

Northeast Asian Trilateral Cooperation in the Globalizing World: How to Re-establish the Mutual Importance

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Abstract

This paper intends to explain the reasons why Japan, South Korea and China cannot have smooth relations in spite of the increase of mutual exchanges, through the analysis of the arguments on the trilateral summit meetings of these three countries since 1998.

In the analysis, this paper insists as follows;

Firstly, different from understandings of Japanese and South Korean media, today's globalization has an impact in Northeast Asia to decrease the mutual importance of neighbor countries. Secondly, however at the trilateral meetings of Japan, China and South Korea, the top leaders never talked about how to reconstruct the relations in this region directly. Thirdly, behind that, there were two premises those were shared by three governments. Namely, the first premise is that the disturbance in this region was just the result of mutual miscommunications of top leaders. This was actually an important reason for three countries to start the trilateral meetings in 1998. The second one is that the increasing of volume of mutual exchanges in this region automatically smoothens the relations, hence the summit meetings repeatedly discuss to prepare more events of exchanges.

However, these two premises seem to be betrayed by the reality in this region. In spite of dramatic increasing of chances for the top leaders to meet each other, their gap of perceptions is never narrowed. As mentioned, despite the mutual exchange in volume, the importance of the exchanges has been relativized by the increase of

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exchanges with other countries outside of Northeast Asia.

In conclusion, this paper emphasizes the needs of sincere efforts to re-establish the importance of neighbor relations.

Introduction

The year 2012 has seen an unprecedented decline in international relations in Northeast Asia. The catalyst for the decline in Japan–South Korea relations was South Korean President Lee Myun-bak’s sudden visit to the Takeshima Dokdo Islands on August 10. President Lee also made statements on August 13 that could be interpreted as a demand for a visit from Japan and an apology by the emperor. Furthermore, he made a statement to the effect that “Japan’s influence in the international sphere has decreased from its former extent”¹. A succession of nationalistic comments and actions made over a short period by South Korea’s former head of state greatly affected public opinion in Japan and South Korea, significantly heightening nationalistic sentiments in both countries.

Regarding Japan and China, the deterioration in their relations is particularly acute. The decline began with actions of one of Japan’s top regional politicians. On April 16, Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara, known for his nationalistic statements, suddenly announced at a press conference in Washington, D.C., that negotiations were in progress for the municipality of Tokyo to purchase the Senkaku Islands². Clearly, the Tokyo metropolitan government intended to establish “effective control” over the Senkaku Islands, ownership of which had essentially been a shelved issue between Japan and China. In an attempt to forestall any move by Tokyo, Japanese politicians, worried by the poor state of Japan–China relations, nationalized the islands. However, this action appeared to the Chinese government and public as a Japanese attempt to assert effective control over the Senkaku Islands and resulted in large-scale anti-Japan demonstrations across China. Some demonstrators lashed out violently at Japanese businesses, further exacerbating Japan–China relations.

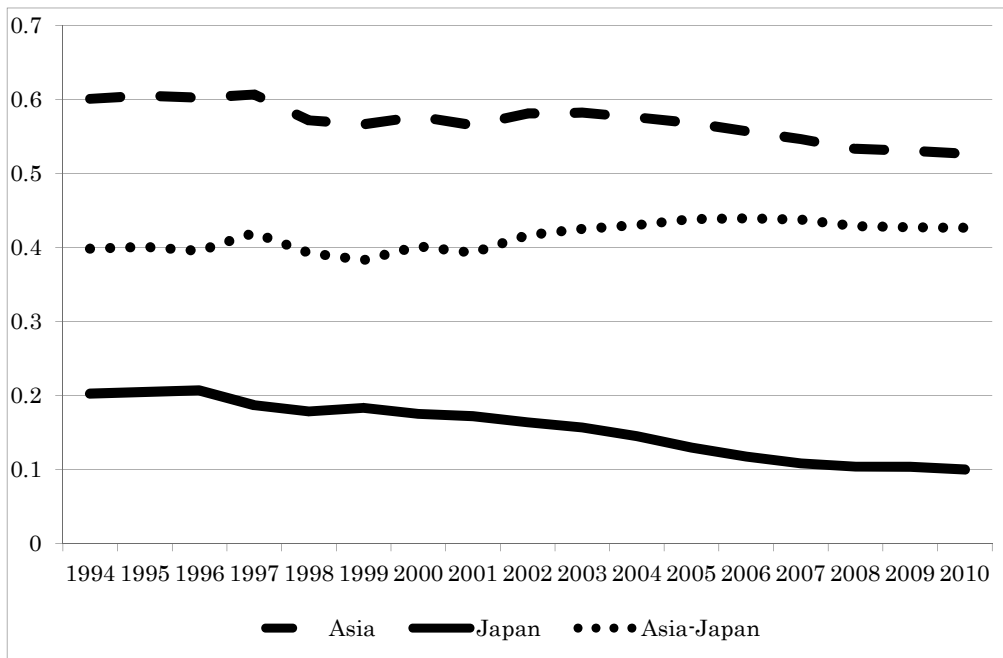
Chapter 1. Theoretical/Abstract Assumptions

Why does Northeast Asia find itself confronted with such a situation? The authors have previously written several articles on this point³; a summary of the general arguments is as follows. First, interdependence among Northeastern Asian countries has not strengthened at present. Although misunderstood at times, the quantitative increase in exchanges between these countries does not signify any direct increase in their sense of mutual importance or mutual respect. This is because, through the parallel progress of globalization, the increase in the number of exchanges among Northeast Asian countries is canceled out by a greater increase in exchanges with countries in other regions. Specifically, economic growth in China—such as its increased share of trade, capital, and human migration—has led to an increase in the significance of China to Japan and South Korea (Graphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)⁴, but not to a commensurate increase in the importance of these two countries to China. The biggest factor in the declining importance of Japan and South Korea to China is Chinese growth and globalization. The state of Japan–South Korea relations is even more serious. A variety of data indicates that Japan’s significance to South Korea is rapidly declining, as confirmed by President Lee Myun-bak’s statements.

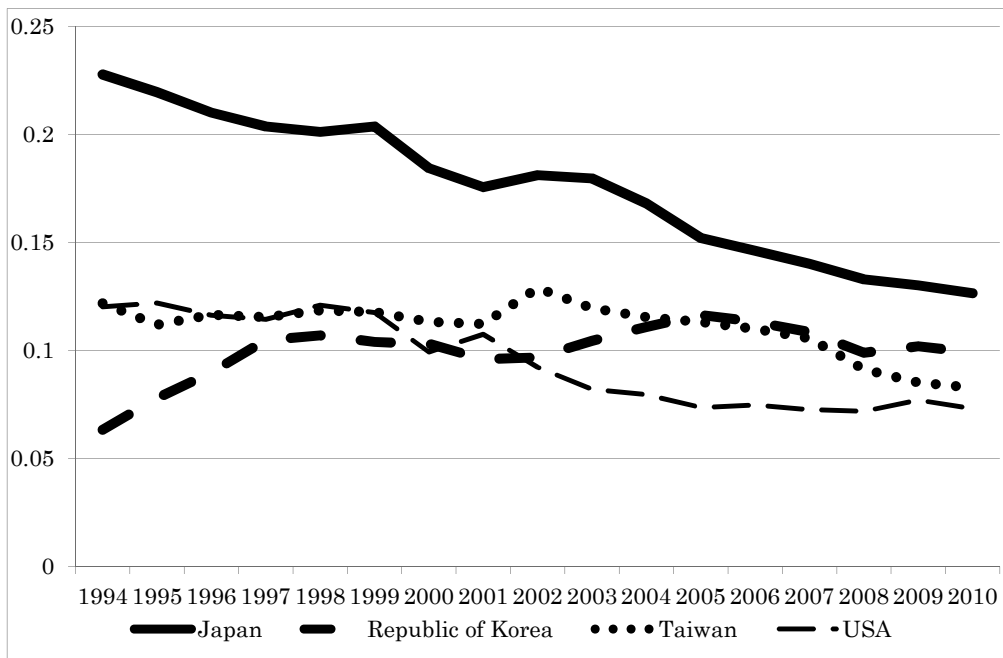
At the same time, despite the popularity in Japan of South Korea’s more colorful exports, such as music and television programs, South Korea’s economic significance to Japan has not improved much. In fact, the market share held by South Korean businesses, such as Samsung and LG Electronics, both of which are making rapid progress in global markets, has not increased substantially in Japan, Samsung’s smartphones and a few other exceptions notwithstanding. Thus, it is unlikely that there will be any associated positive social exchange⁵.

Theoretically, this decrease in mutual significance among Northeast Asian countries greatly increases the potential for latent territorial disputes and different interpretations of historical events to surface⁶. The reasons for this are the follows. Assume, for example, that there is some overriding profit to be gained from nations maintaining amicable relationships. In such a case, at least one group of actors would be likely to move to protect this profit by preventing territorial disputes and different interpretations of historical events from surfacing. However, the current reality of

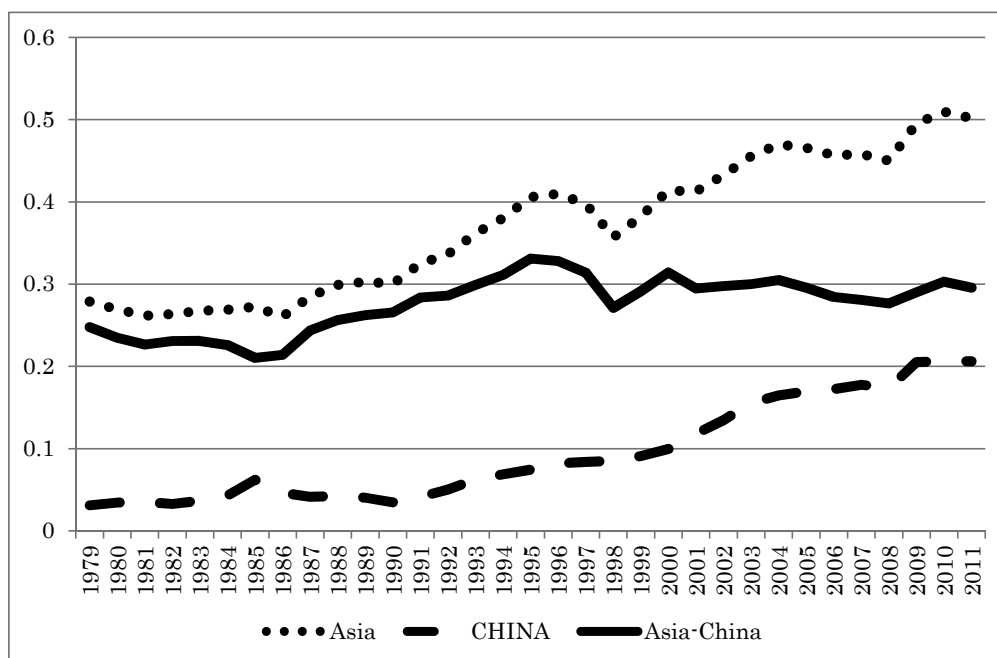
Graph 1: Share of Chinese Trade (1)



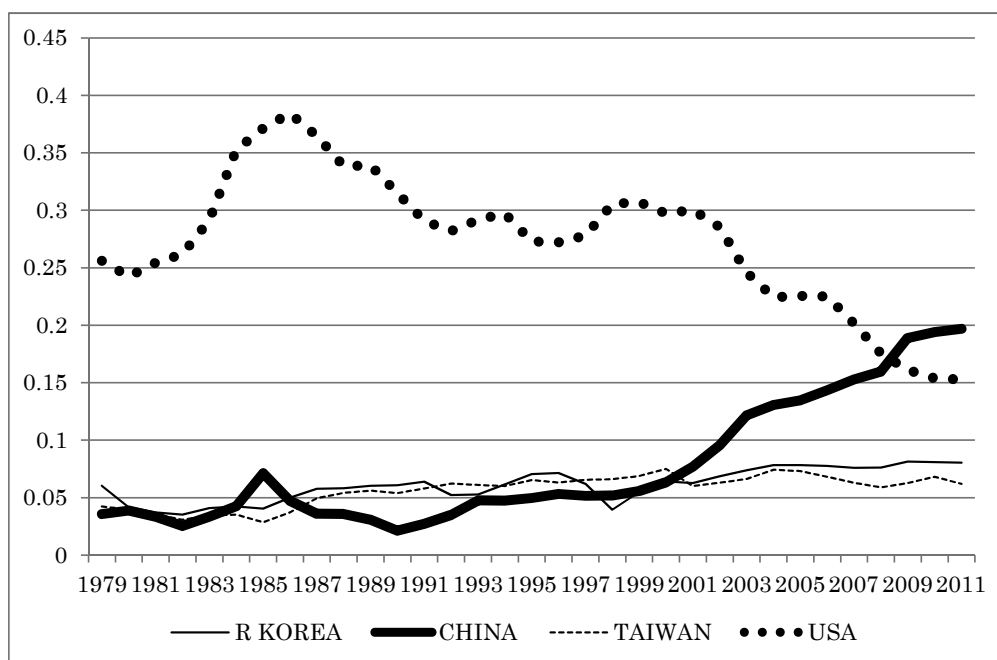
Graph 2: Share of Chinese Trade (2)



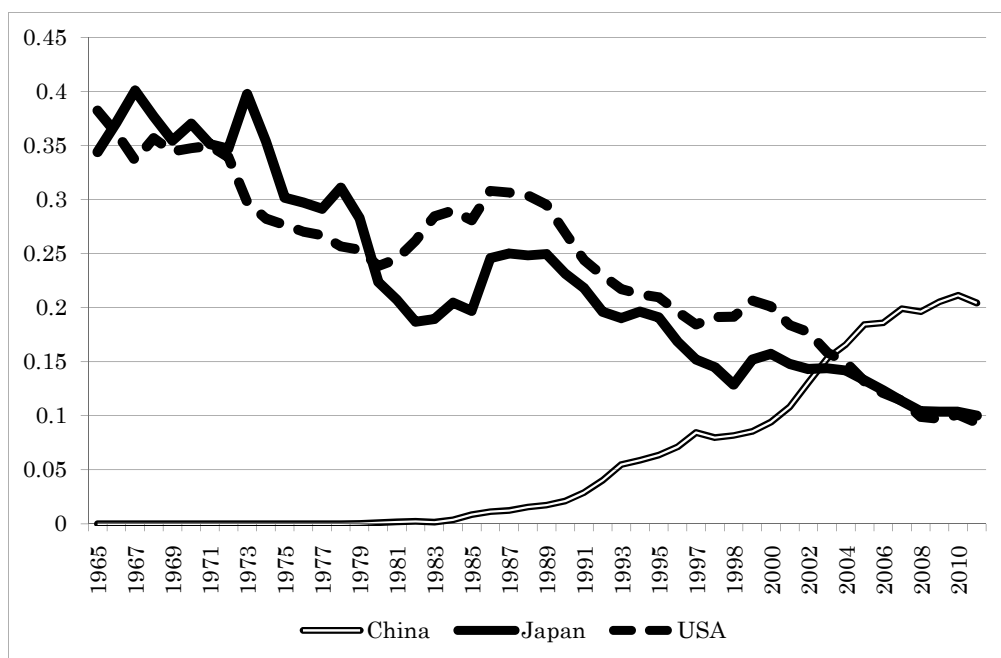
Graph 3: Share of Japanese Trade (1)



Graph 4: Share of Japanese Trade (2)



Graph 5: Share of South Korean Trade



Source: 経済産業省『通商白書 2005』, 経済産業省 2005.

Northeast Asia is very different, visible most characteristically in the developments between Japan and South Korea. Northeast Asia, at present, has a dearth of actors ready to improve or prevent further deterioration of the current conditions. What is noteworthy is that there has been no outstanding change in the status of territorial disputes and different interpretations of historical events. This means that the current recurring outbreaks surrounding these issues cannot be completely explained by the territorial disputes and historical interpretations themselves. Hence, in these frequent skirmishes, we can see, vividly, the impact of weaker interdependence in the region.

Second, political credibility has fallen in each country. In Japan and South Korea, for instance, there is a marked decrease in people's trust in the political regimes and parties⁷, which has led to a loss of political stability to a certain degree. This state of affairs has encouraged politicians in both countries to make increasingly nationalistic statements, in an attempt to garner more support. As mentioned above, behind the statements and actions of President Lee Myun-bak, who was facing the end of his term, and Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara, who was hinting at the creation of a new political

party, is the existence of populist conditions already prevalent in the two countries⁸.

In China, as well, dissatisfaction with government and society exists among the citizens, to a certain extent, as a backdrop to the anti-Japan protests. Similarly, this dissatisfaction is a manifestation of the country's questionable political credibility, although differing in its degree⁹.

The above points can be summarized as follows. Decreased mutual importance among countries in Northeast Asia today has resulted in circumstances that are more conducive to the eruption of territorial disputes and different interpretations of historical events. In addition, incentives exist for politicians to seize upon these circumstances and use them to direct nationalistic action.

Considering these points, the following are necessary for remedying the background circumstances, as well as the matter of territorial disputes and historical interpretations. First, an environment must be constructed that is conducive to the reaffirmation of mutual importance among Northeast Asian countries. It should also be kept in mind that, despite the existence of territorial disputes and different interpretations of historical events, the Northeast Asian countries have successfully coexisted in the past. The question that arises, therefore, is how to recreate the environment that existed once. Second, the new relationships of mutual importance constructed thus must be widely conveyed to the people of each country. If the people of Northeast Asia understand the necessity of conciliatory cooperation, it is likely that their politicians will act in accordance with their expectations.

Put another way, current conditions signify that various Northeast Asian countries have failed to construct a framework for the rediscovery of mutual importance, and recognition of that importance is not filtering down to the people of these countries. What, then, have the Northeast Asian countries done in concrete terms to address this state of affairs? The next chapter will take a look at recent measures taken by different Northeast Asian countries.

Chapter 2. The Progress of Japan–China–South Korea Summit Meetings

The following chapter focuses on the discussions held at trilateral summit meetings involving Japan, China, and South Korea¹⁰. There are several reasons for choosing the

summit meetings in this regard. First, the discussions covered in these meetings are significantly comprehensive; thus, they provide an overall view of how the Northeast Asian countries view the current state of regional affairs and how they have reacted to it. Second, these summit meetings are held regularly. As will be noted later, the Japan–China–South Korea Trilateral Summits have used the ASEAN+3 meetings since 1998, and other meetings, which carried the only slightly different title of “Japan–China–South Korea Summits”, since 2007, to convene nearly every other year.

In other words, we use the subjects of the discussions at the summit meetings to gain insight into how the three countries—Japan, China, and South Korea—have changed their stances and responses regarding regional matters.

The ASEAN+3 conference in Manila in November 1998 was the first occasion for a Japan–China–South Korea summit¹¹. Two broad matters shaped its background. The first was the aftermath of the Asian currency crisis, which had erupted the previous year. This crisis, which spread from Southeastern to Northern Asia, temporarily emphasized Japan as the only economic giant in the area, spurring both China and South Korea to seek better relations with the nation. The second matter was the extremely favorable relations that existed at that time among Japan, China, and South Korea. The most representative examples of this amity were the fisheries agreements that Japan signed with both South Korea and China¹². Although difficult to imagine today, these agreements established temporary fishing zones between Takeshima Islands and the Senkaku Islands, as agreed to by Japan and each of the two other parties, and succeeded in putting the simmering territorial disputes on hold for the time being. Avoiding the territorial disputes facilitated cooperation among the three countries, leading the way to initiate the subsequent summits.

The Japan–China–South Korea discussions, held at the ASEAN+3 summits, would become regular events. However, these formal discussions necessarily and temporarily were suspended when, in 2005, relations between Japan and South Korea worsened, following the Takeshima Islands dispute¹³. A similar decline was witnessed in Japan–China relations, due to the disagreement over the content of history textbooks and the possible appointment of Japan as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council¹⁴. However, the discussions were reinstituted in their original form in 2007, when two meetings were held, with further meetings in 2010 and 2011.

Coincidental with the tense relationships of 2005 was a desire to shift the summit discussions to a new format. Consequently, from being an addendum to ASEAN+3 summits, the talks evolved into stand-alone international summit gatherings. The first such meeting took place in December 2008 in Fukuoka, Japan. At this meeting, a joint statement regarding partnership among the three countries was signed, and intentions were expressed to strengthen future cooperation among the three countries under principles respecting openness, transparency, mutual trust and benefit, and cultural diversity. Thereafter, the stand-alone summits were regularly convened, hosted in rotation and continuing through to the present.

Chapter 3. Discussions Held at the Summits

What, then, were the specific points of discussion during these summit talks? Here I want to analyze them based on documents from Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Regarding these documents, it is particularly noteworthy that subjects of the discussions held at these meetings can be divided into two main categories: discussions that relate only to Japan, China, and South Korea; and discussions that extend beyond Northeast Asia and the three parties and, therefore, are relevant at the global level. In other words, the implications of the summit talks among Japan, China, and South Korea were not limited to Northeast Asia.

Each of these two main categories can be further divided into the following subcategories: The first, it goes without saying, comprises economic issues. Discussions regarding economic matters within the first main category centered on such topics as investment and free trade agreements, while those in the second and globally relevant main category included issues relating to the changing state of the world economy. Within the subcategory of economic issues, the most focused-upon item was related to the May 2012 investment agreement among Japan, China, and South Korea.

The second subcategory contains topics related to environmental issues. Within the first main category, discussions of environmental issues included countermeasures to address the problem of yellow sands, which is of much concern to South Korea, and drifting garbage in the Sea of Japan. Within the second main category, discussions mainly encompassed global environmental problems, with global warming, in particular,

coming up numerous times.

The third subcategory is related to human and social exchange. Discussions in this area fell almost entirely within the first main category. For example, there was major focus on promoting an exchange program in 2002, which was declared the Year of Japan–China–South Korea Exchange. Discussions then expanded to encompass system planning, in order to initiate concrete exchange projects. One such project was the Campus Asia Program, implemented in 2011, which was based on joint discussions that had commenced in 2009. In addition, organizational efforts were made to improve mutual cooperation among Japan, China, and South Korea, with an agreement being signed in 2010 to establish a Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat¹⁵. The secretariat was officially opened in Seoul in September 2011.

The fourth subcategory includes problems surrounding national security. Discussions that fell within the first main category primarily focused on issues with North Korea and rarely shifted beyond that point. National security discussions within the second main category were diverse and, responding to current events, ranged from anti-terrorism matters and Iraq-related issues to the question of United Nations reforms.

In the final subcategory are topics related to disaster prevention. Similar to those in the third subcategory, discussions around disaster prevention were limited to the first major category. They were prompted by the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake, and they continue to be in the spotlight in the wake of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and the ensuing Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Reactor incident.

Chapter 4. Analysis and Outcomes

What, then, were the concrete outcomes of the discussions at these summits for Japanese–Chinese–South Korean relations?

The first and most obvious is the fact that the summit talks, held in conjunction with ASEAN+3, from 1998 to 2007, have not yielded major results. There are several reasons for this. From the beginning, talks held under this format were intended more to facilitate mutual understanding among the three countries leaders than to produce specific results. In particular, on the first three occasions, the talks were held over

breakfast and were under severe time constraints that did not even allow for matters such as the drafting of joint declarations. At the fourth meeting, the format changed to that of a conference, and there was a gradual shift to talks with more substance: the sixth meeting produced a "Strategy for Japan-China-South Korea Trilateral Cooperation," and the seventh meeting yielded a "Joint Press Release." At this stage, the summit talks managed to affirm the directionality of the three participating countries, even though they still did not yield any concrete results.

The Japan-China-South Korea trilateral summits began to have significant meaning as a true "conference" only after the stand-alone summit format was adopted in 2008. The first concrete result under this format was the Japan-China-South Korea Action Plan, which would act as a specific roadmap for the future course of discussions. Although the summits would continue in this manner without any major results through 2009, 2010 witnessed concrete progress with the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the formation of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat mentioned above. Moreover, a Japan-China-South Korea Joint Statement on Cooperation Standards and a Japan-China-South Korea Joint Statement on Strengthening Cooperative Scientific Innovation were issued, functioning as bridges to new sets of goals.

The meetings were proceeding in this manner when Japan faced an unprecedented earthquake in 2011, immediately followed by the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Reactor incident. This meant that the next summit talks commenced under extraordinary circumstances and ended up adopting statements on "Nuclear Energy Safety Cooperation," "Cooperation toward Growth in Sustainable Energy through the Promotion of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency," and "Disaster Prevention Cooperation."

Two points are particularly salient. First, these talks produced extremely limited concrete results, and second, the only outcome that had a broad impact on the people of the three countries was the conclusion of a practical investment agreement. In other words, most discussions provided no more than a vague description of the direction of cooperation among the three nations, and nothing that would directly affect the citizens. Moreover, apart from the investment agreement, concrete outcomes, such as the Campus Asia Program and establishment of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat, involved, at least in the initial stages, only a very small audience. Thus, the effects of

the discussions were almost entirely unknown to the citizens of the three nations.

Chapter 5. Effects on Mutual Cooperation among Japan, China, and South Korea

When viewed thus, it can be seen that the Japan–China–South Korea summits and the resultant cooperation, up to this point, have not conveyed to the people of these countries the mutual importance of these nations. To some extent, this outcome was the only one that could be expected. Since the first meeting in 1998, the primary goal of the summits was to bring the three parties leaders together face to face on a regular basis and facilitate mutual understanding, while the attainment of specific outcomes has been a distant secondary goal¹⁶. In other words, the entire project focused on the act of holding trilateral summits and instigating cooperative efforts, rather than on any substantial outcome. The fact that the summit meetings had become regular occurrences was leveraged by the governments to satisfy public opinion. In fact, when problems of historical interpretation were exacerbated, separate two-party meetings were instituted specifically to propose solutions for the problem.

However, such factors do not necessarily ensure the continuation of this situation when there are no concrete results. Similar to the manner in which summit meetings of the developed countries, the G7 summits, expanded to become twenty-country regional summit meetings, the G20 summits, opportunities for the heads of state of Japan, China, and South Korea to meet together, for example, at G20 or APEC events, have dramatically increased, compared to previous years. Put simply, just continuing to deepen mutual familiarity and communicate intentions will reduce the necessity for holding separately organized summit talks.

In addition, most issues taken up at the trilateral summits—particularly those in the first main category, which extend across boundaries in Northeast Asia—are issues that are similarly discussed at global, Asian, and pan-Pacific international meetings. In other words, the majority of these issues do not necessarily require separate, individual summit meetings. Indeed, most problems that fall within the first main category include topics that lie beyond what can be adequately addressed by Japan, China, and South Korea alone, and, therefore, may be described as issues that do not greatly necessitate discussion under the trilateral cooperative framework.

In the light of this, the experiment in cooperation among Japan, China, and South Korea, centering on the trilateral summits, appears now to face a significant turning point. The main problem is that the present task of trilateral cooperation lacks clarity as to which issues should be discussed. The main issues facing the three national leaders to date—territorial disputes and different perceptions of historical events—have not been adopted, even once, as significant topics of summit discussions. The reason probably lies in the fact that the goal of the summits until now has been simply to hold summits.

In other words, the trilateral summits, to date, have existed to create trust and to deepen mutual understanding among the leadership elite of the three countries, and not to actively build cooperative systems by means of mutual relationships or to create solutions to pressing problems. Therefore, the few results derived from the meetings have not appealed to the citizens of these nations, and the governments have not tried to present them as such. The evidence for this lies, more than anywhere else, in the fact that the duties of the secretariat that was created by the three countries are limited to (1) providing support to organize discussions among the countries, (2) organizing the means of contact between individuals related to the discussions, (3) seeking out and illuminating cooperative projects for the three countries, (4) assessing and reporting on these projects, and (5) monitoring cooperative efforts among the countries¹⁷. In short, official duties of the secretariat are confined to supporting the exchanges among the three governments and cannot be construed in terms of any responsibility to appeal to the citizens of these countries.

Therefore, an assessment can be made that the summit talks and the resultant cooperative efforts have not been concerned with reaffirming mutual importance among the peoples of the three nations.

Chapter 6. Globalization and Cooperation in the Northeast Asia Region

Ultimately, the summits, to date, have been aimed at promoting harmonious exchange among the nations' governments, with no clear understanding of the impact this should have on the citizens of each country. This does not mean, of course, that the talks were conducted without any consideration for the sentiments of the people. The likely scenario is that each government felt compelled to harmonize economic, human,

and social exchange, and predicted that if this prompted expansion of overall exchange among the citizens of the three countries, then mutual understanding would increase, and foreign diplomacy associated with it would improve of its own accord.

However, as has already been argued, at least in relation to recent decades, this prediction was overly optimistic. In addition, it is impossible to show, from macro data, that quantitative increases in exchanges among the three nations has promoted mutual understanding or facilitated smooth foreign diplomacy. In fact, it is clear that inter-country sentiment is becoming more negative, and we can no longer assume an entirely optimistic forecast.

What types of measures then, are required to improve the situation in Northeast Asia? The first and most important consideration relates not to the governing elite of each country, but rather, to their public opinions. The importance of public opinion of politics has increased each year, not only for Japan and South Korea, which have adopted Western forms of democracy, but also for China¹⁸. The nationalism-inducing issues of territorial disputes and different perceptions of historical events have been deliberated on by governments without due consideration given to public opinion. This, in turn, has led to increasing trouble regarding decision making.

The second consideration, which is related to current globalization trends, is that the creation of systems for economic and human exchange does not necessarily boost economic and social importance among neighboring nations. This becomes evident if the example of the EU and its integrated marketplace is examined. As Graph 6 shows, trade within the EU after 1994 has been declining despite market integration, indicating that it will be difficult to reverse the trend of inevitable decline in the mutual importance of directly neighboring nations (which is caused by globalization) solely by further market integration.

How, then, should Japan, China, and South Korea endeavor to rebuild the sense of mutual importance, which will also be readily understood by their respective populations? What must be noted here is that, although globalization is the most important factor in the present decrease of mutual importance among Northeast Asian countries, the effects of globalization on the mutual relations of countries or countries in different geographical situations are not uniform.

Examples include, on the one hand, those of financial globalization. In conjunction

Graph 6: Inter-regional Export Shares



Source: 経済産業省『通商白書 2005』, 経済産業省 2005.

with its impact on the parallel spread of an information society, financial globalization has the effect of broadly leveling out the costs of exchange between countries, irrespective of their geographical differences. For example, in the case of payment transactions in yen and yuan, there is now no substantial difference in the accompanying costs, whether the exchange is carried out in Tokyo or New York. Of course, for a more extreme example, there is globalization of information. With the present proliferation of the Internet, commensurate costs of information distribution have fallen to near-zero levels, bearing little relation to country-level geographical variation.

By contrast, the cost of goods transportation still varies enormously, as it always has, according to the geography of each country. This cost becomes even greater in the case of human transportation. Even with advances in aviation technology, the costs of moving people within Northeast Asia are actually greater than the comparable costs, for example, of moving people between Northeast Asia and Europe or North America. Furthermore, the costs associated with movement of people are not limited to

economic costs; moving people between Northeast Asia and Europe or North America requires nearly ten hours. Such time costs present a significant obstacle to extending the movement of people over long distances. In other words, even with the advance of globalization, each nation's geographical position will continue to bear as much significance as ever in areas where rapid, short-term movement of substantial human resources is necessary.

For even more extreme examples, there are those related to energy, particularly the transfer of electrical power. Globalization allows for near-instant acquisition of finance and information from across the world, and for purchase of power at low rates. However, procuring actual power from across the globe and bringing it to wherever people happen to live is nearly impossible with the current level of technology. This is also the case with oil and natural gas, which are transported through pipelines and other conduits. Given the great restrictions that the geographical location of a country may put on building such infrastructure as pipelines, that location is particularly critical in relation to the distribution of a standard form of energy, despite the advances of globalization.

In addition, there are areas with specific environmental challenges that are directly affected by their geographical location. Differing from global warming, for which the geographical location of a country has almost no relevance, problems of yellow dust, acid rain, and marine pollution, in particular, are significantly related to where and how a particular country is situated geographically. National security concerns are similar. In cases where particular elements of instability exist within a region, the importance of cooperation in handling these elements is as great as ever.

Chapter 7. Building Win-Win Relationships

The key question for rebuilding mutual importance in Northeast Asia, then, is whether Japan, China, and South Korea can utilize, of their own accord, their geographical proximity to construct a cooperative relationship.

However, this does not mean that cooperation will be simple in areas that are not greatly impacted by the progress in globalization as noted above. The reason for this is that nations' geographical positions may bring about disproportionate benefits when

they form relationships of mutual cooperation. The best examples of this are regional environmental problems, such as yellow sands, acid rain, and marine pollution¹⁹. The three northeastern countries are geographically positioned as follows, from west to east: China, South Korea, and then Japan. Given the effects of westerly winds in this region and the prevailing ocean currents, environmental pollution mainly travels from countries in the west toward those in the east. To restate the point, if the countries of Northeast Asia were to take measures to address these issues, the benefits would be relatively smaller for China and greater for South Korea and Japan. This means that should the nations cooperate over environmental measures, the people of China will not experience the full benefit. Consequently, to reach accord on the matter, South Korea and Japan might be asked to pay compensation to China for the greater benefits that these two countries would receive. However, it is likely to be difficult to persuade people in the east to pay for measures addressing environmental problems that have emanated from countries to the west, thereby causing a serious dilemma.

Similar remarks can be made regarding issues of national security. At present, issues surrounding North Korea are clearly seen as the least stable regional elements in Northeast Asia. However, the size and nature of the impact of threats from North Korea do not affect the three countries uniformly. In contrast to South Korea, which stands to be directly affected by North Korea's instability, the threat to Japan is limited, as the two countries are separated by bodies of water. China, which has maintained amicable relations with North Korea for some time, also faces no real threat of military action. Thus, accompanied with the political benefits, the stances of Japan, China, and South Korea toward North Korea would be conflicted; in other words, this situation would make it difficult for the three countries to take uniform action.

On the other hand, there are areas where the merits of cooperation are relatively clear. One of these is cooperation related to electrical power²⁰. All of these three Northeast Asian countries are facing serious electricity shortages, for different reasons. Obviously, the stability of the electrical power supply increases as the scale of supply networks grows. In the EU today, Germany and Italy are able to embark on what seems to be a brave policy of abandoning nuclear energy, because the EU has been actively pursuing integrated electrical power. Expansion of the energy supply network accompanies the merit of enlarging the scale of energy policies within each country.

Even more important, however, is building support networks for times of major disaster. The support provided to Japan by the US military during the Great East Japan Earthquake is illustrative of this point. As is widely known, the US military deployed 24,000 personnel, 190 aircraft, and 24 naval vessels as part of their large-scale support response²¹. What must be noted is that such large-scale response was made possible by the size of the US military presence in the region, mainly in Okinawa, and that this proximity also facilitated its speed. Put differently, in a time of major disaster, willingness to provide robust support means very little if it involves a country with resources and response personnel positioned in a distant location. The rationale here is simple. If the number of personnel exceeds 10,000 and they are fully equipped, rapid deployment to an area in immediate need of assistance is a physical impossibility.

A further important point is that despite different risks, the likelihood of a large-scale natural disaster or other disaster, such as war, terrorist attack, or nuclear accident, and the accompanying human and social destruction, is nearly the same for Japan, China, and South Korea. At times, any country's capability can be overwhelmed by the impact of a major disaster or accident. As is well known, Japan is one of the countries extremely prone to earthquakes, and the Japanese people have endeavored to build self-sufficiency, in all senses of the word, in their preparations for future earthquakes. However, this self-sufficiency has been crushed significantly, first in 1995 by the Great Hanshin Earthquake and then, most viciously, in 2011 by the Great East Japan Earthquake. In the event of a massive disaster, rescue efforts that require rapid mobilization of substantial manpower and specialist skills can only be managed effectively by neighboring countries.

Closing Thoughts

The point to be emphasized is that building frameworks to manage issues of electrical power and large-scale disaster relief brings clear benefits, and it is something that can be readily understood by the participating countries' citizens as important. This may be more clearly explained in the following terms. China and South Korea have reached, or are in the process of reaching, the developed stage, and it may be hard for them to recognize their mutual importance during periods of calm, when there is no

large threat. However, during times of crisis, the value of people's cooperation with each other is much more readily understood, and there may be occasions when neighboring countries are the only ones that can provide certain types of assistance. Needless to say, such crises are unlikely to be financial; the progress of globalization means that financial aid can arrive immediately from the most distant sources and does not necessarily need to be a burden borne by a country's geographical neighbors.

In contrast, one of the most obvious examples of a geographical neighbor being able to fulfill an important role is an event of a major natural disaster. Considering how Japan, China, or South Korea might be able to respond to such inevitable future crises, the mutual importance of neighboring countries in the region is reaffirmed. As shown in the significant improvements of sentiments toward the Japanese Self-defense Forces and the US military in Japan²², the effects of cooperation during disasters are clear, and this may be a potential breakthrough in the lack of mutual importance in Northeast Asia.

At the same time, we should not overlook the fact that this represents only one opportunity for progress in mutual cooperation within Northeast Asia. It is noteworthy that with the advance of globalization, the time has come for concrete thoughts to be developed regarding what the neighboring countries of Japan, China, and Korea are capable of, what actions are required, and how these capabilities and actions might benefit the citizens of each country. The moment has passed when exchanges among the ruling elites of Japan, China, and South Korea was adequate to maintain relations among the countries.

These nations are facing a time when concrete thinking on these matters has become a critical necessity—a time when the delusion can no longer be maintained that these problems will be solved automatically by the quantitative growth of inter-country exchange. Real ideas must be brought forward, and systems must be built, that convey the mutual importance of each of these countries to citizens at home and abroad. This is at the heart of any solution to the problems that these three Northeast Asian countries now confront.

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- 7 See Kan Kimura, "Nationalistic Populism in Democratic Countries of East Asia." Also see World Value Survey statistics, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>.
- 8 For Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara's nationalistic and populist behavior, see 松谷満・高木竜輔・丸山真央・樋口直人「日本版極右はいかにして受容されるのか：石原慎太郎・東京都知事の支持基盤をめぐって」、『アジア太平洋レビュー』第3号、2006年。For Lee Myun-bak's Takeshima Island visit and populist stance, see (at press time) "Japan must explain historical facts," The Yomiuri Shimbun, Aug.18, 2012, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/>.
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