

Korea-Japan Trade Plus War: Where Are You Going Mr. Shinzo Abe?

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Global Research, July 18, 2019

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [History](#)

Right after the G20 Conference (28-28 June 2019) in Osaka, Japan, Shinzo Abe, prime minister of Japan declared the beginning of trade war against South Korea. It was indeed an irony that Abe was the host of the Conference organized specifically to restore free trade system in the world.

The first shot was the administrative restriction of exports of three chemical elements to South Korea; “fluorinated polyimide” used in the production of TV sets and smart-phones and “resist” as well as “hydrogen fluoride-etching gas” which are used for the production of semiconductors.

Japan accounts for 90% of the global production of fluorinated polyimide and 70% world supply of etching gas.

Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix and LG Display will be hard hit in the short run. Korea accounts for as much as 70% of the global production of DRUM chips and 50% of NAND chips

Thus, Abe has made it clear that he will go pretty far in restricting Japanese exports of basic materials needed for the production of semiconductors, TV and many other South Korean goods. Moreover, Japan might exclude South Korea from the “white countries list” to which Japan provides some privileges related to trade.

If this happens, not only the South Korean economy but also the Japanese economy along with the global economy will be the victims. Why, then? What is the real aim of Abe?

My theory is that the ultimate reason for Abe’s war is the realization of his dream of restoring the old glorious but brutal Japan of the 1930s and 1940s enjoyed by his grandfather, Nobuske Kishi, an A-class war criminal.

This paper includes the following: Abe’s strategy for his party’s permanent power, Abe’s ambition to restore the old imperial military empire and the reaction of Moon Jae-in government.

1. Strategy for the Perpetual Power of Abe’s Conservative Government

Abe’s strategy of keeping his party’s (Liberal Democratic Party) permanent power seems to include the following; instigation of anti-Korea opinions in Japan, and return to power of the south Korean conservative government.

1.1 Instigation of Anti-Korea Feeling in Japan through the Denial of Japan’s Colonial Past

The essence of Abe's strategy is to stir in South Korea anti-Japan feeling, which leads to anti-Korea opinion in Japan and Abe's electoral wins. The best way of producing anti-Japan feeling in Korea is to justify and glorify Japan's wrong doings happened during its colonial occupation of Korea.

There are many events which Koreans will never forget and which Japan likes to deny.

Image on the right: Korean volunteers in the [Imperial Japanese Army](#), January 1943 (Source: Public Domain)



What Koreans do remember is mostly humiliation imposed by Japanese and the feeling of anger against them for their harsh treatment of Koreans during their colonial occupation from 1905 to 1945.

Koreans remember how Japanese killers assassinated the Korean empress in 1895. They were humiliated by the way the Japan kicked out the Korean Emperor, Kojong in 1910. They know that the annexation of Korea into the Japanese empire was illegal, since the emperor did not sign it.

During the time of massive uprising against Japan in 1919 crying "Long Live Korea!" several thousand men, women, children, adults, old and young were cut down by the fearful Japanese swords and massacred by machine guns of the Japanese police.

Koreans remember how the colonial Japanese government forced them to abandon their Korean name and adopt a Japanese name; Koreans remember how hard Japan attempted to uproot the Korean culture and identity.

Almost hundred thousand young Koreans were taken away into the Japanese army to kill Korean patriots.

Koreans will never forget the diabolically criminal acts of the notorious Unit 731 of the Japanese army where countless innocent Chinese and Koreans were decapitated in order to test the sharpness of Japanese swords; several thousand innocent people were the victims of chemical and biological weapons. Countless people had to withstand Siberian cold in order to verify how long a human can stand such cold.

Koreans have been trying to forget these crimes committed by Japan, but there are two horrible crimes that they do not want to forget: labour slavery and sex slavery.

Japan mobilized by force several tens of thousands Koreans and made them to work as slaves in mines and factories under living conditions as bad as hog-pen.

The notorious Japanese firms which exploited, without mercy, Korean labour slaves were Mitsubishi Heavy Industry Ltd., and Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corporation. But there are a lot of other Japanese companies which exploited and abused Korean workers.

The surviving victims of the labour slavery went to Supreme Court of Korea to ask for the court ruling on the unlawful exploitation of Korean workers by Japanese companies.

The Supreme Court under the government of Park Geun-hye did not make the judgment in order not to annoy Abe, but the Supreme Court under the government of Moon Jae-in has ordered, in 2018, the Japanese firms to pay to compensate for the suffering of the Korean work slaves. It appears that the Japanese firms would be ready to pay, but Abe would have asked them not to do so.

As far as Abe is concerned, if the Japanese companies pay, it would mean that Japan admits having committed labour slavery, which Abe cannot accept.

There is another tragedy for which Koreans are very sensitive. It is the crime of sex slavery committed by Japanese soldiers during the Pacific War. There are tons of proofs, numerous witnesses and in 1990s a number of important Japanese political leaders admitted the crime.

In 1993, Kato Koichi, Chief Cabinet Sectary of the prime minister's office admitted the crime. In the same year, Japan's Prime Minister Koichi Miyazawa made an apology in his own name.

But, in 2007, Abe denied the use of coercion imposed on the poor victims; in other words, for him, there was no sex slavery.

In December, 2015, the foreign ministers of the two countries produced a document in which Japan would provide funds for the victims.

The government of Moon Jae-in has found some irregularities in the agreement. We must remember that the agreement was made under the conservative government of Park Geun-hye which is highly pro-Japan and always afraid of antagonizing Abe.

The agreement has several problems. To begin with, it was not approved by the Korean National Assembly; it did not meet the victims' wish. It was not the money the victims wanted; they wanted an official formal apology of the Japanese government, not isolated apologies of a few politicians.

Koreans were ready to pardon the Japanese for many of their crimes against Korea and Koreans. But, as for the work slavery and the sex slavery, they want Japanese government's official recognition and apology, which Abe refuses.

In particular, Koreans are having hard time in forgetting the suffering of more than two hundred thousand Korean girls, many of whom were young adolescents; they were raped twenty times, even thirty times a day, every day, and every year by Japanese soldiers.

An intriguing thing is that we have never heard of Japanese girls sent to the sex slave camps.

After the war, a great number of these girls were buried alive in huge pits, many of the survivors never came back home because of shame; many killed themselves; few who came back home suffered their entire life suffering from physical damage and psychological trauma.

What makes the Korea-Japan relations painful is Abe's stubborn refusal to recognize the facts of Japan's war crimes and his efforts to justify and glorify these crimes.

On this point, Japan is far different from post-war Germany, which has apologized – and it is still apologizing – for its war crimes and which has been doing wonderful things for the integration of Europe; Germany is admired for this. Why not Japan?

1.2 Plot to Restore the South Korean Conservative Government

The Candle-Light Revolution achieved by 17 millions South Koreans after eight months of peaceful street fighting in 2016 and 2017 led to the imprisonment of the president of the conservative government, Park Geun-hye, for corruption and abuse of power.



The candlelight movement in Seoul, South Korea, mobilized for change of government (Credit: Women Cross DMZ)

The Revolution has led also to the takeover of power by the liberal government of Moon Jae-in in 2017.

This event was an unwelcome happening for Abe, because it will be more difficult for him to treat Korea as a colonized country.

In the past, for 60 years since 1948, Korea has been ruled by pro-Japan conservative governments originally formed largely by former high ranking civil servants of the Japanese colonial government and, now, by their descendents..

Abe and the South Korean conservatives have one thing important in common, namely, they both wish to be free from their association with past wrong doings. That is why both of them have been trying to rewrite the past history by justifying and glorifying Japan's occupation of Korea.

This relationship between the Korean collaborators and Japanese masters was one of master-servant or colonizer-colonized. Such relationship has always existed under the South Korean pro-Japan conservative governments.

Now, as long as Moon Jae-in has power, Abe can no longer treat South Korea as being inferior. This makes Abe not very happy.

So, Abe tries to discredit Moon's government. He tries to make Moon's government look like incompetent in economic policy, inconsistent in foreign policy and inefficient in welfare policy.

Abe can do this relatively easily, because he can easily dictate Japanese media which is rapidly losing their autonomy. In fact, between 2015 and 2018, the press-freedom rank of Japan got worse from 59 to 67. The higher the press -freedom rank figure, the worse becomes press freedom. By the way, in the same period, the press-freedom rank of South Korea got better from 57 to 43.

Thus, the freedom of press in Japan is radically getting worse. This could lead to Abe's dictatorship.

The result of South Korea bashing is clear enough; it will stir up anti-Japan feeling in South Korea and, inevitably anti-Korea feeling in Japan.

Abe is doing fine. According to a Korea-Japan joint survey, no less than 92% of Japanese say they do not trust Koreans; 93% of Koreans say that they do mistrust Japanese.

Here are some of the current events which Abe has produced to antagonize Moon's government and Koreans.

A few months ago, Japanese war planes approached in very low altitude to a South Korean navy ship to test its reaction. The South Korean navy ship did not show any hostile reaction, but the Japanese media reported without proof that the South Korean navy Ship took "hostile reaction".

During the G20 meeting, Moon Jae-in, President of South Korea was the only head of state excluded from Abe's summits. This is a shameful and utterly childish behaviour of the host of the Conference.

Abe knows that his policy of trade restriction is likely to bring global criticism.

Therefore, he had to bring issues which might make his Moon-bashing policy more acceptable. He has raised the possibility of Moon government's smuggling dangerous materials into North Korea to be used for the production of nuclear weapons.

But, in reality, those companies which have sold such materials to North Korea are Japanese companies and not South Korean firms according to official reports of the Japanese government. This was announced on July 11 by Ha Tae-Kyung, member of the Korean

National Assembly.

It appears that the false story of the involvement of South Korean firms in the smuggling business was published by the most pro-Japan Korean newspaper, Chosun – Ilbo which is notorious for manufacturing lies or for distorting facts in order to discredit Moon’s liberal government. Abe seems to be happy with Chosun-Ilbo’s performance.

2. Abe’s Ambition to Restore the Old Imperial Military Empire

It is perhaps normal for all politicians to seek permanent power to get rich, to become powerful, to become famous, to promote people’s happiness or to achieve a not-so-healthy dream of ruling the world.

This is important. Why does Abe want so eagerly to keep power, perhaps forever?



For Abe, the maintenance of power will allow him to amend the Peace Constitution so that Japan can become a normal country capable of invading foreign countries.

It is indeed possible that Abe’s ultimate plan is the strategy of conquering the whole world.

In short, his ultimate ambition could be to restore the old glorious imperial empire in which his grandfather of maternal side, Nobuske Kishi, was very much involved; he was called “Devil of Showa” for his brutal rule of Manchukuo; he was an A-class war criminal and served three-year imprisonment before he was pardoned by the U.S. government.

The dream of restoring the power and the glory of Japan has been fomented by the extreme right-wing political group, the Japan Conference (Nippon Gaigi) established in 1997. It has 38,000 members. It is richly funded. Its political influence has been increasing and far reaching.

Abe is one of its key leaders. More than 80% of Abe’s ministers are members of Nippon Gaigi

The main principles guiding the Conference seem to include the restoration of emperor’s godhood, the change of national conscience, refusal of the Tokyo War Criminal Tribunal, non-recognition of Nanjing massacre and sex slavery, justification of colonialism and glorification of wars undertaken by Japan.

Here, “the change of national conscience” seems to mean that Japanese people should not feel guilty of the crimes committed by Japan. Abe seems to have a good success for this.

What inspire the actions of the Japan Conference are two basic beliefs.

First, the emperor is living God, hence, the Japanese are divine and chosen people.

Second, Abe's friends seem to believe in Japan's holy mission, "Hakko Ichiu" meaning "eight corners under one roof"; the corners are the world; the roof is Japan. That is, Japan is destined to rule the world. In short, for Japan with emperor-god, it is its holy mission to rule the world.

The Japan Conference insists: "Japan should be applauded for liberating much of Asia from Western colonial powers."

So, the occupation of Korea and Taiwan, the invasion of Manchuria, the war against China and the unprovoked attack of Pearl Harbour were all a part of the holy Hakko-Ichiu mission

It is quite possible that Japan under the new constitution without Article 9 may attempt to repeat the failed adventure of conquering Asia starting perhaps with Korea.

Abe should give up his pipe dream. The world has changed; we are not in the 1930s or 1940s; Korea is not weak; Koreans are not poor; Korea has many friends.

3. Reactions of South Korea

South Korea had been aware of hostile behaviour toward South Korea ever since the pro-Japan conservative government had its dishonourable end in 2017.

Abe has been comfortable with the Korean pro-Japan conservative governments, because they have collaborated with Abe for the justification and even glorification of Japan's colonial policies.

Moreover, the Korean conservative governments have been avoiding, in their Japan relations, those issues for which Japan has been sensitive, especially those issues related to Japan's colonial policies and the issues related to security.

However, the liberal government of Moon Jae-in has been making one thing clear; Moon is eager to develop constructive bilateral relations, but he wishes to separate the issues of the colonial past and current problems. In other words, he hopes that Japan make frank recognition of its past wrong doings and develop deeper and lasting bilateral relations

Among the current issues, the peace on the Korea peninsula is Moon's major concern but, on this point there is a basic difference from Abe's North Korea policy.

Some of these different perceptions between Moon and Abe could be one of the reasons for Abe's trade sanctions against Moon.

South Korea has not yet defined its reaction except the appeal to WTO, hope for mediation by Washington and search for self-sufficiency in the production of basic inputs for semiconductors and related products.

However, one thing sure is that South Korea will not be intimidated or blackmailed by Abe. Besides, the "no-buy Japanese goods" is rapidly spreading among consumers and merchants alike in South Korea; the number of Korean visitors to Japan is expected to fall sharply.

To sum up, I am sure that Koreans are hoping to live in peace with Japan, cooperate for common prosperity and security and develop lasting friendship.

After all, Koreans and Japanese are, in a way, relatives; one of the princesses of Baek-je dynasty of Korea became the mother of Emperor Kammu (735-806) who was one of the most successful emperors of Japan.

As for Japan, I hope that Abe apologizes, in the name of his government, its past wrongdoings, promote friendly and constructive relations with Korea and work hand in hand for the good of Asia and the world.

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