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# **The Trilateral Cooperation of China, South Korea and Japan: A Sign of Regional Shifts**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this dissertation is my own work of research. In preparing this dissertation, I followed the guidelines established in the Guide to Examinations for Higher Degrees by Research of the University of Warwick. This dissertation has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Kamila Pieczara

## **Abbreviations**

**AFC** Asian financial crisis

**AMF** Asian Monetary Fund

**AMRO** ASEAN Plus Three Macroeconomic Research Office

**APEC** Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation

**APT** ASEAN Plus Three (Japan, South Korea, and the People's Republic of China)

**ARF** ASEAN Regional Forum

**ASEAN** Association of Southeast Asian Nations

**ASEM** Asia-Europe Meeting

**CJK** China, Japan, (South) Korea

**CMI** Chiang Mai Initiative

**EAC** East Asian Community

**EAEC** East Asian Economic Caucus

**EAEG** East Asian Economic Grouping

**EFTA** East Asian Free Trade Area

**EAS** East Asia Summit

**EAVG** East Asia Vision Group

**FDI** foreign direct investment

**FMPRC** Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China

**FTA** Free Trade Agreement

**GTI** Greater Tumen Initiative

**IFANS** Institute for Foreign Affairs and National Security

**IGCC** Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation

**IMF** International Monetary Fund

**JBIC** Japan Bank for International Cooperation

**METI** Ministry for Economy, Trade and Industry,

**MOFA** Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan)

**MOFAT** Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (South Korea)

**NAFTA** North American Free Trade Agreement

**NEA-3** Northeast Asian three (China, Japan, and South Korea)

**NEACD** Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue

**NEACI** Northeast Asia Cooperation Initiative

**OECD** Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

**PECC** Pacific Economic Cooperation Council

**PRC** People's Republic of China

**ROK** Republic of Korea (South Korea)

**SPT** Six Party Talks

**SCO** Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

**TC** Trilateral Cooperation (Japan, China, South Korea)

**TCCS** Trilateral Cooperation Cyber Secretariat

**TCS** Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (since September 2011)

**TPP** Trans-Pacific Partnership

**UNDP** United Nations Development Programme

**WTO** World Trade Organisation

## **Abstract**

The separate trilateral cooperation mechanism among Japan, the Republic of Korea (thereafter Korea) and the People's Republic of China (thereafter China) emerged from a wider framework for cooperation, the ASEAN Plus Three. To the scholarship on that framework, the new development constituted a puzzle, as the scholars considered a scenario for trilateral cooperation mechanism without ASEAN as highly unlikely. Instead, it took seriously prospects for Sino-Japanese competition and divisions running deep throughout all of Northeast Asia. Despite the obstacles that seemed insurmountable, a separate trilateral cooperation mechanism emerged in 2008. My argument to explain this development reaches back to regional sources. I introduce the analytical framework centred on foreign-policy preferences and outcomes to argue that collective outcomes originate neither in strategies of individual states nor in their bilateral relations, but through interaction at the level of a region; I also argue that the Trilateral Cooperation is a shift in regional affairs, but it is far from being a genuine revolution. I argue that ASEAN Plus Three provided a cooperative context for their relations in Asia. This thesis argues that for Asian international relations, the Trilateral Cooperation mechanism is neither a revolution nor an insignificant development, but a sign of shifts in regional affairs.

While previous scholarship—as reviewed in chap. 2—focused on obstacles to cooperation, my research emphasised the incentives. Even though a ‘trilateral cooperation’ may seem a vision too distant from the three states’ preferences, through interaction they achieved an outcome of cooperation in International Relations (chap. 1). Intentions of Japan, Korea, and China vis-à-vis Northeast Asian

regional cooperation differ (chaps. 3, 4, and 5), but they share a participation in regional initiatives. Through a study of literature, official documents, and interviews, I re-picture foreign-policy profiles of these Northeast Asian states: albeit none of them was reaching for the Trilateral Cooperation in its specific form, this forum emerged as a side-effect of their regional interactions. This research implies that picturing state interests per 'nation' state leads to a stalemate in explanations. We can overcome this through allowing for side-effects of state interactions, which explain more effectively how preferences of the states can produce outcomes in International Relations.

## Introduction

The three-body problem has yet to be solved by physicists. Can political scientists or policymakers hope to do better in charting the courses of three or more interacting states? Cases that lie between the simple interaction of two entities and the statistically predictable interactions of very many are the most difficult to unravel.

–Kenneth Waltz (1979: 192-193)

Because a ‘three-body problem’—see Kenneth Waltz’s words above—is particularly difficult to solve, International Relations (IR) scholars should be encouraged that such a rare, intriguing case has entered our explanatory matter. This thesis is an attempt at solving it. How far we can arrive in the explanation depends not only on the scale of difficulty of the subject; it depends even more on how we understand the question. My attempt is, therefore, limited by the way I ask this question. I juxtapose the trilateral-cooperation emergence with previous literature and evidence suggesting that such a framework was *not* on the horizon. It is then a puzzle.

This thesis adds an important piece of evidence on Asian regional cooperation. By analysing the Trilateral Cooperation, it posits that the literature on Asian regionalism is in need of a timely revision. What are we going to do about a development that has escaped attention of scholars? What is the price of leaving an important piece of Asian reality in IR unexplained? This thesis suggests that such a price is high, and with this motivation it elucidates this new case of cooperation. The analysis offered here is robust. It indicates that cooperation can emerge even when little speaks in favour of it. Especially at a time when Northeast Asia has offered ‘conflict’ in rich supply, and readers are familiar with disputes on territory in Northeast Asia, hints at cooperation beyond business and economics require extra highlighting. The Secretary-General of the Korea-Japan-China cooperation, Shin

Bong-kil, said: ‘These are three already influential nations we are talking about. Can you imagine the extent of influence they will enjoy as one big group?’<sup>1</sup>.

What can this thesis offer on the question of the Trilateral Cooperation? We learn that:

- 1) Assuming that competition among the states always stops cooperation is short-sighted.
- 2) Side-effects sometimes give rise to new diplomatic frameworks; positing from states’ intentions can be misleading (‘politics of interaction’).
- 3) China joined this multilateral cooperation although it does not display a strong interest in it (see above: the limits of studying intentions).
- 4) Korea is particularly decisive for the shape of the Trilateral Summit; its actions were, however, limited by the acceptance of Japan and China.
- 5) Japan was a ‘leader’ of the Trilateral Cooperation, even though it was not interested in a specific Northeast Asian framework, and more interested in ‘wide’ East Asia.

Although the three Northeast Asian states were already participating in many global/ regional organisations, this one represents a new beginning for their relations: They took a bold step of facing one another, in a *cooperative* forum, unaccompanied by other nations. According to the standard argument in political science, the trilateral cooperation was unexpected. Because this logic focused on specific foreign-policy preferences of the individual states, the scholarship welcomed the trilateral-cooperation outcome as out of the ordinary. What it overlooked was the region-wide context, where strategies interacted with one

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<sup>1</sup> Shin hae-in, ‘Potential for Korea, China, Japan immense’, *The Korea Herald*, [http://www.koreaherald.com/common\\_prog/newsprint.php?ud=20110613000747&dt=2](http://www.koreaherald.com/common_prog/newsprint.php?ud=20110613000747&dt=2) (27 May 2013).

another, leading to a collective outcome—an outcome that was different from the sum of its individual parts.

## **Puzzle**

This puzzle is straightforward—three countries, with a terrible record of conflict and low probability of being able to achieve ‘cooperation’, have formed the trilateral forum under the theme as ‘cooperation’.

Understanding that the establishment of a summit called ‘Trilateral Cooperation’ (among Japan, China, and Korea) is a puzzle is easy when we anchor it in the previous forum. The Trilateral Cooperation emerged from the wider regional diplomacy in ASEAN Plus Three (Association of Southeast Asian Nations<sup>2</sup> Plus Three, APT), where ten member states of ASEAN were accompanied by the three. It took place at the Southeast Asian invitation. It is a fact that literature in IR on this 13-nation forum saw trilateral interaction through the prism of competition, highlighting the importance of ASEAN for introducing a cooperative tone into Northeast Asian relations. This is, however, questioned by developments in the TC, which—starting in 2008—separated its summit from ASEAN and related events.

I will consider this puzzle in IR from the perspective of the three countries’ foreign policies. The Trilateral Cooperation cannot be predicted in a straightforward fashion from the three states’ preferences in their foreign policies at the level of a state. The basic expectation is that Sino-Japanese competition hampers cooperation in Northeast Asia. Normative and mostly Liberal literature argues for a scenario

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<sup>2</sup> ASEAN comprises ten member states of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. <http://www.asean.org/asean/asean-member-states> (7 March 2013).

where a strong tie between Japan and South Korea begins cooperation—yet, this is too far from the reality of their unfinished conflict (see chap. 2). Adding China to the interaction facilitated cooperation, as the interaction fitted into the pre-defined format of ASEAN Plus Three. Given that the roots of the Trilateral Cooperation are in the ASEAN Plus Three cooperative framework, it seemed that it is where the TC came from. This development was the primary subject for my dissertation. The thesis concerns itself with three countries' foreign policies. From studying their foreign policies, we cannot have a clear-cut answer as to the research question on *why* the Trilateral Cooperation developed. However, the connection is to be investigated – trilateral relations there are predominantly pictured as competitive (see chap. 2). The challenge remains: where did the trilateral cooperation come from?

In 2008, the three countries took the most noticeable step of moving these trilateral meetings out of ASEAN, and into their own territories. What this means is that once a year, the three leaders – Japan's Prime Minister, Korea's President and China's Premier – gather for a summit that is *neither bilateral nor in a wider Asian arrangement*<sup>3</sup>.

For a backdrop to the puzzle, just consider:

- (i) China-Japan territorial dispute over Senkaku/ Diaoyu Islands<sup>4</sup>;

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<sup>3</sup> Since September 2011, the Trilateral Cooperation is managed by the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) in Seoul.

<sup>4</sup> See the seminar: 'The Senkaku/ Diaoyutai Incident', Daiwa Foundation, 5 October 2011, <http://www.dajf.org.uk/event/the-senkakudiaoyutai-incident-one-year-on-islands-disputes-and-maritime-strategy-in-sino-japanese-relations>. See also M. Fackler, 'In shark-infested waters, resolve of two giants is tested', *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/23/world/asia/islands-dispute-tests-resolve-of-china-and-japan.html?pagewanted=all> (both accessed on 29 January 2013). On a legal approach to the dispute, see <http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/04/the-diaoyusenkaku-islands-a-japanese-scholar-responds> (4 February 2013).

- (ii) Korea-Japan disagreements over Japan's military past<sup>5</sup>;
- (iii) China-Korea problems with Koguryo (in Korean; Gaogouli in Chinese)<sup>6</sup>.

In other words, bilaterally things looked unpromising. Indeed, the *Economist* (19<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2013) quoted China's descriptions of Japan's sporadic efforts at improving relations as a 'two-faced' strategy: Japan is presumed to try to mend relations, but at the same time it is known to hold a hard stance on the islands or other 'patriotic' disputes<sup>7</sup>. But each of the above relations lived a 'double life': through the channels of trade, channels of investment, and channels of people-to-people exchanges.

We must distinguish the factors that scholars have weighed too casually—let us call them incentives. And we must also consider if new developments, which the literature simply had little chance to grasp, came into play. A new link needs to be found between APT and cooperation of the 'Plus Three'. For example, Ye (2008: 139) writes that East Asian cooperation has facilitated (geographically narrower) Northeast Asian cooperation (see also chap. 2), but this argument fails to elaborate on the actual *process*: why the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), for instance, did not produce a 'Japan-Brunei-Russia' forum? Critics might say: consider economic interdependence in Northeast Asia, and contrast it with that of Russia and Brunei. Interdependence was important, but alone it cannot explain *why* and *how* the TC came to exist. Should every process of cooperation facilitate more

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<sup>5</sup> See an illuminating article by J. Lind: 'Japan must face the past', *Washington Post*, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/japan-must-face-the-past/2013/01/25/7a9b9244-6713-11e2-85f5-a8a9228e55e7\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/japan-must-face-the-past/2013/01/25/7a9b9244-6713-11e2-85f5-a8a9228e55e7_story.html) (29 January 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Gries (2005); also *Economist*, <http://www.economist.com/node/8880909> (27 January 2013).

<sup>7</sup> This article in the *Economist* (19 Jan. 2013) refers to the early period of Shinzo Abe as prime minister (from December 2012), his second term in office (the first was in 2006-2007).

specific cooperation, then we would have other frameworks: Mongolia-Kazakhstan-China, or Japan-Korea-Malaysia, or China-U.S.-Bangladesh—just to imagine a few ‘trilateral’ examples. But also consider the lack of a China-Japan FTA, *despite* their existing interdependence<sup>8</sup>.

## **Argument**

Let us recall that these states are ‘social’ too, like in Johnston (2008), and not only gain-maximisers or defenders of territory<sup>9</sup>. This means that ‘irrational behaviours’, to quote the *Economist* (19 Jan. 2013) on the Senkaku/ Diaoyu dispute, are not to be ruled out. A state is such a complex structure, and a structure that needs to be understood within a given context. Every state has many wants and wishes—how they can be realised depends also on similar ‘desires’ of other states. Such a language, at first glance irrational, can account for a larger slice of world affairs than seemingly scientific considerations.

Without considering APT, we cannot formulate a clear answer to the question: *why* these three countries, and *why* in a separate framework. In his discussion of the neoliberal institutionalism, Christopher Dent wrote that ‘regional organisations have become more than just the sum of their nation-state members’ (2008: 31). This thesis can confirm this; what would the Trilateral Cooperation look like if it *stayed* ‘just the sum of their nation-state members’? It would need to be called ‘trilateral conflict’ indeed, with some ‘breaks’ in the area of economic and business exchange. Regional preferences of the three countries differ, but while they

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<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, one should not overstress the absence of a conclusive China-Japan FTA, given the many obstacles that deal between such big and interlinked economies would face.

<sup>9</sup> Compare this with ‘classic’ notions of ‘self-determination’ and utility maximising in Liberalism (Dent 2008: 30).

differ, Japan, China and Korea have not rejected such a separate ‘plus-three’ cooperation, once it became possible via APT.

Scholarship attached little value to trilateral ‘cooperation’ as it was evolving informally within APT; trilateral interaction within APT and other East Asian arrangements was hardly studied.

Let us recall that the trilateral cooperation initially stayed within APT, holding meetings in ASEAN states (1999-2007), before it moved to become a separate organization (2008-2012). But the literature on Asian regional trends—and APT in particular—considered the scenario of this cooperation as highly unlikely, betting instead on conflictual bilateral relations and incompatible foreign policies of the three states, and affording more weight to obtrusive factors: such as history<sup>10</sup> or competition in multilateral settings, especially Sino-Japanese competition—as reviewed in chap. 2. These stem from a logic encapsulated in a process of ‘competitive bilateralism’ (Dent 2008: 222). ASEAN’s participation is not any more a necessary ingredient for cooperation in Northeast Asia. The crux of the puzzle is the emergence of the trilateral framework separate from ASEAN despite the initially diverging preferences (see chaps. 3, 4, 5 on their preferences). The central question is not why Japan, Korea and China ‘cooperate’ as such—for this cooperation is never complete, leaving some room for ongoing tensions—but why they do so in a *separate* (‘exclusivist’) framework<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> The main argument of the history camp is going back to Japan’s aggression.

<sup>11</sup> I have discovered that the question ‘why do Japan, Korea and China cooperate?’ is not the one we should strive to answer. Many reasons support them to *want* to cooperate, and asking the question in this way elicited responses such as: ‘because they need to cooperate’. Here, the separation from ASEAN—its exclusion—was quite crucial.

Yet, some would see a cooperative trilateral relationship as ‘natural’. A perspective of ancient history and cultural proximity<sup>12</sup> indeed casts a positive light on the trilateral relations. The argument goes back to these ancient traditions of trilateral trade and intellectual exchanges that made for underlying ‘deep understanding’ among the three Northeast Asian countries<sup>13</sup> (Chatham House 2011; see also Morishima 2000; Calder and Ye 2010). We can see that a brief time characterises possible cooperation in Northeast Asia: the year 2012 marked 40 years since Japan and China (PRC) established their diplomatic relations, and 20 years since China and South Korea did so. It is important to understand the prospects for cooperation in Northeast Asia, because of the possible ‘spill-over to the rest of Asia’: if the three countries cooperate, then security dynamics for the rest of Asia will be transformed too (Chung Min Lee, interview, Seoul, April 2013). Only for the last twenty years could a Korea-Japan-China triangle be envisioned.

The ‘Rubik’s cube’ of Northeast Asian international relations – understood as coexistence of contradictory dynamics of cooperation and conflict (Chung Min Lee, interview, Seoul) – is not sufficiently reflected in the available literature, which chooses to one-sidedly present the conflicting dynamics. The first step is to acknowledge the tensions directly<sup>14</sup>. Incorporating new evidence, this thesis has a chance to revisit previous thinking, which failed to pay sufficient attention to the coexistence of contrasts. Another part of the puzzle, after coexisting contradictions, is that the trilateral ties seem to subscribe to a different logic than the (individual)

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<sup>12</sup> Compare this with the ‘extremely diverse East Asian cultures’ in Solingen (2007: 759), in a statement departing from the belief held in East Asia studies. This belief is that the heritage of Confucian culture unites East Asia, especially Northeast Asia, culturally.

<sup>13</sup> Chatham House, 4 February 2011. From my field work in Korea, I discovered that the two Asian countries that matter are Japan and China. Foreign language signs appear, in addition to English, in Japanese and Chinese, in the most popular spots.

<sup>14</sup> On the benefit of asking a question ‘directly’, see Keohane (1984).

bilateral pairs; we can readily observe it by comparing the Japan-Korea-China *cooperative* framework against Japan-Korea, Japan-China, and Korea-China separately contentious ties. (Indeed, the whole point of calling the trilateral summit was to set these tensions aside, as they are discussed primarily in bilateral settings—interview 2, Japan, November 2010).

### *Definitions*

This thesis needs an explanation of just a few definitions.

*Northeast Asia* is at times a shortcut for Japan, China, and South Korea. This is a narrow scope of the Northeast Asian subregion. But it overlaps with the general understanding that these three countries constitute the Northeast Asian core (Rozman 2007: 202)—even if to denote a core of conflict, like in Calder and Ye (2010: 112).

*Cooperation mechanism* here is a foreign-policy arrangement through which the countries discuss issues of their choice – aimed at *increasing* cooperation. The Secretary-General of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), in his words as below, confirms the definition of cooperation focused on an aim:

Cooperation or integration does not necessarily refer to the creation of a single market and currency under a single flag. What's more important is the integration of hearts and minds for mutual respect and understanding. I believe that the

establishment of the TCS marks a milestone in the process of building trust among the three countries .... (Shin Bong-kil)<sup>15</sup>

*Interactions* are ‘the ways in which choices of two or more actors combine to produce political outcomes’ (Frieden, Lake, and Schultz 2009: 48). Interactions are often a ‘grey area’ of international politics. They are more difficult to study than preferences or outcomes. Preferences or visions are frequently explicitly stated (like China’s ‘peaceful rise’), and outcomes are readily observable (like the Trilateral Cooperation establishment)<sup>16</sup>. But even if we know the results, we are almost unable to follow the process: whose initiative was it?

*Cooperation* in the case discussed in this thesis has a meaning different from the technical IR term, where ‘cooperation’ does not even have to signify a good aim. In the textbook *World Politics*, cooperation is defined ‘as a type of interaction involving two or more actors working together to achieve a preferred outcome’ (Frieden, Lake, and Schultz 2009: 43). A preferred outcome could be a war against a weaker state. Axelrod and Keohane (1985: 226) recall that: ‘Cooperation is not equivalent to harmony’. Relations among the three states are deeply conflictual (*not* trilateral relations, but in the individual pairs)<sup>17</sup>. This lack of harmony in the definition of cooperation also eases the task of introducing the organisation of ‘Trilateral Cooperation’. Cooperation here refers to a process or a desired ‘destination’ than a starting point. It also does not cover the entire expanse of their

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.tcs-asia.org/dnb/user/userpage.php?lpage=1\\_1\\_greeting](http://www.tcs-asia.org/dnb/user/userpage.php?lpage=1_1_greeting) (7 February 2013).

<sup>16</sup> We may still now know what such a strategy means, and we may struggle to account for the extent of an outcome. Yet, despite such doubts, we are capable of naming strategies as they are presented by the author states (China in the case of ‘peaceful rise’), or as they are described in the literature.

<sup>17</sup> To clarify this, a conflict among China-Japan-Korea does not exist; there are problems, however, between China and Japan, Japan and Korea, and Korea and China.

relations. Their ‘cooperation’ is an aim. It is also notable that the three countries themselves call their format the ‘Trilateral Cooperation’<sup>18</sup>.

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines ‘to cooperate’ as ‘to act or work with another or others’ or ‘to act together’<sup>19</sup>. According to Longman dictionary, cooperation is about working together toward ‘a common purpose’. Therefore, expressions such as ‘full’ or ‘complete’ denote the gradients of cooperation. By definition, the term needs to accommodate weaker intensities, such as partial or incomplete cooperation. This is the term the countries use to describe their meetings, as in ‘Trilateral Cooperation Summit’ or the ‘Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat’. In the language of IR, such a loose usage poses several problems. (One of them is the marked contrast between what they call ‘cooperation’, and the way they interact outside the summit meetings).

Cooperation is a situation ‘when actors adjust their behaviour to the actual or anticipated preferences of others’ (Milner 1992: 467, quoting Keohane 1984: 51-52, ft. 1). This happens due to a process of ‘policy coordination’ (Keohane 1984: 467). The understanding of cooperation as principally policy coordination entails that cooperation is little beyond a process of technical agreements. More recent literature has responded to this narrow definition with a series of improvements (the ‘ideational turn; see Checkel 2001, on Europe). This thesis, in particular, sheds a more contextualised light on international ‘cooperation’.

I also incorporate ‘cooperation’ in the meaning of a sphere for *building* cooperation–like dialogue or a forum. Although 1980s witnessed a substantial

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<sup>18</sup> On the MOFA (Japan) website, the ‘Trilateral Cooperation’ falls within regional affairs with other Asian countries.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cooperate> (26 January 2013).

literature on cooperation emerging<sup>20</sup>, where is the literature on Asia or by Asian scholars (with the exception of Funabashi)? This is a major criticism: forms of cooperation that are (highly) formalised do not really capture the essence of Asian international relations<sup>21</sup>—a reality of conflict, where any improvement is welcome.

## Contribution

The emergence of the TC highlighted a gap in IR literature on Asia (chaps. 1, 3, 4 and 5). This gap goes back to the 1990s, when the Asia-Pacific cooperation triggered questions on cooperation in ‘non-western and non-northern hemispheric contexts (Higgott 1993: 290). The debate was then developed in the journal *International Security* (Kang 2003b; Acharya 2004; Kang 2003/2004). The discussion in that journal started from Kang (2003b) in his writing on the problem of ‘getting Asia wrong’, through ill-adapted analytical frameworks. In this thesis, I shall also refer to this broader problem: what can we learn from this case of cooperation?<sup>22</sup>

This work is the first one of its kind, by defining a new puzzle for International Relations scholars. It applies the preferences–outcomes debate, also known as ‘is theory of international politics a theory of foreign policy?’ (Elman 1996), to a practical question in IR. What happened that the Trilateral Cooperation emerged, despite negative expectations *and* a sound logic behind those negative expectations? Nothing special happened. Indeed, APT opened a possibility, but apart

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<sup>20</sup> For this literature, see footnote 1 in Milner (1992: 466) and a discussion in the article.

<sup>21</sup> ‘international relations’ as relations among states, in contrast to International Relations (IR) as a field of inquiry.

<sup>22</sup> See the 2014 volume: *Chinese Politics and International Relations: Innovation and Invention*, ed. Nicola Horsburgh, Astrid Nordin, and Shaun Breslin (Abingdon, Oxon U.K.: Routledge).

from that, international politics in Northeast Asia were as predictably full of conflict as ever. Yet, something that IR scholars and Asia specialists did not envisage was that these ‘negative’ (conflictual) strategies did not preclude an outcome of a new cooperative regional forum. So, the division between preferences and outcomes makes a lot of sense. From there, our destination is a new conceptual apparatus for a better understanding about the connection between preferences that states express and outcomes that emerge in IR. This thesis, and all that it can offer, is a beginning (at most) of this journey.

Material presented here is a substantial source of new evidence on Asian regionalism. For example, it shows how new phenomena emerge in International Politics seemingly out of nowhere. IR scholarship has not anticipated, not even predicted, an emergence of such a framework that runs counter to many currents in East Asia. First, trilateral relations were viewed in negative lights, where any of the three pairs is submerged in conflict or tension. From this follows the second point—Japan, Korea and China fail to express a strong common agenda in regional groupings, which they have found more as fields for wielding competing influences over Southeast Asia (more in Chapter 1). And if this was not enough, the quest for ‘leadership’ between Japan and China raises the expectation that initiative must follow from a different place. Fourthly, China, Japan and Korea have been enemies historically.

The real addition to knowledge is introducing the new development in Asian regionalism: from trilateral cooperation within APT now we have a separate summit. New evidence on cooperation in Northeast Asia puts deeply entrenched lenses for analysing eastern Asian regionalism under heavy strain. The progress in cooperation has upset the longstanding focus on the ‘tripartite intra-Northeast Asia divide’

(Hund, 2003: 386). By accepting the image of ‘Sino-Japanese competition’, these old lenses struggle to explain how cooperation emerged despite divisions. Especially, Northeast Asian relations used to be viewed through the bilateral lens, so the potential has not been yet fully explored for using Northeast Asian subregion as a fruitful ground for testing propositions on cooperative practices, like multilateralism.

Alongside those new dynamics, the issues of cooperation have received little attention ‘in non-western and non-northern hemispheric contexts’ (Higgott 1993: 290). Still, the ‘steady movement toward Northeast Asian integration ... has a rising momentum that remains only poorly understood in the Western world’ (Calder and Ye, 2010: 204). Although Northeast Asia has been arguably offered more theoretical attention than the neighbouring region of Southeast Asia, as Acharya and Buzan (2007: 430) claim, this attention has been even so limited. Even as ASEAN Plus Three had existed for a full decade, Solingen wrote that as a ‘novel institution’, it compelled ‘further exploration’ (2008a: 287). These issues of interaction have been to such an extent under-appreciated. This topic being understudied, it offers opportunities for fresh analysis, which was possible through fieldwork with interviews in Japan (November 2010) and Korea (April 2011-May 2011), and field work with seminar participation in Hong Kong, China (in January 2012).

The thesis’ substantial contribution lies in deriving preferences for the scope of regional arrangements (especially in Northeast Asia) from the three states’ foreign policies (chaps. 3, 4, and 5). Presumably, ‘the three larger powers of China, Japan, and ROK’ (Qin and Wei 2008: 129) attracted more attention to Asian regionalism. Now Asian regionalism has become ‘more explicitly Northeast Asia-focused than at any time in the past three generations’ (Calder and Ye 2010: 204).

But a serious imbalance in the literature persists to favour the study of wider groupings—Asia-Pacific and East Asia on the one hand, or the subregion of Southeast Asia on the other. This work offers a mitigating solution to those imbalances, inherent in its focus on the region’s new realities: cooperation *despite* divisions in Northeast Asia. Integrative processes in Northeast Asia open a field for a fresh contribution on a region consistently under-scrutinised as for its cooperative practices.

Especially Korea has been little studied. It is not only the North Korean problem in the shadow of which South Korea has to live with; it is also a massive literature on the North’s foreign policy overshadowing the knowledge of the South. Namely, Korean regional preferences—what does Korea want? APT or EAS?—are customarily omitted (for some exceptions, see Bluth and Dent 2008, and the Korean sources in chap. 5)<sup>23</sup>. Korea’s status as a ‘middle’ power has apparently justified omission of its preferences. Apart from a belief in studying preferences of big powers (like China, Japan) for bringing more explanatory payoff, what else can account for our lack of Korea’s preferences for the institutional shape of the region? It can be a conviction that Korea’s preferences are closely aligned with those of Japan, which have been extensively studied. It can also be a belief that Korea’s preferences are not going to materialise—not in such an environment, where guaranteeing survival is key. But it can also be a sheer lack of knowledge on Korea. Here lies a unique contribution of this thesis: it considers Korea just as it does China and Japan. Korea’s desired shape of a Northeast Asian institution turned out to much resemble the format of ‘Trilateral Cooperation’ (see specific findings in chap. 5).

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<sup>23</sup> When Korean authors discuss Korea’s regional preferences, they often do so in a disconnected way from other states’ preferences; i.e., what should be analysis ‘tastes’ more of proposals, with little weight attached to how to realise these proposals.

South Korean foreign-policy preferences are often discussed—mainly by Korean authors—separately from other countries’ preferences. As for methodology, foreign-policy literature gathered in this way is not optimal for explaining outcomes. From South Korea comes an important finding. It is South Korean preferences that have been omitted too frequently in scholarly debates internationally. This literature generally offers a study of other countries’ preferences—Japan, China, India and Australia—often contrasted with one another. But Korean preferences are hardly present there (see, especially, chap. 5). I address this issue in my thesis. As Korean role in Northeast Asian regionalism has become recognisable, this scholarly practice has created a major gap in the literature. Preferences of a smaller country are not expected to materialise more easily than preferences of more powerful states. This has meant that—in mainstream IR, at least—preferences of bigger powers have been studied. Because previous literature has largely ‘not known’ how far Korea’s desired shape of a Northeast Asian institution overlaps with the trilateral summit, this case provides new evidence for a study of the connection between states’ preferences and outcomes in IR. In many ways, the importance of this study emerges from such ‘silences’ in the early literature<sup>24</sup>.

At the level of scholarship, the research opens a path for incorporating into the study of Asian regionalism these new arrangements that do not necessarily fit squarely into our previous discoveries. This will show a way back to the nation-state. It will also show that sometimes states are able to do more than we expect them to, overcoming obstacles, facing the necessity for cooperation. The question would be how the trilateral summit emergence fits into the whole of East Asian regionalism. Here I do the bridging work between the general IR on the one hand

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<sup>24</sup> I borrow the expression from Breslin and Higgott (2000: 336), used there in a different context.

and the country-specific narratives on the other; this research also serves the function of re-connecting area scholarship with wider disciplinary studies, bringing Asia into IR<sup>25</sup>.

A serious imbalance persists to favour Southeast Asian studies over those of Northeast Asia—and less of ASEAN perspective in this thesis serves to restore the balance, and in this sense offers a considerable advantage for students aiming at a slightly more complete picture of Asian regionalism than the literature so far has provided.

## **Methodology**

For the literature on cooperation, I follow Milner (1992), in addition to the general debate on cooperation from the 1980s (Axelrod 1981, Lipson 1984, Axelrod and Keohane 1985, Oye 1985)<sup>26</sup>. I also introduce a few works on cooperation in the Asia-Pacific from the beginning of the 1990s, when IR approaches were extended beyond the West (Higgott, 1993). An important theoretical source was Stein (1990)—see more in chap. 1.

Methodological underpinnings for this thesis come from the distinction between foreign policy and ‘international politics’<sup>27</sup>—I translate this into the language of ‘outcomes in IR’ and ‘preferences’ of individual states. Simply: ‘Results cannot be predicted from the separate actions’ (Jervis 1997, chap. 2). A

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<sup>25</sup> The difficulty of presenting research on East Asia to top IR journals has been oft-lamented; most recently, to my knowledge, in the presentation by Shogo Suzuki (ISA 2012), ‘The Trap of Insecurity: Does the International Relations of East Asia Contribute Enough to IR Theory?’

<sup>26</sup> The 1985 articles here are from *World Politics*.

<sup>27</sup> Waltz (1979); and Elman (1996)—Waltz (1996) debate in *Security Studies*; Hoffman (1959).

reassessment of this argument is needed to make it familiar to contemporary studies. Namely, if it was an easy task to anticipate the ‘trilateral cooperation’ from the three countries’ foreign policies, there would be no puzzle. Not a single policy, or not even a concert of these policies, facilitated the emergence of the new forum. We need to be clear about this, and create a suitable approach.

A search for reasons behind the outcome of the TC emergence has led me to the observation that certain preferences of the three states have not materialised so far. *Thanks to those non-realizations*, the Trilateral Cooperation could at all emerge. If all their strategies for East Asia materialised, at the same time, we would witness emergence of three separate worlds: Japan would create a broad coalition of ‘democratic’ states, encircling China (at the same time, continuing to trade); Korea would manage to engage other Northeast Asian states in a common effort to deal with North Korea; and China would probably live in a world free from multilateralism, with plenty of scope for unilateral action. These regional visions have not prevented the trilateral forum from being formed. The methodological crux is, therefore, that states’ actual regional *interactions* contribute more to outcomes than the methodologically often prioritised states’ prior preferences. (I elaborate on the methodological focus in chap. 1).

Before the onset of ‘a world of regions’ (see Katzenstein 2005), relations among states tended to be studied bilaterally, especially the ones between major powers. It is indeed true that key events or greatest conflicts could be understood using a bilateral framework. Take for example China and Taiwan, U.S.-Japan alliance, or finally South and North Korea. A brief analysis is sufficient to conclude that no bilateral relation exists bilaterally only, because it is enmeshed in a wider context of IR—see, for example, the U.S. lack of ease regarding a potential conflict

between China and Japan (and the U.S. has a treaty commitment to defend its Pacific ally). Similarly, this line of analysis sheds a new light on the complexity of *trilateral* relations—if the world was free of other states, then China, Japan, and South Korea might wage wars against one another, given their intentions prone to conflict. Yet, they live amidst other states, in the international system and *primarily* a regional sub-system (see chap. 1, and also chap. 2 for my argument on the limited utility of a bilateral approach). T.J. Pempel (2010a: 211) argues that new institutions emerge from ‘pre-eminence of individual state strategies’. This is often true, but the outcome of the trilateral cooperation was rather produced at a regional level, via APT and regional incentives.

Pempel (2010a: 211) speaks of ‘disjointed East Asian efforts’, ‘often contradictory’. New institutions come not from some collective predisposition, but rather individual state strategies (Pempel 2010a: 211). He explains that the ‘explosion in regional linkages in East Asia defies easy categorisation as evidence of the inherent analytic superiority of one theoretical paradigm over the others’ (Pempel 2010a: 211). Categorisation is not easy, but this resistance to such an exercise can point to the utility of other explanations, such as the international ‘diffusion’, highlighted in Solingen’s (2012) ‘Presidential Address’ at the *International Studies Association* convention. But that logic does not have to be right, for a rationale for creating a new institution may come from outside of the states—then, the logic of Pempel’s (2010a: 211) ‘individual state strategy’ is unlikely to work. Hoffmann (1959) writes: ‘The situations created by the interaction of the units, whether their occurrence was expected by the units or not, have *a logic of their own*’ (372; emphasis added). Hoffmann continues that ‘types of power configurations that result ... also from the very structure of the world...in turn

reshape, condition, and often command *foreign policies*' (1959: 372; emphasis added). Assuming such a two-way exchange between In the sense of the above, occurrence of the Trilateral Cooperation was such a 'situation', an outcome – the responsibility for this outcome falls to prior interaction of the 'units'.

**Reviewed Literature.** One caveat is in order: 'Literature', often identified in this thesis by 'scholars', 'scholarship' or 'literature on ASEAN Plus Three', is a limited description. Also the scholars who rely on 'competition' or rivalry as a key description of interstate regional relations still make room at times for accentuating the positive (trade in Northeast Asia, investment, etc). A reader might justly observe that my literature-review fragments (especially in this Introduction and chap. 2) are critical inasmuch as they apparently fail to do justice to this scholarship. But I need to stress that I refer to a *stylised* version of arguments used in a vast proportion of the reviewed literature.

Most of this literature is justified for making these predictions, i.e. the evidence is sound. If we consider the torturous process of aiming for a free trade agreement between Japan and Korea, it is easy to see why scholars have been skeptical. Yet, 'overstretching' bilateral problems to a multilateral forum is a step that scholars need to take responsibility for (see chap. 2). On the other hand, some of the evidence became a subject of (unjustified) overstretching. Concepts such as 'struggle for hegemony' or 'rivalry' proliferate, but when one walks the streets of Beijing or Tokyo, these statements' weak logic is brought into full light.

I indeed agree that much of the state's actions are not visible to the naked eye. What I mean in the 'street'-example is a contrast between highly general statements, carried forward by a hope that this logic is strong *enough*, and the

reality. One might be comfortable to produce a general prose of this sort, but could these statements be repeated in conversations with real citizens? In other words, what *is* a ‘struggle for hegemony’? Does it mean a military action, or diplomatic efforts, or yet something else? I do not know, and after reading that literature I know even less. What I mean by the ‘literature’ is an ‘extracted’ argument—put into a bottle. My suggestion is, therefore, that scholars use concrete examples *or* explain what they mean. For example, a scholar could fruitfully write: ‘By a struggle for regional hegemony, I mean Japanese or Chinese or Korean efforts to dominate ASEAN...’. Such an exercise demonstrates that by *précising* the term, it becomes refutable. (Contrariwise, how to refute a ‘struggle for hegemony’ or how to prove it right—if we do not know what it is?). Only believing that lack of harmony at large between Japan and China will carry such statements is a ‘leap of faith’.

This leads me to the observation that unwarranted statements, which have proven difficult for me to interpret, or lack of examples (magnified by a propensity to ‘overstretch’ one’s arguments), have allowed me to propose a *stylised* approach to the literature as I do in this thesis. The box I label ‘literature’, ‘scholars’ or ‘scholarship’ stands here for this type of analysis that painted a ‘target’ mark on itself for the arrows of my counterarguments. Our case is only a small part in the ‘preferences’ dilemma: do these outcomes emerge as the actors wanted them to, or are these outcomes rather determined by the structure?

We can understand better the connection between preferences and regional outcomes, if we think – specifically – not of outcomes, but of regional cooperation. We might think of various conditions where regional cooperation occurs in order to specify those conditions. Then we will see that preferences of the states interact in various manners with the international context. Depending on the context, the

outcomes might be: limited or full cooperation. With the APT, the context was cooperative, but preferences of the states were conflictual, and so only limited form of cooperation emerged.

The methodological crux is that states' regional interactions contribute more to outcomes than the often-prioritised (at the methodological level) states' prior preferences. Studying states' preferences is basically an analysis of their intentions. Intentional analysis is not sufficient, for it is impossible to know how 'actors' moves'—their foreign policies—(Hoffmann 1959) will follow from their intentions. Practically, it means that Japanese foreign policy preferences (in 1997 or 2000, for instance) had less impact on the new cooperation than the unfolding interaction with China and South Korea, in APT. My straightforward proposition rests on first understanding outcomes, and studying preferences only then—instead of the other way round, as is often the case.

# Chapter 1. Trilateral Cooperation in Theory and in Practice

It is worthwhile at the start to remind ourselves the story of the Trilateral Cooperation, told in its practice, as well as to review theoretical approaches of International Relations.

## Practice

‘It is the ideal opportunity for wise men to discuss solutions’.

Y. Hirata (Nikkei Chairman) about the TC-supportive ‘Northeast Asia Trilateral Forum’, 2014<sup>28</sup>

‘Trilateral Cooperation’ is a formation of three states, Japan, China, and South Korea. It was formed in 2008. ‘Cooperation’ relates to diplomacy at a high level, and the definition can be found in the ‘Definition’ section of Introduction. To remind us, it is not purely cooperation as a synchronisation of policies, but rather the goal that the three states aim at – and may never arrive at.

The three states started this interaction as early as in 1997. On the basis of preparatory meetings for the Asia-Europe Summit, they joined ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, currently 10. members). Japan, South Korea and China participated since then, also against the background of the Asian Financial Crisis 1997, in the ASEAN meetings. In 1999, they not only attended the Southeast Asian gathering, but also scheduled a ‘breakfast meeting’ among the three. It was a step forward in institutionalising this ASEAN-based diplomacy.

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<sup>28</sup> *Nikkei* (21 Apr. 2014)

But in 2008 they took this cooperation to a higher level, convening meetings, on a rotate basis, in Japan, South Korea, and China. It merits a mention that summit-meetings at the highest level: Premier Wen Jiabao, from China; Prime Minister Taro Aso, from Japan; President Lee Myung-bak, from South Korea. They were complemented with functional meetings from the relevant bureaucracies (especially, economy and foreign policy)<sup>29</sup>.

It might be easily ridiculed that just another meeting is not a revolution in Asian international relations, but rather progress at snail-pace. There are problems with such argumentation, as the deliberate effort to create the Summit and surrounding bureaucracy is testimony to the three states' seriousness of purpose.

At the same time, and despite the meetings relative robustness (they were not cancelled even despite challenges), the 2013/4 territorial-dispute escalation has led to the 2013 postponement or even cancellation—as of May 2014, the last summit-level meeting occurred in 2012<sup>30</sup>. It is not equal to all activities being stopped<sup>31</sup>. For example, The 'Northeast Asia Trilateral Forum' (different from the 'Summit'), and with the presence of former leaders (such as Y. Fukuda) gathered in 2014 in China. 'Elders' at this forum were to work on overcoming distrust that stopped summits among current leaders (*Nikkei*, 21 Apr. 2014).

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<sup>29</sup> TCS (Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat). 2014. [http://en.tcs-asia.org/dnb/board/list.php?board\\_name=3\\_1\\_1\\_politics&search\\_cate=Trilateral+Foreign+Ministers+Meeting](http://en.tcs-asia.org/dnb/board/list.php?board_name=3_1_1_politics&search_cate=Trilateral+Foreign+Ministers+Meeting) (15 May 2014); Trilateral economy & trade ministers meetings: [http://en.tcs-asia.org/dnb/board/list.php?board\\_name=3\\_2\\_1\\_trade&search\\_cate=Trilateral+Economic+and+Trade+Ministers+Meeting+](http://en.tcs-asia.org/dnb/board/list.php?board_name=3_2_1_trade&search_cate=Trilateral+Economic+and+Trade+Ministers+Meeting+) (15 May 2014).

<sup>30</sup> See the information: MOFA–Japan, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/jck/summit.html>.

<sup>31</sup> "Northeast Asia Trilateral Forum": [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjbxw/t1149455.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1149455.shtml), 21 April 2014 (last accessed 27 May 2014). Some ancillary activities were held or announced in 2013-2014. 'Trilateral Forum' is not the same as the 'Trilateral Summit'. Also: MOFA-Korea (2014).

It is also worthwhile to see the functional areas where Trilateral Cooperation has been practice. It is especially the Foreign Ministers' domain<sup>32</sup>. Also, meetings were held among ministers of trade and economy (since 2002)<sup>33</sup>.

### **Overview of Theories of International Relations**

In international affairs, a trend is to separate the study of theory from the study of practice. For example, the textbook by Baylis, Smith & Owens (2008) presents approaches to theories and 'issues' separately, as can be seen from their table of contents (2008: xv-xvi). Such a trend is rather unproductive, as it led to divisions in the field: realists would not cross paths with liberals; constructivists will tread roads different from those treated by realists. *To achieve progress, we need a study of world politics where theories are not analysed as 'theories', but instead are treated as guides to resolving specific issues.*

Thus, this thesis is guided *de facto* not by a theory, but by research questions:

Has the formation of the TC meant a revolution for Asian international relations?

An additional question is:

Is the Trilateral 'Cooperation' *cooperation* in the true sense?

The development of the Trilateral Cooperation, starting from the 2008 Fukuoka Summit, has pointed us in the direction of great expectations about the TC. Negotiations of a trilateral trade agreement<sup>34</sup>, and the 2012 signing of Investment

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<sup>32</sup> For a snapshot: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/jck/fm.html> (28 May 2014).

<sup>33</sup> TCS (Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat), [http://www.tcs-asia.org/dnb/board/list.php?board\\_name=3\\_2\\_1\\_trade](http://www.tcs-asia.org/dnb/board/list.php?board_name=3_2_1_trade) (28 May 2014).

<sup>34</sup> MOFA, Japan-on the Free Trade Agreement negotiations [http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/page3e\\_000113.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/page3e_000113.html) (15 May 2014).

Treaty<sup>35</sup>, provided reasons to believe that the three Asian powerhouses were on the track to reinvent their relations for good, *with implications for Asia* beyond the narrowly defined Northeast Asia. The leaders of Japan, China and South Korea started a new movement in Northeast Asia<sup>36</sup>. Some could try to apply tenets of specific theories to the questions of trilateral relations: ‘Is this an attempt to counter China?’; ‘Is it a story of economic interdependence spilling into political sphere?’

But such an approach has the negative side of directing the study into specific theoretical directions, at the expense of other trajectories. It should be obvious that a study readable only to readers with a similar mindset is not good for social sciences. Indeed, ‘Theories of international relations are like planes flying at different altitudes and in different directions’, observed Stanley Hoffmann (1959). In this way, a study by a Realist will not frequently cross paths with a Liberal study, etc. This is unfortunate.

The outcome is that specific questions remain unaddressed: it may be *power* in a constructivist study, for example on ‘regional identity’; economy in a realist study; culture for Liberals focusing on economic ties. The least desirable outcome for informative studies is when three ‘impermeable’ boxes are created.

This analysis would suggest to the readers that I am going down either a post-positivist, or a necessarily eclectic path. In answer to such questions, I would label this work as limitedly constructivist, with an emphasis on *processes* of

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<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)–Japan, ‘Signing of the Japan-China-Korea Trilateral Investment Agreement’. [http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2012/5/0513\\_01.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2012/5/0513_01.html), 13 May 2012 13 (accessed 13 May 2014).

<sup>36</sup> Admittedly (as noted by Christopher Dent in my viva–21 May 2013), trilateral meetings were taken place at a lower level (ministers), and with a focus on economy and trade. All the same, meetings at the highest level (President of South Korea, Premier of PRC, Prime Minister for Japan) have been especially highlighted.

cooperation, and to some extent—‘eclectic’<sup>37</sup>. It is not a perfect description, yet it still reflects the intention of the Author to offer a holistic approach to the Trilateral-Cooperation explanation.

Of course, other approaches than the mainstream ones exist; they have been developed exactly with the intention of countering the mainstream thought. For example, the English School focuses on the concept of ‘international Society’ (with the classic work of Bull, 1966). Critical approaches focus—as their name suggests—on challenging the existing order (see the work of Cox, 1981). They might take for their focus the dominant position of US in Asia. Yet, such approaches are less conducive to offering solutions in empirical studies.

### *Deficiencies of theoretical studies*

Instead, theoretically-informed approaches often go off-tangent: they begin as a careful application to a given case, but later becomes theoretical studies per se, losing touch with the question asked. Indeed, it is a tall order to apply theory well. You can see that from the article by David C. Kang titled *Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks*. Arriving at a “right” analytical framework, however, is not enough by itself, given that we might meanwhile lose touch with empirical material at hand. Therefore, a ‘double’ focus is needed: thinking theoretically, and—at the same time—being committed to solving the actual puzzle.

One ‘theory’ is that Japan has dictated the Northeast Asian initiative out of domestic preferences, and due to institutional logic it has survived later on. Aimed at improving bilateral relations with neighbours, this was a worthy aim—but it leaves a question open: would China and Korea sympathise with Japanese aims, and do so at

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<sup>37</sup> Sil and Katzenstein (2010).

the same time? Therefore, this perspective does not elucidate why either China or Korea would devote sufficient foreign-policy capital to maintain the Japanese idea. But a hypothetical conflation of three foreign-policy lines is highly unlikely. Rather than conflation, we have a ‘constellation’.

A constructivist view would tell us that the trilateral framework is a consequence of China’s socialisation. But it is both incomplete and naïve in the sense that China might be exerting far more influence on Japan and Korea than we have been accustomed to reading about in the IR literature, so much about ‘one-way’ socialisation. ‘Much of this literature focuses on Chinese attempts to balance the power of the US by engaging Southeast Asia, perhaps slightly overlooking the importance of how the APT framework also provides an opportunity to engage Japan and South Korea ...’ (Breslin 2010: 728). Then, a plausibly realist view that Japan and Korea are ‘binding’ China through the trilateral framework might well express the two developed countries’ *intentions*, but not the reality, from which China would opt out—rather than allow it to happen. A trilateral framework as it exists surely used APT as a springboard, but to equate it with a triumph of the social-interaction argument is a step too far. Instead, when allowing the realist logic of power to enter these ‘social’ processes<sup>38</sup>, we are closer to understanding why China was included and ASEAN potentially could be excluded.

Realism	What has happened in the form of ‘Trilateral Cooperation’ is meaningless as when compared to <i>balance-of-power</i> logic (see Friedberg 1993)
<i>Classical Realism</i>	By focusing on the leaders’ characteristics, it would draw

<sup>38</sup> See also Emmanuel Adler for a ‘constructivist reconsideration of strategic logic’. <http://www.emmanueladler.com> (10 March 2013).

	pessimistic remarks on the nature of this ‘cooperation’.
<i>Neo-Classical Realism</i>	It would add interests to the power of states.
<i>Neo-Realism</i> (esp. Waltz 1979)	Systemic: number of powers and their position in the system.
Liberalism	Liberalism adds domestic characteristics. Here, it would lead to a study of three states’ domestic politics.
<i>Neoliberal institutionalism</i>	A new institution in Asia creates extra costs. Contrary to Realism, it would focus not on power, but on rules; the TC is a loosely structured organisation, with rules playing a small role.
<i>Economic interdependence</i>	Economics as an important factor (trade, investment).
<i>democratic-peace theory</i>	China is not democratic; it should not belong.
Constructivism (Wendt 1999)	Cultural proximity, but with history problems.
Cultural theory (Lebow, 2008)	A new take on Constructivism, with the culture of ‘self-esteem’ at the centre.

From the above, it emerges that especially the economic-interdependence school from Liberal theories offers the important observation that economics were important here. It is, however, a fact that economics is not all. If it were, then the countries could aim at and stop at economic agreements: investment treaty facilitating relations with China (already signed), trade agreement (not yet reached). That the three countries aim for ‘qualitatively’ more is evident in the form of ‘cooperation’: trilateral secretariat, cultural exchanges. Additionally, the democratic-peace branch (Russett, Layne, Spiro and Doyle, 1995) suggests that a strong cooperation could happen between Japan and South Korea (see also Cha 1999a), but

it is not a case as has been evident to all those eagerly expecting it, especially in the United States.

### *Critical Approaches and the English School*

Overview of theories cannot stop at the mainstream. Other theories have been developed by students of world politics. I would argue they are not so relevant here, given that the approach this thesis takes is to focus on specific, empirical questions. Such questions are not a strength of post-colonial or Critical approaches, which are normative in scope.

Critical *approaches* differ. Some focus more on international society, others – on international political economy (IPE).

The English School is a valuable addition to International Relations theory. Its focus on the notion of ‘international society’ clearly distinguishes it from other theories. At the same time, it is descriptive in being history-oriented and offers less to research that is empirically driven.

### *Other theories*

Critical Theories (for example, Cox 1981). It offers ‘critical’, not ‘problem-solving’, theory. Here in the thesis, we want to know how the things *are*, not ‘should be’.

The English School (Bull, 1966). Its focus on the notion of the ‘international society’ would allow for a contextualised description of the TC; less so – on solving the actual puzzle & giving time-specific explanation.

Intergovernmentalism Liberal version of intergovernmentalism (for example, Moravcsik 1995) places emphasis upon domestic variables (see also Breslin, Higgott, Rosamond 2002: 7). As we note the creators of this theoretical theme – such as A. Moravcsik – it is also worthwhile to note that this stream of theory was applied especially

Functionalism and Neo-functionalism Functionalism and its version, neo-functionalism, have been applied especially to the European Union. The work of Mitrany (1948) focused on functional, or technocratic, drivers of integration (integration – rather than cooperation).

As for neo-functionalism, we can see it from works: Tranholm-Mikkelsen (1991) and Risse-Kappen (1996). Cannot they be applied to new regionalism worldwide? As for the Trilateral Cooperation, it would be useful to have a longer historical record.

New regionalism theories While theories can be applied to the cases of integration or cooperation, some believe that sui generis approaches would be commendable. This has been happening with the European Union, and such an approach is neo-functionalism by Mitrany<sup>39</sup>. To explain our case, we might look to new approaches, such as New Regionalism theories. New regionalism studies were, in many instances, an exercise at ‘stock-taking’; ‘This has much to do with the emergence and in some cases resurgence of regional projects in the 1980s and 1990s’ (Breslin, Higgott, and Rosamond 2002: 4).

Existence of theories to explain ‘regionalism’ would suggest that regionalism is a special phenomenon—a phenomenon requiring a separate set of theories that are applied to regionalism—not to war, not to peace or other examples. In this way,

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<sup>39</sup> Mitrany, 1948.

inventors of regionalism theories assumed or concluded that regionalism is not a mere coincidence of factors such as geographic proximity, economic interdependence, and so on. By inventing theories of regionalism, a notion that got into International Relations is that regionalism is a separate field of inquiry.

Rightly so? This is a question to be answered by every student, and every time that ‘region-ness’ is studied. The question is not an easy one. We can try to enumerate advantages and drawbacks. Among advantages is a fact that ‘new regionalism theories’ can gather students of regions, who otherwise would be dispersed. A drawback is that another narrow ‘sub-field’ of IR is coming to life. Using widely used theories – Realism, Neo-liberalism, Constructivism, etc–has the added benefit of uniting the field.

But the limitation with these other, middle-range theories that cannot be applied to other cases – war, alliances, etc–is that contributions with their use will be limited. Let us think of the breadth of application of a theory such as Wendt’s Constructivism, as compared to New Regionalism. Surely, it is a possibility that specific theories will give fuller explanations, but they invariably limit general discussions in the field of IR.

### ***Summary***

We take from the theories the notion that Asian international Relations can be studied theoretically, just like the developed regions of North America and Europe. Yet, at the same time, some characteristics of the TC give it a new status – a status that motivates us to go ‘eclectic’ (Katzenstein and Sil 2010). We do not attempt to

use it as a cover-up for not taking a stronger position on theory; instead, this approach will give us the flexibility needed to be guided by a research question rather than being guided by a theoretical ‘orientation’.

This thesis has set for its goal to study the emergence of the TC both for Asia experts & IR students. A ‘double’ focus is then needed to satisfy the criterion of empirical rigour & theoretical engagement. Such exercise has been undertaken in this thesis.

In the country-chapters (3, 4 and 5) I will ‘measure’ the ‘distance’ between each of the three states’ *foreign-policy preference*, and the actual outcome: the Trilateral Cooperation. The TC was a strategic opportunity that emerged, at a time in 2007, for the leaders of South Korea and Japan to grab China’s positive attention, to immerse it in the trilateral diplomacy. The assumption here was, by Japan and Korea, that the more frequent diplomatic encounters with the PRC, the more ready it will be to behave cooperatively. Indeed, this assumption comes out from many a publication and also from my interviews—scholars and practitioners (Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MOFA) volunteered the information that Japan and Korea had such an intention. It also fits with the Chinese diplomatic preference of ‘reassuring’ neighbours. It seems that regional diplomacy is the best tool to the goal. (In a way, diplomacy is both a tool and a goal).

### **Why Liberalism Has Not Satisfied Us<sup>40</sup>**

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<sup>40</sup> See: Oriana Mastro, “Economics Won’t Save Us”, Essay presented at the IISS-S.A.I.S. Young Strategists Programme, Bellagio, 29 July – 1 August 2013.

The specific process, I want to argue, has been the process of ASEAN *Plus Three*. Therefore, it facilitated *this* specific case of a trilateral cooperation—it consisted of Japan, Korea, and China—and *not* Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Australia<sup>41</sup>. Much lies in these earlier attempts at integration—in 1990s—when ASEAN displayed interest in inviting major powers. As a summary, a solid interpretation of the link between APT and TC does not exist, with scholars choosing either a ‘communication’ or ‘competition’ thesis (see chap. 2). Previous scholars have not seriously considered APT as an inherited practice—an ‘imagination’ of cooperation that helped the three leaders to support such a forum. As it happens, these three countries urgently need *any* form of cooperation—in other words, ‘what is the alternative?’ (Chung Min Lee, interview, 2011, Seoul).

Scholars have seriously considered obstacles to cooperation, but they have not ventured into exploring the incentives: these incentives, as front pages of newspapers show, cede ground to possible wars. These are, after all, the three biggest economies of Asia (China is second globally, Japan—third, and South Korea is in the top 15). If this did not play an important role, we would expect the three to stay within ASEAN’s framework as ‘Plus Three’; indeed, the practical benefit from holding a separate summit, with all bureaucracy, is not confirmed (see chap. 2).

The importance of ASEAN Plus Three is that, in essence, it allowed them to ‘predigest’ a situation of facing one another as ‘three’ *despite* existing problems. In the mainstream argument on East Asian regionalism, the pro-ASEAN argument was that in order to manage to cooperate, Northeast Asia needs ASEAN—the ‘diplomatic glue’ (Alatas 2001: 5 [pages unnumbered]; see more sources in chap. 2 in this

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<sup>41</sup> “If APT did not exist, the trilateral cooperation would not emerge”. It’s counterfactual. I want to equally consider the three countries’ intentions, and their role in it—they are not merely passive, whose i.r. are shaped by some institution.

thesis). But power considerations mattered so that any social movement included power; admittedly, APT is a social process, but it did not obliterate power considerations. Japan, China and South Korea—in any configuration—matter more to each other than ASEAN matters to any of them. Especially in South Korea, as some scholars that I have met confirmed, ‘Asia’ refers primarily to China and Japan.

Now we will consider system effects. When we set out to study the preferences of a single actor or state, we are yet unaware of the many events, incentives and factors that should emerge later on. How will the actor respond to them? We do not know it yet, and a study of strategy can provide only a partial answer, contingent upon specific conditions, which unravel in the face of unexpected events. Under novel circumstances, a response in step with a predefined preference, studied at one point in time, might not be in actor’s recent interest. We may well study the preference as it unfolds, day after day, in a concerted effort—indeed, many policy studies do so. Yet, it would resemble building the castles on sand—the goal of explanation will be ‘washed away’ by unforeseen circumstances<sup>42</sup>. In effect, I argue against such reductionist approaches to international interactions, and against those who posit that we may explain international outcomes by studying strategies (in the style of ‘intentional explanation’)<sup>43</sup>. ‘Reductionism—seeking to understand the system by looking only at the units—is not appropriate’ (Jervis 1997: 13) for our study.

We can appreciate this only by reconsidering preferences of the states, viewed in the (regional) context of the later institutional emergence (see individual

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<sup>42</sup> Consider the impact of Hurricane Sandy in the East Coast on the presidential campaign in the U.S., October 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Intentions may assist us occasionally in understanding international relations. See Hollis and Smith (1990) for their distinction between ‘explaining’ and ‘understanding’ in International Relations.

chapters 3, 4, 5 on China, Japan, and Korea). Once we have an outcome like the TC, we can reconsider individual strategies—previous policies of the states—in light of this outcome. Often it is impossible for a single state to implement its strategy individually. The factors that play a role are the following: Complexity in regional structures, presence of other states. Other states may have preferences differing at least in the details. And these details are important. Disagreement over a participation of a single state might well undermine commitment to the entire organisation.

It follows, therefore, that observing behaviour of these states in isolation is *not enough*. For example, some of them have broader interests – East Asia for Japan, and all of Asia for China (Choi and Moon 2010: 364). Their foreign-policy strategies, when taken individually—Korea to China, Japan to Korea, China to Japan, etc—do not converge in the sense that they do not indicate emergence of a separate Northeast Asian framework.

It is due to ‘non-additivity’, see Jervis 1997; but also see Waltz (1979: 64): ‘... nor can one arrive at an understanding of international politics by summing the foreign policies and the external behaviors of states’ (64).

Theories of international relations are like planes flying at different altitudes and in different directions. Hoffmann (1959: 348)

How can we reach from ‘adding-up’ approach to the one that can effectively explain outcomes in International Relations? The answer is in building an analytical framework that addresses complexity. Here is a modest attempt to conceptualise this agenda. My argument is that a new theory of regional cooperation is needed, based on regional interactions. Since they have cooperated in APT, wouldn’t they now

want a separate summit? ‘Structures cause actions to have consequences they were not intended to have’ (Waltz 1979).

We based our thinking on unexpected outcomes. Let us see the example below before we proceed with the argument belonging to this thesis.

This is one of the counterintuitive outcomes in IR (see for example Jervis 1997). ‘Failed talks like those in Istanbul could increase the risk of military action’, said Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council.

It is critical that the talks end up becoming a real negotiation, a real process, and not just another exchange of ultimatums. If the two sides fail to establish a process rather than just another meeting, the risk of war will rise significantly. (*International Herald Tribune*, 7 Mar. 2012).

We would take talks always as a positive sign, decreasing, as it were, the risk of war. Additionally, process was often derided in the regionalist literature as not good enough – *results* were often seen as necessary (‘progress rather than process’). *In comparison*, in other regions, it is difficult even to promise to hold the next high-level talks. A real regional failure is not a lack of process—which is present in East Asia—but a lack of commitment to hold the next high-level talks. The wish for a ‘process’ in the Middle East contrasts starkly with derogatory remarks on the existing process in East Asia, where it is simply deemed not enough. Therefore, Etel Solingen (2008a) is perhaps right that comparisons between the two regions of East Asia and the Middle East would be useful and have not been drawn yet enough.

‘A large part of the difficulty is that policymakers do not know which policies produce which outcomes’ (Callander 2011: 643). In effect, policymakers experiment with policies ‘in a trial-and-error process, learning as they go’ (Callander

2011: 643). By experimenting with new policies, policymakers are able to learn from their experience (Callander, 2011: 643). In the approach of ‘incrementalism’, policymakers deal with complexity by limiting attention to few possible policies (Callander 2011: 643).

Learning and socialisation are two different things. I previously addressed arguments proposed by promoters of the socialisation hypothesis. They often invoke that NEA-3 assumed an ASEAN-developed mode of cooperation. The socialisation agenda is much broader than this and covers particularly extensively the one member of NEA-3, China. The examples quoted with regard to China have very little to do with (positive) socialisation, and a lot to do with learning. China has been a fast learner by adapting to the ‘game’ of the international system. I argue that the paradigmatic rule of the game is competition. Taking this view subsumes the socialisation hypothesis. China need not undergo a ‘cognitive change’ (cf. Yong Deng 1997: 70) in order for its leader to speak like a ‘Western liberal’ (70). What it needs is to learn that success is in a large part economic. Similarly, NEA-3 need not be socialised by ASEAN in order to call its statements ‘Vision 2020’.

Before we try to test the socialisation hypothesis, we should first make sure that no evidence to the contrary exists. This would allow us to straightforwardly reject it. I argue that in the case of Northeast Asian powers, and particularly in the case of China, such evidence is visible. All learning is *strategic* (Tang 2008).

The Northeast Asian case requires a theoretical framework that can account for emergence of a new regional initiative launched in the midst of structural change, on the basis of prior encounters in a setting defined as cooperative. More simply, this regional formula includes a rising power (China) and (partially)

excludes the previous, weaker, facilitator of cooperation (ASEAN)<sup>44</sup>. Emergence of NEA-3<sup>45</sup> will be explained as a joint response by Japan and Korea to the rise of China. The process of learning has been crucial for generating this response. Neorealist learning does not capture the joint aspect of it. While it recognises that states learn by responding to their environment, Neorealism remains silent on the fact that some lessons can be only learned jointly. In this sense, my framework picks up at the point beyond which Neorealism cannot take us: what happens when states learn together. I posit that such learning is not a foreign-policy explanation, as it takes place beyond the borders of a single state<sup>46</sup>.

NEA-3 was formed against the backdrop of already advanced ‘regional institution game’ (Lee and Moon 2008: 48) or simply competition. The empirical trend in East Asia has been consistently pointing to competition for regional initiative primarily between Japan and China. In such a setting, the emergence of a separate format for cooperation in Northeast Asia is a puzzle as it does not easily fit in this trend. A regional institutional structure that has been called a result of ‘disjointed East Asian efforts’ (Pempel 2010a: 211) is not a case of the trilateral framework. In this sense, at the substantive level this chapter is a discussion with statements such as this: ‘most regional bodies in East Asia continue to reflect the pre-eminence and driving force of individual state strategies...’ (Pempel 2010a: 211). I argue for joint learning, because important things happen at the intersection! Thus, by observing regional dynamics in East Asia, we have to conclude that

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<sup>44</sup> Exclusion of ASEAN is presently at best partial. For example, the three countries held a trilateral summit in Hanoi in October 2010 on the occasion of ASEAN summit. It followed the independent summit in Jeju, Korea, a few months earlier.

<sup>45</sup> NEA-3 (Northeast Asia three), the separate trilateral Japan-Korea-China framework.

<sup>46</sup> On a classic account on learning in IR, see Levy (1994)—which is, however, a foreign-policy explanation. (It is a rare example of a behavioural text on course reading lists in the US—see Biersteker 2009). But see Knopf (2003), for an attempt to make this concept more ‘*inter-national*’.

the NEA-3 cannot be explained with Sino-Japanese competition, neither the competition for power nor competition for norms.

A different logic underlies this framework, and this poses a puzzle for theory. Japan and Korea, instead of balancing against China in regional institutions, pursue a cooperation that *includes* China and at the same time *excludes* ASEAN. Exclusion of ASEAN is a problem for a norm-oriented argument, where ASEAN occupies the centre. Inclusion of China is even more interesting, as the literature so far is powerless in accounting for arrangements where Japan *wants to* interact with China closely, without a ‘buffer’ in the form of US and other ‘like-minded’ nations<sup>47</sup>. Neorealism would favour Japan-Korea balancing against China. Japan-Korea relationship has *not* evolved as predicted. Therefore, the actual implications of China’s rise have been different than predicted by the mainstream literature. ‘Unlike those who study the region primarily using realist or neo-realist theoretical frameworks, these scholars who focus on the policies and strategies of East Asian states demonstrate that many key countries like Japan and South Korea in Northeast Asia, and ASEAN, are not balancing against China as realists would expect’ (Goh 2011a: 1).

A trilateral framework as it exists is surely an effect of APT, but to equate it with a triumph of social-interaction argument is a step too far. Instead, when allowing the realist logic of power to enter these ‘social’ processes, we are closer to understanding why China was included and ASEAN excluded. First of all, realism has not let us down in generating predictions in the sense that Japan and Korea

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<sup>47</sup> Korea can hardly be seen as such a buffer from Japan’s perspective. In the security realm, Korea has not figured on Japan’s list for coalition-building against China, nor has Indonesia (Acharya 2008b). In regional institutions, Korea has been depicted as Japan’s rival (Terada 2010).

strongly reacted to the structural change in their proximity—the rise of China. The ‘symbolic’, indeed social, role of ASEAN has not overridden it.

Yet, we must ask ourselves *what* Japan and Korea reacted to. Importantly, they entered the trilateral framework with awareness of the possibility that China could dominate, just as in any other East Asian arrangement<sup>48</sup>. ‘And there is the question: how can we build credible institutions when there is a significant shift in the distribution of power, raising new forms of anxieties?’ (Fujiwara 2009). If they made this compromise, then it points to a *specific image of China’s rise* that triggered their reaction in the form of trilateral arrangement. This image, projected by China in the APT, has enabled an inclusive ‘deal’ with China<sup>49</sup>. But because the rise of China is not ‘one’ and consists of many images, ‘soft balancing’ in wider institutions *co-exists* with arrangements like NEA-3. This co-existence is what existing literature struggles to explain, one-sidedly elucidating either ‘realist’ balancing or ‘neoliberal’ economic cooperation. By showing that NEA-3 is a response to a specific aspect of China’s rise – China’s ability to participate in cooperation alike APT—we can overcome the hurdle of not knowing what to do with the trilateral framework that clearly does not fit into the lens of all-encompassing Sino-Japanese competition. Japan’s and Korea’s ‘learning about China’ confirms that China is more important than ASEAN, and this observation is more about power than anything else.

## **Learning in International Relations**

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<sup>48</sup> Especially that there is a danger of China dominating this framework (Mie Oba, 2010, Tokyo, interview).

<sup>49</sup> Without APT, we might expect Japan, and to a lesser extent Korea, to continue ‘soft balancing’ against China in wider regional frameworks—as a sole trend. There is a possibility of conducting a counterfactual analysis here. (My thanks to Hiro Katsumata at Waseda for this idea).

In general terms, we conceptualise socialisation as a process of learning in which norms and ideals are transmitted from one party to another. Ikenberry and Kupchan (1990: 289).

Neorealist theory can easily explain that such a structural change as China's rise triggers a response in its environment. But it may struggle when the response goes in a cooperative direction.

'Learning' is paradoxically fundamental in Neorealist explanation of the state's international behaviour. A state 'learns' what structural constraints are; if necessary, it postpones its desired preference until structural conditions are permissive<sup>50</sup>. When a state flows on the ebb of structural transformation, we can speak of 'auto-pilot', as Hitoshi Tanaka refers to states that do not pursue influencing the external environment (Tanaka 2007:30, abstract). *Learning* as a link from structure to behaviour (Haggard 1991:414) enables us to translate the Neorealist logic into the language of learning. In the end, the two seemingly distant worlds—learning and neorealist adaptation—overlap to some extent.

### *Definitions and Attributes of learning in Neorealism*

We can define Neorealist learning as adaptation, that is - adaptive learning. But there is a hollow tautological ring to this term, where adaptation and learning are lost in conflation. Some of the theoretical considerations to differentiate adaptive learning from its other forms are hard to operationalise, as observed in Tetlock (1991: 46). If 'structure rarely dictates a fixed course of action' (Alagappa 1998:

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<sup>50</sup> Tang's (2008) line of argument suggests that neorealist learning does not modify states' preferred strategy; it does not touch the core of what a state wants or aims to do. Instead, the learning consists in discerning under which (international) conditions the strategy can be pursued. Tang (2008: 156) provides an example of how China 'learnt its lesson'; his argument implies that neorealist learning can be slow, as China did not get signals from the international environment immediately.

654), can we operationalise the neorealist concept of learning? Because states come without an ‘instruction sheet’, as J.K. Choi (2008: 31) powerfully argues, they must arrive at their own ‘instructions’, and they do so as they learn. There seems to be no agreement among IR theorists on whether the divide between adjustment and learning is purely methodological, or whether two different processes are in place. Levy (1994: 297) claims that ‘[t]he difference lies not in the empirical behaviour that occurs but in the models that we construct to explain that behaviour’. Johnston (2008: xxiv, ft. 15) argues that ‘adaptation and learning are fundamentally different micro-processes. The point I am making here is that Neorealism not constructivism embraces adaptation as learning to structural change in a more compelling fashion.

Neorealist learning is a kind of adaptation, but in this case it is not an adaptation to a ‘situation’. This is an adaptation to an ‘image’—the product of a specific context. Neorealist learning ‘involves the rational adjustment of policy in response to the award and punishment contingencies of the international environment’ (Tetlock 1991: 22). Therefore, a direct link is assumed between a change and response. ‘Realist theories maintain that states learn by responding to structural changes in their environment’ (Nye 1987: 372). Again, there is no intermediate layer between structure and response; states are seen as responding directly to material change. Yong Deng (1997: 69) defines Neorealist learning in terms of a simple or tactical<sup>51</sup> reaction to structural change: ‘state making adjustment in response to changing exogenous circumstances or structural changes in its environment’. Neorealist-style adjustment, therefore, comes down to rapid and

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<sup>51</sup> A debate goes on about differentiating ‘tactical’ from ‘strategic’ learning. This discussion is only tangent to our argument here, and we can agree with Tang (2008) that *all* learning is strategic. For those interested in the differentiation, see: Johnston (2008: xxiv, ft. 15), Tang (2008) and Yong Deng (1997: 69).

accurate learning (Farkas 1998: 5). To appreciate its limits, we have to admit that the Neorealist concept of structure has *no* social content (Thies 2001: 5-6)<sup>52</sup>.

In this sense, ‘social’ interaction in Neorealism becomes selection. In a neorealist world, ‘[t]he choice is between learning and being selected out of the game in ruthless Darwinian fashion’ (Tetlock 1991: 24). Tang (2008: 146) argues, however, that ‘selection is a major mechanism through which states learn’. The neorealist concept of (structural) adaptation has been under-addressed in the sense that there is no clue on how successful behaviours can be selected:

It is hard to pick exemplars in world politics due to the uncertainty about what constitutes success under the security dilemma. It seems odd to claim that uncertainty about relative power drives states to look for successful balancers, but that apparent uncertainty does not make it difficult to identify who in fact are the appropriate exemplars out there. Johnston (2008: 4)

Another problem with Neorealist learning is that learning hardly ever takes place in a capsule that cuts off structural incentives from other stuff of international relations: ‘More importantly, the learning process does not just happen in a vacuum. It happens within the international environment, with both material forces and ideational forces in play’ (Tang 2008: 148).

### *Missing Layer: Images of Ambiguity*

China in APT projected an ‘image’ of its rise; it remains an under-explored aspect of analysis on APT.

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<sup>52</sup> Thus, learning does not play an ‘independent’ role in Neorealism (Tang 2008: 143).

Shiping Tang once suggested that the answer to Elman's (1996) question 'why no neorealist theory of *foreign policy*' (my emphasis) is that the world is far more complex (Tang 2008; see also Jervis 1970, which inspires this section). 'In an uncertain world, a state can never be sure how much power is enough for survival' (Elman 1996: 29). A state never knows. A question that we shall let linger for the moment is: do states indeed act in this way, pondering complex scenarios and the outcomes they may have?

'A perceptual adjunct from outside structural theory' (Snyder 1993: 14) is only necessary if it matters. There are good reasons to believe that it does. If it is so, then studying exclusively structure—no matter in what detail—as if 'on the paper' yields little explanatory power if structure is perceived differently. This opens the question: One structure, but many policies? Structure, indeed, is only one. But policies are many. It is because there are many images of structure, produced when it is viewed from different angles. It could also be argued that 'many interests, thus many policies'. Yet, interests are additive. Diversity of interests can explain emergence of many policies, but *not* their contradiction. Interests are additive, and so the bigger interest can win over the lesser one. This is to pre-empt a critique why I do not explain coexistence of contradictory policies within *the same* (regional structure) with interest-based perspective.

'Realities' like those of cooperative settings (i.e. APT) can be seriously considered to shape images of structural change (i.e. China's rise). The hypothesis is that decisions and actual actions (i.e. emergence of NEA-3) are taken not in response to the structure but to an image of structure. It should not be seen as a rejection of structural theory, but rather as going deeper into it and speaking about these aspects that structural (Neorealist) theory remains silent about. 'Institutions

provide a mechanism by which states can communicate and learn about intentions and beliefs' (Frost and Kang 2008: 232).

The evidence that structure as we study it 'on paper' and perceived structure might be two different things is that *unforeseen* contradictions co-exist within a state's policy. 'Unintended consequences' (Snyder 1993: 5) surely can exacerbate conflict, but apparently they can also lead to unexpected instances of cooperation (which have been under-emphasised). Indeed, 'not all unintended consequences are undesired' (Jervis 1997: 11, toward the end of ft. 22)<sup>53</sup>.

'Neorealist learning rests on the assumption that signals from international environment are uniformly clear' (Farkas 1998: 34). But they are not. By cutting out the richness of the international environment, we may construct our simple parsimonious models, but at the expense of fullness of the explanatory exercise, which necessitates focusing on 'how the actors *understand* the system that they are in' (Snyder 1993: 5; my emphasis). Loosening of the assumption that structural signals are always 'clear' still allows us to benefit from a simple structural theory as a 'Christmas tree on which variables from other theories are hung' (Snyder 1993: 14).

'Cognitive variables are epiphenomenal in realist models that assume that changes in international capabilities are obviously and easily read by rational leaders, who then adapt to changing structures' (Gross Stein 1995: 228). Facts are often conflated with *interpretations* of these same facts. An explanatory 'leap' from fact to behaviour is possible only as a simplified schema – a schema that omits the

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<sup>53</sup> Japan is a telling example. Unintended consequences (or indirect effects) of its strategies have led Japan to being involved in such a net of regional policies that it is pulled in opposite directions. See chap. 4.

relevant layer of interpretation. A state arrives at an image of structural change as it learns. Only by allowing for this mediating layer between structure and behaviour can we appreciate the *ambiguity* that permeates the structure.

Neorealists assume that image is only one, and thus ‘image’ becomes epiphenomenal. From this, Neorealists are *not* necessarily wrong. The fact that their model of learning is simplified, however, makes it unfit to tackle some of the research questions. ‘Elites’ perceptions of what their own countries should be or how they should act are very important. For example, images of being a “great power”, a “regional power” or even an “Asian country” can influence policy directions and filter perceptions of exogenous events’ (Oba 2008: 115). ‘Rise of China is an objective fact, a situation—not a motivation’ (Oba, interview, Japan). China is malign and benign at the same time. It is expected for Japan and Korea, just as for any other deeply involved state, to maintain contradictory policies toward China.

Thinking in terms of outcomes is illustrated in this example on security of the Koreas: ‘strong backing of the South [by Japan] could *create* a more volatile situation on the peninsula’ (Cha 2000: 271; emphasis original). But states do not ‘think’ like this! States pursue strategies—not outcomes! What it practically means is that states do not take all evidence ‘on board’—as we tend to do in social science research. ‘An identification with one another, and with the institutions and practices of their joint socialisation, grows out of a history of interaction and a common set of experiences and points of reference’ (Patten 2011: 748).

### *Social Learning*

Constructivism apparently deserves to be the ‘first address’ within the body of IR theory where to look for theoretical sources of ‘learning’.

Varied constructivist work has been done on learning<sup>54</sup>, but it is difficult to define the concept. Not without a reason has learning been called a ‘conceptual minefield’ (see the title in Levy 1994). But it is surprising given that in *Living with China* (Tang, Li, and Acharya 2009) the word ‘learn(ing)’ appears twenty three times<sup>55</sup>. It is not explicitly theorised, but allusions to ‘social’ aspects of learning suggest that those in IR who utilise the term—even if in a common-sense fashion—lean towards constructivism: ‘In sum, multilateral institutions have provided a conducive environment for Asia’s ‘living with China’—a situation in which weaker and smaller powers learn to live with the inevitable rise of a neighbouring power...’ (Acharya 2009: 259). Constructivism, at least ‘officially’, has no theory of social learning<sup>56</sup>. Constructivism, in general, has not yet produced a theory of IR in the ‘full-blown’ sense (Lebow 2008: 3).

Such a veiled understanding of learning makes it difficult to operationalise. While the Neorealist concept is exclusive (adaptation), the constructivist one is almost all-encompassing, where any interaction becomes learning, and everything is ‘social’ as opposed to material. As a result, it does not allow us to make any definitive statements. We know that the constructivist ‘ship’ is constantly drifting, but we do not know where it is headed. If every interaction is social, and every social interaction potentially counts as learning, we know neither where to look for signs of learning, nor do we know how to distinguish them from ‘non’-learning.

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<sup>54</sup> See Underdal, Haas (1990), Ruggie.

<sup>55</sup> Search for learn\* in the digital version of the book. See also Zhu (2010: 15, 17, 220, 231), for example, for the common-sense usage of learn\*.

<sup>56</sup> See Checkel (2001: 561) for this argument.

What the constructivist learning lacks most is a spine around which learning could revolve. It does not provide answers on how states should react to structural change in their environment—and whether they should react at all.

### *Assessment of Theory According to the Purpose*

This assessment is my reconsideration of the Elman (1996) and Waltz (1996) debate. It follows from the distinction between ‘foreign policies’ and ‘international relations’. That debate comes down to the question, ‘can theory of Waltz (1979) explain specific foreign policies?’ My aim is smaller: I just want to focus on the distinction between foreign policies and international politics *per se*. It is a question, I believe, that precedes the debate. To make the debate meaningful, both sides need to know what the difference between ‘foreign policy’ and ‘international politics’ is; both sides need to agree on the definitions. This will make the task easier. My input to this debate is re-branding it as a ‘preferences–outcomes’ dichotomy. ‘Horses for Courses’ (Elman 1996) is a principal theoretical voice in this debate.

### *World Politics*

The purpose of this section is to explain why outcomes are out of range for Neoclassical Realism. I posit that Neoclassical-realist theory falsely presents itself as a competitor to Waltzian Neorealism; its goals are distinctly different.

The many fruitless debates have unfolded in IR, with theories being pitted against one another, in a stylised fashion where institutions and ‘common identity’ invite Constructivism ‘in’ and Realism ‘out’, with Neoliberal Institutionalism in the middle. Such approaches are essentially good while priming students as to strengths and weaknesses of particular (Constructivism, Liberalism, Realism) theories—but

largely ineffective in applying theory to the real-world cases, because these real-world cases do not always have elements that these theories prescribe ('what is this institution's impact on the government? What is the balance of power? Do ideas matter?').

I am, therefore, more a fan of observing what particular questions a theory is *able* to answer. Even if the topic is 'institution' the question need not be about institutions, and instead on behaviour of particular states. (In this case, a Realist theory might be as good for analysing movements in institutions). Many a study on institutions does something different than entering the debate on the connection between the level of institutionalisation and state behaviour. Studies mostly attack something different (dynamics between institutions or in institutions). Therefore, automatically excluding Realism here is unhelpful.

To be more effective, such studies would do better to discuss with Neorealism on its own merits: structure, state behaviour, competition – particular concepts that are interesting, rather than the vague notion of an 'institution'. My proposition, in this light, is to assess theories as per purpose. In the discussion in this chapter before, I have discounted Neoclassical Realism.

Neoclassical Realism, as I have explained, is interested in identifying sources of foreign-policy formation; I do not deal with such a debate [why?]. What I take are formulated *foreign-policy* structures; this is my starting point. Neoclassical Realism does not deal with outcomes, and I don't deal with foreign policy sources. Our paths part before we undertake the journey; here we have a classification of policies according to *purposes*.

*Neoclassical Realism: Explaining Policies?*

‘Focusing on the interaction of the international system and the internal dynamics of states, neoclassical realism seeks to explain the grand *strategies* of individual states as opposed to recurrent patterns of international *outcomes*’ (Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro 2009: abstract, my emphases). There is no problem with such an explanatory enterprise in itself, but it causes problems for neoclassical realism to explain cooperation—if it attempted to do so. ‘The most glaring omission ... of neoclassical realism ... has been international cooperation (Tang 2009: 799). An explicit focus on ‘expansions’ could be labelled ‘neo-conservative realism’ (Lobell *et al.* 2009; in particular, see Tang 2009). Neoclassical realists appear to have been ‘asleep’ when a qualitative change in the international system took place, and ‘expansions’ stopped to be the only game that states play.

Theory of foreign policy is not a theory of international politics. ‘Structural realism holds that structure dictates state goals/ interests ... whereas *structure and domestic politics together* dictate state strategies’ (Tang 2009: 802; see also Waltz 1979: 91-92, my emphasis). Even if domestic factors do influence a state’s strategy (hence, the value of neoclassical realism), the actual *behaviour* in the end boils down to a structural impact. This statement of neoclassical realism accidentally reveals that employing it as a ‘theory of international relations’ is like building castles on sand. As I will show later, explaining strategies/ preferences—no matter in how great detail—is not the same as explaining international outcomes. Neoclassical realism might be one of the competing theories of *foreign policy*, but not of international politics. Once we set out to explain an international outcome (like war or a new cooperative institution) with neoclassical realism, we inadvertently commit a sin of conflation. Strategies/ preferences and outcomes are two different things,

and if we are explaining the former, we are doing exactly and only this: we have explained a given foreign policy.

It may occur that the line of causation between a foreign policy preference and an outcome appears as straightforward and clear. That makes us believe that conflation is not a sin, but a useful explanatory enterprise. For instance, when State A pursues military build-up and belligerent rhetoric towards State B, by explaining why it is so we may inadvertently fall into believing that we can explain in this way when a war between A and B breaks out. But what we have in reality managed to explain is a strategy. The conflation is almost invisible in this case, friendly towards a loose definition of dependent variable. Whether strategies or outcomes are what we explain, we are not preoccupied with defining it clearly as *both* are conflictual in the case we have mentioned. What happens, however, if State A pursues a *cooperative* policy towards B, and war between them nonetheless occurs? In this case, it is evident that showing causation between a preference and outcome is another task that has to follow explaining a preference. There are so many states in the international system. It may happen that State C declares war against B, and A joins in – even though *individually* it wanted to cooperate with B. Yet, if A considers C as the more important partner than B, then A and B will end up fighting each other.

It was indeed a long example. One sentence may suffice instead: ‘Outcomes do not follow from intentions’ (Jervis 1993: 31). ‘Relations are often not bilaterally determined’ (Jervis 1997: 32). Therefore, the seemingly ‘most relevant documents’ do not have to be valuable sources of information (Jervis 1997: 33). ‘It follows that observers will often misunderstand the state’s policy if they examine it only in *local*

terms' (Jervis 1997: 33; my emphasis). The short statements illustrate the point I am trying to make here: what interests us most in IR lies in the interaction.

To follow a foreign-policy explanation and explain occurrence of the trilateral cooperation that interests us here, we would have to explain: Japanese strategy to Korea and China; Korean strategy to China and Japan; Chinese strategy to Japan and Korea. Yet, perhaps the answer lies in Japanese strategy to the U.S.<sup>57</sup> If we take a book on Korean foreign policy to Japan, we might not read much cooperation there. Analysing six preferences will only supply a great amount of detail, but no explanation. And this amount of detail might still not be enough, as cooperation among the three might have occurred due to their connections to other external actors, like ASEAN or North Korea. Inability to determine at the outset whose strategy (i) and towards whom (ii) was decisive renders neoclassical realism—just as any other theory of foreign policy—unprepared to answer questions about international outcomes. And IR scholars are preoccupied primarily with such outcomes. If those who study foreign policy want to share this preoccupation, they must humbly admit that their findings are, while useful, only tangential to the task that IR scholars deal with. To wrap up this argument: every time that we explain *Strategy A*, we must show why, how, and when it relates to *Outcome X*. We cannot simply assume that *X* has been explained with *A*.

Ultimately, neoclassical realists “bite their own tail” when they stress the foreign policy/ outcome divide: ‘Over the long term, international political *outcomes* generally mirror the actual distribution of power among states. In the short term, however, the *policies* states pursue are rarely objectively efficient or predictable

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<sup>57</sup> Toshiaki Miura (interview, Tokyo, 2010) suggests that the US may want Japan to have ‘stable relationships’ with China and Korea, and in it lies the Japanese interest in NEA-3.

based upon purely systemic analysis' (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009: 4; my emphases).

As above, neoclassical realists pursue a dual division. They are conscious of one of them: short- and long-term, and this is what they wanted to emphasise. They admit that a long-term analysis is a strength of systemic analysis, while their niche lies within the short-term. That is acceptable. They are, however, apparently unaware of the second division they introduce: outcomes and policies. Neorealism, or any other systemic theory, is not their competitor, because they do not even claim to be explaining outcomes. If they could explain outcomes in the short run, their propositions would constitute a valid alternative to the systemic explanation. They, however, explain short-term *policies*.

Elman wrote: 'To be a theory of foreign policy, a theory has to make predictions about an *individual* state's behaviour' (1996: 13; my emphasis). Neoclassical realism does not have, nor is interested in having, an apparatus to explain outcomes (any time range). For it to challenge Neorealism, it would need to lie in the same column (under 'outcomes'). As a theory of foreign policy, it does not challenge Neorealism.

**Neoliberal Institutionalism.** Before we reduce neoliberal institutionalism to a set of assumptions, we shall consider – as my agenda suggests – what questions it is *designed* to answer (is it suited to run the 'international-outcome' course?). As for the title of Keohane's (1989) work (*International Institution and State Power*), and further reading into the theory's key assumptions, the principal statement is that institutionalisation has a strong impact on how governments behave (Keohane 2011:

157), and ‘state actions depend ... on prevailing institutional arrangements’ (157). In view of the words above, it is not a theory that explains institutional emergence.

## Choices *and* Outcomes

The first step therefore is that we free ourselves from the false notion that outcomes observed are a result of policies chosen with precision; that policymakers knew which policies will lead to that outcome.

Once this fallacy is out of our heads, we are ready to face the preferences versus outcomes problem. To unpack the ‘black box’ of international relations is to understand how strategies translate into outcomes.

Although in the short run strategies might be based upon *misperceptions* of reality, ‘states’ security strategies tend to reflect objective reality in the long run (because states will be punished, sometimes severely, if they persist in adopting wrong ideas)’ (Tang 2008: 146): ‘Ultimately, humans must anchor their ideas (or learning) to the objective material world although their knowledge may not capture objective reality all the time’ (Tang 2008: 146). However, sometimes states pursue a policy that goes against conditions created by the structure<sup>58</sup>. It is possible because an *idea* itself, until it is tested against the material reality, can be pursued without consequences (for state survival). But when an idea interacts with reality, it can be selected out with consequences even at the level of state survival.

These dynamics govern foreign-policy making. However, at the level of *inter*-national cooperation, it does not suffice to explain a foreign policy of a single state – even the dominant state in a ‘system’. Because it takes at least two states to

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<sup>58</sup> An example relevant to this thesis is South Korean foreign policy under President Roh, a policy commensurate with a great power which Korea is not (see Kim, BK 2008).

start international cooperation, explaining cooperation-oriented policy of one of these states (no matter in how much detail) is simply not enough to explain why cooperation emerged<sup>59</sup>. ‘States pursue strategies, not outcomes’ (Stein 1990, cited in Higgott 1993). Strategies and outcomes are two different variables and conflating them is costly for an explanatory enterprise. A foreign policy is a strategy, and formation of a cooperative framework is an outcome. Even intuitively, there should be a clear and predictable link between the two. If State A pursues a cooperative line of policy towards State B, and especially if State A is influential in the system, we have good reasons to believe that cooperation might occur, i.e. become an outcome. Then, if we can know that State B also pursues a cooperative strategy to State A, we have good reasons to be *almost* certain of ensuing cooperation.

Real-world cases are far more complex<sup>60</sup>, especially if we deal with more than two actors. Explaining preference of A and B towards each other should not be confused with explaining why cooperation between them occurred. Even if neither of the two pursues cooperative line of policy toward the other, *cooperation may still follow*. In other words, we are interested in explaining why and how *interaction* of A’s and B’s preferences produces a given outcome. The challenge is to take approaches familiar in foreign-policy explanations (learning<sup>61</sup>, selection of ideas<sup>62</sup>), and adapt them so that they can explain how two or more states produced a given outcome.

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<sup>59</sup> For example, explaining why Japan pursued Pacific cooperation idea in the post-war period is not the same as explaining why APEC emerged. Japanese policy might be a part of the answer (in this case it was). In other cases, however, such a partial approach might obscure the real answer (my hypothesis for the Korea chapter—confusing Korean foreign policy with the reality of trilateral cooperation).

<sup>60</sup> This was initially highlighted by Jervis (1993).

<sup>61</sup> Foreign-policy learning as reviewed in Levy (1994).

<sup>62</sup> Tang (2008).

It is important to know the difference between preferences and outcomes. Not only stemming from a theoretical debate, this distinction has huge implications for how we do our research. It is not an attempt at further dividing the field; it rather springs up from my belief that by honestly acknowledging a difference, we can effectively work on bridging the gaps and finding methodological solutions.

It is acceptable to study the foreign policy of, say, China or India. But often these studies carry an in-built conviction that foreign policy equals outcomes. For example, China's policy of 'peaceful rise' is often understood on par with a prediction that China's rise *will* be peaceful. Again, the former – China's intention – is a policy; a future where China is free from engaging in war is an outcome. What does it mean? It means that all the studies of foreign policy should not take pride in extending their findings *beyond the sphere of intention*. A study of foreign policy is exactly this: a study of foreign policy. No matter how 'peaceful' China's – or India's, etc – intentions are, they cannot prevent existence of unpeaceful states. These, when they attack China, might trigger China to respond – not peacefully. We must make our assumptions clear.

Practically, this means that each foreign-policy study is to come with a caveat: 'From my findings, it appears that State X wants to do this and this... but we do not know if it will really do it, or what State A, B, C, ... Z is going to do'. Paradoxically, in end effect, sometimes smaller states will have higher chances of achieving outcomes than bigger states<sup>63</sup>. Without diminishing the value of foreign-

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<sup>63</sup> Many people would respond that U.S. has a greater chance of realising its international objectives than, say, Syria or Costa Rica. Let me note, however, that U.S. not only has more power – its goals are also bigger (i.e. more difficult to carry out, instead of bigger as morally better) than the goals of Syria. For example, a goal of the U.S. might be to stabilise East Asia. So even though U.S. has more power, it is also aiming at more difficult goals. In effect, a belief that can be summarised as 'more power – easier to transform foreign policy

policy studies, I call for a realisation that from foreign policy to outcomes in International Relations is a long, long way.

### *Interactions*

The link between preferences and outcome (to Ch. 1 – theory) is neither obvious nor should be taken for granted. The outcome is ‘international *relations*, in the more narrow or precise meaning of the term’ (Hoffmann 1959:372; emphasis original). ‘Linkage theory’, or ‘the bonds between foreign policy and international politics’ (Hoffmann 1977: 53), has been studied by scholars like James Rosenau and Farrell. The subject of study by Rosenau and Farrell, however, is different than mine, for what they study is the impact of the international environment on the unit. See especially Rosenau (1969); I am interested in how preference of a unit (foreign policy) is translated into an international outcome.

What I propose here, in other words, is to open two imaginary ‘boxes’: one with outcomes, the other one with preferences. While the former is basically about what happens internationally, the latter comprises all sorts of ‘policies’ and ‘intentions’. We should not, at least in theory, be disappointed that intentions have not fed directly into outcomes: ‘Outcomes do not follow from intentions’ (Jervis 1993: 31). IR scholars should know the following: ‘States pursue strategies, not outcomes’ (Stein 1990, quoted in Higgott 1993).

Preference belongs to a single national actor; outcomes in IR are international. When preferences are studied in IR, the goal is *not* to explain their origins and rationales, which belongs to the domain of foreign policy. Waltz wrote:

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into outcomes’ does not hold automatically without being tested. Additionally, U.S. is opposed by some nations just on the grounds of holding the most power in the system that the very principle of being ‘number 1’ limits it in ways not experienced by other states.

‘A theory has to take the performance of governments as its object of explanation in order to be called a theory of foreign policy’ (1996: 55). To explain an outcome from a preference, rather than seeking deeper in the preference *itself*, we must make sure how the preference *interacts* with the environment. ‘Study of the actors tells us more about actors than about interactions’ (Hoffmann 1977: 53). If something important follows, it is not from the preference, but from interactions. In other words, the connection between strategies and outcomes should be studied. How foreign policy of one country interacts with other countries is a good way to study foreign policy *for the sake of* contributing to IR.

We want to know the connection between foreign-policy preferences and outcomes. This is what we want, but we don’t know it yet.

While researchers into national systems can usually afford to lose interest when policies are formally adopted (since compliance by those thereby affected can normally be assumed), *their international colleagues cannot take policy outcomes for granted and must instead engage in calculations as to whether the strategy underlying a proposed course of action is likely to produce desirable responses on the part of those toward whom it is directed.* (Rosenau 1969: 10; my emphasis)<sup>64</sup>.

Outcomes are known, for they are observable. Strategies are mostly known, for they have been studied. Sometimes we know them only in a circumstantial manner. For example, we might not know all the three strategies towards Northeast Asian cooperation. No official statements or visions might be produced on this subject. But we are in a position to infer them from approaches to East Asia, for example. Hence, strategies are mostly known. We know about interactions only little *a priori*. This is a grey zone of international politics. The question is if by knowing

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<sup>64</sup> These ‘desirable responses’ are close to our outcomes.

outcomes and knowing preferences (up to a certain degree) we can know interactions. Certainly not all, but at least we can know that, in the equation, interactions were the most important.

From knowing preferences and outcomes, by the way of inference we will come to know much about interactions. It will be our contribution to understanding, in future, *patterns* of interactions. Once we understand better those patterns, in future we shall be able to *predict* outcomes from preferences. A grand theory is ‘a single theory capable of explaining the *behaviour* of states, their *interactions*, and international *outcomes*’ (Waltz 1996: 57; emphases added). Kenneth Waltz maintains here that no one has ever offered a grand theory, nor suggested how such a theory would be built.

Turning our attention to interactions, studying the word is useful: *interaction*. Sometimes simple actions, not preferences, determine the outcomes! Interaction is “mutual or reciprocal action or influence” (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary). For the goal of explaining outcomes, I shift the weight from studying preferences (that is, foreign policies) to interactions. Importantly, outcomes are often produced through a chain of actions and reactions (Jervis 1991: 113-114), not through any conscious design. For instance, the post-World War I system was ‘consciously designed to bring about peace and stability and yet produced war within a generation’ (Jervis 1991: 113).

### **Foreign policy analysis**

The problem is of the difference between explaining ‘patterns’ and a *particular* event. Foreign policy analysis (FPA), represented by scholars such as Hudson (2005), offers prescriptions that differ from the neorealism of Waltz (1979). This

story is about changing the focus from explaining a particular event to general patterns. But is there necessarily a difference between explaining patterns of events and (single) events?

Hudson's (2005) article is a foundational paper in *Foreign Policy Analysis*.

In our recent article, we write: 'The ability to discern timeless patterns in the social environment is highly prized in academia, but of less use to those who need to explain a particular event' (Pieczara and Eun 2014). In reply to this, a 'particular' event should never be too particular not to belong to a 'pattern'. In this sense, saying that a social protest was generated by unemployment is not wrong at the start. From the methodological point of view, once we start from such a general factor, then we are motivated less to find some more poignant factors (*because* we have already given our answer).

There is a discipline preventing oneself from saying the obvious first, because then we are most likely to give only a partial answer, a sort of blanket that 'covers' part of the phenomenon, but misses the most interesting ends.

First, we have Robert Jervis (*Systems effects*.) Second, we have Kenneth Waltz, how nobody has constructed yet a grand theory—a theory that would explain, all in one, (1) behaviour, (2) interactions, (3) international politics. Nobody had yet suggested how such a theory could be constructed, wrote Kenneth Waltz.

## **Summary**

For Realism, IR, like laws of nature, are universal, timeless and unchanging.

Lebow (2008: 2)

The substantive crux for this chapter is a discussion with T. J. Pempel's 'individual state strategies' and 'disjointed efforts' as forces behind East Asia's institutional architecture. I argue that the trilateral framework is a powerful example of how what is important happens at the intersection. This theoretical framework should guide us states arrived at a specific response in a complex environment. Neorealist learning is this sort of adaptation, but this is not an adaptation to a *situation*, but to an image – a product of a specific context. The difference from the Neorealist concept is that there is a social context, and it is the context that states respond to. Social learning lacks a spine. China was included, because power directs social processes.

This thesis is a powerful example of an old dilemma: how much explanatory input from studying individual foreign policies as they are; how much will be sacrificed from losing sight of the international setting? To use a metaphor, we can precisely describe a butterfly by placing it in a jar; we can understand how it behaves only by letting it free, and seeing how it interacts with the world at large.

Qin and Wei wrote: 'An even more interesting and thought-provoking phenomenon is that the development of East Asian regionalism has coincided with the rapid rise of China' (2008: 116). While regional interactions have been centred on ASEAN for decades, evolution of a new trilateral framework that *excludes* ASEAN but includes China proves that power considerations are decisive. It tells us, then, that Japan and Korea reacted strongly (i.e. by proposing a new semi-institutional solution) to the rise of China, waving in this way (partial) good-bye to the 'power' of ASEAN which is not substantive but an act of social imagination. Yet, it does not tell us why the reaction of China could be and in fact was positive (the solution is cooperative 'on paper' and 'semi-cooperative' in nature). In this sense, Neorealism takes us far by showing that structure triggered reaction. What we

need additionally is a qualifier to this reaction; why it was cooperative, and this is the very last thing that Neorealism would predict. Simply, we need to establish what Japan and Korea reacted to. I posit that they reacted to a (proven) ability of China to *participate* (not necessarily cooperate) in APT. Power of China both attracts and scares. Realism mostly focuses on the repelling aspect; hence all the balancing strategies that are *not* absent from the region. The liberal logic spins off from China's power its usual argument about 'economic interdependence', which allows it to focus on the part of 'attraction'.

I argue, in turn, that Japan and Korea formulated a common response to the rise of China based on the *image* that it projected in ASEAN+3. It is a case where an unlikely third party (China) facilitates cooperation between two otherwise contentious partners – Japan and Korea. Why did the trilateral-cooperation strategy 'win' (i.e. materialised) even though many aspects of regional reality seem to speak against it? Again, it is a different research question than asking: 'why the trilateral-cooperation idea gained momentum in China or in Korea or in Japan?' Interaction within APT structured Japan's and Korea's response to China.

I take seriously Acharya's (2004b: 157) point that *regional institutions have mitigated asymmetries in the regional power structure*. Said otherwise, institutions enabled Asian states to adjust peacefully to *risen* China. Pempel (2010a) argues that these efforts have been largely *disjointed*: '[T]he large number of new institutional ties reflects a sequence of *disjointed* East Asian efforts to deal with discrete changes in the global and regional balance of power' (211; my emphasis). APT might well be one example of those disjointed efforts; it was first promoted by ASEAN. But to explain the NEA-3 case, we must acknowledge that it came about by *joint* effort of Japan and Korea, two individual actors, where China was at first reluctant:

‘Importantly, China was extremely reluctant to join the trilateral framework at the initial stage’ (Yoshimatsu 2008: 68)<sup>65</sup>. The fact that Japanese-Korean response to China was formulated in a social environment created by APT brings a major change to how we can use the neorealist type of learning. We look at a structural change that was *filtered through* this social context. APT ‘packed’ China’s rise in a fashion that Japan and Korea could envision a ‘deal’ with a rising power (rather than exclusion). Thus, I label my theoretical framework as joint learning. And the notion that power directs social learning is the cornerstone of this theoretical framework.

Important events were mainly bilateral; therefore, they became primary objects of study (chap.2). The current results are nonetheless impressive when contrasted against alternative scenarios (derived from structural change *minus* the possibility of learning). A material regional structure would not support the emergence of cooperation in NEA; it would reinforce either ‘self maximising’<sup>66</sup> or a broader regional engagement; (if not accompanied by learning, the resulting behaviour could not be cooperative.) By focusing on regional sources of learning, I offer an explanation that is more suitable to the salient feature of NEA economic cooperation. Namely, it takes place among major economic powers which are capable of generating endogenous incentives for cooperation, especially now when ‘Asians feel self-confident because of economic growth’ (*Economist*, 19 Dec. 2009). ‘In a world of over-information, contradiction and extreme uncertainty, there’s

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<sup>65</sup> I advance an argument similar to Acharya’s (2004b), but with an important modification that adjustment is joint rather than individual. This is a point that neither Acharya (2004b) nor neorealist learning pays attention to.

<sup>66</sup> Higgott (1993: 295-296): ‘joint’, as opposed to nation-state level of ‘self maximising’.

something incredibly compelling about having a single-word answer to a question that, at best, has a definitively uncertain answer<sup>67</sup>.

Our needs will be addressed better with a regional theory – one that takes into account the incentives from regional institutions on top of national strategies of individual states. We need to delineate specific conditions upon which new institutions emerge, and how they emerge.

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<sup>67</sup> Ben Pentreath, an architect, in *Financial Times – How to Spend It*, 5 November 2011.

## Chapter 2. Survey of the Literature: ‘Escaping’

### ASEAN Soil

Observing the style of handshake among the three leaders, one can try to guess how much of the connection to ASEAN is still there: ‘ASEAN has steadily been eclipsed of late by the increasingly *cohesive* Northern powers’ (Calder and Ye 2010: 5-6; emphasis added). Such statements in the field of Asian regionalism mark a clear break (point of departure) from a deeply entrenched pro-ASEAN bias. They may seem to be a fruit of slow and long process of building ‘cohesion’, but they instead abruptly appeared in the literature. It seems that for long important pieces of evidence have been disregarded. Since ‘cohesive’ can be defined as ‘closely united’ (*Merriam-Webster’s* dictionary) and ‘working together effectively’ (*Cambridge Advanced Learner’s* dictionary), such descriptions of Northeast Asia are mildly shocking against the background of the literature claiming the opposite. They testify to the fact that IR researchers indeed needed a trilateral summit, or promises of a secretariat, to turn their eyes to the Northeastern core.

Why has it been so, since IR scholars had a clue precisely in the fact that the separate summit originated from APT? An analysis of APT, we would expect, should take care of explaining this ‘plus three’ case. Reading mainstream literature on APT, however, we could not even *guess* that the trilateral framework was coming!<sup>68</sup> It is because the ‘salient’ obstacles have been taken for more

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<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 2 for a comprehensive literature review and my answer to the question why these explanations are not sufficient.

consequential. The following quotation is telling: ‘The ASEAN+3 framework has thus served as a main stage for a *fierce power struggle* between the two Northeast Asian neighbours’ (Bae, GC 2005; emphasis added). It summarises the reasons why so-far analysis of APT has been useful in a significant but limited way.

‘As for the APT, ASEAN members initiated the regional grouping and each year the summit meeting takes place on ASEAN soil’ (Eaton and Stubbs 2006: 141). It seemed that it was going to stay there forever. But several scholars give a testimony of an ‘eclipse’ of ASEAN (Calder and Ye 2010: 5-6), auguring ‘three plus ASEAN’ (Lee Kuan Yew, quoted in Yoshimatsu 2004: 13) to show how much less ASEAN matters, or even ‘three minus ASEAN’ (Weatherbee 2009) to showcase its exclusion. The question that emerges is whether a separate cooperation is indeed an escape from ASEAN soil. I propose an alternative avenue: escaping ASEAN is not about ASEAN!

In the spirit of the counterfactual thinking, Ralf Emmers makes a claim that without ASEAN, Northeast Asian cooperation would be much delayed (2012: 7). But by recasting NEA-3 as an alternative to ASEAN, it is just another attempt—paradoxically—at reinforcing ASEAN’s centrality. There is a pro-ASEAN bias in claiming that NEA-3 needs APT to be a ‘coherent regional institution’ (Emmers 2012). When I started to do research on this topic, just in 2008, a trilateral secretariat was unimaginable; the starting point was so low.

So what can it be about instead? It is about China and its rise. Both saying that the most important feature of APT is meeting in ASEAN, and of NEA-3 meeting outside of ASEAN, miscasts the analysis by bringing it all to ‘ASEAN soil’. Escaping ASEAN is a consequence, rather than a motivation. Those analyses

that ‘blame’ ASEAN – for inefficiency, for domestic instability<sup>69</sup>, for wrong responses to financial crises – are themselves ASEAN-centric, ascribing to this Southeast Asian organisation a greater power that it really has. Instead, the real question we should be pondering is the question of China’s inclusion, which is a real puzzle. NEA-3 should not be understood, in this light, as an escape from ASEAN – the reasons for it have been more Northeast Asian than the literature has afforded to note.

The purpose of this thesis is to explain the formation of the Japan-Korea-China *separate format of cooperation* as it exists since 2008 (thereafter, NEA-3), with analysis finishing in March 2014, and in this chapter, I will survey explanations available up to date—in particular, the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) process in terms of its explanatory power. All current explanations acknowledge the link to APT, at least for the sake of historical accuracy—‘+3’ institutionalised cooperation developed from ASEAN+3. Before I turn to APT, however, I shall review explanations that precede it, either conceptually or in time. Concluding the analysis on APT, I shall highlight these regional elements that have not attracted sufficient attention in the literature, although they are surprisingly obvious: Korea and security. Then I will deal with tensions between bilateral and trilateral dynamics, to highlight yet another under-explored theme: states’ interaction as it develops in separate spheres.

The issue of separation of economics and security in forming cooperation in International Relations (IR) has been already addressed by scholars such as T. J. Pempel.

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<sup>69</sup> Turmoil in Thailand in 2008, when the first trilateral summit meeting outside of ASEAN took place, is a classic example.

## **Before ASEAN Plus Three**

Before we turn to the crux of this chapter, surveying the literature on APT, it is necessary to acknowledge that there may be other sources of explanations. What else happened, before APT, with possible implications for trilateral cooperation? Before APT, in the conceptual terms we have the ‘catalysts’ of interdependence and crisis, and in chronological sense—other organisations or ideas for them: East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). I will turn my attention to them now. The purpose of this exercise is to leave us with a clear conscience—that we have looked back to events preceding APT—before we tackle that main source, which is APT.

APT’s true origin lies in the preparatory meetings for ASEM. When it was pioneered by Mahathir, it failed. It succeeded as an *answer* to Europe (even though it was proposed by Singapore). It comes from regional dynamics, creating equivalent structures. In this way, I want to argue for regional explanations of regional dynamics.

### **Similarities to Southeast Asia of the 1960s.**

Thinking of Northeast Asia, one can easily think of the Southeast – there, cooperation started earlier, especially from the 1967 formation of ASEAN. The Trilateral Cooperation looks to be aimed at a smaller level of formalisation. It does not seem that the three countries would aim at expanding the TC to stop being trilateral and included Mongolia or another country. Therefore, it is reasonable to draw a line between similarities of the Northeast and Southeast of Asia. At the same time, while less formalised and not an organisation like ASEAN, the TC of China,

South Korea and Japan calls for attention due to the sheer significance of these states.

A mention is required about ‘Malphilindo’ – an incident of Southeast Asian cooperation history that involved three countries: Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia (Chia 1980). A look into Southeast Asian history is informative. At the same time, we need to limit comparisons, because Southeast Asia is an integration project, whilst in the Northeast Asia work is being done to overcome basic problems. Malphilindo came about as an ‘antecedent’ of ASEAN (Chia 1980: 117). Formed in 1963, it had an ‘ethnic’ base. Erstwhile problems based around the formation of Malaysia made the Malphilindo almost ‘still-born’.

### **Intergovernmentalism/ economic interdependence.**

‘Regionalism’ is not tantamount to economic interdependence. Tanaka (2007: 40)

The explanation by Yoshimatsu (2008) employs the lens of intergovernmentalism to stress the role played by state leaders. Having realised growing economic interdependence, three leaders revised their perceptions of regional cooperation:

economic and industrial linkages between China, Japan and South Korea have gradually deepened since the late 1990s as China has exhibited unprecedented economic growth. Japanese and Korean firms have shown a growing interest in China as a production base with cheap labour and enormous markets for their products. These evolutions since the late 1990s *might* [my emphasis] change the perception of regional cooperation among the heads of state and government in Northeast Asia and their commitments to this purpose. (Yoshimatsu 2008: 62)

This explanation can be classified as a liberal/ constructivist notion<sup>70</sup> of a rising ‘awareness of regional interdependence’ (Goh and Acharya 2007: 5). This explanation is weighed down with two problems. First, China as a source of growing interdependence is treated in this explanation as a passive player, which is not necessarily the case: ‘Much of this literature focuses on Chinese attempts to balance the power of the US by engaging Southeast Asia, perhaps slightly overlooking the importance of how the APT framework also provides an opportunity to engage Japan and South Korea ...’ (Breslin 2010: 728). Second, this explanation cannot provide a satisfactory answer concerning the set of countries involved. Yoshimatsu (2008) implies that particularly Japan and Korea were attracted to trade with China. There is evidence to the contrary. ASEAN has already concluded an FTA with China, while Japan and Korea have a long way before possibly doing so in future. In this sense, convergence of foreign economic policies on China has been pan-East Asian rather than NEA-specific, and as such does not explain our research question. Given that economic interdependence is burgeoning *throughout* East Asia, and all East Asia is interested in Chinese growth potential, we find here no clue to why Japan, Korea and China – the old antagonists.

In motivating my focus on the China factor, I have referred to Terada (2010: 75) that Asian states have converged on China: ‘In fact, the uniforming impacts on some or all of the regional states have been so significant that foreign policy orientations among those countries, including Japan, have converged on China’ (Terada 2010: 75). The convergence can be understood in terms of domestic policy preferences (Hurrell 1995: 356): ‘Convergence theories understand the dynamics of regional cooperation and especially regional economic integration in terms of

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<sup>70</sup> For an article that deals with proximity of Liberalism to constructivism, see Sterling-Folker 2000.

converging domestic policy preferences among regional states'. Despite the uniformity, there is a major difference in how scholars assess China-ASEAN and China-rest of Northeast Asia economic ties: 'While China's economic appetite has revived the high-technology economies of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, it has simultaneously sucked investment out of the largely technology-less economies of Southeast Asia' (Jones and Smith 2007: 165). Additionally, after the financial crisis, the act of associating with ASEAN has lost much of the allure (Ba 2006: 171-172).

If Northeast Asia and ASEAN have been divided over China, it would be a powerful explanation of why NEA-3 emerged, but scholars generally refer to intra-Northeast Asian divisions/ 'fractious Northeastern core of the region' (Calder and Ye 2010: 112).

**Northeast Asia through the crises: 1997 and 2008.** The 1997 Asian financial crisis (AFC) urged the region to cooperate, with the call coming from ASEAN: 'For historical reasons, China, Japan and South Korea have not had an easy time cooperating with each other. But ASEAN was hit hard by the financial crisis of 1997 and moved closer to these three countries on the pretext of receiving aid' (Iwamoto 2009). AFC highlighted a *relative* decline in ASEAN role (Calder and Ye 2010: 186; emphasis added).

Then, the global crisis a decade later further established the ground for such cooperation – this time it was not only with ASEAN. The global crisis of 2008 proved to be another turning point, after the Asian crisis, that propelled scholars to focus on 'catalytic' properties of major crises for regional cooperation: 'In particular, the case of the trilateral relationship between China, Japan, and South Korea (ROK) is an indication of how such crises [2008 global financial crisis] can

*trigger* pragmatic efforts for cooperation and deepened regional ties’ (Sato 2009: 107; emphasis added).

Possibly the crises appeared ‘auspiciously’ at a moment when support for Asians-only movement would otherwise wane<sup>71</sup>. One view holds that the global crisis has spurred competition between China and Japan in financial affairs, and the inaugural trilateral summit in 2008 became a playing field for pursuing this competition (Terada 2010: 88). Another view stresses the regional-global connection, where regional moves are a (defensive) response to challenges generated internationally (like in Sato 2009: 107). All the three countries, for instance, are major holders of foreign reserves (Sato 2009: 108).

The main caveat concerns the merely ‘catalytic’ property of crises. The decision about the 2008 summit meeting was made in 2007<sup>72</sup>: ‘The summit meeting was originally planned months ago, before the turmoil in financial markets began in September, with the vague goals of building good will and establishing political dialogue’<sup>73</sup>. Even before the 1997 regional crisis, important processes were already in place: ‘The seed of Northeast Asian regionalism was laid in 1993 and 1994, prior to the economic crisis in 1997, when the ASEAN countries (at that time only six)

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<sup>71</sup> Already in 1995 Japan’s interest in EAEC waned (Yong Deng 1997: 50-51). APT and thus trilateral meetings faced trouble in 2008 in the light of Thailand’s (host country) internal problems (Weatherbee 2009).

<sup>72</sup> When they announced separation of the trilateral summit on the occasion of the 8<sup>th</sup> (dependent) trilateral summit in November 2007 in Singapore: ‘The leaders of the three countries agreed to take turns hosting China-Japan-Korea Summit Meetings in each country, independently from other multilateral occasions such as the ASEAN’ (‘8th Trilateral Summit Meeting on the Occasion of ASEAN+3 Summit’, Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), [http://www.tcs-asia.org/dnb/board/view.php?board\\_name=3\\_1\\_1\\_politics&view\\_id=36&search\\_cate=Trilateral+Summit+Meeting+on+the+occasion+of+ASEAN+%EF%BC%8B3+Summit](http://www.tcs-asia.org/dnb/board/view.php?board_name=3_1_1_politics&view_id=36&search_cate=Trilateral+Summit+Meeting+on+the+occasion+of+ASEAN+%EF%BC%8B3+Summit), 26 February 2013).

<sup>73</sup> M. Fackler, ‘China, Japan and South Korea focus on economy at summit’, *New York Times*, 13 December 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/13/world/asia/13iht-asiaecon.1.18649048.html> (10 May 2011).

invited South Korea, Japan and China to join them in broader discussions' (Choi, YJ 2008: 48-49). 'There was no specific agenda for those meetings. Soon enough, this process attracted the involvement of heads of state' (Soesastro 2001: 1). This lack of a specific idea of what could be discussed, at the meetings like those outlined below, is where the crises proved 'catalytic'.

### *Organisations*

This reminds us that the crises took place against the background of regional processes and regional ideas. East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC), in particular, highlights the above observation that thinking on 'East Asia' was developed before the AFC hit<sup>74</sup>.

In 1991, ASEAN made its decision to invite Korea as a 'full dialogue partner', and China as an observer (Ba 2009: 197-198). Then:

it was on the sidelines of the first meeting of the ARF in 1994 that ASEAN states first met with China, Japan, and Korea for an 'informal lunch' of '6+3' to discuss the principles of the EAEC as 'an issue of mutual interest. Ba (2009: 198).

In July 1994, foreign ministers from ASEAN held an informal meeting with foreign ministers from Japan, Korea and China. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss EAEC (Terada 2003: 261-262). Only few accounts refer to ASEAN-Northeast Asia interaction *before* the APT was formed. These meetings were convened against the backdrop of Mahathir's proposal for East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC)<sup>75</sup>. Mahathir made this proposal in 1993 (Goh and Acharya 2007: 2-3). ASEAN foreign

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<sup>74</sup> EAEC was preceded by a proposal for an 'East Asian Economic Grouping' (EAEG), also by Mahathir. Later it was renamed to EAEC, purportedly to brand it as less exclusionary (see Higgott and Stubbs 1995: 522).

<sup>75</sup> Chin Kin Wah (2009: 24) mentions evolution from EAEC to APT.

ministers endorsed it, and one year later three foreign ministers from Northeast Asia joined their Southeast Asian counterparts (Yong Deng 1997: 50) – in a setting identical with APT membership. ‘Mahathir cultivated Japanese, South Korean, and *ultimately* Chinese support ...’ (Calder and Ye 2010: 185, my emphasis). The memory of EAEC remains emblematic of Asians-only regional grouping. In this sense, the mid-1990s foreign ministers meetings spurred Asians-only thinking, before the Asian crisis set in motion a reinforcing trend. In this way EAEC is a bridge to the APT explanation.

While prior meetings are evidence of another explanation, they are not explanation on their own<sup>76</sup>. ‘But Mahathir’s proposal was also critically different because it was explicitly premised on the argument that *ASEAN was no longer enough*’ (Ba 2009: 145; emphasis added). ‘ASEAN is not big enough to carry clout. But if China, Korea, and Japan are with us, perhaps people would pay attention’<sup>77</sup>. This was the thinking behind extending the invitation to ‘cooperate’ to Northeast Asia. It was Singapore that proposed holding ‘more regular’ meetings between Southeast and Northeast Asia (Ba 2009: 198).

### *United States’ role*

Many scholars unacquainted with the story of the Trilateral Cooperation are willing to ascribe this ‘success’ to the United States. Has the US been interested and involved in what was happening in Northeast Asia under the ‘chapter’ of trilateral

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<sup>76</sup> I thank Professor Shaun Breslin for suggesting this formulation.

<sup>77</sup> Abdul Jabar, a spokesman for The Malaysian Embassy in Washington D.C., quoted in Ba (2009: 145). Originally quoted in George White and Teresa Watanabe, ‘Asian Economic Unity?’ *Los Angeles Times*, 4 March 1991.

relations? No strong evidence has been detected. Instead, a deductive logic tells us that Asia of 2000s is not an Asia of the 80s. Back then, voice of the US was perhaps clearer, and any opposition – efficient. What inspires many to say that US opposition hinders Asian arrangements was perhaps the case of the Asian Monetary Fund (year). Yet, then The US opposition came in a different geo-political & economic climate. Now the challenges faced by the US in the domestic market and internationally are such that some diplomatic moves among China and its neighbours are of less alarm. The US would rather welcome some burden-sharing by Seoul & Tokyo. Today intra-regional movements are so much more intensive, and Japan is so much more a regional actor, that the US could be sidelined.

Additionally, the US is visibly involved in bringing Japan and South Korea closer (Choe, 2012 for the *New York Times*; Fackler and Choe, 2013). Indeed, the TC is not a case of Japan-South Korea ‘rapprochement’ as the US could have wished. At the same time, some argue that it “complements”, rather than undermines, existing ties of the US in Asia (Yeo, 2013). At the same time, it needs to be added that, most probably, the US was not giving a strong opposition; if it did, then probably the TC would be still in nascent state.

### **Reviewing ASEAN Plus Three Approaches**

Particularly relevant are these explanations that treat emergence from APT not only as a fact of diplomatic history (i.e. the chronological development of NEA-3 from APT), but as a material for further analytical work. To assess them, we need to see whether they can do a better job in explaining ‘*why* these three countries’, and ‘*why* in a separate framework’. We, students of regional frameworks in East Asia – have good reasons to be taken by surprise more than anybody else. It is because the

literature on ASEAN+3—the framework from which the separate format of trilateral cooperation conspicuously emerged—has been pointing us in a different direction. Specifically, the mainstream argument on APT—that of Sino-Japanese competition—elucidates little on the subject of the trilateral cooperation. Few scholars have focused on the trilateral cooperation during the evolution of APT.

Although a clear connection exists between APT and development of the new framework, it has either been under-studied or not put in the right perspective. The literature has not yet solidified on NEA-3 connection to APT. However, it is at least puzzling that when one reads literature on APT from late 1990s/ 2000s, one could never deduce that Japan with Korea and China would *strengthen* cooperation among themselves. It is a useful exercise to go back to this literature with anticipation of some hints to Northeast Asian cooperation.

### *APT as a Field for Trilateral Interaction*

The support to the thesis that Japan, China and Korea show no common agenda in APT comes from the finding that Japan and China show little cooperation in their policies regarding ASEAN (Aoyama, interview, 2010). It is reflected in the practicalities of APT meetings. When APT is held, ASEAN, Japan, Korea, and China each have their chairman. (Only for finance, the three Northeast Asian members choose a common representative to face ASEAN – there are two chairmen – interview with Prof. Yoshimatsu in 2010, Ritsumeikan Asia-Pacific University). It means that—aside of the financial aspects—the three do not need to establish a common agenda vis-à-vis ASEAN. In summary, APT has acted as a platform for competition rather than cooperation for the three Northeast Asian states.

**Balancing initiative.** The prevalent position on APT stresses Japan-China rivalry. Two features are common to this literature: 1) no room for Korean role, at times de facto leadership; and 2) a strong focus on FTAs as a predominant mode of regionalism. Two things combined, this approach centres on Japan-China ‘rivalry’ in concluding FTAs in the region; especially their attempts at outdoing each other in taking ‘initiative’. Balancing initiative has become a salient feature of regional trends: ‘Within APT, China is aggressively pushing a strong China–ASEAN axis, whereas Japan is seeking to *balance China’s efforts* and step up its political and economic cooperative profile in the region’ (Hund 2003: 383; my emphasis).

‘But the Realist-favoured notion of balance of power can also be seen as having its basis in normative and social foundations, as evident in notions such as “soft balancing” or “institutional balancing”’ (Acharya 2008: 73). Soeya observes that ‘this competition between China and Japan is not of geopolitical nature but rather conceptual’ (Soeya 2009: 301). Power politics are played in institutions; it is ‘realist institutionalism’ or institutional balancing (Chun, interview, 2010, Tokyo).

By ‘balance of initiative’ I mean a situation in East Asia where Japan and China compete by multiplying initiatives geared towards weaker partners. ASEAN most often acts as the weaker side. On rare occasions Korean position in the midst of this rivalry is acknowledged; unlike in the past, in present regional trends Korea is not the subject of Japan-China rivalry. Rather, as the third regional power, it also produces efforts to show initiative.

How does the balance-of-initiative proposition fits with the emergence of Northeast Asian initiative? Precisely, it is another attempt at generating initiative in the already ‘crowded market’ for regional projects. With the Northeast Asian initiative in this way attributed to Japan, it is tempting to interpret it as an attempt to

forestall a Chinese move in the style of a ‘preemptive theory’<sup>78</sup>, or to set agendas where Japan retains competitive advantage<sup>79</sup>. Yet one would be hard-pressed to use balance of initiative to explain emergence of a cooperative framework featuring major regional rivals – and importantly, featuring China. Yet, proponents of this interpretation *seamlessly* move from ‘tripartite intra-Northeast Asia divides’ (Hund 2003: 386) to origins of the Northeast Asian initiative. In the same article that ascribes to Japan the role of ‘promoter of intra-Northeast Asian dialogue’, we read that ‘[c]learly, Japan is discouraging exclusively East Asian approaches’ (Hund 2003: 398, 394). Pempel (2010a: 217) writes: ‘ASEAN was able to take the lead in the APT largely by default...’.

Sino-Japanese rivalry might bear fruit for region-building in a sense that it is reflected more in balancing initiative than in balancing power. ‘Cooperation through competition’ results in multiplication of regional strategies on the part of both rivals. This view bridges the reality of bilateral/ multilateral Sino-Japanese rivalry with the parallel reality of building new cooperative forums (like the Northeast Asian one) that involve the two. In other words, rivals for regional influence end up in *the same* cooperative frameworks—and then the game takes place inside of institutions. Overlapping and criss-crossing initiatives, unsurprisingly, bring puzzling consequences where NEA-3 springs up from ASEAN Plus One(s) rivalries. Tendencies presented in the literature suggest robust development of ‘ASEAN Plus One’ trend, in which each Northeast Asian state deals with ASEAN ‘unilaterally’, preferably outdoing its ‘competitors’ in promptness of ASEAN-aimed ‘initiatives’; in many ways ASEAN Plus One(s) processes have eclipsed APT (Breslin 2010: 724; also Ba 2006: 163-164): ‘For fear of being overwhelmed by the “combined might”

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<sup>78</sup> I am thankful for such an apt label for what I was trying to say to Professor Takashi Terada.

<sup>79</sup> It might be an attempt to undermine China’s preferred arrangement, which is ASEAN Plus Three, and set agendas where Japan is strongest, like finance (Shaun Breslin made this comment).

of the Plus Three, they have undoubtedly found it advantageous for ASEAN to negotiate separately with China, Japan and South Korea' (Tay 2002, quoted in Webber 2010: 323). A tripartite competition, where even Korea is pictured as one of 'Japan's rivals' (Terada 2010: 87), does not make the task of explaining more *cooperation* easier: 'More countries are taking the initiative. China, Japan and South Korea, East Asia's rival powers, will meet this year for a first 3-minus-ASEAN summit' (*Economist*, 3 July 2008).

Those who call for more cooperation in Northeast Asia, yet stress 'quest for hegemony' (Bae, GC 2005), what do they base their call upon? The problem with this argument is best showcased in the article structure. There is no 'middle section' between *describing* 'fierce power struggle' between Japan and China (Bae, GC 2005) and the trilateral cooperation that emerged from APT (similar problem in Hund 2003). 'The ASEAN+3 framework has thus served as a main stage for a fierce power struggle between the two Northeast Asian neighbours' (Bae, GC 2005). There is no 'middle section' to comment on this contrast. From this, a more important question emerges. *What* is the China-Japan 'rivalry for regional hegemony' (as in Bae, GC 2005)? As to this debate, we have yet missed the question of constitution. What is it? It is the simplest question that we need to answer. Authors who purport to describe it are perhaps referring to some empirical evidence. It is, unfortunately, an open task. Marrying description of 'power struggle' in Northeast Asia with a proposal for a tighter cooperation in Northeast Asia defies any logic. If there is logic, it would be clearer if it were presented.

But the evidence of a struggle for 'regional hegemony' between China and Japan is not compelling. First, it is not clearly understood what such a regional hegemony would be about. Second, at the regional level, one does not see signs of

such a quest on either of the sides. Quoting China-ASEAN and a ‘reactionary’ Japan-ASEAN FTAs is not evidence of any ‘quest’, but is rather based on an underlying flaw that ASEAN is that important. No wonder then that in the same article (Bae GC 2005) we find statements like ‘mounting strategic importance of ASEAN’ – this is not, in the strictest sense, observation but a projection based on prior established knowledge. If in 2005 ASEAN’s importance would have been mounting, we would not have observed what we have observed in 2008.

**Field of communication**<sup>80</sup>. A contrasting line of analysis argues for reinforcing properties of East Asian cooperation for a Northeast Asian one: ‘APT has contributed significantly to cooperation in East Asia *and* Northeast Asia’ (Ye 2008: 139; my emphasis). This literature takes a position that it is good for China, Japan and Korea to meet, as ‘[t]he East Asian cooperation process also helps to facilitate Northeast Asian cooperation’ (Zhang, Y. 2005: 74).

Rather than rivalry, it tends to highlight that ‘APT remains an important mechanism for bringing regional elites together’ (Breslin 2010: 724). Here, APT is interpreted as a venue, as a forum offering an opportunity for exchanges to those who otherwise would meet far less frequently, or not at all in a given configuration: ‘For the first time, China, Japan, and South Korea are involved in a regional organisation that allows for regular trilateral meetings’ (Ye 2008: 139). It also enabled them to develop intra-Northeast Asian channels of communication, notably in the form of personal networks among national leaders (Calder and Ye 2004: 211-216). We can call this mode of cooperation a ‘regional dialogue’ (Foot 1995: 229). ‘Regional cooperation may involve the creation of formal institutions, but it can often be based on a much looser structure, involving patterns of regular meetings

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<sup>80</sup> Note that this line of argumentation is power-neutral; it focuses on Northeast Asia, but not in order to say that Northeast Asia is more powerful, and thus more important.

with some rules attached, together with mechanisms for preparation and follow-up' (Hurrell 1995: 336).

APT has served as a moderately successful field of communication, but there are problems with this explanation as well. First, claims supporting it were largely made *before* the separation of Japan-Korea-China framework from the APT 'umbrella'; thus, they did not have to face the research question of independent trilateralism. Second, against the premise of this hypothesis, East and Northeast Asian trends have not always been compatible.

So far I have analysed what APT has meant for interaction among the three. Both lines of analysis are correct; trilateral interaction has meant both more competition and more communication. It is only regrettable that interaction between these two views is hardly considered; scholars generally choose one line of analysis—competition or communication/ cooperation. Altogether, we have a picture of competitors who cooperate.

In the part that follows, I treat Northeast Asia as one group within APT and analyse its position towards ASEAN. Again, scholarly perspectives are stretching across all theoretical paradigms, without converging.

### *ASEAN/ Northeast Asia Divide*

**Socialisation of power by ASEAN.** The research agenda of this literature revolves around 'power of ASEAN' (see Eaton and Stubbs 2006) and the question: 'Is ASEAN able to socialise the major powers in the region?' (Qin and Wei 2008: 116). The source of the socialisation hypothesis lies in the fact that Northeast Asian representatives were meeting on the ASEAN soil for more than ten years.

Its exponents note that the three countries launched ‘Trilateral Cooperation Vision 2020’<sup>81</sup>, presumably following the example of ‘ASEAN Vision 2020’ (Ong 2010). While the wording and the custom are deceptively similar, is it socialisation, or is it rather copying of templates? It can be that NEA-3 at times behaves as if it had ‘learnt’ from ASEAN. When considered from a different perspective than constructivist, such evidence proves ‘strategy’ rather than socialisation. Jones and Smith (2007: 182, 184) conclude that ‘norms are what strong states make of them’, as both Japan and China manipulate ASEAN’s norms to their own strategic advantage. Projecting power by either China or Japan would harm the projector, making it more strategic for them to restrain; such behaviour does not come from ‘acculturation’ to ASEAN’s norms (Jones and Smith 2006: 184). This simple argument against the constructivist logic proves that other hypotheses must be tested before settling on a socialisation account of NEA-3 development.

This debate opens a broader question of whether smaller powers can socialise larger ones (Ba 2006: 162). Even these accounts that are sympathetic to the socialisation hypothesis, like Ba (2006) who discusses the ASEAN-China case of social learning, conclude that power differentials put limits to mutual socialisation. While ASEAN was fairly successful in drawing China into cooperative arrangements, China was less proficient in convincing the weaker side of its benign intentions—especially what regards the long term (Ba 2006: 170-171). By extension, this argument helps us understand why the three East Asian powers have become more efficient in establishing common ground; while Korea is still highly asymmetrical in power to China or Japan, they are the three most powerful states (in

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<sup>81</sup> FMPRC, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/2649/t705962.htm> (23 February 2013).

economic terms) in East Asia without the US. It follows that power asymmetry hinders *mutual* socialisation (social learning).

The fact that ultimately they decided to ‘escape’ is a significant input to the debate on whether ASEAN can ‘socialise’ Northeast Asian core powers; especially that APT was meant to revitalise ASEAN and reinforce its role in the broader region (Jones and Smith 2007: 163-164). The actual development is headed in the opposite direction, with NEA-3 on the way to eclipse APT in global and regional significance (Weatherbee 2009)<sup>82</sup>.

Putative building of regional identity has shifted research agenda to ASEAN-centred cooperative processes, which gradually began to involve the core Asian powers. ASEAN approach can be credited for bringing attention to indigenous processes spreading through the region. Yet, in explaining the trilateral case of cooperation this approach generates more questions than it can answer. ‘Why have the three states *separated* themselves from APT?’ is the most important of them.

**Dominance of the Three over ASEAN.** Essentially weaker in economic terms, ASEAN has good reasons to fear dominance by the three. Singapore’s Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew pointed out that the grouping can become ‘Three Plus ASEAN’ (quoted in Yoshimatsu 2004: 13). Contrary to Eaton and Stubbs (2006: 141), not all scholars agree that ASEAN controls the APT agenda: ‘While the process has been and is essentially driven by ASEAN, the agenda setting was not controlled by ASEAN’; Korean and Chinese initiatives in 1998 and 2000, respectively, prove it (Soesastro 2001: 1). Despite the name and annual venues, the

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<sup>82</sup> Tang (2008: 143, ft. 7) draws attention to the methodological problem where citing one another’s work serves as ‘evidence’ not supported by collection of original data. A methodological argument against socialisation accounts involving ASEAN is that they favour ‘thick description’ over hypothesis testing (Jones and Smith 2007: 183). While there is nothing wrong with ‘thick description’, it does hinder hypothesis testing of the socialisation thesis, especially when analysis is mixed with advocacy.

APT process has been essentially in control of the more powerful players. More simply, '[m]any Southeast Asian political authorities like to say that ASEAN economic integration is the key to region-wide integration, but this does not make sense' (Frost 2008: 207).

Contrary to what is generally believed, Jones and Smith (2007) argue that the so-called 'ASEAN norms' according to which APT is organised facilitate—paradoxically—the transformation of weaker states *by* stronger ones' (184; my emphasis). The claims that Jones and Smith (2007) make in their article are quite in line with the reality of ASEAN/ Northeast Asia divergence that emerged later on. 'A second ASEAN diplomat said the move to include the US and Russia in an expanded EAS would "preempt" the emergence of other regional groupings that could dilute ASEAN's role'<sup>83</sup>. This suggests that ASEAN is not entirely happy with the development in Northeast Asia, a notion reinforced by the following: 'ASEAN countries had a mixed reaction to this new trilateral cooperation—on the one hand, they welcomed progress on expanding the CMI and better relations among their Northeast Asian neighbours; yet they quietly expressed anxious concern about being left out and potentially marginalized in discussions on regionalism among the three powers' (Searight 2010:3).

The ultimate belief in that Northeast Asia dominates ASEAN is expressed in that:

'Far from preventing Chinese and Japanese expansionism, ASEAN Plus Three provides an attractive vehicle for Northeast Asians to explore their

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<sup>83</sup> Agence France-Presse, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5h3xcrO8YSIm9-PeBMNAC-i5PMfcw> (11 March 201).

regional ambitions and vie for influence in Southeast Asia. ASEAN itself is an empty vessel'. Jones and Smith (2006: 162-163).

**ASEAN/ Northeast Asia clash of interest.** The presumed objective of APT according to Thailand is 'narrowing the development gap within ASEAN and between ASEAN and East Asia' (Nabers 2003: 127)—where 'East Asia' means the three Northeast Asian members of APT. ASEAN presumably wanted to 'exploit' APT for obtaining economic and technical assistance from the three (Yoshimatsu 2004: 13). This might not be the primary reason for which Japan, China or Korea got involved in APT. It leads us to the clash of interest hypothesis.

The original idea behind the EAS was to transform the APT into a more coherent and developed regional framework in which any APT member could host a summit, thus embodying a more holistic regional concept by conferring China, Japan and South Korea with a greater sense of ownership over the East Asia regional community building process. (Dent 2008: 19)

Expansion of the regional process into wider East Asia via the East Asia Summit (EAS) does not change the fact that ASEAN acts as the 'gatekeeper', deciding whom to invite. China, Japan and Korea accepted criteria set by ASEAN (Qin and Wei 2008: 134). EAS was initially designed to keep the same membership as APT, but where each country would participate as an individual member.

What we need to keep in mind is that APT process has not been dismantled, and new Northeast Asia-only cooperation functions in parallel to APT (Zhang, Y. 2005: 74). However, holding the dependent summit, 'minisummits' (Pempel 2010a), is decided on a case-by-case basis; if the two happen to coincide closely in time, then the dependent summit is likely to be cancelled (interview 2, Japan). Additionally, ASEAN+1+1+1 formula has not been dismantled either. Evidently in

the face of ‘loose regionalism of the APT’ (Weatherbee 2009), the three wanted to pursue deeper cooperation. Japan, Korea and China in the first place joined ASEAN in the APT process because it was to benefit them: ‘For ASEAN+3 will be good for ASEAN as well as for its Northeast Asian partners—that is why they joined forces’ (Alatas 2001).

It does not sound plausible that Northeast Asian states moved out from ASEAN because, in APT with an agenda driven by ASEAN, they could not discuss issues of relevance to them. It is proven by what they choose *not* to discuss. What are the issues shared by the three, and not shared with ASEAN? Disputes specific to Northeast Asia—over territory and history—are consistently *not* on the agenda. In truth, no conflictual issues are on the agenda, with the notable exception of North Korea.

There is no serious clash of interest between ASEAN and NEA, because there are no substantive issues at stake in APT discussions!

**Inefficiency of ASEAN.** Another hypothesis within the spectrum of ASEAN/Northeast Asia divide points to inefficiency of APT in delivering results – or making progress. Qin and Wei wrote: ‘Because East Asians value consultation, consensus by unanimity, and comfort level, many of the ASEAN and APT mechanisms are not highly effective’ (2008: 121). In December 2008, internal problems in Thailand were responsible for postponement of the APT summit (Weatherbee 2009; Chin Kin Wah 2009: 33). It is when the inaugural (independent) trilateral summit took place. Pempel (2010b: 18) adds up to the argument that the three were ‘frustrated with the slowness of ASEAN and the APT’<sup>84</sup>. As noted in Yoshimatsu (2004: 13), NEA states prefer formal agreements. ASEAN is also wrong in interpreting its role as

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<sup>84</sup> Still, NEA-3 officially support ASEAN-driven regional integration.

indispensable for Northeast Asian cooperation: ‘There had been an ASEAN assumption that the political differences among its East Asian partners were so deep that they could not be overcome in a cooperative arrangement without the neutral playing field of ASEAN’ (Weatherbee 2009)<sup>85</sup>. The ‘diplomatic glue’ (Alatas 2001), provided by ASEAN, is not as powerful as it was believed. Compare:

[T]he ASEAN+3 should, at least during the initial phase, continue to be ‘ASEAN driven’. This should not be seen as an ambition to assume leadership in the forum but as an *inevitable consequence* of the fact that the bilateral relationship between China and Japan ... leaves us with no better option. (Alatas 2001; my emphasis)

The view that only ASEAN can play this role, with Japan-China animosity leaving no room for a dose of ASEAN-free cooperation, has proven short-sighted. This would in turn suggest that the role of ASEAN has been taken over by Korea: ‘[T]he regional core triangle will be defined by serious rivalry, but that does not mean the third actor cannot try to soften it and find advantage in cooperation’ (Rozman 2007: 202). At the very least Korea has acted as a ‘meetinghouse of cooperation’ (Armstrong et al 2006: 145).

This approach can explain emergence of new institutions easily, against the backdrop of failure of existing ones. But it does not explain why current institutions have not been changed to be more efficient. This approach prescribes a new institution each time a new challenge surprises the existing ones, but it does not tell us why existing institutions have not been changed.

**Security thesis.** Following Hanamaka (2008), we could try to see whether varying preferences for membership depending on issues of cooperation apply to APT/NEA-3 case. If NEA-3 operates within different issue areas than APT, it could

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<sup>85</sup> Note that in this quotation ‘East Asia’ means, practically, Northeast Asia. In American usage, East Asia is often an equivalent of Japan, China, and the Koreans.

explain why a new framework was necessary. This is, however, contentious. APT's scope of activities is interpreted in various ways. For example, Pempel (2010a: 229) notes that NEA-3 is prepared to deal with *any* issue of interest or concern<sup>86</sup>, while APT is financial in scope. Thus he names NEA-3 as one of the few East Asian arrangements that combine economics and security on its agenda. Developments in October 2010 seem to confirm this: 'Leaders of South Korea, Japan and China held separate talks to discuss regional security and other pending issues in Hanoi on Friday afternoon. President Lee and Prime Ministers Naoto Kan of Japan and Wen Jiabao of China discussed pending issues such as North Korean nuclear ambitions and currency conversion rates'<sup>87</sup>. However, according to Ye (2008: 139), APT does have a broad issue agenda, 'covering economic, social, diplomatic, and *security* areas' (my emphasis). Also Katsumata (2009: 12) notes that, the 'APT ... is more than a framework for economic cooperation. Since its 1999 meeting, it has to a certain extent also served as an arena for security dialogue'.

But unpreparedness of APT to deal with security could be important for emergence of NEA-3<sup>88</sup>. Breslin (2010: 724) contends that APT provides a collaborative forum for a 'range of issues such as transnational crime, social welfare and development'—but it does not appear like a hard security agenda. A right path to trace divergence between ASEAN and Northeast Asia might be then to follow the security path<sup>89</sup>: 'For some time to come, it would not be realistic for the forum [APT] to venture into cooperation on political and security issues in view of the substantive divergences of policy on these issues among the East and Southeast

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<sup>86</sup> Officially, 'security issues, like the nuclear issue' started to be discussed in 2002 .

<sup>87</sup> J. K. Oh, 'Lee wraps up Vietnam trip for EAS, ASEAN', *Korea.net*, <http://www.korea.net/detail.do?guid=51019> (10 December 2010).

<sup>88</sup> Perhaps most relevant to Korea.

<sup>89</sup> Additionally, the Northeast Asian three pursue some 'advanced' areas of cooperation, like Africa policy (Sato 2009: 108).

Asian countries' (Alatas 2001). Chu (2007: 170) ponders the question of NEA-3 as a question of a security institution. Areas of most advanced cooperation in NEA-3 have been: investment, trade, environment (interview 2, Tokyo, November 2010). On 13 May 2012, the three countries promised to begin negotiations on a trilateral FTA<sup>90</sup>. A 'preparatory meeting' was held on 21-22 February 2013 in Tokyo<sup>91</sup>.

Yet, there is something convincing in the observation that security tensions gravitate from Northeast Asia, and it is where they should be discussed. The North Korean issue was on the agenda of a dependent trilateral summit in Hanoi in October 2010 (Lee, CD 2010)<sup>92</sup>. In the first meeting, in 1999, security issues were not raised (Togo 2007: 97). 'Security matters' were presumably on the agenda already in 2002 (Yoshimatsu 2008: 66).

Other than security, there are possibly other concerns that can be identified in order to answer the question why the independent framework. 'Common developmental challenges' or 'stability and growth' (interview L, 2011) in East Asia is the common preoccupation of the three countries. Already in the trilateral summit in Jeju in 2010, security dominated the agenda—it was due to the sinking of the Korean vessel 'Cheonan' (*Korea Update* 2010: 10).

As the time goes by, more and more evidence seems to support the 'security thesis'. Yet, its underlying premise—Northeast Asia's common security concerns as

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<sup>90</sup> 'East Asia Nations Seek Regional Trading Pact', *Associated Press*, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/14/world/asia/china-south-korea-and-japan-seek-regional-trading-pact.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/14/world/asia/china-south-korea-and-japan-seek-regional-trading-pact.html?_r=0) (11 March 2013).

<sup>91</sup> [http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2013/2/0221\\_01.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2013/2/0221_01.html) (11 March 2013).

<sup>92</sup> In this meeting, the three countries reached an agreement that early resumption of SPT makes no sense in the light of North Korea's unrepentant behaviour. Producing 'substantial results' should take priority (as reported in C.D. Lee, 'S. Korea, China, Japan in no hurry for North Korea nuke talks', *Yonhap*, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2010/10/29/26/0301000000AEN20101029010200315F.HTML> (9 December 2010). One month later, China proposes SPT 'emergency meeting' following shelling of a South Korean island by the North.

opposed to Southeast Asia—misses to answer one important question. Is there something ‘new’ in the circumstance that the North Korean problem concerns more Northeast Asia than it does Southeast Asia? The *change* for the trilateral cooperation occurred in 2008; has there been any change in the security environment? The ‘security thesis’ seems to be about a general situation in which Northeast Asia has common security concerns, unshared with ASEAN. Then, if the ‘security thesis’ is to stand strong, it needs to show that a change over time occurred; either in the security environment, or in policymakers thinking on it. Otherwise, the security thesis sounds like a mere post-hoc rationalisation; ‘Northeast Asian states have common security concerns, unshared with Southeast Asia, and *that is why* a trilateral summit emerged’. When put into a causal statement, as I have just done, the statement’s incompleteness is revealed: It does not explain why this security issue has not led to the trilateral cooperation *before*.

### **Korea in APT**

Even the APT explanation(s), which is rich in mechanisms and processes pointing to cooperation, is not self-standing in the sense that *deepening of cooperation is taking place outside the ASEAN soil*. ASEAN soil symbolises the embrace of ASEAN around the Northeast Asian ‘three’. ‘These summits sessions took place annually on the periphery of the ASEAN plus Three Summit conference from 1998 to 2008, and now operate independently from ASEAN entirely’ (Calder and Ye 2010: 216). Yet, this is not exactly true, as even now there is an occasional trilateral summit *on* ASEAN soil (for example, in Hanoi 2010). Exclusion of ASEAN is only partial.

It is no surprise that ASEAN-centric analysis of APT bears little result, as ASEAN has not been so important. Perhaps a separate Japan-Korea-China cooperation would not ‘surprise’ us if we treated various pieces of evidence more

seriously. From the above, the final two—Korea's preferences for the 'region' and the 'security thesis' bear most relevance.

Korean active posture in APT, coupled with its interest in focusing cooperation to the Northeast Asian core, point to Korea as an active promoter of NEA-3. Although neither APT nor EAS responds directly to Korean concerns (Frost 2008: 122), Korea has maintained an active participation in them. Presumably, already President Kim Dae-jung wanted to institutionalise trilateral summit, but the conditions were not ripe for it (Lee and Moon 2008: 44). Therefore, he concentrated his efforts on APT. In 1998 Kim Dae-jung proposed forming an East Asia Vision Group (Soesastro 2001: 1). Although so-called 'leadership' of East Asian regionalism is ascribed to ASEAN, agenda-setting at some point was dominated by Korea.

Not uninterested in institutionalising trilateral cooperation (Lee and Moon 2008), Korea's 'cognitive prior' (as in Acharya 2009) has been compatible with a Northeast Asian framework. Facts speak for themselves: Korea proposed launching of TCCS (Trilateral Cooperation Cyber Secretariat), and a (physical) secretariat planned for 2011 has been promised—unsurprisingly—to Korea. In fact, the secretariat will be located in Korea because President Lee proposed it. Korea drafted the treaty, and it will 'organise and choose' location (interview 2, Tokyo, November 2010).

Contrariwise, '[t]he coordinating body for APT affairs has remained a unit within the ASEAN Secretariat, roughly at a foreign ministry desk level, till today' (Qin and Wei 2008: 121). APT has made little progress to become a 'codified institution' (Tang 2006: 69). Arranging a secretariat for APT would be a problem, as the location could easily become 'a fresh point of contention' (Bae 2005). Malaysia was willing to host the secretariat; Singapore and Indonesia preferred to keep it

within the ASEAN secretariat, in Jakarta (Bae 2005). Korea was ‘informally considering it (Bae 2005).

We see Korea, as predicted in Calder and Ye (2004: 217), acting as an ‘institution broker’. It might seem natural for Korea to assume such a role, given its ‘non-hegemonic’ status and intensive Northeast Asian diplomacy. Korea’s problem in Asia is that it is ‘too small to be big, but too large to be small’ (Parello-Plesner 2010). To paraphrase it, Korea’s weight as a middle power is perceptually weakened because of giants that surround it (China, Japan in the strict region; US and even India in the broader region). A ‘shrimp among the whales’ in Asia, Korea in Europe would be a big country.

### **Accommodating Contradictory Dynamics**

Several features of East Asian regional interactions, as literature chooses to present them, stand in tension with the emergence of NEA-3. Northeast Asia, albeit geographically part of East Asia, seems not to subscribe to the East Asian logic in its entirety. Bilateral ties among regional states do not fit comfortably with emergence of NEA-3.

### *Bilateral Dynamics Are Different*

Explanations based on bilateral improvements consciously or not put Japan at the centre of the analysis; it is Japan that has strained relations with both neighbours. For this reason, the ‘bilateral argument’ is always about Japan-China and/ or Japan-Korea, thus putting Japan at the centre. It is *not* about Korea-China side of the triangle.

This line of reasoning points to Japan-Korea and Japan-China bilateral improvements to explain permissive conditions for emergence of the separate

trilateral framework. However, even those that want to focus on bilateral ties have utilised hand-shaking photos from trilateral summits to illustrate their positive logic (Okonogi 2010 on Japan-Korea ties, Fujiwara 2009 on Japan-China ties).

Reasoning implying that Sino-Japanese (or any) bilateral improvement, in any point in time, was the ‘cause’ of *trilateral* cooperation is not logical; at least, it is incomplete. Such argumentation remains silent on admitting that a bilateral improvement could at best be permissive—or ‘catalytic’. It leaves unexplained the fact that bilateral tension could only be blocking emergence of the framework, but the will for it must have been there. And this cannot be explained with the bilateral argument.

**Japan-Korea ‘democratic and liberal’ axis.** The Liberal tradition placed high on its agenda strengthening of Japan-Korea ties and starting Northeast Asian cooperation from this axis: ‘One plausible option for the successful integration in Northeast Asia is to take a gradual approach that will start from a Japan-South Korea FTA. This would bring together the two biggest democratic, capitalist economies in East Asia’ (YJ Choi 2008: 54). Negotiations on Japan-Korea FTA are practically ‘dead’ (Chang Jae Lee, interview, 2011). Starting from Japan-Korea is not plausible empirically. It is only plausible according to the liberal logic. Japan and Korea are ‘economically interdependent industrialised democracies’ (Pempel 2011a: 55).

In a sense the two countries are natural partners. Both are democratic societies. They are economically strong and are the only two Asian countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Both have security treaties with the USA and a number of US soldiers stationed on their soil. They share security concerns when it comes to the North Korean nuclear threat and the rise of China, which at the same time has become the largest trading

partner for both. Japan and South Korea also share similar values, customs, cultures and languages. Söderberg (2011: xii).

It is hard to envisage a more beneficial outlook for strengthening bilateral ties. ‘All this would make it logical for them to have a strong cooperative bilateral relationship. Yet this is still not the case’ (Söderberg 2011: xii).

Northeast Asian cooperation *should* start from Japan-Korea cooperation that gradually involves China: ‘Cooperation among Japan, South Korea and China which *incorporates China* into the Tokyo-Seoul relationship...’<sup>93</sup>. Such a manifestation of what I call ‘Asian Liberalism’ has not materialised<sup>94</sup>. Soeya (2010) offers an alternative view of Japan as not a great power, but rather Korea’s equal—both situated between China and the US. ‘A genuinely cooperative relationship as true equals’ between Japan and Korea would mark an ‘epoch-making’ moment for East Asian regionalism (Soeya 2010). In about two decades, ‘twin states’ will coexist in East Asia. This similarity, adding up to the standard arguments of democracy and democratisation, bodes explicitly well for the bilateral relationship (Okonogi 2010). ‘To a large degree, the future of the Japan-South Korea relationship will be defined in the context of the trilateral relations among Japan, China and South Korea’ (Okonogi 2010).

Furthermore, Japan has not included Korea in the ‘democratic club’ to counter China. It is puzzling why Korea has practically not figured alongside Australia and India—not to mention the US. Why not South Korea? One answer are ‘[t]he dominant realities today’ that make for the impossibility of such a scenario

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<sup>93</sup> K. Saionji, ‘New Japan-South Korea-China framework: Looking toward North Korean participation’, *Asahi Shimbun*, [http://www.asahi.com/english/asianet/report/eng\\_2001\\_06.html](http://www.asahi.com/english/asianet/report/eng_2001_06.html) (7 February 2013).

<sup>94</sup> More prescriptive than the Western school of IR; see my conference paper (2010).

(Soeya 2010). In other words, Japan-Korea tensions prevail over the logic of cooperation among Asian democracies. Acharya (2008b: 160) looks at the ‘quadrilateral dialogue’ (US, Japan, Australia, and India) from a different angle<sup>95</sup>, calling it a ‘club of big powers’: ‘Smaller democracies of the region, such as South Korea or Indonesia, are not part of the group....’. While Soeya (2010) deems Korea as fit to be part of the democratic-alliance logic (with ‘only’ historical hindrances on the way), Acharya (2008b) contends that the *design* of this scheme is not meant to include Korea. Thus, the group is a ‘club’ of big power democracies in Asia rather than simply ‘Asian democracies’.

Japan and Korea show little cooperation in multilateral frameworks. To make this situation change is a ‘struggle on a daily basis’ for Tokyo (interview 1, Japan). Interaction between the two countries focuses on bilateral issues (interview 1, Japan). Since Korea developed, however, more opportunities arise.

South Korean president Kim Dae-jung delivered a speech at the Japanese Diet, which accounted for a positive breakthrough, said Ryosei Kokubun (interview, Tokyo, November 2010). It was a marked difference to Jiang Zemin, who came to talk about Japanese militarism on the Japanese soil. Obuchi made a commission for better relations with Asia<sup>96</sup>, to make of Japan a ‘part of Asia’.

The ‘geostrategic’ perspective puts Japan, Korea, and the U.S. in one camp, and China with North Korea in another. This logic is very neat, yet it does not capture an important truth that Japan and Korea are not typical allies. Theirs is a relationship heavily weighted by unresolved tensions of history full of conflict (see Cha 1999a; 2000). Therefore, the geostrategically mixed triangle of Japan, Korea

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<sup>95</sup> Officially, the group is *not* ‘a security dialogue or alliance’ (Acharya 2008b: 161, quoting Australia’s position)—in order to reassure China.

<sup>96</sup> My interlocutor, Ryosei Kokubun (interview, Japan, November 2010), has been part of that commission.

and China should also be viewed not in a typical way, questioning the Chinese readiness to engage with two 'US allies'. While it is true that Japan and Korea share being US allies, it is not what principally determines their relationship. By extension, a geostrategic tension is not a principal characteristic of this trilateral interaction.

**Sino-Japanese rapprochement.** A regionalist twist on the Neorealist approach, by focusing on major powers interaction, ties the success of Northeast Asian cooperation to Sino-Japanese rapprochement. Modelled on the examples of Franco-German and Brazilian-Argentine rapprochements, Japan and China could lay a foundation for community building (Kim, BK 2007: 267-268). A great-power politics perspective searches for emerging regionalism in an agreement between key regional players, along the lines of Argentine-Brazilian or Franco-German rapprochement in the second half of the twentieth century. But the 'bipolar asymmetry' in Northeast Asia does not bode well for a similar scenario to materialise (Kim, BK 2007: 267). At the moment a Japan-China FTA that could spur regionalism in an 'inclusionary' (Kim, BK 2007: 268) manner can serve but theoretical purposes. We do not possess at the moment a historical record of sufficient length to argue that trilateral 'dialogue' has improved chances for the Sino-Japanese rapprochement scenario.

In 2006, strategic dialogue between China and Japan was initiated under Koizumi, through the track-two channel. The aim of this 'dialogue', however, was not solely bilateral—as a China specialist Ryosei Kokubun told me (interview, Tokyo, November 2010). In 2007 Wen Jiabao delivered a speech at the Japanese Diet, marking an important improvement in Sino-Japanese relations (Ryosei Kokubun, interview, Tokyo, November 2010). But if it was an all-explaining factor,

why would we have a *trilateral* arrangement? Sino-Japanese improvement cannot fully account for emergence of a framework where the two are present among others.

**Sino-Korean close engagement.** The establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 was followed by a ‘cooperative partnership’ in 1998, upgraded to a ‘strategic’ one in 2008<sup>97</sup>. Of these three contentious bilateral relationships, the Korea-China one looks most benign. Korea has moved from successful engagement with China in late 1990s (Cha 1999b: 32), to appearances of ‘bandwagoning’ or even hierarchic acceptance of a risen China (Kang 2003a). One scholar has argued for Korea and China to form a strong core: ‘China and the ROK are two key players in the Northeast Asian community building’ (Zhang, Y. 2005: 66). Korea is most desperate of all to cooperate with China (Chun, interview, 2010, Tokyo).

South Korea has had a very short diplomatic history with China, since only 1992. Thus, Korean government can be forgiven for having a naïve attitude towards China. Events in 2010 (Cheonan and Yongpyong island incident) has opened eyes of South Koreans to the harsh edges of China. On January 9, 2012, Lee Myung-bak made a remark that the progress in two countries’ relations has been ‘unprecedented in diplomatic history’ (quoted in the *South China Morning Post*, 10 Jan. 2012)<sup>98</sup>.

Differences over North Korea have created ‘mistrust’ in Sino-Korean ties (Zhu Feng of Peking University, as quoted in *South China Morning Post*). Lesser clashes concern fishing resources in maritime (exclusive) economic zones. On the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, both sides will attempt to think from a broader

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<sup>97</sup> T. Ng, ‘Kim’s death shifts focus of S Korean leader’s visit’, *South China Morning Post*, <http://www.scmp.com/article/989618/kims-death-shifts-focus-s-korean-leaders-visit> (7 March 2013).

<sup>98</sup> T. Ng, ‘Seoul vows on peace and free-trade deal’, *South China Morning Post*, <http://www.scmp.com/article/989731/seoul-vows-peace-and-free-trade-deal> (7 March 2013).

perspective and build up political trust among themselves' (Cui Zhiying of Tongji University, quoted in the *South China Morning Post*).

### *Summary*

'With the APT in place, one nagging concern remains the rise of China...' (Chin Kin Wah 2009: 24). It is not a straightforward task to state the beginning of China's rise. The literature points to 1992 as the beginning of China's rapid economic growth (Bridges 1993), underlying the regional structural change. Others point to the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis as the beginning of China's rise (Jones and Smith 2007: 165). Literature focusing on 'social' phenomena would point to China's entrance to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, which boosted its international status (Oba 2008), or sudden 'aggressiveness' of China's regional initiatives about the same point in time (Terada 2010). Thus, China's rise that has spawned over a decade or two has become the most prominent change in the regional structure. But it is not clear how it was interpreted by Japan and Korea, as they *included* China in the trilateral framework. Now, it is one thing to place little trust in regional 'institutions', and another – to altogether deny their importance.

Koreans feel that a bilateral agreement with Japan might not be very popular; there is a fear that Korea would be absorbed by Japanese business. Therefore, there is a thought that a trilateral deal is easier. Then Korea does not have to face these bilateral issues with Japan. Similarly, a bilateral deal with China is not popular in Japan. Trilateral deal positively neutralises negative aspects of a bilateral one. Trilateral idea might attract many people; it is a 'political constellation' (Hitoshi Tanaka, November 2010, Tokyo).

In MOFAT, those who prepare for trilateral summit pick up only the issues that are not going to stir conflict; they take a minimalist agenda and steer clear of controversial issues. Importantly, there is no discussion about the Senkaku/ Diaoyu islands in trilateral meetings (Chun Chaesung, interview, 2010, Tokyo).

Since the Senkaku Islands ship collision incident, media sensationalism has raged, and *Japan-China* relations have been greatly shaken. In the middle of this upheaval, which involved the cancellation of various Japan-China related events, I went to Beijing on September 26 to participate in the *Japan-China-Korea* Symposium hosted by the Chinese East Asia Forum. (Amako 2010; my emphases).

Three-state interaction bodes in this case better for future cooperation than any of the dyads. This is one of the major challenges that the newly-found trilateral mode of regionalism in Northeast Asia poses to students of the region. Notably, trilateral cooperation is free from historical or territorial disputes, in the spirit of ‘positive’ and ‘future-oriented’ cooperation (interview 2, Japan). In the context of Japan-Korea-China trio, it calls in turn for contrasting trilateral successes with bilateral clashes. This trilateral framework cannot be subsumed to developments in the set of bilateral ties. In Cha (1999a) Japan-Korea animosity surprises against the backdrop of Japan-US and Korea-US alliances. ‘Not surprisingly, therefore, there have never been any direct security ties between South Korea and Japan even though both have treaty links with Washington and American forces on their territories’ (Foot 1995: 232-233). In the Northeast Asian case all pairs are *not* harmonious, and all form a stunning background to picturing trilateral ‘cooperation’.

From security to economics (finance and trade), this region has been labelled as a bastion of bilateralism. To a major extent, ‘countries of the region are all linked together, but the processes are bilateral’ (Breslin 2010: 724). Our case, however, proves that trilateral relations can take a more promising course than a collection of

regional ties. ‘Some things cannot be done bilaterally’ (interview 2, Tokyo, November 2010). A case in point is trilateral FTA. At the bilateral level, the focus would be on contentious issues like agriculture, while in a trilateral setting the tensions ease (interview 2). In this sense Northeast Asia is not any more a convincing example of ‘lattice regionalism’ (Dent 2006).

So far we have observed that the bilateral and the trilateral interaction seem to be governed by divergent dynamics. It is indeed a puzzle, but only insofar as we treat state interactions as belonging to one unitary sphere. I argue it is not so. Therefore, after Korea’s preferences and Northeast Asian security, what we should pay more attention to is the issue of separation.

The literature focusing on bilateral relationships ponders scenarios that have not materialised. It follows that a trilateral cooperation does not require a ‘spine’ of a strong bilateral agreement. What we can learn from this exercise is that regional trends, as depicted in literature on East Asian regionalism, are ambiguous in terms of explaining our case. In other words, we have to accept that our case of cooperation *coexists* with highly divergent trends elsewhere in the region.

This chapter’s purpose was to set the stage for further discussion, by reviewing the relevant literature. To repeat the purpose of this chapter, it was to highlight the trilateral-cooperation development as a valid puzzle in IR: Why did the three countries move their trilateral summits up north from ASEAN?

Even though APT looks like the main source of explanations, it is not sufficient. The three countries have not been deprived of their own will, even though they participate in APT. The analysis I offered in this chapter makes us realise that what has been missing is viewing the trilateral relations through the prism of their connections *above* APT. That APT was an important arena is rather clear; yet, APT

is only a fraction of the three states' foreign policies. Their strategies are an important source of motivations behind their interactions. In order to answer this thesis' main question – why these three countries *and* why in a separate framework – we need to put their foreign policies on an equal footing with influences of APT. Foreign policies of these three countries were subject to a number of pressures: (i) external – interactions with other countries; and (ii) internal – learning in foreign policy/ International Relations. This thesis assumes that the understanding of outcomes – like the TC – is contingent upon a *right path* to approaching foreign policies.

## Chapter 3. China in Northeast Asia

China's participation in multilateral institutions is very much a regional product, and the so-called 'pull' side of participation is very important to analyse too. In the next chapters (chaps. 4 and 5), I shall study foreign policies of Japan and South Korea, so as to show how the trilateral framework does not come directly from these strategies. We now need to study the Chinese side, the last evolving element in the trilateral cooperation.

First, China started to participate addressing the needs of the outside environment; then this system started to benefit China. The benefit was created. The Chinese calculus of costs and benefits is actually governed by the regional environment. China does not decide on its cost and benefit *alone*. At a Southeast Asian meeting, China expressed its request—supported by Cambodia—not to 'internationalise' the South China Sea issue. 'Multilateral problems should have a multilateral solution'. 'If you cross your national borders, then it becomes an international situation' (President of the Philippines, Benigno S. Aquino III, quoted in the *New York Times*)<sup>99</sup>. And this quote will dictate the tone of the present chapter.

Why does China participate in the trilateral framework with Japan and South Korea? This question can be asked at two levels. First, what interest China has in participating (1); second, what incentives Japan and Korea have to participate with China (2). But the question of China's participation has to be considered as part of

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<sup>99</sup> J. Perlez, 'China stalls move to quell Asia disputes over territory', *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/20/world/asia/china-and-cambodia-stall-move-to-quell-disputes-in-southeast-asia.html> (11 March 2013).

the broader question of why China participates in multilateralism. The mainstream answer to this question—that it was in China’s benefit—is mired in *post hoc* reasoning and obscures the developments that took place before the key dates of 1995, 1996, and 1997. Only if we look prior to mid-1990s can we understand the Chinese thinking at the time, and not only ‘explain back’ *after* the turn had occurred. In this way, we will also be able to appreciate the other side of the equation: the regional states, and their eagerness to engage China multilaterally. It is equally important, especially given that in early stages of participation, China had to be included, or invited. Indeed, by looking only at the China side of the equation, we are likely to put all our explanatory stakes in the grand strategy of China. China participated in regional institutions, responding to the structure of incentives they created for China. The structure of incentives exists in regional institutions.

Indeed, the whole point of adding this chapter is to locate the trilateral cooperation in the foreign policies of the three countries. The whole argument is that *regional* conditions are responsible for China’s inclusion. So the point was to demonstrate that studying the countries’ individual preferences could not account for the outcome. Regional conditions—such as China’s prior participation in APT—mitigated the less favourable conditions of the dynamics of power, divergent security paths, and history. For this reasons, the predictions of Northeast Asian more formalised dialogue’s non-emergence, at the general level, have not fulfilled. These predictions’ starting point was especially Sino-Japanese competitive relations.

On our increasingly small and interconnected planet... global problems cannot be solved within any one nation-state. They call for collective and collaborative action—something that the nations of the world have never been good at... . The current

international system is simply not effective enough—or fast enough—to solve these problems.

Jean-François Rischard, the World Bank, quoted in Slaughter (2005:131)

### **Why ‘Northeast Asia’?**

Strategy traditionally meant, in short, planning and employment of military resources to achieve victory in war; in modern times, ‘grand strategy’ is aimed at achieving a country’s security (Rosecrance and Stein 1993: 3-4). It encompasses political, military and economic means to ensure national security (Goldstein 2001: 835, ft. 2)<sup>100</sup>, in the spirit that: ‘Beyond the survival motive, the aims of states may be endlessly varied; they may range from the ambition to conquer the world to the desire merely to be left alone’ (Waltz 1979: 91)<sup>101</sup>.

For those who choose to focus on grand strategy, a gap in Neorealism is that the system does not ‘determine’ policy for each nation (Rosecrance and Stein 1993)<sup>102</sup>. With a similar motivation in mind, neoclassical realism found for itself a niche in trying to explain ‘grand strategies of individual states’ (Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro 2009, abstract)<sup>103</sup>. For Neoclassical Realism, to contribute to explaining international outcomes better, it would need to stipulate the international conditions under which China would grow peacefully and under which it would not

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<sup>100</sup> In other words, China’s grand strategy expresses its ‘basic foreign policy line’ (Goldstein 2001: 835).

<sup>101</sup> For broader understandings of grand strategy: Kennedy (1991) and Rosecrance and Stein (1993).

<sup>102</sup> Their book (1993) was published before Gideon Rose introduced the term ‘neoclassical realism’ (1998).

<sup>103</sup> Neoclassical realist work often focuses on ‘grand strategy’; see Christensen (1996) on *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilisation and the Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958*, or Goldstein (2005) on *Rising to the Challenge: China’s Grand Strategy and International Security* (works quoted in this context in Johnston 2006: 13, ft. 25 and 27).

– rather than positing China’s behaviour solely from China’s interests. ‘Explanations of behaviour in the social sciences typically begin with reference to intentions’ (Stein 1999: 200). But explaining grand strategy is like explaining how a vehicle is built, but not what happens when it comes into collision with other vehicles down the road.

Rosecrance (2001) suggests that Realism is becoming increasingly a cost–benefit analysis. Gradually, ‘the tenets of specific realism—with balancing as its central preoccupation—have increasingly yielded to a more generalist form of realism’ (Rosecrance 2001: 154). In this more general form, countries ‘do what seems to be in their best interests’ (Rosecrance 2001: 153). In this lies perhaps the allure of studying China’s (grand) strategy – it is the hope that this study will tell us what China will do. But the cost–benefit analysis, especially when taken independently, is not sufficient to weigh China’s participation in regional institutions. Knowing China’s *independent* intentions is of little value in a world full of states. The predefined strategies will just go to the shadow as states respond dynamically to the unfolding situation.

Paradoxically, writing in 2005, Avery Goldstein averred that what China’s strategy is has not been studied well enough; instead, what was studied were the responses *to* China (see back cover). Since then the scholarship on China’s strategy has expanded<sup>104</sup>. The number of works referring to China’s grand strategy tells us a different story<sup>105</sup>; China’s strategy has been studied perhaps too much, at the expense of studies from other angles.

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<sup>104</sup> In Google Scholar (in 2012), the book has been cited over 200 times (including in Avery Goldstein’s other work).

<sup>105</sup> Goldstein (2005), Zhang and Tang (2005), Swaine and Tellis (2000). Zhang, F. (2012) offers criticism to the way the study on China’s grand strategy has been conducted (‘*post hoc* scholarly rationalization’—see p. 319). There is of course a whole subset of the literature

For a more fruitful explanation of outcomes involving China, we shall study now responses *of* China. There is a possibility that the research agenda on China is progressive. A sketch of such a progressive agenda would look like this: responses *to* China (studied until early 2000s); China's grand strategy (from early 2000s); responses *of* China (an emerging agenda). On the triangle, this implies shifting to the right corner of the triangle – these are responses of China, predominantly to the external environment, but also to preferences of other states.

The study of China's strategy had one limitation. It was implying what China will do (action) from what China wants (preferences). A good example is this: 'China's re-emergence to great power status will continue to be peaceful since it *serves China's fundamental interests*' (Zhu 2010: 231; my emphasis). Also: 'it was not obvious why China would opt for regional community when its mercantilist *strategy of going alone was working*' (BK Kim 2008: 202; my emphasis). Similarly, Zhang and Tang contend that China's regional strategy is considered successful by most Chinese policy elites: 'Hence, one would expect the current strategy to continue, unless something dramatic alters its course' (2005: 56).

As we were studying China's preferences, however, they have already been transformed; conditions surrounding China were changing. China re-emerged in a new, notably institutional, environment, and it already had different preferences. Even preferences of the 'hegemon', the U.S., 'were changed from the pre- to the post-institutional setting...' (Solingen 2008a: 287). Institutions can change preferences of the countries. Limits of studying strategy are that the strategy will not reflect these changes! China might have turned to multilateralism purely because of

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on China's strategy in Chinese. See also Johnston's (1995) *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, for an earlier work on China's GS. Also, see Legro (2005) for a relevant treatment of grand strategies.

its own interest, initially—but this interest was created *by others*, notably the new institutional environment. Studying China’s strategy from the domestic perspective would not reflect this external component of China’s interest.

China did not invent this mode of regional relations – international institutions. The need to participate was created by the existence of institutions – and by the invitation *extended* to China; see the example of how China, through ASEAN and Malaysia, became drawn in the regional diplomacy in the first place. And just as important is China’s willingness to participate, equally important is the receptiveness of other states to include China.

Reassurance is an important part of China’s policy. The point is that China seems to put most of the burden for keeping a stable environment on others, ‘expecting others to do almost all the work’ (Hinton 1994: 370-371). China’s grand strategy is in this sense a strategy for peaceful times. It indicates little once the conditions become upset. Peaceful development is a strategy to maintain, for example, ‘continued access to what China needs’ (Breslin 2010b; abstract).

A key question then is what portion of China’s actions – what China actually does—takes place outside of strategy. China formulates a major part of its ‘publishable’ strategy so as to speak to, and assuage, regional powers but also regional states. The policies of ‘peaceful rise’, ‘development’ and ‘a good neighbour’, and even that of ‘a responsible great power’ (*fuzeren de daguo*, *fuzeren daguo*) act as a ‘dialogue’ with concerned Asian states. The addition ‘peaceful’ to ‘rise’ comes notably as a requirement from the international environment. ‘Peaceful rise’ (*heping jueqi*), was first used by Zheng Bijian at the *Boao Forum* for Asia in

2003<sup>106</sup>. China's aim was to 'enrich, harmonise, and reassure the neighbourhood' (Li, M. 2009: 17).

Once China engaged more intensely with the outside world, realising the condition of interdependence<sup>107</sup>, it also started to justify its policy more, like in the term 'responsible great power'. Why does China keep repeating the statements of its peaceful intentions? It is hard to think of another state on the world stage putting this amount of effort into just explaining. The citation comes to mind: 'When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish spurting out ink' (Orwell 1946: 6). Such underlying logic has influenced thinking in the West. One hypothesis is that this 'repeating' helps China in avoiding a counter-balancing coalition<sup>108</sup>. In this predominantly Western view, China's multiple attempts at reassurance tend to be taken for dishonesty<sup>109</sup>, for 'public discourses have a 'civilising' effect on actors...justifying selfish interests on the basis of egoistical reasons is nearly impossible in the public sphere' (Risse 2000: 22)<sup>110</sup>. Here, discourse is a tool to obscure the truth. Again, the Western view ascribes such instrumental meaning to China's discourse. (Importantly, the multilateral environment provided a venue for launching China's public strategies – we can recall how the 'peaceful rise' was

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<sup>106</sup> See the collection of speeches by Zheng Bijian: (<http://www.brookings.edu/fp/events/20050616bijianlunch.pdf>, 17 November 2011). The speech at the Boao Forum: pp. 13-17. Others note that the 'theory' was introduced by Wen Jiabao in the speech at Harvard University in December 2002 (see for example Callahan 2005: 702). *The Boao Forum Asia Annual Conference 2003* took place in November (<http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/93416.htm>, 18 November 2012).

<sup>107</sup> The Asian financial crisis is known for contributing to this. The first work on interdependence was Zhang 1998 [in Chinese], mentioned in Zhang and Tang (2005).

<sup>108</sup> See, for example: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/15/world/asia/15diplo.html> (11 March 2013).

<sup>109</sup> Many in the U.S. government see Chinese talk of multilateral security frameworks as a way to 'deflect' attention from real Chinese actions—increases in military expenditures, 'proactive' military exercises (Johnston 2003: 131).

<sup>110</sup> To counter the argument that China is aimed at deception, Johnston (2003) reminds that those who most oppose multilateral solution are open about their scepticism—to achieve true deception, they would need to public support it (see for this explanation Foot 2005: 149).

announced at the Boao Forum Asia). If China's actions betray its words, it will weaken the belief in its 'discursive language' as a 'constraining mechanism' (Foot 2005: 152).

But to confound such thinking, China could have been secretive about its plans in the first place, but contrariwise it was exceptionally 'explanative'. China might actually believe that it can effect a qualitative change with its statements, as in the pronouncement of its worldview: 'The world, according to the official Chinese interpretation, was essentially harmonious and it was only misunderstandings, a lack of virtue, or sheer foolishness that produced conflict and strife' (Ringmar 2012: 14). As an explanative power, China believes in the power of its statements to transform reality, clarify misunderstandings, and prevent conflict. With its 'peaceful' statements, China provides a 'best-case scenario' interpretation of its intentions. Here, discourse is a way to genuinely transform the reality, so that reality will finally come to reflect this discourse.

International politics is a nasty and dangerous business, and no amount of goodwill can ameliorate the intense security competition that sets in when an aspiring hegemon appears in Eurasia. Mearsheimer (2006: 162)

For us to understand how China's actions determine the outcomes, it might be helpful to consider a few scenarios (in all these three situation China does not have the privilege of taking the first step): a distant island in South Pacific launches a missile towards Taiwan (i); the U.S. and South Korea reach an agreement to contain China (ii); Japan seriously rearms (iii).

In these three situations, would China continue its peaceful growth? We are inclined to answer negatively all three of them. These three examples, or questions,

show how little of China's actions, in the end, depend on China alone. These three scenarios underscore the possibility of outcomes *independent of China's* 'cost-benefit ratio' (Fravel 2010; also Lanteigne 2005). They show how important it is to go beyond the various definitions of China's interest, as expressed in strategy and executed in foreign policy in peaceful times. China's actions could be only to a limited degree derived from the strategy of China, because this strategy is aimed to work in peaceful times. In the presence of a 'trigger', China's actions might seriously depart from its previous promises, or from its strategy broadly defined.

'China has been involved in the use of force with neighbouring states on a number of occasions since 1949 and it carries the burden of past adherence to a pro-transnational doctrine that implied intervention in other countries' (Foot 1998: 426). China as an emerging power was believed to want to overthrow the existing system—not to join. In the early 1990s, China was a real threat. Therefore, regional states did not expect a positive, cooperative response from China. 'Since the 1990s, in particular, the dominant discourse has been that China is outside the "international community" and that it needs to be pulled inside' (Johnston 2004: 65).

Importantly, there is no longer a debate in Beijing about whether to be transparent or not—there is, then, acceptance that some level of transparency does contribute to security; now the Chinese debate turns on how much transparency is enough to build confidence in the benign intentions of one's neighbours. Foot (1998: 430).

Representative of low expectations toward cooperation with China was the 'threat' thesis. The 'China threat theories' are 'essentially foreign attributions to China as having a harmful, destabilizing, and even pernicious international disposition' (Yong Deng 2008: 97). Another view is that of Rosemary Foot (2005: 142), where she explains Chinese motivations with fear (142)—China's responses to

the fear of others, where China perceives its participation in regional arrangements as ‘what its neighbours want’ (149). Its reassurance comes from a ‘new-found appreciation of a need to diminish the bases of the “China threat” argument’ (152). But the fear in others is immediately connected to the fear inside China; China sees itself compelled to respond to the fears of others, as it fears itself that those fears could have a constraining impact on China.

ARF can be seen as helping in undermining the ‘China threat’ argument, but groupings such as this will never convince those who like Mearsheimer believe that ‘no amount of goodwill will ameliorate the intense security competition that sets in when an aspiring hegemon appears in Eurasia’ (2006: 162). We arrive at having two disconnected worlds, the one of institutions and the one of security (competition). Judging from the coverage in news outlets, it is security competition that prevails, even as we remain clueless to how the (East Asian) world would look like without the institutions.

### *Limits in Studying Official Strategy*

Fravel’s (2010) cost–benefit analysis has one important limitation. China ‘isolated’ for analytical purposes might be at the outset essentially against conflict (Fravel 2010), but this analysis is static and does not prepare us to anticipate China’s responses when other states take certain actions<sup>111</sup>. ‘Looking beyond the Taiwan conflict, territorial conflict for China over the next two decades will not pay’ (Fravel 2010: 526). It does not tell us *what* would happen if China was attacked, provoked, or otherwise threatened. Even economic-interdependence proponents would arguably contend that a China that has no ‘interest’ in provoking conflict may still

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<sup>111</sup> Note that Fravel (2010) admits this in his analysis: ‘... I do not examine the interactive nature of territorial disputes...; he admits in this way that China may use force ‘in response to’ actions of other states (2010: 509).

have interest in responding, to aggression or a threat. No matter what China's costs/benefits at the outset, the outcome could still be war – or a military confrontation 'short of war', especially in the South China Sea<sup>112</sup>. The pro-peace result of a cost-benefit analysis does not compel peace.

'...China's leaders still apparently believe that the international environment is sufficiently peaceful that they can continue to concentrate on their modernisation agenda. Aside from Taiwan, which seemingly is the only issue that could trump this assessment...' (Moore 2004: 130). But the end to the Taiwan problem is not Taiwan. Judging Taiwan to be the only plausible 'exception' to the otherwise predictable environment is taking a risky step. Once *the chain of actions and reactions* unravels, it may be also U.S., Japan, China, Australia, the Philippines, and even a distant nation like France, that become involved in what was considered the Taiwan problem. The 'aside-from-Taiwan' assumption makes sense only in a short-term, thus necessarily static, analysis<sup>113</sup>. One would have to say: 'aside from Taiwan, and all other events in the chain of actions and reactions'. Then we shall see that by excluding an actor so involved in the (regional and beyond) security calculus, one excludes much more. In fact, we would not even know how much we exclude, and that is the heart of the problem<sup>114</sup>.

In other words, as the situation actually develops, the matrix of costs and benefits will probably shift; in effect, pre-existing patterns of costs might lose their importance. (Consider, for example, the Chinese perspective on costs of military

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<sup>112</sup> See for example F. Whaley, 'Philippines and China in a Standoff at Sea', *New York Times*, 11 April 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/12/world/asia/diplomatic-resolution-sought-in-south-china-sea-standoff.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/12/world/asia/diplomatic-resolution-sought-in-south-china-sea-standoff.html?_r=1) (12 December 2012).

<sup>113</sup> Note that Fravel 2010 also excludes the 'unique' to China case of Taiwan; see p. 509 for this exclusion.

<sup>114</sup> As an analogy, we could think of Westerplatte (in Gdansk, Poland), which became the first battle in World War II. But 'excluding' Westerplatte would make no sense.

involvement in Taiwan, which is under normal conditions enormous, will not matter so much once the present order is upset). ‘Isolation’ for analytical purposes leads up to several analytical tensions. For example, in 2005 China passed the law that threatens war if Taiwan declares independence (Solingen 2008b: 21). Like Syria that occupies the centre of regional rivalries, Taiwan has the potential to become ‘a whirlpool that draws in powers, great and small, in the region and beyond’<sup>115</sup>. Rosemary Foot (2005: 148) identifies several ‘weak’ states to China’s west and south (like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Burma) whose problems could stall ‘development of productive regional relations’.

### *Cost-and-Benefit Analysis with Its Limits*

Therefore, a cost-and-benefit analysis is not sufficient. In the next sections, when explaining China’s multilateralism, we will allow shifting of preexisting preferences by external events. China’s grand strategy is, after all, in many ways already a response to external pressures (response to existing benefits/ response to the ‘China threat’ paradigm/ response to crises).

This shows the limits of neoclassical realism, which puts all emphasis on the study of one state. A country-specific work is likely to shift—faithfully or agnostically—in the neoclassical direction, for it allows the researcher to take the analysis down from the systemic level to the domestic determinants, i.e. the structure of bureaucracy and varying preferences within the domestic sphere of policymaking. Whatever the motivation, the study focused heavily on one state has the limitation in that many of the outcomes involving the state under study will not

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<sup>115</sup> S Erlanger, ‘With Syria, a vortex of global risks and tensions’, *International Herald Tribune*, 27 February 2012.

come from its cost-benefit analysis<sup>116</sup>. One country's decision might be influenced by (future) actions of other states; for example, we could argue that Japan had no intention of concluding a prompt FTA (or an equivalent arrangement) with ASEAN, but when China did so, Japan's interest *emerged*<sup>117</sup>. Perhaps Johnston (2006) is right when he asserts that the study of Chinese foreign policy is only weakly integrated into IR; most of knowledge on China made available to IR comes from work delineated to that country, and it tends by definition to remain silent on external influences on China's behaviour, such as the choice to participate in international institutions.

Of course, a country-specific work might have no ambition of projecting future outcomes from the study of the actor, for study of the actor may be an analytical goal in itself. However, such ambition often emerges—the good example is the thesis that China's rise *will be* peaceful because China's *intends* it to be peaceful (we have reviewed a few examples before). So far, we have lived in a world that cooperates with China on this point, but an unforeseeable action by one belligerent actor might spoil the decades of work on China's peaceful intentions. It is not to say that a detailed study of one actor's preferences will not be helpful for understanding

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<sup>116</sup> The mitigating solution seems to be putting together the studies of foreign policies of many countries, to explain outcomes involving them (for example, the United States, Canada and then Mexico). The problem is, however, that the 3-actor outcome might NOT be in line with putting these three policies together. For example, Canada and Mexico are just unlikely to launch an attack against the U.S. (Mearsheimer 2006: 160); neither does the U.S. policy indicate any plans of aggression against the two. Taking the three foreign policies together, we are likely to believe in peaceful relations. However, Bolivia may attack Mexico, and then the U.S. becomes involved, and Canada does too. That even by 'summing' the foreign policies of all states cannot lead us to understand international politics was noted in Waltz (1979: 64).

<sup>117</sup> More currently, we could agree that a Korea-Japan FTA is a very difficult one, with negotiations stalled for years and the barriers unresolved (Japan's agriculture, etc). However, the widespread belief is that once Korea and China conclude an FTA (and the chances are rising), Japan will *become* interested. Therefore, the study of country's preferences at the outset (such as Japan's) tells us little of the outcomes this country will become involved in as a response to external events and pressures.

such cases as the Japan-Korea-China TC, but extra care is in order when positing outcomes from a one-country study. (In this case, it is the regional arrangements, such as APT, that proved more decisive than individual countries' foreign policies—in the absence of APT, the trilateral-cooperation format would be unimaginable, as there is no direct foreign-policy rationale for placing these three countries in one framework<sup>118</sup>).

Here, it matters that outcomes in IR are unintended. All states' intentions could be peaceful, but a series of mistakes of judgment could lead to an all-out war of *independently* peaceful states<sup>119</sup>. Goldstein (2001) predicts that China will maintain its present strategy, but he does incorporate complexity effects when he writes that 'any problems tend to ripple through the system in unpredictable ways that complicate efforts at management' (863). China's 'circumspect' diplomacy poses namely the risk of unintended consequences. In a statement that contradicts Fravel's (2010) analysis, China's approach poses challenge for *all* drawn into its orbit (Goldstein 2001: 864). Jervis writes that states are 'prone to confuse their own interests with those of the system' (2012: 624). Finally, the cost and benefit notion bears little practical relevance.

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<sup>118</sup> From individual policies, a more imaginable outcome would be a strong Japan-Korea-US triangle. But this has already been eclipsed by the fully formal TC. The difficulties of a trilateral alliance are visible in the difficulties that troubled potential signing of a Japan-Korea agreement on sharing their military data—sometimes also referred to as a 'military agreement'. See Choe S.H. 'South Korea to Sign Military Pact with Japan', [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/29/world/asia/south-korea-to-sign-historic-military-pact-with-japan.html?\\_r=1&ref=choesanghun](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/29/world/asia/south-korea-to-sign-historic-military-pact-with-japan.html?_r=1&ref=choesanghun) (16 July 2012). Then, some commentaries in Korea viewed it as part of a 'China containment' strategy. As a result, a proposal ('fantasy world proposal') of signing a similar pact with China was followed from Seoul; see: 'Seoul Proposes Military Pact with Beijing' (by Chung Min-uck), *Korea Times*, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/07/116\\_115054.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/07/116_115054.html) (16 July 2012).

<sup>119</sup> The underlying mistake is Fravel's (2010) equating the question 'will China's rise be peaceful' with that of China's potential for territorial expansion. Fravel's framework seems to follow from a different question, like: 'If it depended only on China, would China's rise be peaceful?' or 'Is China likely to take the first step toward aggression?' or '*Ceteris paribus*, will China's rise be peaceful?'. It is just necessary to add this caveat to the analysis.

## *Why Multilateralism*

The quote from Caporaso (1993) would speak to the imagination of some Chinese policy makers:

Most important international problems—including pollution, energy, managing airline traffic, and maintaining rules for trade and investment—intrinsically involve many countries simultaneously. What makes a problem international is that often it cannot be dealt with effectively within the national arena. Costs and benefits spill into the external arena. These external effects are frequently so great that domestic goals cannot be accomplished without coordinated multilateral action. Caporaso (1993: 51).

At the China's foreign ministry, in the Asia department, the argument emerged that more attentions should be paid to multilateral solutions to regional problems (Foot 2005: 149). China *reluctantly* accepted the notion that global integration has to be embraced because it has a 'positive impact' on 'national economic development' (Johnston 2008: 205).

The benevolence of China in multilateral institutions has surprised many. It came as a surprise to the predefined thesis of China challenge—even threat. This ascending China, against the emerging power's 'emerging choice' (Goldstein 2001), has *decided* to be another brick in the multilateral institutional edifice. The first explanation is that China, once it perceived the benefits that multilateralism can bring (mostly through experience in early institutions), has overcome its fear and engaged fully. The other explanation, which strengthens the first, focuses on the crises, as they bared the true meaning of interdependence to China. The third explanation generates China's participation in multilateralism as a response to the

‘China threat’ thesis, where China simply feels compelled to counter the logic that threatens China’s rise—and all China’s plans down the road.

**National Interest.** National interest<sup>120</sup> is behind the study of grand strategy. Classic models of explanation are based on the study of national interest (Stein 1999: 200). Indeed, see an IR textbook by Frieden, Lake and Schultz (2009: 43): ‘Explanations of international political events begin by specifying the relevant actors and their interests’. The grand-strategy approach is classic (traditional IR?) in that it assumes playing out of the national interest within international constraints (classic [traditional approach] = a distinction between the domestic and the international). Even as it does so, it fails to consider how international constraints are reshaping the national interest. The focus on China’s costs/ benefits over-estimates the weight of China’s grand strategy (in determining outcomes with China). And the logic that China realises the ‘national’ interest within ‘international’ constraints<sup>121</sup> (like in neoclassical realism), over-emphasises the national/ international dichotomy, where in reality the national interest is transformed by the international, and not merely constrained by it.

### *Benefits of China*

But the most prolific explanation comes from the study of grand strategy; China’s regional policy/ strategy, in this view, helps it in achieving the ultimate rise (Li, M. 2009)<sup>122</sup>. It is the ‘benefits of China’ thesis which in a summary form ascribes China’s participation in regionalism to China’s perception of benefits as

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<sup>120</sup> Morgenthau (1951).

<sup>121</sup> A stylised neo-classical realist argument-see Goldstein (2001).

<sup>122</sup> The study of grand strategy is directly linked to the cost/benefit analysis in realism, especially neoclassical realism.

outweighing the costs. This explanation has a retrospective flavor to it: ‘By 1996, China *apparently* concluded that accepting the constraints that come with working in multilateral settings was preferable to the risk of isolation and encirclement...’ (Goldstein 2001: 843). Or: ‘Beijing is reaping many benefits from increased international cooperation, including that from international institutions’ (Lanteigne 2005: 144).

After a period of participating and observing for several years, China gradually changed its perception of multilateral cooperation. It increasingly realised that multilateral forums like ARF and the ASEAN-China SOC might not necessarily be harmful to its national security. Instead, multilateral cooperation could be used as a diplomatic platform to promote its own foreign policy agenda. Kuik (2005: 107)

First of all, international institutions started to serve China only *after* it joined them.

The crises explanation could be singled out as a separate explanation, but for the sake of my argument here, it fits into the ‘benefits’ thesis—crises strengthened China’s perception of costs/ benefits. In a hypothetical situation without crises (Asian financial crisis or global crisis), would there be no regional institutions or no China’s participation in them? A crisis explains well the question of the *level* of Chinese participation, but not the entrance itself. Even no actual crisis, but anticipation of various problems, can strengthen participation. The crisis explanation can be credited for bringing in key dates to give to the study a sense of direction, but it fails at the front of: (i) accounting for those cases of Chinese participation that were not immediately preceded by the crisis (ARF); (ii) considering whether China would participate even if no crisis occurred. Indeed, economic or specifically financial character of the major crises underscores the possibility that they are particularly useful for understanding China’s behaviour in economic institutions, but

less so in the security/ general diplomatic ones (like the mentioned ARF, or EAS and SCO).

**Criticism to the ‘benefits for China’ explanation.** There will, in light of the above, these voices—or events or phenomena—that were not pro-benefit, and that therefore are not included in the pro-benefit analysis. Johnston argues opponents of multilateralism, principally in the military, were vocal about their opposition<sup>123</sup>. *Post hoc* explanations do not give a full version of the reality—only a stylised, best-case version, where pro-benefits perceptions were fully embraced. They essentially miss out on the process. For example—what happened to those military voices? Were they stymied? Are they still there?

But even as China was calculating its cost/benefit ratio, the dynamic regional environment was moving toward a new compelling reality of institutions. The statement that China turned to multilateralism because it ‘perceived’ benefits comes from a *post hoc* reasoning that ‘imputes intentions on the basis of effects’ (Solingen 2008a : 266). *Having observed* China’s changed response to multilateral solutions, the most ‘plausible’ explanation is that China found it beneficial—the often retrospective nature of this reasoning is evident in the language like ‘plausible’, ‘apparently’, etc. Such a ‘blanket’<sup>124</sup> story from the end-effect imputes initial intention, trying to find the way back through the maze of data of China’s participation in regional institutions<sup>125</sup>. The ‘blanket’ explanation is constructed so

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<sup>123</sup> See Johnston (2003: 130-133).

<sup>124</sup> Etel Solingen (2008a) uses the expression ‘blanket functionalist premises’ and I borrow the expression from her (288).

<sup>125</sup> Policymakers, looking back at the past events and decisions made, are likely to confirm the ‘plausible’ logic, also deduced by the researchers who interview them. For example, Goldstein (2001: 843, ft. 24) writes that many of his sources agreed with the point that, by 1996, China ‘apparently concluded’ that accepting constraints inherent in working with multilateral bodies was a far superior choice to risking isolation from not joining.

that it covers the observed phenomena, rationalising them, to make China look like a ‘purposive intentionalist’ (Stein 1993) actor.

But deducing a plausible logic marginalises those events—actual or hypothetical—that would not be compatible with it. Instead, what was the Chinese thinking at the time the change was happening (mid 1990s)? A good clue comes from the report by the Institute of Asia Pacific Studies (IAPS 1995, quoted in Kuik 2005: 106). It recognises that the emergence of multilateral institutions in Asia is an ‘unstoppable trend’ that China must accept. ‘Non-participation is not considered an option, as it would only result in self-isolation’ (IAPS 1995: 16, quoted in Kuik 2005: 106). ‘Time has made a choice for China’ (see Foot 2005: 146, ft. 18)—this means that to become a great power, China must cooperate with the outside environment. The argument I want to defend is that China had no other choice but to join. At the bottom line, the language of gains is the language of rational choice (Stein and Pauly 1993)—essentially, the liberal and realist explanations. Gains will not explain everything. Even if China found it in the end beneficial to participate in multilateral institutions, the anticipation of such benefit did not have to be the motivation. Stein and Pauly (1993) point to the avoidance of loss as the motive underlying the choice for cooperation.

In 1998, Asia Department at MOFA started to seek more ‘sophisticated’ and ‘theoretical’ ideas on multilateralism (Johnston 2003: 130). It sought to introduced theoretical IR language (concepts such democratic peace theory), to convince others—for example the military—of the benefits of multilateral diplomacy (Johnston 2003: 131).

*Beyond Northeast Asian Divisions*

China has a long-term vision involving cooperation among the various Asian sub-regions: Central, Southeast and Northeast Asia; yet, this vision is unlikely to be realised any time soon (Foot 2005: 142). ‘The maximalist Chinese vision is for the Central, Northeast, and Southeast Asian sub-regions to be linked in economic and security bodies’ (Foot 2005: 153). As an example, Wen Jiabao considered that the SCO could move beyond its security focus and link itself to the wider East Asia through an FTA; in 2003, he proposed a SCO-based FTA (150). It is rather difficult to accept that these are real Chinese preferences—rather it is part of the official discourse, and basically every Asian country stresses in its foreign-policy rhetoric the complementarity among the many Asian institutions. Those preferences would suggest that China strongly prefers ‘Asian’ Asia.

A more compelling vision is that of China’s least preferred outcome—U.S. strengthening its alliances with Japan, Korea and ASEAN states (Solingen 2008a: 278; see also Christensen 1999: 72). Multipolarity is an outcome favoured by China (Zhang, F. 2012: 331), a desirable yet distant goal (Foot 2005: 151). China prefers multipolarity and weak multilateralism in Asia over the U.S. preponderance. It seems, therefore, that China was unable to counter U.S. dominance with its own strong bilateralism, even as bilateralism was and in many areas still is China’s favoured way of conducting regional relations<sup>126</sup>, so it chose weak multilateralism instead.

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<sup>126</sup> China’s strong support for bilateralism is, in fact, not so different to Japan and Korea—while it seems very useful, such a comparison is not often made. As Hughes (1996) reminds, until the early 1990s Korea was a strong supporter of bilateralism—even stronger than Japan (ft. 10). Still in the 1991 statement from the Korean Foreign Ministry, the point was defended that only bilateralism suits a region with such ‘diverse’ interests as Asia. Interestingly, also China uses this word ‘diverse’, pushing away the idea of a multilateral security body (see Foot 1998: 426). Thus, also Japan and Korea went through ‘strong bilateralism’ phases and, while acknowledging that China’s position has its distinct features, making this observations takes much of a sole focus on China away.

## *Assessing Change in Policy*

The “new security concept” expresses the most appropriate way, according to China, of conducting regional relations (Capie and Evans 2002). China’s regional posture—called ‘regional activism’ (Foot 2005) or ‘proactive participation’ (Li, M. 2009)—marks a break from the previous practice of non-engagement. In the ‘old’ security concept, the only outcome for China was war.

In 1996, China proposed ‘new security concept’ (*xin anquan guan*) that emphasises, among others, ‘institutionalised multilateralism’ (Li, M. 2009: 26)<sup>127</sup>. China describes in this way ‘the most appropriate way’ for organizing security relations in the post-Cold War Asia-Pacific (Capie and Evans 2002: 175); the SCO approach, for example, means to embody this concept. Characteristic in this approach is that problems that cannot be solved should be temporarily shelved (Li, M. 2009). In sum, China puts its regional-policy objectives in phrases such as: ‘friendly and good-neighbourly’, ‘benevolence toward and partnerships with neighbours’, or ‘enrich, harmonise, and reassure the neighbourhood’ (Li, M. 2009).

## *China’s Attitudes to Formal Multilateralism in Asia*

China was reluctant to act in Asia multilaterally before the 1990s. Bilateral diplomacy or ‘unilateral action’ was preferred instead (Goldstein 2003: 72). After that China seemed to take a wholesale approach to the idea of participation. But the limit to this embrace of multilateralism had always been *informality*. China preferred ‘informal multilateralism’ over its perceived ‘worst outcome’—that is, U.S. bilateralism with ASEAN, Japan, or Korea (Solingen 2008a: 278). Deeply rooted

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<sup>127</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/gjs/gjzzyhy/2612/2614/t15319.htm> (11 November 2012).

insecurities were evident in China's reluctance to multilateralising its relations in Asia.

This had to do with China's fear of setting the conditions by the great powers, at a time when China was not one of them. In the early 1990s, China worried about their influence over multilateral frameworks (Christensen 1999: 71). Later, the fear subdued to leave some room for multilateral frameworks, if only this would guard off the undesirable for China consequences of the 'U.S. bilateral business as usual' (Christensen 1999: 72). But by the end of the 1990s, China's participation was still by and large reactive (Zhang, F. 2012); initiatives from China came only after 2000. In this sense, it is the early 2000s that brought a qualitative change in China's regional behaviour.

In 1999, China still opposed a more formal three-country dialogue; at the request of China, it was called a 'breakfast' meeting<sup>128</sup>. The real change, therefore, in China's regional behaviour came in early 2000s (rather than mid-1990s), when China became more predisposed to accept formality. In 2000, the three countries agreed to hold the summit every year. In 1997, Japan proposed a China-Japan-U.S. triangle for discussions; China opposed it, fearing how it might turn into a 'two-to-one' encounter, where it had to face Japan and the U.S. (Wu, X. 2004: 64). Also, China's positive behaviour in the Asian financial crisis contrasts starkly with its opposition to the Japan's proposal for the AMF, at the peak of the crisis (in December 1997; see Hughes 2000a: 220)—an idea likely to bring benefits for the region (Wu, X. 2004: 64-65). China apparently was not able to accept this idea for

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<sup>128</sup> Ryosei Kokubun (interview, Tokyo, 2010). China's initial reluctance is confirmed in the literature: see Yoshimatsu (2008: 68). Similarly, in the ARF, in the third stage of organisational development, China opposed use of the phrase 'conflict resolution', which has an attached meaning to it, and agreed to the formulation 'elaboration of approaches to conflict' instead (Foot 1998: 432), which is sufficiently vague.

the fear of the consequences it would have for itself, rather than for the region, making us realise the boundaries that delimited China's participation.

Of course, now China is inclined to 'rewrite' its own history as a supporter of regional institutions (see Foreign Ministry–People's Republic of China 2012, as an example), so that we have seen the memory of the Chinese reluctance vanishing (in the literature and in public memory):

China attaches great importance to trilateral cooperation and plays an active part in the cooperation process. Chinese premiers have attended all the trilateral summit meetings. China has actively participated in and hosted a series of ministerial meetings and director-general's (DG) meetings within the trilateral framework; initiated, hosted or participated in diverse forms of cooperation projects... . FMPRC (2012).

Additionally, China 'promoted the institutional building of a more rule-based cooperation' (FMPRC 2012).

The study of China's participation in multilateral institutions so far has generated a pattern of expectations that China would be against formal rules. The studies on Asian institutions present them by and large as informal (see Solingen 2005, 2008a; Pempel 2010b: 277; Kuik 2005: 107; and some other works)—informality being often the hallmark of Asian institutions. But in more general studies, ASEAN is formal enough to be called just so; Christensen (1999a), for example, refers to Southeast Asia's 'formal multilateral dialogue' (73) that is unlikely to spread to Northeast Asia. China's negativity toward formal institutions is well documented (see Kuik 2005: 107). Recent Chinese behaviour, in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation but also in NEA-3, however, confounds such expectations. But now we move to a reality where these claims, indeed assumptions,

were only a passing stage in China's multilateral relations. Now China does not need to lean against (informal) ASEAN so strongly, and it can with a degree of confidence embrace formality—fearing less the rule by others. China, in effect, seems to be less against formality than against rules potentially imposed by others, especially China's adversaries<sup>129</sup>.

When Japan made a proposal for the Asian Monetary Fund at the height of the AFC in 1997, China opposed it, presumably encouraged by the U.S., in the name of fearing Japan's dominance (Lipsey 2003: 96). But in 2000, China becomes a participant in the Chiang Mai Initiative of swap agreements. This initiative was 'multilateralised' in 2010—it became binding for all its members. The biggest beneficiaries are the poorer members of ASEAN, whose borrowing rights are their contribution multiplied by 5 (for richer ASEAN states it is 2.5; for South Korea 1). China and Japan can draw ½ of what they each contributed. In 2011, ASEAN Plus Three Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO) was set up in Singapore. One of the directors came from China<sup>130</sup>.

China multilateralised slowly and reluctantly. A new multilateral Asia has little to do with China's traditional relations with its neighbours. The whole setup where China is nominally equal to Korea or Bhutan is a novelty for China that used to occupy the centre<sup>131</sup>. This puts us in a frame of mind to understand the difficulty with which, in a short time, China had to relearn a conduct of relations with erstwhile subordinates. 'The model that had placed the Chinese sun at its symbolic centre could not easily be traded in for a model in which China was merely one

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<sup>129</sup> Foot (1998: 426): China fears that the US will dominate the ARF, according to Foot (1998: 426).

<sup>130</sup> See 'A rather flimsy firewall', *Economist*, April 7, 2012.

<sup>131</sup> This aspect of Chinese regional policy mentality comes to the surface in terms such as 'periphery policy' (*zhoubian zhengce*) to denote its Asia policy. See for example Zhao, S. (1999).

billiard ball among others following an independent path' (Ringmar 2012: 17). As unwilling as China initially was towards multilateral institutions, the latter half of the 1990s brought an observable change. China became a 'multilateralising' power, signing about every 'agreement' it was invited to, especially with states in Southeast Asia<sup>132</sup>. The timing of multilateralism cannot be explained independently from the establishment of normal bilateral relations. Malaysia normalised relations with China in 1974 (Ba 2003: 625). With all of the ASEAN members, China had normalised relations only in 1991.

Rather than trying to deduce a single regional strategy, the empirical payoff will be greater from looking at China's behaviour in *specific* organisations along China's borders. It is after all how China conducts its relations, rather than what it intends in its *strategy*, that matters for regional states and students of East Asia alike.

### *China and Southeast Asia: A Stage of Early Commitment*

In the post-cold war period, the security situation in the Asia-Pacific region and in Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia is undergoing a transformation with the emergence for the first time of multilateral security dialogue. Hughes (1996, abstract)

It is possible that Sino-Japanese relations will grow to fulfil these criteria [of transparency] in the future, but the failure to achieve now even the level of cooperation that could approximate to the conditions for the establishment of some

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<sup>132</sup> If we consider the number of agreements, treaties, and so forth, that China signed notably with ASEAN throughout the 1990s and into 2000s, it is hard to consider these relations 'informal' (the separate question is the strength of these agreements). At least one of them was initiated by China—the ASEAN-China FTA. This is intriguing, given the entrenched belief of China as opposed to codified and multilateral solutions. However, some events do confirm the standard belief—like unwillingness to a codified way of solving disputes in the South China Sea, suggested by the Philippines and Vietnam (see *New York Times*, Apr. 2012).

kind of subregional co-operative body casts doubt upon the future progress of multilateralism, and is a worrying problem for the security of Japan, China, and the entire Asia-Pacific region. Hughes (1996: 244)

China's multilateral engagement with Southeast Asian states can be considered in three states: first appearance at ASEAN meeting (1991); early meetings (early 1990s); more formality in relations (early 2000s).

As early as in 1987 ASEAN envisioned drawing other countries into its orbit (Ba 2003: 629)<sup>133</sup>. China's early multilateral relations with Southeast Asia cannot be considered independently from the establishment of diplomatic relations with specific states. In 1991, China's relations were normalised for the first time with all of the states that then constituted ASEAN: Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines<sup>134</sup>, and Brunei<sup>135</sup> (Ba 2003). That is relatively early, given the instability of Southeast Asia as 'the Balkans of the East' (Solingen 2008: 290), and the later normalisation with South Korea (1992); relations with Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei and South Korea were quickly restored after Tiananmen (Li, M. 2009: 28). Regional states' receptiveness after Tiananmen, contrasted to Western states, mattered here (Li, M. 2009: 27-28)<sup>136</sup>. When China's foreign minister Qian Qichen arrived at the ASEAN summit in Kuala Lumpur in 1991, at the invitation from Malaysia, ASEAN-China diplomatic relations officially began<sup>137</sup> – probably the

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<sup>133</sup> Yet, even before China had relations with ASEAN 'internally', through a large ethnic Chinese population in these countries.

<sup>134</sup> The five founding members of ASEAN (1967).

<sup>135</sup> Joined ASEAN in 1984.

<sup>136</sup> China originally established relations with states in Southeast Asia in the following years (this does not include the periods when the relations were frozen): Indonesia 1950 (but 1967-1990 frozen); Vietnam 1950; Myanmar/ Burma 1950; Cambodia 1958; Laos 1961; Malaysia 1974; Bangladesh 1975; Thailand 1975; Philippines 1975; Singapore 1990; Brunei 1991. (On the basis of the Foreign Ministry PRC and respective foreign ministries web pages and Xinhua sources).

<sup>137</sup> <http://www.aseansec.org/5874.htm>

first attempt to have multilateral relations with China in the region<sup>138</sup>. China became an observer in ASEAN meetings, as early as 1991 (just after diplomatic relations with important Southeast Asian states like Singapore were established). China became drawn into the Southeast Asian management of relations.

In 1991, ASEAN made a proposal for inviting among others Japan and Korea (but not China) to its Post-Ministerial Conference in 1992 (Hughes 2000a: 231). As early as in 1991, Japan was suggesting that ASEAN PMC becomes a security forum ('Nakayama 1991' proposal) (see Hughes 1996: 232).

It is true that, after this initial step into multilateral settings, there were not many diplomatic milestones to account for, until the late 1990s. But already in 1994, the three foreign ministers from China, Japan and South Korea joined Southeast Asian ministers in a setting of 10+3 (see Yong Deng 1997:50; Ba 2009:198; Terada 2003:261-262). The formation of ASEAN+3 in 1997 happened against this background. In 1997, China becomes also participant of the ARF. Tracing development of security institutions highlights the gradual and internal nature of those processes.

More 'formality' in relations appeared towards the end of the 1990s. In 1999, China signed the 'Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty'. In early 2000s, Zhu Rongji proposed to ASEAN an FTA (Solingen 2008b: 20)<sup>139</sup>—in what became perhaps the most quoted Chinese regional initiative<sup>140</sup>. Both for China and ASEAN, it was the first promise of an external FTA (Solingen 2008b: 17). In 2002,

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<sup>138</sup> But China joined the PECC (Track II) consultations already in early 1980s; it joined APEC in 1990 (see Zhang, F. 2012: 323).

<sup>139</sup> (<http://www.aseansec.org/16251.htm>). The framework agreement to establish the FTA was then signed in 2002.

<sup>140</sup> It was important not only regionally, but also for the scholarship on East Asia, spurring the argument of China-Japan competition, as Japan followed China in pursuing an economic agreement with ASEAN.

China signed the ‘Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea’<sup>141</sup>. In 2003, it signed the ‘Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity’<sup>142</sup>; in that same year China also joined the ‘Treaty of Amity and Cooperation’, ahead of any other superpower (Solingen 2008b: 29). However keen China seems to be on acquiescing to a ‘general framework’, it has a continuing preference to deal with *specific* problems case by case<sup>143</sup>. China’s opposition to being dictated at the regional level is most visible in the South China Sea dispute. In June 2012, Vietnam passed a law claiming sovereignty over the disputed Parcel and Spratly Islands; to this step, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC issued ‘resolute and vehement opposition’<sup>144</sup>. ‘While China’s post-Tiananmen policy has gone a long way toward reassuring ASEAN states, it has not completely eliminated concerns about China’s long-term intentions’ (Ba 2003: 646). China’s reassuring strategy was oriented more towards Southeast than towards Northeast Asia. Southeast Asia was the recipient of the ‘China opportunity’ campaign—a change of China’s image sought by Zhu Rongji<sup>145</sup>.

ASEAN Plus Three and its ‘prototypes’, like the ideas of Mahathir in the early 1990s, were arguably the first regional attempts at having multilateral relations

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<sup>141</sup> But the guidelines to implement it were adopted only in 2011 (point 6, <http://www.aseansec.org/5874.htm>).

<sup>142</sup> Avery Goldstein (2003: 74) observes that Beijing started to introduce ‘strategic partnerships’ in 1996, even as the precise term varies—here we have the two East Asian keywords of ‘peace and prosperity’. The one with the U.S. is titled ‘constructive strategic partnership’ (Goldstein 2003: 77).

<sup>143</sup> ‘Last week, at a summit meeting of Southeast Asian leaders, China strongly opposed an effort by the Philippines and Vietnam to draft a regional code of conduct to resolve the territorial disagreements’ (Floyd Whaley, ‘Philippines and China in a Standoff at Sea’, *New York Times*, 11 April 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/12/world/asia/diplomatic-resolution-sought-in-south-china-sea-standoff.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/12/world/asia/diplomatic-resolution-sought-in-south-china-sea-standoff.html?_r=1))

<sup>144</sup> J. Perlez, ‘China criticises Vietnam in Dispute over Islands’, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/22/world/asia/china-criticizes-vietnam-in-dispute-over-islands.html?\\_r=1&ref=asia](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/22/world/asia/china-criticizes-vietnam-in-dispute-over-islands.html?_r=1&ref=asia) (21 June 2012).

<sup>145</sup> Southeast Asia was also granted various ‘privileges’, such as the ‘early harvest’ provision in its FTA with ASEAN.

with China. Officially, APT figures as part of ASEAN's 'external relations'<sup>146</sup>. In the literature, however, 'ASEAN Plus Three' often means a new multilateral interaction in Asia, that is—between ASEAN and Northeast Asia. After 2005, China's foreign policy to Southeast Asia—'one of its brightest foreign policy spots' since 1997—has lost its momentum (see Zhang, F. 2012: 334)<sup>147</sup>.

### *China and Central Asia: The Learning of Formality*

China has land borders with 14 different states<sup>148</sup>, and all of the Asian regions. Apart from the northeast, it is southeast, south and west, and central Asia. They all delineate 'China's security perimeter' (Kim, S.S. 1998: 4). In a statement that strengthens this logic, President Hu Jintao said about the U.S.: 'They have extended outposts and placed pressure points on us from the east, south, and west. This makes a great change in our geopolitical environment' (Li, M. 2009: 24). This would mean that China cannot really single-mindedly focus on any of these regions, at the expense of neglecting others. Even though none of these regions is uniform, each of them 'offers' to China specific problems and specific benefits.

Here, it is noteworthy that China's 'distaste' for formality in institutions (Solingen 2008b) seems to be giving way to tacit approval, and even preaching it—like in the case of a China-initiated organisation in Central Asia. Here, we see China supporting the developing of a grouping in the direction of more formal rules.

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<sup>146</sup> (<http://www.aseansec.org/4918.htm>). It makes then sense to think of the EAS as a way to make an organisation that is *not* 'propriety' of ASEAN. Indeed, the idea was that not only Southeast Asian but also other states would host the summits.

<sup>147</sup> After 2005, 'peaceful rise' was replaced with 'peaceful development' (Zhang, F. 2012: 331)—to give away a 'softer' image of China.

<sup>148</sup> Central – Mongolia; Northeast – South Korea, North Korea, Russia and Japan; southeast – Taiwan, HK, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Myanmar; south – Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka; west – Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan. With 14 of them, China shares a land border. (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html> is a useful source on China's borders).

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a grouping founded in 2001, was initiated, or ‘bankrolled’, by China<sup>149</sup>. Mr. Colley of Barnard College, New York, has called the organisation ‘a major Chinese foreign policy success’<sup>150</sup>. Based on the five countries that met in 1996, under the name ‘Shanghai Five’ (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), it was later joined by Uzbekistan<sup>151</sup>. These western and central Asian states have their distinctive characteristics and problems, forming a distinct rationale for such a grouping, even if mostly from the Chinese perspective. Unquiet borders are the most important rationale; the fight against ‘separatism, extremism and terrorism’ became its mission, all of concern for China, which borders with Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, and Tajikistan—the last four are members of the SCO. In one view, the SCO is presented against the West, specifically the United States—a geopolitical motivation (Memon 2006). But Aris (2011) sees the organisation’s mission rather as solving of intra-regional border problems<sup>152</sup>.

The organisation goes beyond security. It has a ‘stabilisation fund’ for poorer members, and has pushed for ‘law-enforcement’ cooperation, i.e. cooperation among police<sup>153</sup>. China wants to implement a ‘10-year plan’; China also wants to establish cross-border zones for economic cooperation (FMPRC 2011). In 2003, China made a proposal for an FTA in the SCO (Li, M. 2009: 20-21). The grouping

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<sup>149</sup> I. Johnson, ‘China Celebrates Anniversary of Group With a Long Blacklist’, *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/17/world/asia/17iht-china17.html> (2 March 2013).

<sup>150</sup> I. Johnson, ‘China Celebrates Anniversary of Group With a Long Blacklist’.

<sup>151</sup> Mongolia is an observer, but not a member. See the secretariat’s web site, [www.sectsc.org](http://www.sectsc.org) (3 February 2012).

<sup>152</sup> Here, it is useful to note that concerns with relative power are uncertain and difficult to determine, while it is more straightforward to trace domestic motivations (Solingen 2008a). Specifically: ‘Differences in Sukarto and Suharto’s political models were pivotal in shaping cooperative regional policies, more so than any abstract conceptions of relative power and state survival’ (Solingen 2008a: 269).

<sup>153</sup> I. Johnson, ‘China Celebrates Anniversary of Group With a Long Blacklist’.

envisions ‘huge developmental potentials’ (FMPRC 2011). The organisation has a secretariat in Beijing<sup>154</sup>. China promises to turn the Shanghai group into a ‘comprehensive regional organisation’.

It does not seem that China had such intentions from the beginning. A spill-over of functions is also unlikely—there appears to have been some explicit Chinese will to shape the organisation. Going beyond security in this case here is more an effect of China’s specific initiative. It is rather an effect of China’s learning – applying what it has observed in other institutions to the institution it now leads. In regional settings, China is a fast learner<sup>155</sup>. Asian organizations for long seemed to subscribe to the logic of economics–security separation, dictating different memberships and sometimes even different regions. However, as China learns and applies templates from other organizations, notably ASEAN-led, into the ones it influences (like the SCO), these old distinctions seem to be losing salience.

### *China and Northeast Asia: Drawing China*

‘There are also many unstable, uncertain and unpredictable factors facing Northeast Asia and East Asia,’ said Wen Jiabao at the trilateral summit in Beijing<sup>156</sup>. Northeast Asia, to China specifically, means the situation on the Korean Peninsula<sup>157</sup>. From Samuel Kim (1998), we can deduce that China’s interest specifically in Northeast Asia will be low, as China’s security perimeter is defined by almost all of the Asia’s

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<sup>154</sup> <http://www.sectsco.org/EN/> (11 December 2012)

<sup>155</sup> Rosemary Foot (2005: 149) writes that many in the Asia Department at the Foreign Ministry of the PRC had read the academic literature on multilateralism and came to believe that it serves China’s interest.

<sup>156</sup> Quoted in: Li Xiaokun, ‘Trilateral meeting kicks off in Beijing’, *China Daily*, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-05/13/content\\_15279400.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-05/13/content_15279400.htm) (20 June 2012). Uncertainty is also stressed in the ‘Joint Declaration on the Enhancement of Trilateral Comprehensive Partnership’ (13 May 2012, see point 3 of the declaration).

<sup>157</sup> See the reference to ‘Northeast Asia’ in the context of the Six Party Talks: FMPRC (2012), <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t930436.htm>

regions. However, some Chinese analysts on Northeast Asia believed that Northeast Asia is ‘the only *region* where China has a strategic advantage’ (see Zhao, S. 1999: 342)<sup>158</sup>.

With the inception of ARF, early fears behind the institutional genesis were that Japan might remilitarise. Later, the state of real concern proved to be China (Foot 1998: 425). ASEAN Regional Forum became indeed a forum to cope with China’s ascendancy (Foot 1998: 426). But China is inside of this forum—thus the same question arises as for the Trilateral Cooperation. Given that a primary motivation for Japan and Korea, as heard in the interviews, was to cope with China’s rise, what is then the position of China in the forum— assuming that it is not China’s primary motivation to help the two cope with its rise.

Where to place China’s relations with Northeast Asia? Into regional-policy or security literature? By any standard, these relations can be hardly catalogued as China’s relations with its ‘periphery’. China’s approaches to organisations in Southeast Asia (ASEAN) or Central Asia (SCO) are often noted, but the incipient multilateralism with China in Northeast Asia eludes even the literature after 2011 (see Zhang 2012: 325). China in Deng’s concepts is described as being in need to keep ‘a calm and low profile approach’ (Zhang, F. 2012: 324). These are just key words for describing Japan’s position in the region, almost always described as ‘low profile’. Of course, Japan had different motivations than China, but the logic is the same: not stirring up fear (about the past for Japan, about the present/ future for China). The ‘unique’ Chinese posture is not unique at all.

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<sup>158</sup> Ren Xiao (1996) ‘Tongbeiyia anquan xingshi de xianzhuang yu weilai’ [The Current and Future Security Situation in Northeast Asia], *Guoji Zhanwang*, No. 7, p. 11 [source quoted by Suisheng Zhao 1999].

In the three countries, the local municipalities show a pronounced interest in Northeast Asia as a micro-region; these local areas are Niigata in Japan, Incheon in South Korea, and the three northeastern provinces in China: Heilongjiang (with Harbin city), Jilin (with Changchun and Jilin cities), and Liaoning (with Dalian). If a publication, therefore, stems from one of these areas of China, then chances are high that the issue at stake is such micro-cooperation: creating a region out of the bordering areas, rather than of a state-level foreign policy cooperation. *Dongbei* is popular in China particularly in the Jilin province and Heilongjiang.<sup>159</sup> There, what it basically means is *microregionalism*, projects like the one with the Tumen River.

This difference has to be noted, for materials on ‘Northeast Asia’ will often refer to such a limited, subnational understanding, rather than the trilateral cooperation. This trilateral cooperation involves central bureaucracies of the states, and not specific areas. Such an understanding of Northeast Asia, where whole states are covered, has not become popular yet<sup>160</sup>.

The year 2012 marks 40 years since Japan re-established its relations with China (in 1972), and 20 years since Korea established relations with China (in 1992). These last 20 years, therefore, have meant a new opportunity for the relations in Northeast Asia; since 1992, the relations among the Northeast Asian core triangle have been normalised. 2012 appears as sort of ‘contest’ between Japan and Korea in recasting bilateral relations with China in a positive light, by announcing the ‘Year

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<sup>159</sup> See the articles published by universities in the China’s northeastern province of Heilongjiang: Wei QU (2010) ‘The Stance and the Function of China in Constructing the Northeast Asia’ (in Chinese), *Journal of Heihe University* [Heilongjiang province, on the border with Russia], Vol. 1, No. 1 (June), pp. 10-13; Ji-qing WANG and Ji-fu Meng (2003) ‘The Research on the Trend of Economic Situation and Cooperation in Northeastern Asia’ (in Chinese), *Journal of Harbin University* [Heilongjiang province], Vol. 24, No. 7 (June), pp. 42-47.

<sup>160</sup> Relations with Japan and Korea, like with most of East Asian states, are managed within the Department of Asian Affairs at the FM PRC – the Director-General (as of June 2012) is Luo Zhaohui (<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/yzs/>).

of Friendship' with China<sup>161</sup>. For almost half a century, however, between 1949 (when the PRC was founded) and 1992, any step above bilateral relations had been thwarted by the lack of a full diplomatic triangle. The three stages are: not all bilateral relations in place (before 1992); fully restored bilateral relations (since 1992); multilateralism—'inclusive and exclusive' of China (Rozman 2011).

However, the possibility of multilateralism that emerged in early 1990s did not necessarily have to be realised in Northeast Asia. Since '[t]he least predictable outcomes are associated with opposed extant preferences' (Goh 2011a: 5-6), and initial strategic preferences are conflictual in the Northeast Asian cases (Goh 2011a: 26), Northeast Asia posed a harder case. Had the Northeast Asian normalisations taken place in a hypothetical environment without institutions (Solingen 2008a), perhaps the relations would have settled at the bilateral-contest level. See Solingen (2008a: 287): 'it may no longer be possible to assume that an EA [East Asia] free of institutions would have completely resembled the one we observe today'. Yet, there were institutions—or social forums—so post-Cold War relations in Northeast Asia overlapped with initial multilateral diplomacy.

The prediction was against multilateralism in Northeast Asia: 'The acceptance of formal multilateral dialogue has not spread from Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia because of mistrust between China and Japan, and between the two Koreas' (Christensen 1999: 73). Mistrust between China and Japan has not entirely prevented a 'formal multilateral dialogue' in northern Asia. 'China's intense historically based mistrust of Japan' (Christensen 1999: 80) and its assumed explanatory power for predicting absence of regional dialogues, and at best their

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<sup>161</sup> [http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2012/2/0201\\_02.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2012/2/0201_02.html); <http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Culture/view?articleId=99800> (all accessed 5 December 2012).

informality, in the Northeast needs to be re-visited, given that a more formal dialogue has spread to Northeast Asia. Simple positing from negative bilateral ties did not work. This comes from the complexity effects. The two countries are not lonely 'planets' in the universe; their relations have fallen instead into a pre-existing format of regional institutions, and specifically something as pre-determinate as the ASEAN+3. The real value of ASEAN Plus Three, therefore, stems from its power to shape relations among East Asian states. Whereas financial or economic agreements could exist independently from ASEAN Plus Three, the framework has provided an organising 'principle' for developing relations among the regional states. 'Plus Three' cooperation, albeit a surprise against the background of geopolitical logic, comes in a straightforward fashion from APT.

The bilateral mode in Northeast Asia seemed persistent until it was partially eclipsed by a more promising Northeast Asian core triangle. Asian institution appeared at first informal, until they generated such an amount of statements and declarations, sometimes secretariats and other lasting results, that there is now a separate category of formal institutions in Asia. And as the world considers the low efficacy of Asian institutions, these institutions are already working so that states, such as China, do not fall back into recalcitrant ways, but choose 'reputational pay-off' (Goldstein 2001: 845) instead. When assessing the effects of East Asian institutions, it is necessary to address the structure of incentives that they created for states such as China.

**Northeast Asian FTAs and the exclusion of Taiwan.** Taiwan feels threatened by the planned Korea-China FTA. Taiwanese and Korean products are competitors on the Chinese market. Even though Taiwan has an economic agreement, the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), concluded with China in 2010, it does

not cover many of the products<sup>162</sup>. The competitive spirit is expressed in the Taiwan's economic minister's words: 'We must complete talks before China and South Korea do'<sup>163</sup>. Indeed, also for Seoul, one of the motivations was to strengthen its presence against Taiwan on the Chinese market<sup>164</sup>. Since Taiwan's presence in the region is mostly economic, once this position is threatened, Taiwan's fears of exclusion are exacerbated.

Any of these agreements in the region would marginalise Taiwan: a Korea-China FTA, a trilateral FTA, even ASEAN+3 FTA. The deputy trade minister of South Korea said: 'A joint feasibility study on a trade bloc grouping the three nations—none of which has a trade pact with each other—found that all members would benefit'<sup>165</sup>. It shows to what extent Taiwan is not part of the benefits calculation, and it shows the two-sided nature of those benefits. Given Beijing's strong political commitment to cultivating Taiwan, the issue raises the question of China's response. It is especially that the trilateral FTA was proposed by China<sup>166</sup>. The unofficial study was conducted from 2003 to 2009; the official study 2010-2011, and the recommendation was to launch official negotiations, a step likely to be taken later in 2012<sup>167</sup>.

### *Summary*

A claim at the centre of this chapter was that China is not alone responsible for its decision, or the process, of being involved in Northeast Asian regionalism. What I

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<sup>162</sup> <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/china-taiwan-relations/2012/04/08/337148/More-ECFA.htm> (5 September 2012)

<sup>163</sup> Shi Yen-shiang, <http://view.koreaherald.com/kh/view.php?ud=20120214000875&cpv=0>.

<sup>164</sup> <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/business/asia/korea/2012/05/10/340654/South-Korea.htm>

<sup>165</sup> Lee Si-hyung, quoted in <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/business/asia/korea/2012/05/10/340654/South-Korea.htm>

<sup>166</sup> Zhu Rongji, 2002. More on the process of conducting the trilateral FTA feasibility study, see Chapter 5 (Korea).

<sup>167</sup> <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t930436.htm> (15 September 2011).

conceptualised as a 'benefits of China thesis' is not sufficient. This thesis boils down to ascribing to China the power or will to join multilateralism. It rests on a comparative calculation of 'benefits versus costs'. But even the costs and benefits were externally created. Therefore, we have to look equally at the inside—that is, China—and the outside, in order to comprehend why and how China participates in the Northeast Asian cooperation.

## Chapter 4. Japan in the Trilateral Cooperation

The problem that appeared for this chapter were sources of Japanese foreign-policy thinking. Let us remind ourselves that in this thesis (version of May 2013), I strongly held to the notion that a dominant line of Japan's East Asia policy is to be discerned. My interlocutors, however, noted—with a lot of reason—that (1) foreign policy changes with time; (2) additionally, at any given time, various bureaucracies might hold divergent opinions (Johnson, 1995).

Both are true. But it is also possible to say that—as for intensity and longevity—one can discern a trend in Japan's foreign-policy thinking on East Asia region. This trend has been to 'go West' in East Asia policy, in the sense of 'inviting' actors that were either Western (US) or with a 'Western' history (Australia), plus—importantly—the democratic Asian country, India. (Of course, the Republic of Korea is also a 'democratic Asian country', but it is not a country that Japan can reliably turn to for support—this is so for history reasons). Therefore, albeit Prime Minister Hatoyama (in office from September 2009 to June 2010) might have different views from Shinzo Abe, and MOFA holds different views from METI (in some areas), a trend persists—across time and across different prime ministers—that distinguished Japan's FP from other countries' FPs.

To elaborate on those differences, however, we might look at Prime Minister Hatoyama. During his term, Japan's foreign-policy thinking took a sharp turn to 'Asian' East Asia, and specifically farther away from the US. Mr Hatoyama's contribution to the *New York Times* in August 2009, shortly before assuming office, was tellingly titled 'A New Path for Japan'. Of course, the adjective 'new' was to a degree his own assertion, but there was a portion of objective truth in that. If Japan

almost always sided with the US, then a different course was indeed “new”—even if not “totally and forever changed”. A trend that Hatoyama wanted to embark on was new in recent foreign policy of Japan. Does it mean that all in Japan wanted to support American course in foreign policies? Does it mean that no one was pro-Chinese? Both answers are no.

At the same time, a predilection or a trend could be strongly felt. Japan is a democracy. It also has strong bureaucracies, just as METI, that may promote own ideas (with some limit). Namely, economic trends could be more pro-Asian and intra-Asian than security trends (extra-regional & US-focused). Think of Japanese alliance with the US, on the one hand, and strong business ties with China or Southeast Asia on the other. Sources of Japanese foreign-policy thinking are varied and do not always point in one direction. This is especially the case with democracies (see on this topic Risse-Kappen, 1991). This discussion suggests for this Thesis that various policy ideas can be pursued in varied pockets of Japanese policymaking. At the same time, one can still ‘discount’ a dominant idea for Asia from Japan’s perspective: an East Asia that includes Western, democratic states.

In 2000, a Japanese professor Michio Morishima put forward his vision of a ‘Northeast Asian Community’ in *Collaborative Development in Northeast Asia* (Morishima, 2000). His ‘community’ is to encompass northeastern part of the region (Japan, China, South and potentially North Korea), and the author elaborated clearly on reasons for exclusion of Southeast Asia from his vision. It seems that the idea should come across clearly in Japan, since it is authored by a Japanese professor. Yet, the book’s title was translated into Japanese as ‘East Asia community’ (*higashi ajia kyodotai*) instead of ‘Northeast Asia community’ (*tohoku ajia kyodotai*) (Nakagawa 2005: 88, ft. 4). In this way, it connotes a totally different meaning,

surely being casually confused with the Japan's foreign-policy concept of the 'East Asia Community', incorporating Southeast Asia. A vision for a 'regional' community' without Southeast Asia perhaps would not be welcomed well in Japan, and this has been reflected in the translation. This opens up a problem of how to understand Japan's participation in the Japan-Korea-China framework, which is exclusively Northeast Asian. Asian multilateral cooperation was a 'tool' for Japan to improve relations with China and South Korea (Emmers 2012: 5).

This is a major puzzle, against the background of entrenched arguments that Japan would shun such an arrangement: 'Clearly, Japan is discouraging exclusively East Asian approaches' (Hund 2003:394)—making us expect that 'exclusively Northeast Asian' will be even harder to accept. Yet, here we are presented with a case where Japan actually encouraged such a regional formula. This tension between the reality and the literature, which should reflect this reality, has not been explained yet. In my view, it has not even been formulated<sup>168</sup>. As I will try to show later, the literature and scholarly community has not fully embraced this new reality: 'Japan, China, in a closed framework?' Such is a position in the literature on Japan's regional policy; its lenses do not permit it to embrace the reality where Japan does indeed interact closely with China and Korea, without inviting powers from outside the region.

But some recent literature assumes a shift in Japan's policy to embrace Asian regionalism: 'Tokyo's support since the Asian financial crisis for a series of

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<sup>168</sup> The specific research question for this chapter participates in the overarching thesis question in that Japan's foreign policy reluctance to engage with Asia can be seen as an obstacle on the way to a separate Northeast Asian framework. For the overarching puzzle, see Introduction and chap. 2. This chapter is in particular connected to the next chapter, on Korea, the 'twin' chapters in that they present foreign-policy perspectives and are based on strategies—outcomes framework.

regionalist measures, increasingly Northeast Asia-centric and *culminating* in the December 2008 Fukuoka trilateral summit, are clear cases in point’ (Calder and Ye 2010: 210; my emphasis); ‘Tripartite initiatives that Tokyo has clearly supported have included ... of course, the trilateral summits, beginning in December 2008’ (Calder and Ye 2010: 305, fn. 19). I argue that this is not the case, as Japan has not abandoned its baseline course of a ‘broad’ region. What can, after all, explain Japan’s *de facto involvement* in a Northeast Asia-only framework?

Involvement does not mean commitment. My main argument is that the Japanese policy to the *East Asian* region has turned into an exclusively Northeast Asian development in the process of regional enmeshment – not a deliberate strategy. This enmeshment in regional dynamics caused growing tolerance of Japan to a Northeast Asian framework. While the trilateral framework, by itself, might not have been beneficial to Japan at the outset, it is regional dynamics that propelled Japan to become interested in it. This is based on the methodological proposition, signalled<sup>169</sup> yet poorly addressed in applied research, that outcomes need to be separated from intentions<sup>170</sup>.

To make my argument in this chapter, I proceed as follows. First I shall state the case for Japanese involvement in Northeast Asian cooperation as a puzzle, and highlight the unpreparedness of our present analytical tools to resolve it. Next I shall survey the Japanese policy to its key region (East Asia) and the ‘traditionally’ most important subregion (Southeast Asia). The ‘surprise’ is that the Northeast Asian policy–reluctantly and slowly–developed against the backdrop of these two. In this

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<sup>169</sup> For the separation of outcomes from intentions/ strategies, see especially Waltz (1979) and Jervis (1997), and in applied research on Asia–Goh (2005) and Emmers (2003); the latter two refer to ‘balancing’ as strategy vs. outcome/ situation.

<sup>170</sup> This notion, signalled in this chapter’s concept of regional enmeshment, is systematically introduced in the next chapter, on Korea.

sense, Japan has never reached the level of ‘independent’ interest in Northeast Asia matching Korea, as I show towards the end of this chapter. The commitment of Japan is *low*, and if it has been in a leading position in this framework, this role is bound to be short-lived. While Japan has indeed been a key force behind *emergence* of the independent framework, its interest in it is both derivative and dependent, likely to recede as other priorities emerge<sup>171</sup>.

### *Double Puzzle for Japan: Excluding ASEAN, Including China*

From this, another puzzle emerges: ASEAN was excluded and China included<sup>172</sup>. Japan has allowed for exclusion of ASEAN with a simultaneous inclusion of China. In other words, it engaged not only in an exclusivist Asian framework, which already is controversial. Additionally, this framework is exclusively Northeast Asian<sup>173</sup>.

For Japan, the puzzling aspect of this development comes to the surface when we contrast it with Japan’s reaction to China’s rise *outside* of the trilateral scheme. In the wider region of East Asia, Japan has clearly not tilted towards China, pursuing instead ‘soft’ balancing—with the participation of India and Australia. It also points to the fact that Japan has not engaged Korea in its efforts at diffusing China’s impact. Thus, when contrasted with wider regional trends in Japan’s policy, the formation of Japan-Korea-China cooperation should be seen as a genuine

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<sup>171</sup> At some point, Japan arguably pushed for the promotion of APT (Terada 2003: 251). However, we cannot extend this observation to Japan’s interest in APT once it was established; at the very least, it has been relatively lower to its interest in broader regional formulas (EAS, putative EAC).

<sup>172</sup> It is puzzling especially from the Japanese perspective; Korea is much more ambivalent both toward ASEAN and toward China.

<sup>173</sup> Apart from the trilateral framework, other exclusively Northeast Asian ones are: Six Party Talks (SPT) and the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD) (track II at the University of San Diego), <http://www.wiredforpeace.org/>. Thanks to Chaesung Chun for this observation. What is special about this framework in comparison to SPT? Here there is no US, and it is cooperative.

research puzzle concerning Japan's behaviour. Specifically, Japan's 'classic' agenda of debilitating China's relative weight with a high number of participating countries seems not to underlie this specific form of cooperation, as it has emerged in Northeast Asia only very recently.

Both excluding ASEAN and including China is seemingly painful to Japan. Deep-running strategic 'friendship' with ASEAN countries, and troubling uncertainty about China's intentions and capabilities, imply that Japan is more comfortable in an opposite situation: when China could possibly be excluded, and ASEAN stay in. In this light, the development we have observed might be seen as so striking that it could only come into being *via* a rapid and dramatic shift of Japanese thinking toward Northeast Asia. Some scholars have believed in such a shift. Japan had *a* change in its policy; because under Hatoyama and Kan it does not want to be less dependent on US, balancing against China is not a choice (Chun, 2010, Tokyo); thus including China. As Chaesung Chun (2010, Tokyo) noted, under the Hatoyama administration Japan pursued the goal of becoming more independent from the US. To do so, balancing China could not be seen as an option, so more closeness to China came as if automatically. In this sense, there has been *a* change. However, it was as thin and elusive.

### *Northeast Asia in Japanese Foreign-Policy Thinking*

The previous arguments demonstrate how strong commitment of Japan to 'East' and Southeast Asia has greatly *delayed* emergence of a trilateral scheme. At every level, Japan has been behind this delay. It is not to say that the nature of the current 'cooperation' was inherited from ideas formulated decades or centuries back. Nevertheless, the ideas that envisaged purely trilateral cooperation *from the*

*beginning* had to pass through the grind of ASEAN in order to finally come into practical use. From the outside to the inside, Japanese regional policy has been tightened towards the Northeast.

When we consider how broadly ASEAN is viewed as indispensable for Asian cooperation, going back to history might provide a useful wake-up call. There were ideas that excluded ASEAN, as it did not exist as such yet. Then, trilateral cooperation in the form of summit meeting is often discarded as irrelevant and insubstantial. When we consider that the three countries have been considering a trilateral framework for *centuries*, then realisation of the Fukuoka Summit appears more significant –notwithstanding little functional achievements that critics draw upon to downgrade the notion of trilateral cooperation.

***Low commitment.*** Low commitment of Japan to this framework may surprise given that it was initiated at the intergovernmental level, unlike other East Asian forums (Yoshimatsu 2008:62). Japan, which did not have a broad and deep Northeast Asian policy, has nevertheless emerged as a key force in bringing about the trilateral cooperation. With regional trends proceeding as if on an auto-pilot and having their own dynamic, Japan seized the moment. Japan might be falsely accused of seeking primarily ‘economic regionalism’ (Tanaka 2007: 40). Yet, it raises the question whether NEA-3 is a pursuit of regionalism. It is surely *not* the Japanese motivation. (See on differences between regionalism and regional cooperation). The APT prepared such a ground that Japan was tempted to use the opportunity to improve relations with its neighbours. Japan didn’t think: ‘let’s have Northeast Asian regionalism’<sup>174</sup>. The fact that something like this exists now does not mean that it follows from Japan’s intention. We tend to assume that Japan must have wanted it;

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<sup>174</sup> This will be important for chap. 5 (Korea).

otherwise, why would it propose it? But the outcome that we have was built upon a *pile* of regional developments, on which Japan had only little impact. It is not necessary that Japan was 'ready' to downplay ASEAN. We should be more nuanced in this discussion; we should look at the conditions that were there, and what was behind those conditions.

Practical aspect is prominent. In ASEAN, they did not have sufficient time to discuss trilateral issues (interview 2, Japan-check wording). This would mean that trilateral issues have grown bigger and/ or more important. When relations are good enough, Japan and Korea try to advance their agenda with China (source?). At the practical level, the bureaucracies have always discussed issues together (interview 5 - Kokubun). The trilateral framework has been running rather smoothly so far due to the fact that it became *de rigueur* not to bring up contentious issue, like the history or territory problem. This might be the secret why the trilateral framework was little affected by Japan-China trawler incident in October (?) 2010, but it also makes for, as some argue, little substance in this arrangement. As Chaesung Chun perceptively noted, the framework continues though its ineffectiveness (interview, Japan). In this light, the meaning of the summit is also image-building for the outside world (interview 2, Chun).

***Management of NEA-3 at MOFA.*** The subordinate positioning of policy to Northeast Asian cooperation is reflected in the level at which it is handled at the Ministry. In MOFA, management of the trilateral framework does not fall into portfolio of the Northeast Asia Division (interview 1, Tokyo, November 2010), albeit the regional scope of the framework would suggest so. Instead, it is handled by the Regional Policy Division, at a level lower than deputy-director; bilateral relations are managed at a higher level.

Northeast Asia is a relatively new term in Japanese foreign-policy discourse, dating back only twenty to thirty years ago (Nakagawa 2005: 82). After World War II, the Office of Northeast Asia was set up at MOFA, where ‘Northeast Asia’ was a translation from English (Nakagawa 2005: 82-83). The names in themselves indicate nothing, but it shows that Northeast Asia has been artificially constructed from the Japanese perspective. Otherwise, the term ‘Northeast Asia’ in Japan became associated with the North Korean problem (Nakagawa 2005: 88). Nakagawa (2003) claims that recently ‘Northeast Asia’ is undergoing a ‘revival’ in Japan. However, it does not seem to include state-level foreign policy to Northeast Asian states other than North Korea.

Northeast Asia understood here as inter-state cooperation should not be confused with the micro-regionalism known also as ‘Japan Sea Rim’. (Because ‘Japan Sea’ causes opposition of the Koreans, the term ‘Northeast Asia’ is more often used). Japan has mainly gone along with that, especially in English-language translations, but the Japanese originals tend to hold to ‘Japan Sea Rim’ (Nakagawa 2005: 84-85). Kim writes: ‘the Japanese rarely use Northeast Asia as a category for regionalist cooperation’—except for the ‘Japan Sea Rim’ concept (Kim, KS 2010:92).

Lack of Japanese policy to Northeast Asia does not come from the fact that Northeast Asia is not important to Japan, as it *is* very important. It comes from the fact that ‘Northeast Asia’ as a region does not figure in Japanese thinking. MOFA has a ‘Northeast Asia Division’ but it ostentatiously does not deal with the trilateral framework. The Northeast Asia Division is there to manage conspicuously bilateral relations with states *located in* Northeast Asia.

Trilateral cooperation does not have to be based on policy to Northeast Asia. Then it would not matter how 'Northeast Asia' is positioned. This observation could be true. However, there are implications to the fact that 'cooperation' with two countries that lie within the domain of Northeast Asia Division are managed by a broader and less strategically oriented Regional Policy Division.

**Notion of 'Northeast Asia' in Japanese IR academia.** There is a general feeling among Japanese IR scholars that NEA-3 is substantially not an important development. The 'concrete outcomes' have been putatively marginal. This conviction makes doing research from the Japanese perspective on this subject difficult. It is a paradox, given that Japan has been a strong advocate of NEA-3 framework (among prominent figures, former PM Nakasone). However, NEA-3 in itself is already an outcome. At the Northeast Asia Trilateral Forum in 2007, Former PM Nakasone called for regular trilateral summits among Japan, Korea and China<sup>175</sup>. Prof. Chikako Ueki told me that the notion of three countries cooperating together is not as new as it may seem, since PM Nakasone was 'very keen on this idea' (interview 6, Tokyo, 2010).

I have heard many comments along the lines: what has been done in this framework (with an implicit answer: not much), is it the main vehicle for regional action (implicit answer: not really), etc. It is true that the achievements have been mostly functional and not very 'strategic'. All this could be done at the ministerial level, without the hype of trilateral summits. The involvement of top-state level means, however, that it *is* important. We can judge it from our perspective as we wish. The interaction-based approach would reinforce the value of trilateral summits

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<sup>175</sup> 'Nakasone urges regular trilateral summits', *Nikkei Weekly*, 23 April 2007 (*Factiva*, 10 January 2011).

and getting to ‘know each other’ despite attempts in some quarters to downplay the fact of state leaders meeting in “the same room” (Cumings 1997: 161).

Some Japanese academics have paid more attention to the notion of Northeast Asia. This has been, however, mostly connected to the issue of North Korea, rather than to *ongoing* cooperative arrangements. This literature can be mostly read as policy recommendation. Morishima (2000) proposes a Northeast Asian community devoted to developmental projects. Wada (2003, in Japanese; quoted in Noble 2008: 255-256) ‘explores the possibility’ of cooperative arrangements in Northeast Asia. Overall, Japanese academic writing – even academic – on the topic of Northeast Asian cooperation rarely does something else than ‘proposing’ or ‘advocating’<sup>176</sup>.

Circumstances change. Japan has displayed a remarkable commitment to the trilateral cooperation (here, genuine cooperation) after the Great East Japan Earthquake (11 March 2011)<sup>177</sup>. The foreign ministers meeting, scheduled in Japan for late March, was *not* cancelled. This was officially appreciated by the leaders from Korea and China: ‘Both countries praised the efforts made by Japan for realising the foreign ministerial meeting despite the extremely difficult situation [earthquake 11 March 2011]. This fact shows how important Japan considers its relations with China and South Korea’ (*Kyodo News*, 19 March 2011). Then, the summit in May, partially held in Fukushima (in the nuclear disaster area) was perhaps the most noticed summit so far. They were the first foreign leaders to visit the disaster area, and the pictures are indeed telling. Japan treated the summit, often

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<sup>176</sup> Voices of those who have labeled the trilateral summit as ‘meaningless’ are bound to be growing weaker and weaker (forthcoming establishment of the secretariat in Korea).

<sup>177</sup> The MOFA homepage has links to the ‘Great East Japan Earthquake’ in three foreign languages: English, Chinese, and Korean (26 May 2011).

dubbed by scholars ‘unimportant’, as an important opportunity – both to serve the reconstruction, and to reassure what Japan likes to call the ‘international community’.

The disaster gave a new momentum to the trilateral cooperation. ‘Before that, we couldn’t imagine how far we can go’ (Kim, HK, 25 May 2011, Seoul). According to Prof. Kim, Japan has been so far reluctant to actually participate in the trilateral framework. ‘Now there is no way for Japan [to avoid it]’. They have become more active. As evidence, Japan has sent in May a representative (from MOFA) to the trilateral secretariat, to be established in July 2011. They quickly sent someone to Seoul. And they started working.

### *Research on Japan’s Agenda for the Region*

The initial motivation behind the Japan chapter stems from the observation that Japan’s regional policy is contradictory. Emergence of the trilateral framework throws this contradiction into sharp relief. Rather than supporting such exclusivist Asian frameworks, Japan has become known for championing a concept of ‘broad’ East Asia. Following this thread of reasoning, the trilateral summit emerges as a puzzle from the Japanese regional-policy perspective. I was told, however, that there is nothing contradictory in it (interview 2, Tokyo, 2010). Japan, on the one side, tries to engage China in any feasible form of practical cooperation; on the other hand, it hedges against future uncertainty by assembling a broad coalition that could dilute China’s influence. Such a notion of a ‘two-track’ policy does exist in official narratives (Hitoshi Tanaka, interview, Tokyo, 2010). However, when I heard that trilateral cooperation is meant to serve the goal of future EAC, I was rather alarmed. Is EAC still on Japan’s agenda? Does anybody consider it seriously—so seriously as

to motivate Japan's moves by it? In other words, tensions in Japan's policy to the region do exist, and official rhetoric cannot erase this fact.

Also, it is indeed true that Japan must both cooperate and compete with China; some tension is expected to exist. It does not follow, however, that maintaining a regional policy full of contradictions is as 'natural'. On the contrary, defending both 'narrow' (APT) and 'broad' (EAS/ ASEAN+6) East Asian concepts is peculiar and *unique* to Japan. Surely, in the official rhetoric countries to some extent do that<sup>178</sup>. However, even as far as the official rhetoric is concerned, hardly any country goes as far as Japan. China explicitly favours APT, and Korea – Northeast Asian regionalism. 'Former South Korean Prime Minister Lee said that although he recognizes the importance of the current 13-member framework [APT], South Korea, Japan and China should build "a Northeast Asian community" that eventually includes Mongolia and North Korea'<sup>179</sup>.

Thus, it is a specifically Japanese behaviour to support contradictory regional dynamics. After putatively many years of growing exclusivist Asian trends, the literature has not matured yet to capture the trend of Japan becoming close to China and Korea, *without* an air pillow or buffer in the form of the US or Australia<sup>180</sup>. New cooperative frameworks are being acknowledged *as long as* they follow this logic (like Japan-India, Japan-US-Korea formulas). Thus, my question: by focusing on the relationship of Japan with other members of the US-led alliance, are we not in

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<sup>178</sup> Also in the trilateral (joint) statements, the three countries officially 'contribute' to wider East Asian frameworks.

<sup>179</sup> *Nikkei Weekly*, 23 April 2007.

<sup>180</sup> This point was confirmed by Professor William Tow, who answered my question in a conference on Japan's foreign policy, in Tokyo in 2010. The conference used for its poster a photo from the trilateral summit, yet all the discussion was going along the lines of Sino-Japanese competition. My question was whether we do not miss something important in such a one-sided view of the region, despite the emerging evidence to the contrary.

danger of *suppressing* the regional reality of Japan, Korea *and* China cooperating closely? The literature does not instruct us well on the development of Japanese policy to Korea and China *in one triangle*.

Japan, from a regional policy perspective, was *not* interested in a Northeast Asian framework. This point has not been considered seriously by those scholars who equate Japan's involvement in NEA with Japan's newly found interest in NEA. These are scholars who assume that growing 'economic interdependence' will take care of the explanation. This, of course, poses a challenge to explaining Japanese apparent interest in it. Scholars would review factors that *could* have made Japan interested in Northeast Asia, such as: (i) economic growth or interdependence; improvements in bilateral relations; among the most prominent. There is, however, a big problem with the two. I have gone through them in chap. 2; now I will move to these aspects that are relevant to Japan's foreign-policy perspective.

Economic growth and ensuing interdependence surely rekindled interest of Japan in continental Asia, and it did so for good reasons. There is no salient reason, however, why it should lead to holding *regular summit meetings*; it is not a 'standard' measure taken in response to economic interdependence. (These economic issues could be dealt with at the bureaucracy level). In other words, it is a fallacy of stretching the conclusions too far when we move from the allure of the Chinese, and perhaps also Korean, economy to all the trilateral movement and its grand 'visions'. Liberalism is, in the very wise words of Lebow, 'restricted to one historical epoch: the modern, industrial world'<sup>181</sup>. Similarly, in the Japanese putative conversion to Northeast Asian regionalism, the experts have

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<sup>181</sup> On top of that, Lebow refers to Wendt as 'structural liberal' rather than constructivist (2008: 3, ft. 7).

offered merely post-hoc rationalisations. It is very boring indeed to listen to those dusted explanations zooming in on economic interdependence! Once *any* country strikes a deal of cooperation with another country, we could pin it down to interdependence. But the world, in any given moment, is interdependent.

As for bilateral improvements, they indeed played an important role. Without some warming in, subsequently, Japan-Korea and Japan-China relations, the whole project of Northeast Asian cooperation would simply not be on the agenda. It may suffice to say that between 2001 and 2006 (under the Koizumi administration), Japan-China state visits were basically frozen (Calder and Ye 2010: 206); and between Korea and Japan from June 2005 until the end of Koizumi's term. Paradoxically, Koizumi—having served as a PM for five years—attended more trilateral summits than any other Japanese PM so far (2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 – four meetings). Pempel notes 'frostiness of Japan's relations with both the ROK and China under Koizumi' (Pempel 2011b: 270). The photos reflect the frostiness (the first trilateral photo is from 2002 and is frosty). It is important to note, however, that the trilateral summit suffered cancellation in 2005 and 2006, when the protests reached their apex. Until 2004 inclusive, the summit had been regularly held. On top of that, under Koizumi, in 2002 the meeting gained 'official' status and 'security issues, like the nuclear issue began to be discussed' (Trilateral Cooperation Cyber Secretariat 2007). A similar situation could be observed in the event of the Senkaku incident, when a trilateral meeting did not suffer cancellation. Again, bilateral relations and trilateral framework belong to *different* spheres of interaction. The trilateral framework, even though it consists of three states, is part of regional diplomatic movements – not bilateral ties. It does offer an important venue for more bilateral interaction (notably the 2011 summit), but it did not originate from bilateral

ties. As evidence, we can consider that (negative) ‘national’ *bilateral* issues are not raised in trilateral summits (interview 2, and Chaesung Chun, Tokyo, 2010). *Bilateral* improvements logically translate into strengthening of *bilateral* relations, but not necessarily a trilateral scheme. There must be other reasons beyond it. The trilateral summit, with its imagery, serves to improve relations, rather than is a result of improved relations.

The unexpected outcome is also Japanese initiative. Aside the fact that we could not expect Japan to bring on a summit independent from ASEAN, we did not think that Japan can make any initiative in the first place. Although it is not strongly stressed, it is a *de facto* occurrence that the first trilateral summit was in Fukuoka, on the Japanese territory. On other occasions, even such an insignificant fact (like location in Japan) would most likely trigger opposition from Japan’s closest neighbours.

Japan indeed did want to participate in the economic awakening of Asia, and it also wanted at some point to have better relations with the two neighbours. Does it follow that it wanted a trilateral scheme? The answer is *no*. Economic interdependence and bilateral improvements provide some ingredients for our explanation, but by mixing them too much we arrive at an answer that does not reflect the reality. No matter how close we are to the truth, we have not discovered the truth itself. The fact is that, for Japan, the trilateral framework belongs to its ‘regional policy’. It is managed by the Regional Policy Division, as we shall see later<sup>182</sup>. It is *not* a common denominator of Korea and China divisions in the Japanese administration. Those analyses zoom in on Japan-Korea and Japan-China improvements inadvertently make us believe so.

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<sup>182</sup> South Korea’s MOFAT has a Northeast Asian Regional *Cooperation* Division.

Calder and Ye (2010), authors of one of the most recent major publications on Northeast Asian international relations ponder Japanese interest in Northeast Asia from a bilateral-centric perspective, and not a regional ‘East Asian’ one. By acknowledging Korea, they do admit that there is something more to it than ‘Sino-Japanese symbiosis’ (Calder and Ye 2010: 210), but they stay in the bilateral realm. If the trilateral framework had such a bilateral meaning, then it should be a venue for discussing the Takeshima and Senkaku disputes, Korean-Chinese ancient history controversies, and Japanese textbook issues. Overall, we could expect it to become another forum where Japan is pressured – in this case by China and Korea – to deliver a series of apologies and make various concessions. The reality of the trilateral scheme could not be farther than that. From the fact that it is part of *regional policy* it follows that it is where we should look for the answers. I have already framed the puzzle of how much including China while excluding ASEAN is a puzzle for Japanese regional policy. This is the angle from which we should look at this question. And this is where the real challenge begins.

### *Southeast Asia: Expression of Japanese Interest*

This part on Southeast Asia aims to illustrate the following paradox. (1) ASEAN has been cornerstone of Japanese regional policy, the most important ‘sub-section’ of its policy to East Asia (and as we shall see later, Northeast Asia has not been near as important). (2) Southeast Asia remains important to Japan from the interest perspective. (3) Despite (1) and (2), in 2008 Northeast Asian cooperation becomes separated from ASEAN Plus Three, and it happens *with* Japan’s support. Fukuoka Summit tends to be recently explained with a diminished importance or efficiency of ASEAN. However, I argue that we do not possess enough evidence to show that

Japan has lost interest in ASEAN in absolute terms. Specifically, there is no conclusive evidence that Northeast Asia has diminished ASEAN's importance in Japan's regional thinking. This point shows that from the Japanese perspective, we cannot explain 'exclusion of ASEAN' with interest in Southeast Asia alone. Shortly before the breakfast meeting in 1999<sup>183</sup>, Obuchi told the journalists: 'I feel much obliged to ASEAN which gave us [Japan, China, Korea] this occasion, *but* I simply cannot miss this opportunity' (Togo 2007: 97, quoting *Asahi Shimbun*, 29 November 1999)<sup>184</sup>. By saying this, Obuchi indicated that the trilateral meeting did indeed mean sidelining of ASEAN's role. It was, however, *too important* to resign from just for the sake of ASEAN's 'centrality'.

One of the surprises for this chapter is that in spite of historical ideas for trilateral cooperation, emergence of the actual framework was delayed by centuries, and had to pass through the 'mill' of ASEAN in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When a discussion in Asian IR arises about the history, it is expected that it will be dominated by the 'history' and 'memory problem' with Japan. What has been forgotten is a long and deep history of *cooperation* in Northeast Asia. It is hardly ever raised in the literature on contemporary regionalism. Morishima (2000) as well as Calder and Ye (2010) are among the few who go back to the positive side of trilateral interaction. ASEAN might well be in the driver's seat of contemporary Asian integration, but beyond ASEAN-centric discourse, it is Japan, Korea, and China that are regarded as 'East Asia' (Calder and Ye 2010: 106, referring to Reischauer and Fairbanks). In the late Meiji period (early 20<sup>th</sup> century), Japan was the source of pan-Asianist ideas. Again, rather than today, they were heavily

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<sup>183</sup> Obuchi wanted to hold such a meeting already a year earlier in Hanoi, but China rejected that offer.

<sup>184</sup> They had been working on it together with Kim Dae-jung, who spoke Japanese (Kokubun).

Northeast Asia-oriented. Japan and Korea were particularly active. It was meant as cooperation of three *independent* countries. Because in the Meiji period Japan was the most powerful among them, Japanese intellectuals wanted it to take the leadership. However, in real politics, it ended up as a colonial expansion that led to war (Y. C. Lee, interview, Tokyo, 2010).

The three countries wanted trilateral cooperation ‘from the beginning’. It would suggest that APT served only as a ‘springboard’ (Chaesung Chun, interview, Tokyo, November 2010), rather than incubator of trilateral cooperation. Yet, ASEAN does occupy a special place in the Japanese thinking on Asia. Practically speaking, NEA-3 so conspicuously emerged from the ASEAN umbrella that this development is not to be questioned. Trilateral cooperation started from only a ‘breakfast’ meeting in 1999. It was China’s request that the meeting be labelled as ‘just breakfast’ (Kokubun). To reach today’s format of independent summit, it was a step-by-step process not to alarm ASEAN (Tanaka, 2010, Tokyo). Japan was worried that ASEAN might feel that it is not important if it is excluded. Now ASEAN does not mind, because it was a gradual process—‘for the sake of peace’ (Hitoshi Tanaka, interview, Tokyo, November 2010). Ryosei Kokubun (interview, Tokyo, November 2010) believes that ASEAN is ‘dissatisfied’ with the three countries. In APT, ASEAN was at the centre, now it is fine to have a separate meeting – but not immediately. It was a deliberate process, not to ‘offend’ ASEAN. However, R. Kokubun (interview, Tokyo, November 2010) believes that ASEAN ‘used to’ be at the centre of East Asian (cooperative) processes. Now it is rather the three countries. This policy was deliberate, not *ad hoc*, even though from the beginning the three countries wanted a separate meeting (Hitoshi Tanaka, interview, Tokyo, November 2010). In brief, from the standpoint of the Japanese foreign policy

(intention/ interest), we could not foresee what has happened in Northeast Asia recently.

‘Southeast Asia’ is a well entrenched term in Japanese foreign-policy thinking. The Yoshida administration in the 1950s worked on a plan for economic cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, which came as a response to the US proposal (Nakagawa 2005: 83). Around the same time, the term ‘East Asia’ (*Higashi Ajia*) was created, incorporating Japan, China and Korea to the pre-existing unit of Southeast Asia (Nakagawa 2005: 83). This term was introduced to avoid connotations with ‘East Asia’ (*To-a*), as it was known in the pre-war period, to minimise memories of Japan’s imperialism (Nakagawa 2005: 83).

Japan has attached a high value to its relationship with ASEAN, what is corroborated by Japan’s adherence to the centrality of ASEAN in the process of region-building. As Hund remarks, in the case of Japan ‘there can be no doubt about the importance it attributes to ASEAN’ (Hund 2003: 394). ‘From the 1950s through the late 1980s, Japan focused on developing deep political-economic ties, predominantly with the United States and Southeast Asia’ (Calder and Ye 2010: 209). Before ASEAN made a call for ‘ASEAN Plus Three’, Japan (under PM Hashimoto) extended a proposal to ASEAN to regularise ASEAN + Japan summit (Soeya 2009: 301). Even though interactions among the three countries have been traditionally trilateral, and even though it had been a goal for a very long time, in the present era it had to pass through Southeast Asia first, before becoming an independent reality.

‘From the 1950s through the late 1980s, Japan focused on developing deep political-economic ties, predominantly with the United States and Southeast Asia’

(Calder and Ye 2010: 209). The Asian re-turn to exclusivist Asian approaches in 1990s had primarily a 'Japan/ ASEAN-centric' flavour (Calder and Ye 2010: 111). This has been epitomised by the Fukuda Doctrine of 1977 (Tanaka 2007: 31, 44), and ASEAN's response to under the form Mahathir extending leadership invitation to Japan 'on a silver platter'. A *long* decade later, in 2004, Japanese foreign minister was stressing ASEAN's role, allowing for only functional and informal cooperation in Northeast Asia that would bypass ASEAN (Calder and Ye 2010: 115). This could be read as a prop-up for APT, a 'primary address' for cooperation between Northeast Asia and ASEAN.

Apart from regionalist, Japan's support to ASEAN is also – if not primarily – strategic in nature. Even though ASEAN is likely to side with China on many issues – both self-proclaimed 'developing' – there is a 'certain dislike' in ASEAN nations toward China, as argued by Hitoshi Tanaka (2010, Tokyo). This suggests that from Japan's perspective *all* regional movements can be seen as devices to prevent disruptive China. NEA-3, on par with APT and a host of others, could be categorised as such. When viewed in this way, NEA-3 does not have to be an offence by Japan to ASEAN's role. Yet, even for Japan, 'ASEAN + something' stopped to be the only effective and viable mechanism for gathering regional action.

What interests us here is rather why a powerful country like Japan paid such a careful attention ASEAN. Most importantly, why toward the end of the 2000s, Japan's preoccupation lessened to the point where an independent framework became possible. Had Japan held to the 'ASEAN in the centre' principle, the Fukuoka Summit would be unthinkable. In this way, the influence that ASEAN has enjoyed – 'out of all proportion' (Dibb 1995: 41) – might be gradually receding back to normality, back to what conventional IR analysis would expect.

## *Japanese and Korean Initiatives*

Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi officially proposed holding a meeting with his Korean and Chinese counterparts alongside the APT meeting in Manila in 1999 (Yoshimatsu 2008: 65):

‘The meeting, initiated by Obuchi, began as an informal gathering without a substantial discussion agenda. The summit has since gradually changed into a more formal and substantial event. At the second summit in 2000, the three leaders agreed to hold meetings on a regular basis’.

It is widely accepted that the 1999 meeting was proposed by the Japanese PM Keizo Obuchi (see also Do Thu Thuy 2008: 1). Keizo Obuchi initiated the 1999 summit (according to Do Thi Thuy 2008: 1). Also Tanaka (2007: 64) attributes making of the initiative to Obuchi.

‘Obuchi ... his most striking initiative was to convene a Japan-China-South Korea tripartite breakfast meeting on the fringe of the APT meeting. This gathering concentrated on trade and economic matters, avoiding any political matters such as North Korea. But whatever the central theme of the talks, given the complexity of Japan’s relations with China and South Korea, a tripartite gathering under the auspices of ASEAN was like a welcome change (Togo 2008: 173).

Calder and Ye (2010: 191) challenged this understanding, stating that the breakfast meeting in 1999 was the Korean President Kim Dae-jung’s initiative [unreferenced]. I have not encountered such information in any other source. According to Ryosei Kokubun (interview), the meeting was proposed by Obuchi; he

did so first to Kim Dae-jung, who spoke Japanese. (Indeed, Kim and Obuchi had very good relations). The decision was thus reached by them together.

**2008.** ‘Both former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his successor, Yasuo Fukuda, have made improving relations with China a policy priority’ (Frost, Przystup and Saunders 2008: 5). In November 2007 in Singapore, the leaders of Japan, China, and Korea decided to hold their trilateral summits outside of ASEAN, and Japan is the first to hold the venue (OANA 2008a). The finding is not definitive, but both press releases and my interviews (interview 2 in particular) suggest that it was Japan (under Prime Minister Fukuda<sup>185</sup>) that took the ‘initiative’<sup>186</sup> to officially propose the separate summit: ‘It is learnt on good authority that Japan, under its former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, took the “initiative” last year [in 2007] to suggest this exclusive network’ (Suryanarayana 2008)<sup>187</sup>. The agreement was to hold meetings outside of ASEAN-related frameworks, and Japan proposed to organize a summit on its own territory: ‘Japan *led the way* in initiating regularized summits among the top leaders from China, Japan and Korea’ (Pempel 2011b: 256). *But* see another source: ‘Lee also initiated the first ever stand-alone China-Japan-Korea Trilateral Summit in Fukuoka in December’<sup>188</sup>. Also, a similar information is provided by the Korean MOFAT: ‘The Korea-China-Japan Summit was first held in

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<sup>185</sup> Fukuda attended Lee Myung-bak’s inauguration (Calder and Ye 2010: 302, ft. 24)

<sup>186</sup> It opens a potentially interesting avenue for research, namely why Japanese initiative was accepted by Korea and China, known for turning down Japan’s attempts at assuming any form of ‘leadership’ in the region. (It seems, from MOFAT web site, that Pr. Lee accepted Japan holding the first summit on its territory—perhaps a symbolic reconciliation.

<sup>187</sup> P.S. Suryanarayana, ‘Towards a new “balance of economic power”’, *The Hindu*, <http://www.hindu.com/2008/12/25/stories/2008122555340900.htm> (7 February 2013).

<sup>188</sup> ‘Japan Real Time’, <http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2010/11/30/wikileaks-japan-north-korea-collapse-going-nuclear-un-security-council> (7 February 2013).

December 2008 in Fukuoka, Japan, upon Korea's suggestion'<sup>189</sup>. 'Meanwhile, Aso and South Korean President Lee Myung Bak agreed during their talks Friday on a plan to hold a tripartite summit in Japan that also includes China later this year and confirmed that they will work closely in addressing the global financial crisis, a Japanese official said'<sup>190</sup>.

According to Do Thi Thuy (2008, *not* referenced), at the Cebu summit-meeting in December 2006, China and South Korea proposed the independent summit, but it was rejected by Japan. 'The summit meeting was originally planned months ago, before the turmoil in financial markets began in September, with the vague goals of building good will and establishing political dialogue'<sup>191</sup>.

C. W. Chung goes one step farther in claiming that it was Roh Moo-hyun who in November 2000, Singapore (13<sup>th</sup> APT), "formally proposed" independent summits (2012: 182?). (It is a deeply contested statement. The initiative is generally attributed to Japan. Chung 2012 fails to engage these other views – so do the accounts oriented toward Japan). Even when a scholar refuses to engage evidence going in the opposite direction, he or she has to face it in the next piece of evidence. So it is with Chung 2012. In the paragraph immediately after he attributes the 2007 proposal to the Korean president, he recounts the fact that the first independent summit was held in Fukuoka (Chung 2012: 182). If it was held in Fukuoka, we are tempted to ask, why wasn't it held in Korea? Did the two leaders make an agreement

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<sup>189</sup> MOFAT, South Korea, <http://news.mofat.go.kr/ewspaper/articleview.php?master=&aid=2674&ssid=23&mvid=765> (10 May 2011).

<sup>190</sup> *Japan Today*, 28 October 2008, <https://www.japantoday.com/category/politics/view/aso-in-beijing-for-asean-talks-with-chinese-s-korean-leaders> (3 May 2011).

<sup>191</sup> M. Fackler, 'China, Japan and South Korea focus on economy at summit', *New York Times*, 13 December 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/13/world/asia/13iht-asiaecon.1.18649048.html> (10 May 2011).

that Korea will propose, but Japan will host? Was China acceptant to this arrangement? In any case, we are not freed from engaging with contrarian views, especially when those are hard to ignore and constitute a majority.

### *Trilateral Investment Treaty*

Although China tacitly opposes investment treaty, and made an impression of supporting the trade deal, the former seems to be progressing better (interview 2, Japan). The trilateral investment treaty is interesting in that it does not seem to work according to the ‘least common denominator’. Instead, China must work to reach standards set by Japan and Korea.

The negotiations on the trilateral investment treaty were concluded in March 2012, and it might be signed in May 2012<sup>192</sup>. (Formal discussions on a trade deal are still to be announced, probably in May 2012 in China). The treaty includes ‘new provisions’ as compared with the existing (1989) Japan-China agreement: protection of property rights and prohibition of demands for technology transfer<sup>193</sup>. In a trilateral summit in January 2007 in Cebu, the three countries agreed to start negotiations towards a trilateral investment treaty. It was most likely on Japan’s initiative (interview L, 2011, London). Negotiations are held among the Japanese JBIC, Korean export-import bank (EXIM) and Chinese export-import bank. The discussion on the trilateral investment treaty is expected to mostly focus on restriction imposed by China on Japanese and South Korean companies’ operations

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<sup>192</sup> ‘Japan, China, S. Korea agree investment pact’, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 23 March 2012, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/business/T120322005713.htm> (25 April 2012).

<sup>193</sup> ‘Japan, China, S. Korea agree investment pact’, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 23 March 2012, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/business/T120322005713.htm> (25 April 2012).

in this country<sup>194</sup>. The main points on the agenda were: reciprocal national treatment; relaxation of licence and permit rules; protection of intellectual property rights; transparency in administrative procedures; and limitations on equity investment imposed by China on Japanese and Korean entities. All of these points are weaknesses of the Chinese side.

Japan is at the forefront of advocating the investment treaty for a number of reasons. First, Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) in China is the strongest among all the pairs. Second, having concluded a bilateral treaty with China relatively early (in 1988)<sup>195</sup>, Japan had to grant China many concessions, which it is now eager to amend. Japan feels that the agreement is unbalanced, as China ceased to be such a ‘poor’ country as it was in 1980s. Korea, having negotiated a bilateral treaty with China relatively late (in 1992)<sup>196</sup>, as a late-comer, did not have to give China as many concessions as Japan had to. Starting from early 2000s, China’s outward investment started to grow (Li, M. 2009); 50% of this total investment goes into Asia. (Still, the literature continues to stress China’s role as a recipient of Japanese and Korean investment. By the end of 2011, direct investment from Japan reached 80 billion USD, and from Korea–50 billion USD).

As an important ‘stakeholder’ in the ‘international financial community’, China started to feel the weight of certain expectations. Most importantly, they *fear*

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<sup>194</sup> ‘Trilateral meeting results in common resolve on North Korea’, *Nikkei Weekly*, 22 January 2007 (*Factiva*, 18 January 2011).

<sup>195</sup> Agreement between Japan and the People’s Republic of China concerning the encouragement and reciprocal protection of investment, Beijing, August 1988. Available from UNCTAD: [http://www.unctad.org/sections/dite/ia/docs/bits/china\\_japan.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/sections/dite/ia/docs/bits/china_japan.pdf) (21 January 2011).

<sup>196</sup> Agreement on the encouragement and reciprocal protection of investments between the government of the Republic of Korea and the government of the People’s Republic of China, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1992, Beijing. Available at UNCTAD: [http://www.unctad.org/sections/dite/ia/docs/bits/korea\\_china.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/sections/dite/ia/docs/bits/korea_china.pdf) (21 January 2011). In fact, there is only 4 years time difference between JP-CN and KR-CN BITs.

complaints. In this light, China considers various elements, not only the profit variable, in deciding on appropriate behaviour. Both Japan and Korea, as OECD members, are obliged to follow environmental and other regulations. China does not have a prospect of entering OECD soon, and is free from such obligations. The Japanese side ‘informs’ the Chinese about the regulations imposed by OECD, and encourages China to follow them as well. In a practical sense, there are cases of Chinese and Japanese companies operating jointly, for example in Southeast Asia. Then, the Chinese side has to match the level of standards that are required from Japanese businesses<sup>197</sup>. ‘In a way, China is still playing in its own field, but gradually they came to listen to us’ (interview L, London, 2011).

It is intriguing, however, that China cannot simply walk away from the table, even if it had no minimal interest in the treaty. ‘At least, they must discuss with us’ (interview L, London, 2011). My interviews suggest that for Japan, the trilateral framework is not as much a part of the desired regional architecture, as much as it is a forum to face China, in a setting less daunting (and more effective) than *bilaterally*. Japan is at the centre of this puzzle, because Japan is at the heart of the history problem. It is then at the centre of the puzzle, because it has a history of past and ongoing territorial and historical struggles with both China and Korea. Because of being much of the problem, it is equally much of the puzzle.

### **Puzzle: Japan in a Northeast Asian Framework**

Shortly before the breakfast meeting in 1999, Obuchi told the journalists: ‘I feel much obliged to ASEAN which gave us [Japan, China, Korea] this occasion, but I simply cannot miss this opportunity’ (Togo 2007:97, quoting *Asahi Shimbun*, 29

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<sup>197</sup> To be sure, Japanese companies share with their Chinese counterparts only reluctantly, especially if high technology content is involved.

November 1999). It suggests that ASEAN's role was indeed diminished. Kokubun (personal interview) believes that Japan feels 'sorry' about ASEAN.

It needs to be made clear at the outset that I do not purport to explain the one-off *decision* that the three leaders made in 2007 in Singapore. That decision could be reached only because certain *conditions* have been met, and these regional conditions interest me. The connection to ASEAN Plus Three (APT), and through it to the general dynamics in regional frameworks, is clear and widely accepted. If the connection to APT did not matter, then the decision could be made through other channels. (More than this, the trilateral summit *partially* continues to operate through ASEAN-provided venues to this day<sup>198</sup>). These are the points that those who prioritise a purely bilateral explanation (like Sino-Japanese improvement)<sup>199</sup> have to wrestle with. My explanation lies in turn within the regional 'tissue', because it is where the trilateral framework has its origins. I do not stop at explaining permissive/catalytic conditions (like the state of bilateral relations or a doctrine of a given prime minister). Instead, I aim to offer an underlying regionally-derived explanation to the question how Japan became involved in an exclusively Northeast Asian cooperative framework, with China and Korea only.

While in its foreign policy Japan has showed no pursuit of an 'exclusivist Northeast Asian' framework, it is what occurred. In fact, to say that Japan pursued an exclusivist Northeast Asian framework would sound like a paradox. Locking itself into a Northeast Asian framework does not correspond to Japan's regional objectives as they have been almost unanimously accepted in the literature: (soft/institutional) balancing against China, seeking presence of external powers,

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<sup>198</sup> In 2010, two trilateral summits were held: in Korea and in Vietnam.

<sup>199</sup> Soeya (2009), Kokubun (interview 5).

promoting the broad East Asia Summit (EAS) instead of ‘narrow’ APT. Then, why scholars have come to believe so easily that Japan has quickly realised the benefits of cooperating with China and Korea in a three-party only framework? Why are we not questioning this piece of Japanese regional behaviour, if it is so sharply in contrasting with what has been firmly established in the literature? In this chapter, my aim is to demonstrate that Japan’s foreign policy to Northeast Asia has a dependent nature, which throws a new light on the naïve acceptance of Japan’s ‘interest’ in Northeast Asia. Japan has a low commitment to the cooperative scheme with Korea and China.

In this light, I argue that Japan’s policy for Northeast Asia has its sources in East Asia. Northeast Asian environment, in itself, is too small and too hostile to Japan. For Japan, Northeast Asia does not have an independent significance, and as such Japan does not have an independent Northeast Asia policy. Heeding this fact is important for explaining the nature of Japanese initiative to form a Northeast Asian framework. With a baggage of East and Southeast Asia, Japan’s involvement in Northeast Asian cooperation has a derivative nature.

Japanese regional policy does not fit comfortably with emergence of a Northeast Asian framework, because Japan has not based its regional policy on ‘Northeast Asia’. This emerges against the background of an observation: What is a *basic unit* of regional preference for Japan? It is clearly *not* Northeast Asia. It is East Asia<sup>200</sup>. It clearly has policy lines to the Koreas, China (and the rest of geographically Northeast Asian states), but it has no policy to ‘Northeast Asia’ as a

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<sup>200</sup> In the early post-war period, Japan has been a champion of the Asia-Pacific concept. Currently, however, it is better not to confuse Asia-Pacific with regional policy. The whole idea of Asia-Pacific from the Japanese perspective can be best understood as tying itself to the US, and tying the US to the region—East Asia. Asia-Pacific is East Asia plus an ‘adjunct’ in the form of the US. (The same can be said for Australia).

regional unit. Japanese ‘by-default’ foreign policy to Northeast Asia has not, however, been a matrix of bilateral pillars. Instead, it is an offshoot of its strategies in ‘East Asia’ as a conceptual region.

The purpose of this chapter is to bring into the present debate these recent pieces of Japanese behaviour in the region that fit so uncomfortably with conventional depictions. The puzzle of ‘excluding ASEAN, including China’, from the Japanese point of view can be best interpreted as a puzzle of joining an exclusively Northeast Asian framework. This is because of the problem Japan famously has with being in exclusively Asian frameworks (which most often happen to be exclusively *East Asian*). ‘Over the past decade, as this continental Asianism has been deepening, and growing more exclusive, Japan has been more ambivalent toward the new dynamic than its neighbours’ (Calder and Ye 2010: 205). It is good to start the country-analysis from Japan, because Japan is at the heart of the Northeast Asian quandary.

### **Japan’s Foreign Policy to East Asia**

Few nations in history have been more racked with self-doubt about their national strategy than Japan. Green (2008:170)

Japan can draw its policy to East Asia either as if it incorporated only ASEAN Plus Three countries, or as if it was broader. Terada (2003: 252) in his article defines East Asia as ASEAN plus Japan, China, Korea – the same constellation of counties as in APT: ‘... East Asia, which consists of China, Japan, South Korea and the ten members of ASEAN...’. In our research, East Asia can be how we define it. However, Hund (2003: 393-394) implies that *for Japan*, ideal ‘East Asia’ is broader than APT, which is only a ‘starting point’ for a wider grouping. Additionally, there

is no problem with having policies to East Asia that are based on various definitions of the region. Japanese ‘regional’ foreign policy operates on two ‘East Asias’. In this section, I understand the Japanese policy to East Asia as Japan’s intention to the region.

It is true that Japanese preferred ‘East Asia’ is much broader. Japan has undoubtedly been at the forefront of advocating inclusion of extra-regional states like India, Australia, New Zealand—and most importantly, the US. Yet, the same Japan has supported Asia-centric, namely ASEAN-centric, arrangements. And the same Japan hosted the first independent trilateral summit (Fukuoka, December 2008). At first sight, this strikes as a major tension in foreign-policy making. Not without a reason have institutional responses in East Asia been described as contradictory, with a general trend pointing towards exclusively (East) Asian frameworks (Pempel 2010a: 211, 219). Identifying this tension has led me to framing my initial puzzle: ‘Does Japan act counter to its interest by engaging in the trilateral framework?’ As we shall see later, the real puzzle might be how the Japanese interest evolved.

Two contending visions of broader and narrower East Asia beg the question: how broad or narrow. On the broad end of the spectrum, there is little doubt that for Japan ‘the more, the better’ sets the rule. Arguably, there is little room for stretching the region even further. On the narrow end, we currently have two contending visions, which are at the crux of this research. APT represents the well-established East Asia-only framework, while NEA-3 is the emerging one.

### *Broad East Asia*

‘For it is clear that the underlying Japanese strategy has always been to maintain economic dominance in East Asia’; but at the same time Japan wanted to keep the U.S. and others involved, thus preferring APEC over the closed EAEC (Hughes 2000a: 221).

To explain Japan’s willingness to work closely with states such as Australia and New Zealand, it is worthwhile to look at Japan’s initiatives from previous periods. Japan was, with Australia, advocating the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). The Japanese economist K. Kojima prepared reports such as the (1971) one. The work was also done by Australia-based scholars, P. Drysdale, (Drysdale and Garnaut 1989; Drysdale and Patrick 1979).

Additionally, under the current (2014, May) administration of Prime Minister S. Abe, Japan is willing to pursue policies that might threaten China (Abe, 2014; BBC 2014). At the 13<sup>th</sup> Asia Security Summit (IISS) in Singapore, Abe, according to BBC (2014), is set to put forward Japan as a potential counterbalance to China; this step is envisaged to ‘anger’ China, according to the same source. It is apparent that current developments, at least in the security/ military sphere, are not conducive to resuming the Trilateral Summit (last special trilateral meeting took place in 2012). At the same time, it would be ‘jumping to conclusions’ to say that Japan is not interested in holding trilateral talks, but a security environment as of now (June 2014) needs to change. Holding a spurious ‘summit’ would not help the three countries.

There are various pathways to explaining Japan’s interest in ‘East Asia’ as a broad region (Alford, 2009; Mancheri, 2010). Calder and Ye (2010: 120) present Japan as torn between East and West, which that pushes Japan for a ‘broader and

more porous regionalism<sup>201</sup> than the versions propounded in China and to a lesser degree in Korea'. Calder and Ye (2010: 210) argue that 'economic forces—pre-eminently burgeoning transnational production networks – are driving Japan to press for *broad* regional policy arrangements that are substantial and much more extensive than a mere Sino-Japanese bilateral accommodation' (my emphasis). Indeed, Japanese preferred vision of regional policy is broad and focuses on economic cooperation.

The 'broader' East Asia region has served Japan to balance between developed and developing, Western and non-Western, communist and democratic nations (interview with H. Tanaka, 2010, Tokyo). The broadest plan for the region has been ASEAN Plus Six, the above mentioned 16-country framework, where Russia and the U.S. join EAS. Beyond this balance for the sake of harmony, there is a geostrategic meaning attached to it. Coalition-building with regional and extra-regional powers serves Japan to hedge against the possibility of disruptive China.

A regional vision broader than this is Asia-Pacific. Japan is clearly an Asia-Pacific nation, separated from the Asian landmass. This geographic characteristic, combined with a strong pro-US bias, makes of Japan a 'natural promoter' of the Asia-Pacific concept. More recently, Japan has turned its eyes to East Asia, but it is a well-known fact that Japan's commitment to this idea is low (see Terada 2003: 257). I argue that Japan's interest in 'Asia-Pacific' should not be confused with 'regional policy'<sup>202</sup>. Japan-US alliance is in particular believed to intensify Japan-China tensions<sup>203</sup>. Since recent China's aggressiveness, the US-Korea-Japan triangle

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<sup>201</sup> 'Porous regionalism' has been coined by Peter J. Katzenstein.

<sup>202</sup> APEC should be seen rather as a 'transregional' body: Ravenhill (2000: 329), quoted in Lee and Moon (2000: 42).

<sup>203</sup> Quoting Christopher Hughes, *Japan's security agenda and Japanese re-emergence*.

emerged as a prominent avenue of analysis. ‘No country cooperates with only one country’ (Tanaka). ‘Japan thinks it is sometimes okay [to cooperate] without the US’ (Masao Okonogi, interview, Tokyo, 2010). In January 2011, shortly after APEC representatives gathered in Yokohama, the mood at METI was clearly TPP-oriented. The trilateral FTA subsequently fell off the agenda<sup>204</sup>. This clearly demonstrates the dependent nature of Japanese policy to Northeast Asia. Japan is more interested in the exercise of ‘tying’ US and extra-regional states, like Australia, to its own region–building ‘a region called “the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity”’, along ‘the outer rim of the Eurasian continent’ (MOFA 2007).

In the official expression of Japanese foreign policy, the concept of broad East Asia stood prominently in the speech of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. A ‘broader Asia that broke away geographical boundaries’ joined Japan and India, and incorporated US and Australia (MOFA 2007). This ‘wide, open, broader Asia’ left no room for China or (South) Korea– countries that Abe was trying to mend relations with, more in the spirit of ‘narrow’ Asia.

Open regionalism was for Japan a ‘magic formula’ (Hughes 2012), a good answer to the question where it should locate itself.

### *Narrow ‘East Asia’*

China and Japan... have already begun to circle each other warily, each trying to ascertain the other’s intentions. Mahbubani (2002: 125).

‘Military, economic and political dependence thus constrains any Japanese inclination to build an inward-looking Asia’ (Katzenstein 2000: 365)–but the need for this is enormous. At the same time, Japan engages China in the ‘narrow’ East

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<sup>204</sup> Informal meeting with Prof. Takashi Terada, 4 February 2011, London.

Asia. Trilateral framework is seen as part of the engagement-track policy to China, and also policy of 'greater prosperity' (Tanaka, 2010, Tokyo). Japan's relationship to China is not like Western states' relations to Soviet Union. Western countries did not need cooperation with communist Soviet Union, but Japan needs cooperation with communist China. The narrower vision of the region can be interpreted from Japanese perspective as 'inclusive multilateralism' (Tanaka 2007: 37) towards China. Japan is willing to discuss with China 'everything' (Tanaka 2007: 38). This is as far as the official rhetoric goes.

In a narrow framework that includes China, Japan might fear the prospect of China dominating it – like in the case of APT. Japan was indeed troubled with the influence that China has enjoyed in the APT (Pempel 2010a: 228). Thus, why such a fear did not emerge in the case of NEA-3? Possibly, with Japan and Korea as representing one strategic front, China could not dominate (Sato, 2010, Beppu). The 'narrower' East Asia vision is linked to the question on Japan's attitude to exclusivist Asian frameworks. Exclusivist Asian frameworks could possibly go in two directions. One focuses on East Asia that comprises North Pacific and Southeast Asia (that is, only a rim of the Asian landmass). This is a vision that has prevailed so far. Another avenue would be to focus on the Asian landmass, what could be seen as 'Northeast Asian regionalism'. Some believe that Japan has been active in East Asian regionalist movements in order to balance against China, notably through its 'traditional' links with ASEAN. The same could be said of arguably more recent Japan's inroads into the continent. Calder and Ye (2010: 126) hold that Japan's motivation to be involved more deeply with continental Asia is to balance against China.

Regardless of the ‘strategic’ (balance of power) objectives, the logic of geographic closeness ties Japan more tightly to its immediate neighbours than to India or Australia. Japan’s relationship to Korea is much ‘deeper’ and more intensive than to India or Australia (Tanaka, 2010, Tokyo). The amount of daily flights between Tokyo and Seoul testifies: twenty (Calder and Ye 2010: 4). After the catastrophe of tsunami and earthquake in March 2011, Chinese and Korean leaders were the first foreign leaders to visit the devastated area. There are populations of Koreans and Chinese in Japan (students). This is also true for Korea. 850 planes land between China and Korea weekly (Kim, HK, interview, 2011). In Seoul, there are three foreign languages that matter: after English, Japanese and Korean (probably in this order of occurrence, at least in major places of general interest). Students of regional institutions tend to live disconnected from reality, where geography and simple intensity of human/ cultural relations do not matter.

Second, the ‘narrower East Asia’ paradigm emerged for Japan more recently, Two things combined, the reality seems to point to a Japan drawn into exclusivist Asian logic. From the two tracks, which is more important? As long as they can harmoniously co-exist, that is fine. But what would happen if they collide? Which track would dominate the other one?

Japan in this chapter is the state—not a bureaucracy or a policymaker. I argue that the statements made here can be applied to the Japanese foreign policy. Therefore, where I argue for contradictions, I mean contradictions within the same policy, rather than conflicting ideas across various bureaucracies, at different points in time. In some instances, however, the tensions were reaching their peak, and I will then clearly signal what I mean (as in the case of Prime Minister Abe or Hatoyama). Although a convention for viewing ‘Japanese’ foreign policy as the

outcome of competition among strong bureaucracies is well grounded<sup>205</sup>, the end effect in the international arena is actually this: Japan, as a state, participates or not participates, whoever was the advocate. Therefore, while differentiated and competing intentions of various bureaucrats play a role in formulating a given policy, there is not such differentiation in the end effect. Japan *is* a member of APEC, regardless of who supported it more—MOFA or METI. Similarly, the *cumulative* effect of Japanese foreign policymaking is that it supports broader arrangements more clearly than it does ‘Asian’ ones.

Japanese economic influence in Southeast Asia was much stronger than political influence. Mahathir’s proposal coincided with the Gulf War, which was fairly unpopular in Malaysia. Malaysia felt that Japan – the only non-Western voice in the G-7 – should take leadership in Asia (Palmujoki 2001: 87). ‘Japan’s evasive attitude particularly annoyed Malaysia since in the Malaysian proposal Japan would take the lead in the new grouping’ (Palmujoki 2001: 83, 86-87).

New Miyazawa Initiative returns the focus to ‘what Japan can do in Asia’ (see Hughes 2000a: 221). The Asian financial crisis focused Japanese initiatives on purely ‘East Asian’ proposals. Japanese initiatives were oriented at *East Asia* (instead of Asia-Pacific), multilateral (not hub- and-spokes’) and under Japanese leadership – these three features are distinguished in Hughes (2000). The ‘New Miyazawa Initiative’ (1998) substituted for the AMF proposal that did not go through, and although it lacked the multilateral character of the original idea, it can be considered a substantive initiative from Japan<sup>206</sup>. Japan was carving a way for

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<sup>205</sup> See, however, T. J. Pempel (for instance Pempel 2011b), where he uses ‘Japan’ as a state, without taking it down to the bureaucracy level.

<sup>206</sup> Christopher W. Hughes, [http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/1058/1/WRAP\\_Hughes\\_9871481-080709-japan\\_and\\_the\\_east\\_asian\\_crisis\\_wrap.pdf](http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/1058/1/WRAP_Hughes_9871481-080709-japan_and_the_east_asian_crisis_wrap.pdf) (5 July 2012). Practically, the link was

itself in the region. Japan accepts that too much foreign-policy reliance on the U.S. is not ideal, but then to make a distinctively East Asian proposal is very difficult for Japan (Hughes 2012). Japan has little interest that is exclusively East Asian.

Now Japan tends to overlook security linkages with those countries that are not U.S. allies (China springs to mind). ‘Trans-pacific Partnership’ (TPP) is in essence a closed and discriminatory arrangement (Hughes, 2012). Japan turned to ‘Bilateralism Plus’ (Hughes, 2012). Several years after the crisis, Japan has lost many of the opportunities for leading a distinctively East Asian regionalism.

But has Japan ever wanted it? Christopher Hughes (2012) interprets Japan’s wasted opportunities in East Asia as falling back into the U.S. agenda again. I argue that the crisis has ‘bent’ Japan’s normally broader, Asia-Pacific preferences. After the crisis, Japan returned to the ‘expected’ spot in preferences: a broader, EAS-type East Asia. How do we derive this normal or expected state of Japan’s preferences? Simply, it is created by Japan’s interests, in part stemming from its security interests and in part from its broad economic participation in the region and outside the region. In itself, Japan has no interest in championing a narrow Asia. But importantly, the fact that Japan returned to in its preferences to the expected/ default position does not mean that these preferences dictate the outcomes—Japan’s actions and commitments might still differ (from the preferences)! So, there is no straightforward projection of what Japan actually did and where it got involved in from its preferences. Japan might still be involved in ‘narrower-East Asia’ projects and so on; it might even occasionally initiate them, as in the case of the trilateral cooperation. The point is that even if Japan returned to ‘preaching’ its favourite

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established between Japan and a recipient country, while in the AMP proposal the link would be between AMF and the recipient (and Japan would be one of contributors to the AMF) (see for a graph Lipsy 2003: 102).

regional doctrine, it is a different task than putting it into practice. It is because Japan's preferences, no matter how strong and well-established, do not exist independently, and many of Japan's actions and commitments will come as responses to what is happening externally. Japan does not always have a chance to work on fresh ground.

## **Regional Enmeshment with Low Commitment**

Although designed to reinforce state power, there may still be an important difference between *intention* and *outcome*. The mushrooming of cooperative arrangements may set in motion changes that ultimately tie down states in a process of 'institutional enmeshment' that alters the dynamics of regional politics. (Hurrell 1995: 338, ft. 17; emphasis original).

'States create, or have preferences for, a particular regional order, and work to achieve them. Viewed from this, regional orders can be seen as products of layers of multiple interactions by deliberately chosen *strategies* of countries...' (Choi and Moon 2010: 361, my emphasis).

Japan in its foreign policy was aiming at 'expanding' the region. The Northeast Asian framework is just a *contribution* to the *wider* 'East Asian Community'. In other words, Japan's goal was to move from the inside out. In reality, however, the opposite happened. Dynamics spurred by the existing exclusivist Asian frameworks (notably ASEAN Plus Three) have led Japan to look more inwardly in Asia. The 'contribution'-rhetoric may well support Japanese foreign policy 'on paper', but in reality it is clear that NEA-3 serves its *own* goal and its *own* purpose, which was not created by foreign policy makers. 'The situations created by the interaction of the units, whether their occurrence was expected by the

units or not, have a logic of their own...’ (Hoffmann 1959: 372). What happens to intentions (East Asian Community) and interests (Southeast Asia) when regional enmeshment comes in?

In the process of enmeshment, actor’s interests are redefined (compare Goh 2011a). In regional enmeshment, a *new* dynamic emerges, resulting in ‘regional’ enmeshment, that cannot be ascribed singularly to any particular actor. A regional trend starts to live according to its own logic that may have little to do with ongoing foreign policy of a particular state (like in Japan’s case—Japan might be enmeshed in trends that do not reflect its current policy). There is no clear ‘target state’ in *regional* enmeshment (compare Goh 2008: 121). In this sense, regional enmeshment is not a state’s preference, but a *process* in which various ‘intentions’ (preferences and policies) become converted into an ‘outcome’.

Such an outcome may not correspond to any particular preference, not even to a preference of the most powerful state in the region. This also shows why emergence of the trilateral framework from APT has taken us—IR scholars—‘by surprise’. We have carefully studied preferences of major regional states and groupings, concluding that Northeast Asian states are competitive *towards each other*. Yet, we have missed to study the truly *regional* logic, where as if ‘the invisible hand’ of the region transforms interests and redirects such competitive intentions, through the channels of its own (regional) making.

Unlike ‘institutional enmeshment’, regional enmeshment here has little to do with formal commitments and obligations. East Asian frameworks are rather loose and little formalised. It does not mean, however, that the implications cannot be far-reaching. In the process of regional enmeshment, new interests for Japan were

created. Japan could accept, and even was mildly enthusiastic towards, ASEAN+3. This in turn created an interest for a trilateral framework.

Although Japan was not interested in starting a framework with Korea and China *per se*, involvement in ASEAN+3 shaped this interest. ASEAN+3 gave Northeast Asian states a new platform of interaction. We cannot confuse Japanese intentions for Northeast Asia with what actually happened. Enmeshment in regional dynamics has not left Japan unchanged. Regional dynamics shape Japan's interest. Japan might have been in principle unsupportive towards exclusivist Asian groupings, yet it ended up *there* [APT]. And it opened to Japan new opportunities. Japan apparently did not have a 'master plan' for trilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia. It was rather shaping its regional preference against the benchmark of what was happening in East Asia.

Growing Japanese tolerance to the Northeast Asian framework, punctuated by moments of questionable leadership, stem from Japan's enmeshment in regional dynamics. They do not stem from the Japanese interest, but rather they shape the Japanese interest as they evolve. Outcomes shape Japanese foreign policy; there is a two-way relationship between foreign policy and outcomes. We generally study foreign policy with the intent of explaining outcomes, but we tend to forget to explore the other direction: how outcomes impact on foreign policy.

Regional enmeshment is not a result of a particular preference, like 'traditional' enmeshment in IR can be. The focus on *regional* implies a blend that has gone 'out of control'. Even if APT framework was a result of ASEAN's attempt at 'enmeshing' or even 'socialising' the Northeastern powers, the actual result is likely to displease ASEAN. It is because a new regional dynamic is created. While

in APT ASEAN is in the centre of Northeast Asia's moves, it is pushed to the margin in their independent interaction.

### *Tensions Between the Two*

Co-existence of the 'wider' and 'narrower' East Asia in Japanese thinking, as two goals that should be simultaneously pursued, seemingly obviates the puzzle of why Japan pursues contradictory goals. At the apex of Japanese policy making, this tension has been recognised and accepted. This is as far as official rhetoric can go. 'On the surface, governments have been at pains to suggest that the two cooperative processes ... APT and the EAS ... are complementary'; in reality, they constitute 'different and competing' approaches (Chin Kin Wah 2009: 23).

The key fact is that the two contradictory tracks were pursued at the same time, by the same state—Japan. At the peak of contradictions, Shinzo Abe was behind the scene of organising the Fukuoka summit, based on warmer relations. '... Japan led the way in initiating regularised summits among the top leaders from China, Japan and Korea...' (Pempel 2011b: 256). At the same time, he was proposing a strategic concept of 'big democracies' –without China (not a democracy) and without Korea (not a *big* democracy)<sup>207</sup>. Japan often sought 'friends', other than China—even especially *not* China (Einhorn and Phillips, 2013). Yet, in August 2007, only a few months before Japan allegedly proposed the trilateral summit, the same Abe proposed a concept based on 'strategic interest' (Abe, quoted in Pempel 2011b:

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<sup>207</sup> The four big democracies were: Japan, U.S., India, Australia (Pempel 2011b: 271). See also Acharya (2008b: 160) for an interesting argument on exclusion of Korea. Acharya looks at the 'quadrilateral dialogue' (US, Japan, Australia and India) from a different angle, labelling it a 'club of big powers': 'Smaller democracies of the region, such as South Korea or Indonesia, are not part of the group and are likely to resent it'.

270-271)<sup>208</sup>. It is important to consider these two pieces of information together! Those who purport to present the background to the trilateral cooperation often refer to warming relations under Abe. Yet, in August 2007 – just before Japan allegedly proposed (in November 2007) the separate trilateral summit, Abe put forward the concept of the ‘confluence of the two seas’<sup>209</sup>. That concept, based on ‘strategic interest’, excluded China and it excluded Korea. ‘China was conspicuously missing from the list of potential members’, writes T.J. Pempel (2011b: 271). Even more conspicuously missing was South Korea – a democracy, an advanced economy, and a US ally. This shows that even though Japan has been ‘multilateralising’ links with Asia, ‘even in the security field’ (Pempel 2011b: 273), it shows ambivalence to Asian regionalism, importantly, ‘less about joining but more about *deferring* to’ (Pempel 2011b: 256; my emphasis). Vividly illustrated here is the line we need to draw between Japan’s joining of many institutions, and Japan actually adhering to them. In reading these tensions, one caveat applies. The point on ‘broader Asia’ is actually a small portion of Abe’s *speech* to the Indian parliament. It is diplomacy, not even a preference.

‘The most serious differences, ironically, are between two nations that would unquestionably be accepted as core members of the region of East Asia, however it is defined. China prefers the APT process, involving ASEAN and the three Northeast Asian states... while Japan would prefer to see the East Asian Summit, with the participation of India, Australia, and New Zealand... .’ (Acharya 2008c: 333). Some accounts do point to Japan’s increasing interest in Asia-only

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<sup>208</sup> The ‘arc of freedom and prosperity’ concept was invented by Aso, when he was foreign minister, in November 2006 (Pempel 2011b: 270). It was designed for Japan, US, India, and Australia—the ‘four big democracies’ (Pempel 2011b: 271).

<sup>209</sup> Initially, Aso as foreign minister formulated the concept of ‘arc of freedom and prosperity’ in November 2006 (Pempel 2011b: 270).

arrangements like APT: ‘Japan’s push for the promotion of ASEAN+3...’ (Terada 2003: 251)—especially after the Asian financial crisis (Calder and Ye 2010). The bulk of evidence, however, confirms that *relatively* Japan is more interested in the wider frameworks: ‘Japan’s public statements on APT are surprisingly neutral in tone’ (Hund 2003: 393). That is, even if in *absolute* terms Japan became more tolerant to APT, it has not become priority. Co-existence of frameworks going in contradictory directions can be explained with Japan’s lower commitment to Asia-only arrangements. ‘Analytic sense’ is remains to be done about Japan’s relationship with Asian regionalism (Pempel 2011b: 257).

Japan here is clearly an interesting case, on which example we can distinguish the nuanced separation between preferences and outcomes. Japan became ‘enmeshed’ in the framework of NEA-3, through its prior presence in APT. When we study Japan’s ‘national’ interest in the context of APT, it becomes increasingly clear that here we have an actor with a separate set of interests. At a broader level, it did not pursue a closed framework with China and South Korea. Yet, it is APT that spurred a new dynamic where inviting China and South Korea turned out to be an option hard to reject. ‘[Only 20 to 30 years ago] the general public seldom came across the term “Northeast Asia” in journals, newspapers or on television’ (Nakagawa 2005: 82). This is a stark contrast to Korea, where the term ‘Northeast Asia’, when speaking about the region, is virtually omnipresent. Korea is as if a natural promoter of Northeast Asian regionalism. This is quite in contrast to the steadfast commitment of Korea to Northeast Asia; Lee Myung-bak proposed the trilateral secretariat, and Korea prepared a draft treaty (interview 2, Tokyo).

Policy to East/ Southeast Asia is behind Japan’s policy to Northeast Asia, leading to a constellation right on spot of *Korean* objectives. ‘Koreans think that

Asia is Northeast Asia', while to Japan Southeast Asia is very important (YC Lee-interview 11, Seoul, April/ May 2011). (As we shall see in the next chapter, Korea has been the key promoter of Northeast Asian regionalism). Deeply enmeshed in regional frameworks, Japan found a new interest in Northeast Asian cooperation, which has been for long on the Korean agenda. In this way Japan crossed the path with Korea.

'The multilateral impulse has been strong in Japan's post-war foreign policy *thinking*, but in practice it has often been elusive' (Green 2002: 193). In the next chapter, Korea—a smaller power, noticeably tied to Northeast Asia – offers a glimpse into a contrasting behaviour. The original foreign-policy background of Japan's approach to the region has been East Asia, officially revolving around Southeast Asia. For Korea, as we shall see in the next chapter, it is Northeast Asia. In the environment created in ASEAN Plus Three, they both had to test their preferences against the reality of this new China—a country that cannot be easily excluded. They *learnt* the merits not only of including China, but also of not 'diluting' it too much. They learnt that it is possible and workable.

## Chapter 5. Korea in Northeast Asia

China, Japan and Korea are the minimum or the ‘core’ that geographically build Northeast Asia. Conventionally, the region incorporates Russia and often Mongolia (Calder and Ye 2010). Su-hoon Lee equals the scope of Northeast Asia with the Six Party Talks participants (South Korea, North Korea, US, China, Japan, and Russia), but regards Japan, China and Korea as the ‘core’ (Lee, SH 2010: 72, 73).

Japan and Korea served as ‘one integrated unit’ for US security planning (Cha 2000: 271, ft. 26). At its gloomiest, ‘[t]he concept of Northeast Asia was known to have been devised by the US army’ (Kim, KS 2010: 91). From this, it is not at all surprising that Northeast Asia brings to mind security themes, mostly ‘hard security’. Northeast Asia indeed tends to imply security, while East Asia—focus on economics. In Japan, the term ‘Northeast Asia’ became associated with the North Korean problem (Nakagawa 2005: 88). But Roh’s NEACI extended the ‘conceptual space’ of Northeast Asia to economics, so that Northeast Asia became a ‘central unit of the regional cooperation scheme of Korea’ (Kim, KS 2010: 90). The economic component in the Initiative distinguishes it from the mainstream vision of Northeast Asia, which has little to do with economics. Scholars often refer to the economic ‘gap’ between Northeast and Southeast Asia, as well as to the fact that Korea, unlike Japan, doesn’t have much business with Southeast Asia, in order to explain Korean preference for Northeast Asia<sup>210</sup>.

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<sup>210</sup> There are also disciplinary considerations, as Jong Kun Choi notes, that IR scholars, as researchers, have to ‘specify’ the domain of their interest (interview, Seoul, 2011).

‘Strategically and geopolitically, Northeast Asia is the most important region to the Korean peninsula’ (Lee, SH 2007: 18). This accumulated weight gains importance against the background of the trilateral summits. It results that comparing foreign policy objectives to that actual outcome, Korea comes closer than both Japan and China to having realised its objectives. Korean scholars tend to maintain that Korea was the key force, even if asked specifically about the separate format. The Roh government proposed institutionalisation of the trilateral summit outside of the APT (Lee and Moon 2008:50).

‘Northeast Asia’, therefore, occupies a special place in the IR academia. The term ‘Northeast Asia’, generally little popular in studies on the region (where ‘East Asia’, ‘Asia-Pacific’ or even ‘Southeast Asia’ prevail), is very popular in Korea. Popularity of this term distinguishes Korean academics and policymakers from neighbouring countries. Notably in Japan, the term ‘East Asia’ is much more frequently used. It is simply striking, when one reviews literature on the subject, to find how often Korean scholars refer to ‘Northeast Asia’—to the effect that any IR work with ‘Northeast Asia’ in the title is most likely to be of South Korean origin. Korean IR community has been obsessed with the notion of Northeast Asia<sup>211</sup> (Taehyun Kim, in Korean, cited in Choi, JK 2008: 208).

Northeast Asia is a region taken more seriously in Korea than elsewhere. The Northeast Asian thread has consistently run through Korean academia and policymaking. From the many Asian regions, it is Northeast Asia that attracts most attention in Korea. It is a default geographic concept for those who study or practice the region.

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<sup>211</sup> ‘Dongbuk-a’ in Korean.

## Is the Evidence Compelling?

The issue of evidence and its role in generating warranted knowledge presents us with a variety of problems. Kratochwil (2007: 25)

‘Seeing these three partners coming together will give many countries a good sense of awe’. This is a statement by the first secretary-general of the trilateral cooperation secretariat of Japan, China and the Republic of Korea (thereafter, Korea) (*Korea Herald*, 13 June 2011)<sup>212</sup>. A regional secretariat was established there in 2011. There was no secretariat for APT due to power competition; ASEAN would not allow Korea, because it needs to be ‘in the centre’ (Yoshimatsu, 2010, Beppu). Just as Japanese, Korean and Chinese leaders have practiced various types of handshakes after their trilateral meetings, they have arguably moved beyond the ‘ASEAN handshake’. Thus, this thesis considers these developments that remain a puzzle: *why has a Northeast Asian cooperation emerged*. It is, however, the ‘three leaders-only’ summit in December 2008 (Fukuoka, Japan), that marks the beginning of a trilateral cooperation independent from APT. The secretariat is like the ‘peak of an iceberg’ here, because the surprise has been mounting for long, to form a significant research puzzle.

South Korea is better known to IR scholarship for its problems than successes: a divided state, complicating the big powers’ ‘strategic calculations’ (Scalapino 1987: 3). Thus, recent contributions placing Korea in a more active position serve the useful aim of diversification. Consider for example the following statement: ‘...through a catalytic mediating role among its neighbours – in many

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<sup>212</sup> H.I. Shin, ‘Potential for Korea, China, Japan immense’, *Korea Herald*, <http://www.koreaherald.com/national/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20110613000747> (30 June 2011).

ways like that of the Benelux nations in the formation of the European community – South Korea is dynamically inspiring the Making of Northeast Asia...’ (Calder and Ye 2010: 193)<sup>213</sup>. We are justified to expect that Korea has built a more robust record of regional achievements than said ‘dynamic inspiration’. Said otherwise, there *seems* to be evidence that Realists have not captured all the reality about Korea, yet is this evidence compelling?

Why do we have to look at Korea? Because in the preceding chapter (Ch. 3), we have perceived that Japan’s call for a Northeast Asian cooperation was loud yet superficial. We have started from accepting the notion that Japan can be credited with the official proposal, but we have then learnt, in the course of analysing its foreign policy objectives, that Japan’s call for a Northeast Asian summit shouldn’t be equated with an interest in Northeast Asia. This notion shows an important thing. Namely, the trilateral summit cannot be equated with ‘Northeast Asia’. For long, the publications with ‘Northeast Asia’ in the title have been referent to the so-called micro-regionalism. This meant, for example, the Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI).

This, again, shows the danger in using regionalist descriptions loosely and in a non-committal manner. How can we now compare the works on the trilateral summit with those on the Tumen river, both with ‘Northeast Asia’ plainly in the title? This has been a difficulty of doing this kind of research, explaining what it is about and sifting through the sources. Northeast Asia is not an established entity. Its meaning has been evolving in the past decades, from militarist notion, to micro-regionalism, and finally the state-level cooperation among the three countries.

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<sup>213</sup> For a lucid comparison to the Benelux nations, see also Calder (2006).

By studying Korean foreign policy, to which I will refer here as ‘strategy’, in isolation, the optimists overemphasise Korea’s intentions. By weighing external constraints and other actors’ intentions heavily, Realist-style analysis deemed a trilateral cooperative framework impossible. From this, the strategies-versus-outcomes framework follows. The Korean pro-Northeast Asian vision is embodied in the Northeast Asia Cooperation Initiative (NEACI) of the late President Roh Moo-hyun (2003-Feb. 2008), which I discuss in more detail later. The outcome under scrutiny here is, understandably, the trilateral cooperation. While foreign-policy students (many of whom are optimists arguing for Korea’s centrality) diligently study strategies, and Realists privilege materialisation of outcomes, nobody has really paid enough attention to interaction among states.

This chapter advances the argument that Korea has been *the* key force behind Northeast Asian cooperation; it does so by starting from a rereading of Korea’s nominally ‘East Asian’ or ‘Pacific’ initiatives as actually Northeast Asian ones. Insofar as it is left at a general level, the statement is not controversial. When reinterpreted as: Korea, *not* Japan, has been the key force behind the trilateral cooperation, the statement goes against evidence such as: ‘... Japan *led the way* in initiating regularized summits among the top leaders from China, Japan and Korea’ (Pempel 2011b: 256). Japan is credited with making the official proposal; it should not be, however, mistaken for Japan genuinely promoting Northeast Asian cooperation. All the way from the beginning, the task has been led by Korea<sup>214</sup>.

The order of this chapter is inspired by the preferences-outcomes framework. First, we shall look at Korea’s preferences for the region, to which the literature pays scant attention. We know well that China favours ASEAN+3 (or ‘Asian’), and Japan

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<sup>214</sup> On the remaining role of China, see Chapter 3.

ASEAN+6 (or 'broader') regional formulas, but we know little about Korea's preferences, sometimes discounted as 'ambiguous' (CJ Lee, Seoul, 2011, interview). Second, and perhaps more importantly, my task here is to demonstrate that the point of studying these preferences *in the first place* lies in interactive approaches; I argue therefore against the notions of 'individual state strategies' and 'disjointed efforts' as in Pempel (2010a: 211) when applied to the trilateral framework. I propose instead that an interactive study of Korea's foreign policy is a better path to explaining the new regional configuration in Northeast Asia.

### *Realist Argument*

Neorealists see Korea being tightly constrained, a mere participant in a game whose rules it will never influence. For Neorealism, the trilateral framework is a puzzle because rather than China's or Japan's, it is more in line with Korea's agenda—the smallest among the three; it is an occurrence that Neorealism would not expect. This is best represented in Kim, BK (2008) and some of similarly-minded research (notably Choi, YJ 2008). Although theirs is not a direct statement about the trilateral framework, it shows well the logic that could be applied to it. This logic leans toward the point that Korea cannot 'make things happen', at best playing successfully within non-negotiable constraints. To illustrate this point, I will show arguments which put little hope in Korea pushing forward its agenda for Northeast Asia.

Placed between Japan and China, Korea is a smaller power. Realist success – 'making things happen' – is out of reach for Korea, whose foreign policy, should it ignore this fact, is bound to bring costly consequences. 'A specific foreign policy can be made and promoted only when the policy direction, created in line with

political leaders' ideas or worldviews, is compatible with the characteristics of the international structure' (Terada 2010:73). In this light, 'Northeast Asia Cooperation Initiative' (NEACI) of President Roh, the specific case for this chapter, was criticised 'from the beginning', as it was believed to carry 'a low potential for realisation' (Kim, KS 2010:91).

This concern [that politically motivated efforts at integration have a poor record] leads us to critically examine South Korea's effort to facilitate Northeast Asian integration. Northeast Asia has been at the centre of President Roh's foreign policy. He invested a significant portion of his diplomatic assets in a Northeast Asian integration project while both China and Japan showed little interest. President Roh was mainly motivated by his political ambition to bring peace to the Korean Peninsula. He saw no major breakthrough in the process and invited only worries and cynicism from the two neighbours. (Choi, YJ 2008: 50).

The above statement rests upon an immovable logic of Chinese and Japanese opposition; it conveys an understanding that China and Japan are 'against' the Northeast Asian project. It talks about 'little interest', 'worries and cynicism' from their part.<sup>215</sup>

Testing against the trilateral framework reveals weaknesses of such literature. What Kim, BK (2008:203) writes about Roh's policy cannot withstand the test: 'his regionalist strategy overestimated South Korea's ability to persuade unwilling or disinterested [sic] China and Japan into not only a trilateral FTA, but also the ASEAN Plus Three community'. (It is *de facto* China that is more interested in a trilateral FTA than either Japan or Korea.) The argument goes further that 'South Korea was more likely to be disregarded by its neighbours, who had not only

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<sup>215</sup> This quotation also shows that, in effect, the 'Northeast Asia' that matters consists of China, Japan and Korea - despite 'diplomatically correct' efforts at envisioning a broader and more inclusive region.

different intentions, but also overwhelming power capabilities' (Kim, BK 2008: 212).

Different intentions do not have to act as an obstacle. Many outcomes in international relations eventually take place despite 'different intentions'. The literature above represents *Realist-style* argumentation, but it is not Realist in the strictest theoretical sense, for Waltz takes note of the weak connection between 'results' and 'intentions'<sup>216</sup>. 'In the history of international relations, however, results achieved seldom correspond to the intentions of actors' (Waltz 1979: 65); Jervis adds that 'outcomes may not correspond with the intentions of any of the actors, *even the most powerful*' (1991: 113; my emphasis).

Korea was not inherently mistaken to focus on Northeast Asia. While Neorealists pay indeed a lot of attention to the external environment and especially constraints, they still isolate them, to the effect that we cannot see how Korean preferences *interact with* this environment—instead of simply bouncing against it; the 'environment' here refers to China and Japan. What Neorealists should do instead is to allow all the parts move, like in a theatre. The position I take, therefore, is that Korea's preference for Northeast Asia should be studied *in interaction* with those of Japan and China, in order to assess if or how successful it was<sup>217</sup>.

### *'Korea-at-the-Centre' Argument*

What does a 'reality check' say? Korea today is involved in a myriad of frameworks, designed for cooperation, with these same great powers. In particular,

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<sup>216</sup> The paradigm of Analytical Eclecticism also takes note of 'unforeseen outcomes' (see Katzenstein and Okawara 2001/02: 157 for their awareness thereof).

<sup>217</sup> Here, I am certainly not saying that these are the *only* interactions, and that there are no other *important* interactions. Interactions of Korea with China and Japan, however, are the minimum that can be studied here in anything approaching a comprehensive manner.

the trilateral framework with Japan and China showcases the success of Korea. This raises the question about the sources of Korea's apparent foreign policy success—a success not taken into account by the Realists. Yet, has this situation been shaped by the Korean foreign policy? The logic that Korean foreign policy has been successful on its own merit hangs on the fragile condition: China and Japan would have to follow. The analysis that promises to acknowledge the potential of Korea is a useful discussion with those who stress constraints. But is it able to offer a salient counterargument to the Realists?

To address this question, I will look at the argumentation behind the 'Korea at the centre' thesis, on the basis of two principal works: one under the title from which I borrow here (*Korea At the Centre*, ed. Armstrong, Rozman, Kim and Kotkin 2006), and a more recent one by Calder and Ye (2010, chap. 8). But rather than their claim, it is the evidence they use that should attract more attention. On the back cover of Armstrong et al. (2006) one can find three claims: i) Korea's location at the 'very centre' of the region; ii) a 'natural corridor' between China and Japan<sup>218</sup>; iii) and the potential of North Korea's opening. Argument on location is a healthy corrective to detached-idealistic claims; location matters, but—in this case—in which way does it? Nothing is so transparently 'natural' about being located between Japan and China that it would not need a more careful elaboration. The opening of North Korea, finally, is only 'potential' – as the authors rightly note – and as such it does not count as evidence either. Location or a (potential) future scenario does not count as evidence.

The problem of evidence is further well presented in newer literature on the example of Korea being a 'catalyst'. The problem is that the Korean administration

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<sup>218</sup> For more rigour, it could be collapsed with point i.

defined Korea's role as 'catalytic'; this meant, in short, to become a hub, a centre, and a co-operator (Calder and Ye 2010: 193, referring to the Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative 2004). Korea is a 'regional catalyst'; it plays 'a catalytic mediating role' (Calder and Ye 2010: 185, 193). It is left unexplained what it has done to deserve that naming, and the strongest evidence that we have is this: foreign-policy language. 'Catalyst' has not been created, in this case, to capture achievements of Korea; instead, it has been inherited from foreign-policy intentions. These may well indicate objectives of Korea, but surely not the actual situation. We should be open to the possibility of Korea playing a 'catalytic' role in the region. Yet, we should be wary of embracing such conclusions on basis of no evidence. Nor can we deduce from foreign policy. Without probing whether a foreign policy has been realised and a tangible outcome has been achieved, it is the mistake to inflate present outcomes with foreign-policy language.

Weak evidentiary character of 'Korea at the centre' argument allows the Realist visions to sound more compelling; this vision is not an apt reflection of the reality, since Korea can claim a lot more from the 'centre' thesis. Stronger evidence-based claims would thus benefit those analyses which rightfully want to stress Korea's active role, at times centrality. Based on intentions and probabilities, they do not fall into the category of outcomes; hence, they cannot effectively respond to the Realists. We should be suspicious of such cases where foreign-policy language enters—on the virtue of compatibility with observation—into the realm that can be occupied only by *empirical* evidence. Neither plausible geopolitical 'logic', nor convincing foreign-policy ideas, can substitute empirical record of what happened; when it happened; and how it happened. 'So support your claims with as much

evidence as you can, even when you think you have the power of logic on your side’ (Turabian 2007: 60).

‘Korea at the centre’ argument is in its present form more about possibilities that Korea may have, and foreign policy visions that may prove successful, than it is about empirical evidence that could weaken the Realist thesis. And in order to do so, looking at Korea’s efforts *alone* is but misleading. Korea has actively acquired a position in the Northeast Asia triangle, but it has done so within a context that has not been studied. Just because Korea is in the ‘middle’ does not mean that it always effectively acts as a bridge between China and Japan.

### *Realist versus ‘Centre’ Positions*

To comprehend the tension between ‘Korea at the centre’ and the Realist argument in analytical terms, I will now suggest the framework of preferences vs. outcomes. Foreign policy of Korea will be understood here as ‘preference’, and the trilateral framework as an ‘outcome’ in IR<sup>219</sup>.

We cannot really find books on interactive approaches to foreign policy. But are there any interactive approaches in the literature? We could expect to find them in *Responding to Japan’s Asian Policy: The Korean Calculus* (Lee, JH, and Moon 2002), a title which presumes interaction of foreign policies. Lee, JH, and Moon (2002) preclude a real-time interaction of preferences, however. They calculate moves as if ‘on paper’, taking Japan’s preference as ‘A’ and calculating how Korea would respond. But international politics resembles rather a game of billiards; balls keep one another constantly in motion (see Wolfers 1962:19). Another chance to identify interactive approaches lies in the following:

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<sup>219</sup> For a full exposition of this framework, see Chapter 1.

We argue that Northeast Asia has in the first decade of the 2000s entered a period when regionalism will intensify...This perspective should provoke a re-examination of local history *that transcends parallel, nonintersecting nationalist narratives*. In its enduring geography, Northeast Asia consists of three linked entities: China, Japan, and Korea ... Any discussion of Korean centrality in Northeast Asia, therefore, must range between two long-time historical partners and four great power contenders. Rozman (2006: x-xi).

Yet, in the book, I have not identified interactive approaches to foreign policies. Finally, Johnston (2004) refers to interactive conditions in explaining the tension between ‘status quo-ness’ of China’s foreign policy and the growing ‘China threat’ perception in Northeast Asian states; he refers to the interaction between China’s policies/ actions with policies/ actions of other states.

### ***Reality Check: Korea in the Trilateral Cooperation***

‘Despite their importance, many of these items have been overlooked within the libraries’ collections and largely neglected by scholars.’

–‘Korean Treasures: Rare Books, Manuscripts and Artefacts in the Bodleian Libraries’<sup>220</sup>

The trilateral cooperation is a useful ground to spell out evidence on what Korea has achieved in Northeast Asia; despite being important, these actions have been attached little priority. What we need to do is look beyond the surface and compare the preference with the outcome. ‘But what used to be called linkage theory...that is, propositions about the bonds between foreign policy and international politics has remained in the frozen stage of static taxonomies’ (Hoffmann 1977: 53). ‘Students

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<sup>220</sup> Oxford, 26 August–26 September 2011.

of the international system and students of foreign-policy making have never really blended their research' (Hoffmann 1977: 53).

Speaking of the summit in Fukuoka in 2008, Su-hoon Lee writes: 'it is important to remember that this was an accomplishment that resulted from South Korea's consistent efforts toward pursuing cooperative measures and emphasis on the establishment of a NEA community' (2010: 83). It is important to remember that it is a subjective statement. Northeast Asian community was a Korean vision. And vision is an 'imagined outcome' (Acharya 2008c: 327-328). This statement is important because it casts Korean participation in a different light.

#### *Outcomes in Comparison*

In Calder and Ye (2010), Korea is pictured as a catalyst, on the track to becoming an 'institution broker'; indeed, a central actor which has realized its vision. Where are the sources of this success: in a failed foreign policy project?, one is tempted to ask. Because *at the moment* Korea appears to be playing a central role, the authors go back to Roh's NEACI, borrowing from its language and its 'logic'. Suddenly, ideas that were once considered failed, or at least not realised, aptly capture the present moment. But these claims remain empty, if they are not filled with empirical evidence. These ideas, due to their plausible logic, seamlessly transpired into the sphere of outcomes. Without becoming outcomes, they got to be treated as equivalents. We should be highly suspicious of such cases where foreign-policy language enters—on the virtue of pure compatibility with observable facts—into the realm that can be rightfully occupied only by *empirical* evidence. If Calder and Ye (2010) wanted to argue for a connection between Roh's policy and Korea's present

behaviour, which other analysts missed to perceive, they should empirically demonstrate that such a connection exists.

### *'Including' China*

Referring to the first trilateral meeting in the late 1990s, Yoshimatsu writes that 'Korean President Kim [Dae-jung] acted as mediator to persuade the Chinese government to sit down at the summit table' (2008:68)<sup>221</sup>. Calder and Ye open it out to a broader statement even: 'Seoul has, for example, helped to incorporate China into regional dialogues' (2010:125). While the trilateral framework *may* give Korea such opportunities, we have been forced to accept conclusive statements on the basis of little evidence. The *empirical*, rather than theoretical/ deductive, question would be: what has been the actual role of Seoul in including China?

Yet, the story of China having to be included is a story from 1980s or 90s, when China was reluctant to act multilaterally, preferring the bilateral mode. The Chinese were afraid of Japan and Korea 'siding' against China (Kim HK, 25 May 2011, Seoul). Today China helps Korea to take a more leading position; it is the opposite of Korea 'helping' China, what many scholars still believe. 'If China takes the initiative, who will follow?', asks Prof. Kim (interview, 2011, Seoul). Japan would be especially reluctant to follow China, which makes Korea's 'initiative' a more acceptable option; China can have more influence using Korea in this way. And Korea wants more leadership. In this way, Korea takes the initiative in many issues.

In Seoul in 1991, Korea 'managed to negotiate' the entry of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Palmujoki 2001). South Korea's preference is to increase the

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<sup>221</sup> Reference to *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 29 November 1999.

web of networks in which China is involved, with the view of checking China's power (Kim HK, 25 May 2011, Seoul). The trilateral summit is part of the plan to 'involve' and 'encourage' China, and to extend the ground of issues in 'cooperation'. The arrangement belonged to the 'South Korea's diplomatic strategy to engage China multilaterally' (Chung 2012: 183).

### *Trilateral FTA: Japan's Problems*

This is the account from the interview with Chang Jae Lee (KIEP), who has led the joint study on CJK (China-Japan-Korea) FTA from the Korean side.

Negotiations on Japan-Korea FTA started in late 2003 and were suspended in November 2004. As of 2011, they are practically 'dead'. The present government dropped them from the MOFAT list of 'under negotiation' agreements. Japan, Korea and China formed many FTAs – but with other countries. 'It is abnormal'. The reasons for it are 'non-economic' and fall into the rubric of 'the past'. 'Japan, unlike Germany, didn't clear its history'. In Japan, government officials are not willing to form an agreement with China.

From 2003, the three institutions conducted studies<sup>222</sup>. Japan was reluctant even to start the study. To accommodate Japan, the study topic was softened to 'Economic effects of a possible FTA'. The study was concluded in 2009 (after 7 years)<sup>223</sup>. It was first planned to last 3-4 years, but the governments were not ready to upgrade to 'governmental' status. It was not easy, but Japan accepted discussions

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<sup>222</sup> KIEP from Korea, Development Research Centre from China, and NIRA from Japan which was then moved to JETRO.

<sup>223</sup> It was first planned to last 3-4 years, but the governments were not ready to upgrade to 'governmental' status, so the study continued.

at the governmental level. In 2009 the study yielded the recommendation to the three governments to start a government-level discussion<sup>224</sup>.

What are the prospects? Korea-Japan FTA is not easy. There is no strong political leadership. Some of the Japanese business people think that a Korea-Japan FTA is not possible; they prefer a CJK FTA. China is willing to agree on a Korea-China or CJK FTA and is most active. A trilateral FTA would mark a new beginning in this part of the world. FTA is something ‘very loose, but they don’t even have an FTA’. The real impact of CJK FTA would be larger than just economic. In the short term, Korea-China FTA is more possible. The Korea-Japan one has already failed and thus the approach is more cautious. (Japan would be eager to have a Korea-Japan FTA if Korea concludes an agreement with China).

The Japanese government is ‘very reluctant, but then people expect negotiations’. The problems for Japan are forestry, fishery and agriculture. It has no tariff on manufactured products, as its manufacturing is perhaps strongest in the world. But Japan would like to exclude the agricultural sector. The paradox is that Japan is the most advanced country in Asia, but cannot have a “high quality FTA” (interview, Yoshimatsu, Nov. 2010)<sup>225</sup>. (Korea has high quality FTAs with the United States and the European Union). Japan is the most reluctant.

But a trilateral FTA is also a Korean problem. Despite pockets of committed individuals (a sort of an epistemic community), it is China, not Korea, that has pushed for a trilateral agreement.

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<sup>224</sup> The official study is to be finished by December 2011, in time for the 2012 trilateral summit (May).

<sup>225</sup> A “high-quality FTA” would signify a comprehensive deal that is inclusive as for list of items in the actual agreement. (Low-quality FTA would make exceptions of those).

‘South Korea may be a key facilitator of regional leadership by working in conjunction with others in the region’ (Bluth and Dent 2008: 247). The trilateral framework, including China and Japan, is ‘somewhat unique’ (Bluth and Dent 2008: 261) ‘The Northeast Asia trilateral meetings provide South Korea with a significant opportunity to exert intermediary or middle power influence in both Sino-Japanese and regional affairs’ (Bluth and Dent 2008: 261). This sheds some light on leadership in Asia and ‘middle power’ concept.

### *Trilateral Secretariat*

Among tangible achievements of Korea’s diplomacy, which would finally serve to support the ‘centre’ thesis, is the trilateral secretariat. The secretariat was proposed by the new administration of Lee Myung-bak, at the summit in Beijing in 2009<sup>226</sup>. ‘At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Korea-China-Japan Summit in 2010, an agreement was reached to set up a trilateral cooperation secretariat in Korea by the end of 2011’ (MOFAT 2011). It was opened on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2011 in Seoul<sup>227</sup>.

Asia has been known in IR scholarship for its unwillingness to institutionalise—but rightly so? A few scholars (among them Yoshimatsu 2010) have afforded to note that this unwillingness is, after all, lower in Northeast than in

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<sup>226</sup> Shin Hae-in, ‘Potential for Korea, China, Japan immense’, *Korea Herald*, 13 June 2011, <http://www.koreaherald.com/national/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20110613000747> (30 June 2011).

<sup>227</sup> Previously, the considered location was Incheon. That the secretariat was ultimately situated in Seoul can be seen as an indicator of the ‘seriousness’ of the situation. (The secretariat will operate from the 20<sup>th</sup> floor of the S-Tower, according to *Korea.net*, <http://www.korea.net/detail.do?guid=57746>, 22 September 2011, and the opening ceremony was scheduled for late September 2011). There was a recruitment campaign posted through embassies and consulates, for example [http://www.kr.emb-japan.go.jp/people/news/news\\_110801.htm](http://www.kr.emb-japan.go.jp/people/news/news_110801.htm), 22 September 2011. The job advertisement in Chinese was trying to establish itself on the popularity that Korean culture enjoys in China: ‘We are an international organisation being set up in the country that is home to... [names of Korean pop stars]’ (see *Chosun Ilbo*, [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2011/08/03/2011080300813.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/08/03/2011080300813.html), 22 September 2011).

Southeast Asia. Lack of a secretariat in APT started to be seen as a ‘hindrance’ (Evans 2005: 210). The premium that ASEAN places on ‘a lack of permanency and formality’ (as summarised in Katzenstein and Okawara 2001/02: 174) is *ridiculous*; it’s the same as placing a premium on living in temporary shatter houses rather than owning a residence. Still, the belief that Asia is unwilling to institutionalise is so deeply entrenched that in my interviews in Korea, at a time when setting up of the trilateral secretariat was in motion, even mentioning of the planned secretariat was greeted with disbelief. The secretariat, in the meantime, calls itself an ‘international organisation’<sup>228</sup>.

### **Korean Preferences for Northeast Asia**

China, Japan and Korea are the minimum or the ‘core’ that geographically build Northeast Asia. Conventionally, the region incorporates Russia and often Mongolia (Calder and Ye 2010). Su-hoon Lee equals the scope of Northeast Asia with the Six Party Talks participants (South Korea, North Korea, US, China, Japan, and Russia), but regards Japan, China and Korea as the ‘core’ (Lee, SH 2010: 72, 73).

Japan and Korea served as ‘one integrated unit’ for US security planning (Cha 2000: 271, ft. 26). At its gloomiest, ‘[t]he concept of Northeast Asia was known to have been devised by the US army’ (Kim, KS 2010: 91). From this, it is not at all surprising that Northeast Asia brings to mind security themes, mostly ‘hard security’. Northeast Asia indeed tends to imply security, while East Asia—focus on economics. In Japan, the term ‘Northeast Asia’ became associated with the North Korean problem (Nakagawa 2005: 88). But Roh’s NEACI extended the ‘conceptual space’ of Northeast Asia to economics, so that Northeast Asia became a ‘central unit of the regional cooperation scheme of Korea’ (Kim, KS 2010: 90). The economic

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<sup>228</sup> <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t842356.htm> (27 February 2013).

component in the Initiative distinguishes it from the mainstream vision of Northeast Asia, which has little to do with economics. Scholars often refer to the economic ‘gap’ between Northeast and Southeast Asia, as well as to the fact that Korea, unlike Japan, doesn’t have much business with Southeast Asia, in order to explain Korean preference for Northeast Asia.<sup>229</sup>

‘Strategically and geopolitically, Northeast Asia is the most important region to the Korean peninsula’ (Lee, SH 2007: 18). This accumulated weight gains importance against the background of the trilateral summits. It results that comparing foreign policy objectives to that actual outcome, Korea comes closer than both Japan and China to having realised its objectives. Korean scholars tend to maintain that Korea was the key force, even if asked specifically about the separate format. The Roh government proposed institutionalisation of the trilateral summit outside of the APT (Lee and Moon 2008:50).

‘Northeast Asia’, therefore, occupies a special place in the IR academia. The term ‘Northeast Asia’, generally little popular in studies on the region (where ‘East Asia’, ‘Asia-Pacific’ or even ‘Southeast Asia’ prevail), is very popular in Korea. Popularity of this term distinguishes Korean academics and policymakers from neighbouring countries. Notably in Japan, the term ‘East Asia’ is much more frequently used. It is simply striking, when one reviews literature on the subject, to find how often Korean scholars refer to ‘Northeast Asia’—to the effect that any IR work with ‘Northeast Asia’ in the title is most likely to be of South Korean origin.

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<sup>229</sup> There are also disciplinary considerations, as Jong Kun Choi notes, that IR scholars, as researchers, have to ‘specify’ the domain of their interest (interview, Seoul, 2011).

Korean IR community has been obsessed with the notion of Northeast Asia<sup>230</sup> (Taehyun Kim, in Korean, cited in Choi, JK 2008: 208).

Northeast Asia is a region taken more seriously in Korea than elsewhere. The Northeast Asian thread has consistently run through Korean academia and policymaking. From the many Asian regions, it is Northeast Asia that attracts most attention in Korea. It is a default geographic concept for those who study or practice the region.

### *Northeast Asian Shadow over Southeast Asia*

Here I want to show that Korea's primary regional interest is Northeast Asia, demonstrated even in broader groupings, and how unusual it is. Preferences of Japan and China are well-known in the literature. 'What is lacking, however, is a serious analysis and discussion on South Korea's strategies...' (Lee, SH 2010: 64)<sup>231</sup>.

Scholars noted that in the decades preceding Roh Moo-hyun, the geographic scope of Korean policy was narrowing down: from globalisation and internationalisation to East Asia. It was 'globalisation' and 'internationalisation' (under Roh Tae-woo and Kim Young-sam) and then East Asia under Kim Dae-jung (Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative 2004: 13), and only finally Northeast Asia. This is indeed what emerges if we study the official titles of subsequent policies. But what I want to demonstrate is that Northeast Asia was the real focus even when Korea was 'preaching' broader visions. Northeast Asia officially became the centre of Korean regionalist effort at the time of President Roh Moo-hyun. It was, however, not the beginning.

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<sup>230</sup> *Dongbuk-a* in Korean.

<sup>231</sup> S.H. Lee (2010) uses literature all in Korean (see 70, ft. 1).

‘Broad East Asian groupings could thus, in the view of Korean leaders and policy analysts, ultimately become the vehicle for producing much needed reconciliation at the fractious Northeastern core of the region – the delicate relationships among the two Koreas and the People’s Republic of China’ (Calder and Ye 2010: 112). This is what has happened in the social environment of APT. According to the East Asian Vision Group convened in 2002, the ‘ultimate goal’ for East Asia is establishing an East Asia Community (Calder and Ye 2010: 112). Within this broad current, a Northeast Asia-specific current has emerged and became more salient.

In 1988, President Roh Tae-woo in an address to the United Nations made a proposal for a ‘Consultative Conference for Peace in Northeast Asia’ (Lee, SJ 2008: 199). This was a very early regional proposal, pre-dating even ASEAN (Hughes 1996, ft. 8). The countries to be included were: two Koreas, US, China, Japan and Russia (Kim, KS 2010:89). In 1994 at the ARF<sup>232</sup> Senior Officials’ meeting in Bangkok, Han Sung-joo (then minister of foreign affairs, later chairman of the EAVG) proposed the launching of a Northeast Asian Security Dialogue (NEASED)<sup>233</sup> (Calder and Ye 2010: 191; Lee, SJ 2008: 199, see also Moon and Kim 2004). In 1993, IFANS attached to Korean MOFAT and the Brookings Institution produced a report calling for a separate multilateral security dialogue to address problems of Northeast Asia (Lee, SJ 2008: 200)<sup>234</sup>.

At that time, Korea was actively participating in Asia-Pacific security talks. But taking the Northeast Asia-centric proposals outlined above, it casts a different

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<sup>232</sup> It is worth noting that ARF, Asian Regional Forum, is not really Asian, but rather Asia-Pacific. (See participants).

<sup>233</sup> ASEAN feared arrival of a rival NEASED (Khong 2004: 189).

<sup>234</sup> *Evolving Multilateral Security Regime in Northeast Asia*, Seoul. IFANS (1994).

light on this participation. Asia-Pacific was at the high tide in early 1990s, as the regional concept under discussion. “Weighing the importance of its U.S. export market and security alliance, at the times South Korea viewed its national interests as solidly grounded in trans-Pacific cooperation’ (Lee, SJ 2008:201). The legacy of those times seems to be maintaining the principle of what is called ‘undiscriminating openness’ (Lee, SJ 2008:200). The acceptability of APEC to Korea presumably lied in this open regionalism (Lee, SJ 2008:200). As we shall later see, even in the Northeast Asia-specific proposals Korea was keeping the openness clause officially, but is rather a straightforward task to read its true intentions. Even as Korea was backing up arrangements that were coming into existence (like APEC, ARF, ASEAN+3), its own proposals were oriented toward Northeast Asia. At a time when APEC was formed and Korea was supporting it, have we considered the question what was it that Korea wanted? We have not considered preferences of a minor actor.

Former President Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) was aiming at an institutionalised summit with China and Japan (Lee and Moon 2008:44); he took APT for the field of his initiative as the conditions were not conducive to a specifically Northeast Asian arrangement. Kim Dae-jung was among the ‘exponents of East Asian thinking’ (Evans 2005: 210). In 1998, he proposed the establishment of East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) (Terada 2011:4). But he also proposed to establish a Northeast Asian security cooperation regime (Moon and Kim 2004:264). The EAVG (East Asia Vision Group) report in 2001 had the title ‘Towards an East Asian Community: A Region of Peace, Prosperity and Progress’ (Acharya 2009c:215). The focus was peace and prosperity, just like for President Roh later.

Neither APT nor EAS responds directly to Korean concerns (Frost 2008: 122). ‘Neither of these frameworks, however, seems suitable for Korea or the countries of NEA’ (Lee, SH 2007: 20). We wouldn’t find such a blunt statement coming out from any official’s mouth. ‘Former South Korean Prime Minister Lee [?] said that although he recognizes the importance of the current 13-member framework [APT], South Korea, Japan and China should build "a Northeast Asian community" that eventually includes Mongolia and North Korea’<sup>235</sup>. This shows how digging deeper into the background of Korean initiatives in East Asia reveals their double (Northeast Asian) face. The undertone that we missed in the East Asian melody was the Northeast Asian one.

### *Lower Attachment to Southeast Asia*

Lack of ‘bones of contention’ between Korea and Southeast Asia means that ‘conventional diplomatic relations’ are sufficient to manage their relations with each other (Lee, SH 2007: 20). ‘There is no burning historical or security issue with the Southeast Asian states...Even in case critical situation happens to the Southeast Asian countries, it does not affect the national security or agenda of Korea seriously’ (Presidential Committee, quoted in Kim, KS 2010: 99). The ‘direct interest’ of Korea lies in Northeast Asia (Jong Kun Choi, interview, Seoul, 2011); it is motivated by the immediacy of the situation. The Korean belief is that the North Korean problem does not matter to Southeast Asia. The difference between East and Northeast Asian ‘communities’ is how deeply US and North Korea are discussed (Lee, SH 2010: 74). In Korea, East Asian regionalism in the configuration of APT ‘tends to be accepted as a Southeast Asian project’ (Kim, KS 2010: 98).

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<sup>235</sup> ‘Nakasone urges regular trilateral summits’, *Nikkei Weekly*, 23 April 2007 (*Factiva*, 10 January 2011).

South Korean writings are sensitive to the ‘favouritism’ that Southeast Asia automatically acquires in East Asian processes (Lee, SH 2010: 74). Korea has always wanted an ‘independent’ mechanism in the region-independent from ASEAN (Kim, HK, interview, Seoul, 2011)<sup>236</sup>.

Bae (2005) does not count ASEAN-dependent, Korea-Japan-China summits as ‘Northeast Asian’ summits. When the three were meeting within APT, their trilateral summits could not be called ‘Northeast Asian summits’ (Bae 2005). Yet, even after they moved out of Southeast Asia, there is still one problem. As Bae (2005) observes, to be called ‘Northeast Asian’ summits, they would need to be open to expanding the membership—perhaps to Russia and Mongolia, and North Korea in future.

### *Mongolia*

Korea suits well to be Mongolia’s ‘third neighbour’. Korea is the country that hosts the highest number of Mongolian expatriates, even more than Mongolia’s only two land neighbours, China or Russia (*Economist*, 8 Oct. 2011). South Korea is a ‘geostrategic island’ (Calder and Ye 2010: 186), sharing with Mongolia a quest for good ‘neighbours’. Mongolia calls Korea ‘Solongos’, or ‘Land of Rainbows’ (Calder and Ye 2010:196). Good relations may explain perhaps why Mongolia, such a peripheral state, is included in the NEACI ‘logically’ (Lee, SH 2007:19).

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<sup>236</sup> Korea has a lower interest in a Southeast Asian regional *organisation*. What I am saying here is different from saying that Korea has a lower interest in Southeast Asian *nations*. In 2003, ASEAN was Korea’s 5<sup>th</sup> largest trading partner. 42% of Korea’s developmental assistance was spent in APT region (Lee, SJ 2008:204). Yet, there are hardly any Southeast Asian academic departments in South Korea; at Sogang and Busan among the few.

In practice, however, in the entire document, the only part apart from the definition where Mongolia springs up is the Trans-Mongolia Railway (NEACI 2003: 28). Also, the 'Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative; (2004) does not mention the GTI, which includes Mongolia (Moore 2004: 117). It would link Mongolia through the China's northeast to the Sea of Japan (Hughes 2000b: 3). Mongolia's problem is that it is landlocked, so it is interested in the Tumen for 'gaining access to the world'. So, Mongolia is connected to the Tumen river programme (Asian micro-regionalism), but not the organisations. This is the bad luck of Mongolia, to eventually belong to a project, which it turns out does not work.

Mongolia, it follows, is neither sufficiently problematic nor significant enough to be included. Between China and Russia, in the words of the Mongolian foreign ministry's state secretary, Tsogbaatar Damdin, Mongolia is 'the buffer and the filling that makes this sandwich very juicy' (*Economist*, 8 Oct. 2011). The problem of Mongolia might be that it lacks access to the sea, while East Asia is a region oriented by the sea (see Kaplan 2011, on 'seascape' of East Asia)<sup>237</sup>.

Mongolia is included in definitions of Northeast Asia, yet it does not participate in any major Northeast Asian organisation. In the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which touches on this region, it is only an observer. It does not belong to the wide APEC; indeed, Mongolia is a landlocked, not Pacific nation. It doesn't belong to any of the many East Asian groupings: ASEAN, APT or EAS. It seems not important enough strategically to be 'invited', for example by Japan, to shift the weight towards the U.S. Mongolia does not even belong to those very

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<sup>237</sup> Russia has only a limited access to the Sea of Japan through a far eastern part of its territory (Vladivostok, Nakhodka). Russia belongs to SCO and is a member of APEC since 1998 (APEC web site) and the 2012 summit will take place in Vladivostok.

Northeast Asian frameworks like the Six Party Talks, Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD), or of course the Trilateral Cooperation.

It is hard not to think that Mongolia is often included in Northeast Asia because it is hard to include it anywhere else. If from some perspectives there are doubts on Japan being an East Asian country, even more so on Mongolia. Mongolia seems to have not joined yet the East Asian diplomatic game. With less than 3 million people and an income of slightly above \$2,000 per capita, it can boast an economy sizing mere \$6 billion (U.S. Department of State, 2012); that will be an economy about 10 times smaller than Luxembourg (see CIA, 2012). This may, however, change. Mongolia has already begun to change. Next door to the former headquarters of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, the capital of Ulan Bator hosts a new shopping mall, perhaps a symbol of Mongolia's new aspirations (*Economist*, 21 Jan. 2012). Mongolia in the next decade is likely to grow faster than any other country. For 2012, Mongolia's GDP is projected to expand at the rate of 11.8% (*World Economic Outlook* 2011). 'IMF economists now predict strong growth this year for the landlocked country in northeast Asia' (IMF, 2010). So, Mongolia is only now becoming 'northeast Asian'.

### **Study in States' Intentions**

'Strategically and geopolitically, Northeast Asia is the most important region to the Korean peninsula' (Lee, Su-hoon 2007: 18)

In the preceding section, we have seen how Northeast Asia has been implicit in Korean regional proposals. Now it is time to deal with the initiative aimed specifically at Northeast Asia.

When Korea first became interested in regionalism, it was micro-regionalism, like the GTI, involving business and local rather than central government ‘and state-level cooperation had not been considered’ (Lee, SJ 2008: 203). In late 1990s, ‘Kim [Dae-jung] was the first Korean president to envision East Asia as a community’ (Lee, SJ 2008: 202). With the persisting presence of the North Korean problem, then the shift was to strengthening cooperation in Northeast Asia. Already after the Asian financial crisis, Korea made proposals for a Northeast Asian Development Bank (Sato 2009: 107).

It is *institutionalising* Northeast Asia that is actually unique in South Korea’s approach to the region. ‘Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative’ (NEACI) was a key South Korean foreign-policy proposal, launched in 2003-04, of Roh Moo-hyun government. In the chapter’s later sections, we shall question whether the link between the NEACI and the trilateral cooperation is direct, yet for the moment it is nevertheless important that Korea’s proposal came very close to what happened later. The ‘Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative’ is so important here as it had a unique focus on the cooperation of China, Korea and Japan, foretelling, as it were, the trilateral cooperation. It was the idea to make of Northeast Asia not merely a region as it exists on the map, but a region in its own right—comprising states, not parts of the states.

President Roh’s major goal was creation of a ‘Northeast Asian era of peace and prosperity’ (Lee, SJ 2008: 205), the key words that will reappear many times. The document expounding the Initiative itself is titled ‘Toward a Peaceful and Prosperous Northeast Asia’ (2004). The Initiative was developed and promoted in close cooperation with South Korean academics, who chaired the NEACI

committee<sup>238</sup>. The initiative envisioned an active role for South Korea in institutionalising Northeast Asia (Lee, SH 2007: 15); NEACI, it was said, was clearly aimed at institutionalisation (Lee, SH 2010: 72). Institution can mean ‘a significant practice’ or ‘something firmly associated with a place’ (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary). Northeast was in this sense to become an institution.

Even as the NEACI document repeats many times that such Northeast Asia must be broad, in practice it is about the three countries, unsurprisingly Japan, Korea and China. Korea could not accomplish much in projects with North Korea, Russia or Mongolia. The web page presenting the Initiative, apart from English and Korean was offered also in Japanese and Chinese<sup>239</sup>. The Initiative mentions growing popularity of the Korean popular culture, ‘as well as those of China and Japan’ (Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative 2004: 9). It says also that ‘Northeast Asia is already a significant global economic power, not much less than Europe and North America’ (8). And any economic power belongs not to Russia, North Korea and Mongolia, but to China, Japan and Korea. Northeast Asia not being a frequent regional category, competing with the ‘East Asian’ miracle that dominates the economics, it was nevertheless selected by the World Bank in its *World Development Report 2009*. There it includes Mongolia, China, North and South Korea, and Japan (World Bank, 2012). The World Bank puts these Northeast Asian states together as one market: ‘In 2000 about three-quarters of world GDP was concentrated in North America, Western Europe, and Northeast Asia’ (*World Development Report 2009*: 5). So, Korea’s view is in a large part a reflection of how Korea perceives the economic weight of itself and the surrounding powers.

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<sup>238</sup> Especially big influence had professors Chung-in Moon (Yonsei University) and Su-hoon Lee (Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Seoul).

<sup>239</sup> See Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative (2004).

Before we move on to further characteristics, we shall keep in mind that an important part of the Initiative was institutionalising Northeast Asia, and Northeast Asia for this purpose was especially South Korea, Japan and China. But the actual initiative predicted a broader participation. Roh's proposal counted as Northeast Asia: South Korea, Japan, China, North Korea, United States, and Russia; his vision was therefore broader than the existing trilateral summit. 'From a geographical point of view, the region includes the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia, and Mongolia' (Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative 2004: 12). It seems, however, that stressing the broader geographic scope served as a response to the criticism. Bae (2005) for example writes that 'the NACI [NEACI] is not a restrictive endeavour that involves only South Korea, China, and Japan', as if responding to an attack not disclosed to the readers. Also defensive is Su-Hoon Lee: 'Although Roh administration established NEA Cooperation Initiative with the goal of creating close cooperation with NEA countries, it is important to note that it did not exclude cooperation with ASEAN+3' (2010: 71). Officially, the initiative was thought so open that welcome to participate were 'all nations' (Lee, SH 2007: 23). These assurances, paradoxically, invite an intense questioning of where was the real target of the initiative.

The NEACI envisioned therefore three types of participants: the three states as the intended core; the broad Northeast Asia stretching north to embrace the other Korea, Russia and Mongolia; and a general any nation, invited to participate. North Korea was surely at the core of Roh's concerns, but it could not be a target of specific projects.

The northern focus here was distinctive. Seoul's 'Northeast Asia summit plans' should envision participation by North Korea, Russia and Mongolia (Bae

2005). As a regional project, therefore, it does not typically stretch west to include the United States, or south to the usual ASEAN, or even to India. It is not a problem if the three countries are not all Northeast Asia; this makes the Korean vision even more relevant, as the Koreans envisioned an expansion to the north. The Korean idea is not finished as long as there is no embrace of the northern countries. This northern focus is the uniquely Seoul's concern with North Korea. NEACI was 'aimed at creating a peaceful and prosperous Northeast Asia' (Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative 2004: 6). More subtly, this direction been translated into the goal of easing 'northern development' (Bae 2005).

From the core countries, the initiative envisions northern expansion, as in the words of Roh: 'The Korean Peninsula is no longer on the periphery of the world. If the inter-Korean roads are linked and the Iron Silk Road is opened, we can expand into the vast continent—new opportunities await us in China' (MPVA, 2011). The Iron Silk Road here refers to the trans-Asian railway network, which would connect the Trans-Siberian Railway to the Trans-Korean Railway (see Lee, JY 2009). It is easy to see why Korea would look north. By being able to cross through the North Korean territory, it would reach Eurasia by land. Northeast Asian *integration* was thus pursued by Korea, which wanted to create real connections.

NEACI, it turns out, mixes inter-state cooperation, as we have seen in the beginning of the section where we discussed the foreign-policy project, with a northern development plan. Mongolia, via transport and industry linkages, indeed northern development, can participate in a Northeast Asian micro-regionalism.

The perspectives of the two other non-core states, Russia and North Korea, are analysed on the study of the GTI. The significance of the Tumen River for this

chapter is such that it crystallises regional interests of the same host of countries that the Korean NEACI talked about. Tensions concern the participants. The project is said to involve six nations: China, Russia, North Korea (three countries touching the Tumen), South Korea, Mongolia, and Japan (like in Hughes 2000b). The initial conference in Ulan Bator, in 1991, however, involved only China and the two Koreas apart from Mongolia; Russia and Japan were later invited by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP; American University, 2012). Formally, the project's organisation involves only four nations: China (secretariat), Russia, South Korea and Mongolia (Tumen Secretariat, 2012).

We have to start discussing the GTI from two observations. First, it includes the regime of North Korea. Second, it lies on the territories of not fully market economies. When we realise this, many of other considerations become secondary: that it is micro-regionalist, that it includes Mongolia, that it is supported by UNDP, and so on. Only that the North Korean border cuts the area off from South Korea is sufficient for us to imagine what sort of problems it encounters. 'Despite recent growth in trade, the area is still composed of three fairly closed economies' (Pomfret 1997/98: 82). "Business and investment flow when you open borders," according to Ian Davies of the Tumen secretariat in Beijing (quoted in *Economist*, 25 Jun. 1998). State character defines this project.

The GTI is supposed to be about developing the Asian northeast. But normally, Asia would develop itself. The Tumen area does not possibly lie in the core interest of any of the three countries. For China, it is a less densely populated, landlocked 'rust belt'. For North Korea, it is an area with unfavourable climate, host land to low-'class' citizens from the perspective of the leaders, some 400 kilometres east from Pyongyang, where in the cities like Chongjin, hunger came first in the

1990s (Demick 2011). For Russia, it is a corner of its Far East, notoriously short of development. There is nothing natural about the Tumen River.

Areas such like this, united by a river, where development spill over the borders, are called ‘natural economic territories’, or NETs (Scalapino 1991). But there is nothing natural about the Tumen River, which marks a North Korean border. Actually, it is not all about North Korea. China is landlocked in this part. So, the port at Tumen belongs to Russia and North Korea. This area has little that would make it thriving, even if political conditions were different.

Dividing into regionalism and micro-regionalism, with the criterion being area size, is misleading. Regionalism is first of all about foreign policy, and micro-regionalism – about economic development. The difference is not just whether a small territory or the whole state is counted in, but there is a qualitative difference in motivation: one is foreign policy, the other economic development. So, it’s not only the question whether it is Jilin or all China, but it is the question of how it is managed and where it belongs.

Studying country preferences regarding the GTI is elucidating.

The GTI is a study in the gap between local government’s struggle for development, and central government’s fear of relinquishing central power. The GTI is an exercise in complex centre-province relations. ‘On a very basic level, each state developed plans that were designed to protect its own perceived state interests’ (Breslin 2000: 220). A local-area project suffered from the central government’s considerations. Local authorities are more inclined to cooperative development, as they do not have to think about national power. At the first sight, projects such as

Tumen River, that benefit local development, are expected to play into the government's hands.

### *South Korea*

Microregionalist preferences of the key actor, South Korea, are often missing in the literature. Although the Tumen does not flow through its territory, given its shared past and a potentially joint future with the northern neighbour, South Korea's position cannot simply be omitted.

Looking at the map with South Korea's land transport, the part closest to the Tumen area, the province of Gangwon-do, has the weakest connections to the rest of the South Korean territory. A few secondary towns, like Sokcho or Gangneung, are scattered along the coast. In South Korea, local interest in Northeast Asia has concentrated west of Seoul in Incheon, by the Yellow Sea. The Songdo area of Incheon is where the Trilateral Cooperation was to be located; this was instead opened in September 2009 in Seoul. Even so, Incheon has a prominent Northeast Asian presence. In Songdo International City, the Northeast Asia Trade Tower is planned as the tallest building in Korea<sup>240</sup>.

South Korea might be the only one willing to 'pay the price' for making an investment on North Korean terms (American University, 2012). But practically, investment has been blocked. The South Korean troubles in this limited project mirror its bigger troubles in dealing with the North. There is much political will in Seoul to sponsor economically not viable and politically risky transfer of funds to

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<sup>240</sup> <http://www.songdo.com/songdo-international-business-district/the-city/master-plan.aspx> (13 March 2012).

North Korea, but the practicalities and the larger ramifications of such moves, such as North Korea's behaviour on the nuclear issue, make it virtually impossible.

Corporations from South Korea have additional interests. One is the interest in developing the Russian Far East, for its mineral and energy resources, in a contribution that apparently would be welcome by Moscow after its pro-Asian twist in policy to Eastern Siberia. South Korean conglomerates also want to do business in the North Korean special economic zone of Songbon and Rajin, but rather than on their own, they are more willing to do so jointly with the Chinese, minimising political and economic risks.

South Korea at the central government level uniquely supports a definition of Northeast Asia that embraces whole states. To say that Korea is the only supporter of Northeast Asia might be easy to reject, but that the South Korean diplomacy by Northeast Asia referred to *East Asia minus Southeast Asia* makes this position special. South Korean central government lends thus credence to Northeast Asia beyond the micro-region, unlike in China or Japan. The municipalities there, by the Sea of Japan or in China's Jilin province, referred instead, sub-nationally, to the area that they economically had to develop. President Roh's 'Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative' was an attempt at building an organisation separate without ASEAN.

This Korean preference that has been little studied shows an important overlap in the new trilateral summit. The goal of having 'peace' and 'prosperity' is an exercise at politics–economics linkage (Lee, SK 2008:205). The security agenda is an important point. When the Roh initiative was considering a China-Korea-Japan summit separate from APT, it was considered in the rubric of 'multilateral security

cooperation' (Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative 2004: 23). Both APT and EAS were dismissed as viable options for managing Northeast Asian security, not to mention specifically Korean problems (Lee, SH 2007:21). Hence, the term 'East Asia' marginalizes not only North Korea, but also inter-Korean relations and security (Lee, SH 2007:20). APT could not contribute to Northeast Asian security directly: 'Probably the most that the architecture of ASEAN Plus Three can accomplish is to keep up the pressure on the "Plus Three" countries to figure out how to get along better' (Frost and Kang 2008: 233). Here were also included NTS threats (Lee, SH 2007:21); like 'typhoons, earthquakes, and other disasters' (Kang and Lee 2010). The "3.11" Japan disaster opens a new opportunity to cooperate on those, while 'traditional' security remains difficult to embark on. The security component reveals inadequacy of East Asian institutions, casting light on what we were saying in the beginning—the Northeast Asian shadow following Korea's 'nominally' East Asian, or earlier Pacific, initiatives and ventures. South Korea used to be wary of ASEAN-led security talks, for it saw them focused on South China Sea, rather than on the Korean Peninsula (Katzenstein and Okawara 2001/02: 173).

Roh's Initiative has been described as 'the venture into Northeast Asian regionalism' (Lee, SJ 2008:205). Regionalism's model definition, in the East Asian context, is a 'top-down *process* of government-to-government formation of institutions such as ASEAN, APEC, or the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)' (Pempel 2005: 6; my emphasis). By stressing this formal/ top-down characteristic, the key focus has been so far to differentiate it from regionalisation. Indeed, so much effort has gone into drawing a line between the formality of "ism" and informality of

“isation” that the need to explore other controversies is even greater<sup>241</sup>. Such a commonly neglected aspect is the process–outcome discussion, already opened for other major terms like the balance of power<sup>242</sup>. Just like the balance of power, regionalism can be understood both as the outcome (regionalism as existing institution) or an intention (‘regionalism in Korean policy’). So, when we talk of regionalism, do we refer to efforts at creating it, or do we refer to the state of accomplishment? (For if we refer interchangeably to both, we are confused indeed). The distinction is important, for efforts can lead nowhere<sup>243</sup>.

It appears that Roh’s ‘Northeast Asian regionalism’ conveys rather efforts, being defined as a process rather than an outcome. Too often, we are so preoccupied with studying strategies that we lose sight of the outcomes that followed, not corresponding to preferences. It seems that Roh and the followers of his idea wanted Korea to initiate something new, to ‘invite’ China and Japan. President Roh saw Korea initiating ‘a regional program of community building’ (Kim, BK 2008: 201). Korea should host the first trilateral summit in Seoul, ‘to which the Japanese prime minister and the Chinese president (sic) would be invited’ (Bae, GC 2005). Here lies the tension: a *regional* vision needs to be shared with others! The reality is acknowledged on the final pages of the document: ‘Such an ambitious plan cannot be pursued by the ROK alone’ (Presidential Committee on Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative 2004: 30). NEACI is not only a ‘national strategy’ but also a

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<sup>241</sup> It is not so important who (governments) or what (companies) pushes the process, but rather it is important if we have reached the destination.

<sup>242</sup> Inis Claude distinguishes balance of power as a situation (equilibrium), a policy or a system (1962:13-20). ‘The trouble with the balance of power’, he writes, ‘is not that it has no meaning, but that it has too many meanings’ (13). For the separation of outcomes from intentions/ strategies in applied research on Asia see Goh (2005) and Emmers (2003); they discuss ‘balancing’ as strategy vs. outcome/ situation.

<sup>243</sup> The distinction that I am making here is different from regionalism ‘as form’ and regionalisation ‘as process’ in Breslin (2010). I am staying within regionalism, but differentiating between *strategies* aimed at regionalism and the *outcome* of regionalism.

‘vision of regional cooperation’ (Lee, SH 2007: 22). ‘The Roh government just drew up an overall view for future cooperation on community-building, but community-building cannot be done unilaterally’ (Moon 2007: 3). It appears that Roh’s bad relations with Japan, and Japan’s bad relations with China, prevented the initiative from moving ‘past the planning phase’ (Lee and Moon 2008: 50).

Overall, the same adjectives that were used toward the literature on Pacific economic cooperation in the 1990s – *prescriptive and exhortatory*’ (Higgott 1994b: 66; emphasis original)—could be applied to the Northeast Asian agenda. In other words, what has been mostly written so far—and analysed—on the subject of NEACI refers to perspectives and intentions rather than observed phenomena; NEACI is in this sense a ‘desired outcome’ rather than an observed outcome. Again referring to the ‘disjuncture between aspiration and actualisation’ (Higgott 1994b: 68), which falls well into the template of preferences and outcomes here, we move on to analysing the outcome that was not obvious—the trilateral cooperation.

### *North Korea*

The vice mayor in charge of economic development, Hwang Chol-nam, said that the ‘Rason government will do our best to provide favorable conditions for investment...Please tell the world’<sup>244</sup>. Will Pyongyang support this policy line, lavishly open for the North Korean standards? North Korea, ‘desperate’ for investment (Hughes 2000b: 22), is at the same time not willing to relinquish power. With its ‘cagey’ approach, North Korea finds it very difficult to accept funds from the South (Hughes 2000b: 22). ‘Some analysts say Mr. Kim’s visit to Rason in

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<sup>244</sup> E. Wong, ‘Tending a Small Patch of Capitalism in North Korea’, *New York Times*, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/13/world/asia/north-koreans-woo-business-to-rason-economic-zone.html?\\_r=1&scp=3&sq=rajin&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/13/world/asia/north-koreans-woo-business-to-rason-economic-zone.html?_r=1&scp=3&sq=rajin&st=cse) (16 February 2011).

December 2009 was a signal that this town, at least, should embrace experimentation'<sup>245</sup>. Survival in North Korea came down to the individual level. From the central party, to provinces, and local authorities, finally the individuals were left to themselves. Yet, as dire conditions have made survival come down from the state to the individual level in North Korea, localities may dare more – and the regime may gradually accommodate it – in order to reach for foreigners' money, trade, or else that would help in making the economic deprivation of the North less acute.

In a way, we can see the GTI as an experiment—especially for North Korea. In this sense, it cannot be dismissed completely, even if the socio-economic benefits were scarce. Also, as noted by Demick (2011), Chongjin and north-eastern North Korea in general has been more economically deprived than the rest of the country. In the 1990s, at the outbreak of hunger, the area of Chongjin was hit first. The locality of Chongjin has been traditionally a destination to the lowest tier of the North Korean society.

Yet North Korea is the participant likely to be impacted most. At the Russia-China-DPRK crossroads, huge differences in GDP mark these areas. What would happen if the borders were open? The 'poor-on-request' North Korea faces China across the border. The GTI may call itself a 'future Rotterdam' (American University, 2012), but Rotterdam, situated amidst Belgium and Holland, is on a territory homogenous in incomes. But if free flow occurred at the Tumen intersection, the impact on the area would be dramatic.

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<sup>245</sup> E. Wong, 'Tending a Small Patch of Capitalism in North Korea', *New York Times*, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/13/world/asia/north-koreans-woo-business-to-raise-economic-zone.html?\\_r=1&scp=3&sq=rajin&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/13/world/asia/north-koreans-woo-business-to-raise-economic-zone.html?_r=1&scp=3&sq=rajin&st=cse) (25 February 2013).

The importance of the river is that, being shallow and poorly monitored, it is often chosen by the refugees heading to China. The river Tumen, Tuman in Korean, flows into the Sea of Japan/ East Sea, but it does not flow through the South Korean territory. This shallow river constitutes a part of the China's border with North Korea, and part of the Russian border. Close to the river, the North's government was trying to install a special economic zone, like the one in Kaesong. It failed. Because the South Korean border is stocked with landmines and practically impassable, the refugees only way is to head north, to China (*New York Times*, 22 Oct. 2006).

### *Russia*

For Russians, the dilemma of the Tumen project is the obvious one. Why should they care for developing other countries' territories? A ministerial representative in Primorsky Krai said that Russia needs to worry more about reviving Vostochny, a port at the eastern end of the Trans-Siberian Railway, than about improving 'Korean ports and Chinese railways' (quoted in the *Economist*, 25 Jun. 1998). Russia's promulgated in this way its parochial attitude to the regional matters. The main reason quoted is a fear of the Russian Far East being pulled away from Moscow's control; the influx of Japanese investment, in particular, could lead to the 'rich economic resources' being captured for 'another foreign power', that is Japan (Hughes 2000b: 20-21). Fears of relinquishing power mattered here. Central government's actions have overly 'impeded' progress on the project (Hughes 2000b: 20-21). The Russian contribution can be thus judged as negative.

This testifies to the problem faced before one can achieve cooperative development: why should one nation care about development of the other. The

answer that first offers itself as a response to the official in Primorsky Krai is that Russia simply will not develop if its neighbours do not, and especially in that remote corner. The whole idea of microregionalism had to do with ‘natural economic territories... often cutting across political lines’ (Scalapino 1991: 20-21). But to do justice to the official’s logic, the development goal is more likely to be served by market forces. When it comes to devoting financial and administrative resources specifically, then the reservations of the Russian official are understandable. For the Northeast Asian area to develop, one must count perhaps more on natural processes of economic integration, and less on pre-planned development; weaknesses of any form of planned economy should be familiar to Russia).

Under conditions of hampered economic cooperation across borders, it is not only markets but also ‘mental constructs’ that are imperfect and ‘a lack of understanding will exist about each actors’ motivations and perceptions of self-interest’ (Harris 1993: 275). Russian fears are not isolated.

### *China*

China is also suspicious, just as Russia, that its northeastern provinces (Heilongjiang or Jilin) gain more autonomy. China’s motivation here is not to create more ‘interdependence’ between China and Russia (American University, 2012). And China’s development preferences lie still in its southern areas (Hughes 2000b: 21). China can also develop ‘naturally’, without the Tumen project, and it is not surprising that the Chinese Hunchun is the whole area’s most successful component.

Here comes China’s surprising contribution. China is said to have initiated the project (American University, 2012). The idea was first launched in the East-West Center, Hawaii in 1989. Two years later it was properly established through a

series of conferences in Changchun, Jilin. The secretariat of the organisation is in Beijing.

But the key difference, from the Chinese perspective, is that China in the Tumen area lacks direct access to the sea. China has more salient reasons to be interested in the Tumen River, for its northeast is landlocked. In 1860 China lost access to the Sea of Japan, in the Peking Treaty with Russia (American University, 2012). China's Northeast, almost by the coast, is surprisingly cut off from the sea by a strip of Russian and North Korean territory. China's key motivation is to gain access from its province Jilin to the Sea of Japan directly, even as China still prefers Dalian on the Yellow Sea as an indirect passage into the Sea of Japan, crossing the Korean Strait.

China has access to the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Sea—a 'core' Chinese interest. China's East is abundantly provided with sea access, but apparently for China gaining more access is important. And in this sense China envies other powers, the envies expressed in a statement in the *Global Times* (as quoted in the *National*, undated):

Although China is a big country, many of its key areas are landlocked. Other powerful countries in the world don't have the difficulty of entering the sea [that] China faces. The US directly faces two oceans in its east and west. Russia has a big part of its territory that is coastal. Japan is an island country by itself. India is a peninsula.<sup>246</sup>

China might be the most engaged in the project for its own strategy, not because of its regionalist ambitions.

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<sup>246</sup> S. Lee, 'China's acquisition of Sea of Japan port rattles its neighbours', *The National*, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/asia-pacific/chinas-acquisition-of-sea-of-japan-port-rattles-its-neighbours> (3 February 2012).

‘Cooperative development, unthinkable in the past, has become conceivable since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the mending of Sino-Russian relations, and the new found development zeal of China, Russia and North Korea’ (American University, 2012). We have perceived that China, Russia and North Korea share similarities in state character. Distrust to relinquishing power, low attachment to the goal of developing peripheral areas are inimical to a regional, cross-border project, making a micro-regionalist—or any, for that matter—project difficult. It was very much a Russo-Sino-North Korean project, and the limitations these three states were imposing, on one another and the remaining parties, showcases its pitfalls. A state character, therefore, emerges as the key explanatory variable to account for low success along the shores of the Tumen River. That China and the DPRK are the biggest supporters of the Greater Tumen Initiative very well illustrates the rules on which it is predicated, and the rules on which it is not. If the project was one in a free flow of capital, people and resources, we would not expect them to support the project. It must be one of planned economy, limited trust and limited cooperation.

A change augurs as the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, made promises to develop the Far East as part of the presidential campaign; by 2013 a corporation with state capital should be founded, to revive economically the Russian Far East. An interesting new twist of his strategy is inviting Asian involvement. Namely, the Russian authorities extended an invitation to Asian neighbours to lease Far Eastern territories for a period of 50 years.<sup>247</sup> It is “natural” in that already 80% of the local economy is said to be targeted at Asia.

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<sup>247</sup> Nino Dzikija, ‘Russia to Spend a Fortune, Not to Lose Control Over the Far East’ [in Polish], *Dziennik-Gazeta Prawna*, 9 February 2012.

What might also turn the outcome of this venture is the agreement for initially a 10-year lease to China of a pier at the North Korean port, Rajin. The port remains importantly ice-free in winter, ‘a rarity in Northeast Asia’ (*New York Times*, 12 Oct. 2011). This gives China an access point to the Sea of Japan. (Legally, China should have access to the Sea of Japan via Tumen, but a Russia-China bridge has effectively blocked China’s ships<sup>248</sup>. We shall see, therefore, if prospects of China’s more intense presence will spur development of the area.

### *Japan*

Japan’s central government that is not a supporter has been reported to be ‘the greatest drag’ on the project (Hughes 2000b: 22). Against the character of these previous states, explaining Japan’s ambivalence not only to developing the Tumen area but the Sea of Japan seems a difficult task. Conflict over the Northern territories with Russia has, in a way, lowered Japan’s interest, but Japan is not expected to oppose engagement of its provinces in a local project. In Japan’s case, the problem is not that it is opposing, but a lack of interest is a problem.

Japan’s foreign policy continues to look across the Pacific rather than the Sea of Japan. Even so, municipalities like Niigata have been lively supportive of increasing regional interactions (Hughes 2000b: 23-24). Hughes (2000b) takes Japan for an ‘economic superpower located geographically within Northeast Asia, but which due to its low level of economic and political interdependence...is not a fully functioning component of the regionalist project’ (2000: 24). ‘Japan has been also interested in East Asian regionalism. South Korea has been strongly interested in a Northeast Asian multilateral forum.’ (Lee, SS 2009: 12).

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<sup>248</sup> Kang Juan, ‘China gains Sea of Japan trade access’, *Global Times*, 10 March 2010, <http://china.globaltimes.cn/diplomacy/2010-03/511351.html> (2 February 2011).

## Summary

In the case of Korea, the problem is of evidence. There is lack of clear signs as to the nature of the Korean participation in the initiation of the Trilateral framework. Said otherwise, in the absence of these signs, the belief persists that Japan initiated the trilateral cooperation. At the heart of this chapter's quandary has been the weak evidentiary status of arguments supporting Korea's central position. In the sphere of intentions, Korea has been very active. Beyond intentions, we would be hard pressed to enumerate tangible outcomes. Across the cases, Korea cannot claim success on its own. Therefore, branding the establishment of the trilateral cooperation as a success of Roh's preference is an exercise in appropriating outcomes.

The present Korean administration (of President Lee Myung-bak) is very enthusiastic about the trilateral cooperation (CM Lee, interview, Seoul, 2011). A statement published on the MOFAT website is confirmatory, presenting 'partnership relations with neighbouring countries, and naming specifically Japan and China, as a 'major diplomatic achievement' (MOFAT 2011). Korea's participation in the trilateral cooperation now is a different story. President Lee proposed the secretariat and was successful, but it is not to say that he pursues NEACI-style 'catalytic' policy ideas. It appears that simple actions, even without a grand Northeast Asian preference in the background, can be highly effective.

These present actions, rather than past preferences, have carved out for Korea a space where it can execute leadership in moderate doses. The truth lies in between the *empirically* sounder claim on Korea's diplomatic centrality in Northeast Asia and the *methodologically* superior Realist position on constraints, for indeed Korea's actions are played out within its constrained environment. No middle

power, in effect, is self made or ever will be. The discussion so far indicates that we have found in Korea a true promoter of a specifically Northeast Asian cooperation; nothing that Japan has been beyond the surface. The step incumbent upon us now is to take a look at the final participant, China.

It is a problem that in studying preferences, we focus on major states. Our hope is that major states' preferences will translate into outcomes. We have studied regional preferences of major states in East Asia, analytically hoping that other players will accept that outcome. When an unexpected (not congruent with any of those preferences) outcome arises, we are unable to ascribe it to an actor which might have had a congruent strategy, like Korea, because we have not studied them. Therefore, by studying smaller players we are not changing the state of the world, but we are better prepared to explain puzzles and answer research questions.

## Conclusion

This thesis has made two sets of claims. First, previous scholarship has not fully prepared us to study new developments in Asian regionalism (in chap. 2 and 4). Second, patterns of interaction in the region influence the emergence of new outcomes, such as the Trilateral Cooperation. Did the ‘ASEAN-Plus-Three’ scholarship equip us with proper tools for making predictions, or at least discerning new trends soon? The answer this thesis gave is that ASEAN has made a contribution to the study of East Asia, but its preferences were too close to ASEAN to catch a broader picture. We have then turned our attention to the preferences—outcomes analysis. In order to study the connection better, we need to bet on more interactive approaches to studying foreign policies. Having done that, we can cautiously say that how the foreign policies interact is conclusive for the outcome.

Throughout this thesis, we could see that motivators of international interactions are different at a bilateral (state to state) level than they are at a level of the region. In terms of this regional level, we can quote Anne-Marie Slaughter: ‘What is possible is not independent of what we *believe* to be possible’ (quoted in 2004: 1; my emphasis). Prior evidence was scarce to indicate the possibility of any ‘trilateral cooperation’ to come in the future. Because bilateral and regional outcomes in this case differ greatly, it is no wonder that China accused Japan of maintaining a ‘two-faced’ strategy (*Economist*, 19<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2013), where diplomatic efforts at one front starkly contrasted with ‘hard-line’ policies on the others<sup>249</sup>. And the same could be said also of China, and maybe even South Korea. Such bifurcated efforts summarise the argument of this thesis. These bifurcated efforts are:

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<sup>249</sup> The reference is to the beginning of the term of Prime Minister Abe, in early 2013.

willingness to cooperate in regional forums, but conflict in many other areas (territory, interpretations of history). The pressures that this thesis had to respond to were primarily about the freshness of the subject—the Trilateral Cooperation, since 2008, and with a background since only 1999. This has meant little previous scholarship to rely on.

In this thesis, I embarked on a quest after an answer to a very important question. How did it become possible that adversaries, which have not reached full reconciliation managed to shape the TC, despite scholarly expectations and common sense? I have stressed, throughout the thesis, that the regional level of analysis mattered, and strategies of the states receive more meaning when studied in light of the regional level. The quest is now over; it is a time for conclusion. I will highlight what I have done in terms of methodology, theory, and empirical findings in the relevant sections below; these are divided into findings, limits, and research agenda sub-sections.

## **Theory**

### *Findings on Theory*

The novel take on strategies presented here contributes to the stream of literature on institutional emergence (Breslin and Higgott 2000, Goh and Acharya 2007, Solingen 2008a). Great power politics have been traditionally at the centre of explaining how new institutions emerge; see works such as *A World of Regions* (Katzenstein 2005), focusing on Germany and Japan, Mearsheimer's *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001)—or the theory by Waltz (1979)<sup>250</sup>. Kenneth Waltz, specifically, pragmatically observed that a theory could hardly be constructed based on the experiences of states such as 'Malaysia and Costa Rica' (Waltz 1979: 73). New

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<sup>250</sup> These works have been previously referred to in Katsumata (2012: 77).

institutions do not necessarily come from preferences of the most important state (here Japan or China). A merit is substantial in studying regional preferences of lesser actors, such as South Korea here.

Cases that encapsulate contradictory interests are the most difficult to predict, as argued in Goh (2011a: 5-6), who studied mostly Southeast Asia. By including China, Korea, and Japan, the trilateral cooperation was indeed an outcome defying prediction. Social environments transform states' preferences; this transformation highlights the difficulty of accounting for institutional emergence in dynamic and fluid environments, such as this of East Asia.

### *Limits of Research on Theory*

In keeping with the chosen methodological tools, I analysed the TC at the level of the state. At lower levels, studies would fill the gaps that this thesis could not tackle, such as opinions of individual leaders, foreign-policy discussions within the state<sup>251</sup>, and other processes. From a domestic-politics perspective, the main limitation of this research is that it chose the level of the system; the specific people involved in the trilateral diplomacy were not targeted, also for practical reasons. One must remember, however, that diversifying our conceptual apparatus for the sake of 'more explanation is better' would necessarily distance us from answering the original research question: '*why* these three countries, and *why* in a separate framework?' Limits, in other words, have their merits.

### *Research Agenda*

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<sup>251</sup> See a new (2012) book: *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers: Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China, India, Iran, Japan, and Russia*, ed. Henry R. Nau and Deepa M. Ollapally (New York: Oxford University Press).

The research agenda on theory is straightforward. It is to categorise the preferences –outcomes debate within the boundaries of IR – with a possibility of expanding these boundaries.

Axelrod and Keohane write that: ‘If governments are prepared to grope their way toward a better-coordinated future, scholars should be prepared to study the process. And, in a world where states have often been dissatisfied with international anarchy, scholars should be prepared to advance the learning process—so that despite the reality of anarchy, beneficial forms of cooperation can be promoted’ (1985: 254).

## **Methodology**

### *Findings on Methods*

My motivation was to solve an important puzzle in IR: why the three countries cooperate. I found that the three countries cooperate despite obstacles because in a trilateral cooperation they can address many issues more cooperatively than on a bilateral footing. There is no objective reason why relations of three countries, which remain in many domains conflicted, should proceed more smoothly when there are more than two countries, or specifically three.

The first point to remember about the preferences –outcomes framework was to separate preferences and outcomes. Preferences here were understood in the first place as foreign policies; in the second place, as intentions of the states. Outcomes are events that IR scholars observe to explain – such as the trilateral cooperation (see Introduction).

My finding is that ignoring the above can lead to confusion. If we do not distinguish between preferences and outcomes, it will be easy for us to believe such

a ‘plausible’ statement like this one: ‘The trilateral cooperation was in the three countries’ interest’. The problem with such thinking is that it is a form of implication. We see what the three states have been doing, and we assume then that ‘it is in their interest’. It might be, but actually it might be not. A new story emerges when we actually undertake the effort to study their intentions – keeping the outcome (TC) within our view, but without being as if ‘blinded’ or guided by it. What we see then is that the outcome cannot be posited in a straight line from their expectations about regional frameworks (see chap. 1).

The whole point of showcasing difficulties with studying countries’ individual interest has, down the road, pinpointed the payoff from such an effort. A weak notion of regionalism in Northeast Asia has, paradoxically, brought the benefit that these countries *could* still be studied individually—contrary to ASEAN. An initial stage of the process, which is before the scholarship has developed any strong notions about the TC, gave me an opportunity to probe into this most interesting connection; preferences and outcomes. It is interaction of the three states that stood behind the trilateral outcome, and this interaction is motivated by their national interests (but how this interest played out depends not on the *a priori* interest, but on the interaction). Therefore, studying interaction of the three *individual* states—Japan, Korea or China—but in a social context of ASEAN has proven the most fruitful explanatory avenue available to us. Starting from the regional level was a necessary step.

Outcomes that surprise us often come from preferences that were not overly clear. Instead of putting a lot of efforts into studying preferences—many of which remain invisible to the observer’s eye—it makes more sense to discern patterns among existing outcomes. For example, launching of a trilateral ‘breakfast meeting’

within APT was indicative of the will to cooperate—will that might seem unreasonable. This piece of evidence was not treated seriously enough—for example, ‘impossibility’ of a regional forum in Northeast Asia that would be both cooperative and without ASEAN, was still defended. Trilateral cooperation is something more than the sum of the three countries’ intentions. What transpires from this thesis is that no outcome can be predicted solely from intentions.

### *Limits of Methods*

The explanation here offered would benefit from a deeper consideration of what exactly *happened* among the three countries in APT as well as earlier ASEAN initiatives. A collection of more focused studies on diverse processes in ASEAN or APT would complement this thesis beautifully, leaving no doubt as to the question: what reasons did the three states have to ‘move’ their summit away from ASEAN territories? Such a step would add a sense of depth as well as analytical vigor to my study here, which could capture, unavoidably, only a fraction of this important interaction. Yet, given that East Asian regionalism *is* studied primarily from the perspective of ASEAN, a more focused study of the Northeast Asian players, as presented here, serves the goal of redressing the imbalance.

### *Research Agenda on Methods*

Next groups of researchers will be in need of tackling more substantive questions that this thesis eventually did. For example, we do not know what degree of ‘cooperation’ is in the trilateral summit. While it is called ‘cooperation’ by the participating countries, we know that it is not yet cooperation, rather diplomacy. Another study will also need to delve into the areas of cooperation (functional) and

how they spread across different levels. It has been partially done by Yoshimatsu (2008), but we need to know the new reality after formation of the trilateral summit.

## **Empirical Questions**

In brief, this thesis has made two sets of claims. First, the puzzle of the trilateral-cooperation emergence needs a solution that needs a separation between preferences of the states and outcomes in IR. Second, I test my hypothesis that regional incentives gave rise to the Trilateral Cooperation – indeed, the answer to the puzzle cannot be found in *individual* policies. To do this test, I have covered these policies in separate chapters, thereby demonstrating what sort of outcomes we could expect from these states’ preferences. The likelihood of including China was too low, from Japan’s and Korea’s perspectives; the likelihood of excluding—in a way<sup>252</sup>—ASEAN was too low as well.

## *Findings*

**China.** We couldn’t have easily guessed that China would see itself with Korea and Japan. China is at present Asia’s most significant economy, and its preferences are different – it fosters ‘good neighbourly’ relations with developing states and ensures that the U.S. is kept away from the region. With its new experience of participation in East Asian diplomacy, China might have treated the trilateral venture as *just another* place where it is invited. More research in China is necessary to corroborate this finding. This research could go along the analytical framework of preferences

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<sup>252</sup> In a way, because some ‘dependent’ summits still take place on the occasions of APT gatherings.

and outcomes: what are *specific* intentions for Northeast Asia? What China contributes at the moment is participation (see chap. 3).

The lessons from my work presented here on China showed that states' actions are limited. This statement might at first sound unjustified, and trigger questions such as: 'who can limit China's actions?' The answer that I give to this question is to consider a 'catalogue' of any state's actions, after limiting it to the international arena. I propose a brief catalogue of *states' international actions*. Again, this concerns a state in its international behaviour. After imposing these two 'filters', we arrive at a rather short list: to trade or not to trade, to go to war or to live in peace! Even if we include other sub-types of economic or political behaviour, we do not have a wide range of possible behaviours. On our list of what states can do, the types of actions are limited.

I mention these points because I see China's participation in multilateralism – as chap. 3 indicated – in a different manner than most of the literature I have reviewed. I emphasized in that chapter an over-emphasis on China's (in this case) 'choice'. 'What is the alternative?' I asked. China could stay out of the institutions, but at what *cost*? The important point was that considering external conditions on par with China's own plans (strategies) is essential for seeing a bigger picture of why China is in, not out.

**Korea.** In the case of Korea we have seen a smaller power trying to use the Northeast Asian region as a field to realise some of its key visions: securing the support of neighbours in creating 'peace and prosperity' despite what North Korea has been doing. Northeast Asia is, therefore, a key area of South Korean interest. But the dissent in the country itself – especially the way in which many still prefer to emphasise the U.S. – has, it follows, prevented Seoul from fully seizing the initiative

and launching the trilateral framework (see chap. 5). Its initiative has been rather *dependent*.

**Japan.** This state emerged as a leader. And to those who would say that it is ‘still not a leader’, I would provide this piece of evidence that the first trilateral summit was in Japan. It is true to say that the trilateral forum does not harm Japan; also, the trilateral forum *is not* against Japan’s interests as a state in Asia. Saying, however, that Japan wanted this forum (especially that it ‘wanted it from the beginning’) is a different story. Instead, Japan has worked hard to make sure that East Asia is ‘broader’ and less geographic; ‘thanks to’ Japan, India, Australia and especially the U.S. can partake more in East Asian than without this Japanese agenda. But it is implausible that Japan would stay indifferent to the APT, and indifferent to China’s rise. Japan became enmeshed in the region (see chap. 4).

**Informality.** My important conclusion is that the notion of ‘informality’ in Asian regionalism should be contested. In brief, a statement that is widely accepted – on Asian states’ preferences for ‘informality’ – needs to be subjected to further tests, in light of new evidence. When the three states form a secretariat, where is informality then? It appears that ‘formality’ is there.

Additionally, in the part on the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), formality has been a part of its functioning. In other words, we cannot afford to ‘inherit’ the notion of putative Asian states’ preferences for informality. Instead, we need to define first what informality means in the claims that we make, and whether it has ceased to leave more room for formality.

I conclude from my research on the trilateral framework that China, Japan and South Korea have *allowed* for a formality in specific form. Regardless of whether they have desired it from the start, they are now involved in a Trilateral

Investment Treaty, and they have the above mentioned secretariat. If this is not formality, then what is? We need to redefine our standards for measuring formality or *informality* in Asian regional frameworks according to the new criteria.

**Outcome.** Therefore, a picture that emerges is the one of three very different collaborators. China and Korea are known for resenting Japan's leadership; Japan is also known for avoiding a 'close' presence of China; Korea at best tolerates its two significant neighbours. But this received knowledge needs to be constantly questioned. One of the examples is the new trilateral framework. When we start to question the way in which we have gathered previous findings – which form the received knowledge—then we will be on the way to picture Asian regionalism as it is. It might turn out to be a more chaotic and less controlled picture, where 'future' outcomes will not be neatly aligned with catalogued intentions. The only alternative is a field that is not receptive to change.

### *Limits*

This thesis would benefit from a primary research on the part of China. For China, the puzzle is the biggest, as this country appears to be a target of 'encouragement' efforts from both Japan and Korea (Heung Kyu Kim, interview, Seoul, 2011). My finding is that China was drawn to the framework by others, rather than being an active part in its calling.

China doesn't fit, but it was necessary! (Such a framework of Japan-Korea is at the moment inconceivable, and indeed it doesn't exist)<sup>253</sup>. Counterintuitive instant

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<sup>253</sup> Some might argue that Japan and South Korea have a lot in common—indeed, they do: bilateral alliances with the U.S., common problems with North Korea and with China. But this possible common agenda does not mean that they have taken some steps in the direction of building a formalised forum. As an example, consider relentless calls from the U.S., to its two Asian allies, to put away tensions and strengthen cooperation—calls that need to be repeated over and over again. See M. Fackler, 'Tensions between Japan and South Korea complicate picture for U.S.', *New York Times*,

in which adding China facilitates – at least in this diplomatic, constrained format – between South Korea and Japan puts many of our beliefs (in IR) under heavy strain. The third country, China, is a relatively new participant in Asian regionalism, and my findings cannot confirm the full scope of its motivations. It remains unclear if China is merely ‘following’ Japan and South Korea.

Japan in part supported calling of the first independent summit at the state level. And the first trilateral summit took place in Fukuoka, on the Kyushu Island. It is difficult to reconcile with the concept of ‘broader Asia’. At the domestic level, many tensions emerge. For Korea, it fills the ‘vessel’ with practical content – such as the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), established in Seoul in September 2011. With its ‘secondary initiative’, it was hard to establish the beginnings and endings of the Korean initiative. Although my interviewees (April-May 2011, Seoul) were pointing to the Korean interest in Northeast Asia, other sources tended to highlight the Japanese initiative<sup>254</sup>.

Before it reaches a mature stage (5 or 10 years from now?), we cannot know what effects the TC will have on behaviour of these states. What appears rather clear is that these states may have an agenda of their own, rather different from what *we, scholars*, may expect them to pursue. Therefore, the lighter theoretical treatment that this thesis can offer – its key limitation – has discovered its merits down the road. This thesis remains a work in progress – just as the Trilateral Cooperation is a work in progress.

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[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/21/world/asia/japan-and-south-korea-tensions-complicate-us-efforts-on-security.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/21/world/asia/japan-and-south-korea-tensions-complicate-us-efforts-on-security.html?_r=0) (31 January 2013).

<sup>254</sup> M. Fackler, ‘China, Japan and South Korea focus on economy at summit’, *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/13/world/asia/13iht-asiaecon.1.18649048.html> (10 May 2011).

## *Research Agenda*

This research is important because it touches on many of the tenets in Asian regionalism. Where Japan is often depicted as a regional player whose initiative is detested by neighbours, on the basis of this case I can show that an important exception emerged: Japan proposes the trilateral summit, in Fukuoka in 2008, which was accepted by the two neighbours. In Japan's case, to clarify who and when proposed the first trilateral summit would be beneficial.

If so, China could ascribe to them all sort of malign intentions – such as ‘containing’ China. Also, many of my interviewees in Japan and Korea pointed to the reality that TC serves as a platform for ‘managing’ China. These findings were not corroborated by direct interviews in China. Had China any hidden intention? Further research would need to incorporate more of Chinese sources. Other factors were left mostly untouched – the US, ASEAN.

Previously in the literature, it has been often asserted, without sufficient proofs, that ASEAN's cooperation or integration is deeper (a cognitive-cultural claim), more advanced (a semi-empirical claim), or more promising (predictive claim) – than any cooperation in Northeast Asia could ever be. But these claims–indeed, assumptions–have been undermined by emerging practices of cooperation in Northeast Asia. It rather appears now that the claim was not empirically grounded, but it was rather a ‘photograph’ of a given moment in ASEAN's record. It *was* a moment when all the elements seemed to work together. ASEAN has individual members whose problems, when compounded, simply predispose this organisation to have a trouble-ridden cooperation<sup>255</sup>. It appears that the three countries’

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<sup>255</sup> For an unusual lack of a common statement after a summit of ASEAN, see <http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/07/20/asean-south-china-sea-idINDEE86J05120120720> (23 July 2012). Indeed, an entry for a ‘joint communique’ in 2012 is missing on the

substantive weight predisposes them to have a deeper, more advanced and at times more promising cooperation, and with lower levels of diplomatic investment. The research agenda that emerges here is to witness how indigenous practices of cooperation will develop, and the Korean character in it. For Korea, the trilateral cooperation was clearly in line with its preferences, but foreign policy's realisation was contingent upon responses from the other two states.

This sketch just opens the further question of how to place the development of Trilateral Cooperation on the larger map of institutions in East Asia.

**Implications for Asian regionalism.** What are the implications of this research? Students of Asian regionalism will need to pay attention not only to preferences of major powers. The example of Korea has made the point clear that preferences of smaller powers may be aligned with outcomes in regionalism. Because of it, there is no a priori reason to assume that new institutions are going to come from preferences of actors such as Japan or China. We need to expand our studies to study small to middle powers. This point in itself is a fairly standard argument; yet, there is a difference between 'calling for' and actually studying preferences for regionalism of lesser actors. Even if many before me have asked 'what about Burma or Costa Rica?' few have empirically ventured into questions such as: 'what do Burma or Costa Rica *want* from world politics?' What I said hits at the difference between suggesting research, and using new analytical frameworks to carry it through.

I do not claim any generalisability of my findings to other continents, not even to other regions of Asia. I do not, therefore, argue that a new institution will

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ASEAN's website: <http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-political-security-community/category/amm-joint-communiques> (7 March 2013). Also, consider the clash between Malaysia and the Philippines over a region of Sabah, which belongs to Malaysia: [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/06/world/asia/malaysia-attacks-filipino-rebels-on-borneo-island.html?ref=asia&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/06/world/asia/malaysia-attacks-filipino-rebels-on-borneo-island.html?ref=asia&_r=0) (5 March 2013).

emerge from Burmese or Costa Rican preferences. Yet I do suggest that if we turn our eyes away from these ‘minor’ actors, we may later be disillusioned by failing to explain new events in world politics. Our books on ‘grand’ strategies of ‘great’ powers will not answer all the questions, a point that even Kenneth Waltz would agree with (1996: 54).

With the Trilateral Cooperation in place, the study of Asian regionalism will have to be different. Even if a reader chooses to ignore the findings of this study in full, he or she is still incapable of rejecting a form of Northeast Asian cooperation away from Southeast Asia. A ‘so-what?’ effect of this research is, therefore, hard to underestimate. It places a novel Asian framework amidst a set of highly organised arguments on regional institutions, as if suddenly throwing an object into a still water pond. I have frequently re-emphasised throughout this thesis the way in which the TC unsettles our beliefs so far on regional tissue of institutions in Asia. But it is worth reminding ourselves once again that a structure of our conclusions is challenged by the new development. Findings of this thesis suggest that it is a risky step to make all-encompassing predictions from ‘competition’ or ‘rivalry’ among Asian states.

A more fruitful analytical path will refocus from what actors *can't* do to what they *can*. It will necessarily take a more specific route, not just saying that new institutions will emerge, but what kind of institutions they will be. This research has also shown that the sieve we use for understanding should have bigger holes. That is, we need to avoid ‘sieving out’ too many events just because they appear to fail to fit with some preconception of, in this case, cooperation. Indeed, speaking strictly of ‘cooperation’ as it stands in the IR dictionary, this event wouldn’t qualify. There is hardly any sort of abiding with rules that would satisfy the definition. But to those

who would say that this event doesn't matter as a 'real' cooperation, I would say that if it matters to the three states, then we should study it too.

International Relations are competitive (Waltz 1979: 127), but only to a certain point. The way that states structure their interactions is based upon a premise that—anytime, anywhere—conflict is possible. Otherwise, armies would have evaporated from most of the locations. War seems there to stay—whether it is in words, deeds or memories. Because of such complex past and inevitably uncertain future, it is easy to see why cooperation, in most cases, is a difficult task.

In the course of studying, as the TC was 'developing', I understood finally that my thesis was due to render 'negative' results in hypothesis testing. Yet, I can still defend the course I took & the contribution emerging from that for IR. Namely, the topic involved three Asian giants, yet it was little studied. If the three countries removed the obstacles for trilateral cooperation more effectively (as I had the reasons to expect they would), then it would be giant step for more peaceful Northeast Asia. The contribution to regional studies in IR is then a cautious warning: even if a regional framework looks very promising (as was the case of APEC and early studies on it in the 1990s), one must wait about 10 years to see how the actual developments are unfolding.

This research is likely to influence what we study in Asian regionalism, and how we go about studying it. The cumulated impact of the small changes that this research is going to trigger may push the field of IR and Asian studies into new, unexplored directions.

## List of Interviews

I conducted interviews for my research in Tokyo, Japan, and in Seoul, South Korea. As a recipient of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) Short-term Award in November 2010, I interviewed former and current policymakers, journalists and scholars. I also conducted interviews with scholars in South Korea from April to May 2011, thanks to a fellowship from the Korea Foundation in Seoul. Below I list the interviews in the order in which I conducted them. The first two interviews, noted as 1 and 2, were arranged to stay anonymous; so was the interview with an official in London (marked here as ‘interview L’).

### Japan (Tokyo, unless specified otherwise; November 2010)

1 Interview 1 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs – MOFA, Japan)

2 Interview 2 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs – MOFA, Japan)

3 Toshiaki Miura (Journalist, *Asahi Shimbun* – a newspaper)

4 Masao Okonogi (Professor, Keio University)

5 Ryosei Kokubun (Professor, Keio University)

6 Chikako Ueki (Professor, Waseda University)

7 Hiro Katsumata (Assistant Professor, Waseda University)

8 Mie Oba (Associate Professor, Tokyo University of Science)

9 Rumi Aoyama (Professor, Waseda University)

10 Hitoshi Tanaka (Chairman, Japan Research Institute; former deputy minister, MOFA)

11 Yong Chul Lee (Professor, Waseda University)

12 Ki-jung Kim (Professor, Keio and Yonsei University)

13 Chaesung Chun (Professor, Keio and Seoul National University)

14 Yoichiro Sato (Professor, Asia-Pacific University, Beppu)

15 Hidetaka Yoshimatsu (Professor, Asia-Pacific University, Beppu)

London (January 2011)

16 Interview L (Executive Officer, Japan Bank for International Cooperation)

South Korea, Seoul (April – May 2011)

17 Jong Kun Choi (Professor, Yonsei University)

18 Chung Min Lee (Dean, Graduate School of International Studies–Yonsei)

19 Chang Jae Lee (Director, Korea Institute for International Economic Policy–KIEP)

20 Yanghyeon Jo (Professor, Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security–IFANS)

21 Chung-in Moon (Professor, Yonsei University)

22 Yeon Ho Lee (Professor, Yonsei University)

23 Heung Kyu Kim (Professor, Sungshin University)

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