

Necessity of Power Restructuring in Northeast Asia

北東アジアの勢力建て直しの必要

PingPing Zhu Lincoln

Abstract The superficial balance of U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations is based on unequal relations among them. The premise of this surface balance is the political and economic hegemony of the U.S., along with a developing economy of China and a relatively weak political position of Japan in international politics compared with Japanese economic strength in the world. Due to the lack of an omni-directional interaction between Japan and China, it is often the situation that either Japan or China is restrained by the U.S., which is also the main reason of imbalanced relations among the three countries. Since the U.S. has a dominant position in U.S.-Japan-China relations and international affairs in Northeast Asia, to safeguard the present situation is the fundamental point of U.S. Northeast Asia strategy. Although both Japan and China want to change their present status quo in Northeast Asia or/and in the world due to their economic or political development, Japan has to abide by the present arrangement in order to change its position in this arrangement and in international politics whereas China pursues its economic changes in an unchanged or a stable political environment. The real solution for both Japan and China is to enhance the interaction between them, which includes mutual understanding, mutual support, and independent contact without interfere or influence from the U.S. A power restructuring in Northeast Asia should take Northeast Asian or East Asian conformity as the ultimate objectives, and only then there will be equal and balanced U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations.

Introduction

The present political and economic situation in Northeast Asia where it gathers the three most important powers in the world, the U.S., Japan, and China, is somewhat similar to that in the history of Europe. In European history, Britain, France and Germany went through several hundred years of military and political friction, and finally have implemented a European Community based on democracy and market capitalism. They share an equal diplomacy of coexistence and co-prosperity, and act in unison in the majority of international affairs. The relations between Britain, France, and Germany contribute greatly to the stability of Europe as well as Western Europe. However, among the three core areas of the world political economy, Northeast Asia is the least stable area compared with Europe and North America. Scholars list all the unstable factors existing in this region (Zhu, 2007): lacking of a regional and multinational security organization, unstable relations between powers, various ideology and political systems, territory disputes, history issues and Cold War mentality reflected in the Korea Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait. According to the author of this article, the crux of Northeast Asia's instability is the unstable relations between the U.S., Japan, and China. The three powers need to improve their relations in order to turn Northeast/East Asia into another Europe. It is one of the most important tasks in international relations and world security.

The political and economic relations between the U.S., Japan, and China in Northeast/East Asia and the world with the appearance of cooperation and agreements are not trilateral or multinational but bilateral through three imbalanced bilateral relations. There are no trilogue or trilateral mechanism among the three powers. The superficial balance of U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations is based on unequal relations among them. The premise of this surface balance is the political and economic hegemony of the U.S., a developing economy of China and a relatively weak political position of Japan in international politics compared with Japanese economic strength in the world. Due to the lack of an omni-directional interaction between Japan and China, it is often the situation that either Japan or China is restrained by the U.S., of which the U.S.-Japan Alliance plays an important role as killing two birds with one stone: guarding China and safeguarding Japan.

The importance of U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations does not limit to the stability of Northeast Asia or East Asia. It goes beyond the world. The influence of this trilateral relationship covers every aspect of international affairs other than security. The gross domestic products (GDP) of the U.S., Japan, and China in 2007 are respectively \$13.8 trillion, \$4.4 trillion, and \$3.3 trillion, amount for 41% of total world GDP. The three economies are inevitably interdependent, and tremendously affecting each other as well as affecting the world economy. In political arena, both the U.S. and China are the permanent members of UN Security Council. Japan has been elected as a nonpermanent member of the Security Council ten times, and is striving for becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Although the military expenditure of China and Japan has no comparison to that of the U.S., the total military expenses of three countries amount for 57.6% that of the world. Therefore, it is extremely important to understand, build up, and ensure a healthy U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relationship that has a great influence on the world economy and politics.

Due to the importance of the trilateral relations between three powers in the region and the problems hindering an omni-directional integration of Northeast/East Asia, it is necessary to consider a power restructuring in order to change the political pattern to bring more positive development in Northeast/East Asia. An equal and healthy U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relationship is the key to the regional integration of Northeast/East Asia and to the solution of the regional problems.

Literature Review

It is commonly accepted in the literature that the present structure of U.S.-Japan-China or the presence and hegemony of the U.S. are necessities of a stable Northeast/East Asia, and that the U.S. is a balancing force in the region. As Abramowitz (2002) states: in the contemporary Asian scene, "on almost every major economic and security issue, the U.S. voice is central or important". These are the typical viewpoints of realism in its classical, neo, or neo-classical forms. According to classical realism, the U.S., Japan, and China all seek to amass their own economic and political power, and seek to decrease the power of the other two competitors. According to neo-realism, because of lacking a world government and unbreakable rules, and because of the threatening nature of power, it is better to keep the status of this trilateral relationship as it is, in which Japan and China are much weaker either economically or politically than the United States. Otherwise there may have a hot war among the three

powers. According to neo-classical realism, because of the differences in ideology between U.S.-Japan and China, China is more likely to be a rivalry of either the U.S. or Japan than the U.S. and Japan to become rivalries to each other (Qin, 2004).

As a non-Northeast/East Asian country, the U.S. plays a more important role than two Northeast Asian powers in the region. The U.S. is a world power whereas Japan and China are only East Asian powers (Chen, 2005). Based on its military superiority, the U.S. maintains the hegemony in the present international system of primary unipolarity (Chen, 2005; Zhu, 2007).

Some scholars rank the three bilateral relationships between the U.S., Japan, and China as follows: Japan-U.S. link continues to be the thickest, China-Japan connection is more stable than that between China and the United States, and China-U.S. relationship is the most volatile and vulnerable of the three (Wang, 2002). The fission condition in the Korea Peninsula and Japan's status after WWII provided the U.S. a center of strategic resistance. The U.S. and Japan have kept a strategic synchronism and policy interaction in the area since then (Jin, 2004). Curtis (2000) concludes U.S. policy toward Japan: "Every American president has understood that vital U.S. national interests are at stake in the relationship with Japan, and every Japanese prime minister has viewed the U.S. alliance as the cornerstone of Japanese foreign policy".

The nature and structure of the long-term bilateral relationship between the U.S. and China remain uncertain, unsettled, and unclear (Chu, 2008). The U.S. government considers its relationship with China is a complex one. There are many "critical issues as non-proliferation, WTO compliance, and U.S. efforts to promote democracy, legal reform, and human rights" (Kelly, June 2004). The U.S. government also criticized China's policy to Hong Kong, saying, "the U.S. is committed to supporting Hong Kong's autonomy and the protection of its civil liberties" (Kelly, June 2004). Taiwan Strait issue is the main barrier of U.S.-China relationship; especially U.S. arms sell to Taiwan (Li, 1999; Lincoln, 2008). The latest arms sell deal of \$6.4 billion was announced by State Department deputy spokesman Robert Wood on Oct. 3, 2008. The U.S. claims that the decision is "consistent with U.S. policy of providing arms for defense of Taiwan and consistent with the Taiwan Relations Act" (CNN, 2008). The U.S. had debates on whether China is a friend or an enemy in its political and academic circles (Feng, in Zhang, 2008) The U.S. is also deeply concerned about the uncertainty of China's future (Xue, 2008). It is obvious that the Chinese description of the United States as conducting policies of hegemonism and power politics reflects a deep-rooted resentment against U.S. efforts to dominate the world at the expense of China and other developing countries. Anti-hegemonism is an important tenet in China's foreign policy targeting the U.S., along with a desire to foster a multipolar political world including Northeast/East Asia (Li, 1999).

The relationship between Japan and China has been affected by issues of history, territory, energy, trade, etc. But the Eternal Japan-U.S. Alliance is probably the most important latent factor that undermines Japan-China relations. In addition to Cold War elements of the U.S.-Japan Alliance, regarding China as a communist dictatorship and, Japan and the U.S. as democratic nations (Nagao, 2005), it is very difficult for China to accept the fact that Japan, as China's close neighbor and partner, has been leaning on the U.S. absolutely (Shi, 2005). China also has trouble acknowledging a Japanese leadership role in East Asia and Japan seems tired of deferring to China... Basic changes in attitudes are

going to take much more time (Abramowitz, 2002). Bush Administration also worries about China's rising and a close relationship between China and Japan. It will weaken American influence in Asia. When the U.S. loses its dominant power, it is likely that Japan and China will be even closer (Feng, in Zhang, 2008). Although the reasons for China's ambivalence toward Japan and the United States differ, they will likely continue for a long time and may at times aggravate the existing difficulties in China's relations with the two nations. The heat of the history issue between China and Japan has not declined considerably fifty-five years after the war. However, China and Japan share more common civilizational and racial traits with each other than either of them does with the United States (Wang, 2002). These elements may play a more important role to Japan-China bilateral relationship in a period of peace and development.

To their own survival and development, Japan, China, and the U.S. must take same stand in many international issues. As Funabashi (2002) points out that China, Japan, and the United States have common interests in the areas such as the peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, the stability and development of the Asian economy, a new Asia-Pacific regionalism, etc. In the economic field, three countries talked more, their companies have had many more dealings, and their private citizens and organizations love to get together (Abramowitz, 2002). One can argue that those business activities are more of bilateral than trilateral. However, as a general trend, globalization continues to make the three national economies interdependent with one another. In fact many of the next generation of Chinese economic planners, entrepreneurs, scientists, scholars, and educators will have been trained in either Japan or the United States, or both (Wang, 2002).

A true trilateral relationship should be based on three fairly equal bilateral relations or a trilateral dialogue. A multilateral mechanism helps defuse nationalism, and it is a way to avoid zero-sum unilateral domination or bilateral rivalry, and at the same time to provide opportunities for countries to play role in regional and global affairs. However, there has not been any mechanism to bring together leaders from Beijing, Washington, and Tokyo to talk about trilateral and regional issues (Chu, 2008). The U.S., Japan, and China have not reached the point where all three can discuss common issues (Abramowitz, 2002). In addition, three partners are not actively working toward that direction. As Chu (2008) points out: China regards the United States and Japan as one party or two parties on security issue; Japan fears that the U.S. may align itself more with China, not Japan, on historical and other issues; the Bush administration argues that a trilateral mechanism is not needed, and that a trilateral approach among the United States, Japan, and China might cause some damage to the close bilateral alliance between the United States and Japan. Wang (2002) predicts, "China will stick to the principle of noninterference in other countries' domestic affairs, whereas Japan will be cautious in participating in interventionist actions. However, the United States is most likely to play a leading role in future humanitarian interventions".

The dominant interpretation of U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations is a combination of realism and constructivism. Within the theoretical frame of realism and constructivism, the relations between the U.S., Japan, and China fall into two forms, either the U.S. and Japan stand by each other to be against China, or the U.S. considers both Japan and China as its threats – China as "Power Rising" and Japan as "Political Rising" (Zhu, 2007), but never the case of the U.S.-China alliance against Japan. The

U.S.-Japan Alliance serves as a deterrent to China and prevents Japan being a threat to the U.S. Since the new century, more states have realized that in many instances cooperation is a better strategy than conflict. They try to create enforceable international law, or to make the United Nations more effective. However, the liberalism or neo-liberalism remains only as wishful thinking limited to certain areas and to weak states. Hegemonic states never follow rules that limit their power and privilege. This article, however, is trying to challenge the realist and constructivist interpretation of U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations, and to bring more attention to the power restructuring of the region, and to the world as well.

Present Power Structure in Northeast/East Asia

The present structure among three powers in Northeast/East Asia can be summarized as “one above two” and “two against one” instead of “three equal and mutual ones”. “One above two” means the U.S. is economically and politically superior to both Japan and China. “Two against one” indicates that China is one of the main targets of the U.S.-Japan Alliance, although it was not established for that purpose half a century ago. U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations will not promote long-lasting positive developments for every country in the area until three of them are mutual and equal ones.

The imbalance in U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations manifests in the following situations: the U.S. can either diverse China by using Japan or diverse Japan by using China; Japan can diverse China by using the U.S., but cannot diverse the U.S. by using China; and China can diverse Japan by using the U.S., but it is also very difficult for China to diverse the U.S. by using Japan. The U.S. initiates political or economic bilateral dialogues with Japan or China respectively. The U.S. also initiates political and economic trilateral dialogues with both Japan and China. But neither Japan nor China initiates bilateral dialogues especially political ones on Northeast Asia completely ignoring the U.S. or not being under the influence of the U.S. although strictly speaking, only Japan and China are the Northeast Asian countries. The U.S., Japan, and China have relatively little in common except under the circumstances within a multilateral frame toward a fourth party. Even if there is an agreement reached, it is not a trilateral decision on an inclusive issue of U.S.-Japan-China, but on an issue pending on the attitudes of the fourth party and other players involved. None of China, Japan, and the U.S. has to sacrifice its own interests for such an agreement.

The most contradictory phenomenon in the trilateral relationship of U.S.-Japan-China is that none of the three countries seemed to have tried to make the other two partners closer to each other. It seems like that any one of them wants to see the conflicts between the other two partners. Both China and Japan do not want to see the other party to be closer to the U.S. The United States also does not want to see the two Asian powers to become friends although the U.S. does not want to see a war between Japan and China. To separate Japan and China is the only way that the U.S. can keep its dominant position in Asia. The strategy that the United States uses to keep China and Japan apart is to create an imaginary “threat” between Japan and China. In late 1980s when Japanese economy boomed, “Japan threat” was popular in America as the late president Reagan said to Gorbachev that Japan has taken advantage of their countries while the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were fighting (Feng, in Zhang, 2008). In recent years, due to the fast development of Chinese economy, the increase in Chinese military spending

and the rise of China's military capability and activities in Asia, the U.S. considers China as the country that has the strongest potential to become the military rival of the U.S. In 2006, the U.S. calls China "the biggest latent challenger" for the first time (Zhu, 2007). The U.S. strategically used "China threat" to make Japan believe that China is a threat to Japan, and that only the U.S. can protect Japan, as a Japanese critic, Masuda comments that there are no countries know strategies better than the U.S. In order to mobilize the Japanese public opinion, the American strategy is to make Japan fall into a crisis of "China threat" so that more Japanese support the defense system of their government (in Zhang, 2008). A number of high-level Japanese officials, including former Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma, current Prime Minister Taro Aso, and other politicians, have called China a "threat" to Japanese security (Chu, 2008). In his recent visit to China, however, Japanese Prime Minister Aso says that China is not a threat but an opportunity to Japan. If one or two parties treat the third party as an imaginary enemy, it is hard to believe that a trilateral unity does exist.

There are two bilateral alliances existing in the region that are exclusive to China. They are the Japan-U.S. Alliance and the South Korea-U.S. Alliance. Having been effective since 1952, the aim of the Japan-U.S. Alliance is to "reaffirm their mutual security relationship and expanding defense cooperation in areas ranging from theater missile defense to regional contingency planning and intelligence sharing" (Green, 2007, in Curtis). To the U.S., the alliance provides itself a "critical forward basing in East Asia". But when dealing with China, the U.S. stressed the role that the U.S.-Japan alliance played in keeping a lid on Japanese military power, as serving a "rein on Japanese unilateralism" (Curtis, 2000). To Japan, the alliance provides a nuclear umbrella and alignment with the world's power. The U.S.S.R. was the imaginary enemy of this alliance. But now it is more aiming at China. There are some developments of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance that Seoul wants the U.S. to return the command jurisdiction of its military by 2012 (Zhu, 2007). China will always has reservations on the alliances that the U.S. has with Japan and South Korea respectively. "The forging of relationships of trust between China and the Japan-U.S. and South Korea-U.S. alliances is indispensable" (Funabashi, 2002).

Another serious contradict in this trilateral relationship is that there is no real support to each other's most important issues among three countries. For example, although the Korean Peninsula seems to be one area in which three countries can see their common interests, they are not working exactly toward one direction. As Li (2006) points out that from the Six Party Talks, we can see a Cold War pattern behind the scene that China, Russia, and North Korea as one side, and the U.S., Japan, and South Korea as the other side. Some Chinese observers fear that the Bush administration would not like to see the reduction of tension on the Korea Peninsula because further relaxation on the peninsula might lead to more pressure on Washington to reconsider the rationale for its troops to remain in Korea. They also fear that with the North-South relaxation the Japan-U.S. alliance may be directed more at the Taiwan issue. (Wang, p21) On the other hand, neither the U.S. nor China supports Japan's request of solving the North Korea kidnapping issue during the Six Party Talks in action. Recently, the U.S. agrees to take North Korea off the list of terrorism without seriously including Japan's consideration. The U.S. and Japan have the same attitudes toward China on the issues of Taiwan, and to certain extent, to Tibet as well. Taiwan and Tibet are the most sensitive issues to China. Supporting Chinese government on the

two issues is considered as the touchstone of a real friend and the premise to develop any diplomatic relationship with China. The U.S. still has a very close security and military relationship with Taiwan based on an American domestic law. According to Chen (2005), whether Taiwan is in U.S. sphere of influence or China's sphere of influence is the touchstone of whether the United States can maintain its global hegemony status. As an ally of the U.S., Japan may feel the need to get involved in the conflict, thus causing conflict between Japan and China (Chu, 2008). Since October 2006, the Sino-Japanese relations went through icebreaking, ice melting, winter jasmine, and warm spring while the top leaders visited each other. However, major problems remain. Historical gratitude and grudges between Japan and China have not reached a consensus and common understanding on issues of Yasukuni Shrine visits by Japanese leaders, the use of "comfort women" by the Japanese military during WWII, whitewashing of Japanese war crimes in school textbooks, etc. These issues often contribute strategic and security suspicions and conflicts. As scholars comment, "Strategic competition between China and Japan is very much the result of the Taiwan issue. In the same way, China-U.S. relations remain strained by Taiwan" (Amy P. Celico, in Abramowitz, Funabashi, and Wang, 2002).

The U.S. changed its diplomatic focus from Europe to Asia after the Cold War ended in 1991 when the red Soviet flag was lowered from the Moscow Kremlin (Jin, 2004; He & Jiang, 2007). U.S. trade with Asia accounted for 40% of its total foreign trade in early 1990s, surpassing its trade with North America and Europe greatly (Jin, 2004). However, in the area of security, the "ghost" of the Cold War has been still haunting Northeast/East Asia: the existence of two Koreas, the separation of China and Taiwan, the U.S.-Japan Alliance toward imaginary enemies, of which China is always the main one. The present power structure in Northeast/East Asia contains many crises. First, it is the only area where the sequels of the Cold War are still the major causes of the regional instability such as the two Koreas and "one China" yet the separation of Taiwan and China. Second, it is the area where exists both the leading power of the present international system and the rising powers from the region. According to "power transition theory" (Zhu, 2007), the relations between the established power and the rising power are the most conflicting. The sensitivity of Washington to Beijing's every military development can find the source to this theory. Between 2004 and 2007, Japan initiated many plans to promote common currency of Asia, China-Japan-South Korea platform, and East Asia Community. The United States considers these actions as hurting U.S. interests by separating East Asia and Pacific free trade circle (Liu, 2008). Third, there are two rising powers in the area, one is rising economically, and the other is rising politically. They inevitably fall into a "great power rivalry" pattern, trying to get a better position in a new power structure. Fourth, the rising powers normally stand by each other, and fight together with the established power. However, in Northeast Asia, due to the contradictories between the two rising powers such as history and territory issues, the established power defeat them in detail, using one rising power for the purpose of weakening the other rising power.

When facing the political and economic power shifting, a nation should refer to the history of mankind that no power lasts forever, and each nation has ups and downs. A nation is either a leader or a follower in the power structure of old system of international politics, but more as a cooperator or a participator in the age of globalization, enjoying the win-win effect of prosperous neighbors or partners while abandoning the concept of zero-sum.

Attitudes towards the Present Power Structure

The present power structure in Northeast/East Asia shows a superficial balance of U.S.-Japan-China relations based on unequal relations among them. The premise of this surface balance is the political and economic hegemony of the U.S. Although China has been much stronger in recent years, its economy is still developing with a GDP less than a quarter of the U.S. Japan has a relatively weak political position in international politics compared with its economic strength in the world. The U.S.-Japan Alliance with its function of killing two birds with one stone helps maintain the present power structure in the region.

Since the U.S. has a dominant position in U.S.-Japan-China relations and international affairs in Northeast Asia, to safeguard the present situation is the fundamental point of U.S. Northeast Asia strategy. The Bush Administration has intensively involved in the region, claiming “we are an Asia-Pacific country not only by geography, but also by virtue of our openness to free trade, our support for the growth of democracy, our interest in worldwide security and stability, and the enduring ties of the millions of Americans of Asian origin. We are a key player in the region, and we are in the region to stay” (Kelly, Nov. 2004). All things listed by Kelly contribute to U.S. hegemony with rationality and validity. Another important thing to do in order to keep the dominant role in this trilateral relationship is to make sure that neither Japan nor China exceeds the U.S. in military or has more power in international affairs. As Curtis (2000) has written, the U.S. “worked hard to convince the Chinese leadership that it was in China’s best interest to avoid a U.S.-Japan-China triangular relationship in East Asia”.

U.S. dominant position in this trilateral relationship is based on its economic power, political power, especially its military power. The following charts and graphs provide a clear picture of U.S. position in the world economy and military, and the relativity of its economic advantage and military hegemony.

Top 10 Countries GDP 2007 List by the World Bank (millions of USD)

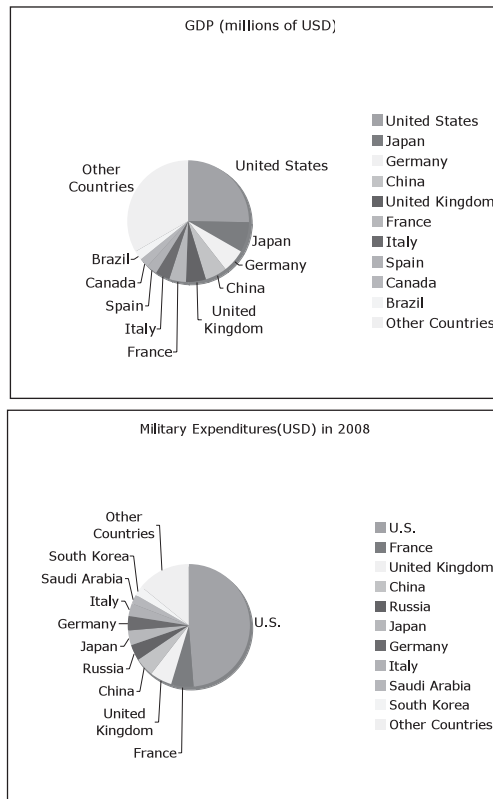
Countries	GDP	%
United States	13,840,000	25
Japan	4,384,000	8
Germany	3,322,000	6.1
China	3,251,000	6
United Kingdom	2,773,000	5.1
France	2,560,000	4.7
Italy	2,105,000	3.9
Spain	1,439,000	2.6
Canada	1,432,000	2.6
Brazil	1,314,000	2.4
Other Countries	18,260,600	33.6
World	54,347,038	100

Resource from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Economic_Outlook

Top 10 Countries Military Expenses 2008 List by Wikipedia (USD)

Countries	Military Expenditures	%
U.S.	583,283,000,000	48.6
France	74,690,470,000	6.2
United Kingdom	68,911,000,000	5.7
China	59,000,000,000	4.9
Russia	50,000,000,000	4.2
Japan	48,860,000,000	4.1
Germany	45,930,000,000	3.8
Italy	40,060,000,000	3.3
Saudi Arabia	31,050,000,000	2.6
South Korea	28,940,000,000	2.4
Other Countries	170,400,000,000	14.2
World Total	1,200,000,000,000	100

Resource from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_military_expenditures



Resource from: the two charts above.

The charts and graphs above show that seven out of top ten GDP countries are among the top ten military spending countries. The three top GDP countries that are not among top ten military spending countries are Spain, Canada, and Brazil. Their military expenditures are ranking respectively at 13th (Brazil), 15th (Canada), and 17th (Spain) (see the same resources above). The three top ten military

spending countries that are not among top ten GDP ones are Russia, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia. Their GDP ranks are respectively 11th (Russia), 13th (South Korea), and 24th (Saudi Arabia) (see the same resources above). The charts and graphs above also show U.S. economy and military power are much stronger than Japan and China. However, U.S. military power is proportionally even stronger. The GDP of the United States is three times as that of Japan, and four times as China. It is nearly twice as much as the sum of Japanese and Chinese GDPs. U.S. military expense is 10 times as much as China's, and 12 times as that of Japan. The United States spends more than five times as much as the sum of what Japan and China spend on military. This, to certain extent, means that the U.S. spends twice as much of the money proportionally on military. This is a phenomenon that the U.S. would never let it happen to any other countries in the world. To the opposite, the U.S. criticizes China's increasing of military expenses in recent years, yet China's military expenses are relatively much lower than the U.S., and even lower than normal standards in terms of proportion to its GDP. The charts and graphs above also clearly show that among major powers in the world, France, the United Kingdom, and Russia spend more money on military proportionally to their GDPs. The ratio between GDP and military expense of South Korea is also above 1. Even Italy has a 0.85 ratio between military expense and GDP, higher than China's ratio of 0.82. But since they are old or new allies of the U.S., their military development will only help U.S. interests. Among these countries, Russia is another target of U.S. criticism. This phenomenon can be either explained as the traces of the Cold War, or interpreted by the constructivism that the U.S., France, and the United Kingdom share the identities, whereas both China and Russia clash with the U.S. in their state characteristics. This situation can refer to the most often used example by Alexander Wendt that the U.S. is not worried even if the United Kingdom has 100 nuclear warheads, but worried about one nuclear warhead North Korea has (Qin, 2004).

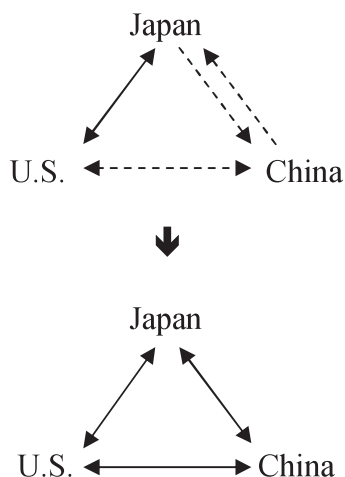
The U.S. and Japan should not feel the challenge from China as China is only trying to develop army proportionally to its economic development like most powers do, or to match its present position in the world. China's GDP amounts for 6% of the total GDP of the world, and its military expenditure accounts 4.9% that of the world, whereas the U.S. GDP amounts for 25% that of the world, but its military expenses reach 48.6% that of the world. Japan has the lowest military budget as 4.1 % of the world, only half of the proportion of its GDP share. Japan feels no pressure of U.S. military power, but worries about China's one tenth of American military budget. To use a constructivist explanation, it is because Japan considers the U.S. as a friend, and China a competitor. In this case, one country that feels threatened should be China because of the existence of the U.S.-Japan Alliance with its 52.7% of the world military expenditure. In terms of average investment on military personals, in 2003, the U.S. spent \$30 on each soldier or military official, Japan \$20, China only \$1.5 (Chen, 2005). The gap is huge.

According to a realist interpretation, China is speeding up its military expand along with its economic rising. As a reaction to China's amassing its power, the U.S. and Japan are trying to decrease China's military power by strengthening their military alliance. Although both Japan and China want to change their present status quo in Northeast Asia or/and in the world due to their economic or political development, Japan has to abide by the present arrangement in order to change its position in this arrangement and in international politics whereas China pursues economic changes in an unchanged or

a stable political environment. China does not seem to worry about U.S. military adventure too much because China traditionally follows the principles of liberalism, believing that institutions and organizations can influence the behavior of states by spreading values or creating rule-based behavior. Japan is attempting to become a normal country to match its economic status in, and contribution to the world through pursuing a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. China is not enthusiastic to see Japan become a normal power. However, the U.S. as Japan's ally is the biggest barrier of Japan becoming a member of the UN Security Council (Jin, 2004). Instead of keeping the U.S.-Japan Military Alliance for a disappeared enemy and an imaginary enemy, the U.S. should let Japan to be independent militarily and politically to become a normal country and develop its military proportionally, and to have its own voice in the important regional and global issues.

Power Restructuring in Northeast/East Asia

The current U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations can be visualized as the following unsteady triangular. There is a solid and mutual relationship between the U.S. and Japan supported by the alliance between them. They share opinions on most matters and stand by dealing with most issues in the region as well as in other areas or worldwide. The long-term bilateral relationship between the U.S. and China will not be improved fundamentally as long as the U.S.-Japan Alliance exists and the U.S. keeps supporting Taiwan militarily. The relationship between Japan and China had been stable from the normalization to most of the last century. However, China-Japan relations are not fully mutual and solid, but are determined mostly by two governments, sometimes by individual government officials. In recent years, Washington and Beijing have been trying to establish semi-systems to have regular talks on financial and military issues. One explanation can be that two countries do not bear the burdens of history, territory, or national emotions. However, China-Japan relations are not supported by a system, or lack of a mechanism, and it has been affected greatly by governments and public opinions of both countries, and sometimes, an individual incident will dramatically damage the relationship between two countries. In Us-Japan-China trilateral relationship, the U.S. sits in a most favorable position, and China the least favorable one. There is a big gap between Japan-U.S. relationship and Japan-China relationship. Since its relationship with the U.S. is solid and mutual, and its relationship with China is unsteady and unidirectional, Japan is leaning on the U.S. in most cases. China is in the least favorable position within the trilateral relationship. Its relations with the U.S. are somewhat mutual but not solid, and its relations with Japan are sometimes normal and sometimes fragile. A firm U.S.-Japan-China relational triangle should be a solid and balanced triangle without missing sides and with three mutual connections. It means that there are no bilateral alliances within this trilateral relationship, especially a bilateral alliance considers the third party as an imaginary enemy. This is the key to change the imbalance in U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations.



In order to balance this trilateral relationship, three countries have to reach an agreement to allow China to take its rightful place as a regional power, to treat Japan as a “normal” country, and to respect the stabilizing role of the United States in the region (Celico, 2002 in Abramowitz). However, it is impossible to satisfy all three countries in the directions above mentioned. First, none of the other two countries would support the third country to realize its goal due to the accumulated grievances from history, and international politics, their own economic, political, and security concerns, and their ideology and system differences. Second, the goals and interests of three countries are not compatible. Both the U.S. and Japan “feel threatened” when China is becoming a regional power. Both the U.S. and China did not support Japan to become a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council too soon, which is a very important step for Japan to become a “normal” country. In general, China does not respect U.S. role in Asia, especially its role in Taiwan Strait. Japan welcomes U.S. appearance in the region to protect itself from North Korea and the imaginary enemy, China. But when Japan becomes a “normal” country and plays an important role in international politics as well as in the world economy, the stabilizing role of the U.S. in the region will be challenged. Third, “the stabilizing role of the U.S.” in Northeast Asia is only a phenomenon resulted from U.S. superior economic and military power. It is not a solution to a healthy trilateral relationship of U.S.-Japan-China. It is not based on “the consistency and soundness of their policies toward each other” (Wang, 2002) but on policies to keep Japan and China apart and maintain U.S. hegemony.

The present power structure in Northeast/East Asia is a continuity of which established half a century ago. One of its assumptions was that the U.S. plays the major role in the region when Japan was under the control of the U.S., and China was not taken seriously due to the new regime of Communism, and the ideology of the Cold War. The present power structure has been interpreted with a combination of realism and constructivism. The former focuses on power, and the later focuses on state characteristics or identities. However, as mentioned above, the political economy of the region including the U.S., Japan, and China have changed dramatically. New power structure and different theoretical interpretations are needed in order to have some development in practice and a breakthrough in theory. The hypothesis of a possible solution can be based on the following steps.

1) Clearance of the Cold War Ideology

Cold War has ended in 1991. However, it left puzzles in an area where neither of the two rivals was originated. Two Koreas and Taiwan Strait are the remaining of the Cold War. They are the causes and magazine of deference and struggles between the U.S., Japan, and China, with Japan as a “springboard” of the U.S., and China as a “scapegoat” of the U.S.S.R. Does China have the same interests as the Soviet Union had before in the area? Even if China is as strong as the former Soviet Union, China has its own identity. One cannot assume that China will represent Communism to fight with Capitalism in the region. In fact, before the Six-Party Talks, China persuaded Pyongyang to improve its relationship with the capitalist West during Kim Jong Il’s two visits to China in May 2000 and January 2001 (Wang, 2002). And after North Korea tested a nuclear device in October 2006, “China is more ready than before to go ahead with the other parties to form a multinational security mechanism in Northeast Asia” (Chu, 2008). The Taiwan Strait issue should be also dealt with without the shadow of the Cold War thinking and hegemony; the US should stop its military relations with Taiwan and stop its military deterrent in the Taiwan Strait (Lincoln, 2008). Clearance of Cold War ideology is the premise of power restructuring in Northeast/East China.

2) Each party as an equal in trilateral or multinational relations

No international relations should be controlled by one country. Every member is equally related when working on important decisions. This means to avoid “two against one” in a trilateral relationship as current power structure in Northeast Asia. It also means more trilateral or multinational dialogues than bilateral dialogues on regional issues to find more common areas to work together.

Beside the areas of anti-terrorism and the security of the Korea Peninsula, Chu (2008) lists many areas that the U.S., Japan, and China must address together: environmental protection, energy supply and the search for new energy sources, integration of different cultures, civilizations, religions and ethnic groups, fast-spreading public health problems, law enforcement issues, etc. In order to stop the “two against one” phenomenon, each bilateral relationship should be unimpeded whenever it is needed. The important thing to do to improve the imbalance in U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations is to improve Japan-China bilateral relationship to strength both countries. The real solution for both Japan and China is to enhance the interaction between them, which includes mutual understanding, mutual support, and independent contact without interference and influence from the U.S. All these should take Northeast/East Asian conformity as the ultimate objectives, and only then there will be equal and balanced U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations.

3) Restructuring and reinterpreting

The history of international relations is often interpreted as a history of power transition. In the past, military played the most important role in determining a country’s power. The existing factors determining the basic pattern of U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relations are not going to change within next two decades. It will take China at least thirty years to be able to compete its economy and military with Japan. It will probably take Japan the same period of time to stand at a more equal political position dealing with the U.S. However, since peace and development have become the main stream of the international relations, a country’s military advantages should not play an important role in every international decision-making process. Every country that pursues a peaceful community and economic

development should have a chance to play an equal role in the international affairs. Every country should contribute to building up a world of justice, where no powers can determent weak countries, and no decisions are based on power. Every country should participate in the process toward that direction to have an influence on the change of power structure. A new power structure reflecting the changing situation and open to future restructuring should be built up. A theoretical interpretation of the new phenomenon is therefore needed.

Conclusion

The trilateral relationship among China, Japan, and the United States is the most important factor determining the direction of Northeast/East Asia Affairs. Yet, in their relations, three countries often deal with issues, especially in the field of security, without a trilateral way of thinking. As long as there is a bilateral alliance within this trilateral relationship with one side missing in this triangular of three bilateral relations, the U.S., Japan, and China will not act in unison in the most important international affairs.

The common interests of China, Japan, and the United States fall into either those general issues inclusive to all of them, or those toward a fourth party. In most political, economic, and security relations relating to three countries, their interests are often mutually exclusive. That is why there are almost no trilateral agreements between the U.S., Japan, and China in important economic and political areas. In other words no trilateral relations are established between China, Japan, and the United States.

The present structure of U.S.-Japan-China relations is under the assumption of realism that all three countries seek to increase their power so that it is necessary to keep the hegemony of the U.S. to balance off the competition of power amassing between Japan and China. However, neither Japan nor China admits their action of realism. The bilateral system of U.S.-Japan Alliance established during the peak of U.S. power is not a system inclusive to China. To the opposite, China has been, and will be resentful to this system until a new system including all three countries is established. The difference between European trilateral relations of Britain, Germany, and France and Northeast Asian trilateral relations of the U.S., Japan, and China is that the former does not have a hegemony but an inclusive system and the later does not have an inclusive system but a hegemony. That is the fundamental difference between realism and liberalism.

The establishment of U.S.-Japan-China unity needs to take the abandons of realism as the premise. It is a unity that every member shares the power and responsibility. An integrated Northeast Asia thinks primarily the regional interests, not the interests of the U.S., or Japan, or China, along with the hegemony of any one of them. It will take much time and efforts before a U.S.-Japan-China trilateral relationship in its true meaning is established. However, it is the direction of all three countries they are moving toward although in a zigzag way. The speed toward this trinity accelerates only when China becomes stronger economically and Japan becomes more independent politically, and three countries are closer in all directions.

References

- Abramowitz, M. I., Yoichi, F. & Wang, J. (2002). *China-Japan-U.S. relations: Meeting new challenges*. Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange.
- Chen, H. (2005). United States' hegemonic position and her East Asia policy: An analysis of international polarity and regional security. Retrieved on Oct. 12, 2008 from <http://140.109.171.199/2005/中政會論文/PANEL%203/P3陳欣之.doc>
- Chu, S. (2008). *A Mechanism to Stabilize U.S.-China-Japan Trilateral Relations in Asia*. The Brookings Institution: Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies. Retrieved on Oct. 4, 2008 from http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2008/01_east_asia_chu.aspx.
- CNN (2008). <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/10/03/us.taiwan.arms.deal/>.
- Curtis, G. L. (ed). (2000). *New Perspectives on U.S.-Japan Relations*. Tokyo: Japan Center for International Studies.
- Jin, Q. ((2004). Northeast Asia strategy of the U.S. and Japan and Korea peninsula. Retrieved on Sept. 24, 2008 from <http://iaps.cass.cn/Bak/ddyt/0409-3.htm>.
- He, J. & Jiang, Z. (2007). U.S. factor in Northeast Asia regional cooperation. *Journal of World Economy*, Oct. 2007. Retrieved on Sept. 24, 2008 from <http://www.gx-info.gov.cn/zt/viewwenzhai.asp?id=1400>.
- Kelly, J. A. (June 2, 2004). An overview of U.S.-East Asia policy. Retrieved on Sept. 19, 2008 from <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2004/33064.htm>.
- Kelly, J. A. (Nov. 9, 2004). U.S.-East Asia policy. Retrieved on Sept. 19, 2008 from <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2004/38335.htm>.
- Li, B. (1999). *Diplomacy of Contemporary China*. Beijing: People's University of China Publishing House.
- Li, M. (2006). *New strategic pattern of Northeast Asia from a vision of globalization*. *Lianhe Zaobao*, Oct. 6, 2006. Retrieved on Sept. 24, 2008 from http://zaobao.com/special/forum/pages4/forum_us061006.html.
- Lincoln, P.Z. (2008). *The USA and the Taiwan Strait Conflict: Principal Cause and Main Beneficiary*, *NUCB Journal of Commerce and Business*, Vol. 53, No. 1.
- Liu, J. (2008). *Japan-U.S. financial war elevation and U.S. seeing through*. *Global Finance and Economy*, May, 2008. Retrieved on Sept.19, 2008 from <http://finance.sina.com.cn/economist/jingjiguancha/20080530/15114930228.shtml>.
- Nagao, H. (2005). *Eternal Japan-U.S. Alliance*. Tokyo: Kobunsha.
- Pekkanen, S. M., & Tsai, K. S. (ed). (2005). *Japan and China in the World Political Economy*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Qin, Y. (2004). *Evolution of theories of modern international relations*, Teaching and Research, 2004, No. 4.
- Shi, G. (2005). *China-Japan Relations after World War II: 1945-2003*. Beijing: Contemporary World Press.
- Xue. L. (2008). Constructing an interactive trilateral framework of China-Japan-U.S. *Lianhe Zaobao*, Feb. 26, 2008. Retrieved on Sept. 24, 2008 from <http://www.iwep.org.cn/info/content.asp?INFOLD=3119/>
- Zhang, Y. (ed). (2008). *China and its neighbors: Making new partnership*. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press.
- Zhu, F. (2007). *International Relations Theory and East Asian Security*. Beijing: People's University Of China Publishing House.