I. Introduction

East Asia comprises of China, Korea and Japan was once the frontier of the Cold War. The three countries are interwoven geographically, culturally and economically. Added up the three countries together, their GDP has taken more than 20% shares of the world’s aggregate GDP\(^1\). Decades of Cold War standoff split the region into two blocs. Yet historical reminiscence couldn’t resist the trend of accelerated economic and social interaction in the region.

Post-Cold War era has witnessed the prevalence of bilateralism discourse in the region driven by the economic interaction and globalization. Building an East Asia region has been proposed many times on various multilateral platforms and during political discourse. Nonetheless, regionalism finds itself difficult to take root.

As a response to the multiple regional challenges, 1990s Asian economy crisis, the North Korea Nuclear issue and the trend of globalization, multilateral cooperative mechanisms emerged in the region. From APEC, ASEAN, Six-Party Talks to the recent Trans-Pacific Partnership, multilateral initiatives spring up in East Asia.

The progress of these efforts is not significant enough to put an East Asia region together. It seems to many scholars that the prospect for East Asia regionalism is quite bleak. Some believed it’s an “Anti-Region” (Hayes:2003) that will not have deeper cooperation but rather ad hoc and extra-regional arrangements (Evans: 2007).

\(^1\) IMF, World Economic Outlook April 2012
East Asia region-building has been criticized by scholars, media, politicians. Why is impact so minimal in East Asia? What kind of multilateral arrangements will realize regionalism? This paper aims at providing policy recommendation to these questions.

**Defining Key Concept**

*Regionalism and Regionalization*

Regionalism, evolved from early European model, has various ways to define. Broadly it refers to cooperative efforts of both state and non-state actors within a certain region in search for mutual benefits. Following this line regionalism is defined as “cooperation among governments or non-government organizations in three or more geographically proximate and interdependent countries for the pursuit of mutual gain in one or more issue-areas” (Alagappa 1995, p. 362).

A narrower approach to define regionalism focuses on state-led initiatives and national strategies. From this perspective, regionalism is defined as “state-led projects of cooperation that emerge as a result of intergovernmental dialogues and treaties” (Breslin, Higgott and Rosamond 2002, p. 13) or “the construction of intergovernmental collaboration on a geographically restricted basis” (Ravenhill 2001, pp. 6–7). In this definition, state is the main actor to build regionalism through government policies and formal institutions to increase interdependence and cohesion of countries within a region.

With the division of state and non-state actors, a comparative concept “regionalization” emerged. Regionalization refers to spontaneous and less conscious processes that ‘come from markets, from private trade and investment flows, and from the policies and decisions of companies’ (Hurrell 1995, p. 39).

In this paper we believe East Asia’s region-building process has been driven by both formal top-down regionalism-- the narrower definition of regionalism, and the informal bottom-up regionalization.
Multilateralism & Trilateralism

As the vanguard of the concept, John Gerard Ruggie defined multilateralism as “coordinating relations among three or more states”, a “generic institutional form” that “implied institutional arrangements” (Ruggie 1993:8-10). Later Caroline Bouchard and John Peterson, with critique of Ruggie, proposed contemporary functionalistic multilateralism as “three or more actors engaging in voluntary (and essentially) institutionalized international cooperation governed by norms and principles, with rules that apply (by and large) equally to all states”. (Bouchard & Peterson 2011:10)

Trilateralism, one type of multilateralism, traditionally refers to foreign policies promoting friendly trilateral relations among countries or regions. We perceive trilateralism to be a multilateral means to achieve regionalism in East Asia. It is exclusive to describe multilateral cooperation among the three East Asian countries, namely China, Japan and South Korea. In contrast to multilateral institutions like APEC which stands upon the inclusive “Asia Pacific” conception of regionalism, trilateral framework in this paper emphasizes an exclusive “East Asian” region.

Regionalization in East Asia since 1990s

Burgeoning need for globalization stimulated regionalization for the lower transaction costs associated with geographic proximity (Kim, S. 2004, p. 43). Also, regionalization processes can be seen as reactive to backlashes of globalization (Oman 1994). Since the 1990s, globalization spurred economic interactions and increasing business activities in East Asia. Market-led economic regionalization started before FTA negotiations were brought on the table.

China has become both Japan and Korea’s biggest trading partner since 2007.² Korea rank sixth among countries that have most foreign direct investment in China³.

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Following U.S and U.K, China is the 3rd country where most Japanese FDI went in 2011.\(^4\) Other statistical data show that trade between Southeast Asia, China and Japan increased dramatically after the late 1990s. (METI: 2007a, p. 98)

Growing economic interaction and pressure from extra-regional economies pointed to momentum to acquire formal institutional support from the government. Commercial groups and trans-national companies are incentivized by potential profit. The aggregated business interests entail intergovernmental cooperation to create an integrated market with business norms and regulatory framework to secure transaction and minimize cost. Driven by the economic regionalization, regional economic arrangements took place. Chiang Mai Agreement, for instance, is a leap forward in terms of East Asian cooperation. The three East Asian countries together with ASEAN joined the initiative for an enlarged foreign reserve and currency swap agreement.

On top of economic activities, regionalization of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has contributed to East Asian Cooperation. International, regional, and local non-governmental groups played an important role in advancing cooperative projects in areas of development/environment, war crimes, and peace/security.\(^5\)

Social interaction within East Asia has grown rapidly from Mid 1990s. The three countries have become much wealthier with substantially improved living condition and soaring middle class. The tourism industry, an indicator of direct interaction between nationals of the three countries is growing fast. Especially the newly-emerged Chinese middle class has contributed to the booming of tourism in South Korea and Japan. Since February 2008, Chinese tourists can get tourist visa exemption for if their destination is Jeju Island, a major tourism attraction of South Korea. According to tourist statistics of Fuji Mountain in Japan, Chinese tourists have accounted for the biggest proportion of

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Daehoon Lee, Transnational cooperation among NGOs in Northeast Asia: from re-thinking development towards re-thinking security. *Regional Cooperation and its Enemies in Northeast Asia: The impact of domestic forces* p185-204. Edited by Edward Friedman and Sung Chull Kim. 2006 by Routledge
visitors in 2011. Products of popular culture such as pop music, TV plays, movies and comic books are shared throughout cities of East Asia.

Universities cooperation program is another indicator of increasing regional interaction. Regionalization in higher education has taken different types ranging from workshop-style programs aim at international understanding, programs mainly targeting graduate students to programs connected with global cooperation. For instance, Peking University and Waseda University have established joint graduate school programs.

There are also bilateral non-profit organizations, for instance, the Beijing Forum, an international forum promoting the study of humanities, which is co-sponsored by Peking University, Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, and Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies.

II. Regionalism Attempts in East Asia

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), launched in 1989, is a forum for 21 Pacific Rim countries (formally Member Economies) that seeks to promote free trade and economic cooperation throughout the Asia-Pacific region in response to the growing interdependence of Asia-Pacific economies. Supported by the U.S, APEC has become an influential regional mechanism since 1993 the first APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting. Chinese top leaders have been highly supportive to APEC since the beginning.

APEC is the first multilateral institution involving East Asia region and is recognized as the highest-level multilateral process in Asia Pacific region. However, its

7 Miki Sugimura, Possibility of East Asian integration through the regional networks and universities' cooperation in higher education. Asian Education and Development Studies Vol. 1 No. 1, 2012 pp. 87-88
8 http://www.waseda.jp/eng/news08/080508_1e.html
10 http://www.apec.org/About-Us/About-APEC.aspx
threshold is quite low. It is primarily an economic dialogue that even though political and security issues are brought on the table, it’s very unlikely to evolve into an institution with functional economic, political and security mechanism.

Since the “Bogor Goals” were approved, APEC meetings haven’t made any recognized progress. Its membership range, adding Mexico, Argentina, Chile and the European Union, is too broad to be considered as a regional institution for Asia, but more likely a trans-Pacific multilateral institution.

U.S was once the main force to support and drive the development of APEC. But the once main advocate of APEC lost its imperative to push forward APEC’s leverage. Slow and ineffective response to the Asia Economic Crisis has made the APEC institution less attractive. The British magazine The Economist commented the APEC has “a pernicious effect” for “it creates the illusion that something is being done and so weakens other efforts to reach meaningful agreements on, for example, climate change and trade.”\(^\text{11}\) APEC meetings have become no more than just a talk shop and gathering for heads of state.

Subsequently, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was launched. It’s a multilateral free trade agreement (FTA) for further economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. Again, advanced by the U.S, TPP is adopted as a strategy to provide more market access for American companies. It is “an ambitious, next-generation, Asia-Pacific trade agreement that reflects U.S. priorities and values.”\(^\text{12}\) The ultimate goal is to build US-style regulatory frameworks similar to North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in Asia (Kelsey 2010; Wallach and Tucker 2010).

Compared to APEC, TPP has a much more progressive and ambitious agenda. It aims at liberalizing the Asia Pacific economy and creating a new set of global rules and norms. It covers a variety of topics ranging from intellectual property rights, pharmaceutical to investment rights. Leaked documents concerning intellectual property

\(^{11}\) The Economist, APEC—a pretty empty chatter: Four adjectives in search of a conclusion. Sep 12th 2007

rights from the “closed and biased” TPP negotiation process revealed the excessive strictness of TPP clauses.

Asian economy, centered on Japan in the 20th century, is now led by a rising China. In 2011, the Obama administration officially shifted its foreign policy focus from Europe and Middle East to East Asia.13 The strategy shift is apparently to balance China’s Rise and to maintain economic and political influence in the Asia-Pacific region. The TPP is seen in part as a means of neutralizing Chinese economic influence in the region (Buchanan 2010: 86–89). If China take the lead in shaping Asia economy, it will become difficult for U.S to advance its leadership in the region. Therefore in East Asia, U.S’s strategy is to prioritize Japan and South Korea’s membership to balance the influence of China. Japan and South Korea both expressed their interests to join TPP but haven’t entered the negotiation.

On top of political constraint, the odds for China to become member of TPP are low. U.S has been pushing for privatization and more regulatory disciplines for state-own enterprises, which collides with China’s interests. For China, joining the TPP will infringe its domestic economic institution and undermine its current political system. Excluding China, the major economic power that can shape the Asian market, will subsequently split the region into alliance and non-alliance of U.S. The split could potentially impede regional integration and reduce TPP’s leverage in East Asia.

It may seem too early to conclude whether TPP will excel APEC. At least from East Asia perspective, TPP is very unlikely to become the catalytic agent of regionalism.

Security issue is another driver of multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia. The aftermath of Cold War and U.S-North Korea antagonism complicated the nuclear issue on many levels. Six-Party Talks (6PT) once was the silver lining to create a permanent multilateral security mechanism, resolve the North Korea nuclear issue and bring peace to the region. The talks started when North Korea withdrew from Nuclear Non-Proliferation in 2003. As a multilateral attempt to create a security frame work, Six-Party

Talks get U.S, China, Russia, Japan join the talks between South and North Korea, a “2+4” logic. It was a phenomenal multinational track I forum involving all major powers in the region to resolve urgent security issue without hard-line diplomacy or military intervention.

Progress has been made after rounds of talks until North Korea decided to launch its satellite in 2009, against international pressure. A new round of sanctions and condemnations on North Korea pushed it to announce that it will never join the talks and will not be bound any previous agreements. North Korea expelled all inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency and claimed it will resume its nuclear weapon program.\(^\text{14}\) So far there’s no positive sign of resumptions of the talks.

Supporters of Six-Party Talks were over-optimistic about its prospect. The complexity of North Korea nuclear issue and the Northeast Asia region is underestimated. U.S- North Korea conflict is not just a result of the Cold-War, but the fundamental differences of political system, ideology, interests and objectives. These entrenched differences make any compromise between the two states impossible. They have built each other’s image as completely opposite to the other, therefore no middle ground is available to stand upon.

As a result, Six-Party Talks can hardly resolve the issue, but only postpone it. Multilateral cooperation by definition is based on mutual understanding and compromise. Even though China, Japan and Russia were collaborating positively, the deadlock between U.S and North Korea offset all the other efforts. The volatile nature of the DPRK government makes it impossible to build a sustainable institution, either. North Korea easily disclaimed agreements reached from previous talks. Relying on an unpredictable country, East Asia cannot consolidate a regional framework.

China meanwhile publicly expressed its interest to build an East Asian Community (EAC) with Japan.\(^\text{15}\) Former Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama first proposed the concept during the 2009 election. Compared to other multilateral initiatives, EAC focuses

\(^{15}\) “Japan, China to Work Together on Creating ‘East Asia Community,’” Japan Times, September 29, 2009
more on community-building. Its agenda includes building a common currency. Initially Hatoyama didn’t want to include U.S in the rudimentary phase of East Asian Community building. Geographically, U.S is too far away to be considered as an East Asian country. Politically U.S’s ambition in the region will only complicate the political economy dynamics.

U.S is wary of any attempt at creating a East Asia region that excludes its presence. The idea of building a common currency triggered U.S’s suspicion that EAC aims at becoming independent from U.S dollar based trade structure and eventually kick U.S out of the region. To avoid being marginalized by the East Asian Community, U.S official started putting pressure on Japanese government. Under the pressure of U.S, Japan had to adjust its position and eventually shift its ground to support U.S involvement in EAC. In 2010, Hatoyama indicated his support to have U.S and Russia to be part of EAC when addressing his speech in a forum in Seoul, South Korea. Other ASEAN member countries, for instance Indonesia also required to join EAC. The East Asian Community drifted apart from its initial notion and became unachievable unclear roadmap and tangled conflicting interests.

III. Trilateralism – Opportunity & Challenge

Trilateral cooperation between China, Japan and South Korea historically are more successful than other multilateral framework. ASEAN Plus Three (APT), the first of this kind, was born amid the turbulence of Asian Economic Crisis in 1997. The annual 10+3 summit centers on economic cooperation with increasing attention on politics, security and culture. In the three area of cooperation, respectively political-security cooperation, finance and economic cooperation and socio-cultural cooperation, APT has built 57 mechanism in 20 different subjects including transnational crime, economics, finance, 

16 http://www.hkcna.hk/content/2010/1014/71957.shtml
forestry, energy, mining, tourism, heath, art and culture, environment, telecommunication, social welfare, etc.

Among these mechanisms, there are the annual APT Summit, APT Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, APT Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM) and as well as track 1.5 and track two dialogue.\(^\text{18}\) The Network of East Asian Think-tanks (NEAT), for instance, established in 2002 among “10+3” countries in East Asia, “aims at integrating the research resources in East Asia, promoting the academic exchanges and providing intellectual support for East Asian cooperation.”\(^\text{19}\)

Evolved from APT, the East Asia Summit (EAS) was ambitious to become the prominent cooperative mechanism for East Asian community building and eventually replace APT. Nevertheless, Beijing and Tokyo’s competition within the summit has led to the expansion of 10+3 to 10+6, adding India, Australia and New Zealand, the other Asian-Pacific democracies. In 2011, EAS agreed to include United States and Russia, possibly an attempt to dilute China’s increasing influence. The enlargement challenged a pure East Asian region concept for extra-regional power get involved. EAS is criticized for being merely “a dinner followed by sixteen speeches” (Emmerson 2010:2). Chinese scholars believed that “APT is the only one which is truly an East Asian body”. China is unlikely to spearhead the development of EAS.\(^\text{20}\)

Perhaps the most encouraging progress apart from all the above-mentioned trilateral/multilateral arrangements is the Trilateral Summit between China, Japan and Korea. The summit was evolved from an unofficial breakfast meeting comprising heads of state during ASEAN (10+3) and eventually became independent forum outside ASEAN. The first summit was held on December 13\(^{\text{th}}\), 2008. It was the first time for top leaders from China, Japan and Korea to have formal meeting outside the APT framework.\(^\text{21}\) In 2011, conforming the resolution passed during the 3\(^{\text{rd}}\) Trilateral Summit,

\(^\text{18}\) [http://www.asean.org/16580.htm](http://www.asean.org/16580.htm)
Accessed July 15\(^{\text{th}}\), 2012
the three countries launched a Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat in Seoul. Steps towards institutionalizing the region have been brought on the agenda.

In 2012, the 5th summit was held in Beijing. The Joint Declaration on the Enhancement of Trilateral Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership was issued along with two attached documents – the Joint Statement of Cooperation on Sustainable Forest Management, Combating Desertification and Wildlife Conservation, and the Joint Statement on Agricultural Cooperation. The trilateral cooperation includes trade & investment, great East Japan earthquake, people-to-people & culture exchange and maritime cooperation. A variety scope of issues, both regionally and globally were discussed during the summit such as Northeast Asian situation, international economic situation, East Asian cooperation, disarmament & non-proliferation, climate change and the Millennium Development Goals. The Trilateral Summit beaconed a multilateral rudiment for institutionalizing East Asia.

Based on success and failure of these precedents, we recommend an evolved trilateralism strategy to stabilize the regional cooperation. Firstly, the trilateral mechanism should be closed and exclusive to the three countries, i.e. China, Japan and South Korea. Multiple stakeholders outside the East Asian region normally complicate the situation because they added in tangled conflicting interests and unclear goals. One of the reasons why APT, EAS and EAC all failed is because they involve extra-regional countries like the U.S and ASEAN countries.

In the trilateral framework, the three countries can focus on tackling their own issues without as many conflicts as under other multilateral mechanism. Successful bilateral cooperation between China and Korea, China and Japan, and Japan and Korea have proved that common interests are able to push the three countries to work and compromise with each other, as long as they can achieve economic and political positive-sum outcome. Bringing the three together will not become that much difficult than sustaining the existing bilateral cooperation.

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China, Japan and Korea have all established stable trade relations with each other. Through past experience, the three countries can rely on each other unless there are external disturbance. A trilateral framework will reduce uncertainties that are rampant in other multilateral institutions.

Trilateral framework can balance the region in different area of issues and become the drive to resolve regional disputes. Japan’s wartime record in history textbooks and the prime minister’s visit to the Yasukuni shrine have been fiercely criticized by China and Korea. Japan’s wartime aggression has triggered domestic boycott of Japanese products in China. Anti-Japanese sentiments stimulated political mistrust. The way Japan deals with historical problem will determine whether there will be chance to gain social cohesion in the region. The trilateral framework will be able to help resolve issue because China and Korea can collaborate together to confront Japan’s hardline attitude and push Japan to concede.

Similarly, Japan and Korea together can push China to open up its market. The triangular relations can create a positive negotiation dynamics to advance trade, marine and other functional areas of cooperation. Gradually, the trilateral framework can further the cause of regional integration in the long run. The core of trilateralism is to “聚同化异” (converge common interest and resolve differences).

To build the trilateral framework, three principles should be upheld: “先经后政” (economics first, politics second), “先易后难” (the easy ones first, the hard ones second), “循序渐进” (proceed orderly and step by step).

Firstly, the three countries should avoid being disturbed by political and security elements before a mature regional economic body is built. Historically, political and security issues undermine the economic integration by dividing a region into different blocs and stirring conflicts. The North Korea nuclear issue is one driven factor of lagged regional cooperation. South Korea, backed by the U.S has different ground from China.

The three countries also have different political system. The difference of political institution- China being an “authoritarian” regime as contrast to Japan and Korea being liberal democracies, is another barrier to build a “generic institutional form” for the
region and exacerbated political distrust (Ryu 2010; Shu 2012). China has been cautious of any attempts that could potentially fluctuate its domestic political sphere. Therefore it will not push for drastically liberal political institution that will spread to its backyard. Adding politics and security into the early regional cooperation agenda will not resolve the potential security threat, but split the stance within the three countries.

U.S’s hegemonic influence in the region is another threat. If East Asia revealed its ambition of becoming an allied regional political power, U.S will certainly exert its power to block the regionalism process. U.S’s objection to EAC and its effort to become part of EAC have indicated the possibility of U.S interference.

Secondly, East Asian cooperation should start from the easier area and then penetrate into harder ones. The European Union, for instance, was developed on the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), an international organization initiated by France and Germany. Eventually the cooperation spill over into other economic and political aspects and spurred the establishment of EU. East Asian cooperation can trace back to regional response to the Asian economic crisis in 1997. Same logic applies to establishing the trilateral framework. Through cooperation in fishing, energy, natural resources, etc., three countries can proceed to negotiate for a free trade zone.

The point of constructing a multilateral mechanism in the region is primarily for harmonious regional cooperation, not for a supranational authority that looks over the rest. Therefore, the three countries should not compete with each other to become the dominant power in the region, but rather to dilute competition, notably between China and Japan. “Surrounding area diplomacy” is a priority for China. China has adhered to its strategy of “good-neighborly diplomacy”, in which proceeding orderly and step by step is a guiding principle to ensure a stable and friendly relation with neighboring countries. Regional cooperation should be sustainable without intervention from extraregional power or hegemony within member countries.

Nonetheless, trilateralism is not rejecting engagement from outside East Asian region completely. If U.S, Russia, Australia, ASEAN or other countries want to engage with the region, mechanism similar to ASEAN Plus 3 can be incorporated in to the
framework. There could be China, Japan and Korea (A3) plus U.S, A3 plus Australia, so and so forth. A trilateral institution is still closed to its members, but will be open to outside stakeholders on a case-by-case basis. Once there’s a need for external cooperation to resolve a specific issue, A3 could invite the other party to join the discourse.

We recognize there will be political drags for a trilateral mechanism in East Asia. U.S will either demand to get involved or dismantle the closed East Asian region. ASEAN, in fear of a rising East Asia that will challenge its role as a prominent regional mechanism in Asia, would not tolerate the initiative either. However, the trend of forming an East Asian region is irreversible. Sustaining bilateral interaction and mutual supports among the three countries are premises for a new mechanism to overcome these barriers. The trilateral framework will enable the three countries to formalize their ad-hoc cooperation reflected by increasing regionalization progress. Ultimately trilateralism can become the carrier of regionalism in East Asia.

IV. Policy Implications

From the neo-functionalist perspective, during regional integration process usually one sector will involve related sectors and creating new problems that can only be solved by further cooperation. The domino effect of cooperation in economic, technical and other non-controversial area will eventually push to cooperation in high politics area and create institutions. (Haas 1958; 1964; Lindberg 1963) The early phase of European integration verifies this point. Following the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951, subsequently there were the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) in 1957.

East Asia could go through the similar pattern. In terms of political cooperation, there is already the Trilateral Summit. Following this mechanism, ministerial and sub-national level of political dialogue is also emerging. We would recommend to extend the
cooperation in economic, marine, culture and academic areas, using a multi-layered regional approach.

East Asia free trade agreement (FTA) has been brought on the agenda of politicians and scholars since the start of trilateral discourse. Recently the progress of establishing FTA through trade compact is accelerating. The formal negotiation for the China-Japan-Korea Free Trade Agreement has started in 2012.

On May 13th, 2012, the China-Japan-Korea Trilateral Investment Agreement is signed among the the Government of the People's Republic of China, Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of Korea for the Promotion, Facilitation and Protection of Investment. "The investment agreement is the first legal document on trilateral cooperation in the economic field, it is a milestone," said Mr. Wen Jiabao, the prime minister of China. The agreement has gone through 13 rounds of negotiation since 2007.

The Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI) has successfully launched bilateral swap agreement to cope with future economic turbulence. China, Japan and Korea, in order to enhance regional economic cooperation and integration can push for one step further. In this regard we would recommend the three countries to ratify a trilateral swap agreement.

A trilateral swap agreement can help the three countries to manage regional short-term liquidity problems. East Asia’s presence in international financial arrangements and organizations are relatively low profile. Trilateral cooperation in this realm can also help multilateral finance institutions to take root in the region in the future. Whether to establish a common currency in the region as proposed in East Asian Community could become the next step.

Fisheries management could become another area of regional cooperation. There have been bilateral fisheries agreements between China and Japan, China and Korea, and Japan and Korea. A trilateral fisheries agreement will provide a better framework to

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23 http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-05/14/content_15280279.htm
regulate, facilitate and legalize the fisheries cooperation among China, Japan and Korea. Other than the need to resolve marine conflicts, namely territorial disputes and fishing area, there is also need for China, Japan and Korea to realize integration of the fishing industry.

Even though there is competition between the three countries in terms of exports and marine resources, the fisheries structure of the three countries are different. China relies more on farmed or freshwater fish whereas Japan and Korea’s fishing industry are primarily based on capturing of wild or saltwater fish. China’s domestic market has increasing need for more marine products but has not has much productivity as Japan and Korea, either. Once fishing disputes are effectively managed and trade of marine products is opened up, the three countries’ fishing industries can all be better off.

Responding to regionalization in social and cultural aspect, the inaugural ministerial meeting among ministers of tourism from China, Japan and Korea was held in 2006 in Japan. The China-Japan-Korea Tourism Exchange Plan that seek to expand total amount of participants from 12 million in 2005 to 17 million in 2010 was actualized in 2010. Subsequently during the 5th meeting in 2010, new plan aims to expand the amount to 26 million in 2015. 24

The meeting set an ambitious goal of expansion. Growing demand for inter-regional tourism is a result of both economic growth and regional culture exchange. To keep up with the demand and realize the ambitious expansion, a possible approach is to establish a tourist-visa-free region for nationals of the three countries to travel freely and economically. There have been positive signs of cooperation. Since February 2008, Chinese tourists can get tourist visa exemption for if their destination is Jeju Island.

Trilateral education cooperation is also highly supported by governments of the three countries. To push for universities exchange and cooperation in China, Japan and

24 China, Japan and South Korea Cooperation from 1999-2012, Sec.3, Chapter 5. Minster of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China.
Korea, governments of the three countries jointly launched the “Campus Asia” program, also referred as “Collective Action of Mobility Program of University Students”. Through cross-crediting system resembling European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, student exchange and a variety of forms of exchange programs, Campus Asia aims to improve universities’ competitiveness and cultivate Asia’s next generation of elites. Campus Asia started its pilot projects in November 2011 and formally launched student exchange program in April 2012. These pilot projects are said to last for 3 to 5 years.

This approach will be a very good instrument for trilateralism. It borrows the patterns of the European Union and can follows the trajectory of education regional integration. We would recommend establishing more trilateral arrangements like Campus Asia to further academic cooperation in East Asia. Building a China-Japan-Korea universities league to incorporate not only academic exchange but possibly exchange of extracurricular activities can better serve the purpose of regional integration.

Conclusion

After decades of Cold War standoff, East Asia slowly began regional integration process since 1990s. Both bottom-up regionalization and top-down regionalism efforts are present in the region but none of the existing multilateral mechanism can last long or push forward regionalism. We reviewed these multilateral institutions and concluded they are either too ambitious and ideal, or too fragmented and irresponsible.

Trilateralism, a form of multilateralism, is more realistic to become the carrier of regionalism in East Asia. The core of trilateralism is to “聚同化异” (converge common

26 China, Japan and South Korea Cooperation from 1999-2012, Sec.2, Chapter 5. Minster of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China.
interest and resolve differences). In the trilateral framework, the three countries can focus on tackling their own issues without as many conflicts as under other multilateral mechanism. It can also help reduce uncertainties that are rampant in other multilateral institutions. The trilateral framework can further the cause of regional integration in the long run.

To build the trilateral framework, three principles should be upheld: “先经后政” (economics first, politics second), “先易后难” (the easy ones first, the hard ones second), “循序渐进” (proceed orderly and step by step). Applying these three principles, East Asia trilateral cooperation can start from economic issues, to build an East Asian Free Trade Zone and leave political and security issues behind. In other area, trilateral cooperation can include fisheries agreement, tourist-visa-free zone and universities league.

The trend of regionalism is hard to reverse. Identifying the right framework to be the catalytic agent of regionalism is essential to avoid unnecessary conflicts and political drags. We are positive to conclude that a trilateral framework is the best way to realize regionalism in East Asia.