

## Can We Say “The End of East Asia Regionalism?”

The idea of an East Asian Community has a long history and much has been written about why it has not come to fruition. This paper will focus on Northeast Asian countries of China, Japan, and South Korea and what those countries have done in the recent past, present, and what we can expect in the future from them. Finally, the paper makes four recommendations for finally achieving an East Asian Community. First, the role of the US in East Asia has to be solidified. Second, China must stop being a shirker of the international order and start being a supporter. Third, historical issues and animosities must be left in the past. Finally, the gulf between CJK and ASEAN both economically and politically must be narrowed.

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The concept of an East Asian Community (EAC) is something that has a long and sometimes unfortunate history. According to Kim (2013), Asia was never conceptualized in the same way that Europe was. It never had been under one country's control like Europe. In fact, the ideas of "Asia" or "East Asia" were concepts created by Europeans. Kim goes on to tell us that there were three phases of community discourse in East Asia. The first was China-centered, or Confucian; the next was Japanese Imperialism; the third US-centered. Thus the idea of an East Asian Community has been thought about, written about, and debated for several centuries. Recent history involves ASEAN, which was created in 1967 in order to support regional economic growth and as a way to fight the spread of communism in the region (Eccleston, Dawson, and McNamara, 1998). After the economic miracles which took place in Japan and South Korea in the 1970s and 1980s, ASEAN invited China, South Korea, and Japan to what is now called ASEAN+3 thirty years later. ASEAN was further expanded with what is called ASEAN+6, which is ASEAN+3 along with India, Australia and New Zealand. Currently, the closest we have gotten to an EAC is the East Asian Summit (EAS) which is ASEAN+6 along with Russia and the United States. Within this group, Malaysia and China feel ASEAN+3 should lead the vision of the EAC while India and Japan see that EAS should be the focus of an East Asian Community (Han, 2005; Acharya, 2006; Christensen, 2006).

First, it is prudent to have brief discussion of the two divergent areas of East Asian regional structure: economy and security. With security, the US has largely been the regional security partner of many East Asian countries. The US has bilateral security relationships with Australia, Japan, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand and New Zealand. It also has key strategic relationships with India, Indonesia, Singapore, and Taiwan. This system, especially the alliances with South Korea, Japan and Taiwan, is called the "hub and spokes" system of bilateral relations. Victor Cha (2010) wrote that the US created this system in order to have a

“powerplay” in East Asia. This “powerplay” is meant to give the US an advantage in the region by making allied countries dependent on them.

Economically, the regional structure is quite different. While there are several bilateral FTAs between the countries, the most powerful economic institutions in East Asia are multilateral in nature. Katada (2009) argues that East Asian economic regionalism cannot be the same as that of the EU as there is strong political tension in the region. She also argues that poor East Asian countries have a distinct disadvantage as there is no safety net such as the Regional Structure Fund and Cohesion Fund in the EU. The complexity of bilateral FTAs and multilateral economic institutions has been termed an “Asian Noodle bowl” because the various FTAs and institutions are intertwined and entangled in an administrative nightmare that, in some cases, impedes and slows down economic progress and trade facilitation (Baldwin, 2008; Kawai and Wignaraja, 2011; Chum, Sonya, 2014).

Security and economics drive the regional structure in East Asia. Problems such as US influence, political and historical tension and the wide gulf between developed and developing countries have made the reality of a regional structure in East Asia difficult. This paper will focus on the “+3” of ASEAN+3. What have China, Japan, and South Korea (CJK) done in the recent past regarding an East Asian Community; what are the current leaders doing; and what are possible regional roles for those countries in the future? What are some roadblocks in realizing an East Asia Community? Are they similar or different to those Sung-joo Han wrote about 10 years ago (Han, 2005)? Finally, I will attempt to give an answer to the question: Can we say “the End of East Asian Community?”

### Theoretical Considerations

Much has been written about possible East Asian integration. One theoretic path to an East Asian community is from the emergent peace perspective (Hong, 2015). In this article, Hong argues that a security community may arise from a self-organizing peace process

emerging after a time of war. He also argues that the role of institutional entrepreneur is bounded by morphogenetic fields. He gives two cases to back his theory. The first case is Claude Monnet's influential role in the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The second case is Ahn Jung-geun's concept of Pan-Asianism. The ECSC worked as the morphogenetic fields were ripe after WWII while in Ahn's case, his idea was sown in unproductive morphogenetic fields and his idea faded with his execution in 1910.

Another important path is using the European Model. According to Cameron (2010), four important tenets to sustained multilateral community have kept the EU intact and strong. 1) Use of supranational rather than balance of power model; 2) Strong leadership in the Franco-German axis; 3) The will amongst member countries to share sovereignty; 4) a consensus approach combined with solidarity and tolerance. Core amongst these is the willingness and readiness to share sovereignty and operation through strong common institutions. Other regional groupings such as ASEAN or the African Union have not been able to achieve the success of the EU because there seems to be no willingness to share sovereignty. Additionally, he writes that the basis for EU integration was the reconciliation between Germany and France. In East Asia, Japan will have to reconcile with China and South Korea before any integration is able to happen.

To the end, Lind (2009) has examined various forms of apologies. She finds that some claims of contrition are valid while others are not. Denial especially hinders reconciliation, but reconciliation can be had without contrition. She shows the cases of the US-Japan relationship, Germany and France and Britain and Germany where reconciliation was possible without contrition.

The prospects for East Asian integration are not dead. According to Kim (2009) the prospects for an East Asian Community fall somewhere between "Procedural Divergence" and "Fundamental Skepticism." That is to say, integration can be possible depending on

regional circumstances or regional integration is neither possible nor desirable. Kim concludes that Asia and Europe have many more differences than similarities and that close examination of the differences is required. He also states that integration is not necessarily inherently good. For it to be good there must be sufficient consensus on the subject.

### China

David Shambaugh (2005) tells us that despite a half-century of negative relations with its neighbors, China is now “an exporter of goodwill and consumer durables.” In recent times, China has been a leader in economic regionalism. China was the first of the Northeast Asian countries to open negotiations for an FTA with ASEAN, called the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) in 2001. China jumped at the chance due to the proliferation of regional economic integration around the world (Gradzuik, 2010). The ACFTA was also a result of the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s and stemmed from China’s stabilizing actions thus helping to slow the crisis (Shambaugh, 2005). Tongzon (2005) saw that China and ASEAN would experience both great economic opportunity and substantial challenges with the ACFTA. No matter the pros and cons, the ACFTA showed that China was actively promoting multilateralism in economic matters as far back as 2000.

More recently, a study by Chen and Yang (2013) showed that ASEAN states have taken gone in different directions regarding economic cooperation with China. Because of the rapid ascension of Chinese economic power, ASEAN states have either balanced, bandwagoned with, or hedged against China. The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCESR, 2015) support this thesis in how high, middle and low income ASEAN countries have interacted with China. Overall, China remains the largest trading partner with ASEAN, having a 14% share of overall trade. Also, China is becoming a large contributor of FDI, but still has a small percentage of total FDI in ASEAN countries.

Overall, recent history suggests that China will continue to be a major partner and

leader in economic development in the ASEAN region. The recent creation of Chinese centric New Development Bank (NDB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) lead many to believe that the Chinese intend to continue its leadership of regional economic structures well into the future.

While China's cooperation with ASEAN seems to be strong; its strategic relationship with many ASEAN countries is not so strong. Dillon and Tkacik Jr. (2005) tell us that China was strengthening its military relationships with ASEAN. At the time, China was building military bilateral relationships with many ASEAN countries while the US was largely ignoring the region. In the 1990s China decided to delay its strategy in the South China Sea in order to make inroads into ASEAN with stronger security ties (Zhao, 2009; Odgaard, 2007). The ASEAN area was traditionally under American security influence, but China took advantage of the apparent US-Middle East distraction.

We must also view China's foreign policy and policy toward East Asia Community from the lens of nationalism. Zhao believes that Chinese foreign policy is "both motivated and constrained" by nationalism (2009: 1). Chinese nationalism motivates regional cooperation by using that cooperation to boost Chinese economic power in the region. China has especially formed and joined multilateral institutions with neighboring countries. It sees this as boosting its reputation in the region as a friendly neighbor while also boosting wealth domestically. But, as Zhao comments, China is also constrained by nationalism. Most importantly, China is wary of Japan's influence in the region and also any binding resolutions that may hinder sovereignty.

### Japan

Because of its constitution and Article 9, which states that the Japanese people forever renounce war as a right and means of settling international disputes, Japan is not a player in the security architecture of East Asia. Things change, however, and recent actions

by the Japanese government to ease the constitutional mandate are under way. It is too early to know what this will mean for East Asian security but it certainly has been thoroughly debated.

Before we get into the present time, we should have a brief discussion about what Japan has meant for East Asian economic structure in the last few years. Japan has been a strong and important actor in raising the economic profile of East Asia. After China announced the ACFTA in 2001, Japan rushed to put forth its own ASEAN-Japan FTA, called the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (AJCEPA). But due to several factors such as divided government and non-government entities and the unwillingness to include agriculture in the FTA, the AJCEPA did not come into force until 2010 (Chum, 2014). Chum also states that while the AJCEPA was a reaction to the ACFTA, it was also a vehicle to exert influence in ASEAN and provide security for itself. He felt that the AJCEPA would strengthen Japan's image in Asia while also boosting its geostrategic and geopolitical power.

Japan was a major proponent of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) since its inception in 1994. In his book, Takeshi Yuzawa outlines the initial enthusiasm and eventual "pessimistic realism" that Japan's leaders experienced regarding the ARF (2007: 157). The Realist theory of international politics was vindicated with the ARF. While the Liberalists and Constructivists saw the ARF as a viable security institution, Realists knew it could not solve the region's problems. Eventually, Japan caught on to reality.

The most prominent period of regionalism in Japan came during the brief period when Yukio Hatoyama and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was in power. Zhao (2009) mentions how Hatoyama contacted the Chinese regarding an East Asia Community within 5 days of assuming power. East Asian regionalism was a priority in his government. While Japan's major role in East Asian regionalism has mostly been economic and finance as stated

earlier, Tanaka (2009) mentions how Japan's role had also moved into sustainable growth and nuclear proliferation. The view that Japan can play a mediator role in East Asia is one that has spanned over the years. Tanaka stresses the importance of Japan in the relationship between the US and China. In 2012, Kazuhiko Togo (Togo, 2012; Radchenko, 2014) also pushed the idea (even after the East Asian regional focus died with the DPJ) that Japan must play a mediator role in the Asia Pacific region.

### South Korea

Similar to Japan, South Korea has had a long relationship politically with the United States. This security alliance has largely kept South Korea out of the conversation in terms of regional security. South Korea, as well as Japan, has taken a back seat to the United States in securing the region. Apart from that, South Korea has long been a centerpiece of realizing the goal of an East Asia Community.

Before the US pivot to Asia, South Korea played a strong role in East Asian economic and security cooperation. It joined ASEAN together with China and Japan in 1997 to form ASEAN+3. Since then, it has lead initiatives to move the idea of a community forward. It was President Kim Dae-jung who proposed the East Asia Vision Group (EAVG), whose report led to the East Asia Study Group (EASG). The EAVG saw the need to lead Asia from a "region of nations" to "a bona fide regional community" (Acharya, 2006: 415; EAVG, 2001:1-6).

Writing prior to the breakup of the Six Party Talks, Sung-han Kim surmised that "inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation... [could] contribute to creating a favorable environment for multilateral security cooperation" in Northeast Asia (2008: 146). He went on to give 4 recommendations on how a security dialogue should continue. 1) Multilateralism should be seen as a supplement to bilateralism; 2) Inter-Korean relations should be taken into account; 3) Any security dialogue needs to be consistent with the goals and aspirations of



ASEAN and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF); 4) the process needs to be slow. As Kim pointed out, even East Asian security issues need to be taken with the whole East Asian region in mind. His recommendations are still useful even as efforts to reignite the Six Party Talks are not coming to fruition.

Economically, South Korea is contributing to the discombobulated FTA architecture of East Asia. Korea is either in the process of or has completed FTAs with all countries that would be a part of the Trans Pacific Partnership (Hess, 2013). Korea also has an FTA with ASEAN and recently finished an FTA with China.

South Korea is in the unique position of being the only country that was once a receiver of official development aid (ODA) to becoming a giver of ODA. It is also important to consider that South Korea is in a strong position to help as it is one of the top economies in the world. Korea's ODA output had risen more than double from 2008 to 2013 (Office of the Prime Minister). Its stated goal is to give ODA at 25% of its Gross National Income by the end of this year. According to the data available, Korea has given the majority of its ODA to Asia.

### Present Considerations

The present triumvirate of China, Japan, and South Korea and their respective leaders has seemed to put forming an East Asian Community on the back burner. As the US has reaffirmed its pivot to Asia, China and President Xi Jinping have turned to the west. Currently, China is holding the position of Chairman of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia. In a speech last year to the Fourth Summit of CICA, Xi outlined how he saw common, cooperative, and Asian led security with China at the forefront (Xi, 2014). He stated that "China will take solid steps to strengthen security dialogue and cooperation" in East Asia (p. 6).

While China has boosted its regional presence in the south and west of Asia, South

Korea and Japan are focused on historical and diplomatic issues. Until last year, South Korean President Park Geun-hye had refused to hold a bilateral summit with Japanese President Shinzo Abe. She blames Abe for the poor relations between the two countries. In a speech to mark the 69<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Liberation, she implored Abe to “take a correct view of history” in regards to Japan’s war crimes and use of so-called “comfort women” (Park, 2014). In marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, she again reiterated that the two countries should “move forward to a new future guided by a correct view of history” (Park, 2015).

For its part, Japan’s modification of article 9 of its constitution has caused China and South Korea to worry about its imperialist intentions. ASEAN countries, however, have welcomed the rise in Japan’s military power. They see Japan as a balancer to China in the region (Carpenter, 2013). As part of this role, Japan and the Philippines agreed to enhance their cooperation on maritime security.

With economic cooperation between China, Korea, Japan and the rest of East Asia seemingly secure, it seems as if they have moved toward security as the main focus of their views of regionalism. While China is boosting its presence and influence to its neighbors to the west; Japan is boosting its presence in Southeast Asia and building on its maritime might; Korea is looking inward.

Again, in her speech commemorating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Liberation, Park spent a substantial amount of time pushing her agenda on unification. She called on the examples of better relationships between the US and Cuba as an example of what can happen between the North and South. But she does so by not pushing for normalization of relations, but peaceful unification (Park, 2015).

In his most recent publication, Sung-han Kim sees unification as a catalyst to Northeast Asian regional security. He offers three perspectives to unification: 1) North and South Korea should communicate without foreign interference; 2) the Korean peninsula

should lead a regional multilateral security structure; 3) the ROK-US alliance should be the driving factor (Kim, 2015). In this view, perhaps President Park's inward focus can be a spur in building an East Asian Community.

### Recommendations

At the present time, an East Asia Community is still imagined (Acharya, 2006). Acharya's view of the imagined East Asia Community still holds. 1) We are no closer to defining what exactly East Asia is geographically; 2) we also have no psychological impulse toward creating an East Asia Community; 3) finally, there is still no collective identity. An East Asia Community is most certainly still imagined. It is quite possibly less imagined than when Acharya wrote his article almost 10 years ago.

Also, the roadmap laid out for us by Sung-joo Han (2005) has not been followed. 1) We have not figured out what role the US will play in East Asia; 2) no leaders have stepped up to take an imagined East Asia Community into reality; 3) historical and territorial problems still dominate East Asian diplomacy.

Can we say, "The end of East Asia Community"? Is it finally time to give up hope for an all-encompassing multilateral economic and security institution in East Asia? I, and many others, would say no. There is quite simply too much to gain by creating such a structure. An East Asia Community would clean up the "Asian Noodle Bowl" of FTAs and economic agreements currently dominating current international political economy in East Asia. An East Asia Community could also serve to solidify the role of the United States in East Asia. Finally, an East Asia Community could bring countries closer together that have historically had poor relationships and could perhaps put history behind them and look to a bright future.

How can we achieve an East Asia Community? What steps are needed to fulfill this long imagined entity? I think four things need to happen before an East Asia Community can be realized: 1) the role of the US in East Asia has to be solidified in order for an East Asia

Community to exist without the US; 2) China must stop being a shirker of the international order and start being a supporter; 3) historical issues and animosities must be left in the past; 4) the gulf between CJK and ASEAN both economically and politically must be narrowed.

How can the US be happy about not being a part of the East Asia Community? In order to answer that, we need to look at Europe. The beginning of the European Union was the European Coal and Steel Community. This community had the strong backing of the United States. The US was one of the first nations to accept and recognize the ECSC. One reason for the strong backing is because of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Because the US was firmly entrenched in Europe because of NATO, it had no problem allowing Europe to work toward an economic and security regional institution.

There is only one institution that can keep the US firmly rooted in East Asia: Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Negotiations for TPP were just finished this last which was a major hurdle. The next hurdle is whether or not each individual country will approve membership. In essence, the TPP could become one of the most important catalysts toward realizing an East Asia Community, or it can be a modern version of the League of Nations.

The next thing that needs to happen to realize an East Asia Community is China needs to back up its rhetoric with true leadership and support the international order. As noted earlier in this paper, President Xi has stated that China is ready to lead an Asian led security organization. It is important that China take the lead, but the only way they will do it is if the US is not involved. Whether or not a China led East Asian Community will supplement or take the place of the US's bilateral security alliances is yet to be seen. I think the two can co-exist, but eventually Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan will have to choose between the US bilateral alliances or China led multilateral community.

An East Asia Community cannot be realized if China, Japan and Korea can get past the historical problems stemming from Japan's colonial period and wartime atrocities. There

are also numerous territorial disputes that will need to be alleviated before the countries can come together. The historical problems are confounded by the difference of reactions by Japan and Germany after WWII.

While Germany has continually shown regret and paid enormous reparations, Japan has paid reparations and apologized, but recently has pushed for forgetting the past and moving on. This is obviously the wrong tactic. Germany has become a leader in the EU and highly respected in that role. One reason for that is because they never play down their historical role in atrocities during WWII and continually apologizes and never forgets its past. China, Korea, and most of the international community wish Japan would act in the same way Germany is acting. In order to realize an East Asia Community, Japan must own up to its past completely and never forget the horrible things it has done.

In terms of territorial disputes, this is not a concept exclusive to Asia. The EU has many territorial and border disputes amongst its members. They have been able to look beyond those disputes in order to create the EU. There is no reason Asia can also look past its disputes and push them to the future in order to realize a community.

Finally, there is a major gulf between the countries of Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. China, Japan and South Korea combine to create one of the most economically powerful regions in the world. The countries of ASEAN are largely considered developing, except for Singapore. Even within ASEAN, the economies of Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam lag behind the rest of ASEAN. For their parts, China, Japan, and Korea have created FTAs with ASEAN and with several bilateral FTAs with individual ASEAN countries. Those FTAs are helping to boost the economics of ASEAN, China, Japan, and Korea need to do more to narrow the gap between them. Complete liberalization of trade is a way to do that, but there are sticking points, especially with agriculture, labor, and human rights.

### Conclusion

The idea of an East Asia Community is not dead. In international politics, it is hard to ever say that nothing will ever happen. Over time, politics change, leaders change, and national interests change. Since the end of the Cold War, we have seen ebbs and flows in terms of interest or disinterest in creating an East Asia Community. The period directly after the EU was officially formed with the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1990s was a time when forming an East Asia Community was important to countries and leaders. The height of the six party talks during the middle and end of the 2000s was another time many thought a multilateral institution in East Asia was possible, perhaps even imminent. Other times, such as the present time, forming an East Asia Community is not a priority.

In reality, before a community of any form can be realized, the parties involved have to want it. Currently, only President Xi and China is strengthening its posture in multilateral organizations. Presidents Park and Abe are focused more on trying to fix the problems that plagued the two countries in the past. Do these countries really want an East Asia Community or is this just an academic debate? What are countries willing to sacrifice in order to achieve it? These are questions that need to be answered before any serious debate about forming an East Asia Community can continue.

This study hopefully can add to the lexicon of information present in studying the viability of an East Asia Community. I think this study better reflects the current political and economic situation in East Asia and builds on the work done by Sung-joo Han, Sung-han Kim, Amitav Acharya and many others. While the recommendations are similar to those studies, they are also different. In 2015, I think it is quite obvious that China needs to be the leader of a future East Asia Community. We do not need to look for a leader, but hope that China will take on the role. Also, in the last 10-15 years, the economic gulf between Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia has gotten larger. That is a major roadblock in realizing an East Asia Community. It is also becoming apparent that the US role as hegemonic power in

East Asia is being challenged by China. I think the two cannot exist as bipolar security guarantors in the region. Contrary to Sung-joo Han, I feel the US cannot be a member of an East Asia Community. Similarly, though, historical and territorial disputes still dominate diplomacy between the countries. History needs to be resolved before any East Asia Community can be fully realized.

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