

# South Koreans and Their Neighbors 2014

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**ASAN** POLL

THE ASAN INSTITUTE for POLICY STUDIES



## THE ASAN INSTITUTE for POLICY STUDIES

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The Asan Institute for Policy Studies is an independent, non-partisan think tank with the mandate to undertake policy-relevant research to foster domestic, regional, and international environments conducive to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, East Asia, and the world-at-large.

## PUBLIC OPINION STUDIES PROGRAM

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The Public Opinion Studies Program at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies conducts some of most widely cited public surveys in international relations and political science. Its regular polls produce reliable data for political leaders and the general public, creating more informed policy debates and decisions. The Program also publishes survey reports dealing with both international and domestic issues in Korea.

The full text of each survey report is available on the Asan Institute website ([www.asaninst.org](http://www.asaninst.org)) under the Publication-Public Opinion Survey section.

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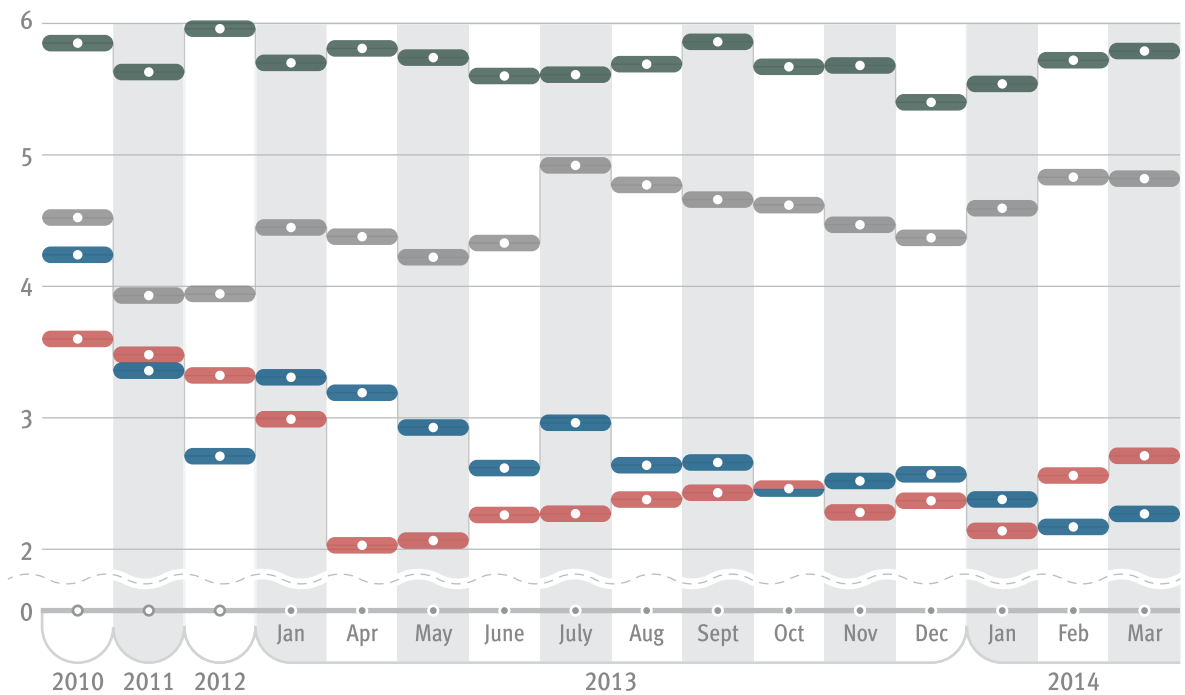
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## Country Favorability



Scale 0-10, Completely unfavorable = 0; Completely favorable = 10



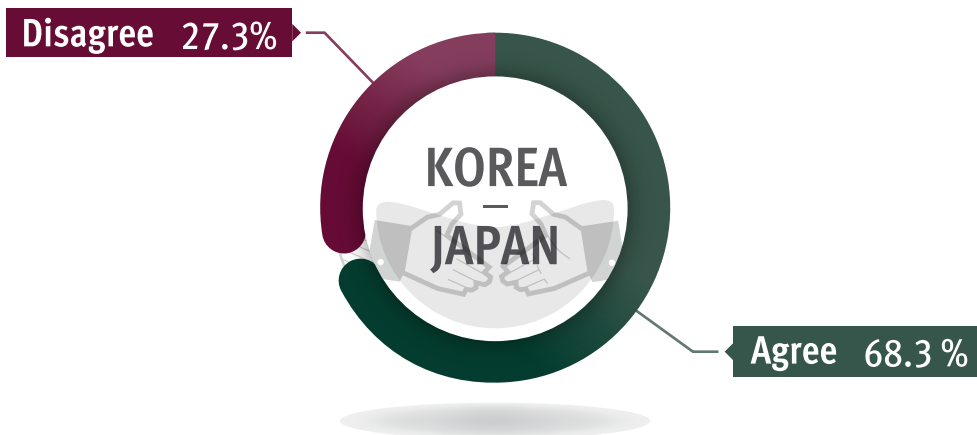


To establish country favorability, respondents are asked to rank each country on a scale of zero to ten, with zero representing “zero” favorability. The mean score is then calculated and presented as the favorability ranking. On this zero to ten scale the United States has consistently been ranked as the most favored nation by the South Korean public with very little variation. While China was viewed second most favorably, its ranking was more volatile. This suggests that views of China are not engrained and that ongoing developments, even if relatively minor, could push those attitudes in the corresponding direction. Japan finds its favorability below that of North Korea in March 2014, reflecting just how toxic the Korea-Japan relationship has become.

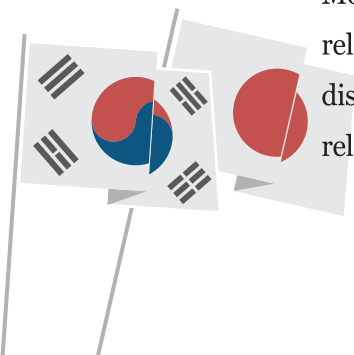


## Need to Improve Korea-Japan Relations

Feb 23~25, 2014

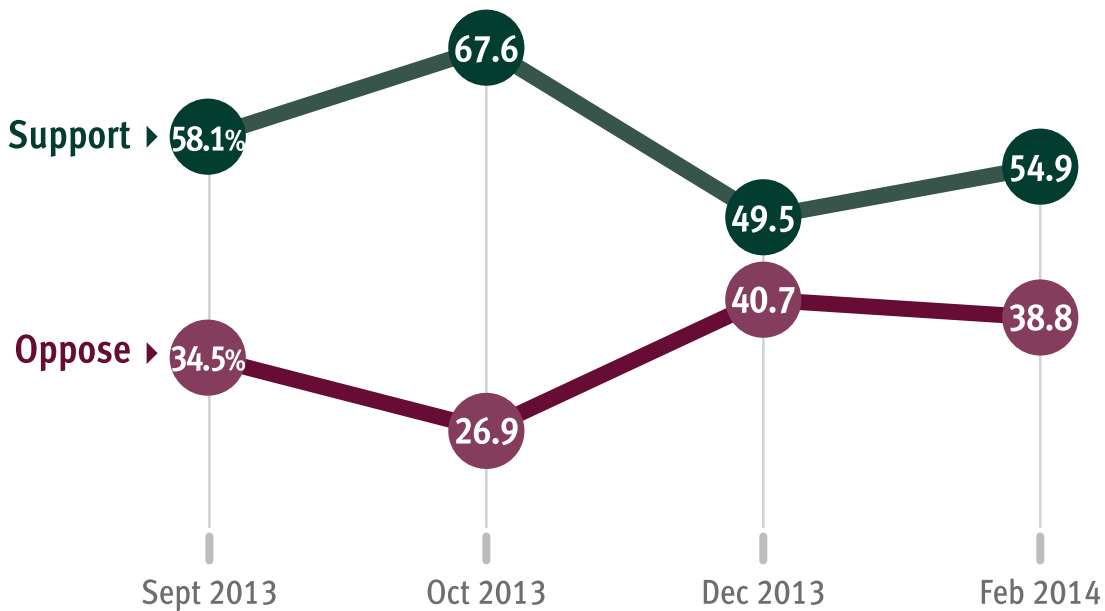


Despite the ongoing animosities between Korea and Japan, the South Korean public continues to clearly support improving the Korea-Japan relationship. More than two-thirds (68.3%) agreed that Korea-Japan relations should be improved, while less than one-third (27.3%) disagreed. Respondents were not asked about preconditions for relations to improve.





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**Korea-Japan Summit**  
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**S**upport for a Korea-Japan summit remained relatively strong in early 2014. In February 2014, 54.9% stated support for a summit to take place. This marked an increase in support for a summit following the Yasukuni visit in December 2013 when 49.5% were in support. However, both numbers are far off the high of 67.6% in October 2013. The Yasukuni visit has had a lasting effect on the Korean public's support for a potential summit.

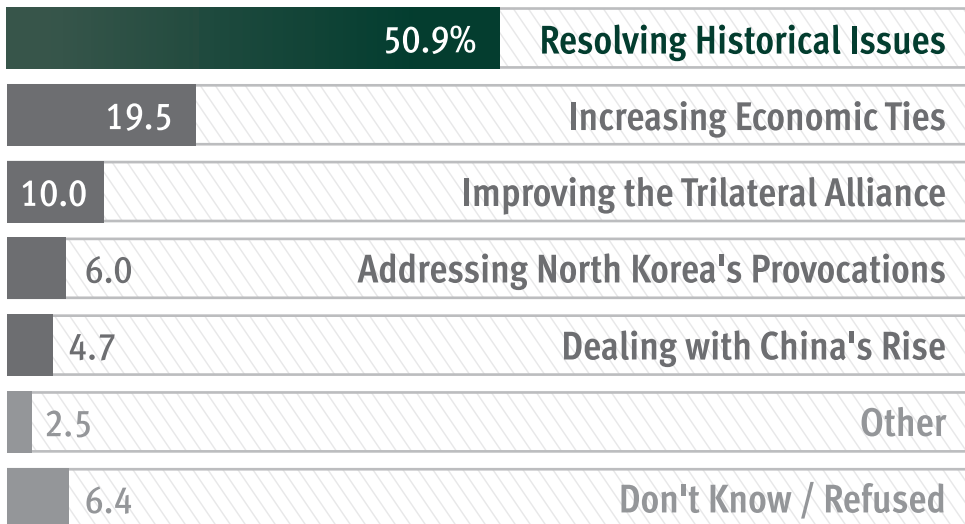


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## Reason for Supporting Korea-Japan Summit

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n=549 / Feb 23~25, 2014



If such a summit were to take place, a slim majority (50.9%) of the South Korean public expects President Park and Prime Minister Abe to take steps to resolve long standing historical issues. The most likely to be addressed is that of enforced sexual slaves, euphemistically known as comfort women. A distant second was the issue of increasing economic ties, cited by 19.5%.



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## Support for Korea-Japan Summit if Japan...

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Feb 23~25, 2014

### Continues Historical Provocations



### Continues to Claim Dokdo



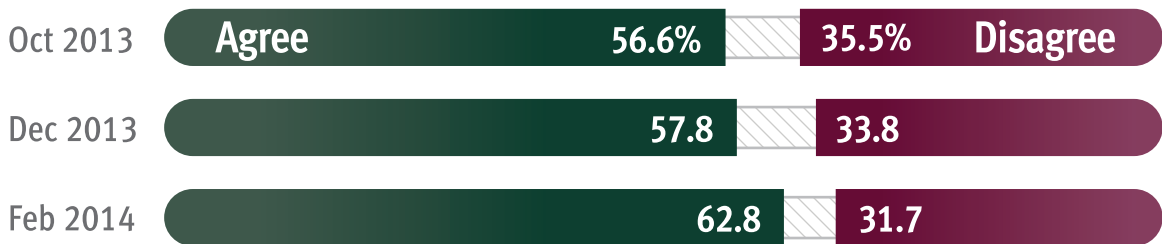
If Japan continues its historical provocations, the public is ambivalent on a Korea-Japan summit. Should Japan continue to lay claim to the Dokdo islets, 44.8% would continue to support a summit while 50.0% would oppose. If Japan continues its other historical provocations—which were not defined in the question—47.6% opposed holding a summit versus 46.6% that supported.



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## Proactive Role by President Park to Improve Korea-Japan Relations

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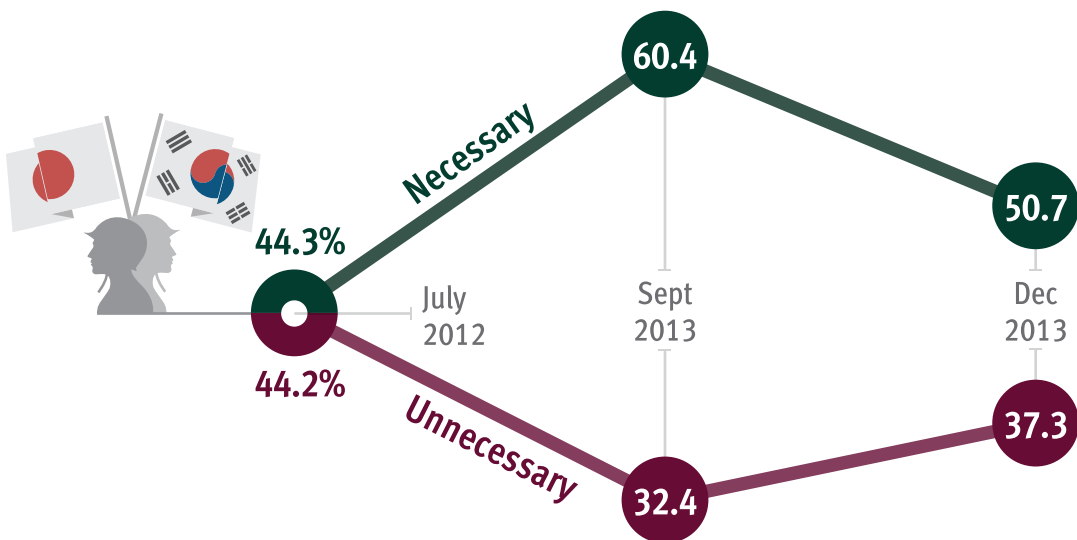


Sentiment remains strong for President Park to take a proactive role in improving relations between Korea and Japan. In February 2014 a clear majority (62.8%) was in favor of President Park taking on such a role. Even following the December 2013 Yasukuni visit by Prime Minister Abe 57.8% supported a proactive role by President Park. However, what that proactive role would look like is not yet clear.





## Necessity of GSOMIA with Japan

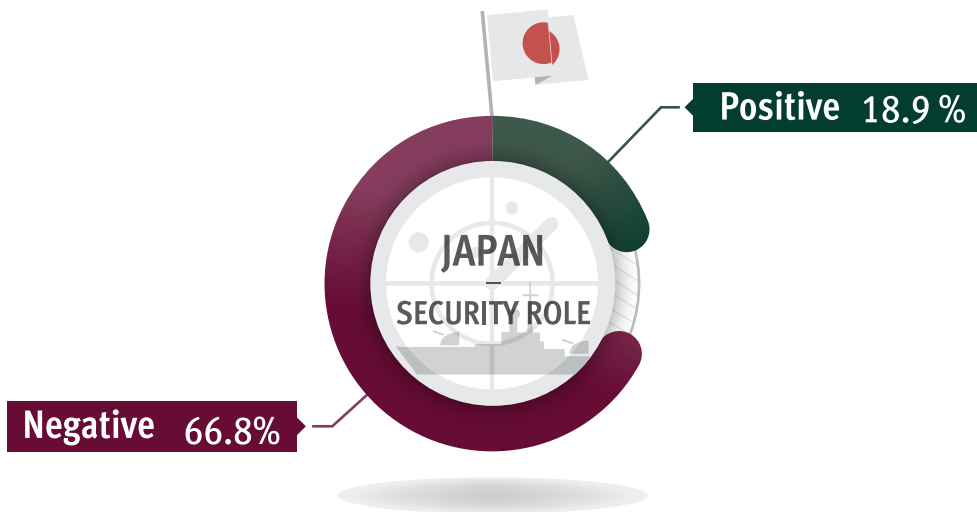


**G** SOMIA was nearly passed in July 2012 during the presidency of Lee Myung-bak before being scrapped at the last moment due to public backlash. While this backlash was widely interpreted as being caused by the fact that the agreement was with Japan, Asan polling data at the time revealed that the backlash was due to the perception that President Lee was attempting to enact the agreement with virtually no public debate. In September 2013, public support for GSOMIA was as high as 60.4%. Even following Mr. Abe's visit to Yasukuni in December, 50.7% saw the agreement as a necessity.



## Korean Opinion on Expansion of Japan's Security Role

Dec 29~31, 2013

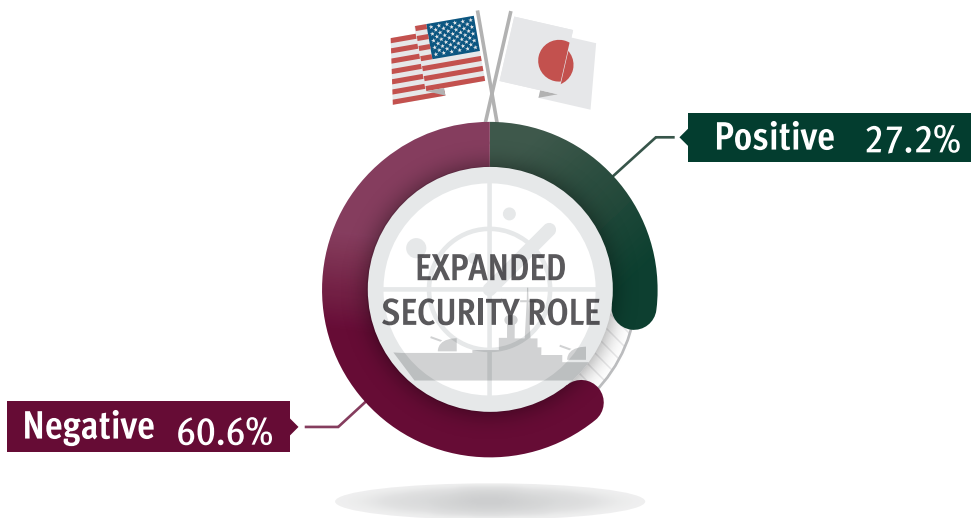


Under Mr. Abe, a recurring theme has been the expansion of Japan's security role in the region and around the world. The Korean public views such an expansion warily, with many expressing concern that it is the first step towards the remilitarization of Japan. In Korea, 66.8% disapproved of a growing role for Japan in security issues, with 18.9% in approval.



## Korean Opinion on US Support for Japan's Expanded Security Role

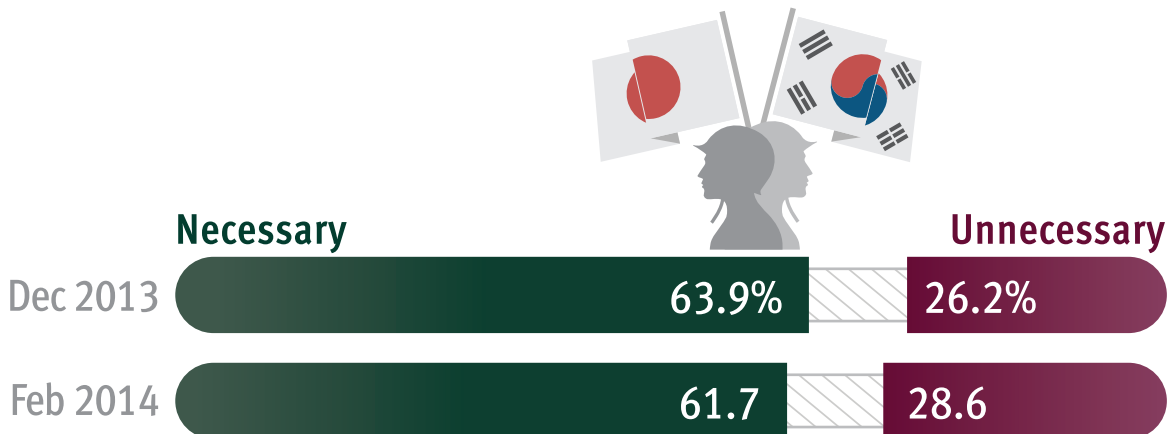
Feb 23~25, 2014



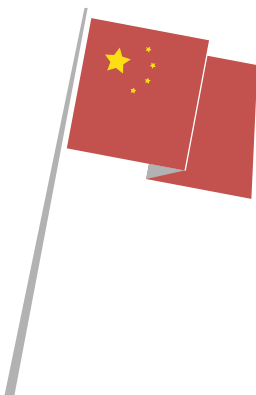
**T**he United States has supported Japan's move to expand its role in regional security, as most recently evidenced at the 2+2 meetings in October 2013. In Korea there is increasing worry about the nature of such an expansion and what it will mean for the region. While there is some worry about this expansion leading to a remilitarization of Japan, the more immediate concern is instability in the region. Thus, a clear majority (60.6%) disapprove of US support for Japan in expanding its role in regional and global security.



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**If China continues its rise, should Korea increase  
security cooperation with Japan?**  
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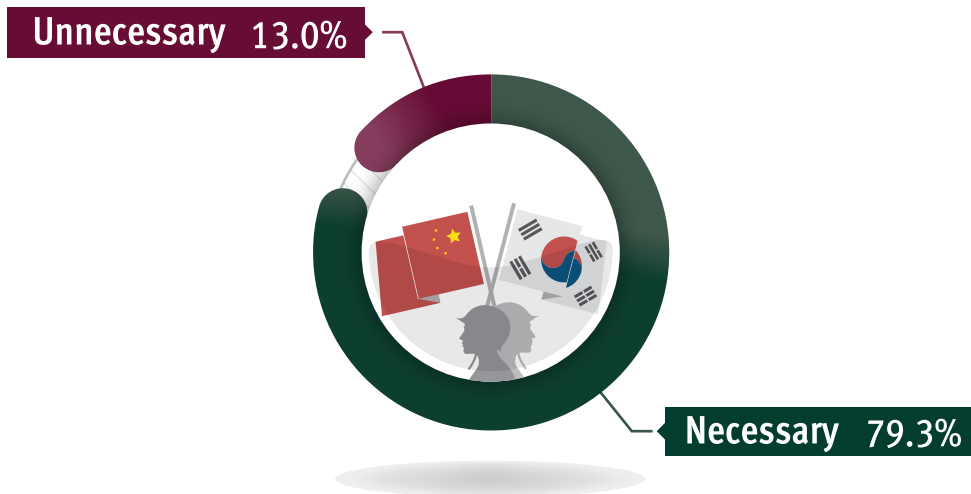
**D**espite improving views of China over the past year, the Korean public remains wary of its large neighbor. Perhaps nothing illustrates this caution better than the Korean public's willingness to cooperate with Japan on security should China continue its rise. While China is clearly seen—and rightly so—as South Korea's most important economic partner, the expansion of China's ADIZ and the double digit increases in China's defense spending has further spurred caution.



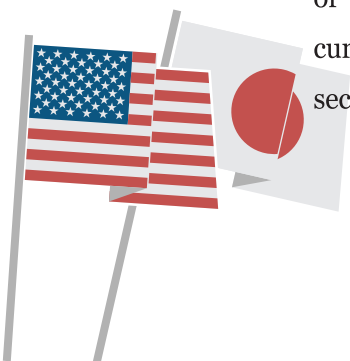


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**If US and Japan increase security cooperation,  
should Korea increase security cooperation with China?**  
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Feb 23~25, 2014



**D**espite the Korean public's wariness of China, it is not yet ready to rule out military cooperation with China should the United States and Japan continue to elevate their own military cooperation. Taken together with all of the other data, this helps to illustrate a Korean public currently taking a flexible, pragmatic approach to the uncertain security situation in the region.





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## Impediments to Improving Korea-Japan Relations

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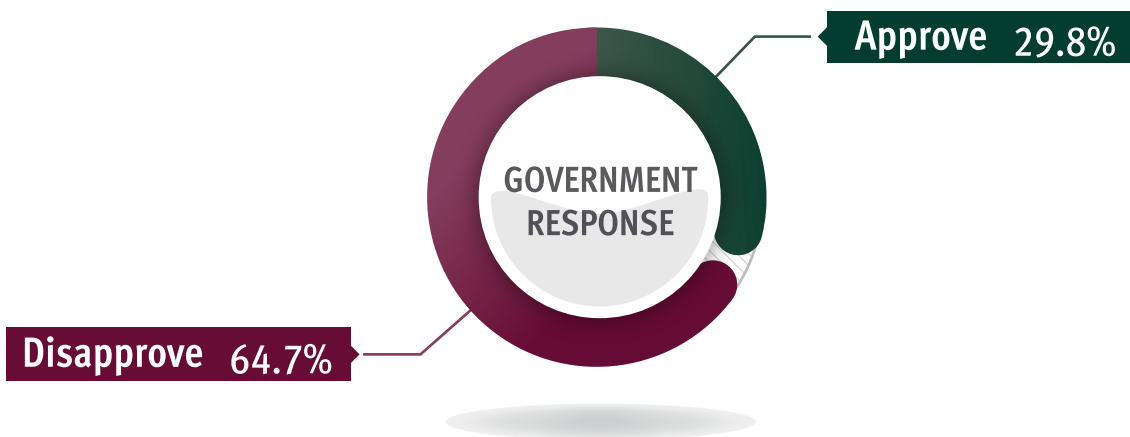


Dokdo remains the single most important issue when it comes to Korea-Japan relations. While that importance has declined overall since 2011, it still serves as the symbol of Korean independence from Japan. Repeated claims to Dokdo by Japan, by both its central government and by Shimane Prefecture's "Takeshima Day", should ensure that it remains so. However, there is also an increasing importance attached to the enforced sexual slavery—comfort women—of Koreans during Japan's imperial period. The increase of importance for this issue is especially strong among Korea's youth.



## Korean Government Response to Japan's Dokdo Claims

Feb 23~25, 2014

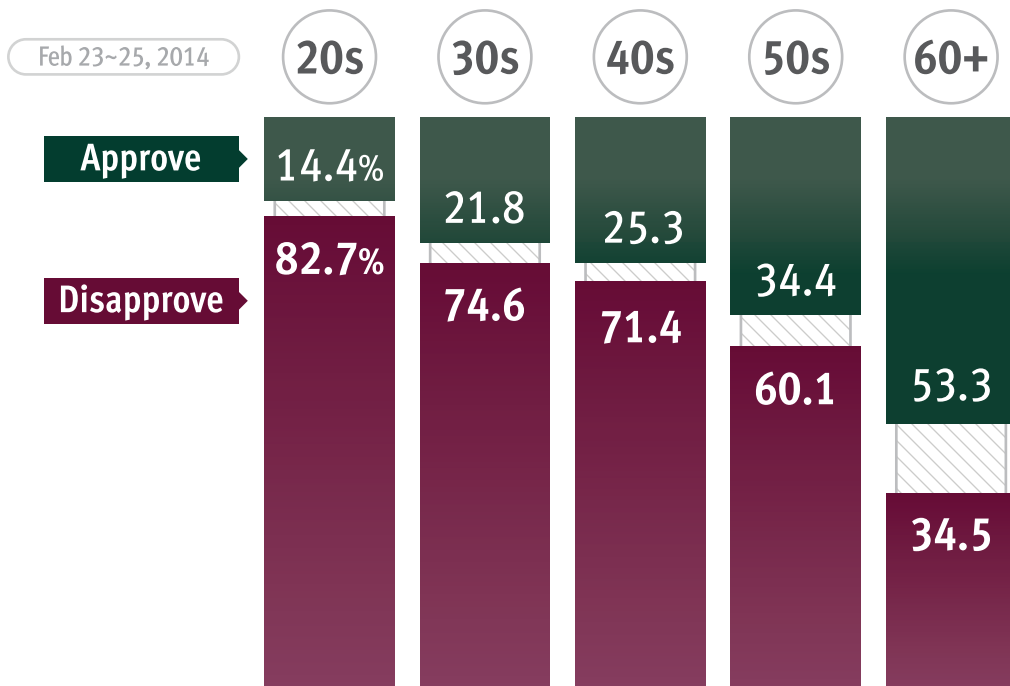


**T**he South Korean government has refuted Japan's claims to Dokdo, but the public thus far does not approve of the response overall. While just 29.8% approved of the government response, 64.7% disapproved. While respondents were not questioned about how the government should respond to these claims, it is likely that a majority who disapproved would like to see the Korean government take a harder-line approach in addressing the issue.

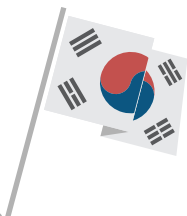




## Korean Government Response to Japan's Dokdo Claims: By Age



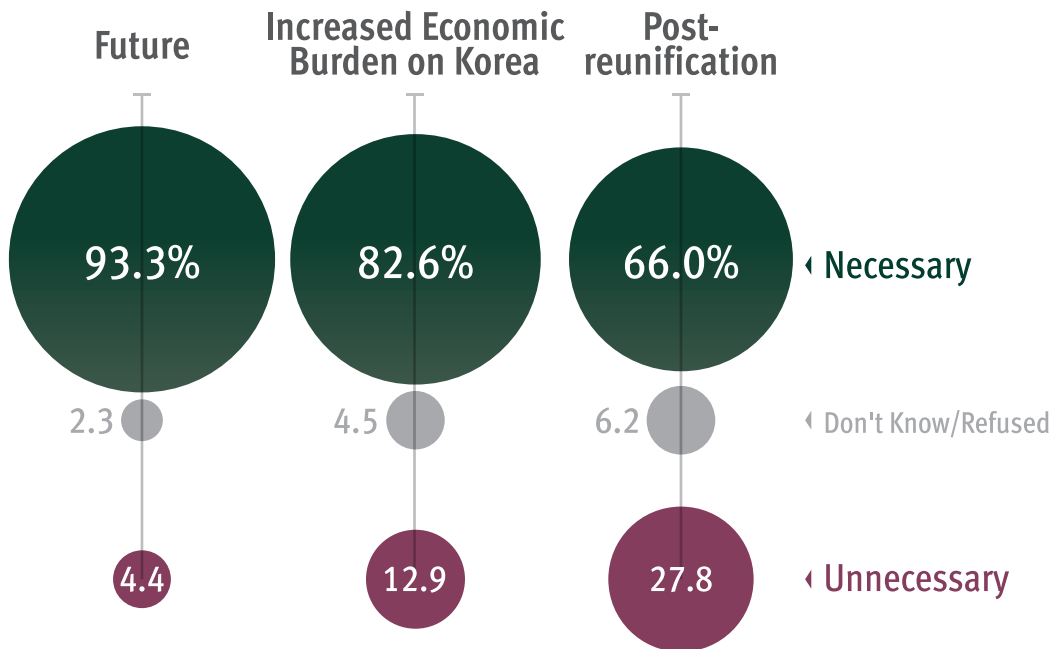
**K**orea's oldest cohort—those aged 60 and older—was the only age group among which a majority approved of the Korean government's response to Japan's claims to Dokdo. Those in their 20s were the most dissatisfied. If this sentiment holds over time—and those that disapprove do indeed want the Korean government to take a firmer stance—the Korean government may very well begin to take a harder line in dealing with Japan over its Dokdo claims. This will complicate efforts to seek improvements in the relationship.





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**Necessity of the Korea-US Alliance**  
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Mar 16~18, 2014



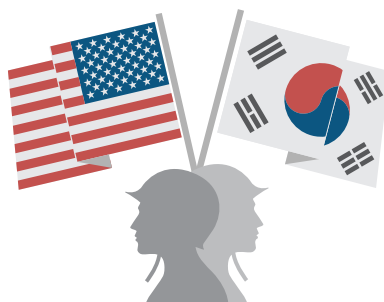
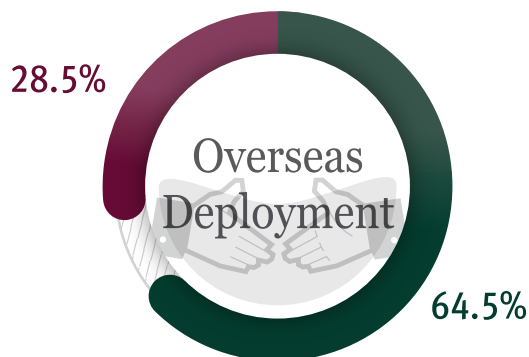
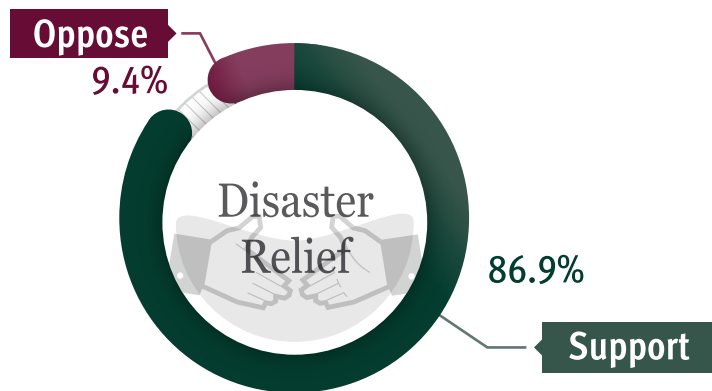


Positive assessments of the Korea-US alliance are robust with 93.3% citing the alliance as a necessity. These attitudes proved to be resilient. When asked if the alliance should be maintained despite increasing the economic burden placed on the Korean economy, 82.6% remained in favor. The data also suggest that the scope of the alliance is perceived to extend beyond the threat of North Korea. When asked to consider a post-reunification scenario, 66.0% favored maintaining the Korea-US alliance.



## Participation of Korean Troops at the Request of the United States

Mar 16~18, 2014



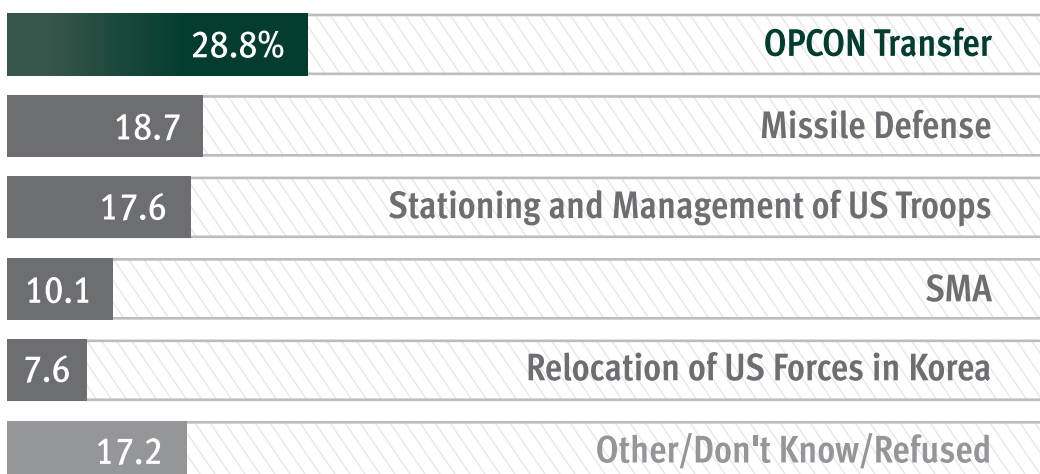


In line with the expanding role of the Korea-US alliance beyond the Korean Peninsula, the South Korean public largely favors the participation of Korean troops in overseas operations at the request of the United States. The strongest response was in favor of sending Korean troops to participate in disaster relief efforts, with 86.9% in support. When it came to more general overseas deployments, a smaller, but still clear majority of 64.5% were in favor. However, the questionnaire did not specify the nature of these overseas deployments. If those deployments are combat-oriented, public support would likely be significantly diminished.



## Most important issue for the Korea-US alliance

Mar 16~18, 2014

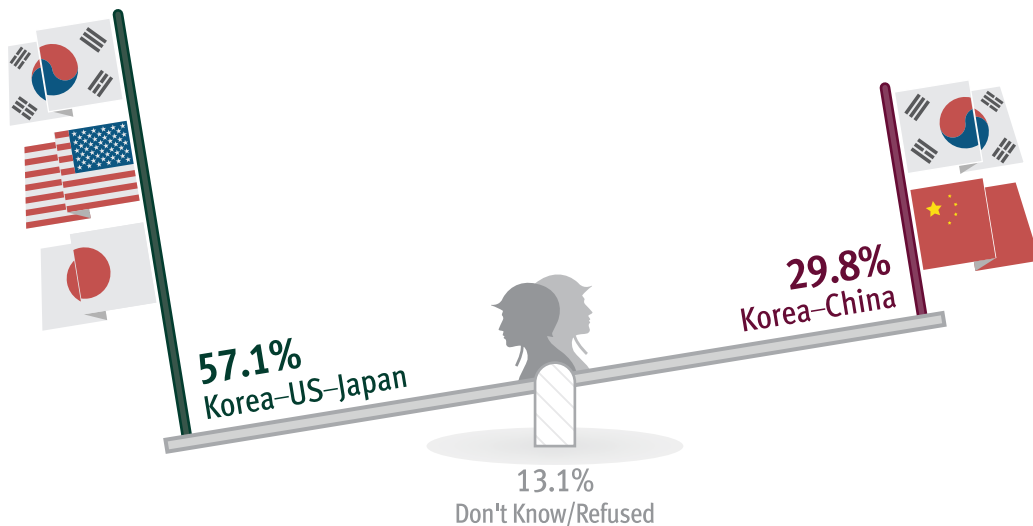


There are a number of issues to be dealt with that are internal to the alliance itself. The Korean public cited the transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) of Korean troops to Korean commanders as the most important, with 28.8% stating as such. However, issues related to US troops on the Korean Peninsula were nearly as equally cited. While 17.6% cited the stationing and management of US forces, a further 7.6% cited the rebasing of US troops on the Korean Peninsula. Missile defense remains another important issue, as cited by 18.7%, but one that other findings have shown the Korean public has little understanding of, and often contradictory attitudes towards.



## Strengthening Security Cooperation Preference

Mar 13~15, 2014



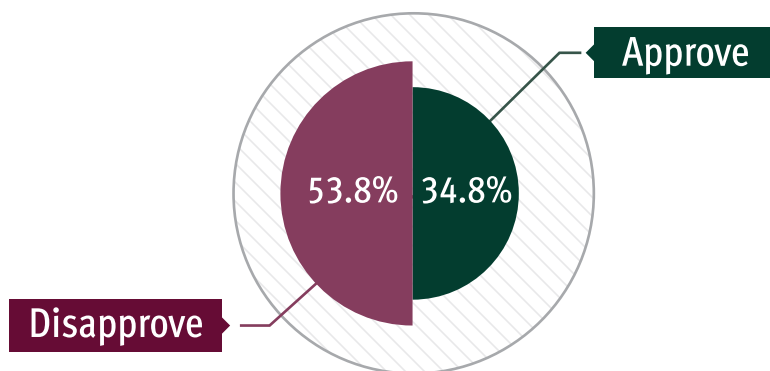
Despite the ongoing tensions with Japan, a majority (57.1%) of the South Korean public preferred strengthening security cooperation within the framework of the trilateral alliance of Korea, the United States, and Japan. Less than one-third (29.8%) stated a preference for strengthening security cooperation with China. This number will require close observation. An increase in those citing a preference to strengthen security cooperation with China may signal a longer-term structural change towards the trilateral alliance and the United States.



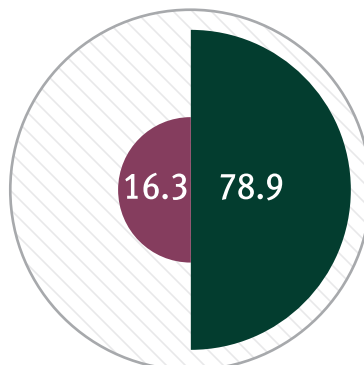
## US Role in Korea-Japan Relations

Mar 13~15, 2014

### US Response to Korea-Japan Tensions



### Strong Role for US in Improving Korea-Japan Relations







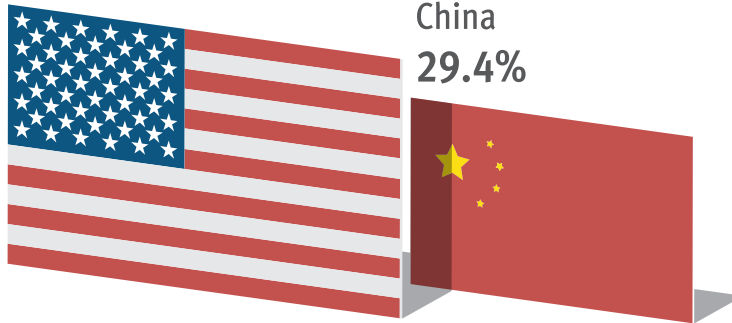
**T**here is wide agreement among the Korean public that the US should play a strong role in improving Korea-Japan relations, with 78.9% stating as such. Of course, the challenge then becomes what role the United States should assume in addressing the ongoing tensions. A majority disapproves of the US response thus far.



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**Country to Improve Cooperation with**  
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Mar 13~15, 2014

United States  
**56.9%**



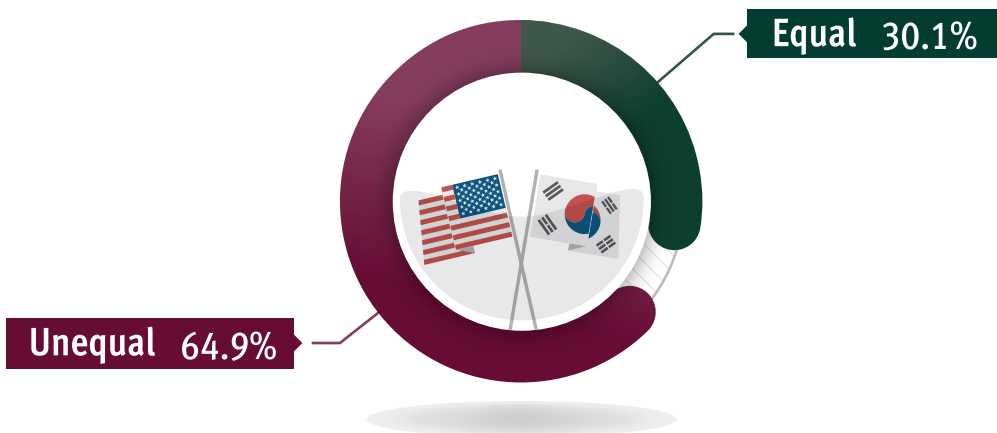
Don't Know/Refused **13.7%**

**I**n a broader measure of preferred cooperative partner, the Korean public continued to see the United States as the country it was most important to increase cooperation with. When presented as a binary option, a majority (56.9%) of the Korean public prefers improving cooperation with the United States versus 29.4% that cited China.



## Equality of Korea-US Relationship

Mar 16~18, 2014



**T**he relationship shared by Korea and the United States is seen as fundamentally unequal by nearly two-thirds (64.9%) of the Korean public. With Korea's growing confidence and influence on a range of global issues, there is broad sentiment that Korea needs a larger say in all aspects of the Korea-US relationship. The US will likely welcome a stronger voice by Korea, but the challenge will remain how to effectively communicate the increased influence of Korea within the relationship to the Korean public.



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## Influence on Global Affairs

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Mar 13~15, 2014



Current

United States

**64.7%**



China

**25.2%**



Future

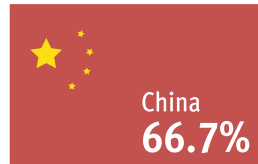
United States

**22.0%**



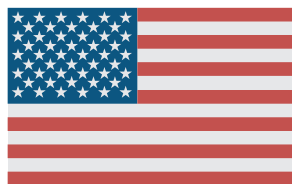
China

**66.7%**



POLITICAL

Current



United States

**81.8%**



China

**5.2%**

Future

United States

**44.8%**



China

**39.3%**





**T**here is broad sentiment in Korea that the United States is in decline relative to China in terms of both economic and political influence. A majority rated the United States as currently being the most economically (64.7%) and politically (81.8%) influential country in the world. However, a majority (66.7%) stated that China would be the most economically influential country in the future. While a plurality (44.8%) cited the United States as continuing to be the most politically influential country in the world in the future, 39.3% cited China.

For more details on polling methodology,  
please visit [\*\*www.asaninst.org/eng\*\*](http://www.asaninst.org/eng)





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