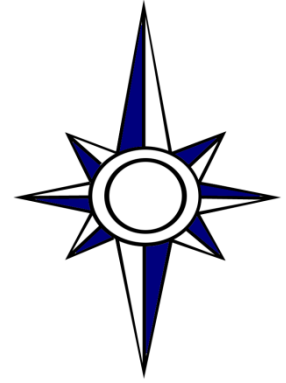


Comparative Connections

A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations



Japan-Korea Relations: Leadership Changes and National Trajectories

David Kang, University of Southern California
Jiun Bang, University of Southern California

Elections dominated the news in both Korea and Japan. South Koreans elected the first female head of state in modern Northeast Asian history and Japanese voters overwhelmingly returned the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to power, giving Abe Shinzo a second run at prime minister. Unsurprisingly, both elections focused on domestic economic issues, and both Park and Abe made an effort to downplay Korea-Japan relations during their campaigns. This did not stop observers from speculating about how both would rule and in particular how Korea-Japan relations might evolve. This was particularly salient because 2012 marks a considerable cooling in relations between the ROK and Japan. Surprisingly, North Korea was not a major factor in either case. The DPRK's December satellite launch failed to disrupt or significantly change the dynamics of either election and was met with a predictable but muted sense of outrage from the US and the countries in the region.

Public diplomacy vs. propaganda

Sir Harold Nicolson once remarked that public diplomacy is what we do, while propaganda is what others do. In the case of Korea-Japan relations, this may just be the case. Of course, the most befitting case here, would be North Korea vitriol broadcast on its state-run *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)* that characterizes South Korean leaders as “maniacs’ mud-slinging” or as a “group of traitors” or as “good-for-nothings” (*KCNA*, Dec. 19, 2012). There is also much to be said about Tokyo (aka “the imperialists”) and its “escalating espionage” and “criminal drone policy” (*KCNA*, Nov. 19, 2012). Despite such accusations, the consensus in both Seoul and Tokyo is that Pyongyang is the poster child for propaganda. Still, the ongoing territorial dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima exposed South Korea and Japan to accusations of propaganda, starting with the revelation in September of requests for significantly increased budgets by the respective foreign ministries to publicize their claims to the territory. The *Sankei Shimbun* reported that Tokyo would “place ads in 70 national and regional newspapers for a week” to reinforce its sovereignty over Takeshima, highlighting that this was the first time that the government had used newspaper advertisements in its cause. Subsequently, *Yonhap* ran a statement made by South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan that “the government is preparing to run ads in Japanese media to tell the Japanese people that Dokdo is a Korean territory historically, geographically and under international law.” The opportunity costs of such ad blitz efforts aside, the issue of whether what Seoul and Tokyo are doing can be called public diplomacy has not been explored. It seems reasonable to assume that the strategy of telling or demanding that an audience be receptive to your message is pitting “your information” against “their information,” when the issue is not more information but rather more engagement on the issues themselves.

The monologues soon spilled into the international realm, when both states decided to use the United Nations (UN) as a forum to practice strategic ambiguity that was neither strategic nor ambiguous. In speaking at the high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly on the Rule of Law, Japanese Foreign Minister Gamba Koichiro called for the greater use of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to resolve international conflicts peacefully – a reference likely aimed at South Korea, which has been against the idea of taking the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute to the ICJ. The speech drew immediate reaction from Gamba's South Korean counterpart, who claimed that the rule of law should not be used to advance "political agendas." For his part, Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan used his keynote speech at the 67th session of UN General Assembly to state that "wartime sexual violence is a fundamental infringement of human rights, and is in fact an affront to human dignity and integrity ... a country's true valor is proven when it confronts the dark side of its history and endeavors to rectify past wrongdoings." Although Japan was not directly referenced, it was obvious that this "dark history" was that of Japan's colonialism. Less than a month after the meeting at UN, the Oct. 25 *Korea Times* carried an editorial by Shin Maeng-ho, a Korean official working on the Dokdo/Takeshima issue, accusing Tokyo of using the ICJ as "an international forum for propaganda" given the repeated talk of unilaterally referring the territorial dispute to the ICJ despite Korea's protests. With the increasing temptation by both countries to denounce the other's tactics, it may be worthwhile to tease out the difference – theoretically and empirically – between public diplomacy and propaganda.

Some like it hot

The UN also played host to Psy – the Korean singer who exploded onto the music scene with his song, "Gangnam Style." In addition to his imitation of the song's well-known dance moves, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon noted the singer could be a "force for global good," referring to the role that music plays in reaching global audiences and reducing intolerance. While Korea laid claim to Psy and basked in the glory of newfound popularity and fame, there was an interesting tangent picked up by foreign media that evoked a more curious question directly addressing Korea-Japan relations: *was* Korea "heating up" while Japan "losing its' cool"? Were Douglas McGray's predictions regarding Japan's "Gross National Cool" finally wearing off?

The first such story was by *AFP* ("Gangnam Style and its Icy Reception in Japan," Oct. 22, 2012), which framed the debate as one between a Japan that is somewhat indifferent, if not resistant to the hit song, and Korea that is fiercely defending its success. The article references Han Koo-hyun, president of the Korean Wave Research Institute (KWRI), in equating Japanese skepticism about the success of Gangnam Style with doubting a world record in an Olympics marathon, and tantamount to "a primary school kid's jealousy and envy." The article goes further and cites Han's mockery of the only Japanese entry in the top 30 all-time most-viewed videos (with more than 237 million views) involving a young Japanese woman dropping some Mentos into a bottle of Diet Coke and swooshing the drink around, which Han finds to be "most grotesque and preposterous" in content, and a "lowly example showing the video-related preferences of the Japanese."

Another article, while documenting the strides made by Korea (Samsung, pop culture etc.) focuses more on the endogenous weakness of Japan's industry rather than the exogenous receptivity issue (Dan Grunebaum, "Is Japan Losing Its Cool?" *The Christian Science Monitor*,

Dec. 8, 2012). For instance, referencing the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry's 2012 "Cool Japan Strategy" White Paper, the article highlights the fact that Japan only exports 5 percent of its Cool Japan contents, not quite one-third of US creative industries' 17.8 percent. Moreover, it mentions recommendations made by experts that Japan should support its struggling domestic content industries (as opposed to marketing campaigns), and that Japan spent only 0.12 percent of its national budget on the arts in 2008, while South Korea during the same time period spent 0.79 and China, 0.51 percent. The article also suggests the awkward marketing problem of labeling Japan's culture as "cool," quoting Kitawaki Manabu, director of Meiji University's Cool Japan program: "to call yourself cool is by definition uncool – and it defies Japanese modesty."

A third article (Mark Schreiber, "Japan Loses its Cool as South Korea Heats Up," *Japan Times*, Dec. 16, 2012) starts by bringing attention to the Dec. 15 cover of *Shukan Toyo Keizai* (*Weekly Toyo Keizai*) which asked, *Kankoku no tsuyosa wa honmonoka?* (Is Korea's strength the real thing?) Basically, the article mentions "grudging respect" by the Japanese toward such corporate giants like Samsung, but also that some readers would be most likely attracted or comforted by another article in the magazine titled, "The True State of Living Difficulties that Plagues Koreans," which highlights Korea's top spot in the less glamorous categories like suicide rates, poverty among the elderly, and unemployment among school graduates.

We should note that although there is considerable attention to popular culture's influence outside the originating country, scholars such as Jing Sun (*China and Japan as Charm Rivals*) have questioned whether "soft power" actually has a tangible effect on other countries' economic or security policies. Although it is not clear from where this Japanese anxiety about Korea's success stems (or whether it even really exists outside of the lens of media), it does seem that in parallel with other phenomena in international relations such as the "rise of China," the success of others often provides a handy mirror to reflect on your own inadequacies and weaknesses than to admire the other's accomplishments and strengths.

The thin line between neutrality and objectivity

On the whole, the latter part of 2012 for Korea-Japan relations did not bode well, significantly elevating the level of fear in the US of alliance entanglement and entrapment. In terms of Korea-Japan relations, various surveys seemed to capture the general hostility/indifference. First, a survey conducted between late August and early September by the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) of 500 businesses trading with Japan, revealed that 12 percent of the respondents claimed to have suffered setbacks in commerce due to the deterioration in bilateral relations. The findings showed the tourism sector was the most vulnerable to setbacks, followed by automakers, and companies dealing with food, cell phones, and home appliances.

The second poll, reported in the October edition of Korea's *Shin Dong-A* Magazine, was a survey of 800 people from Sept. 3-6 on three main questions: 1) whether President Lee Myung-bak's visit to Dokdo in August was appropriate; 2) whether Seoul should respond more forcefully to Japan's demand to take the territorial dispute to the ICJ; and, 3) which side (Korea or Japan) was more to blame for the ongoing bilateral tensions. To summarize, 79.7 percent of respondents viewed President Lee's visit as appropriate, 73.8 percent wanted Seoul to act more

strongly in its territorial dispute with Japan, and 72.2 percent cast more blame on Japan for the ongoing diplomatic row (with 27.8 percent faulting Seoul for its own incompetence).

The third poll was a joint survey conducted by *Chosun Ilbo* and *Mainichi Shimbun* of 1,000 people in Korea (on Oct. 1) and 986 people in Japan (Sept. 29 to 30). The headline was that bilateral sentiments had sunk to its lowest since its height in 2002. The proportion of Koreans with ‘friendly feelings’ toward the Japanese was at 36 percent (61 percent did not hold such feelings), while those from the Japanese side with friendly sentiments toward the Koreans was at 47 percent (48 percent without such feelings). This represents a steady fall over the past six surveys of its kind since the first one in 1995. Nevertheless, both publics seemed to recognize the importance of the bilateral relationship, with 50 percent of the Koreans and 67 percent of the Japanese claiming that relations should be strengthened in order to better manage the stability of Northeast Asia (conversely, 40 percent and 25 percent of the Koreans and Japanese, respectively, did not agree with the statement). Interestingly, while Koreans were more apt to cheer for the Chinese side if it was playing against Japan (56 percent for China and 15 percent for Japan), the Japanese would rather cheer for the Korean side if it was playing against China (60 percent for Korea and 11 percent for China).

Japanese reservations toward Korea and China were similarly reflected in the interviews conducted by the Japanese government (carried out from Sept. 27 to Oct. 7 on 3,000 people in Japan). According to the results, the number of respondents feeling friendly toward both Korea and China were at record lows. Those with negative views of South Korea exceeded the positive for the first time in the survey’s history; likewise, those with negative views of China surpassed those with positive feelings by over four-to-one. Although surveys are readily influenced by specific events, one should also be cautious about jumping to the conclusion that this general lack of affinity in the region is merely a product of the recent territorial disputes involving the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and Dokdo/Takeshima, or that this reflects a resurgent nationalism on the part of the Japanese. In fact, the survey results may just be channeling the overwhelming sense by the Japanese that they are surrounded by rivals rather than partners; introversion is not necessarily coterminous with nationalism.

Conscious of the perceptible rise in bilateral tensions, there was a noticeable uneasiness in the US about the continuing feud. For instance, the Dec. 3 *Korea Herald* carried [an interview](#) with Joseph Nye in which he focused on the necessity of a “future-oriented” Korea-Japan relationship that is not a slave to the past. He also warned of a ‘reactive nationalism’ among postwar-generation Japanese who feel like they are being held unfairly accountable for the wrongdoings of a markedly different historical era. Several days prior, another article by Nye was published in the Nov. 27 *Financial Times* where he warned against exaggerated alarmism toward Japanese nationalism; instead arguing that “the real problem is not that Japan is becoming too powerful in international affairs but that it may become too weak and inward-turning. The question is whether Japan wishes to continue to be a great power nation, or if it is content to drift into second-tier status.”

Two other well-known scholars threw in their two cents at the debate: Stephen Walt and Bruce Klingner. Citing the historical example of how Britain started to patch up its relations with other major powers to manage the rise of Germany at the beginning of the 20th century, [Walt argues](#)

that the wildly contrasting behavior of South Korea and Japan (in the face of a rising China) could lead one to conclude that “these two states are letting national pride cloud their thinking in a most unproductive way. And one big reason might be the long habit of expecting Uncle Sam to take care of their security for them.” Therefore, his advice for the US is to make efforts in East Asian diplomacy that would include “helping its friends settle differences among themselves.”

In a somewhat similar vein, one of Klingner’s [key recommendations](#) for policy-makers in the US is to “facilitate contact and reconciliation between Seoul and Tokyo, but avoid being drawn into serving as a mediator.” In the meantime, both Korea and Japan should “exercise pragmatic leadership by not allowing emotional nationalism to impede policies that strategically benefit both countries.” Why “emotions” and “strategic interests” are uncritically placed on opposite poles is too lengthy of a discussion to delve into here. However, it is just as plausible that neither Seoul nor Tokyo are actually that interested in ‘exploiting’ the security blanket afforded by the US. In fact, they may be more interested in having the US take an objective stance regarding the issue, which is not necessarily the same as trying to keep one’s neutrality by not getting one’s hands dirty. Given the length of time that the two nations have dwelled on the issue, it may serve the US well to stop its wishful thinking and break its ambiguous silence (after all, lack of opinion on the matter does not negate the existence of a problem). This is especially poignant when we see the danger of media manipulation and the use of phrasing that may poison US policy of non-involvement as suggested in “Why Japan is Still Not Sorry Enough,” *Time Magazine*, Dec. 11, 2012: a review of Thomas U. Berger’s new book, *War, Guilt and Politics After World War II*.

Rocket man

In mid-November, Japan-North Korea talks had resumed, with Director General of the Japanese Foreign Ministry’s Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Sugiyama Shinsuke meeting North Korean Ambassador Song Il Ho for the talks. With the announcement of North Korea’s plans to launch the rockets on Dec. 1, Tokyo notified Pyongyang that the second round of talks would be canceled; once again, bringing Japan-North Korea relations to a standstill.

As if to redeem itself for the failure to put a satellite into orbit in April – marking the first time the country did not actually spin the embarrassment in its announcement to the public – Pyongyang successfully launched the satellite *Kwangmyongsong-3* into orbit on Dec. 12. According to North Korean state media, Kim Jong Un thereafter called for more such satellite and rocket launches at the banquet honoring those that contributed to the launch.

The occasion did, however, at least temporarily permit South Korea and Japan to see eye-to-eye. Indeed, even China voiced regret and “deep concern” over the launch, joining the rest of the UN Security Council in condemning North’s actions. In fact, despite considerable wariness among the three countries, a few months prior in early October, the South Korea-China-Japan Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat held an inaugural forum marking the first anniversary of the establishment of the organization. There were also talks in September to move along the necessary procedures for the trilateral free trade agreement (FTA), but the general election hubbub seemed to squash any progress on the matter.

All in moderation

Both Seoul and Tokyo had important elections in December, generating significant speculation about the future of bilateral relations. Soon after Abe Shinzo's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) won a landslide victory in the general elections on Dec. 16, Park Geun-hye won the South Korean presidential elections on Dec. 19. The media quickly labeled the general pattern a "back to the future" of sorts: the LDP returning to power with Abe back at the helm, and Park becoming the first daughter of a former president to head the country. Likewise, the media did not miss the opportunity to cover the similarities of the three leaders of Korea, Japan, and China (Park, Abe, and Xi Jinping), including their age (all between 58 and 60) and all representing second- or third-generation politicians. It is true that to some extent the leaders in both Korea and Japan may have in part appealed to voters who were looking for comfort and reassurance in a past rather than the uncertainties of the future.

For example, in early November, presidential hopeful Park Geun-hye made it clear that South Korea's claim to Dokdo/Takeshima was not only legitimate, but also non-negotiable. Moreover, she was just as stern in her view that Japan's subjugation of Korean women by the Japanese military during the colonial period cannot be justified. In addition to such rhetoric, some also expressed concern that Park's personal legacy as the daughter of former President Park Chung-hee, who was educated in Japan, may mean that her potential susceptibility to criticisms of being too Japan-leaning may make closer Korea-Japan relations that much more difficult. From Japan's side, there was news of possible amendments to the Kono statement, which acknowledges Japanese Imperial Army involvement in forcing thousands of captured women to provide sex for those soldiers. The *Asahi Shimbun* carried an interview (Dec. 12, 2012) with Kono Yohei, a former politician in the LDP who issued the Kono statement as chief cabinet secretary in 1993, quoting his remarks that "total denial of postwar Japan is not conservatism," and highlighting his concern that "inward looking remarks, prone to fuel cheap nationalism, can gain currency on the international level." The apparent pull to the right was quickly picked up by the Korean media that painted Abe as a nationalist but also his new Cabinet as ultra-nationalists, not passing up the opportunity to highlight some of their credentials. (e.g., Aso Taro, former premier, deputy prime minister and finance minister, and his statement that Koreans during the colonial period had changed their names by choice and not from any coercion by the Japanese.)

It is likely however, that any "electoral posturing" that may have sparked early commentaries predicting a rocky bilateral relationship may not be entirely correct; a more realistic trajectory is one where both parties commit to the median voter theorem, or the logic that any politician straying too far from the voters at the center will soon be out of a job. Abe has already been called a "pragmatist" for his recent moves to not only send a special envoy to South Korea, but also to consider backtracking on his initial campaign pledge of sponsoring an event to mark 'Takeshima Day' on Feb. 22.

Winter 2013

The coming months will most likely see the installation of Cabinets, advisors, and the formation of a broad range of policies in both South Korea and Japan. Although one often predicts a few months of quiet as new administrations take power, events can often overtake careful planning,

especially with rumors of a North Korean nuclear test in the near future. We will learn most about how these new leaders will govern when they face and respond to their first, almost inevitable, international crisis. Meanwhile, there is continuing movement among China, Korea, and Japan to increase economic coordination on policies ranging from financial flows and trade to ferry service and disaster relief. It will be interesting to see whether the South Korea-China-Japan Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat can move forward in the next year in any meaningful manner, and whether Abe and Park focus on domestic economic issues or whether they pursue political agendas first.

Chronology of Japan-Korea Relations September – December 2012

Sept. 3, 2012: *Asahi Shimbun* quotes a Japanese Self-Defense Force (SDF) source that claims Seoul sent notice that its officers would not be taking part in military exchange programs. Plans to invite officers from the South Korean Air Force's Southern Combat Command to Japan to meet their Japanese counterparts Sept. 3-6 are canceled.

Sept. 5, 2012: *Chosun Ilbo* quotes a South Korean diplomatic source in claiming that Japan informed the US it was against an increase in the range and payload of South Korean missiles.

Sept. 6, 2012: *Asahi Shimbun* reports that the four-member Japanese delegation to North Korea has wrapped up its 10-day trip to the country. The group visited four burial sites in preparation for possible retrieval of remains to Japan and future visits to such sites by the bereaved families and relatives.

Sept. 8, 2012: Japanese Foreign Minister (FM) Gamba Koichiro meets South Korean counterpart Kim Sung-hwan at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Vladivostok.

Sept. 9, 2012: US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton speaks at the APEC meeting, urging for cooler heads from both South Korea and Japan in working out their ongoing territorial dispute.

Sept. 11, 2012: *Yomiuri Shimbun* reports President Lee Myung-bak and Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko engaged in a brief discussion at the APEC meeting. This marks the first contact between the two since Lee's visit to Dokdo in August.

Sept. 11, 2012: Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) survey reported by *Yonhap* reveals that more than one in 10 South Korean companies engaged in trade with Japanese companies believe they are suffering damage due to the South Korea-Japan diplomatic spat.

Sept. 11, 2012: According to *Yonhap*, Seoul is seeking an increased budget for 2013 in dealing with its claims to sovereignty over the disputed territory of Dokdo/Takeshima. The amount requested totals 4.2 billion won (roughly \$3.7 million), representing an increase of 81 percent over the 2012 budget. The article also states that Japan has similarly increased its requested budget for the same purpose, to \$7.5 million for 2013.

Sept. 20, 2012: South Korea's *Shin Dong-A* Magazine in its October edition publishes the findings of a poll regarding perceptions toward the South Korea-Japan bilateral relationship.

Sept. 23, 2012: The *Wall Street Journal* carries an interview with Japanese Prime Minister Noda where he reiterates Japan's official position regarding compensation to those Korean victims of sexual slavery (referred to as "comfort women"), saying "the matter is closed."

Sept. 24, 2012: The *Japan Times* states that FM Gemba has called for the greater use of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for the peaceful resolution of international conflicts – an apparent reference to the territorial dispute with South Korea over Dokdo/Takeshima.

Sept. 24, 2012: FM Kim Sung-hwan meets FM Gemba on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, reaffirming efforts to work together on pressing bilateral issues including North Korea.

Sept. 25, 2012: *Sankei Shimbun* reports that South Korea refused to allow Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force ships to dock in Busan during a joint naval exercise involving the US and Australia. South Korea's Defense Ministry denies the reports, claiming that the decision not to dock at the port was based on prior mutual agreement.

Sept. 28, 2012: *Yonhap News* reports that Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing will begin their domestic procedures starting October toward the launch of the trilateral free trade talks.

Sept. 28, 2012: FM Kim Sung-hwan addresses the 67th session of the UN General Assembly and includes references to wartime sexual violence as an infringement of human rights and the need to face up to history.

Oct. 5, 2012: *Asahi Shimbun* reports that Matsubara Jin (who lost his job in an Oct. 1 cabinet reshuffle) attempted to open his own lines of communication with North Korea, in order to influence bilateral relations. An anonymous Japanese government official is quoted saying that "fame-hungry politicians have poked their noses into Japan-North Korea relations, while the Foreign Ministry has become wary of holding dialogues on the abduction issue."

Oct. 6, 2012: *Chosun Ilbo* publishes the findings of its joint survey with *Mainichi Shimbun* on Korean and Japanese public perceptions toward the bilateral relationship.

Oct. 7, 2012: Seoul announces that it has received approval from the US to develop ballistic missiles with a range of up to 800 km, more than double the prior limit.

Oct. 7-8, 2012: The annual South Korean-Japan Cooperation Committee Meeting is held in Seoul. In a speech read by FM Kim Sung-hwan, President Lee calls for "a mature partnership between the two countries by having the courage and wisdom to look squarely at history and sincere action backing it up." In a speech read by former Prime Minister Aso Taro, Prime Minister Noda urges "a cool-headed approach."

Oct. 9, 2012: *Yonhap* announces that South Korea and Japan agreed to let the expanded portion of the bilateral currency swap deal expire at the end of the month. The expiration will mean that the bilateral currency swap deal will decrease to \$13 billion from \$70 billion.

Oct. 11, 2012: *Korea Herald* states that a Tokyo District Court ordered the Japanese government to disclose parts of the classified 1965 Korea-Japan normalization treaty dealing with Japan's wartime sexual slavery, ruling in favor of the 11 Korean and Japanese civic activists representing the so-called "comfort women." Japan has refused to disclose the proceedings of the treaty claiming that such disclosure may hinder relations between South and North Korea.

Oct. 11, 2012: Finance Minister Pak Chae-wan meets Japanese counterpart Jojima Koriki on the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank meeting in Tokyo.

Oct. 12, 2012: *Chosun Ilbo* hints at a potential thaw in bilateral relations, citing news of resuming regular meetings between finance ministers that had been suspended due to the dispute over Dokdo/Takeshima. The fifth such meeting was scheduled for August but postponed indefinitely following President Lee's visit to the disputed islands.

Oct. 15, 2012: A *Financial Times* article, "Tokyo and Seoul: Relationship on the Rocks," cites US Asia experts on the negative impact of Korea-Japan relations for the US 'pivot' strategy.

Oct. 15, 2012: The Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) involving South Korea, China, and Japan holds its inaugural forum in Seoul, bringing together South Korea's Kim Sung-hwan, Vice President of the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs Lu Shumin, and former Japanese Science and Technology Minister Nakagawa Masaharu.

Oct. 17, 2012: President of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Abe Shinzo visits Yasukuni Shrine, his first such visit since winning the party election in September.

Oct. 17, 2012: South Korea's chief negotiator to the Six-Party Talks Lim Sung-nam, Director General of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Sugiyama Shinsuke and US Special Envoy for North Korea Policy Glyn Davies meet in Tokyo for talks on North Korea.

Oct. 22, 2012: Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Fujimura Osamu calls on Korea's parliamentary leaders to cancel their scheduled trip to Takeshima.

Oct. 23, 2012: South Korea's lawmakers from the National Defense Committee visit Dokdo, marking the third such visit since 2005.

Oct. 29, 2012: *Kyodo* announces that 33 of Japan's 47 local assemblies have voted in favor of Tokyo pressing its claims to the disputed territory of Dokdo/Takeshima.

Oct. 29, 2012: Japan's new Ambassador to Korea Bessho Koro arrives in Seoul.

Nov. 6, 2012: *Asahi Shimbun* covers the visit of 40 or so members of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force Staff College to South Korea. The article quotes the director of the MSDF Staff College's education department, stating, "We want to promote exchanges at all levels even though political relations are bedeviled by some issues."

Nov. 7, 2012: In an interview with Korea's *JoongAng Daily*, Shin Bong-kil, secretary general of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), states that "Korea, China, and Japan are in basic agreement that bilateral conflicts over historical and territorial issues should not affect trilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia."

Nov. 16-17, 2012: Director General of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Sugiyama meets Song Il Ho, North Korean ambassador for talks to normalize relations with Japan.

Nov. 20, 2012: Trade ministers from South Korea, China, and Japan meet in Cambodia and announce the launch of free trade negotiations, ten years after the joint civic study in 2003.

Nov. 22, 2012: Seoul and Tokyo hold their 11th high-level economic consultation in Seoul, headed by Korea's Deputy Trade Minister Lee Shi-hyung and Japan's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tsuruoka Koji.

Nov. 22, 2012: According to *Kyodo*, the Japanese government decided to create Japanese names for the rock formations on Takeshima and register them with the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan.

Nov. 22, 2012: *Dong-A Ilbo* details the campaign pledges of Abe Shinzo, pointing out his pledge to elevate the significance of 'Takeshima Day' designated for Feb. 22.

Nov. 22, 2012: According to *Japan Times*, Shimane Prefecture has called on the public to provide historical documents that would reinforce Japan's claims to Takeshima.

Nov. 24, 2012: Finance ministers from South Korea and Japan meet to discuss economic and financial ties, releasing a joint statement that notes the importance of resuming negotiations on the free trade agreement.

Nov. 28, 2012: A boat carrying five dead men, all believed to be from North Korea, is found beached on Niigata Prefecture's Sado Island.

Nov. 29, 2012: *Washington Post* reports on recent findings of the Japanese government survey on Japanese public sentiment toward South Korea and China. The article suggests that the significant decline in affinity for both Seoul and Beijing by the Japanese may represent a shift back toward nationalism of an earlier era.

Dec. 1, 2012: North Korea announces plans to launch a satellite between Dec. 10 and 22.

Dec. 2, 2012: Japan announces that it “has informed North Korea of a postponement of bilateral talks planned for later this week out of consideration for current circumstances.”

Dec. 7, 2012: The *Japan Times* reports that three MSDF destroyers armed with *Aegis* missile defense system left the base in Sasebo on Dec. 6 in preparation for North Korea’s rocket launch.

Dec. 8, 2012: *KCNA* states that roundtable talks were held in Tokyo on Nov. 27 to mark the 40th anniversary of the realization of the North Korea-Japan sport exchange.

Dec. 10, 2012: *KCNA* releases a statement from the Korean Committee of Space Technology, claiming that preparations for the scheduled rocket launch were “at a final phase,” but adding that “they, however, found technical deficiency in the first-stage control engine module of the rocket carrying the satellite and decided to extend the satellite launch period up to Dec. 29.”

Dec. 11, 2012: According to *Chosun Ilbo*, three Korean mobile service providers – SK Telecom, KT, and LG Uplus – have submitted an application to the Dokdo Management Office to set up a base station on the islets, paving the way for 4th generation mobile coverage on the island by February 2013. KT has already established Wi-Fi connection network on the islets.

Dec. 12, 2012: North Korea launches a satellite into outer space using a three-stage rocket.

Dec. 12, 2012: The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) releases a statement that confirms initial indications suggesting that North Korea’s rocket “deployed an object that appeared to achieve orbit.”

Dec. 12, 2012: *Kyodo* reports that the Japanese Coast Guard rescued four men aboard a North Korean boat drifting in the Sea of Japan/East Sea.

Dec. 16, 2012: The LDP wins by a landslide in Japan’s national parliamentary elections.

Dec. 19, 2012: Park Geun-hye wins South Korean presidential elections.

Dec. 20, 2012: Japan’s incoming Prime Minister Abe Shinzo congratulates Park Geun-hye on her recent win in the South Korean presidential elections.

Dec. 21, 2012: *Asahi Shimbun* includes an article citing plans by incoming Prime Minister Abe to send a special envoy to South Korea to improve relations and the possible cancellation of the central government support for a national “*Takeshima Day*.”

Dec. 21, 2012: South Korea releases its defense white paper, reiterating its claims to Dokdo/Takeshima. Japan protests, with Seoul sending a rebuttal letter stating that “Dokdo is an integral part of Korean territory historically, geographically, and under international law.”

Dec. 22, 2012: According to *Yonhap News*, President-elect Park Geun-hye has turned down a proposed visit by former Finance Minister Nukaga Fukushiro, the special envoy designated by incoming Prime Minister Abe, due to a scheduling conflict.

Dec. 22, 2012: *Yonhap News* reports that North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un has called for more satellites and rockets to be launched following the country's successful effort in early December.

Dec. 26, 2012: The voting to designate Japan's prime minister takes place at both the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors; Abe Shinzo becomes the 96th prime minister (the 63rd person to assume the post).