



The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus

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As Japan's trade with South Korea and China continues to surge, there is mounting evidence of growing mistrust of Japan among its near neighbors. A recent poll conducted by Japan's Yomiuri and South Korea's Hankook newspapers is indicative. The poll comes in the wake of angry South Korean responses to Japanese claims to Takeshima/Tokdo islands, Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's widely publicized Yasukuni Shrine visits, and the continuing controversy over Japanese textbook treatments of colonialism and war.]

The Korean boom in Japan continues and while it may help increase affinity toward South Korea among Japanese, it does not necessarily result in promotion of mutual trust between the neighboring countries.

According to results of a survey jointly conducted by The Yomiuri Shimbun and South Korean daily Hankook Ilbo, a record high 90 percent of South Korean respondents said they did not trust Japan. The survey found a rapidly growing gap in trust between citizens in Japan and South Korea.

There is also a gap in opinion between pollees in the two nations over North Korea and China.

The survey findings showed signs that Japanese-South Korean relations soured by a territorial dispute over Takeshima island could have impact on the situation in East Asia.

Between early- and mid-May, 1,880 Japanese and 1,000 South Koreans--both randomly selected and aged 20 and over--participated in the face-to-face interview survey.

Regarding the current state of bilateral relations, 60 percent of Japanese respondents gave positive answers, up 13 percentage points from the previous survey in 2002. But only 11 percent of South Korean pollees gave such answers, down 21 percentage points from the previous poll. The number of South Koreans who perceived bilateral ties negatively grew 22 percentage points to 89 percent--the worst figure over the past four surveys conducted jointly by the newspapers since 1995.

Asked about the factors contributing to deterioration in bilateral ties, the largest number of respondents--in both Japan and South Korea--who viewed ties negatively cited the Takeshima issue at 65 percent and 94 percent, respectively.

Fifty-nine percent of Japanese pollees said they trusted South Korea, up four percentage points from the previous poll while trust of Japan by South Korean pollees fell from 24 percent to 9 percent. Ninety percent of South Koreans said they did not trust Japan, 15 percentage points higher than in the previous survey.

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