed against its neighbors in the late 19th and first half of 20th century should be settled through political means, and that's how they have been dealing with the problems for decades, so that historical problems have not affected economic and trade cooperation in the region. Otherwise, East Asia and Southeast Asia would not have been able to develop into powerhouses of the world economy.  That Japan insists on using trade and economic measures to resolve historical disputes will only make the situation more complicated. Historical issues will and should not be resolved this way, as the formerly stable economic and trade ties will be damaged at the same time, causing spillover effects far beyond the region. |
| SCMP Reporter | Commentary | Southern China Morning Post | February 16, 2019 | Hong Kong | Explained: the legacy of war in Asia | The  second world war left deep scars on Asia  – they are still visible in the fraught ties between various countries today.  As  Japan  seeks to strengthen its military,  South Korea  and  China  are determined its wartime atrocities not be forgotten.  What happened in the Asian theatre during the second world war?  Although Japan sided with the Axis powers in Europe during the second world war, the Japanese militaristic expansion across Asia started before the war in Europe.  In 1910, Japan annexed the Korean peninsula. In 1931, the country orchestrated a military attack on its own forces as a pretext to invade Manchuria, China’s northeastern region. The war officially started in 1937, when Japan launched an invasion on the rest of China, quickly seizing control of the major Chinese coastal cities.  The conflict killed more than 20 million Chinese.  Japan’s invasion of Nanking  – now known as Nanjing and the Chinese capital of the day – involved a systematic campaign of rape and executions. More than 300,000 people were killed and it is considered one of the darkest episodes of the second world war.  EVERY MONDAY  This Week in Asia Newsletter  By submitting, you consent to receiving marketing emails from SCMP. If you don't want these, tick here  By registering, you agree to our T&C and Privacy Policy  Between 1941 and 1942, the Japanese control further expanded across Southeast Asia, where Japanese troops swiftly conquered most of the territory from the  Philippines  to  Burma (now Myanmar)  .  The war did not end until the US dropped two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of  Hiroshima  and  Nagasaki  in August 1945. Soon after, Japan’s  Emperor Hirohito announced the surrender  .  Why the conflict is still relevant today?  Over the years, the Japanese government has offered several official apologies for its role in the second world war. But Japan’s current prime minister,  Shinzo Abe  , has cast doubts about the need to keep apologising for Japan’s wartime actions, and has questioned whether the occupation of China and the  Korean peninsula  can be described as an “invasion”.  Abe’s revisionist stance has damaged relations with China and South Korea. It coincides with his ambition of strengthening his country’s military capabilities and amending Article 9, the “war renouncing” clause, of its pacifist constitution.  South Korean survivor of Japan’s forced labour bears the scars  7 Nov 2018    In 2015, during the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, Abe acknowledged the “immeasurable damage and suffering” Japan inflicted on “innocent people”. Despite this, Abe said later generations “who have nothing to do with the war”  should not be “predestined to apologise”  .  The statement angered both China and South Korea, who accused the Japanese premier of failing to sincerely atone for Japan’s wartime atrocities. The Chinese Foreign Ministry criticised Abe’s speech as “evasive” in a statement on its website. Park Geun-hye, then South Korean president, said the remarks contained “regrettable elements”.  A group of Japanese lawmakers at the Yasukuni Shrine. Photo: Kyodo  Where else is the legacy of the second world war evident?  Abe and other members of his cabinet have also been heavily criticised for repeatedly visiting and sending offerings to Tokyo’s  Yasukuni Shrine  , where millions of war dead, including 14 war criminals, are honoured.  In the past, Abe also questioned evidence for the existence of  “comfort women”  from occupied countries forced to become sex slaves in Japanese military brothels.  In 2015, Japan and South Korea reached an agreement on the issue, with Japan apologising to the victims and providing funds to create an organisation to help the surviving victims.  Relations between Seoul and Tokyo soured after South Korean President Moon Jae-in rejected the deal, which was negotiated between the administrations of Abe and the impeached Park.  South Korea’s Foreign Ministry said the accord ignored the views of victims. The Japanese government, however, insists there is “no other policy option”.  A diplomatic row over wartime forced labour has also strained ties between the two neighbours. The South Korean Supreme Court ruled twice last year that Japanese corporations must compensate South Koreans for their forced labour during the second world war.  Japan urged South Korea to overturn decisions, arguing the 1965 bilateral treaty, which normalised relations between the two countries, settled the issue of war reparations. |
| Paul Surtees | Opinion | China Daily | August 21, 2020 | China | It's time for Japan to atone for its WWII atrocities | The generation of our fathers and grandfathers endured two devastating world wars, and much else besides. Military conquerors from earlier periods were often lauded over conduct that, by today's standards of behavior, would be considered despicable.  Japan has just marked the 75th anniversary of the two terrible atomic bombings of its cities that forced it to surrender, which helped quickly bring World War II to an end by the cessation of all hostilities in the Far East in 1945, apart from the declaration of war against Japanese aggressors by the Soviet Union.  Unfortunately, the message that the annual remembrance ceremony conveys implies that Japan was the victim, rather than the aggressor.  The Chinese mainland generally, and Hong Kong, too, had ample painful experience of being at the receiving end of Japanese military aggression, as had many other unfortunate parts of East Asia and the Pacific.  Japan again attacked China by invading Manchuria back in 1931. This was described by the Lytton Commission as "ethically illegitimate". The commission was established by the League of Nations, the first worldwide intergovernmental organization whose mission was to maintain world peace, to determine what caused Japan's invasion of Manchuria.  The wider Sino-Japanese War, which followed from 1937, continued the military expansion of the then-growing Empire of Japan.  People wearing protective face masks pray for atomic bomb victims in front of the cenotaph for the victims of the US 1945 atomic bombing, at Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima, western Japan, August 6, 2020, on the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing of the city. Kyodo/via REUTERS  The infamous Rape of Nanking (then China's capital and today's Nanjing) in late 1937 saw the mass murder by Japanese soldiers of hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war, and of civilians, as well as mass raping and pillaging. Japan's conduct of the war has been described as "Asia's Holocaust".  Millions of Asian people, including civilians and captured Chinese soldiers, died. Some estimates put the total death toll at 25 million or more.  In Hong Kong, invaded by Japan in 1941, at about the same time as Pearl Harbor was attacked, the Japanese occupation－which lasted for three years and eight months-included the deaths of more than 10,000 Hong Kong people by murder, torture, mutilation and rape.  In other parts of China, Japanese military units weaponized deadly infectious diseases, including exposing soldiers and civilians to bubonic plague, botulism, anthrax, smallpox and cholera, causing huge casualties to the Chinese people for years to come.  There was even a secret plan to attack California by germ warfare, which had already been launched around the fields and cities of China.  Inhuman and illicit experiments were conducted on human beings, who were vivisected as part of their chemical and biological weapons development program. Japan did not hesitate to use such banned germ warfare techniques.  The enforced slave labor imposed by Japan on prisoners of war and civilian victims in the territories it conquered remains a byword for cruelty. Many thousands were maltreated, starved or murdered as a result, some while building a railway track to Burma, which is today's Myanmar.  Both Nazi Germany and Japan had their own secret research units, tasked with developing nuclear weapons. Had either country not been forced into surrender in time, before these were fully developed, it seems very likely that both countries would have attacked allied countries with them.  It just reinforces the justification in forcing Japan to surrender with the two atomic bombs because the alternative could have led to even more casualties and prolonged people's suffering in land and sea battles for Japan's home islands.  So instead of just preaching against the use of atomic weapons, clearly justified in the context of the situation at the time, Japanese leaders should be laying wreaths of regret at the many places throughout Asia (such as Nanjing) that it conquered and for the people whom Japanese soldiers had killed or abused during World War II, which it played a pivotal role in triggering. |
| John Power | Commentary | Southern China Morning Post | July 18, 2019 | Hong Kong | Explained: what’s driving Japan’s escalating feud with South Korea | Explained: what’s driving Japan’s escalating feud with South Korea?  Tokyo’s decision to restrict exports of hi-tech materials to Seoul and a simmering row over forced labour have sent the relationship between the two countries tumbling  With no end in sight to the spat, the trade tensions could lead to higher prices for customers globally, analysts warn  Relations between Japan and South Korea have hit rock bottom in recent weeks as an unresolved dispute over Korean forced labourers has spiralled into an escalating spat over trade.  The dispute, which comes amid the ongoing trade war between the United States and China, has economists sounding the alarm about disruption of technology supply chains and knock-on effects for the global economy.  How did the spat begin?  Tensions between both sides escalated dramatically when Japan announced that from July 4, it would restrict exports of three materials used in South Korean smartphone chips and displays.  South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s administration accused Tokyo of retaliating against court orders telling Japanese companies to compensate forced labourers during Japan’s 1910-1945 colonial rule of the Korean peninsula.  Japan insists that all claims arising from its colonial rule were settled by the signing of a 1965 normalisation treaty that provided Seoul with US$800 million in economic aid and loans.  Tokyo has since cited national security concerns arising from Seoul’s “inadequate management” of exports of sensitive chemicals, including hydrogen fluoride, which can be used for the manufacture of chemical weapons by countries subject to international sanctions, such as North Korea.  The administration of Shinzo Abe is now mulling the removal of South Korea from a “white list” of countries with minimum trade controls.  Why Japan-South Korea ‘trade war’ is good news for China  10 Jul 2019  What’s the fallout?  South Korean tech giants such as Samsung and SK Hynix rely on Japanese suppliers to manufacture chips and displays, which are in turn bought by Apple and other tech firms for use in their smartphones.  The complicated web of supply chains involved in the production of popular tech products means that escalating trade tensions between the East Asian neighbours could lead to higher prices for customers globally, according to analysts.  “Japan’s decision to place export restrictions on South Korea will ripple out to other countries,” said Troy Stangarone at the Korea Economic Institute in Washington. “The downside to the type of weaponised interdependence that Japan is using to coerce South Korea is that … there will be collateral damage as interdependent links are disrupted.”  Bernstein, an investment management and research firm, reported on Monday that prices of dynamic random-access memory chips, of which South Korea is the world’s largest producer, had risen 12 per cent in less than a week.  Samsung relies on Japanese suppliers to manufacture chips and displays. Photo: Bloomberg  Samsung relies on Japanese suppliers to manufacture chips and displays. Photo: Bloomberg  South Korea’s chipmaking sector accounts for 25 per cent of exports, while Samsung alone represents 21 per cent of the country’s stock market, according to the South Korean government, which has accused Japan of trying to damage its export-led economy.  But Lloyd Chan of Oxford Economics is more sanguine.  “We do not expect tensions to escalate to such an extent that they harm businesses significantly, particularly when the ongoing US-China trade conflict is already weighing on the trade outlook,” he said.  “Korea and Japan should have enough economic incentives to minimise the potential fallout.  In the meantime, major firms such as Samsung and SK Hynix have began looking to mainland China, Taiwan and local producers to make up the shortfall in key materials.  Sundi Aiyer, managing director of supply chain and operations advisory Aiyer Group, said the spat would serve as a “wake-up call” to South Korean manufacturers who were dependent on Japanese suppliers.  “This might mean that Korean companies will seek more reliable supply sources from alternative markets such as China or Taiwan, which could, in turn, use the opportunity to build up their own capabilities,” he said.  Why can’t Japan and South Korea get along?  Despite sharing a mutual ally in the United States and a common security threat in North Korea, the two countries remain bitterly divided over a raft of outstanding historical and territorial issues.  These include the treatment of “comfort women,” the euphemistic term used for Korean and other Asian women and girls forced to work in wartime brothels for imperial Japan. A 2015 agreement to settle the issue fell apart last year after Seoul dissolved a foundation set up to provide compensation, following complaints from surviving comfort women that they hadn’t been properly consulted on the deal.  When history isn’t causing friction between the countries, territory is getting in the way. Dokdo, a tiny islet claimed by both countries, is a semi-constant source of tension between the sides.  Moon warns Japan against taking trade fight into ‘dead-end street’  10 Jul 2019  “For the Republic of Korea [South Korea], their modern identity is rooted in the Japanese colonial experience and subsequent division of the peninsula,” said Stephen Nagy, a senior associate professor at International Christian University in Tokyo. “For Japan, their post-WWII identity is rooted in their experience of being the only nation to experience the atomic bomb, their pacifist constitution and their post-WWII behaviour in the region and on the international stage.  “Both identities are not recognised by each other and as such bilateral frustrations, nationalism and selective historical understandings continue to divide what should be natural allies in the region,” he said.  Brad Glosserman, deputy director of the Centre for Rule Making Strategies at Tama University in Tokyo, said that historical and territorial disputes were often exploited for domestic political gain in both countries.  “This is seen as a domestic play on the part of the South Koreans to appeal to a domestic political base on the part of the progressives and President Moon himself,” said Glosserman, adding “there is a similar tendency in Japan.”  Will the US come to the rescue?  During previous spats between South Korea and Japan, the US, which hosts key military bases in both countries, has tried to get its mutual allies talking to iron out their differences. Abe and former South Korean president Park Geun-hye met for the first time in 2014, more than a year after the leaders had entered office, after then-US president Barack Obama brought them together on the sidelines of a nuclear security summit at The Hague.  The Trump administration, however, appears less inclined to get involved.  Although the US State Department last week said it would work to “strengthen our relationships between and among all three countries,” David Stilwell, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, on Friday said that Washington did not plan to intervene.  Analysts say President Trump’s suspicion of traditional alliances and Pyongyang’s improved relations with the US and South Korea mean that Washington is likely to take a hands-off approach to the growing rift between its allies.  So what will happen next?  For now, there looks to be no end in sight to the spat. In July 2020, South Korea revived a complaint it filed with the World Trade Organisation last year over Japan’s trade restrictions, after describing them as “politically motivated.” Tokyo has tried to block the WTO inquiry, saying its measures fall under a national security exemption.  Moon warned Japan that its trade restrictions had “shattered credibility” for cooperation in manufacturing and would hurt its economy more than South Korea’s in the end.  Korean business owners have rallied to boycott Japanese products and in a poll released last week by Gallup Korea, 67 per cent of South Koreans said they supported a boycott of Japan.  3 in 4 Japanese distrust South Koreans – and the feeling’s mutual  12 Jun 2019  Meanwhile, the sides face a number of deadlines and politically-charged milestones that could raise tensions further, including the July 18 deadline for South Korea to accept a third-party arbitrator in the forced-labour dispute; Japan’s July 21 upper house election, that critics argue has given Abe a political incentive to keep the dispute alive; and the July 24 deadline for public feedback on Tokyo’s plans to remove South Korea from its trade “white list” paving the way for customs restrictions on 40 new categories of South Korean products. On August 15, South Korea will celebrate National Liberation Day, which marks the end of Japanese rule over the peninsula.  Shin Kak-soo, former South Korean ambassador to Japan, believes the only way out is for the Korean government to “suggest a viable solution to resolve the forced labour issue”.  If not, he said: “There is a likelihood of further measures by Japan that will rapidly lead to a downward spiral, being fanned by strong nationalism in both countries.” |
| China.org with Xinhua | News Analysis | China.org.cn | August 28, 2019 | China | S.Korea expresses strong regret over Japan's enforcement of whitelist removal | South Korea's presidential Blue House on Wednesday expressed strong regret over Japan's enforcement to remove South Korea from its whitelist of trusted trading partners amid the escalating trade spat and the controversy over historical issues between the two countries.  Kim Hyun-chong, deputy director of the National Security Office (NSO) of the Blue House, told a press briefing that South Korea "strongly regrets" the latest action taken by Japan to enforce the removal of Seoul from its whitelist.  "The (South Korean) government has continuously demanded the retraction of economic retaliation that Japan had undertaken with regard to the ruling of the (South) Korean Supreme Court," Kim said.  The comment came after Japan's move to drop South Korea off its whitelist of nations, entitled to simplified export control procedures, came into effect at midnight as planned. Earlier this month, Seoul also took Tokyo off its whitelist of trusted export partners.  The trade dispute between Seoul and Tokyo was sparked by Japan's tighter control in early July on its export to South Korea of three materials vital to produce memory chips and display panels, which are the mainstay of the South Korean export.  Japan's export curbs came in an apparent protest against the South Korean top court's ruling that ordered some Japanese firms, including Nippon Steel and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries among others, to compensate the wartime forced labor victims.  Hundreds of thousands of South Koreans were forced by Imperial Japan into hard labor without pay during World War II. The Korean Peninsula was colonized by Japan from 1910 to 1945.  Japan claimed that all colonial-era issues, including the forced labor, were settled via the 1965 treaty that normalized diplomatic relations between the two countries, but South Korea said the accord did not involve individuals' right to reparation.  Amid the resurfacing controversy over historical issues and the mounting trade spat, South Korea decided last week to terminate the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan that was signed in November 2016.  "We want to once again point out that it was Japan who actually linked security issues to export restriction measures in the first place," the Blue House official said.  "Japan initially claimed that trust had been breached between the two nations with regard to the forced labor issue as it took export restriction measures. But, Japan went on to change its tune to claim that the problems in (South) Korea's export control regime had a negative impact on Japan's security," Kim said.  Kim refuted Japan's claims citing the Institute of Science and International Security, which ranked South Korea at 17th place and Japan at 36th each when grading the two countries' export control regimes for strategic materials.  "Let me emphasize once again that the purpose of GSOMIA between (South) Korea and Japan is to facilitate the exchange of sensitive military information between the two countries based on a very high level of mutual trust," Kim said.  "Now that basic trust has been undermined between the two countries as Japan is claiming. There is no justification for maintaining GSOMIA," he said.  Regarding the 1965 treaty, Kim reiterated South Korea's position that the "crimes against humanity" in which Japan's government and military had participated during the colonial era "cannot be deemed as resolved" by the 1965 pact and that the individual rights of the forced labor victims to claim reparations "are very much alive".  "The ball is now in Japan's court," said Kim citing South Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon's comment on Thursday that if Japan withdraws its unwarranted measures and the two countries could reach a solution, the GSOMIA could be reconsidered |
| Cho Ki-weon | Commentary | Hankyoreh | March 27, 2019 | South Korea | Japan downplays its responsibility for forced labor and forced adoption of Japanese names | “People in the colony of Korea were made to change their names to the Japanese style or conscripted as soldiers in the Japanese military and sent into the battlefield.”  This sentence appeared without a clearly stated agent in a social studies textbook for sixth year elementary school students published by Kyoiku Shuppan, which was approved by Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) on Mar. 26. The sentence mentions the forced adoption of Japanese names and conscription that the Japanese government imposed on Koreans in the late stages of the occupation, but obscures the responsibility of the government itself in implementing those policies. The current textbook, which was authorized in 2014, mentions the government as the agent of oppression.  Another omission of agency was found in an account of the Great Kanto Earthquake of September 1923 by Tokyo Shoseki.  “An incident occurred in which many Koreans and Chinese were killed,” a sentence reads, making no reference at all to the Japanese military, police, and vigilante groups responsible for killing at least 6,000 Koreans during the quake. In the past, the Japanese government has omitted subjects from major sentences in which its own responsibility should have been made clear, including a December 2015 agreement with South Korea on the Japanese military comfort women issue and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s August 2015 statements regarding comfort women victims.  Instances like these that illustrate Japan’s backward perceptions of historical issues are noticeably abundant in government approved school textbooks. In its national teaching guidelines, the Japanese government wrote that students should “be made to understand the effect that the war had on all of humanity, including the massive damages inflicted on people in many countries, particularly in Asia.” But detailed accounts of the actual damages suffered by Japan’s Asian neighbors have been relatively scarce – possibly due to the influence of a historical revisionist push spearheaded by Abe.  Omission of forced laborers on Hashima Island and Japan’s medieval invasions  The dodging of responsibility has also been apparent in references to Gunkan, which emerged as a major diplomatic issue between South Korea and Japan in 2016. In a section on Japan’s “world cultural heritage,” a social studies textbook published by Tokyo Shoseki included a picture of Nagasaki’s Hashima Island – widely known by the nickname of “Gunkanjima” – and indicated its position on a map. But no mention was made of the Koreans and Chinese who were forcibly mobilized there for grueling labor. Describing the Imjin War of the late 16th century in a history of medieval Japan, Kyoiku Shuppan omitted previous references to “invasions,” writing only that Japan “sent a large force to Korea.”  The only textbook to mention Japan’s responsibility for the war was Nihon Bunkyo. In its textbook, it wrote that Japan “inflicted great damage on Asians through wars and other actions.”  “It is important not to forget this historical fact, and to continue building stronger relationships of friends and trust while respecting each other’s countries,” it continued. “Even today, there are some who hold Japan responsibility for damages inflicted during wartime.”  But the same company also included an account whitewashing the Russo-Japanese War that proved pivotal in Japan’s decision to colonize the Korean Peninsula.  “It inspired hope and an awareness of independence in the people of many Asian countries who were suffering from the expansion and control of the European and American empires,” it wrote.  References to South Korea-Japan interchange and South Korea in general were also reduced. While the current Nihon Bunkyo textbook included a sentence about Japan “continuing to strengthen its friendship with Korea, including the co-hosting of the 2002 World Cup,” the latest version omits the reference to “continuing to strengthen friendship.” References to the influence of people from the Korean Peninsula on ancient Japanese civilization were also reduced. Whereas the current textbook notes that people from the Korean Peninsula “shared culture and technology from the mainland,” the latest textbook omits the reference. |
| China.org with Xinhua | News Analysis | China.org.cn | August 28, 2019 | China | Japan remove S. Korea from preferential "whitelist" of trusted trade partners as row intensifies | Japan on Wednesday removed South Korea from its "whitelist" of nations entitled to simplified export control procedures as planned, further raising the stakes in a bitter diplomatic row between the two neighbors that encompasses issues of history and trade.  The removal of South Korea from the list, the first time Japan has revoked a countries' trusted trade status, came into effect at midnight and followed the necessary completion of domestic procedures.  "We will carry out the plan (to remove South Korea from the whitelist)" Japan's Trade Minister Hiroshige Seko told a press conference, saying the move was not aimed at hurting the South Korean economy.  "This is a domestic decision aimed at implementing the appropriate export controls. It's not meant to impact relations between Japan and South Korea," Seko said.  The latest measure by Japan, amid sinking ties between both countries, was approved by the cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and means South Korea will no longer enjoy minimum trade restrictions on sensitive goods including electronic components, and Japanese companies must receive case-by-case approval from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan before such goods can be exported.  Seko maintained that the move by Tokyo was not aimed at restraining trade or supposed to damage bilateral ties between both countries, although observers have noted that bilateral relations have already plunged to new lows in recent times amid an ongoing labor dispute and Japan's previous tightening of export control regulations.  Japan, early last month, tightened regulations on its exports to South Korea of three materials vital to make memory chips and display panels, which are mainstays of the South Korean economy, in a further escalation of souring ties between both parties.  South Korea has been on the whitelist since 2004 and has been guaranteed preferential treatment in terms of importing certain products from Japan.  Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, Japan's top government spokesperson, has said that Japan will now deal with South Korea the same way it treats other countries in the region.  Suga previously reiterated that Japan believes that it is an appropriate step from enforcing effective export controls to remove South Korea from the white list.  Up until South Korea's removal, Japan had a total of 27 countries or regions on its whitelist, including the United States, Britain, Germany, Australia, New Zealand and Argentina, and whitelisted countries can, through simplified procedures, receive products exported from Japan that could be potentially be diverted for military use.  In order to then export the products to countries not on the whitelist, the countries only need to obtain approval from Japan's trade ministry.  The South Korean government had urged Japan not to proceed with its removal from the whitelist, which it estimates could have a negative bearing on more than 1,000 items in key industries spanning the auto and petrochemical sectors.  Experts close to the matter have said that the measures could adversely affect both South Korean manufacturers and Japanese exporters as their supply chains are closely connected.  Japanese and South Korean foreign ministers failed to resolve differences between the two countries in recent meetings.  South Korea, for its part, has decided to take Japan off of its own "whitelist" of trusted trade partners and announced tighter restrictions for importing coal ash and some waste recycling materials from Japan.  Last week, the South Korean government also decided to scrap the General Security of Military Information Agreement, or GSOMIA with Japan on exchanging classified military information as the tit-for-tat dispute escalates.  Japanese Defense Minister Takeshi Iwaya said the decision by South Korea was "disappointing" and he believed that the present security environment had been "completely misread" by South Korea.  Iwaya added that Japan will continue to ask South Korea to "reconsider" its decision not to extend the GSOMIA.  The GSOMIA pact between both sides, signed in 2016, has enabled the two neighbors to share military information and has helped both sides to counter potential regional threats.  The severity of Seoul's decision to terminate the pact, from Tokyo's perspective, was reflected in Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono summoning South Korean Ambassador Nam Gwan Pyo to lodge an official protest last week.  Japanese Prime Minister Abe, for his part, said that recent moves by South Korea, including the rulings by South Korean top courts last year ordering Japanese firms to pay compensation to forced laborers during Japan's colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula, had damaged trust between the two countries.  Despite bilateral relations sinking to their lowest level in recent years amid wartime, trade and now military information sharing issues, Abe said Japan had been trying to deal with the situation to maintain relations with South Korea at a functional level "so as not to produce a negative impact on cooperation between Japan, the United States and South Korea, in light of the current security situation in Northeast Asia."  The latest escalation by Japan comes amid an ongoing wartime labor dispute that Tokyo believes Seoul has not cooperated in trying to resolve bilaterally or by way of the establishment of an arbitration panel involving a third party, which has spilled over into trade and now intelligence sharing disputes.  The Japanese side initially believed Seoul had intentionally missed a deadline to establish an arbitration panel to settle the dispute over wartime labor.  Japan had tried to maintain that the initial tighter export controls of some materials used in high-tech products were not in retaliation for South Korea's mishandling of the arbitration situation, and under the new restrictions, Japanese manufacturers now have to file individual applications for exports to South Korea of fluorinated polyimide, hydrogen fluoride and resists.  These products are commonly used in smartphone displays and chips, mainstays of South Korea's tech-forward economy and integral to some key supply chains that flow from Japan and through South Korea onward.  Economists have pointed out that due to the interconnectedness of the supply chains, while South Korean chipmakers like Samsung Electronics Co. and SK Hynix Inc. would likely be affected, Japanese exporters could also take a hit.  South Korea's top court ordering some major Japanese firms to compensate South Korean plaintiffs over forced wartime labor during Japan's 1910-1945 occupation of the Korean Peninsula, with lawyers being allowed to seize the assets of some Japanese firms, initially raised the ire of the Japanese side.  Japan, for its part, has claimed the rulings are not in line with international law and run contrary to the foundation of friendly and cooperative relations between the two neighbors since the 1965 normalization of diplomatic ties.  Japan maintains the matter of compensation for wartime labor was "finally and completely" resolved under the pact. |
| Hankyoreh, | Editorial | Hankyoreh | July 17, 2019 | South Korea | Cooperation between S. Korean government and businesses more crucial than ever | After imposing export controls on three key materials, Japan is now pushing ahead with its plan to remove South Korea from its “white list.” If it actually goes ahead with this, the result will be difficulties importing key materials and serious damage to the bilateral relationship of trust with Japan. The Japanese government should bear in mind that both its export controls and its white list removal measures have been characterized as violations of WTO norms.  The white list removal is taking the form of an amendment of an “export decree for strategic goods” by Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry. The current schedule has a public comment period through July 24, after which a Cabinet meeting will be held to finalize and proclaim the measures, which go into effect three weeks later. Once this happens, the comprehensive permit system (with a three-year validity period) will be abruptly replaced with an individual permit system (with renewable validity periods of six months or more), forcing South Korea to undergo reviews for every importation of key materials. This approach is damaging to bilateral relations and should be withdrawn.  Ahead of the WTO discussions, Japan is expected to cite Article XXI of GATT (on “Security Exceptions”) as a key basis for both its controls on three export items and its plan to kick South Korea off its white list. The argument is that the trade retaliation measures are intended for essential national security protections and are not subject to legal action. But with its regulations on the three materials, Japan merely leaked speculation about the “possibility” of their being transported into North Korea, without offering any evidence. It also has failed to produce any concrete facts since a working-level meeting of department directors on July 12 to justify invoking Article XXI.  In addition to these issues, analysts are saying South Korea’s removal from the white list is a violation of GATT’s Article I-1 (on “General Most-Favoured-National Treatment”) barring discrimination among member nations. In other words, it violates the principle that in the absence of clear grounds for exceptions, the same items require the same treatment. Japan needs to provide a suitable answer on this. It also needs to answer about the possibility of its actions being in violation of GATT’s Article XI-1 requiring WTO member countries not to prohibit or restrict exports through the use of permits.  With WTO General Council set to address export controls on the three materials as part of the agenda for an upcoming meeting in Geneva on July 23–24, the South Korean government will need to focus its energies on actively emphasizing the unjustness of Japan’s measures to the international community and winning support for its position from countries around the world. Along with this international opinion campaign, it is more crucial than ever to foster a mood of coordination between the government and domestic businesses and cooperation across party lines by politicians. |
| Kim Ji-suk | Opinion | Hankyoreh | July 18, 2019 | South Korea | The parallel between Abe and Trump in using economic warfare via preemptive “shock therapy | The parallel between Abe and Trump in using economic warfare via preemptive “shock therapy  Posted on : Jul.18,2019 16:18 KST Modified on : Jul.18,2019  Japan’s diminished presence on global stage could be prompting rash actions from Abe  On July 15, the New York Times published an article comparing Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s export controls to the trade policies of US President Donald Trump. (Hankyoreh archives)  Nothing like it has happened before in the history of South Korea-Japan relations since Korea’s liberation from colonial rule. I’m referring to the unilateral attempt by one party to choke off the other. And the party responsible is none other than Japan, the perpetrators of colonial rule and perennial beneficiaries of a trade surplus.  Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s provocations with his economic warfare are identical to the actions of US President Donald Trump. To begin with, both try to weaken their adversary by leveraging an advantage to apply preemptive “shock therapy.” The US, which possesses the world’s biggest market, has used increases in import duties; Japan is applying export controls. Both have shown an utter disregard for the international trade norms exemplified by the WTO. Both adopt an attitude of “If we do it, that makes it the international norm.”  Both also resort to incoherent security-based arguments to rationalize their actions. In the US’ case, it’s the high-handedness of a hegemonic power that uses arbitrary definitions of “security” as a tool for economic warfare – but few if any countries are in a position to disregard what it says. When Japan invokes North Korea sanctions-related issues as grounds for export controls, however, it’s basically playing follow-the-leader. Both are identical in their use of economic warfare as a political means of strengthening their own position. For Abe in particular, hackneyed ideological tactics that alternate attacks against South and North Korea represent part of his political base.  In terms of their goals, the two show some similarities and some differences. They differ in content, if not in category – since each country has a different stature and different intermediate- to long-term goal.  Abe has two main goals. One of them is to alter South Korean policy or weaken the current administration’s authority. A key part of this policy involves sustaining the 1965 regime with Japan’s own wording. This means returning itself to pride of place in relations with its neighbor, with no further mention of historical issues related to colonial rule no matter which administrations arrive in power. It means to forestall any mention of as-yet unresolved issues concerning individual compensation to Japanese military comfort women or forced labor survivors, while joining forces only with those who will cooperate with it. Japan’s right wing, Abe included, would also like to see the South Korean administration replaced with others who march in lockstep with them.  Trump is similar in the way he seeks to change the policies of other countries and weaken their political authorities, but his focus is on US interests that are somewhat more clearly visible: employment mercantilism (increased jobs for Americans) and improving an adverse trade situation.  Another aspect is the reorganizing of structures and systems. Abe also hopes to turn around the decline in Japan’s role within Northeast Asia. In the past, Japan stood poised to account for 15% of total global production; that number has since fallen to 6%. China’s total production is 2.5 times higher than Japan’s, while South Korea has reached 80% of Japan’s level in terms of per capita income. Japan is also a weaker presence when it comes to security issues, including denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the establishment of a peace regime. South Korea finds itself the first target in Abe’s offensive to reverse this trend. It’s an attempt to bring South Korea in line and enlist it as Japan’s subordinate partner.  Washington and Trump have little incentive to intervene on S. Korea’s behalf  Abe’s provocations with his economic warfare coincide further with the US’ offensive against China – buttressing a framework of antagonism pitting the US and Japan on one side against China on the other. In its bid to knock China down a peg, the US supports a stronger Japan as a faithful, subordinate ally. At the same time, it doesn’t want to see a weakening in its existing trilateral alliance with Japan and South Korea. In other words, the Washington has little motivation to intervene in Tokyo’s economic warfare provocations so long as that alliance is not compromised.  This is not the first time Japan has scapegoated the Korean Peninsula in a bid to pass the buck with internal uncertainties and attempt to realize a new international order. It did the same thing in the late 19th century amid the heavy tide of Western advancement in Asia, and in the post-unification years of the late 16th century when it was awash in warriors after a long civil war. Japan’s right wing longs for those times even today.  Kim Ji-suk, editorial writer  Since the modern era, the world has undergone a changing of generations roughly every 35 to 45 years. I’ve used the term “neoliberalism/inter-Korean antagonism era” to describe the post-Cold War period since the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. Following an “entrenchment period” through the launch of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 and a “development period” through the global economic crisis in 2008, that era has been undergoing a “reorganization period.” The keywords for that reorganization period have been the “Asia Axis Policy” of the Obama administration and the “America First” approach of the Trump administration. In East Asia, the US and Japan have been the establishment forces representing the north, while China has been challenging this as a major player from the south. Japan’s economic warfare provocation is an attempt to forcibly suppress a South Korea that is regarded as a threat to the establishment.  Abe’s Japan is symbolic of the old order. In a few years, East Asia may see the emergence of a new order that is completely different from before. The latest economic warfare is part of that current. Negotiations are necessary, but however difficult it may be, we must follow a course that does not embarrass us before history. The most important thing is to strengthen our capabilities so that Japan is not able to brandish weapons like this again. |
| China.org with Xinhua | Commentary | China.org.cn | July 4, 2019 | China | Trade dispute between S. Korea, Japan risk damaging both economies | The trade dispute between South Korea and Japan was feared to damage both economies as the two countries were intertwined in the global chain of supply and demand, South Korean media reported.  Citing an economic interdependence, Christian Broadcasting System (CBS) NoCut News said Wednesday that if the current friction develops into a trade war, it would inevitably pose damages to both economies of Japan and South Korea.  South Korea is Japan's third-biggest exporting country and the fifth-largest importing nation, according to S. Korean media.  In the semiconductor sector, the bilateral interdependence was deeper. As of 2017, Japan exported 10.4 billion U.S. dollars of chip-related products to South Korea, taking up nearly one fifth of Japan's total export to South Korea.  The report came after Japan announced a plan Monday to impose export restrictions from Thursday on three major materials to South Korea's tech industry.  The materials included fluorinated polyimide, hydrogen fluoride and polymer resist used to produce semiconductors and display panels that inevitably affect the manufacturing of TVs and smartphones.  The South Korean government lambasted the measures, calling them an "economic retaliation" that ran counter to the spirit of free trade and the World Trade Organization (WTO) regulations. It vowed to file a suit with WTO against the Japanese measures and take other necessary steps based on domestic and international laws.  Local newspaper Seoul Shinmun forecast that the Seoul-Tokyo trade friction would not develop into a trade war as Japan would also be damaged by the prolonged trade dispute.  Given the inventory of the three materials, with which South Korean chipmakers can endure for two to three months, it could be an opportunity for domestic companies to reduce their excessive chip inventory, the newspaper said.  The global semiconductor industry had been rattled by the downturn in business cycle and the supply glut, leading to a sharp fall in chip price.  However, the local newspaper noted that the Japanese government was expected to maintain its aggressive position toward South Korea for the time being as the Japanese government believed that its deepened conflict with South Korea could benefit the Japanese ruling party in the upcoming parliamentary election later this month.  Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga of Japan said Tuesday that the tighter export controls to South Korea came as Seoul had failed to show a satisfactory solution to the ongoing wartime labor dispute between the two countries.  Japan has protested against the South Korean top court's recent rulings that some major Japanese companies, such as Nippon Steel and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries among others, to compensate the South Korean victims who were forced into hard labor without pay during World War Ⅱ.  The Korean Peninsula was colonized by Japan from 1910 to 1945. South Korean historians said at least 700,000 young Koreans were coerced into the forced labor during the colonial era.  Japan claimed that the reparation issues were settled through the 1965 accord that normalized diplomatic relations between Seoul and Tokyo following the colonial era, but South Korea said the 1965 pact did not refer to individuals' right to compensation for the wartime hard labor.  South Korea's Yonhap news agency said in a commentary that Japan's economic retaliation linked to historical issues was "shameful beyond measure," worrying that the complicated diplomatic row was not expected to be resolved easily.  The commentary noted that the Japanese measures had something to do with the upcoming parliamentary election, adding that it would not be good for the South Korean economy, which saw its export fall for seven straight months through June. |
| Shin Gwang-yeong | Opinion | Hankyoreh | July 21, 2019 | South Korea | The future of East Asia and how the past is tying it down | The future of East Asia and how the past is tying it down  The current S. Korea-Japan trade dispute a remnant of imperialism and Cold War era  On July 15, the New York Times published an article comparing Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s export controls to the trade policies of US President Donald Trump. (Hankyoreh archives)  The conflict between South Korea and Japan is assuming greater proportions with each passing day. Though the trade dispute began with the Abe administration placing restrictions on Japanese exports of three items, including high-purity hydrogen fluoride, to South Korea, it’s escalating beyond the economic domain.  The Hankyoreh has been covering South Korea’s dependence on Japanese parts and materials and Japan’s white list. The newspaper’s articles have also shed light on South Koreans’ boycott of Japanese products and their cancellation of planned trips to Japan. Articles in the Japanese and English-language media about the two countries’ spat has illustrated how this issue is being regarded abroad. It has received less coverage in other countries in East Asia, such as China or Taiwan.  An understanding of this dispute requires a more historical approach because of its connection to changes in East Asia resulting from the legacy of imperialism and the Cold War.  East Asia is the only region in the world that’s still dealing with that legacy. Japan succeeded at achieving Western-style development under the mantra of “Datsu-A Ron,” or de-Asianization. While seeking to expand its territory on the model of Western imperialism, Japan colonized Korea, then known as Joseon. It was Japan that provoked World War II, the most horrific war in human history, endangering young Korean men and women.  While the war ended in Japan’s defeat, Japan’s conservative political forces long for the country’s glory days, rather than repenting of its past deeds. They denigrate repentance as self-flagellation and distort history by praising the age of imperialism.  The current situation in Japan is the product of the Cold War. While the US and the Soviet Union had fought together against Germany, Italy, and Japan in World War II, they became the poles of two competing systems after the war. In 1947, an American diplomat at the US embassy to Moscow named George Kennan submitted a piece to Foreign Affairs, under the pseudonym “Mr. X,” in which he argued that Stalinist expansionism was a threat to democracy and advocated a strategy of containment against the Soviet Union. President Truman bought into this viewpoint, leading him to scrap FDR’s plan of working with the Soviet Union and China to build a peace regime in Northeast Asia and declared the Truman Doctrine, with the goal of containing those two countries.  The emergence of the Cold War also led the allies’ General Headquarters (GHQ), led by General Douglas MacArthur, in Japan to halt its efforts to institute democratic reforms and dismantle militarism in that country. The allied command adopted a policy known as the Reverse Course, in which it curtailed the executions of war criminals and gave Japan’s militaristic forces a second chance in the hope that Japan would serve as a counter to the Soviet Union. Japan was transformed from a country of war criminals into the US’ Asian partner in its containment of Soviet and Chinese expansion.  Furthermore, the Korean War, which began in 1950, brought a huge economic boom to Japan. Given Japan’s geographical proximity to the Korean Peninsula, the US used it as a source of war supplies, enabling Japan to earn a total of US$2.5 billion from the US during the three years of the war. At the time, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida called the Korean War “a blessing from the heavens.” After the travails of the colonial occupation, the Korean Peninsula was devastated during the war, but Japan was flush with cash from the wartime boom.  During the Cold War, the US arranged for South Korea and Japan to normalize their diplomatic relations through a bilateral agreement signed in 1965 and to stand together in the fight against the communist world. Despite large-scale protests by university students, the South Korean government, under President Park Chung-hee, declared martial law and hastily signed the agreement, called the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea. Thus, relations between the two countries were established before they could properly reckon with Japan’s colonial depredation of Korea.  During the late 20th century, there have been huge economic changes in East Asia. Japan has been suffering a protracted economic slowdown since 1995, while China has enjoyed rapid growth, overtaking Japan in 2009 to become the world’s second-largest economy. South Korea has become an economic powerhouse in its own right, currently ranking 11th in the world. The gross domestic product (GDP) of China, Japan, and South Korea has narrowed to a ratio of 8:3:1, a reality that’s hard to swallow, and even nerve-wracking, for Japan’s conservatives.  Shin Gwang-yeong, professor of sociology at Chung-Ang University  East Asia has the world’s most sophisticated division of labor in the production of electronic goods. The corporations of East Asia use parts manufactured in countries including Japan, South Korea, Singapore, China, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Thailand to assemble products with a high amount of added value. This production network is integrated globally as well. Throwing up major roadblocks in this network for political ends creates chaos in the market, harming companies and consumers not only in South Korea but also in many other countries around the world.  The future of East Asia depends on untying the knots of past disputes. As is shown by the history of Germany’s relationship with the rest of Europe, continuing apologies by a state for its past mistakes and a multilateral pursuit of a future of symbiosis and coexistence will empower the dream of a new East Asia. |
| China.org with Xinhua | News Analysis | China.org.cn | July 3, 2019 | China | Trade dispute between S. Korea, Japan risk damaging both economies | The trade dispute between South Korea and Japan was feared to damage both economies as the two countries were intertwined in the global chain of supply and demand, South Korean media reported.  Citing an economic interdependence, Christian Broadcasting System (CBS) NoCut News said Wednesday that if the current friction develops into a trade war, it would inevitably pose damages to both economies of Japan and South Korea.  South Korea is Japan’s third-biggest exporting country and the fifth-largest importing nation, according to S. Korean media.  In the semiconductor sector, the bilateral interdependence was deeper. As of 2017, Japan exported 10.4 billion U.S. dollars of chip-related products to South Korea, taking up nearly one fifth of Japan’s total export to South Korea.  　 The report came after Japan announced a plan Monday to impose export restrictions from Thursday on three major materials to South Korea’s tech industry.  The materials included fluorinated polyimide, hydrogen fluoride and polymer resist used to produce semiconductors and display panels that inevitably affect the manufacturing of TVs and smartphones.  The South Korean government lambasted the measures, calling them an “economic retaliation” that ran counter to the spirit of free trade and the World Trade Organization (WTO) regulations. It vowed to file a suit with WTO against the Japanese measures and take other necessary steps based on domestic and international laws.  Local newspaper Seoul Shinmun forecast that the Seoul-Tokyo trade friction would not develop into a trade war as Japan would also be damaged by the prolonged trade dispute.  Given the inventory of the three materials, with which South Korean chipmakers can endure for two to three months, it could be an opportunity for domestic companies to reduce their excessive chip inventory, the newspaper said.  The global semiconductor industry had been rattled by the downturn in business cycle and the supply glut, leading to a sharp fall in chip price.  　 However, the local newspaper noted that the Japanese government was expected to maintain its aggressive position toward South Korea for the time being as the Japanese government believed that its deepened conflict with South Korea could benefit the Japanese ruling party in the upcoming parliamentary election later this month.  Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga of Japan said Tuesday that the tighter export controls to South Korea came as Seoul had failed to show a satisfactory solution to the ongoing wartime labor dispute between the two countries.  Japan has protested against the South Korean top court’s recent rulings that some major Japanese companies, such as Nippon Steel and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries among others, to compensate the South Korean victims who were forced into hard labor without pay during World War Ⅱ.  The Korean Peninsula was colonized by Japan from 1910 to 1945. South Korean historians said at least 700,000 young Koreans were coerced into the forced labor during the colonial era.  Japan claimed that the reparation issues were settled through the 1965 accord that normalized diplomatic relations between Seoul and Tokyo following the colonial era, but South Korea said the 1965 pact did not refer to individuals’ right to compensation for the wartime hard labor.  South Korea's Yonhap news agency said in a commentary that Japan’s economic retaliation linked to historical issues was “shameful beyond measure,” worrying that the complicated diplomatic row was not expected to be resolved easily.  The commentary noted that the Japanese measures had something to do with the upcoming parliamentary election, adding that it would not be good for the South Korean economy, which saw its export fall for seven straight months through June. |
| Cho Ki-weon | Opinion | Hankyoreh | July 21, 2019 | South Korea | Unraveling the meaning of Japan’s “international order” | Tokyo’s export controls were the result of months of deliberation, not a sudden outburst  Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at a roundtable discussion at the Japan National Press Club on July 3. (AFP/Yonhap News)  In coarse terms, the gist of the Shinzo Abe administration’s beef with South Korea in terms of historic issues is that South Korea does not respect the international order and does not honor its promises. In addition to this, Japanese conservative media and right-wingers also argue that South Korea puts “emotions” ahead of “logic.”  These figures have put forth the argument that the matter of forced labor mobilization during Japan’s colonial occupation of Korea was completely resolved in 1965 with the Agreement between Japan and the Republic of Korea Concerning the Settlement of Problems in Regard to Property and Claims and Economic Cooperation (Claims Settlement Agreement). That agreement states that Japan and the Republic of Korea “confirm that the problems concerning property, rights, and interests of the two High Contracting Parties and their peoples (including juridical persons) and the claims between the High Contracting Parties and between their peoples, including those stipulated in Article IV(a) of the Peace Treaty with Japan signed at the city of San Francisco on September 8, 1951, have been settled completely and finally.”  Their position is that with the two sides having already confirmed the issue of Japanese military comfort women to have been “finally and irreversibly resolved“ with an agreement between their governments in December 2015, all that remains is for them to implement the agreement.  Fundamentally, this is a difficult argument to support, as it does not attempt to directly confront the damage suffered by victims of forced labor and the comfort women survivors. As far as the South Korea-Japan Claims Settlement Agreement is concerned, even Japanese lawyers have noted that it did not extinguish individual claims. At the same time, it could be understood in terms of a sort of logical consistency on the Japanese government’s part. That’s how it felt, at any rate, until late last year.  But recently it has become impossible not to question Japan’s entire line of reasoning on the “international order” and the “importance of keeping promises.” In December 2018, the Japanese government announced that it would be resuming commercial whaling and pulling out of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling as of July 2019, after previously halting the practice in 1988. The reasons it gave for its withdrawal – that whaling resources were showing a trend of recovery, and that whaling itself was a longstanding Japanese cultural tradition – were in defiance of global trends. It also began arguing that the World Trade Organization (WTO) was not performing its dispute resolution role, after Japan lost in its WTO appeal battle with South Korea this April concerning an import ban on seafood from Fukushima and seven surrounding Japanese prefectures. Despite taking every opportunity to emphasize the importance of the international order, international law, and promises in and of themselves, the Japanese government changed its tune once the outcome went against it.  On July 1, the Japanese government announced that it was stepping up export regulations on three items, including semiconductor materials. Once again, it cited “damage to the relationship of trust” between the two sides as a reason. Even in Japan, many saw this as a “resistance measure” against South Korean Supreme Court rulings ordering the payment of damages for forced labor, but Tokyo insisted this was not the case. On the last day of the G20 Summit in Osaka on June 29 – two days before it announced the export control measures – the Japanese government spearheaded the drafting of a joint declaration that stressed the importance of a “free, fair, non-discriminatory” trade environment.  Cho Ki-weon, Tokyo correspondent  Many critics in Japan have questioned whether Tokyo was not going against the same spirit of free trade that it championed on the international stage. In response, the Japanese government has recently changed course and begun citing “security reasons,” arguing that its controls are simply part of its trade management policies.  I do not believe the Abe administration simply whipped these measures up out of thin air just to rally its conservative supporters’ votes ahead of the House of Councillors election on July 21. I see it as the result of a complex mixture of factors, including resentment that has built up in Japan in the wake of the Supreme Court forced labor compensation rulings. There are signs that the Japanese government prepared this move with a good deal of thought to what means of retaliation would prove most effective against South Korea. Seeing these measures from Japan, I find myself once again pondering the meaning of the words “international order.” |
| China.org with Xinhua | News Analysis | China.org.cn | July 5, 2019 | China | S.Korea officially dissolves Japan-funded "comfort women" fund, Tokyo says "never accept" decision | The South Korean government has officially dissolved a Japan-funded foundation in Seoul for the South Korean victims forced to work in the Japanese military brothels before and during World War II, local daily newspaper Joongang Ilbo reported Friday.  Confirming the earlier report by Japan's Asahi Shimbun newspaper, the South Korean media said the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation, set up under a 2015 agreement between Seoul and Tokyo, has been officially dissolved.  The foundation applied for the dissolution on June 17 and was notified Wednesday that the dissolution procedures were completed, according to the report.  For the actual dismissal of the foundation, some steps reportedly remained to be taken including the liquidation of the remaining assets.  The foundation was launched in July 2016 under the December 2015 agreement between Seoul and Tokyo to "finally and irreversibly" settle the issue over Korean women who were forced into sexual slavery under the 1910-45 Japanese colonization of the Korean Peninsula.  The agreement, reached under the previous Park Geun-hye government of South Korea, was criticized by the victims and civic groups here as Japan failed to sincerely apologize and take legal responsibility for the wartime atrocities.  The Moon Jae-in government of South Korea decided to dissolve the foundation in November last year, launching procedural steps toward the dissolution.  Soldiers from the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II coerced and kidnapped hundreds of thousands of girls and women and forced them to work as sex slaves, servicing Japanese soldiers at military brothels.  Euphemistically, these sex slaves have come to be known collectively as the "comfort women."  Most of these women, with renowned scholars putting the figure at 400,000, came from Asia including China and the Korean Peninsula.  In response, the Japanese government on Friday said it could never accept the decision by South Korea to dissolve the fund.  Japanese Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasutoshi Nishimura said Japan "can never accept" the decision (for the fund to be dissolved).  The Japanese government, through a diplomatic channel, reasserted its call for the South Korean government to implement the 2015 agreement.  Under the agreement, Japan provided the funds to the foundation to help former "comfort women" and their families, and, for Tokyo's part, the agreement reached was supposed to settle the issue "finally and irreversibly."  Seoul maintains that the "comfort women" issue has not been settled, as the will of the surviving victims has not been reflected.  Along with a long-running territorial dispute between Tokyo and Seoul, a South Korean top court ordering Japanese companies to pay compensation for forced wartime labor during its occupation of the Korean Peninsula has also added to bilateral disharmony.  Japan, meanwhile, has slapped tighter regulations of exports to South Korea of some materials used in semiconductors and displays, claiming that the reason for the move was for national security.  The South Korean government slammed the measures, calling them "economic retaliation." |
| Hankyoreh, | Editorial | Hankyoreh | July 22, 2019 | South Korea | Japan should consider international community when making trade decisions | Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the coalition party Komeito won a majority of seats on the line in the Japanese House of Councillors election on July 21. Proponents of amending the Japanese constitution – including the Japan Restoration Party – failed to acquire the two-thirds majority of total House of Councillors seats needs for such an amendment. While Abe called it a “huge victory,” the outcome could be seen as something of a check on his administration’s activities.  Of the six elections (including local ones) held since the launch of Abe’s second Cabinet in 2012, few if any have drawn this level of interest from South Korea. Part of that was because of the current crossroads in the debate on amending Japan’s Peace Constitution. But it was also seen as a bellwether election in terms of gauging the future behavior of the Abe administration, which has been waging an all-out offensive in terms of relations with Seoul. It’s viewing things too narrowly to see the administration’s recent export controls on South Korea as simply part of an LDP election strategy. But it is very worrying to consider how any constraints on the administration’s arbitrary decisions and free hand will be effectively gone once the Abe administration gains “wings” by acquiring the necessary seats in both the House of Representatives and House of Councillors to amend the constitution.  Abe put the constitutional amendment issue front and center throughout the election process, questioning whether parties would “responsibly discuss things or irresponsibly refuse to even consider them.” In part, this was an attempt to deflect some of the issues forcefully raised by opposition parties, including issues with the national pension (following the publication of report indicating a “20 million yen [US$185,240] shortfall in post-retirement funds”) and the raising of the consumption tax. As the LDP’s “new era” election slogan indicated, however, the aim is effectively to alter the very order that has prevailed in Japan over the 70 years since the war.  Once it is proposed by two-thirds of lawmakers in the lower House of Representatives and upper House of Councillors, the matter of amending the Japanese constitution will be put up for a national referendum, where it will be decided by majority vote. Having secured a margin of close to 80% in support of amendment in the 2017 House of Representatives election, Abe has repeatedly talked about proceeding with it in 2020. Even without securing the necessary two-thirds this time, many are predicting he will start going after conservative opposition forces and ramping up the amendment debate.  Not only would Abe’s plans spell a radical shift for the postwar regime under which Japan achieved prosperity with its Peace Constitution stipulating the abandonment of war, but in light of the current political situation, it would also raise tensions in East Asia and throughout the international community. International opinion on the Japanese government’s trade retaliation measures against South Korea is becoming increasingly critical – as exemplified by the UK publication “The Economist” describing them as “reckless self-harm” both economically and geopolitically. US President Donald Trump’s remarks the day before yesterday hinting at the possibility of intervention – albeit on the condition that both the South Korean and Japanese leaders want it – is another sign that the situation with South Korea-Japan relations is not simply a matter for the two sides. More than anything, we have to wonder how welcoming other countries will be of a Japan capable of making war when it refuses to reflect on its own past – as demonstrated by its attitude toward South Korean survivors of forced labor – and lays waste to the very international trade order.  The global order today is very different now from how it was a century or so ago when Japan was advocating “leaving Asia and joining Europe.” South Korea, for its part, no longer shrinks in the face of Japanese threats. Japan has announced plans to hold a public comment period through July 24 on whether to take South Korea off of its white list. We urge the Abe administration to take the international community’s concerns seriously and make a wise decision. |
| Shin Min-jung and Yu Sun-hui | News Analysis | Hankyoreh | July 22, 2019 | South Korea | S. Koreans boycott Japan campaign spreading to culture and travel | The “boycott Japan” campaign in South Korea that was prompted by Japan’s economic retaliation against the country appears to be heating up. The scope of the boycott is expanding from consumer goods to the realm of culture, including travel and film, while sales of the boycotted products continue to decrease.  Figures released by the travel and hospitality industries on July 21 show a precipitous decline in new reservations for trips to Japan through travel agencies. Since July 8, Hana Tour, South Korea’s biggest travel agency, has only had an average of 500 new reservations for trips to Japan each day — less than half of the 1,200 average of previous years. Mode Tour announced that its number of new reservations between July 1 and 18 was down 70% year on year, with a 50% decline in the number of people on the reservations. 25% of annual tourists to Japan are South Koreans.  Some travel agencies are also seeing an increase in their cancellation rate. “From July 1 to 18, the number of people booking trips to Japan has fallen 70% from the same period last year, while the cancellation rate for reservations is around 50%,” said a travel company called Yellow Balloon.  Similar figures were reported by InterPark Tour. “Since July 8, our new reservations have been cut in half, while cancelled bookings have doubled,” the tour company said.  Meanwhile, sales of South Korean tour packages are booming. Yanolja, an online platform for booking hotel stays, said that the number of in-country reservations in July 1-19 was up 40% from the same period last year, while Yeogi Ottae, a competitor, reported a boost of 29%. “South Korea is seeing an increasing variety of high-quality accommodations and activities, which is elevating consumer preference for South Korea over Japan as a travel destination,” said a representative for Yalnolja.  As the days go by, the sales of consumer goods like beer that have been the prime targets of the  boycott have continued to plunge. Figures released by retailer Emart on July 21 show that sales of  Japanese beer on July 1-18 were an average of 30.1% lower than the same period last year.  Breaking this down into weekly figures shows that the decline is intensifying: -24.2% in the first week of July, -33.7% in the second week, and -36% in the third week. CU, a convenience store chain, reported that the sales of Japanese beer on July 1-18 were down 40.1% from the same period in the previous month, while sales of South Korean beer were up 2.8%. 7-Eleven saw a 20.6% month-on-month decline in Japanese beer sales, with a corresponding 2.4% rise in domestic beer sales.  Indications that boycott has extended into film  There are also indications that the boycott is extending into the world of film. Japanese animated film “Butt Detective the Movie” — which hit theaters on July 11, when the boycott was launched — was bombarded with negative reviews. Even though the film is based on a children’s book that has been quite popular in South Korea, consumer review boards have been overwhelmed by one-line posts that disregard the story and simply say that Koreans shouldn’t watch Japanese films. According to a film ticket tracking system, 117,810 people had watched “Butt Detective the Movie” by July 21. That’s surprisingly low, considering that “Crayon Shin-chan: Burst Serving! Kung Fu Boys - Ramen Rebellion,” a Japanese animated film targeting a similar age group, sold 350,000 tickets when it opened this past winter.  Alarm bells are also ringing for other soon-to-be-released Japanese films, including “Detective Conan: The Fist of Blue Sapphire,” on July 24, and “Doraemon: Nobita’s Chronicle of the Moon Exploration,” on Aug. 14. These films, where are both parts of an ongoing series, have a robust fan base.  The company promoting “Detective Conan: The Fist of Blue Sapphire” finds itself in an awkward position, a representative said. “There are comments on our message board suggesting that Koreans shouldn’t go to see Conan because it’s a Japanese anime. This is worrisome and makes us wary about promoting the film. I guess we’ll have to see how things go after the film comes out.”  The boycott on Japanese goods is also having an impact on the stock prices of related companies. Between June 28 and July 19, the value of stock in Lotte Shopping — which holds a 49% share in the Korean branch of Japanese apparel retailer Uniqlo — fell by 10.28%. During the same period, Hitejinro Holdings’ stock rose by 53% while Shinsung Tongsang, which operates apparel retailer TopTen, saw a 27.78% increase in stock prices. |
| China.org with Xinhua | Commentary | China.org.cn | July 5, 2019 | China | Japan-S. Korea political, economic ties further unravel as wartime contentions resurface | Bilateral ties between Japan and South Korea have again begun to unravel as a number of disputed issues rooted in Japan's wartime colonization of the Korean Peninsula have resurfaced with a magnitude that could have a significant bearing on the two countries' diplomacy as well as economic and trade relations.  The Japanese government on Friday said the decision by South Korea to dissolve a fund set up to settle the so-called "comfort women" issue was unacceptable, as the flames of discontent continue to be fanned by both sides.  Japanese Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasutoshi Nishimura said Japan "can never accept" the decision (to dissolve the fund)." His remarks followed reports that Seoul had formally dissolved a foundation to which Japan had provided 1 billion yen (about 9.27 million U.S. dollars) to help former "comfort women" and their families.  Soldiers from the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II coerced and kidnapped hundreds of thousands of girls and women and forced them to work as sex slaves, servicing Japanese soldiers at military brothels.  Euphemistically, these sex slaves have come to be known collectively as the "comfort women."  Most of these women, with renowned scholars putting the figure at 400,000, came from Asia including China and the Korean Peninsula.  The Japanese government, through a diplomatic channel, reasserted its call for the South Korean government to implement an agreement made in 2015 on the issue, sources close to the matter here said Friday.  Under the agreement reached in December 2015, Japan provided the funds to the foundation to help former "comfort women" and their families, and, for Tokyo's part, the agreement reached was supposed to settle the issue "finally and irreversibly."  Seoul maintains that the "comfort women" issue has not been settled, as the will of the surviving victims has not been reflected. It also said the 2015 deal falls a long way short of the reparations due in light of the immeasurable suffering inflicted on the "comfort women" and Japan's seeming inability to truly voice its remorse as evidenced by myriad efforts to whitewash its wartime wrongdoings.  Along with an undercurrent of tensions stemming from Japan's wartime atrocities as well as a long-running territorial dispute between Tokyo and Seoul, a South Korean top court ordered Japanese companies to pay compensation for forced wartime labor during its occupation of the Korean Peninsula, adding to bilateral disharmony recently.  Bilateral ties have become further strained following Japan's moves to impose stricter rules on its exports to South Korea of some materials used in high-tech products.  Under the new restrictions that came into effect Thursday, Japanese manufacturers will now have to file individual applications for exports to South Korea of fluorinated polyimide, hydrogen fluoride and resists that are commonly used in smartphone displays and chips, mainstays of South Korea's tech-forward economy.  Japan has said the reasons for the move were for national security and not a retaliation against Seoul over the war time forced labor dispute.  "South Korea did not show a satisfactory solution over the issue of former workers on the Korean Peninsula before the Group of 20 (G20) summit through Saturday, and we can not help but to say the relationship of trust has been severely damaged," Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said earlier this week.  The South Korean government, meanwhile, has slammed the measures by Japan to tighten some of its export regulations, calling them "economic retaliation."  Japan has said the rulings by South Korea's top court for Japanese firms to pay compensation for the forced labor of plaintiffs, with lawyers being permitted to seize and liquidate the assets of some Japanese companies it deems culpable, are not in line with international law and run contrary to the foundation of friendly and cooperative relations between the two neighbors since the 1965 normalization of diplomatic ties.  While the need for fairly urgent dialogue from both sides is evident to prevent escalation, for Japan's part, its "non-retaliatory" measures for a perceived lack of cooperation from Seoul on wartime labor arbitration parameters could negatively impact Japanese firms as well as their suppliers in South Korea.  Industry commentators here have expressed concern that the effects could, theoretically for now, harm both sides' economies and damage bilateral ties to untold measures.  "So far, the export of semiconductor materials themselves is not being banned. But as the screening period grows longer, some analysts project considerable shutdowns of semiconductor production in South Korea," Japan's Asahi Shimbun said in a recent editorial on the matter.  "And that will quite likely hurt Japanese companies that do business with South Korea. Ultimately, South Korean manufacturers may turn to non-Japanese suppliers," the national newspaper said, adding that, "dragging a political conflict into economic activities will do incalculable harm to Japan's relations with South Korea." |
| Park Min-hee and Cho Ki-weon | Commentary | Hankyoreh | July 23, 2019 | South Korea | Abe’s offensive against S. Korea to continue for time being | Liberal Democratic Party fails to secure enough seats to amend constitution  Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during a press conference on the results of the House of Councillors election at his party headquarters in Tokyo on July 22. (Yonhap News)  The “semi-victory” in the Japanese House of Councillors’ Upper House election by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s coalition party – which failed to secure the number of seats needed to push through an amendment of the country’s constitution – is subtly emerging as a variable in Tokyo’s frictions with Seoul.  To begin with, the Japanese government’s pressure tactics against South Korea are predicted to continue, with South Korea’s white list removal expected to proceed following a public comment period through July 24. This has to do with the retaliatory export control measures spearheaded by Abe against South Korea being not simply a House of Councillors election issue, but a multi-purpose strategy to “bring Seoul in line” and revamp the Northeast Asian security and economic structure.  In a press conference on July 22, Abe declared, “When I think of Japan-South Korea relations at the moment, the biggest question is whether or not they keep promises between countries.” He also repeatedly emphasized that South Korea had “failed to honor the international treaty that served as a foundation for normalizing diplomatic relations with its unilateral violation of the South Korea-Japan Claims Settlement Agreement.”  “Speaking of the export management [measures], this was a reexamination of operations from the standpoint of suitable implementation for security purposes under international rules. It is not a ‘counter measure,’” he said, reiterating his previous stance on the issue.  A South Korean government official said, “While there may be some margin for Japan to change its stance now that the House of Councillors election is over, we need to prepare with the expectation that the measures it has previously announced will go ahead.”  But with the popular sentiments expressed in the House of Councillor election results suggesting an unfavorable environment for Abe to push forward with even harsher retaliatory measures against Seoul, some analysts are suggesting the possibility for a diplomatic resolution.  Commenting on the significance of the election results, Nam Ki-jeong, a professor at Seoul National University, noted, “Japanese voters offered a vote of confidence when they gave Abe and his coalition party a majority of seats, but they opted to keep amendment of the constitution in check when they failed to give them the two-thirds of seats they would need to do that.”  “Sole candidates on the opposition side also won in regions that are tied to major issues in Japanese society – including nuclear power, US military bases, and Aegis Ashore [a land-based missile interception system] – which sent Abe the message that he needs to be cautious with his handling of the situation,” Nam noted.  Under the circumstances, analysts said that while Tokyo may carry on with its pressure tactics and South Korea’s removal from Japan’s white list, it is unlikely now to ratchet up the level of its retaliatory measures too far.  “Even in Japan, you had the opposition and businesses arguing that the grounds for the export control measures against South Korea were feeble, and with predictions of a backlash if South Korea is removed from the white list, there could be a signal from Tokyo to Seoul that it wants to resolve things diplomatically,” Nam suggested.  “We need to pursue an international opinion campaign by speaking fair and square to the WTO and elsewhere about Japan’s mistakes, while developing new ideas in terms of a solution on the forced labor issue and acting in a way that takes the Japanese businesses and public opinion into account,” he advised.  Abe expected to pause attack to gauge response from Seoul at some point  Lee Won-deog, a professor at Kookmin University, predicted, “The Japanese government will gain the discretionary power to remove South Korea from the white list and beef up reviews on exports to South Korea, but he won’t actually have the opportunity to wield the stronger export review weapon before forced labor survivors have Japanese companies’ assets liquidated.”  “Abe’s offensive against South Korea will continue for the time being, but at some point he will pause to observe the response from Seoul, and there’s now the possibility for things to be resolved diplomatically if Seoul can come out with a reasonable solution on the forced labor issue,” he suggested.  The South Korean government appears poised to continue calling on Tokyo to agree to diplomatic negotiations while at the same time working on winning international support for its position, including submitting an opinion to the World Trade Organization (WTO) on July 23 regarding the unfairness of Japan’s export measures and removal of South Korea from its white list. Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon left the door for negotiation with Tokyo open last week when he said the proposal for South Korean and Japanese businesses to jointly create a fund for forced conscription survivors was “not our administration’s final plan.” |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | July 23, 2019 | South Korea | It’s Abe that needs to provide a “decent answer,” not South Korea | In a series of interviews with the press on July 21 and 22, following the election for seats in Japan’s House of Councillors, or Upper House, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that “there won’t be constructive discussion until South Korea comes up with a decent answer” and that “South Korea needs to be first to provide an answer.” This appears to reconfirm that, even after the election, Abe is continuing to pin the blame for the two countries’ dispute on South Korea, without any intention of actually resolving the issue. It’s highly regrettable that Abe continues to disregard the South Korean government’s repeated proposals for diplomatic deliberations and is rudely pressuring South Korea to make one-sided concessions. The time has come for Abe to take seriously the results of an election in which he failed to secure the supermajority needed to table a constitutional amendment. He should also desist from his line-crossing political and diplomatic onslaught.  The Blue House turned Abe’s remarks on their head by saying, “This raises the question of whether South Korea has ever failed to provide a decent answer.” While South Korea has left open the option of additional negotiations by offering the “1+1” plan for South Korean and Japanese companies to donate money to cover the damages for victims of forced labor awarded by South Korea’s Supreme Court, Japan hasn’t made any response to that. Abe needs to recognize that the government that needs to offer a “decent answer” isn’t South Korea’s, but Abe’s own administration.  The Abe administration rehashed its ludicrous argument that its export controls “aren’t punitive, because we’re reviewing our operation [of export management] for security purposes.” But multiple reports have confirmed that South Korea enforces the Wassenaar Arrangement and other multilateral regimes for controlling the exports of strategic weapons even more strictly than Japan. While the South Korean government has proposed having an international body assess their respective management of strategic weapons, Japan has rejected the proposal.  Abe has furthermore argued that “the greatest issue in South Korea-Japan relations is whether promises between states will be kept. South Korea failed to abide by an international treaty when it unilaterally violated its claims agreement with Japan.” Abe went on to say that Japan “will be straight up with South Korea after a proper trusting relationship has been built.” It’s already absurd to argue that a Supreme Court decision recognizing the individual right to make claims represents a “broken promise,” and the remarks about “building a proper trusting relationship” are just smoke and mirrors. For South Korea and Japan to build trust, they need to engage in dialogue.  It’s shameful that Abe has voiced his intention to continue trade retaliation with these flimsy  arguments even after the election in the House of Councillors. The time has come for Abe to reflect on who will benefit from such a disruption in the free trade order. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | July 25, 2019 | South Korea | S. Korea has little to lose by withdrawing from GSOMIA | US White House National Security Advisor John Bolton, currently on a visit to South Korea, brought up the issue of deploying South Korean military units to the Strait of Hormuz during a meeting with Blue House National Security Director Chung Eui-yong. The Blue House reported on July 24 that Chung and Bolton had agreed to continue deliberations about ways to cooperate on maritime security and the freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz. That can be basically understood as constituting a request for South Korea to send military assets to the region. The government needs to make a prudent decision on this issue, viewing it from all angles, while placing top priority on South Korea’s national interests.  On July 19, the US organized an information meeting for diplomats from various countries, at which it urged them to join a coalition for protecting civilian vessels in the Strait of Hormuz. That also appears to have been the focus of Bolton’s visit to Japan, prior to his arrival in South Korea. There are indications that the South Korean government is leaning toward contributing to a coalition force in the strait.  True, the Strait of Hormuz is a critical area for South Korea, since 70% of crude oil bound for the country must pass through it. But the primary origin of the tensions is the nuclear dispute between the US and Iran. Rushing to side with the US could sour our relations with Iran. Furthermore, South Korea already has plenty of diplomatic challenges on its plate —not only the North Korea-US denuclearization negotiations, but also, and more urgently, South Korea’s current trade spat with Japan. South Korea can take its time making its decision while strengthening cooperation with the US on such issues.  It’s especially crucial that we ask the US to play a proactive role in mediating the dispute between South Korea and Japan, which was triggered by Japan’s economic retaliatory measures. While that issue did come up during Chung and Bolton’s meeting, there’s no telling how detailed the discussion was. The South Korean government has already announced that, if Japan takes additional punitive measures, it will consider all options, including withdrawing from the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), an intelligence-sharing agreement between the two countries. While the US is concerned that scrapping GSOMIA could undermine its trilateral security cooperation with South Korea and Japan, South Korea has little to lose from dropping out of the largely ineffective agreement.  The US continues to maintain a neutral stance on the South Korea-Japan conflict. But if the conflict continues and starts impacting military issues, the US will inevitably lose out. The South Korean government needs to keep hammering on such points to bring the US around to its side. Cool-headed calculations are needed to link such issues to the question of joining a military coalition at the Strait of Hormuz. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | July 26, 2019 | South Korea | Japan needs to open its eyes and ears and face the global reality of its trade measures | The World Trade Organization’s (WTO) General Council in Geneva on July 24 saw sparring between South Korea and Japan over Japan’s restrictions on exports to South Korea. While the South Korean delegation asserted that Japan’s export restrictions were a violation of trade norms and the Japanese delegation offered a rebuttal, representatives of other countries at the council, including the US, apparently didn’t express their positions. The South Korean government is preparing to lodge an official complaint against Japan with the WTO, based on the assumption that it’s winning the sympathy of the international community.  There were disturbing aspects in the attitude that Japan exhibited at the council meeting on Wednesday, which was a crucial moment in the two countries’ battle for international public opinion. For example, Japan’s remarks during the meeting were made by Junichi Ihara, ambassador to Geneva, who is one rank lower than the person Japan had originally designated as its representative: Shingo Yamagami, the director-general of economic affairs at Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It also Ihara who spoke at the press conference while his senior remained silent. These changes appear to have been aimed at belittling the significance of the council. This attitude can also be detected in Ihara’s claim that “this matter doesn’t deserve to be discussed by the WTO.” Japan appears to have unwittingly revealed its lack of a legitimate logical argument to back the export controls.  Kim Seung-ho, deputy minister of the office of international trade and legal affairs at South Korea’s Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy, holds a press conference following the World Trade Organization (WTO) General Council in Geneva, Switzerland, on July 24. (Yonhap News)  Japan also disregarded the South Korean government’s proposal for face-to-face high-level deliberations, not even dignifying it with a response. That was why Kim Seung-ho, deputy minister of the office of international trade and legal affairs at South Korea’s Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy, criticized Japan for “closing its eyes and ears” in a meeting with reporters following the discussion at the council. If the Japanese government were in the right, it would have no reason not to agree to the South Korean government’s open proposal for dialogue.  The Japanese government mustn’t ignore the growing criticism in the international community about its export controls on three materials used in the manufacture of semiconductors and displays and on the steps it’s taking to remove South Korea from the “white list” of countries who are granted expedited export screening. Japan is taking heat from foreign media outlets such as the New York Times, organizations representing the leaders of US electronics firms, and even conservative-leaning think tank the American Enterprise Institute, which recently made a post on its website titled, “Japan, back off on Korea: Samsung and Hynix are not Huawei.”  “There are concerns that further aggravation of the situation by Japan could have unexpected consequences,” warned South Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon on July 25 during the meeting of a government committee reviewing current issues, while also calling for dialogue. “We’re preparing for diplomatic deliberations,” Lee said.  Our hope is that Japan will respond to this and resolve the issue through negotiations. Japan needs to face the reality that, if it sticks to the export controls and goes ahead with removing South Korea from the white list, it could damage not only these two countries that are linked by the global supply chain but also the global economy as a whole. |
| China.org with Xinhua | Commentary | China.org.cn | July 4, 2019 | China | Japan's technology exports curb on S. Korea could result in lose-lose outcome | Japan on Thursday started tightening rules for the exports of semiconductor-related materials to South Korea, which some experts say could result in a lose-lose outcome for both countries.  The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan said earlier this week that it will tighten restrictions on exports of high-tech materials to South Korea, citing "significant damage to the relationship of mutual trust."  Under the new restrictions which took effect from Thursday, individual applications will be necessary for exports to South Korea of three materials used in high-tech products, a process that can take around 90 days.  They materials include fluorinated polyimide, hydrogen fluoride and resist, which are used in the manufacturing process of semiconductors and screens for smartphones and TVs.  Japan also indicated Monday it plans to remove South Korea from its "white list" of countries that enjoy preferential treatment in the shipments of items that could be diverted for military use.  The move came as relations between Japan and South Korea soured since late last year over a series of South Korean court rulings that ordered Japanese firms to compensate laborers who were forced to work for the companies during World War Two.  However, the Japanese government insists that the measure is being taken due to security concerns, adding it is not a retaliation against South Korea.  The restrictions could deal a blow to the technology industries of both countries, whose supply chains are deeply linked, experts say.  According to the South Korea Trade Association, among the three materials which Japan has tightened export controls, South Korea has imported 90 percent or more from Japan of two materials.  "Fluorinated polyimides" used for organic EL panels for TVs and smartphones are imported from Japan from January to May at around 12.14 million U.S. dollars ,accounting for 93.7 percent of the whole.  Meanwhile, since 2010, Japan has continuously accounted for more than 90 percent of South Korea's imports of "resist," which is used as a photosensitive liquid to be applied to semiconductor substrates.  Japanese economist Hidetoshi Tashiro told Xinhua that Japan's actions against South Korea would cause serious damage to itself.  The semiconductor industry which is in a recession in Japan will be affected, he said, as Japanese companies that make materials and components are struggling to survive on sales to South Korea.  According to the expert, if exports to South Korea are restricted, there will be an oversupply of production equipment and investment, and even the survival of Japanese enterprises will be threatened.  Meanwhile, the semiconductor materials that Japan restricts exports to South Korea will be used by South Korean companies like LG and Samsung to make parts for products needed by Japanese companies like Sony Corp. If South Korea imposes export restrictions on Japanese components, it will push Sony's TV industry to the brink of collapse.  Japan's move is seen as a retaliation for South Korea's handling of "labor issues". In addition, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party is doing so to rally support for the upcoming upper house election, the economist said.  Japan will hold upper house elections on July 21. According to Tashiro, the implementation of export curbs on South Korea at this time can quickly stir up anti-South Korean sentiment among the Japanese people, demonstrate the actions of the Japanese government and prompt the public to vote for the ruling camp.  Ni Yueju, a researcher at the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said South Korea is bound to strike back at Japan.  According to the expert, on the one hand, South Korea will take Japan's actions to the WTO, and on the other hand, South Korea will restrict the import and export of Japanese products and take retaliatory measures against Japan. Thus, the already strained relations between Japan and South Korea will only get worse.  Japan's Nikkei newspaper said that negotiations are the right way to resolve the issue. Japan's export controls on South Korea will hurt its efforts to secure a free trade environment. If there is any improper behavior in the export management of South Korea, the Japanese side should solve it through consultation with the South Korean government.  Export controls on South Korea will not only affect the relations between Japan and South Korea, but also affect the future development of the global economy, Nikkei said. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | August 3, 2019 | South Korea | Japan itself will face consequences of Abe’s trade war | Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe finally made a decision that stands to leave South Korea-Japan relations in utter disrepair. In a Cabinet meeting on Aug. 2, Japan voted to remove South Korea from its “white list” of countries receiving expedited export processing for strategic goods. This could fairly be called an act of economic warfare on Tokyo’s part: controlling exports of items that could potentially deal a blow to South Korean businesses. The measures mean that Japan intends to compromise the very principles of free trade and treat its neighbor South Korea as a hostile power. The fissures this creates in the global system of cooperation and division of labor could have serious negative efforts not just on the South Korea and Japanese economies, but the global economy as well. We sternly denounce this myopic and self-destructive act by the Abe administration. Japan itself will have to face the consequences of the trade war Abe has ignited.  The important thing now is how we respond. President Moon Jae-in convened an emergency Cabinet meeting and decided that South Korea will also be removing Japan from its own white list. Criticizing the Japanese Cabinet’s approval of the measure as a “profoundly reckless decision that rejects diplomatic efforts and further exacerbates the situation,” Moon announced that Seoul would be “resolutely adopting measures corresponding to Japan’s unjust economic retaliation.” Declaring that South Korea “will not lose to Japan again,” he called on the public to “trust in the capabilities of the administration and businesses” and to “unite in confidence.”  Moon’s speech appears to have been well-timed: offering a point-by-point critique of the injustice of Japan’s decision and proclaiming a resolute response, while also sending a message in refined terms calling for the public to unite and for Japan to reflect. Not to echo the president, but the crucial thing at the present moment is indeed for us to unite and harness our capabilities. We cannot allow any more of the same reckless behavior shown by certain opposition parties and conservative media when they tried to pin the blame for the South Korea-US trade war on the Moon administration rather than on Abe back when Japan first made the decision to restrict semiconductor material exports in early July. Responsibility in this case – for violating the victims’ human rights, damaging the values of democracy, and laying waste to the principles of free trade – lies fully with the Japanese government. While some criticisms may be raised over the appropriateness of Seoul’s response, they should not be allowed to transform into support and defense for the hegemonic actions of Japan’s far-right administration. The time has come now for all sectors, including politicians, to focus their criticisms on Tokyo’s atrocious actions.  The president and administration need to play a central role in this uniting of public opinion. Certain groups will face the public’s judgment for their focus on criticizing South Korea rather than Japan. Hopefully, the president and administration will voice a message of unity and put it into practice, allowing us to marshal all of South Korea’s capacity in its battle against the Japanese government. We look forward to energies being harnessed by not just overcoming small political differences, but based on causes for the sake of South Korea-Japan relations and peace in Northeast Asia.  It’s also important for the relevant government ministries to carefully formulate and implement a response. The Abe administration’s white list decision spells unavoidable damage for South Korean industry. In addition to the three semiconductor material items that were already subject to export controls, individual reviews at the time of exportation will be required as of Aug. 28 for over 1,100 items spanning every industry except food and lumber. The administration and businesses will need to cooperate closely to keep the damage to a minimum, using every available means to ensure a stockpile of supplies and diversify importation sources. What we cannot allow in this process are attempts to drum up overblown fears by exaggerating risks that are unlikely to become reality. The key thing is for the South Korean economy to break free from its excessive dependence on Japan. Fostering South Korea’s material, component, and equipment industries – which are weaker than their Japanese counterparts – and building an ecosystem of mutual benefits for large and small businesses are tasks that can no longer be put off. If the administration and businesses can combine their capabilities, this situation can be turned into a blessing in disguise.  This situation originated out of a South Korean Supreme Court ruling ordering compensation for forced labor conscription, and the trade retaliation measures taken by the Abe administration in response. More fundamentally, however, it is a symbolic signal that the regime from the 1965 Claims Settlement Agreement – concluded between Japan and a Cold War-era South Korean military dictatorship – can no longer be sustained in its current antiquated form. That is why we do not have the option of simply papering over the conflict by agreeing to some sort of reconciliation in view of the potentially large economic blow. Even as it assumes responsibility for certain legacies of the “1965 system,” we hope the administration responds in a way that reflects changes in our historical values. It’s the only way to lay the foundation for a better future for both South Korea and Japan. |
| Lee Wan | News Analysis | Hankyoreh | August 3, 2019 | South Korea | S. Korea touts trade spat as chance to surpass Japan | After the Japanese government decided in a cabinet meeting on Aug. 2 to remove South Korea from its “white list” of trusted trading partners, the South Korean government immediately announced firm retaliation through a list of prepared countermeasures. Along with a support plan centered on strengthening the country’s economic and security capabilities, Seoul called for unity, so as to best utilize the nation’s resources. South Korean President Moon Jae-in also declared that this was an opportunity to get the better of Japan. “There’s a saying that history can be accelerated but not ignored. This is a hurdle we’ll have to clear at one point or another,” he said.  ■ A firm counterattack in the cards  During the emergency cabinet meeting on Friday, Moon used a lot of language that suggests a head-to-head showdown: “the attack by the Japanese government,” “harming the future growth of our economy,” and “self-centered and bothersome behavior that damages the global economy.” Such phrases leave no doubt that Moon considers this a grave situation and intends to respond firmly to the Japanese government.  This response was apparently already unfolding on Friday afternoon as Kim Hyun-chong, second deputy director at the Blue House’s National Security Office, called a briefing at which he officially mentioned that the government as mooting a withdrawal from South Korea and Japan’s information-sharing agreement, known as GSOMIA, while First Vice Foreign Minister Cho Sei-young called in Japanese Ambassador to Seoul Nagamine Yasumasa to lodge a strong complaint.  “Japan may be an economic power, but we have the means to fight back. We won’t stand for Japan loudly claiming victimhood when, in fact, it’s the perpetrator. If Japan deliberately damages our economy, it will be in for some serious damage as well,” Moon stressed.  ■ A chance to move past the “cormorant economy”  Seoul clearly signaled its intention to treat Japan’s measures as an opportunity to end what has been called the “cormorant economy.” This refers to an economic structure in which South Korean companies import key parts and components from Japan for the manufacture of semiconductors and displays that are then exported to other countries — an arrangement in which increasing exports serve to line Japan’s pockets.  The term “cormorant economy” derives from a Chinese fishing practice, in which a string is looped around the neck of the cormorant and then drawn tight when it catches a fish, preventing the cormorant from swallowing until the fish can be retrieved.  “The time when an adversary could be beaten down by force is merely a vestige of the past,” Moon said during the cabinet meeting. His remark about “turning adversity into an opportunity for advancement,” suggesting that the conflict could be a blessing in disguise, appears to fall along the same lines.  With that goal in mind, Moon said, “the government will provide companies assistance whenever possible to minimize their damage, helping them find alternative importers of parts and materials, restock inventory, acquire foundational technology, develop technology to foster domestic industries, build new factories, and improve their finances.”  “We will take this as an opportunity to make the parts and materials industry more competitive. That will not only ensure we are never again subjected to technological hegemony but also further elevate our status as a manufacturing power,” Moon pledged.  “Japan’s absolute advantage in the manufacturing industry was overcome by Park Chung-hee’s policy of developing heavy industry, and the foundation for the development of the parts and materials industry was laid by Kim Dae-jung’s strategy of growing that industry. This is the time for us to combine our powers,” Kim Hyun-jong stressed during the briefing.  ■ Door still open to dialogue  Though these remarks make clear that Seoul won’t be pulling any punches, Seoul also held open the possibility of dialogue. “Even now, the South Korean government doesn’t want a vicious cycle of attacking and counterattacking. There’s only one way to halt [the current situation], and that’s for the Japanese government to swiftly retract its unilateral and unjust measures and to engage in dialogue,” Moon said. In the long term, Moon suggested, Seoul will continue its efforts to find a diplomatic solution through dialogue.  Moon’s remark during the cabinet meeting that “the US proposed that [South Korea and Japan] take time to negotiate, but Japan didn’t accept that proposal” was also apparently aimed at pressuring Japan to take part in dialogue.  In a similar vein, Kim Hyun-chong revealed that Seoul has expended considerable effort on diplomacy, with a senior government envoy paying two visits to Japan last month. “We explained why it took us eight months to express our position about the forced labor issue, and we communicated our willingness to discuss all issues, including Japan’s proposal,” Kim said.  Kim also added that Japan had rejected both the US’ proposal to hold trilateral high-level talks with South Korea and South Korea’s proposal for two-party dialogue between senior envoys at the World Trade Organization (WTO) |
| Yoo Kang-moon & Lee Wan | Commentary | Hankyoreh | August 3, 2019 | South Korea | Backing out of GSOMIA a option for S. Korea to retaliate? | Japan’s decision at a Cabinet meeting presided over by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Aug. 2 to remove South Korea from its “white list” of countries receiving favorable treatment in export reviews for strategic goods has observers watching to see whether Seoul fires back with the threat of backing out of the two sides’ General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). With Tokyo’s decision shifting the conflict over resolving historical matters related to Japan’s colonization of Korea into the realm of security matters, many with the Moon Jae-in administration and ruling party are increasingly supporting the development of corresponding measures by Seoul.  To date, the South Korean government has used the threat as a way of stirring the US to become involved. Signed in 2016 amid a series of nuclear and missile tests by North Korea, the agreement was a reflection of the US’s East Asia strategy, which sought to build a trilateral security system to contain China. Seoul’s stance could be seen as one of encouraging the US to take an interest by sending the message that Japan’s measure placed trilateral security cooperation in jeopardy.  But with Japan moving on Aug. 2 to take South Korea off its white list, the question of backing out of GSOMIA has shifted from a matter of sending a diplomatic warning to one of a strategic response. Kim Hyun-chong, second deputy chief of South Korea’s National Security Office, said the administration planned to “pursue comprehensive response measures going forward, including the question of whether to continue sharing sensitive military information with a country that lacks trust in us and presents issues in terms of security.”  In logical terms, exiting the agreement would be an equivalent measure to Japan’s. Japan’s removal of South Korea from its white list signaled that it does not intend to view South Korea any longer as a “friendly power” in security terms. It stands to reason, then, that South Korea would also be unable to share sensitive military information with such a country.  “Under the circumstances where Japan is treating South Korea as a ‘country it cannot trust,’ we would be within our rights to pull out of the agreement,” said Yang Kee-ho, a professor at Sungkonghoe University.  “There may be worries and objections raised with regard to trilateral cooperation with the US, but the responsibility lies with Japan,” Yang said.  The agreement’s efficacy has received mixed assessments. Kim Jong-dae, a lawmaker with the Justice Party, said, “The information we provide plays a definite role in preserving Japan’s security, whereas the information that Japan provides tends mostly to fall outside the scope of the Korean Peninsula’s vicinity.”  “From the outset, this agreement has been part of Japan’s vision of exercising a say [on Korean Peninsula matters] and moving to do away with its Peace Constitution,” Kim argued. But many observers have countered that Japan’s intelligence assets are superior to South Korea’s in practical terms and have helped with South Korea’s security in substantive ways.  Potential shifts in Northeast Asian security framework  The key question has to do with the shift in the Northeast Asian security framework that an exit from the agreement would bring. Some analysts have speculated that South Korea’s exit could be the “detonator” that sets off changes in the Northeast Asian security order.  “The issue in short is one of the direction of trilateral South Korea-US-Japan security cooperation shifting,” said one military affairs expert. This leaves a lot to think about for the Moon Jae-in administration, which has been working to leverage trilateral cooperation into the establishment of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia. Another potential burden is the agreement’s increasing efficacy amid North Korea’s recent short-range missile launches.  Some are predicting that abandonment of the agreement could end up backfiring. If South Korea does back out of the agreement, it would come across as the first party to break with the trilateral security cooperation framework.  “We’ve tried to use the threat of abandoning the agreement and ended up getting the US involved,” said Nam Ki-jeong, a professor at Seoul National University.  “This could end up becoming a situation where we’re drawn in an unintended direction by the magnetic field of the South Korea-US-Japan security triangle,” he suggested.’’ |
| China.org with Xinhua | News Analysis | China.org.cn | July 12, 2019 | China | U.S. seeks to mediate between Japan, S. Korea over export row | The United States is trying to ease the tensions between its two Eastern Asian allies -- Japan and South Korea -- over Tokyo's export restriction of crucial high-tech materials to Seoul, the U.S. Department of State said Thursday.  "Japan and South Korea are, of course, not only friends, they're allies ... we're going to do everything we can to pursue ways to strengthen our relationships between and amongst all three countries, both publicly and behind the scenes," U.S. State Department Spokesperson Morgan Ortagus said at a press briefing.  "Both relationships are incredibly important. We all share, face shared regional challenges and priorities in the Indo-Pacific and around the world, and so we will continue to do that..." Ortagus added.  Last week, Japan tightened restrictions on exports of high-tech materials vital to produce semiconductors and display panels for TVs and smartphones to South Korea, citing "significant damage to the relationship of mutual trust," in response to a court ruling of South Korea over the issue of compensation for South Koreans forced to work for Japanese firms during World War II.  Last month, a South Korean appellate court upheld a lower court's order to a Japanese steelmaker to compensate the South Korean victims of forced labor during World War II.  The Seoul High Court ruled that Nippon Steel Corp. pay 100 million won (86,400 U.S. dollars) in compensation each to the family members of the seven South Korean victims for their wartime forced labor without pay, according to local media reports.  The seven plaintiffs began the compensation suit in 2013, and a Seoul district court ruled in favor of them in 2015. For the past six years, all the plaintiffs passed away because of old age.  Japan, for its part, has claimed the rulings are not in line with international law and run counter to the foundation of friendly and cooperative relations between the two neighbors since the 1965 normalization of diplomatic ties.  It also maintains the matter of compensation for wartime labor was "finally and completely" resolved under the pact.  However, Japan maintained that the tighter export controls were not a retaliatory measure against South Korea, saying that Seoul had failed to show a satisfactory solution to the ongoing wartime labor dispute between both parties.  South Korea has condemned the move by Japan to tighten the export controls of materials and demanded Tokyo withdraw the measure, arguing that it runs counter to the spirit of fair trade.  Earlier on Thursday, the U.S. State Department said that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has spoken by phone on Wednesday with his South Korean counterpart, Kang Kyung-wha, on denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula and the state of U.S.-Japan-South Korea ties.  During the phone talks, Kang said Japan's trade restriction moves would cause damage to South Korean companies and have a negative impact on world trade as well as U.S. firms, according to South Korean Foreign Ministry.  South Korea will make efforts for the diplomatic resolution via dialogue with Japan, Kang was quoted as saying.  For his part, Pompeo expressed his "understanding" of South Korea's position, and agreed to continue cooperation to strengthen diplomatic communications between South Korea and the United States and trilaterally among South Korea, the United States and Japan, according to the ministry.  Japan's public broadcaster NHK reported that Japan and South Korea would hold talks in Tokyo on Friday at Seoul's request to discuss the export restrictions, the first of this kind since Japan implemented the measure last week. |
| Choe, Byoeng-du | Opinion | Hankyoreh | August 5, 2019 | South Korea | How Abe and the ruling class of Japan have stirred up anti-Korean nationalism | The Japanese government, led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, first placed restrictions on exports of key materials to South Korean semiconductor manufacturers, and now it has decided to drop South Korea from its “white list” of trusted trading partners. Conscientious intellectuals in Japanese civic society have responded by issuing a protest statement and collecting signatures for a petition. Such individuals claim that Japan hasn’t offered an honest apology for its colonial occupation of Korea or taken responsibility for its actions during that time; they declare that Japan’s imposition of economic sanctions on South Korea represents an act of hostility. The title of their statement poses the following question to the Abe administration and to the Japanese public: “Is South Korea our enemy?”  World history has frequently witnessed hostile relations between states. Since the creation of the nation state in modern times, conflicts between states have been treated as conflicts between the peoples divided into those states’ respective territories. In actuality, however, the majority of those conflicts have been caused not by those peoples themselves, but by their ruling classes, the smaller groups that run the state. While the peoples have suffered because of these conflicts, their leaders have whipped them up through nationalist ideology and fomented hostile attitudes in an attempt to enrich themselves.  The relationship of the neighboring countries of South Korea and Japan has always been fraught by latent tension that has occasionally erupted, with tragic results for both sides. The hostility in their relationship can be blamed not on South Korea but on Japan, and especially on the hegemonic push for territorial expansion that drove its ruling elites. To be sure, another problem was South Korea’s failure to prevent the formation of that hostile relationship or to deal with it appropriately once it had formed. As a result, the people of both South Korea and Japan have been sacrificed to the greed of the ruling class, and civic society was unable to cultivate the strength necessary to stop this.  While the Abe administration’s explanations of its export controls have been inconsistent, its motivation is perfectly clear. The controls were used to stir up anti-Korean sentiment in a bid to bring out the conservative base in the recent elections for the House of Councillors. That election results show the inefficacy of such an approach and make it impossible, at least for the time being, for the ruling party to follow through on its pledge of amending Japan’s “peace constitution.” Nevertheless, it’s evident that the Abe administration will continue attempting to push through that amendment in order to achieve its ultimate goal of removing Japan’s postwar shackles and making it a “country capable of waging war.”  Abe’s power based in right-wing lobby group called Japan Conference  Whence does the Abe administration derive its strength? While Abe is said to have inherited the tendencies of his maternal grandfather, who has been accused of being a Class A war criminal, the policy direction of a state is rooted in the collective, rather than being defined by any individual politician. Indeed, in a public opinion poll about the export controls held by Tokyo Broadcasting System, support for the controls far exceeded opposition, by a ratio of 58% to 24%. Meanwhile, a poll by the Nihon Keizai Shinbun found that 52% of respondents favored Abe’s effort to amend the constitution during his time in office.  These hostile and aggressive views held by the Japanese public have been presumably cultivated by the Nippon Kaigi (Japan Conference), the largest lobby group in Japan’s right wing and a major mover in the Abe administration. In a book exploring the true nature of the Nihon Keizai, journalist Osamu Aoki argues that the group’s basic operating principles are emperor worship (the rejection of popular sovereignty), constitutional reform, devotion to the national defense (rearmament), and patriotic education. In an attempt to restore imperial power, this group has been attempting to change popular opinion in Japan by bringing strategic hostility back into its relations with its neighbors.  Immaturity of Japanese civil society based on lack of facing history after WWII  The growing power of these far right forces is linked to the immaturity of civil society in Japan. During World War II, 3.1 million Japanese, and 20 million Asians, lost their lives. But whereas German war criminals were held strictly accountable during the Nuremberg trials, Japan preserved the imperial system that bore the ultimate responsibility for its actions even after the war. Japan’s failure to prosecute war crimes allowed the far right to return and eventually to regain power, while stunting the growth of civil society, which could have helped establish human rights, equality, and democracy.  To be sure, Japan is not the only country in which civil society remains immature. The countries of Northeast Asia — South and North Korea, China, and Taiwan — were all victims of Japan’s colonial rule and wars of aggression, and each followed its own historical path after the war. But in each country, civic society was unable to cultivate the people power needed to resist the authoritative rule of their respective ruling classes. In that sense, the enemy that civil society should be fighting can be defined as the authoritarian ruling class that uses various tricks to mobilize the populace and then sacrifice them toward its real goal of satisfying its hegemonic ambitions.  The Abe administration’s export controls, which have triggered hostility between South Korea and Japan, and its attempt to turn Japan into a “country capable of waging war,” which would terrify the people of Northeast Asia, is an issue whose ramifications go beyond the individual states of South Korea and Japan. Rather, it’s a grave issue that must be dealt with in concert by civic groups in those two countries, as well as in other countries in Northeast Asia.  Along similar lines, there’s also a critical need for civic groups in each of these countries to support each other and to band together in support of democratization and peace in Northeast Asia. For example, they should call for North Korea to denuclearize and to end its totalitarian behavior and human rights abuses, and they should also support the Hong Kong demonstrators who are opposing a proposed law that would allow the extradition of criminals to mainland China. |
| Park Min-hee | Opinion | Hankyoreh | August 5, 2019 | South Korea | The Abe-nomics clock is ticking towards decline | South Korea-Japan relations appear headed into a long-term crisis of confrontation between equally matched powers after Japan fired an opening salvo of economic warfare with its decision to remove South Korea from its “white list.” While Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and hardline associates who have joined him in his “Korea-bashing” agenda appear to have the aim of dealing a blow to South Korean industry and bringing about a political capitulation from Seoul, analysts say the economic situation in Japan suggests that Abe himself is facing a ticking clock.  For Abe, diplomacy and the economy have been key political assets. Over the years, he has drummed up support by fanning crises and negative opinion involving North Korea and Japan; when the North Korea-US negotiations and reconciliation with Beijing left this card unavailable to him, he opted to go on the offensive against South Korea instead. On the economic front, his “Abe-nomics” approach, which depends on unlimited quantitative easing and aggressive fiscal expenditures, produced results in the early going, helping to further raise his approval rate.  The problem for Abe is that the illusory nature of Abe-nomics is becoming increasingly apparent, with the continued surfacing of growing trade deficit and retirement pension issues. His most pressing concern involves trade negotiations with the US. While the target of the US-Japan trade talks is to reach a conclusion in broad terms by around September, US President Donald Trump is pressing for major concessions from Tokyo on its agricultural market and other areas, with the talks having been put off until after the House of Councillors election in July in order to reduce the political burden on Abe. On Oct. 1, the Japanese consumption tax is scheduled to rise from 8% to 10%, with the resulting decline in domestic demand expected to deal a significant blow to the Japanese economy.  Meanwhile, in the wake of its removal of South Korea from its white list, fears have been growing internationally that Japan is upsetting the global ecosystem in the high-tech information technology (IT) industry, including the area of semiconductors. Early October marks the deadline (90 days) for the decision on whether to grant approval to companies requesting permits to export items to South Korea following the semiconductor component and material export control measures announced by the Japanese government on July 4. The issues of violation of WTO regulations and overseas trust are poised to grow if Japan does not grant the export permits. In effect, the period from late September to early October amounts to a major economic deadline for Abe.  Under the circumstances, observers suggested that for all of the apparent signs of long and careful preparation behind his export controls against South Korea, Abe also faces a number of vulnerabilities. The lack of consistency in Tokyo’s stance – with Abe and his associates citing “North Korea” and “sarin gas” as factors following the announcement of the export controls in early Japan, only to walk back the claims later – appears to be evidence of a lack of preparation.  “Prime Minister Abe began his pressure campaign against South Korea from an unfavorable domestic and international position, without having made the necessary preparations to alter the geopolitical framework surrounding the Korean Peninsula,” said Kang Dong-kook, a professor at Nagoya University.  “He may have been trying to rally supporters for the House of Councillors election and verify the continuation of the ‘1965 regime’ [of South Korea-Japan relations under their Claims Settlement Agreement] by dealing a blow against South Korea at a time when [Japan] holds an overwhelming economic advantage over South Korea ahead of the consumption tax hike in October,” Kang suggested.  Growing concern among Japanese political circles  Signs of dissension have also been evident within the Japanese government.  “The situation right now is one where the Office of the Prime Minister, the Foreign Ministry, and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry are all saying different things,” said Yang Kee-ho, a professor at Sungkonghoe University.  “The Japanese Foreign Ministry is talking about a diplomatic situation, claiming that things could be resolved if South Korea offers a solution on the forced labor conscription issue, while the Office of the Prime Minister appears to hold a different position,” he said.  “Within the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, there’s been conflict between Minister Hiroshige Seko – a top Abe associate who has spearheaded the hardline measures against South Korea – and the other officials,” he added.  Kang Dong-kook predicted, “While South Korea may suffer a bigger blow early on, over time there will also be a blow to the Japanese materials industry, which will lose South Korea as a major export market, as well as to Japanese businesses that use South Korean semiconductors, which will result in more critical attitudes from the Japanese business community and public.”  “Japan will agree more readily to negotiations as the likelihood of South Korea securing alternative materials becomes more apparent,” he added. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | August 7, 2019 | South Korea | Civic groups should focus on “No Abe” rather than “No Japan” | Since the Japanese government’s adoption of economic retaliation measures, there’s been a growing movement of voluntary “shows of strength” including boycotts across different regions and industries. It goes without saying that this is a legitimate expression of opinion and an exercise of sovereignty by awakened democratic citizens. The increasing movement of solidarity between civic groups in South Korea and Japan even as economic warfare rages is also noteworthy as an extension of this. But some of the excessive reactions and more perplexing behavior that have been taking place are quite troubling. With the South Korea-Japan clash predicted to drag out for a long time, we need to start now in looking for judicious and mature responses – sending a message where the focus is on “no to Abe” rather than “no to Japan.”  For National Liberation Day on Aug. 15, two South Korean and Japan groups titled Joint Action for Resolution of the Forced Mobilization Issue and Settling Historical Matters are set to hold an international peace march together in Seoul. They reportedly plan to start their march at Seoul Plaza and proceed to the Japanese Embassy, where a statement of protest is to be delivered. The two groups previously issued a statement of solidarity at an Aug. 4 candlelit cultural festival in front of the former Japanese Embassy, stressing that South Korean and Japanese citizens “need to join forces in demanding a resolution to the forced labor mobilization issue.”  South Korean and Japanese civic groups are also holding a closed-door forum ahead of National Liberation Day to discuss plans for responding to bilateral relations and organizing an event to honor atomic bomb victims. With figures from the religious community also jointly staging a “prayer meeting for the current situation,” campaigns of solidarity by citizens are taking off like never before. It’s worth considering the message shared by the representative of one civic group, who stressed that it is “important that conscientious citizens in Japan who oppose the Abe administration receive support and solidarity from South Korea so that they can truly have an influence in Japan.” We should pay heed to the argument that the actions of South Korean citizens should not be ones of “opposing Japan,” but ones of criticizing the Shinzo Abe administration.  A controversy recently erupted after a “no Japan” flag was briefly raised on the premises of the Jung-gu (Central) District Office in Seoul. It was eventually removed after over 10,000 people added their signatures to a citizens’ petition board message calling for it to be taken down, with many stressing the need to distinguish between “no to Japan” and “no to Abe” messages. This was a wise decision. Certain politicians’ sale of T-shirts with the slogan “Traveling to Japan = Kopina (a Korean expression meaning to ‘have a nosebleed’)” also looks to be an inappropriate example of patriotic marketing. Na Kyung-won, floor leader for the Liberty Korea Party, crossed the line even for a political attack when she characterized President Moon Jae-in’s remarks as “an ostrich sticking his head in the sand” and “a new isolationism.” To see certain right-wing groups and members of the Protestant community shouting messages like “South Koreans are war criminals too,” “Moon Jae-in must be punished,” and “Stay strong Japan” truly beggars belief. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | August 8, 2019 | South Korea | Japan needs to know that returning to status quo is first step in normalizing relations | On Aug. 7, the Japanese government published a revision of its export and trade management rules, removing South Korea from its “white list” of countries that enjoy streamlined export procedures, as it had promised. As of Aug. 28, Japanese companies that export products with potential military applications to South Korea can no longer receive a “general comprehensive permit” valid for three years.  At the same time, the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe didn’t cancel the “special general comprehensive permits” already secured by companies exporting to South Korea when it announced the regulations for handling comprehensive permits, which are part of the export and trade management rules. That is to say, no more special general comprehensive permits were replaced with individual permits, which is what happened with the three materials for semiconductors that have been under export controls since July 4.  Special general comprehensive permits are three-year comprehensive permits issued by the Japanese government after certifying that a Japanese exporter is competent at managing exports, which eliminates the need to apply for a permit for each individual shipment. Nearly all Japanese companies that export to South Korean chaebol reportedly have a special general comprehensive permit. This means that, at least for the chaebol, the fallout will only affect companies that are importing the three semiconductor materials subject to tightened controls.  The Suwon branch of the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry holds a meeting regarding Japan’s export controls on Aug. 7. (Yonhap News)  This is leading some analysts to infer that the Abe administration is holding off on escalating the dispute because of the stern response from the South Korean government and public and because of criticism from the international community. But there are few signs that the Abe administration’s fundamental attitude has changed. For one thing, the Japanese government could cancel the special general comprehensive permits at any time; for another, small and medium-sized South Korean companies that do business with Japanese exporters without those permits are likely to suffer harm.  In addition, the Abe administration unexpectedly altered the categorization system for its white list. Previously, there were only two categories: either a country was on the white list or it wasn’t. But in the future, Japan has decided to create four groups, named A, B, C, and D. Of the 27 countries that have enjoyed white list privileges, all 26 except for South Korea will be in Group A, while South Korea will be in Group B. The basic effect is still the same, however, since Japanese companies will be given the discretion to manage their exports to countries in Group A, while Japanese government regulators will oversee exports to countries in Group B. This categorization is likely aimed at emphasizing that South Korea’s removal from the white list isn’t economic retaliation but rather a matter of export management. In a word, this is a sneaky move aimed at obscuring the fact of Japan’s economic retaliation.  During a regular briefing on Wednesday, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga reiterated the claim that South Korea’s removal from the white list was not “economic retaliation or a protest measure.” Japan is still trying to pull the wool over our eyes. The Abe administration needs to cease such prevarication and immediately retract its export controls. Japan needs to know that a return to the status quo is the first step toward normalizing relations with South Korea. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | August 8, 2019 | South Korea | Japan should immediately move to engage in dialogue with South Korea | On Aug. 8, the Japanese government announced that it had approved the export of extreme ultraviolet (EUV) photoresist, which is one of the first semiconductor materials Japan implemented export restrictions on. This is the first time in around a month Japan has allowed exports since restricting exports to South Korea of three semiconductor materials, including hydrogen fluoride (also known as etching gas).  Japan has thus far avoided expanding the “individual approval” of items it announced that would make it difficult for South Korea to seek approval for shipments. The Japanese government now appears to be avoiding escalating the conflict over exports to South Korea. However, it is highly likely that Japan’s latest move is just a temporary gesture to strengthen its justification for implementing export controls in the first place. If the Shinzo Abe administration has any intention of ensuring the current situation does not damage the economy of either country, it should immediately move to engage in dialogue and negotiations through diplomatic and trade channels with South Korea.  In response to Japan’s approval of the exports, the South Korean government also discussed removing Japan from its “white list” on Aug. 8. However, government ministers and other senior officials decided to delay this action during a meeting presided over by Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon, calling for Japan to find a diplomatic solution to the problem. South Korean President Moon Jae-in pointed out that the measures Japan had implemented up until this point have not been beneficial to the economies or people of both countries. That is accurate. While South Korea’s economy is now faced with greater uncertainty due to Japan’s economic measures, Japan has also seen damage to its tourist and materials export industries.  Japan’s apparent hesitation to expand the conflict does not necessarily indicate that it is ready to find a fundamental resolution with South Korea. Rather, after its initiation of the conflict, Japan is now “taking a rest” as it tries to persuade the international community its export controls are justified. This is proven by Trade Minister Seko Hiroshige stating recently that “I hope South Korea understands that this is not an export ban” and that Japan would take additional measures if violations are discovered. In short, Japan has threatened to use export controls whenever it feels they are needed. If the export controls are indeed not aimed at “taking revenge” against South Korea then Japan should respond positively to the South Korean government’s efforts to find a diplomatic resolution.  The South Korean government, for its part, should avoid overestimating the significance of Japan’s succession of “yielding moves” and respond to them both rationally and prudently. While it may seem that Japan is taking a step back from the brink, in reality the Japanese government is doing nothing more than taking a break after perpetrating its “economic provocation” of implementing export controls and removing South Korea from its white list. The effective responses to Japan’s actions by the South Korean government and its people have likely contributed to Japan’s hesitation. South Korea must continue to show a firm stance until Japan removes all of the export restrictions in place. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | August 13, 2019 | South Korea | Despite S. Korea’s new export controls, both sides should still seek dialogue | The South Korean government announced measures on Aug. 12 that will strengthen controls on Japanese exports. The new policy appears to be a counter to the undue retaliatory trade measures imposed by Japan. After the Japanese government strengthened controls on Korean exports in response to the South Korean Supreme Court’s ruling on compensation for victims of forced labor, the latest development appears to be an inevitable move in a situation where the Japanese government has not changed its attitude and rejected an offer for negotiations by the Korean government.  Nevertheless, as economic conflict between the two countries is not desirable, efforts to attempt to resolve the dispute through dialogue and negotiations must continue to the fullest extent. The South Korean government should also continue to monitor any side effects that the new measures may have on domestic exporters.  The revision to the ‘rules on the export and import of strategic goods’ released by the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy (MOTIE) on Aug. 12 reclassified Japan from “Region A,” a list of countries that receive preferential treatment through simplified export screening, to a newly created category called “Region A2.” Under the previous rules, all 29 signatories to the four major export controls systems on strategic goods, including the Wassenaar Arrangement, that were classified as Region A benefited from simplified export screening, while other countries were classified as “Region B.” However, under the revised rules, Region A has been divided into A1 and A2, the latter referring to countries that do not run their systems in line with the principles of the four major systems, despite being signatories to such agreements. Japan is the only country that has been placed in this category. Exports from A2 need to receive comprehensive or separate authorization every three years in principle, which represents a tightening of regulations that effectively relegates them to a level on par with Region B.  As for the reason behind the changes, the Ministry stated “The amendment was made because it is difficult to remain in close collaboration with countries that run their systems in a manner inconsistent with the principles of the international export control system.” Although the Ministry claims that the changes are not in response to the retaliatory measures adopted by Japan, it is difficult to deny that they appear to be retaliatory in nature due to the timing and content. The new rules seem to have been written based on a determination that most Japanese-made materials and components in Korea can be replaced with products made locally or procured from other countries, and the fact that there is growing concern within Japan about the repercussions of the Japanese government’s export regulations.  Depending on how Japan reacts to the latest measure, there is a high likelihood that the trade dispute between Korea and Japan will intensify. The new rules will come into effect starting next month after a 20-day period of canvassing public opinion, regulatory screening, and screening by the Ministry of Government Legislation. The South Korean government announced, “If the Japanese government seeks to engage in negotiations during the period of receiving opinions, we are prepared to accept at any time and place.” It is hoped that the Japanese government will agree to engage in proactive discussions this time and facilitate an opportunity for resolving the trade dispute through dialogue and negotiation. |
| Choi Ha-yan, Lee Wan & Seong Yeon-cheol | News Analysis | Hankyoreh | August 13, 2019 | South Korea | The significance of S. Korea’s removal of Japan from its white list | Despite concerns from some quarters that South Korea and Japan are heading into a full-blown tit-for-tat confrontation, the South Korean government decided to remove Japan from its white list (countries that enjoy streamlined export procedures for strategic materials). The strong-armed measure is aimed at both pressuring Japan following that country’s hesitation due to international criticism and to open the door for negotiations to find a bilateral resolution. Analysts also suggest that South Korea has shown that it can always respond to Japan again by pulling out of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).  Several South Korean government officials emphasized that the revised act on the export and import of strategic materials announced on Aug. 12 is not a response to Japan’s strengthening of export controls toward South Korea. Trade Minister Sung Yun-mo said that South Korea cannot work closely with countries that have not run their export control systems in line with international export control principles or that continue to conduct “inappropriate trade practices.” A Blue House official also said that the South Korean government has simply judged whether or not Japan is conducting its trade practices in line with international export control principles and that the measure is not aimed at responding to Japan’s measures. Rather, this official emphasized, South Korea has slightly “readjusted” the act on the export and import of strategic materials.  Ultimately, South Korean government officials appear concerned that South Korea will face criticism from the international community if the revised act is deemed a “retaliatory” measure against the Japanese. The World Trade Organization (WTO) prohibits retaliatory trade measures, and South Korea is now preparing a suit against Japan for breaking that very rule. Park Tae-sung, deputy minister of the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy's International Trade and Investment Office, told the Hankyoreh, “We don’t believe that [this revised act] will negatively impact the WTO suit in the future because the act was legally changed within the framework of South Korean and international law.”  Creation of A2 category exclusively for Japan  The South Korean government is providing vague explanations for the reasoning behind changing the act. Officials say that even though South Korea is part of four major multilateral export control regimes, including the Wassenaar Arrangement, there are still countries that conduct trade practices that fail to meet international export control principles and this situation has necessitated a change in the act. Park Tae-sung says that a country party to these four major regimes can be removed from a white list (moved from Region A to Region A2) for the following reasons: a country fails to follow the principle protecting normal private transactions; a country does not follow international agreements recommending the exchange of information between countries; or, a country conducts inappropriate trade practices.  Reflecting this, South Korea has removed Japan from its white list for the following reasons: Japan put the entire semiconductor industry in danger by suddenly requiring “individual export permission” for three semiconductor materials, including hydrogen fluoride; Japan did not attempt to hold consultations at the ministry head level on the import and export of strategic materials with South Korea; and, finally, South Korea’s long-held accusation that Japanese strategic materials have flowed into North Korea. Choi Jae-sung, a Democratic Party lawmaker heading the Japanese Economic Inquiry Measures Committee, has said that Japan failed to effectively control strategic materials, adding, “A UN report said that strategic materials leaked from Japan have been used in weapons or industries that support weaponry.”  Now the ball is in Japan’s court. Sung has stated that the revised act will be implemented in September after canvassing public opinion for 20 days, reiterating that South Korea will be ready to respond to any Japanese government requests for talks during that period. The deadline to extend the GSOMIA is Aug. 24, which is when the end of the period for canvassing public opinion. Japan’s revised Export Trade Control Order that removes South Korea from its white list will go into effect only four days later, on Aug. 28. A high-ranking official in South Korea’s Ministry of Defense told the Hankyoreh, “The US and Japan want GSOMIA to be extended so it’s now up to South Korea to make a choice” and that “[The government] is comprehensively reviewing what choice will be most beneficial to the national interest.” In short, South Korea could use its exit from GSOMIA as another, and particularly potent, weapon to pressure Japan.  Strengthening of controls in tourism, food, and waste still a viable option  The strengthening of controls in tourism, food, and waste toward Japan announced by Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki is also on the table. On Aug. 8, the Ministry of Environment tightened radioactivity testing during customs clearance of coal ash imported from Japan. Kim Sang-jo, Blue House policy director, said during a recent radio talk show, “The situation today is - to borrow from economic game theory - a strategy game and a game of repetition,” adding, “My [South Korea’s] own strategy changes depending on what kind of response the other side makes. This back-and-forth is then repeated several times.”  In short, South Korea will adjust its strategic response and the level of that response depending on changes in the situation with Japan. An opposition party representative told the Hankyoreh that the removal of Japan from South Korea’s white list shows that South Korea has the willingness to use a wide range of options to bring about change in Japan’s attitude |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | August 16, 2019 | South Korea | Moon’s Liberation Day speech was laudable for taking the high road | In his congratulatory address on Aug. 15, the 74th anniversary of Korea’s liberation from Japan’s colonial occupation, South Korean President Moon Jae-in presented the vision of making Korea a “responsible economic powerhouse” and ushering in an age of peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and of mutual cooperation in Northeast Asia. With South Korea-Japan relations in an abysmal state, it’s very timely for Moon to pledge to make South Korea an “unshakable” country. It was also reasonable of him to call on Japan to move down the path of amity and cooperation.  Moon should be praised for taking the high road in his speech, focusing not on anti-Japanese feelings but rather on ways to transcend South Korea’s dependence on Japan. That raises hopes that the door will open toward reconciliation and cooperation with Japan.  Rather than criticizing Japan directly, Moon opted to offer an indirect admonition. “We hope that Japan will play a leading role together [with us] in facilitating peace and prosperity in East Asia while it contemplates a past that brought misfortune to its neighboring countries,” Moon said, calling on Japan to show its sincerity about past issues. He also offered veiled criticism of Japan’s export controls with his remark, “A country that achieved growth first must not kick the ladder away while others are following in its footsteps.”  Significantly, Moon made clear that Seoul will fully cooperate with Tokyo in next year’s Summer Olympics. “Just as people around the world witnessed a ‘Peaceful Korean Peninsula’ at the Pyeongchang Olympics, I look forward to seeing the Tokyo Olympics become a source of hope for friendship and cooperation,” Moon said. On Liberation Day, Moon urged Japan to adopt a mature and sophisticated attitude; we hope that Japan will pay heed to his advice.  As part of Moon’s pledge to build “a nation that cannot be shaken,” he proposed that Korea should become a “responsible economic powerhouse” and “a bridge [. . .] in promoting peace and prosperity on the continent and out in the ocean” and called for unification and the establishment of a “peace economy.” Moon made clear his ambition to build “an economy that will never be shaken” by promoting a symbiotic relationship between workers and employers and between large conglomerates and smaller companies and by strengthening the competitiveness of the parts, materials, and equipment industry. Now is the time for all South Koreans to work together to realize Moon’s vision and find the silver lining in our economic conflict with Japan.  Also noteworthy is Moon’s expression of the specific timeline that he envisions for unification: “I pledge to solidify the foundation so that we can [. . .] stand tall in the world as one Korea by achieving peace and unification by 2045, which will mark the 100th anniversary of liberation.” Moon’s proposal for not only a “peace economy” but also unification essentially constitutes a long-term vision for “complete liberation.”  We also draw attention to the fact that Moon brought up several issues with North Korea in a roundabout way. He indirectly warned the North about its missile launches, which he described obliquely as “a series of worrying actions.” Moon added that “we possess defense capabilities that are even stronger,” leaving no doubt that South Korea has the ability to deter North Korean provocations.  Moon went on to say that “If there is dissatisfaction, it too should be raised and discussed at the negotiating table,” Moon went on to say, sending a measured but unmistakable message to the North, which has slandered Moon and the South Korean government while launching multiple missiles. North Korea needs to take Moon’s words to heart by engaging sincerely in dialogue while refraining from raising tensions. |
| China.org with Xinhua | News Analysis | China.org.cn | July 19, 2019 | China | Japan dismisses South Korea's remarks on export curbs, Seoul denies violating int'l law in wartime forced labor ruling | The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan on Friday refuted South Korea's claims on export curbs of hi-tech materials, with an official of the ministry saying that it is difficult to see how the countries can hold talks on the issue given the current state of bilateral relations.  Japanese Trade Ministry official Jun Iwamatsu during a press conference rejected South Korea's call for bureau chief-level talks, saying Japan's trade control system is a domestic matter and not up for discussion with other countries.  "Discussions between two countries should never be revealed without prior agreement," Iwamatsu said.  "Therefore, we're shocked to learn that South Korea has divulged the nature of our talks last week and the content of emails we exchanged. Some of the information they released is false," he added.  According to the official, South Korea had agreed to engage in a dialogue but suddenly cancelled. He said the two sides need to build trust before they can move forward.  Earlier this month, Japan tightened restrictions on exports of high-tech materials to South Korea, citing "significant damage to the relationship of mutual trust."  Under the new restrictions, individual applications will be necessary for exports to South Korea of three materials used in high-tech products, a process that can take around 90 days.  The materials include fluorinated polyimide, hydrogen fluoride and resist, which are used in the manufacturing process of semiconductors and screens for smartphones and TVs.  Bilateral tensions have become strained between both sides, most recently over a wartime labor dispute.  Tokyo believes Seoul has not cooperated in trying to resolve this bilaterally, or by way of the establishment of an arbitration panel involving a third party.  Japan has tried to maintain that the tighter export controls were not a retaliatory measure against South Korea, but has said that Seoul had failed to show a satisfactory solution to the ongoing wartime labor dispute between both parties.  South Korea's top court ordered some major Japanese firms to compensate South Korean plaintiffs over forced wartime labor during Japan's 1910-1945 occupation of the Korean Peninsula, with lawyers being allowed to seize the assets of some Japanese firms, initially raising the ire of the Japanese side.  Japan, for its part, has claimed the rulings are not in line with international law and run contrary to the foundation of friendly and cooperative relations between the two neighbors since the 1965 normalization of diplomatic ties.  South Korea's presidential Blue House said Friday that not South Korea, but Japan violated international law regarding the forced labor of Korean people before and during World War II.  Kim Hyun-chong, deputy director of the National Security Office (NSO) of the Blue House, told a press briefing that it was wrong for Japan to continue asserting the South Korean violation of international law.  He said it was Japan that violated international law with illegal acts against humanity by forcing Korean people into hard labor without pay during the 1910-45 Japanese colonization of the Korean Peninsula.  The NSO deputy director told reporters that although South Korea sought to resolve the forced labor issue through diplomatic channels with Japan and the dialogue efforts had yet to be concluded, Japan unilaterally slapped export restrictions on South Korea.  Kim said Japan's export curbs were an act damaging the free trade principle and the global value chain.  He stressed that Seoul was open to all constructive proposals as it prioritizes the diplomatic resolution of the forced labor issue, saying the resolution through the arbitration panel can negatively influence the bilateral ties and worsen public hostilities against each other as it takes long and brings a partial victory or loss in many cases.  Kim added that South Korea was ready to consult with Japan on ways to find a middle ground acceptable both to peoples of the two countries and the forced labor victims, urging Tokyo to immediately retract the export restriction |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | August 16, 2019 | South Korea | To free future generations from burden of apology, Abe needs to recognize historical facts | During a ceremony honoring Japanese soldiers who died in World War II, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe didn’t make any mention of Japan’s aggression in the war or of the entailing responsibility. Since 1993, Japanese prime ministers had expressed “remorse” and “condolences” on each Aug. 15, the day marking Japan’s surrender in the war, but Abe ended that tradition when he returned to power in 2012, seven years ago.  On the same day, Abe sent an offering to Yasukuni Shrine, where Class A war criminals are enshrined, once again for the seventh year in a row. Fifty Japanese lawmakers on the far right paid a personal visit to the shrine.  While commemorating the end of the war in his address, Abe placed a particular emphasis on the harm suffered by Japan during World War II. He also remarked that Japan has “done everything in its power on behalf of global peace and prosperity, while keenly recalling the lessons of history.” Such remarks add insult to injury for the comfort women and others compelled to serve Japan’s war effort.  An important international academic conference was held the day before, on Aug. 14, which is the international day of remembrance for the comfort women. During this event, Chinese researchers unveiled confessions written by war criminals in the Japanese army, detailing sex crimes committed during the war.  In those written confessions, Japanese generals at the level of divisional commander apparently admitted that they’d given orders to set up comfort stations and ordered Korean and Chinese women to be brought there through inducement or deceit. Those documents stand as evidence contravening Japanese denials that its military was directly involved in the compulsory mobilization of the comfort women and the operation of the comfort stations.  In an official response submitted to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights at the end of 2015 and in other venues, the Abe administration has repeatedly expressed its position that there are no documents confirming that the comfort women were carried off by force. Japan claims that its investigation extended to documents held by the US National Archives and Records Administration and South Korea’s Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. If that’s true, there’s no reason why Japan wouldn’t look over documents composed by its own generals.  In a statement released on 2015, Abe said that future generations of Japanese shouldn’t be forced to shoulder the burden of apologizing. We hope he’ll recognize, before it’s too late, that the only way for that wish to be realized is by acknowledging the plain facts of history and officially apologizing to the victims. |
| China.org with Xinhua | News Analysis | China.org.cn | August 2, 2019 | China | S. Korean lawmakers blame Japan's "diplomatic discourtesy" after meeting canceled | South Korean lawmakers who are visiting Japan to discuss trade and history row between the two countries expressed anger Thursday after a leading Japanese politician canceled a meeting, saying it is "huge diplomatic discourtesy."  A group of 10 lawmakers from South Korea began a two-day visit to Tokyo on Wednesday, hoping to help ease the worsening dispute over trade and history.  They met their Japanese counterparts on Wednesday, urging Japan not to downgrade their country from a preferred status with simplified export procedures. However, they ended up repeating their demands to each other.  The Japanese government will decide whether to exclude South Korea from the list as early as Friday at a cabinet meeting.  If South Korea is removed from Japan's so-called "white country" list, which takes effect 21 days after the Cabinet's approval, it would mean that requirement will apply to dozens of more products on a list of items that potentially could be converted to weapons.  During the visit, the South Korean lawmakers were originally scheduled to meet Toshihiro Nikai, secretary-general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), on Wednesday afternoon.  According to the South Korean lawmakers, two hours before the planned meeting, Nikai's side abruptly requested to postpone the meeting until the following morning because of a party session.  At night, Fukushiro Nukaga of the LDP, a co-head of the South Korea-Japan Parliamentarians' Union, called his South Korean counterpart, Kang Chang-il of the ruling Democratic Party (DP), to cancel the talks because he had to preside over an emergency party meeting.  Kang expressed anger about Japan's move, saying it is "huge diplomatic discourtesy."  "The LDP may have ordered its members to keep silent, but anyway he said Nikai can't meet us because of his hectic schedule. I said they should have not committed such a discourtesy and hung up," Kang said.  According to him, it is not important to meet someone, but to convey the country's thoughts. The South Korean side has already understood the "true intentions of the LDP and Abe administration."  Japan has already tightened regulations early last month on its export to South Korea of three materials vital to make memory chips and display panels, which are the mainstay of the South Korean export.  Seoul argues that Japan's moves were retaliation over South Korean court decisions ordering Japanese firms to compensate for wartime labor.  Tokyo insists that the planned removal is meant to address security concerns and compensation issues related to its former colonial rule over what is now South Korea were settled in a 1965 bilateral agreement "finally and completely." |
| Nam Ki-jeong | Opinion | Hankyoreh | August 18, 2019 | South Korea | Ending the 1965 regime between South Korea and Japan | The history of the end of the “1965 regime” is now in full swing. The trigger pulled by Japan with its trade warfare is set to go down in history as its opening salvo.  The origins lie in the Korean Peninsula peace process that began last year. It marked the beginning of a new stage in the establishment of the “new Korean Peninsula regime.” That regime is a new order created as the Korean Peninsula transforms from a setting for warfare and confrontation to one of peace and cooperation. This will necessitate overcoming two “postwar eras” that have imposed a warfare rationale upon Northeast Asia. The threat of war became intensified on the peninsula in the past as the post-World War II era, persisting in the form of the Cold War, combined with the post-Korean War era, which has survived as the armistice system. That was the essence of the 2017 crisis.  The year 2018 marked the beginning of the end for these two postwar regimes. As the Korean Peninsula peace process moved forward, a movement arose to bring an end to the 1965 regime established between South Korea and Japan as part of the Cold War order. The Panmunjom summit of April 2018 and the Supreme Court judgment the following October were inextricably linked. Establishing a new relationship between Seoul and Tokyo to suit the new Korean Peninsula regime emerged as a matter in need of being addressed.  The two sides’ past relationship as a subordinate alliance amid trilateral security cooperation with the US to ensure the perpetuation of the Northeast Asian Cold War order and the Korean War armistice no longer fits with the new Korean Peninsula regime.  South Korea has sought to bring an end to the Korean Peninsula armistice regime, which has functioned to amplify the threat of war. Japan has sought to maintain a strategic balance in Northeast Asia that is predicated on the armistice regime’s continuation. This has shaped the geopolitical front between South Korea and Japan, exacerbating mutual trust amid conflicting historical layers in the interpretation of the armistice and Cold War. Such is the backdrop for the latest trade war.  Japan is the party that excluded South Korea from its list of countries receiving favorable treatment in terms of export procedures, shrugging off diplomatic efforts by Seoul and mediation by Washington. It is a clear-cut case of unilateral diplomacy – just one without the mobilization of military force. In essence, Tokyo shifted from a diplomatic approach of “argument” to one of “action.” Japan also made the choice to say goodbye to the postwar era. How should we view its actions? A hint can be found in “Rebuilding the US-Japan Alliance,” a Japanese strategy report published in September 2017. That report produced some shocking conclusions with regard to South Korea. One was that Tokyo should continue demanding that the Moon Jae-in administration enforce the 2015 comfort women agreement between the two governments, regardless of the pall this might cast on bilateral relations. Another was that Japan should join the US in checking the Moon administration if it became too conciliatory toward North Korea. These attitudes toward South Korea, which are shared by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the figures who surround him, are coarsely embodied in the latest provocations involving the use of export controls for trade warfare.  Abe’s objective of Japan emerging as a flag bearer in a new liberal global order  Here, the historical revisionism that Abe is pursuing appears to be combining with geopolitics and manifesting as policy. But the Japanese “revival” that Abe and his cohorts envision does not mean a return to the Meiji Restoration or leadership of a Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. They aren’t that deluded. Political realists, they are pursuing something modeled on the Japanese diplomacy of the 1920s. Their model is the Japanese approach to diplomacy that spearheaded an international alliance under a doctrine of “international cooperation” that actually amounted only to cooperation by imperial powers. Their aim is for Japan to return a century later as flag bearers for upholding the liberal global order.  The fact that Japan’s latest provocations are coming in the same year as the centennial of the March 1 Independence Movement and the establishment of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea clearly shows how differently the year 1919 is viewed by Japan compared to South Korea. Where Koreans saw an opportunity in Wilson’s idea of “national self-determination,” Japan gained a sense of confidence over its stable government of Korea. Their diametrically opposed perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference are now manifesting again in 2019.  The Indo-Pacific strategy – which has played out under an approach were Japan proposes things, which are then accepted by the US – is another part of Japan’s envisioned revival. That strategy adopts a two-pronged approach toward Trump’s America: binding the US to the bilateral alliance on one hand, while preparing at the same time for the possibility of the US forsaking Japan. While Japan preemptively moves to share strategic interests with the US – which has its own interest in the Indo-Pacific region – it is also anticipating the US’ departure from East Asia by making spirited efforts to develop relationships with the UK, France, and other countries that are returning to the region.  Perhaps we should recall that this region – the one stretching from eastern Africa across India and into Indochina – was colonized by the UK and France in the past, and that the “glorious” Japanese diplomacy of the 1920s was based in cooperation with those powers. We might gain some sense of what it signifies for Japan to be moving to defend a rule-based liberal global order in this region.  Need to reexamine S. Korea’s larger strategy in Northeast Asia  What sort of new Korean Peninsula regime should we envision and practice in the face of this behavior by Japan? How should we go about establishing a relationship with Japan as the base of a “peace triangle” with North Korea under the new system? Without establishing a larger strategy and final goals, it becomes impossible not only to manage bilateral relations but also to rebuild them. For that reason, we need to reexamine our larger strategy and final goals.  We can conceive of three goals and strategies: South Korea-Japan cooperation to address current issues, resolve issues of history, and build the future. In terms of cooperation to address current issues and establish a new future for East Asia, we can set the first task as being to encourage Japan to play a role in the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. To Pyongyang, nuclear weapons and missiles offered the only means of remedying the disadvantageous international environment created by the normalization of South Korea’s diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and China.  The keys to persuading North Korea to abandon its nuclear program are progress on North Korea-US negotiations and, at the same time, the normalization of diplomatic relations between North Korea and Japan. Even though Japan is seeking to circumvent South Korea, therefore, we should strive to mediate between Japan and North Korea and to regard the normalization of their diplomatic relations as a common good for a peace regime in Northeast Asia. That could also help propel us toward one of the essential tasks for securing the future of East Asia, namely concluding a treaty that would declare Northeast Asia to be a nuclear-weapon-free zone.  Strength of non-nuclear peace regime  Surprisingly enough, the foundation is already laid to frame such a treaty in Northeast Asia. In last year’s Panmunjom Declaration, South and North Korea both declared their support for turning the Korean Peninsula into a nuclear-weapon-free zone. In 1998, South Korea and Japan released a joint statement proclaiming the value of a non-nuclear peace, with South Korea crediting Japan for its three non-nuclear principles. And in 2002, North Korea and Japan released a joint statement affirming the principle of resolving the North Korean nuclear issue according to international law, which suggests that North Korea and Japan also share the values of non-nuclear peace.  Since the principle of non-nuclear peace has already been confirmed bilaterally by all three sides of the “triangle,” weaving those into a position shared by South Korea, North Korea, and Japan could help turn Northeast Asia into a nuclear-weapon-free zone. Non-nuclear peace is a fundamental policy of the Japanese government that even Shinzo Abe would find it difficult to deny, as well as the value most cherished by Japanese civil society. Since the push began to revise Japan’s “peace” constitution, there are indications that those NGOS are being realigned around the values of pacifism and non-nuclear peace. We need to be thinking about how we can cooperate with them.  The most important thing is for South Korea and Japan to work together to settle their past disputes once and for all. How can they go about this in a manner that contributes to the new Korean Peninsula regime? How can we completely normalize relations between the two countries, which have been unequal since they signed the Treaty of Gangwha Island in 1876? That should be the focus of our efforts to turn Japan’s instigation of a trade war from a crisis into an opportunity.  The reason that South Korea-Japan relations are currently at their worst point since the two countries normalized diplomatic relations in 1965 is because of that self-same 1965 regime. My choice of the term “1965 regime” focuses on the constant instability produced by contradictory interpretations of the treaty on basic relations and the treaty settling outstanding claims, the signing of which ostensibly normalized diplomatic relations. One of those basic contradictions concerns the illegality of colonial rule.  Establishing the illegality of Japan’s colonial occupation  The South Korean government’s interpretation of its basic treaty with Japan assumes the illegality of Japan’s colonial rule, while Japan’s interpretation is grounded in its legality. When protracted negotiations failed to bridge that gap, South Korea and Japan shelved the issue by agreeing to disagree. Since then, the two countries have strained to paper over this issue whenever the foundation of the relations have been undermined by historical issues, but last year’s decision by the South Korean Supreme Court means that such measures are no longer possible. Rather than treating the symptoms, the time has come to cure the disease.  Steps must now be taken to unify the two countries’ interpretations of their 1965 treaty and agreement. Some may be skeptical about such a proposition, doubting whether that’s possible as long as Japan is led by Abe. Pessimism is understandable if we focus on the limitations of the 1965 regime, but hope is possible if we focus on how those limitations have been overcome during past decades. That hope derives from South Korea’s civil society, which coalesced around calls to resolve the comfort women issue. The groups that flourished after South Korea’s democratization pushed the government to raise that issue with Japan, leading to a gradual shift in Japan’s attitude toward history.  In a 1993 statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono, the Japanese government acknowledged its military’s involvement in the comfort women issue; in a 1995 statement by Tomiichi Murayama, it expressed remorse and an apology for its colonial rule; in a joint statement by South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi in 1998, it apologized specifically to the Korean people; and in a 2010 statement by Prime Minister Naoto Kan, it even acknowledged that its colonial rule had been forced on the Korean people against their will. Even Abe, despite being a historical revisionist, has been unable to reject or deny those statements, and they can serve as grounds for confirming the illegality of Japan’s colonial occupation. What remains is for South Korea and Japan to produce a document formally affirming the illegality of the colonial occupation.  If North Korea and Japan then use that as a springboard for affirming the illegality of the colonial occupation as a basic position, the economic cooperation that Japan pledged in a 2002 joint statement with North Korea could be reframed as compensation, forming the foundation for normalizing the two countries’ diplomatic relations. And if the position shared bilaterally by South Korea and Japan on the one hand and by North Korea and Japan on the other can be integrated into a joint statement by all three countries, it could lead to the total resolution of the outstanding historical issues between Japan and the Korean Peninsula.  No more unequal treaties  Nam Ki-jeong, associate professor at the Institute for Japanese Studies at Seoul National University  Japan’s instigation of a trade war could be a signal that the 1965 regime is drawing to a close and that a new history is unfolding. Japan’s provocation has made us aware that the “unequal treaties” between South Korea and Japan that go back to 1876 remain in place even today. Before South Korea could rectify the unequal Treaty of Gangwha Island, it was made a Japanese colony, and that inequality was not definitely rectified even when the two countries normalized diplomatic relations in 1965, after Korea was liberated. It’s time for us to launch a diplomatic campaign to finally deal with that inequality. Moving beyond the 1965 regime is an essential stage in the Korean Peninsula peace process, as well as in the construction of a new regime for the Korean Peninsula. |
| Hong Se-hwa | Opinion | Hankyoreh | August 18, 2019 | South Korea | The dangers of making Japan and the Japanese people the enemy | This is no Thucydides trap, but the trap of government-led nationalism. Without brakes to stop them, Koreans are madly driving into the trap of government-led nationalism. One politician is calling for Tokyo to become a “restricted travel zone” while 150 local government leaders are making a big show of “opposing Japan.” A high-ranking member of the Democratic Party said that “I am calling for the repeal of GSOMIA (the General Security of Military Information Agreement) immediately” and proposed that a statement to this effect be sent to Japan on Aug. 15, the day Japan was defeated in World War II. Sushi has now become a target for attacks, and the lowly standard of Korean politics – now relegated to fighting over the use of sake or cheongju (Korean rice wine) - was again confirmed by the Democratic Party’s recent proposal to reconsider a boycott of the Tokyo Olympics next year.  This kind of nationalism exists with other types in “confrontational” coexistence. Government-led nationalism condemns Shinzo Abe in one voice, but most of the time it actually just helps the Japanese leader. Just like ordinary Korean people were the ones who removed former President Park Geun-hye from office, ordinary Japanese – not Koreans - should be the ones to take down Abe. Instead of creating enemies of the Japanese people, Koreans need to find ways to come together with the Japanese people in solidarity so that they can take things into their own hands.  Unencumbered nationalism can easily turn unwieldy. On Aug. 5, Moon called for the creation of a “peace economy” through inter-Korean economic cooperation as a way to “break through” Japan’s economic attacks. “The advantage Japan’s economy has over us is the size of its (overall) economy and domestic market,” Moon said. “If the South and North could create a peace economy through economic cooperation, we can catch up with Japan’s superiority in one burst.”  Almost as if he had the knowledge that an ordinary person like me would be unfamiliar with the term “peace economy,” Moon then emphasized that “We can achieve peace and shared prosperity on the Korean Peninsula as well as denuclearization if South and North work together under the conviction that a peace economy is a future that is ours alone, something no one country in the world can possess.” Hearing this, a rosy vision of a train travelling through North Korea and across the Eurasian continent flashed before me, but this image quickly disappeared upon realization that the Kaesong Industrial Complex and tourism to Mt. Kumgang are both still dead in the water.  A hasty and compulsive sense of purpose eliminates or distorts the process of rational thought. My admittedly narrow knowledge of economics tells me that the focus of the economy should be on production, not on its scale or the size of the domestic market. I believe that Moon’s statements came from aides who cling to chauvinistic nationalism. That being said, his speech presents a serious issue because of its exceedingly empty-sounding, far-right statements (for example, “[. . .] under the conviction that a peace economy is a future that is ours alone, something no one country in the world can possess”) and other declarations that revealed basic misunderstandings about the workings of the economy. People’s limited knowledge of this – or perhaps because everyone has become enveloped in government-led nationalism expressed through the “12 ships” (led by Yi Sun-sin to fight the Japanese navy in the Myeongnyang Strait), the Jookchang-ga (literally, the “Song of Bamboo Spear,” a popular song during the democracy movement) and the “Righteous Army” (an irregular army that fought the Japanese) - means that Moon has received muted criticism.  It is worth referencing, however, Irving Janis’ concept of “groupthink” to explain the Blue House’s way of making decisions. According to Janis, groupthink is a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group that makes them strive for unanimity when a decision is made. Groupthink makes people in groups blindly adhere to an optimistic viewpoint and leads to irrational actions directed toward those outside of that group.  The sense of intellectual and moral superiority of S. Korea’s nationalist left  Personally speaking, I am not educated enough to be an expert, but I take it as one of my fundamental principles not to become a “democratic idiot” armed with feelings of intellectual and moral superiority. South Korea’s road to democratization was extremely difficult. Most of the so-called “[3]86 generation” who were part of that long and difficult democratization movement have a sense of moral superiority over others. That’s natural, of course, given that they fought against the anti-democratic, morally-corrupt dictatorships of Syngman Rhee, Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan. Most, moreover, have read a couple of ideological texts recommended by their elders and thus have an easy time feeling an intellectual sense of superiority over others as well. They are also nationalists.  It is too much to ask nationalists armed with such intellectual and ethical superiority to self-reflect or question themselves. The hand of a compass may quiver in hesitation before pointing out a direction, but these nationalists don’t hesitate in any way. Korea’s state of division gave nationalists the gift of a majority opinion and has allowed them to dominate all aspects of the civil society movement. They don’t feel the need to study the discourses espoused by their opponents at the Chosun Ilbo or the Liberty Korea Party. That is because the two sides are not part of a relationship where debates and persuasion take place; rather, their relationship is relegated to that of the oppressor and the oppressed.  As soon as these nationalists acquired political power on the back of candlelight demonstrations, they obtained pretty good public sector jobs. Linked closely on a sentimental level, a culture of “we’re all friends” appeared among them. Even while witnessing Moon Jae-in’s pledge regarding public education turn into an empty one, I wonder if their aim to obtain power is less on realizing a political philosophy than providing jobs to one another.  Yang Jung-chul, a confidant of Moon, was put in charge of the Institute for Democracy. As far as I know, the extent of this Democratic Party think tank’s research capability is its conclusion that the South Korea-Japan conflict will serve to benefit the Democratic Party during the parliamentary elections in April 2020.  Fleeting moral satisfaction does not justify long-term economic damage  If you lack talent, at least have the grace to be modest. Perhaps the point is to win some kind of moral victory or make Koreans look better by comparison, but the government-led nationalism we’re seeing is extremely selective, given our willing subservience to the US. Since the Abe administration claims that South Korea is in violation of international law, the Moon administration has known for eight months that Japan might make an economic provocation. But Moon disregarded that, focusing all his diplomatic resources on the Korean Peninsula peace process. And instead of owning up to its negligent response to the crisis in relations with Japan and working to repair those relations, the South Korean government has been fighting back by trying to whip up nationalistic fervor.  But the moral satisfaction of “sticking it to Japan” is fleeting, while the resulting economic tsunami can cause devastating and irreparable harm to the public livelihood. This must be stopped. In the words of one member of the Democratic Party’s Supreme Council, I’m afraid of that “Japan’s political ambition of installing a pro-Japanese government in this country” might actually come true. Despite all my criticism, the current administration is much better than reactionary sell-outs such as the Liberty Korean Party or the Chosun Ilbo. After all, we mustn’t abandon our embattled dreams of building a society that respects its workers and achieving income-led growth; and we mustn’t let Samsung scion Lee Jae-yong, the man who fleeced the national pension fund, be lionized as the person who led South Korea to economic victory over Japan.  Hong Se-hwa, CEO of Simple Freedom  Right now, 60-year-old Kim Yong-hui is perched on a tiny landing atop a metal pole in the heart of Gangnam. For more than 60 days, he’s thrown his remaining energy into his protest, despite being physically broken by the Samsung Group’s brutal suppression of his attempts to set up a labor union. Should we really be talking about the human rights of Koreans forced to work for criminal Japanese companies back in the colonial period while leaving Kim to his fate? It’s time we took a good look at ourselves. |
| Ahn Jae-seung | Opinion | Hankyoreh | August 18, 2019 | South Korea | S. Korea’s economy is no longer that fragile | The front-page headline on the July 6 issue of the Hankyung, also known as the Korean Economic Daily, said, “Semiconductor plants might shut down by the end of this month.” During a meeting with high-ranking government officials, the newspaper reported, CEOs of semiconductor manufacturers said they only had a two-to-four week supply of etching gas and other materials and expressed concerns that their factories could go idle at the end of the month. It’s not clear if the CEOs actually said that, but at any rate those semiconductor factories haven’t shut down. The CEOs now view the dispute with Japan as a blessing in disguise and are urging their staff to treat the crisis as an opportunity.  It’s true that the Abe administration’s economic retaliation, coupled with the escalating trade conflict between the US and China, presents a major challenge to the South Korean economy. But predictions that this will precipitate an unprecedented catastrophe on the level of the 1997 Asian financial crisis are really going too far. The South Korean economy isn’t that fragile.  Let’s step back from the rumor mill and take a hard look at the facts. South Korea reached a per capita gross national income (GNI) of US$31,734 in 2017 (according to statistics updated in June 2019), becoming the seventh country to join the “30-50 club,” referring to countries with a population of at least 50 million and a per capita GNI of at least US$30,000. By the end of July, our foreign reserves amounted to US$403.1 billion, ranking ninth in the world. That’s a 20-fold increase from the Asian financial crisis in 1997, when the reserves stood at US$20.4 billion. At the end of March, we had a short-term debt ratio of 31.6%, much lower than the ratio of 286% before the Asian financial crisis. The credit debt swap premium, an indirect measure of the risk of a sovereign default, has gone up over the past few days, but on Aug. 7, it was still very stable, at 34bp. Our net foreign assets totaled US$436.2 billion at the end of March, the highest they’ve ever been. Our national credit rating, as assessed by Moody’s and Standard & Poor’s, is only two steps away from the top of the scale, and two steps higher than China’s and Japan’s. These rating companies reportedly gave high marks to South Korea’s economic and fiscal fundamentals.  Now let’s compare South Korea with Japan. South Korea’s 2018 gross domestic product (GDP) was US$1.72 trillion dollars, while Japan’s GDP was nearly three times greater, at US$4.97 trillion. The decisive factor here is that Japan’s population is about two and a half times larger than South Korea’s, but that’s still a big difference. But that gap is being rapidly narrowed. Since 1990, South Korea’s GDP has increased by 520%, while Japan’s has only grown by 60%. The change in the per capita GNI has been even more rapid. By 2018, South Korea had a GNI of US$33,434, which was 81% of Japan’s, at US$41,340. Last year, South Korea overtook Japan in electronics, a key industry for both countries, becoming the world’s third largest manufacturer in the field, after China and the US. The value of South Korea’s production output shot up by 54% in five years, while Japan’s moved in the opposite direction, sliding by 11%.  Abe administration’s provocations prompted by fear that S. Korea is catching up  Many analysts believe that the Abe administration’s provocations are prompted by fear that South Korea is catching up to Japan. According to this view, Japan is striking a blow at South Korea’s key semiconductor sector with the hope of extinguishing a driver of economic growth. But Japan has miscalculated. Now, unlike the past, a head-on collision between the two countries would be fatal to Japan, as well.  Amid all this, rumors are circulating that Japan might even impose financial retribution, an unlikely prospect. There are calls to kowtow to the Abe administration now, before we suffer even more harm. Does it really make sense that profit-driven financial companies would call in loans from customers just because Abe told them to? Any firm that did so would be branded as a dishonest broker, ruining their reputation in the international financial market. Even so, some are stirring up fears by spreading rumors about funds being leaked. Such self-defeating behavior is exactly what the Abe administration wants.  Ahn Jae-seung, editorial writer  Undoubtedly, the South Korean economy faces a number of problems. Over the past few weeks, Japan’s economic retribution has unveiled the vulnerability of our parts and materials industry. Furthermore, our economy as a whole is overly dependent on semiconductors, while leading industries such as automobiles, shipbuilding, and steel are losing their competitive edge. Meanwhile, the industries that should be driving new growth haven’t managed to gain traction. There’s also a severe imbalance between exports and domestic demand. Over time, South Korea’s demographic structure, which is being reshaped by societal aging and the low birthrate, will place an increasing burden on the economy. This stack of structural challenges makes the recent uptick in our economic slowdown even more worrisome.  But every country has its own economic issues. We need to be dealing with our issues systematically, through comprehensive measures that have been carefully framed, and we must avoid creating a panic or engaging in groundless criticism of our economy. That’s what Japan’s far-right politicians and press do. If we don’t respect ourselves, no one will. |
| Jiro Yamaguchi | Opinion | Hankyoreh | August 19, 2019 | South Korea | The true way to honor Japan’s war dead is to face the facts | We must soberly face the lessons to be learned from past wars and casualties  Yamaguchi Jiro, professor of political science at Tokyo‘s Hosei University  It has been 74 years since Japan’s defeat in World War II. The day that Emperor Hirohito assented to the surrender terms outlined in the Potsdam Declaration, Aug. 15, also happens to be the Ghost Festival, a day that Buddhists devote to thinking about the dead. In Japan, this is the time of year when people pray for peace and for the comfort of the victims of war. But the ruthless efforts of historical revisionists in Japan to justify their past wars are straining relations with its neighboring countries. This isn’t a time when the dead can be quietly honored. Those of us who are alive face the sober question of what lesson should be learned from the tremendous casualties suffered by Japan and the rest of Asia.  Various opinions have been expressed about the victims of war. One important lesson can be taken from the book “Requiem for Battleship Yamato,” by Mitsuru Yoshida. While still a student, Yoshida was made an officer in the navy and assigned to the Yamato (72,800 tons), a massive Japanese battleship. At Okinawa, he took part in a “special operation” — that is, a suicide mission — but against all odds, he survived to return home. The book records his experiences from that mission.  The night before the hopeless operation, when Japan’s defeat was all but certain, the young naval officers discussed what they were dying for. “Victory is impossible without progress. The best outcome is for defeat to open our eyes. We stand in the vanguard,” said a captain named Iwaora Usubuchi, the oldest officer present. Everyone found Usubuchi’s words persuasive, Yoshida wrote.  Since World War II, have the Japanese opened their eyes and realized the progress of which Usubuchi spoke? There’s no doubt that, for around 50 years after Japan’s defeat, the country forged a model of an economic power without the ability to wage war, focusing on economic development under Article 9 of its constitution and the slogan of a peaceful state. At ceremonies honoring the fallen, Japanese emperors and prime ministers have echoed the official position that Japan’s peace and wealth was built on the sacrifice made by those lost in the war.  But Japan’s economy has been stagnant for a quarter century and its population has started to decline, enabling a groundless ethnocentrism and contempt for its neighboring countries to spread through society. Japanese politics has lacked intellectual sincerity, the desire to find honest answers for difficult questions, such as how much suffering Japan inflicted upon the people of Asia during the war, why Japan began a war with the US that it was sure to lose, and why it took so long to acknowledge its defeat.  As long as those who had lived through the war were still alive, the Japanese public as a whole shared their hatred for war. And what the Japanese army did in China and Southeast Asia was widely known, even if not explicitly discussed. But after the Japanese lost their pride in their economy and the buffer of personal experience with the war disappeared, Japan’s identity as a peaceful state began to waver.  The inclusion of “Statue of a Girl of Peace,” which symbolizes the comfort women, in “After ‘Freedom of Expression?’” an exhibition in the Aichi Triennale 2019 art festival was stridently criticized not only by the mayor of Nagoya and the governor of Osaka Prefecture, who are both regarded as historical revisionists, but also by some lawmakers in the Diet. After the festival’s secretariat was inundated by threats, the exhibition was finally canceled. In short, politicians were able to stir up the public by exploiting the worsening relations between Japan and South Korea, which are in a row over the issues of forced labor and export controls.  Takashi Kawamura, the Nagoya mayor who was a leading instigator of this controversy, said that the comfort woman statue “tramples on the feelings of the Japanese.” That contradicts the official position of the Japanese government itself, which has admitted that the Japanese military was involved in recruiting and managing the comfort women.  I don’t think that Kawamura’s rejection of the very existence of the comfort women is a view shared by the majority of Japanese. The problem is that even politicians in the ruling party are supporting such false claims and that more Japanese are being incited to threaten violence. There’s a tendency to stigmatize those who want Japan to face up to its past crimes as being “anti-Japanese” and to silence them by force. That represents the very delusional and regressive mindset that Usubuchi risked his life to change. The way we can honor the victims of the war is to be humble before the facts and to respect freedom. |
| Park Min-hee | Opinion | Hankyoreh | August 20, 2019 | South Korea | S. Korea-Japan conflict serves China’s interests | The dispute that has created upheaval in South Korea-Japan relations serves the strategic interests of China, numerous experts say. The dispute opens up a fissure in the American strategy of containing China through trilateral cooperation with South Korea and Japan.  “Since stronger security cooperation among South Korea, the US, and Japan is a strategic blow to China, China regards the recent spat between South Korea and Japan as a positive development. The reason that China has strengthened military cooperation with Russia and joined Russia on an incursion into South Korean air space over the island of Dokdo, a sensitive area for both South Korea and Japan, is in order to maximize its interests amid deteriorating relations between South Korea and Japan,” said Kim Han-kwon, a professor at the Korean National Diplomatic Academy.  South Korea and China once worked together in every historical dispute over Japan’s colonial rule and wars of aggression, but there is no evidence of such cooperation this time around. Considering that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has hit South Korea with methods developed by US President Donald Trump in his attack on China, including tariff hikes and export controls targeted at Huawei, South Korea and China could plausibly stand together under the slogan of defending free trade, but there are few indications that they will.  China concentrating on conflict with US, and don’t want another front  “Because China is concentrating on its conflict with the US, it doesn’t want to open up a new front. China has concluded that Japan’s attack on Korea isn’t unilateral but has some degree of tacit approval from the US. If the US is behind Japan’s action, China fears, getting involved might aggravate its dispute with the US,” said Yang Gap-yong, head of research at the Institute for National Security Strategy.  While the US might appear to have gained the advantage against China on a global level by pressuring it on all fronts, not only in the trade war but also with its financial and technological hegemony, China has been steadily accruing influence in East Asia. It has been cobbling together a motley coalition amid its escalating conflict with the US, moving to improve relations with Japan; cooperating with Russia, a potential strategic ally; and even strengthening relations with North Korea.  In these circumstances, the Chinese government is pushing to arrange a trilateral meeting with the foreign ministers of South Korea and Japan on Aug. 21 as a way to show off its mediating chops as a regional power in the South Korea-Japan dispute. In reality, though, it doesn’t seem that motivated in pushing for their reconciliation. During a visit to Tokyo on Aug. 9, Chinese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Le Yucheng met Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono. “As the world’s second and third largest economies, China and Japan must strengthen their cooperation and make a joint response to challenges,” Le said in a meeting that stressed bilateral cooperation. China appears to have concluded that improving relations with Japan best serves its interests during a showdown with the US.  China currently focusing on Hong Kong protests  As the hegemonic struggle between the US and China expands in all directions, China is focusing its response on the Hong Kong protests, which it regards as the front line of that struggle. Chinese authorities and the state-run press have launched a massive propaganda campaign that portrays the Hong Kong protesters as violent rioters and hammers home China’s allegation that the US instigated the protests. The apparent view in the US is that the prolongation and intensification of the Hong Kong protests will boost support for Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, who tends to oppose closer ties with Beijing. That could work against China in Taiwan’s next presidential election, which is scheduled for January 2020.  South Korea’s relations with China have yet to recover from their dispute over the deployment of the THAAD missile defense system, and they’re likely to be damaged even further if South Korea agrees to join freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, participate in the Indo-Pacific Strategy, or host US intermediate-range missiles -- all things that the US is currently requesting or is likely to request in the future. On top of that, the Hong Kong protests and the internment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang could become contentious points in South Korea-China relations. |
| Noh Ji-won | Opinion | Hankyoreh | August 20, 2019 | South Korea | South Korea has no place in Abe’s Indo-Pacific Strategy | Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who has taken the extreme step of imposing punitive economic measures on South Korea in retaliation for a ruling by the South Korean Supreme Court about forced labor, has been moving steadily forward with his plan to rewrite the geopolitics of Northeast Asia.  Under Abe’s lead, the Japanese government seeks to free Japan from the postwar arrangement and enable its emergence as a militarily strong country capable of waging war. The goal is for Japan to regain its position as a world power, standing alongside the global superpower of the US. After upgrading its Defense Agency, which had been under the influence of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to the cabinet-level Defense Ministry and expanding the defense budget, these figures are pushing to amend Japan’s “peace constitution” in order to turn Japan into a “normal country.” A long-term initiative that’s being pursued in parallel with this is the Indo-Pacific Strategy, which is designed to contain China. This strategy encompasses the US, India, Australia, Africa, and even the UK. Increasing military cooperation with other countries — Japan recently conducted joint exercises with France and the UK — is part of this plan.  Although Japan achieved swift economic growth after World War II under the protection of its alliance with the US, friction with China during its rapid rise as a hegemonic power has persuaded Japan of the need to devise its own security strategy and has impelled it to continue developing a containment strategy vis-à-vis China. Since Abe began his first stint as prime minister in 2006, the Japanese government has forged a strategic global partnership with India, unveiling a plan for the “confluence of the two seas,” signifying a linkup between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, in 2007.  Following his return to power in December 2012, Abe has promoted a more sophisticated version of this plan called the “democratic security diamond,” envisioning a strategic space in which Australia and the Indian Ocean, India, Japan, and the US are connected as the points of the diamond. That was after Japan experienced a row with China over the Senkaku Islands (which China calls the Diaoyu Islands). In 2016, Japan unveiled a strategy that it calls the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, in concert with the US, India, and Australia. The US government, under President Donald Trump, has adopted Japan’s plan as an American national strategy. While this strategy is supposedly designed to guarantee the freedom of flight and navigation in the region and to protect the usage of the seas according to international law, its obvious goal is to prevent China’s oceanic expansion.  Where exactly does South Korea fit into the Abe administration’s geopolitical calculus? It’s basically nowhere to be seen, several experts say. “South Korea has even less priority than the ASEAN states in Japan’s plans for the Indo-Pacific,” argued Nam Ki-jeong, a professor at the Institute for Japanese Studies at Seoul National University. South Korea is Japan’s neighbor, a country that shares the values of a market economy, democracy, and human rights; furthermore, maintaining amicable relations between South Korea and Japan is necessary from the perspective of trilateral strategic cooperation with the US. Nevertheless, the Abe administration taken retaliatory economic measures against South Korea and removed it from Japan’s white list of trusted trading partners on the grounds that it can’t be trusted on matters of security. This apparently reflects the Abe administration’s belief that South Korea’s rejection of the comfort women agreement with Japan and the South Korean Supreme Court’s ruling that victims of forced labor must be paid compensation are anathema to Japan’s attempts to reinterpret history, under the banner of wrapping up the postwar order.  S. Korea needs to devise its own long-term global strategy  Under these circumstances, experts say, South Korea needs to devise a long-term global strategy of its own. “In the past, Japan sought to expand into the continent via the Korean Peninsula. But South Korea isn’t a major factor for Japan any longer, since it now seeks to expand its global presence via the Pacific Ocean. We need to devise our own global vision while only participating in other country’s plans — whether the US and Japan’s Indo-Pacific Strategy or China’s Belt and Road Initiative — when it serves our needs,” said Kim Suk-hyeon, a foreign strategy analyst at the Institute for National Security Strategy. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | August 20, 2019 | South Korea | Japan ends to deliberate with S. Korea on Fukushima water dumping | On Aug. 19, the South Korean government called in the economic minister at the Japanese Embassy to Seoul and delivered a note, referred to as a “note verbale” in diplomatic circles, expressing its position on the question of dumping contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear reactor into the ocean. The note requests confirmation of claims made by the press and environmental groups that Japan plans to dump radioactive water presently stored at the reactor into the ocean and asks for Japan’s official position on future plans pertaining to the disposal of the contaminated water.  Japan needs to recognize that releasing this radioactive water could have a very serious effect on the maritime ecosystem in the area, as well as on the health and safety of both Japanese and South Koreans, and it needs to disclose all related information with transparency.  According to officials at South Korea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Japan has explained that it hasn’t decided on a disposal plan for the contaminated water at the Fukushima plant and that various options are under review. Japan also said it’s making efforts to decrease the amount of water being contaminated and increase the capacity of the plant’s storage tanks and promised to keep the international community informed of its position.  An image of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011. (AFP/Yonhap News)  But such explanations are insufficient to fully dispel our suspicions considering that Toyoshi Fuketa, chief of Japan’s Nuclear Regulation Authority, hinted last October that he would approve a plan to dump contaminated water from Fukushima into the ocean once it has been diluted. On top of that, environmental group Greenpeace revealed in a January report that Japan is working on a plan to dump 1 million tons of contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean.  Dumping the contaminated water would be sure to have a major environmental impact on South Korea, given its geographical proximity. According to one report, currents in the Pacific Ocean would bring contaminated water to the east coast of Korea within the space of a year. Tokyo needs to set up a deliberative body to discuss this matter in detail, and in depth, with Seoul.  Admittedly, some suspect the South Korean government of trying to use this issue to put pressure on Japan in the two countries’ ongoing trade dispute. But since this matter is directly linked to public health and safety, it goes without saying that it must be handled strictly, without concern for the political situation between the two countries. We urge the Japanese government to engage in close deliberations and to share information transparently so as to assuage its neighbors’ concerns. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | August 21, 2019 | South Korea | S. Korea-Japan-China foreign ministers’ meeting hopefully leads to Seoul-Tokyo dialogue | The top diplomats from South Korea and Japan will be meeting in Beijing on Aug. 21, their first meeting in 20 days since the ASEAN Regional Forum in Bangkok on Aug. 1. The meeting is attracting attention because it comes shortly before South Korea decides whether to remain in the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) on Aug. 24 and before Japan’s removal of South Korea from its white list of trusted trading parties goes into effect on Aug. 28. We hope this meeting will lead to a breakthrough in the South Korea-Japan conflict, which was triggered by Japanese measures taken in retaliation for a South Korean Supreme Court ruling about forced labor during the Japanese colonial occupation.  Since Japan imposed controls on exports of several key materials to South Korea on July 4, the two countries’ relationship has entered a downward spiral. The Japanese government pushed ahead with a cabinet decision on Aug. 2 to remove South Korea from its white list of countries that enjoy expedited screening for exports; the South Korean government countered on Aug. 12 by downgrading Japan to “Region A2,” further escalating the conflict. During that time, the two countries’ foreign ministers held one meeting and politicians from the ruling and opposition parties traveled to Japan for closed-door negotiations with Japanese politicians, but those efforts have failed to prevent a head-on conflict.  But we mustn’t sit idly by and watch the South Korea-Japan conflict unfold. If the two countries don’t stop staring each other down before long, it will surely place a greater burden on their economies, which are already struggling because of the trade war between the US and China. Recent statistics show that Japan’s exports in July declined 1.6% from the same period last year, with exports to South Korea dropping by 6.9%. South Korea’s exports were also down by 11% in July. While further analysis is needed to determine how much of the decline in exports can be attributed to the South Korea-Japan conflict, what’s clear is that the two countries’ dispute is multiplying the pressure they face amid a global economic slowdown.  During his commemorative address on Liberation Day, on Aug. 15, South Korean President Mon Jae-in held out an olive branch to Japan, remarking that “if Japan chooses the path of dialogue and cooperation, we will gladly join hands.” The Japanese government must respond enthusiastically. It’s encouraging that calls for reconciliation are being made in Japan, too. A few days ago, the Asahi Shimbun wrote that “President Moon’s Liberation Day address must be taken as an opportunity to bring an end to mutual retaliation and to move ahead with dialogue.”  But if the Japanese government nevertheless persists in rejecting dialogue, the South Korean government will surely face increasing pressure to withdraw from GSOMIA. We should take heed of the remarks by a Blue House official about the need to “take into consideration several matters” related to the agreement, “including Japan’s attitude and a quantitative and qualitative assessment of military intelligence.” This meeting is being held at a crucial time, and we hope that the two countries will find a way to resolve this issue. |
| Jung In-hwan | Opinion | Hankyoreh | August 22, 2019 | South Korea | The question of S. Korea’s withdrawal from GSOMIA | How far is Seoul willing to go to respond to Tokyo’s trade measures?  South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha makes her remarks during a meeting with the Japanese and Chinese foreign ministers in Beijing on Aug. 21. (EPA/Yonhap News)  Reports that the Blue House plans an announcement shortly on whether to extend its General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Japan – a question it has weighed as a means of pressuring Tokyo in response to its economic retaliation measures – are turning attention to the level of Seoul’s response. The reports come in the wake of bilateral foreign minister talks in which both sides merely reaffirmed the differences in their positions.  A Blue House official said on Aug. 21 that an “announcement on whether GSOMIA will be extended should be made as early as Aug. 22 and no later than Aug. 23.” While the Blue House’s plans have reportedly already been decided internally, the official explained that they would need to undergo a final review by the National Security Council (NSC) standing committee on Aug. 22, after which a report would be made to President Moon Jae-in and the administration’s approach would be announced.  The likeliest approach currently being considered by the Blue House would involve extending GSOMIA in view of the importance of trilateral security cooperation with the US, while suspending information exchanges for the time being as a means of pressuring Japan. But heavy opposition to renewing the agreement from within the ruling Democratic Party could prove a variable in the late stages. Speaking at a discussion held the same day by the Korea Broadcasting Journalists Club, Kim Sang-jo, Blue House policy chief, explained, “South Korea-US-Japan security cooperation is a very important matter, and this is not a decision that can be made lightly.”  “We plan to continue examining things until the very end in terms of the question of whether we should be exchanging sensitive military information with a country that claims not to be able to trust South Korea, and we will be making a careful decision,” Kim said.  No common ground was reached at South Korea-Japan foreign minister talks the same day in Beijing, with both sides holding firm to their opposing positions. But they also sent the clear message that communication and discussions on the issue would continue to take place between the relevant officials. Despite being the second meeting to take place amid the South Korea-Japan conflict touched off by Tokyo’s announcement of export controls against South Korea on July 1, the foreign minister talks represented more or less their first occasion to date for full-scale diplomatic negotiations.  The two sides continue to have difficulties finding common ground on the particulars, however. South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha was bluntly critical of the unilateral export control measures imposed by Japan.  “Countries should demonstrate through their actions the consensus among the three sides’ foreign ministers that the free, fair, transparent, and predictable trade environment that has served to underpin peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia must be firmly established,” she said.  “We must eschew unilateral, arbitrary trade retaliation measures and clear away the uncertainties that now hover over regional trade,” she added.  Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono makes his remarks during a meeting with Kang and the Chinese foreign minister in Beijing on Aug. 21. (EPA/Yonhap News)  Japan once again shifts responsibility for conflict onto S. Korea  Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono made Tokyo’s position clear the day before the talks on Aug. 20, telling Japanese reporters that “we want to exchange opinions, but this issue is clearly something that South Korea will need to respond to.” His message was that South Korea is responsible for the deterioration of bilateral relations and should move first to present a solution.  At the same time, Kono also clearly stated that he hoped dialogue would continue. Speaking with the Japanese press just after the meeting, he said, “In addition to making our respective positions clear, we shared the view that this is the most pressing issue for both our countries.”  “We agreed that communication between diplomatic authorities should be continued to allow this matter to be solved for certain. We would like to make real progress going forward,” he added.  Kono went on to say that “interchange among citizens is all the more important at difficult times.”  “If anything, it’s times like this that call for proactive exchange among citizens,” he said.  Kono confirms S. Korea-Japan cooperation with respect to N. Korea issues  Referring to North Korea’s successive test-launches of short-range missiles, he added, “We want to solidly confirm South Korea and Japan’s cooperation with respect to North Korea issues.”  Kang relayed to Kono that the South Korean government was still on the fence on whether to renew GSOMIA or pull out, as Seoul has hinted at doing so in response to Tokyo’s export controls. Indeed, the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated ahead of the meeting that it was weighing the possibility of pulling out of GSOMIA. Japan was also first to mention the GOSMIA issue during the talks on Aug. 21, with Kang’s only reply being that it was “under consideration.”  China also showed signs of attempting to play a mediating role in the South Korea-Japan frictions. In introductory remarks before talks on Aug. 20, Foreign Minister Wang Yi noted, “In the past 20 years, trilateral trade has increased by 4.5 times from US$130 billion to US$720 billion.”  “China plans to broaden its cooperation with South Korea and Japan, while upholding the principles of multilateralism and free trade,” he added. His remarks were seen as signaling Beijing’s intervention in the two sides’ regional conflict over export controls – albeit at a weak level – as well as conveying indirect criticism.  Wang also noted, “In China, we have the term ‘jiang xin bi xin’ [meaning to ‘put oneself in the other side’s shoes].”  “We hope that South Korea and Japan will consider each other’s interests and resolve their opinions constructive so that they can find an appropriate solution to the issue,” he explained.  But when asked by Japanese reporters after the talks whether there was any chance of China intervening to resolve issues in relations with South Korea, Kono replied with a blunt “no.” |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | August 22, 2019 | South Korea | As the instigator of the conflict, Japan needs to be proactive about finding solutions | The top diplomats from South Korea and Japan met on Aug. 21 and shared their opinions about the two countries’ ongoing conflict, but they were only able to confirm their disagreement, and the meeting concluded without achieving anything. Admittedly, there was little chance that the huge gap between the two countries could be bridged in a couple of meetings, but in light of the gravity of the situation, it’s unfortunate that no progress was made toward improving bilateral relations. Even so, it does seem significant that they agreed to maintain diplomatic channels of dialogue moving forward.  During the meeting on Wednesday, South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha expressed her regret for the Japanese cabinet’s decision to remove South Korea from its white list of trusted trading partners on Aug. 2 and strongly called for Japan to retract that measure. Her Japanese counterpart, Taro Kono, reportedly responded by reiterating Japan’s basic position on the matter. This effectively confirmed that neither of the two sides have budged a single inch in the conflict that was triggered by Japan slapping export controls on semiconductor materials bound for South Korea on July 4.  The Japanese government rejects the South Korean Supreme Court’s ruling that the victims of forced labor during the Japanese colonial occupation must be paid compensation, on the grounds that all such matters were resolved by a 1965 agreement with South Korea that settled outstanding claims. But that’s only one side of the story. The Supreme Court found that the damage inflicted by forced labor couldn’t have been resolved by a claims agreement that settled property-based creditor-debtor relationships. That ruling corresponds to international human rights standards that recommend proactive efforts to provide relief to victims of crimes against humanity.  The current row between the two countries was instigated by the Japanese government’s decision to retaliate against the Supreme Court’s ruling. Since Japan started the conflict, it obviously should be proactive about finding a solution, instead of trying to shift all the responsibility to the South Korean government. Seoul has already suggested finding a solution through dialogue and negotiations. On Wednesday, Blue House Policy Chief Kim Sang-jo reaffirmed the government’s desire to deal with this issue diplomatically. “South Korea has proposed the ‘one plus one’ idea [South Korean and Japanese corporations setting up a joint fund], but that’s not the only option. We’re ready to discuss this issue diplomatically with Japan,” Kim said. Tokyo needs to take Seoul up on that offer.  During the meeting, Kono expressed his hope that South Korea would renew its information-sharing agreement with Japan, called the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). Seoul was already on the verge of making its final decision about whether the agreement should be extended, with news reports suggesting that the Blue House might make the announcement as early as Aug. 22. But when Japan is refusing to give an inch on the issue of the export controls, serious questions must be asked about whether there’s any reason to renew the agreement. For a crisis to be averted, Japan must adopt a forward-looking attitude. |
| Yoo Kang-moon & Park Min-hee | News Analysis | Hankyoreh | August 23, 2019 | South Korea | Trilateral security cooperation collapses amid SK-Japan row | After previously being viewed as a fixed framework within the Northeast Asia, trilateral security cooperation by South Korea, the US, and Japan broke down on Aug. 22 with the South Korean government’s decision not to extend its General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Japan. Consequently, trilateral security cooperation returns to its level before GOSMIA was signed in November 2016 – but now burdened by the fallout from the recent frictions between Seoul and Tokyo. Observers are predicting the situation could deteriorate further depending on how Japan responds going ward.  Potential to unsettle Northeast Asian order  The effects of Seoul’s decision appear poised to extend beyond its relations with Japan to unsettle ties with the US and the Northeast Asian order in general. To begin with, it is strongly significant to Japan in terms of questioning the bleeding over of historical attitudes into the realm of security. For the US, it may read as a warning calling for responsibility and respect toward the alliance – a message from the Moon Jae-in administration in response to Trump administration remaining on the sidelines amid South Korea’s efforts to resolve its conflicts with Japan, while at the same time pressuring Seoul with demands for a larger share of defense costs and the deployment of intermediate-range missiles. While Washington relayed the message that it wanted Seoul to keep GSOMIA in place during recent South Korea visits by White House National Security Advisor John Bolton and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, it also made it clear that it sees the South Korea-Japan dust-up as a matter for the two parties to resolve on their own.  “Japan would like to make its relationship with South Korea into a vertical framework as it pushes forward with its Indo-Pacific strategy with the US, while the US has been focused entirely on bringing South Korea on board with its Indo-Pacific strategy,” said Cho Sung-ryul, a senior researcher for the Institute for National Security Strategy.  The South Korean government’s decision is also significant as a move to push on the brakes as the situation around the Korean Peninsula is redrawn in line with the US- and Japan-led Indo-Pacific strategy. Washington’s past Northeast Asia strategy followed a structure with the US as a central axis, where both South Korea and Japan formed relationships on an equal footing as its “spokes.” But the new trend has been one where South Korea joins the ASEAN countries as a subordinate partner under an Indo-Pacific strategy pursued by the US and Japan as a way of checking China’s rise.  Seoul’s decision further deals a blow to the US’ Northeast Asia strategy of using the sharing of military information between South Korea and Japan as a basis for establishing trilateral missile defense, and ultimately developing this into a regional alliance. Amid the frictions between Seoul and Tokyo, it spells a major crossroads for the strategic direction of the trilateral security cooperation that the US has been spearheading to date.  “The signing of a South Korea-Japan acquisition and cross-servicing agreement (ACSA), which had been mentioned as the next stage following GSOMIA, is out of the question now,” said one military expert in Seoul.  “The future of trilateral security cooperation is going to be unavoidably constrained,” the expert predicted.  Some analysts suggest the nature of the recently emerging South Korea-US row was never compatible with the vision for trilateral security cooperation in the first place – owing to the inevitable clash between South Korea-Japan cooperation and Japan’s growing militarism with its basis in distorted historical views.  “Trilateral security cooperation is rooted in the US’ vision of using South Korea and Japan to keep China and Russia in line and opposing the North Korean threat,” explained a professor at Korea National Defense University, speaking on condition of anonymity.  “There’s also an internal contradiction, where the backlash from South Korea only intensifies as Japan’s push to establish itself as a military power and amend its Peace Constitution gains force,” the professor said.  South Korea’s decision now raises addressing the cracks in trilateral security cooperation as a matter to be resolved. Other powers that are troubled by that cooperation – including China, Russia, and North Korea – are already digging at the fissures.  “As soon as the South Korea-US row was exposed, China and Russia were staging military exercises in the East Sea, and the intrusion of a Russian military aircraft on [South Korean] airspace could be seen as a case of picking at those holes,” a military official said.  SK, Japan entering tunnel of long-term conflict  South Korea-Japan relations now appear to have plunged into a tunnel of long-term confrontation or conflict. The end of GSOMIA sends a stern message that South Korea does not intend to flinch before Japan’s unreasonable demands.  “When Japan is treating South Korea as an ‘untrustworthy country in security terms,’ taking it off its white list [of countries receiving expedited export reviews for strategic materials], and refusing to view South Korea as a friendly power when it comes to security, South Korea cannot share sensitive information with such a country,” the Blue House said.  Experts saw Seoul as adopting an all-or-nothing approach after Japan’s continued refusal to engage in dialogue, ignoring the signals sent by President Moon Jae-in in his celebratory address for National Liberation Day on Aug. 15. The Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which is spearheading the export controls, has rejected Seoul’s demands for discussions; in a bilateral foreign ministers’ meeting on Aug. 21, Japan merely reiterated its previous stance.  “By ending GSOMIA, the South Korean government hit back with a stronger-than-anticipated move in response to the total lack of any sign of room for compromise on Japan’s part,” said Nam Ki-jeong, a professor at Seoul National University.  “If Japan’s removal [of South Korea] from its white list signaled that it was entering a long-term process of re-establishing bilateral relations in terms of historical issues, then the end of GSOMIA may be a signal that relations are entering a long-term process of geopolitical reconstruction,” Nam suggested.  Yang Kee-ho, a professor at Sungkonghoe University, noted, “While Japanese companies have been willing to reconcile with the victims of forced labor mobilization, the Japanese government has exacerbated things by moving to block them from offering compensation.”  “The situation is one where it’s going to be tough to restore trust for the time being,” he said.  Now that South Korea is putting an end to GSOMIA, observers are watching to see if Japan escalates things further. One possibility is a hardline response as Japan increases the number of items requiring individual export permits when it issues its enforcement degree on Aug. 28 removing South Korea from its white list.  “Japan could use its technology dominance to step up its ‘Korea onslaught,’ claiming that South Korea ‘can’t be trusted,’” predicted Yang Kee-ho.  “That could end up leading to a blow-for-blow response where South Korea makes an even more forceful case over the discharge of radiation-contaminated water from the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant into the ocean and turns radiation safety into an international issue for the Tokyo Olympics,” he added. |
| Choi Ha-yan | News Analysis | Hankyoreh | August 23, 2019 | South Korea | No end in sight for S. Korea’s economic row with Japan | The South Korean government’s decision to terminate its information-sharing agreement with Japan, called the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), is expected to further heighten tensions in the economic war between the two countries that began at the beginning of July. The two countries’ disagreement over Japan’s colonial legacy has escalated beyond the economy into the areas of diplomacy and security, inevitably inciting more uncertainty in the South Korean economy.  The revision to Japan’s export and trade management rules that dropped South Korea from the “white list” of countries that enjoy expedited screening for the export of strategic materials will take effect on Aug. 28. South Korea announced a corresponding measure on Aug. 14 that will remove Japan from its own white list, with opinion canvassing scheduled to conclude on Aug. 2. The South Korean government decided to remove Japan from its white list on the grounds that Japan’s unilateral tightening of its export controls are a violation of the Wassenaar Arrangement and other multilateral export control regimes, which encourage extensive deliberations between member states and discourage them from obstructing innocuous transactions in the private sector.  The economic war between these two countries, which had proceeded through tightening export controls on strategic materials, has unfolded without either side giving an inch, at least officially. But more recently, Japan has made what could be taken as conciliatory gestures, in a nod to international criticism. Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry has granted export permits on two occasions for extreme ultraviolet (EUV) industrial photoresist ordered by Samsung Electronics before the end of the official 90-day screening period. In recent days, Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry Hiroshige Seko also indicated his willingness to hold deliberations at the director general level, under certain conditions.  But the South Korean government’s termination of GSOMIA has effectively torpedoed any chance of bringing the two sides to the negotiating table to find a solution to their economic conflict, at least for the time being. Higher tensions between the two countries make it more likely not only that Japan’s revision to its export and trade management rules will go forward as planned but also that it will continue its economic retaliation, perhaps by imposing more export controls.  For now, the biggest question is how far Japan will go in the next round of tit for tat. Dropping South Korea from its white list on Aug. 28 gives Japan the flexibility to tighten its regulations at any time, by delaying or simply not issuing export permits for strategic materials of its choosing. If Japan expand its export controls beyond key materials used in the manufacture of semiconductors and displays, the conflict is sure to intensify. While some have voiced concerns that Japanese banks could take financial retaliation by calling in loans, both the market and the government believe that’s unlikely.  The South Korean government has also threatened payback in the safety and food sectors and in fact is already moving ahead with such measures. If the two countries’ cycle of retaliation takes on a competitive edge, the economic spat could conceivably erupt into an all-out war affecting a gamut of sectors.  “Whatever the reasons, there’s a greater likelihood of the two countries’ trade dispute becoming protracted. Linking this to security has increased uncertainty and risk across all sectors of the economy,” said an official at one of South Korea’s four major conglomerates. |
| Ko Myoung-sub | Opinion | Hankyoreh | August 25, 2019 | South Korea | The isolated civilization of Japan and its dangerous self-contained world view | In his “The Clash of Civilizations,” US political scientist Samuel Huntington divided the world into eight civilizations. Interestingly enough, he named Japan as a civilization of its own, distinguishing it from the rest of East Asia. Whereas all of the other civilizations encompassed multiple countries, he explained, Japan was the only case in which the civilization unit was coterminous with a national one; from a cultural and civilization perspective, he declared, Japan was an island unto itself.  There is some truth to Huntington’s conclusion. While Japan has been subject to Confucian and Buddhist influences from China and Korea, it also remained within its own isolated cultural world through the Meiji Restoration under its indigenous Shinto religious system. The situation has remained basically unchanged since the Meiji Restoration as well. Even as Japan adopted modern culture from the West, it only intensified the role of past heritage by elevating Shinto to the status of a state religion, with the emperor at its apex. This religion of emperor worship was used as a justification for Japan’s invasions of East Asia and waging of the Pacific War.  The cultural characteristics that Huntington saw in Japan have started to become more pronounced again in the 21st century. From opening its arms to the world under its Peace Constitution, Japan has now seemingly succumbed to a mass delusion of sorts, sinking deep into itself amid obvious signs of regression. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been at the forefront of this voyage backward. Abe’s true colors were once again on display in an Aug. 15 ceremony remembering Japan’s World War II surrender. For the seventh time since he returned to office in 2012, he focused solely on praising the “sacrifices” of the Japanese rather than acknowledging Japan’s responsibility as the country responsibility for invading the Korean Peninsula and waging war. He offered not a single world of remorse or apology. As he had done in the past, he made offerings at the Yasukuni Shrine, where Class A war criminals are honored. Fifty far-right politicians who support Abe have visited Yasukuni and paid their respects to the “glories” of the past. If recognizing and taking responsibility for the mistakes that result from our actions is a mark of maturity, then Japanese politicians remain stuck in adolescence, forever stumbling at the threshold of growth.  In 2006, Abe shared his political blueprint with the publication of a short book titled “Toward a Beautiful Country.” Judging from the various attempts he has made since taking office to amend the Peace Constitution and enable Japan to wage war again, Abe’s idea of a beautiful country appears to incorporate the “Rising Sun” advancing toward an invasion of the Asian continent and conquest of the world, as in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War and Mukden Incident. Yet the farther Abe moves toward his version of a “beautiful country,” the farther Japan drifts from beauty. The more he pursues a place for Japan as a “normal state” capable of waging war, the more Japan diverges from the normal and succumbs to isolation. Such is the paradox of Abe’s wild ride. He may think that he is fighting to make Japan a beautiful country, but the more he battles to acquire his own kind of “beauty,” the more Japan is thrust into a place that is anything but beautiful. A country that is dishonest, unreflecting, and undemocratic cannot be a “beautiful country” as is commonly recognized by humanity.  Under Abe, Japan is using its Indo-Pacific strategy as a basis for joining forces with the US and enlisting India to encircle China. But simply harboring these kinds of military ambitions is not enough to make Abe’s Japan the kind of country the international community esteems. As long as it fails to break down and rebuild the same mental framework that gave rise to the errors of the past, it will never escape a fate of practical diminishment, for all its imagined exploits in the Indo-Pacific region. When all is said and done, Abe’s aggressive approach will only leave Japan as the kind of “shut-in country” alluded to by Huntington – an odd country out. Until it stops Abe’s race backwards, Japan can never become a truly “normal” state, a moral party to the world’s universality.  Ko Myoung-sub, editorial writer  Economically, Abe’s approach poses a threat to South Korea – but it poses a far more fundamental threat to the Japanese themselves. Unless its people wake up, Japan will remain trapped with Abe’s delusions in a state of eternal immature isolation. Herein lies the supranational sense of the battle being waged against Abe by South Koreans. If the anti-Abe campaign under way with a boycott of Japanese products does succeed in awakening the Japanese public and developing into a joint battle by South Korean and Japanese civil society, it could become the starting point for creating a new order of peace in East Asia.’ |
| Yang Ki-ho | Opinion | Hankyoreh | August 25, 2019 | South Korea | The rise of the Abe-friendly political elite | Japan’s move to implement export controls on South Korea and exclude it from Japan’s white list was targeted at the heart of the Korean economy. The Japanese government has been preparing specific countermeasures to the South Korean Supreme Court ruling on forced labor and the expected sale (seizure) of the assets of Japanese companies since January last year. With the Prime Minister’s Official Residence at the basecamp, the Japanese Ministry of Trade, Economy and Industry (METI) has been crafting a plan for economic retaliation so elaborate that related departments exchanged contact several times per day.  It appears that the Prime Minister’s Official Residence has ordered “three major principles” that are capable of sending shockwaves through the Korean economy while not influencing people to people relations between Korea and Japan and maintaining the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).  The economic retaliation is full of contradictions and gaps both in terms of its justification and reality. It is difficult to understand whether the measures are economic retaliation or a strengthening of export controls and why, if they are motivated by security reasons, Japan did not first seek to end GSOMIA. It is also unclear whether it is correct for Japan to launch the baseless accusation that “hydrogen fluoride exported to (South) Korea was leaked to North Korea” while pushing ahead with an unconditional Japan-North Korea summit meeting at the same time. It is difficult to claim that sufficient agreement had been reached between Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his associates, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the METI, Japanese corporations, the LDP, and right-wing media.  As bureaucratic entities, the two ministries are deeply dissatisfied with the current situation where the issue of forced labor has been recklessly intertwined with economic retaliation. The export regulations on Korean companies, which are connected to global production and supply chains, have almost no effect in practice, and the basis for the measures flies in the face of common sense.  Attack on S. Korea orchestrated by Abe and close associates  In that case, who is behind this attack on Korea, and how did it come about? This situation was orchestrated by Abe, his close associates and right-wing officials from the LDP. These figures are statesmen and key bureaucrats who are blindly loyal to the prime minister, and many of them are connected to the METI. It is believed that the MOFA has been effectively kept out of the picture. Yachi Shotaro, national security advisor to the prime minister, largely regarded as the brain behind Abe’s diplomacy, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Kono Taro, have barely played a role in policy decisions related to the current situation. Yachi’s influence over Abe has been greatly reduced since the comfort women agreement reached between South Korea and Japan in December 2015 led to the dissolution of the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation near the end of last year.  Some parts of Abe’s obsession with the comfort women issue and the Statue of Peace are difficult to understand under normal circumstances. Instead of the “sincere apology and reflection as the prime minister” prescribed by paragraph 1 of the comfort women agreement, Abe has made the issue a point of diplomatic contention on two further occasions and obsessed over the phrase “final, irreversible solution,” which has not been raised as a problem in the international community. He believes that the essence of the comfort women problem is not healing the pain of the victims with Japan apologizing and reflecting on the past, but simply a diplomatic card that Korea holds against Japan. Accordingly, he views it as more important for Japan to not apologize and cover up facts than learn from the past and prevent history from repeating itself. The government has revisited the Kono Statement, which admitted that the country forcibly brought people to Japan, and ordered the MOFA to interfere with the erection of Statues of Peace in the US and other countries. Abe’s associates have claimed that the sex slavery claims are fabricated or that the women involved did so voluntarily. Kawamura Takashi, the Mayor of Nagoya, recently removed a Statue of Peace from an exhibit hall at the Aichi Triennale 2019.  The historical distortions and mistrust of Korea by Abe and his associates reached fever pitch after the South Korean Supreme Court’s ruling on compensation for forced labor in October last year. Abe criticized the decision by the Korean judiciary as a challenge to the international order established through the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco and a “outright violation of international law,” referring to the 1965 claims agreement. Abe has been quick to criticize the South Korean government, without giving any consideration to the harm suffered by individuals under the illegal 35-year colonial occupation of Korea, the principle of separation of powers, the fact that individual rights to claims are still relevant, and the lengthy lawsuits filed by victims as they continue to grow older.  The claim that Korea cannot be trusted for security reasons, and therefore had to be struck off the export white list, was first put forward in January this year by Aoyama Shigeharu, a member of the House of Councillors, in a meeting between the LDP and MOFA after the targeting radar dispute. Aoyama is a right-wing politician and long-time friend of Abe, who took part in an advertisement opposing US House of Representatives Resolution 121 on the “comfort women” issue. He is also a security and trade expert and a member of the National Diet Committee on Economy and Industry. Around the same time, Akaike Masaaki, another member of the House of Councillors, advocated economic sanctions against Korea beginning with specific, immediately implementable measures. Another proposal was also put forward at this time to cut off the supply of strategic goods such as high-purity hydrogen fluoride, a cleaning agent used in the manufacture of semiconductors.  The Moon Jae-in administration has continued to seek communication and dialogue with the US and Japan while pushing ahead with the Korean Peninsula peace process. However, Japan demands a complete and comprehensive solution to issues such as Japanese nationals kidnapped by North Korea and the North’s nuclear weapons and missiles, including mid-range missiles. Japan does not believe North Korea’s promise to denuclearize, and believes that the country will not abandon its nuclear ambitions. The historic dispute between South Korea and Japan has caused the gap between the two countries on North Korea policy to widen. In the end, the Abe administration was able to manipulate South Korea’s image during the radar lock-on dispute in January to brand it as a “country that cannot be trusted on security matters.” The talk of “shared strategic benefits between South Korea and Japan” that Abe had normally referred to in his State of the Union address completely disappeared in this year’s address.  The Abe administration’s prolonged term has created the by-product of a foreign policy that has no strategy or consistency. Those that orchestrated the economic retaliation are mostly former bureaucrats or politicians who are loyal followers of Abe and have been involved in politics with him for a long time. They have also become friendly with one another over a long period of time through Regional Revitalization, Nippon Kaigi, the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership, and a group that visits the Yasukuni Shrine. Recently, these officials have been monopolizing key policy decisions on Northeast Asian diplomacy while shutting out Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Abe’s associates have been responsible for the offer made to Russia of returning the “Northern Territories” (four of the Kuril Islands), a point of contention between Japan and Russia, in exchange for US$30 billion in economic cooperation, as well as seeking a cooperative relationship with China as a hedging strategy in response to the US-China trade war, and the establishment of a dedicated North Korea department within its foreign ministry two years ago.  ”New mainstream” of Abe administration needs to monitored  Some of the most notable figures in this group are Imai Takaya, executive secretary to the prime minister, who hails from the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the predecessor to METI, Hasegawa Eiichi, special advisor to the prime minister, who is also a former bureaucrat from the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Eiichi is also Imai’s senior from the University of Tokyo Faculty of Law, and served as minister of the Small and Medium Enterprises Bureau. There is also METI Minister Hiroshige Seko, who is a loyal supporter of Abe within the LDP and an expert in trade and industry, and Hagiuda Koichi, executive secretary, who has received criticism for advocating replacing the Speaker of the House of Representatives in order to amend the Constitution.  These officials have been hovering around Abe, building up established relationships of trust through LDP meetings and serving as the prime minister’s secretaries. As METI bureaucrats or members of the National Diet Committee on Economy and Industry, they are all well-versed in trade and industrial economics, and another commonality is that they are in their 50s or 60s, making them comparatively young in the world of Japanese politics and the “new mainstream” within the Prime Minister’s Official Residence and the LDP. In the cabinet reshuffle that is expected to take place in September, Motegi Toshimitsu, who has already served in the cabinet during Abe’s second term in office as the METI minister, has been unofficially given the nod as the next minister of foreign affairs.  These bureaucrats are very hawkish on issues such as the territory dispute with China over the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyudao Islands) and the return of the Northern Territories, and have no qualms about visiting Yasukuni Shrine and distorting Japan’s history of sexual enslavement and the Nanjing massacre. They have been responsible for determining the core direction of Abe’s foreign policy, while Kono Taro and Yachi Shotaro, who are close to the foreign ministry line that stresses the importance of strategic decisions, have been left out of policy decision-making. These right-wing politicians have very different views from the traditional diplomatic lines that viewed South Korea-Japan relations as important, and it is also worth noting that they view diplomatic issues through the lens of trade. They favor strategic national benefit over solutions to historical disputes, a biased perception of trade over alliances, and bilateral relations over multilateral relations, and believe in the importance of exercising technological power in Japan’s interest. Rather than mediating between the interests of the Prime Minister’s Official Residence and bureaucratic agencies, they collude behind closed doors.  Yang Ki-ho, professor of Japanese Studies at Sungkonghoe University  The inclinations of this group suggest raise suspicion that the Abe administration may have a goal which goes beyond economic retaliation against Korea. These politicians are not only trying to coerce Korea into taking responsibility for measures to address the forced labor issue while trampling over individual rights to make claims and the separation of powers, but do not hesitate to attempt to completely shift the victim-perpetrator frame between South Korea and Japan. With the Korean economy rapidly catching up to Japan’s, an intention to take down the Korean economy cannot be ruled out. This overlaps with an attempt by Japan, which has been left out of the Korean Peninsula denuclearization process, to become involved in Korean Peninsula affairs by wielding its technological power. By using economic retaliation as a catalyst to cause a South Korean backlash, Japan may seek to mobilize domestic right-wing forces through the tension and conflict between the two countries and leverage this to push ahead with amendments to the Constitution. There are many such multi-purpose strategic moves that are worthy of suspicion, which is why the words and actions of key figures in the “new mainstream” of the Abe administration must be continually monitored |
| Yoo Kang-moon | Opinion | Hankyoreh | August 28, 2019 | South Korea | Disappointed in the US | Strong concerns and disappointment — that just about sums up the US government’s response to the Moon administration’s announcement that South Korea will be pulling out of its intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan, known as the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). The term “disappointment” does seem a little strong for diplomatic language used about an ally, but considering that the US had communicated through several channels that it hoped GSOMIA would be extended, that word choice is somewhat understandable. Even Kim Hyun-chong, second deputy chief of the Blue House’s National Security Office, said he sees the US’ disappointment as “only natural.”  What’s harder to understand is the US State Department’s statement that the GSOMIA decision reflects “a serious misapprehension on the part of the Moon administration regarding the serious security challenges we face in Northeast Asia.” That implies that the South Korean government was speaking out of ignorance when it said that the GSOMIA decision is not in the national interest. These remarks echo the statement by Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the South Korean decision “completely misunderstands the security environment in the region.” It’s astonishing to think that two allies could hold such wildly diverging opinions about a threat.  The strength of an alliance can vary from time to time, and two parties can cooperate without being in complete agreement. Such relationships permit the occasional squabble or misstep. But for such an alliance to be sustained, the stronger party must ensure that alliance benefits are distributed between the various members and take steps to ensure that cooperation continues. The fact that South Korea and Japan’s dispute over how to reckon with their colonial legacy has blown up, with Japan dropping South Korea from its white list of trusted trading partners and South Korea announcing its withdrawal from GSOMIA, signifies that the US has been unable to, or chosen not to, exercise that kind of leadership.  From the very beginning, South Korea and Japan have been strange bedfellows in the US’ scheme for trilateral security cooperation. It’s no stretch to say that it was unnatural for the US to yoke together South Korea and Japan, given their history of conflict. For such a partnership to be maintained, those two countries must refrain from asking questions about their past or digging too deep. That’s also why the US pushed for a “final and irreversible solution” to the comfort women issue during the presidency of Park Geun-hye. By engineering the conclusion of GSOMIA the following year, the US strengthened the bonds between the two countries. Until that point, we can see American leadership as having played some kind of role in South Korea-Japan relations.  But after Donald Trump became president of the US, American leadership dried up. Trump’s emphasis on “America first” caused the value of alliances in many parts of the world to plummet. Rather than complimenting the South Korea-US alliance, Trump has grumbled about the money being spent on maintaining the American troop presence there and on carrying out joint military exercises. Trump has disregarded Japan’s attempt to revise its “peace constitution” and its movement down the road toward militarism. Japan’s military expansion recalls its history of aggression, which cannot coexist with friendly relations with South Korea. At the very least, there are already indications that trilateral security cooperation among South Korea, Japan, and the US is coming undone.  The US State Department’s comment about “the serious security challenges we face in Northeast Asia” appears to be a reference to China’s growing influence and its stronger military. This perspective isn’t wrong, considering that China’s rise has created fissures in the US-led order in the region. China is attempting to alter the existing order in Northeast Asia, and that clashes with American interests. The two countries’ dispute has led to a competition to recruit countries in the region to their respective camps.  The problem is that the countries in the region — especially South Korea and Japan — have their own complex interests, which prevent them from fitting neatly into the China-US alignment. Furthermore, the power gap between them is narrower than ever before; in some areas, a power transition is underway that’s likely to flip their relative positions. Since all the players have assets that can alter geopolitical dynamics or affect its direction, the current changes in Northeast Asia should be seen as multifaceted.  Such complexity is behind the conflict in South Korea and Japan’s bilateral relations. South Korea seeks to build a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula by improving inter-Korean relations and through cooperation with China and the US. Japan seeks to join the US’ Indo-Pacific Strategy, aimed at containing China, while throwing off the shackles of its peace constitution and becoming a military power. South Korea-Japan relations have been stranded in that process, and their exact coordinates remain unknown. It’s time for the US to exert its leadership in a more sophisticated manner, a manner that accounts for the conflicting interests in its Northeast Asian alliances. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | August 29, 2019 | South Korea | Japan rejects dialogue, goes ahead with removing S. Korea from “white list” | The administration of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe ultimately went ahead on Aug. 23 with an amended Export Trade Control Order removing South Korea from its “white list” (Group A) of countries benefiting from expedited trade procedures. The South Korean government responded immediately with a Foreign Ministry spokesperson’s statement expressing “profound dismay and strong protest” and urging the decision’s “immediate withdrawal.” Kim Hyun-chong, second deputy chief of the Blue House National Security Office, also expressed “strong dismay” in a briefing that afternoon. A long and drawn-out economic war between the two sides is now looking inevitable.  Japan’s measure is deeply damaging to bilateral relations, rejecting as it does the proposals for dialogue made by Seoul in President Moon Jae-in’s National Liberation Day address and South Korea-Japan foreign minister talks. We cannot contain our disappointment at the Abe administration not only refusing to reflect on Japan’s history of aggression but also using brute force in an attempt to justify its misconduct.  As many have pointed out since Japan’s first round of retaliatory measures on July 4 (regulating exports for three major items), these export control measures are unfairly tied to historical matters and violate international norms. Despite the Abe administration’s claims that it is merely “changing its export management approach,” even the Japanese press takes it as a given that this is retaliation for a South Korean Supreme Court ruling on forced labor conscription. This was made apparent once again by Chief Cabinet Secretary and administration spokesperson Yoshihide Suga in a press conference the same day. Even as he claimed that the measures were “intended for suitable export management,” Suga also sent a message urging South Korea to resolve the conscription issue.  It also became apparent early on that Japan’s claims of South Korea’s controls on strategic goings being “sloppy” are untrue. An example of this can be seen in an assessment of controls in 200 countries last May by the US non-profit Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), which ranked South Korea (17th) ahead of Japan (36th).  With this white list removal, Japanese companies that export strategic goods to South Korea face far more cumbersome procedures. Instead of simply undergo one review every three years, they will now have to receive case-by-case permits. The massive inconvenience and hassles this will mean for companies on both sides has concerns being voiced not just in South Korea but in Japan as well. It’s in that context that the Asahi Shimbun newspaper called for a summit between the two leaders, lamenting the “wasteful situation in which civilian economies on both sides are suffering.” The Abe administration should heed its message.  The South Korean government, for its part, needs to develop and implement response measures on the assumption that the situation could drag out into a long-term battle. The most pressing thing at the moment is to allay the companies’ fears. We also hope the measures for fostering the material, component, and equipment industries announced at a party/government/Blue House meeting the same day will be implemented without delay. Regardless of what happens with this situation, ecosystem innovations for materials and other basic industries are something we must achieve. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | August 29, 2019 | South Korea | Is the US siding with Japan on GSOMIA? | South Korean marines engage in a training exercise on Dokdo on Aug. 25.  In the days following the South Korean government’s decision to terminate its intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan, the US government has continued to heap pressure on South Korea. On Aug. 27, a senior US official basically asked Seoul to reverse its decision to pull out of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), which it claims impinges directly on US security interests. We can’t help but feel disappointed in the US for appearing to only pressure South Korea while turning a blind eye to Japan’s unfair economic retaliation, which triggered the GSOMIA decision.  In statements issued immediately after the South Korean government’s GSOMIA decision, the US State Department and Defense Department both expressed their “deep concerns.” In a separate tweet on Aug. 25, US State Department Spokesperson Morgan Ortagus wrote, “We are deeply disappointed and concerned that the ROK’s government terminated the General Security of Military Information Agreement.” The US embassy in Seoul went so far as to retweet a Korean translation of that message.  On Aug. 27, a high-ranking US official who spoke on condition of anonymity made remarks that went even further. While directly mentioning American security interests, the official said that the US couldn’t just sit idly by while South Korea terminated GSOMIA. The same official said he hoped that South Korean leaders would change their mind before Nov. 23, when GSOMIA actually ends. It’s apparent that Washington is upping its pressure on Seoul to reverse its decision.  This US official also took issue with a Dokdo defense exercise carried out by the South Korean government, asserting that the exercise doesn’t help resolve the situation and just makes it worse. These remarks were not only excessive, crossing a red line in diplomatic relations, but can also be seen as inappropriate interference in the affairs of a sovereign state. Considering that the US hasn’t taken issue with Dokdo exercises before, making such claims now, during a period of conflict between South Korea and Japan, could be construed as the US looking out for Japan’s interests while disregarding South Korea’s.  This same official said that both South Korea and Japan bear responsibility for the escalation of their conflict, remarking that this problem needs to be resolved through serious discussion. That represents something of a departure from the “concern and disappointment” that the US had aimed entirely at the South Korean government. But overall, the remarks are focused on putting pressure on South Korea. The US has yet to make a single comment about Japan’s unfair retaliatory measures, which are the fundamental cause of this conflict. Such American bias favoring Japan will not only make its calls for dialogue between the two countries ring hollow but also provoke defiance from the South Korean public over American pressure. The US needs to make sure it doesn’t appear to be siding with Japan and fulfill its duties as an ally. |
| Park, Min-hee | Commentary | Hankyoreh | August 28, 2019 | South Korea | S. Korea-Japan spat likely to drag on until the fall | As part of its continuing heavy-handed treatment of South Korea, Japan pushed ahead on Aug. 28 with a planned revision to its export and trade management rules that removes South Korea from its white list of countries that enjoy expedited screening on exports of strategic materials.  Japan has stubbornly rejected South Korea’s repeated requests for dialogue. While expressing its strong regret for Japan’s measures on Wednesday, the Blue House called on Japan for a change of attitude, noting that “the ball is in Japan’s court.”  At the same time, Japan chose not to escalate the dispute by increasing the number of products that must receive separate permits before being exported to South Korea. For the time being, South Korea-Japan relations appear to be entering a protracted chill.  Potential dates that could trigger a turning point are the enthronement ceremony for the new Japanese emperor, on Oct. 22, and the termination of South Korea’s intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan (the General Security of Military Information Agreement, or GSOMIA), on Nov. 23. If the two sides fail to reach an understanding by that point, the victims of forced labor — who still haven’t received any kind of compensation, despite the South Korean Supreme Court’s ruling in their favor — are likely to move ahead next January of February with liquidating assets seized from Japanese companies, triggering tougher retaliatory measures by Japan.  “The dispute will continue after South Korea’s decision to terminate GSOMIA, with Japan reiterating its position that Seoul is untrustworthy on security matters and is defecting from trilateral cooperation with Japan and the US. During the two months prior to the enthronement ceremony for the Japanese emperor in October, the Blue House and the Japanese Prime Minister’s office need to proactively organize backroom discussions aimed at finding a breakthrough,” said Kang Suk-hyeon, head of foreign strategic research at the Institute for National Security Strategy (INSS).  Kang’s idea is for the two sides to reach an understanding through dialogue between the Blue House and the Japanese Prime Minister’s office, which has been spearheading the economic retribution against South Korea. Then South Korean President Moon Jae-in or Prime Minster Lee Nak-yeon could visit Japan for the imperial enthronement ceremony in October, creating momentum for restoring bilateral relations.  “For the time being, we’re in the eye of the storm: the tensions will continue without any apparent off-ramp. There needs to be a dialogue-based solution before the victims of forced labor sell off seized assets early next year. Since Lee Nak-yeon has expressed his hope that a solution will be found before the enthronement ceremony and has suggested that the GSOMIA termination could be reconsidered if Japan takes forward-looking actions, such as putting South Korea back on its white list, we need to apply our diplomatic resources toward making the most of that momentum,” said Yang Gi-ho, a professor at Sungkonghoe University.  On a related note, Kenji Kanasugi, director-general of Asian and Oceanian Affairs for the Japanese Foreign Ministry, will be visiting Seoul on Aug. 29 to meet Kim Jung-han, his counterpart at the South Korean Foreign Ministry, in what will be the first deliberations between the two countries’ diplomats since South Korea was dropped from Japan’s white list.  As the Blue House has said, the South Korean government has continued to push Japan to engage in dialogue, even sending a special envoy on Aug. 15, but Japan has rejected those overtures. Given those conditions, the role of the US is emerging as a major variable, in addition to behind-the-scenes diplomacy between South Korea and Japan. The US’ repeated expressions of “concern” about Seoul’s decision to terminate GSOMIA indicate the extent to which it values military cooperation between South Korea, the US, and Japan, which is a major component of its strategy in Northeast Asia. There are continuing calls within the US to recognize the importance of its alliances and to take steps to “repair” South Korea-Japan relations.  If South Korea and Japan resume dialogue, their talks will probably focus upon resolving the issue of forced labor. Japan has firmly stated that it won’t join talks unless the South Korean government takes full responsibility for dealing with the issue of forced labor and offers a way to prevent its companies’ assets from being liquidated. South Korea’s position is that deliberation with Japan based on the “one plus one” solution that it proposed on June 19 — namely, creating a fund with money provided by South Korean and Japanese companies — could help the two sides narrow their differences and lead to a new multifaceted solution.  For the time being, Japan doesn’t seem likely to further inflame the conflict by imposing additional economic measures on South Korea. Concerns are being raised in Japan about the falling number of tourists and sluggish exports. In a story about Yashima, a Japanese company that exports electrical equipment to South Korea, Japanese broadcaster NHK reported that the company’s sales last month had plunged by about 40%, even though its products aren’t affected by the export regulations.  “This doesn’t have to be resolved all at once. The leaders of South Korea and Japan need to bear in mind their mid- and long-term national interests rather than being swayed by overheated public opinion; they need to hold talks, rather than avoiding dialogue,” the Asahi Shimbun said, arguing that a summit should be organized to find a solution.  “Because of the domestic situation, even Abe isn’t able to keep escalating the situation. Some Japanese are calling for self-reflection and questioning whether South Korea is really the enemy, and others are saying that Abe needs to be reined in,” Kim Suk-hyeon said.  But, Kim acknowledged, “even if a solution is found by resuming dialogue, South Korea-Japan relations are unlikely to return to where they were before Japan imposed retaliatory economic measures on July 2.” |
| Kim Young-hee | Opinion | Hankyoreh | September 4, 2019 | South Korea | The rise of anti-Korean media in Japan | Struggling publishers latch onto inflammatory content to boost sales  The name of Japanese publisher Shogakukan is well known among South Koreans – manga fans in particular. During the 20th century, it launched Japanese manga into a golden age, releasing popular works like “Touch” and “Detective Conan” through Weekly Shonen Sunday. It’s considered one of the “big three” such publishers, alongside Shueisha and Kodansha.  Launched in 1922 as a publisher of educational magazines for elementary students, the company published children’s magazines for militarist educational purposes during the imperial era. After Japan’s World War II defeat, it branched out into general publications, scoring a major hit in 1969 with the publication of “Doraemon” in an educational magazine. But despite its image as the company that included fairly strong anti-war messages in “Doraemon” and selected the work of Jeon Won-son – a Zainichi Korean singer active in Japan and South and North Korea – for its nonfiction prize in 2006, other magazines that it publishes, like the monthly “Sapio,” are seen as right-leaning.  The recently published “Shukan Post” ended up at the center of a firestorm after publishing a special edition titled “We Don’t Need Korea!” Alongside provocative messages such as “we don’t hate Korea, we just want to cut ties,” and “goodbye, annoying neighbor,” it coarsely claimed, “Koreans have a disease: they can’t keep their anger in check.” It also predicted that the “[South Korean] boycott of the Tokyo Olympics will increase the Japanese medal count to double digits.” It has drawn an outcry from writers over its “hate speech.” Some authors who announced that they would no longer be serializing essays in the message, with one philosopher promising not to “do anything more for Shogakukan.” Yu Mi-ri, a Zainichi Korean writer, denounced the “hate speech fanning racism and hatred.” “Did they not stop to imagine how it might feel for Korean and Chosen children living in Japan to see these ads, or Japanese citizens with roots on the Korean Peninsula?” she asked.  A survey estimated that Japanese people posting right-wing messages represent 1% of all internet users (according to the introduction to the Korean-language edition of Eiji Oguma’s “Democracy and Patriotism”). The problem is that those people are offering a market to allow struggling publishers to break even. Anti-Korean content in particular has undergone a sharp and visible rise ever since the Asahi Shimbun acknowledged misreporting in a 2014 article about the eyewitness account of Seiji Yoshida, who claimed that the forced drafting of comfort women to serve as sexual slaves to the Japanese military had taken place on Jeju Island.  In response to the torrent of criticism, the Shukan Post published a position statement. But as an apology it was vague, with a strong sense of stressing how “other views also exist.” In a Sept. 3 appearance on one Japanese network, journalist Osamu Aoki, author of the books “The True Nature of the Japan Conference” and “Three Generations of Abe,” said, “At a time when magazines aren’t selling, they’re latching on to the notion that special editions that appeal to the exclusionary ‘online right’ will at least sell copies – and there’s also an increasing mood with the television networks that Korean bashing will always find an audience.” His remarks really seem to show the current state of anti-Korean reporting in Japan. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | September 4, 2019 | South Korea | It’s Japan’s duty to investigate threatening letter sent to S. Korean embassy | The South Korean Embassy in Tokyo disclosed that it recently received a threatening letter with a bullet enclosed. The writer of the anonymous letter claimed to have “several rifles” and to be “hunting Koreans,” while demanding that “Koreans get out” of Japan.  As South Korea and Japan’s economic quarrel intensifies, the delivery of a threatening letter to the embassy shouldn’t be taken lightly. It may as well be a threat to all Koreans in Japan. The Japanese government must thoroughly investigate this incident and hold the guilty person responsible in accordance with international conventions mandating that states guarantee the safety of diplomatic personnel.  This wasn’t the first time that the South Korean embassy was attacked or threatened. Two days earlier, a leader of a right-wing organization in his 60s was arrested for punching the mailbox on the embassy wall, leaving a dent. A similar incident of vandalism occurred in March, committed by a male in his 20s. We hope that the Japanese authorities will swiftly take measures to guarantee the safety of South Korean diplomats and diplomatic missions and to ensure that such incidents don’t happen again.  Signatories of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, which entered into force in Apr. 1961, are obliged to guarantee the safety of diplomats agents and missions. “The premises of the mission shall be inviolable,” Article 22 of the convention states, adding that “the receiving State is under a special duty to take all appropriate steps to protect the premises of the mission against any intrusion or damage.” Article 29 goes on to say, “The receiving State [. . .] shall take all appropriate steps to prevent any attack on [a diplomatic agent’s] person, freedom or dignity.” It goes without saying that no state should tolerate illicit threats to the life or safety of anyone, even if they’re not a “diplomatic agent” protected by an international convention.  The recent series of threats against the South Korean embassy is apparently due to the wave of anti-Korean sentiment that’s sweeping Japan. The escalation of the two countries’ dispute has unleashed a flood of anti-Korean media; in the publishing industry, people are even saying that an anti-Korean book is a surefire success.  This trend in Japan is both regressive, and extremely worrying. But one hopeful sign is that quite a few Japanese intellectuals are bucking that trend. When Japanese weekly tabloid Shukan Post printed a vulgar attack on South Korea in a feature called “We don’t need Korea” a few days ago, several famous writers announced they were cutting off ties with a publisher that incited hatred and joining the opposition to anti-Korean agitation. That’s a fortunate development, and we urge Japanese society to return to its senses. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | September 5, 2019 | South Korea | Abe administration’s contradictory claim is epitome of hypocrisy and absurdity | As South Korea moves forward with removing Japan from its white list of countries that enjoy streamlined screening on exports of strategic materials, the Japanese government, under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, has described Seoul’s decision as an “arbitrary retaliatory measure.”  South Korea’s Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy (MOTIE) announced on Aug. 14 that it would be revising the rules for exporting strategic materials by removing Japan from the white list, and Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) submitted a position statement to that effect during the canvassing period, which concluded on Sept. 3.  On Aug. 28, Japan’s METI pushed through a revision to its export and trade regulations that dropped South Korea from its white list, rejecting the South Korean government’s repeated appeals for dialogue and for Japan to roll back its export controls. That step was clearly economic retribution for the South Korean Supreme Court’s ruling that victims of forced labor during the Japanese colonial period must be paid compensation.  But the Japanese government at the time made the laughable claim that the exclusion was “not a retaliatory measure but an operational reassessment that’s necessary for appropriately managing exports in terms of security.” In short, Japan is arguing that its removal of South Korea from the white list is not retaliation, while South Korea’s reciprocal action is. This is the epitome of hypocrisy and absurdity.  Simultaneously, the Abe administration is contradicting its own claims. In a column published in Bloomberg on Sept. 4, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono said that South Korea-Japan relations have been strained by the forced labor issue and asserted that the problem came down to both countries keeping the promises they’d made when they normalized their diplomatic relations. Japan is taking its case before the international court of public opinion in the hope that South Korea will shoulder the blame for the two countries’ deteriorating relations, but its story isn’t consistent.  On Sept. 4, South Korea’s MOTIE issued a rebuttal to the position statement submitted by Japan’s METI: “We’re revising the rules for imports and exports of strategic materials so as to more strictly manage exports to a country that is hindering international cooperation by operating its export control system in violation of international principles.” That seems to be a reasonable response to the Abe administration’s tenacious mendacity.  Unless the Japanese government evinces a change of attitude, its removal from the white list is expected to take place in about two weeks, following related measures, including a review by the Regulatory Reform Committee. While some think this step is necessary for South Korea to negotiate with Japan on equal terms, there are also concerns that it could negatively impact South Korea’s strategy in its lawsuit with the WTO and exports by local SMEs. The South Korean government needs to make the best choice after thoroughly assessing what is in the national interest. |
| Ahn Jae-seung | Opinion | Hankyoreh | October 10, 2019 | South Korea | 100 days later, S. Korea still fine despite Japan’s export controls | Oct. 11 will mark the 100th day since the Japanese government tightened regulations on exports to South Korea. When Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced he was imposing export controls on South Korea in early July, the coverage by South Korea’s conservative newspapers suggested that the economy was going to collapse. They claimed that semiconductor factories were going to shut down within a month and that the damage to South Korean companies would exceed that of Japanese companies by more than 300-fold. They also said the Abe government would follow up on its export controls with financial retribution that would trigger a disaster on the scale of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.  But 100 days have now passed without anything of the sort happening. In fact, we’re seeing the exact opposite.  So far, there hasn’t been a single report of a South Korean company being directly harmed by the Abe administration’s export controls. Of course, there’s still a lot of uncertainty, and there’s no telling what Abe may have up his sleeve. We’ve got to stay vigilant and be prepared for anything.  The export controls have also brought unexpected benefits. The South Korean government and corporations have woken up to the risks attendant upon excessive dependence on other countries in the parts, materials, and equipment industry. This has served as an opportunity for identifying and rectifying the problematic aspects of previous policies. A more harmonious and cooperative relationship is forming between South Korea’s chaebol conglomerates and their smaller suppliers. There is news of successful attempts to move production of semiconductor materials onshore.  Japanese companies seeing more damage than S. Korean companies  In contrast, the Abe administration has provoked major complaints from Japanese companies because its trade retribution came in the form of export controls, rather than import controls. During the months of July and August, Japan’s exports to South Korea declined 8.1% relative to the same period last year. That’s more than double the 3.5% decline in South Korea’s exports to Japan. In effect, Japan has fallen afoul of its own scheming. Japanese manufacturers are dodging the export controls by rerouting products through other countries — a desperate measure aimed at maintaining relationships with the South Korean companies that are their main clients.  The Abe administration’s export controls triggered the rage of the Korean public and ignited a boycott of Japanese products that has battered affected industries in Japan. The damage has been particularly severe in the area of tourism. Statistics collected by the Japan National Tourism Organization show that the number of South Korean tourist visits to Japan was down 7.6% in July and 48% in August from the same periods last year. This story ran on the front page of Japan’s major newspapers on Sept. 19, when the statistics for August were released, suggesting that the news came as a major shock. Japanese automobiles, a symbol of Japan’s manufacturing prowess, saw sales in South Korea drop by 60% in September. Over the past year, Japan’s share of South Korea’s import car market has fallen from 15.9% to 5.5%. And in September, just US$6,000 worth of Japanese beer was imported to the country, a decrease of 99.9%. Imports of Japanese beer have basically been halted.  Abe’s miscalculation that S. Korea would immediately raise white flaga  Why is the situation unfolding in this manner? It turns out that the Abe administration made several miscalculations.  When the Abe administration announced its export controls, pundits said that the announcement followed a long process of painstaking preparation. In retrospect, however, that assessment appears to have been inflated. The Abe administration had hoped to use trade as a cudgel to simultaneously solve issues in domestic politics and foreign policy, backed by anti-Korean sentiment in Japan. That turned out to be a blunder. Abe appears to have believed that interrupting exports of semiconductor materials would force South Korea to raise the white flag. Abe was apparently working with incorrect data, and the plan went awry from the first step.  It’s extremely rare to conduct trade retribution through export controls, rather than import controls. Restrictions on imports, such as tariffs and the exchange rate, are at the heart of the trade dispute between the US and China, too. Nevertheless, the Abe administration bizarrely chose to push through export controls, even though such measures are liable to not only damage the targeted country but also the global supply chain. Interrupting South Korea’s production of semiconductors would throw the global electronics industry into disarray. That’s why major media in the US and Europe warned the Abe administration to back away from a hopeless trade war.  Second, the Abe administration underestimated South Korea. While it’s true that Japan has a stronger economy, the South Korean economy has also grown swiftly. South Korea is no longer easy for Japan to push around.  Third, the firm but mature response by the South Korean public far exceeded the expectations of the Abe administration. At the boycott’s initial phase, officials in the Abe administration pooh-poohed it, assuming it wouldn’t last for long. Little did they know that it would spread so far, unlikely previous campaigns.  In the end, reconciliation is best for both countries  Even so, it’s not desirable for South Korea-Japan relations to remain like this. The two countries have maintained a win-win relationship based on cooperation and division of labor that takes advantage of their geographical proximity. Deteriorating bilateral relations is a loss for both countries. Not only conscientious NGOs but also conservative politicians in Japan are saying that Japan needs to get along with South Korea.  Ahn Jae-seung, editorial writer  Two potential turning points are coming up: the enthronement ceremony of Japanese Emperor Naruhito on Oct. 22 and the termination of the two countries’ GSOMIA intelligence-sharing agreement on Nov. 22. This is an opportunity for the South Korean government to use its leverage. It’s time to apply our diplomatic negotiating skills while sticking to our principles. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | October 11, 2019 | South Korea | 100 days after Japan’s export controls, it’s time for the Abe admin. to change its attitude | It’s been 100 days since Japan’s Abe administration imposed export controls on South Korea. On July 4, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe tightened controls on exports of three key materials for semiconductors and displays. This act had no precedent in the decades that have passed since South Korea and Japan normalized their diplomatic relations in 1965. Then on Aug. 28, Abe went a step further by removing South Korea from Japan’s white list of countries that enjoy expedited screening for the export of strategic materials.  The Abe administration’s export controls are clearly economic retribution, which contravene both the principles of free trade and the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Abe has used trade as a bludgeon to retaliate against the South Korean Supreme Court’s ruling awarding compensation to the victims of forced labor during the Japanese colonial occupation, a ruling that is unrelated to trade issues. That’s why international opinion has been critical of the Abe administration’s export controls. In response, the South Korean government decided on Aug. 22 to terminate its GSOMA intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan and removed Japan from its own white list on Sept. 18.  Looking back over the past 100 days, the Abe administration’s export controls have caused more harm to Japan than to South Korea. The Japanese government’s unfair economic retribution has triggered a boycott in the South Korean public that has caused snowballing losses in tourism and other related Japanese industries. In effect, warnings that Japan’s rash export controls were a counterproductive move that would come back to haunt it are starting to come true.  On several occasions over the past months, including South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s commemorative speech on Liberation Day, Aug. 15, the South Korean government has asked Japan to resolve this situation through diplomacy and dialogue. But there are no indications that the Abe administration has changed its attitude.  Amid these circumstances, bilateral deliberations between director-generals in the South Korean and Japanese government are being held in Geneva, Switzerland, on Oct. 11, representing the first stage in WTO arbitration of the export controls. These deliberations are typically managed by section chiefs, but the two countries reportedly upgraded their formality to director-general in their preliminary discussion. Since this is the first meeting between high-level trade officials since the export controls were imposed, we hope their discussion will be productive.  Furthermore, South Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon is reportedly likely to represent the government at the enthronement ceremony of Japanese Emperor Naruhito on Oct. 22. As the deputy chair of the Korea-Japan Parliamentarians’ Union, Lee is one of the government’s best-known experts on Japan. If a meeting is held between Lee and Abe, it could be an important starting point for finding a solution.  As close neighbors, South Korea and Japan are fated to work together toward their mutual prosperity. Even if not for their own interests, they ought to cooperate closely for peace in Northeast Asia. Continuing this pointless conflict doesn’t benefit anyone. Since Japan started the conflict, it ought to have the grace to change its attitude, and retracting the export controls is the first step toward doing so. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | October 21, 2019 | South Korea | Abe must respond proactively to Moon’s letter | According to Japanese media reports, South Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon, who is scheduled to visit Japan on Oct. 22 to attend the imperial enthronement, has announced plans to “deliver a letter from South Korean President Moon Jae-in to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.” If the reports are accurate, Lee appears likely to deliver Moon’s letter in person after the ceremony during a meeting with Abe on Oct. 24.  Hopefully, Lee’s Japan visit and presentation of Moon’s letter will mark a new turning point toward easing the tensions in relations between the two sides. With Moon going to these lengths in expressing his intent to pass a letter along to Abe, we also hope the Japanese government will respond favorably and proactively to his efforts to improve ties.  To say South Korea-Japan relations are at an all-time low would be an understatement. Tokyo adopted trade control measures against South Korea in retaliation for a Supreme Court ruling ordering compensation for forced labor conscription; in response, Seoul informed Japan that it was pulling out their General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). A conflict with its roots in historical issues has been spilling over from the realms of economy and trade to negatively impact the areas of foreign affairs and national security as well.  Under the circumstances, it’s encouraging to see a window for dialogue recently opening up between the two sides with Lee’s scheduled visit for the emperor’s enthronement. Abe has also been showing a notably more conciliatory attitude that the past, calling South Korea an “important neighbor” and insisting that we “can’t go without dialogue indefinitely” while attending a meeting of the House of Councillors budget committee a few days ago.  Lee’s planned delivery of Moon’s level appears likely to further fuel this conciliatory climate. While the Blue House and Office of the Prime Minister have cautiously maintained that the plans for the letter’s delivery are not definite, the way Lee has talked about it suggest that he will be personally conveying a message in some form or another from Moon about improving bilateral relations.  To be sure, the issues in play at South Korea-Japan relations are not so simple that they can be resolved through a single meeting between prime ministers or the delivery of one letter. The differences in attitudes on the forced conscription issue remain large between the two sides. Abe continues to hold the South Korean government responsible for the Supreme Court’s ruling on the matter, insisting that it should “abide by a promise between countries according to international law.”  No matter how important South Korea-Japan relations may be, we cannot allow ourselves to make a deal that undercuts the gist of the Supreme Court ruling. But with this hard-won opening in the window for dialogue, the government needs to look from every angle to find a way of reaching common ground with Japan. Seoul has stated that it does not intend to insist on the current “1+1 approach,” which involves compensating conscription survivors from funds contributed by South Korean and Japanese companies. Japan also needs to show a more active willingness to negotiate now. |
| Park Min-hee & Jang Ye-ji | Commentary | Hankyoreh | October 31, 2019 | South Korea | Forced labor victim reflects on past year since Supreme Court ruling | On Oct. 30, 95-year-old Lee Chun-sik, a victim of forced labor under Nippon Steel, was sitting at a press conference at the office of MINBYUN―Lawyers for a Democratic Society, in Seoul’s Seocho District. The press conference had been organized by MINBYUN and a group called Joint Action for Resolution of the Forced Labor Mobilization Issue and Past Issues with Japan.  On Oct. 30, 2018, the South Korean Supreme Court ruled that Nippon Steel must pay compensation to the victims of forced labor. A year has passed since then, but the victims haven’t seen any compensation. Japanese companies have refused to comply with the court order because of interference by the Japanese government. Instead, this has led to retaliatory export controls by Japan and Seoul’s decision to terminate its General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) to share intelligence with Japan, shoving the two countries’ relationship into the contentious mire of historical, economic, and security issues.  Lee heard a reading of a letter he had received from an elementary school student in Incheon: “On the news, you apologized to us, but this isn’t your fault, it’s the fault of Japan for conscripting you. The countries apologized to each other, but they haven’t apologized to the victims. So you shouldn’t cry or thank anyone. Make sure you stay in good health and good spirits, OK?” The whole time Lee was listening, he kept wiping tears from his bloodshot eyes.  The only way to ensure the victims receive the compensation ordered by the Supreme Court and to end the complex dispute affecting South Korea-Japan relations is for the two sides to reach a compromise about implementing the court’s ruling about forced labor.  South Korea is holding to its principle of respecting the Supreme Court’s ruling that Japanese companies must pay compensation, while Japan is adamant that its companies must not suffer damage since all outstanding claims were resolved by an agreement concluded by the two countries in 1965. While Japan rejected the “one plus one” proposal made by the South Korean government in June ― the proposal to create a fund to which South Korean and Japanese companies could make voluntary donations ― reports indicate that the two sides have recently been discussing a number of variations on that theme.  These are some of the ideas that have reportedly been mooted so far: South Korea pays the victims compensation after Japan offers an apology; South Korea pays compensation and then asks Japanese companies for reimbursement; Japanese companies pay compensation and are then compensated by South Korea; South Korean and Japanese companies pay compensation to the plaintiffs whose lawsuits have already been settled by the Supreme Court, and then South Korea provides a remedy for victims whose trials are still pending or who haven’t filed a lawsuit.  But none of those ideas have apparently reached the stage where a concrete proposal is being discussed. Some of them are at odds with the spirit of the Supreme Court’s order for Japanese compensation; there are questions about the legal feasibility of claiming reimbursement; and some aspects aren’t acceptable to the Japanese.  Tokyo’s supposed attempt to relabel compensation as “economic cooperation”  On Oct. 28, the Japanese media reported that Tokyo had drafted a proposal to create a fund, nominally for “economic cooperation,” and have Japanese companies donate to that. Some analysts think that Japan deliberately leaked this proposal in order to gauge South Korea’s reaction. If adopted, this proposal would weaken the “compensatory” nature of the South Korean Supreme Court’s ruling with the label of “economic cooperation” while allowing Japan to maintain its basic stance that the issue of forced labor was resolved through the claims agreement.  South Korea-Japan relations will soon be facing more challenges: the GSOMIA agreement will be officially terminated on Nov. 23, and the victims of forced labor are planning to sell off assets seized from Japanese companies around the end of the year. The victims have been moving forward with asset liquidation since the Japanese companies refused to pay compensation.  In the lawsuit against Nippon Steel (Lee Chun-sik is a plaintiff in that lawsuit), the Pohang branch of the Daegu District Court seized 194,794 shares of PNR stock, worth 765 million won (US$659,341), from Nippon Steel. This past July, the court sent the company an official questionnaire as part of the liquidation process, but so far it hasn’t received a response.  “The questionnaire has already reached Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but there’s no way for us to ascertain its delivery status inside Japan. If the questionnaire is returned in three or four months, we could regard that as the company waiving its right to defend [against the liquidation],” said an official with the Daegu District Court.  The Japanese government’s stance is that, if Japanese companies’ assets are harmed by the liquidation, it will take harsher retaliatory measures than before, which is raising concerns that even more trouble is in store for South Korea-Japan relations. Even so, many think that South Korea should stick to its guns while seeking a solution instead of rushing to cobble together a compromise.  “We have to find a solution to the forced labor issue that respects the Supreme Court’s decision, provides the victims with a meaningful remedy, and takes into account the future of South Korea-Japan relations. Given the major gap between South Korea and Japan, I don’t think this is an issue that can be resolved in the short term. Unless we take the time to find a proper solution, the backlash will be even worse,” a South Korean government official said. |
| Cho Ki-weon | Opinion | Hankyoreh | October 31, 2019 | South Korea | What are Japan’s intentions behind prolonging the forced labor issue? | On Oct. 30 of last year, the South Korean Supreme Court ruled for the first time that Japanese companies must compensate victims of forced labor during Japan’s colonial occupation of Korea. But a year later, the Japanese government continues to maintain that the Supreme Court’s decision is a violation of international law.  Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said on Oct. 30 that the issue of forced labor had been “completely and finally resolved by Japan and South Korea’s claims agreement.”  “The claims agreement is an international treaty, and one of the overarching principles of international law is that all government bodies ― not only the executive but also the legislature and judiciary ― are bound to comply with such treaties,” Suga said.  South Korean courts have seized assets of Japanese companies at the request of lawyers for the plaintiffs, who were conscripted into forced labor, and the Japanese government is watching closely to see whether those assets are liquidated.  Japanese newspaper the Asahi Shimbun reported that the Japanese government is considering taking “countermeasures” that would inflict a comparable amount of damage on Korea in the event of liquidation. Speaking on condition of anonymity, senior officials with Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that enforcing the compensation ruling through liquidation of the assets would mean “crossing the Rubicon” and would “spell the end” of Korean-Japan relations.  But not even the Japanese government apparently wants bilateral relations damaged any further. Since Japan imposed export controls on South Korea in July, Korean tourism to Japan has plummeted, Japanese exports to South Korea have fallen, and Seoul has announced the imminent termination of its GSOMIA intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan ― and all those developments are having a broad impact. Reports indicating that the Japanese government is working on its own plan for the forced labor issue appears to be connected to circumstances at home.  For now, the Japanese government appears to be taking a “wait and see” attitude. Japanese newspaper the Yomiuri Shimbun reported that Tokyo has resolved not to hold a summit with South Korea next month, preferring to watch for Seoul’s next steps. Events scheduled for next month include an ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) summit in Bangkok and an APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) summit in Chile. The APEC summit, however, has been canceled by the Chilean president amid violent protests.  Meanwhile, a number of Japanese NGOs have released statements on the first anniversary of the forced labor ruling calling for the South Korea and Japanese governments to resolve the issue.  “We strongly call on the governments of Japan and South Korea and the companies involved to put their heads together and quickly find a solution for this issue,” a group called Civic Action for Resolving the Issue of Compulsory Mobilization and Reckoning with the Past said in a statement issued on Wednesday.  On Oct. 29, a Japanese academic organization called the Korean History Research Society, which has around 400 members both inside and outside of Japan, issued a statement of support for the Supreme Court’s ruling. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | November 5, 2019 | South Korea | Moon and Abe need to utilize their moment to continue dialogue | During the ASEAN Plus Three summit in Bangkok on Nov. 4, South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held a surprise 11-minute tete-a-tete. This was the first time the two leaders had held a private meeting in 13 months, since their summit in September 2018.  During this meeting, Moon and Abe “affirmed that they both consider South Korea-Japan relations to be important and reconfirmed the principle that pending issues in their bilateral relationship should be resolved through dialogue,” Blue House Spokesperson Ko Min-jung said.  Though the meeting was brief, the fact that the two leaders took each other’s hands and agreed to find a solution through dialogue is significant in light of the two countries’ current relationship. We hope that the two countries will now engage in high-level dialogue in order to resolve the dispute that has spilled over from the issue of forced labor into the areas of trade and even military cooperation.  During their meeting on Monday, the two leaders “expressed their hope that a meaningful plan for improving relations will be produced by the deliberations that are currently underway through official channels in our respective foreign ministries,” the Blue House said.  Moon also proposed that the option of high-level deliberations could be reviewed, if deemed necessary, to which Abe replied that they should “work to find solutions through all available methods.” That’s quite a change from the G20 summit in Osaka this past June, when Moon and Abe parted ways after a mere handshake.  The Blue House said this meeting hadn’t been planned in advance. Rather, Moon remained in the summit waiting room until Abe finally arrived and then led him to the seat next to him. It’s encouraging that Moon took the initiative by taking Abe’s hand and breaking the ice on dialogue.  South Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon and Abe agreed on the need for resuming dialogue during the former’s Japan visit for Emperor Naruhito’s enthronement ceremony at the end of October. Now that this has been confirmed by the two countries’ leaders, their diplomats will have to proceed immediately with meaningful deliberations.  One worrying development is that the Japanese government said that Abe “clearly communicated our [Japan’s] principled position” during the meeting. Since Japan’s “principled position” is that the issue of compensation for forced labor was completely resolved by the 1965 claims agreement, there still appears to be a big gap between the two countries on this issue.  Nevertheless, it’s obvious that dialogue is the only way forward. If the two sides are unable to reconcile their views about historical issues, one option is for Japan to retract its retaliatory trade measures and for South Korea to cancel its decision to terminate the GSOMIA intelligence-sharing agreement. Both governments need to take practical steps right away to settle their dispute. |
| Park Min-hee & Lee Wan | News Analysis | Hankyoreh | November 5, 2019 | South Korea | Moon and Abe take surprise 11-minute meeting in Bangkok | South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe affirmed an approach of resolving their issues through dialogue in their first conversation in 13 months. While the conversation was taken as signaling a chance for positive change in the two sides’ chilly relations, analysis said a lot of ground remains to be covered before they find solutions, which involve a complex mixture of factors such as a resolution on the forced labor issue, export controls, and Seoul’s pending termination of its General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Japan.  While in Thailand to attend the ASEAN Plus Three (South Korea, China, and Japan) summit, Moon met with Abe for an 11-minute one-on-one conversation at the Novotel Impact Forum in Bangkok, site of the summit. No prior discussions had been held on the conversation, which took place when Abe entered and suggested “sitting for a moment and talking” while Moon was talking with other ASEAN leaders.  The conversation between the two leaders that day -- which came in the wake of a meeting between Abe and South Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon while the latter was visiting Japan for the imperial enthronement ceremony last month -- raised hopes that bilateral relations may be reaching a turning point. It contrasted with the G20 summit in Osaka, held in late June just before Japan imposed export controls on South Korea, where the leaders departed without holding any dialogue.  “The two leaders hoped to see ideas for substantive progress in their relationship emerge from discussions that have recently been taking place through their foreign ministry channels,” the Blue House explained after the conversation that day. During the conversation, Abe reportedly offered his condolences on the passing of Moon’s mother and his thanks for sending Lee to the imperial enthronement ceremony last month. Purportedly, Moon thanked Abe for the condolences and congratulated Japan on its recent imperial enthronement; he also thanked Abe for the cordial reception offered to Lee.  Abe clearly emphasizes Japan’s “principled position” on forced labor  But Japan’s position on the forced labor issue appears to remain unbending. According to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, Abe “clearly communicated our [Japan’s] principled position on the issues between our two sides.” The “principled position” refers to Tokyo’s stance that the forced labor issue was fully resolved by the Claims Settlement Agreement of 1965 and that a South Korean Supreme Court ruling last year ordering compensation for forced labor was in violation of that agreement.  “Japan has been firm in its position that the only way the strain in South Korea-Japan relations can be eased is if South Korea produces a solution on the forced mobilization [issue]. It’s unlikely that a real breakthrough in relations is going to come out of an 11-minute meeting between the leaders,” said Kim Sook-hyun, director of the international strategy research office at the Institute for National Security Strategy.  “But there have been changes recently with Prime Minister Abe stating that South Korea-Japan relations can no longer be neglected and with the two sides agreeing on the need for dialogue,” she acknowledged. Kim added that solutions could be devised through active government communication with forced labor victims, the co-establishment of a foundation by South Korean and Japan, and continued efforts to address shortcomings in the current South Korea-Japan agreement -- a process she predicted would take some time.  With the GSOMIA renewal deadline approaching (at midnight on Nov. 23) and the US repeatedly stressing the need to extend it, the question of how the three sides address the issue is emerging as an important test.  During a scheduled South Korean visit on Nov. 5-7, US Assistant Secretary of State David Stilwell is expected to stress the importance of trilateral cooperation and renewing GSOMIA while meeting with officials at the Blue House, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of National Defense. But as Seoul has already stated that it can only consider renewing GSOMIA if Tokyo withdraws its export controls -- which treat South Korea as a country that “cannot be trusted” in security terms -- and as Tokyo is unlikely to alter its stance on the controls, GSOMIA-related frictions appear poised to continue. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | November 6, 2019 | South Korea | Moon Hee-sang’s proposal could be starting point for S. Korea-Japan dialogue | During a visit to Japan on Nov. 5, National Assembly Speaker Moon Hee-sang made an augmented “one plus one” proposal for providing compensation to forced laborers and other victims by setting up a fund based on voluntary contributions from South Korean and Japanese companies and citizens. While opinions may differ about the substance of his proposal, this is an encouraging development, presuming it can kick-start dialogue for resolving the two countries’ dispute. Now is the time for the Japanese government to move away from its current position that the issue of compensation for forced laborers was fully resolved by the 1965 claims agreement and to start discussing practical solutions.  Moon made the proposal about a compensatory fund for historical victims during a lecture at Japan’s Waseda University. “Not only implicated companies in South Korea and Japan but also unrelated companies could donate to the fund. We could add donations from the general public in both countries and the 6 billion won (US$5.19 million) that remains in the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation,” the speaker said. His proposal would upgrade the South Korean government’s “one plus one” plan, under which the government would help South Korean and Japanese companies set up a fund, by expanding the range of participation in the fund and by making contributions voluntary.  This proposal has yet to win a consensus in South Korea or Japan, and it undeniably contains controversial aspects. Primary among these is that voluntary donations by Japanese companies could be accused of contravening the spirit of the South Korean Supreme Court’s ruling about compensation, in which the perpetrators were held strictly responsible. It’s also uncertain whether the victims of forced labor themselves would be willing to accept these terms. We have already seen that attempts to solve past grievances without securing the consent of the victims are doomed to fail. That’s why the Blue House and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs appear to be distancing themselves from Moon’s proposal, describing it as being a “personal idea.”  Nevertheless, we believe that the proposal is meaningful in the sense that it could finally get the ball rolling on dialogue between South Korea and Japan. Significantly, Moon expressed his intention to table a bill in the National Assembly to give his proposal legal backing, calling for a “comprehensive solution” for not only the forced laborers but also for the comfort women issue.  At this juncture, we should give serious thought to the idea of taking a comprehensive approach to the issue of compensation for historical victims, which is the key challenge in South Korea-Japan relations.  South Korea-Japan relations had been moving in a dire direction, but Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon’s visit to Japan and the unexpected meeting between the South Korean and Japanese leaders appear to signal a shift toward dialogue. There seems to be a growing consensus in both South Korea and Japan about the need to restore bilateral relations. Since Moon has made a new proposal, we hope the Japanese government and political establishment will respond in kind. We look forward to seeing the Japanese adopt a flexible and forward-looking attitude. |
| Cho Ki-weon | Opinion | Hankyoreh | November 11, 2019 | South Korea | At the heart of tensions in S. Korea-Japan relations | Resolution for forced labor issue needs to focus on the victims  South Korean National Assembly Speaker Moon Hee-sang talks to reporters at the Japanese Diet in Tokyo on Nov. 4. (Yonhap News)  On Nov. 5, South Korean National Assembly Speaker Moon Hee-sang gave a talk in a classroom at Waseda University in Tokyo. Attendees had to undergo an inspection of their belongings. Police could be seen positioned all around the school. This seemed to be a reflection of negative Japanese public opinion toward Moon following a February interview where he suggested that the Japanese military comfort women issue could be resolved with an apology from the Japanese emperor. Indeed, when Moon referenced his earlier remarks during his talk, saying that he “would like to apologize if I upset any Japanese people,” one audience member showed, “Lower your head and apologize before [then] Emperor [Akihito].”  Visiting Japan at a time when the mood toward him was not positive, Moon presented a proposal on what has recently been the most sensitive issue between the two sides: survivors of forced labor mobilization. He suggested that South Korea enact a law to create a fund with voluntary contributions from South Korean and Japanese companies and members of the public. His idea was to head off future legal action over historical issues between the two sides through legislation that encompassed both the forced labor mobilization and the comfort women issues.  I do believe that Moon’s proposal came after serious consideration of what feasible means exist for ending the chill in South Korea-US relations. During the talk, he said, “I am aware I could end up facing criticism from the public of both countries for not living up to their standards.”  But there are some worrying aspects of Moon’s proposal. The first concerns the nature of the fund. During a Nov. 1 joint meeting of the two sides’ respective bilateral parliamentarians’ unions, Takeo Kawamura, chief secretary of the Japan-South Korea Parliamentarians’ Union, said it would be “acceptable to create a fund for future-oriented things, for energy and new industries.” His remarks suggested Japan would only consider it if it were intended as an “economic cooperation fund” that was not recognized in any way as compensation for forced labor. The survivors, for their part, would never support the fund if it were turned into something that completely repudiates its nature as compensation for forced labor.  Second, because it would be based on “voluntary” contributions, there would be no means of “forcing” the Japanese companies responsible for forced mobilization to participate. These companies were the ones who perpetrated forced mobilization, and a fund that does not require their participation loses its rationale for existing. Even if Japanese companies that engaged in forced mobilization were to take part in the fund, they could easily claim that they were not doing so for reasons related to the forced mobilization issue. Third and most important is the question of whether there was any dialogue with the survivors and whether this is a victim-centered plan.  Unless the South Korean government reverses its decision, the South Korea-Japan General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) ends at midnight on Nov. 23. The US government is pressuring Seoul to extend the agreement. The Japanese government has also been adamant in claiming that Japanese companies must not agree to compensation for forced mobilization, maintaining that the South Korean Supreme Court ruling was in violation of the Claims Settlement Agreement signed by the two sides in 1965. Barring some dramatic deal being reached, assets seized from Japanese companies following the Supreme Court ruling are to be liquidated early next year. When this happens, the Japanese government is very likely to implement some new retaliatory action, characterized officially as a “resistance measure.” The situation facing South Korea is a serious one.  Cho Ki-weon, Tokyo correspondent  At the same time, it needs to avoid allowing these circumstances to push it into a hasty “solution” that repeats the same mistakes as the comfort women agreement reached by the South Korean and Japanese governments in 2015. Referring to the comfort women agreement in his talk, Moon said, “I think it never was realistic to have an agreement that the victims themselves did not support at all. The essence of a resolution to the comfort women issue lies in restoring the dignity and honor of the victims and healing their wounds.” At its root, the same is true for a resolution to the forced mobilization issue: it needs to be about restoring the victims’ dignity and healing their wounds. |
| Hankyoreh, editorial | Opinion | Hankyoreh | November 14, 2019 | South Korea | Key to solving GSOMIA issue is within Japanese government, not S. Korea’s | US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe meet in Tokyo on Nov. 12.  In the countdown to the termination of South Korea and Japan’s General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), the US is ratcheting up pressure on South Korea to extend it. US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley arrived in South Korea on Nov. 13; he will be joined by US Defense Secretary Mark Esper on Nov. 14.  While the agenda of the South Korea-US Security Consultative Meeting (SCM), scheduled for the following day, is supposed to deal with assessing joint defense readiness and returning wartime operational control of South Korean troops (OPCON) to Seoul, current circumstances suggest that GSOMIA will be the hottest item on the agenda. The South Korean government needs to stick to its guns and boldly stand up to American pressure about extending GSOMIA.  The US has been pulling out all the stops to pressure South Korea on this issue. David Stilwell, US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, pushed hard for extending GSOMIA while meeting with South Korean government officials during a visit last week.  While Milley was touring Japan and South Korea, he described GSOMIA as being “key for security and stability in the region” and stressed unity between South Korea, the US, and Japan. After discussing GSOMIA during a personal meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Tokyo, Milley expressed his hope that a solution would be found before GSOMIA is scrapped.  Robert Abrams, commander of US Forces Korea, also stated publicly that terminating GSOMIA could send the “wrong message” to Korea’s neighbors. In short, not only top officials at the US State Department but also American military leaders have been mobilized for the pressure campaign to extend GSOMIA.  But what the US needs to realize is that it was Japan that provided the rationale for ending GSOMIA. It was Japan that imposed export controls on South Korea on the grounds that Korea is not a country that can be trusted for security reasons. It doesn’t make sense to receive critical security information from such a country. The South Korean government’s decision to end GSOMIA is an appropriate response to Japan’s unjustified economic retribution.  Nevertheless, the US only appears to be pressuring South Korea while keeping its mouth shut about Japan’s provocations. Such behavior not only disregards the courtesy South Korea deserve as an ally but also degrades the value of that alliance.  The South Korean government has already said several times that it’s willing to reconsider its decision to terminate GSOMIA if Japan retracts its unfair export controls. The US needs to give some careful thought to the determination of the South Korean government and public. The key to resolving the GSOMIA issues lies not with the South Korean government but with the Japanese government.  Pressuring Seoul and coddling Tokyo cannot lead to a workable solution; in fact, it will only make the South Korean public take a dimmer view of sharing military intelligence with Japan.  The South Korean government needs to hold to its principles instead of giving way to pressure from the US. If Seoul extends GSOMIA without any change of attitude from Japan, its subservience to the US will harm both its reputation and practical interests. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | April 15, 2019 | South Korea | Japan needs to take S. Korea’s concern seriously | After the Japanese government decided to discharge radioactive water at the Fukushima nuclear plant into the ocean, South Korean President Moon Jae-in instructed his government Wednesday to aggressively explore the option of appealing Japan’s decision to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, along with taking an interim measure.  When Japanese ambassador to South Korea Koichi Aiboshi visited Moon on the same day to present his diplomatic credentials, Moon said, “There’s something I’m obliged to tell you. [Japan’s decision has aroused] very serious concerns in Korea, which is your closest neighbor and shares a sea with you.”  Despite South Korea’s rocky relationship with Japan, Moon made clear that he means to take firm action on an issue that could have a serious impact on the environment and public health.  The interim measure that Moon mentioned would be asking the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea to issue an injunction preventing Japan from releasing the contaminated water until the tribunal can reach a final decision, a key official from the Blue House said.  Song Gi-ho, an attorney who specializes in international commerce, explained that South Korea could ask the tribunal for such an interim measure unless Japan carries out a scientific assessment of whether the contaminated water treated through the Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS) is safe for the environment and the human body, transparently releases that information to South Korea (given the potential harm that Koreans could suffer), and deliberates its plans with South Korea.  When the Japanese government decided Tuesday to release around 1.25 million tons of contaminated water into the ocean over the next 30 years after bringing the concentration of radioactive materials down to a safe level, it not only dismissed the objections of neighbors such as South Korea and China but also ignored the concerns and criticism of its citizens, including those in the fishing industry.  Japan has also engaged in irresponsible behavior since making that decision. A Japanese government agency came up with a cartoon character to promote the safety of tritium, which is a radioactive material, while Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso said “even drinking that water wouldn’t be a big deal.”  It’s also regrettable that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the US have supported the Japanese government’s decision to release the contaminated water. Since the IAEA has been a leading proponent of the safety of nuclear power and depends on dues from the US and Japan, it’s increasingly doubtful whether it’s an objective judge of the safety of releasing the water.  It would be wrong for Japan to unilaterally go ahead with releasing the water despite the opinion not only of its neighbors but also of locals, who are likely to suffer the most damage. Japan needs to ensure that South Koreans can take part in the scientific assessment of the safety of ALPS-treated water and give them access to adequate information and opportunities for consultation.  We hope that the South Korean government will ask Japan for scientific verification and consultation as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and make cool-headed preparations for lodging a complaint with the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea if its legitimate requests aren’t accepted. |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | April 16, 2021 | South Korea | How I am pro-Japanese in my own way | There are Japanese who have come together to learn the truth and transcend the history of harm given and received  Young people from South Korea and Japan volunteer to recover the remains of Korean forced laborers in Hokkaido on Aug. 21, 2006. (Chung Byung-ho)  One fine day in 1987, one year before the Summer Olympics were held in Seoul, a small festival was held in the Ikuno Ward of the Japanese city of Osaka. This Korean Cultural Festival, as it was called, provided a day of fun for Zainichi Koreans in the area.  Performers in traditional attire paraded through the streets, putting on an energetic show. Some musicians shed tears as they banged on the janggu, a two-headed drum, and the kkwaenggwari, a small gong, which they barely knew how to play. This was one of the first times these ethnic Koreans had showcased their culture, given their fears about discrimination in Japanese society.  A variety of cultural performances and plays were held on the sports field of a Japanese elementary school that had been borrowed for the festival. In one corner of the field, a petting zoo had been set up. There weren’t any exotic animals there, just chickens, pigs, calves, sheep, goats, and rabbits — the kind of animals raised on a farm.  An old man in a straw hat gave kids a pony ride, leading them along a white line drawn in the shape of the Korean Peninsula. As each child finished the ride, the man would tell them, “I hope you get to travel around South and North Korea once Korea is unified!” This man was Ryosuke Hanafusa, a Japanese man who ran a farm nearby.  When I asked the man about the pony rides, he explained that he felt sorry that Korea had been divided instead of Japan.  As a boy during the War in the Pacific, Hanafusa had been taught that contempt for Koreans and Chinese was part of Yamato-damashii, or the spirit of Japan. But following Japan’s defeat, he’d realized that was a lie. Out of a sense of guilt, he’d resolved to do something that would help everyone who the Japanese had hurt.  Hanafusa told me he’d once been a producer at NHK. Now he was running a farming commune where people could come to experience life on the farm.  He also volunteered to teach at a summer camp for children from both Mindan, which is affiliated with South Korea, and Chongryon, which is affiliated with North Korea. The Korean community in Japan has long been divided between the two organizations.  The most interesting part about the summer camp for these kids was that they had to kill the chickens that were going to be served at the camp. The idea was to tackle continuing discrimination against the descendants of Japan’s untouchable caste of Burakumin, who once had to do the “dirty work” of killing animals, just like Korea’s Baekjeong.  The children were taught that farming involves not only growth but also death. Both the animals raised for their meat and rice, barley, and vegetables are living creatures, just as we are, and we take their lives to sustain our own.  Hanafusa taught the children to value and appreciate the lives that we take. He also told them that people need to learn how to respect each other and find a way to get along.  My wife, who was full of anti-Japanese sentiment, began studying Japanese so that she could talk directly to people like him. A few years ago, he passed away, leaving a short message of farewell: “I’m going to get a head start. Take your time and see you on the other side.”  Even today, I still miss Hanafusa. I know I’ll be following in his footsteps before long.  I have an old friend in Japan whom I’m very fond of. Yoshihiko Tonohira is a monk in a small temple in rural Hokkaido. When I first visited the nursery there, the children were barefoot, playing in the mud.  Tonohira brought me to a birch grove deep in the woods and showed me the graves of Korean forced laborers who had never made it home.  Though the monk is ten years older than me, we’ve spent the last three decades as equals. We don’t use the “older brother, younger brother” titles typical for friends with such an age gap.  We wanted to avoid the sense of hierarchy that those titles tend to produce, both in Japan and Korea. Instead, we refer to each other by nicknames and use informal language. We’ve done a lot together.  Our friendship sparked a project to recover the remains of Korean forced laborers. It’s a project in which many young people, both Koreans and Japanese, have taken part for more than two decades, since 1997.  Among the bodies we’ve recovered, 115 people came from South Korea. Their remains were finally sent home, after an absence of 70 years.  But the remains of people from North Korea still haven’t gone back to their loved ones, even though Tonohira visited Pyongyang twice to arrange their return.  Yoshihiko Tonohira and Chung Byung-ho lay down flowers at a memorial service on Sept. 17, 2015, for forced Korean laborers whose remains were dug up in Japan. (Chung Byung-ho)  The authorities in North Korea weren’t very interested in the project. They had no time for a simpleminded monk from a tiny organization who wanted to send back the remains that he’d dug up — unless, that is, he could arrange some kind of apology or compensation from the Japanese government or Japanese companies.  Even after learning that his efforts were doomed, Tonohira went back to Pyongyang, where he made an impassioned case for his project. Returning home empty-handed, he was sick for days. I really like that man’s stubborn honesty.  Young Koreans and Japanese have been touched by Tonohira’s steadfast dedication over the decades. He has taught them how to tend and heal historical injuries. He has also helped young Zainichi Koreans hurt by discrimination in Japanese society regain trust and hope in the Japanese.  Japan isn’t a monolith. There are Japanese who have come together to learn the truth and transcend the history of harm given and received. They are learning each other’s languages, learning how to work together across national borders.  These Japanese are dear to me. True reconciliation and friendship begin with the truth. |
| Gil Yun-hyung | Commentary | Hankyoreh | April 22, 2021 | South Korea | Court’s dismissal of “comfort women” lawsuit is biggest roadblock to justice to date | “They held on to me and wouldn’t let go, they wouldn’t let go, those Japanese brutes, those terrible soldiers. All I could do was weep as they had their way with me. I’d just like to get revenge, even if only in words, just once before I die, before my eyes close for the last time.”  Kim Hak-sun (1924-1997) made this testimony thirty years ago, on Aug. 14, 1991, becoming the first person to open up about her experiences as a “comfort woman” for the Japanese imperial army. Her story filled South Korean society with unbearable sadness and shame.  Since that time, sympathizing with the pain of the victims, restoring their dignity, and receiving a proper apology from the Japanese government have become an imperative mission for South Korean society to accomplish in this era.  Initially, the Japanese government duplicitously claimed that the comfort women had been tricked by brokers. But then on Aug. 4, 1993, Tokyo released the Kono Statement, which acknowledged the Japanese military’s involvement in the comfort women system and the compulsory nature of their mobilization.  When South Korea and Japan normalized diplomatic relations in 1965, they agreed that all claims had been completely and finally resolved, creating a serious stumbling block for South Korean victims seeking remedies.  The Japanese government established the Asian Women’s Fund in July 1995 in an attempt to resolve this issue, but it refused to provide any government funds because of the 1965 agreement.  Japan would only accept “moral responsibility” for the comfort women issue, but not “legal responsibility,” which would require admitting that it had been a state crime. Because Japan refused to take on legal responsibility, South Korean society rejected the Asian Women’s Fund and initiated an open-ended struggle against Japan.  The situation changed when the South Korean government declared in August 2005 that the comfort women issue hadn’t been addressed by the 1965 agreements.  South Koreans earnestly demanded to know why their government wasn’t taking action to resolve the issue. They were backed up by the Constitutional Court, which ruled in August 2011 that the government was brazenly remiss in its duty to negotiate with the Japanese government about the comfort women.  After that, the comfort women issue rose to the forefront of lingering historical disputes between the two countries, becoming a diplomatic issue that the South Korean government was obligated to resolve.  Painful diplomatic deliberations over the comfort women issue began under South Korean President Park Geun-hye and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2013. Under pressure from the US, which insisted that South Korea and Japan needed to work together to counter the rise of China, South Korea was forced to accept a comfort women agreement, which it concluded with Japan on Dec. 28, 2015.  In the agreement, Abe declared that Japan “is painfully aware of responsibilities,” without specifying whether those responsibilities were legal or moral. In line with the agreement, Japan agreed to contribute 1 billion yen (US$9.3 million) from the government budget, a step it had long refused to do.  What South Korea promised in exchange was “the final and irreversible resolution” of the comfort women issue. Moon Jae-in, who came to power in South Korea in the wake of the candlelit protests in late 2016, said that the comfort women issue hadn’t actually been resolved by the agreement, but then in January 2018, he said he wouldn’t seek to renegotiate the agreement.  By that point, the comfort women issue had been degraded from one that the two governments had to solve to one that they needed to manage.  Then on Jan. 8, 2021, a South Korean court reached a ruling that defied everyone’s expectations. The district court said that the Japanese government must compensate the comfort women survivors, despite sovereign immunity, a principle in customary international law.  But President Moon said in in his New Year’s press conference that he had been “a little perplexed” by the ruling. At the end of last month, another court blocked the victorious plaintiffs from seizing Japanese government assets.  Then on Wednesday, another South Korean court rejected a separate lawsuit brought by comfort women survivors. Whereas the first court had said that the principle of sovereign immunity doesn’t apply to crimes against humanity such as the comfort women system, the second court accepted that principle and said that the 2015 comfort women agreement could serve as an alternative method of restoring the victims’ rights.  The court’s ruling recognizes the 2015 agreement as being the final resolution of the comfort women issue. While an appeals process remains, this makes it much less likely that the comfort women survivors will receive a legal remedy. It serves as a major inflection point in the comfort women’s thirty-year struggle.  The ruling isn’t likely to lead to an improvement in South Korea-Japan relations. The two countries still face a fundamental strategic disagreement about North Korea and China, and they’re wrestling with challenges both old and new, ranging from another court ruling that awarded compensation to the victims of forced labor to Japan’s plan to release radioactive water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant into the ocean.  The South Korean and Japanese governments have had little to say about the latest ruling so far.  “We will refrain from commenting specifically about today’s ruling, since we’re still looking into the details. The government will continue doing everything in its power to restore the dignity and repair the reputations of the comfort women survivors according to the principle of prioritizing the victims,” South Korea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.  In comments directed at Japan, the Ministry observed that “the comfort women issue concerns a violation of universal human rights and an infringement of women’s rights in wartime without precedent in the world” and called on the Japanese government “to take action that is in line with the keen responsibility, regret and remorse it expressed in the Kono Statement in 1993 and the comfort women agreement concluded on Dec. 28, 2015.”  Tokyo’s response was terse. Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato said during the daily press conference that morning that Tokyo is “looking into the details of the ruling and will refrain from commenting at the present time.” |
| Hankyoreh | Editorial | Hankyoreh | Appril 28, 2021 | South Korea | Japan’s new diplomatic bluebook repeats inaccurate claims on “comfort women,” Dokdo | The 2021 Diplomatic Bluebook unveiled by the Japanese government Tuesday repeated the same unconvincing claims about Dokdo being “inherently Japanese territory.” It also referred to a Seoul Central District Court decision in January awarding compensation to survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery as being “utterly unacceptable.”  The Diplomatic Bluebook is an official document in which Japan announces its diplomatic guidelines domestically and internationally each year. It’s unfortunate to see the Japanese government parroting the same old arguments in the latest version, which is the first to come out since a new Cabinet was launched under Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.  It’s enough to erase any shred of hope that Suga’s arrival in office last September might be a step on the way to relieving the severe strain that South Korea-Japan relations suffered during his predecessor Shinzo Abe’s tenure.  The Diplomatic Bluebook stated that Dokdo was “clearly inherently Japanese territory, both according to historical fact and in terms of international law.” It also claimed that South Korea “continues its illegal occupation [of the islets] without any basis in international law, including the permanent stationing of guard units.”  As recently as its 2017 Diplomatic Bluebook, Japan had been simply referring to Dokdo as “Japanese territory.” But after relations with Seoul severely soured in 2018, that year’s edition saw the addition of a reference to “illegal occupation,” which Suga has carried on intact.  The latest Diplomatic Bluebook also included new references to the Seoul Central District Court ruling awarding compensation to military sexual slavery survivors, which it said was “in violation of international law and agreements between South Korea and Japan.”  It further announced plans to “continue sternly demanding that South Korea develop appropriate measures to remedy the violation of international law.” On the issue of forced labor mobilization, it repeated its previous insistence that South Korea needs to quickly devise a solution that is acceptable to Japan.  It’s deeply disappointing to see the Japanese government attempting to blame South Korea and hold it responsible for a tragedy that arose because of Japan’s own colonization history and wars of aggression.  Tokyo needs to face up to the fact that the Japanese military sexual slavery issue ultimately boils down to a matter of human rights violations and infringements of universal rights perpetrated against women during an unprecedented global military conflict.  There are a lot of issues that need to be resolved between South Korea and Japan. In addition to the historically rooted ones, there is also the matter of Japan’s decision to release radioactively contaminated water from Fukushima into the sea, as well as the North Korean nuclear issue and other matters related to the Korean Peninsula’s political situation.  In his commemorative address for this year’s March 1 Independence Movement Day, South Korean President Moon Jae-in indicated a strong commitment to improving ties with Japan. Yet, Tokyo continues doggedly sticking to its guns. Japan needs to let go of its galling perceptions on historical matters and its irresponsible attitude on the Fukushima water issue and make good faith efforts to resolve these things through dialogue with South Korea.  Hopefully, they will realize the obvious truth that it takes two to achieve a real solution |
| Yu Sun-hui | Commentary | Hankyoreh | July 16, 2019 | South Korea | A Japanese-American filmmaker’s quest to shed light on the comfort women issue | Miki Dezaki has come under attack from Japan’s right wing before  A scene from the documentary film, “Shusenjo: The Main Battleground of the Comfort Women Issue.” (provided by Cinemadal)  “Where is the main battleground of the cold war that’s being fought over the comfort women issue?”  The documentary, “Shusenjo: The Main Battleground of the Comfort Women Issue,” which is being released in South Korean theaters on July 25, plots a different course from previous films that have dealt with the comfort women issue. During the making of this film, director Miki Dezaki, a 36-year-old Japanese-American, interviewed not only professors and groups who support the comfort women’s cause but also 30 or so far-right Japanese historical revisionists who deny their very existence. By bouncing their conflicting arguments off each other, Dezaki offers a new perspective on the comfort women issue. As the very title implies, the contestants in this logical battle — which is fierce enough to evoke an actual battleground — continue to trade blows.  A scene from the documentary film, “Shusenjo: The Main Battleground of the Comfort Women Issue.” (provided by Cinemadal)  South Korea’s Liberation Day, Aug. 15, is just around the corner, and anti-Japanese sentiment is running high because of punitive economic measures recently taken by the Japanese government, led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in retaliation for the South Korean Supreme Court’s decision awarding compensation to Koreans forced to provide labor to Japanese companies during the colonial occupation. Since the documentary is being released as such a time, it will be interesting to see what kind of response it evokes from South Korean viewers.  When Dezaki arrived in South Korea on July 15, he had several quips at the ready. “I’ve got to tip my hat to Abe for making an issue that’s boosted interest in my film. Saying that I didn’t want Abe to watch the film has also been helpful in promoting it,” the filmmaker said with a laugh.  Dezaki offered the following account of how he’d come to make the film. “I’d realized that there’s a serious gap in information about the comfort women issue between South Korea and Japan and that that gap sometimes leads to conflict. I felt that there was a need for a documentary that could give a clear comparison of the points being debated.”  As this suggests, Dezaki chose not to have the elderly victims of the comfort women system take the stand to criticize historical distortions. Instead, he meticulously tracks down and dissects the documents and press reports that Japan’s far-right figures cite as evidence. Along the way, the film treads upon some very sensitive issues, such as the truth of claims that the comfort women were forcibly abducted, detained, and forced to become sex slaves and the accuracy of the estimate that there were 200,000 comfort women.  “The main documents by US army units that reported on the comfort women show that they were just prostitutes and that they were paid rather well for their work.” “Why do so many people take such an excessive interest in this dumb issue? It must have some kind of pornographic appeal for them.” Insensitive remarks spouted off by Japan’s right-wing figures are refuted by the director with sparkling logic, his targets including Yoshiko Sakurai, one of Japan’s leading right-wing pundits; Mio Sugita, a lawmaker with the Liberal Democratic Party; Kent Gilbert, a pro-Japanese American lawyer; and Hideaki Kase, a member of Nippon Kaigi (Japan Conference), Japan’s biggest right-wing group.  Born into a family of Japanese immigrants to the US, Dezaki spent five years working as an English teacher in Japan, starting in 2007. After posting a video to YouTube about racism and discrimination in Japan, he came under attack from the right wing. That was when he learned that Takashi Uemura, a former reporter for the Asahi Shimbun newspaper who was the first to cover the comfort women issue, had faced similar attacks. “Why is the Japanese right wing so sensitive about the comfort women issue?” Dezaki asks at the beginning of the film. That question is a thread running throughout the entire film.  The state can “never be wrong and should never apologize”  Japanese intellectuals in the documentary, such as professors Koichi Nakano and Setsu Kobayashi, say that the Japanese right wing’s ideological conviction that “the state can never be wrong and should never apologize” is “based in a deep-rooted desire to return to the pre-war Meiji constitution and their Shinto faith, which centers on the emperor and involves visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, where the spirit tablets of class A war criminals are still worshipped as divine.” At the heart of this is the Nippon Kaigi, the hotbed of Japan’s far right wing, with 85% of Japan’s cabinet belonging to the Nippon Kaigi group in the Japanese Diet. When we recall that Abe’s maternal grandfather was Nobusuke Kishi, a Class-A war criminal and a member of the cabinet of Prime Minister Hideki Tojo, who ordered the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the historical outlines of Japan’s right wing become clear.  These groups have also flexed their muscles on the textbook issue. All middle school textbooks in Japan dealt with the comfort women issue in 1997, after the Japanese government issued the Kono Statement in 1993, acknowledging its responsibility for the Japanese imperial army’s involvement in the comfort women system. But by 2012, all mention of the comfort women had been erased from textbooks. That was the result of efforts by the Japanese Society for a New History Textbook, which is supported by the Nippon Kaigi.  The Japanese right wing is extending this “battleground” to the US. When the first comfort woman statue outside South Korea was erected in Glendale, California, on July 30, 2013, about 100 Japanese held a rally expressing their fierce opposition to the statue. The Japanese right wing also attempts to manipulate US public opinion by funding sympathetic American YouTubers or by keeping American journalists in their pockets.  Dezaki also brings up the responsibility of the American government. “The US has continued to force South Korea and Japan into some kind of awkward reconciliation as its primary allies in Northeast Asia, where it seeks to counter China. The remarkable similarity between South Korea and Japan’s establishment of diplomatic relations in 1965 and the Park administration’s comfort women talks with Japan in 2015 was “due to the influence of the US, which has prioritized its own interests over justice on the comfort women issue.”  A scene from the documentary film, “Shusenjo: The Main Battleground of the Comfort Women Issue.” (provided by Cinemadal)  Opposition from right wing boosted public press and brought out more viewers  During this film’s debut in Japan in April, it brought out more than 30,000 viewers. That was a surprisingly good turnout for an independent film, boosted by buzz from press conferences held by right-wing groups opposed to the film.  The comfort women issue ought to be seen as “a fight against racial discrimination, sexual discrimination, and fascism,” Dezaki said. “It’s very unfortunate that the Japanese government has responded to the [Supreme Court’s] recent ruling about forced labor by instituting economic retaliation. They’ve always done the same thing about the comfort women issue. Both of these issues ought to be seen as human rights issues.”  A scene from the documentary film, “Shusenjo: The Main Battleground of the Comfort Women Issue.” (provided by Cinemadal)  Dezaki hopes that his film will have a positive effect. “I don’t think the Japanese government’s positions are the same as what the Japanese people think. If this film helps Koreans and Japanese learn things they didn’t know about each other before, it might reduce hatred and enable productive discussion and debate,” he said. |
| Chen Yang | Opinion | Global Times | October 27, 2019 | China | External support needed to repair Japan-South Korea ties | On Thursday, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held talks with visiting South Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon who attended the ceremony of Emperor Naruhito's ascension on October 22, according to a report by the Asahi Shimbun.  Abe said that Japan-South Korea relations cannot continue deteriorating, and Lee emphasized that uniting the intelligence of the two countries can overcome the difficulties. Lee also handed over a personal letter from South Korean President Moon Jae-in to Abe.  It is worth noting that it was the first meeting between the Japanese and South Korean government leaders after South Korea's supreme court ordered Japanese companies to compensate 10 Koreans, who were forced labor victims, in October 2018.  After the Japanese government announced in July that it would restrict raw materials exports to South Korea, the South Korean government struck back by cutting off military intelligence sharing with Japan.  In the context of the nationalist support ignited by the two societies, the Japanese and South Korean governments have indeed punished each other with mutual sanctions. However, since the economy of the two countries is highly complementary, the negative impact from the sanctions has gradually emerged.  As for Japan, the number of South Korean tourists to Japan has declined sharply and shown a long-term trend, and Japan's export of goods to South Korea has been greatly affected as well.  For South Korea, the lack of Japanese raw material imports has damaged the supply chain, which has affected the overall economic performance.  It's not hard to find that South Korea is more proactive than Japan in promoting the easing of their relations. Earlier in October, Japan was hit by the super typhoon Hagibis. Moon immediately sent a message of condolence to Abe, which was regarded by the two countries' public opinion as a positive move to improve their relations.  In addition, Moon also sent a personal letter to Emperor Naruhito through diplomatic channels. Dispatching Lee to the enthronement ceremony came after Moon's serious consideration. Known as an expert on Japan, Lee used to be a Tokyo correspondent before he joined the political stage and once worked as chairman of the Japan-Korea Parliamentarians' Union.  Japan, on the other hand, does not seem to be as active as South Korea in repairing their bilateral relations. However, given the fact that the top officials of both sides understand that they cannot allow their relations to deteriorate even further, Japan needs to take measures to effectively interact with South Korea to actually improve their relations.  Lee's latest trip to Japan was a good start, but was not enough as he is only the second-top leader from the Blue House. Only a dialogue between Moon and Abe can have substantial impact on the two countries' relations.  Moreover, it also needs external support to foster Japan-South Korea relations. Since US President Donald Trump's administration is unwilling to mediate in the disputes between Japan and South Korea, there are voices inside both of the two East Asian countries saying that they hope China will play a role.  China can do something together with Japan and South Korea to promote the betterment in Japan-South Korea relations.  For example, at the Ninth China-Japan-South Korea Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting in August, the three sides unanimously adopted the cooperation framework of "China, Japan and South Korea plus X," which not only is conducive to the development of the three countries, but also can contribute to Asia's prosperity and stability.  Last but not the least, Japan and South Korea are geographically and culturally close, and have basically the same political and economic system, living standards and social values. They should be close neighbors, but there has been constant friction between them in recent years. This might be explained by the famous Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's thesis "the narcissism of minor differences."  Freud's idea explains that communities with adjoining territories and close relationships are especially likely to engage in feuds and mutually ridicule each other because of hypersensitivity to details of differentiation.  In fact, the differences between Japan and South Korea may not matter so much, but some politicians can gain political dividends by manipulating such small differences, which could be converted into opposition or even hatred.  It is not something that can happen overnight for Japan and South Korea to reach a settlement on historical issues, but it is necessary to be alert to some politicians' manipulation of the small differences between the two countries. |
| Lü Benfu | Opinion | Global Times | August 5, 2019 | China | How South Korea can deal with a debilitating Japanese ban on semiconductor exports | Since the beginning of July, South Korea has played almost all of its cards to deal with Japan's export controls. Seoul reported Tokyo at a WTO meeting for tightening export curbs. The former is stepping up diplomatic overtures to the US to mediate and is boycotting Japanese products. But all those tactics are seemingly having little effect.  Reading the Art of War, an ancient Chinese military treatise, one will get a better understanding of the situation.  "If equally matched, we can offer battle; if slightly inferior in numbers, we can avoid the enemy; if quite unequal in every way, we can flee from him. Hence, though an obstinate fight may be made by a small force, in the end it must be captured by the larger force," reads the book.  It means if a weak troop stubbornly fought to the end in a fight, it would be captured by the stronger one.  Reports show that Japan's tighter export curbs due to go into effect will target three materials: fluorinated polyimides, photoresists and hydrogen fluoride. The three chemical ingredients are indispensable to South Korea's semiconductor manufacturing.  The semiconductor industry is a pillar industry in South Korea. The South Korean economy grew 2.7 percent in 2018. If the contribution of the semiconductor industry is excluded, economic growth rate would fall to 1.4 percent. South Korea cannot afford to lose the semiconductor industry.  The development path of South Korea's semiconductor industry in the past 20 years or so has been very successful. As Japanese chipmakers, such as Toshiba, withdrew from semiconductor manufacturing, South Korean companies grabbed the opportunity to take over the memory card market.  Enterprises such as Samsung and SK Hynix have quickly risen in the global chip market, showing the outside world a high-tech image of South Korea, which is dominating the upstream industry chain. However, over-dependence on the semiconductor industry has led to distortion of the country's economy.  There are three major steps in the semiconductor manufacturing process: design, manufacturing and assembling and testing. Key equipment and materials are needed in the latter two steps, as they are the guarantee for smooth chip-making.  Japan's hard-core capability lies in its raw materials and hardware equipment production. As technical thresholds, especially for material production, are high, products made by many Japanese enterprises are irreplaceable.  Facing the competition from the US and South Korea, the Japanese industry was forced to transform and upgrade, moving upstream in the industrial chain. Given its advanced technology, the best choice for Japan is to move upstream.  China can learn the lessons from the trade row between Japan and South Korea. An ideal strategy is to develop both upstream and downstream technologies. When it comes to supplies, one should not put all eggs in one basket and try to maintain more suppliers rather than one. |
| Su Hao | Opinion | Global Times | August 4, 2019 | China | Japan needs to balance alliance with a prickly US amid China’s rise | Japan is regarded as a maritime country whose strategic security depends on the US. Sometimes Japan's policy is oriented by continental strategy; sometimes it is oriented by maritime strategy; and sometimes the country emphasizes both aspects.  In modern times, Japan's policy has been oriented by continental strategy. Since the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan has been seeking to control East Asia. Tokyo attempted to use East Asia as a strategic platform to support its hegemony, or dominating position, in Asia.  World War II overturned such ambitions of Japan but the country hasn't completely given it up. This orientation is to some extent still influencing Tokyo's needs and policies.  The development of Japan's maritime strategy can be viewed in two phases. During the Cold War, Japan gradually recovered its military strength and economy under the security alliance with the US and gained its status in East Asia by taking advantage of its economic development.  Japan later established a Japan-led economic order in East Asia, which Japanese scholars called the flying geese paradigm (FGP) in 1930s - division of labor in East Asia based on dynamic comparative advantages. It means "one economy, like the first goose in a V-shaped formation, can lead other economies toward industrialization, passing older technologies down to the followers as its own incomes rise and it moves into newer technologies," as The New York Times put it.  Japan had enjoyed the FGP concept for a long time, which positioned Japan as a leading power in terms of economic development in East Asia. So, despite China's rapid growth, Japan still believed that its own high-end manufacturing industry was in dominant position in the region.  In the late 1990s, Japan realized it needed to coordinate with rapidly developing China, which was becoming the leading power in the region while bringing about changes in the regional economic structure. The FGP upheld by Japan then turned into what I call "hinge paradigm."  With all-round industries' development, China can easily cooperate with other countries in East Asia. Japan is also part of cooperation in the region. But it is no longer the leader of the "flying geese," yet an important hinge.  Japan feels the pressure from China in spheres like economy and security, in particular after China surpassed Japan to become the world's second largest economy in 2010 and the Diaoyu Island question deteriorated in 2012. Hence, Japan reconsidered its strategies and put more effort into maritime expansion.  When former US president Barack Obama advocated his rebalance to Asia-Pacific strategy, Japan found its maritime position with support of the US.  But after US President Donald Trump took office, Japan felt uncertain about Trump's diplomacy and thus began to adjust its moves, which led to its current dilemma.  On the one hand, Japan has clearly realized that, without China, it will have limited economic growth. In the meantime, Japan won't turn its back on the security alliance with the US.  Japan wants to maintain good relations with both China and the US. But the question is how it will balance its different needs from the two powers.  On the other hand, Japan has begun to discover that Trump is unreliable. During the G20 summit in Japan, Trump said that the security treaty between the US and Japan doesn't favor the US as the treaty only demands Washington to guard Tokyo but not vice versa. Trump thought the treaty was unfair, which shocked Japan. Tokyo thus began to consider keeping some distance from Washington. |
| Chen Yang | Opinion | Global Times | July 28, 2019 | China | For Abe, victory comes with a caveat | Japan's governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), led by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and junior partner Komeito won a majority of the seats in election to the House of Councillors or the Upper House election, on July 21. According to The Nikkei, "Of the 124 seats that were contested, the ruling coalition secured 71, with Abe's LDP winning 57. That is enough to give the coalition a majority in the Upper House."  The election result reflects Japan's public mandate. The victory of the ruling party in the Upper House election indicates that Abe administration's policies are generally recognized by most Japanese. Meanwhile, voting for the ruling party shows the citizens' desire for stability.  According to the Japanese Constitution, members of the Upper House serve six-year terms and about half the seats are up for grabs every three years. This time, 124 of the 245 seats were up for grabs. After the election, the LDP holds 113 seats in the Upper House. That being said, even if the LDP has more than half the seats in the Upper House, it can be argued that the foundation of its support is not quite strong.  Moreover, the Upper House is not as important as the House of Representatives, or the Lower House, in Japan. When there is a disagreement between the Upper House and the Lower House, the country's Constitution "grants more power to the Lower House by giving its decision precedence," said The Mainichi.  Since Abe assumed office as prime minister for the second time in 2012, he has been committed to amending Japan's postwar pacifist Constitution. But securing more than half the seats in the Upper House is not enough. Japan's Constitution stipulates that a proposed amendment must be approved by a supermajority of two-thirds of the elected membership of each house. But this condition has not been met.  Now Abe has only two years left in office and faces time constraints to amend the Constitution. Although the LDP, the Komeito, the Japan Innovation Party (JIP), the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP) and some individuals without party affiliation who are members of the National Diet support the revision of the Constitution, the specific plans of each party for the amendment are different.  For example, the LDP advocates the revision of Article 9 of the Constitution, the JIP wants to reduce the members of the National Diet, and the CDP insists on limiting the rights of a prime minister to dissolve the Lower House. It means the game among different parties is complicated.  In addition, the attitude of the Japanese toward constitutional revision has not changed with Abe's long-term governance. According to a poll released by the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute in April last year, only 29 percent of respondents think it is necessary for Japan to revise the Constitution. And any constitutional revision requires a national referendum.  The Abe administration may be able to persuade members of the National Diet to support constitutional amendments through political promises and exchange of interests, etc. But it is obviously difficult to make the Japanese people to accept it. |
| TELLY NATHALIA | News Analysis | Jakarta Globe | August 3, 2019 | Indonesia | Indonesia Urges Japan, South Korea to Prioritize Shared Interests to Ease Tensions | Indonesia urged Japan and South Korea to prioritize their shared interests after tensions between the two neighbors peaked during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Bangkok on Friday.  The tension flared earlier in the day, after the Japanese government announced that it would remove South Korea from its export whitelist. The South Korean government responded in kind by removing Japan from its export whitelist.  The quarrel involves the decades-old issue of compensation for Korean forced labor during the Japanese occupation of World War II. The Japanese government did pay compensation in 1965, but many people in South Korea continue to raise the matter, demanding that some Japanese companies also compensate victims.    The two countries' foreign ministers, who attended the Asean Plus Three (APT) meeting between the foreign ministers of the 10 member states of the regional bloc and their Chinese, Japanese and South Korean counterparts, issued strongly worded statements on their dispute.  In her statement, South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha touched on the importance of the Regional Cooperation on Economic Partnership (RCEP).  "We must choose to enlarge the piece of the pie that we all share through expanding the free flow of commerce, rather than taking steps to shrink it. Unfortunately, that fundamental principle is being challenged in our own region," Kang said.  "In this regard, I am compelled to draw your attention to the decision made by Japan just this morning to remove my country from its list of trading partners that receive comprehensive export preferential treatment in a unilateral and arbitrary manner," she added.    She said her government was gravely concerned about the Japanese government's decision, as it would affect about 1,000 export items from South Korea.  Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono responded by saying that South Korea can still enjoy equal trade status along with Asean member states.  "I have not heard any complaints from our Asean friends about our export-management measures. ROK [the Republic of Korea] has been and is going to enjoy preferred status, or equal status with our Asean friends and I don't know what is the so-called complaint by Foreign Minister Kang. Maintaining effective export control over sensitive goods and technology from a security perspective is Japan's responsibility as a member of the international community," Kono said.  "Japan's necessary and legitimate review of its export control is fully compatible with the free-trade regime, including the WTO agreement and relevant rules; you all know that. That is why we have not got any complaints from Asean countries. I don't think there is going to be any issues concerning this," he continued.  The two countries' Asean counterparts responded by urging their foreign ministers to consider stability in their region.  South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha. (Photo courtesy of Asean Thailand 2019)  South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha. (Photo courtesy of Asean Thailand 2019)  Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono. (Photo courtesy of Asean Thailand 2019)  Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono. (Photo courtesy of Asean Thailand 2019)  Indonesia's Response  Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said she raised four topics, including a response to the Japanese-South Korean dispute, during the APT meeting.  She said Indonesia called on other participants, especially Japan and South Korea, to remember how the APT was formed – through cooperation and trust among its members.  "So, communalities should be prioritized over differences. We therefore urge [all parties involved] in the very dynamic situation of the world and region not to forget to prioritize communalities," she told reporters after the meeting, referring to the tensions between the two neighbors.  She said countries participating in the APT managed to overcome the 1998 Asian financial crisis because of their strong resilience, but added that this resilience cannot remain without member states' efforts to maintain it.  "Indonesia highlighted that trust and friendship must be maintained, so we can send a signal to the world that APT countries can, through trust, friendship and the promotion of communalities, respond to new challenges in the region and the world. Because we know these APT countries [Japan and South Korea] are economic powerhouses in the region," Retno said.  Call for Dialogue  Separately, on the sidelines of Asean ministerial meeting on Friday, South Korean Foreign Minister Kang again expressed her country's strong regret of the Japanese government's decision to remove its close neighbor from its export whitelist.  She urged Japan to immediately reverse the decision. In a press conference with South Korean media in Bangkok in the afternoon, Kang called for dialogue with Japan to end the dispute and ease tensions between the two countries. |
| Kornelius Purba | Opinion | The Jakarta Post | July 25, 2019 | Indonesia | Japan-South Korea quarrels annoying for neighbors | Urusai (noisy)! I remembered the Japanese word often uttered by my mother when CNN reported that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had punished South Korean President Moon Jae-in by suddently restricting Japan’s pivotal exports to its neighbor. Japan occupied Korea for 35 years until 1945. Abe was apparently outraged with Moon’s repeated demands that Japan should pay more compensation for victims of forced labor and sex slavery. Japan insisted that it had paid all war obligations. Japan totally differed from Germany, which had officially and wholeheartedly apologized to all victims of Hitler’s crimes and paid all its obligations, including compensation for victims. Japan chose its own way to prove its remorse, but it was unacceptable for most of its former colonies. But no matter how firmly its former colonies demand fair settlement of the war impacts, Japan will stay stubborn. A compromise is also unlikely. Both PM Abe and President Moon, however, should remember that their prolonged conflicts and quarrels will make them both losers. Amid a worsening trade war between the United States and China, the unpredictibility of US President Donald Trump and the possible “alliance” between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, the two nations have spent so much energy on an endless dispute over history. The two countries also have their separate problems with neighbor China, and even with Russia. If my mother were still alive, I am pretty sure she would be on Moon’s side. My late mother often cited her bitter experience with Japanese soldiers during the occupation of Indonesia for three years and six months until 1945. She said the Dutch colonial power occupied Indonesia for over three centuries, but Japan left a much more painful impact on the people. She was a teenager when the Japanese military invaded Indonesia, living in a small town in North Sumatra. “My parents had to shave all my hair and told me to behave like a crazy girl. Japanese soldiers very often grabbed young women whom they found on the street or when they raided our village, and took them to their trucks. Most never returned,” she often said. She was unhappy when she knew I worked for a Japanese newspaper in Jakarta. When she personally met my boss, she asked, “Has Japan changed?” when I told her that I was well paid and treated excellently. PM Abe shocked South Koreans with his recent decision to restrict exports to South Korea of fluorinated polyimide, resist and hydrogen fluoride — three chemicals used to make semiconductors, smartphones and television screens. Japan has also threatened to remove its former colony from its “white list” of trading partners that enjoy preferential trade treatment from Japan. Ironically, Abe announced his punitive action just after boasting during last month’s Group of 20 Summit that Japan would always champion a “free and open economy”. His decision seemed well planned because he refused to meet Moon bilaterally during the Osaka summit. Japan’s government clearly has lost patience with President Moon. Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide came up with the excuse: “Japan’s export curbs are based on national security reasons.” Clearly Abe’s main message to South Korea was that enough is enough. “President Moon has crossed the demarkation line,” a Japanese official told The Jakarta Post recently. Japan insists that all war-related compensation had been settled between the two countries in 1965. Abe was angry when Moon dropped the “comfort women” agreement that he signed with then-South Korean president Park Geun-hye in 2015. The Supreme Court of South Korea also recently obliged payment of more compensation to forced laborers who worked for the Japanese military during the occupation. Upset that Japan had mixed politics and economics, Moon also warned that Japan would lose more than his country. “Japan’s export restrictions have broken the framework of economic cooperation between South Korea and Japan that had continued for over half a century based on mutual dependence,” President Moon reacted last week. According to the former human rights lawyer, “eventually, it will be the Japanese economy that will be damaged more.” South Korea took the case to the World Trade Organization, demanding that Japan scrap its unilateral acts. The case was deliberated on Tuesday and Wednesday. Reports said Tokyo maintained it had imposed the sanction because of “inadequate management” of its exports by Seoul. “We have a problem of history with Japan. It has nothing to do with our economic cooperation,” a South Korean official told the Post. Koreans both in the North and South had to endure unimaginable suffering from the brutality of Japanese soldiers during the occupation. Chinese people were also forced to experience the same horrors from Japanese occupation forces for 14 years until 1945. Other Asian countries including Indonesia were also occupied by Japan, which claimed to have saved Asians from western colonialization. Yet for Indonesia and the nine other member states of ASEAN, Japan and South Korea are strategic economic and trading partners. Their investment is one of the key factors for this region’s economic growth. It will not just be disturbing, but even annoying if Japan and South Korea cannot control their temper and continue to attack each other. Urusai! Most Viewed ‘Mudik’: You want me to turn back? No way! Chinese university campus plan meets resistance in Budapest How to lose belly fat in seven days As Indonesia detects India and South Africa variants, fears grow over possible case spikes Thousands march in Pakistan Shia procession as virus cases soar New Zealand declines to call China's Uyghur treatment genocide Indonesia close to following India`s COVID-19 surge India sees record Covid-19 deaths, new cases in 24 hours Chinese Navy to help salvage sunken KRI Nanggala 402 submarine US eyes working with Japan to bolster deterrence for Taiwan peace |
| Hiroshi Minegishi | Opinion | Nikkei Asia | August 25, 2019 | Japan | South Korea's Moon torn by split personality when it comes to Japan | South Korea's Moon torn by 'split personality' when it comes to Japan  President lacks clear principles for managing relations between Seoul and Tokyo  President Moon Jae-in's past as a student activist comes forth when he addresses sensitive issues in relations with Japan. © Reuters  HIROSHI MINEGISHI, Nikkei senior staff writer  August 25, 2019 13:51 JST  TOKYO -- South Korean President Moon Jae-in has two public personas when it comes to dealing with Japan: the statesman and the activist.  In his address marking South Korea's Liberation Day on Aug. 15, which celebrates the end of Japanese colonial rule on the peninsula, Moon avoided stirring up nationalistic, anti-Japanese sentiment. One line in particular stood out. "If Japan chooses the path of dialogue and cooperation, we will gladly join hands," he said.  But Moon's basic policy toward Japan remains unchanged. This was clearly reflected in his government's decision on Thursday to discontinue an intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan, known as the General Security of Military Information Agreement.  During my most recent stint in Seoul, which lasted from April 2015 to until March 2018, I had an opportunity to meet Moon soon after his inauguration. He impressed me with his friendly demeanor and gentlemanly behavior. He did not seem to be lying when he said he wanted to repair South Korea's strained relationship with Japan.  On such occasions, Moon behaves as head of state -- the person formally representing his country.  But his colors can change surprisingly quickly. When he discusses issues related to the troubled history between South Korea and Japan, he takes on the persona of a student activist turned left-leaning politician. In this guise, he is quick to heap criticism on Japan.  Only two weeks before his Aug. 15 address, Moon harshly denounced Japan's formal decision to downgrade South Korea's status as a preferred trade partner. "We will never overlook such circumstances where Japan, the instigator of these [past] wrongs, is turning on us," he said at an emergency cabinet meeting held to discuss Japan's action. "We will never again lose to Japan."  In his cabinet reshuffle on Aug. 9, Moon appointed You Youngmin, a reputed expert in semiconductor technology, as science minister, and picked Cho Kuk, who is known for his hard-line stance toward Japan, as his closest aide. Moon also expressed determination to fight Japan's "unjust" export controls, stressing that he would not make concessions over the issue.  Moon frequently switches between his activist and statesman roles. In his Liberation Day address last year, Moon also avoided criticizing Japan over historical issues. Instead he said, "Japanese Prime Minister Abe and I reached an agreement to closely cooperate to develop Korea-Japan relations in a forward-looking manner."  But Moon has failed to match those words with actions. His government unilaterally dissolved a fund established through a bilateral agreement to provide financial support to wartime "comfort women," and his response to a ruling by South Korea's Supreme Court ordering Japanese companies to pay compensation to Korean wartime laborers angered Tokyo and many Japanese people.  Moon's acerbic attacks and his contrasting calls for friendship between the two countries are both honest reflections of his personality. One explanation for his Jekyll-and-Hyde approach is that bilateral relations with Japan are less important to him than they were to his predecessors.  Rather than calling him anti-Japanese, it is probably more accurate to say that Moon has no clear principles for how to deal with Japan.  During his Aug. 15 speech, Moon devoted much time to his ideas for promoting Korean reunification. Despite the harsh treatment he has received from North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, Moon made clear that he remains committed to denuclearization in the North and creating a peace regime by the end of his term in 2022. His goal is full unification of the North and South by 2045 at the latest.  Moon once said development of North-South relations would give the Korean people more leverage in talks with the U.S., China and Japan. He has pledged to make every effort to secure peace on the Korean Peninsula.  He knows that better ties between Tokyo and Seoul and the normalization of Japan's relationship with North Korea are crucial to that peace. But Moon's worldview is centered on intra-Korean relations; Japan as just one piece of his geopolitical puzzle.  In fact, the largest factor in the total failure of the Abe and Moon administrations to understand each other may be the deep-seated and seemingly unbridgeable differences in their positions regarding Pyongyang.  After Moon's Liberation Day speech, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono expressed hope that Moon would exercise his leadership to break the impasse over the wartime labor issue. Seoul responded by filing a strong protest, calling Kono's remarks "highly deplorable." A South Korean diplomat explained it was a violation of diplomatic protocol for a nation's foreign minister to make demands of another nation's head of state.  The episode is just one instance of the cycle of miscommunication between the two capitals.  While Moon's Liberation Day speech was restrained in its criticism against Japan, it did not make any reference to the wartime labor issue. That leaves a root cause of the bilateral feud unresolved.  Seoul seems to think that Tokyo should first compromise on the issue of export controls. The Japanese side, meanwhile, insists that South Korea should first demonstrate its commitment to the 1965 treaty normalizing relations, which Tokyo says settled all claims for wartime reparations. The Abe government says the ball is in South Korea's court.  With no resolution in sight, South Korea scrapped the intelligence-sharing pact. Moon even turned a deaf ear to the U.S. call for the agreement to be extended, and its warning that abolishing it would undermine security cooperation among the three countries.  South Korea had hoped to mend ties with Japan by Oct. 22, when Emperor Naruhito will declare his enthronement at a ceremony that will be attended by leaders from around the world. Those hopes now look forlorn. |
| Jakarta Post | News Analysis | The Jakarta Post | February 2, 2021 | Indonesia | South Korea "downgrades" Japan's status in defense white paper | South Korea "downgrades" Japan's status in defense white paper This file photo taken on July 23, 2019 shows South Korean protestors cutting a banner with a picture of Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during a rally denouncing Japan for its recent trade restrictions against Seoul over wartime slavery disputes, near the Japanese embassy in Seoul. A visceral trade row between Japan and South Korea risks damaging both countries' national interests as their leaders seek to bolster domestic political positions, analysts say.  South Korea's Defense Ministry dropped its description of Japan as a "partner" in the latest defense white paper published Tuesday, a move painted by local media as a "downgrade" that reflects worsening ties between the two countries. In the previous white paper published two years ago, South Korea and Japan were described as "geographically and culturally close neighbors as well as partners cooperating for global peace and prosperity." The latest white paper states the two countries are "close neighbors that should cooperate not only for the two countries' relationships but also for peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia and the world." A ministry official said in a briefing that given Japan's stronger export controls implemented against South Korea in 2019, the ministry decided it was "reasonable" to call Japan a "neighbor" and stop at that. The downgrading in description was not the first. Biennially published South Korean defense white papers used to state the two countries "share the basic values of liberal democracy and market economies." But the white paper published in 2019 -- the first one released under the government of President Moon Jae In -- no longer contained that description. Japan-South Korea relations have long been difficult due to Japan's colonization of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945. But their ties have soured considerably in recent years, particularly after South Korean Supreme Court rulings in 2018 that ordered Japanese companies to compensate groups of Koreans for wartime forced labor. The latest white paper, meanwhile, blamed Japan for stalemating ties with South Korea by making "unilateral announcements that misrepresented facts" about such issues as Japan's claim to a pair of South Korean-controlled islets in the Sea of Japan and a 2018 close encounter between a Japanese surveillance plane and a South Korean destroyer. While pledging to "resolutely deal with unilateral and arbitrary measures taken by Japan," the white paper said South Korea will "continue cooperating" with Japan on |
| KAN KIMURA | Commentary | Japan Times | July 9, 2019 | Japan | South Korea's botched handling of wartime labor issue | On June 19, the South Korean government made Japan an interesting offer. It suggested that South Korean and Japanese companies set up a joint compensation fund through voluntary contributions. The fund would then be used to compensate those people deemed by the courts in an ongoing lawsuit to have been wartime forced laborers mobilized from the Korean Peninsula during World War II. Seoul made it clear that if Tokyo accepted its proposal, it would accede to Tokyo’s request for diplomatic talks based on the 1965 treaty known as the Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Co-operation between Japan and South Korea.  The Japanese government rejected the offer on the day it was made, and talks between the two countries once again reached an impasse.  The sudden proposal to set up a compensation fund is typical of the current South Korean government’s handling of historical issues between South Korea and Japan. Seoul’s policy is inconsistent. After the Supreme Court of Korea handed down its Oct. 30 judgment on conscripted factory workers, the South Korean government considered a bill for dealing with the decision, in which the most likely approach was the joint fund that it proposed last month. At the time, the Japanese government watched the progress of the bill with considerable interest.  In January, however, the South Korean government — or to be more precise, the Blue House — rejected the fund idea, claiming it was out of the question. Apparently, Seoul wanted the ball to be in Tokyo’s court. But in May, after the Japanese government proposed diplomatic consultations over the interpretation of the 1965 treaty, and called for the selection of arbitration board members based on the agreement, South Korea suddenly changed tack. Seoul began to hint that it was considering the fund after all, and once again waited for Japan to react.  The volte-face reveals South Korea’s lack of any consistent policy; it was simply making ad hoc responses to Tokyo.  Indeed, the details of the fund proposed by South Korea have yet to be worked out to any extent. Apparently the Japanese government is afraid that setting up a joint compensation fund would prompt many former Korean wartime laborers to come forward with their forced labor experiences, causing compensation to balloon. The latest proposal from Seoul leaves the question unanswered.  There is another issue: The South Korean government did not fully consult with the parties to the lawsuit in making its latest proposal. When it comes to historical recognition questions with Japan, the Moon administration often calls for an approach that puts the victims themselves front and center. The reality, however, is quite different.  For example, since November 2018, the South Korean government has worked to dissolve the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation, which was established on the basis of the Japan-South Korea “comfort women” agreement that was reached at the end of 2015. As a result, there have been delays in the payment of support funds to some former comfort women.  Now the same thing is happening with the wartime laborers. Almost 74 years after the end of World War II and Japanese colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula, the former forced laborers are well over 90 years old. The governments of the two countries are wasting what little time remains for the survivors. That hardly seems to be putting the victims front and center.  In the first place, an offer for diplomatic consultations on the interpretation of the 1965 treaty, and the selection of arbitration board members — both of which Japan is demanding — are procedures stipulated by the treaty, and the South Korean government is obliged to agree. It is inappropriate for Seoul to make its unilateral proposal a condition for its acceptance of diplomatic consultations. This is not an honest and sincere response, and criticism of it is only to be expected.  According to a prearranged plan, Japan’s proposal to hold diplomatic talks for selecting a third country that would choose the arbitration board members based on the treaty will be brought to the International Court of Justice separately after a deadline of 30 days has passed while waiting for the reply. Of course, the proceedings of the International Court of Justice will not commence unless both the Japanese and South Korean governments agree. In other words, unless the South Korean government agrees no proceedings will commence at all.  But what is important here is that the South Korean government’s current approach will make a strong impression on the international community, with its slippery handling of the historical issues that lie between it and Japan. As a former human rights lawyer, the president of South Korea really ought to do better. |
| The Jakarta Post | News Analysis | The Jakarta Post | January 8, 2021 | Indonesia | South Korea court orders Japan to compensate former "comfort women" | A South Korean court ordered the Japanese government on Friday to pay damages to a group of former "comfort women" over their treatment at Japanese military brothels during World War II, marking the first such court ruling in South Korea. The ruling is certain to further fray the already strained ties between the two countries over wartime labor compensation and other issues. In awarding the 12 plaintiffs 100 million won ($92,000) each as demanded, the Seoul Central District Court said sovereign immunity -- a concept under international law that the state is immune from the jurisdiction of the court of a foreign country -- cannot be applied to the case. The Japanese government has taken the position that the lawsuit should be dismissed on that ground and declined to be involved in the suit. In rejecting the application of sovereign immunity to the case, the court said it can be judged that the government "violated international norms by committing intentional, systematic and wide-ranging inhumane criminal acts." The plaintiffs claimed the manner in which they were compelled to work as comfort women, and treated while they did so, amounted to an "inhumane criminal act," and demanded the court not adopt sovereign immunity for their case. The plaintiffs consist of both living and dead including Lee Ok Son who is in her 90s and lives with other women at the "House of Sharing," a group home on the outskirts of Seoul for Korean women who were forced into wartime brothels. In August 2013, the women filed for court mediation seeking 100 million won each in damages from the Japanese government. But after Japan refused to accept the mediation, the case proceeded to a formal trial. With Japan refusing to accept relevant documents, the court considered papers served through a process known as public notification, and proceeded with the case. A ruling on a similar case is scheduled at the Seoul court on Wednesday. In that suit, 20 plaintiffs including the bereaved families of some former comfort women are seeking a total of 3 billion won from the Japanese government. The issue of comfort women has long been a source of tension between Japan and South Korea, and the two countries struck a deal in December 2015 to "finally and irreversibly" resolve the dispute. Using the 1 billion yen ($9.68 million) provided by the Japanese government as part of the deal, cash was distributed to former comfort women and the families of those who had died. But some women refused to accept it, calling instead for an official apology and compensation from Japan. Japan and South Korea have also been locked in a dispute stemming from 2018 South Korean Supreme Court rulings that ordered Japanese companies to compensate South Koreans for forced labor during Japan's 1910-1945 colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula. The dispute could worsen bilateral ties, which are already at a historic low, with court proceedings under way in South Korea to possibly liquidate Japanese firms' assets to compensate the plaintiffs. Japan says all claims related to its colonial rule were settled by a 1965 bilateral agreement under which it provided financial aid to Seoul on the understanding that the issue of compensation was resolved "completely and finally."  "Comfort women," used by the Japanese military used for sex, were present wherever the army invaded and occupied Asia countries from the early 1930s through the end of World War II. That aspect of wartime history was kept quiet until the early 1990s, when a South Korean woman came forward, joined by some others, seeking Japanese help and accountability. Since then, the two countries have been divided over how badly Japan treated comfort women and how it should atone for past behavior. That hasn't changed despite a 2015 agreement intended to resolve differences. After South Korean activists installed a "comfort woman" statue in front of the Japanese consulate in the South Korean port city of Busan, Japan announced last week that it would temporarily recall its ambassador to South Korea and suspend economic talks. (Read also: South Korean dies after setting himself ablaze over Japan deal) The divide is reflected in the term "comfort women" itself. Both countries use it, but it means different things to each: WHO ARE THE "COMFORT WOMEN"? The original Japanese word, "ianfu," is a euphemism for women sent to front-line brothels called "comfort stations." Recruited or captured in Japan, the Korean Peninsula, China, the Philippines and Indonesia and elsewhere in Asia, they were used by hundreds of brothels supervised by the military, which set the tariffs, service hours and hygiene standards. The idea was to prevent venereal diseases and avoid triggering anti-Japanese sentiment by deterring Japan's troops from raping local women. Japan says there is no official record of the number of comfort women. Estimates by Japanese historians range from 20,000 to 200,000 depending on the parameters used. Initially, some were adult prostitutes or women from poor Japanese families, historians say. Later in the war, many non-Japanese, sometimes minors, were kidnapped or tricked into working in the brothels, some victims have said. Japan and South Korea also used their own comfort women for American GIs after the war. Japan's government set up brothels soon after its surrender in 1945 for US servicemen pouring into the country and hired as many as 70,000 Japanese prostitutes, though Gen. Douglas MacArthur closed them in 1946. Seoul had a similar system for American troops during the Korean War. In 2014, more than 100 of the South Korean comfort women filed a lawsuit against their own government, demanding restoration of human dignity and compensation; that lawsuit remains pending. WHAT TERM MEANS IN JAPAN In Japan, comfort women initially were considered victims of World War II atrocities and thought to have come mainly from South Korea and the Philippines. Dozens from the two countries regularly visited Japan demanding official government apologies and compensation mainly in the 1990s-2000s. Years of continuous pressure for apologies have soured the initial sympathy, though, and many Japanese have grown weary of reminders of their country's wartime past. Some argue the women were not coerced but volunteered to be prostitutes for the military. During Shinzo Abe's first term as prime minister in 2006-2007, his Cabinet adopted an official line that there was a lack of documentary proof the women were forcibly recruited or put to work in the wartime brothels. In 2016, Abe told a parliamentary session that replacing the term "ianfu" with "sex slaves" was inaccurate and said the widely used estimation of 200,000 women was groundless. Abe expressed his sympathy for the women, but described them as victims of human trafficking. He has repeatedly denied the women were coerced into sexual slavery. Japan has lobbied the United Nations to remove the word "sex slaves" from documents related to the issue. Japan's largest newspaper, the Yomiuri, apologized in 2014 for using the expression "sex slaves" in its English edition in the past, promising not to use it again. Japan issued an apology in 1993 and a government investigation concluded many women were taken against their will and "lived in misery under a coercive atmosphere." A fund set up in 1995 paid nearly 5 billion yen (US$44 million) for medical and welfare projects for more than 280 of the women, including 61 South Koreans. Many victims in that country rejected the fund money under their powerful support group's stance to keep seeking further official apologies. Japan maintains all its wartime compensation issues with South Korea have been settled by a 1965 treaty. WHAT TERM MEANS IN SOUTH KOREA Most South Koreans prefer the term "comfort women" even though it is adopted from their former colonial ruler. Critics of the euphemism say it makes light of the women's suffering, but the victims themselves generally have preferred it, perceiving more stigma from being called sex slaves. South Korea was a more deeply conservative society and talking publicly about sex-related topics was taboo in the 1990s, when the women began revealing their long-hidden experiences. The South Korean government uses the phrase "comfort women of the Japanese military" to reflect the victims' preferences. The main support group for the women that organizes weekly protests outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul uses "comfort women" in its Korean-language documents, with an explanation of the meaning. It uses the phrase "military sexual slavery by Japan" in English statements. "I personally hope we don't call them 'comfort women.' When Americans or other foreigners hear this term, I think they would say, 'What's that?'" said Jung Hye-kyung, an expert on Japanese colonial abuses. Of the 239 South Korean women who officially registered themselves as comfort women, to obtain subsidies and benefits, only 40 are still alive. Experts believe many others have never come forward. \_\_\_ Kim reported from Seoul, South Korea. |
| KUNI MIYAKE | Commentary | Japan Times | August 16, 2019 | Japan | Tragedies over the trade spat with Seoul | Two junior directors from the South Korean trade ministry and their Japanese counterparts held an unusual six-hour meeting in Tokyo last Friday. It was a nightmare scenario for those who recall the security coordination between the United States, Japan and South Korea during the Cold War. Back then, the de facto tripartite hub-and-spoke alliance was solid and functional. Those four officials in charge of security-related export control may not be senior enough to remember the good old days of the 1980s.  For Tokyo, the measures announced July 1 were a well-crafted, World Trade Organization-consistent “silver bullet” that would hopefully put an end to the ongoing disputes with South Korea.  Optimistic Japanese officials, therefore, might have been startled to see a New York Times article on July 15 that said “Mr. Abe became the latest world leader to strike a blow against free trade, when he moved to limit South Korea’s access to Japanese chemicals … citing vague and unspecified concerns about national security.”  The article went on to say that “the Japanese exporters will need to apply for licenses for each one, a process that can take up to 90 days. Additionally, Japan has indicated it may remove South Korea from a list of countries that are exempt from licensing requirements for exports with possible military applications.”  While officials in Tokyo might have thought it was a great idea at first, they did not anticipate that the rest of the world would misunderstand and consider the measures another example of a nation using trade measures to coerce other nations over unrelated issues, which U.S. President Donald Trump always likes to resort to.  Obviously, South Korean officials see this in a different way. They suspect Japan is trying to retaliate over bilateral political disputes that Tokyo says were settled “completely and finally” when the two countries normalized relations in 1965. While many pundits tend to link Tokyo’s trade measures with political issues, the following is my take on this tragedy.  Japan didn’t use national security to limit trade.  The July 1 measures do not restrict free trade. Tokyo still treats South Korea as one of many ordinary nations equally subject to a regular process of obtaining an export license for each case, which can take up to 90 days but in most cases is much shorter. South Korea is not discriminated against, but it just loses some privileges.  Japan didn’t cite vague national security concerns.  Make no mistake. Some South Korean companies have inadequately managed the specialized chemicals under the category of “controlled items” with potential military applications. Tokyo did not disclose details only because they are usually highly classified. No country discusses intelligence in public, either.  Japan made a mistake in making the measures seen as retaliation.  Some Japanese officials may have misled and confused journalists by inadvertently referring to the ongoing disputes between Japan and South Korea. In Japan, this issue has been mainly handled by trade ministry officials, whose lack of diplomatic knowledge and skills might have further aggravated the confusion.  Economic pressure doesn’t work and is even counterproductive.  It would be a tragedy if anyone in the Japanese government was too naive to believe that the July 1 measures would eventually force the South Korean leaders to change their policy toward Japan. As in the case of U.S.-Iran disputes, U.S. economic sanctions would never successfully persuade the mullahs in Qom.  The U.S. won’t mediate.  If you have two best friends who fight against each other, which one of the two will you help? Of course, the answer is none. For the U.S., the most urgent concern is Iran and by no means the Korean Peninsula. I would be surprised if the Trump administration ran a risk of losing one of Washington’s most important allies or both.  The markets will have the final say.  By the same token, neither South Korean President Moon Jae-in nor Prime Minister Shinzo Abe can run the risk of making concessions and giving in to the other. There is a peculiar state of political cohabitation between the two leaders. In this environment, it may have to be the business community in South Korea or Japan, or both, that puts an end to this game of chicken.  South Korea keeps moving the goal posts.  How long should Japan wait for a final rapprochement with Koreans? As I wrote as far back as 2013, fear has been growing that South Korean leaders, by moving the goal posts, are just fanning anti-Japanese sentiment for domestic political purposes, and that Japan can never alter those Korean attitudes.  In October 1998, then-South Korean President Kim Dae-jung visited Japan. He stressed the need for forgiveness and reconciliation in the bilateral relationship with Japan. In an address to the Diet, Kim even stated that the bilateral joint declaration issued during that visit would put an end to the history disputes.  His remarks deeply moved many Japanese, including myself. We truly believed that a new era had come to Japan-South Korea relations and hoped that the previous 50-some years of sincere efforts would finally bring about mutual benefits. Yet, 21 years later, Tokyo now feels that something is changing in South Korea.  What has changed is South Korea’s foreign policy. No matter how unrealistic it may sound, Koreans finally see an opportunity to become the owner of their history. North Koreans call it juche ideology and the current South Korean president seems to believe in the idea.  Is Seoul worse than Pyongyang? Hardly. Think strategically. South Korea shares democracy, freedom, human rights and other universal values that Japan has upheld for the past 70 years. It is to the interest of Japan to see a free, stable, independent and democratic (even if not pro-Japan) Korean state in East Asia.  If South Korea does not come back to the tripartite security alliance, does spiting South Koreans with humiliating but still WTO-consistent trade measures make sense at all? I strongly doubt that. What Japan needs is a strategy, not a fruitless and unpleasant pastime. The Chinese and Russians are laughing at us, aren’t they? |
| ANDREW INJOO PARK  &  Elliot Silverberg | Commentary | Japan Times | July 16, 2019 | Japan | For U.S., Japan-South Korea ties are too important to fail | One of the biggest disappointments of U.S. President Donald Trump’s Asia policy has been his inability to facilitate stronger relations between Japan and South Korea — America’s two most important allies in the region.  For more than 20 years, Japanese and South Korean leaders have discussed building a “future-oriented” relationship, but fundamental historical differences remain an insurmountable obstacle. Seoul’s recent effective withdrawal from a 2015 agreement with Tokyo on the “comfort women” issue, as well as South Korean Supreme Court rulings ordering Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Nippon Steel to compensate Koreans conscripted for wartime labor during Japan’s colonial rule, have aggravated historical tensions.  In March, South Korean shop owners launched a nationwide boycott of Japanese goods, with lawmakers from Gyeonggi province near Seoul even proposing that all such products be affixed with a “made by war criminals” sticker. Following last month’s Group of 20 summit in Osaka, where the extent of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s interaction with South Korean President Moon Jae-in was a perfunctory handshake during the formal welcoming ceremony, Japan imposed export regulations on South Korea that threaten to disrupt global supply chains of microchips and smartphone displays. In response, Samsung’s heir apparent and South Korean trade officials have engaged Japanese counterparts in Tokyo without success, and the Moon administration is preparing a case against Japan at the World Trade Organization.  Domestic politics also contributes to this paradoxical cycle of rapprochement and tensions. The two countries’ economic interdependence provides a safety net for leaders on both sides to parlay nationalist sentiments tied to historical differences into political leverage without fully severing their necessary relationship. A notable example is former South Korean President Lee Myung-bak’s ploy to “show the flag” against Japan with a visit to the disputed Takeshima/Dokdo islands in 2012, which saw his approval ratings nearly double in just two weeks. Tokyo’s and Seoul’s heated responses to an unresolved incident between a South Korean navy vessel and Japanese reconnaissance plane last December suggest that both governments remain willing to play nationalist politics no matter the broader strategic consequences.  Since the 1990s, the United States has tried to unite its two democratic allies by focusing on North Korea. However, while North Korean denuclearization remains a necessary focus of cooperation, the present contradictions in U.S., Japanese, and South Korean views on dealing with Pyongyang underscore the difficulty of forging a unified approach. North Korea by itself will not be enough to unite Japan and South Korea.  Instead, coordinated efforts to offset both countries’ tepid economic growth, aging demographics and economic overdependence on China may provide that focus. Despite (or perhaps in light of) Seoul’s failure to resist Beijing’s economic retaliation for accepting the U.S.-made Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system in 2017, Japanese and South Korean views are increasingly aligned against China.  A case in point is South Korea’s mixed response to the U.S. boycott of Chinese 5G technology. Despite the South Korean government’s continued tolerance of Chinese 5G, a trilateral private sector coalition appears to be forming against Huawei. In October, Samsung joined with Japan’s NEC to develop a platform rivaling Huawei’s. And last month, Samsung, with the Trump administration’s blessing, announced a joint venture with AMD, America’s top graphics card producer, just as AMD was severing its relationship with Huawei. This loose alliance of Huawei competitors suggests there may be a groundswell of public support for trilateral U.S.-Japan-South Korea cooperation against Chinese economic coercion.  The U.S. can capitalize on this. One way forward is to promote further Japan-South Korea cooperation in high-technology sectors where interests align. Like Japan, South Korea faces an imminent population crisis that imperils its long-term economic prospects. Setting aside the boundless possibilities for co-innovation in the so-called silver market of geriatric health services and wellness goods, Tokyo’s and Seoul’s efforts to invest in emerging, high-growth markets overseas may provide an additional layer of opportunities for both countries to jointly bolster their individual domestic economic revitalization policies.  But while Moon’s New Southern Policy of rapid economic diversification into Southeast Asia is ambitious, South Korea’s public sector presence there remains weak. Japan, on the other hand, has been a leader in development assistance to Southeast Asian countries since the 1950s. Underscoring its commitment to the Indo-Pacific, Japan announced in 2016 a new “quality infrastructure” initiative for building roads, railways, bridges and ports in the region.  However, China’s dramatic technological advancement threatens Japan’s comparative advantage in infrastructure build-outs. Although Japan remains a leader in research and development, China has already surpassed Japan both in the quality and quantity of its scientific output. In 2015, Beijing dealt a significant blow to Japan, outbidding the latter’s state-of-the-art bullet train technology in an Indonesian tender for high speed rail. Although the “Belt and Road” initiative faces challenges, Beijing’s “Made in China 2025” plans for global technological hegemony are proceeding apace — particularly in key industries like clean energy technology, semiconductors, advanced electrical equipment and artificial intelligence.  Today, the two countries promote energy access in vulnerable markets across the Indo-Pacific. For example, the Japan-U.S. Strategic Energy Partnership (JUSEP) aligns Tokyo’s $10 billion commitment to regional capacity building with Washington’s Asia EDGE (Enhancing Development and Growth through Energy) initiative. JUSEP is already helping to deliver liquified natural gas and other renewable fuels to India and Sri Lanka, countering China’s “string of pearls” strategy to occupy various military and commercial choke points in the Indian and Pacific oceans.  One U.S. approach to further cooperation in this crucial area of geopolitical competition is a trilateral business forum. Despite the ongoing strain on bilateral industry relations since the Japan-Korea Economic Association’s indefinite postponement of its annual business conference, originally slated for May, there are signs of considerable enthusiasm for this variety of summitry. Indeed, on a bilateral level, the Korea-Japan Cooperation Foundation for Industry and Technology has already advocated for private-sector cooperation in Southeast Asia since at least the early 2010s.  Even with the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Washington too remains committed to multiple high-profile projects supporting multilateral economic engagement in Asia. The Trump administration’s flagship Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, the subsequent launch of the inaugural Indo-Pacific Business Forum in Washington last July, and Congress’s passage in 2018 of the BUILD Act (establishing the U.S. International Development Finance Corp.) and the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (submitting a bipartisan vision for U.S. economic policy in Asia) all illustrate the U.S. government’s sustained zeal for trade facilitation and capacity building across the region’s developing markets.  As recently as May 2018, Keidanren helped organize a seventh Japan-China-South Korea Business Summit in Tokyo, bringing together the leaders of all three countries in a large meeting of senior policymakers and business influencers. That same month, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Keidanren and the Federation of Korean Industries met to consider over-the-horizon opportunities in North Korea — reflecting broad private sector enthusiasm for coordinating in emerging markets. While the Blue House has been slow to pick up on this industry interest in tapping the developing world, it is high time the U.S., Japanese and South Korean governments came together to organize a similar trilateral conference of industry decision-makers.  Finally, the U.S. must help both countries tackle their history. Past bilateral efforts to address painful historical differences have been largely unsuccessful, particularly when Japan’s imperial legacy is intentionally distorted. Despite the country’s repeated formal apologies to South Korea for its activities during World War II, a research committee formed in 2002, comprising a dozen academics from both countries, was unable to resolve its differences — with the panel settling on “parallel histories” and skirting the most controversial areas of disagreement. Another joint task force begun in 2006, this time addressing historical differences with China, was similarly inconclusive about contentious topics like the Nanking Massacre.  In February, 226 Japanese intellectuals issued a statement expressing concern about the two countries’ persistent historical tensions, arguing that “mutual understanding” and “reflection and apology” were necessary for good relations. However, as younger, apology-fatigued Japanese forget the lessons of the nation’s wartime past, self-reflection becomes increasingly far-fetched. A sustained civilian-led dialogue, unbound from the trappings of public diplomacy, may thus be the only way to reshape a unified historical understanding needed for durable relations.  Accordingly, the U.S. should move beyond encouraging its two allies to pursue a fixedly government-led solution. A compensation fund, like the one set up with the agreement on the comfort women issue, can be revoked by any new administration. Likewise, no elite task force, however actionable its recommendations, can single-handedly overturn decades of entrenched cultural convictions.  Rather, what is needed is a lengthy and candid civic conversation bringing together a variety of ordinary citizens from both countries — including academics, educators, students, journalists and business leaders. No amount of geopolitical and economic statecraft, even centered on shared national interests, alone can bypass the undercurrent of mutual suspicion that festers between Japan and South Korea. |
| MICHAEL MACARTHUR BOSACK | Commentary | Japan Times | July 18, 2019 | Japan | Remembering the role Japan played in the Forgotten War | NIIGATA – Next week will mark the 66th anniversary of the Korean War Armistice. On July 27, 1953, representatives from North Korea and United Nations Command — the multinational coalition formed in 1950 to counter North Korean aggression — signed the agreement and brought an end to three years of fighting that claimed at least 2.8 million lives, both military and civilian. Despite its brutal cost, the war earned the nickname the “Forgotten War” outside of the Korean Peninsula and has been treated as an epilogue to World War II, both at the time of the conflict and in historical memory afterward.  Among the oft-overlooked features of the Forgotten War was the role of Japan, a nation still reconciling its defeat in World War II. Given the recent deterioration of ties between Japan and South Korea, it’s worth remembering Japan’s contribution to the coalition effort in the Korean War, if for no other reason than to recognize how deeply intertwined these two countries’ security interests are in the modern era. The stability of the Korean Peninsula has and will continue to be critical to Japan, and Japan still stands to play a vital role in support of coalition operations against North Korean aggression if diplomacy should fail as it did nearly 70 years ago.  In 1950, Japan was an occupied nation still struggling to regain its sovereignty and to rebuild itself in the aftermath of defeat. There was no formal military, in part because of the 1947 Constitution that formally renounced war and the maintenance of military forces, though there was an embryonic naval force in the form of the Maritime Safety Agency established in 1947. At the behest of the Occupation authorities, the agency started its operations with former Imperial Navy minesweepers clearing Japanese ports after the war. Meanwhile, the Japanese economy was flagging, still seeking to regain its footing after the dissolution of the old zaibatsu (family-owned conglomerate) system and the transition from military industry to commercial goods.  When North Korea invaded South Korea in June 1950, the U.S. Occupation forces were among the first to answer the call. A major question for the Occupation leadership was what to do with Japan: Few were ready for it to remilitarize, but the country’s strategic potential vis-a-vis the Korean Peninsula was too important to leave untapped. The answer was to include Japan in the war effort, though not under the auspices of the U.N. Command structure that was formed shortly after the declaration of an armed attack against South Korea.  Japan was not a formal U.N. “Sending State,” but the absence of that designation did not prevent it from being a critical component of U.N. Command operations. Japan served four major functions during the war.  First, it was home to U.N. Command headquarters and Far East Command, the command and control centers for the broader war effort.  Second, the country provided a staging area for troops flowing into the Korean Peninsula, a rear support base for logistics and medical functions, and airfields for the prosecution of U.N. air operations into Korea.  Third, Japan provided logistics and services support to U.N. forces based in or transiting through Japan. This included provision of utilities, domestic transport of goods, medical services, and such functions as embalming and processing the many war dead.  Finally, the Maritime Safety Agency deployed minesweepers and other vessels to support the war effort directly, though it did so under independent orders from the U.S. Navy’s 7th Fleet and outside of the direct U.N. command and control structure.  It is also worth mentioning that the Korean War catalyzed the creation of the National Police Reserve, the predecessor to the Ground Self-Defense Force. Occupation authorities ordered the formation of this contingent of about 100,000 uniformed Japanese personnel to supplement Allied military functions in Japan. This in turn freed up coalition resources for use in the Korean War.  None of this is to say that all (or even many) Japanese were enthusiastic participants. Much like the current relationship between Japan and South Korea, the situation was messy, complicated by myriad political interests and subject to American influence. For some Japanese, the Korean War was simply a doorway to regaining sovereignty (which Japan obtained with the 1951 San Francisco Treaty that ended the Occupation in 1952). Others coveted the economic boom that would come with the increased demand for Japanese goods and services to support the war effort. Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida captured that sentiment in his infamous remark that the Korean War was a “gift from the gods.”  There was also Japan’s need to preserve stability in the region while satisfying its primary security guarantor, the United States. The perceived threat of Communist-driven conflict spilling across borders loomed in Japan just as it did elsewhere in Asia. Meanwhile, a Japanese government trying to establish an enduring relationship with its American occupiers and, later, allies needed to mind U.S. needs and wants.  Despite the complexity of circumstances and interests underwriting Japanese support, there was an undeniable and critical contribution to the Korean War effort. This contribution to security on the Korean Peninsula has not gone away, nor have the conditions that will continue to bind the regional neighbors.  A deterioration of security on the Korean Peninsula would present an even greater crisis for Japan than in the 1950s given North Korea’s nuclear and missile development. Further, the fact that the Japan-U.S. alliance is still a pillar of Tokyo’s security designs means support for U.S. operations in the event of a Korean conflict will demand Japanese involvement.  This is all reflected in Japan’s security posture. Just as U.N. Command still exists on the Korean Peninsula to sustain peace and to respond should deterrence fail, so does U.N. Command Rear headquartered at Yokota Air Base. To that end, Japan hosts seven U.N.-designated bases, several of which have been the home port for recent sanctions-monitoring missions against North Korea. Also, among the many documented functions of the U.S.-Japan alliance is responding to crises and contingencies on the Korean Peninsula.  The point of this remembrance is not to laud the Japanese or to excuse the other sources of animosity between Japan and South Korea; rather, it is simply to recall that the last time war broke out on the Korean Peninsula, Japan was an integral part of the effort to drive back the North Korean invaders. The anniversary of the Korean War Armistice offers all parties a reminder that should diplomacy fail — should Kim Jong Un be more Kim Il Sungian in his enterprise than many officials and observers hope — circumstances may once again demand Japanese support for a coalition effort meant to return peace and stability to the Korean Peninsula.  For Japanese and South Koreans, this anniversary ought to present a reminder that back-and-forth erosion of trust is in neither of their self-interests. For Americans, it is a call for action in mediating tensions between its mutual allies for the sake of regional security, if nothing else. |
| KUNI MIYAKE | Commentary | Japan Times | August 5, 2019 | Japan | Who lost South Korea? | Seventy years ago, “Who lost China?” was one of the queries that bitterly divided the United States. From the late 1940s through the 1950s, Sen. Joseph McCarthy and his supporters persecuted hundreds of Americans for being “communists” or “communist sympathizers.” That was a period known as the Second Red Scare.  Thirty years later, a similar divisive question was raised in 1979 following the collapse of the shah’s empire in Tehran. “Who lost Iran?” was a favorite topic of the time. A Washington Post article harshly criticized former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s comments that U.S. President Jimmy Carter should be held responsible for the fall of the shah.  Yes, Carter’s authorization of the shah’s entry into the U.S. led to the hostage crisis at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. The question, however, hasn’t been fully answered, since recently declassified documents suggest that the Nixon and Ford administrations created an environment for cornering the shah’s corrupt regime into a revolution.  In Northeast Asia, Tokyo and Seoul seem to have trapped themselves in an endless game of chicken. On Aug. 2, the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe formally approved removing South Korea from the so-called white list of nations entitled to preferential treatment in Japan’s security-related export control regime.  Tokyo insists that the new export control measures are consistent with the World Trade Organization and other international law and are not trade restrictive. Seoul, on the contrary, views the Japanese measures as retaliatory and is ready to double down. Now the disputes appear almost unstoppable, with the two capitals seemingly willing to fight to the death.  History does not repeat itself, but it rhymes. Four decades after 1979, a new proposition has surfaced, this time in Northeast Asia. The question in 2019 is about the future direction of South Korea. Are we losing  Seoul to Beijing or Pyongyang? Or, where does South Korea go from here, following its Catch-22 spat with Japan?  My prediction is that by the end of the 2020s, just a decade from now, future politicians and pundits in Washington and elsewhere may start raising the question of “Who lost South Korea in the 2020s?” Although I am not a historian, the following is my take on this somewhat apocalyptic proposition.  1. Has Japan lost South Korea?  No, we don’t even own them in the first place. We thought South Korea and Japan share freedom, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and other universal values. What we have witnessed so far is to the contrary. South Korea looks more willing to depart from Japan.  2. Has South Korea lost Japan?  They don’t believe so. Incumbent South Korean leaders found that geopolitical environment surrounding Korean foreign policy is changing. They know that the Cold War is over, and China is on the rise. And finally, they know that the Americans are not dependable anymore. So, they have nothing to lose in Japan.  3. Has the United States lost South Korea?  Maybe. Washington seems to be losing Seoul, to say the least. If the Americans believe that Japan is solely responsible for the loss of South Korea, they are helplessly naive. The recent bitter disputes between Tokyo and Seoul are just the results, not the cause, of the U.S.’s potential loss of South Korea.  4. Is U.S. President Donald Trump responsible for the loss of Seoul?  Most likely. A series of unconventional and least strategic diplomatic events since March 2018, including three meetings between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore, Hanoi and the DMZ, must have emboldened and tempted South Korean President Moon Jae-in to prioritize his inter-Korean agenda over ties with the U.S. and Japan.  5. Has South Korea lost the United States?  Not yet, but Seoul seems to be losing Washington, too. The tragedy is that South Korean leaders seem to truly believe that a steady rapprochement with China and North Korea, on the one hand, and a strong security alliance with the U.S., on the other, can and will coexist with each other.  6. South Korea is losing its national interests.  What Seoul is losing the most is the strategic interests of South Korea. Accusing Japan may help Moon stay in the Blue House with a higher approval rating but it will not achieve the optimum balance of power that South Korea wishes to keep among relevant major powers in the region. Seoul just seems to have gone too far.  7. Who gained most out of this mess?  If the United States loses South Korea, Beijing, Pyongyang and probably Moscow to a lesser extent will be laughing out loud. The three capitals all wish to see a weakened U.S.-South Korea-Japan tripartite security alliance/cooperation in times of contingencies in Northeast Asia.  In 1949, when people asked who lost China, it was neither communist sympathizers in the U.S. nor the communists in mainland China. It was the corrupt and venal Chinese nationalists who lost China, which they thought they had won. The next time it could be equally corrupt and venal Chinese communists who lose China again.  By the same token, in 1979, when we asked who lost Iran, it was neither Carter nor the Nixon and Ford administrations. It was the dictatorial and corrupt shah of Iran, who had lost the support of ordinary Iranians. The Islamic scholars/politicians in Tehran and Qom today may face a similar political crisis if they become too venal and authoritarian.  In the 2020s, South Korea’s socio-political transformation will be inevitable, whether one likes it or not. If anyone loses a free and democratic South Korea, it will be ordinary Koreans living in the south. If political leaders cannot provide strategic visions and realistic policies, it will ultimately be the people who lose their country.  Americans could have had opportunities in the past to do something to unwind or solve the Tokyo-Seoul disputes, but, unfortunately, it seems too late for Washington to mediate. If so, Japan and South Korea may need a few more decades before reaching a true rapprochement. Will both nations still exist then on Earth? |
| MICHAEL MACARTHUR BOSACK  • | Commentary | Japan Times | August 15, 2019 | Japan | Decluttering the Japan-South Korea debate | There has been no shortage of commentary on the recent tensions between Japan and South Korea. The focus is justified, considering the importance of this relationship to the economy and security of Northeast Asia and abroad, but the rush to define exactly what is driving the conflict has led to a mischaracterization of the factors underwriting it. These tensions are layered and complex, so to declutter the current discourse for policymakers, negotiators and observers, I challenge two prevailing arguments.  The first is the claim that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is taking actions against South Korea to secure domestic political capital; the second is that his administration has an inherently anti-Korean platform. On the contrary, there is simply no substantial political gain for Japan from escalatory measures against South Korea, and up until this year, the administration’s yearslong policy has been to foster engagement with South Korea, not erode it. Those things both suggest that Japan’s policy actions of late are not driven by anti-Korean sentiment as many have argued, but as practical responses — whether right or wrong — to recently developing situations between the two countries.  Starting first with the claim that there is a domestic political gain for Abe from escalating tensions against South Korea, there is none to be had. Case in point: The Upper House elections just took place in July and tensions with South Korea did not register as a voting issue. Turnout was a near-record low, and valence issues like the economy continued to monopolize voter priorities. Even if Abe was seeking to gain votes via a hard-line stance against South Korea — which again, he is not — there is not another major election in Japan scheduled until October 2021. In short, this is not about politicking for votes.  What about satisfying domestic right-wingers? Many observers have rushed to assert that Abe is “playing to his base” without clarification of what that means. Those individuals will throw out terms like the Nippon Kaigi (the name of a special interest group) and kenkan (anti-South Korean sentiment) without adequately explaining why Abe would challenge existing government policies to prioritize those things over national interest. Whatever those critics claim, since taking office in 2012, Abe has continually demonstrated pragmatism over ideology.  As for Nippon Kaigi, the group has its own interest in claiming outsize influence on Japanese politics, and it will argue that any politician who sends a dairi (a business card-wielding staffer) to one of its conferences is affiliated with the organization. Also, while there is still a real and problematic anti-Korean segment of the population in Japan, they do not wield enough political influence to matter right now because they lack the numbers, the organization or the real policy activism to make a substantial difference in Japanese governance.  Further, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party is not a monolithic organization with a single set of views on any issue. Rather, it runs the gamut from center-left to right, even with regard to tensions with South Korea. For example, soon after the patrol plane radar lock incident took place last December, some LDP lawmakers demanded immediate sanctions against South Korea. Others called for a de-escalation of tensions and visited South Korea in bids to produce off-ramps for the conflict. The Abe administration has to balance interests from all sides within the party, and the political benefits of taking a heavier-handed approach do not outweigh the costs.  The second claim that the Abe administration has an anti-South Korean platform ignores six years of evidence. I worked in the Foreign Ministry in 2013 and the Diet in 2014, and as a trilateral security coordinator between the United States, Japan and South Korea for years after that. It was my business to understand the Abe administration’s stance toward South Korea, and up until the radar incident last December, Tokyo’s standing policy was to foster better ties with its regional partner, no matter how difficult that may be given historical issues.  When South Korean President Park Geun-hye took office in 2013, things were already shaky between the two governments. President Lee Myung-bak had recently visited the disputed Takeshima islets and Park made the claim that the relationship between Japan as the aggressor and Korea as the victim would last a thousand years.  That difficult situation did not dissuade the Abe administration from continuing to prioritize engagement with South Korea. Seoul was kept atop the list of important partners in security documents, on par with or just behind Australia. The country maintained its place on Japan’s export whitelists despite tensions that simmered for years. The Abe government worked steadily toward resolution of historical issues while taking steps to avoid regression of ties.  There are historical issues that serve as flash points in the relationship, and while the baseline Japanese policy may not be favorable to many South Koreans, the Abe administration’s approach has been threefold: to resolve what it could; not to exacerbate issues that were unsolvable; and not to reopen matters that were considered previously closed via international agreement.  The Abe administration sought resolution on wartime atrocities in negotiating the 2015 “comfort women” agreement. The Moon administration has refuted the agreement, but it still was a South Korean government of both bureaucrats and elected officials that negotiated and ratified it.  Further, many will claim that Abe has continually refused to acknowledge the comfort women issue and to apologize, but a clear statement at the time of agreement in 2015, which was then forwarded to the United Nations for record, challenges that assertion: “As Prime Minister of Japan, Prime Minister Abe expresses anew his most sincere apologies and remorse to all the women who underwent immeasurable and painful experiences and suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women.”  With regard to the Takeshima islets, the Japanese government under Abe has continued its decadeslong claim on them. However, the Abe administration has never sent anyone higher than a sub-Cabinet official to Shimane Prefecture’s annual “Takeshima Day,” and the last request to have the issue settled by the International Court of Justice came under the Democratic Party of Japan-led government in August 2012, not Abe’s LDP.  Then there is the issue of Yasukuni Shrine. In his seven-plus years as prime minister dating back to his first run in 2006, Abe has only visited the shrine once, in December 2013. He has purposely avoided traveling to the shrine to mitigate tensions with regional neighbors, including South Korea.  It is also worth noting that with all of the debate centering on the Abe administration’s treatment of Article 9 — the war renunciation clause of the Constitution — the incident in which his government pushed the envelope of constitutionality the furthest came in support of South Korea.  As the situation deteriorated in South Sudan in December 2013, South Korean peacekeepers came under attack. By Dec. 22, they had expended most of their small arms ammunition, and desperately needing resupply, the South Korean unit commander reached out to the nearest contingent that had compatible ammunition available: the Ground Self-Defense Force in Juba.  Japanese decision-makers on the ground wanted to act, but there was no precedent for provision of ammunition. In fact, if the Japanese commander had provided the ammunition to the South Koreans and they in turn used it in armed conflict, it could have constituted a violation of Article 9 and the “Three Principles on Arms Exports” which were still in effect at the time. Abe’s newly formed National Security Council nevertheless acted swiftly, and by midday on Dec. 23, the government decided to provide 10,000 rounds of ammunition to South Korean peacekeepers.  I was present in the LDP headquarters in January 2014 when LDP Diet members issued an inquiry into the constitutionality of that decision, and the prevailing response was that Japan’s critical partner needed the support, and that they would debate how to shape future legislation to accommodate situations such as these.  Nothing in this commentary is meant to suggest that Japan’s current policies are right or wrong. Damage is being done, and it behooves both parties to re-examine their current trajectory to find a better way forward. To do that, it is critical to identify what factors are driving tensions, and in cases as complex as these, it is best to start by decluttering the debate.  Here, the Abe administration’s actions are not being driven by a desire to curry political favor or to placate a base, nor are they born from anti-South Korean policy preferences. It is time to put those arguments aside and gain a more clear-eyed perspective of the current problem so that all interested parties can cease a lose-lose conflict. |
| Kumiharu Shigehara | Commentary | Japan Times | August 28, 2019 | Japan | Japan's war crimes, colonialism and apologies | In a recent exchange of opinions that I had with friends that was spurred by the latest developments in Japan-South Korea relations and a recent news report that an attempt by Emperor Showa’s to officially express in 1952 his remorse and regret over World War II was prevented by Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, a Westerner observed that historically Japan has lacked critical self-reflection on its society.  He considered that even the concept of hansei (self-reflection) was about putting all responsibility for an error or incident on one’s self, without even considering and reviewing external factors. He thought that this feature of Japanese culture contributed in no small extent to Japan’s adamant reticence to admit any wrongdoing.  He concluded that this should not stop Westerners from “pushing and prodding” the Japanese into further reflection and that if the Japanese managed to integrate critical thinking on a systemic level into their culture, as a result of Western influence, that would be a very good thing in the long run.  I responded by arguing that Westerners’ pushing and prodding could be counterproductive because it runs the risk of a strong response from Japanese nationalists who not only defend Japan but are also quick to point out the injustice of Western imperialism, and the double standards and inconsistencies in regard to the punishment of war criminals in World War II as well as in subsequent wars and military conflicts.  Westerners’ reflection on their countries’ histories of colonial domination and their apologies for the atrocities committed by the commanders and soldiers of their military forces in WWII and in more recent international conflicts could encourage the Japanese to reflect on Japan’s modern history, which was marred by atrocities committed by the Imperial Japanese Army and colonialism.  I also suggested that not only Japanese people but also Westerners should learn from Allan A. Ryan’s book “Yamashita’s Ghost: War Crimes, MacArthur’s Justice and Command Accountability” (University Press of Kansas, 2012).  Ryan critically examined Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s targeting of a Japanese general after WWII using a hand-picked military commission and disregarding customary rules of evidence to send him to the gallows. The verdict, ultimately upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, found Gen. Tomoyuki Yamashita accountable for atrocities committed in the Philippines during the closing months of the Pacific War simply because the Japanese troops were nominally under his command.  In his book, Ryan argued that there was no evidence that Yamashita committed crimes or ordered others to do so, was in a position to prevent them or even suspected they were about to happen. This set a far-reaching precedent for command responsibility that has never been undone. American generals, however, were not held to this standard in subsequent wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.  While agreeing with the main points of my observations, a German friend of mine argued that an objective and impartial scrutiny of a nation’s past behavior is a sign of national maturity. It should be done independently, regardless of whether other nations do so. When such scrutiny reveals past crimes and atrocities, an unconditional admission and an expression of regret or perhaps an apology could set an example for how to assume responsibility for a nation’s past.  Actually, at the 50th memorial ceremony for the war dead on Aug. 15, 1995, Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama stated, “Upon this historic occasion of the 50th anniversary of the war’s end, we should bear in mind that we must look into the past to learn from the lessons of history, and ensure that we do not stray from the path to the peace and prosperity of human society in the future. Building from our deep remorse on this occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, Japan must eliminate self-righteous nationalism, promote international coordination as a responsible member of the international community and, thereby, advance the principles of peace and democracy.”  However, attempts to shy away the spirit of the Murayama Statement have been made strenuously by right-wing political groups with strong influence over a number of Japanese politicians, including Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. This can be clearly detected in the phraseology used in the prime minister’s speeches at the annual memorial ceremonies for the war dead in recent years.  These speeches mark a stark contrast with those of German political leaders. For example, in a speech delivered at the event commemorating the Warsaw Uprising on Aug. 1, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas noted: “We do not only owe it to the dead to address the past honestly. We also owe it to ourselves, as only by remembering the past together can we pave the way to a future together. That’s why we want to do more to raise awareness in Germany about the Polish victims of the war and to remedy the fact that the Warsaw Uprising is still discussed far too little, particularly in Germany.”  Teaching the correct history of the war and having Japanese people, both young and old, reflect on and understand the atrocities committed by Japan is a basic factor needed to achieve a lasting reconciliation between Japan and the countries where the atrocities were committed.  Likewise, an undertaking of an objective and impartial scrutiny in South Korea of the nation’s past should also help improve the now-difficult relationship between Tokyo and Seoul.  A book titled “Anti-Japanese tribalism: the Root of the Korean Crisis” reportedly became a best-seller in South Korea recently. Authored by South Koreans, including retired Seoul National University economics professor Lee Young-hoon, the book is said to offer alternative explanations about Japan’s colonial rule, and the treatment of wartime laborers and Korean “comfort women” to those that currently prevail in South Korea.  Both Japan and South Korea must aim for objectivity and impartiality in their grasp of their history. As Maas put it, this is the only way to pave the way toward a future together, and there is much more that unites than divides us in this uncertain world |
| [YUKI TATSUMI](https://www.japantimes.co.jp/author/int-yuki_tatsumi/) | Commentary | Japan Times | August 20, 2019 | Japan | Can Japan-South Korea relations be saved? | WASHINGTON – Japan-South Korea relations are spiraling out of control. The bilateral relationship between Tokyo and Seoul, which has undergone numerous ups and downs since the two countries normalized ties in 1965, seems to have entered an unprecedented period of uncertainty with emotional arguments against each other drowning out rational arguments for the necessity of a relationship that is functional at the very least.  To be fair, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has not asked for the current tension. When he first became prime minister in the fall of 2006, Abe chose Seoul as one of his first foreign destinations. In the news conference that followed his visit he referred to South Korea as Japan’s “most important neighbor” and expressed a desire to “strengthen a future-oriented partnership of mutual understanding and trust.”  Abe then continued to reiterate that South Korea is Japan’s “most important neighbor” in his annual policy speeches to the Diet, which he delivers when the new Diet session commences in January. His reference to South Korea as “the most important neighbor” continued even when Tokyo and Seoul went more than three years without a summit meeting between Abe and then-South Korean President Park Geun-hye.  Furthermore, Abe upheld the government’s position on the “comfort women” issue and gave a green light for the two governments to sign a December 2015 agreement under which Japan committed to provide a monetary contribution to the fund that would be established by the South Korea government, as the agreement stipulated a “final and irreversible” settlement of the issue.  Abe’s hope to close the door on history in Japan-South Korea relations came to naught when Moon Jae-in became South Korea’s president in 2016. Abe and Moon got off to a rocky start when the latter appointed a presidential commission to evaluate the December 2015 agreement on the comfort women issue.  Even though the Moon administration did not nullify the December 2015 accord, enough damage had already been done to the credibility of the agreement in Seoul when a presidential advisory panel harshly criticizing the agreement, and by the time Moon began to talk about a “two-track” strategy with Japan to prevent the history issue from hijacking the bilateral relationship.  Bilateral ties grew even colder following two incidents that unfolded in the final months of 2018. First, the South Korean government failed to act when the South Korean Supreme Court ordered Japanese firms to pay compensation for Korean workers they used for labor during World War II, even though a bilateral agreement signed in 1965 settled the compensation issue. Second, the two countries’ defense establishments could not resolve conflicting claims over a dangerous encounter between a South Korean Navy destroyer and a Maritime Self-Defense Force surveillance aircraft.  Today, the depth to which the bilateral relationship can sink seems to have no limit. The two countries are practically in a trade war — a situation that began with their inability to address the Japanese export control authorities’ concern over the South Korean government’s enforcement of its export control regulation, and resulted in both sides stripping the other of their respective “preferred” status in their export control regulations.  South Korea recently hinted that it is even considering pulling out of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), an important military intelligence agreement that allows Japan and South Korea to share intelligence on North Korea’s military developments. This agreement is critical to ensuring robust cooperation among the defense establishments of the United States, Japan and South Korea.  The recent turn of events between Tokyo and Seoul is all the more concerning because the sectors of the government and society that used to help stabilize bilateral relations in times of political tension have ceased to function. South Korea’s court rulings on wartime labor threw cold water on the business relationship between the two nations.  The inability to resolve the conflicting claims on the questionable encounter between the South Korean Navy and the MSDF impacted the functioning of defense ties — a situation that has been further aggravated by Seoul’s hinting about reneging on the GSOMIA. Finally, Moon’s pushing Japan to do more on the wartime issues of comfort women and mobilized laborers has been interpreted by Tokyo as an attempt to undermine the foundation of diplomatic relations that has been built since ties were normalized in 1965.  Recently, a South Korea official suggested that Seoul may need “a cooling-off period” in its interactions with Japan. The feeling is mutual. After all, Abe stopped referring to South Korea as Japan’s “most important neighbor” in this year’s annual policy address to the Diet. Despite Seoul’s hope that Moon could hold a meeting with Abe when he visited Osaka for the Group of 20 summit, the prime minister showed no interest. Today, the media of both countries use critical tones in their reporting, each blaming the other side for the stalemate.  The status quo does not help either side, however. By continuing to freeze the bilateral relationship, the two countries prevent themselves from pursuing policy issues that are critical to their futures, including the endgame for the denuclearization of North Korea.  Furthermore, as hosts to a considerable U.S. military presence at a time when Washington has a president who views alliances more as a transaction than the embodiment of the strategic importance of U.S. relationship with each country, now is not the best time for them to continue the bickering that has allowed the issues of the past — however important they may be — to dominate the bilateral relationship. Doing so has blown the disagreements over today’s issues, such as export controls, out of proportion and created more bilateral problems.  It takes a politically courageous and strategically wise decision for the leadership in both countries to begin to restore bilateral relations. The prospects for either Abe or Moon to be willing to be the first one to make such a gesture, however, seem remote at this point. |
| SHAUN O'DWYER | Commentary | Japan Times | September 23, 2019 | Japan | Korean nationalism and the 'comfort women' issue | Recently I attended a session on the “comfort women” issue at a Kyushu University symposium on war-related heritage in East Asia. I was surprised by the diversity in views among the Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Australian presenters at the session.  An Australian researcher questioned assumptions linking the experience of comfort women exclusively with militaristic violence, arguing that there were continuities between the comfort women system and patriarchal practices of prostitution in countries like Japan and South Korea today.  A Japanese researcher criticized the “model victim” dimension to the sex slavery narrative, and stated that the experiences of women in Japan’s wartime military brothel system had been marginalized. During the question-and-answer session one audience member vented her irritation over the supposed anti-Japanese biases of the speakers.  Such robust, open discussion over the comfort women issue has not always been the norm, and sometimes it still isn’t. In post-World War II South Korea and Japan, the comfort women were considered best forgotten; they were lower class and tainted by their “shameful” profession.  But from the late 1980s, South Korea’s democratization enabled more critical media discussion of the Japanese colonial era and feminist campaigns for women’s rights. The fate of Korean comfort women sparked public interest, survivors began coming forward to testify to their experiences, and Japanese journalists and feminists also began to investigate and campaign for them.  As feminists and human rights activists helped make the Korean comfort women’s suffering a global issue in the 1990s, the Japanese government came under increasing pressure to investigate and atone in appropriate fashion, eventually sparking a backlash from Japanese nationalists.  In the ongoing controversies over the comfort women issue between the Japanese and South Korean governments, much has been written about how Japanese nationalists have distorted the comfort women story with their historical revisionism. They have seized upon a shortage of official documentary evidence (most of which was conveniently destroyed at the end of the war), apparent inconsistencies in elderly survivors’ testimony and upon evidence of relatively open contractual employment conditions for Korean women in some wartime urban facilities to argue that the comfort women system was licensed prostitution, managed largely by civilian contractors.  In this story, the comfort women system was no different from prostitution systems elsewhere in the world, and enslavement, coercion and rape were rare exceptions rather than being endemic to it. These nationalists have fiercely denounced Japanese scholars, journalists and activists for supporting human rights perspectives on the comfort women, and for bringing international condemnation upon Japan.  Less well-known is how South Korean nationalism has co-opted the comfort women issue. What Korean American scholar Sarah Soh has described as a post-Cold War, transnational “feminist humanitarian perspective” on comfort women has been shoehorned into a government-supported discourse of Korean national victimhood under Japanese rule.  The violation and suffering of Korean comfort women is one of its most potent symbols. This nationalist orthodoxy is enforced more severely through criminal defamation laws than any revisionist nationalism in Japan. Historian Park Yu-ha was recently prosecuted and fined and another professor jailed for dissenting from it.  Now that disputes over South Korea’s colonial history are once again driving a legal and diplomatic rift between Japan and South Korea, the underlying motivations for the Korean nationalist appropriation of the comfort women story merit closer scrutiny.  Recent research by political scientists Joseph Yi, Joe Phillips and Wondong Lee has explained the domestic context for this nationalism. It emerged from a decadeslong culture war between South Korea’s right- and left-wing factions, waged over the contentious legacies of Japanese colonial rule, civil war and autocratic postwar industrialization.  Under South Korea’s postwar autocracies, right-wing nationalism focused more on North Korea than on Japan as South Korea’s main enemy. Progressive South Korean activists and political leaders were denounced as North Korean allies and persecuted. Since the democratization of South Korea, progressives have successfully pushed back against rightists’ more propagandist representations of North Korea, and against their anti-communist slurs.  Yet according to Yi and his co-researchers, South Korean progressive activists, intellectuals and political parties evolved their own populist, anti-right wing nationalism. Central to it is a “Manichaean” representation of Japan’s colonial rule over Korea as equal in its oppressions and cruelty to Nazis wartime rule over Europe. The populist aspect to this nationalism is its denunciation of key historical figures in the Korean right as elite, pro-Japanese collaborators during the colonial era, enriching themselves and their families through craven clientelism, enthusiastically joining the Imperial Japanese Army, and trafficking working-class Koreans into slavery under the Japanese.  There is some truth in this populism. South Korea’s postwar dictator and modernizer Park Chung-hee had served as an officer in Japan’s wartime army. Many colonial era Koreans who became administrators, entrepreneurs, military officers and scholars under Japanese patronage went on to comprise South Korea’s commercial, academic and political elites during its postwar industrialization. Korean labor brokers, pimps, businessmen, teachers, officials and police helped recruit poorer Koreans into sexual and industrial servitude for the Japanese empire.  This anti-Japanese nationalism, now spread through school history textbooks as well as the mass media, is currently upheld by President Moon Jae-in’s Democratic Party government. But it has proven electorally attractive enough for conservative political parties and governments to exploit as well, though with far less enthusiasm for denouncing the collaboration of former colonial elites. Its narrative of national victimhood under Japanese colonial domination papers over Japan’s role in Korean modernization, and nowadays it increasingly elides the colonial class system that allowed some Koreans to prosper more than others under Japanese rule.  Sarah Soh argues that the nationalist and even human rights perspectives have also flattened out the comfort women’s experiences into a uniform sexual slavery narrative, overlooking the complexity of an evolving empire-wide system incorporating both “licensed prostitution and indentured sexual labor … and battlefield abduction into sexual slavery.”  Japanese historian Akane Onozawa has pinpointed the origins of the comfort women system in prewar, state-licensed debt-bondage prostitution in Japan, which expanded in the 1920s to colonial Korea before being adapted to service the sexual demands of Japan’s armed forces in China, amid concerns about soldiers raping local women.  This system employed mostly poor, working class Japanese and Korean women sold to brokers by their parents, or often deceitfully recruited with promises of jobs in factories or in hospitals. These women were all vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, but in keeping with the empire’s ethnic hierarchy, Japanese comfort women generally received better pay and treatment.  Surviving Japanese military records analyzed by Chinese scholar Su Zhiliang demonstrate that expanded wartime operations and rising military demand for comfort women in China in 1938 generated a recruitment crisis in the licensed comfort women system. Increasing resort was made to using Chinese women for growing comfort women facilities, now managed under closer state and military supervision, or set up informally beyond official supervision. This pattern of using local women was replicated in other wartime occupied territories, including the Philippines, Indonesia and Timor Leste.  Though some were forcibly recruited with the assistance of local collaborators, others were kidnapped or captured in counter-insurgency operations, and — unlike Japanese or Korean comfort women — were far more likely to be repeatedly raped, tortured or murdered. However, as Japan’s military capabilities and economy collapsed in 1944-1945, Japanese and Korean comfort women trapped in war zones with other civilians also faced increased risks of starvation, disease and violent death.  The international research summarized above, based on careful analysis of incomplete documentary evidence and the testimony of aged survivors and witnesses, undermines the dogmatic certitudes of Japanese and Korean nationalists — and of some comfort women supporters. There are many lessons to draw from it. Feminists should be wary of a Korean nationalism that draws from a deep well of masculine humiliation over Japanese abuses of Korean women’s innocence, and reassert more transnational perspectives on the comfort women issue.  Yet South Koreans also should ask themselves whether an intolerant, divisive, anti-Japanese nationalism is compatible with their own hard-won liberal democracy. Though its prospects seem unlikely, a liberal nationalism emphasizing South Korea’s rich cultural history, successful modernization and democratic values would be the better alternative; and if anti-Japanese animus can be defused and defamation law reformed, there would be greater freedom for scholars and activists to discuss the comfort women problem.  Such a nationalism would also be more conducive to building better relations with Japan, and to working out more collaborative approaches to investigating historical injustices. |
| Taro Kono | Commentary | Japan Times | September 4, 2019 | Japan | The real issue between Tokyo and Seoul is trust | Relations between Japan and South Korea are currently strained due to a dispute over former civilian workers from the Korean Peninsula during World War II. The heart of the problem is whether the promises made between our two sovereign states when they decided to normalize their relations in 1965 will be kept or not.  In some people’s view, Japan’s recent update of its export control measures related to South Korea is linked to this question of former civilian workers. I want to make it clear that they are completely separate issues.  In 1965, after 14 years of hard negotiations, Japan and South Korea concluded the Agreement on the Settlement of Problems concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Co-operation between Japan and the Republic of Korea. Under the terms of the 1965 agreement, Japan extended $500 million in grants and loans — a sum that totaled 1.6 times as much as South Korea’s national budget then. All problems concerning claims between the two countries and their nationals were confirmed to be “settled completely and finally.”  Among the eight items in the Outline of the Claims of the Republic of Korea against Japan that were raised during negotiations, “accrued wages of the requisitioned Korean[s]” as well as “compensation of damages by war to the requisitioned Korean[s]” were included. The Agreed Minutes to the 1965 Agreement clearly state that the claims that were “settled completely and finally” included any that fell within the scope of these eight items.  Furthermore, when seeking compensation for Korean workers “requisitioned” by Japanese companies during the war, South Korean officials explained that their claim included damages for psychological and physical suffering. In response, the Japanese side proposed that its payments be made to individuals. But the South Korean representatives asserted that they were putting forward the claims for compensation as a state and that their government would be responsible for distributing any money received from Japan.  Four decades later, in August 2005, South Korea reaffirmed that the $300 million in grants received from Japan had included compensation for the “historical fact of suffering” of the victims of “forced mobilization.” In so doing, the Korean government made it clear that it bore the moral responsibility to allocate an adequate amount of the resources received to provide relief to those victims.  Then, last year, the South Korean Supreme Court rendered a series of judgments against Japanese companies, ordering them to pay “compensation” to the former civilian workers. These judgments clearly violated the 1965 agreement. Yet the South Korean government has failed to take any concrete measures to remedy the situation.  In effect, after more than 50 years, South Korea has unilaterally abrogated the pledges made by our two governments. This is the crux of the issue we face now. If an international agreement can be broken because of the domestic circumstances of one country, we will never be able to maintain stable international relations.  I strongly hope that the South Korean government addresses this issue from the standpoint of international law as well as bilateral state-to-state relations, and takes concrete actions as a responsible member of the international community.  Japan repeatedly sought diplomatic consultations with the South Korean government after the court decisions and referred this dispute to arbitration, as provided for under the 1965 agreement. However, South Korea refused to agree.  Just as importantly, I would like to reiterate that this issue has nothing to do with the recent update by Japan of its export control measures, which was required to ensure the nonproliferation of weapons-related materials. This decision was made solely from the standpoint of national security.  The materials and technologies in question are sensitive because they can be diverted to military uses. The relevant authorities in every country are responsible for appropriately managing exports of such dual-use materials and technologies.  Since 2004, Japan had applied to South Korea simplified procedures for exporting such materials, compared to the rules applied to most countries and regions including the rest of Asia. The arrangement was predicated on sufficient trust between our two governments, which was to be fostered through continuous consultations.  Such consultations have not been held for the past three years, despite repeated requests from the Japanese side. Meanwhile, there have been several inappropriate cases concerning export control related to South Korea. For that reason, Japan concluded it could no longer maintain the simplified procedures applied to exports to South Korea.  This decision was not in any way meant as “retaliation” or a “countermeasure” in relation to the issue of former civilian workers from the Korean Peninsula. Such a linkage only obscures the root causes of two very different problems.  Japan has been acting as a responsible member of the international community, adhering to international law. We hope that South Korea would do the same, so that we can continue to build a forward-looking bilateral relationship.  Finally, I would like to touch upon the South Korean government’s decision to terminate the Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of Korea on the Protection of Classified Military Information (GSOMIA), which had contributed to strengthening security cooperation between the two countries and to ensuring regional peace and stability since 2016. I must say this decision reflects a total misapprehension of the security situation in Northeast Asia.  The South Korean government has linked its decision to Japan’s update of its licensing policies and procedure for exports. These two issues are of a totally different nature and should not be linked together. |
| YOSHIO SHIMOJI | Opinion | Japan Times | August 23, 2019 | Japan | What about the 1965 treaty? | To clarify the current Japan-South Korea feud, there’s one question I want to ask.  Isn’t it true that, under the treaty signed in 1965, Japan paid $500 million (today’s rate: $4.025 billion) to South Korea, part of which had to be appropriated as compensation for the victims of Japan’s colonial rule? But the South Korean government used most of the aid money (damages) for the improvement of social and economic infrastructure, thus triggering the country’s booming economic development as we see today.  If I am mistaken, please correct me |
| Yasuko Ikeuchi | Commentary | Japan Times | August 9, 2019 | Japan | 'Comfort woman' statue should be exhibited | We applaud the insight of Daisuke Tsuda for his curation of “After ‘Freedom of Expression?'” and for choosing to include the “Statue of a Girl of Peace” in the Aichi Triennale. We are dismayed that this section of the exhibition has been shut down (“Statue threats disrupt art festival,” Aug. 5).  As The Japan Times reviewer noted in “Diving into the World of Political Performance” in the July 31 edition, this year’s triennale brings political performances from around the world to viewers in a dynamic and innovative way. As many who have studied the “military comfort women” issue know, while it reveals a dark part of Japan’s military history, it also sheds light on sexual violence in conflict zones everywhere, including the U.S. military occupation of Okinawa and South Korea today.  Showing such a work of art in a public space not only creates an opportunity to learn about and reflect upon what is a global human rights issue in the widening context of socially engaged contemporary art, it also creates a space for dialogue and reconciliation toward a more peaceful future. |
| Yoichi Funabashi | Commentary | Japan Times | October 10, 2019 | Japan | Tokyo, Seoul and the weaponization of history | In July, Japan tightened its control of exports of certain materials for semiconductor production to South Korea. On Aug. 28, the government took further action and removed South Korea from its whitelist of nations granted preferential trade procedure.  South Korea responded to these actions by removing Japan from its own whitelist, and by declaring it would terminate the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) between the two countries. In the past, the GSOMIA has served as the framework for sharing defense intelligence on such matters as North Korean nuclear weapons and missile deployment.  Behind these developments is the smoldering issue of compensation for Koreans conscripted as wartime laborers for Japanese companies. In fall 2018, South Korea’s Supreme Court ruled in favor of the former laborers in cases brought against Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. and Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corp., and ordered the Japanese firms to compensate individuals for their labor. South Korean courts later approved the seizures of these firms’ assets in order to extract compensation for the plaintiffs.  The Japanese government has pushed for the third-party arbitration stipulated by the countries’ 1965 agreement on the settlement of problems concerning property and claims deriving from Japan’s past colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula, but the South Korean government has not complied with this request.  Japan and South Korea are bound together by dense ties of economic interdependence. Japan’s economy is three times larger than South Korea’s (the two countries have the third- and 12th-largest economies in the world, respectively). In terms of trade, Japan’s exports to South Korea comprise 6.6 percent of total exports, while imports from South Korea make up 4 percent of the total. By contrast, South Korea’s exports to Japan make up 5.3 percent of total exports, and imports from Japan total 9.6 percent of all imports. Japan thus enjoys a significantly favorable balance of trade.  South Korea’s dependence on Japan for semiconductor components and materials is a major structural factor in this imbalance. South Korea is home to Samsung and SK Hynix, the world’s second- and third-largest semiconductor manufacturers, respectively. Yet both manufacturers rely on Japan to provide much of their components and raw materials. Most notably, Japan controls 80 percent of the world’s supply of three materials needed in semiconductor production: fluorinated polyimide, resist and hydrogen fluoride.  According to estimates by the Korea Economic Institute, a 30 percent decrease in the supply of essential materials to Korean semiconductor manufacturers would result in a 2.2 percent decrease in South Korea’s GDP. The Bank of Korea (South Korea’s central bank) views Japan’s regulation of semiconductor-related exports to South Korea as one of three major risks facing the country’s economy.  Within the Japanese government, very detailed consideration was apparently given to the question of how to issue a “warning” to the administration of South Korean President Moon Jae-in. These deliberations centered around two questions: Where is South Korea’s “chokepoint” and what kind of leverage does Japan have over South Korea?  For example, while refusing to conclude the Trans-Pacific Partnership 11 or a currency swap agreement with South Korea would constitute “leverage,” many veteran finance experts believe that taking aim at South Korea’s vulnerable financial institutions is the best way of going for the jugular.  South Korea has a number of powerful industrial conglomerates, but their financial units are weak. Leading Korean enterprises, including Samsung, have borrowed enormous sums (in the trillions of yen) from the three Japanese mega-banks and other Japanese lenders.  During the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998, the South Korean currency plummeted and the country suffered from a shortage of foreign currencies. Ultimately, the International Monetary Fund responded to South Korea’s appeals for relief by approving loan assistance to the country. At the time, the Japanese government used the Bank of Japan to channel ¥165 billion in short-term bridge loans to the South Korean central bank.  Notwithstanding South Korea’s obvious vulnerability, finance could prove difficult for Japan to “weaponize.” Doing so would inflict catastrophic damage on the South Korean economy. Not only would Japan also suffer the repercussions of this damage, but it would be subjected to worldwide criticism for its actions.  In the current dispute, the entanglement of historical problems with economic interdependence have left politicians in both countries struggling for a solution. As mutual irritation intensified, South Korea chose to weaponize history, while Japan has weaponized economic interdependence. This is the most distinctive feature of the current dispute. The administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is attempting to use economic leverage to suppress the Moon administration’s flagrant demonstration of “moral superiority” over history issues.  The ties of economic interdependence often render power invisible, concealing the potential for its weaponization should circumstances demand. From the beginning, the economic interdependence between the two countries, which emerged from the 1965 normalization of relations through the conclusion of the Treaty on Basic Relations and accompanying agreement on the settlement of property and economic claims, was characterized by an asymmetrical power relationship borne of stark economic disparity. South Korea believes it was forced to accept a mutual settlement of claims and a “lump sum” payout in the form of economic cooperation.  Japan’s economic cooperation laid the groundwork for South Korea’s subsequent development but also contributed to the growth of the Japanese economy. As South Korean economic power grew, however, so did its desire to “take back” what it was unable to claim in 1965. This political sentiment was on display when South Korean President Lee Myung-bak became the first postwar South Korean political leader to set foot on the disputed islets of Takeshima in August 2012, and observed that “Japan’s international influence is not what it used to be.”  The current standoff between Japan and South Korea is not only an ideological problem posed by the Moon administration’s hard shift to the left and the North. We should take a sober look at the changing power balance in Japan-South Korea relations. |
| WARREN IWASA | Opinion | Japan Times | October 25, 2019 | Japan | The weaponization of denial | Yoichi Funabashi’s opinion pieces are usually well-informed, thoughtful and sane. It’s a disappointment to find him now writing as a patriot. His article “Tokyo, Seoul and the weaponization of history” in the Oct. 11 edition boldly broaches urgent issues but fails to come to terms with the main one.  He lines up the points of contention: stricter controls over exports to South Korea of “certain materials for semiconductor production;” the sharing of military information; South Korea’s Supreme Court decision to hold Japanese companies liable for wartime compensation, despite a 1965 agreement between the two countries that was meant to settle all claims.  Moreover, he aptly characterizes a crucial aspect of the bilateral relationship. Japan and South Korea, he writes, are “bound together by dense ties of economic interdependence.” In addition, he recognizes “the entanglement of historical problems with economic interdependence.” The “dense ties” between the two countries are more than economic. They share a long, complicated history.  Funabashi makes clear that Japan has the upper hand in the economic dispute. His country has “chokepoints” and leverage to damage South Korea’s economy.  Despite Japan’s disproportionate economic advantage, he cautions — the voice of sanity — against inflicting “catastrophic damage” to the South Korean economy.  Here, however, is Funabashi, the patriot: “South Korea chose to weaponize history, while Japan has weaponized economic interdependence.”  History and economic power are false equivalences.  Can history be used as a weapon? Can the South Korean government adopt a policy of ignoring the years under Japanese rule?  South Koreans, on their own, will remember how their country suffered under Japanese rule for as long as Japanese will remember the barbaric atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.  Even though we don’t seem to learn from history, keeping it alive is important. Japan’s efforts to weaponize denial will win less respect than ridicule. |
| Kuni Miyake | Commentary | Japan Times | September 30, 2019 | Japan | Keep South Korean judiciary independent | Some TV stations in Tokyo asked me last week to comment live on the moribund Japan-South Korea relationship. I asked them if there were any other topics and whether they were still obsessed with South Korea. The producers of the programs replied that no other topic can get higher ratings these days.  They’re probably right. Almost everybody in Japan seems not only know the full name of South Korea’s new justice minister, Cho Kuk, and many Japanese seem to know about his wife and children as well as the potential criminal charges they face in an investigation by the Public Prosecutors’ Office in Seoul.  Maybe the Japanese and the South Koreans are the only two nations who know so much about the justice minister. The Cho scandal, however, is much more than a simple domestic power struggle between the progressives and the conservatives in South Korea.  Many people in Tokyo, and at least some in Seoul, may wonder if the Cho investigations could trigger a political chain reaction that would not only weaken the administration of President Moon Jae-in but also expedite his lame duck period. This seems to be the conventional wisdom in Tokyo.  A more important aspect of the Cho case, however, is not about the longevity of the Moon administration but rather the health of democracy in South Korea and in particular the level of its judicial independence. As a democracy with separation of powers, it should have an independent judiciary.  Judicial independence is essential for protecting people’s rights and freedoms. In any healthy democratic system, judges and public prosecutors are not be subject to political pressure from the other two branches or from private or partisan interests. An independent judiciary, however, is easy to talk about but rather difficult to implement.  The best example is the United States. The Washington Post’s report that U.S. President Donald Trump “repeatedly urged the Ukrainian president to investigate Joe Biden” eclipsed the two important summits that Trump held with his Japanese and South Korean counterparts in New York late last month, .  A nine-page document revealed the whistleblower’s “urgent concern” that the president was “using the power of his office to solicit interference from a foreign country in the 2020 U.S. election.” It’s no wonder that this bombshell claim led to an impeachment inquiry into the president by the House of Representatives.  No president of the U.S. is above the law, including Trump. Under the U.S. system, whistleblowers are expected to question any wrongdoings inside the government, even by the president himself. If a suspicion is real, the judiciary will automatically go after it. This is American democracy.  Trump, however, doesn’t seem to understand what he is doing. Although it is really a tragedy for many Americans, Trump is not interested in governing anyway. He is still a businessman and has no idea of the importance of an independent judiciary. If he knew, he would not have made that phone call to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.  Moon, however, should be much more responsible than Trump given that he is a professional jurist who studied and practiced law. As such, he knows the true meaning of an independent judiciary. He may claim that the Public Prosecutors’ Office is corrupt but that does not justify his undermining the independence of judiciary.  When the Russiagate scandal erupted in Washington in 2017, then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a potential stakeholder in the case, wisely recused himself from the investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller. Trump was naturally furious but Sessions just did what a jurist is supposed to.  Cho is also a jurist and was a professor of law at Seoul University. He must have studied how a justice minister should conduct himself. As such, he should have immediately recused himself from any investigations involving his family.  Some of my South Korean friends in Seoul have asserted that the country’s public prosecutors are corrupt and have never been politically neutral. But others say the prosecutors have been opportunistic and willing to punish an outgoing president to woo an incoming one. I am not so sure about that.  One thing I know, however, is that no matter how corrupt, biased and therefore politicized the public prosecutors might have been under the Cold War military regimes, at least some in the new generation of South Korean prosecutors hopefully understand the importance of an independent judiciary, including the public prosecutors’ office.  No matter how eloquently the president, the justice minister or the rest of the Moon administration’s members may justify the reform of South Korea’s prosecution system, what they are doing appears to be another attempt to politicize the judiciary branch — which must be independent from political pressures to protect South Korea’s democracy.  Contrary to the conventional wisdom of some people in Tokyo and many people in Seoul, I value the existence of a free, democratic, independent, prosperous, stable, strong, united nation that is free of nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula. I especially wish to see an independent judiciary in South Korea, which is a proof of functional democracy.  The real problem is not whether the Cho scandal leads to the fall of the Moon administration: What is truly at stake now is the future of democracy in South Korea. It’s time for Seoul to stop politicizing the judiciary. If Moon doesn’t, South Koreans might lose the stable and sustainable democracy that he has long dreamed of. |
| Lee Jong-wha | Commentary | Japan Times | October 4, 2019 | Japan | Saving the Japan-South Korea relationship | Japan and South Korea have never been easy partners. Although both have long been well-consolidated democracies, historical and territorial disputes have consistently marred bilateral relations. But today, their relationship may be at its lowest point since diplomatic ties were established in 1965.  The situation began to deteriorate in July, when Japan’s trade ministry introduced new licensing requirements on exports of three chemicals that South Korea needs to manufacture high-tech products like semiconductors and display panels.  Japanese officials claimed that the move was necessary to prevent sensitive materials from being shipped illegally to North Korea for military use. South Korea called the justification groundless and consumers launched a boycott of Japanese goods, from beer to clothing.  In South Korea’s view, Japan is trying to punish it for a 2018 Supreme Court decision ordering Mitsubishi Heavy Industries to compensate South Koreans for wartime labor during Japan’s colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula during the first half of the 20th century. Japan contends that the 1965 treaty establishing diplomatic relations — which included $500 million in grants and loans to South Korea — resolved all questions related to compensation, while South Korea argues that the treaty does not cover individual claims.  In any case, Japan did not stop at semiconductors. In August, it removed South Korea from its whitelist of countries that receive preferential trade treatment. Japanese exporters now require government approval each time they export a shipment of “strategic items” — including 1,115 types of parts and materials — to South Korea.  South Korea then filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization about Japan’s export controls and removed Japan from its own whitelist of trusted trade partners. It also announced that it would not renew the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a bilateral arrangement that facilitates exchanges of sensitive intelligence, including about North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs.  The economic consequences of the spat are already becoming apparent. Rising tensions, together with a broader economic slowdown, caused South Korean exports to Japan to fall by 6.2 percent year on year in August. Over the same period, Japanese car sales in South Korea plummeted by 57 percent, owing largely to consumer boycotts, and the number of Korean visitors to Japan dropped by half.  And the dispute may be set to escalate. In particular, if assets seized from Mitsubishi Heavy Industries under the 2018 court order are liquidated next year, Japan will most likely implement tough new retaliatory measures. This would plunge Japan-South Korea relations into turmoil, with far-reaching implications for both sides — Japan is South Korea’s fifth-largest export market and South Korea is Japan’s third-largest — and for the entire global economy.  Japan and South Korea are the world’s fourth- and fifth-largest exporters, respectively, and major players in global tech supply chains. At a time of rising protectionism worldwide — exemplified by the protracted U.S.-China trade war — and heightened geopolitical risks, a Japan-South Korea trade conflict is the last thing the global economy needs.  Japan and South Korea are two of the largest beneficiaries of the post-World War II multilateral trading system and neither can escape criticism for damaging it. As Group of 20 leaders emphasized in Osaka in June, trade should be “free, fair and nondiscriminatory.” But outside criticism is unlikely to carry as much weight as domestic public opinion, which in both countries seems to oppose concessions.  In fact, by stoking nationalist sentiment and appealing to deep-rooted public mistrust of the other, South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe have marshaled considerable popular support for a tough stance. According to the latest survey by Nikkei-TV Tokyo, 67 percent of Japanese support the government’s export controls. In South Korea, recent polls indicate that a majority of citizens are participating in the boycott and 48 percent support exiting the GSOMIA.  The best chance of convincing Abe and Moon to compromise lies with intervention by the United States. But U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration has so far taken a largely hands-off approach to the dispute, which it seems to have assessed solely in terms of U.S. economic interests. This misses the tremendous strategic importance of ensuring continued cooperation between two major Asian allies, both for managing North Korea’s nuclear ambitions and for coping with growing Chinese influence.  In fact, China is already seizing the opportunity created by the Japan-South Korea rift to expand its influence, including by playing the role of mediator. At a trilateral meeting of foreign ministers in late August, China encouraged Japan and South Korea to engage in continuous dialogue to resolve their differences.  After South Korea announced that it would not renew the GSOMIA, high-ranking U.S. officials expressed “strong concern” and “disappointment,” and called on South Korea “to recommit” to the pact, which is a critical component of America’s security architecture in Asia. It’s a start, but what is really needed is for the Trump administration to bring Japan and South Korea to the negotiating table.  In lieu of such leadership, Japan and South Korea must recognize the danger their dispute poses and exercise self-restraint. With or without the U.S., they need to find a way to break the deadlock before it spirals out of control. |
| Mainichi Japan, editorial | Editorial | Mainichi Japan | September 14, 2019 | Japan | Drop in S. Korean tourists to Japan a lost cultural exchange opportunity | The number of South Korean tourists visiting Japan has sharply decreased, due largely to the South Korean public's dim opinion of Tokyo's tightening of controls on exports of certain materials to their country.  【Related】Feuds between Japan, neighbors to test Motegi's diplomatic skills  【Related】S. Korea files WTO complaint over Japan export controls  【Related】Diplomatic feud between Japan, S. Korea takes toll on tourism  According to the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), the number of South Korean sightseers who visited Japan in July decreased 7.6% from a year earlier.  The Chuseok holiday period began in South Korea on Sept. 12. Many South Koreans apparently flew to Southeast Asia and other regions this year. Until last year, Tokyo, Osaka in western Japan and Fukuoka in southwestern Japan were popular destinations for South Korean tourists during the holiday period.  The number of South Korean visitors to Japan is feared to fall further after the tourism season ends in late September. Because of this, South Korean airlines have decided to suspend or decrease flights to and from Japan. Even if most tourists stay in Japan for just a handful of days, these are important opportunities for them to interact directly with Japan's culture. It is regrettable that their opportunities to do so are decreasing.  The outcome of an opinion poll released by the Genron NPO this year shows that the ratio of South Koreans who had a good impression of Japan had hit a record high of 31.7%. The steady improvement of South Koreans' image of Japan corresponded with the increase in the number of tourists coming from that country with each passing year.  One cannot help but wonder whether views on Japan based on indirect information could spread in South Korea if the number of South Korean visitors to Japan continues to dwindle. It would be alarming if diverse views on Japan among South Koreans, views nurtured by first-hand exchanges between the peoples of the two countries, were to be lost.  The Japanese government is putting on a front of composure, saying that the number of inbound tourists from China and Southeast Asia as well as other regions has been growing considerably.  However, South Koreans had accounted for nearly one-fourth of all inbound tourists. It is thus obvious that recent trends are adversely affecting the drive of the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to attract 40 million visitors a year.  According to the Japan Tourism Agency, South Korean visitors to Japan spent a combined 590 billion yen in 2018. In particular, Kyushu in southwestern Japan and the northernmost prefecture of Hokkaido, where South Koreans accounted for the largest percentage of inbound tourists, are beginning to suffer. There are fears that the recent trend could deal a serious blow to these local economies.  Officials of municipalities in Hokkaido have raised banners bearing the message, "Welcome to Hokkaido" in Hangul script at local airports. However, these local bodies have reportedly been flooded with criticism that the friendly message is unneeded.  Still, Hokkaido Gov. Naomichi Suzuki underscores the importance of exchanges with South Koreans.  Local bodies and the tourism industry appear hesitant to openly campaign to attract South Koreans to Japan in view of severe public opinion on South Korea. The government, which is striving to transform Japan into a tourism-oriented country, should take proactive measures to encourage South Koreans to visit Japan rather than leaving the matter entirely to local governments and tourism businesses. |
| Mainichi Japan | News Analysis | Mainichi Japan | August 22, 2019 | Japan | Diplomatic feud between Japan, S. Korea takes toll on tourism | Japan has seen a marked decline in the number tourists visiting from South Korea amid a diplomatic standoff between the two countries, resulting in a downturn in flights, ferry bookings and visits to sightseeing hotspots.  In July, the number of tourists from South Korea was down 7.6% from the same month the previous year, and the figure is expected to decline further.  Talks between the foreign ministers of both countries on Aug. 21 ended without convergence, and there are no immediate prospects of an improvement in relations between the two countries.  The Minami shopping and entertainment district of the western Japan city of Osaka is usually bustling with visitors from overseas. Even on weekdays it is crowded with sightseers from across Asia, and it is a popular destination for those from South Korea. Normally about one-quarter of the visitors to the Dotonbori outlet of popular okonomiyaki restaurant Chibo, in the city's Chuo Ward, are from South Korea, and the restaurant provides menus in Korean. Over the past two months, however, the number of South Korean customers is said to have dropped by around 80%. Tomohiro Oyamada, a 38-year-old worker at the store, commented, "The restaurant used to be filled with South Korean visitors who had finished their sightseeing for the day, and it was common to see lines of people waiting in front of the restaurant, but that's no longer the case."  The Kyushu region in southwestern Japan, which is geographically close to South Korea, has also seen a decline in visitor numbers. Previously around 70-80% of visitors to Kamado Jigoku (Cooking Pot Hell), a hot spring attraction in the Oita Prefecture city of Beppu, were from South Korea, but in July the proportion of visitors from the country dipped by about 30%. The figure is expected to decline further in August. In the past, many South Korean visitors had taken smartphone photos of steam rising from the ground and of people relaxing in footbaths, and then shared those images on social media, but resort president Takashi Utsunomiya commented, "It seems that not many people are uploading posts to social networks, perhaps because they don't want people to know they've been having fun in Japan."  Autumn is usually a busy season for hot springs, but Utsunomiya remains at a loss about how to boost business. "There's nothing we can do," he said with a shrug. "We have to think about attracting people from regions other than South Korea."  Major Japanese travel agency JTB Corp., meanwhile, says that individual reservations through its Korean language website for August are down by about 70% compared with the same month last year, while September reservations have dropped by around 80%. At first, reservations by Japanese people visiting South Korea were not greatly affected, but August reservations were down by around 30%, and those for September have fallen by about 50%.  The dip in tourist numbers has led to reductions in flights and ferry trips between the neighbors.  According to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, South Korean airlines operate about 1,200 return flights a week to 26 cities in Japan. But South Korea's largest carrier, Korean Air Lines Co., announced it would halt flights between Sapporo and Busan, and then on Aug. 20 said that it would suspend or reduce flights on 11 other routes, including between Kansai and Busan. Asiana Airlines and low-cost carrier T'way Air have also decided to suspend some flights.  In the past, over 40% of passengers aboard the Beetle high-speed ferry that JR Kyushu Jet Ferry Inc. operates between Busan and Fukuoka in southwestern Japan had been from South Korea, but in July, the that figure was down by about 20% compared to the same month the previous year, and this month the level is expected to fall by about half.  One 20-year-old university student who arrived at Hakata Port International Terminal in Fukuoka's Hakata Ward with a friend said she was looking forward to shopping at a Japanese anime goods store and visiting a beer factory. But she added that her father didn't have a good image of Japan, and discussion of Japan was taboo in her family.  "Japan is a neighboring country. I want things to head in a better direction," she said.  Spending by South Korean tourists in Japan also appears to be down. The Japan Department Stores Association announced on Aug. 21 that gross duty free sales for July had risen by about 3.4% to 28.1 billion yen, increasing for the sixth consecutive month. However, association Managing Director Shigeki Yamazaki said purchases by South Koreans were down by about 10%. |
| Mainichi Japan | Editorial | Mainichi Japan | September 4, 2019 | Japan | Japanese weekly magazine's anti-S. Korea feature totally out of order | The weekly magazine "Shukan Post" is under fire for a recent feature that could incite hatred and discrimination against South Koreans. The article, carried in the Sept. 13 edition of the magazine released by major publishing house Shogakukan Inc., makes one wonder if the magazine's editors thought writing anything would be acceptable as long as the article was going with the tide of public sentiment over Japan's ongoing conflict with South Korea.  The feature, titled "We don't need South Korea," argues about severing ties with South Korea, instead of merely showing disdain for the country. In particular, a section of the article about the trait of South Koreans degrades their country, claiming that one in 10 of them needs treatment for psychiatric disorders.  Magazines are a medium for divulging straight opinions. Such publications have historically energized journalism by challenging authority and those in power in a guerrilla-like manner while employing borderline tactics.  However, Shukan Post's feature in question headed into a different dimension from those valued merits of magazines. It apparently rather sides with prejudice and hatred against South Koreans that is underlying in a segment of Japanese society, thereby aiming to satisfy their sentiment. If that's the case, the magazine's stance can only be described as malicious.  Some authors have lashed out at the feature article, with one of them declaring he will no longer work with the publisher. In response, the editorial department of Shukan Post released an apology, saying the feature "lacked consideration."  Shukan Post is not alone in adopting an editorial policy of stimulating hate among readers. In the fall of last year, the "Shincho 45" monthly magazine was forced to fold after coming under fire for carrying discriminatory articles on sexual minorities. Yet magazines featuring rightist discourse are still studded with such agitating headlines as "A disease called South Korea" and "No to South Korea -- A declaration for breaking relations" in their recent articles.  Behind such inflammatory headlines and articles apparently lies a slump in the sales of magazines amid the rapid growth of online media. As articles in the conventional fashion hardly contribute to boosting sales, publishers are resorting to the heavy use of biased expressions. South Korea has emerged as their favorite target as the political schism between Tokyo and Seoul only deepens.  South Korean President Moon Jae-in's response to the issues surrounding Korean wartime laborers forced to work in Japan and the bilateral accord over Korean "comfort women" made to work in Japanese military brothels during World War II surely betrayed the trust between Japan and South Korea in some respect. As a democratic country, Japan should be guaranteed to freely make political criticism to the maximum extent possible.  Nevertheless, if such criticism transcends the necessary bounds and turns into hate speech that could lead to discrimination against people in other countries, the media needs to exercise its responsibility to rule this out, for discrimination is a form of violence that hurts the very existence of humans.  Japan and South Korea share a history that is susceptible to spawning emotional conflict. Because of this, it is all the more necessary for the two countries to make efforts to bridge the gap in their perceptions. Isn't it the media's job to play that role? |
| Mainichi Japan | Editorial | Mainichi Japan | August 23, 2019 | Japan | Tokyo, Seoul both to blame for failing ties, both must seek solution | The tensions between Japan and South Korea have reached a new dimension, their effects now extending into the realm of international security. To say that this is highly regrettable is an understatement.  The South Korean government on Aug. 22 announced that it would scrap the 3-year-old General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), an intelligence-sharing arrangement with Japan. Seoul stated that GSOMIA "does not serve our national interests," a judgment Seoul says it arrived at because Tokyo has not provided a clear explanation for placing controls on certain exports to South Korea and revoking its preferential trade status.  It appears the South Korean government is looking to appeal to domestic public opinion as it takes a hard-line stance against Japan. When Tokyo announced last month that it was placing controls on South Korea-bound exports of materials vital for semiconductor production, distrust of Seoul was given as the reason. The latest move reciprocates, with South Korea indicating plainly that it doubts it can share confidential information with Japan in the absence of a mutually trusting relationship.  Vestiges of the Cold War remain in Northeast Asia, entwining China, Russia and North Korea. Japan and South Korea ought to share the basic values underpinning democracy, and it is a grave error for them to indulge in a verbal tit-for-tat squabble that will lay waste to all the fruits of their bilateral security cooperation.  GSOMIA is a declaration to audiences at home and abroad that Japan, South Korea and the United States are firm in their cooperation on North Korean issues. For Seoul and Tokyo, the framework plays an important role in analysis of North Korean ballistic missile launch trajectories, and apparently allowed the smooth sharing of intelligence among the three powers.  That being the case, Japan and the U.S. both made strong calls for GSOMIA to be extended. The agreement's cancellation could spell further escalation of the confrontation between Tokyo and Seoul, and cast a shadow over the U.S.-South Korea alliance as well.  In recent years, South Korea has displayed a cautious attitude to security cooperation with Japan, with the latter's colonial history on the Korean Peninsula and Seoul's increasing attention to China's growing presence both playing a part. Just before GSOMIA was to be signed, South Korea delayed the ceremony due, it said, to the domestic situation. At the time, the agreement was facing stiff opposition from South Korea's political left -- forces that are now connected with the government.  However, part of the responsibility for the current predicament lies with the Japanese administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.  It is true that the South Korean administration of President Moon Jae-in has taken a consistently faithless position on historical problems including the comfort women and forced labor issues. Nevertheless, it was inappropriate for the Abe government to tangle diplomatic problems up with Japan's economic policy. Tokyo ought to have seen Seoul's hard-line reaction coming.  The costs of this bilateral rivalry will not only be economic. It will also impact cultural, sports and human exchange across the Sea of Japan. The two countries must understand that they are both responsible for correcting the steep downturn in bilateral ties. |
| Mainichi Japan | Editorial | Mainichi Japan | August 3, 2019 | Japan | Revoking S. Korea's preferential trade status raises fears of a spiral in ties | The Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has decided to revoke South Korea's preferential status as a trade partner for export of goods that can be converted for military use. It is an unprecedented move.  It comes after Tokyo enforced restrictions on exports of three items including semiconductor materials. However, this latest development is particularly serious because it could represent a historic crossroads in Japan-South Korean relations. The move could exacerbate into a conflict between the two countries that is far more serious than past frictions.  One of the reasons is that Japan has drastically expanded the scope of items that could be subject to export restrictions. Those newly covered include machine tools such as equipment to produce semiconductors, which are core products made by South Korean firms. It could deal a serious blow to South Korea, which has already been hit by restrictions on semiconductor materials.  Carbon fiber and lithium ion batteries could be subject to restrictions too, adversely affecting the car industry, South Korea's second largest sector. Communications equipment and electronic parts are included in items covered by the restrictions, and there are concerns that diverse industrial sectors could be affected by the latest move.  This could shake the separation of politics and the economy, a key principle in Japan-South Korea relations.  Japan and South Korea are important trade partners. Even when their political relations deteriorated over historical perceptions and other issues, close ties between Japanese and South Korean companies have prevented overall relations from worsening further.  The South Korean economy, which achieved rapid growth, is a source of the country's self-confidence. Japan's latest move has stirred bitter protests from South Korean society because it hits its economy hard. Campaigns to boycott Japanese goods have already started; it is feared they will spur anti-Japan sentiment further.  Secondly, the move could destabilize the security environment in East Asia. Tokyo's revocation of Seoul's preferential status as a trade partner for exports is tantamount to regarding South Korea as untrustworthy in terms of security and an unfriendly country to Japan.  South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha has hinted at the possibility of scrapping the Japan-South Korea General Security of Military Information Agreement, with the deadline for renewing the accord coming in late August. If cooperation between Japan and South Korea is impeded, it would only benefit North Korea and others.  The latest series of Pyongyang's short-range ballistic missile firings is apparently not unrelated to the conflict between Tokyo and Seoul. Some observers say that the Russian military aircraft that flew jointly with Chinese military aircraft and entered Japan's airspace above the Takeshima Islands in Shimane Prefecture, also claimed by South Korea, did so to unsettle Japan by taking advantage of the conflict between Tokyo and Seoul.  What is troubling is that both sides have fallen into a negative spiral of blaming each other, apparently while keeping domestic sentiment in mind.  The United States attempted to mediate between Japan and South Korea, but Tokyo decided to revoke South Korea's preferential status before Japan-U.S.-South Korea foreign ministerial talks.  After the decision, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshige Seko released details of public comments regarding Japan's move. Seko said the government gathered opinions from some 40,000 people, and that 95% of them were in favor of the move. The trade minister said the government decided to revoke South Korea's status with the surveyed results in mind.  After the decision, South Korean President Moon Jae-in bitterly criticized Japan. In the past, Prime Minister Abe has criticized South Korea for not keeping its promises with other countries.  It is the role of both governments to calmly evaluate public opinion in making policies. It is highly risky to instigate nationalism.  Bilateral relations have soured so badly because of both countries' responses to the issue of compensation for South Korean people who were forced to work for Japanese companies during World War II.  South Korea had taken the position that the matter was settled under a 1965 agreement on the issue. However, following the South Korean Supreme Court's rulings last year ordering Japanese companies to pay compensation to former forced workers, Seoul proposed that Japanese companies concerned should extend financial contributions for a settlement.  The South Korean government has not complied with Japan's request for appointing arbitration panel members under the agreement, a practice Tokyo views as constituting a violation of international law.  Tokyo went ahead with export restrictions, effectively in retaliation for the issue of compensation for former forced workers. Trade minister Seko commented that Seoul's response badly damaged mutual trust.  However, it is unreasonable to resort to trade procedures that are irrelevant to the forced labor issue. While Japan denies that, the international community views Japan's move as a use of trade for political purposes.  What is necessary is for both the Japanese and South Korean governments to make compromises from a broad perspective.  Japan and South Korea normalized their diplomatic relations in 1965 during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. Despite a gap in historical perceptions, the two countries maintained their cooperative relationship as fellow members of the Western bloc.  The power structure within East Asia has changed since the end of the Cold War. South Korea has strengthened its relations with China, which has emerged as a major power. Border disputes have also heightened nationalist sentiment.  Still, the importance of the roles Japan and South Korea should play in maintaining order in East Asia remains unchanged. Tokyo and Seoul need to closely cooperate in denuclearizing North Korea. Collaboration between Japan and South Korea in efforts to help stabilize East Asia will contribute to common benefits for both countries.  Friction over historical perceptions and other sticking issues will not easily be resolved. What is important is for both governments to take adequate crisis management measures if friction arises, to prevent it from adversely affecting bilateral economic ties and private-sector exchanges.  The two countries cannot conduct diplomacy if they just blame each other without any prospect of settlement. The Japanese and South Korean leaders should face each other with sincerity to settle any dispute. |
| Mainichi Japan | Editorial | Mainichi Japan | July 31, 2019 | Japan | S. Korean-Japan diplomatic tensions shouldn't hamper civic exchange | The deteriorating diplomatic relationship between Japan and South Korea has begun to have an impact on grassroots exchanges between the two countries.  【Related】S. Korean cities suspend exchange programs with Japan amid tensions  【Related】US urges Japan, S. Korea to mull 'standstill' amid tensions  【Related】Japan-Korea trade spat to intensify with new export limits  【Related】Korean Air to suspend Busan-Sapporo flights in Sept. amid row  【Related】Concerned citizens rap Japan gov't over worsening ties with S. Korea  The South Korean city of Busan announced that it would suspend administrative exchanges with Japan. Busan is located in the very south of the Korean Peninsula and has historically had very active exchanges with Japan. But it has said it will halt citizens' visits to Nagasaki Prefecture, with which it has had friendly relations, and other interactive programs until bilateral ties improve.  Furthermore, the city of Seosan in South Chungcheong Province, South Korea, notified its sister city in Japan -- Tenri, Nara Prefecture -- that it would temporarily stop its exchange programs. A soccer team and a choral group from the South Korean city of Changwon, South Gyeongsang Province, lodged a request to postpone their respective visits to the Gifu Prefecture city of Ogaki, both of which are part of youth exchange programs between the two countries.  According to the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), 162 local governments in Japan and South Korea are in sister-city or friendship-city relationships. The number of sister cities and friendship cities that Japan has with South Korea is the third most it has with any country after the United States and China, and yet, exchange programs have been subjected to suspension one after another.  South Korea, which has decided to halt these exchange programs, sees Japan's beefed-up restrictions on exports as problematic. The city of Busan argued that it was keeping in step with the administration of South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who is demanding the retraction of the restrictive trade measures.  However, the point of sister cities is to further mutual understanding at the civic level regardless of what is happening at the government level. It is precisely at a time when tensions are high between the governments of the two countries that bilateral exchange at the grassroots level becomes important. The cancellation of exchange programs, therefore, comes as a great disappointment.  President Moon is enthusiastically advocating that the South Korean public come together as a whole against the export restriction issue. This attitude is indirectly nudging the suspension of civic exchange programs.  "Exchanges between local governments comprise the pillars of civic exchange, so we would like them to continue carrying them out responsibly," Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono has emphasized. But Japan appears to be doing little but silently observe the situation. It's merely sending a cool gaze at South Korea's handling of the situation against a backdrop of unforgiving public opinion.  As early as Aug. 2, the Cabinet of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe plans to approve a government ordinance revision that would remove South Korea from its "white list" of countries that enjoy an expedited export process. As Seoul has requested that the step not be taken, if Abe's Cabinet does indeed approve the move, South Korea's anti-Japanese sentiment is bound to grow even further.  Aug. 15, or National Liberation Day of Korea, on which the liberation of the Korean Peninsula from Japanese colonial rule is celebrated, is coming up. It is a time when nationalism on both the Japanese and South Korean sides can easily flare up.  When Japan and South Korea normalized diplomatic relations in 1965, the number of people going back and forth between the two countries was around 10,000. Last year, the number reached 10 million. Multilayered ties among everyday people from the two countries continue to expand. We must not allow this progress to reverse itself. |
| Mainichi Japan | Editorial | Mainichi Japan | July 26, 2019 | Japan | Japan, S. Korea won't solve row while preoccupied with own arguments | Fixating on one's own arguments will not help lead anyone toward a path of resolution.  At a World Trade Organization (WTO) General Council meeting convened to discuss Japan's imposition of restrictions on some key exports for South Korea's high-tech industry, the two countries exchanged bitter words.  South Korea criticized Japan for violating WTO rules by discriminating against a specific country based on a political issue such as compensation for wartime forced laborers. Japan, meanwhile, countered that the restrictions that it placed on exports to South Korea were unrelated to the forced labor issue, and were rather measures based on concerns over national security. However, Japan has yet to clarify what specifically it considers a national security-related problem.  The administrations of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Moon Jae-in have both taken a hard-line stance, and probably feel they are unable to retreat at this point. If things continue in this manner, however, the dispute will only get worse.  As early as next month, Japan plans to remove South Korea from its "white list" of countries that enjoy an expedited shipment process. Currently, only three items, including materials necessary for manufacturing semiconductors, have been made ineligible for this expedited process. But the complete removal of South Korea from the list will mean that a wide range of items will no longer be eligible for the speedy process. There is no denying such a measure could negatively impact South Korean corporations.  The South Korean government has strongly objected to Japan's planned move, and has not ruled out the possibility of filing a lawsuit with the WTO. Anti-Japanese sentiment has spread at the civic level as well, in the form of boycotts of Japanese-made products.  A chain of retaliation, once begun, will only complicate a problem. No matter what is being disputed, there can be no diplomacy if the parties involved are not always searching for a way out. Japan and South Korea must reach a compromise through dialogue.  The international community's reaction to the bilateral row was the focus of attention at the WTO General Council meeting. But no countries aside from Japan and South Korea made any remarks, indicating they wished to distance themselves from the row. The current chair of the council, Thailand's Sunanta Kangvalkulkij, said she hoped the two countries would seek a cordial resolution to the problem, nudging them toward direct dialogue.  No matter how much the Japanese government denies it, its export restrictions are being viewed as retaliatory measures for the forced laborer issue. The apparent use of trade as a political tool is drawing criticism from South Korea.  Even when the relationship between Japan and South Korea has deteriorated politically due to differences in historical interpretation and other issues, close economic ties and civic exchange have provided a strong foundation for the two countries. It is the government's job to ensure that political issues do not affect the economy.  We would like South Korea to rethink their handling of the issue as well. Seoul has not responded to Tokyo's request for the establishment of an arbitration committee for the forced labor issue based on a 1965 bilateral agreement concerning the settlement of problems in regard to property and claims. If South Korea is going to demand that Japan comply with international laws such as WTO rules, then it should respond in kind with the forced labor issue. |
| Mainichi Japan | Editorial | Mainichi Japan | June 20, 2019 | Japan | Dialogue necessary to settle Japan-S. Korea wartime labor dispute | The deadlock in talks between Japan and South Korea over the wartime forced labor issue is feared to be prolonged. South Korea rejected Japan's request that an arbitration panel be established over the dispute and instead offered to settle the issue through diplomatic channels, a proposal unacceptable to Tokyo.  【Related】Japan rejects S. Korea's offer for wartime labor talks  【Related】Japan, S. Korea foreign ministers to meet on fringes of G-20 summit  【Related】Japan fails to convince S. Korea on wartime labor issue  It is unwise to close the door for dialogue. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Moon Jae-in should hold talks on the occasion of the upcoming summit meeting of the Group of 20 major countries and regions in Osaka.  Seoul announced on June 19 that it is prepared to hold two-way talks under the 1965 bilateral agreement on compensation for wartime problems on condition that Japanese and South Korean companies concerned spontaneously contribute funds to pay compensation to victims of forced labor. The proposal is part of countermeasures that Seoul had postponed implementing since South Korea's Supreme Court ordered Japanese firms to pay compensation to the victims.  South Korea apparently attempted to demonstrate to the world that it has unveiled countermeasures to tackle the problem before the G-20 summit conference. However, Seoul's announcement means that the country is urging Tokyo to accept its top court's decision. It is only natural that Tokyo has rejected the proposal for dialogue with preconditions attached.  The Abe government has raised serious questions about South Korea's stance toward the wartime forced labor issue. Therefore, observations are growing within and outside his administration that Japan and South Korea will not hold a bilateral summit on the sidelines of the G-20 conference later this month. However, it would be disadvantageous to Japan if the two countries chose not to hold a bilateral summit only for that reason.  Japan and South Korea have not held a single summit meeting since October 2018. Nor have Abe and Moon held telephone talks since their last such conversation in April last year. A lack of direct communication between the two leaders for a long time has cast a shadow over bilateral ties in various fields.  Shortly after the Moon government was inaugurated, the two leaders frequently held telephone consultations to collaborate with each other in responding to North Korean issues. Under the current circumstances, however, Abe and Moon cannot sufficiently share information on these problems even though they are supposed to pursue ways to break the deadlock as U.S.-North Korea talks have stalled.  The lack of two-way summit talks has adversely affected bilateral economic relations. According to a survey by a South Korean private business organization, the volume of trade between the two countries from November 2018 to this past May fell 9.3% from a year earlier. This is compared to a mere 3.2% decline in South Korea's overall trade volume.  Grass root-level exchanges between Japan and South Korea have been continuing since the court rulings were handed down over the forced labor issue. However, Japanese and South Korean citizens' impressions of the other country's leaders have worsened. Both representatives have a responsibility to ease tensions between the two countries.  A drastic breakthrough cannot be expected from a single summit meeting. The possibility cannot be ruled out that even if such a meeting takes place, it will develop into a clash between the two leaders over their assertions.  Still, it is of great significance for the two leaders to demonstrate to their respective peoples that they will sincerely hold dialogue with each other. Top-level discussions will certainly help dispel mutual distrust between the two countries' citizens. |
| Mainichi Japan | Editorial | Mainichi Japan | July 18, 2019 | Japan | Japanese, S. Korean leaders should stay calm as conflict intensifies | Tensions between Japan and South Korea have been intensifying recently since Tokyo stiffened its export controls on Seoul. At a working-level meeting, South Korea demanded that Japan retract the restrictions. The two countries remained far apart as Tokyo flatly rejected its neighbor's claim.  【Related】Tense Japan, S. Korean meeting on export curbs highlights mutual distrust  【Related】Japan stresses export curbs on S. Korea are not countermeasures  【Related】Japan's hopes that forced labor case would stay S. Korean issue are dashed  Concerns have been raised that mutual distrust between Japan and South Korea will deepen and bilateral ties will further deteriorate.  Prime Minister Shinzo Abe bitterly criticized South Korea at a debate session before and during campaigning for the July 21 House of Councillors election and on other occasions, describing South Korea as "a country that can't abide by international conventions" and "one that can't keep promises with other countries."  Specifically, the prime minister is criticizing Seoul for pressing Japan to accept the South Korean Supreme Court's rulings ordering Japanese companies to pay compensation to wartime forced workers even though the issue of compensation has been settled under a 1965 bilateral accord. His remarks also appear to reflect his displeasure at Seoul's unilateral disbandment of a foundation to support former wartime "comfort women" that had been established under a bilateral agreement.  South Korea's responses to these issues were certainly problematic. Still, one cannot help but wonder whether labeling South Korea as "a country that breaks promises" will contribute to a solution to bilateral problems.  Moreover, South Korean President Moon Jae-in warned that Tokyo's stiffening of export controls "will eventually cause more damage to the Japanese economy" than South Korea, as if to intimidate Japan. Under these circumstances, no one can expect the two countries to hold constructive dialogue.  Moon also stated, "We'll overcome the difficulties we face now just as everyone joined hands to surmount economic crises in the past," showing no consideration to Japan. It is regrettable that Moon, while suggesting that Seoul can reconsider measures to settle the issue of wartime forced labor, shifted the blame for the failure to settle the matter to Japan by claiming that Tokyo has refused to hold consultations on the issue.  The cause of friction between the neighboring countries lies in how to interpret rules and historical perceptions. In the 21st century when the economic might of South Korea has become close to that of Japan, a growing sense of rivalry between the two countries tends to intensify bilateral conflicts.  It is the role of diplomacy to search for common ground while pursuing long-term benefits. However, if the two leaders are proactively provoking nationalism, no diplomatic solution can be achieved. In fact, national sentiment in both countries would only worsen.  July 18 is the deadline for procedures to set up an arbitration panel on the forced labor issue, which Tokyo requested under the bilateral agreement on issues relating to compensation. South Korea is poised to reject the request. Since an arbitration process will unlikely be initiated, it could reignite the exchange of criticism between the two countries. The leaders of Japan and South Korea should exercise self-restraint in their comments on bilateral issues. |
| The  Straits Times editorial with AFP | Commentary | The  Straits Times | November 22, 2019 | Singapore | 5 things to know about the Japan-South Korea intel-sharing pact Gsomia | - South Korea's decision on Friday (Nov 22) to "conditionally" extend a key intelligence-sharing pact with Japan will come as a huge relief to the United States, which was deeply troubled by the diplomatic spat between its two main allies in the region.  Here are five things to know about the decision:  What happened?  With just hours to go until it was due to run out, South Korea announced it would suspend the expiry of a pact with Japan called the General Security of Military Information Agreement (Gsomia).  Under the pact, originally signed in 2016, the two directly share military secrets, particularly over North Korea's nuclear and missile capacity.  In August, following a sharp deterioration in ties, Seoul said it was no longer in its national interest to continue sharing confidential information with its neighbour.  At the time, Tokyo "strongly" protested against the move and urged South Korea to reconsider.  Why is it important?  Get exclusive insights into Asia  ST Asian Insider newsletter helps you stay ahead of developments in the fast-changing region  Sign up  By signing up, you agree to our Privacy Policy and Terms and Conditions.  Sharing intelligence between the two US allies is especially vital at a time when unpredictable and nuclear-armed North Korea appears to be sabre rattling amid a deadlock in talks with Washington.  Tokyo has said that during missile launches, there is a "thorough and careful exchange of information between both sides" that would otherwise be lost.  Analysts say that without the agreement, both militaries may find it more difficult to track missile launches from the regime in Pyongyang.  Scrapping the pact would have been "a huge setback for one of the pillars of East Asia's security that Japan, South Korea and the United States have established", said Mr Kenichiro Sasae, former vice-minister for foreign affairs, negotiator, and ambassador to the US.  Other experts have played down the move, however, noting the United States previously coordinated the flow of sensitive information between the pair anyway, and this would simply have resumed.  What is the regional and global impact?  The US had pleaded with Japan and South Korea not to allow a deterioration in ties to affect the military-sharing pact, with officials as senior as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urging the pair to bury the hatchet.  US officials admit privately that the spat between the two complicated diplomacy in the region - including with North Korea over its nuclear programme.  Defence Secretary Mark Esper said on a recent trip to Asia that the only beneficiaries from the pact being scrapped would be North Korea and China, and urged the two allies to "sit down and work through their differences".  How did it come to this?  Bitter memories of Japan's brutal colonialisation of Korea between 1910 and 1945 have long cast a dark cloud over bilateral relations.  Japan says a 1965 treaty that normalised relations with a significant financial contribution effectively settled all reparation claims.  But in past months, a string of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to compensate forced labour victims infuriated Japan.  Bilateral ties went further into tailspin in July after Tokyo said Seoul was not properly handling sensitive imports, and took the country off a list of nations that enjoyed streamlined export control procedures.  This enraged South Korea, which hit back with similar moves targeting Japan, before cancelling the intelligence-sharing pact.  What happens next?  Bilateral ties are unlikely to come out of the deep freeze in the near future, said Mr Sasae, but should still be seen as positive over the longer term.  "The current situation is extremely deplorable and extremely regrettable... but the Japan-South Korea relationship has been expanding when seen in a historical perspective," he said.  Anti-Japan sentiment continues to grow in South Korea, however, with protests and boycotts of Japanese goods and a dramatic drop in South Korean tourists visiting Japan. |
| CNA editorial | Commentary | Channel News Asia | August 23, 2019 | Singapore | 5 things to know about Japan-South Korea intel-sharing pact | TOKYO: South Korea's decision to scrap a key intelligence-sharing pact with Japan has far-reaching geopolitical implications and shows the two neighbours are still struggling to come to terms with a bloody history.  Here are five things to know about the decision:  Advertisement  WHAT HAPPENED?  To general surprise, South Korea announced late Thursday (Aug 22) that it would not renew a pact with Japan to share military intelligence, called the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).  READ: South Korea to scrap military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan  Under the pact, originally signed in 2016, the two US allies directly share military secrets, particularly over North Korea's nuclear and missile capacity.  Seoul said it was no longer in its national interest to continue sharing confidential information with its neighbour during a sharp deterioration in ties. Tokyo said it would "strongly" protest the move and urged South Korea to reconsider.  WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?  Japan's Defence Minister Takeshi Iwaya said the pact was vital for regional security, pointing in particular to the nuclear and missile threat from North Korea.  "During the series of North Korean missile launches, there was a thorough and careful exchange of information between both sides," Iwaya told reporters on Friday.  Scrapping the pact would only make bilateral defence cooperation harder, he said.  READ: Ending intelligence pact shows South Korea fails to appreciate North Korean threat, Japan says  READ: Japan 'strongly' protests South Korea defence pact move: FM  Without the agreement, both militaries may find it more difficult to track missile launches from the regime in Pyongyang, said Tobias Harris, an analyst at the Teneo consultancy.  Harris noted that Seoul's move came "just as North Korea has ramped up tests of short-range ballistic missiles."  Some analysts have played down the move, however, noting the United States previously coordinated the flow of sensitive information between the pair and this practice would simply resume.  WHAT IS THE REGIONAL AND GLOBAL IMPACT?  South Korea's decision shows trust between the two countries has "crumbled", the left-leaning Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun said, adding that it would only benefit Washington's regional rivals.  "Discord between Japan, the US, and South Korea might be welcomed by China, Russia and North Korea," the paper said.  "They might seize the opportunity and drive further wedges" between the three allies.  Harris said the move was "also a blow to the United States, which has looked to its allies to help shore up its position in a rapidly changing Asia."  "The widening rift not only could complicate efforts to respond to North Korea if the diplomatic process breaks down... but could also hinder future efforts to strengthen coordination between the US and other democracies in the region," Harris said.  It is a "significant step in the deterioration of South Korea's relationship with Japan" and indicates a "broad shift" in how the two countries see their regional role, added the analyst.  HOW DID IT COME TO THIS?  Bitter memories of Japan's brutal colonialisation of Korea between 1910 and 1945 have long cast a dark cloud over bilateral relations.  Japan says a 1965 treaty that normalised relations with a significant financial contribution effectively settled all reparation claims.  In past months, a string of South Korean court rulings ordering Japanese firms to compensate forced labour victims has infuriated Japan.  And bilateral ties went into tailspin in July after Tokyo said Seoul was not properly handling sensitive imports and took the country off a list of nations that enjoyed streamlined export control procedures.  READ: Japan ramps up row with South Korea, removing favoured export status  READ: Angry South Koreans accuse Japan of 'economic invasion'  This enraged South Korea, which hit back with similar moves targeting Japan, before cancelling the intelligence-sharing pact.  WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?  Bilateral ties are unlikely to come out of the deep freeze in the near future, said Harris, bracing for "reduced levels of trade, investment, and tourism, and enduring mistrust over history, national security, and territorial issues."  Anti-Japan sentiment continues to grow in South Korea, with protests and boycotts of Japanese goods and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe may come under domestic pressure to retaliate.  The US appeared to be taken by surprise, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo using the unusually strong term "disappointed," noted Choi Kang, vice-president of the Asan Institute of Policy Studies, a private think tank in Seoul.  "But there is also the sentiment that the Trump administration didn't do enough as a mediator to help the two sides find a middle ground," said Choi.  "The US can propose three-way talks in seeking to find a compromise but it will be a long time," added the analyst. |
| CNA editorial with AFP | News Analysis | Channel News Asia | August 23, 2019 | Singapore | South Korea to scrap military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan | South Korea said on Thursday (Aug 22) it will terminate its military intelligence-sharing pact with Japan, sparking protest from both Tokyo and Washington amid an intensifying trade and diplomatic dispute between the Asian neighbours.  The decision comes with the countries at loggerheads following a run of South Korean court rulings against Japanese firms, requiring them to pay for forced labour during World War II.  Advertisement  "Maintaining this agreement, which was signed to facilitate the exchange of sensitive military information, does not serve our national interest," said Kim You-geun, a national security official at Seoul's presidential Blue House.  In a series of tit-for-tat measures, Japan had earlier this month removed South Korea from a so-called "white list" of countries that receive preferential export treatment.  Tokyo had done so citing security concerns and a loss of trust with South Korea, but did not provide "concrete evidence to support those allegations", said Kim.  This caused "fundamental changes" to the nature of defence cooperation, he added.  Advertisement  Grab  Sponsored by Grab  A supportive community bound by food  A mutually supportive network of bikers, merchants and customers keeps this delivery rider going  SEE MORE  Seoul's decision to end the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) marks a low point in relations between Japan and South Korea and was met with concern from their key ally the United States.  "We're disappointed to see the decision that the South Koreans made about that information-sharing agreement," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters following South Korea's announcement.  "We hope each of those two countries can begin to put that relationship back in exactly the right place," Pompeo said, adding that he'd spoken to his South Korean counterpart and urged both sides to "continue to have dialogue."  Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono called the move "a complete misjudgement of the current regional security environment, and it is extremely regrettable."  "We cannot accept the claims by the South Korean side and we will strongly protest against the South Korean government," Kono said, adding that Tokyo had summoned the South Korean ambassador.  Both Japan and South Korea are market economies and US allies faced with an overbearing China and nuclear-armed North Korea.  But their relationship continues to be heavily affected by Japan's colonial rule of the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945.  The pair's worst squabble in years, which has seen many South Koreans boycotting Japanese goods and trips there, has alarmed Washington.  Pompeo held talks with his Japanese and South Korean counterparts this month in Bangkok.  However the brief meeting appeared to have been frosty as the trio - with Pompeo in the middle - did not speak or shake hands when they posed for photos afterwards.  'HISTORICAL DISPUTE'  The termination of the military pact comes after Seoul announced earlier this month it would remove Tokyo from its list of trusted trading partners, reciprocating an identical decision by Japan.  That followed Tokyo's imposition last month of tough restrictions on exports of chemicals used for semiconductors and displays crucial to South Korean tech titans including Samsung.  On Thursday Seoul made it clear it believes Tokyo's export restrictions are motivated by "historical dispute".  The South Korean government "had to reconsider the effectiveness of GSOMIA as Japan has applied historical issues to the security matter", an unnamed presidential official told reporters.  The dispute has raised concerns over potential implications for the countries' security cooperation in the face of North Korean missile tests, and the possible impact on global supply chains.  The intelligence pact was signed in November 2016 with Washington's backing in response to Pyongyang's missile launches and nuclear tests, to better coordinate the gathering of information about the reclusive state.  The accord had been renewed every year and Seoul's decision to end it comes as a surprise, as the country was largely expected to maintain security cooperation with Japan despite the ongoing row. |
| Japan Today editorial with with Kyodo | Commentary | Japan Today | May 6, 2021 | Japan | Japan, S Korea at odds over wartime history, radioactive water | The foreign ministers of Japan and South Korea held their first talks in more than a year amid soured bilateral ties, but failed to narrow gaps over issues involving wartime history and Tokyo's decision to release treated radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant into the sea.  Meeting with his South Korean counterpart Chung Eui Yong on the fringes of the Group of Seven foreign ministerial gathering in London, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi demanded Seoul present at an early date a solution that would be acceptable to Tokyo with regard to the wartime labor and "comfort women" issues, the Japanese Foreign Ministry said.  Chung, for his part, said it would be impossible for the two sides to resolve the issues unless Japan has a "correct" perception of history, South Korea's Foreign Ministry said.  The two ministers met for the first time since Chung took the post in February. Mirroring the deteriorated relations, Motegi and Chung had not even held telephone talks.  Motegi also expressed concerns about Seoul's external communications amplifying its opposition to Tokyo's decision to release treated radioactive water from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the sea, according to the Japanese ministry.  Chung voiced "deep concerns" that Japan made the decision on the planned discharge of wastewater without sufficient prior consultation with neighboring countries, the South Korean ministry said, according to Yonhap News Agency.  Motegi said Japan will continue to provide information to South Korea and other parties on the issue.  In mid-April, South Korean President Moon Jae In instructed government officials to actively consider ways to take Japan's decision to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in a bid to stop its neighbor from discharging the water into the sea.  Despite remaining gaps over a range of issues between the two countries, the ministers appeared to keep hope alive for improving bilateral relations.  Motegi told an online press conference after the meeting, "We were able to share the view that we cannot leave the Japan-South Korean relationship as it is."  Motegi also indicated his willingness for another meeting with Chung in the future.  According to the Japanese ministry, the two agreed to continue communication between their ministries in an effort to restore the strained ties.  They shared the view that the two countries should develop relations "in a future-oriented manner," Yonhap quoted the South Korean ministry as saying.  The meeting between Motegi and Chung was held in London as South Korea was invited to the G-7 gathering as a guest along with Australia, India, South Africa and Brunei, this year's chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.  The United States hopes for improved ties between two key Asian allies since it sees that robust three-way coordination is indispensable for curbing North Korea's weapons development and keeping an increasingly assertive China in check.  Tokyo-Seoul relations have sunk to their lowest point in decades following South Korean Supreme Court rulings in 2018 that ordered Japanese companies to compensate plaintiffs who were laborers during Japan's 1910-1945 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula.  Also souring ties is the issue of comfort women in Japan's wartime military brothels.  Japan takes the position that a 1965 bilateral agreement settled all claims related to its colonial rule of the peninsula, including those of the laborers and former comfort women.  The last foreign ministerial talks the two neighbors held were in February 2020 between Motegi and then South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung Wha in Munich, Germany.  The G7 groups Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States, plus the European Union. |
| CNA Asia | News Analysis | Channel News Asia | August 22, 2019 | Singapore | Japan 'strongly' protests South Korea defence pact move | Japan's foreign minister said on Thursday (Aug 22) that Tokyo "strongly" protested against South Korea's decision to scrap a military intelligence-sharing pact, calling the move "extremely regrettable".  "I have to say the decision to end the pact by the South Korean government is a complete misjudgement of the current regional security environment and it is extremely regrettable," Taro Kono said in a statement.  Advertisement  "We cannot accept the claims by the South Korean side and we will strongly protest against the South Korean government," Kono said, adding that Tokyo had summoned the South Korean ambassador.  Earlier, Seoul had announced it was "not in the national interest to maintain the agreement that was signed for the purpose of exchanging sensitive military intelligence".  The end of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) marks a fresh low point in relations between the two democracies and US allies and is likely to be seen with dismay in Washington.  It was the latest in a series of tit-for-tat measures that began with a run of South Korean court rulings against Japanese firms, requiring them to pay for forced labour during World War II.  Advertisement  Grab  Sponsored by Grab  A supportive community bound by food  A mutually supportive network of bikers, merchants and customers keeps this delivery rider going  SEE MORE  The diplomatic spat has bled through into the trading relationship between the two high-tech economies, with both removing each other from a list of trusted trading partners.  Seoul's surprise move came just one day after Kono met his South Korean and Chinese counterparts in Beijing and the trio pledged to diffuse regional tensions, with one eye on North Korea's belligerence and nuclear threat.  Kono insisted that scrapping the pact and Japan's decision on the trade restrictions were completely different issues. |
| Pushan Dutt | Commentary | ChannelNews Asia | September 3, 2019 | Singapore | How a century-old dispute between Japan and South Korea threatens the global supply of smartphones | Japan and South Korea are showing no signs of resolving an escalating trade dispute, which traces back to 1910. It now poses a threat to the world’s tech supply chain and has potentially severe consequences for the global economy.  And the dispute is being played out within a complex confluence of historical grievances, domestic politics, the ongoing US-China trade war and a looming global recession.  Advertisement  Japan has officially removed South Korea from its list of trusted trade partners that receive preferential treatment for importing sensitive Japanese-made goods, as of Aug 28. The list of goods includes chemicals that are crucial to producing the semiconductor memory chips found in most modern electronic devices.  This means that Japanese companies will now have to apply for a license to export the chemicals to South Korean companies, a process that could take up to 90 days. Semiconductors are South Korea’s top export item.  From a global perspective, South Korea semiconductor giants Samsung and SK Hynix, which supply 60 per cent of the world’s memory chips, have warned that they can’t rule out production disruption if the Japanese export restrictions remain in place.  Samsung Electronics is the world's biggest smartphone and memory chip maker. (Photo: AFP/Jung Yeon-je)  Advertisement  Any delay to supply could cause serious disruption to global tech supply chains and significantly impact other tech giants, like Apple and Huawei, who use memory chips and displays from Samsung.  A CONFLICT WITH DEEP ROOTS  Japan has given no indication that it will change its mind. It claims the restrictions are a response to a national security concern, alluding to leaks to North Korea.  With no evidence put forward to support this, the likely scenario is that Japan’s action is part of an escalating and ongoing dispute involving historic grievances that date back to Japan’s colonisation of the Korean peninsula more than a century ago. During World War II, Japan conscripted more than 670,000 Koreans as forced labourers to support its military ambitions.  The recent decision to remove South Korea from trusted trade partner status originates with a South Korean high court ruling in October 2018. The court ordered Japanese companies to compensate individual victims of forced labour including the “comfort women” – Korean women taken as sex slaves and forced to work in war-time brothels.  Japan insists that most of the necessary compensation was settled as part of a US$500 million payout under a treaty signed in 1965 and then a new agreement that was reached in 2015.  But the current South Korean president, Moon Jae-in, created a taskforce in 2018 which concluded that the 2015 agreement did not reflect the opinions of the victims, especially their demand that Japan admit direct responsibility. Tokyo refuses further discussion of this issue and the bilateral relationship has continued to deteriorate.  Feelings are running high in South Korea, where a boyoctt of Japanese goods and services is gathering pace. (Photo: AFP/Jung Yeon-je)  The dispute is an emotional one for both countries. Thousands of South Korean protesters have marched on the Japanese embassy in Seoul, to express their displeasure at being downgraded as a trading partner.  Get the expert view  The best commentaries and analysis to better help you see beyond today’s news headlines. Subscribe to CNA’s Commentary newsletter.  This service is not intended for persons residing in the EU. By clicking subscribe, I agree to receive news updates and promotional material from Mediacorp and Mediacorp's partners.  SIGN ME UP  Many South Koreans have also vowed to boycott Japanese products, and there are reports that petrol station operators have been urged to stop refuelling Japanese cars.  GLOBAL SLOWDOWN  Both Japan and South Korea are integral to the world economy and disruptions will have spillovers that will go beyond the two antagonists. The most immediate threat is to the global tech supply chain, but any slowdown increases the likelihood of a worldwide recession.  The dispute has come at a particularly bad time. Major economies are currently experiencing weak growth with negative numbers coming out of the UK and Germany and a general slowdown in the US, China and India.  With the world’s two largest economies, the US and China, involved in an escalating tariff war that is chilling business investment, confidence and trade flows across the world, the Japan/Korean trade spat will only add to business uncertainty.  READ: Commentary: Have the gloves come off in latest US-China trade war saga?  READ: Commentary: There is no longer any doubt the US is pursuing containment of China  There is little indication as to when these disputes will be resolved, or in whose favour. Add to this the chaos surrounding Brexit and businesses are left wondering what will happen next.  Not surprisingly, firms are already adopting a wait-and-see attitude, postponing investment and waiting for clarity amid increasing uncertainty, as bond markets send alarming signals of a looming recession.  China's latest comments have soothed investor worries at the end of a painful week for markets hit by uncertainty over the trade talks AFP/STR  READ: Commentary: After the Fed’s rate cut, the impact on Singapore and growth  READ: Commentary: Who’s manipulating who in this China-US currency war?  SHIFTING POWER, WEAPONISING TRADE  In the past, the US would have stepped in to prevent any flare up between its two East Asian allies from getting going out of hand. But the Trump administration has been hesitant to get involved, despite the important role both countries play in monitoring North Korea’s nuclear ambitions.  In a telling sign of shifting power in the region, China has already offered to step in and help mediate the dispute. The foreign ministers of the three countries met recently but failed to set a date for the annual meeting of their leaders.  China considers stability a priority and has been actively seeking to bolster regional economic integration as its relationship with the US sours.  It will also be worried about the impact the Japan-South Korea trade spat could have on large Chinese technology companies like ZTE and Huawei, which rely on US suppliers like Qualcomm for chips and semiconductors. But if the US trade sanctions cut off this source of supply, they will be looking to South Korea for the vital components.  Hi1710 BMC management chip is seen on a Kunpeng 920 chipset designed by Huawei's Hisilicon subsidiary in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, China on May 29, 2019. (File photo: REUTERS/Jason Lee)  Another concern globally is Japan’s use of national security to justify its trade policy. This weaponising of trade follows Donald Trump’s citing of security concerns when putting tariffs on steel and aluminium imports.  China sees the trade war as an attempt to disrupt its core development strategy, the Made in China 2025 plan, prevent it’s re-emergence as a world power and views the trade dispute through the lens of security and sovereignty.  World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules which govern trade between countries are, to a large extent, based on norms. They include a national security exemption clause which relies on members applying it in good faith.  Once member states start taking advantage of the provision, there is likely to be a cascading effect, tempting more countries to weaponise this exemption in a tit-for-tat trade war. |
| Hyonhee Shin & Tim Kelly | Commentary | Channel News Asia | August 20, 2019 | Singapore | Less bluster, but no compromise seen as South Korean, Japan ministers meet in China | South Korea and Japan have toned down the rhetoric but show little sign of compromise in a bitter political and economic dispute as their foreign ministers prepare to meet in China this week.  Relations between the two U.S. allies are at their worst in years, with a trade row rooted in a decades-old dispute over compensation for Koreans forced to work during Japan's wartime occupation of South Korea.  Foreign ministers Kang Kyung-wha of South Korea, Taro Kono of Japan and Wang Yi of China will have trilateral meetings in Beijing from Tuesday evening to Thursday.  "We will have to actively express our position, but I am leaving with a heavy heart because the situation is very difficult," Kang said before departing for China where a one-on-one meeting with Kono is set for Wednesday.  Their August meeting in Bangkok, where cameras captured the unsmiling pair making perfunctory handshakes, achieved little. A day later, Japan cut South Korea from a white list of favored trade partners, drawing retaliatory measures from Seoul.  "We expect to exchange views on various issues between Japan and the ROK, such as the issue of former civilian workers from the Korean Peninsula," Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement, using the initials of South Korea's official name, the Republic of Korea.  The Beijing talks would reaffirm Japan's "close bilateral cooperation" with South Korea, as well as trilateral ties with the United States, the ministry said.  Since the Bangkok meeting, Seoul has urged a "cooling off period" and Japan approved shipments of a high-tech material to South Korea for the second time since imposing export curbs in July.  Nevertheless, the dispute is far from over.  South Korea warned this month it may consider revoking a military intelligence sharing pact with Japan, though an official at the presidential Blue House said on Tuesday no decision had been taken.  Seoul has also raised concerns about Japan's handling of contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant, a South Korea official said, though it may not bring it up in Beijing.  South Korea and other countries have restrictions on imports of produce from areas around the Fukushima site where three reactors melted down after an earthquake and tsunami in 2011.  NOT SO NICE FACE  While both sides have moderated their public statements, observers do not expect any major breakthroughs this week.  "I don't think Japan is going to show a nice face to Seoul this time," said one former Japanese diplomat familiar with the government's position.  Japan believes South Korea's economy is hurting more in the trade row, and "doesn't mind waiting for further concessions from Seoul," said the ex-diplomat.  Citing national security, Japan in July restricted exports of some key materials used in chips and displays made by South Korea firms, threatening to disrupt the global supply chain.  Later this month a decision to remove South Korea from Japan's list of trading partners with fast-track access to a number of materials is scheduled to go into effect.  South Korea has responded by removing Japan from its own trade white list, and South Korean consumers are boycotting Japanese products and avoiding travel to Japan.  There also has been no progress in resolving the issue that triggered the latest chill in relations - a series of South Korean court rulings that ordered Japanese firms to compensate South Koreans forced to work for Japanese occupiers.  "I don't think we can expect a big change in the situation as a result of tomorrow's meeting because the forced labor issue is at the root of the deterioration in ties and there hasn't been any new development regarding that," said Kyungjoo Kim, a professor at Tokai University in Tokyo. |
| CNA editorial with Reuters | News Analysis | ChannelNews  Asia | July 18, 2019 | Singapore | Japan-South Korea gloom spurs worries of 'never seen before' chip price spike | Memory chip spot prices have risen for the first time this year, indicating grim warnings of “never seen before” spikes and a supply disruption could come to pass as a dispute between South Korea and Japan drags on.  FILE PHOTO: Memory chip parts of U.S. memory chip maker MicronTechnology are pictured at their fair booth at an industrial fair in Frankfurt, Germany, July 14, 2015. REUTERS/Kai Pfaffenbach/File Photo  The 15% spike in DRAM chip prices over a week - in a sector dogged by oversupply and weak demand for more than a year - comes after Japan tightened curbs on exports of some chipmaking materials to South Korea - home to the world's top two memory chipmakers, Samsung 005930.KS and SK Hynix Inc 000660.KS.  To be fair, the price surge indicated by industry tracker DRAMeXchange refers to the spot market that accounts for less than a tenth of the memory chip landscape as most major tech firms source through mid- and long-term contracts.  Given this background, major customers such as iPhone maker Apple AAPL.O are yet to start stockpiling, but the price spike has started fuelling fears that Japan's curbs will soon impact supply, several industry sources said.  “If the ban continues, memory prices will skyrocket like never seen before as 75% of DRAM and 45% of NAND global output is at risk,” Mark Newman from Bernstein said, referring to South Korea’s dominance in the supply of those memory chips.  A person at a South Korean chipmaker said customers were “following the situations closely” but “taking a wait-and-see approach as demand still remains weak”.  Samsung and SK Hynix declined to comment.  "We will need contingency plans if the impact materializes," said a spokeswoman at Vaio, a Sony Corp 6758.T spinoff.  “Options include seeking alternative chip suppliers outside South Korea,” she said, adding business at the Japanese computer maker had, however, not yet been hit.  Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co Ltd 2330.TW, the world's top contract chipmaker, warned that Japan's export curb is the "biggest uncertainty" for the fourth quarter.  CONTINGENCY PLANS  Japan has tightened curbs on exports of three chipmaking materials - fluorinated polyimides, used in smartphone displays; photoresists, used to transfer circuit patterns on to semiconductor wafers; and hydrogen fluoride, used as an etching gas when making chips.  South Korea sourced 94% of fluorinated polyimides, 92% of photoresists and about 44% of hydrogen fluoride from Japan in the first five months of this year, Korean industry data showed.  Seoul has said it is seeking to make its supply chain more independent and has been getting fresh offers from Russia and China to provide hydrogen fluoride.  A local media reported that South Korea was considering lowering import tariffs on these products from other countries to fill in any potential supply gaps.  “We ... do see some (chip) module manufacturers raising their quotes or announcing halts to production in light of the material restrictions ...,” research firm TrendForce said.  In NAND flash market, supply has also been hurt by an output halt at Japan’s Toshiba Memory last month due to a power outage.  A person at Toshiba Memory said the plant resumed operations in mid-July but it will take time for shipments to recover fully and that the company still has to catch up with existing orders.  Brokerage UBS said this week it expects NAND contract chip prices to fall 5% in the third quarter, less than a previous forecast for a 10% quarter-on-quarter drop, citing Toshiba’s output cut and Japan’s export curbs. But it kept its projection for a 17% drop in DRAM contract prices unchanged.  NAND chips are found in mobile devices as well as memory cards, USB flash drives and solid-state drives, while DRAM is used to support electronic devices performing multi-tasks.  Clear winners from better chip prices would be Micron, Toshiba, Nanya and Western Digital, Bernstein’s Newman said.  “Samsung and SK Hynix, although potentially hurt from production issues, would also benefit from significantly higher prices and ironically likely still be net winners,” he added.  Shares of Micron have risen 12% since Japan announced the export curbs on July 1, while Western Digital Corp WDC.O and SK Hynix have gained 8% and 7% respectively. Taiwan's Nanya Technologies 2408.TW has increased 5%.  Samsung shares, however, have dipped 2% over the period, hurt by its forecast for a 56% plunge in second-quarter profit due to tumbling memory chip prices. |
| Cna with AFP | News Analysis | Channel News Asia | August 2, 2019 | Singapore | Angry South Koreans accuse Japan of 'economic invasion' | Angry South Korean demonstrators on Friday (Aug 2) accused former colonial power Japan of "economic invasion" after Tokyo removed Seoul from a so-called white list of favoured export partners in a dispute over wartime forced labour.  Protesters stood in front of the Japanese embassy building in central Seoul with signs reading "No Abe", referring to Japanese premier Shinzo Abe.  "The Abe government distorts history and commits economic invasion!" they chanted, surrounded by police officers and reporters.  South Korea is the first country ever to be dropped from Tokyo's list of nations granted minimal constraints on exports of products, which analysts say could affect hundreds of key items imported to the South.  Friday's decision follows Tokyo's announcement in early July that it would place tough restrictions on exports of chemicals vital to Seoul's world-leading chip and smartphone industry.  "This is an economic invasion that attacks the vital point of our economy," said Park Seok-woon, president of the Korea Alliance for Progressive Movement.  Advertisement  Fighting it amounted to "South Korea's second independence movement" against Japan, he said.  READ: South Korea's Moon pledges action against Japan's 'unfair' trade step  The relationship between the two nations has been strained for decades as a result of Tokyo's brutal 1910-45 colonial rule over the Korean peninsula.  A series of rulings since last year by South Korean courts ordering Japanese firms that used wartime forced labour to compensate victims - an issue Tokyo says was settled by a 1965 treaty - have further soured ties.  Many Koreans remain bitterly resentful over the past, even going back centuries.  "I feel that Japan has always been the same since the Japanese invasions of Korea in 1592," Cho Hyun-joo, president of the Seoul Young Korean Academy NGO.  "They've always, always considered the Korean peninsula as a commodity and a tool for their own advancement and benefits."  The protesters called on the South Korean government to abolish its military intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan. Known as GSOMIA, the pact enables Seoul and Tokyo - both are US allies - to share intelligence on North Korea, among others.  "If Japan cannot trust us with issues related to the economy, then it makes no sense for the two countries to trust each other on military intelligence," said Park, who was among around 30 demonstrators at the embassy.  Also on Friday, authorities in Gangnam - the wealthy Seoul district made famous worldwide by Korean rapper Psy - said they will remove all Japanese flags from their streets, some of which are decorated with the emblems of all nations. |
| Sang Hyun Back | Opinion | The Straits Times | October 30, 2019 | Singapore | Improving Japan-South Korea relations necessary: Korea Herald contributor | Line is a messenger application that nearly all Japanese smartphone users have.  The application originally started as a disaster response messenger system after 2011 earthquake. Soon, Line became the most popular application in Japan.  One thing about Line that many Japanese probably don't realise is that Line Corporation is a subsidiary of Naver, the Google of South Korea.  Line shows that the relationship between South Korea and Japan is not always a competitive one - and can be a constructive one.  Relations between Japan and Korea today are at a historical low. Improving them is a difficult task but a necessary one, important to both countries.  The economies of South Korea and Japan are complementary, having benefited both nations for decades.  Get exclusive insights into Asia  ST Asian Insider newsletter helps you stay ahead of developments in the fast-changing region  Enter your e-mail  Sign up  By signing up, you agree to our Privacy Policy and Terms and Conditions.  The two countries help maintain the liberal international order in East Asia. If the cooperation between them diminishes, it would have a profound regional impact, not just in Korea and Japan.  Their bilateral relationship is important for all of Asia, and for the world.  South Korea and Japan are both liberal democracies that value free trade. The two countries benefit from the international liberal order and it behooves them to strengthen the ideal in the Indo-Pacific.  RELATED STORY  Japan, S. Korea agree to mend ties after ice-breaking talks  RELATED STORY  The real background to recent Republic of Korea-Japan disputes  Asia, unlike the West, has not embraced the liberal international order.  China is still trying to create its own order in Southeast Asia through economic coercion and aggressive policies. Many Southeast Asian countries still are developing and have not become democratic.  South Korea and Japan both are promoting a policy to engage with Southeast Asia, for Japan it is the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy and for South Korea it is the Southern Policy.  These two policies are complementary to one another and could be improved with more cooperation.  South Korea and Japan could help strengthen the liberal order together in the Indo-Pacific by promoting free trade, free and open navigation, and eliminate economic coercion.  In the economic sector, South Korea and Japan working together benefit the entire world. Both countries work closely in energy and resource industries in other countries.  Cooperation between Hyundai and Mitsubishi was crucial to the development of Saudi Arabia's Co-generation plants. There also are additional 50 cases of cooperation on energy, including in geothermal and LNG.  Around the world, many enjoy consumer goods from South Korea and Japan.  South Korean companies rely on parts from Japan and vice versa. Many of South Korea's electronic goods need chemicals from Japan, and many Japanese TV manufacturers require OLED displays made in Korea.  Thus, over 300 business leaders, knowing the importance of supply chains in the two nations, tried to stop Japan from removing South Korea from its whitelist.  RELATED STORY  The background to recent Japan-Republic of Korea disputes  RELATED STORY  Japan agrees to hold bilateral talks with South Korea in WTO dispute  Historical disputes between South Korea and Japan lead some in each country to believe it was better to cut off ties with the other.  They believed that self-sufficiency should be the goal as relations got worse.  However, it is important to remember that both South Korea and Japan are highly advanced countries.  Replacing the technology in which each country specialises will take considerable time, money and manpower.  In addition, issues of China, Russia and North Korea are security issues for both countries. Each cannot solve these issues alone.  The historical disputes are a salient topic. However, both countries must realise there are pressing current issues that require cooperation.  When a new South Korean president or a Japanese prime minister is elected, they talk about looking forward to a future-oriented relationship between the two nations.  It is also worthwhile looking back at past accomplishments, to remember why the two countries are so important to each other.  Line is just one of the countless examples that shows that South Korea and Japan have made millions of lives better around the world. |
| Japan Times with • BLOOMBERG | Commentary | The Japan Times | AUGUST 19, 2019 | Japan | Japan's feud with South Korea threatens heating fuel shortage | Consumers may pay a higher price to stay warm this winter if South Korea bans exports of heating fuel to Japan as the bilateral trade feud deepens.  Kerosene is used as a fuel in portable stoves and fan heaters, particularly in the colder northern part of Japan. While local production accounts for about 90 percent of consumption, most imports come from South Korea. An export ban by Seoul — especially if accompanied by refinery outages or a severe winter — could cause shortages and price spikes, according to six traders.  The neighbors have been at loggerheads since late last year over compensation for Koreans forced to work in Japanese-run firms during World War II. The dispute has escalated in recent weeks with Tokyo and Seoul removing each other from preferred trading lists and Korean consumers boycotting Japanese products.  “The likely outcome of any potential ban of kerosene exports from South Korea to Japan will be a period of acute supply tightness,” said Peter Lee, an analyst at Fitch Solutions in Singapore. The impact will be magnified if it happens in winter when Japan becomes more reliant on term cargoes from South Korea, he said.  Some 79 percent of Japan’s kerosene imports came from South Korea last year, with those shipments accounting for 13 percent of total requirements, according to government data. Japanese refiners typically start stockpiling fuel from South Korea as early as August to prepare for winter.  Japan would likely turn to China and Singapore for kerosene and gasoline imports in the event of a South Korean ban, said Sushant Gupta, director of Asia-Pacific refining at Wood Mackenzie Ltd. in Singapore.  While replacement supplies are available, expensive freight costs and a lack of receiving capacity at ports make transporting the fuel difficult, according to several of the traders, who did not want to be named due to company policy.  JXTG Holdings Inc., Japan’s biggest refiner, said it was not too concerned about the rise in tensions.  “There’s no particular impact on our energy business for the time being, but we need to pay close attention to developments,” said Yoshiaki Ouchi, JXTG’s senior vice president.  However, Idemitsu Kosan Co. said it has to think about how to prepare if the political situation worsens. The refiner has several options, including producing more kerosene locally, importing more from nations apart from South Korea or building up bigger inventories than usual before winter, executive officer Noriaki Sakai said.  • |
| LINDA SIEG | News Analysis | The Japan Times | AUGUST 11, 2019 | Japan | In generational shift, Japan stands firm in feud with South Korea | When Yohei Kono made a landmark 1993 apology to the wartime “comfort women,” the chief Cabinet secretary was speaking for a moderate conservative mainstream seeking to reconcile with its Asian neighbors.  The term is Japan’s euphemism for those who provided sex, including those against their will, for Imperial Japanese troops before and during World War II. Many were Koreans.  A quarter century later, Kono’s son, Taro, now foreign minister, is on the front lines of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s escalating feud over compensation for Koreans who were forced to work in wartime Japanese mines and factories, an unresolved legacy of the two countries’ bitter past.  The contrast between father and son reflects a change in the ruling party symbolized by Abe’s own rise to power.  “There has been a generational shift,” said Andrew Horvat, a visiting professor at Josai International University.  “Those who saw Korean conscript laborers in their emaciated condition forced to work in Japanese mines and companies have died or are very, very old,” he said.  “The failure to reach consensus on a difficult past … has resulted in a lack of tolerance in a new generation that sees things in a less-nuanced manner, devoid of real experience.”  Ties between the two countries have seen good and bad times but never escaped the bitter legacy of Japan’s 1910-1945 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula and its wartime abuses.  Relations soured last October after the South Korean Supreme Court ordered Japanese firms to compensate Korean wartime workers, a move strongly condemned by Tokyo.  They got worse when Japan tightened export controls on materials vital to South Korean chipmakers and then dropped Seoul from a list of countries eligible for fast-track exports, steps angrily denounced by Seoul.  Those moves, which Japan said were not retaliation over the history row, threaten to disrupt global supply chains and undermine security cooperation in the face of North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats, analysts say.  Japan’s government says the South Korean court rulings broke the 1965 treaty that normalized ties and an accompanying agreement that settled compensation “completely and finally.”  Japanese critics also accuse Seoul of moving the goal posts with its demands for historical accountability. They point, for example, to President Moon Jae-in’s decision to dissolve a fund for the women set up under a historic agreement in December 2015 by Abe and Moon’s predecessor, Park Geun-hye. The agreement was supposed to bring a permanent end to the comfort women row.  “The biggest problem is a matter of trust, and whether promises made between nations are kept,” Abe said last week.  Abe, 64, was first elected to Diet in 1993, the same year the Kono statement was issued.  Two years later, then-Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, a socialist who led a coalition with the conservative Liberal Democratic Party, made a “heartfelt apology” for suffering caused by Japan’s “colonial rule and aggression.”  The acts of contrition sparked a backlash in the LDP among a younger generation including Abe, who felt their elders were selling out and adopting a “masochist” view of history.  “On a broad trajectory, the Murayama statement was the high point of Japanese war responsibility and there was a reaction against that,” said William Underwood, an independent researcher who has done extensive work on the wartime labor issue.  Abe, elected in 2006 as the first prime minister born after World War II, quit abruptly after one troubled year. He made a rare comeback in 2012, supported by a corps of conservatives sharing his commitment to pride in Japanese culture and history and a less apologetic view of the war.  Electoral system changes and three years in opposition helped ultraconservative lawmakers and lobbying groups strengthen their clout in the LDP.  “It’s like the NRA (National Rifle Association) in the United States. A very small group … can leverage the democratic system in a direction the majority do not wish to go,” Horvat said.  Pressure in the LDP to take a tough stance is strong.  In June, Defense Minister Takeshi Iwaya came under fire from party colleagues for smiling before cameras at a meeting with his South Korean counterpart.  Diet members favoring good ties with Seoul met their Korean counterparts in Tokyo recently but made little progress in easing the conflict.  Abe’s government has embarked on an aggressive public relations campaign.  Trade minister Hiroshige Seko took to Twitter to chastise NHK for using the term “export restraints” for moves that could slow product sales to Seoul. He said the proper term was the more neutral “export control” or “export management.”  NHK declined to comment on Seko’s tweet, but said in a statement that it made independent decisions and constantly revised terms to be more appropriate and easier to understand.  In reporting on the topic on Thursday, NHK used the more neutral expression.  Diplomats have reached out to domestic and foreign media with detailed briefings and handouts on the dispute.  “I think there is very strong pressure, especially toward major media such as NHK,” said Kozo Nagata, a former NHK producer and professor of media studies at Musashi University.  Opinion polls show the public is mostly supportive of the government’s tough stance.  A survey by the conservative Sankei newspaper and Fuji News Network released on Monday showed two-thirds of respondents backed removing South Korea from the fast-track export list, but nearly 60 percent were also worried about future ties.  “There is ‘Korea fatigue,'” Underwood said, before adding that the general public wasn’t as harsh as many in the ruling party.  “As for the younger generation, they have no knowledge base, but they have a sense the Koreans are intractable,” he said.  With Tokyo and Seoul digging in their heels for now, the prospects for ending the feud appear slim until it starts to hurt their economies or security cooperation, experts said.  “The reality of historical redress settlements is that it boils down to a cost-benefit matrix,” Underwood said.  “It is only when the costs of perpetual intransigence are perceived as greater than the costs of settlement that anyone moves,” he added. |
| KYODO, STAFF REPORT | Commentary | The Japan Times | August 22, 2019 | Japan | Despite subtle overtures, Japan-South Korea dispute likely to drag on | Recent signs that Japan and South Korea are making subtle overtures to each other have raised hopes that they are moving toward de-escalating their diplomatic feud.  But while their foreign ministers agreed Wednesday to continue dialogue, it remains unclear what a compromise that would satisfy both sides would look like, making it unlikely that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Moon Jae-in will agree to a detente anytime soon.  Seoul on Thursday also announced that it would scrap a key intelligence-sharing pact with Tokyo, saying that it did not meet South Korea’s “national interests” to maintain the deal amid the spat.  In a speech last week to commemorate Liberation Day, the anniversary of Japan’s 1945 surrender in World War II and the end of its colonial rule on the Korean Peninsula, Moon extended a rare olive branch.  “We hope that Japan will play a leading role together in facilitating peace and prosperity in East Asia while it contemplates a past that brought misfortune to its neighboring countries.  RELATED STORIES  • South Korea to make decision on Japan intel sharing pact soon, report says  • JSR wins permit to resume exports to South Korea: source  • South Korean tourists shun Japan over trade row  • China's Wang Yi urges Japan and South Korea to solve dispute during trilateral talks  “Better late than never: If Japan chooses the path of dialogue and cooperation, we will gladly join hands. We will strive with Japan to create an East Asia that engages in fair trade and cooperation,” he said.  It was a decidedly more conciliatory note than Moon struck on Aug. 2, when he condemned Japan’s removal of South Korea from a list of trusted countries that enjoy minimum trade restrictions as “a selfish, destructive act.”  The removal from the whitelist, as well as a tightening of trade controls on some materials needed by South Korean firms to manufacture semiconductors and display panels, has drawn a heated response from Seoul.  In a three-way meeting with her Japanese and Chinese counterparts Wednesday on the outskirts of Beijing, South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha called for “arbitrary” measures targeting exports to be withdrawn, without naming Japan.  But a Japanese official pointed out that, compared to Kang’s comments at a regional conference that she attended with Foreign Minister Taro Kono earlier this month in Bangkok, where she explicitly criticized Japan, there had been “a clear change in tone.”  Japan has also signaled that it does not want an all-out trade war like the one the United States and China are embroiled in.  The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said that its tightened trade controls are meant to address national security concerns and do not constitute an export ban.  As if to prove its point, the ministry approved a South Korea-bound shipment of photoresists, one of the chipmaking materials that now require case-by-case licenses for export to the country, in about a month, quicker than the 90 days or so it usually takes for such applications to be processed.  Despite the displays of restraint on both sides, however, there is no resolution in sight to the issue at the heart of the dispute — reparations for South Koreans who say they were forced to work in Japanese factories during the colonial era.  Japan has long maintained that the issue of individual claims was resolved “finally and completely” by a bilateral agreement reached when the countries normalized relations in 1965.  But last fall, South Korea’s Supreme Court handed down rulings ordering Japanese companies to compensate more than a dozen South Koreans and their families.  The companies, Nippon Steel Corp. and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., have refused to comply, and lawyers for the plaintiffs are now in the process of seizing and liquidating their assets.  The issue has frustrated the Abe administration, which already distrusts Seoul after it reneged on a landmark 2015 agreement aimed at helping South Korea’s former “comfort women,” a euphemism for women who provided sex, including those who did so against their will, for Japanese troops before and during World War II.  As relations sour to their lowest point in years, Abe and Moon haven’t held bilateral talks this year, even when the opportunity presented itself at the Group of 20 summit in Osaka. The last time they did so was in September 2018 on the fringes of the U.N. General Assembly in New York.  The next chance for them to speak in person will likely come next month, during this year’s U.N. General Assembly. After that, another target could be in December, on the sidelines of a planned trilateral summit with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang.  But Michael Cucek, a professor at Temple University Japan and Waseda University in Tokyo, says Abe and Moon will only meet if there are “clear deliverables” to settle the differences between their countries.  “What Abe wants, the end of harassment of Japanese corporations, does not appear to be a promise any South Korean leader can make, much less deliver upon. My guess is that the stalemate will continue into 2020.” |
| Kornelius Purba | Opinion | Jakarta Post | September 29, 2020 | Indonesia | President Moon and PM Suga reconcile for Madame Yoo | Yoo Myung-he may have been on the mind of South Korean President Moon Jae-in when he received a telephone call from newly elected Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga last Thursday. There was no official confirmation from either side as to whether President Moon openly asked the prime minister for support for Yoo’s nomination for the top post at the World Trade Organization (WTO). Even if Suga agreed to Moon’s plan, Yoo’s road to the WTO job remains long and winding as she has to compete with two other women from Nigeria and Kenya and two men from the United Kingdom and Egypt. Support from other countries is much needed, but for Moon at least one of the major hurdles has been cleared. Moon’s top aides had told him that Japan was reluctant to back South Korea in the race for the WTO director-general’s post. But I do believe both Moon and Suga have reached a mutual understanding on this specific case, despite the complex and emotional feud between the two neighbors. In their 20-minute conversation on Sept. 24, PM Suga expressed his hope that the two nations can put their conflict behind and promote bilateral cooperation in various fields instead. According to Japanese media the conversation took place at Moon’s request. Moon failed to come to terms with Suga’s predecessor, Shinzo Abe, who lost patience after Seoul relentlessly demanded war compensation from Tokyo. Japan unexpectedly imposed economic restrictions to punish its neighbor. In July last year, Japan decided to severely restrict exports of three key industrial materials that Korea’s chip and display industries need most. Seoul took the case to the WTO, saying Japan was retaliating against the South Korean Supreme Court’s ruling on new compensation. The WTO is scheduled to issue its ruling later this year. Moon is expecting to build a closer relationship with Japan under PM Suga for several reasons, but Japan’s support for Yoo’s quest to secure the WTO director general seat must be one of them. “I told President Moon that the current bilateral relations, which are very severe at this moment, due to issues such as wartime labor, should not be left hung out to dry. I’d continue to press South Korea strongly to take appropriate action based on our coherent position on various issues, like I did in today’s meeting,” Suga told journalists. Korean media had widely reported Tokyo’s refusal to support the 53-year-old trade minister’s WTO bid. Korea had attempted to take the chief post at the 166-member WTO twice through Kim Chul-su in 1994 and Bark Tae-ho in 2012 but to no avail. Indonesia also tried its luck in 2012 by nominating then tourism and creative economy minister Mari Pangestu. Brazil’s Roberto Azevedo eventually won the coveted post and was reelected for a second four-year term in 2017. He resigned at the end of August. In response to Japan’s reluctance, Yoo said: "When they actually look at the candidates, to Japan, what's of utmost important is the person's, the candidate's, competency and capability to save and enhance the WTO, and also to take up WTO reform. So in that regard, I will reach out to Japanese colleagues and will present my vision for the WTO.” Tokyo, however, has never openly revealed its official stance. Japan may worry about the WTO’s deciding in favor of Korea in its trade dispute with Japan if Yoo was at helm. But as in the case of senior Korean diplomat Ban Ki-moon’s two terms as the UN secretary-general, there should be no reason for such fear of a conflict of interest. Yoo, Nigeria’s Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Kenya’s Amina Mohamed, Egypt’s Abdel Hamid Mandouh and Britain’s Liam Fox are the five remaining candidates going into the second round of election. The Nigerian candidate is tipped as the favorite contender as she is a former number two at the World Bank. Indonesia needs to learn from South Korea’s massive and well-orchestrated campaign to win an international position or the right to host Summer and Winter Olympics and the World Cup. In 1987, we were very confident the internationally recognized intellectual Sudjatmoko would win the UNESCO director general’s post, but it ended in failure. He was later elected the rector of the Tokyo-based UN University. In 2010, Indonesian nominee for FAO chief post, Indroyono Soesilo, fell at the first hurdle and two years later our campaign for Mari did not work out. Which WTO chief candidate will Indonesia support? From the trade and economic points of view, President Joko “Jokowi” will prefer a candidate from Asia, Yoo. Besides, South Korea is one of Indonesia’s major trading partners and sources of investment. But in the greater interest of developing nations, Indonesia could support Nigeria and Kenya. Nigeria is the more favorable choice because Indonesia is one of the largest trading partners of Africa’s largest economy. “We are still finalizing our position on the WTO election,” a senior government official said over the weekend. In fact, Indonesia has built good bilateral ties with all the countries the five candidates come from. Notwithstanding the race for the top seat at the WTO, Tokyo and Seoul’s rapprochement is crucial not only for their future relationship, but also for the good of Asia and the 10-member ASEAN. And South Korea’s all-out effort to get Madame Yoo into the prestigious office in Geneva, Switzerland, whether it succeeds or not, is a valuable lesson about a nation’s determination to achieve its ambitions. |
| REIJI YOSHIDA | Commentary | The Japan Times | July 31, 2019 | Japan | Japan fears compromise on South Korea wartime labor could open Pandora's box of WWII issues | Foreign Minister Taro Kono was furious — or at least looked that way — during a July 19 face-off in Tokyo with South Korean Ambassador to Japan Nam Gwan-pyo.  Suddenly interrupting the Japanese-language translator for Nam, Kono began castigating the envoy for being “extremely rude” — a highly unusual scene for a high-level diplomatic meeting open to journalists and television crews from both countries.  “What the South Korean government is doing right now is tantamount to overturning the foundation of the post-World War II international order,” Kono thundered at Nam.  The ambassador had been speaking about Seoul’s earlier proposal to settle the wartime labor compensation issue by raising funds from both Japanese and South Korean companies, when Kono insisted that the enjoy was merely pretending he knew nothing about Japan’s earlier rebuttal of that proposal.  Tokyo has maintained a tough stance on the matter, with senior Japanese diplomats repeatedly emphasizing a single view; that South Korean President Moon Jae-in and his lieutenants have failed to grasp the meaning and magnitude of the wartime labor compensation issue for Japan.  RELATED STORIES  • Incursion by Russian plane seen as test of Japan's collaboration with U.S. and South Korea  • Japan keen to continue military intelligence-sharing pact with South Korea: top government spokesman  • South Korean city exchange programs and flight routes with Japan suspended amid tensions  • North Korea fires two short-range missiles into Sea of Japan for second launch in six days  • Pompeo calls for 'standstill agreement' to give feuding Japan and South Korea time to cool off  Japan’s 1910-1945 colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula presents a number of emotional and thorny historical issues. So why does the wartime labor issue carry such importance for the Japanese government?  Officials in Tokyo say that the logic of a finalized ruling by South Korea’s Supreme Court last year ordering Japanese companies to pay redress is so radical that it could open a Pandora’s box.  For example, it could effectively nullify a landmark 1965 economic cooperation pact that was supposed to settle all compensation issues involving Japan’s colonial rule.  The ripple effects of that, Japanese diplomats say, could cascade into other issues, and even reignite World War II compensation issues with other countries.  On Monday, the Foreign Ministry held a briefing for reporters in Tokyo, distributing copies of records from normalization talks in the 1960s that they said showed the South Korean government had agreed that all wartime labor compensation issues were settled by the 1965 pact.  For Japanese officials, the way forward is clear.  “We can’t make any compromise. Even 1 millimeter,” a senior Foreign Ministry official recently said.  The ruling “totally runs against the idea behind Article 4 of the San Francisco treaty,” the official said, referring to the 1951 peace treaty inked by Tokyo and 48 countries to end the post-World War II occupation of Japan.  The San Francisco Peace Treaty obliged Japan to recognize the independence of Korea, while Article 4 of the pact stipulated that any property and claims between the two countries should be settled “through special arrangements” between the two parties. Based on this, Seoul and Tokyo launched post-colonial bilateral normalization talks in 1952.  After heated marathon negotiations, the two countries finally concluded in 1965 a basic relations treaty with an attached pact on economic cooperation.  Under the 1965 lump-sum pact, Japan agreed to extend a massive amount of “economic cooperation” to the South Korean government. The package consisted of grants worth $300 million and loans of $200 million over 10 years — funds totaling 1.6 times South Korea’s annual national budget at the time.  In return, the South Korean government agreed to use part of those funds to compensate individual South Korean wartime laborers forced to work in Japan.  South Korea’s president at the time, strongman Park Chung-hee, used most of the remaining funds for social and infrastructure development, a move that experts say helped the country to achieve rapid economic growth.  But the South Korean perspective on this shared understanding seemed to start to shift in 2005.  Under the administration of President Roh Moo-hyun, the South Korean government began arguing that the 1965 pact did not cover compensation issues for some of those who experienced war-related hardships, such as the “comfort women” — a euphemism used to refer to women who provided sex, including those who did so against their will, for Japanese troops before and during World War II.  At the time, Moon — who years later would run unsuccessfully for the presidency against Park Chung-hee’s daughter, before finally winning in 2017 — was Roh’s chief of staff.  Still, Seoul acknowledged in 2005 that the pact did cover the wartime labor issue, and that the South Korean government was responsible for paying compensation funds to individuals.  Then, last year, South Korea’s Supreme Court ruled that the 1965 pact was only designed to settle financial issues between the two countries, and that the rights of individuals to seek compensation was not terminated by the accord as it was predicated on Japan’s “illegal colonial rule.”  Based on that logic, the top court insisted in its ruling that Japanese firms pay damages for the “mental suffering” of four former wartime forced laborers.  The thinking behind the ruling came as a shock to Japanese officials, they said, because it bypassed the 1965 deal and created a new concept of “damages for mental suffering” from “inhuman acts” under what was described as Japan’s “illegal” colonial occupation.  In fact, Seoul has argued since the 1950s that Japan’s annexation of the Korean Peninsula was “illegal.” Tokyo has maintained that the annexation was done legally under international law at that time, and that many countries — including the United States and the U.K. — endorsed it.  So while last year’s Supreme Court ruling did not deny the effectiveness of the 1965 pact, it instead sought to circumvent it.  First, the ruling pointed out that the 1965 pact made no mention of the “illegality” of Japan’s colonial rule. Based on that point, the ruling then concluded that the lump-sum, government-to-government deal did not cover damages for the mental anguish of individual wartime laborers.  However, Japanese experts and officials point out that this could also mean that any South Korean individual who has experienced “mental suffering” under the “illegal” colonial rule may argue a case for compensation despite the 1965 pact.  “Japan’s colonial rule was not illegal. (South Korea) should observe what it agreed under the (1965) pact,” the senior Foreign Ministry official said.  The ruling “won’t have a positive impact on relations between European and African countries, either. No country has ever provided compensation for their colonial rule,” the official added.  In fact, while a number of African countries became independent in the 1950s and 60s, no Western country has ever paid out compensation for their colonial rule. Instead, many European countries extended economic assistance to their former colonies, just as Japan did under the 1965 deal with South Korea.  Another senior Japanese official said that if Tokyo accepted the ruling by South Korea’s Supreme Court, it could reignite wartime compensation issues with other Asian countries. The ruling “has created the right to claim a new category of damages” and if Japan accepted that argument, “it would mean nothing has been resolved as far as mental pain (under colonial rule) is concerned,” the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.  At Monday’s Foreign Ministry briefing, copies of records created and kept by both the Japanese and South Korean sides documenting Tokyo-Seoul normalization talks held on May 10, 1961, quoted a South Korean representative as saying Seoul had demanded “appropriate compensation for mental and physical pain caused by forced recruitment.”  This may cast a different light on the central argument of the Supreme Court ruling, that “damages for mental suffering” of individuals due to “illegal” colonial rule were not covered by the 1965 government-to-government economic cooperation pact.  The records show that Seoul’s demands included compensation for both “mental and physical pain,” and that it was based on this argument that Japan concluded the 1965 pact to provide a massive amount of funds to its neighbor, Japanese officials said.  Article 2 of the pact explicitly confirms that all post-colonial compensation issues “have been settled completely and finally,” and that “no contention shall be made” thereafter, Japanese officials pointed out during Monday’s briefing.  “Whatever the cause of the mental pain might be, all of these issues were settled with this pact,” a senior Foreign Ministry official argued during the briefing. “Otherwise, phrases like ‘completely and finally’ wouldn’t have been used.”  The Japanese officials also noted that the records of the 1961 normalization talks produced by South Korean officials showed that Japanese negotiators had proposed Tokyo providing funds directly to “individuals,” rather than the South Korean government, to ease “emotional” frustration and promote mutual understanding between the two countries.  But according to the records, it was South Korean negotiators that rejected that idea during the 1961 meeting, saying that the Seoul government should pay compensation money to individuals after receiving funds from the Japanese government in a lump-sum deal.  “We will deal with this as a domestic problem,” the records of the meeting show the South Korean representative as saying. “There are issues over the number of people and the amount of money (to be paid), but we, the government, will make payments” to individual forced laborers.  The South Korean government, meanwhile, has repeatedly argued that the Supreme Court ruling should be respected given the principle of separation of legislative, administrative and judicial authorities.  In response, Japanese officials point out that under international law, South Korea is obliged to observe the 1965 pact as a state. According to international law, issues involving the principle of separation of the three powers should be dealt with domestically, Japan’s officials have said, urging the South Korean government to take measures to compensate for damages incurred to Japanese firms — some of which have seen their assets seized by the plaintiffs — based on the Supreme Court ruling.  Despite Japan’s initial approach to the row, which focused on the legal arguments, the situation between the two countries may now be one driven more by emotion rather than any discussion based on the specifics of talks in the 1960s.  In the nine months since the South Korean Supreme Court’s ruling last October, Seoul has yet to take any action despite repeated requests from the Japanese government.  Then, on July 1, Tokyo announced the introduction of new export regulations on South Korea, including those on key materials desperately needed by South Korean firms to produce semiconductors and other high-tech devices.  Japanese officials have strongly denied the move was in retaliation for Seoul’s inaction on the wartime labor issue, but South Korean officials have criticized the new export regulations as a violation of free trade rules under the World Trade Organization.  The dispute has also led to a large-scale boycott of Japanese products in South Korea, as well as the cancellation of a number of cultural exchange events between the two countries.  • |
| Paul de Vries | Commentary | Japan-Forward | April 10, 2021 | Japan | Alone Among Asian Democracies, Why Does South Korea Choose to Hate Japan? | Perceptions of Japan are highly positive among Asia-Pacific democracies. Japan is the most trusted major power in the region, in the opinion of Southeast Asian nations. Recent surveys concerning Australia, New Zealand, and India show favorable attitudes as well.  The sole outlier is South Korea, where the collective stance towards Japan is negative in the extreme.  South Korea’s ire stems from Japan’s 35-year annexation of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945. It is certainly understandable that no nation would appreciate having been under the control of a foreign power, yet South Korea has harbored its grievances to a duration and extent that is not evident among other Asian democracies that were similarly subjected to colonialism.  To what do we attribute this discrepancy? Was the Japanese occupation uncommonly severe?  Korean assasin Ahn Jung-guen, who killed Japanese Gov General of Korea Hironobu Ito in 1909  The Pacification Period  According to academic Brandon Palmer, around 17,600 Koreans lost their lives in failed attempts to bring down Japan’s colonial regime. This figure, while at first glance alarming, pales in comparison to the hundreds of thousands who were contemporaneously killed by the colonial United States administration in the Philippines. The full Philippine tally, including those who died from disease after being herded into concentration camps, is estimated at around one million — a seventh of the population.  The American media routinely refers to the Japanese occupation of Korea as “brutal,” while taking pride in the relative passivity of the Philippine people during the U.S. colonial era. One suspects, however, that the Korean population may also have been considerably more benign if Japan had carried out pacification with the same level of dedication as the U.S.  In terms of total Korean years lived, however, the Korean people enjoyed a massive net gain in lifespan. During Japanese colonial rule, Korean life expectancy rose from 26 to 42 years. This compares favorably with the 32 average years that an Indian could enjoy under British rule — a figure which regular famine ensured would only rise after the British had left. There was no famine in Japanese-administered Korea.  South Koreans oppose Japan and say it is because of the ‘forced labor’ issue in the war era.    War Era Labor  Much is often made of the Japanese dragooning of Koreans onto the Japanese mainland to assist with the war effort during the early 1940s. What is largely forgotten is that, due to their status as Japanese citizens as a result of the outright annexation of the Korean Peninsula, Koreans were free to relocate to Japan, and enjoyed the right to vote and run for office. They exercised this prerogative for the greater opportunities on offer during the full 35 years of the occupation, in the same manner as present-day Puerto Ricans do in respect to the U.S.  The comparison against the Australian wartime enlistment of its Papua New Guinean colonial subjects, who hauled supplies and Australian wounded along the mountain tracks of their homeland, is particularly stark. The carefully nurtured myth of the problematically termed “fuzzy wuzzy angels” suggests that they performed these duties willingly. Under the tenets of “White Australian Policy,” however, the people of wartime Papua New Guinea, unlike those of the Korean Peninsula, were deemed unworthy of stepping upon their colonial master’s soil. The extent of their willingness might thereby be considered questionable.  South Korea’s Samsung Corporation, founded in 1938 in the Japanese Colonial era, benefitted from the benevolence of Japanese efforts to build up the Korean economy. REUTERS/Kim Hong-Ji/File Photo GLOBAL BUSINESS WEEK AHEAD  Imperial Intent  Japan’s efforts to modernize Korea ultimately led to a net loss for the colonial administration. This was again unprecedented. Ordinarily, the European powers imposed the provision of mandatory crop quotas or taxation, resulting in the necessity to produce cash crops. This not only stripped the colonial possession of its wealth but routinely led to famine. The most stunning example is the Belgium colonization of the Congo in which the population dropped from around 25 million to 8.5 million between 1885 and 1911.  The British performance in India is also of particular note. It is estimated that the British took the present-day equivalent of several trillion U.S. dollars out of the subcontinent, leaving it divided and destitute. India’s share of the world economy dropped from 27% to 3% during that time. The West’s collective performance within China was equally predatory, the opium trade being the source of much present day “old money” wealth.  Education  In Korea, in 1904, there were only a handful of primary schools with a total student number of around 500. Enrollments grew to 20,100 in 1910, the year of the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty, and then up to 901,200 in 1937. Korea’s first university was set up during the Japanese annexation in 1925. Meanwhile, upon independence at the end of British colonial rule in India, a mere 16% were literate.  A comfort woman statue used in anti-Japan international propaganda  Sexual Predation  The comfort women program has been widely publicized by South Korea over the past 30 years. These efforts have been embraced in the West, where it is self-servingly viewed as an example of Japanese imperial exceptionalism. Let us avoid the rabbit hole and merely note that, in 1943, the casualty rate for British troops in Asia from sexually transmitted diseases was 16 times greater than from combat.  From whom were the British troops acquiring them? “Willing” prostitutes, no doubt.    RELATED: Do You Know? There’s a More Inclusive View of the Controversy Over Comfort Women Statues  The Absence of War  A final comparative virtue of the Japanese tenure of Korea was that the peninsula was not a theater of the Asia-Pacific War. The destruction ultimately wrought was as great as any elsewhere, but it transpired during the Korean War, not in opposition to the Japanese presence during the Asia-Pacific War.  In short, had an orderly transition to independence occurred after the defeat of Japan in 1945, Korea would have emerged from its colonial experience in considerably better condition than any of its neighboring nations.  South Korea, shown below North Korea, in the context of its dangerous regional neighborhood  Korea’s Genuine Grievance  The primary affliction of 20th century Korea arose from the Asia-Pacific War, but had little to do with Japan. It was the division of the peninsula along the 38th parallel.  The origin of the division was the decision by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt to mandate the unconditional surrender of Japan at the Casablanca Conference in 1943. This led to an invitation being extended to America’s communist WWII ally, Russia, to assist in the defeat of imperial Japan. The Russians duly arrived and civil war followed. The Chinese stepped in when the Russian puppet regime was in danger of being defeated.  In the initial decades of the division, there was a general sense that the two Koreas would ultimately reunify. That began to diminish after the failure of the Koreas to emulate German reunification in the early 1990s. There presently exists the real possibility of permanent division.  In this post-German reunification era, an issue for South Koreans is the means through which they identify themselves, how they express their nationalism. There is much with which South Koreans might ordinarily feel pride, including history, culture, cuisine, and language. Yet, these they share with their mortal enemy to the North. With all that is positive thus downgraded, it would seem that South Korea has chosen to identify itself in negative terms, as a perennial victim.  The logical targets for South Korea’s ire should have been the U.S., China, and Russia, as they brought about the peninsula’s division. The U.S., however, as the South’s military protector, is essentially off limits, as is China, for economic reasons. Russia, for all of its ills, was nonetheless one of the allied powers. That, it would seem, leaves Japan.  Hugely successful South Korean Idol pop group BTS, in performance in France. Yoan Valat/Pool via REUTERS  Idol Diplomacy  The logical remedy to this negative brand of nationalism is the development of a positive cultural form that is not shared by North Korea. Looking at today’s South Korea, it would appear that an opportunity exists through South Korean idol culture, as strange as this may immediately seem.  South Korea has recently taken idol culture to new heights, with acting skills and proficiency in multiple languages having become essentially prerequisites. This is a far cry from the “girl and boy next door” image of Japanese idols.  Significantly, in addition to generating a singularly southern form of Korean peninsula pride, these idols command massive followings among Japanese youth. Several South Korean idol groups, in fact, have leveraged this popularity by including Japanese members within their number, greatly contributing to a sense of admiration and respect between the younger generations of South Koreans and Japanese.  Speaking as one who grew up in the era of garage bands, I might (somewhat humorously) add that, while the soft power of the idol in Japan-South Korea relations will steadily increase, it may not peak until a few more of my generation retire. Nonetheless, while diplomats toil to repair Japan-South Korea ties and America frets over the lack of goodwill between its two Northeast Asian allies, the soft power of the South Korean idol may be more potent than anything the bureaucrats of those three nations can bring to bear. |
| Masako Nagato | Commentary | Japan-Forward | February 12, 2021 | Japan | Japan Should Tell the World of South Korea’s Deviance | Recently, there has been a curious turn of events.  President Moon Jae-in reacted in what could be called a negative manner to the January 8 Seoul Central District Court ruling that ordered the Japanese government to pay compensation to former comfort women. This ruling was in violation of the broadly accepted international law of “sovereign immunity” based on the principle that a sovereign nation cannot be sued by another sovereign nation.  At a New Year’s press conference on January 18, Moon stated, “Our two countries have continued to hold talks to explore a diplomatic solution to this unresolved issue between Korea and Japan. In the meantime, the comfort women verdict was announced. Frankly speaking, I am bewildered.”  Likewise, in regards to the so-called wartime labor lawsuit, Moon stated that “it is undesirable for the assets of Japanese companies to be sold.” This was a step forward from his previous adamant stance on “respecting judicial rulings”. So, there was some prior indication of this turn of events.  In a comment on the day of the ruling in the comfort women case, a spokesperson said, “We remember that the agreement on the comfort women issue reached by the governments of Korea and Japan in December 2015 is the official agreement between the two governments,” referring to the Japan-South Korea agreement that the Moon administration had reneged on to date.  It is also curious that the ruling for a similar case, scheduled for January 13, was suddenly postponed. I can only assume that the Moon administration wanted to avoid “something”.  A Step Forward or Masquerade?  This is Moon’s first move toward Japan in his five years in office. But what are his true intentions?  If his ultimate goal is to improve relations between the two countries, I welcome his approach. However, it has been reported in South Korea that some observers believe that the move may be an attempt to get closer to Japan in order to use this summer’s Tokyo Olympics as the “perfect stage” for North-South reconciliation, as well as a reconciliation between the United States and North Korea.  Currently, the Japanese government is considering taking the comfort women case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).  Although South Korea is not expected to cooperate, former ambassador to South Korea, Masatoshi Muto, asserts, “Japan should not give up right away, but maintain the stance that the ICJ is the proper forum to resolve the issue, while appealing to the international community on the unfairness of this judgment.”  In 2012, the ICJ rejected an Italian Supreme Court decision that ordered the German government to compensate Italians who were forced into labor during World War II, citing “sovereign immunity”. If South Korea is so confident in its ruling on the comfort women lawsuit irrespective of this past decision, it should act on this conviction and file a countersuit.    South Korea’s Sliding Rules  Although the Moon administration claims to stand for human rights and justice, the West is beginning to clue in to the deviant nature of South Korea’s democracy.  According to Muto, “there are differing standards for convenient human rights (anything related to Japan) and inconvenient human rights (anything related to North Korea),” shown in South Korea’s silence on human rights issues involving North Korea.  Late last year, South Korea passed a law banning the cross-border distribution of anti-North Korea leaflets.  In fact, this anti-North leaflet law, which has been criticized for violating the right to freedom of expression stipulated in the South Korean Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, was met with fierce opposition from lawmakers in the U.S. and the U.K., as well as the United Nations, even more so than from within South Korea.  Victor Cha, Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a U.S.based policy research institute, pointed out that South Korea could be “alienated from the multilateral coalition of democracies” by the anti-North leaflet law. The US Congress’ Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission plans to hold a hearing on the law.  The comfort women lawsuit and the anti-North leaflet law are two separate cases, but they share a common thread in their divergence. Japan’s new ambassador to the U.S. is soon to be Koji Tomita, who served as ambassador to South Korea. Japan should raise the issue of South Korea’s “deviations” with the U.S. and the rest of the world. |
| The Sankei Shimbun | Editorial | Japan-Forward | January 20, 2021 | Japan | Japan Should Stop Engaging Until South Korea Learns to Follow the Rules | Sovereign immunity is a bedrock principle of international law, which South Korea trampled upon when a local court ruled that Japan should compensate former ‘comfort women.’  The Sankei ShimbunPublished 4 months ago on January 20, 2021By The Sankei Shimbun  ~~  Innovators in Japan are Developing New Technologies to Counter Coronavirus  The February edition of the monthly magazine Bungei Shunju carries a roundtable discussion among opinion leaders entitled, “The Coldest Winter in Japan-South Korea Relations.”  One of the participants is Liberal Democratic Party Diet member Minoru Kiuchi, who formerly was a diplomat responsible for South Korea within the Foreign Ministry’s Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau.  Kiuchi likens the current state of bilateral relations to a soccer match in which the administration of South Korean President Moon Jae In “has bought off the referees and repeatedly fouls.”  In fact, one of those “referees” — the Seoul Central District Court — has just committed another flagrant foul.  On January 8, the court handed down a ruling awarding ₩100 million KRW (around ￥9.5 million JPY or $91,400 USD) to each of 12 plaintiffs. They are former “comfort women” (ianfu) who had sued the Japanese government. The court ordered the Japanese government itself to pay this compensation.  Sovereign immunity, in other words the assumption that a nation state is not subject to the jurisdiction of courts in another country, is a bedrock principle of international law. Even experts in South Korea were taken aback by the court decision that flies in the face of this established legal principle.  To begin with, the decision is not based on facts. There is no evidence of the “criminal acts against humanity” the court alleges took place. And clearly its contention that the “comfort women have not received an official apology or compensation” is false.  An article by Ruriko Kubota, senior staff writer at The Sankei Shimbun Tokyo headquarters, carried in the same issue of Bungei Shunju, was even more disheartening. She describes how a network of Japanese women living in Germany has supported the South Korean citizens’ group that has erected a statue of a comfort woman in central Berlin.  The decision issued by the Seoul Central Court read just like the explanations engraved in the pedestals of statues of comfort women that have been erected in various cities worldwide: “The Japanese military forcibly took countless young girls and women from the Asia-Pacific region and made them sex slaves.”  The popularization of this simplistic formula that “comfort women” equals “sex slaves” has without a doubt done much to swell the ranks of anti-Japanese groups overseas.  Returning to Mr. Kiuchi’s analogy of a soccer game mentioned earlier, it no longer makes sense to continue playing. As he puts it, “Japan should leave the field until the other side changes its attitude.”  Nevertheless, even if Japan leaves the field, the fight against the fabrications of history and denigration of Japan will continue. |
| Katsuhiro Kuroda, | Opinion | Japan-Forward | December 8, 2020 | Japan | To Set Issues Straight, Japan’s Best Bet is to Talk Directly to the South Korean Public | Despite the many issues that involve both countries, Japan has rarely expressed its stance in a proactive manner. It is time for Japan to put an end to stepping around South Korea.~  Innovators in Japan are Developing New Technologies to Counter Coronavirus    South Korea’s bizarre level of concern over radiation issues linked to the Fukushima nuclear accident is not exclusively down to anti-Japanese sentiment.    In recent years, South Korea’s younger generations have become increasingly concerned about issues such as food safety, environmental pollution, and health — which partly explains the country’s heightened sensitivity over radiation.    For example, there was uproar recently when radioactive radon was detected in domestically produced beds in South Korea. Tens of thousands of beds were subsequently thrown on the scrap heap and left out in the open — a photo of which is still very clear in my mind.    When Japan is involved, though, an anti-Japanese mood of “disgraceful Japan” tends to rise to the surface. In particular, if the case is Fukushima-related, some people in South Korea seemingly regard that as a weakness, and use it as a point from which to verbally attack Japan.    For example, South Korean media and citizen groups have spread rumors about the Tokyo Olympics being the “Radioactive Olympics,” based on the fact that Olympic baseball will take place in Fukushima and food from the prefecture will feature in the Olympic Village.    Recently, there has been a South Korean backlash against Japan’s plans over the release of effluents from Fukushima into the ocean. The media, citizen groups, and the government have taken the issue to Japan, claiming that ocean currents will carry these effluents to South Korea and inflict radioactive harm.    The radical environmental organization Greenpeace has been fanning the flames on this issue, but South Korea is the only nation that is openly critical of Japan.    In response to South Korea’s claims, Japan has attempted to put forward constructive counterarguments, and the embassy of Japan in Seoul recently held a news conference for the South Korean media.    After the conference, some sections of the media wrote malicious headlines about the Fukushima effluent situation. However, the majority went with headlines such as “Only South Korea is Anti.”    The news conference was possibly the first time that Japan was able to convey the Japanese government’s stance — including plans accepted by the international community — to the South Korean public. The effectiveness of the conference was arguably the embassy of Japan in Seoul’s first major “hit.”    Under the leadership of ex-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the Japanese government tried hard to convey its policies and stance to the international community, but it stepped back from South Korea on certain issues on the grounds of “not wanting to stoke anti-Japanese sentiment.”    This is reminiscent of an incident in 2005.    In that particular year, the then-ambassador to South Korea, Toshiyuki Takano, stated that Takeshima belonged to Japan at a gathering of foreign correspondents in Seoul. Takano’s statement triggered a backlash across South Korea’s public and private sectors, with comments such as, “Japan’s ambassador is delusional in the middle of Seoul.”    Subsequently, the Japanese embassy toned down its stance, stating, “We will not be making any specific comments about territorial rights going forward.”    There are several issues that involve both Japan and South Korea: Takeshima, textbooks, comfort women, wartime labor, UNESCO world heritage, the name of the Sea of Japan, the Rising Sun flag. However, Japan has rarely expressed its stance in a proactive manner on South Korean soil to the South Korean public.    Japan must not be afraid. The country should appeal directly to the South Korean public by using tools such as the media. It is time for Japan to put an end to stepping around South Korea. |
| Ruriko Kubota | Commentary | Japan-Forward | November 11, 2020 | Japan | His Work Refuted, Korean Novelist Jo Jung-rae Suggests Witch Hunt for ‘Japan Sympathizers’ | The feud has escalated between South Korean novelist Jo Jung-rae and a group of academics who refuted his anti-Japan work.  Tokyo During COVID-19: Green Space, Rise of Telework Bring New Lifestyle Opportunities    Jo Jung-rae, one of the foremost novelists in South Korea, has made claims that Japan “massacred’ between three million and four million Koreans during the era of Japanese imperialism. His anti-Japan novels are imbued with a level of hatred most Japanese would have a hard time imagining.    A group of academics including Lee Young-hoon, former Seoul National University professor and author of Anti-Japan Tribalism (Bungei Shunju Ltd, in Japanese and Korean, 2019), a bestseller in both Japan and South Korea, has responded, calling Jo an “insane and hateful novelist.”    The feud worsened when Jo recently attacked Lee by calling him a “new type of traitor.”    South Korean authors of ‘Anti-Japan Tribalism’ challenge author of hate-filled novels    Counterattacks from the Lee Young-hoon Faction    It all started on October 12 when Jo, at a reception to commemorate his own 50-year literary career, called Lee Young-hoon “a liar,” adding that he was “a betrayer of the people and a new type of traitor to the country.”    In his most representative anti-Japanese novel Arirang (Iwanami Shoten, Japanese and Korean, Vol. 1, 1994), a 12-volume series selling 3.5 million copies, Jo describes in graphic detail scenes of Japanese police officers brutally killing Koreans — accounts that completely have no factual ground. At the October 12 reception, Jo declared that the scenes were “objective and historically accurate descriptions based on precise materials, largely consisting of materials issued by the National Institute of Korean History and books written by people with forward-thinking awareness.”    In response, one of the authors of Anti-Japan Tribalism, the historian Ju Ik-jong, director of the Syngman Rhee School where Lee Young-Hoon is president, released a video on the Syngman Rhee YouTube channel entitled, “Jo Jung-rae: The emergence of a fascist — lies and insanity.”    The counterattacks had begun.    In one of his novels, Jo wrote: “In 1944, Japan forced Korean laborers to build an airport on the Chishima Islands. After it was completed, 4,000 of them were locked inside an air raid shelter and slaughtered.”    The counterattacks addressed this story, producing detailed records of persons from the Korean peninsula working in Hokkaido around the same time, including an itemized statement for retirement money, letters that proved allowances made for persons who died or were injured in accidents, and a payment slip for an artificial arm.    In the video, Ju Ik-jong asserts: “These materials were kept by the persons concerned or their families for over 60 years, and have been submitted to the Korean government. Laborers worked in the coal mines, received retirement money, and returned to their homes. Why would Japan need to massacre 4,000 Korean laborers in the first place?”    Ju goes on to demand that Jo “take responsibility for his criticisms of Lee.”    Original materials documenting pay of wartime Korean workers in Japan    These historical materials are stored in a collection of photographs of a government agency established under the Prime Minister’s Office of the Roh Moo-hyun administration.    For instance, an itemized statement of the retirement money paid to a Korean laborer who retired from the coal mines in November 1944 shows a record of ¥608 JPY, a figure 10 times the ¥60 JPY salary of a Korean bank worker at the time. If a worker died in a coal mine accident, family members could be brought over from Korea for the funeral.    There was also a letter stating: “I am sending the allowance for bereaved family, group life insurance and retirement money. Please send back a receipt.”    There was a written notice to a laborer who had lost his right hand, reading “1,200 yen will be paid as an allowance for an artificial hand. If this amount is insufficient, you should claim the actual cost.”        Jo’s Huge Popularity in South Korea    Lee’s response to Jo’s “traitor of the people” accusation is as follows:    Jo’s accusations came right out of his inner psychological world and are nothing particularly new. The history of anti-Japan tribalism is depicted in detail in Jo’s novels. I criticized Jo in a 2007 paper entitled, “Jo Jung-rae — historical novelist of hatred and an air of madness.”  Until now, he has ignored me. His remarks coming now just go to show that the anti-Japan (historical viewpoint) stance in his books has become less and less compelling.    Aside from Arirang, Jo has recorded phenomenal sales totaling 14 million copies of his epic novels, such as The Taebaek Mountains (Haenaem publishers, available in English, 2001). There are three literature museums in South Korea dedicated to Jo’s works, including the Arirang Literature Museum (Jeollabuk Province), that are popular destinations for school field trips.    Jo’s anti-Japan historical views are said to have predominated in history and literary societies. Lee addresses this point as follows:    Jo’s “Arirang” was praised for its literary value and has had great commercial success. South Korea’s literary society had all the volumes translated into French in hopes of it getting the Nobel Prize in Literature. But the huge number of pure fabrications make it impossible to call it a historical novel. This type of tribalism will not be chosen for an international literature award. But it has had a major impact in Korea.    ‘Anti-Japan Tribalism,’    Where is the Controversy Headed?    At the October 12 reception, Jo labeled South Koreans who had studied abroad in Japan as “Japan sympathizers,” and called for “the conviction of 1.5 million Japan sympathizers.”    Waves of criticism ensued on social media sites, calling Jo’s remarks “outdated nationalism.” They pointed out that President Moon Jae In’s daughter had studied in Japan, and challenged him to name “just who these 1.5 million Japan sympathizers are.”    Jo made his counterarguments on a radio program, continuing his tirade on “Japan sympathizers” over a period of several days.    However, this battle of words did not extend to any criticism or examination of the veracity of Jo’s fabricated claims of a history of brutal killings by the Japanese.    Ju Ik-jong explained the likely reason for the silence, noting:    In South Korea, criticizing an anti-Japan stance is taboo. Opposition is strong and also pervades the media. You can write, “Jo Jung-rae’s tribalism” vs. “Lee Young-hoon’s revisionism,” but you wouldn’t enter into a discussion of historical facts. That’s the limit to which the South Korean media would go. They lack the courage. |
| Katsuhiro Kuroda | Commentary | Japan-Forward | October 2, 2020 | Japan | For a Country of Rising Int’l Stature, South Korea is Woefully Stuck in Anti-Japan Past | South Korea is being rocked hard by the exposure of alleged “military service-related irregularities” involving the son of Justice Minister Choo Mi Ae.  [3.11 Earthquake: Rebuilding] 10 Years Later: Tohoku’s Recovery and Resilience Together with the World    The son of the justice minister, a political bigwig, might have allegedly received special treatment during his compulsory military service several years ago. Among others, he was reportedly given more leave time than he was entitled to by riding on his mother’s coattails.    Justice Minister Choo Mi Ae    In South Korea, allegations about wrongdoing by the privileged regarding military service and school entrance exams are blistering offenses in the public eye. The administration of President Moon Jae In has now been put on the defensive in the face of the scandalous allegations, for which Defense Minister Suh Wook has been used as a scapegoat to bear the brunt of the criticism independently from the justice minister.    When the defense minister responded to questions about the incident in a recent session of the National Assembly, newspapers captured and published a photo of the memo he had picked up. The photo showed a small ballpoint pen along with the memo, according to the daily JoongAhg Ilbo (Central Daily News, September 16). The ballpoint pen was produced by Mitsubishi Pencil Co. and made in Japan.    I felt concerned about the photo simply because former Justice Minister Cho Kuk, then a key figure in the government, was brought to task about this time in 2019 for the reason that he used a Japanese-made ballpoint pen during a news conference while being lambasted by the public for alleged “entrance exam wrongdoings” involving his daughter.    The Moon administration was bogged down last year in the mire over alleged irregularities involving Cho Kuk, the justice minister at that time. Moon’s government narrowly managed to weather the crisis with the resignation of Cho Kuk. What played a role in helping the Moon administration ride out of the storm was a string of anti-Japanese campaigns carried out both by government and private sectors, including boycotts of Japanese-made products in retaliation for Japan’s tightening of export procedures for materials used in the manufacture of semiconductors.    This sign in a July 9, 2019, photo, at a store in Seoul, South Korea read: “We don’t sell Japanese products.” (AP Photo /Ahn Young-joon)    Slogans calling for “Boycott Japan” and “No Abe” were especially conspicuous in gatherings of Moon supporters, while the slogan of “Don’t be deceived by the Moon administration’s agitation under the guise of anti-Japan rhetoric” was often seen at meetings held in protests against the Moon government.    This time, Defense Minister Suh was probably unaware that he was using a ballpoint pen that was made in Japan. He was presumably using the pen simply because his aides had provided it. Obviously, that was not important. Japanese-made ballpoint pens are highly popular in South Korea because of their smooth glide that influences the ease of use when writing. Generally the use of a single ballpoint pen does not bring out sentiments of nationalism and patriotism.    Regarding last year’s “Boycott Japan” campaigns mounted by both public and private sectors, some South Korean media described the drives as “selective approaches to boycott of Japanese products” by South Korean citizens, meaning that the boycotts did not cover those Japanese goods that would otherwise have been unavailable to South Korean consumers. The description seems likely.    Reflecting back again on the anti-Japanese boycotts, it seems that few countries in today’s world bother to instigate a boycott against a wide range of daily necessities and services, including overseas travel, in a move against a foreign country simply because of diplomatic conflict. South Korea has been making a point of boasting of its economic development and advances to overseas markets, citing such things as Korean pop music and Academy Award recipients, as well as Samsung and Hyundai Motor Co. products. In the face of this, the boycott of Japanese goods and services was really stupid.    When it comes to relations with Japan, South Koreans are apt to put down themselves, losing track of their dignity and rising national presence in the international community. After having been around South Koreans for years, I acutely feel that the South Korean education system and media should put their efforts into spreading international sensitivities better suited to realities of South Korea in the contemporary world, rather than staying stuck in the easy way out of anti-Japanese patriotism focused on the wartime past.    Speaking of alternatives, for Koreans, there is no substitute for travel to Japan which is cheap, satisfying, and convenient. In 2020, we may have the coronavirus infection problem, but I frequently hear South Koreans express their expectations for early resumption of tourism in Japan. The long mid-autumn holidays were held from the end of September to October 2, but this year it seems that many South Koreans are simply becoming stressed. |
| Katsuhiro Kuroda | Commentary | Japan-Forward | September 21, 2020 | Japan | Latest Flag Controversy a Bizarre Side-effect of South Korea’s ‘Anti-Japan Syndrome’ | Once again South Korea is in a frenzy over the “Rising Sun Flag” [kyokujitsu-ki].  Innovators in Japan are Developing New Technologies to Counter Coronavirus    This time “patriotic netizens” have gone so far as to virulently attack a young woman in the Philippines for having an arm tattoo that incorporates elements of the flag’s sunburst pattern with 16 rays. The result has been a nasty Korean-Filipino war of words. The fallout has even spilled over into Japan’s online community.    According to South Korean media, the tempest erupted when eagle-eyed Korean netizens noticed during her dance routine that Filipina TikTok star Bella Poarch was sporting a red tattoo that vaguely resembled the flag they revile. That led to a wave of criticism and denigration of Filipinos, despite the fact that Poarch apologized for her “negligence.”    In recent years, attacks on the Rising Sun Flag as a “symbol of Japanese militarism,” a “war crimes banner” and so on have become a notable aspect of the anti-Japan movement. As a result, many South Koreans believe that the mere sight of any sunburst design that “brings to mind Japanese militarism” is reason enough to protest and criticize. The result is a truly strange phenomenon that has gripped South Korean society.      Unbalanced Attack on Filipinos    What makes the latest spat between Koreans and Filipinos particularly outrageous is that the Philippines was the scene of some of the fiercest fighting in the Pacific War, while the Korean Peninsula did not see combat.    What are we to make then of aspersions by Korean TikTok users that Filipinos “are apologists for the country that started the war,” as well as being “short,” “poor” and “not properly educated?”    These attacks provoked a volley of angry reactions from Filipinos. For example:    The Philippines supported South Korea during the Korean War by sending soldiers to fight there for you.  Do you only remember your history of being ruled as a colony and forget the truth of how we helped you in the past?    The hashtag #CancelKorea even started trending on social networks in the Philippines.    The cyberspace mudslinging eventually died down, thanks to the intervention of cooler heads on both sides, with some Koreans urging their compatriots to do a bit of self-reflection and Filipinos urging the “TikTok star” in question to apologize for “having hurt the feelings of the Korean people.” That appeared to put the controversy to rest.        Any Excuse for Anti-Japan Attacks    Nevertheless, we can say that the uproar caused by the incident continues to fascinate as a classic example of how South Korean society has repeatedly jumped at the chance to use objections to the Rising Sun Flag as an excuse to attack Japan. In the eyes of international society it is a bizarre story often repeated.    Without a doubt, for many Koreans the Rising Sun Flag evokes memories of Japan’s past history of militarism and colonialism. However, it has really only been in the last decade or so that critics have taken to referring to the Rising Sun Flag as a “war crimes banner” and weaponized it in their constant efforts to engage in one-upmanship vis-à-vis Japan. They’ve even taken to exporting this “weapon,” and the South Korean media has heaped praise on such criticism as a “patriotic movement.”    The results can sometimes be ridiculous. For example, there was a much-publicized case in the United Kingdom in which a student from Korea bought a sushi bento lunch that had a rising sun mark on it. He protested that fact to the manufacturer, leading to the removal of the offending mark from the product.    Then there was the case of a South Korean living in the United States who took offense at the design on a wall of a favorite bank which supposedly brought to mind the Rising Sun Flag. The bank obliged by having the design removed.    RELATED STORY: [Mythbusters] First, A Flag. Now, A Moustache. What Will South Koreans Whinge About Next?      Political Exploitation of Anti-Japanism    Although the frenzy occasioned by the Rising Sun Flag manifestation of “anti-Japan syndrome” is centered among anti-Japanese activists and the online community, we cannot afford to ignore the baneful effects it has had in the areas of politics and diplomacy.    Japan withdrew from scheduled participation in an international fleet review held off the South Korean island of Jeju in October 2018 after the South Korean government announced that it would not recognize participation by Self-Defense Force vessels flying it as their standard. Incidentally, South Korea is the only nation that refuses to allow SDF vessels flying the Rising Sun Flag to visit.    Previously Japanese vessels had participated in such events in South Korea flying the flag without incident. Moreover, the Japanese Navy had used the flag in question long before the Pacific War.    RELATED STORY: Why the Uproar Over Japan’s Rising Sun Flag? It’s A Symbol for Celebrating Life and Bounty    But the situation has changed under the administration of President Moon Jae-in, who has actively exploited anti-Japanese public opinion for political advantage.    Moreover, South Korea’s official athletic association has been the only organization in the world to oppose the design of the gold medal for the upcoming Tokyo Paralympics because it suggests the rising sun.    Although the recent South Korea-Philippines Internet firestorm was only the latest episode in an ongoing saga, it may well offer South Korea a golden opportunity to consider just how abnormal is its addiction to manipulating public opinion by falling back on the Rising Sun Flag anti-Japan trope.    International common sense dictates that course of action for Seoul. |
| Duncan Bartlett | Commentary | Japan-Forward | August 18, 2020 | Japan | South Korea’s President Moon Tells Japan ‘Let’s Talk about History’ but Does He Mean It? | The President of South Korea Moon Jae In made some striking promises during his big televised speech to mark Liberation Day on August 15.  Tokyo During COVID-19: Green Space, Rise of Telework Bring New Lifestyle Opportunities    His main pledge was to work towards a peaceful reunification between South and North Korea, despite the fact that North Korea used explosives to blow up their joint liaison office in June. Since then, a united Korea has seemed a very distant dream.    Mr. Moon also said he is working toward creating an economically thriving Korean Republic “brimming with individual freedom and equality”. This ambition presents his left wing administration with an enormous challenge. Despite South Korea’s success in tackling coronavirus, its economy recently suffered its worst contraction in more than two decades, and social divisions run deep.      Talking to Japan    Mr. Moon made an important commitment in terms of international relations. He said he is ready for talks aimed at a reconciliation with Japan and that he wishes to establish “a bridge for friendship and future cooperation between the peoples of our two countries”.    To me, this sounds encouraging. After all, nearly all the South Korean and Japanese people I meet would love to see a better relationship between their nations. Japan could learn much from the South Koreans when it comes to tracing the spread of COVID-19.    Businesses have made it clear they want no further politically motivated trade disputes. A smooth trading relationship in East Asia is also important to other nations. For example, Britain struck a provisional free trade agreement with South Korea last year and is close to reaching a similar deal with Japan. The United Kingdom therefore wants to be friends with both countries.    For the United States, a rift between Japan and South Korea threatens to upset the delicate security balance in the Indo-Pacific region. The American defense secretary, Mark Esper, has called on the countries to resolve their differences and maintain trilateral security cooperation with the U.S.    Mr. Esper said during a trip to Asia last year: “My message to them was, look, I understand the historical issues, but we have far greater concerns that involve Pyongyang and Beijing.” He concluded by saying “We have to move forward.”        Obstacle to Detente    So is the way now open for detente between South Korea and Japan?    Listening to Mr. Moon’s speech carefully, I fear not. There is a major obstacle which stands in the way of his plan to patch things up with Japan.    It all comes down to what he said about the role of the supreme court in South Korea. That court has ruled that Japanese companies, such as Nippon Steel, should pay money to Korea in relation to the colonial era, which ended 75 years ago.    In his speech, Mr. Moon insisted that in South Korea, it is the supreme court which “has the highest legal authority and executory power” in the land. In other words, the buck stops with the court and not with the office of the president.    The government of Japan has made it clear it sees no legal reason why any Japanese company should cooperate with the ruling of the supreme court in Seoul. Nippon Steel has robustly challenged the court’s plan to liquidate its assets in South Korea. Tokyo says financial issues relating to the colonial period were settled decades ago.    By siding against Japan, the supreme court has placed a huge barrier in the path towards better international relations. Mr. Moon has not shown the political will to overcome it.    Let us suppose that the government of Japan sends a ministerial delegation to talk with Mr. Moon and his government. Even if negotiations go well, how could any deal be struck without the supreme court agreeing to it? I cannot see any viable basis for discussion here.    I’m sure it frustrates the diplomats on both sides to know that under present conditions, talks between South Korea and Japan would be a waste of time. Yet, if the Japanese side declines the talks, despite Mr. Moon’s claim he’s “ready” to talk to them, the South Koreans will surely blame Tokyo for the impasse.      The Message from Japan    I noticed that the speech by Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 15 carefully avoided any mention of South Korea. He vowed never to repeat the tragedy of war, while on the same day Emperor Naruhito expressed “deep remorse” over Japan’s wartime past.    Mr. Abe said: “Over the last 75 years since the end of the war, our country has consistently valued peace. Under the banner of proactive contribution to peace, Japan is determined to play an even greater role in resolving the challenges the world faces, working together with the international community.”    The Japanese government was cautious with regard to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, where Japan remembers its war dead. Some members of the cabinet went to the site. If Mr. Abe had joined them, it would certainly have raised the tension with South Korea, so he sent a ceremonial gift instead.    It would be wrong to see either Mr. Abe or Mr. Moon as authoritarian rulers who can do as they wish without repercussions, domestically or internationally. They are the elected heads of complex democracies and require the support of the public and the media to survive. Both are struggling in the opinion polls at the moment, particularly as the coronavirus situation in Asia worsens.      Noisy Protests    Emotions are running especially high in South Korea. There were huge anti-government street protests in Seoul over the weekend, despite police concerns that these could lead to the further spread of COVID-19.    Police say more than 20,000 people participated in the marches. The demonstrators included far-right groups, who shouted “President Out” and denounced the recent sexual abuse cases involving members of the ruling political party.    Meanwhile, the Korea Confederation of Trade Unions held a separate protest with around 2,000 workers, calling for closer ties with North Korea and a halt to the joint exercises between the South Korea army and the United States.    In Tokyo, there were small but noisy demonstrations, organized by far right groups who scorn the Japanese government. Although they represent the views of only a tiny minority of Japanese people, they nevertheless gain international attention and are eager to speak to foreign reporters. When their inflammatory comments are reported abroad, they inevitably stoke up anti-Japanese feelings.      In Search of a Solution    So how can we move forward from here?    In my view, it would be wise for the Japanese to keep the diplomatic channels open to South Korea. A forceful but discreet effort is needed to counter the extremism which is a threat to the interests of both countries.    I am pleased that Mr. Moon has spoken about a vision for the future which sees Japan and South Korea as partners and friends. But in order to make history and bring his vision to reality, he will need to see past the restrictive legal system in Seoul, which is doing a disservice to his government and marring relations with a peace-seeking Asian neighbor. |
| Katsuhiro Kuroda | Commentary | Japan-Forward | June 18, 2020 | Japan | South Korea’s Development Today Traces to Assets the Japanese Left Behind | SK Group, a major South Korean chaebol (conglomerate), is known as a telecommunications giant and one of the most familiar firms in a country known as the “smartphone kingdom.”  Innovators in Japan are Developing New Technologies to Counter Coronavirus    SK Group’s old name is Sunkyong Group, which was abbreviated into SK. While its origins are in Sunkyong Textiles, the group evolved into the petrochemical industry with the production of chemical textiles, and then later advanced into the semiconductor and telecommunications fields, thus becoming one of the mega group companies in South Korea.    By the way, Sunkyong Textiles was a Japanese company during Japan’s colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula. Sunkyong is said to have been created through the merger of Chudan and Kyoto Textile Co. Sunkyong sounds like a typical Japanese name, but it was sold to a South Korean who was an employee of the company, after Japanese were withdrawn from the Korean Peninsula in 1945, in the wake of Japan’s defeat in the Pacific War. Thus, it became a South Korean company.    These are the roots of the now thriving SK Group, which contemporary South Koreans do not know. It is impressive that the group has maintained its corporate name, with Japanese roots in a South Korea that tends to find fault with Japan by stoking anti-Japan sentiment. I am grateful to the SK Group for this.    In fact, there are many South Korean firms that have developed by taking over companies left by Japan, just as the SK Group did. This was the case with North Korea, too. As I traveled along the China-North Korea border area some years ago, a guide hailing from North Korea pointed at a chimney towering in the city of Sinuiju, North Korea, saying, “That’s the place where Oji Paper Company [of Japan] used to exist during the period of Japanese rule.”      New Revelations About Japanese Colonial Era Assets    I felt like writing this episode because I recently read a book titled A Study of Belongingness of Property (帰属財産研究), which was written by Lee Tae Gun and published in South Korea in 2015. The author presented the book to me in 2019. I could finally finish reading the book, which has about 700 pages, by taking advantage of the increased time at home due to voluntary restraint on going out amid the new coronavirus pandemic. A graduate of Seoul University, Lee is a professor emeritus of Sungkyunkwan University, and an expert in the theory of world economics. He also studied at Kyoto University in Japan.    It is the first overall nonfiction book of its kind to delve into the fate of property left by the Japanese on the Korean Peninsula following the end of World War II in August 1945. This property included assets held publicly and privately, including all of those possessed by both corporations and individual persons. Relying on data and statistics, the book analyzes in detail the process of assets being formed and disposed of after Japan’s defeat in World War II, which meant liberation of the peninsula from colonial rule.    Japanese assets were first requisitioned as war reparations by U.S. troops that advanced to South Korea before being transferred to the South Korean side. The assets were later defined by South Korea as “enemy property,” with some of them nationalized and others sold to the private sector.    The assets amounted to $5.2 billion USD, or about ￥80 billion JPY at the currency rate of the time. But, according to monetary experts, they are worth no less than several hundreds of billions of U.S. dollars, or several tens of trillions of Japanese yen, when calculated at today’s values.    The experts demonstrate that Japan’s investment and development efforts were the dominant contributing factor in the formation of these assets. In doing so, they also totally repudiate South Korea’s official view of history that the assets were originally seized by Japan.    The number of Japanese companies whose property was requisitioned totaled 2,373. It is these requisitioned assets which are said to serve as the foundation for economic development, after they came into the possession of South Korea.    Considering the enormity of Japanese assets obtained by South Korea at the time, it is hard to understand why Japanese firms’ postwar assets have been seized for compensation of wartime former Korean requisitioned workers. The so-called compensation issue over what happened in the past should all be settled by South Korea, domestically. |
| Aldric Hama | BOOK REVIEW | Japan-Forward | April 1, 2020 | Japan | ‘The Burden of the Past: Problems of Historical Perception in Japan-Korea Relations’ by Kan Kimura | Many in South Korea blame the strain in relations between Korea and Japan on Japan’s alleged lack of contrition for its past. The current bone of contention is compensation for Koreans mobilized for the Japanese war effort.  Tokyo During COVID-19: Green Space, Rise of Telework Bring New Lifestyle Opportunities    Until recently, the comfort women issue riled peninsular activists. But what are all of these things really about, and how and why do they become headline-grabbing issues in the first place?    In The Burden of the Past: Problems of Historical Perception in Japan-Korea Relations (University of Michigan Press, 2019), Kobe University Professor Kan Kimura presents an in-depth analysis of the historical perception conflicts between Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK).    Kimura gives us what has been missing in the historical debate: the context of a particular bout of Japan-Korea tension, and an analysis of the events that led to a seemingly routine bureaucratic procedure — textbook review — becoming an international incident.      From History to History Wars    For Kimura, such incidents do not flare up without warning. Instead, Kimura says that certain preconditions must be fulfilled in order for a “historical perception dispute” to arise:    There must be multiple actors who attach meaning to the event.  Those actors must have different perceptions of the same event.  The multiple actors must recognize the existence of sufficient benefit to stir them to action.    What is clear from Kimura’s analysis is that history wars, surprisingly, are not substantially related to actual history. The Burden of the Past uses the comfort women and Japanese history textbook issues as case studies, but readers will likely be left with the impression that other historical perception disputes also have little to do with colonial era history per se.    In other words, so-called contentious histories do “not map directly to the era of colonial rule” and are not the result of an alleged ancient antagonism between the two countries. Nor can they be explained by simplistic narratives, such as Korean democratization of the late 1980s and early 1990s and Japan’s alleged “tilt to the right” during the 1980s.        The Importance of Context    What matters more than history, Kimura states, is context. The stages he proposes are “shaped” by social, political, international, and economic circumstances at the time.    Take the comfort women dispute, for example, which gained traction in Korea in the late 1980s, when Marxist class-struggle attitudes, along with social and political liberalization, began to be embraced by the South Korean masses. Popular South Korean thinking at the time was that the ruling class was merely a “puppet of Japan and U.S. giant capital,” which had no interest in serving the “interests of the Korean people.”    Kimura explains that Korean sex workers were viewed as the “ultimate embodiment of oppression and exploitation of the South Korean people,” as their “exploiters” were mostly foreigners — American soldiers and Japanese “sex tourists.” Thus, “South Korean women came to view the comfort women issue as part of their own issue,” and as one more grievance against the Japanese as well as the South Korean “ruling elites.”    This is not about history, then, but about contemporary geopolitics and economic ideology. It is important to remember that at the time, before the end of the Cold War, bilateral relations between Japanese and South Korean ruling elites were good. Japan had a national security interest in supporting South Korea as a frontline state against communism, and South Korean elites were overseeing the capitalist miracle on the Han.    Without this context, provided in abundance in The Burden of the Past, it is impossible to truly understand the disagreements between Japan and South Korea over historical issues.      New Realities in Northeast Asia    With the end of the Cold War, the Japanese government no longer placed a high priority on active cooperation with South Korea.    Domestically, because of a considerable loss of public confidence in the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan and electoral defeats at the hands of the Japan Socialist Party, the LDP lost their “ability to control the domestic discourse.” This paved the way for South Koreans to amplify and distort the talking points of their fellow travelers in Japan. The groundwork for the “history dispute” over the comfort women was in place.    Within South Korea, by the same token, President Roh Tae Woo and his ruling coalition were in a precarious position. Roh won the presidential election of 1987 with only about one-third of the vote in a four-way contest. His support in the National Assembly rested on the Democratic Liberal Party (DLP), an unstable coalition headed by rivaling personalities.    In 1992, following Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa’s state visit to Seoul, both the South Korean ruling and opposition parties voiced their support for comfort women “apologies and compensation.” One could surmise that both were merely pandering to the Korean people for votes for the upcoming general and presidential elections. The opposition, though, was in a better position to utilize the comfort women issue as a means to lash out at Japan and discredit the DLP, as leading personalities within the party had been associated with the South Korean government at the time of establishing the 1965 agreement normalizing relations with Japan.    This 1965 agreement “completely and finally resolved” the issue of compensation to Koreans during the Japanese colonial era, such that no new claims could be made, including by comfort women. No treaty, however, can put a stop to politics, and so the comfort women issue, separated from historical reality, became a pawn in political machinations in both South Korea and Japan.      Activists Take Advantage of Discord    South Korean and Japanese media and activists saw an opportunity in this fraying of elite control. In 1991, activists sued the Japanese government on behalf of Korean comfort women for compensation and an apology.    But why file suit for something that happened some 50 years in the past? The answer in part was that, before South Korean political liberalization, disputes of historical perception were pushed into the background by the ruling elites of both Japan and South Korea, on the understanding that such disputes were to be settled after tackling more pressing economic and security matters.    The changing economic fortunes of South Korea also impinged upon the historical perception dispute. This in turn helped fulfill Kimura’s third condition, that “multiple actors must recognize the existence of sufficient benefit to stir them to action.”    Japan had been a key trade partner for the ROK since the end of World War II, but Japan’s importance to South Korea diminished from the late 1970s. The collapse of Communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s further eroded Japan’s economic importance to South Korea, as China and former Communist nations were targeted for Korean exports. As a result, Japan could not effectively utilize its economic strength to obtain South Korea’s political cooperation.    For example, during the ROK-Japan trade dispute of 1992, South Korea sought a reduction in the trade deficit on terms that were impossible for Japan to accept. Japan rebuffed the South Korean demands. It is possible, Kimura argues, that the South Korean ruling elite saw the potential benefit in using the emerging popular support for the comfort women issue as a cudgel to force Japan to make trade concessions and as a signal to voters that the ruling party was doing everything it could in the name of Korean dignity and honor.    Soon after the Miyazawa state visit to Seoul in January 1992, the South Korean government demanded that Japan open “a full investigation” of the comfort women issue and “take steps including appropriate compensation.” As Kimura notes, however, the South Korean government phrased its demands in non-legal terms, a tacit recognition that demands for compensation were forbidden by the 1965 Japan-Korea normalization treaty.    Thus, a confluence of several events, rather than just one, brought the comfort women to the foreground.      From Apologies to Fact-Based Dialogue    Understanding the cause of disputes involving historical perception is necessary in order to formulate possible solutions, as alluded to earlier. But how one manages to formulate a solution is not entirely clear from the current book. Perhaps preventative measures to keep historical perception disputes from crossing all three of Kimura’s conditional thresholds could be instituted. Economic incentives for politicizing history could be zeroed out, for example, such that costs greatly exceed any perceived benefit.    What has proven to be least effective, however, is apologies. In order to move forward in true partnership, Japan and South Korea must learn the “history of their history”. Both sides must ground ongoing dialogue in context-rich facts about the past and come to understand the many ways in which the past has been used to score short-term advantage in present debates. |
| Chizuko T. Allen | BOOK REVIEW | Japan-Forward | March 2, 2020 | Japan | ‘Anti-Japan Tribalism: The Root of the Japan-Korea Crisis’ by Lee Young-hoon and others | Since its publication in November 2019, the book Han-nichi shuzoku shugi: Nikkan kiki no kongen or Anti-Japan Tribalism: The Root of the Japan-Korea Crisis (Bungeishunjū) has quickly become a bestseller. As of the date of this article, it has sold approximately 400,000 copies.  Tokyo During COVID-19: Green Space, Rise of Telework Bring New Lifestyle Opportunities    This is the Japanese edition of the book under the same title in Korean, Pan-Il chongjok chuŭi, with a slightly different subtitle: “The Root of the Crisis of the Republic of Korea.” It is authored by six South Korean scholars led by Lee Young-hoon. Lee is a former professor of economics at Seoul National University and current president of the Naksungdae Institute of Economic Research in South Korea.    Since its July 2019 publication, the Korean edition has sold 110,000 copies, a huge number for a scholarly book in South Korea, making it a social phenomenon. The book encompasses many critical issues in modern Japan-Korean relations, ranging from Japan’s colonial policies in 1910-1945, to wartime Japan’s mobilization of Korean men and women, to the 1965 Japan-South Korea normalization treaty, to South Korea’s territorial claim of Tokdo or Takeshima.    Although I have spent years studying Korean history, reading about the extent of anti-Japanese distortions in Korean history narratives, as exposed in this book, was an eye-opening experience.      Taking On the History Lies Propagated in Post-war Novels    Lee begins his chapters by introducing the award-winning and bestselling historical novel, Arirang, authored by Jo Jung-rae in the 1990s.    The novel graphically depicts Japanese policemen’s summary executions of Korean farmers who resisted the authorities’ confiscation of land, and comments that 4,000 such executions took place during the Japanese land survey of Korea in 1910-1918. The novel’s portrayal of Japan’s brutality was widely circulated through creating movies, monuments, and even a French version.    Jo Jung-rae was not alone, however. Beginning in the 1980s, Sin Yong-ha, a renowned South Korean historian and sociologist, claimed that the Japanese land surveyors had driven Koreans out of farmland by holding “a surveying instrument in one hand and a pistol in the other.”    South Korean public schools have taught students that the Japanese colonial government used the land survey to plunder 40% of Korea’s agricultural land.    All these accounts were fabrications. In the 1990s, after his careful study of primary sources, Lee began publishing his findings that the Japanese colonial government had always operated according to the law and never conducted summary executions.    South Korean society and academia did not receive his criticism well, and many called him “pro-Japanese” — an insult in South Korea.    Another prevalent lie propagated in South Korea is about Japan’s plunder of Korean rice that allegedly caused food shortage in Korea. The book’s coauthor Kim Nag-nyeon, a professor of economics at Tongguk University in Seoul, points out that Koreans in fact exported rice to Japan proper for large profit, and imported cheap Manchurian grains for domestic consumption. He adds that the modern Japanese legal system, firmly transplanted in colonial Korea, protected property rights for all, and the Korean economy continued to grow until 1945.        Correcting the Record on Korean Wartime Laborers    Even more publicized today are the lies concerning Korean laborers in wartime Japan.    As seen in South Korea’s Supreme Court order of 2018, Koreans believe that wartime Japan, from 1937 to 1945, conscripted Korean men to labor in dangerous Japanese coal mines and construction sites for little or no wages. In reality, as discussed by Lee U-yeon, the book’s coauthor and researcher at the Naksungdae Institute of Economic Research, Japan’s better wages and employment opportunities attracted 100,000 to 200,000 Korean workers each year through the 1930s and the early 1940s. Moreover, there was little wage discrimination during the war, when Japanese companies were in need of Korean workers.    Koreans were conscripted for only eight months from the autumn of 1944 to the spring of 1945. Besides, the postwar Japanese government’s grant of $300 million USD to the South Korean government, following the signing of the 1965 normalization treaty, included compensations for damages received by wartime Korean workers, as pointed out by Ju Ik-jong, another coauthor of the book.      Addressing the Comfort Women Issue    The most damaging distortions of Korean history of the colonial era concern “comfort women,” wartime prostitutes who serviced the Japanese military abroad.    According to the Korean master narrative, imperial Japan forced 200,000 to 300,000 women, largely from Korea, to work as “comfort women” under brutal conditions. But Lee Young-hoon thoroughly refutes this myth through his in-depth research.    He traces the history of Korean “comfort women” all the way back to the Chosǒn dynasty (1392-1910), when women of the lowest social class were assigned to sex work for government officials and foreign guests, while upper-class women were required to maintain Confucian chastity. Ironically, the “sage king” Sejong (r. 1418-1450) introduced an early version of “comfort stations” that serviced military men at frontiers and remote locations, and this system lasted till the end of the 19th century.    When the Japanese took over Korea, they abolished the class system, but transplanted the Japanese licensed prostitution system, modeled after European precedents, in Korea in 1917. As the Korean economy grew in the 1920s and 1930s, the licensed prostitution employed an increasing number of young Korean women to cater to Korean customers.    Korean recruiters and brothel owners often paid advance money to heads of households, usually fathers, so their daughters worked under contract to pay off the debt. Korean brothels prospered in China and Manchuria, and many of them became “comfort stations” to service Japanese military men exclusively, upon the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937.    Concluding that the Japanese “comfort stations” were extensions of the licensed prostitution operated in Japan and colonial Korea, Lee rejects the notion of “comfort women” as sex slaves, on the basis of women’s freedom to send money home and retire or move upon the completion of their contract.    Lee estimates the total number of Imperial Japan’s “comfort women” to be around 18,000, based on the numbers of troops and contraceptives issued. He thinks that Korean women numbered approximately 3,600, a fraction of the inflated figures widely publicized today.    Importantly, Lee argues that Korean “comfort women” did not disappear in 1945 because the South Korean government placed their women in brothels dedicated to Korean and U.S. soldiers beginning in the Korean War. And they were called “comfort women” all the way to the 1980s.    These “comfort women,” as well as other prostitutes in South Korea, were bound by debt and exploited under conditions worse than their predecessors. Lee’s study points to hypocrisy in feminists and human rights activists who turn a blind eye to tragedies of many women within the Korean peninsula.      Fundamental Problems in Korean Nationalism    After decades of fighting with Korean nationalist narratives full of lies and distortions, Lee concludes that something is fundamentally wrong in Korean nationalism.    Scholars outside of Korea have regarded Korean nationalism as “ethnic nationalism,” sustained by the belief in common ancestry and bloodline, since the Stanford University sociologist Gi-Wook Shin’s 2006 publication. Lee’s quest goes much deeper.    According to Lee, Korean nationalism denies autonomy to individuals and forces them to submit to powerful leaders, who promote unchanging hostility to the neighboring state of Japan. He calls this nationalism “tribalism” to set it apart from nationalism in the West, where individuals’ independence and freedom are respected.    Korean tribalism, according to Lee, is reinforced by the Korean people’s worldview, which is deeply rooted in indigenous beliefs such as geomancy and shamanism.    Geomancy, a pseudo-science of Chinese origin, has come to facilitate the Korean people’s attachment to the land, by presuming flows of energy through mountain ranges. Even more important is Korean shamanism that has constituted the substratum of the Korean psyche, despite the dominance of Neo-Confucianism in the Chosǒn dynasty and the popularity of Christianity and Buddhism in present-day South Korea.    According to Lee, Korean shamanism is materialistic and rationalizes dishonesty because it upholds no absolute god, no clear distinction between good and evil, and no heaven and hell for the dead. In the world of shamanism, the spirits of the dead retain their lifetime status, such as the rich, the powerful, or the poor, and hover in this world to cause harm to the living.    Following nationwide attempts to counter North Korean assaults and achieve industrialization from the 1950s to the early 1980s, South Koreans found the freedom to pursue material gains. Beginning in the 1980’s, this freedom extended to the creation of stories about their past that were favorable to their anti-Japan tribalism identity. It was from this period that the statues of Korean “comfort women,” who were allegedly defiled by barbarous Japanese troops, became an inviolable totem. At the same time, anti-Japanese activists, endowed with the authority of shamans, dominated South Korea’s relationship with Japan.      Conclusion    While this book enlightens many Koreans and Japanese, it infuriates those who subscribe to the stories inspired by anti-Japanese tribalism.    No comprehensive criticism of the book has emerged so far, although some reacted with political slander and reiteration of their views, such as insistence upon holding the Japanese government responsible for the mobilization of Korean men and women for the Pacific War.    What we need is a broad discussion of anti-Japanese tribalism and its many consequences, which, according to the authors, are threatening to destroy South Korea. Researchers in the two countries and beyond should also explore North Korea’s direct and indirect impact on the rise of anti-Japan tribalism.    An English edition of the book is required for these purposes. |
| Tsutomu Nishioka | Opinion | Japan-Forward | December 27, 2019 | Japan | [Wartime Laborers] Japan Activists Incite Koreans to Sue Based on Lies About Forced Labor | Despite the 1965 Agreement and payments to mobilized laborers, anti-Japan activists, including Japanese lawyers and extremist labor union members, have traveled to South Korea since the 1990s, looking for plaintiffs, encouraging them to sue Japanese companies and agreeing to bear the expenses.  Tsutomu NishiokaPublished 1 year ago on December 27, 2019By Tsutomu Nishioka  ~~  Innovators in Japan are Developing New Technologies to Counter Coronavirus  South Korean statue to Mobilized Korean Laborers Gets it Wrong – they moved for jobs, they weren’t forced  Gunkanjima, where many wartime jobs were held by Japanese, Koreans and others  Actual Korean labor photos show different story from South Korea’s claims of forced labor  Japan’s foreign minister, Taro Kono. South Korea’s top court ordered Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Co. to pay monetary damages to former South Korean wartime laborers  Coal mine worker in Meiji Era – not forced Korean labor in wartime  South Koreans protesting Japan and demanding compensation again for “forced labor”  (Last of 5 Parts)    Part 1: [Wartime Laborers] South Korea Ignores History, Violates 54-Year-Old Treaty  Part 2: [Wartime Laborers] Separating Facts from Fiction: Korean Workers Were Recruited, Not Coerced  Part 3: [Wartime Laborers] The 3 Phases of Recruitment: Workers Came to Japan on Their Own  Part 4: [Wartime Laborers] Koreans Were Compensated Twice Before      Despite the 1965 Agreement and payments to mobilized laborers, anti-Japan activists, including Japanese lawyers and extremist labor union members, have traveled to South Korea since the 1990s, looking for plaintiffs, encouraging them to sue Japanese companies and agreeing to bear the expenses. Lawsuits were filed in Japan, demanding reparations from Nippon Steel and Sumitomo Metal Corporation, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, and Nachi-Fujikoshi.    In these cases, the Japanese courts ruled against plaintiffs and the activists promoting them. Nevertheless, the activists and supporters continued their activities, persistently holding demonstrations at the headquarters of Japanese companies and criticizing the companies in the local media.      Settlements That ‘Settle’ Nothing    Bending to the pressure of demonstrators, Nachi-Fujikoshi agreed in 2000 to an out-of-court settlement of the case against it. The company ended up paying a sum of over ¥30 million JPY to three plaintiffs, five former colleagues, and the Association for Pacific War Victims and Bereaved Families, whose president was Kim Gyeong Suk.    This did not resolve the matter, however. As soon as the out-of-court settlement was paid, another new plaintiff appeared from South Korea, and Nachi-Fujikoshi was sued again.        When at First You Don’t Succeed, Try Another Court    Meanwhile, in all court cases in Japan where the companies refused to settle out of court, the companies won. Nevertheless, activists and their plaintiffs did not give up, taking their cases next to the South Korean courts.    The plaintiffs also lost in the South Korean trial courts in their lawsuits against the companies Nippon Steel and Sumitomo Metal Corporation, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, and Nachi-Fujikoshi. They appealed, however, and in May 2012 the South Korean Supreme Court abruptly reversed the lower court decisions and sent the cases back for further hearings, in violation of both international law and common sense.    The South Korean Supreme Court’s ruling was based on the theory that Japan’s annexation of Korea was illegal. It declared that “grounds for Japanese rulings were premised on the legality of Japanese colonial rule of the Korean peninsula and Korean people.”    The court added its view that “forced labor itself during Japanese imperial occupation was illegal and in direct conflict with the core values of the Constitution of South Korea.” The ruling claimed decisions by the Japanese courts “violated the good public morals and social order of South Korea,” and thus, the South Korean courts did not have to recognize their validity.    On that extraordinary basis, the high court ruled against the Japanese companies, which then filed an appeal again.    As one would expect, the Chief Justice and several other justices of the Supreme Court, along with then-president Park Geun Hye and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, felt that issuing a final judgment on the case would shake the foundations of Japan-Korea relations, and would not be in South Korea’s national interest. Thus, they attempted to coordinate behind closed doors.    But in the face of public opinion tainted by anti-Japan discrimination in the mass media, they lacked the courage to overturn the 2012 ruling. The trial dragged on.      Activist ‘Justice’ Under the Moon Administration    Immediately after President Moon Jae In took office in May 2017, he took the exceptional step of appointing Kim Myeong Soo, a well-known left-wing district court judge, as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Chief Justice Kim then promptly initiated a criminal investigation into the actions of his predecessors who had delayed finalizing the 2012 ruling.    The former justices who had headed the Supreme Court under the previous administration were then arrested. The previous chief justice was targeted as a suspect, even having his private vehicle searched.    By August 2018, Chief Justice Kim had appointed new justices to the Supreme Court and held a comfortable majority. The Supreme Court then sent the Nippon Steel and Sumitomo Metal Corporation case back to the South Korean superior court for trial in accordance with the findings of the Supreme Court’s ruling. Likewise, the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries trial was sent back for trial in September that year.    The Moon Jae-in administration has continued to implement policies that arouse anti-Japanese sentiment without consideration of their bilateral obligations under international law or the diplomatic consequences of their actions.    This is the reason why rulings that violate international law and common sense have been handed down one after another in succession. The Japanese companies lost their cases in October and November 2018.      Conclusion    Japan’s mobilization of Korean wartime laborers was legal by Japanese and international standards, not an inhumane criminal act as it has sometimes been misconstrued. Mobilized workers were hired by private companies on two-year contracts and paid wages on a par with those of Japanese. Tales of forced or slave labor are lies invented well after the war.    Likewise, all individual claims for unpaid wages and compensation for deaths were properly settled under the 1965 Agreement. The Korean government has already implemented compensation for individuals based on the 1965 Agreement on two separate occasions.    Present-day Japan-Korea relations must be approached on the basis of this fundamental reality. Yet, unfortunately, these facts are not well-known in the international community. It is my hope that this essay will contribute to awareness of the basic facts of this issue. |
| Editorial Board, The Sankei Shimbun | Editorial | Japan-Forward | November 25, 2019 | Japan | It’s Time to Put Japan-U.S.-South Korea Cooperation on a Firmer Footing | On November 22, South Korea officially notified Japan that it was holding off on the termination of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) which it had announced in August.  Innovators in Japan are Developing New Technologies to Counter Coronavirus    The arrangement, which includes sharing intelligence on North Korea, was scheduled to become inoperative at midnight of November 22. The last-minute reprieve means the agreement has been automatically extended for one year.    Seoul also agreed to suspend procedures in the appeal of its complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO) concerning Japan’s stiffened export controls on shipments of sensitive materials to South Korea, which the Japanese government imposed out of national security concerns. Instead, the two governments will engage in a policy dialogue.    “Cooperation between Japan and South Korea, as well as among our two nations plus the United States, is of the utmost importance,” Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Friday, November 22, after the South Korean decision was announced. “South Korea seems to have made its decision from a strategic point of view,” he added.    It was certainly proper for the government of President Moon Jae In to rescind its foolish decision to scrap GSOMIA. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the move by the Moon administration to terminate the intelligence-sharing mechanism has inflicted serious damage on trilateral security cooperation among Japan, the United States, and South Korea, and indeed on the U.S.-South Korea alliance itself.    Pyongyang has ignored calls to denuclearize and continues to launch ballistic missiles. In the meantime, China arrogantly continues its naval expansion. And Russia is stepping up its military activity in the Far East.      Repairing the Damage to the Alliances    Rebuilding effective security cooperation among Japan, the United States, and South Korea, as well as the Washington-Seoul alliance, is a matter of great urgency.    In order for this reconstruction process to be effective, President Moon himself must reflect deeply on his erroneous stance of emphasizing emotional anti-Japanese rhetoric above protection of the security of his own country and the Northeast Asian region. Instead, he should shift to championing true cooperation with Japan and the United States.    The Moon administration had previously taken the position that it would terminate GSOMIA unless Japan removed the more stringent curbs it had imposed on the export of sensitive items to South Korea, emphasizing that it was a bilateral Japan-South Korea issue only. In fact, Chung Eui Yong, director of South Korea’s National Security Office, had gone so far as to say, “This has nothing to do with the United States-South Korea alliance.”    The truth, however, is that GSOMIA plays a vital role in strengthening the deterrence roles played by the respective alliances of Japan and the United States, and of the U.S. and South Korea. The absence of a mechanism for sharing military information between Japan and South Korea would have created obstacles, hindering the force readiness posture of the U.S. military in the event of a crisis in the Northeast Asia region.    This is why Washington strongly pressed the Moon administration to reverse its position on withdrawal from GSOMIA, arguing that eliminating bilateral Japan-South Korea information sharing arrangement would only please Pyongyang, Beijing, and Moscow.    Seoul Must Quickly Resolve Its Violation of International Law    The tightened controls on the export of certain sensitive materials from Japan was necessary in order to prevent them from being diverted for uses prohibited under international law. The existence of these protections is not something that is negotiable.    If Seoul is dissatisfied with the status quo, it should welcome a policy dialogue to explain the measures it proposes to remedy the deficiencies within it current export regime.    As Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi has pointed out, the greatest issue outstanding between Japan and South Korea is the decision of a South Korean court on the “forced laborers” question, which clearly runs counter to international law. The Moon administration needs to quickly resolve this problem. |
| Takao Harakawa, | News Analysis | Japan-Forward | November 11, 2019 | Japan | Japanese Officials Irked by South Korea’s ‘Photo Ambush’ of Prime Minister Abe at ASEAN Meeting | Japanese officials are incensed by the South Korea’s attempt to set up Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for a photo opportunity that could mislead the public that all is well between the two countries.  Tokyo During COVID-19: Green Space, Rise of Telework Bring New Lifestyle Opportunities    Photos of a recent meeting between South Korean President Moon Jae In and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe were taken and published without the approval of the Japanese side, it was learned on Thursday, November 7.    The staged photo was seen by observers as a unilateral attempt by Seoul to show to domestic and international audiences that it is eager to improve bilateral ties recently frayed by the controversy concerning wartime Korean laborers in Japan.    The surprise move might have backfired, however, since the “photo ambush” by the South Koreans appears to have only increased the Japanese government’s distrust towards South Korea. Several Japanese officials were openly indignant about what they considered a breach of the “principle of good faith.”      Photos by Director of South Korea National Security Office    The meeting in question took place in a waiting room on the sidelines of the ASEAN Plus 3 (Japan, China, and South Korea) summit held near Bangkok, Thailand. According to members of Prime Minister Abe’s party, only the two government leaders and their interpreters were supposed to be in the room during their 11-minute talk.    However, the President’s Office in Seoul subsequently published photos with four people in the room, namely Abe and Moon, as well as two interpreters who used English. Multiple Japanese and South Korean sources have confirmed that the additional person who took the photographs was Chung Eui-yong, director of the South Korean National Security office.    It is clear that everything — from the unscheduled meeting to the photo snapping and rush to publish the photos — was carefully stage-managed by the South Korean side.    A source who traveled with Prime Minister Abe revealed that “the Prime Minister was there in the waiting room and he shook hands one after the next with the 10 national leaders attending the summit, with Moon the last in line.” If Moon wanted to talk, Abe could hardly refuse.        Surreptitious Appeal to World Opinion    President Moon’s official homepage and other South Korean outlets later carried the photos of the two men speaking, along with captions like “President has a friendly chat with Japanese P.M.” These were in English and Japanese, as well as Korean, as part of Seoul’s efforts to appeal to world opinion.    The website of Japan’s Foreign Ministry has no mention of the meeting, as Japan takes the position that it was not an official meeting. Since it was an impromptu encounter, the Japanese side had made absolutely no preparations for such top-level talks. So much more so when it came to the picture-taking.    Granted, there are no hard and fast rules concerning the taking and publishing of unofficial exchanges between national leaders. Nevertheless, a Foreign Ministry official notes, normally even with SNS (social networking services) accounts, a user is expected to have obtained the permission of anyone whose photograph he or she uploads. The source added that the Japanese side viewed South Korea’s behavior in this respect as a “violation of etiquette.”      More Needed to Repair Relations    The leaders of the two countries had not met since September 2018. In an effort to break the impasse concerning the wartime laborer issue, on November 5 Moon Hee Sang, speaker of the South Korean National Assembly, proposed a bill that would establish a fund to which Japanese and South Korean businesses and individuals would contribute to pay compensation to the workers in question. It was seen as evidence of a desire on Seoul’s part to get bilateral relations back on an even keel.    It is clear that Tokyo’s tightening of restrictions on Japanese exports to South Korea since July has caused damage to the South Korean economy. Be that as it may, the Japanese government remains cool to the prospects for a quick fix.    A Foreign Ministry source put it this way: “In the end, the ball remains in South Korea’s court. The question remains whether or not South Korea will offer a concrete plan for solving our outstanding issues.” |
| Yasushi Tomiyama | Commentary | Japan-Forward | September 20, 2019 | Japan | Japan Needs to Explain to the U.S. Its Policy on South Korea Better | The United States government has taken a definite position of strongly criticizing South Korean President Moon Jae In for his decision to terminate the agreement with Japan known as GSOMIA, the General Security of Military Information Agreement. The action expands Seoul’s disputes with Tokyo into the military and security field.  Tokyo During COVID-19: Green Space, Rise of Telework Bring New Lifestyle Opportunities    At the same time in the U.S., the Trump administration and congressional leaders may not yet sufficiently understand Japan’s concerns behind the deteriorating bilateral relationship with South Korea. The government in Tokyo must make a greater effort to deepen Washington’s understanding of Japan’s position.      Washington Objects to Seoul’s Termination of GSOMIA    “We are deeply disappointed and concerned,” U.S. State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said, conveying an official response by the Trump administration to Seoul’s decision to end GSOMIA.    The pact has been useful in facilitating the sharing of information between Japan and South Korea, primarily on matters such as North Korea’s military movements. The South Korean decision would result in an “increased risk to U.S. forces,” Ortagus said.    Randall Schriver, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, said in a speech, “We are concerned it may reflect serious misapprehension on the part of the Moon administration regarding the serious security challenges we face in Northeast Asia.” He called on Seoul to withdraw the decision.    At the recent Group of Seven summit in France, U.S. President Donald Trump branded Moon as unreliable. According to multiple Japanese media reports, he quoted North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as describing Moon as a liar, and questioned why such person became president. Trump might have indicated that he would not forgive anyone for making a decision that poses a danger to U.S. forces.    In a press release, U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Eliot L. Engel, a Democrat from New York, said that he was “deeply concerned” about Seoul’s decision to terminate GSOMIA.    “It is irresponsible to allow the escalating tensions to hinder practical national security-oriented cooperation,” he said, condemning Moon for the decision.        U.S. Doesn’t Understand Japan’s Toughened Export Controls    However, it should be noted that the U.S. does not necessarily side with Japan over the broader issues making up the Japan-South Korea dispute.    Washington has remained neutral over Japan’s exclusion of South Korea from a list of countries subject to preferential treatments regarding export control, which has led South Korea to take corresponding action against Japan.    Schriver said that the Japanese and South Korean measures to strengthen export control against each other might have been “politically motivated.” “I think our preference would be that they, in fact, do remove one another and return to a more normal trading relationship,” he said.    Tokyo has explained that its decision to toughen export control came because Seoul refused to hold bilateral talks on appropriate export control measures and has provided an inadequate explanation of the end user in some cases.    Tokyo said the decision was not a countermeasure or retaliatory action against the Moon administration’s inaction on South Korean Supreme Court rulings ordering Japanese companies to compensate former South Korean workers for their wartime labor in Japan, despite the issue having been settled in the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco.    Schriver’s mention of possible political motivation suggests there is a failure of effective communication of Tokyo’s explanation throughout the Trump administration.    “It is disappointing to see that the Japanese government has chosen to retaliate against South Korea using trade actions,” Engel said in his earlier statement, indicating that he too took the Japanese export control action as an act of retaliation.    The Japanese embassy in Washington needs to be more shrewd and coherent in explaining the government’s position so that the Trump administration and the U.S. Congress fully understand the reasons for Japan’s action. |
| Archie Miyamoto | Opinion | Japan-Forward | September 15, 2019 | Japan | Why Can’t South Korea Say Who’s Using High-tech Chemicals Bought from Japan? | There is a basic misunderstanding about the current trade friction between Japan and South Korea. Many see Japan’s refusal to sell South Korea three types of high-tech chemicals and the removal of South Korea from Japan’s white list of privileged trading nations as a form of retaliation for Seoul’s seizure of assets of Japanese corporations in a dispute over payments to wartime laborers.  Tokyo During COVID-19: Green Space, Rise of Telework Bring New Lifestyle Opportunities    The real issue, however, is the refusal of South Korea to provide accountability about the end users of increasing purchases of strategic materials.    South Korea has managed to change the narrative, blaming Japan for utilizing its economic advantage supposedly in retribution for political differences.    Why did Japan allow the issue to be changed from its suspected South Korean violation of the United Nations Boycott of North Korea to payment for World War II-mobilized laborers? How is it that an international security issue was suddenly characterized as economic retribution for reparations demanded by Seoul for Koreans mobilized during WWII?      RELATED ARTICLES:  The Reality of the Mobilization of Koreans During World War II – An Analysis Based on Statistics and Written Records  Koreans in Wartime Japan: Don’t Confuse Illegal Immigrants with Recruited Workers  A Rebuttal to President Moon’s Claims on Wartime Korean Workers in Japan      Many are still unaware of the true reason for Japan’s concern about suspicious South Korean purchases of materials that can be used in the production of weapons. The fact is, there was a dramatic increase in the amount of strategic material purchased by South Korea after President Moon Jae In assumed the presidency.    The Moon administration itself may be unaware of any illegal shipments, but it has ignored Japan’s request for end-use confirmation to ensure Japan’s sale of the materials complies with international sanctions, which Seoul has resisted. This places the full blame on South Korea, not Japan.    It is my understanding that one of the items, hydrogen fluoride, which is used as etching gas for semiconductors, can also be used for nuclear enrichment. Japan’s repeated statements that there is a security issue that requires verification has fallen on deaf ears.    In all of this, the United States has taken a neutral stance, leaving the two parties, Japan and South Korea, to work out “historical issues.”      A Very Serious Problem for the World, Not Just Japan    However, the unverified end-use is not solely a problem for Japan. It is a very serious problem for the world. For Japan to have continued allowing unrestricted shipments of listed materials to South Korea would make Japan complicit in any part of it which is traded to North Korea. The U.S. cannot fail to see this point.    Another point needs to be made clear: Japan has not refused to sell the strategic items to South Korea for legitimate use. Sales are taking place when proper end-users are verified.    Although this issue seriously impacts on the U.S. national interest, perhaps present American concern for apologies for past and ongoing racial injustice has fogged our minds so that many feel sympathetic to Koreans who have marked themselves as “victims.”    Koreans are masters at playing the victimization card against Japan. Throughout its long history, Korea has been invaded and exploited many, many times, mostly by China. Yet, Koreans have a victimization complex only with Japan and make comments about Japan owing an apology at every opportunity.    The true facts of the 35 years the Korean peninsula was annexed to Japan are immaterial to them and to this issue. The actions South Koreans take as a result of their false perception of history does matter, however.    There is no other former colony in the world with such a victimization complex.    Vietnam, a part of former Indo-China which was under Japanese military occupation during WWII, recently showed its appreciation to the Emperor of Japan and the former Japanese soldiers who remained after WWII and assisted Vietnam in its war for independence from France.    In Indonesia, the thousand or so Japanese soldiers who remained and died assisting Indonesians in the war for independence from the Netherlands are interred at the Kalibata Heroes Cemetery in South Java.    Taiwan was under the control of Japan a decade longer than Korea, and yet, according to one survey, Japan is the country most admired by the Taiwanese people. The Taiwanese remember both the good and the bad of past occurrences, but they focus on the present and the future.    It is long past time for South Koreans to overcome their anti-Japan sentiments and victimization complex. Individually, of course, many have already done so. There are also many South Koreans who never hated the Japanese.    The South Korean perception of history disseminated by interest groups and the media, however, has been shaped to fit the political objective of the moment. Facts and past events have been changed as needed. Japanese today don’t spend time arguing that the annexation of the Korea Peninsula by Japan was proper or justified.    At the same time, the security threats facing Japan from external enemies then have changed, but not by much. Japan fought China, and then Russia, to evict those powers from the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria.    As an ironic aside, Count Hirobumi Ito — the Japanese statesman who opposed the annexation of Korea and whose adopted daughter Bae Jung-ja was Korean — was assassinated in 1909 by a Korean, Ahn Jung-gun. Today, the assassin Ahn is regarded as a national hero by South Koreans and even has a South Korean submarine named after him. The Chinese, who are masters at influencing other nations, have erected a statue honoring Ahn in Harbin, where the assassination took place, to play on Korean sentiments.    Count Ito didn’t think so highly of Ahn, however. As he lay dying, he said, “The dumb fool!” Count Ito was probably right. Ahn had assassinated the most influential Japanese friend Koreans had.        ‘Hate Fixation’ and Korea’s Errors in Dealing with the U.S.    With South Koreans, the hate for Japan seem to override reason. Politicians on both the left and right use this sentiment to unify their supporters. South Koreans are taught to hate Japan from childhood. This is encouraged by the government because hate for Japan seems to be an effective tool for holding the country together.    Hate for Japan will also spell their doom.    Almost every other word from South Koreans is about how Japan owes Koreans apologies. The recent president of South Korea, Park Geun-hye, said Japan owes apologies for a thousand years. This fixation on hate of Japan will result in South Korea making great errors in dealing with an ally of Japan, the United States of America.    It’s problems with Japan aside, one thing is certain: South Korea is not moving closer to the United States. Because of this “hate fixation” with Japan, South Korea has recently made a number of serious errors in its dealings with the United States.    Among Seoul’s mistakes was the cancellation of the intelligence exchange agreement with Japan, GSOMIA (General Security of Military Intelligence Information Agreement). Instant exchanges of intelligence are essential between South Korea and Japan to accurately track missiles launched from North Korea in a timely manner. South Korea’s cancellation of the agreement took place in spite of U.S. objections.    The other mistake Seoul made was to summon the U.S. ambassador to South Korea to admonish him against making comments on the GSOMIA cancellation, telling him this is strictly an internal Korean affair. Is tracking North Korean missiles strictly an internal affair when there are some 30,000 American troops in Korea and countless more in Japan?    Adding to this were South Korea’s recent military exercises on the disputed island of Dokto/Takeshima aimed at agitating Japan. These too were a slap in the face of the United States, which has been making a sincere effort to reduce tensions between Japan and South Korea.    It is past time for South Korea to take heed. The U.S. is not Japan. Japan is slow to anger and quick to forgive. The U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense have reacted to these arrogant acts by refusing to attend scheduled meetings in Seoul with Korean groups. South Korea may be unaware that President Donald Trump’s unpredictable nature should be their primary concern. It is their decision, and theirs alone now. Whatever President Trump does, he cannot be blamed for what happens to South Korea.    South Koreans should pray that my prediction proves false. My prediction? I say, “The Korean culture of falsifying history to suit political ends will seal their doom.”    Nor am I the only one to have said this. Bak Yeong Cheol said something similar in his book, Gojunen no Kaiko (Fifty Years of Recollections, Tokyo Osaka Yago Shoten publishers, 1929, in Japanese).    Speaking as a Korean, Mr. Bak said, “We have no one to blame but ourselves for the situation we find ourselves today.” And that was 90 years ago! |
| Sotetsu LEE | Opinion | Japan-Forward | August 21, 2019 | Japan | The First Step Towards Normal Relations is Removing Japan’s Special Treatment of South Korea | President Moon Jae In clearly adopted a defiant stance in response to the Japanese government’s decision to delist South Korea from the list of Group A countries (“white countries”) subject to minimum controls regarding the export of sensitive materials and goods.  Innovators in Japan are Developing New Technologies to Counter Coronavirus    Upon Japan’s decision, Moon declared: “Japan, the perpetrator in this case, rather than showing remorse, is running around raising a ruckus. We won’t stand idly by and let them get away with it.”    Here Moon was up to his old tricks, not giving any specific reasons for why the revision to Japanese regulations were wrong. His statement was nothing more than an emotional appeal, with Japan ipso facto the “perpetrator.”    President Moon evoked the memory of Korean national hero Admiral Yi Sun-sin, whose naval forces wreaked havoc among Japanese samurai invaders sent by warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi during the late 16th century. He wished to create the impression that he too would resist to the end against Japanese intimidation.    The anti-Japan refrain was quickly picked up by members of the power establishment, including public servants and leaders of the ruling Democratic Party of Korea.    Influential Seoul University law professor and former Senior Presidential Secretary for Civil Affairs Cho Kuk (Cho resigned from the latter position on July 26) has been posting anti-Japanese diatribes on his Facebook page nearly daily.    Cho has been trying to get people take sides in the controversy. On August 18, he posted, for example: “In this situation, it is not a question of progressive or conservative, leftwing or rightwing, rather it is whether you are a patriot or serving the interests of the enemy.”    He also wrote: “South Koreans who reject, criticize, distort or cast aspersions upon the decision of the Supreme Court [ordering Japanese companies to pay compensation to Korean former laborers] should naturally be considered ‘pro-Japanese elements.’”      Moon Administration Ignoring the Facts    South Korea’s exclusion from the “white list” does not mean that Japanese companies can no longer sell items in question to that country.    The South Korean government seemed incapable of rationally addressing Japan’s concerns about several previous cases in which sensitive items exported to South Korea ended up in unknown destinations. Therefore, Japan is simply requiring Korean companies buying sensitive materials to “declare” where the materials will end up and for what purpose they will be used.    These are the exact same regulations that are applied to similar exports to China, Taiwan, and the ASEAN countries. Be that as it may, the Moon administration has demanded that it should continue to receive special treatment.    President Moon asserted that the new measures “are designed to cripple the growth of the South Korean economy.” He also seemed to be threatening Japan when he makes statements like: “Japan’s intent in that regard (interfering with South Korea’s growth) will never succeed. Let me warn Japan that in the end damage to the Japanese economy is sure to be greater.”        Proposals for Building Normal Relations    As things stand, if it is to build normal relations with South Korea, Japan needs to start by taking the following three steps:    Japan should not submit to dredging up the past. By that I do not mean that the past should be forgotten. My point is that the reason Seoul-Tokyo relations have been on the rocks since President Moon took office is that Japan has become ensnared in Moon’s gambit to make everything about the “past.” So, in cases where past history should have been considered settled, Japan now finds itself wallowing in a historical swamp.    Last February President Moon stated, “Wiping away every tinge of pro-Japanism is the first step on the road to creating a just country.” This statement alone is ample evidence of Moon’s distorted perception of history.    Moon is, in effect, saying that having friendly feelings towards Japan is inherently “unjust.” Does that mean that the postwar friendship between South Korea and Japan based on shared democratic values has meant absolutely nothing?    We have to conclude that Moon views prewar Japan and postwar Japan as one and the same, or he has jumbled them up in his mind. Therefore, he seems determined to purge anything that to him might resemble a “pro-Japan” stance.    As a result, he appears prepared to make pariahs of his many countrymen who have not sought to dwell on the past but instead want to deal with Japan as it is today, by labeling them “pro-Japanese.”    Moon has in this fashion up until now done all he can to use “past history” as a means to whip up anti-Japan sentiment among the Korean people by not just legitimizing it, but by equating “anti-Japan” with “justice.”    Isn’t it time for Moon and company to get over their practice of using Japan bashing for political purposes?    Quarrels are inevitable. Up until now, when Seoul has gotten into any kind of dispute with Tokyo, it has not argued in terms of the actual relationship, but instead has sought to play the history issue card and take on the role of “victim” to appeal to international public opinion.    That holds true for the current export regulations controversy, as it first tried to enlist Washington as a mediator. Failing at that, Seoul then appealed to the World Trade Organization, even though that organization had nothing to do with the matter at hand. Next, it complained about Japan’s “unreasonableness” at a working level meeting of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.    In other words, Seoul is doing everything it can to enlist international support wherever it can find it. That being so, as things now stand, the Moon government shows no inclination whatsoever to deal with actual bilateral relations and address Japan’s concerns.    Still, Japan should not give up in its efforts to get the relationship back on a realistic track.    Seoul does not merit any kind of special treatment. After the war, there was a period when, out of a sense of atonement for its past actions, Japan viewed South Korea in an especially favorable way.    Many Japanese business leaders tried to help South Korea’s economy develop. If it had not been for such cooperation from Japan for South Korea’s steel, motor vehicle, electronics, and semiconductor sectors, the miraculous development of the South Korean economy might never have been possible. Japan should not be shy in pointing this out when arguing its position.    Unfortunately, South Korea can no longer be a “special country” for Japan. One reason for that is because the South Korean economy has grown to be as big as it is today.    It can’t be denied that the special treatment shown towards Seoul in the past has created a structure of dependence in bilateral relations.    It is only if Japan-South Korea ties become a truly mature, normal bilateral relationship that we can eliminate this structure of dependence. Isn’t the removal of Seoul from the list of “white countries” the first step towards achieving that goal? |
| Robert D. Eldridge | Opinion | Japan-Forward | August 22, 2019 | Japan | Japan-Korea Relations Should Overcome History | I first began thinking about writing this commentary six months ago. In the interim, however, Japan-South Korean relations have plummeted to their lowest levels since the first half of the 1950s, when the Republic of Korea seized the Takeshima Islands. Daily, the bottom continues to fall out.  [3.11 Earthquake: Rebuilding] 10 Years Later: Tohoku’s Recovery and Resilience Together with the World    During these months, relations between the two countries have deteriorated even further due to the handling by the South Korean government of the October 2018 Supreme Court’s decision to uphold a lower court’s decision on wartime “forced labor.” The October 2018 tension was followed by a Republic of Korea warship locking its radar on a Japanese patrol plane in December and the unsuccessful conclusion of discussions over that potentially dangerous incident.    The situation was further worsened due to South Korean appeals to the World Trade Organization to support its restrictions on seafood and agricultural imports from the Tohoku region as a result of the Fukushima nuclear reactor accident, and Japan’s decision to restrict high-tech exports to South Korea.    The latter country has started a tourism boycott of Japan as well, and there are references to ending cooperation in intelligence and other military matters. Further, the ROK government announced removing Japan from its most favored export partners list.      Is This An Alliance?    All of these actions place the United States, the ally of both of those countries, in a highly difficult situation in Northeast Asia. Things are so bad that U.S. President Donald J. Trump lamented: “South Korea and Japan are fighting all the time. They’ve got to get along because it puts us in a bad position…. They’re supposed to be allies.”    When the president of the United States has to make comments like these, it is time for Japan and the Republic of Korea to do something different.        Ending the Perpetuation of Hatred    For Japan and the Republic of Korea to continue to fight over World War II, from which much of the sentiment behind the above frictions arise, undermines regional security. But even worse, this continuous fighting over history perpetuates unforgiveness and lingering hatred, and shackles future generations of Koreans and Japanese with a history they can’t change and keeps them from achieving a bright and prosperous future they deserve.    This is not to say we forget history and learn nothing from it. We must never forget and never repeat the horrific acts of others who made devastating decisions that inflicted pain and suffering upon millions of people. War is the most horrific of all human events — it dehumanizes all participants. None of the countries or its peoples are completely innocent — this includes the United States, Japan, and, yes, Korea.    I recently wrote “Why Not a Joint Ceremony at Sea to Remember the Battle of Okinawa?” for JAPAN Forward, noting how the United States and Japan have both sought to overcome history, commemorating events together that the bitter enemies 74 years ago would have found impossible to believe.    Most symbolic, in 2016, U.S. President Barack Obama visited Hiroshima and embraced former victims of the atomic bomb, and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe paid an official visit to Pearl Harbor.    To me, however, the quiet side-trip at that time of Prime Minister Abe and his delegation to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), the agency responsible for locating and identifying missing U.S. personnel from past conflicts, nearby was the most significant part of his trip. It suggested an emphasis of Prime Minister Abe and his team to truly address the recovery of Japanese remains.      Cooperation and Recovery    With its motivated staff, DPAA has been increasingly helping allies and former enemies identify and locate their own missing, providing educational, technical, and financial support for them.    This cooperation is especially important in the Indo-Pacific region, where 75% of the 82,000 American service members missing from previous conflicts are. For example, the United States has used DPAA and its predecessor organizations to successfully collaborate with former adversaries, such as Vietnam and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (i.e., North Korea), to recover American remains, but also build confidence with those nations.    This was likely the reason the POW/MIA mission was included in the agreement signed between President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-un during their Singapore summit in June 2018.    Of note, the United States and the Republic of Korea have been recovering Korean War remains in South Korea through bilateral efforts for many years. Their cooperation and experience have certainly informed multilateral personnel accounting efforts.    Long overdue cooperation between the United States and Japan has begun in recent years, too. This is especially important because Japan, which has an estimated 1.12 million still missing, has failed to proactively use DNA testing and other scientific methodology in identifying remains (emphasizing volume over quality), or invest properly in such projects and expert personnel, which has been the subject of critical news reports recently here in Japan.    Another reason this cooperation is important is that the warriors of both countries died in heated battle together at the same site. So, not only have the United States and Japan been moving beyond history, but they are also working together on identifying remains of each other’s precious lost personnel.      The Broader Importance of Working Together    Historians and forensic specialists are aware that, in addition to the remains of American and other U.S. allies, there also are the remains of Korean (which includes both North and South) and Formosan conscripts and laborers that are collocated and commingled with the Japanese war dead still missing on battlefields throughout the Pacific.    For this reason, it is essential that Japan and at the minimum, the Republic of Korea, work together to improve the recovery and identification process in a way that no single country can do by itself. This bilateral cooperation can lead to trilateral and quadrilateral cooperation too, which is also necessary in this and other matters.    Last year at this time, DPAA Director Kelly McKeague stated at Chidorigafuchi, the national memorial for the unidentified remains of Japanese soldiers and sailors, “There is no greater way for former enemies to show their friendship than to help each other in recovering their fallen soldiers, identifying them, and returning them to their families and nations.”    If this is true, then it is even more true when soldiers, such as Japanese, Korean, and Formosan, fought on the same side and in the same places.      A Way to Begin the Healing    Most readers probably know, or at least sense, that things between Japan and the Republic of Korea will unfortunately get worse before they get better. Cooperation in gathering and identifying remains of their fallen loved ones may be a way to begin the healing process (as well as to promote further cooperation between Japan and Taiwan).    At the minimum, it needs to happen once the healing begins. Hopefully, this process will start soon, as we are coming up on the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. Finding and identifying the remains of all who died, regardless of country of origin, will help bring closure to many families on both sides of the conflict who have never fully been at peace.    Rather than fighting over history, Korea and Japan should be overcoming history. If the United States and Japan can do it, Korea and Japan should be able to do it as well. |
| Sotetsu LEE | Opinion | Japan-Forward | August 21, 2019 | Japan | The First Step Towards Normal Relations is Removing Japan’s Special Treatment of South Korea | President Moon Jae In clearly adopted a defiant stance in response to the Japanese government’s decision to delist South Korea from the list of Group A countries (“white countries”) subject to minimum controls regarding the export of sensitive materials and goods.  Innovators in Japan are Developing New Technologies to Counter Coronavirus    Upon Japan’s decision, Moon declared: “Japan, the perpetrator in this case, rather than showing remorse, is running around raising a ruckus. We won’t stand idly by and let them get away with it.”    Here Moon was up to his old tricks, not giving any specific reasons for why the revision to Japanese regulations were wrong. His statement was nothing more than an emotional appeal, with Japan ipso facto the “perpetrator.”    President Moon evoked the memory of Korean national hero Admiral Yi Sun-sin, whose naval forces wreaked havoc among Japanese samurai invaders sent by warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi during the late 16th century. He wished to create the impression that he too would resist to the end against Japanese intimidation.    The anti-Japan refrain was quickly picked up by members of the power establishment, including public servants and leaders of the ruling Democratic Party of Korea.    Influential Seoul University law professor and former Senior Presidential Secretary for Civil Affairs Cho Kuk (Cho resigned from the latter position on July 26) has been posting anti-Japanese diatribes on his Facebook page nearly daily.    Cho has been trying to get people take sides in the controversy. On August 18, he posted, for example: “In this situation, it is not a question of progressive or conservative, leftwing or rightwing, rather it is whether you are a patriot or serving the interests of the enemy.”    He also wrote: “South Koreans who reject, criticize, distort or cast aspersions upon the decision of the Supreme Court [ordering Japanese companies to pay compensation to Korean former laborers] should naturally be considered ‘pro-Japanese elements.’”      Moon Administration Ignoring the Facts    South Korea’s exclusion from the “white list” does not mean that Japanese companies can no longer sell items in question to that country.    The South Korean government seemed incapable of rationally addressing Japan’s concerns about several previous cases in which sensitive items exported to South Korea ended up in unknown destinations. Therefore, Japan is simply requiring Korean companies buying sensitive materials to “declare” where the materials will end up and for what purpose they will be used.    These are the exact same regulations that are applied to similar exports to China, Taiwan, and the ASEAN countries. Be that as it may, the Moon administration has demanded that it should continue to receive special treatment.    President Moon asserted that the new measures “are designed to cripple the growth of the South Korean economy.” He also seemed to be threatening Japan when he makes statements like: “Japan’s intent in that regard (interfering with South Korea’s growth) will never succeed. Let me warn Japan that in the end damage to the Japanese economy is sure to be greater.”        Proposals for Building Normal Relations    As things stand, if it is to build normal relations with South Korea, Japan needs to start by taking the following three steps:    Japan should not submit to dredging up the past. By that I do not mean that the past should be forgotten. My point is that the reason Seoul-Tokyo relations have been on the rocks since President Moon took office is that Japan has become ensnared in Moon’s gambit to make everything about the “past.” So, in cases where past history should have been considered settled, Japan now finds itself wallowing in a historical swamp.    Last February President Moon stated, “Wiping away every tinge of pro-Japanism is the first step on the road to creating a just country.” This statement alone is ample evidence of Moon’s distorted perception of history.    Moon is, in effect, saying that having friendly feelings towards Japan is inherently “unjust.” Does that mean that the postwar friendship between South Korea and Japan based on shared democratic values has meant absolutely nothing?    We have to conclude that Moon views prewar Japan and postwar Japan as one and the same, or he has jumbled them up in his mind. Therefore, he seems determined to purge anything that to him might resemble a “pro-Japan” stance.    As a result, he appears prepared to make pariahs of his many countrymen who have not sought to dwell on the past but instead want to deal with Japan as it is today, by labeling them “pro-Japanese.”    Moon has in this fashion up until now done all he can to use “past history” as a means to whip up anti-Japan sentiment among the Korean people by not just legitimizing it, but by equating “anti-Japan” with “justice.”    Isn’t it time for Moon and company to get over their practice of using Japan bashing for political purposes?    Quarrels are inevitable. Up until now, when Seoul has gotten into any kind of dispute with Tokyo, it has not argued in terms of the actual relationship, but instead has sought to play the history issue card and take on the role of “victim” to appeal to international public opinion.    That holds true for the current export regulations controversy, as it first tried to enlist Washington as a mediator. Failing at that, Seoul then appealed to the World Trade Organization, even though that organization had nothing to do with the matter at hand. Next, it complained about Japan’s “unreasonableness” at a working level meeting of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.    In other words, Seoul is doing everything it can to enlist international support wherever it can find it. That being so, as things now stand, the Moon government shows no inclination whatsoever to deal with actual bilateral relations and address Japan’s concerns.    Still, Japan should not give up in its efforts to get the relationship back on a realistic track.    Seoul does not merit any kind of special treatment. After the war, there was a period when, out of a sense of atonement for its past actions, Japan viewed South Korea in an especially favorable way.    Many Japanese business leaders tried to help South Korea’s economy develop. If it had not been for such cooperation from Japan for South Korea’s steel, motor vehicle, electronics, and semiconductor sectors, the miraculous development of the South Korean economy might never have been possible. Japan should not be shy in pointing this out when arguing its position.    Unfortunately, South Korea can no longer be a “special country” for Japan. One reason for that is because the South Korean economy has grown to be as big as it is today.    It can’t be denied that the special treatment shown towards Seoul in the past has created a structure of dependence in bilateral relations.    It is only if Japan-South Korea ties become a truly mature, normal bilateral relationship that we can eliminate this structure of dependence. Isn’t the removal of Seoul from the list of “white countries” the first step towards achieving that goal? |
| Archie Miyamoto | Opinion | Japan-Forward | July 30, 2019 | Japan | At the Crossroads: Can South Korea Survive Without Japan? | On July 3, 2019, Japan halted the unrestricted export to South Korea of three high-tech materials essential for the production of semiconductors and display panels. This will impact severely on Korean makers.  Innovators in Japan are Developing New Technologies to Counter Coronavirus    Japan also plans to remove South Korea from the white list of countries extended preferential export treatment. This could affect over a thousand other items.    To understand why this is taking place, it is necessary to go back in time over 100 years.      The Background of Korea-Japan Relations    In 1910, Korea was annexed by Japan in a mutual Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty. The Japanese call it a benevolent unification, Koreans refer to the period as the most brutal colonization in history.    Whether Korea was “annexed” or “colonized” by Japan, it was not an equal unification of two countries. And the fact that there was no military invasion and that the royal family of Korea became members of Japan’s royal family does not make it less so — Japan controlled Korea.    Call it what you will, but there are a number of contradictions and unsubstantiated allegations in the Korean version of this period. The Korean version of history has caused hate and resentment by Koreans against Japan, which are the root causes of the present crisis.        Evidence of Acceptance and Respect for Koreans    Japan’s treatment of Koreans differed from how European nations governed their colonies. Japan’s policy was to unite Korea with Japan as one nation, even to the extent of encouraging Koreans to assume Japanese names, doing away with the distinction between the two races. Koreans consider this to be genocide.    A glaring difference from European powers was that a significant number of Koreans became officers in the Imperial Japanese Army. Seven were general officers. In no Western nation has any individual from a colony risen to the rank of general and commanded troops of the occupying power.    One of the Koreans was Hong Sa-ik, a lieutenant general in the Imperial Japanese Army. He entered the Imperial Japanese Military Academy soon after annexation and graduated as a lieutenant in 1914. He commanded a Japanese brigade in China as a major general and was promoted to lieutenant general in the Philippines.    There were four Korean lieutenant generals and three major generals who were Korean. Some sources say there were nine Korean generals. There were many Imperial Army officers of lesser rank who were Koreans. A number of them later held high positions in the South Korean government and military.    The first 10 chiefs of staff of the South Korean Army were former Japanese officers. Others include former President Park Chung-hee; Prime Minister Chung Il-kwon (1964-1970); Provost Marshal General (later defense minister) Won Yong-dok; and South Korean generals Park Sun-yup and Kim Suk-won. There were many others.    Whether Koreans who served in Japan’s military were or were not traitors or collaborators is not the point. The fact is, immediately after annexing Korea, Japan was accepting Koreans into its armed forces as officers commanding Japanese troops.      Sand Beneath the Comfort Women Story    This is hardly the treatment of a brutalized colony.    Yet, Koreans believe that 200,000 women, mostly Koreans, were abducted by this same Army as sex slaves. How could this be possible? Collaborators or not, these Korean officers were outstanding men.    In addition, there were thousands of Koreans serving in the Imperial Japanese Army. For Japan to abduct Korean women as sex slaves would have been the height of stupidity, inviting mutiny and even civil war.    No Korean would remain silent when their young women were being abducted as sex slaves. Koreans are not cowards.    As a matter of fact, other than the uncorroborated statements of former comfort women, there is not a single documented case of forced recruitment by the Japanese of Korean comfort women.    In the last few years, a number of books have been published in English, citing primary source evidence, refuting earlier books on the subject vilifying Japan. For those interested, the most comprehensive book on Japan’s comfort women system is Comfort Women and Sex in the Battle Zone by Dr. Hata Ikuhiko of Japan (Hamilton Books, 2018). The book was originally published in Japanese in 1999. It was updated and translated into English by Dr. Jason M. Morgan in 2018.    This is a comprehensive book providing exhaustive details about the comfort women system and the controversies surrounding this issue. No serious commentator on the comfort women issue should be without this book. It is available on Amazon.      Treaties and Agreements Between Korea and Japan    All claims by the Republic of Korea (South Korea) against Japan were settled between the two countries in 1965 with the signing of the “Treaty of Basic Relations Between Japan and the Republic of Korea.” South Korea and Japan confirmed that the problem concerning people’s rights and the interests of the two contracting partners and their people and claims between the two have been settled “completely and finally.”    South Korea agreed to demand no further compensation, either at the government or individual level. There was further agreement that any future issue would be referred for arbitration.    In 1977, and again in 1983, Seiji Yoshida wrote a fictional account of himself as a Japanese soldier being involved in the rounding up of comfort women in Korea. This was accepted as gospel and his account added great momentum to the South Korean attack against Japan.    By the time the truth emerged that the account was fictional, the damage had been done. It had been published by a major Japanese newspaper and not only Koreans, but Americans, and even the United Nations were taken in. Some say the Kono Statement by then-chief Cabinet secretary Yohei Kono formally admitting to forced recruitment of Korean comfort women resulted from Yoshida’s fictitious account. Many Koreans still accept Yoshida’s account as factual.    Since all issues had been settled in the 1965 Agreement, in 1995, Japan set up the Asian Women’s Fund, a government sponsored civilian-operated funding campaign to provide funds to former comfort women. About $5 million USD was donated by the Japanese citizens and $40 million USD by the government of Japan.    This failed to settle matters and, in 2015, Japan and South Korea reached a formal agreement resolving the matter “finally and irreversibly.”    Recently, the President of South Korea arbitrarily decided to revoke this treaty.      Fool me once… fool me twice… fool me thrice….    Aside from the comfort women issue, South Koreans have been clamoring for settlement of payments to laborers mobilized during WWII to work in Japan’s factories.    This issue had been settled between Japan and the Republic of Korea in the 1965 treaty. However, in 2018, the Supreme Court of South Korea ruled that nation-to-nation international agreements have no legal impact on claims by individual citizens and ruled in favor of Korean citizens suing Japanese companies for reparations.    Japan ignored the ruling and the government of the Republic of Korea has allowed South Korean individuals with grievances to seize the assets of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Nachi-Fujikoshi Corp., and Nippon Steel.    Japan has asked that the matter be referred for arbitration, as stipulated in the 1965 Agreement. South Korea, however, refuses arbitration and refuses to halt the seizure of Japanese assets.    South Korea has proposed another country-to-country agreement, but Japan refuses to take the bait. Japan considers any treaty with South Korea as worthless. Fool me once, fool me twice, fool me thrice….      Falsified History Fostering Resentment and Hatred    With the seizure of assets of Japanese firms in South Korea, Japan’s patience has run out. The immediate problem is for South Korea to resolve this issue before its high-tech industries, which rely heavily on Japan, are forced to cease operating.    Emotional outbursts and boycotting Japanese goods will only make matters worse. Other restrictions by Japan will soon follow.    South Korea will encounter serious economic problems if it isolates itself from Japan. Japan too will suffer, but Japan can survive without Korea.    The basic cause of these issues is the Korean culture of fostering hate and resentment against Japan. Seoul has refused to accept Japan’s hand of friendship which has been extended since South Korea came into being.    Without Japan’s past economic assistance, South Korea would not be where it is today. Without Japan’s future assistance, can South Korea survive? Two nations, so close in so many ways and yet so distant!    There is a saying, “Any nation that falsifies its history is doomed!” Will South Korea be next?’ |
| Takahiro Namura | Opinion | Japan-Forward | July 23, 2019 | Japan | When Some Korean Intellectuals Exaggerate, Distort History with Japan | There was “no racial discrimination concerning wages” against conscripted workers from the Korean peninsula during the wartime, according to Dr. Lee Woo-youn, 52, a research fellow at Korea’s Naksungdae Institute of Economic Research.  Innovators in Japan are Developing New Technologies to Counter Coronavirus    Lee spoke on the issue at a symposium at the United Nations Office in Geneva on July 2.    We wanted to know more, and sent Dr. Lee an interview request. He sat down with the Sankei Shimbun and shared his view and the results of his research work.    “The fundamental principle of Korea-Japan relations that must be upheld” is the 1965 agreement between Japan and South Korea, resolving all issues between the two and settling all issues of claims, according to Dr. Lee.    He told us, the final judgment of South Korea’s highest court on October 30, 2018, put South Korea at odds with the 1965 agreement by ordering a Japanese company to pay reparations in a lawsuit brought against the company by so-called conscripted workers. The case is a cause of increasing tension in the Japan-Korea relationship, along with South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s call for Japan to abide by the court’s decision.    Lee further pointed out that the judicial branch of government and the Moon administration are under the misconception that the mobilization of labor during wartime was “forced labor” or “slave labor.”    “In the backdrop is an emotional ‘anti-Japanese’ racism that sees Japan as the enemy, no matter what,” Lee continued.      ‘Intellectuals that Distort History are Irresponsible’    Lee explained that “a fundamental problem with the distorted historical viewpoint “of certain academics, journalists, and ‘conscience intellectuals’ in Japan” who have influenced the historical awareness of Korean people. “They assert that Korean laborers were forced to work without pay, or that they were paid a much lower salary than Japanese people due to racial discrimination — but this is an outright lie,” Lee said, based on his research results.    “The irresponsible words and deeds of Korean intellectuals who exaggerate and distort history have resulted in misunderstanding among most people,” Lee argued, “and this needs to stop.”    Likewise, he admonished Japanese people who readily make apologies to South Korea surrounding historical issues. “These are needless acts of sympathy that do more harm than good to Korea-Japan relations,” Lee said.    Lee, who serves as a spokesman of the “Group Against Anti-Japanese Doctrine,” also has tackled the issue of unrelated photographs of victims in Korean textbooks depicting people who are not Koreans.    He is against erecting statues of comfort women and conscripted workers. Although he has been harassed and his work obstructed, Lee said, “I want to restore history based on the truth of Korea and Japan and thereby contribute to good neighborly relations between the two neighbors.” |
| The Sankei Shimbun Editorial Board | Editorial | Japan-Forward | July 16, 2019 | Japan | South Korea Digs Its Heels In As More Countries Lift Import Ban on Japanese Products | “In view of our findings of rigorous monitoring and inspection procedures, we are ready to take them off our list of regulatory targets,” said European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in a June 27 meeting with Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.  [3.11 Earthquake: Rebuilding] 10 Years Later: Tohoku’s Recovery and Resilience Together with the World    He was referring to the E.U.’s plans to drastically ease restrictions on food imports from Japan that have been in place since the March 11, 2011, nuclear accident at Tokyo Electric Power Company’s Fukushima No. 1 complex. The deregulatory measures will cover Japanese food products, including soybeans and five kinds of mountain vegetables produced in Fukushima Prefecture, home to the stricken nuclear complex.    A Japanese source well informed on the Japan-E.U. negotiations on the matter said, “It was a pleasant surprise to us that the E.U. had come to this point.”    The E.U.’s easing of import curbs includes fisheries products from Iwate, Miyagi, Gunma, Tochigi, Ibaraki, and Chiba prefectures. It seems certain to serve as a message to South Korea, which stubbornly continues to ban the importation of all marine products from the six prefectures.    Recently during his May visit to Japan, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte informed Prime Minister Abe of his government’s decision to lift its import ban on marine products from Fukushima Prefecture. In June, the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo also announced the complete abolishment of restrictions on the import of Japanese-produced foods.    These developments are a sign that Japan’s diplomatic efforts to dispel reputational damage are gradually bearing fruit.    In the June 28-29 G20 Summit meetings, a Japanese sake booth was set up at the International Media Center in Osaka’s Suminoe ward. There, Japanese and foreign journalists covering the summit were able to sample a variety of Japanese sake, shochu, and other beverages.    Apparently reflecting the rising popularity of sake abroad, the booth was thronged with reporters from various parts of the world.    Among the samples available at the booth were sake brands produced in Fukushima Prefecture, such as Karahashi and Okunomatsu. The journalists enjoyed them without hesitation, along with brands from the northern Kanto and Tohoku regions.    Since the safety of the beverages already had been scientifically ascertained, it was only natural that the journalists would relish the flavors of different brands as they tasted the drinks.    Japanese officials have been rather dumbfounded at South Korea’s unreasonable, meaningless regulation of imports from Japan.    According to Japan National Tourism Organization, about 3.25 million South Koreans visited Japan from January to May 2019.    As one senior official of Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs put it, “Well, undoubtedly they would be enjoying eating and drinking Japanese products which are banned in their own country, I guess.” |
| Hideo Tamura | News Analysis | Japan-Forward | July 10, 2019 | Japan | Japan Beefs Up Export Controls to Counter South Korea’s Political Maneuvering | Japan’s action slapping export restrictions on trade with South Korea earlier in July brought to mind images of Abashiri Bangaichi (The Walls of Abashiri Prison). It is a Japanese film series starring movie legend Ken Takakura, who played a man who demonstrates patience and tolerance, and then more patience over a long time, before finally launching into a counterattack.  Innovators in Japan are Developing New Technologies to Counter Coronavirus    On July 1, the Japanese government took South Korea off the list of countries friendly to Japan and entitled to exemptions from complicated export procedures on the part of Japanese exporters.    Effective July 4, Japanese exports to South Korea of three high-tech items have been subject to tangled, time-consuming permission procedures. These are fluorinated polyimide, the material used in organic electroluminescent (EL) displays for such products as televisions and smartphones, and resists and etching gases (high-purity hydrogen fluoride) that are essential in the manufacturing of semiconductors.    Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry cited the export curbs as a precaution taken because of the “lack of dialogue over a fixed period between Japan and South Korea on trade controls involving national security.”    However, the truth is that Japan decided on the action as a de facto countermeasure due to the perception that no progress is in sight on resolving the issue of Japan’s so-called wartime era “forced recruitment” of laborers from the Korean Peninsula, as reported in the July 1 morning edition of The Sankei Shimbun. (RELATED ARTICLE: Koreans in Wartime Japan: Don’t Confuse Illegal Migrants with Recruited Workers)    Japan’s global market share of the three products is particularly high. Japanese production accounts for about 90% of the world share of fluorinated polyimide and resists, and about 70% of etching gas.    It is rumored that the toughening of export regulations against South Korea could deal a serious blow to production activities of leading South Korean manufacturers, such as Samsung Electronics Co. a semiconductor giant, and LG Electronics, which is a leader in the manufacturing of flat-screen, high-definition TVs. South Korea, for its part, is reported to be considering its own countermeasures.    Some analysts might well call the situation the breakout of a Japan-South Korea high-tech trade war, though it is small in scale compared to the trade war between the United States and China. The export restrictions have drawn fire from South Korea, which called Japan’s move an “act of trampling international free trade rules.”    The Nihon Keizai Shimbun’s July 2 editorial raised concerns that the export-curbing step could harm the reputation from abroad of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s administration, which has been seen as a standard-bearer of free trade.      A Predominantly Political Issue for Seoul    The reality of international trade today is that it is not black or white. In its trade with Japan, South Korea has long placed restrictions on the import of home appliances, automobiles, and semiconductors with the aim of nourishing its own domestic industries. At the same time, Seoul is on record as depending on imports from Japan for parts and materials that cannot be procured through domestic technologies.    Japan, in light of the special relationship with South Korea, effectively acquiesced in this bilateral trade relationship, which has been unilaterally advantageous to Seoul. It was a politically-motivated calculation.    Over the years, South Korean industries have gradually caught up with Japanese technologically. In particular, South Korea’s world market shares have surpassed Japan in sectors such as TVs and automobiles, as well as semiconductors and smartphones. The quality of a limited number of South Korean parts and materials, however, still lags behind Japan.    Faced with South Korea’s negligence in honoring bilateral treaty commitments on the comfort women issue as well as the wartime recruitment of South Korean laborers, Japan had no other choice but to act. In doing so, it struck at one of the few weak points in Seoul’s trade relations with Tokyo.      The graph shows year-on-year changes in South Korea’s dependence on Japanese imports, broken down by all imports and imports of semiconductors from Japan. It demonstrates that South Korea’s trade dependence on Japan has dropped sharply over the past 20 years, with both overall imports and semiconductors from Japan now reduced to less than 10% of South Korea’s imports from all sources.    This means South Korea does not need to rely on imports from Japan as it did before, including in the semiconductor sector. In the process, successive South Korean administrations have ceased worrying about aggravating relations with Japan by recirculating history issues. (RELATED ARTICLE: A Rebuttal to President Moon’s Claims on Wartime Korean Workers in Japan)    At the same time, South Korea has been deepening its reliance on China in trade. The result is that Seoul has made a point of abasing itself when it comes to ties to Beijing.    On the other hand, in the eyes of South Korea, relations with Japan have become nothing more than a tool for political maneuvering.    The Japanese side has just begun to fight back. |
| Shimpei Okuhara | News Analysis | Japan-Forward | May 11, 2019 | Japan | ‘Forced Labor’ Photo Disseminated by South Korean Media is Actually Postwar Photo of a Japanese Coal Miner | South Korean media have been promoting a photograph of a man working in a coal mine, alleging it shows a Korean conscripted to work under horrendous conditions on “Gunkanjima” (Hashima island in Nagasaki Prefecture) during the war. However, on April 3, the photographer who took the controversial photograph debunked the claim and confirmed to the Sankei Shimbun that his photo actually shows a Japanese coal miner in a different location.  Tokyo During COVID-19: Green Space, Rise of Telework Bring New Lifestyle Opportunities    The photograph has been widely disseminated in the South Korean media and by activists as alleged documentary evidence to back up claims of extensive use of Korean forced labor during World War II. The photographer, however, says he took the photo at a coal mine in Fukuoka Prefecture in 1961, long after the war was over.    The photo shows a shirtless coal miner lying flat in a claustrophobically narrow, low-roofed coal seam. He is using a pickaxe to chip away at the coalface. It was taken by well-known photographer Koichi Saito (84), who is an honorary member of the Japan Professional Photographers Society.    According to Saito, he snapped the photo of the miner in question when on a photojournalism trip through the extensive Chikuho coalfield in Fukuoka Prefecture in the summer of 1961. It was carried in the October 19 issue of the now discontinued weekly magazine Shin Shukan, and other media outlets.    Saito strongly affirms that the photo was taken 16 years after the end of the war and that the man in question “was Japanese.”    Many Korean media organizations and books have used this particular photograph as alleged evidence that Koreans were subjected to forced labor on Gunkanjima. A panel is devoted to it, for example, at the National Museum of Forced Mobilization under Japanese Occupation in Pusan, which was established to buttress South Korea’s contention that Korean laborers who were mobilized by the Japanese authorities during the war were mistreated.    Just last year, the December 16 online edition of the influential South Korean daily Chosun Ilbo carried this same photograph to illustrate an article on forced deportation of workers from Korea to work in Japan. The caption read “Korean Engaged in Coal Mining.”    In all of these cases, the photo was used without Saito’s permission.    Saito discovered that his photo was being used in a manner that perverted the facts after the release of the South Korean movie “Gunkanjima” (The Battleship Island) in July 2017, an action film depicting an uprising by exploited Korean laborers working on the island. An acquaintance informed him about it.    “My photo shows a Japanese hard at work,” Saito says. “The South Koreans have used it as they like to advance their own arguments. What’s the use of even protesting?”    Professor Munehiro Miwa, who teaches business and economic history at Kyushu University, has done considerable work on the conscripted labor issue.    “The South Korean side starts with the image that the Korean workers brought to Japan were forced to work under atrocious conditions,” he explains. “So, based on that premise, without adequately verifying its background, they probably jumped at the chance to use it (the photograph).”    The photograph has been used as “proof” in the ongoing controversy between South Korea and Japan over the “deportation for forced labor.” However, it should be noted that on March 21, South Korea’s Ministry of Education admitted the true origin of the coal miner photograph, confirming that it was actually a photo of a Japanese worker. At the same time, the Ministry also signaled that it was ready to revise primary school textbooks that use the photograph as an illustration of “forced labor.”    An article carried in the April 12, 2017 morning edition of the Sankei Shimbun rebutted many of the South Korean charges about the conditions Korean workers labored under on Gunkanjima. The same article revealed that the photo of the mine worker in question had been carried in a book titled A Pictorial History of Chikuho Over a Century (Kyodo Shuppansha, 2006). (RELATED ARTICLE: Lie Debunked: Historical Data Show No Forced Labor for Koreans)    The accompanying caption in the book stated that the photograph portrayed what mining was like in the middle of the Meiji Period (1868-1912). Later reporting clarified that the photographer was Koichi Saito and the photo dated from 1961. |
| Mizuki Okada | Features: Book Review | Japan-Forward | March 26, 2019 | Japan | Naoki Hyakuta’s Bestseller Tells Us the Real Reason Japan Should Apologize to South Korea | Japanese author Naoki Hyakuta has just published a new book, Now is the Time to Apologize to South Korea, Then Say Farewell.  [3.11 Earthquake: Rebuilding] 10 Years Later: Tohoku’s Recovery and Resilience Together with the World    This paperback book, which came out on March 1 from Asukashinsha Publishing, is already a bestseller in Japan. Why has it achieved such popularity while the relationship between Japan and South Korea continues to sour?    This pocket book achieved good sales quickly, reaching number two on the bestseller list by March 2, a day after it came out, according to a search at the Yaesu Book Center’s parent store.    On Amazon Japan’s book review site, the book has maintained its top position in the category of South and North Korean geographic and regional studies as of Sunday, March 24.    This book follows Hyakuta’s earlier volume on the subject, Now is the Time to Apologize to South Korea, also published by Asukashinsha Publishing in June 2017. Two years later, his new book points out that Koreans did not ask for modernization of the Korean peninsula by the Japanese government during the time of Japan’s annexation of Korea. Mr. Hyakuta calls it “extensive backseat driving,” and the Japanese should “apologize for that.”    He exposits examples of “backseat driving” by the then-governor general of Korea, such as construction of railways, improvement of roadways, dam building, and the diffusion of education throughout the country, among other development policies carried out during the annexation years.    This new pocket book also touches on current areas of friction, including recent developments concerning the comfort women issue, requisitions made of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Japan by the chairman of South Korea’s Congress on the issue of Korean women who were so-called comfort women, and the South Korean Navy’s radar lock-on of Japanese Self-Defense Force aircraft. In explaining his thesis concerning these disputes, he brings up the point, “the major cause is South Korea’s lying.”    At the same time, he says, “Japan is responsible.” This is because, as he emphasizes, in spite of Japan’s 35-year-annexation of the peninsula, Japan never taught Koreans the morals of what is important to become responsible citizens.    Moreover, in spite of South Korea’s repeated lying since its independence, the Japanese government has not scolded or corrected South Korea. This, he says, again demonstrates “the Japanese government’s accountability.”    Amazon Japan’s website selling the pocket book includes many comments on various aspects from readers. Here are a few of them:    “I can comprehend very well how much Japanese ancestors had taken efforts for the Korean peninsula and South and North Koreans.” This kind of feedback that shows understanding of issues surpasses 100 entries.    “You would ridicule sarcastic writing by Mr. Hyakuta. However, for Korea watchers, there is nothing new but already-known things.” This commentator evaluated the book as a three on the five-star scale, dropping in such neutral feedback.    Customer reviews of the book on the Amazon site’s five-star scale, as of Sunday, March 24, ranged in distribution as follows: five stars – 85%, four stars – 9%, three stars – 3%, two stars – 0% and one star – 3%.    As the relationship between Japan and South Korea worsens, there is no small number of people who pick up the hottest book to deepen their understanding of both countries and their relationship, or to seek answers as to why Japan is repeatedly required to apologize to South Korea.    Mr. Hyakuta notes in the book’s “Afterword” that he is considering whether to make translations into both English and Korean (Hangul). If he does, he suggests he may upload those onto free websites. |
| YOMIURI SHIMBUN | News Analysis | Eleven Media | February 8, 2019 | Myanma | ROK’s decision on GSOMIA damages security cooperation with Japan, U.S. | It can be said that this is a senseless move that could shake trilateral security cooperation among Japan, the United States and South Korea at a time when North Korea is continuing its nuclear and missile development.  The South Korean government has decided to scrap the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a pact to protect military intelligence between Japan and South Korea. As a reason for the decision, South Korea cited Japan’s step to remove it from the list of countries eligible for preferential treatment in the form of simplified export controls.  Japan took that step as South Korea’s trade control management system and its operations were inadequate. Seoul should first try to improve its management system.  The South Korean side also stressed that Japan did not respond even after South Korean President Moon Jae-in called for dialogue in his speech on Aug. 15. Moon has not presented any concrete measures on the issue of South Korean former wartime requisitioned workers, which is at the root of the bilateral feud. South Korea’s claims are hard to understand.  The GSOMIA is designed to allow allies and friendly nations to share as classified materials information on countries hostile to them. A framework under which countries cooperate to analyze images and codes, among other things, is essential.  Keep contact with Seoul  The Japanese and South Korean governments are said to have exchanged information in about 30 cases since they concluded the pact in November 2016. The South Korean military detects signs of a missile launch by North Korea. An Aegis-equipped destroyer of the Maritime Self-Defense Force analyzes the trajectory of and distance flown by the missile in the Sea of Japan.  The two countries also shared information about a new type of short-range missile that North Korea has fired on successive occasions since July.  The termination of the pact will make it difficult for South Korea to obtain Japan’s data directly. Short-range missiles can reach South Korea. It is a major threat. Is it reasonable for South Korea to take measures on its own initiative that would reduce the deterrence capability of its military?  The United States has urged South Korea to maintain the pact. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed disappointment and showed unusual dissatisfaction with South Korea, a U.S. ally, apparently out of concern that the disarray among Japan, the United States and South Korea could widen.  It is North Korea and China that will benefit from the pact being scrapped. By sending the wrong message — that the functions of the U.S.-led alliance may decline — the situation in East Asia could become unstable.  It should be no surprise that Foreign Minister Taro Kono lodged a protest with South Korea, saying, “It is a completely misjudged response in terms of the regional security environment.”  Japan needs to minimize the impact of the pact’s termination. It is imperative for the Self-Defense Forces to keep up deterrence by strengthening cooperation with the U.S. military.  The Japanese government should maintain communication with Seoul and continue to have multilayered dialogue. It must analyze the security environment in Asia calmly and stress the importance of maintaining Tokyo-Washington-Seoul cooperation. |