

## Historical Reconciliation and East Asian Transnational Relations: South Korea-Japan-China Hyung-Gu Lynn

History issues seem to surface with disturbing regularity in hampering relations between Japan, China, and South Korea, yet progress in analyzing first, whether history debates actually influence transnational relations; second, what the causes of either actual or perceived influence of historical issues may be; and third, what might be done to promote progress towards greater levels of mutual transnational trust at official and grassroots levels have been harder to generate. In answering the questions that we have been asked to discuss regarding this issue, I flag four points that can be considered cornerstones for further discussions.

### 1. How are current South Korea-Japan-China relations?

*Sectoral Specificity* - In assessing relations among these three countries, sector-specific analysis that takes into account variations within and among areas such as trade, investment, security, tourism, cultural and educational exchanges, etc. is required. Disputes over history can sometimes influence but other times have zero influence on other issue areas.

### 2. What influences do problems with historical reconciliation have on East Asian relations?

*Causal Dynamics* - While disputes over history have been constant presences, there are causal dynamics that need to be examined regarding why history issues flare up at specific moments. Oft-invoked international security concepts such as balancing, hedging, or bandwagoning, can help explain the periodic rise of historical disputes, but basic problems with trust extend beyond these. States can have territorial disputes and unresolved historical issues (both domestic and international), but can maintain relatively stable relations and even develop trust.

### 3. What are North American views or evaluations about East Asian international relations and historical reconciliation?

*Domestic diversity* – In each country, aside from the publicly-expressed views of government officials, there are usually not one unified set of views in any country. Aside from differences between liberals and progressives, public and private views, etc., even among academics, there is a range in the views and the robustness of arguments among academics in each country. While factors such as degrees of informal and formal censorship, constructed notions of race and nationality, gender, age, educational-levels, occupations, and/or discipline of specialization (history, sociology, political science), often shape views, the challenge for North America or the West remains the deficit of specialists without sufficient language skills and archival knowledge to make meaningful contributions to debates over history and international relations in East Asia.

### 4. What should and can be done to overcome historical reconciliation problems? What are crucial factors or obstacles for East Asian Community buildings and mutual dialogue in East Asia?

*Precedents and Benchmarks* – In proposing solutions, there must be thorough awareness what initiatives have already been undertaken, what official and unofficial assessments of the results were, and whether we have sufficient levels of specialized knowledge to have convictions about any issue to begin with. Calls for more multilateral initiatives or grassroots exchanges without understanding past trajectories and outcomes only fuel the recurrence of familiar patterns.