

Attempts and Reasons for Failure of Regional Cooperation Organizations in East Asia

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Abstract. The possibility for regional collaboration and community-building remains enticing in an age of globalization and interdependence. This paper examines the interconnected forces that impede China, Japan, and South Korea's collaborative attempts to form a unified regional community. This research offers insight on the numerous hurdles that stand in the way of this cooperative vision through a tripartite lens of political differences, economic competitiveness, and US interference. It also sheds light on the varied nature of the challenges that China, Japan, and South Korea confront while working together to form a regional community. The paper aims to give three nations with reference ideas for resolving this complex and intricate multilateral relationship. In any event, the three East Asian nations should work hard to bridge their differences and forge constructive relationships. The fruits of such initiatives can determine East Asia's future pattern.

Keywords: Regional cooperation organizations, East Asia, political differences, economic competition, territorial disputes.

1. Introduction

Regional cooperation groups are new actors in international relations that play an important role in encouraging regional cooperation and development [1]. There is the European Union in Western Europe, while the North American Free Trade Agreement exists in North America. However, there is no equivalent regional organization in East Asia, which likewise has a highly developed economic model and cultural interactions. East Asia's efforts to create regional cooperation face significant hurdles in the complicated pattern of international relations, and some issues have hampered the path of solidarity and collaboration among countries. This paper comprehensively explores the multifaceted factors behind East Asia's failure to build robust regional cooperation and sheds light on the complex realities holding back the progress in the region.

Considering these complex variables, this paper thoroughly examines the fundamental causes that stymie East Asian regional cooperation initiatives. It sheds light on the complexity impeding regional advancements by untangling the tangled threads of political turmoil, economic links, and foreign meddling. The paper aspires not just to add to the scientific discussion of international relations, but also to give some policymakers and stakeholders seeking to enhance long-term regional cooperation with practical insights.

2. Unavoidable Conflict of Reality

East Asian countries, primarily involving China, Japan, and Korea, and their cultures share deep historical connections and have made efforts towards exchanges and collaboration. However, the road to regional cooperation has been obstructed by persistent political tensions, casting a shadow over the prospect of united cooperation. Historical grudges, territorial disputes, and the potential for confrontations among East Asian countries have collectively led to a climate of mistrust.

2.1. Historical Legacy Issues

The historical complexities and sensitivities in East Asia indeed make the region's diplomatic landscape intricate. The deep subjectivity in China, Japan, and South Korea's distinct narratives has

created a significant and long-lasting influence on their bilateral ties. East Asian countries' emphasis on historical memory is imbued with pride in their own histories and distrust of other countries, making them vulnerable to political manipulation and impeding the prospects for cooperative efforts. This may result from the unique historical focus of Confucian culture [2].

The legacy of war crimes and colonial occupation by the Japanese Empire, particularly in the early twentieth century, casts a long and bleak shadow over trilateral relations between China, Japan, and Korea. The aggressive expansion of Japan caused tremendous misery and horrors throughout East Asia [3]. It has caused enormous suffering and atrocities throughout the region, especially in China and Korea. These crimes, characterized by brutality, sexual assault, and massive civilian mortality, have left an indelible impact on the collective memory of China and South Korea. The present Japanese government's lack of explicit acknowledgement and imprecise apology for these actions has fueled animosity among Chinese and Korean citizens, creating a feeling of injustice and straining ties between the two nations.

The ramifications of this historical enmity have infiltrated the fabric of governmental decisions and strategic stances, not just public sentiment. The reality of a refusal or inability to settle past grievances has jeopardized diplomatic efforts to create collaboration. As a result, while summits and discussions among East Asian states have occasionally been hopeful, they have frequently resulted in short-lived gains and have been overshadowed by deep-seated hostility.

2.2. Territorial Disputes

Territorial disputes between East Asian countries over islands such as the Diaoyu (Senkaku Islands) and Dokdo (Takeshima) intensified these tensions, widening the regional gap. These conflicts have fostered strong nationalist emotions among the countries, making compromise and reconciliation difficult. Each of the three nations has its own view of the scope of its own maritime power, which often clashes with the views of the other two states.

The three nations' areas of influence overlap in the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea. As a result, any patrol by Beijing, Tokyo, or Seoul in the territorial waters they believe may irritate other states [4]. Disputes caused by other reasons can be even more troublesome. For example, in 2022, China conducted a military drill in the East China Sea to send a warning to Taiwan [5]. The drills were proclaimed to be totally beyond China's sphere of influence and on the high seas by Beijing, but the Japanese were outraged when two Chinese missiles fell in Japan's claimed economic zone in the East Sea. Tokyo filed a protest but received no answer [5]. Such military conflicts are more deadly than conventional resource and economic disputes and have the potential to intensify animosities between the parties involved.

Sometimes, governments may intentionally create such a tense climate to rally domestic support, but it can also produce unease among the disputed parties. For example, the South Korean president's visit to the disputed Dokdo Island substantially increased his popularity in South Korea, but it has also sparked Japan's harsh condemnation [6]. Similarly, a Chinese or Japanese battleship patrolling near the Diaoyu or Senkaku Islands may be a source of inspiration for supporters in their own country, but it would only escalate hostilities with the residents of the opposing nation.

In short, historical issues and practical disputes in China-Japan-South Korea relations pose substantial obstacles and challenges to cooperation, extending beyond purely political discourse. These contradictions between history and reality continue to cast a long shadow over the diplomatic interactions and strategic considerations of all parties involved.

3. Economic Conflicts

Despite tremendous expansion in East Asian economic ties, regional cooperation in East Asia has yet to attain its full potential. Despite the fact that economic linkages between East Asian nations have grown, distinctions in economic development levels and economic systems remain visible.

Furthermore, East Asian nations face severe rivalry in many industrial domains, making economic collaboration difficult and limiting the efficiency of East Asian regional cooperation.

3.1. Difference in Development

The obvious discrepancy in economic growth among East Asian nations is a major impediment to successful regional collaboration. East Asia's economy span from established industrialized countries like Japan to growing underdeveloped ones like China. These disparities in economic growth make it difficult for countries to align interests, objectives, and goals, impeding the construction of a cohesive regional cooperation framework.

The divergence of economic interests is one prime illustration of these discrepancies. Generally, less developed economies priorities basic industries, labor-intensive manufacturing, and agricultural sectors, whereas highly developed countries priorities advanced industries, technical innovation, and high value-added output. This misalignment of economic interests can result in competing agendas, making it difficult to build mutually beneficial policies and projects. Japan and South Korea have long competed in the semiconductor and electronics sectors, and China's fast economic expansion has also supported a variety of new electronics businesses, that makes the battle even more severe. Furthermore, due to their highly import-dependent economic structures, Japan and South Korea are more inclined to invest in China's manufacturing and agriculture in order to get products, which may produce dissatisfaction among local Chinese agricultural firms.

Furthermore, disparities in economic growth reinforce power dynamics imbalances. Traditionally, sophisticated economies have had more influence and resources. However, even if China's average economic level remains lower than that of other East Asian nations, the enormous scale of China's economy has already had an influence on Japan, South Korea, and other countries. This might raise worries about countries competing for regional economic domination. Because certain economies may fear being marginalized or coerced into agreements that do not serve their interests, this power imbalance can undermine confidence and stymie collaborative efforts.

3.2. Industry Competition

In the East Asian economic landscape, the evolution of industrial structures among the region's major players—China, Japan, and South Korea—all testify to divergent economic trajectories, laying the groundwork for intense competition across a range of industries. Whether it is the competition for semiconductor supremacy or the competition for electronic products or heavy industry chains, these countries have requirements that cannot be waived in these competing economic industries.

The three East Asian countries' industrial growth histories were initially distinct. China, as a manufacturing powerhouse, has leveraged its plentiful labor supply to become the world's factory. Japan's excellent workmanship has propelled it to the forefront of high-tech sectors, with notable successes in vehicle manufacture and cultural soft power output. With a foothold in semiconductors, consumer electronics, and shipbuilding, South Korea has created knowledge-intensive areas driven by major corporations.

However, in recent decades, shared changes in the three nations' fundamental economic structures and the global economy have resulted in strong rivalry among them. Japan's and South Korea's chaebols fight hard in mobile phones and semiconductors, and each favors trade protection in their own nations. Even though Samsung's mobile phones are popular around the world, there are still a lot of local mobile phone brands in Japan. As China steadily encourages industrial upgrading, the heart of East Asia's car sector has relocated from Japan to Shanghai's or Shenzhen's factories [7]. This is a disastrous economic situation for Japan, which employs tens of millions of people in this automobile sector. Therefore, those two countries compete for each other's technologies and markets, rather than conducting industrial joint ventures or cooperation.

At the same time, being the source of more than 90% of the world's ship manufacturing, the competitiveness in the shipbuilding sector among the three East Asian countries is particularly visible [8]. Shipbuilding competition exemplifies the complex interaction of economic, technological, and

geopolitical issues peculiar to the East Asian area. Cooperation strategies such as shipbuilding consortia pooling resources and cooperative development among numerous companies have arisen as the times need in this type of competition. Shipbuilders in these countries compete for global market share for their home countries, including South Korea's Hyundai Heavy Industries and Daewoo Shipbuilding and Offshore Engineering, Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Imabari Shipbuilding, or China's shipbuilding groups. This is undoubtedly what domestic practitioners would like to see, but it may be detrimental to regional collaboration.

4. Influence of the United States

The presence of extraterritorial forces has always been a critical and dynamic force defining the relations among East Asian nations in the region's convoluted geopolitical environment. Among these foreign forces, the United States is the most prominent, exerting a major impact on East Asia's political system.

The United States' geopolitical interests in East Asia have profoundly affected its stance on fostering or opposing collaboration among China, Japan, and South Korea. As a Pacific power, the United States has tried to preserve its influence, alliances, and military presence in the area, as a counterweight to China's expanding power [9].

Because of Cold War-era alliances against communism, the United States has long maintained security ties with both Japan and South Korea. In order to strengthen its East Asian alliance circle, the US frequently pushes the formation of a strong bilateral connection between Japan and South Korea. However, it may be ignoring objective contradictions has indirectly escalated tensions between the two countries. The most recent expression is South Korea's Yoon Suk Yeol government's "active reconciliation" with Japan. Yoon often declared his understanding of Japan's colonial history in the twentieth century. This behavior might be highly beneficial to Japan. And the United States feels that this is a positive thing that will benefit the East Asian military alliance that it leads. The only question is that Koreans may think it's a bad idea. After President Yoon announced a compromise with Japan on the issue of comfort women compensation, South Korea's opposition to him has not stopped for a moment [10]. If the future South Korean administration continues to utilize this strategy of infuriating the home people in order to concede too much with Japan under the "persuasion" of the United States, terrible repercussions may follow.

In terms of commerce, the United States may have unintentionally hampered East Asian regional cooperation. Even though the three East Asian nations' mutual trade volume is enormous, the United States is also one of the three countries' major trading partners. This somewhat mitigates the relevance of the three nations' economic requirements or links. In terms of currencies used in trade, for example, given the dominance of the US dollar and the enormous trade volume of the three nations with the US, the fraction of the three countries utilizing the US dollar in foreign commerce is fairly considerable. Even China, which is most eager to get rid of the dollar, uses more dollars than Chinese Yuan in its trade with Japan and South Korea. Because of the existence of the US dollar, East Asian countries find it may be impossible to follow the example of the European Union in establishing a single currency and regional economic organization. Because the dollar is the primary reserve currency for the three nations, it is widely recognized and utilized for cross-border transactions.

As a result, if East Asian nations are to quit the US dollar as the primary means of exchange for reciprocal interactions. To accommodate the new single currency, they may need to change their financial systems, update rules, and develop new infrastructure. Furthermore, the transition from dollar-based transactions to those based on the new single currency may disrupt trade and investment flows and require time to implement. The process of weaning the economy off the dollar will be complicated and slow. Many businesses, governments, and financial organizations in China, Japan, and South Korea will need to adjust to the new currency. This can lead to uncertainty and resistance, especially if the stability and acceptance of the common currency has not firmly established yet.

5. Conclusion

Taken collectively, the obstacles to collaboration among China, Japan, and South Korea highlight the complexities of international relations. Historical grudges and territorial squabbles, economic competitiveness, and the influence of other powers. The willingness of all sides to make efforts and compromise is required to resolve these difficulties.

Eastern nations should use East Asia's common culture and values as a connection to carry out cooperation and collaboration, which will become the cornerstone for East Asia in the future to address problems and establish a strong regional community. Although the process of such collaboration may be difficult and contradictory, the potential advantages in terms of regional economic growth, political stability, and cultural interchange are undeniably worthwhile. The establishment of an East Asian regional community is not only a dream, but a fundamental prerequisite for the region's joint prosperity and stability. Only consistent efforts can genuinely turn the complicated relationship between China, Japan, and Korea into a peaceful and integrated regional community.

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