

## Regionalism versus Nationalism in Northeast Asia\*

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### 21세기 동북아 국제정치에서 지역주의와 민족주의의 충돌

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#### Abstract

The end of the Cold War enabled the nations of Northeast Asia – China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) – to forge for the first time a consensus that focuses their energies on pursuing peace, prosperity and stability. The end of ideological rivalry made this possible and improved prospects for regional cooperation. Even the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) concurs with this consensus while retaining its priority of building what it deems a “nuclear deterrent” capability. But the Cold War’s end and new consensus also allowed nationalism to reassert itself. Central to nationalism in China and the two Koreas’ are a shared negative attitude toward Japan because of its perceived misdeeds prior to and during World War II. These three nations generally agree that imperial Japan sought to exploit their weaknesses by seizing their territory and abusing their citizens. Given their pre-modern Confucian philosophical

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heritage, they continue to judge a nation's conduct according to the Confucian definition of virtuous or non-virtuous behavior. Japan's political leaders have repeatedly apologized for Imperial Japan's misdeeds, but these expressions lack sincerity in the eyes of Japan's neighbors. One reason is that some Japanese leaders continue to rationalize Japanese imperialism as essential to defend their homeland against Western imperialism. They tend to dismiss the allocations of exploitation. Also, Japan's official apologies have not been substantiated, in the eyes of Japan's neighbors, with actions aimed at fostering reconciliation. Japan's official position is to raise the banner of international law and to declare repeatedly that all claims against it because of its imperial past were resolved with the 1952 Treaty of San Francisco that ended World War II in Asia plus subsequent bilateral treaties that normalized relations between Japan and South Korea (1965) and China (1978). Thus friction between Japan and its neighbors persists, impeding progress toward regional cooperation.

□ Key words : East Asian Regionalism, East Asian Nationalism, Northeast Asia Relations, Japan, China, Korea.

## 초록

냉전의 종식은 처음으로 동북아시아의 국가들-중국, 일본, 대한민국-이 평화, 번영, 그리고 안정을 추구하는데 에너지를 집중하는 컨센서스를 형성하도록 만들었다. 이데올로기 대결의 종식이 이것을 가능하게 만들었고 또 지역 협력의 가능성을 증진시켰다. 심지어 북한도, '핵 억지' 능력의 건설이라는 우선순위를 여전히 유지하면서도, 이 컨센서스에 동의하고 있다. 그러나 냉전의 종식과 새로운 컨센서스는 또한 민족주의가 다시 발호하도록 허용했다. 중국과 두 한국의 민족주의의 핵심은 제2차 세계대전 이전과 도중의 일본의 잘못 때문에 일본에 대한 부정적인 태도를 공유하고 있다는 것이다. 이 세 국가는 제국주의 일본이 영토를 점령하고 시민들을 학대함으로써 자신들의 약점을 이용했다는 데 대체적으로 동의한다. 이 세 국가는 근대 이전의 유교 철학의 유산 때문에 한 국가의 행동을 도덕적인 것과 비도덕적인 것이라는 유교적 정의 방식에 따라서 판단한다. 일본의 정치 지도자들은 제국주의 일본의 잘못에 대해서 반복해서 사과했지만, 이러한 표현이 일본의 이웃의 눈에는 진정성이 부족한 것처럼 보인다. 한 가지 이유는 몇몇 일본 지도자들이 자신들의 본토를 서구 제국주의로부터 방어하는데 일본 제국주의가 필수적이었다고 계속 합리화하는 것이다. 그들은 착취의 분배를 일축하는 경향이 있다. 또한 일본의 공식적인 사과는, 일본의 이웃의 눈에는, 화해를 증진시키고자 하는 행동으로 뒷받침되지 않는다. 일본의 공식적인 입장은 국제법을 내세워서 일본의 과거 제국주의에 대한 모든 청구는 아시아에서 제2차 세계대전을 끝낸 1952년 샌프란시스코 조약

과 일본과 남한(1965), 일본과 중국(1978) 간의 관계를 정상화시키는 일련의 양자 조약으로 해결되었다고 지속적으로 주장하는 것이다. 그래서 일본과 이웃 국가들 사이의 마찰은 지속될 것이고 지역 협력의 진전을 방해할 것이다.

□ 주제어 : 동아시아 지역주의, 동아시아 민족주의, 동북아시아 관계, 일본, 중국, 한국

## I . Introduction

Northeast Asia remains a region divided despite extensive regional economic integration and decades of maturing security cooperation. Rival political phenomena – nationalism and regionalism - are dueling to forge Northeast Asia's future. Regionalism, nurtured by the end of Cold War ideological rivalry, economic prosperity and integration, and a shared quest for security, are pulling China, the two Koreas and Japan toward a future of security, economic and possibly political collaboration.<sup>1)</sup> Simultaneously nationalism is impeding the process. Also complicating the situation is the divergent political and economic systems in the region. China and the DPRK retain authoritarian political systems where as Japan and the ROK have developed democratic systems. Similarly, China and the DPRK prefer socialism while Japan and the ROK favor a more capitalist economic system. Here we review the causes for this situation and assess prospect for the emergence of a formal regional structure in Northeast Asia.

## II . Regionalism

Regionalism's aim is to link a small group of nations to a joint pursuit of shared goals. Collaboration is formalized through regionally focused multilateral agreements and formal structures such as the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).<sup>2)</sup> The arrange-

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1) Baogang He and Takashi Inoguchi, "Introduction to Ideas of Asian Regionalism," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 12 (2).

ment requires member nations to voluntarily pool their sovereignty, or at least restrain it, so that they are better able to combine resources and to coordinate priorities in the hope of more effectively and efficiently achieving specific shared goals. Diplomacy is emphasized over confrontation to resolve disagreements. Economic competition is sanctioned but regulated by regionally agreed rules. Ideally regionalism collectively addresses shared concerns that encompass security, economic integration, political cooperation, humanitarian needs, etc. Successful regionalism benefits equally all members otherwise the system becomes dysfunctional and collapses.

Regionalism both constrains and enhances national power.<sup>3)</sup> Strong nations see regionalism as potentially restricting their sovereignty and thus attempt to minimize its impact. Small nations also see regionalism as a potential threat to sovereignty and tend to seek a balance between membership and unilateralism. This is to say that nations that fall between the two polarities tend to favor regionalism because they see it as maximizing their influence on regional issues and the regional economy.

### **Regionalism in Northeast Asia**

Regionalism in Asia dates from 1968 and has steadily rallied support across Southeast and Northeast Asia, and across the Pacific. It began with the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Like the EU, ASEAN began as a regional security cooperative, Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)<sup>4)</sup>. The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) followed in 1989. Its primary impetus was economic and its parent was the United States. Recognizing the economic dynamism of Northeast Asia, ASEAN expanded to link itself to Japan, the ROK and China, ASEAN plus Three, in 1997. Japan proposed ASEAN plus Six (Japan, ROK, China, India, Australia, and New Zealand) which was renamed the East Asian Summit (EAS), still an ex-

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2) Hans Kohn, "Nationalism – Identification of State and People," *Britannica Online Encyclopedia*. [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com).

3) He Baogang, 169.

4) He Baogang, 166.

tion of ASEAN.<sup>5)</sup> The EAS added the United States and Russia in 2010. Somewhat eclipsing APEC's original purpose, the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) was established in 2006. By 2010 it included the Australia, Canada, Chile, Mexico, Peru, Philippines, the ROK, and the United States. Japan applied for membership early in 2013. Its agenda is to vigorously promote the liberalization of economic transactions across the Pacific.<sup>6)</sup>

Regionalism in East Asia is forged by the area's cultural heritage, history, security characteristics and economic dynamics.<sup>7)</sup> Thus regionalism in East Asia is developing along a path distinction from that of the EU.<sup>8)</sup> As we will review below, the history of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century relations between Japan and its neighbors China and Korea has created a deep distrust of Japan. The Korean War and Korea's continuing division into rival hostile nations threatens the area's prosperity. Although Japan, China and the ROK rank among the world's leading economies, their primary investment and trading partners are outside the region. They are economically more oriented toward and integrated into the global economy than the area's regional economy. The size and resources of each nation varies dramatically from huge China, to tiny ROK and island Japan. These factors make trilateral cooperation a cautious and tenuous process. Unlike the EU, there has been little movement toward pooling sovereignty as evident from Japan and the ROK's decade long but still futile pursuit of free trade. Also the United States' influence in Japan and the ROK remains pre-eminent, which makes China nervous and highly suspicious of collaboration between the US, Japan and ROK. <sup>9)</sup>

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5) National Bureau of Research (USA), "A Brief History of the EAS," [www.nbr.org](http://www.nbr.org).

6) He Baogang, 167. MOON Chung-in, "Economic Regionalism," *Online Encyclopedia*. [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com).

7) Kevin G. Cai, "Regional Economic Integration in East Asia," Chapter 5, *The Politics of Economic Regionalism: Explaining Economic Integration in East Asia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 91-131. Ezra Vogel, "Regionalism in Asia: Why We should Stick with Existing Structures," *East Asia Forum* (30 March 2010).

8) He Baogang, 170.

9) Amitav Acharya, "ASEAN's Dilemma: Courting Washington without Hurting Beijing," *Asia Pacific Bulletin* No. 133. [www.EastWestCenter.org/APB](http://www.EastWestCenter.org/APB), and Meidyatama Suryodiningrat, editor, *Jakarta Post*, "ASEAN Regional Forum 2011: China and the

### III. Some Impediments to Regionalism in Northeast Asia

Further complicating the region's progress toward regional cooperation are the divergent political and economic systems of China, the DPRK, Japan and ROK. EU and ASEAN nations generally share similar political and economic systems. Most of the nations in these two regions prefer varying forms of representative government. Most European nations, including new members admitted since the Soviet Union's demise, prefer democracy. Europe's mature democracies are governed by either a constitutional monarchy or popularly elected president. Newer members generally have democracies of varying degrees of maturity. Similarly in Southeast Asia, the preferred form of government is democracy as found in most member states such as the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, and Australia. Vietnam alone retains an authoritarian government, albeit one generally perceived as benevolent. Both EU and ASEAN members also share a preference of free market economies characterized by varying degrees of socialism.

The situation in Northeast Asia differs significantly from that of Europe and Southeast Asia where regional integration is most mature. Politically, China and the DPRK retain highly centralized, authoritarian political systems supported by economic systems that favor extensive government management of economic activity. These authoritarian governments need not be sensitive to popular priorities and concerns, enabling their political leadership to implement with relative ease and speed policies conducive to promoting regional cooperation when deemed a priority. This is particularly true regarding China. Although it continues to develop a "market economy," government management remains pervasive. If elements of China's communist past impede pursuit of economic integration with regional and international economic partners, the political leadership can readily override any and all ideological or economic resistance.

The case of the DPRK differs dramatically from that of China, but not because of its political system, which is also authoritarian. The difference

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United States," *Asia Pacific Bulletin* No. 127, August 4, 2011. LEE, John, "China Still has a Long Way to Go," *Asia Pacific Bulletin* No. 134, October 24, 2011.

is the DPRK's political ideology which accents intense nationalism, i.e. *Juche*, that assigns priority to the preservation of national sovereignty. Obviously clinging to national sovereignty greatly impedes movement toward regional integration.

The political and economic systems of Japan and the ROK contrast sharply with their Northeast Asian neighbors. Both are democracies with free market economic systems. Their governments much more cautiously than their authoritarian neighbors when implementing policies aimed at fostering regional integration. Recently this has been evident in both governments' pursuit of free trade agreements. The ROK's promotion of agreements with the EU, US and Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) aroused the opposition of special interest groups, particularly farmers and auto-workers. Gradually, and with some difficulty, this resistance was overcome. Japan's 2013 joining the TPP negotiations sparked similar opposition from rice growers, among others. Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, promoter of Japan's membership in TPP, is optimistic that domestic resistance will wane.

Thus, in addition to relatively intense nationalism rooted in displeasure with Japan's imperial past and territorial disputes, the region's divergent political and economic systems further complicate progress toward regional cooperation. These formidable barriers, however, have not halted nor reversed progress toward regional cooperation in Northeast Asia.

#### IV. The Birth of Regionalism in Northeast Asia

On the contrary, since China, Japan and the ROK began collaborating on the formation of a trilateral regional organization in 1999, they have achieved steady progress. Their effort began in conjunction with the ASEAN Plus Three summit in the Philippines.<sup>10)</sup> In 2003 the three Northeast Asia nations issued the Joint Declaration on the Promotion of

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10) People's Republic of China (PRC) Foreign Ministry, "White Paper-China-Japan-ROK Cooperation (1999-2012). May 10, 2012. [www.fmprc.gov](http://www.fmprc.gov). BYUN See-won, "The China-South Korea-Japan Triangle: The Shape of Things to Come?" *Asia Pacific Bulletin* No. 115, June 6, 2011. [www.EastWestCenter.org/APB](http://www.EastWestCenter.org/APB).

Tripartite Cooperation.<sup>11)</sup> Annual meetings of Finance and Foreign Ministers followed. The group held its first Trilateral Summit outside the ASEAN PLUS Three framework in October 2009 in Fukuoka, Japan. Summits followed in Beijing (2010) and Jeju, ROK (2011). Memoranda of Understanding pledged cooperation in counter-terrorism, transportation, intellectual property rights, communications, metrology, environment, disaster management, etc.<sup>12)</sup> In March 2012 the First Trilateral Policy Dialogue on Asian Affairs convened in Beijing and the fifth Trilateral Summit Meeting met in Beijing on May 13, 2012.<sup>13)</sup>

The three nations at the end of their May 2012 meeting mentioned for the first time the Senkakujima/Diaoyou Islands dispute between Japan

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- 11) PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “China-Japan-ROK Cooperation 1999-2010,” [www.fmprc.gov](http://www.fmprc.gov); and Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Fifth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit (Summary) June 27, 2012” and, “Joint Declaration on the Enhancement of Trilateral Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership, Beijing, China, May 13, 2012. [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).
- 12) Second Trilateral Summit: “Joint Press Conference by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama of Japan, Premier Wen Jiabao of the PRC and President Lee Myung-bak of the ROK. (October 10, 2009). “Joint Statement on the Tenth Anniversary of Trilateral Cooperation,” Beijing, China, October 10, 2009. “Joint Statement on Sustainable Development among the PRC, Japan and ROK,” Beijing, China, October 10, 2009. Third Trilateral Summit: Joint Press Release of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Trilateral Summit Meeting; ROK, Japan and PRC,” Jeju, ROK, May 30, 2010. “Trilateral Cooperation VISION 2020,” Jeju, ROK, May 30, 2010. “Memorandum on the Establishment of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat by the Governments of Japan, PRC and ROK, May 30, 2010. “Joint Statement on Standards Cooperation Among ROK, Japan, PRC, Jeju, ROK, May 30, 2010. “Joint Statement on Strengthening Science and Innovation Cooperation among ROK, Japan and PRC, Jeju, ROK, May 30, 2010. Fourth Trilateral Summit, “Summit Declaration,” Tokyo, Japan, May 22, 2011. “Japan to Host the 4<sup>th</sup> Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit Meeting,” Tokyo, Japan, May 13, 2011. “Cooperation on Nuclear Safety, Tokyo,” Japan, May 22, 2011. “Cooperation toward Sustainable Growth through Promotion of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency,” Tokyo, Japan, May 22, 2011. “Cooperation on Disaster Management,” Tokyo, Japan, May 22, 2011.
- 13) Fifth Trilateral Summit, “Fifth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit (Summary), Beijing, China, June 27, 2012, and “Joint Declaration on the Enhancement of Trilateral Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership, Beijing, China, May 13, 2012. [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).



and China, and the Tokto/Takeshima Island dispute between the ROK and Japan.<sup>14)</sup> Subsequently, progress toward trilateral cooperation sputtered to an end. The extent to which “sensitive issues,” as the Chinese foreign ministry labels disagreements over history and ownership of islands, will impede trilateral cooperation, as of June 2013, remains to be seen, but clearly the disputes are impeding progress.

## V. Nationalism

Nationalism is an 18<sup>th</sup> Century European concept that achieved political maturity in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>15)</sup> It focuses political leaders and their constituents’ concerns on nation specific issues and priorities. At nationalism’s core is the idea of national sovereignty, another European concept forged in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when nations began to formulate international laws to regulate their conduct. Sovereignty meant each nation reserved an “inherit right” to ultimately determine whether it would submit to international law. Cooperation with neighboring nations and international law was and is still viewed as undermining a nation’s ability to address its priorities because the nation’s resources are shared with rivals. An early 20<sup>th</sup> Century example of this is US President George W. Bush’s world view which deemed unilateralism preferable to multilateralism because he preferred to marginalize the importance of regional and international organizations in his foreign policy.<sup>16)</sup> The DPRK is another example of a nation that prefers unilateralism to multilateralism, a consequence of its *Juche* ideology that puts nationalism and self determination above all else.<sup>17)</sup>

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14) Japan-PRC Summit Meeting (Summary),” Beijing, China, May 31, 2012. “Japan-ROK Summit Meeting (Overview), Beijing, China, May 28, 2012. [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

15) Hans Kohn, “Nationalism – Identification of State and People,” *Britannica Online Encyclopedia*. [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com).

16) C. Kenneth Quinones, “Dualism in the Bush Administration’s North Korea Policy,” *Asian Perspective* (April 2003).

17) C. Kenneth Quinones, “Beyond Collapse - Continuity and Change in North Korea,” *International Journal of Korean Reunification Studies* (January, 2003).

## Nationalism in Northeast Asia

Culture and history have defined nationalism in Northeast Asia, giving it characteristics distinct from those of European nationalism.<sup>18)</sup> Japanese nationalism was born in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and matured into an emperor focused ideology only to be discredited at the end of World War II (Great Pacific War). Nineteenth Century Japanese nationalism shrouded loyalty to the nation in a fusion of Confucian values, specifically *Bushido* or the Way of the *Samurai* warrior, and Shinto myths that linked the emperor to a mythical ancestor the Sun Goddess.<sup>19)</sup> This nationalism, like that of many European forms, contained an undercurrent of racism. Whereas many of Europe's leading empires used claims of racial superiority to rationalize their imperialism and exploitation of non-Europeans, some of Japan's late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century civilian and military leaders claimed that Japanese racial superiority gave it the mission of "enlightening" its neighbors, particularly Korea, by separating it from China and introducing it to "modern" knowledge. Similar sentiments are evident in the continuing political dueling between Japan's post WWII "right" and "left" wing politicians, a topic explored later. Korean and Chinese nationalism share a similar genesis. Both were born in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century largely as a reaction to Japanese imperialism, and anti-Japanese sentiment remains at the core of both. This topic will also be explored in greater detail later.

## VI. Regionalism versus Nationalism

The devastation of two world wars plus the Cold War convinced

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18) Baogang He, *op.cit.* Ezra Vogel, "Regionalism in Asia: Why We should Stick with Existing Structures," *East Asia Forum* (30 March 2010).

19) Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore DeBary, and Donald Keene, *Sources of the Japanese Tradition. Vol. II.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1969. Marius Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000. David Earl, *Emperor and Nation in Japan - Political Thinkers of the Tokugawa Period.* Seattle, Washington, University of Washington, 1964, and Donald Keene, *The Japanese Discovery of Europe, 1720-1830.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969.

Europe's political leaders that they needed to find a better way to manage their imperialistic impulses and nationalistic rivalries. Obviously the idealism which had given birth to international law in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century failed dismally when it came to managing the conduct of sovereign nations each intent upon subduing their rivals with military might and by building vast empires. Their first endeavor, the League of Nations, essentially continued the idealistic belief that sovereign nations ruled by nationalistic leaders could be managed using international law. But as World War II taught, international law is feeble in the face of armed might; a lesson soon relearned when the United Nations faltered when confronted by Soviet expansion in Europe.

The Cold War made clear the need to confront armed might with armed might. Realism replaced the idealism of international law after the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) emerged in Europe, and the United States used the UN Security Council to legitimize its deployment of 'UN forces' to the Korean Peninsula.

Northeast Asian regionalism was conceived during the Korean War in the form of security cooperation. The US and USSR created rival treaty systems to assert their influence in the region and to deter a second Korean War on the Korean Peninsula. The US 'hub and spokes' alliance system committed US and Republic of Korea's (ROK) armed forces, supported by Japan's hosting of US bases and logistical support, to deterring another Korean War. In the northern half of the peninsula, a similar treaty system emerged between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the USSR and China. This arrangement blocked further regional cooperation and economic integration because the ROK and Japanese economies were linked to the US economy while that of the DPRK was tied to the USSR and China. Thus, while the cooperation NATO nurtured among European nations during the Cold War set the stage for the European Union, the Cold War's polarized treaty system centered on the Korean Peninsula prevented progress toward regional cooperation.

Not until the end of the Cold War in 1990 did economic integration become possible in Northeast Asia. But first the United States and Japan had to discard their Cold War strategy of 'containing' communism, i.e. diplomatic and economic isolation of China and the DPRK from the in-

ternational community. Next China's economy needed to develop the capacity to engage in international commerce, a process first fostered by the United States' foreign policy shift from containment to engagement of China after 1972. Instead of diplomatic and economic isolation from the international community, the United States joined by Japan and eventually other nations together nurtured China's economic transformation by admitting it into the international market place, a process which became increasingly evident after 1990.

East Asia since 1990 has developed an unprecedented consensus among the regions' nations that designates the pursuit of peace, prosperity and stability as shared priorities. This has encouraged regional integration in two major areas: security cooperation and economic integration. Paradoxically, the DPRK's decision in 1991 to build its own "nuclear umbrella" by developing an arsenal of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons promptly gave the nations of Northeast Asia a new, common goal – keeping the Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons. Initially bilateral efforts between the two Koreas in the form of the 1992 Joint South-North Korea De-nuclearization Declaration and the first ever US-DPRK Agreed Framework of 1994 suggest the problem could be dealt with bilaterally. But by 2002 it was evident this would not be the case. China intervened by forming and hosting the Six Party Talks, the region's first ever multi-lateral security forum that brought together the world's four superpowers (the US, Russia, China, Japan) plus the two Koreas in the common quest for a peaceful, diplomatic end to the DPRK's weapons of mass destruction programs.<sup>20)</sup> After some initial progress, the talks stalled and have remained dormant since 2009. Nevertheless, China, the US, Russia and the ROK remain determined to resume the talks at the earliest opportunity. Although Pyongyang occasionally proclaims its readiness to resume the negotiations, the other parties remain reluctant pending a concrete demonstration of the DPRK's earnestness to dismantle its nuclear

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20) PARK Jong-chul, "Korea's Perspective on the Linkage of Economic and Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia," Korea Institute for National Unification, Online Series (September 2006). [www.kinu.or.kr](http://www.kinu.or.kr). PAIK, Soon, "Toward a Northeast Asian Security Community: Implications for South Korea's Economy," Korea Economic Institute, 2009. [www.keia.org](http://www.keia.org).

weapons program.

Simultaneously the same nations, excluding the DPRK, have been working to form regional organizations that promote their common quest for prosperity. They continue to work toward improving the efficacy of APEC, Asia-Pacific Economic Council. Its effectiveness, however, is greatly limited by the continuing strong sense of nationalism evident in its deliberations and the rule that all decisions require all members' consent. The three nations remain active participants in ASEAN's East Asia Summit (EAS). Membership in TPP will likewise further foster regional collaboration. Also, as previously discussed, Japan, the ROK and China remain optimistic that their own trilateral forum to promote economic integration will eventually yield success.<sup>21)</sup>

Liberated from the constraints of Cold War alliances and ideological rivalries, Japan, the ROK and China share a firm consensus as to their priorities, but thus far, Japan's imperial legacy and each nation's strong sense of nationalism continues to impede progress toward regional cooperation, both in the economic and security areas.

## **VII. History's Burden**

History is politics, at least in East Asia, an axiom that dates from the ancient formation of what the prominent American historian of China John King Fairbank deemed the "Chinese World Order." This regional order emerged during ancient China's Han dynasty (221 BC-200 AD). China designated itself the "middle kingdom" and asserted suzerainty over its neighbors, particularly Korea, Vietnam and the nomadic tribes

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21) Kurt Tong, Acting Senior Official for APEC, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, "East Asia and the Pacific: The Future of APEC, Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment," October 14, 2009. ASO Taro, Foreign Minister of Japan, "Working Together for a Stable and Prosperous East Asia—Address, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC," May 3, 2006. [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp). TAKASHI Terada, "A Golden Opportunity for Japan's Regional Integration Policy: TPP, RCEP and CJK," Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies-Commentary No. 173, March 26, 2013. [www.jiia.or.jp/en\\_commentary](http://www.jiia.or.jp/en_commentary).

of central Asia. Confucian morality, not law defined inter-state relations. It also imposed restrictions on the arbitrary assertion of power by China's emperors, the Son of Heaven. His role was to foster and sustain harmony among all people by manifesting virtuous and benevolent rule. Lacking the Bible or Koran to define virtue and morality, China's officials turned to maintaining historical records as the way to restrain the emperor's power. The Confucian classics and dynastic historical records became a detailed record of precedent and the "constitutional" guide for a ruler's conduct. A virtuous ruler was defined as one whose conduct promoted social harmony, both within and beyond his domain. If, according to the historical records, his actions disrupted social harmony, and thus were deemed to lack virtue and benevolence toward his subjects, the ruler risked the wrath of ancestors who, as Confucius disciple Mencius wrote, had the ability to unleash the forces of nature in the form of flood and famine that would incite his subjects to rebel against his.

Today many would promptly argue that East Asia's Confucian legacy lacks validity and currency. But one can counter that the historical record and a ruler's conduct remain critical elements in the region's political culture, particularly China and Korea. A nation's previous conduct, as revealed in the historical record, remains a core element in assessing whether a nation and its leaders' previous conduct fostered or disrupted social harmony. Accordingly, the nation and its leaders are deemed either virtuous or not, and thus merit respect or criticism. This Confucian political axiom continues to be reflected China's and the two Koreas' criticism of Japan's 20<sup>th</sup> century imperialism.<sup>22)</sup>

Viewing contemporary friction between Japan and its neighbors in a broad, historical context brings greater clarity to the continuing disputes over history and territories that impede regional cooperation in Northeast Asia. Japan's claims to Takeshima (Tokdo) Island and the Senkakujima is-

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22) PRC Foreign Ministry, "Some Sensitive Issues," May 8, 2002. [www.fmprc.gov](http://www.fmprc.gov). ROK "1<sup>st</sup> Vice Foreign Minister Summons Japanese Ambassador to the ROK over the Issue of Japan's Wrong Perception of History," April 25, 2013. [www.mofat.go.go](http://www.mofat.go.go). *Chosun Ilbo*, "Japan, Korea Move to Ease Tensions," January 5, 2013. [www.english.chosun.com](http://www.english.chosun.com). *Daily Yomiuri*, "Textbook Change Raises Questions," April 1, 2007.

lands are consistently rooted in international law, the European basis for regulating relations between the European empires that emerged in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Japan's Meiji rulers (1868-1912) adopted the practice of imperialism and its international law to first contest the Chinese world order and then to assert its suzerainty over East Asia between 1894 and 1945.<sup>23)</sup>

Today China and the two Koreas assess Japan's imperial legacy according to the concept of Confucian virtue, not international law. Japan's imperialism and seizure of territories from China and Korea are deemed to have been inappropriate, that is lacking in virtue and benevolence as measured by Confucian morality. Japan is accused of distorting the historical record not so much by rewriting history but because Japan's politicians, despite numerous apologies for imperial Japan's misdeeds, persist in rationalizing Japan's imperialism as necessary to protect Japan against European imperialism.<sup>24)</sup>

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23) Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Basic View on the Sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands," April 2013, and, "Fact Sheet on the Senkaku Islands," November 2012. [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

24) See *Daily Yomiuri*: "Abe Explains 'Comfort Women' Stance to Bush," April 5, 2007, p. 1. "Abe Sorry Over 'Comfort Women' Issue," April 22, 2007. "Abe Expresses Apology to 'Comfort Women,'" April 28, 2007, p. 1. "South Korea Raises 'Comfort Women' Issue," September 26, 2011, p. 1; and *BBC News (news.bbc.co.uk)*: "Wartime 'Sex Slaves' Get Compensation," April 27, 1998. "No Compensation for Japan Sex Slaves," December 6, 2000. "Japan Overturns Sex Slave Ruling," March 29, 2001. "Japanese Cabinet Donates to WWII Fund," July 2, 2002. "Japan to end WWII Sex Slave Fund," January 24, 2005. "Japan WWII Sex Slave Redress Call," March 12, 2005. "Japan Anger at US Sex Slave Bill," February 19, 2007. "Abe Questions Sex Slave 'coercion,'" March 1, 2007. "Japan PM Apology on Sex Slaves," March 2, 2007. "Japan's Divisive 'Comfort Women' Fund," April 10, 2007. Also see *Chosun Ilbo* ([www.english.chosun.com](http://www.english.chosun.com)): "Korea Slams Japanese PM's 'Comfort Women' Denial," August 28, 2012. "China, Korea Criticize Japanese Ministers' War Shrine Visit," October 19, 2012. "Most Japanese Want Abe to Visit Militarist Shrine," January 22, 2013. "Abe Denies Japan Invaded Asian Neighbors," April 24, 2013. "Abe Bemoans 'Threats' from Asian Neighbors," April 25, 2013. "Seoul Expresses 'Strong Regrets' Over Abe's Remarks," April 26, 2013.

### VIII. Virtue versus Legality

Both sides are talking past one another. The underlying issues are not Japan's alleged efforts to distort the historical record or the consistency of imperial Japan's conduct with international law. For China and the two Koreas, the greater concern is whether Japan's imperialism was virtuous or merely self serving exploitation of its neighbors. China and Korea, reflecting their Confucian cultural legacy, have determined that imperial Japan's conduct was unjustifiable, selfish and void of virtue. They insist that Japan must not only apologize for the past but cease attempting to justify its imperialism and relinquish claims to seized territories. Japan responds that it has repeatedly expressed regrets for its previous misdeeds against its neighbors, but persists in attempting to justify them in light of the threat of European imperialism. As for the disputed territories, Japan maintains that its claims to these territories are consistent with international law and thus beyond dispute.

This divergence of views between Japan and its neighbors is firmly rooted in each nations' nationalism. For China and Korea, Japanese imperialism forged their sense of nationalism, making "anti-Japanese" sentiment a core element of their nationalism. Acceptance of Japan's perspective by a Chinese or Korean national is thus, by definition, a denial of one's own nationalism. The same can be said of the Japanese. Their sense of nationalism compels them to avoid any appearance of accepting the Chinese and Korean assessment of imperial Japan because Japan's intent was to defend itself, not to exploit its neighbors.

### IX. Conclusion: Impediments to Regionalism

The end of Cold War ideological rivalry in 1990 promptly allowed nationalism to reassert itself as concern for ideology evaporated. For the first time in history, the nations of Northeast Asia forged a consensus that focuses their energies on attaining the shared goals of peace, prosperity and stability. They recognize that their common goals can best be achieved through regional cooperation. Divergent political and economic systems,



however, complicate their efforts in this regard. The more formidable obstacles, however, cluster around nationalism. For China and the two Koreas, anti-Japanese sentiment remains a core feature. It is rooted in their experience with Japanese nationalism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Given their Confucian heritage and tendency to judge nations and their leaders according the Confucian definition of virtue, they remain hesitant about reconciliation with Japan pending its demonstration of sincere remorse through acts of contrition.

Japan's nationalism, however, blunts its political leaders' efforts to assuage China and Korea with official apologies. As for pursuing reconciliation using monetary compensation, Japan's government rejects any and all claims citing international law. Similarly, Japan insists on sovereignty over disputed territories acquired from its neighbors during its imperial past., again citing international law as the justification for its claims.

Consequently nationalism persists as the most formidable impediment to regional cooperation in Northeast Asia. Collaboration regarding mutual security concerns, i.e. the DPRK's nuclear program, and economic integration through trade and investment, will continue to nurture the desire for regional cooperation, but nationalistic sentiment rooted in the region's recent historical past appears destined to obstruct regionalism well into the future.

Ultimately only the concerned nations of Northeast Asia can resolve this conundrum. Until they do, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea will continue to clash over the past while striving to forge a future of regional cooperation. As for the United States and Russia, both eager to see the emergence of regional cooperation, it is best that they minimize their involvement in this situation given the emotionally charged nationalistic sentiment of the regional players.

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