

What Japan expects of Ambassador KWON Chulhyun

By OE Shinobu

Mr. KWON Chulhyun, South Korean Ambassador to Japan returned to post on August 5 after 3 weeks of recall in protest against the inclusion of the disputed Takeshima (Dokdo in Korean) islets in Japan's new educational guidelines for junior high social studies. On his return to post, he sparked controversy by stating that " nobody could say with confidence if we can make happen" a Japan-China-South Korea summit meeting which is scheduled this month in Tokyo. I quite doubt that a series of his recent remarks, such as his menacing allusion to the denial of Japan-Korea cooperation in the last Six-party Talks, or his reference to above summit meeting as if it is taken as hostages, are well-considered. Objectively speaking, South Korea's diplomatic relations with North Korea are at a deadlock and is not in a position to talk knowingly about "cooperation."

This first summit meeting among the three countries is "above" the Takeshima disputes, or in totally another dimension. If South Korea is trying to make a political capital of this meeting, odds are against her. In a rapidly decelerating world economy, South Korea is most likely to suffer a major blow without cooperation with Japan. It just so happens that the US Board on Geographic Names, which is an official body in US, had the indiscretion to backtrack its decision to change the status of Takeshima from "South Korean" to "nondesignated sovereignty" after protests from South Korea. There is a smoldering criticism in Japan against this move as "opportunist chops and changes."

This move, however in hindsight, turned out to be a momentum to placate the sentiment of South Korea, both public and private, and to allay the wave of criticism against Japan. We sincerely hope that Ambassador KWON takes the advantage of this chops and changes of the US as political windfall and aims to achieve for a dignified Japan-Korean relations.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. OE Shinobu, Professor of Edogawa University, which originally appeared on the BBS "Hyakka-Somei" of CEAC on August 11, 2008)