

June 28, 2012

Diplomatic Bluebook and South Korea's Protest

By SAKURADA Jun

According to an April 6 (Friday) article posted on Yomiuri Online, in protest against Japanese Foreign Minister Koichiro Gemba's introduction of the fiscal 2012 Diplomatic Bluebook's description of the disputed Takeshima islands ("known as Dokdo in South Korea") as Japanese territory in a cabinet meeting on the day, South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade announced on the same day its spokesman's statement declaring, "We deeply deplore Japan's unjustified claim. We will never approve any attempt against our territorial sovereignty." The statement also pointed out that if Japan claimed its sovereignty over the Dokdo islands on the basis of mistaken historical views, "future-oriented South Korea-Japan relations" would just end up as an empty slogan, strongly criticizing that Japan would not be able to fulfill responsible roles in the international community. The article also adds that the bluebook declares that the islands are undoubtedly within territory that is an inherent part of Japan both in reference to historical facts and in agreement with international law and that the Japanese government will continue its tough negotiations for a peaceful resolution of the dispute.

These responses from South Korea are quite the same as ever before. However, whatever way South Korea may respond, Japan's stance on its territorial sovereignty over the islands, the name of the Sea of Japan and the related historical views will never change and also must not change. Considering these circumstances, the dispute will persist for a long time as a chronic affliction between the two countries. Just as a "delicate and fragile" person can sometimes result in long life by striving to stay in good health, consistent keen recognition of the affliction will work well to prevent inertial and cozy relationships between Japan and South Korea from being formed. This is not a negative thing at all in itself.

South Korea used to be just a minor country to Japan both politically and economically in the past. In that situation, Japan looked down at South Korea "from above" and therefore treated the country as if it were soothing a "crying baby." That was

the way Japan reacted to South Korea when the two countries faced frictions involving different historical views and territorial disputes. Probably, this is why Japan's "reflection" does not look as such from the South Korean perspective. However, this is no longer the time for continuing such relationships. Now that South Korea has grown into a country with a level of power that it deserves, it is time for Japan to push for its own national interests without any hesitation from now onward. It is just like boxing with a grown-up contender for real, ending the approach of going easy on a child. The author has no concrete grounds to judge if South Korea will be able to stand that "real boxing fight." Japan has continued to play the game of international politics, including its relationship with South Korea, for more than half a decade with one hand tied up in terms of constitutional restraints, diplomatic personnel and budgets. If Japan is set free from these shackles, it will be pretty "interesting." South Korea has never experienced diplomacy with Japan as an "ordinary country."

The Yoshihiko Noda Cabinet has made "no serious mistake" at the diplomatic front so far. The diplomatic mistake during the Yukio Hatoyama administration was so serious that the Noda Cabinet's "ordinary diplomacy" may just seem more refreshing. The relaxation of the Three Principles on Arms Exports was a very good job. If the Liberal Democratic Party comes back in power, it will remove the aforementioned "shackles" one after another. The author has proposed that some people related to the LDP make prompt preparations for that.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Prof. SAKURADA Jun, Professor, Toyo Gakuen University, which originally appeared on the BBS "Hyakka-Somei" of CEAC on June 1, 2012.)