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# Understanding and Recommendations for Strengthening Resilience in East Asia and Promoting Trilateral Cooperation Among China, Japan, and South Korea

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On May 17, 2025, the *“2025 ‘China-Japan-Korea+’ Think Tank Cooperation Forum”* was successfully held in Shanghai. The forum was co-hosted by the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, the Japan Forum on International Relations, and Yonsei Institute for Sinology. With the theme of “Strengthening East Asian Resilience: Exploring the Paths of China-Japan-Korea Cooperation in Turbulent Times,” the forum was held with the support of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat. It brought together experts from China, Japan, South Korea, ASEAN, and other countries for in-depth discussions on political, economic, and institutional cooperation among the three countries and within the East Asian region.

Experts proposed a series of recommendations for enhancing trilateral cooperation across economic, political, and institutional dimensions:

## 1. Building Economic Resilience: Institutional Innovation and Multi-Stakeholder Participation

First, experts widely agreed on the need to upgrade and align regional institutional frameworks. Given external pressures, relying solely on existing mechanisms is insufficient. China, Japan, and Korea should deepen trade facilitation and mutual recognition of rules of origin through platforms like RCEP to rebuild “institutional resilience” and establish an inclusive and stable regional economic order. This thinking extends to creating embedded mechanisms and pilot platforms, such as establishing “technology pilot zones” and “regulatory sandboxes” to accumulate experience in cross-system

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cooperation through policy flexibility.

Second, there was significant concern about repairing the global rule system and coordinating regional rules. In today's international community, the misuse of national security clauses is weakening the multilateral order under the WTO. China, Japan, and Korea should temporarily set aside political differences, collectively advocate within the WTO framework, enhance consistency and coordination of regional rules, and promote the restoration of the WTO dispute settlement mechanism. Additionally, functional cooperation with ASEAN should be strengthened by aligning with enterprise needs and standards to jointly address key issues such as digital connectivity, green transformation, and cybersecurity.

Third, on supply chain resilience and emergency mechanisms, some experts proposed establishing a “CJK+ASEAN Supply Chain Resilience Platform” based on three pillars: information sharing, joint reserves, and collaborative R&D. Priority areas include semiconductor materials, rare earths and lithium, and port logistics hubs. It was suggested to set up an early warning center, mutual recognition of emergency stockpiles, and a joint R&D fund. The focus should be on low-sensitivity, high-operability topics to enhance regional responsiveness and risk perception in critical industries. Lastly, effective implementation of mechanisms requires multi-stakeholder participation and pragmatic implementation pathways. Experts emphasized the importance of designing mechanisms that are both feasible and beneficial. More involvement from enterprises, industry associations, and local governments is needed to promote “government-industry-academia” integration and translate high-level visions into tangible outcomes. Promoting small-scale, visible, and feasible cooperation projects—such as port information sharing, green supply chain standards, and logistics tax coordination—can help replace high-threshold “strategic alignment” with “functional trust,” gradually building a solid foundation for cooperation.

## **2. Enhancing Political Resilience: Building a Stable and Sustainable Cooperation Architecture**

First, there is a need to restore and strengthen high-level political leadership and policy coordination

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among the three countries. Currently, domestic populist tendencies in all three countries suppress rational voices and constrain pragmatic cooperation under the banner of “political correctness.” Against this backdrop, it is crucial to guide public opinion, foster political responsibility for regional cooperation, and reestablish consistent and forward-looking dialogue frameworks such as trilateral summits and foreign ministers' meetings. Moreover, cooperation should shift from its current loosely communicative nature to more institutionalized engagement, enhancing stability and shock resistance. This requires the introduction of institutionalized Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) covering data sharing, crisis communication, and non-traditional security areas to strengthen the foundation of cooperation.

The Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), as a permanent mechanism, urgently needs an expansion of its functional scope. Experts propose transforming TCS from a primarily technical platform for economic and cultural coordination into a comprehensive mechanism capable of political dialogue and policy coordination. By organizing high-level closed-door dialogues among politicians and think tanks, conducting thematic research, and providing policy input, TCS can act as an “intellectual hub” and “information channel” during summit preparations and policy implementation. To address limitations in funding and staffing, Japan’s model of corporate-supported think tanks—like Mitsubishi and Mitsui—could be emulated by bringing in financial support from large enterprises in all three countries, giving TCS greater autonomy and operational capacity. Additionally, establishing closed, informal exchange mechanisms allowing participation in personal capacity could help mitigate policy frictions and improve communication quality.

Second, in functional cooperation, stakeholders emphasized prioritizing low-sensitivity topics to lay the groundwork for political trust. Projects can be launched in areas such as climate change, energy transition, public health, food security, and aging societies. These topics are both relevant to people’s livelihoods and conducive to consensus building. A noteworthy model is ASEAN’s “Fukuda Doctrine,” which emphasizes equality, consultation, and non-interference—building trust through functional projects. Inspired by the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF), trilateral cooperation funds or burden-sharing mechanisms could be established in fields like vaccine production, digital

transformation, and green finance to ensure resource continuity. Platforms such as TCS, ASEAN+3, the G7, and the United Nations could be used to promote multi-track collaboration with enhanced flexibility and resilience in mechanism design, issue selection, and emergency response.

Third, experts highlighted that strengthening exchanges among civil society, academia, and youth is essential for building a societal foundation for cooperation. The three countries should value cross-cultural understanding among the younger generation and support normalized exchanges among universities, think tanks, and enterprises. Academic exchange should be viewed as a proactive political act, offering diverse perspectives and professional support for policymaking through joint research projects, think tank networks, and translated publications. Track 2 and 1.5 diplomacy mechanisms should be further activated, integrating insights from scholars, policymakers, and industry to explore institutional solutions to bilateral tensions and trilateral cooperation.

Fourth, in security and regional cooperation, the three countries should work toward building more effective and coordinated regional security platforms. On traditional security issues, they should coordinate their policy stances on international frameworks like the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the South China Sea Code of Conduct (COC), enhancing the enforceability and credibility of regional rules. Progressing from “personal diplomacy” to institutional coordination is crucial to prevent cooperation mechanisms from becoming overly reliant on the relationships between specific leaders.

Finally, with technological competition and asymmetric information dissemination becoming new challenges for trilateral cooperation, stakeholders propose creating dialogue and regulatory coordination mechanisms centered on technology. These would help reduce misunderstandings and strategic anxieties in areas like semiconductors, AI, and clean energy. An “industrial public opinion coordination mechanism” is recommended to enable rapid evaluation and risk responses during unexpected events—such as tech bans, corporate sanctions, or supply chain disruptions. Mainstream media in the three countries should raise professional and ethical standards, avoiding inflammatory reporting that misguides public perception. A “Trilateral Public Opinion Monitoring Platform” or

“Cognitive Coordination Mechanism” could be established to facilitate in-depth dialogue among media professionals and opinion leaders, reducing cognitive bias and preventing antagonism caused by misinterpretation or stereotypes.

### **3. Optimizing Institutional Resilience: Toward a Robust and Enduring Trilateral Platform**

First, rather than blindly establishing new mechanisms, efforts should focus on integrating and strengthening existing platforms, especially in non-political, functional areas such as smart cities, environmental protection, public health, and disaster relief. Cross-border data flow and AI governance represent major breakthroughs for future institutionalized cooperation.

Second, institutionalizing trilateral relations is a key opportunity. Regular summits and ministerial meetings should be established to reinforce high-level exchanges. Concurrently, Track 2 diplomacy—featuring scholars, think tanks, and businesses—should be revitalized. Historical experience shows that flexible, informal communication channels help foster mutual understanding and enhance crisis response capacity, acting as a stabilizer.

Lastly, institutional mechanisms must be resilient, strategic, and structural—achieved through repeated dialogue, procedural formalization, and strengthening of secretariat functions. To maximize the potential of trilateral cooperation, a medium- to long-term vision should be formulated to guide consensus-building and institutional development. Trust must be built through long-term arrangements rather than solely project-driven engagement. Organizing side events during major summits, establishing annual vice-ministerial dialogues, and developing cooperative standards on data governance and AI ethics are crucial steps toward deeper institutionalization.

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