To Like and Like Not: Perceptions Among East Asian Neighbors

A snapshot of public opinion compiled by Tae-Seop Bahng, Senior Fellow at the Samsung Economic Research Institute. Key points of his analysis include:

- South Korea and Japan are more favorable to the US than China. This implies that both feel their “traditional alliance” with the US is important. South Korea, though, is becoming more favorable toward China than Japan. For Koreans, it is more important to develop relations with the US and China than strengthen the Korea-US-Japan trilateral alliance.

- US perceptions place Japan as more important than South Korea or China, and China prioritizes relations with South Korea over those with Japan. Accordingly, the US will continue to strengthen the US-Japan alliance in order to check the rise of China in East Asia. For its part, China will try to develop relations with Korea on the assumption that its rise will inevitably clash with US and Japanese interests.

- Periodic downturns in Sino-Japanese relations will continue. As security issues such as territorial disputes in the region remain unresolved, Japan will lean harder toward the US. This approach is not conducive for negotiations and resolution of various issues among Seoul, Beijing and Tokyo, including North Korea’s nuclear program.

### South Korean Opinions of the US, China and Japan

In a survey asking respondents’ opinions of 17 countries, far more were “favorable” to the US than China or Japan. European nations were top, and more were favorable to Brazil (69%) and India (34%) than China or Japan.

Source: East Asia Institute (May 23, 2013), Public Opinion Briefing No. 134.

In another survey asking South Koreans to name 10 countries that they liked from a list of more than 200, the highest percentage of votes went to the US. Japan was sixth and China was ninth.

Source: Gallup Report, South Korea (July 25, 2012).

The survey also asked for 10 countries that respondents disliked. The highest percentage of votes went to Japan; China was second and the US fourth.

### Chinese Opinions of South Korea, the US and Japan

Percentage of Chinese polled who said they had a favorable opinion:

- South Korea: 60.7%
- US: 40%
- Japan: 28.6%

### Japanese Opinions of South Korea, the US and China

Percentage of Japanese polled who said they had a favorable opinion:

- South Korea: 39.2%
- US: 69%
- China: 18%

### US Opinions of South Korea, China and Japan

Percentage of Americans polled who said they had a favorable opinion:

- South Korea: 65%
- China: 43%
- Japan: 81%