

# Coexisting with different value systems

— The first step to improving the relationship between Japan and South Korea —

The national security of Japan is directly connected to the stability of the Korea Peninsula, so Japan's currently worsening relationship with South Korea is not advantageous to either country. How did the two countries get into this situation?

Japan was on the losing side in the Second World War, and after it regained its independence, it put great effort into being accepted in the international order as a nation of peace, erasing its image as a militarized state. From 1955 to 1970, Japan enjoyed an era of high economic growth and saw its national prestige increase. During that period, North Korea was economically stronger than the South Korea. South Korea aimed to build a better economy than North Korea and deemed it necessary to look to Japan for financial assistance, and Japan believed achieving peace on the Korea Peninsula was important. These factors led to the normalization of diplomatic relationship with South Korea in 1965. South Korea's economy eventually outpaced that of North Korea, but it needed its alliance with the United States and a cooperative relationship with Japan as the world was still in the midst of the Cold War. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, tensions increased on the Korean Peninsula with the start of North Korea's nuclear weapon development program. In addition, North Korea's relationship with Japan deteriorated due to the issues surrounding people being abducted from Japan and taken to North Korea. At that point in time, Japan and South Korea shared the same interests.



The countries of Northeast Asia

However, the world saw China's economy grow rapidly with the start of the new millennium, and with its subsequent increase in global influence, China and the United States found themselves in conflict with each other. South Korea continues to maintain its alliance with the United States, but it has also started to put more emphasis on its relationship with China, its largest trading partner. Moreover, President Moon Jae-in, who was elected in 2017, is promoting policies aimed at reconciliation between the North and South – a stance that conflicts with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's policies towards North Korea. This has made it more difficult for the two countries to cooperate in creating policies to deal with North Korea.

Neither Japan nor South Korea have any plans in place for creating a new relationship to handle this situation. Military strength has taken on a relatively smaller role in national security in the post-Cold War world, a world released from issues caused by that ideological strife, and political value systems have become more diverse. During the Cold War and the unipolar era of US dominance, Japan found it easy to respond to its national issues as it shares the system of liberal, democratic values with the United States. However, Japan must come up with its own way of interacting with other countries with differing political value systems in the future. South Korea is facing similar challenges.

Ayumi Togashi is a lecturer at Toyo Eiwa University and she researches security issues in Northeast Asia. She believes that students need to have a multi-faceted point of view to understand other countries with different political systems. Some of her students use social networks to get a feel for public opinion in South Korea. Even if a solution to improving the Japan-South Korea relationship can't be found soon, the first step to take is to consider not only the perspective of Japan, but also that of South Korea.

\* ODA (Official Development Assistance): Financial and technological assistance provided by governments to developing countries.



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英国サセックス大学国際関係学修士号取得。ソウル大学校政治外交学部政治学博士号取得。政治学博士。専門は国際政治、北東アジア安全保障、韓国政治。主に韓国を中心として、日本や北朝鮮、米国、中国を含む北東アジア地域における安全保障を研究している。主な業績として、富樫あゆみ著『日韓安全保障協力の検証—冷戦以後の「脅威」をめぐる力学』(亜紀書房、2017年)など。



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