

Challenges for Trilateral Security Cooperation and the Way Ahead

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Introduction

The framework for Japan-China-ROK trilateral cooperation has evolved over two decades since the breakfast meeting on the side of ASEAN+3 in 1999. Political leaders of the three countries confirmed the further development of the trilateral cooperation in the "Trilateral Cooperation Vision for the Next Decade" which was agreed at the 8th Trilateral Summit in Chengdu, China, in December 2019. This paper examines the future of trilateral security cooperation based on this vision.

While the global situation in the twenty-first century has changed dramatically, the East Asian region has enjoyed stability and prosperity. During this period, trilateral cooperation has developed consistently. In view of this fact, the trilateral cooperation can be evaluated as a robust framework contributing to peace and stability in East Asia. However, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic poses new challenges to the globalism that has been the foundation of world prosperity. The direction of the trilateral cooperation, which has been based on previous globalism, will be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has more to do with reinforcing previously existing currents than with creating new ones in international relations. Therefore, we need to consider the future direction of the trilateral cooperation, based on a careful examination of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international relations.

This paper argues that the COVID-19 pandemic poses challenges to the trilateral cooperation in cooperative multilateralism, but it does not diminish the significance of the trilateral cooperation. Rather, the trilateral cooperation will continue to play a significant role in building confidence for regional security, expanding functional cooperation, and contributing to existing cooperative multilateralism across the region.

This paper is organized as follows. First, it examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the international order and regional multilateralism. Then, after reviewing the history of and current challenges to the trilateral cooperation, this paper argues the direction the trilateral cooperation should take in the post-Corona period, pointing out

¹ The views expressed in this paper do not represent the Japanese government, the Ministry of Defense, or the National Institute for Defense Studies.

specific issues for security cooperation.

1. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on International Relations

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has been ongoing since early 2020, is having a significant impact on international relations. This impact is more likely to reinforce previously existing currents in certain aspects than to create new currents. In addition, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been ambivalent and transformed over time. Therefore, the impact on international relations observed at the present time may cause a backlash in the future. In the following, this paper discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international relations, focusing on the four currents that have existed so far, with an emphasis on long-term changes.

(1) Growing Suspicion of Existing Globalism

Robin Niblett, director of Chatham House, notes that "*it is the end of globalization as we know it*" and that "*it seems highly unlikely in this context that the world will return to the idea of mutually beneficial globalization that defined the early 21st century*"². If globalization in particular refers to the process of interaction and integration among people, companies, and governments worldwide, then the COVID-19 pandemic has severely restricted the transfer of people across borders in particular. This is because the movement of people mediates the international spread of COVID-19. The fact that even the EU has border controls in place has come as a shock to people. According to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the number of international flights per day worldwide plummeted from 28,338 on 1 January 2020 to 1,972 on 6 April³.

The retreat from global interdependence will force a revision of globalism as an idea that promotes the process of globalization. Of course, once the COVID-19 pandemic is under control, human migration will recover. But it is highly likely that the nations of the world will become more vigilant about the risks of global interdependence. Globalization has been promoted as a global value because it is expected to increase wealth. It has been pointed out in the past that the pursuit of wealth through globalization has had various negative aspects, including the widening of the international wealth gap and environmental pollution. The latest pandemic has

² Robin Niblett, "The End of Globalization as We Know It," "How the World Will Look After the Coronavirus Pandemic," *Foreign Policy*, March 20, 2020.

³ "COVID-19 Airport Status," ICAO, Aug. 21, 2021, <https://www.icao.int/safety/Pages/COVID-19-Airport-Status.aspx>

reaffirmed the fact that the deepening of economic interdependence is also linked to the vulnerability of national economies. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to change the way globalism has tended to focus on the pursuit of increasing wealth. Globalism will have to address the challenges of existing globalization, including wealth disparity, international supply chains, border control systems, and wildlife management.

(2) Worsening divisions in the international community

Although COVID-19 itself has spread around the world, differences in national and societal responses have deepened the division in the international community on two fronts: wealth and values.

Large differences have emerged between nations with strong and weak social resilience in the fight against COVID-19, and one of these differences in response arises from the wealth of nations. Most developing countries do not have the medical and quarantine systems that are essential for COVID-19 control. As COVID-19 has spread to developed countries as well, these countries are concentrating on domestic COVID-19 control measures rather than providing assistance to developing countries. As a result, suspicions over the inequity of international governance are unfolding.

Furthermore, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a vigorous debate over the superiority of regimes between authoritarianism and democracy⁴. However, the superiority or inferiority in the fight against COVID-19 does not necessarily arise from the differences between authoritarian and democratic regimes. For regardless of whether it is a democratic or authoritarian regime, some countries have succeeded in combating the COVID-19, while others have failed. Rather, it has been suggested that the states that have been successful in combating COVID-19 are those that have a high level of public trust in their governments.⁵ The reality, however, is that both camps are increasingly critical of the different regimes. This escalating division over wealth and values will continue to have an impact on international cooperation even after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

(3) Intensification of the U.S.-China Conflict

Although the U.S.-China confrontation gradually intensified over the 2010s, it became more serious with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The U.S. and China had agreed on the first phase of trade negotiations on the trade conflict in January 2020.

⁴ See Shivshankar Menon, 'This Pandemic Can Serve a Useful Purpose', 'How the World Will Look After the Coronavirus Pandemic,' *Foreign Policy*, March 20, 2020.

⁵ Ivan Krastev (Fumi Yamada, trans.), *How the Corona Shock Will Change the World: The Crisis That Strikes Politics, Economics, and Society* (Chuo Koron Shinsha, 2020). (In Japanese)

However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to growing discontent with China, especially from the United States, and the U.S.-China confrontation is expanding beyond trade frictions to include the full range of values and political systems. In particular, the accelerated power shift caused by the COVID-19 pandemic could exacerbate the situation. Graham Allison of Harvard University points out that U.S.-China relations could fall into a collision - a "Thucydides trap" - between an existing hegemonic power and a rising power attempting to change the status quo⁶. He points out that rapid power shifts can lead to instability in international relations. Although the COVID-19 pandemic spread from Wuhan to the rest of the world, China has succeeded in controlling the COVID-19 relatively quickly through strict quarantine measures and made progress toward economic recovery. The United States, on the other hand, seems to be failing to contain COVID-19 and suffered the most serious economic crisis since WWII. In this context, the frustration the United States has with China is rapidly increasing. In contrast, China seems to be taking a hardline foreign stance, "Wolf Warrior diplomacy[战狼外交]". These trends are likely to speed up the power shift between the United States and China, and potentially destabilize the international order.

(4) Growing suspicion of multilateralism and regionalism

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to doubts about multilateralism, which seeks to solve common problems through multilateral cooperation, and may also affect the nature of multilateral regionalism in East Asia. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many countries to focus on their domestic affairs, and has led to international competition for strategic resources such as medical supplies⁷. In particular, there are serious doubts about the multilateralism of the United States, which has supported the post-war international order. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. government has made clear its disregard for multilateralism by criticizing the WHO as being pro-China and announcing its withdrawal from the WHO.

The multilateral cooperation framework, including the U.S. and China, may become even more unworkable, although, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a tendency for its coordination to malfunction. For example, the existing United Nations Group of Governmental Experts (GGE), led by the United States, and the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG), newly proposed to be established by Russia, have coexisted as

⁶ Graham T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

⁷ Masanobu Takamizawa, "The Crisis of Multilateralism: How the Global Security Environment is Changing," Koken Seminar (August 2020) (in Japanese)

UN venues for discussing cyberspace norms since 2018. Each framework continues to discuss actively without convergence⁸. Raja C. Mohan of the National University of Singapore notes that the environment of cooperative multilateralism that emerged in the 1990s has declined and competitive multilateralism has emerged in its place⁹. Rather than broader multilateralism, in which the U.S. is a member and has conflicts, China tends to be more active in new multilateral cooperation, such as BRICS and SCO, which excludes U.S. participation. In the future, the U.S. and China may proceed with their own rulemaking in a multilateral framework that excludes each other. The rise of such competitive multilateralism could make communication between the camps difficult and spread double standards in the international community.

The stagnation of cooperative multilateralism means that the international community's ability to deal with common challenges will be weakened. Global environmental and public health problems affect people all over the world, but no one great power can solve these problems alone¹⁰. It is clear that even as the momentum for multilateralism declines, the significance of multilateralism will continue to exist.

2. Progress and Challenges of the Trilateral Cooperation as Multilateral Regionalism

(1) Multilateral Regionalism in East Asia

The Japan-China-ROK trilateral cooperation has developed in the context of the rising tide of multilateral regionalism in East Asia since the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War, under the rivalry between the two major powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, the liberal and communist camps were divided into two military alliances in the security field, while the economic system was also segregated between the two camps. Almost simultaneously with the end of the Cold War, APEC was established as an “open regionalism” organization and moves to promote economic interdependence within the Asia-Pacific region. It gained momentum, with China, Russia and other former communist bloc countries joining as members. The formation of multilateralism in East Asia, which straddles the former East-West camps, is of great historical

⁸ Yu Harada, "An Experimental Study on the Current Status and Prospects of Efforts for Norm Formation in Cyberspace", *Journal of Security Strategy*, Vol. 1, No. 1, August 2020, pp. 1-18. (In Japanese)

⁹ Raja C. Mohan, "Towards Competitive Multilateralism," Center for Strategic Research & Antalya Diplomacy Forum, *The World After COVID-19: Cooperation or Competition?* June 2020, pp. 99-104.

¹⁰ Joseph Nye, "COVID-19 is testing American leadership but it will not change the global order," *The World after COVID-19: Cooperation or Competition?*, Center for Strategic Research & Antalya Diplomacy Forum Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 2020, p. 106.

significance.

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was established in 1994, and the ARF expanded with the participation of many countries, including those in the former communist bloc. The ARF aimed to be a development mechanism for the security function in three major stages: (1) confidence-building, (2) preventive diplomacy, and (3) conflict resolution. However, The ARF has been criticized for being little more than a talk shop, failing to move forward with binding rule formation due to its emphasis on consensus building among a large number of member states. On the other hand, one of the significant outcomes of the ARF was to bring together countries from different political systems to discuss common security and build trust. A side development of this was to create a network of dialogue between policy makers in the region¹¹. This network of policy dialogue leads to policy transparency and predictability among countries, which contributes to regional stability in the long run.

The outbreak of the Asian financial crisis in 1997 prompted the rise of regionalism in East Asia, including China, Japan, and South Korea. Originally, the ASEAN+3 summit was scheduled to be held in December 1997 within the ASEAN, but the outbreak of the Asian financial crisis called for the ASAN+3 to achieve functional cooperation in the financial sector. Thus, an agreement was formed to address the common regional challenge of the financial crisis through regional multilateral cooperation. Trilateral cooperation began in 1999, when the leaders of the three countries took the opportunity to hold a breakfast meeting on the side of ASEAN+3. In the two decades since then, trilateral cooperation has continued to develop, including in the security field.

Ken Jimbo of Keio University argues that there is a three-tiered security architecture in East Asia, and that its dynamic interactions define the regional order of East Asia¹². According to the study, there are three layers of multilateral security frameworks in East Asia: (1) a military security network led by the United States; (2) functional cooperation to address issues on an ad hoc basis, including the Six-Party Talks, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI); and (3) multilateral security dialogues. The first layer, the U.S. alliance network, has served to shape the regional security order of East Asia post-WWII through a hub and spoke alliance system centered on bilateral alliances with the U.S., including U.S.-Japan, U.S.-ROK, and U.S.-Australia, etc. At the beginning of the 21st century, ties between non-U.S. actors such as Japan, ROK and Australia have strengthened, and the network of

¹¹ Tanaka, A. et al, *The East Asian Community and Japan's Pathway* (NHK Publishing, 2005), p. 20.

¹² Jimbo Ken et al. "Regional Security Architecture in the Asia Pacific: The Multi-Layered Structure of Regional Security," Policy Research Institute, Tokyo Foundation, August 2010. <https://www.tkfd.or.jp/files/files/doc/2010-08.pdf>

alliances are now being charted. These U.S. alliance networks, while exclusive in nature, have also helped to deter adventurist military action and maintain regional stability. The second layer of the regional security network has the ability to be formed on an ad hoc basis to implement functional cooperation for the resolution of specific security issues. And the third layer, the pan-regional frameworks such as the ASEAN+3, ARF, and the East Asia Summit (EAS), promote confidence-building through the formation of networks of policy makers in the region, as mentioned earlier.

The trilateral cooperation is a limited regional framework composed of Japan, China and ROK, but it has a third-layer role in the sense that it has a diversity of regimes and values and aims to build confidence among the three countries. On the other hand, trilateral cooperation has a second-layer nature in that it can build on the political agreement reached at the summit and promote functional cooperation by setting up ad hoc projects under the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS). In other words, the trilateral cooperation in security has significance for confidence-building and functionalist cooperation.

(2) Development of and Challenges for Trilateral Cooperation

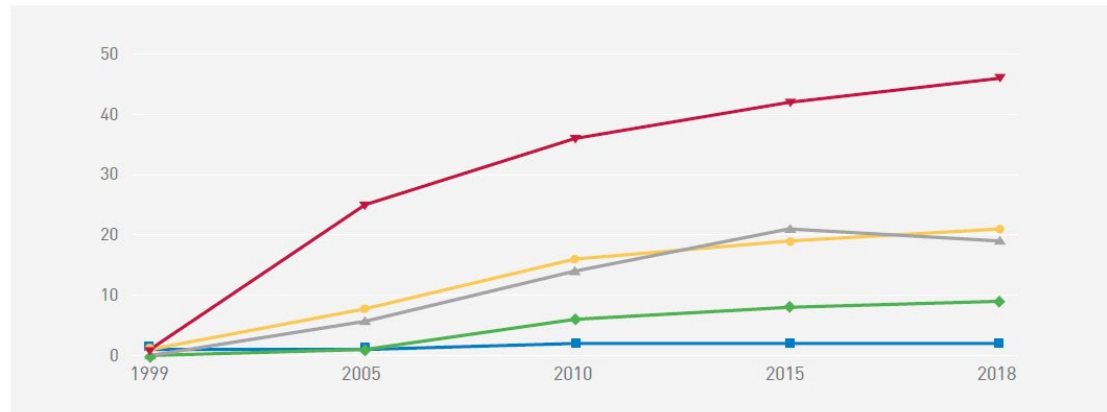
The trilateral cooperation began in 1999 when a summit meeting was held on the side of ASEAN+3 in the form of a breakfast meeting. Since then, the meetings have become more diversified and multi-layered. According to the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), the dialogue mechanism of the three countries has evolved over time, with various levels of meetings established, including summits, ministerial level meetings, senior official level meetings, director generals' level meetings, and working level meetings, as shown in the figure below. In the area of cooperation, the 2015 Trilateral Summit also issued a joint statement stating that they would promote cooperation across various fields, including in peace, environment, economic and trade, agriculture, and education¹³.

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, May 2, 2018, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/jck/summit/bn.html>

NUMBER OF TRILATERAL MECHANISMS (as of 2018)

2 ■ Summits 21 ◆ Ministerial-level Meetings 9 ◆ Senior Officials' Meetings 19 ▲ Director Generals' Meetings 46 ▼ Working-level Meetings

PROGRESS OF TRILATERAL MECHANISMS (1999-2018)



(出所) Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat, "Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat Annual Report 2017-2018," 2018, p.43.

In particular, the institutionalization of meetings plays an important role in the continued development of trilateral cooperation, and the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), established in 2011, is in charge of preparing senior official meetings, ministerial meetings and summit meetings, as well as reviewing the implementation of the results of each meeting and building a database¹⁴. The enhancement of the TCS's functions will lead to the continuous development of trilateral cooperation, even at difficult times in the political situation among the three countries, and has the effect of increasing the sustainability and resilience of cooperation.

However, the trilateral cooperation also faces challenges. A major challenge is the existence of mutual distrust between the three countries. According to a Japan-Korea public opinion survey conducted by Genron NPO, as of 2019, 49.9% of Japanese people had an unfavorable impression of South Korea and 20% had a favorable impression of the country. On the other hand, 49.9% of Koreans had an unfavorable impression of Japan and 31.7% had a favorable impression of the country¹⁵. According to a Sino-Japanese public opinion survey also published by Genron NPO, 45.9% of Chinese people had a favorable impression of the Japanese and 52.7% had an unfavorable impression of the Japanese, showing a trend of improvement, while 15% of Japanese people had a

¹⁴ Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat, *Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat Annual Report 2017-2018*, 2018 <https://tcs-asia.org/en/data/publications.php>

¹⁵ Genron NPO, June 12, 2019, <https://www.genron-npo.net/world/archives/7250.html>

favorable impression of China and 84.7% had an unfavorable impression of the country¹⁶.

While these issues are directly related to the level of public sentiment, in reality, they are rooted in the political and security issues among the three countries. Looking at the Japanese public sentiment, the most significant reason for their unfavorable impression of China is that it has frequently violated Japan's territorial waters and airspace around the Senkaku Islands, the second major reason is that they distrust the Communist Party's political system of one-party rule, and the third reason is that they feel that the country is not behaving in accordance with international rules¹⁷. On the other hand, the most significant reason for the Chinese public's unfavorable impressions of Japan is that "Japan has not properly apologized for its history of aggression against China" and the second reason is that "Japan has 'nationalized' the Senkaku Islands, causing conflict". The above results show that the distrust between Japan, China, and South Korea stems from political and security issues such as differences in recognition of the territorial rights, differences in political systems, historical issues, and differences in attitudes toward international rules.

In order to resolve such mutual distrust, there is no other way but to promote steady confidence-building among the three countries. In the "Trilateral Cooperation Vision for the Next Decade," the three countries also agreed to "enhance communication on strategic issues and political mutual trust, in the spirit of mutual respect, manage differences properly and develop long-term relations of peace and friendship¹⁸." In confidence building, emphasis should be placed on functional cooperation in the security field, which is a cause of political distrust. The three countries have been gradually building up functional cooperation at the working level in common security matters such as cyber, HA/DR, and counter-terrorism, and the "Trilateral Cooperation VISION 2020," released in 2010, also states that strengthening security dialogue and facilitating exchange and cooperation among the defense or military personnel of the three countries are key elements of the trilateral cooperation¹⁹. However even now, ten years later, the trilateral defense dialogue has not been launched.

As we have seen above, the significance of trilateral cooperation is confidence-building and functional cooperation, rather than on the formation of a community as is the case with the ASEAN and the EU. In addition, a complementary role of cooperative

¹⁶ Genron NPO, October 23, 2019, <https://www.genron-npo.net/pdf/15th.pdf>

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, "Trilateral Cooperation Vision for the Next Decade," March 20, 2020, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000552950.pdf>

¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit Trilateral Cooperation VISION 2020, May 30, 2010, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/jck/summit1005/vision2020.html>

multilateralism across the region could be considered as a direction for the trilateral cooperation. If cooperative multilateralism including the U.S. and China ceases to work, the trilateral cooperation framework may play an important role as a forum to deliberate on sensitive issues between the two camps. In other words, the trilateral cooperation, as open regionalism, could play a supporting role to a cooperative multilateral framework.

3. Prospects for Trilateral Cooperation in the Post-Corona Era

The Japan-China-ROK trilateral cooperation is a regional framework that recognizes heterogeneity and promotes mutual understanding to seek peaceful coexistence, rather than increasing homogeneity in order to build a community. As for the direction of the trilateral cooperation, this paper examines three areas: (1) confidence building, (2) functional cooperation among the three countries in the security field, and (3) open regionalism cooperation.

(1) Strengthening confidence building

Despite the importance of the framework, trilateral cooperation is sometimes dependent on the political situation among the three countries. For example, the trilateral summit did not take place for two and a half years until the 7th Trilateral Summit of the three countries was held in 2018. The 7th Trilateral Summit reaffirmed the regularity of holding the summit, and the 8th Trilateral Summit was held the following year in 2019. For strengthening confidence-building, it is necessary to build a resilient dialogue mechanism to regularly host the Trilateral Summit, regardless of the political climate.

In this trilateral cooperation, a mechanism has already been established to promote dialogue on multiple levels, including working level meetings, senior official meetings, ministerial meetings, and summits. Further strengthening of the interconnectedness of different dialogue frameworks will lead to sustained political outcomes. To this end, further strengthening the functions of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) could be expected to improve its ability to cultivate potential cooperation agendas, prepare political consensus documents, and follow-up on cooperation practices. In addition, we can generate momentum for continuous and practical cooperation through releasing the outcome document at the Trilateral Summit.

(2) Strengthening Functional Security Cooperation

In the security field, policy dialogue and functional cooperation, such as disaster prevention, counterterrorism, and cyber security, is gradually developing. Looking ahead to the next decade, there is potential to expand functional cooperation in the three areas of maritime security, new security domains, and non-traditional security.

The first is maritime security. Japan, China, and the ROK have different perceptions of their maritime interests, and maritime security is a sensitive issue that could lead to armed conflict. In December 2018, Japan-ROK relations worsened after a ROK naval vessel directed its fire-control radar at an MSDF patrol aircraft in the Sea of Japan. One of the causes of the incidents may be a lack of common understanding of international norms such as CUES. The occurrence of such incidents would seriously undermine mutual trust in the region. Therefore, it is necessary not only to establish a bilateral crisis management mechanism, but also to improve communication among the defense authorities on the existing international norms. Japan and China agreed on the Maritime and Air Communication Mechanism in 2018, and the two countries also agreed to hold annual meetings between defense authorities to strengthen this mechanism. Such activity between the two countries will improve the crisis management mechanism and predictability between the two countries, as well as contribute significantly to regional stability. As for trilateral cooperation, it is worth considering holding expert meetings among the defense authorities, as well as to conduct joint CUES exercises.

Secondly, it is significant to enhance dialogue and practical cooperation in the new security domain. At present, trends in new security fields such as space, cyber, and even AI are becoming increasingly important to the international security environment. Japan, China, and South Korea are each interested in advanced technologies and their military applications. Maintaining policy dialogue in this security area is important not only for regional security, but also for global security. In the cyber field, Japan, China, and South Korea have already held four policy dialogues between their diplomatic authorities²⁰. Although the three countries have exchanged information on the process of discussing international norms, it may be possible to expand participation in these dialogues to include defense and security authorities to exchange information on domestic cybercrimes and cyberattack cases.

In addition, versatile military and civilian technologies such as IoT, artificial intelligence, supercomputers and robotics are changing the shape of warfare.

²⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, November 18, 2019, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press4_008012.html

International norms pertaining to military use of cutting-edge technology are in the process of formation. The unilateral operation of advanced technology weapons in the region could destabilize the situation in the vicinity. Therefore, it is necessary to consider addressing future policy dialogues for crisis management within the framework of trilateral cooperation, especially in the context of crises involving unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and unmanned submarines (UUVs) that could be operated in the East China Sea and the Sea of Japan.

Third is the development of functional cooperation in non-traditional security. In terms of trilateral cooperation, commitment has been repeatedly reaffirmed to strengthen cooperation on disaster prevention. However, as the recent COVID-19 pandemic has revealed, epidemic prevention is also an important regional security issue. Japan's Self-Defense Forces and China's People's Liberation Army are playing a major role in the medical and transport sectors in the fight against COVID-19²¹. The Japanese Self-Defense Forces have accumulated expertise in the HA/DR field, through operation in disasters including earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters in Japan. Japan, China, and South Korea should further promote cooperation among defense authorities for disaster and epidemic prevention, based on each country's experience with the COVID-19 pandemic. These areas of disaster and medical care can also lead to open regional cooperation, as discussed below.

(3) Expanding Cooperation as Open Regionalism

The trilateral cooperation also plays an important role for regional peace and stability. The directions in which this trilateral cooperation will be for open regionalism in the future could include (1) joint support for developing countries and (2) cooperation in a pan-regional cooperative regional framework. At the 7th Summit in 2018, the three countries agreed on a concept paper on "Trilateral + X" cooperation²². In this paper, the three countries set out seven key areas of cooperation (i)sustainable economy, (ii)ecological and environmental conservation, (iii)disaster prevention, (iv)health, (v)poverty reduction, (vi)human exchange, and (vii)other areas, under the six principles of (a)voluntarism, (b)equality, (c)openness, (d)win-win, (e)transparency, and (f)sustainability.

Developing countries including Southeast Asia and Pacific island countries also face

²¹ For example, Shinji Yamaguchi, "The New Coronavirus Infectious Disease Crisis in Wuhan, China and the People's Liberation Army," NIDS Commentary, No. 112, March 13, 2020 (In Japanese). Ministry of Defense for Japan, May 18, 2020, https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/disaster/covid/siryo2.pdf

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 21, 2019, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000508824.pdf>

common non-traditional security issues that transcend national borders, such as environmental problems and natural disasters, due to their geographical proximity. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the demand for international cooperation in the fields of quarantine systems and preventive health care in developing countries²³. Although China, Japan and Korea have already been providing assistance to developing countries on an individual basis, in order to implement more effective assistance to developing countries, the three countries may consider sharing cooperation projects after confirming the principles and philosophies of assistance among them. Specifically, the three countries should hold a working-level dialogue to share information on their capacity building for developing countries. For example, Japan has developed the “Vientiane Vision” for defense cooperation and capacity building assistance to the ASEAN. Japan, China, and South Korea can exchange views on their respective aid programs for developing countries, which will enable them to provide more effective support to developing countries. Particularly in developing countries, the military plays a wide range of roles, including HA/DR and border security, so there is potential for capacity-building support for these national defense authorities.

There is also a concern that cooperative multilateralism will not work as U.S.-China relations deteriorate. In particular, the lack of progress in security policy dialogue could worsen the international security environment. The ADMM Plus and the ARF, led by the ASEAN, have promoted not only confidence-building but also functional cooperation, including the United States and China as members. However, discussions on crisis management and international norm have stalled in the multilateral framework, including with the U.S. and China. For example, the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting agreed the “Guidelines for Air Military Encounters in 2018, while the ADMM Plus, which includes the U.S. and China, failed to agree it²⁴. In addition, as mentioned above, discussions in the cyber security field at the United Nations have tended to be polarized between the GGE led by the United States and Europe, and the OEWG led by China and Russia²⁵. In contrast, the trilateral cooperation, which is a group of nations with different values and political systems, may be able to serve the function of converging discussions through in-depth round table talks. It may also be possible to feed back the outcomes of the discussions on these important international norms to the cooperative multilateral framework. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the TCS is strengthening its liaison

²³ Shinichi Kitaoka, "Leading International Cooperation in Health Care," Nikkei Shimbun, July 7, 2020 (In Japanese).

²⁴ MINDEF, Singapore, October 19, 2018, https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/news-and-events/latest-releases/article-detail/2018/october/19oct18_fs2

²⁵ Justin Sherman and Mark Raymond, "The U.N. Passed a Russia-baked Cybercrime Resolution. That's Not Good News for Internet Freedom," Washington Post, December 4, 2019.

function with the ASEAN Secretariat and the European Commission. In the future, it will be necessary to further strengthen the inter-secretariat liaison system of the multilateral framework to share the results of policy dialogue and functional cooperation.

Conclusion

The Japan-China-ROK trilateral cooperation as multilateral regionalism has the potential to continue to develop even in the post-Corona era, despite the various challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic will pose a major challenge to the security environment in East Asia. To address these challenges, the three countries need to work together and develop cooperation from a long-term perspective. In particular, it is necessary to promote functional cooperation in the area of maritime security, new security domains and non-traditional security, which have been a source of mutual distrust among the three countries. Strengthening confidence-building is also the direction for developing the significance of trilateral cooperation in the security field. In addition, in the midst of the escalating confrontation between the United States and China, it is necessary for trilateral cooperation to seek its role as open cooperative regionalism for multilateralism across the region.