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About the Author

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China-Japan-Korea: Tangled Relationships

I. Introduction

Territorial disputes between China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea and between Japan and South Korea over the Takeshima/Dokdo islands in the Sea of Japan have, particularly in the second half of 2012, given rise to concerns about peace and security in North East Asia. Because China, Japan and South Korea are, respectively, the 2nd, 3rd and 15th largest economies in the world, potential regional conflict assumes great significance. Currently, the China-Japan-Korea bilateral relationships are mired in complexities spiced by historical baggage, emotions and strong nationalist fervour. The story of these tangled relationships is a litany of grievances and disputes, emerging mostly out of Japan's colonial rule over the Korean peninsula and China.

Despite generational change, memories of invasions and atrocities continue to adversely affect foreign policy. Latent feelings of slight, disrespect, and disparagement ignite, from time-to-time, national outrage and upset the delicate regional power equilibrium. As Fareed Zakaria points out, “Asia's greatest geopolitical problem is that its two great powers—with the two largest economies and militaries—have an unresolved bitter relationship.”¹ Not surprisingly, in 2012 the convergence of South Korea and China's territorial disputes with Japan and Japan's commemorative services at the Yasukuni shrine on the 67th anniversary of the end of World War II starkly brought to present day political consciousness deeply divisive memories of these three nations.² While

China & South Korea blame Japan for not having done enough to atone for its wartime atrocities and failing to offer an apology commensurate with their expectations, Japan believes its contribution towards the economic development of South Korea and China has been expediently overlooked.³ At the same time, territorial disputes prevent building enhanced strategic relations amongst these nations, which could better address the imperative issues relating to North Korean nuclear and missile threats.⁴ All three seek to back territorial claims by upgrading military capabilities, thereby exacerbating lingering strains.⁵

Hence, what could be the most powerful triangle on the international stage is not even in the making.⁶ Ironically, the country in North East Asia which has been the biggest source of tension, i.e. North Korea, has been relatively peaceful vis-à-vis immediate external relations, despite a recent changing of guard brought about by Kim Jong-il's death and the succession of his son Kim Jong-un. Although there is progress, particularly in forging strong economic and trade ties, latent tensions from historical animosities require only a pretext to give rise to conflict. Acquisition and testing nuclear and missile technology by North Korea has raised the spectre of regional conflict. Japan and South Korea have been at loggerheads with North Korea, as it steadfastly refused to meet its commitments and chose to opt out of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).⁷ China's reluctance to use its considerable clout with North Korea has also created distrust within South Korea and Japan. So far, considerable economic linkages between China, Japan and South Korea have not allowed events to get out of hand.

However, this safeguard suffered a serious setback in 2012. The fragile relationships acquired a shriller tone in recent times due to China's rise and the perceived economic benefits of territorial possessions in regional seas. Growing confidence in South Korea, economic stagnation and rising

nationalism in Japan and refusal of Asia-Pacific neighbours to toe China's line have all contributed to increased instability in North East Asia.

China, Japan, North and South Korea have many complexities in their bilateral relationships with each other. Even the closest bilateral relationship among the group, between China and North Korea, has its share of uncertainties and imponderables. China, despite its significant clout in North Korea, cannot or does not rein in North Korea's nuclear and missile programme. Similarly, the natural relationship between the two democracies and US allies, Japan and South Korea, has its own frailties, exposed in the autumn of 2012. To understand these complexities, it is useful to examine a few issues in detail and the underlying reasons for certain patterns of behaviour.

II. China-Japan Relations

Historical contest

While Japan's long chain of invasions and associated atrocities perpetrated in China between 1894 and 1945 and modern Japan's attitude towards this past are major issues afflicting current China-Japan relations, the history predating Japanese invasions reveals a very different picture. Through the ages, China and Japan have influenced each other through writing, architecture, culture, religion, philosophy and law. China and Japan never occupied the world stage as equals.⁸ For most of the past 500 years, China was the region's hegemon, and Japan accepted its role as a distant satellite.⁹ That changed in the late 19th century, as Japan became the first Asian country to modernise its economy and society, catching up with the West. With the Meiji Restoration, Japan began viewing China as an antiquated civilization, unable to defend itself against the West. Japan

became militarily strong, and in 1895 it defeated China's Qing dynasty, gaining control of Taiwan. This was seen as an affront to China, which always felt entitled to the mantle of regional leadership.¹⁰ The other consequence of the war, one with modern-day ramifications, was Japan's annexation of the Senkaku/Daioyu islands.

Upon the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, pragmatism led to improving of relations with Japan. They established diplomatic relations on September 29, 1972. However, negotiations for a Sino-Japanese peace and friendship treaty, which began in 1974, were broken off in September 1975. As happened in the autumn of 2012, an April 1978 dispute over territorial rights to the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands flared up, disrupting peace treaty talks. However, talks were resumed in July 1978, and the Treaty came into effect on October 23, 1978. Close cooperation emerged in many areas, particularly trade and investment. Since normalisation of relations, both countries have sought to prevent dispute over the islands from taking centre stage. Despite misgivings and lacking trust between both sides, economic pragmatism and geo-political considerations, including America's active regional role, has ensured peace. The fine balance maintained started to fall apart in 2010, with a series of incidents in the South and East China Seas. These involved China and its maritime neighbours—notably Japan, Philippines and Vietnam—over disputed islands and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). These disputes in some ways reached their 2012 crescendo between Japan and Philippines.

Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands

The disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu¹¹ islands are located in an area rich in fisheries and said to contain significant hydrocarbon resources. When the US occupation of Okinawa ended in 1972, the islands were returned to Japan. However, both Taiwan and China were quick to claim them. Japan

has laid claim to the islands since the 1800s. China sees this claim as an initial assertion of power by imperial Japan. Chinese claims in the South and East China Seas, where it believes its EEZ to extend, is seen as a challenge to maritime neighbours. Sovereignty over the Senkaku/Diaoyu would allow China to extend its EEZ right up to Japan's territorial waters.¹² While most of the region resents China's maritime expansionism, China sees Japan's maritime designs as troublesome.¹³ Although, the two nations have the same amount of coastline, Japan by some estimates (by virtue of being an archipelago) claims an EEZ of 4.5 million square km, five times greater than China.¹⁴ China's rise, which allowed it to surge past Japan as the world's second largest economy, has further aggravated Japanese sentiment.

On September 7, 2010, a Chinese fishing trawler collided with two Japanese Coast Guard patrol boats near the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. The trawler's captain was arrested by Japanese sailors, sparking diplomatic tensions. China resorted to retaliatory action, arresting Japanese tourists on trumped-up charges. More damagingly for Japan, China imposed restrictions on the export of rare-earths, which are critical for Japan's hi-tech industry. This severely damaged Japanese confidence regarding China as a reliable partner. In the face of mounting pressure from China and US intervention, Japan released the fishing boat captain after two weeks.¹⁵

The latest round of recriminations on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands began on September 11, 2012, when Japan's central government bought the three islands it did not already own.¹⁶ Ostensibly, it was a bid to foil attempts by Japanese nationalists to acquire the islands. Shintaro Ishihara, Governor of Tokyo—a stringent nationalist—intended to buy the islands by establishing a Senkaku fund. Ishihara claimed his actions were made in response to the national government's weak reaction to Chinese

sovereignty claims. China saw Japan's action as blatant provocation and a means to solidify control over the disputed islands.

Subsequently, both countries have acted in a manner that made matters worse. Violent anti-Japan protests broke out in more than 100 cities across China in September 2012. Japanese car makers Toyota and Honda were forced to close factories in China. Hundreds of Chinese fishing boats began approaching the islands to assert Chinese claims. They were joined by an increasing number of Chinese surveillance boats, many coming dangerously close to Japanese coast guard ships. Not to be over shadowed, even Taiwan sent a flotilla of boats to attempt a landing on the islands. On September 18, the anniversary of Japan's 1931 military invasion of China, the Chinese blogosphere became hyper-active with Japanese condemnation. On September 17th, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said, [the] "gravely destructive consequences of Japan's illegal purchase were steadily emerging". Hong made another stark assessment regarding the cancelling a commemoration of the 40th anniversary normalising of Chinese-Japanese diplomatic ties, which was scheduled for September 27. Hong said,

“Previously, all concerned in China and Japan hoped that through this anniversary they could further advance relations between China and Japan. But due to Japan's erroneous action of illegally buying the Diaoyu Islands many plans have been ruined and currently many activities have been affected. The culpability entirely lies with Japan.”¹⁷

China and Japan: Conflict amidst Cooperation

According to Kazuko Mori of Waseda University, “The huge contradiction at the centre of Japan-China relations is that politics and

economics are moving in completely opposite directions”.¹⁸ In 2011, bilateral trade reached US\$ 349 billion, and Japanese investment in China reached \$6.3 billion, ranking 3rd behind Hong Kong and Taiwan. China was Japan's largest trading partner in 2011, and Japan is China's second-biggest trading partner after the United States.¹⁹ Japan is also China's largest outside investor, with Japanese companies employing about 10 million Chinese nationals.²⁰ The latest round of disputes had an adverse effect on trade, as indicated by data from China's General Customs Administration.²¹ During the first eight months of 2012, trade fell 1.4 percent (to \$218.7 billion) after growing by 14.3 per cent in 2011.²² The role of political tensions in this decline cannot be ignored. Growth of Japanese investment in China also slowed, growing 16 percent in the first eight months of 2012 compared to a 50 percent rise over the same period in 2011.²³

While the two countries are economically tied, Japan has a higher dependence on China than vice-versa. Japanese exports to China constitute around 50 percent of trade volume and about 20 percent of its total exports. Consequently, China has leverage over Japan regarding the imposition of trade restrictions.²⁴ Japanese automakers, electronics companies and even supermarkets and convenience stores are heavily invested in China, in part to escape the shrinking demand at home. Professor Kazuo Yukawa of Asia University, Tokyo says, “China and Japan need each other, but honestly speaking, Japan needs China more”.²⁵ Japanese feel strongly about sovereignty but not at the expense of business.²⁶ The value of the economic ties may also explain why the Japanese reaction has been muted and why even China worked to roll back the protests over the disputed islands after the initial reaction. There is also a great deal of business complementarity, as Chinese industry depends on high technology imports from Japan. Japan's technological prowess continues to provide much of the production machinery in Chinese

factories and many core components in Chinese-made products, both of which helped make China's rise possible. Japan's struggling electronics industry, in turn, is dependent on sales to China's lower-cost manufacturers. On the other hand, low-priced Chinese goods have been embraced by consumers in Japan, who are affected by declining wages and economic stagnation.

Economic dependence between Japan and China and China and the US is helping to cool the dispute. However, according to Victoria Hui of Notre Dame University, neither China nor Japan has an easy exit strategy from the tensions.²⁷ For Japan, China's untrammelled rise is a serious threat to its influence in the region and the world. There is an urge to challenge China either directly or in unison with other partners. Consequently, Japan veers between accommodating China and competing with it.²⁸ The dispute over the islands is not really over fishing, oil and gas. Rather, Japan fears that if it makes concessions to China, China will sense weakness, preparing the next demand.²⁹ For Japan, the rising nationalistic feeling has let a small but vocal group of nationalists, such as Ishihara, drive the island agenda.³⁰ The desire to avoid looking weak constrains Japan's options for Japan does not want a repeat of 2010 when it was forced to release the Chinese captain. In November 2012, Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda announced new elections. On December 16, 2012, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), led by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, returned to power. Even before the election, Abe pronounced his views on Chinese relations. He told an interviewer that "he expects the current bilateral tensions over disputed islands in the East China Sea to continue at least for several more months. What we have now are furious fights between coast guards. For now, we need to focus on making sure we defend these islands. We need to display our strong resolve and action."³¹

The China factor has led to a rethink in Japan on the value of Japan-US relations. There has been back pedalling with regard to the US base at Okinawa. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) came to power on the electoral promise of relocating the US base at Futenma in Okinawa. However, they soon realised that Japan could ill-afford to antagonise the US, and such plans were shelved. The US-Japan military treaty also involves US in the islands dispute, as the US is treaty bound to aid Japan in case of conflict with China. On the other hand, strong Japan-US military ties act as a balancing and controlling force on Japan. Unwillingness or inability to support its most important ally in the Asia-Pacific would seriously impair the US “pivot” formulation and its rebalancing strategy, at least in the eyes of China's Asian neighbours.³² In her 18 January 2013 remarks to the media, during the visit of the new Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said:

“With regard to regional security, I reiterated longstanding American policy on the Senkaku Islands and our treaty obligations. As I've said many times before, although the United States does not take a position on the ultimate sovereignty of the islands, we acknowledge they are under the administration of Japan and we oppose any unilateral actions that would seek to undermine Japanese administration and we urge all parties to take steps to prevent incidents and manage disagreements through peaceful means.”³³

When the latest round of disputes over the islands broke out in the autumn of 2012, US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta rushed to the region to counsel restraint. Japan has also tried to build relations with other Asian powers such as India, Vietnam and Indonesia, in the hope that these ties will help Japan to deal more effectively with China's rise.

China has no easy exit strategy from the tensions. Japan is unlikely to do anything to make China happy. Unless Japan surrenders control of the islands, a virtual impossibility, China will have no successes to show, making it seem weak.³⁴ China fears that if it fails to press its case, America and other Asia-Pacific neighbours will be free to scheme against it.³⁵ China is critical of the 2011 Japan Defence White Paper, which mentions the "China threat theory". China remains unsatisfied on a number of fronts with Japan, including Taiwan, Senkaku/Diaoyu, war reparations and Japanese chemical weapons discarded in China. "Anger at Japan is real and enduring in China. Years of patriotic education have deepened the wounds of Japanese wartime depredations."³⁶ China and Japan continually debate over the actual total killed in the 'Rape of Nanking'. These disputes have stirred enmity against Japan from the global Chinese community, including Taiwan. Despite the apologies from Japan, many Chinese feel there is a lack of true remorse for the wartime crimes. This is reinforced by past visits by Japanese Prime Ministers to the Yasukuni Shrine, viewed as a symbol of Japan's militarism. Wenfang Tang and Benjamin Darr concluded in a September 12 paper, "Nationalism serves as a powerful instrument in impeding public demand for democratic change." Based on surveys conducted in the past decade, the paper concludes that China had the highest level of nationalism amongst 36 countries and regions surveyed. Japan was not far behind.³⁷

China obviously carefully assesses the strength of American commitment to the Asia-Pacific. While China is critical of US regional intervention,³⁸ it sees value in the US-Japan military alliance for its moderating influence on Japanese conduct. China knows that the US-China relationship is too important to be disrupted by Japan. Despite close China-US ties, particularly economic (so called G-2), there is a great deal of competition between the two. The US 'pivot' or rebalancing strategy has definitively

increased its role in East Asia. During the March-April 2012 China-Philippines spat over sovereignty of the Scarborough shoals, the Philippines directly appealed for US support, thereby angering China. Since March 2009, the US has heightened regional interest by contesting Chinese supremacy. Obviously, China perceives US support for Vietnam and the Philippines as standing up to China in territorial disputes. In the context of the China-Japan dispute, a commentary carried by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Daily on 12 September noted:

“The Japanese government should not anchor its hopes on the 'U.S.-Japan Security Treaty', which can serve at best as a mere 'whetstone' on which the Chinese military will convert pressure into power. On the other hand, Japanese people should really think carefully about when the Uncle Sam can be trusted, and when the U.S. has ever truly abandoned its own interests for others?”³⁹

III. Japan-South Korea Relations

Japan and the Koreas (South and North) have deep historical animosities fuelling nationalistic feelings. These surface from time-to-time, causing setbacks to an otherwise healthy economic relationship, between Japan and South Korea. The depth of sensitivities is such that even mundane issues, such as Kimchi, can be subject to bilateral dispute. In the 1990s, a dispute arose regarding the marketing of Kimchi, a traditional Korean dish. Japanese Kimchi manufacturers were significantly increasing production during this time. Korean manufacturers argued that Japanese Kimchi is fundamentally different, as Japanese manufacturers skip traditional processes.

Takeshima/Dokdo Islands

More seriously, in 2012 territorial disputes over the contested Liancourt Rocks⁴⁰ led to a setback in relations. Known as Takeshima (Bamboo Island) in Japan and Dokdo (Rock island) in South Korea, these islets measure about 19 hectares in area. They are located almost 200 kilometres from both Japan and South Korea in the Sea of Japan. These uninhabited rocks are generally insignificant, except in the minds of South Koreans and Japanese, where they have invited brinkmanship. Tensions between South Korea and Japan over Dokdo have been simmering over the last couple of years, reaching a peak in early August 2012. The then-President of South Korea, Lee Myung-bak, became the first leader to visit the islets. President Lee added salt to Japanese wound by announcing that if Emperor Akihito of Japan ever wishes to visit South Korea, he first needed to apologise for Japan's colonial rule of the Korean peninsula. This led to a flurry of invectives from Japan, with then-PM Noda denying that Japan's imperial army ever forced Korean women to work as comfort women, which infuriated South Korea. Tensions grew to the point that South Korea planned military exercises on the disputed islets and both countries cancelled a currency swap deal earlier agreed upon. The quarrel reached ludicrous levels when PM Noda sent a letter of complaint to President Lee, who declined to accept it. President Lee sent the letter back to *Gaimusho*⁴¹ via a Korean diplomat, and Japan refused to accept it. Eventually, South Korea was able to mail the letter to *Gaimusho*.

In its 1951 peace treaty with Allied Forces, Japan relinquished most Korean territory occupied during WW II. However, Japan insists that the islets were exempted, since they were declared as part of Shimane prefecture in 1905, five years before the Japan annexed the Korean peninsula. In 1952, South Korean President Syngman Rhee unilaterally took control of the

islets by declaring a maritime demarcation line, and in 1954 he sent troops to occupy the islets. Japan has since described this as illegal occupation. South Koreans see the islets as a sacred place to be protected at all costs. Since 2005, when Seoul began allowing tourists into the islets, visits have become like pilgrimages. In 2011 alone, 180,000 South Koreans made the arduous trip. 25th of October every year is commemorated as Dokdo Day in South Korea, and Dokdo awareness campaigns have become a regular occurrence. In recent years, Seoul has taken a series of steps to strengthen its claim over the island, including the expansion of a naval airbase on the nearby island of Ulleung to boost Dokdo defences. For South Korea, the issue is about territory and righting a historical wrong, i.e., the 36 year Japanese occupation of the peninsula. Japan considers Takeshima to be strategically important. It served as a temporary watchtower for Japan during the Russo-Japanese War and for the US during the Korean War. Although it covers a miniscule area, sovereignty would allow Japan to gain control over the EEZ around it and resources lying therein.⁴² The island's strategic location is fuelling the sovereignty debate.⁴³

The unprecedented visit by President Lee to the islets is intriguing because he had been trying to establish strong South Korea-Japan relations since the start of his term in 2008. However, South Korea-Japan relations have historically seen both warm and cold phases go sour in the final year of presidential terms. The most credible explanation for President Lee's actions was a desire to shore up his approval ratings. However, because South Korean presidents can be elected to only one term, such behaviour remains inexplicable. Unfortunately, these actions have generated reactions in Japan, even though Takeshima has so far not been a political hot potato.

Comfort Women

The euphemism "comfort women" (*ianfu*) was coined by imperial Japan to refer to young women of various ethnic and national backgrounds and social circumstances forced to offer sexual services to Japanese troops before and during the Second World War. The Tokyo tribunal did not punish any Japanese leaders for the abuse of comfort women. According to C. Sarah Soh,⁴⁴ it is believed that most of the estimated 50,000-200,000 comfort women were Koreans. Even today, many surviving comfort women, now in their 80s, protest in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul every Wednesday.

As they continue to strive for acknowledgment and a sincere apology, the Japanese court system has rejected their compensation claims citing lack of evidence. Japan has steadfastly maintained that the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the 1965 Japan-Republic of Korea Basic Relations Treaty settled all post-war claims to compensation. Nonetheless, in response to mounting international pressure to compensate former comfort women, Japan acknowledged its moral responsibility and established the Asian Women's Fund (AWF) to express national atonement. From the perspective of groups demanding state compensation, the AWF is a convenient ploy aimed at evading legal responsibility. The AWF has been controversial from its formation in July 1995 and created divisions among pro-comfort women activists.

Comfort women remained a non-issue for both Japan and South Korea during the fourteen years (1952-1965) of negotiations to normalise bilateral relations. The 1982 history textbook⁴⁵ controversy in Japan, which epitomised Japan's nationalist view of Korean colonisation, fuelled tension and disagreement with South Korea (and China) over Japan's post-

war responsibility for colonisation generally and comfort women survivors in particular.

On January 11, 1992, the Asahi Shimbun reported that Yoshiaki Yoshimi, a Japanese historian, had discovered several official war documents at the Library of the National Institute for Defence Studies in Tokyo proving that the imperial army was involved in establishing and operating the comfort stations. As a result, the Japanese government issued an apology. PM Miyazawa formally apologised to the Korean people during his visit to Korea. In August 1993, the Japanese government admitted that there had been coercive recruitment in some cases. Yohei Kono, the then-Chief Cabinet Secretary, stated, “The Japanese army during the war deeply hurt the honour and dignity of many women.” PM Miyazawa indicated that the government would create some gesture in lieu of compensation for survivors.

However, unless Japan officially acknowledges its legal responsibility, Korea will never accept compensation, so PM Miyazawa's proposal cannot take a concrete shape. At the legal level, the Japanese government seems desirous to ward off the possible domino effect that accepting comfort women claims could have on other non-Japanese war victims. Contemporary Japan is deeply divided over the comfort women issue. Some progressive lawyers and grassroots activists are campaigning for legislation that would authorise an investigation into the comfort women issue, an apology, and compensation. In contrast, conservative neo-nationalists feel neither a moral nor legal responsibility for the comfort women survivors.

Sea of Japan or East Sea

Even the name 'Sea of Japan' for the sea between Japan and Korea is fraught with tension. The South Korean national anthem mentions the sea

between Japan and Korea as the East Sea. The name naturally creates great deal of consternation in Korea. It was only in 1928, when the International Hydrographic Organisation's (IHO) '*Limits of Oceans and Seas*' officially christened the 'Sea of Japan', which eventually influenced other international documents. Korea believes the IHO only took into account Japanese views when deciding on the name, as Korea had lost effective control of its foreign policy during Japanese occupation.

South Korea argues that "East Sea", a common name found on ancient European maps, should be used instead of or at least concurrently with Sea of Japan. Japan claims that Western countries named it the Sea of Japan prior to 1860, before the growth of Japanese influence over Korea after the 1894 outbreak of the First Sino-Japanese War. In 2012 during the Monaco Conference of the IHO, South Korea mounted a diplomatic offensive to change the status quo. South Korea did derive some consolation with the Conference deciding to examine the matter in 2017.

Non-nuclear Japan

For the first time in 34 years, Japan's *Diet* revised the Atomic Energy Basic Act in June 2012 by including national security among its goals. In separate legislation, the *Diet* also deleted a phrase that had thus far confined the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's activities to "peaceful purposes". This triggered widespread uproar in South Korea, particularly in the media. The *Korea Times* in an editorial said that Japan, hitherto a 'virtual nuclear power', had taken the first step towards becoming a 'real' one by enacting the legislation. Korean media further pointed out that Japan has a sufficient stockpile of weapons grade material technological prowess to quickly fabricate roughly 6,000 Hiroshima-level bombs. Korea knows that Japan was one of the last nations to sign the NPT in 1970 and only ratified it six

years later when the US promised not to interfere with Tokyo's acquisition of plutonium and pursuit of independent reprocessing capabilities at commercial power plants.⁴⁶ As Korea sees it, Japan has built up its nuclear capability since the late 1950s, while pursuing civilian nuclear and space programmes.⁴⁷ Japan successfully put its first rocket into orbit in 1970 and mastered the nuclear fuel cycle in the 1980s.

Korean Re-unification

Japan has its own perspective on Korean unification. While China may not be in favour of re-unification, doubt also exists as to whether Japan favours this move. Japan would have its own set of worries on how to deal with a unified Korea. Japan does not have diplomatic relations with North Korea, and relations between the two have bordered on hostility, particularly due to nuclear and missile tests conducted by North Korea. There has been little progress in returning Japanese nationals kidnapped by North Korea. An eventual re-unification must also address the question of whether unified Korea will be nuclear or non-nuclear. In 1957, the US renounced an article of the armistice agreement and introduced nuclear weapons in South Korea. In 2003 North Korea withdrew from the NPT. As Immanuel Wallerstein points out, neither China, the US, Japan or even Russia are really in favour of Korean re-unification. All prefer the status quo.⁴⁸

Japan- South Korea: Conflict amidst Cooperation

For Japan, the linking of various issues (i.e. rightful ownership of the Liancourt rocks, justice for comfort women and excesses committed by Japan during colonial occupation) is unreasonable. The dominant feeling in Japan is that it has atoned enough for its sins in Korea, including setting up the AWF to provide comfort women's compensation. Notably, Japan has

made efforts to improve relations with China and Korea. All three DPJ Prime Ministers—Yukio Hatoyama, Naoto Kan and Yoshihiko Noda—refrained from visiting the Yasukuni shrine.⁴⁹ With respect to Korea, in October 2011 Japan returned five historically significant copies of treasured ancient royal documents dating back to Korea's Joseon dynasty (1392-1897). In December 2011, 1,200 volumes of historic archives, including 150 royal texts known as the *Joseon Wangsil Uigwe*,⁵⁰ were returned to South Korea. Nevertheless, nationalist fervour continues to grow in South Korea. There have been extreme demonstrations of such passion that protestors severed their fingers in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.

How the territorial dispute between South Korea and Japan will pan out remains uncertain. If allowed to linger, it will affect bilateral relations, including security cooperation.⁵¹ In June 2012, South Korea was scheduled to sign the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), which creates a procedural framework for exchanging military information between the two countries. However, South Korea postponed the signing at the last minute due to domestic opposition.⁵² The two were also close to concluding an Economic Partnership Agreement. At the trilateral China-Japan-South Korea level, there have been negotiations for Free Trade Agreement, which may now hit turbulence. Newly elected Japanese PM Shinzo Abe reached out to South Korea's President-elect Park Geun-hye in early January 2013, sending LDP lawmaker Fukushima Nukaga as special envoy with a message of mending ties. The special envoy delivered an invitation letter from Abe to Park, which hoped that “the launching of new Governments in both countries will mark a good starting point in both countries”.⁵³

IV. China–South Korea Relations

Koreans have been traditionally nervous towards China due to historical claims surrounding Goguryeo and related kingdoms. China's controversial Northeast Research Project, claiming that Goguryeo and other various Korean kingdoms, (including Gojoseon, Buyeo and Balhae), are Chinese tributary states, sparked a massive uproar in South Korea when first publicised in 2004. China participated in the Korean War when it sent the People's Volunteer Army to battle United Nations troops in October 1950. UN forces were successfully driven out of North Korea, but China's own offensive into South Korea was repelled. The Korean War ended by July 1953, resulting in the establishment of the Korean Demilitarized Zone and the eventual withdrawal of Chinese forces. Throughout the Cold War there were no official relations between communist China and capitalist South Korea. China maintained close relations with North Korea, and South Korea maintained diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Establishment of formal diplomatic relations on August 24, 1992 between Seoul and Beijing paved the way for ties to prosper. South Korea and China have a flourishing trade and investment relationship engendering a great deal of dependency.

However, at the political level, South Korea remains unhappy with Beijing for not doing enough vis-à-vis North Korea. Beijing is politically close to Pyongyang, and relations between the South and North Korea remain distrustful. South Korea expected China's endorsement of a report by international investigators, who concluded that the South Korean naval ship Choenan, which sank on March 26, 2010 killing 46 seamen, had been hit by a North Korean torpedo. China has also done precious little to contain North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes, which directly adversely affect South Korean security.

V. North Korea: Common Problem?

As a direct consequence of the Korean War, Japan and South Korea do not have diplomatic relations with North Korea, unlike China.⁵⁴ Owing to the North Korean regime's character and its pursuit of nuclear weapons and missile technologies, both Japan and South Korea contend that regional peace and security are threatened.⁵⁵ However, Beijing loathes exercising influence on North Korea and has been instrumental in limiting international pressure and action against the country. This attitude adds an additional layer of tension between China on one side and Japan and South Korea on the other. The Six Party Talks (SPT) mechanism—involving North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, US and Russia—has yet to engage North Korea in a dialogue to abandon its nuclear and missile programmes. China finds itself in a quandary vis-à-vis North Korea. Although it has a close relationship with the country, China does not rule the roost in Pyongyang. As a responsible world power, China would like its influence to prevail on its immediate neighbour. Helplessness regarding North Korea does not befit China's image as a global power. However, China is acutely aware that the moment it tries to implement the West's agenda (including that of Japan and South Korea) with North Korea, it would lose influence with Pyongyang.

VI. Looking Ahead: Untangled relationships

According to the liberal theory of international relations, peace prevails among freely trading nations, but free trade is not the only criterion for peace. Economic cooperation does not necessarily create trust—high economic interdependence between Germany and Great Britain in the second half of the 19th century did not prevent the outbreak of World War I. Similarly, high quantum India-China trade does not necessarily mean

close ties and the resolution of disputes, such as the boundary question. To guarantee peace, China, Japan and South Korea must trust each other, not just trade with one another.⁵⁶ The leaderships have to work to contain nationalistic fervour from disrupting diplomatic discourse.

Although China has in the last two decades risen as a formidable power on the international scene, Japan has been and continues to be significant a player in the North East Asian economic and security sphere, despite its relative decline. It also continues to enjoy full US support. South Korea, on the other hand, has recently appropriated international prestige by acquiring economic clout and being at the forefront of international diplomacy.⁵⁷ South Korea, many say, has acquired the stripes for being assertive. However, South Korea has, particularly with the visit of former President Lee to the Liancourt Rocks and making pointed remarks at Japan's Emperor, committed some diplomatic faux pas. These actions would have surely led to the erosion of South Korean political capital in both Tokyo and Washington without changing the status quo on the ground. The new South Korean President Park Geun-hye must take seriously the offer of PM Abe and mend relations with Japan. All three countries have considerable economic inter-linkages, with overlapping trade and investment connections. Co-existence of competition and cooperation is the essence of these linkages. Disputes and conflict seriously disrupt them. As all three are economic power houses, the economic rationale is most likely to mitigate disputes and prevent escalation.

As seen earlier, there is a severe lack of trust between China and Japan. Effective diplomacy is based on a rational trust-building processes and not on letting emotions run wild, yet neither party in the Senkaku/Diaoyu controversy seems to want to bear the domestic political costs of building

trust.⁵⁸ These disputes should be set aside, as no solutions exist to the conflicting claims—just as India and China have been able to tackle a much graver problem of the long disputed border by insulating it from other aspects of the bilateral relationship. China now has much more to gain from cooperation with Japan than from conflict.⁵⁹ Harping about past sins and inflaming the island dispute does little good.⁶⁰ If China is to become the predominant regional power, it can only do so with Japan, not against it.⁶¹

Similarly, on Japan and South Korea, Hitoshi Tanaka says, “In order to address the diplomatic fallout, the bilateral relationship must be reframed in such a way that shared interests and cooperation, not history and territorial disputes, take centre stage.”⁶² Leaders in both countries need to recalibrate and re-emphasise the importance of Japan–South Korea cooperation, not only for the sake of the two countries themselves but also for the region as a whole.⁶³ Tanaka believes that in order to mitigate the diplomatic fallout, Japan and South Korea should insulate historical and territorial issues, preventing them from affecting substantive areas of cooperation.⁶⁴ Both countries will benefit if shared interests trump historical animosity.⁶⁵ As the *Economist* suggests in 'Protesting too much', the lid must be kept on nationalism for peace in North East Asia. The escalatory dynamic on the high seas is worrisome, and the absence of a maritime crisis management regime for the East China Sea is even more troubling.⁶⁶ The lack of an overarching North East Asian security architecture is also problematic as no mechanism exists to mediate and moderate state action. Miscalculation by either side could result in serious damage and even the loss of life. China, Japan and South Korea must intensify security cooperation within the framework of trilateral cooperation.

In the midst of escalating tensions, it is interesting to note how the leaders of China, Japan and South Korea utilised an opportunity to meet on the sidelines of the APEC Summit at Vladivostok on September 8, 2012. The formally scheduled meeting between the leaders of China and Japan was cancelled. Instead there was a standing 15-minute pull-aside conversation between President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Noda. The Japanese PM “underscored the importance of dealing with the Senkaku Islands from a comprehensive perspective, effectively calling for China's cooperation to prevent the dispute from adversely affecting the overall bilateral relations”.⁶⁷ According to Chinese Foreign Ministry reports, President Hu told PM Noda that “he firmly opposes Japan's plan to nationalise islands in the East China Sea”. President Hu said, “Bilateral ties faced a critical situation” and criticised the Japanese plan to acquire some of the Senkaku Islands and bring them under state control. Whatever means Japan uses to purchase the islands are illegal and invalid, and China firmly opposes such moves, Hu noted, At the same summit, there was no meeting between PM Noda and President Lee of South Korea, there was only brief contact and a handshake. Interestingly, there was a properly scheduled sit-down meeting between President Hu and President Lee at Vladivostok. With all three leaders leaving office in 2013, there is hope of reconciliation and dialogue in North East Asia, particularly as all sides increasingly realise the negative economic impact of territorial disputes.

Trilateral Cooperation: The NEATS way

Commander Sarabjeet Singh of IDSA neatly summarises the conundrum existing in North East Asia when he says, “The immediate areas surrounding the three nations could be viewed as geopolitically unstable. There are rising threats due to varying economies, different forms of governance, aspirations of nations and the presence of extra regional powers operating in the area, further compounding the stability factor.

The relationship with neighbours due to differences on land and at sea has at times resulted in incidents of varying degrees and conflicts that have and will always affect stability in their respective regions. These areas are therefore considered a tight rope walk for political and diplomatic and maritime manoeuvring.”⁶⁸ In the post-Cold War era, North East Asia has been lacking an effective multilateral management system for political and security issues, giving it the apt title of “wasteland for regionalism.”⁶⁹

In 1999, an agreement was reached for heads of state from each of the three countries to meet on the sidelines of the ASEAN+3 (APT) Summit. This agreement initially constituted little more than an annual informal breakfast and was established more to right perceived imbalances between the 'plus three' countries and ASEAN within the APT, as opposed to any desire to improve problematic relations.⁷⁰ In December 2008, trilateral cooperation formally separated itself from the APT process and acquired its own identity with the first North East Asia Trilateral Summit (NEATS), held at Fukuoka, Japan. Since then, NEATS has been held every year. Significantly, the fifth NEATS Summit took place in May 2012 in Beijing, before Japan's recent round of disputes with China and South Korea over the islands. Since then, there has not been any formal high level meeting among the leaders of China, Japan and South Korea. The sixth NEATS Summit, to be held in South Korea, will be keenly watched and serve as a potential ice-breaker for new leadership in all three countries.

NEATS is the mechanism that can take on board the objectives of multilateral security cooperation in North East Asia. Without such a mechanism, there was rising tensions between Japan and South Korea and Japan and China, which became so palpable in 2012. NEATS has to evolve into a forum allowing participant countries to exchange views and coordinate differences on common security issues. The institutionalisa-

tion of security cooperation contributes to so called 'confidence building measures', preventive diplomacy and conflict resolving mechanism.⁷¹

At present, cooperation has expanded to include 58 government-to-government processes.⁷² However, security cooperation has been limited, including the common concern of dealing with North Korea. Ultimately, NEATS has to become an important part of the emerging security architecture in Asia.⁷³ NEATS can provide the missing link between economic cooperation and security cooperation. The three North East Asian giants have economic cooperation sorted but falter on building mutual trust and confidence regarding security and territorial issues. Economic compulsions will force them to roll back nationalistic fervour and seek peace and tranquillity in the region. NEATS provides a forum for achieving this objective. However, before that happens, NEATS must move from functional cooperation to play an effective high-level role on security issues. This is the hope for North East Asia in order to avoid being sucked into self-destructive, nationalistic territorial aspirations.

India and the Indo-Pacific

India has vital stakes in the Asia-Pacific region (now increasingly referred to as the Indo-Pacific^{74, 75}) in general and North East Asia in particular. China, Japan and Korea are India's principal trade, investment and technology partners. India has Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements with Japan and South Korea, and China is India's biggest trading partner.⁷⁶ India also has strategic partnerships with all three North East Asian greats.⁷⁷ Close ties with Japan and South Korea have started to acquire security dimensions. India has a substantive and multi-dimensional relationship with China, despite the long standing boundary dispute. Unlike the South China Sea issue, on which India has made public

statements⁷⁸ expressing concern for the need to maintain freedom of navigation on the high seas,⁷⁹ India has decided against publicly commenting about recent disputes involving China, Japan and South Korea. This has been done to avoid further inflaming the situation.

However, one can assume that India advised all three countries in private to exercise restraint and not allow escalation. India engages with Japan and the US in a governmental trilateral process. This forum would have discussed Japan's disputes with South Korea and China. A semi-official (track 1.5) India-Japan-South Korea trilateral dialogue was also launched in June 2012 in New Delhi. This forum provides India with the opportunity to discuss the disputes involving Japan and South Korea and advocate for caution and restraint.

All three countries are vital economic partners of India, and there is much to lose from conflict in the region. India would counsel these three countries to engage more closely on security issues and allow NEATS to assume a greater role in maintaining peace and security in the region. The SPT mechanism has so far failed to restrain North Korea. NEATS can also play a crucial role on this front. Furthermore, as fellow member of the East Asia Summit (EAS), India would hope the EAS mechanism to be at the core of any emerging regional security architecture, thereby providing India a role in maintaining peace and security in a vital part of the Indo-Pacific strategic space.

Map of Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands⁸⁰



Map of Takeshima/Dokdo Islands⁸¹



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