

# Coming Relations Between Japan and the Korean Peninsula

By Kamiya Fuji

## Three Kims

I became acquainted with South Korea's three Kims about 30 years ago, which means that I was probably one of the first people in Japan to get to know all three men at that time. Ranking these three Kims today in terms of the number of seats held by the political parties that they lead, Kim Young Sam comes first, followed by Kim Dae Jung and Kim Jong Pil.

Thirty years ago, however, their positions were without doubt reversed: Kim Jong Pil was first, followed by Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam. Kim Jong Pil was the number two figure in the administration of General Park Chung Hee and a rising star, while Kim Dae Jung was becoming widely known as an up-and-coming antigovernment controversialist. Kim Young Sam was hardly known at all.

Today, 30 years later, Kim Young Sam is president and leader of the ruling New Korea Party, and Kim Dae Jung and Kim Jong Pil head the opposition New Congress for New Politics and United Liberal Democrats parties, respectively. It was in these positions that the three politicians faced the general election for South Korea's National Assembly in April. As well as being amazed once again by the long political lives of these three Kims, I also cannot help but feel the mutability of politics.

In the general election in April, the South Korean media, and the Japanese media, which swallowed the story whole, made a huge blunder, having forecast that the ruling party would suffer a serious setback. Overturning the predictions, President Kim Young Sam and the NKP made an unexpectedly good showing and nearly came away with an absolute majority in the assembly. The president no doubt breathed a deep sigh of relief. All the same, although serious political fluidity has been avoided for the time being, the overall political picture painted by

South Korea's first general election in four years certainly does not leave an impression of progress and stability. Rather, as one significant trend, the results of the election indicate that politics in South Korea is reaching a certain limit.

During the past decade South Korean politics has made tremendous advances in terms of democratization, shifting from military to civilian control. Fortunately, President Kim Young Sam's unprecedented gamble in bringing accusations against South Korea's previous two presidents under ex post facto legislation and openly bringing them into court in prison clothing has not invited any major opposition from the public. Nevertheless, there has been almost no improvement in the old customs of regionalism, and even if it has become clear that the curtain has risen on the final act of the three Kims' generation, the image of the next era remains completely shrouded. Despite his good showing in the general election, President Kim Young Sam still does not enjoy a very high degree of popularity, and in the remaining couple of years of his term it will be difficult for him to halt his slide into a lame-duck capacity.

President Kim Young Sam's lack of popularity can also be seen in widely held interpretations of the election results, which suggest that North Korea's repeated intimidating language and provocative military behavior just before the election put a brake on the NKP's slide or that North Korea's daily abuse of Kim Young Sam, calling him a "puppet" and a "traitor," ironically had the effect of spicing the president's campaign.

It can be expected, however, that President Kim Young Sam, who has much more ambition than his ability warrants, will try and put up a strong resistance to this trend. In view of these factors, it seems to me that there are several complex scenarios mixed

together in South Korean politics as that country prepares for its next presidential election at the end of next year.

## Contradiction in Japan-South Korean relations

What will be the effect of this political situation in South Korea, which remains a far cry from stability, on Japan-South Korea relations? Unfortunately, there is unlikely to be any remarkable change in President Kim Young Sam's attitude to Japan so far, which has been distinctly anti-Japanese.

Just as he has urged a thorough trial under ex post facto legislation of those implicated in the Kwangju incident of 16 years ago, so President Kim Young Sam no doubt will use every possible opportunity to continue his vociferous call on Japan to carry out a complete revision of its past denials and history, thus appealing to the anti-Japanese sentiment among the Korean people. This, unfortunately, is the general outlook.

Last year, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, President Kim Young Sam ordered the commencement of demolition work on the building of Japan's former government-general in Korea. After the central front part of the building's circular dome had been removed, a South Korean newspaper asked me for a comment, but I refused. Whatever I may have said, the South Korean people would never have been fully satisfied. So I thought that it would be better not to tarnish the title that had been given to me as the representative of the first postwar generation of pro-Korean Japanese. It will be a clear contradiction if President Kim Young Sam continues his two-sided approach of proposing joint historical research and a common historical understanding by Japan and South Korea on the one hand and, as his basic attitude, pursuing the complete denial of Japan-South Korean history

on the other.

Because of overwhelming support by the South Korean people, this contradiction has become a common belief rather than being recognized as the contradiction that it is. The problem is whether the South Korean government and opinion leaders move to consolidate this national belief or squash it. As far as President Kim Young Sam is concerned, he cannot be expected to try and follow the latter path. If he can find a different means of attracting greater support among the nation, all the better. But unfortunately it will not be easy for him to find another way. And in such a case, in the end he will probably have no other option but to play the anti-Japanese card.

### South Korea's part in the 'miracle'

If we continue to harp on issues of basic understanding, such as history, we will become involved in a kind of theological debate that has no end. Surely we can find another path to Japan-South Korea cooperation that is a little more practical and concrete—although, even in this case, the situation will only become more acrimonious if Seoul insists on taking up such bilateral issues as Takeshima and fishing, which only stimulate South Korea's radical nationalism and uncompromising attitude. This might even hinder the promotion of bilateral cooperation in the area of economic relations, where it should be relatively easy to shut out emotional and irrational factors.

For South Korea, which is one of the leaders of the "four dragons" playing a central role in Asia's trademark high rate of growth, economic development is the starting point and premise for all discussions. At the time of the inauguration of the present administration three and a half years ago, President Kim Young Sam made two pledges—namely, the removal of the military from politics and the removal of the *chaebol* (large financial combines) from the economy. As described above, the demilitarization of politics continues to take place in a thorough manner.

Unprecedented action has been taken against the two previous presidents, who both hailed from the military.

Regarding the removal of the *chaebol* from regional economies, however, President Kim Young Sam abandoned his pledge at a very early stage in his administration. He believed that the existence of the *chaebol* was essential for the continued high growth of the South Korean economy, which was the premise for the country's development.

As can be seen by the huge donations that were channeled to the two previous presidents, the *chaebol* have grown even stronger in recent years. But what about the South Korean economy itself? Superficially it continues to achieve spirited growth, and South Korea is preparing for promotion from the ranks of the newly industrialized economies to the rich-men's club of advanced industrial nations. South Korea's per capita gross national product recently passed the \$10,000 mark, and in July the country is expected to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. So Seoul, understandably, is full of hope, and I certainly do not begrudge them praise for their wonderful performance.

But as Theo Sommer, editor of the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, wrote in *The Daily Yomiuri* recently ("'Asian Miracle' a Mixed Blessing," March 18, 1996), "Asia is fast coming up. But then it also has a lot to catch up on. And if they coldly consider absolute figures rather than allowing themselves to be bamboozled by relative growth-rate figures, the older industrial nations of the West need not run scared. . . . the South Korean economy

is twice as big as Denmark's and smaller than the Netherlands."

One of the industries that South Korea is especially proud of is the automobile industry, but the country's dependence ratio on Japan for parts in this sector reaches as high as 59%. In the electronic appliances sector, the same dependence ratio is 45%. And today South Korea's shipbuilding industry, which once boastfully bid farewell to Japan, is once again playing second fiddle to the Japanese shipbuilding business. These conditions seem to suggest that, although no crisis has yet reached the surface, South Korea's technology and the economy that rests on this technology are approaching an important turning point for the first time since people began talking about the "Korean miracle." In other words, it is probably no exaggeration to say that a limit is coming into view not only for South



A South Korean ceremony celebrating its release from Japanese colonial control highlights the withdrawal of the former Government-General of Korea.

Photo: Kyodo News Service

Korean politics but also for its economy.

If this prediction is not very far off the mark, then it certainly cannot be said that from now on the cooperative factor will expand in Japan-South Korea economic relations. On the contrary, we might well have to expect an increase of friction, which would be a very undesirable scenario indeed.

### The North Korea question

Now, as for North Korea, what is the most important point that we should consider? Following the death of Stalin, the Soviet Union went through a process of de-Stalinization; and after the death of Mao Zedong, China went through a process of de-Maoization. So, similarly, it is probably an unavoidable rule of history that after the death of Kim Il Sung North Korea should go through a process of de-Kimization (or perhaps it would be less confusing if I said de-Kim-Il-Sungization, because there are so many Kims in North Korea).

Assuming that Kim Il Sung's successor is his son, Kim Jong Il, then the first condition for the long life of a Kim Jong Il regime would be for Kim Jong Il himself to stand at the forefront of an anti-Kim Il Sung movement. However, we cannot hope for this development. Kim Jong Il does not have the character to deny his father's role. Rather, ever since Kim Il Sung's death, Kim Jong Il has tried hard to be even more like his father than his father was. Therefore, it seems likely that the Kim Jong Il regime (although I do not know whether it is correct to speak in these terms because, as of the time of this writing in May 1996, the situation there remained unclear) will collapse in the not too distant future.

When Kim Il Sung was alive, I made this prediction on several occasions. (See my work "Theories of the Korean Peninsula," PHP Kenkyujo, 1994, Part III.) And I have repeated the forecast



North Korean children gearing up for a massive game to be held in honor of Secretary Kim Jong Il's birthday.

frequently since Kim Il Sung's death. The rock-hard dictatorship in North Korea has continued for nearly half a century, and now the Kim Il Sung regime's fatigue is reaching the limit. The situation is aptly described by the Chinese colloquial saying, "Never paint over a lump of excrement." In other words, however much you try to paint over a crumbling wall from the outside, if it is crumbling, it will not hold. As long as he tries to prolong his political life by portraying his father as everything and deifying him, Kim Jong Il's North Korea will have no future.

Just think about it. For more than two decades it has been publicized both inside and out of North Korea that when father dies, the son will succeed him. But despite this publicity, North Korea has been without a head of state ever since the father's death. Whatever explanation is given, this can only be described as an abnormal situation. According to a Pyongyang spokesperson, Kim Jong Il has been leading the party and government ever since his father's death, so his official appointment as president and general secretary of the party is only a question of ceremony and formality. But this is nothing more than sophistry; it does not explain the situation at all. If in Japan, after an emperor's death, the crown prince was

not enthroned for some time and the imperial throne remained vacant, who could possibly claim that the situation was quite normal?

### U.S.-North Korea first

As the regime in North Korea thus shows terminal symptoms both formally and in practice, the response of the United States has been to do its utmost to formulate support policies and prop up the regime. The U.S. government reached

nuclear-related agreements with the North Korean regime in Geneva in October 1994, just after Kim Il Sung's death; in Kuala Lumpur in June 1995; and in New York in December 1995, establishing the Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO). The U.S. has been eager to provide North Korea with assistance concerning a variety of matters: light-water reactors, KEDO, fuel oil and food. Following the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, when the Chinese government crushed a prodemocracy demonstration in Beijing, the U.S. time and time again has pressed China on the issue of human rights. But I have never heard of the U.S. giving the same lecture to North Korea. While justly describing North Korea as a terrorist state, the U.S. has continued to provide unrelated services to that country that can only be described as excessive. This approach is very strange indeed.

The U.S. justifies its policy of extending life-prolonging support to Pyongyang by saying that if North Korea were pushed into desperate straits, it would resort to war as a last resort or that the sudden collapse of North Korea would exert a serious burden and confusion on the surrounding region and related countries. But these reasons themselves are extremely

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doubtful. Certainly no one can rule out the possibility of war. But it can be said for sure that the probability of North Korea right now having the will and the capability as an organized state to embark on what would clearly be a suicidal act is one in a million. And as regards the fear that a collapse of the regime in North Korea would have a serious impact on the surrounding region, compared to the expenditures that related countries will inevitably have to provide from now on for continued support to North Korea, which almost certainly will prove to be a vain effort anyway, I believe that such an impact would actually be much easier to endure.

Ever since the final stages of the Kim Il Sung era, U.S. support for North Korea has constantly proceeded at a pace determined not by Washington but by Pyongyang. To be frank, really it should be most difficult for Pyongyang to engage in negotiations with Washington even on an equal footing. Not only does the U.S. have overwhelmingly stronger national power, but North Korea does not have any official diplomatic relations with most countries of the world, including the U.S. However, using its nuclear card, North Korea has endeavored, successfully so far, to establish bilateral talks with the U.S. (and without South Korea). The reason is that North Korea, quite rightly, believes that the establishment of bilateral relations with the U.S. toward the normalization of diplomatic ties between the two countries in the not too distant future is the biggest lever enabling the continuation of the Pyongyang regime, which would otherwise face a serious crisis.

South Korea has stated on every possible occasion that the entrenchment of the North-South dialogue is more important than the progress of talks between the U.S. and North Korea. Yet, while repeatedly admitting verbally that the promotion of the North-South dialogue is an essential factor for a complete settlement of the Korean problem, the U.S. has not changed its basic posture of placing importance on talks between the U.S. and North Korea

rather than the North-South dialogue, leaving South Korea out in the cold.

### And what of Japan?

A similar thing can be said concerning Japan's position. The basis of the U.S. policy toward North Korea's nuclear program is to put a freeze on and eliminate North Korea's present and future plans while leaving an ambiguity about its nuclear weapons development in the past. The prevention of North Korea's potential to challenge the worldwide nuclear nonproliferation regime is not only the basis for regional stability but also a guarantee of U.S. leadership in the post-cold-war world order. Although the nuclear nonproliferation regime is formally a nuclear oligopoly of five nations, in practice it represents a nuclear monopoly by the U.S. Therefore, it forms the most important basis of America's global leadership in the future.

From Japan's standpoint, however, North Korea's past nuclear arms development program is just as serious a problem as its future plans. Accordingly, it is desirable that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) should carry out a complete inspection of North Korea's nuclear facilities as early as possible. Despite this fact, however, in the same way that it has ignored South Korea's requests concerning the North-South dialogue, so the U.S. has been almost entirely indifferent to Japan's position concerning the postponement of the IAEA's full inspection. (In their Geneva accord in October 1994, the U.S. and North Korea agreed that the IAEA's complete inspection should take place by the time of the installation of one of two light-water reactors to be supplied to North Korea—that is, as late as 1998 or even 1999.)

Essentially Japan should express its dissatisfaction with this U.S. policy. However, worried that if it harps on about this matter the issue might progress to three-way talks among the U.S., North Korea, and South Korea, and Japan might be left behind, Japan has continued to meekly toe the U.S. line. I do not believe that U.S., South

Korean and Japanese policies toward North Korea are in harmony.

By making excessive concessions to North Korea, the U.S. is trying to maintain the worldwide nuclear nonproliferation regime while propping up the regime in Pyongyang. Japan and South Korea are not necessarily satisfied with this policy, but they do not have any cards for proposing an alternative to Washington, so they have no option but to walk in step with the U.S. I only hope that no situation arises in the future to bring this feeble discrepancy out into the open.

Let's go back to the fundamental question regarding North Korea.

Based on data and information now available, though not sufficient, it will be safe to assume that North Korean politics is in the terminal stage. There is no hope for that country to sustain itself on its own.

It seems the U.S. deems it possible to sustain the North Korean regime with outside help. When Washington struck a deal with Pyongyang in Geneva, it committed itself to providing Pyongyang with two light-water reactors by 2003. This means Washington guarantees the continuation of the current regime at least until that year.

Japan and South Korea identified with the U.S. policy and agreed to gradually increase assistance to North Korea.

Nevertheless, I cannot imagine North Korea will be able to see the arrival of the 21st century with the current regime still in power.

Just as it failed to sustain the South Vietnamese government for some 20 years, the U.S., in my judgment, will be unable to sustain North Korea beyond the latter half of the 1990s.

Stopping of assistance to North Korea could create various difficulties. Even so, Japan should frankly advise the U.S. that it is no longer possible to sustain the Pyongyang regime with outside help. ■

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