

APPENDIX 2

BUILDING TRUST IN NORTHEAST ASIA: THE ROLE FOR ACADEMICS¹

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It is an honour to attend this conference in Fukuoka, a beautiful setting for an academic gathering involving scholars from several Northeast Asian countries all studying the region or engaged in people-to-people exchanges and educational cooperation.

The issue before us is very clear. Despite a long history of interaction in Northeast Asia, political and security tensions are significant and the level of economic operation well below its potential. The important question is how to build mutual understanding and trust as the foundations for a more peaceful and prosperous region.

My own perspective is that of a North American academic who teaches and writes about the international relations of East and Southeast Asia and the broader Asia-Pacific and focuses on regional security issues and the limits and possibilities of multilateral institution building. Over the last twenty-five years I have participated in a dozen different regional processes and attended some fifty workshops and conferences in Northeast Asia.

Canadians do not claim to be part of Northeast Asia but do have an abiding interest. One of the earliest efforts at inclusive regional security dialogue was a Canadian initiative between 1990 and 1993, the North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue, that brought together academics and, in their private capacities, officials from eight countries (Canada, China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia, Russia, the United States) for discussions of regional issues with particular attention to confidence building measures appropriate to the region.

There have been dozens of subsequent efforts at regional dialogue, some of them like the American-led Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue now more than 20 years old. And it has been a fertile two decades for broader Asia-Pacific discussions, many of them ASEAN-led including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) at the governmental level and the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP) at the track-two level.

It is fair to say that efforts focussed on Northeast Asia have rarely been successful in sustaining deep collaboration on economic matters or lowering tensions in the security realm. Many analysts see Northeast Asia as the graveyard for cooperative initiatives. Some do not see Northeast Asia as a region at all but instead as an “anti-region”

1 This paper builds on a paper presented at the meeting on “Northeast Asia People-to-People Exchanges and Cooperation: Cultural Interaction and Mechanism Innovation,” Dalian University of Foreign Languages, 28 April 2016 and a collection of essays which I edited and contributed to on “Cooperative Security 2.0: Recasting the East Asian Security Order,” *Global Asia* 11, no.1 (Spring 2016).

in which the national political cultures “largely define themselves by virtue of their differences and in relation to their opposition against their neighbors.”²

It is difficult to think of an area of such size and significance that is more bereft of multilateral institutions. This is immediately apparent if we compare the level of institutional development in Northeast Asia to the Americas, Africa, and especially Europe. And within Asia, Northeast Asia is operating at a lower base than Southeast Asia, the broader Asia-Pacific or even South Asia and Central Asia. As one American author noted more than a decade ago, and it still rings true, “many of the factors normally constitutive of a ‘region’ are in scant supply.”³

Geographically, it is not easy to make the case for an area that does not have common or defining topographic boundaries, similar climate patterns, or an integrated infrastructure. On identity, differences heavily outweigh similarities. Culturally, parts of Northeast Asia have a common Confucian heritage, but others do not. There is no unifying religion, language, consciousness or sense of shared destiny. The history of the Liaodong and Korean peninsulas speak to more than a century of geo-political competition, volatile state-to-state relations, high levels of militarization and defence spending, divided countries and unresolved historical legacies.

There are significant flows of investment and trade tied to global production networks and value chains in the broader region. China, Japan, South Korea and to some extent Mongolia and Russia are all outward-looking, global trading nations. But the level of transnational activity, the transnational flows, the major infrastructure projects, the level of institution building to address common problems, are all below their potential and vulnerable to political dislocations.

In a place where the security situation remains turbulent, it makes sense to try to build the foundations for cooperation on shared economic interests and common problems, environmental degradation a prominent example. Yet the abiding presence of political and security conflicts makes this functional cooperation tortuous, especially but not exclusively when North Korea is centre stage. Those who advocate waiting for a solution to the political security problem before addressing the functional issues face a long wait. And those who advocate pushing ahead on the economic and environmental fronts as a way of loosening the security knot face severe constraints and frustration.

My purpose is not to pour cold water on plans for deeper cooperation and the reduction of tensions. To the contrary, I will make the case for a long-term approach of which this conference is a part. The objective is to build confidence then trust with the interim step being empathy.

2 Peter Hayes and Linda Zarsky, “Acid Rain in A Regional Context,” June 1995, 4. Available on-line at <http://www.nautlius.org>.

3 Lowell Dittmer, “The Emerging Northeast Asian Regional Order,” in *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, ed., Samuel S. Kim (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 304.

GETTING TO COOPERATION

Virtually every leader in Northeast Asia has used terms like “mistrust,” “strategic mistrust,” “trust deficit” or “absence of trust” to describe a fundamental obstacle to improved relations and deeper interactions. No one doubts that more trust would be a good thing. The debate is about how to define and build it.⁴

Trust is best understood as a certainty that a state can count on non-violent interaction and peaceful dispute settlement based on mutual respect and concern for the other’s well being. It involves a sense of shared interest and identity. We see it in several bilateral relations, for example Canada-US relations. We see it in the strong elements of a security community in Europe. And we may now see it in the US-Japan relationship. In all three instances, war is virtually unimaginable.

One school of thought is that trust is the by-product of a long and sustained period of functional cooperation in trade, movement of people, and common endeavour.

Another school of thought is that a first step in building trust is the creation of confidence building measures. This normally focusses on trying to make states confident that their neighbours will not surprise them or cause them imminent harm. Confidence building measures often take the form of codes of conduct, prior notification of military exercises, transparency about force levels and doctrine, rules of engagement and the like. In the ASEAN Regional Forum process a formative idea was that its members should pursue a three-stage process — confidence building, preventive diplomacy, and resolution of conflicts — as the road to trust.

In Northeast Asia it has proven immensely difficult to deepen functional cooperation in a context of acute security tensions that repeatedly de-rail cooperation projects. Even modest confidence building measures are painstakingly difficult to implement.

The missing ingredient in moving from confidence to trust, in establishing higher levels of cooperation, is empathy. Empathy is best understood as the capacity to understand another’s view of the world, to walk in another’s shoes, to understand and share another’s experiences and emotions. Empathy is different from sympathy because it does not demand agreeing with another’s point of view, just understanding it.

Scholars of Southeast Asian international relations frequently identify the socialization and creeping empathy-building among officials and political leaders that comes with an enormous number of meetings. Years of intense interaction and close cooperation help dispel misconceptions. This does not mean that the leaders and officials from different countries like or always trust each other. But it does demonstrate that empathy can take hold in a very complicated and diverse region and is a necessary if insufficient condition for moving up the trust ladder.

Advocates of something akin to “empathy building measures,” like the Canadian

4 The government of President Park Kyung-hye launched the much publicized approach of *trustpolitik* to the North that takes a very narrow view of trust as reciprocity and quid pro quo and has been largely abandoned.

professor David Welch, have offered several suggestions for deeper dialogues among former and current decision makers, role playing exercises, and crisis management simulations.⁵

ACADEMIC ROLES

What functions can researchers and educators play?

Existing Activities. In many respects the academic enterprise is fundamentally about deepening knowledge and understanding among specialists and students and providing information and analysis for governments and broader publics. International conferences, faculty and student exchanges, international student recruitment, summer institutes, are all well explored mechanisms for working across national boundaries. Has anyone tried to map past and existing networks in this part of Northeast Asia? Do Northeast Asian academics function as what have been described as “rooted cosmopolitans” based in single countries but endowed with openness to foreign others?⁶

Revisiting History. As an example, the track record of multiple efforts to produce a common history of Northeast Asia is not good. State-sponsored projects for devising common textbooks have not only failed, they have in some cases been counter-productive by increasing animosities rather than reducing them. Non-governmental projects, including the Harvard-sponsored program to create a serious dialogue about the history of World War II as seen by American, Japanese, and Chinese historians, also failed. Simply mentioning topics including “comfort women,” “Nanjing massacre,” or “Diaoyutai/Senkaku,” polarizes discussions and reinforces strong nationalist sentiments. As noted in a recent article, “debates over wartime history intertwined with territorial disputes have inflamed nationalistic sentiment and prevented pragmatic diplomatic solutions...Just as memory affects and shapes present and future international relations, current relations and future visions affect our views of the past.”⁷

But are all projects destined to failure? Why and how have US-Japan explorations of their wartime experiences led gradually to historical reconciliation and fostered mutual trust and strengthened bilateral relations? What are the impediments for doing

5 David Welch, “The Trust Deficit and How to Fix It,” *Global Asia* 11, no.1 (Spring 2016); and “Crisis Management Mechanisms: Pathologies and Pitfalls,” *CIGI Papers* no.40 (September 2014), available at: <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/crisis-management-mechanisms-pathologies-and-pitfalls>.

6 Ulrich Beck, “‘Rooted Cosmopolitanism’ Emerging from a Rivalry of Distinctions,” in *Global America? The Cultural Consequences of Globalization*, eds., Ulrich Beck, Natan Sznaider and Rainer Winter (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 15-29.

7 Seiko Mimaki, “Case for ‘Enlightened Realism’: Reconciliation as an Imperative Task for Regional Peace and Stability,” *PacNet* # 37 (April 2016). Available at <http://csis.org/publication/pacnet-37-case-enlightened-realism-reconciliation-imperative-task-regional-peace-and-sta>.

this *within* Northeast Asia? How can they be overcome? Are there historical figures or fictional characters, political leaders or artists, who should be celebrated regionally as embracing values and ideas that engender widespread respect? Can, as argued by Hiro Saito, new networks of historians over time find ways to propagate a cosmopolitan point of view on topics such as commemorations of World War II?⁸

Publicizing the Positive. Most academic activities do not communicate their achievements on a regional level. Information and publications are sometimes disseminated but are rarely summarized in the kind of short, vivid portrayals that attract attention in neighbouring countries or with senior officials. What types of social media can be employed? How to overcome language barriers? How can transnational networks of scholars find ways to influence policy communities and publics and counteract narrowly nationalist accounts?

CONCLUDING NOTE

Empathy will not solve all problems and will not naturally emerge from closer and more frequent interactions. Sometimes states simply have incompatible identities, conflicting interests, and the intention to actually do harm to each other. A South Korean intellectual once pointedly observed that the problem in North-South relations is not that the two sides do not know enough about each other but that they know too much.

Even so, empathy needs cultivation and has no more natural an incubator than the modern university. It will be a pleasure to see what fresh ideas and strategies this gathering can produce about how better to organize and harness academic debates and exchanges in a trust building agenda.

8 See Hiro Saito, "Historians as Rooted Cosmopolitans: Their Potentials and Limitations," *Global Networks* 15 no.2 (2014).