

**ABSTRACT:** Regionalism verse Nationalism in Northeast Asia by C. Kenneth Quinones, Akita International University, June 2013

The end of the Cold War enabled the nations of Northeast Asia – China, Japan and the Republic of Korea – to forge for the first time a consensus that focuses their energies on pursuing peace, prosperity and stability. The end of ideological rivalry made these possible and improved prospects for regional cooperation. But it also allowed nationalism to reassert itself. Central to nationalism in China and the two Koreas' are reservations about imperial Japan's perceived misdeeds. China and Korea agree that imperial Japan committed grievous misdeeds against them and exploited their weakness by seizing their territory, perceptions rooted in their Confucian heritage which judges a nation's conduct according to the Confucian definition of virtue. Japan's political leadership has countered with repeated expressions of regret qualified with claims that Japan was only defending itself against Western imperialism, not exploiting its neighbors. As for territorial disputes, Japan justifies its claims in terms of international law. Thus the two sides continue to talk past one another making resolution difficult, possibly even unlikely. Thus despite their consensus on goals and desire for cooperation, their sense of nationalism rooted in the past continues to impede progress toward a future of regional cooperation. Ultimately, only the disputing parties can resolve this conundrum.

**Regionalism verse Nationalism in Northeast Asia**  
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## **Introduction**

Northeast Asia remains a region divided despite extensive regional economic integration and decades of maturing security cooperation. Rival forces – nationalism and regionalism - are dueling to forge Northeast Asia's future. Regionalism, nurtured by economic integration and a shared quest for security, are pulling China, the two Koreas and Japan toward a future of security, economic and possibly political collaboration.<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously nationalism is impeding the process. Here we review the causes for this situation and assess prospect for the emergence of a formal regional structure in Northeast Asia.

## **Regionalism**

Regionalism's aim is to link a small group of nations to a joint pursuit of shared goals. Collaboration is formalized through regionally focused multilateral agreements and formal structures such as the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).<sup>2</sup> The arrangement requires member nations to voluntarily pool their sovereignty, or at least restrain it, so that they are better able to combine resources and to coordinate priorities in the hope of more effectively and efficiently achieving specific shared goals. Diplomacy is

<sup>1</sup> Baogang He and Takashi Inoguchi, "Introduction to Ideas of Asian Regionalism," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 12 (2) 165-177.

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

emphasized over confrontation to resolve disagreements. Economic competition is sanctioned but regulated by regionally agreed rules. Ideally regionalism collectively addresses shared concerns that encompass security, economic integration, political cooperation, humanitarian needs, etc. Successful regionalism benefits equally all members otherwise the system becomes dysfunctional and collapses.

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

#### *Regionalism in Northeast Asia*

Regionalism in Asia dates from 1968 and has steadily rallied support across Southeast and Northeast Asia, and across the Pacific. It began with the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Like the EU, ASEAN began as a regional security cooperative, Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)<sup>4</sup>. The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) followed in 1989. Its primary impetus was economic and its parent was the United States. Recognizing the economic dynamism of Northeast Asia, ASEAN expanded to link itself to Japan, the ROK and China, ASEAN plus Three, in 1997. Japan proposed ASEAN plus Six (Japan, ROK, China, India, Australia, and New Zealand) which was renamed the East Asian Summit (EAS), still an extension of ASEAN.<sup>5</sup> The EAS added the United States and

<sup>3</sup> He Baogang, p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> He Baogang, p. 166.

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>8</sup>He Baogang, p. 170.

<sup>9</sup>Amitav Acharya, "ASEAN's Dilemma: Courting Washington without Hurting Beijing," *Asia Pacific Bulletin* No. 133. [www.EastWestCenter.org/APB](http://www.EastWestCenter.org/APB), and Meidyatama Suryodiningrat,

These formidable barriers, however, have not halted nor reversed progress toward regional cooperation in Northeast Asia. On the contrary, since China, Japan and the ROK began collaborating on the formation of a trilateral regional organization in 1999, they have achieved steady progress. Their effort began in conjunction with the ASEAN Plus Three summit in the Philippines.<sup>10</sup> In 2003 the three Northeast Asia nations issued the Joint Declaration on the Promotion of Tripartite Cooperation.<sup>11</sup> Annual meetings of Finance and Foreign Ministers followed. The group held its first Trilateral Summit outside the ASEAN PLUS Three framework in October 2009 in Fukuoka, Japan. Summits followed in Beijing (2010) and Jeju, ROK (2011). Memoranda of Understanding pledged cooperation in counter-terrorism, transportation, intellectual property rights, communications, metrology, environment, disaster management, etc.<sup>12</sup> In March 2012 the First Trilateral Policy Dialogue on Asian Affairs convened in Beijing and the fifth Trilateral Summit Meeting met in Beijing on May 13, 2012.<sup>13</sup>

editor, *Jakarta Post*, "ASEAN Regional Forum 2011: China and the United States," *Asia Pacific Bulletin* No. 127, August 4, 2011. LEE, John, "China Still has a Long Way to Go," *Asia Pacific Bulletin* No. 134, October 24, 2011.

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

<sup>11</sup> PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "China-Japan-ROK Cooperation 1999-2010," [www.fmprc.gov](http://www.fmprc.gov); and Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Fifth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit (Summary) June 27, 2012" and, "Joint Declaration on the Enhancement of Trilateral Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership, Beijing, China, May 13, 2012. [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

<sup>12</sup>Second Trilateral Summit: "Joint Press Conference by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama of Japan, Premier Wen Jiabao of the PRC and President Lee Myung-bak of the ROK. (October 10, 2009). "Joint Statement on the Tenth Anniversary of Trilateral Cooperation," Beijing, China, October 10, 2009. "Joint Statement on Sustainable Development among the PRC, Japan and ROK," Beijing, China, October 10, 2009. Third Trilateral Summit: Joint Press Release of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Trilateral Summit Meeting; ROK, Japan and PRC," Jeju, ROK, May 30, 2010. "Trilateral Cooperation VISION 2020," Jeju, ROK, May 30, 2010. "Memorandum on the Establishment of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat by the Governments of Japan, PRC and ROK, May 30, 2010. "Joint Statement on Standards Cooperation Among ROK, Japan, PRC, Jeju, ROK, May

The three nations at the end of their May 2012 meeting mentioned for the first time the Senkakujima/Diaoyou Islands dispute between Japan and China, and the Tokto/Takeshima Island dispute between the ROK and Japan.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, progress toward trilateral cooperation sputtered to an end. The extent to which “sensitive issues,” as the Chinese foreign ministry labels disagreements over history and ownership of islands, will impede trilateral cooperation, as of June 2013, remains to be seen, but clearly the disputes are impeding progress.

## **Nationalism**

Nationalism is an 18<sup>th</sup> Century European concept that achieved political maturity in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>15</sup> It focuses political leaders and their constituents’ concerns on nation specific issues and priorities. At nationalism’s core is the idea of national sovereignty, another European concept forged in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when nations began to formulate international laws to regulate their conduct. Sovereignty meant each nation reserved an “inherit right” to ultimately determine whether it would submit to international law. Cooperation with neighboring nations and international law was and is still viewed as undermining a nation’s ability to address its priorities because the nation’s resources are shared with rivals. An early 20<sup>th</sup> Century example of this is US President George W. Bush’s world view which deemed unilateralism preferable to

30, 2010. “Joint Statement on Strengthening Science and Innovation Cooperation among ROK, Japan and PRC, Jeju, ROK, May 30, 2010. Fourth Trilateral Summit, “Summit Declaration,” Tokyo, Japan, May 22, 2011. “Japan to Host the 4<sup>th</sup> Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit Meeting,” Tokyo, Japan, May 13, 2011. “Cooperation on Nuclear Safety, Tokyo,” Japan, May 22, 2011. “Cooperation toward Sustainable Growth through Promotion of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency,” Tokyo, Japan, May 22, 2011. “Cooperation on Disaster Management,” Tokyo, Japan, May 22, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Fifth Trilateral Summit, “Fifth Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit (Summary), Beijing, China, June 27, 2012, and “Joint Declaration on the Enhancement of Trilateral Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership, Beijing, China, May 13, 2012. [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp).

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

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

multilateralism which marginalized the importance of regional and international organizations in his foreign policy.<sup>16</sup> The DPRK is another example of a nation that prefers unilateralism to multilateralism, a consequence of its *Juche* ideology that puts nationalism and self determination above all else.<sup>17</sup>

### *Nationalism in Northeast Asia*

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

<sup>16</sup> C. Kenneth Quinones, "Dualism in the Bush Administration's North Korea Policy," *Asian Perspective* (April 2003).

<sup>17</sup> C. Kenneth Quinones, "Beyond Collapse - Continuity and Change in North Korea," *International Journal of Korean Reunification Studies* (January, 2003).

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

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

Japan's post WWII "right" and "left" wing politicians, a topic explored later. Korean and Chinese nationalism share a similar genesis. Both were born in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century largely as a reaction to Japanese imperialism, and anti-Japanese sentiment remains at the core of both. This topic will also be explored in greater detail later.

### **Regionalism verse Nationalism**

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

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

Northeast Asian regionalism was conceived during the Korean War in the form of security cooperation. The US and USSR created rival treaty systems to assert their influence in the region and to deter a second Korean War on the Korean Peninsula. The US "hub and spokes" alliance system committed US and Republic of Korea's (ROK) armed forces, supported by Japan's hosting of US bases and logistical support, to deterring another Korean War. In the

northern half of the peninsula, a similar treaty system emerged between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the USSR and China. This arrangement blocked further regional cooperation and economic integration because the ROK and Japanese economies were linked to the US economy while that of the DPRK was tied to the USSR and China. Thus, while the cooperation NATO nurtured among European nations during the Cold War set the stage for the European Union, the Cold War's polarized treaty system centered on the Korean Peninsula prevented progress toward regional cooperation.

Not until the end of the Cold War in 1990 did economic integration become possible in Northeast Asia. But first the United States and Japan had to discard their Cold War strategy of "containing" communism, i.e. diplomatic and economic isolation of China and the DPRK from the international community. Next China's economy needed to develop the capacity to engage in international commerce, which became increasingly evident after 1990.

East Asia since 1990 has developed an unprecedented consensus among all the regions nations that designate the pursuit of peace, prosperity and stability as shared priorities. This has encouraged regional integration in two major areas: security cooperation and economic integration. The DPRK decision in 1991 to build its own "nuclear umbrella" by developing an arsenal of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons promptly gave the nations of Northeast Asia a new, common goal – keeping the Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons. Initially bilateral efforts between the two Koreas (the Joint South-North Korea De-nuclearization Declaration) and the first ever US-DPRK Agreed Framework accord suggest the problem could be dealt with bilaterally. But by 2002 it was evident this would not be the case. China intervened by forming and hosting the Six Party Talks, the region's first ever multilateral security forum that brings

together the world's four superpowers plus the two Koreas in the common quest for a peaceful, diplomatic end to the DPRK's weapons of mass destruction programs.<sup>20</sup>

Simultaneously the same nations, except for the DPRK, have been working to form regional organizations that promote their common quest for prosperity. The largest of these endeavors is APEC, Asia-Pacific Economic Council. Its effectiveness, however, is greatly limited by the continuing strong sense of nationalism evident in its deliberations and the rule that all decisions require all members' consent. Consequently Japan, the ROK and China have since 1998 worked to form their own trilateral forum to promote economic integration.<sup>21</sup>

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

### **History's Burden**

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

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

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

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

Today many would promptly argue that East Asia's Confucian legacy lacks validity, but one can counter that the historical record remains a critical element in the region's political culture. The historical record remains a core element in assessing whether a nation's past conduct was virtuous and benevolent, and thus merits either respect or criticism, a fact evident in a close examination of China's and the two Koreas' criticism of Japan's 20<sup>th</sup> century imperialism.<sup>22</sup>

Viewing contemporary friction between Japan and its neighbors in a broad, historical context brings greater clarity to the continuing disputes over history and territories that impede

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

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

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

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

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

## **Virtue verse Legality**

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

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

The end of Cold War ideological rivalry in 1990 promptly allowed nationalism to reassert itself as concern for ideology evaporated. For the first time in history, the nations of Northeast Asia have forged a consensus that focuses their energies on attaining the shared goals of peace, prosperity and stability. The governments of Northeast Asia since 1998 have recognized that

regional cooperation will best promote their common goals. However, concerns about Japan's past conduct and a common sense of keen nationalism impede further progress toward regional collaboration. Only the concerned nations of Northeast Asia can resolve this conundrum. Until they do, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea will continue to clash over the past while striving to forge a future of regional cooperation.

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