

Such considerations make it all the more important that we lay the groundwork for a regional system to guarantee the area's stability and prosperity and to give shape to a new forward-looking order at this time of transition. In building this order, the region's three major countries, China, Japan, and the United States, will play the decisive role as what in Japanese is known as the *hashiwatashi*, or the mediator or go-between. In saying this, my aim lies not in excluding other countries and regions such as the Republic of Korea and the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations from this trilateral² entente; rather, I intend to emphasize only that these three countries possess the ability to play a central *if temporary* role within a broader context of continued close ties between all the countries and groupings within the Asia Pacific region.

In this essay, I propose to treat the following fundamental topics so as to clarify the task ahead:

1. What are the issues facing the Asia Pacific community in the post-cold war world?
2. Why is the triangular relationship among China, Japan, and the United States important?
3. What factors will advance or hinder cooperation among these three powers?
4. How can we best promote cooperation among these nations?

The Asia Pacific Region After the Cold War

The Cold War Era and Asia Pacific

The cold war is defined here as (1) the heightened consciousness of mutual enmity between the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR) within the confines of an overall situation in which these two powers did not come directly to blows and (2) mutual exchanges of hostile behavior between these countries and their blocs.³ The cold war standoff deeply penetrated the politics of the Asia Pacific region and in the cases of the Korean peninsula and Vietnam led to full-scale warfare, episodes leaving wounds that have yet to heal fully. However, close examination of the character of the cold war reveals several key differences between the cold war in Asia and that in its point of origin, Europe. To begin by summarizing, the cold war in Asia underwent a process of "indigenization"—what we might term "Asia Pacificization"—that led to an independent pattern setting it apart from its manifestations in other world regions. Permit me to enumerate some of its peculiarities now.

First, the cold war in Asia became deeply intertwined with the fate of national liberation and independence movements native to Asia; in brief, we may conclude that it almost always was the case that regional cold war in Asia Pacific

Prospects for Trilateral Cooperation in Asia Pacific

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THERE REMAIN ONLY a few years in this century, yet the new framework for international relations in the coming century is still unclear. The end of the cold war arrived with unexpected speed; the world today continues to transform itself rapidly in ways that lie beyond our understanding. What character and structure, we wonder, will the new system of international relations possess? We stand at the outset of an era in which we must forge a new history while at the same time drawing lessons from the era that has just drawn to a close. To make the new international order a structure possessing harmony and stability, we must now urgently seek analysis and knowledge of prospects for our future that are grounded in both history and actuality.

The Asia Pacific region¹ has become the focus of the world's attention due to its role as a center of economic growth. And indeed it is the case that economic growth has proven capable of both alleviating poverty in Asia Pacific and serving as a major support for the creation of affluent societies there. Yet economic growth in and of itself is no panacea. On the contrary, economic growth carries with it the potential to produce a whole range of problems, including arms races, uneven development, and environmental degradation. The issue of the gains from economic growth—namely, the justice and efficiency whereby these are shared—becomes a crucial concern as well. If just distribution is lacking, economic growth can easily become a source of regional and international conflict.

Given these facts, what is required is the deepening of mutual interdependence among the countries comprising the Asia Pacific region and the construction of appropriate mechanisms of checks and balances to deal with potential conflicts. If we compare the situation of Europe on this score, we find that whereas in Europe economic unification and a multilateral security framework continue to advance steadily, the economic and political framework supporting the Asia Pacific region as a whole remains just as nebulous as in the past. It is of course a fact that such bodies as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) continue to serve as sites for multilateral discussion in the post-cold war era. Nevertheless, it appears that it will take considerable time for such groupings to attain the level of their counterparts in Europe.

erupted against the backdrop of opportunity created by the larger, global cold war. Whereas the majority of East European communist regimes originated under conditions where the USSR could employ force directly because of the presence of its military in the area, in the case of Asia many countries adopted communist systems willingly, while retaining a number of independent national characteristics. For these reasons, even though the cold war has reached its terminus elsewhere, the issues and problems that animated the cold war in Asia have not entirely disappeared, nor have the communist regimes in the region collapsed.

To illustrate this point, let us examine the case of China. After 1927, China witnessed a period of hostile relations between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Guomindang, or Nationalist Party, and following a brief period during World War II when the two parties allied against Japan, this enmity led to an all-out civil war, after which the defeated Guomindang fled to Taiwan in the 1940s. During the civil war, the superpowers backed their respective allies within China (the United States the Guomindang, and the USSR the CCP), with the result that the civil war acquired a global dimension.

On the Korean peninsula as well, two separate nations were established on either side of the 38th parallel at the bidding of the superpowers, and the Korean War erupted in June 1950 in the broader context of a continuing standoff between Russia and America in Asia. Since the two Koreas had as their respective foundations the different national independence movement groups that had resisted Japanese colonial rule from both within and outside Korea, it is possible to view the Korean War as well as an instance of globalization of what was in essence a civil war.

As for Vietnam, the liberation movement there led by Ho Chi Minh launched an independence movement against France during World War II and eventually achieved a division of Vietnam at the 17th parallel, following which the movement's goal became the reunification of the motherland in its entirety. This aim constituted the subplot of the so-called Vietnam War with America. In this sense, one may view the case of Vietnam too as the globalization of an indigenous independence struggle.

Second, the cold war in Asia was less a U.S.-USSR confrontation than a Sino-American one. To be sure, even in the Asia Pacific region the U.S.-USSR conflict had originated in the cold war. Nevertheless, upon examination of the question of the cold war in Asia's initial formation, one must conclude that it did not begin in earnest until 1950, when the eruption of the Korean War led China and the United States to trade blows and the United States interposed the Seventh Fleet between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland. It is an undeniable fact that in the background of the U.S. intervention in South Vietnam during the 1960s there lay the long shadow cast by China, the area's major communist power.

This confrontational situation completely vanished in the early 1970s, when Sino-American rapprochement suddenly took root between 1971 and 1972. While Sino-American détente resulted from a mutual strategic decision that the Soviet Union was for both countries the primary potential enemy, this shift in strategic logic served to alter fundamentally the structure of the regional cold war in Asia that had existed since the end of World War II. If we concur on viewing the cold war in Asia as essentially a standoff pitting the United States against China, then we might suppose that at the present stage one half of the cold war in Asia has ended. Once more, viewed from this standpoint, the cold war in Asia clearly possesses a character rooted in local realities.

Third, in the process of the dissolution of the cold war in Asia, the role played by economics loomed large. In general, compared with the abrupt democratization of Eastern Europe and the end of the cold war in Europe, events in Asia appear to have proceeded relatively slowly, as symbolized by that abortive attempt at democratization in China, the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident. In reality, in tandem with the rapid economic growth enjoyed by the Asia Pacific region in the 1980s, many countries in the area also realized democratization, the chief examples being South Korea and Taiwan but including of course the earlier case of the Philippines. As far as China is concerned, one might view the Tiananmen Square incident as an example of the side effects of economic growth on politics. In this sense, it appears to be the case that in the Asia Pacific region economic growth has greatly smoothed the path toward democratization; in other words, the end of the cold war in Asia demonstrated aspects unique to the regional context.⁴

The End of the Cold War and the Asia Pacific Region

In contemporary Asia, the cold war has not only not completely ended but many of the wounds opened by it have also yet to close and heal. This is because the regional cold war has remained unresolved in its essentials even though the larger global conflict has come to a finish. This reality is further complicated by the expansion of what were initially regional civil wars through a process of globalization. Not only have such problems as the reunification of the Korean peninsula and the status of the "two Chinas" constituted by the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China been left pending, but in Indochina and Cambodia in particular the scars inflicted by war have yet to fade.

Furthermore, communist regimes continue to exist in China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Vietnam, and other countries, and Western countries and the United States in particular have consistently called on these communist nations to implement policies of democratization, external opening, and respect for human rights, and have even at times exerted political pressure

toward such ends. Such issues provide further evidence that the cold war in Asia has yet to be brought to a final conclusion.

That said, there can also be no question but that the dynamic economic growth of the region is steadily dissolving the various relics of the cold war era. Following on the rapid economic advances registered by the so-called newly industrializing economies of Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan in the 1980s, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and, finally, Vietnam have successively jumped on the economic growth bandwagon. Currently, India too is being cast in the same limelight. And now even Myanmar (Burma) and North Korea have gradually adopted a positive stance on such issues as economic reforms and external opening.

However, the negative aspects of economic growth have begun to produce a wide variety of thorny problems. First is the matter of the increase in military spending in the region, whether as a portion equal to the overall increase in economic growth or as a percentage surpassing it. The United States has repeatedly announced clearly its intent to retain a military presence in the region, and has advanced a policy of calling for its allies in the area to shoulder more of the financial burden because of its own economic restraints. The pullout of American forces from the naval base at Subic Bay in the Philippines served as an example of such a policy. The reaffirmation of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty that resulted from the summit between President Clinton and Prime Minister Hashimoto in April 1996 can also be taken as aiming at an increase in Japan's contribution to America's regional presence and thus as constituting another step toward more military spending. As for Russian forces, the majority have been removed from the region.

A clear tendency is detectable among the countries in the region to contemplate moves aimed at providing for their own self-reliant national defense. At present, the majority of countries in Asia Pacific are advancing in the direction of expanding their military power; and among these nations, the greatest focus of attention has been on China and North Korea. China has demonstrated a clear bent toward insisting on its maritime rights and prerogatives in recent years, and has moreover embarked on a strenuous program aimed at building up its naval forces. It is common knowledge that China and the various nations of Southeast Asia have been embroiled in a dispute surrounding the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. Moreover, it has been reported that in current policy debates in China the voice of the Chinese military has been growing stronger. As for North Korea, while its military strength remains difficult to gauge accurately, one can still not completely exclude today the suspicion that it is engaged in the development of nuclear weapons.

A second problem is the widening gap between those regions that have achieved high rates of economic growth and those that have not. Ironically, it was during the cold war that relatively great concern was expressed over North-South

economic issues, since the superpowers incessantly voiced such concern in order to expand their own influence in the Third World. Yet the economic boom in Asia has overshadowed the conundrum of regional economic disparities. Thus, the concern for Third World countries formerly demonstrated by the superpowers has begun to abate in the post-cold war world.

But the problem is by no means solved, and in some respects it has in fact grown more serious. To be sure, in the Asia Pacific region it is commonly acknowledged that the "flying geese model" of economic development, whereby the various countries of the region have gradually been pulled up by the economic prowess of the United States and Japan into a sustained take-off like a flock of geese, fits well with the facts of the area's economic success.⁵ Nonetheless, it will take much time to verify the truth about such a developmental model in Asia. Even taking the case of a single country such as China, one notices a widening gap between the situation of coastal regions, which are affluent and have access to abundant foreign investment, and that of the vast Chinese hinterland where impoverished areas still abound. Despite this growing inequality, the central government in China no longer possesses the administrative tools to regulate effectively such regional discrepancies. Should the gap grow too wide and the numbers of impoverished hinterland dwellers swell to too great a number, a massive flood of economic refugees could flow from such regions, which would place intense pressure on urban life in China and which even raises the specter of a deluge of foreign-bound Chinese refugees.

Latent political instability is a third problem. Although the region has been bolstered by economic growth and its regimes thus appear stable at first glance, the majority of these regimes remain authoritarian political systems supported by the armed forces and various police and security forces; once the bloom appears to be off the rose of economic growth, or once such regimes lack the right to rule conferred by a just and efficient distribution of wealth, the potential for a sudden collapse into political instability is quite real. In such countries as China, North Korea, Vietnam, and Myanmar, and even Indonesia and Singapore, all of which lack evolved mechanisms for the democratic choice of successors to the present leadership in an appropriate institutional framework, the possibility of instability cannot be excluded. In Cambodia in particular, one may surmise that considerable time will be needed before true stability undergirds its political system.

Fourth, as is widely recognized, major environmental problems loom in the region. The heated pursuit of "economics in command," a somewhat altered version of the Maoist call for "politics in command," by the countries in the region has meant that concerns about the environment have taken a back seat for the time being. China in particular has witnessed a grave deterioration in its environment due to air, water, and other forms of pollution, and the rapid spread of deserts in that country also continues unchecked. Though sustainable

development is theoretically compatible with such environmental degradation, in reality the current pace of growth may well prove impossible to sustain.

The issues enumerated above are no longer matters that can be handled within the confines of a single nation-state. Rather, the problems confronting each country in the region exert an intractable influence on its neighbors in myriad ways. Thus even if the region's leader continues to assert national sovereignty, institution building and a framework aimed at dealing with issues that in fact do or might possibly arise in the context of globalism are of the essence.

The oldest forum for multilateral discussions in Asia Pacific is ASEAN, which this year will celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of its founding. With the admittance of Vietnam, this organization now includes seven member states, and it continues to play an increasingly important role within Southeast Asia as a regional cooperative body, with of course multilateral economic cooperation as its central task. At present, Myanmar and other countries have begun to express interest in joining as well.

Connected with ASEAN is ARF, which serves an important role as a forum where multilateral security discussions concerning the region can be raised. ARF began to hold meetings in 1994 as an outgrowth of the enlarged prime ministerial meetings of ASEAN originally held annually, and it remains the sole venue for discussion of security matters in the Asia Pacific at present.

APEC, which functions as a forum for discussions on problems related to trade and economics and which has become an increasingly important body in recent years, is an organization that covers the entire Asia Pacific region. Its successive annual sessions have been held in Canberra (1989), Singapore, Seoul, Bangkok, Seattle, Jakarta, Osaka, and Manila. At the fifth session in Seattle, an informal summit meeting was also convened, a move that marked the start of the upgrading of the body's stature. APEC, though, has not evolved to the point where it serves as a venue for discussion of regional security matters.

In sum, although a number of fora for multilateral consultations on matters of regional concern have indeed been established, none of these has been sufficiently institutionalized as yet and each thus remains at a somewhat embryonic stage. None of them bears the least comparison to the European Union or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. As in the past, even the definition of what constitutes the Asia Pacific region remains to be decided, since among the area's countries there exists such a tremendous variety of cultures and of levels of economic growth on the one hand and such large discrepancies in political and economic systems on the other.

Why China, Japan, and the United States Now?

Historical Context

Why raise the question of trilateral cooperation between China, Japan, and the United States at this point in time? The answer to this begins with the historical context of the region. If we examine the Asia Pacific area's international relations from a historically informed standpoint, we must conclude that up to the present the broad parameters of the region's historical development have been determined by the interactions of these three countries.

Looking back over the relations between China, Japan, and the United States in the twentieth century, we can discern four successive stages of evolution. First is the period up to 1945, which in addition to the Japanese invasion of China witnessed the beginnings of a conflict of interest between Japan and the United States and resulted in a Japanese push into the larger Asia Pacific region and warfare between the United States and Japan. Owing to this, a Sino-American alliance based on joint resistance to Japan was formed.

The second stage lasted from the end of World War II until the Sino-American rapprochement and the normalization of Sino-Japanese ties occurred in 1972. During this time, Japan and the United States jointly pursued a policy of containment toward China under the aegis of the Security Treaty, which buttressed the post-World War II cold war system in the region, and recognized the Republic of China on Taiwan as the legitimate government of China. In sum, a U.S.-Japan alliance aimed at China characterized the period.

The third stage lasted from 1972 until 1991, when the cold war ended with the dissolution of the USSR. During this period, all three countries formed a triangular alliance predicated on the belief that the USSR constituted the chief enemy power for each. The Sino-American entente even strengthened to the point where it included relations of military cooperation, and in reality Japan too played a key anti-Soviet role, thus forming a three-nation front with amicable relations all around. However, this three-power entente inevitably had to change in the wake of the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989, the democratization of Eastern Europe, and the dissolution of the USSR.

Fourth is the stage at which we find ourselves today, namely, one where the future complexion of relations between China, Japan, and the United States has yet to reveal itself. On occasion one today hears cries about an impending "Chinese threat," but this has yet to become a mainstream view in either Japan or the United States. Nonetheless, a variety of problems have cropped up in China's relations with the other two nations—Sino-American ties have been roiled by economic frictions, human rights problems, and the Taiwan question, while Sino-Japanese relations have suffered from unresolved historical issues, territorial claims, and Taiwan too. The U.S.-Japan relationship as well has been hurt

by rancorous economic disputes. None of these knotty issues offer any prospect for rapid resolution. The outlook at present is that each of the three countries will adjust and develop their bilateral ties with the other two and try to square the circle by groping for balance in the triangular ballet without casting one of the other two or even a third country as an imminent threat.⁶

Whatever may happen in this delicate triangle, it seems clear that international relations in the Asia Pacific area in the twentieth century have been shaped chiefly by China, Japan, and the United States, and due consideration of the prospects for the coming century leads to the conclusion that the fumbling toward a *modus vivendi* among these three powers at present cannot help but serve as an axis for the region's internal relations in the future.

Foundations for a Multilateral Framework

The security of Asia Pacific is basically buttressed by a framework wherein the United States maintains bilateral or multilateral security relations with the area's various nations. Currently, America possesses such bilateral security ties with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand; a trilateral security pact with Australia and New Zealand (ANZUS); and a Free Association Compact with the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau. These treaties, however, are first and foremost arrangements for bilateral ties between the United States and its particular alliance partners; by no means is it the case that they hold any wider import.

The sole venue for multilateral discussion of security issues is ARF. ARF, however, remains devoted to security matters insofar as they affect the countries in ASEAN; its influence is feeble when it comes to the more intractable problems of East Asia such as the Korean peninsula and Taiwan. Moreover, while out of consideration for China ARF has not enrolled Taiwan in its ranks, Taiwan itself is a party to various regional disputes; without Taiwan's membership ARF's views on such matters will not serve as a moderating force.

On the economic front, the region is likely to come increasingly under the scrutiny of the global economic regime with the World Trade Organization (WTO) as its nucleus, a fact which leads one to anticipate that all the nations in Asia Pacific will have to move in the direction of liberalization and external opening. The matter of overwhelming importance is whether China, which boasts the region's largest market, will join this regime. But this too may be a question of time; moreover, one might suppose that China's participation will come to serve as a lever for propelling the entire region's move toward adherence to WTO rules and the like.

APEC also constitutes an important step toward economic union in the Asia Pacific region.⁷ Although the stature of APEC has risen over the years, appropriate

institutionalization and a proper legal framework for the body have not been realized yet, nor have sundry organs, associations, a secretariat, and the like been set up. Moreover, although an expanded form of the informal leaders summit has occurred, out of a concern for the diverse positions of the various countries attending such meetings the content of the agenda for discussion has been restricted to economic matters. Perhaps owing to the unfamiliarity of such multilateral discussion in the region, these gatherings have tended to deteriorate into photo opportunities and thus occasions where it is difficult to undertake discussion of concrete controversies affecting the region.

In short, in Asia Pacific multilateral consultation remains at an embryonic stage, and it will require much time and experience for such consultation to achieve a higher level. In the transitional period before this higher stage, working-level discussions are a must. And it is precisely here that China, Japan, and the United States, the main players at present in the region, can demonstrate leadership. China and the United States are now the world's two great powers, and they occupy key positions as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Japan holds a claim to great power status owing to its economic clout. Once again, my aim in pointing out these facts lies not of course in excluding from consideration the numerous other countries in East and Southeast Asia but rather in underscoring the role which these three countries can potentially play as a transitional force toward a truly multilateral framework for the region in the future.

The Rise of China

The eyes of the world are currently fixed on China. Due to the Tiananmen Square incident and the subsequent democratization of Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the USSR, China wound up being isolated internationally for a period of time. Confronted with this isolation, China reacted in a very thin-skinned manner to pressures exerted by the West (with America typically at the fore) for it to decompress and democratize its system, and as a consequence the pace of China's domestic reforms and external opening slackened somewhat.

At the beginning of 1992, however, the situation in China changed dramatically owing to Deng Xiaoping's tour of southern China, wherein he issued an order calling for bold advances in reform and external opening. At the fourteenth party congress of the CCP held in the fall of 1992 after Deng's tour, transition to a "socialist market economy" was established formally as a national objective, and from that time on Beijing began to express even stronger aspirations to join the WTO (at that time still the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). As a result, global interest in China has grown rapidly, a trend further stimulated by the Chinese economy, which began to post annual growth rates

in the double digits. It was at this time as well that the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank successively issued reports ballyhooing the prospects of a "Greater China" economy incorporating China and its surrounding areas in the twenty-first century,⁸ and that the notion of a Greater China centered on South China began to be raised in the print media.

Many views exist about how to evaluate the Chinese economy. Some believe, on the one hand, in the evidence of miraculous economic growth, while others, on the other hand, warn of the centripetal forces being generated by the appearance of regional disparities and a tendency toward dispersal of centralized administrative power.⁹ Though I will not attempt to answer here the question of which of these diagnoses is correct, we can all agree on the fact that both views underscore a sense that China's presence has become increasingly important in the world at large. Moreover, we can see that this will only continue to strengthen a feeling of uncertainty about China today, when the controlling hand of Deng Xiaoping exists no longer.

What is noteworthy in this connection is the notion of a "Chinese threat," which has been bandied about in recent years. As evidence of such a threat, the notion's proponents have pointed to such things as China's increasing military outlays, its hard-line attitudes concerning its nuclear testing, the recent rise in the Chinese military's political prominence, conflicts over territorial rights stemming from a general Chinese thrust into maritime affairs and including in particular the imbroglios over the Spratlys and the Senkakus, and China's repression of human rights. It is, however, undeniable that each of these counts in the anti-China indictment has been somewhat exaggerated. Of total budgetary outlays for China, for example, the proportion allotted annually to military expenditures has actually declined compared to the figure for the 1980s (from roughly 15 percent for the 1980s to somewhere in the neighborhood of 10 percent today). Following its decision to recognize the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, China ceased its nuclear tests; furthermore, China's weapons exports have decreased markedly compared to what they once were. As for China's naval strength, the worst one can argue is that it remains at a low level overall, and moreover it is difficult to detect any clear territorial designs on China's part. Even in the fields of human rights and democratization, if one examines these matters in terms not of absolutes but rather the historical tendencies in China, one must grant that there have been major improvements here as well.

In sum, the notion of a Chinese threat appears to have arisen as an upshot of the suddenly heightened perception of China's presence in the world, a development that is due to the fact that China, the sole socialist superpower in the world following the USSR's dissolution, has achieved record economic growth in recent years. We must remind ourselves that even China has yet to cope in a mature manner with its own explosive economy. The reason for this is that as China has aggressively attempted to promote its incorporation into the

international system, conflicts have arisen between this goal and the realities of China's domestic order. Thus, China has occasionally responded to the contradictions by adopting a vocal hard-line posture and taking a stance of resolutely refusing to bring its domestic system into line with the international one. For our part, we must speed up the creation of conditions necessary for the integration of China into international society, while efforts by China itself toward this goal remain essential as well.¹⁰

Here again, the thing that China recognizes as most crucial for the region is its relations with both the United States and Japan, and it is precisely in this sense that a cooperative system incorporating these three powers is necessary. China continues to view the United States as the largest and most important power in the region, and considers Japan a second major power aiming at becoming a political force in the area in the future. As a result, China has expressed considerable concern over the future of the Security Treaty and interpreted the 1996 reaffirmation of U.S.-Japan security ties as creating a state of crisis in the Taiwan straits and constituting a tightening of the *cordon sanitaire* erected by these countries around China; in sum, Beijing expressed a strong sense of vigilance over the reaffirmation. Despite the fact that Japan and the United States repeatedly stated that the renewal of security ties was not aimed at China, it has proven impossible to assuage deep-seated Chinese suspicions on this score. Such is China's sensitivity to relations with both Japan and the United States.

China, Japan, and the United States as Regional "Problems" *

It is undeniable that China, Japan, and the United States each constitute a "problem" for the Asia Pacific region in its own respective way. In recent years, Japan has expressed the desire that it not only play the role of an economic superpower but also that it increase the scope of its international contributions on various global questions, including regional political issues.¹¹ The reaffirmation of U.S.-Japan security ties constitutes an extension of this desire.

Any discussion of Japan's international contribution, however, inevitably raises strong suspicions and stirs up increased vigilance on the part of other Asian countries, particularly China, and on the Korean peninsula, as well as in the overseas Chinese communities of Southeast Asia. The reason for this is that these latter view Japan's moves as a fig leaf for the revival of Japanese militarism. Japan regards itself as having created a democratic system in the post-World War II era based on a rejection of its pre-1945 past, but when viewed from the vantage point of surrounding countries there is a feeling that Japanese proclamations of regret concerning the past ring hollow and that Japan's consciousness of its need for atonement remains insufficient. Such sentiments are in turn fanned from time to time by statements denying wartime atrocities and the like

uttered by a segment of the bureaucracy and party politicians tied to Japan's Liberal Democratic Party. Though China basically accepts the current substance of the U.S.-Japan security relationship, it does so half out of a recognition that the arrangement serves as a cap on Japan's remilitarization.

The position and role of the United States remain unclear as well. In the Asia Pacific region, and particularly in the field of military affairs, a *de facto* unilateral U.S. hegemony has become an undisputable fact. Yet it is doubtful whether such a situation can continue indefinitely. Though the U.S. economy has improved somewhat in the last few years, viewed from a long-term perspective it is difficult to imagine the United States increasing its outlays in the future for the sake of maintaining a continuous presence in the region. It appears more probable that the United States will promote self-help efforts on the part of respective nations and subregions in the area given the region's rapid economic growth. Moreover, it is highly likely that calls will arise in the near future from within the region itself for the pursuit of greater local autonomy.

It is possible as well that there will be moments of conflict between the United States and Asia over questions of ideology and values. Such clashes have already occurred over the divergent conceptions of human rights. The United States, which assumes human rights to be a universal notion, has demanded of Asian countries that they respect such rights uniformly, and at times has presented such respect as a precondition for a wide array of bilateral ties, economic assistance included. In response, some Asian nations, including China, Malaysia, and Singapore, have opposed this pressure and criticized the United States for using human rights as a diplomatic ploy and for holding a double standard.

I have already discussed in detail the inscrutability of China's current situation. Moreover, I have noted that the "China factor" will be a major element in determining the region's fate in the coming century. In sum, China too is a regional "problem."

We must conclude that all three countries constitute potential problems for the area. For the sake of the stability of the entire region, adjustments will be necessary so that none of these three becomes a troublemaker. One might surmise that to achieve the goal of regional stability these three "problem" nations will need to equilibrate their respective bilateral relationships with each other and put into operation an effective system of checks and balances therein.

Prospects for Trilateral Cooperation

Factors Conducive to Cooperation

In the context of the post-cold war world, what factors will likely promote the possibility of cooperation between China, Japan, and the United States? The

first one that should be mentioned is the need for all three powers to share a common will for joint efforts. Under the Hashimoto administration, Japan publicly proclaimed that its relations with China and the United States are its top two diplomatic priorities. As far as U.S.-Japan relations are concerned, recent years have witnessed serious tensions arise over such issues as bilateral economic ties. Within the context of calls for a restructuring of the bilateral relationship, however, Japan nonetheless continues to state clearly its posture of emphasizing the overall relationship with the United States. In the area of Sino-Japanese relations, a slew of problems like nuclear testing, conflict over the Senkakus, and Japan's attitude concerning its wartime behavior in Asia have arisen in recent years, and as a result considerable time and effort were required to keep relations on an even keel. The Japanese government has elaborated a clear and cogent policy regarding the necessity of establishing a solid relationship with Beijing.

As far as the United States is concerned, it too has maintained its stance of prioritizing the Asia Pacific region. The Clinton administration has even raised the notion of an "Asia Pacific community." And within the region itself the relationships the United States has considered most crucial are those with Japan and China. In the case of the former, America has made clear its goal of building a U.S.-Japan alliance and global partnership on the foundation provided by the Security Treaty; in the case of the latter, America is calling for a deepening and a development of bilateral ties through its policy of "engagement" with China. Frictions have often arisen in the Sino-American relationship, particularly over the question of Taiwan and human rights issues, yet when it comes to the matter of the incorporation of China into international society the United States has consistently adopted a positive forward-looking posture. Although it will probably be impossible to avoid further conflicts in the future, efforts will also doubtlessly be exerted so that such conflicts do not spin out of control and undermine the bilateral relationship as a whole.

China too has acknowledged in recent times that its most important bilateral relationships in the Asia Pacific area are those with the United States and Japan. Beijing considers the influence of Washington in the post-cold war world to be overwhelmingly great, and thus has consistently placed top emphasis on its ties with the United States. China has attempted to deal with the United States by means of both hard and soft lines, the former often when it has opposed Washington's pressure on human rights and the latter at times when it adopted a conciliatory stance on economic negotiations. In the future, it is unlikely that there will be any fundamental alteration in this basic pattern. The thorn in Sino-Japanese ties, as is evident by Beijing's reaction to the 1996 reaffirmation of U.S.-Japan security relations, is Beijing's concerns over the prospects for a higher political profile for Tokyo in the region. On the other hand, Japan's economic clout exerts a powerful attraction on China's own economic development.

This antagonism between politics and economics may resolve itself, however, as attempts by China to achieve a harmonious balance in its relations with Japan promise to remain a leitmotif of its regional diplomacy.

The second factor conducive to trilateral cooperation is the fact that real relations of interdependency among these three nations continue to ramify and spread. Be it the framework set by the WTO or the long-term goals promulgated by APEC, there exists solid trilateral consensus on a future reorganization of the economic system of the Asia Pacific region toward an order characterized by relatively open trading relations. Even assuming that the region's economic growth will slacken in coming years, a free market system has steadily infiltrated the area and flows of capital and technology have grown apace. Moreover, it appears likely that the global economy itself will continue to develop in ways that surpass the constricting frameworks of both nation-states and their populations owing to quantum leaps in information technology. As a result, one can foresee a gradual deepening of relations of interdependency between both the nations and the subregions of the Asia Pacific.

That China itself (despite the limitations imposed by the leadership of the CCP) has established the marketization of its economy as an ultimate goal and has ardently pursued membership in the WTO demonstrates both that economic globalization in Asia Pacific has made significant inroads in China and that further advances cannot materialize fully without Chinese involvement. As if by some design that has all countries in the region marching in lock step, Vietnam is hastening its own transition to a market economy, and even in Myanmar indications of similar intention are evident. Of course, there remain exceptions to the rule such as North Korea, but on the whole it looks likely that regional interdependence will grow and there will be no major reversals in this overall trend.

Third, as noted above, venues such as APEC and ARF for multilateral consultations have already begun to assume a number of functions, and this fact demonstrates the existence of a will toward true multilateralism in the region. It is often noted that the most salient characteristics of Asia Pacific are its heterogeneity and diversity. However, if such variation is not underpinned by fixed rules and an established institutional order but rather is a matter of each individual country in the region pursuing its respective course, then chaos will result. The desire for a functioning multilateralism is indeed a crucial precondition for stability, and as a first step toward assuring its realization the formation of a system of trilateral cooperation by the area's three major players that takes into account the concerns of other countries in the region is essential.

Factors Hindering Trilateral Cooperation

I have already pointed to the formation of greater globalism due to the spread of a system of mutual interdependence as a factor tending to promote trilateral cooperation. However, international relations at present remain as in the past built on the foundation of nation-states and their respective peoples, and as a consequence conflicts over national advantage display a tendency to become a quotidian affair. Stated negatively, in tandem with the deepening of interdependence there occurs a phenomenon wherein the state alternately rears its ugly head in opposition to such interdependence and then disappears from view. I allude here of course to such hoary realities as diplomatic isolationism and trade protectionism; needless to say, both of these "isms" bear the stamp of a larger one, namely, nationalism. Japan has been the target of repeated demands by the United States to exert greater effort in opening its markets; and even in the case of the United States, one notes a tendency to hanker after traditional isolationism rather than multilateralism in its international relationships. As for China, although its application to the WTO is currently pending, its penchant for protecting its domestic industries is throwing up obstacles to its entry into this body; moreover, China continues to insist strenuously on its national particularities when it comes to universal values shared by international society in such realms as human rights and democracy.

A broader tendency toward the export of domestic contradictions due to deficiencies in national leadership is evident. Be it China, Japan, or the United States, regardless of the fact that each must tackle many intractable domestic quandaries, each lacks an effective leadership and a political will to resolve its internal ills in an efficient way. Consciously or not, these countries have tended to export their internal conflicts or to allow domestic issues to develop readily into forces that spill over national boundaries and thereby exert an influence over international affairs. As everyone is aware, there are times when such things as the domestic policy struggles of a given regime or administration, economic well-being or recession, or problems of industrial structure can influence international relations in a variety of forms.

Though evaluations of China on this score are not entirely uniform, one might raise here one factor tending to block Beijing's ability to cooperate with Washington and Tokyo. While at the official level both the American and Japanese governments continue to voice the hope that China will be integrated into international society in a salutary fashion, there does exist in both Japan and the United States the aforementioned debate over the "Chinese menace." Though it is hard to conceive how China could possibly constitute an imminent threat to either Japan or the United States at present, the lack of political transparency in China, including in particular the issue of Chinese security policy, hinders a complete easing of suspicions in the other two nations.

To be certain, diverse opinions on these matters exist within China itself. Although the modal Chinese position remains one of promoting its participation in international society, one also encounters the view that excessive contacts with international society carry a potential threat to the maintenance of CCP rule; and in this sense some resolution of internal Chinese differences on this score may well be necessary. As for the external side of the equation, it is best that we eschew a policy of simply applying pressure to China, and moreover that we explain to the Chinese clearly and resolutely the terms of our own debates about that country while prudently keeping in mind China's own stance and its own sense of national honor.¹² Even if we exert pressure on Beijing, it remains likely that we will wind up producing the reverse of our wishes in that country, namely, fanning the fires of nationalist sentiment. A typical example of this is the recent series of publications in China with titles like *A China That Can Say No*, works which have enjoyed considerable popularity.

Another factor that can easily hinder cooperative relations is the sensationalism of certain business journalists who have bandied about the "Chinese menace" in their writing, and the various effects on our image of China that result therefrom. Given the realities of free expression in Japan and the United States, it is obviously not permissible to attempt to limit what the press might say about China. But we must not forget that the perception gap rooted in differences of culture and custom as well as long-standing prejudice may continue to inhibit the smooth development of relations with China.

As I have just noted, there exist many factors carrying the potential to obstruct the smooth development of trilateral cooperation. Here I would like to turn to a consideration of how we can overcome these obstacles and create a harmonious trilateral system in the region.

The Means to Trilateral Cooperation

Establishing Agents for Cooperation

In what fields is trilateral cooperation between China, Japan, and the United States possible? As noted above, the rapid economic growth of the Asia Pacific region continues to produce a variety of thorny problems such as the upward trend in military expenditures, the appearance of regional inequities and impoverished zones, latent political instability, and environmental degradation. The role that the three major actors in the region can play in resolving these problems is to my mind quite great. Yet it is no exaggeration to claim that practically all of these problems turn largely on the future course charted by China. Viewed from this perspective, the underlying meaning of "trilateral cooperation" lies in the discovery of means for incorporating China into a

cooperative system of mutual interdependence for the stability of the region as a whole.¹³

Which problems should the three countries tackle first? There is no need to begin by rashly raising intractable issues that have either been shelved for the time being or have temporarily lost their salience. Moreover, questions of sovereignty and territory as well as those connected with military and security affairs can easily stoke the flames of nationalist sentiment. As such, we might conclude that the most appropriate starting point should be such issues as regional inequities, environmental protection, and energy, which are chief concerns for the region as a whole and which are policy areas where the respective demands and interests of China, Japan, and the United States are relatively less likely to clash.

Security matters can most properly be taken up at a stage where a trilateral cooperative system on the above issues has already begun to function smoothly. For problems outside the scope of trilateral control, for example the standoff on the Korean peninsula, it may perhaps be somewhat easier for the three powers to cut the Gordian knot of "national security" and engage in productive negotiations since such issues involve a fourth party. In such cases, China, Japan, and the United States will no doubt have to take pains to avoid excluding another of the region's nations in their deliberations; at the same time, though, the promotion of the participation of such countries as South and North Korea in the structures of trilateral cooperation may well serve as yet another vehicle for ensuring regional stability.

The Formation of Networks

It is often said that in the fashioning of harmonious international relations interdependence is a must. Naturally, if interdependence deepens, opportunities for mutual frictions can easily increase. The growth and deepening of relations of mutual interdependence, however, can be thought to lessen the likelihood that such frictions will result in a decisive breakdown in bilateral ties because of the ways in which interdependence weaves mutual benefits into the fabric of international relationships. How then should we create such a system of mutual interdependence? We might agree to view economics and security as its warp and woof, yet what ultimately holds this fabric together are the firm threads of networks of person-to-person communication. In this sense, we must conclude that the ultimate foundation of international relations is human beings. This holds true for the bilateral and trilateral relations of China, Japan, and the United States as well.

The generation that has for the past half century since the end of World War II sustained bilateral and trilateral ties among these countries has now disappeared from the stage of history, and the creation of new networks of such

personal relationships to replace them has become an ever more urgent matter. This being the case, by what methods and formulae can we assure the establishment of a firm foundation of such relationships? I would like to propose in closing three levels at which this constructive work might be undertaken.

First are channels at the intergovernmental level. This means the interchanges between the leadership cadres of the respective countries, including summit talks. If such mutual encounters at the leadership level were to occur annually, personal relationships of mutual trust would be nurtured, and this in turn would serve as an important basis for stable ties at the respective national levels. Interchanges at this level, for instance, direct summit conferences and the like, would exert an immediate beneficial effect for improved relations at times when the bilateral relationship as a whole might have deteriorated. For this reason, would it not be best to promote fixed and regular summit meetings in the respective bilateral relationships as well as a similar trilateral summit, whether at fixed periods or not?

Second are channels at the grass-roots level. Such exchanges imply a solid foundation formed by innumerable interactions of civilians (whether it be between cities or regions, or deriving from commerce or foreign study). Viewed from a long-term perspective, these exchanges constitute an absolutely indispensable basis for bilateral ties. Without such ties true relations of mutual interdependence and trust cannot arise. In order to strengthen the overall relationship, it is essential for us to weave as finely meshed a net of such grass-roots ties as possible. Regrettably, it remains the case that such grass-roots contacts can easily be severed once there is a breakdown at the level of intergovernmental or interstate relations.

Third and finally is a channel at the epistemic level that may possess the ability to influence policy decisions. Although regular meetings between leaders may provide immediate benefits, they cannot serve as a long-term strategy by themselves. Once the influential figures of a particular time step down, the possibility is high that the relations of mutual trust they built up with their counterparts abroad over the years will simply end there. Currently, the importance of a so-called epistemic community capable of exerting an influence on the aforementioned intergovernmental and grass-roots levels is widely appreciated in the West. In Japan too the value of such a "third track" supplementing state-to-state and grass-roots contacts has finally begun to be acknowledged. At present, the creation of such channels is our most realistic goal, and the prospects of their serving as a solid foundation for both short- and long-term relations is extremely bright. Thus, we should seek the establishment of such epistemic channels in a variety of fields of endeavor with a particular emphasis on the nurturing of talented youths.

Needless to say, Japan and China cannot exchange places. For this reason the two countries must tirelessly attempt to adjust and harmonize their bilateral

relations and try to channel them in a mutually cooperative direction. This will function as a crucial basis for the stability of the Asia Pacific region as a whole. As for the United States, although various forms and points of emphasis may well change as that country faces the coming century, it is nonetheless probable that it will continue to increase its attention to its relations in the Asia Pacific region as a whole without any general retreat from the area. For this reason, it is necessary for the United States that its bilateral relations with Japan and China will serve for the time being as important pillars of its presence in the region, and thus it must strive to harmonize these relationships both for the sake of its own national interest and that of the region as a whole.

The task before us is to discover a point of balance wherein we can avoid a zero sum game in the international relations of the Asia Pacific area while at the same time respecting and harmonizing the respective national interests of the countries within it. What is necessary to achieve this goal is, above all, wide-ranging discussion among a broad spectrum of the citizens of the countries involved and the thick network of personal exchanges that such discussion will engender.

Endnotes

1. In this essay, I refer many times to the Asia Pacific region and the cold war in Asia, which are standard terms in English. Unless otherwise modified, I mean in both instances the countries in East and Southeast Asia.
2. In this essay, the term “trilateral” will be used to refer to the triangular relations of China, Japan, and the United States, and thus has no connection with the more common use of the word to denote the relations between Western Europe, the United States, and Japan.
3. For a balanced approach to the definition of the cold war, see Halle (1967).
4. See Vogel (1991) and the World Bank (1993a).
5. On the flying geese model see Yamazawa (1984).
6. On the relations between China, Japan, and the United States and China in the post-cold war era, see Kokubun (1995).
7. For a comprehensive analysis of APEC and Japan’s role therein, see Funabashi (1995).
8. See IMF (1993) and the World Bank (1993b).
9. See, e.g., the debate between Yasheng Huang and Jack Goldstone in *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1995.
10. For a view that casts doubt on the value of “engagement” with China, see Shambaugh (1996).
11. See the policy address by Prime Minister Hashimoto delivered on January 20, 1997 (carried in the evening edition of all major Japanese papers the same day).
12. On U.S. policy toward China, see Shinn (1996).
13. For a view along these lines see Funabashi, Oksenberg, and Weiss (1994).

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