

Complex Transitions and Korea-Japan Relations in the Post 3.11 Era : Possibilities and Challenges

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The Great East Japan Earthquake of 3.11 produced multi-layered, multiple, and complex social-political transitions which have brought about both positive and negative effects for international relations and domestic political dynamics.

Three transitions have been identified in this speech: transnational transition; power transition; and identity transition. I am going to sort out positive and negative impacts that each transition has brought about in Korea-Japan relations.

<Transnational Transition: Liberalists>

3.11 provided a new momentum for rethinking contemporary civilization and the importance of transnational interconnectedness.

1. *Limits of human engineering*

The Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima disaster have revealed a combination of natural disaster and human mismanagement. In principle, it reawakened the limits of human political and social engineering in the face of huge natural forces.

2. *Globalized world and transnational network*

After 3.11, disaster relief has mainly been carried out by the Japanese themselves, but international society provided massive humanitarian assistance without expecting any return. This showed a power of transnational network

3. *Interconnected business and economy*

3.11 awarded a chance to rethink about interconnected social and economic life in the region and the world

⇒ ***Transnational transition produced positive momentum for Korea-Japan Relations.***

1. After 3.11, South Korean people wholeheartedly gave a helping hand to the Japanese people without any consideration of return and feedback. Civil society took an initiative of humanitarian assistance. It was regarded as a paradigm shift in Korea-Japan relations.
2. The earthquake provided a chance to realize how Japan and South Korea are interconnected as closest neighbor in terms of human network. After 3.11, Korean tourists refrained from traveling to Japan, which recorded 64 percent decrease in 2011 and bounced back only to 32 percent decrease compared to 2010.
3. Japanese corporations have found a new potential in a geographically close and economically vibrant neighbor, South Korea. We find increasing instances of large-scale direct investment in Korea by the Japanese firms. They are taking advantage of disaster-free land, cheap Korean won, low corporate tax, low electricity fees, well-trained labor, and FTA-abundant trade.
 - A. Large-scale investment out of purely economic reasons
4. Japan and South Korea come to have more clear consciousness about energy and

environmental cooperation not only at a regional level but also at a global level. Green growth strategy has become symbol of the new era.

< Power Transition: Realists >

The earthquake did not immediately change the balance of power in the region, but it molded an image that Japan would be in trouble in handling domestic hardship in the age of fiscal deficit while China would continue to grow. Power transition works negatively for Japan and positively for China and Korea. This made China's presence more visible and assertive in the region, especially in the maritime affairs. Chinese muscle training is on the upward hill. America's return to Asia, represented by pivot to Asia discourse and rebalancing debate, has been facilitated by 3.11.

Also, mired into the earthquake disaster relief, Japan took more inward orientation while curtailing its international activities. 'Lost decade' made Japanese eyes turn more to inside-Japan, but 3.11 propelled inward orientation more visibly. Budget cuts in global engagement activities through Japan Foundation and other organizations prove the case. Fiscal restraint made the investment in soft power diplomacy further for the purpose of concentrating on disaster relief and responding to increasing social welfare needs. On the other hand, China and Korea pushed forward outward-going orientation.

⇒ *Power transition produced dubious impacts for Korea-Japan relations.*

1. Increasing China's assertiveness and muscle training also gave strains in Korea-China relations. This expedites the demand for deeper alignment between Korea and Japan.
2. On the other hand, Japan's image of declining power and inward-orientation constrain smooth progress of Korea-Japan ties.
3. We find increasing presence of China in Korea, including massive number of tourists, while Japanese presence is generally on the decline.

<Identity Transition: Constructivists >

3.11 did not necessarily create it, but we find increasing instances of conservative backlash in the political domain. It reflects changing emotional and psychological perception among the ordinary Japanese.

1. 3.11 awarded a chance to test political leadership and their crisis management. Though the DPJ made its utmost efforts to deal with the crisis, it produced an image of weak and disabled government. This produced a backlash, which raised a voice for stronger government and stable leadership.
2. In the process of recovering from the disaster, expedience of the case made little room for designating who are responsible for mismanagement of the crisis, making the question of responsibility and accountability ambiguous. Disaster became everyone's fault again as it was the case for the defeat in the world war II.
3. Because of emotional emptiness after 3.11, political movement for resurrecting Japanese pride and glory emerged to the fore. Instead of fiscal compensation, Japanese society began looking for spiritual compensation to get away from lost confidence. It partly gave energy for right-wing movement.
4. Liberal social movements returned to Japan that advocate peace, human right, nuclear resistance, and etc. This in turn brought in conservative backlash in civil

society, who are principally against the re-rise of liberal social movement

⇒ *Identity transition produced negative and turbulent impacts on Korea-Japan Ties*

1. Comfort women issues
2. Territorial disputes
3. Textbook controversies
4. Yasukuni shrine

Practical wisdoms for renewed Japan in international society

It is time for Japan to rethink its national strategy and political soundness again. Regained confidence should be based on two principles stated below.

1. Preserving Liberal international order
 - Aligned for peace and stability
 - Active international engagement and freer transaction
 - Cooperative and collective security
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2. Transforming, not ending, Post War Regime
 - Politically flexible pragmatism for avoiding extremism: liberals within conservatism
 - Search for fiscal balance despite egalitarian social welfare distribution: administrative reform combined with compensation
 - Balancing US-Japan alliance and Asian diplomacy