Divergent Memories Versus Collective Cooperation: Ambivalent Relations in Northeast Asia

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The Journal of Northeast Asian History
Volume 13 Number 1 (Summer 2016), 9-37

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On November 15, 2015, the three leaders of China, Japan and South Korea met in a Trilateral Summit for the first time in three and a half years. Positive promises of future cooperation tumbled forth suggesting a sanguine future. But the meeting took place with a backdrop of fissures among the three over issues of history and memory. Japan was at the center of these as both China and South Korea have been critical of Japanese leaders in recent years for their allegedly inadequate repentance over their country's prewar actions.

This paper analyzes both the prewar and postwar historical narratives about Japan in the Asia-Pacific. It differentiates between the imperial actions of prewar Japan with its postwar focus on economic development. Postwar Japan's behavior had positive repercussions for the region as a whole, including particularly for China and South Korea. The last eight to ten years however saw far more criticism of what Chinese and South Korean leaders have portrayed as a reemergence of right-wing tendencies in Japanese politics and policies. While acknowledging the accuracy of many of these charges the paper notes ways in which both China and South Korea also contributed to today's march of competitive nationalism across Northeast Asia.

Keywords: Northeast Asia, history, conflict, World War II, Abe

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I. Introduction

On November 1, 2015 Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Korean President Park Geun-hye wrapped up the Sixth Trilateral Summit meeting. The leaders from the three countries emerged radiating handshakes and warm cordiality. Their official statement celebrated the fact that "…steady progress has been made in trilateral cooperation in various areas." The statement went on to detail a list of fifty-six areas where the three had agreed on plans for future cooperation. Among other things they agreed to "…encourage a more active promotion of over 50 intergovernmental consultative mechanisms, including about 20 ministerial-level mechanisms, as well as numerous cooperative projects, and promote the creation of new intergovernmental consultative mechanisms, including ministerial-level mechanisms." As well, the three leaders further "…decided to make joint efforts to achieve the common goal of building regional trust and cooperation." And they went on: "we will make full use of the high complementarities and great potential of the three economies and bring to higher levels our cooperation in various economic and social fields." Moreover, they

declared: "We will further strengthen economic and trade relations and deepen the convergence of interests." Reflecting such multifaceted agreements the three concluded that "we shared the view that trilateral cooperation has been completely restored on the occasion of this Summit."[1] President Park, in a joint news conference with the other two leaders, captured the cooperative symbolism of their meeting: "This summit meeting carries a historic significance because it restores a system of cooperation among the three countries, which in turn is an important frame of peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia."[2]

The upbeat promises sought to project a renewed spirit of collegiality implying that all three leaders would move forward in a spirit of cooperation, pursuing the advancement of trilateral ties, unbinding the recently bound roots inhibiting trilateral cooperation. Admittedly, relations among the three remained ambiguous. It was by no means clear, for example, beyond the photo-op and the final communiqué, how much substantive cooperation will result from the Summit. Certainly no painful commitments, no explicit rules, and no promises of reversals of past practices were agreed to, nor were any officially anticipated.

The broadly cooperative messages of the Trilateral Summit resonated with the increasingly expanding economic interdependence among their three countries. Cross-border trade and foreign direct investment, a cooperative investment agreement, regional production networks, export free zones, along with enhanced communication and transportation links have woven China, Korea and Japan into an ever richer tapestry of trilateral interdependence. Enhanced economic ties have worked to offset the legacy of brittle fragmentation that often divide

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[1] http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2015/11/01/0301000000AEN20151101003900315.html. Accessed March 17, 2016.

[2] Sang-hun Choe, "China, Japan and South Korea Pledge to Expand Trade at Joint Meeting," *New York Times,* November 1, 2015 at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/02/world/asia/china-japan-and-south-korea-conduct-first-trilateral-meeting-in-3-years.html. Accessed March 17, 2016.

the three, a battle between cooperation and division that have long marked relations among the three. In particular, their experiences during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, World War II, Cold War divisions and the inward-focused processes of nation-building have generated a constant ebb and flow of attractions and repulsions among the three.

The sanguine spirit of the Trilateral Summit was the most recent manifestation of trilateral attractions. But it stood in conspicuous contrast to the tense interactions among the three countries over the preceding several years. China and Japan had been locked in a testy quasi-military standoff over competing sovereignty claims in the East China Sea. As well, during 2012, mass violence against Japanese-owned businesses was carried out in numerous Chinese cities bolstered by minimally veiled official support. In early 2014 the Chinese government introduced two anti-Japanese national holidays that further inflamed anti-Japanese sentiments. Korean and Japanese officials published starkly contrasting views on the sovereignty of Dokdo/Takeshima; vicious anti-Korean protests, led by right-wing thugs, occurred on multiple occasions in Japanese cities. All such actions elicited at best perfunctory condemnation from government officials. Socotra Rock in the Yellow Sea is subject to competing territorial claims by all three countries, each arguing that it lies within their Exclusive Economic Zone. In June 2015, China suddenly announced an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) that asserted Chinese claims to maritime features under both Korean and Japanese sovereignty. And as a backdrop to such territorial disputes the three were divided over the tawdry aspects of Japanese military behaviors during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Membership in competing free trade and investment institutions pulled them into different economic directions. Netizens in all three countries maintained a steady stream of xenophobic attacks against one another. The Asian Barometer surveys underscore the widespread mutual distrust among the general populations of these three countries.[3] Chinese nationalism has also been fused with official ROK criticisms of Japan as manifested, for

example, in the two countries' collaboration to erect a statue and memorial hall in the VIP lounge at Harbin railway station for anti-Japanese Korean nationalist, An Jung-geun, on the site of assassination of Ito Hirobumi, architect of Japan's constitution but also the overseer of Japan's colonization of the Korean peninsula a century earlier.[4] China's massive military celebration of the 'victory over fascism' (read Japan) was attended by only one leader of a political democracy, Korean President Park Geun-hye.

The above examples represent but a smattering of the trilateral tensions captured in the headlines prior to the 2015 Trilateral Summit. Relations had deteriorated to such an extent that the Summit, which had been held annually from 2008 was postponed for three and a half years before finally being resumed in 2015. Although numerous issues divided and/or united them in their long historical interactions, most of the recent tensions rest on resurgent national narratives concerning issues involving their shared and contentious historical relations as well as the competing territorial claims rooted in those competing historical narratives. This paper attempts to shed light on the links between the current mix of cooperation and contestation on the one hand, and the often competing historical narratives that underlie them.

II. Competing Narratives About East Asia

History involves of course a complex matrix of facts and events, but, just as those panning for gold or mining for coal quickly learn, separating what is valuable from what is worthless is the key to what one takes away. Historians are rarely in full accord on the specifics of what to hold

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[3] Takashi Inoguchi, S. Okada, A.Tanaka, and T. Dadaev, *Human Beliefs and Values in Striding Asia* (Tokyo Akashi Shoten 2006). 482-485.

[4] Asahi Shimbun, "China sets up memorial for Korean anti-Japanese activist," January 20, 2014 available at http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/china/AJ201401200074.

and what to discard. No less is this true regarding the historical experiences and narratives surrounding East Asia.

To the extent that there is any broadly accepted history of prewar Japan, the story centers on different responses to Western imperialism. By the later part of the 19th century, most of Asia had been carved up or economically enfeebled by imperial powers--Britain, France, the Netherlands, Russia, Portugal and the United States being the most prominent. As Stephen Krasner astutely observed, these Western powers advanced across the region under an umbrella of "organized hypocrisy." Nominally they defended the Westphalian system of state sovereignty and respect for the equality of national rulers as well as notional commitment to mutual non-interference in the domestic politics of other countries. In practice they refused such acknowledgments to the Asian (and other non-Western) countries they encountered.

Simultaneously, as Krasner points out, both China and Korea were locked in their own ideological hypocrisy with leaders unprepared to change longstanding and ideologically embedded practices in an effort to ward off the predations of the West. Instead, they resisted modernizing their antiquated political systems in the service of the presumptive imperial hierarchies embedded in Confucianism. Essentially they ignored the intruding Westerners and their technologies as simply the amusing antics of lower ranking barbarians. Japanese leaders, by way of contrast, quickly jettisoned their countries' past national practices as essential to Japan's survival under independent rule.[5]

The most popular historical narrative for Japan's subsequent course continues as follows: realizing that national autonomy meant domestic Westernization and industrialization, while also concluding that global politics was a contest between 'imperialists' and 'colonies,' Japanese

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[5] Stephen D. Krasner, "Organized hypocrisy in nineteenth-century East Asia," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 1, no. 2 (2001): 173-197.

leaders carried out blitzkrieg political and economic transformations while simultaneously marching along the path of territorial expansion. The Japanese military won a stunning sequence of wars and led a colonial enterprise that became self-validating through its vast expansion of the country's territorial control. By the 1920s and 1930s domestic reforms and foreign policy expansion had made Japan one of the world's five great powers. This status was recognized during the Washington and London Naval Conferences in the 1920s and 1930s. And, in this Japanese version of events, that country's colonial rule was far more benevolent to those under its control than was the case with its Western counterparts. Japanese rule brought modernization, meritocratic and technologically sophisticated governance, advanced education, complex banking, cadastral surveys, and a host of other benefits to Korea and Taiwan.[6]

An important subtheme in this Japanese narrative was the blatant racial hierarchy imposed by the West. Though Japanese leaders saw themselves as successfully imitating the Western powers by playing a successful military the West's purported racial superiority came in the form of the "unequal treaties" and later by stripping Japan of its gains after the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) through the triple intervention of Russia, France and Germany. Japanese efforts to insert a statement of racial equality into the Versailles Peace Treaty following World War I were blocked by Britain and the United States among others. Japan's conquest of Manchuria was condemned in the League of Nations even though many Japanese leaders saw no difference between the Japanese takeover and similar land grabs that the other imperial powers had been engaged in for decades. Japanese perceptions of a Western imposed

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[6] Bruce Cumings, "The origins and development of the Northeast Asian political economy: Industrial sectors, product cycles, and political consequences," *International Organization* 38, no. 1 (1984): 1-40; T. J. Pempel, "The Developmental Regime in a Changing World Economy," in *The Developmental State*, ed. Meredith Woo-Cumings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), esp. p. 177.

racial hierarchy was the backdrop to Japan's self-justificatory advance of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, i.e. the unification of all the "yellow peoples" of Asia under Japan's leadership in a collective effort to break the stranglehold of the constraining Western powers.

Clearly this narrative is not without its vigorous critics. Many Japanese on the political left reject its emphasis on modernization, industrialization and regional liberation as masking domestic oppression and foreign subjugation advanced under an Emperor system that in Maruyama Masao's felicitous phrase ultimately spawned 'fascism from below.'[7] And of course Korea and China as victims in this drama roundly castigate its self-serving nature. For most elites and a vast majority of the populations in these two countries, the regional historical story pivots instead on national humiliation, widespread Japanese abuse of the local populations during periods of peace and even more viciously during wars. Subjugation under Japan was, in this view, at best marginally less brutal than that inflicted on peoples under the colonial thumbs of Britain, France and the other Western powers. And none in their eyes were morally justified or even congruent with asserted Western values.

III. The Early Postwar Period

World War II upended the prevailing order across East Asia in sweeping ways. Most fundamental was the demise of a world and regional order predicated on empires and colonies. In its place arose a system predicated on the forces of nationalism and national independence. Asian efforts were initially challenged by many of the former colonialist powers anxious to reestablish their former empires on the ashes of the

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[7] Masao Maruyama, *Thought and behaviour in modern Japanese politics,* ed. Ivan Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); See also Gregory J. Kasza, "Fascism from Below? A Comparative Perspective on the Japanese Right, 1931-1936," *Journal of Contemporary History* 19, no. 4 (1984): 607-629.

war. But the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu signaled the conclusive military failure of European powers to reclaim imperial prerogatives in the face of budding nationalist forces that could mobilize widespread popular support. As part of this nationalist upsurge, the two Koreas gained national autonomy albeit as two divided halves. China's long and painful civil war ended with the communist victory and consolidation of mainland control in 1949 while Japan and the U.S. reached a mutually accommodative end to the Allied Occupation and a resumption of Japanese sovereignty, albeit over a much smaller territory than had been under its suzerainty in the 1930s.

A second thread emerged out of WWII, however, namely the Cold War and the global and regional bipolarity it engendered. The Cold War advanced along two competing if reinforcing dimensions—security and economics. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union vied for the allegiance of governments across East Asia. This competition revolved fundamentally around military alliances and assistance; however, the competing economic strategies of the two super powers were critical to their alliance competition. Direct economic aid and competing trade and financial programs represented two alternative paths of development, communist or capitalist. Each sought to solidify the domestic and foreign policy allegiance of their prospective partners.

Economic and security alignments were initially reinforcing. Countries traded with others in their ideological bloc but rarely across the bipolar abyss. Japan thus was deprived of its prewar economic links with China, becoming instead highly dependent on its privileged access to U.S. markets. China, while never fully accepting Soviet preeminence over the 'communist world,' remained cut off from pro-Western markets, technology and businesses, oscillating instead between economic links to other communist states and periodic embraces of autarky. The two Koreas saw their economic and security linkages similarly severed by Cold War bipolarity. The North was heavily dependent on 'friendship prices' from China and the U.S.S.R. while the South, like Japan, spurred

links to China and other communist countries, relying instead on U.S. military protection, foreign aid, and market access, bolstered by tentative links to Japanese markets as well.

Contributing as well to today's situation, a number of territorial issues remained unresolved at the end of World War II, frozen in antagonistic ambiguities that reflected Cold War contestation. The Korean peninsula, for example, was explicitly divided with one half resting in each camp. Communist consolidation after China's civil war was short-circuited by divisions across the Taiwan Straits and America's support of a pro-Western KMT government in Taipei. Territorial sovereignty over a host of maritime islands, rocks, islets, and reefs in Northeast Asian waters were left unresolved and remained subject to competing claims.

A decline in Cold War bipolarity and the rise in the penetrative capabilities of global capital and corporations undercut this bipolar division of Northeast Asia. Deng Xiao-ping's political and economic reform program followed quickly on diplomatic normalization with China's prior enemies. This marked China as the first major communist country to liberate itself from bipolar rigidities. The 1989-91 collapse of the USSR along with its Eastern European client states sealed the end of the bipolar world. The governments of China, Japan and South Korea quickly began adjusting to these external changes in economics and security. In most instances they quickly built new bridges over previously divisive ravines.

Even if recent years have seen an escalation in trilateral tensions and a resurgence of mistrust toward neighboring countries, it is essential to highlight the ways in which their initial adjustments to these big external changes impelled them toward economic interdependence, regional multilateralism, and reduced conflict. While the territorial and political maps of East Asia have remained largely intact since the end of World War II, any map of today's commercial ties, communication linkages, transportation webs or institutional networks would show the

absence of any rigid borders. On any of those dimensions today's East Asia's regional order is vastly more integrated, enmeshed and interdependent.

Regional reorganization can be traced to a host of changes. But a valuable starting point was the continued demonstration of economic vitality by countries that opted for versions of capitalism over those that held to the communist ideal of state-owned enterprises and top down planning. Japan led the way, embarking on a radically different path than the one it had pursued in the prewar period. Abjuring external expansion, postwar Japanese leaders, under a domestically-focused conservative regime, committed the country to a strategy of low military spending and a concentrated effort at industrial reinvigoration, export-led growth, and reconciliation with many of the victims of its prewar expansion. Reparations, foreign aid and technological assistance along with membership in numerous multilateral organizations allowed Japan to project an image of itself as a peaceful trading state.[8] It was an image that led to varying degrees of forgiveness by neighboring nation-states for Japan's prewar aggression.

Domestic political democracy under the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) sustained domestic support for the country's path. So did the security guaranteed by the U.S.-Japan Alliance along with the regional presence of U.S. troops. Japanese political elites had long been divided into several major clusters on questions of security. Nevertheless the broad policy of limited defense expenditures and a concentration on economic development drove foreign policy from the late 1950s into the mid-to-late 1990s and still exerts residual influence today. This broad grand strategy eponymously labelled "The Yoshida Doctrine" continued to shape Japanese actions for forty or more years.[9]

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[8] Richard N. Rosecrance, *The rise of the trading state: Commerce and conquest in the modern world* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

[9] Kosaka Masataka, *Saishô Yoshida Shigeru* [Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru] (Tokyo: Chûô

Equally vital to this course of action were the constraining powers of both Japanese public opinion and the organized political left. Each one exerted sustained pressures that prevented any major deviations from the so-called 'peace constitution' and a minimal-to-non-existent security role for the Japanese Self-Defense Forces.

As Japan's economy rocketed forward during the 1970s and 1980s two critical changes took place across the region. First a number of other countries in the region began, to a greater or lesser extent, to emulate the Japanese emphasis on economic development married to a minimization of military contestation. Japan's economic success was followed by South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore; then eventually by Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia in Southeast Asia. Equally significant, starting in 1978 for China and 1986 for Vietnam, two major communist regimes opted for accommodation to their own versions of capitalism. Across East Asia, leaders from different regimes began to pivot their legitimacy less on military prowess and confrontations with geographical neighbors and more on national economic development and improved living conditions for their citizens. The consequence was a rather comprehensive "East Asian peace" manifested in a dramatic drop in state-to-state conflicts and the virtual elimination of battle field casualties.[10]

Building out from such internally-focused strategies of national economic development countries began to invest, trade, communicate with, travel to, and produce goods in ways that blurred, if not completely ignored, previously rigid national boundaries. For most of the 1990s and well into the early 2000s, East Asia generally, and Northeast Asia in particular, saw increasing economic interdependence, a deepening multilateralization, and a reduction in military clashes and threat levels.

Kôronsha, 1968); Kenneth B. Pyle, *Japan rising: The resurgence of Japanese power and purpose* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008); Richard J. Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 109-132.

[10] On this peace see the special issue of *Global Asia* 10, no. 4 (Winter, 2015).

It is hard to deny the significance of Japan's postwar historical redirection in catalyzing this region wide transformation.[11]

Japan's economic success led to a soaring rise in the Japanese currency that in turn stimulated the country's firms to invest heavily abroad. Asia, including South Korea and China, were major destinations. A torrent of official Japanese yen loans, grant aid and technical cooperation benefited governmental coffers across Asia, including heavily in China. All of this resulted in a boom for Japan's regional influence and a cementing of its position as the de facto leader of East Asia's economic miracle. But equally significant was the jump in the value of the Korean won and the Taiwanese new dollar leading companies in both of these countries to emulate the Japanese moves abroad, all triggering today's complex matrix of regional production networks and economic interdependence.[12]

Of particular note for China-Japan relations, over the three decades following bilateral diplomatic normalization in 1972, Japan was consistently the largest aid donor to China. Private sector investments were also extensive. By 2007, China and Hong Kong combined were host to 9.1 percent of Japan's total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) overseas stock. Only the U.S. (31.9 percent) and the Netherlands (11.7 percent) garnered larger shares of Japanese FDI. Furthermore, in 2005 China outstripped the U.S. to become Japan's major trade partner

Relations between Korea and Japan also improved most conspicuously with the historical visit to Japan of President Kim Dae-jung in October 1998, a visit highlighted by an apology from Prime Minister Obuchi for the suffering Japan had caused its former colony. In

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[11] For an elaboration see T. J. Pempel, *Remapping East Asia: the construction of a region* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); T. J. Pempel, "The race to connect East Asia: an unending steeplechase," *Asian Economic Policy Review* 1, no.2 (2006): 239-254.

[12] John Ravenhill, "Production Networks in Asia," in *Oxford Handbook of the International Relations of East Asia,* ed. Saadia Pekkanen, John Ravenhill, and Rosemary Foot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 348-368.

turn Kim praised Japan for its postwar achievements and promised to "put history behind us" and to look to the future when considering their bilateral relations. The joint Japan-Korea hosting of the World cup in 2002 and the explosion in cultural exchanges between the two countries offered further evidence of the increasingly positive bilateral ties.

The above represents a historical sketch of Japan's role in the formation of a new postwar regional order, an order that prevailed at least into the late 1990s. The above narrative would be broadly palatable to most Asian observers and in particular to those in Northeast Asia. How then did such embryonic positive ties become overlaid, if not reversed, in recent years?

IV. Histories In Contention

Although there might be nuanced modifications of the above narrative of Japan's peaceful and regionally constructive postwar role, most historians and political leaders would agree that the above story provides at least the broad outlines of agreed upon and critical facts. At the same time, centripetal moves toward multidimensional regionalism and trilateral cooperation by no means obliterated the power of nationalism in the region. Yet, once the unifying glue of existential Cold War bipolarity was removed, many latent historical memories and revanchist territorial claims resurfaced. Today Northeast Asia is therefore simultaneously the home of deepening economic interdependence and closer regional cooperation on the one hand but of often xenophobic nationalism on the other. Competing nationalist narratives, once dampened by the Cold War have resurfaced with particular ferocity in Northeast Asia. This has been most notable around territorial disputes left unresolved since World War II, along with competing historical narratives about the war itself, how it developed, what it means, and who was most brutally victimized. Like most historical debates a great deal depends on what one uses as a starting point to the narrative. There is no shortage of fingers pointing

accusingly in all directions to account for the rising discord.

1. Chinese and Korean Fingers Pointed at Japan

From both a Chinese and Korean perspective, any deterioration in trilateral tensions traces to Japan. For those two countries, Japan's domestic political regime has been freed up to move in what is seen as its natural rightwing direction as the consequence of the electoral decimation of the once formidable left. Never more than a one-third minority in parliament, the Japanese left had provided an ongoing, if limited, check on Japan's ruling conservatives, hindering efforts to alter the postwar constitution, stressing the dangers of war even to the point of warning about potential entrapment in U.S. security maneuvers, and endeavoring to keep the citizenry attuned to the darker aspects of Japan's prewar history. Electoral reforms in 1994, however, and the prime ministership of Japanese Socialist Party (JSP) leader Murayama Tomiichi (1994-96) spawned a series of actions that scrapped virtually all of the longstanding positions of his party. These led to the party's electoral collapse in the 1995 election, a defeat from which the left collectively has never recovered. For many Korean and Chinese the result has been an increasing right-of-center ideological impetus and efforts at historical revisionism by Japanese conservatives.

Central to the narrative was the administration of Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichiro (2001-2006). Koizumi oversaw a reinvigoration of Japanese defense and security policies, largely in keeping with the goals of the combined defense establishments of Japan and the U.S. He boosted the status of the Defense Agency, provided Japanese military support for U.S. actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, enrolled Japan as the first foreign participant in America's missile defense system, and enhanced the interoperability of Japanese and U.S. equipment. He also oversaw a new military outline in 2004 that broke precedent by explicitly identifying China and the DPRK as potential security concerns to Japan.

Even more troubling to China and Korea, Koizumi undercut the longstanding, if implicit, agreement between Japan and China put in place by Prime Minister Nakasone (1982-87), that Japanese prime ministers would not visit the controversial Yasukuni Shrine. The shrine, as is well known, is a memorial to the Japanese military that enshrines, among thousands of Japanese military dead, several leaders of Japan's World War II expansion who were executed after the Tokyo War Crimes Trial as Class A war criminals.

In a blatant attempt to garner the votes of the right-leaning War-Bereaved Families Association during his campaign for LDP president, Koizumi promised that, if elected, he would visit the shrine on August 15. His recurrent Yasukuni visits were supplemented by those of numerous cabinet members and LDP legislators, along with other gestures to the ideological right. These included government approval of textbooks that denied large segments of Japan's aggression during World War II, downplayed the significance of forced prostitution to serve the Japanese military and promoted Japanese claims over Dokdo/Takeshima (long under ROK administrative control). In these and related ways, Koizumi and the LDP tapped into a lodestone of latent nationalist frustration over Japan's cascading economic decline and China's corresponding rise in regional political and economic stature (most demonstrably driven home when China's GDP surpassed that of Japan in 2010).

A host of events reflected the deteriorating ties: anti-Japanese demonstrations at soccer matches in Chongqing China in July 2004, a Chinese submarine intrusion into Japanese waters in November 2004, a statement by U.S. and Japanese officials in February 2005 that Chinese officials took as hostile, protests at the Japanese Embassy in Beijing in April 2005, cancellations of visits by Chinese and ROK leaders to Japan, and combined Korean and Chinese opposition to supporting Japan's bid for a seat on the UN Security Council, to name but a few items.

Subsequent LDP Prime Ministers Abe and Aso further damaged

relations. Abe welcomed back to the party a number of hard core conservatives purged by Koizumi and accelerated Japan's rightward and security moves, thus swinging the party further to the ideological right. Aso promoted an "arc of freedom and prosperity" which made no explicit mention of Korea and which China interpreted as an effort at containment. Their combined nationalist push included a drumbeat of criticism about the dangers of China's rise and North Korea's failure to account adequately for various Japanese citizens abducted by the DPRK program in the 1970s.

Such moves to the right were interrupted by the LDP's replacement by the more centrist Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government that took office in 2009. In an effort to improve relations in Northeast Asia Prime Minister Hatoyama floated a proposal for Japan to create and lead an "East Asia Community" that would include China and Korea. The DPJ also sent a major business entourage of several hundred Japanese business and political leaders to China.

If the DPJ embraced greater regional cooperation on the one hand it was also responsible for a key rupture in relations between Japan and China. For decades, Japan and China had operated on an implicit, if not always publicly acknowledged, agreement to avoid squabbles over the contested Senkaku/Daioyu islands. Among other things, custom dictated that if Japanese official vessels seized Chinese fishermen in those waters they and their ship would be held for a few days and returned to China minus the catch. Following a 2010 incident in which a Chinese fishing trawler rammed two Japanese Coast Guard vessels, newly installed Foreign Minister Maehara spurned precedent and declared that the captain would be subject to Japanese law. This triggered a violent series of anti-Japanese demonstrations in China, the tit-for-tat arrest of four Japanese businessmen in China, and China's freezing its export of rare earth materials—a critical component in many high tech Japanese goods. The DPJ and the Foreign Ministry quickly backed off and returned the captain to China but not before triggering a major rupture in bilateral ties.

Relations soured further under the DPJ when Prime Minister Noda took what he believed was the tension-reducing move of purchasing three privately owned islands in the Senkaku group. This was aimed at forestalling their sale to the hyper-nationalistic mayor of Tokyo who had threatened to use them for right-wing, anti-Chinese propaganda purposes. Rather than welcoming Noda's actions as conciliatory, China chose to interpret them as an official effort to upend the status quo and to bolster Japanese sovereignty claims. The result has been several years of a testy cat-and-mouse game by Japanese and Chinese maritime vessels and aircraft attempting to outmaneuver one another in ways that might assert or refute competing claims of sovereignty.

The drubbing of the DPJ in 2012 ushered in the second prime ministership of Abe Shinzo. Both China and Korea took this as the latest chapter in what they saw as a long move by Japan to resurrect and link back to many of its prewar roots. Winning office with promises to revitalize Japan's languid economy through a mix of policies labelled "Abenomics," the returning Abe proved slow to deliver economically but quick to advance his deeply held nationalist agenda. Abe had made numerous promises during the LDP presidential election campaign in 2012 that were widely regarded as part of a distinctive right-wing tilt—revising the Constitution, visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, and reexamining the basis behind the Kono statement that had been the most prominent governmental apology for Japan's military enslavement of the so-called "comfort women."

Abe followed through on many of these once in office by forging a cabinet rife with right-of-center parliamentarians. His 2014 cabinet reorganization for example involved fifteen out of a total of nineteen cabinet officials, including Abe, who were members of right-leaning organizations. Furthermore, he appointed historical revisionists to key posts in a heavy-handed attempt to rein in criticism from Japan's public broadcasting network; rammed through a secrecy bill that would essentially prevent public whistle blowing; endorsed textbook revisions

that whitewashed wide swaths of Japan's wartime behavior; regularly pursued constitutional revision; made a public visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine; and also flashed his own widely photographed 'thumbs up' while sitting in an SDF fighter plane with the conspicuous number 731 written on the side. A coincidence, perhaps? But for many who saw the photograph the links to the notorious biological experimental Unit 731 were unmistakable. It was such actions that led both China and Japan to suspend Trilateral Summit meetings for that three-and-a-half-year period.

2. Japanese Fingers Pointed at China

There is strong criticism of a resurgent conservative tilt in Japan as the source of recent problems. Yet, for many Japanese, the story really begins, not in Japan, but in China in the aftermath of Tiananmen. In its effort to legitimate continued Communist Party rule, the CCP rushed to shore up mass support and leadership cohesion through a new program of officially sanctioned nationalism.[13] The administration of Jiang Zemin launched "patriotic education" in the 1990s, centering on a somewhat new (and certainly dubious) narrative of Chinese resistance against the Japanese invasion and its ultimate defeat in 1945. Integral to the campaign was the fostering of highly negative portraits of Japan among the Chinese people. Patriotic fervor emerged as "an official doctrine of state nationalism by the CCP," the rubric under which to promote national unity and to strengthen its ruling power. Xenophobic museums, patriotic school education, patriotic chat networks and popular demonstrations all became part of a party-driven agenda designed to legitimate the centrality of the CCP to China's independence and security. This has since been bolstered by a cognate nationalist narrative

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[13] Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 35-78.

focused on the need to eradicate "a hundred years of national humiliation" that paints the West and particularly Japan as longstanding and ever-ominous threats. The presidency of Xi Jinping has shown an enhancement of party control over information and nationalist messages. Nationalism and xenophobia in China today are counterbalanced by a party leadership anxious to maintain close economic links with Japan and other economic partners.

Equally troubling to Japanese policymakers have been the potential strategic and diplomatic implications of China's rapid economic growth and Japan's decades of economic sluggishness. Nervous about Chinese expanding military budgets, including the development of a blue water navy and the search for enhanced energy resources in maritime areas claimed by both countries, Japan in October 2001 began reducing and redirecting its Chinese ODA. In 2008 it followed up by ending yen based loans to China in recognition of the country's rising economic success and "diminished need."

Years of stoking anti-Japanese flames had ebbed and flowed but it took on a new dynamism over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands that began with the ramming of Japanese Coast Guard cutters by a Chinese fishing boat noted above. But from the Japanese perspective China overreacted to the captain's subsequent arrest. The offsetting arrest of four Japanese businessmen, widespread citizen attacks on Japanese companies and property in China, and an outpouring of anti-Japanese vitriol from suddenly uncensored 'netizens' were followed by the introduction in early 2014 of two anti-Japanese national holidays that further inflamed anti-Japanese sentiments. None seemed evocative of appreciation for all of Japan's prior economic assistance.

Chinese nationalism has been partnered with official ROK criticisms of Japan as manifested, for example, in the two countries' collaboration to erect a statue and memorial hall in the VIP lounge at Harbin railway station for anti-Japanese Korean nationalist, An Jung-geun, on a site where An assassinated Ito Hirobumi, architect of Japan's

constitution but also the overseer of Japan's colonization of the Korean peninsula a century earlier.[14] As noted above, such cooperation seemed also evident in President Park's agreement to a preeminent presence in China's 2015 military celebration of what emerged as China's role at the center of an international movement to defeat fascism, as most visibly seen in the crushing of Japan's invading armies.

As economic growth has slowed and popular protests have mounted, China's new leader Xi Jinping has periodically stoked the fires of what is often xenophobic nationalism as a companion to his risky efforts to fight official corruption (and eliminate intra-party rivals). While economic development remains the CCP's official priority, government rhetoric is often embellished with nationalistic flourishes suggesting a shift toward enhanced military assertiveness directed at Japan, Southeast Asia and the United States. Moreover, given the increased perception among Chinese elites about U.S. weakness as well as Japanese self-isolation, a broad Chinese policy shift toward the rest of the region appears to be on the march. This has been manifested in plans for "One Belt, One Road," the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the so-called BRICs bank, among other moves perceived in Japan as elements of economic policies implicitly directed at showcasing China as the region's new de facto leader offsetting the declining economic wherewithal of Japan and the U.S.

3. Japanese Fingers Pointed at Korea as well

Nor has Korea been without its castigators in Japan. Thirty-five years of harsh colonization has left the Korean public simmering with negative attitudes toward Japan. At the same time, normalization and financial aid

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[14] Asahi Shimbun, "China sets up memorial for Korean anti-Japanese activist," January 20, 2014 available at http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/china/AJ201401200074.

in 1965, the two countries' ties to the U.S., their respective rapid economic growth and democracy, their domestic economic systems, expanding tourist, educational and cultural exchanges along with explicit governmental efforts to improve ties often dampened such criticisms.

Japan-Korea relations had been set on a largely positive course during the two progressive presidencies of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. Bilateral relations between Japan and the ROK continued to be warm under overlapping conservative administrations of Lee Myung-bak and Japanese Prime Minister Aso Taro. The two met on the periphery of larger meetings such as ASEAN Plus Three and the G-20. They also held a sequence of individual summits. Between the last quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2009 Aso and Lee met as many as eight times, indicating warm personal ties. Additionally in early 2009, Japan and South Korea signed their first formal defense pact covering military cooperation measures in a wide range of areas. Both also participated in joint military exercises with the U.S. along with the exploration of a bilateral free trade agreement.

Meanwhile, at the Shangri-la Dialogue in Singapore, Defense Ministers Lee Sang-hee of South Korea, Hamada Yasukazu of Japan, and Robert Gates of the U.S. held their first trilateral defense ministerial talks. The ROK and Japan also reinvigorated suspended talks for a bilateral FTA. Equally important, Japan and South Korea joined with China in the first Trilateral Leaders' meeting in Fukuoka in 2008 that subsequently became institutionalized with annual meetings and a secretariat in Seoul. Yet Lee was not above playing to his own domestic nationalists as he demonstrated by his sudden visit to the island of Dokdo/Takeshima (the first by a Korean president, and one roundly criticized by Japan) in the run up to Korea's 2012 presidential elections.

Moreover, in his efforts to distance himself from his progressive predecessors, Lee's administration swung right on the issue of Korean history, contending that school texts promoted under the Kim-Roh regimes had denigrated the democratic and economic achievements of

earlier leaders (such as military ruler Park Chung-hee, father of the current president). In the words of Chung-in Moon, Lee saw earlier revisions by the progressives as having "adopt[ed] an anti-market, anti-liberal democracy, anti-American, and pro-North Korean stance."[15] Lee's moves exacerbated the already wide left-right gap domestically and moved toward the instilling of deeper nationalist sentiments in Korea.

The overlapping administrations of Abe and Korean President Park Geun-hye saw bilateral Japan-Korea relations spiral further downward. After taking office her administration boosted U.S.-Korea links while softening Lee's tough line toward the DPRK. She also worked to improve ties with China. She and Abe have overseen the stunning collapse of the previously warm Japan-Korea links. For Park the "comfort women" issue triggered her powerfully personalized rejection of Abe.

Since its inauguration the Park administration has joined China in relentless criticism of the Abe administration and his ongoing embrace of multiple right-wing positions, most sensitive of which to Park personally has been the broad wink-and-nod skepticism Abe and his administration have demonstrated regarding the Japanese government's responsibilities for the wartime military system of "comfort women." Frostiness between the two leaders was evident in the fact that the first post-inauguration phone call between Abe and Park did not come until March 2013, the numerous previously-scheduled high level meetings cancelled by the ROK, and Park's unrelenting refusal to meet bilaterally with Abe, describing him as failing to have a correct understanding of history. Following Abe's visit to Yasukuni, Korean public opinion of him plummeted to a level below that of Kim Jong-un.[16]

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[15] Chung-in Moon, "South Korea in 2008: From Crisis to Crisis," *Asian Survey* 49, no. 1 (2009): 125

[16] Asan Institute, "Challenges and Opportunities for Korea-Japan Relations in 2014," available at http://en.asaninst.org/contents/challenges-and-opportunities-for-korea-japan-relations-in-2014.

Park was finally strong-armed into a three way sit-down among herself, Abe and President Obama in March 2014, the U.S. being distressed over the deterioration of ties between its two most important Northeast Asian allies and the risks of poisoning America's broader regional goals. Nevertheless, the bitterness of Japan-Korea relations under Abe and Park, despite the strategic logic pressing for cooperation, continues to underscore the driving power of domestic politics.

From the Japanese perspective, all claims against Japan by Korea, including the "comfort women" issue, had been "solved" whereas for the Park administration the agreement had been negotiated in a time of Korean economic weakness and lack of full awareness of the plight of the remaining Korean "comfort women." Hence the 1965 agreement left the issue open for further examination and resolution.

Perhaps the most persistent criticism of Korea by Japanese officials of late has been that despite a long list of apologies of varying depth and self-abnegation, the Koreans "keep moving the goal posts" and demanding new phrasing or a reaffirmation of prior apologies. Regardless, the Korean version of events, as heard by many in Japan, is seen to have contributed heavily to recent fissures.

IV. Concluding Remarks

In the past several years, a wave of competing nationalisms and finger-pointing has derailed what had previously been a herky-jerky but nonetheless clear trend toward reduced tensions and greater cooperation among China, Korea and Japan. As was noted above, nationalism has had deep roots and recent watering in all three countries. Hostility toward Japan in Korea and China has ebbed between latent and inflammatory for decades. Meanwhile, within Japan, a burgeoning and often chauvinistic nationalism has been evident since the bursting of the economic bubble in 1990-91. To many in Japan, neither Korea nor China show sufficient appreciation of the long and positive contributions made by Japan's

peaceful behavior and economic contributions to their own successes. A festering animosity toward China was visible as early as 2000 when a Chinese naval reconnaissance ship sailed around the Japanese archipelago along with subsequent intrusions into undisputed territorial waters as well as with the two countries' mini-trade war of 2001.[17] Yet for most of the first decade of this century tensions were tamped down and popular xenophobia was checked by political leaders in all three countries. All appeared to stress collectively the positive benefits of cooperation over the competing national interests threatening to push them apart.

Leadership efforts that long skirted the worst excesses of domestic nationalism in the interest of regional economic improvement have been outstripped in recent years by three leaders more willing to stoke the flames of mutual suspicion. Ongoing shifts in the regional order, as well as the recent flare-up in maritime security tensions, have made it tempting for leaders to hunker down behind national walls, pointing damning fingers at neighboring countries while ignoring flaws in their own back yards. Clearly, recent tensions and expressions of cross-border animosity have powerful roots in domestic politics.

Prime Minister Abe has made no secret of his broad scale efforts to bolster national pride among the Japanese citizenry and to erase what he claims has been a postwar penchant for national self-abnegation and apology. Korean President Park has been wary for domestic political reasons of appearing too sympathetic to Japan since her father has long been criticized for his collaboration with Japan during the colonial era and as the man who, in 1965, signed away Korea's rights to an official apology and reparations from Japan for its thirty-five years of colonization. And surely the Abe administration's efforts to rewrite the

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[17] Akio Takahara, "A Japanese Perspective on China's Rise and the East Asian Order," in *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics,* ed. Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 220, 226.

well-established historical record on sex slavery feed Park's efforts. And stoking anti-Japanese flames in China is undoubtedly helpful to President Xi as he attempts to consolidate his rule, crack down on CCP and other official corruption, deal with the slowing pace of economic development, erase the 'hundred years of national humiliation,' and in the process improve relations with South Korea as a possible wedge in the U.S. alliance structure in East Asia.

The current uncertainty and diminished cross-border trust may well be temporary. After all, economic and financial links continue at a blistering pace and regional institutions, mil-mil cooperation and the like continue beneath the negative headlines. We may well see leadership-led moves to reduce tensions as has frequently happened in the past and as appears to have motivated the 2015 Trilateral Summit. Yet the present situation poses serious risks. As governments jostle to ensure themselves the greatest possible influence over the evolving regional order, the chances for inadvertent mishaps are high. Ships maneuvering for position in contested waters; aircraft scrambling to meet erstwhile challengers; military vessels attempting to spy on nearby military maneuvers and calculate how much is "routine," how much is "probing," or how much is provocatively "hostile"; top leaders refusing to meet; and the mutual exchange of nationalistic vituperations: all these are freighted with the potential for unwanted clashes or miscalculations. The risk of accidental and unintended military interactions rise when emotions run high, leaders fail to meet, and military forces operating in close proximity carry the bulk of the burden for foreign diplomacy. Rabid nationalism among the populace makes it difficult for even witting leaders to back off from potentially tense security situations. The central task facing political leaders across the region today is reducing the danger that such interactions will escalate into more serious and irreversible spirals into conflict. Instead it would be welcome to remember the long and generally positive ties that have linked the three countries, particularly since the end of bipolarity.

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