Northeast Asian Security Regionalism: A Chinese Perspective

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Abstract

Northeast Asian regionalism has become increasingly thinkable and even desirable since the 1990s. This paper engages the topic by focusing on one of its constitutive parts – Northeast Asian security regionalism (NEASR). It takes account of the conceptual meaning of regionalism and the context in which NEASR proceeds. Two types of sources of insecurity in Northeast Asia that make NEASR both desirable and stunted are identified and two factors that may affect the process of NEASR are explored. The paper also examines China’s involvement of NEASR by analyzing its changed views of U.S. military role in Northeast Asia as a result of China’s advocating of the conception of “New Diplomacy” and “New Security Concept” in the late 1990s.

Keywords: Northeast Asia, Security Regionalism, China’s New Diplomacy

I. Introduction

Regionalism is among one of the few conceptions in the social sciences that have regained attraction since the 1990s. Evidence is that people have taken an increasing interest in the topic of the process of Northeast Asian regionalism, and endeavors have been made conceptually and empirically in International Relations (IR) to improve one’s awareness and understanding of this fascinating trend in the region.1

Indeed, if both challenges and opportunities equally unfold into 21st century Northeast Asia, regionalism as a process, among others, is expected to deal with those challenges and seize the opportunities by acting as a linkage between the national level that nations in the region are transcending and the global level that nations in the region are embracing.

It is only natural to view regionalism in Northeast Asia as the result of the unprecedented interdependence of economies and the shared social practices of the nations in the region. The process of economic regionalism in Northeast Asia is encouraging
and illustrative, partly because it is remarkably unusual in its significance and dynamics, and partly because of its aspect in which it is easier and more comfortable for the group of nations in the region to share common interests and reach consensus. As a grand regional project, however, Northeast Asian regionalism, if broad and open, is not restricted to aspects of economic integration and/or social interactions, it also involves cooperative engagement aiming at improving political ties and guaranteeing common security. The efforts in the fields of economic, social, political and security practices are closely linked to one another and determine collectively how successfully the process of regionalism in Northeast Asia will unfold.

This paper attempts to join the discussion of Northeast Asian regionalism by addressing security regionalism as an integral part, and examines how China, starting from the late 1990s, became more involved in the process of Northeast Asian security regionalism (NEASR) in terms of its shifting diplomacy and security politics through increased participation and contribution in the ever changing conditions at home and within the region. This paper will first take a look at the basic conceptual meanings of "regionalism" and the context in which security regionalism unfolds in Northeast Asia, arguing that today’s challenges and yesterday’s experiences in Northeast Asia make security regionalism both desirable and stunted. The paper then addresses two factors that may affect the direction and order of security regionalism in Northeast Asia. One is the evidence of divergent cultures that can be seen in the region and the other is the conventional pattern of security cooperation, that is, the bilateral military alliances that have lasted since their inceptions. Finally, the paper examines how China began to respond more positively to security regionalism in the late 1990s by looking at its “New Diplomacy” and “New Security Concept” which shaped China’s new foreign and security policy, and how they brought about a change in China’s view of U.S.’s military role in Northeast Asia.


II. NEASR: Meaning and Context

Like many basic concepts in social sciences, the meaning of regionalism varies depending on what is emphasized. One definition focuses on the dynamic nature of regionalism by referring to it as “intensifying political and /or economic processes of cooperation among states and other actors in particular geographical regions”. Another understanding of regionalism is related to its ideational feature as all “isms” possess, and thus is defined as an ideology that is shared among actors within a given region (including governments, inter-governments, non-governments, civil societies, groups and individuals) who favor the practice of cooperation and coordination based on common interests and values. Still another way to endow the meaning of regionalism is suggested from both the broad and narrow senses. In the broad sense, regionalism refers to the cognitions, policies and behaviors among governments, civil societies, groups and individuals within a given region for pushing forward regional integration; and narrowly, refers to common strategies and policies reached between governments for initiating and promoting regional unity. In terms of security regionalism it may be understood to be the intensifying of processes of cooperation and coordination in the field of security politics among nations and other actors in a given region.

A region is a spatial concept, which is defined by the combination of geographical proximity, density of interactions, shared institutional frameworks, and common cultural identities. Regions can be identified empirically by “relying on data on mutual interactions such as trade flows, similarities of actor attributes, and shared values and experiences”. Based on this understanding, Northeast Asian security regionalism (NEASR) refers to an intensifying of processes of cooperation and/or cooperative ideas and practices among these states: the two Koreas, Japan, China, Russia and the United States. The first four states are geographically proximate to one another. Russia, though its capital is situated in Europe, has its easternmost parts geographically located in Northeast Asia. The United States, extraterritorially located far from the region, is deeply involved and embedded into the region in many aspects, and is metaphorically taken as a crucial player in Northeast Asia.

Northeast Asia is diversified in several aspects. First, it is a region composed of major powers in one way or another (such as the only superpower, global powers, and regional powers). It is also a region that is constituted by states whose political institutions are divergent in nature (such as democracies, a communist state, and a market-oriented state with socialist characteristics). Of the seven officially declared nuclear powers, the two Koreas, Japan, China, Russia, and the United States are major powers. The two Koreas are the only nuclear states in the region. Japan, China, Russia, and the United States participate in various security arrangements in the region. Japan and China are major powers in the region, and both countries have nuclear aspirations. Russia and the United States are the only superpowers in the region. The two Koreas are the only nuclear states in the region. Japan, China, Russia, and the United States participate in various security arrangements in the region. Japan and China are major powers in the region, and both countries have nuclear aspirations. Russia and the United States are the only superpowers in the region.
powers in the world, three (the United State, Russia, and China) are present in this region where there also exists potential or latent state(s)/actor(s) seeking nuclear capabilities. Northeast Asia is also a region that has witnessed its own modern history replete with episodes of wars and conflicts, colonization, invasions and resistance, occupation, and divisions, in which peoples of each nation involved were victimized. Two Cold War legacies (divided China and divided Korea) still remain the most prominent potential flashpoints in the region, though the Cold War ended more than a decade and a half ago in the rest of the world.

Since the 1990s Northeast Asia has seen more than fifteen years of relatively peaceful time. Efforts have been made to account for the maintenance of this favorable environment. One explanation is that the increased interdependence of economies and better cooperation between nations in the region have created such tightly knit interrelated networks that no nation is willing to break them up. Another explanation attributes the phenomenon of post-Cold War peace in Northeast Asia to consecutive interactions of well-intended partnerships between major states in the region, such as – other than Russia’s and China’s normalizing of diplomatic ties with South Korea in 1990 and 1992, respectively – the U.S.-Russian “friendship and partnership” (1992), “a constructive partnership” between China and Russia (1994), China-U.S. “constructive strategic partnership” (1997), Japan-Russian “mutual trust partnership” (1997), China-Japan “friendly cooperative partnership” (1998), and others. The purpose and goal of those declaratory partnerships is “to avoid hostility and confrontation, to advocate mutual coordination and cooperation; to respect each other equally and gain mutual benefits; and not to aim against or harm a third party.” Still another explanation is that maintenance of the post-Cold War peace in the region is due to issues related to geopolitics. It is argued that the role played by the U.S. in Northeast Asian security is not unlimited despite its current status as the worlds’ sole superpower, and the existence of a balance of power among the regional powers, say, between China and the U.S. All of these accounts are credible but it is worth noting that the perceptions of them are more or less taken from bilateral rather than multilateral standpoints.

That said, Northeast Asia remains a region that is vulnerable to insecurity and potential dangers. Two major interrelated sources of insecurity and danger in the region should be highlighted. One is from what can be called physical or hard issues such as ongoing territorial and maritime disputes, terrorism and/or sectarianism, military

10 Such as the Tokdo/Takeshima Islands (Seoul versus Tokyo), the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands (Beijing versus Tokyo), the Northern Territories (Tokyo versus Moscow), the Northern Limit Line on the Yellow/West Sea (Seoul versus Pyongyang), and the Spratly Islands (China versus six other East Asian states. Besides, as some has observed, with the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1994, the enlarged exclusive economic zones “pose a clear and present danger of a new
build-ups/arms races as well as the potential for nuclear proliferation. Another source is from what can be labeled the non-physical or soft issues, which include constant disputes over historical narratives, divergent collective/public memories, nationalistic sentiments, suspicions, and distrusts/mistrusts that are manifested one way or another between almost all nations in the region.

Both hard and soft issues are closely interrelated and mutually constituted. For instance, there are linkages between historical accounts, collective memories, territorial disputes, and nationalistic sentiments. Historically rooted mutual suspicion and even biases, often betrayed in rhetoric of government officials and other power elites and even in discourses of mass media and public opinions, are transformed into radical nationalism and/or ethnocentric sentiments, which in turn refuel the historical disputes and reinforce entrenched collective memories as they are socially, culturally and politically (re)constructed. As one commentator has asserted, collective memories produce victim syndrome by constant narratives of the past “as a means to strengthen group cohesion”, or past achievements may be stressed to “indicate a sense of pride to boost morale and to justify a sense of superiority". Moreover, it has been increasingly become aware that the soft issues pose greater challenges to the process of NEASR. While hard issues are negotiable through diplomatic or dialogic means and can be put aside for the wisdom of later generations to deal with, soft issues appear far more difficult to tackle: they often pop up and can be easily subject to manipulation and politicization.

So the common foes that Northeast Asian nations confront are intraregional rather than extraregional. For instance, historical memories or narratives constitute one of the major obstacles standing in the way of peace and stability in the region. It is important to remember history so as to avoid repetition of the same tragic past. It is also important to learn to forget history in order to move toward a better future. The painful history constitutes the part, not the whole, of Northeast Asia. “Indulgence” in the past may become seeds of new sufferings. It is not easy to let bygones be bygones, but the unfolding of Northeast Asian regionalism in the 21st century requires more forward-looking rather than backward-looking attitudes.

Against this context the social construction of NEASR as a process is desirable. Despite constant complaints about the lack of any official regional security institutions or mechanisms in Northeast Asia, one does see that enthusiasm for creating an official regional security institution has never ceased since the 1990s. Although still elusive and stunted, NEASR is becoming more thinkable and desirable. In the following section, the paper turns to some aspects of security regionalism in Northeast Asia.


12 There are non-official efforts in Northeast Asia that intend to facilitate the creation of official security mechanisms. One of such efforts is the creation of The Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD) in 1993, which is considered a leading “track II” forum in Northeast Asia.
III. NEASR: Cultures and Patterns

Northeast Asian regionalism has become thinkable and desirable since the 1990s. The process, however, does not proceed easily because of the complexities and uniqueness of the region in aspects that were addressed in the previous section. The paper here restricts itself to two factors that are believed to be relevant to the direction and the regional order NEASR intends to shape. The first factor is the coexistence of Asian and western cultures in the region and the other is the existence of a traditional pattern of regional security cooperation – bilateral security alliances – which have prevailed since their first inception in the region.

NEASR is and will continue to be affected by cultures that hold “Asian values” and “Western values”. Asian cultures are considered to be collectivist while western cultures are more “individualistic”. In the case of the former, certain values are advocated. First, collectivist societies foster the coexistence of different communities and groups and promote mutual accommodation and respect in attempting to reach consensus. Second, is the presence of a defined hierarchy where collectivist orthodoxies support authorities that make subcultures subordinate to them, and who are “reluctant to consider legal commitments, binding agreements and structured organization”.13 Third, differences are tolerated, if not publicly, and the (re)adjustment of positions through civil means so as to maintain harmonious ties between different communities and groups is favored. On the other hand, western culture champions culturally derived values that differ considerably from those favored in Asian cultures. For instance, the insistence on the rights of individuals, freedom and democracy, the rule of law as sources of ultimate authorities, and the proclivity for public disclosure of differences and condemnation of what is regarded as deviant behavior are all stressed “Western values”.

In terms of how to create and maintain peace in Northeast Asia, “Western values” may favor the idea of balance of power among nations, while “Asian values” may embrace the concept of hierarchic order in the region. But doubts have been cast on both balance of power and hierarchic order as to whether either of them can bring about permanent peace in the region. If shared cultures and common value foundations are absent in Northeast Asia as a whole, complications may arise with regards to which values to adopt to guide and shape the direction of the process of NEASR constructs.

Fortunately, cultures are not static, but products of social construction. They evolve through social practices and human experiences; cultures change in accordance to conditions. For Northeast Asia there is the likelihood that the transformational power of regional security institutions or mechanisms may reshape cultures to accept greater cooperative security relations as a basis for enduring peace and stability in the region. What is unclear is whether NEASR can go beyond or transcend conventional wisdom of balance of power or hierarchic order. Or whether desired regional security institutions or mechanisms will fall apart along cultural lines.

Another factor linked to NEASR is the conventional pattern of security cooperation in Northeast Asia: bilateral military alliances. Within the context of the Cold War, almost all states in Northeast Asia pursued their own national security through the for-

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formation of bilateral strategic or military ties with other states (say, the Japan-U.S. alliance, South Korea-U.S. alliance, Sino-Soviet alliance (which broke down later), North Korea-China alliance, and Sino-U.S. strategic ties as a balance against the Soviet Union). Allied states protected and ensured their security through threats and deterrence through the formation of mutually promised military commitments. This pattern of security cooperation was widely practiced and regarded as valid for maintaining peace and stability during much of the Cold War in Northeast Asia. One remarkable feature of this pattern, among others, was its exclusiveness and bilateralism, which were natural by-products in the context of Cold War balance-of-power politics. Regional stability was achieved and maintained by balanced distribution of material capabilities among states in the region.

However, stability based on physical balancing is likely to be filled with uncertainties or not lasting since the distribution of material resources is not static but subject to change. In Northeast Asia, some forms of bilateral military alliances have survived the end of the Cold War and have been strengthened and further institutionalized to a certain extent. Regional multilateral security dialogues and mechanisms are accepted but are considered supplements to, not substitutes for, this conventional pattern of security cooperation. However, although post-Cold War bilateral security alliances have helped improve security and strategic relationships between allies that share more with one another, what is central is that this pattern of security cooperation on a bilateral basis can hardly change the nature of concealed suspicions and anticipated confrontations between the allied states and those who are non-allied.

It has become very evident that Northeast Asia has undergone tremendous changes in its security environment since the 1990s. The sources of insecurity and dangers in the region are shifting: major Cold War threats have disappeared while other issues such as possible nuclear proliferation have emerged as serious regional security concerns. It would appear then that the conventional security alliance system, exclusive and bilateral in nature, faces important challenges as to how to deal with these changes.14 To address the security requirements of an environment that has changed and continues to be changing, a new pattern of security cooperation among Northeast Asian nations is imperative. Otherwise, a return to an age ripe for classical great-power rivalry characterized by confrontations, tensions, deterrence and counter-deterrence can hardly be ruled out in Northeast Asia. As a result, nations in the region would once again rely on the creation and strength of bilateral military alliances, and preserve their own national security through heightened readiness for action against potential aggressors.

NEASR is an institution or mechanism that is different from the conventional pattern of security relationships. It is a cooperative security system which is of inclusiveness and multilateralism in nature. The peace and stability produced by NEASR is expected to last longer on the grounds that nations in the region will treat each other

equally and trustfully and share norms and collective identities. A recent promising illustration is the collective efforts made to resolve the North Korea nuclear issue. It is the first time since World War II that the five nations in the region (the United States, Russia, South Korea, Japan, and China) have cooperated and worked together on a “hard” security issue, during which the social and political process of collective identity and discourse formation is played out among them.

In the process of NEASR, the first and foremost step is to build trust among Northeast Asian nations. Of major concern among Northeast Asian nations for the coming decades is China’s ascendancy in the region as a powerful social fact. There are mixed opinions to the question of how China will make use of its increased power. Some take China as a potential threat to the status quo of the region. Others see China as a responsible power and a greater stabilizer in the region. For China, it now finds itself to be, for the first time in more than 150 years, a country that is perceived to pose a potential “threat” to the world – a country that had long been, at least experienced and narrated by its own people, “threatened” and actually victimized by others since 1840.¹⁵

In the next section, the paper examines how China has responded to the unprecedented changes both at home and in the region through the readjustment of its foreign and security policies so as to become more involved in the process of NEASR.

IV. China and NEASR: “New Diplomacy” and Changed View of U.S. Role

In much of the Cold War period, China pursued an independent or “isolationist” foreign and defense policy which was based on the principle of Maoist “self-reliance” [duli zizhu]. China once had almost all of the Northeast Asian countries, except North Korea, as its adversaries (the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan, and South Korea). Retrospectively, it was indeed rare to see a nation in the Cold War era simultaneously take on two superpowers as adversaries on the grounds that it was both theoretically unacceptable and in practice risky. But China did. That situation began to change in the early 1970s when there was a rapprochement between China and the United States (then between China and Japan). In the late 1980s China and the Soviet Union patched up their relationship and in 1992 China normalized diplomatic ties with South Korea. Since then China has established diplomatic ties with all countries in the region. Yet the concept of regionalism was not immediately appreciated in China in the early 1990s.¹⁶ China’s growing interest in regionalism became obvious in the late 1990s when China, increasingly accepted globalization in the wake of its efforts to deal with the Asian financial crisis along with other countries, and its negotiation and then accession to the World

¹⁵ China “threat” rhetoric can be roughly reduced into two major concerns. One concern is that it is unclear whether a strong China will revive its old tributary system as it practiced hundreds of years ago towards its neighboring countries. Another concern is that it is unclear how a strong China may make use of its power in the world and for what purposes.

¹⁶ A series of events – the 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident in China, the sudden political change in East Europe and subsequent demise of the Soviet Union – made China’s leadership reluctant to accept the concept of regionalism and took it as a potentially negative thing in terms of China’s national security.
Trade Organization (WTO). At the time, China was believed to be among the few nations that enjoyed economic growth and benefits through the process of globalization.

To keep up with rapid changes both at home and the world, the late 1990s saw China begin its most noteworthy foreign policy mentality change. The first was the adoption of a “New Diplomacy” [xin waijiao] that had two basic “guiding principles” (zhidao fangzhen): 1) “actively engaging in international affairs,” with a general approach of “seeking cooperation, putting aside disputes so as to avoid confrontations [and] promoting multilateral communication and cooperation”; and 2) maintaining stable relationships with major powers especially the United States, which is the core issue in China’s diplomacy. Although China claimed that it still adhered in foreign affairs to the “principles” laid down by Deng Xiaoping in the early 1990s, i.e., “observing sober-mindedly, standing firm, and remaining calm,” this “new diplomacy” had in fact departed from Deng’s teaching that China should “hide [its] capacities and bide [its] time” (taoguang yanghui) in world politics and concentrate on economic growth and political stability at home. This change in ideas was the signal that China was breaking away from its conventional independent and “isolationist” policies while moving towards embracing the world by advocating cooperative and multilateral approaches and becoming more committed to international affairs as China was increasingly regained its confidence in the world.

Further endorsing the concept of “New Diplomacy” is China’s proposed “New Security Concept” [xin anquan guan], which was mandated in China in the late 1990s. The “New security Concept” is meant to transcend the boundary of the conventionally narrow vision of security and seek “common security” [gongtong anquan] based on mutual cooperation and benefits. It asserts that mutual trust is the political foundation for maintaining long peace and stability in the region; that security cannot simply rely on military means or alliances, but rather on mutual trust and common interests. The “New Security Concept” also asserts that sources of insecurity and dangers do not simply originate from unequal distribution of physical capabilities among nation-states, they also come from the various approaches that nation-states take, and that genuine security can be achieved only through communication, coordination, and cooperation among the countries concerned.

With the conception of “New Diplomacy” and “New Security Concept”, China has adopted “development strategy of peaceful ascendance”, a strategy which is aimed at integrating China positively into international society, and at “seeking multilateral and constructive cooperation’ with other countries in solving disputes and conflicts existing between them.

The change in ideas has encouraged the recasting of China’s identity and the change of its behavior. To put it concretely, just as one commentator has pointed out,
China’s identity and behaviors can be expected as follows: first, it must strive to cast the image of a responsible nation that abides by the accepted norms and principles in international affairs; second, it must integrate itself into the existing system and be opposed to any attempts to undermine it; third, it commits to a good and interdependent relationship with its neighboring countries in Northeast Asia; fourth, it must actively engage in the use of cooperative approaches with the other countries in order to develop a “stable framework of big power relations” [wending daguo guanxi kuangjia]; and finally its long-term development strategy must be constructive for promoting regional prosperity.20

In terms of Northeast Asia regionalism, China champions openness, tolerance, and mutual benefits. In other words, three points are stressed here: 1) to take development as a central theme and promote common prosperity; 2) to construct harmonious ties with its neighboring countries, so as to maintain peace and stability in the region; and 3) to realize mutual benefits through cooperation and coordination.

Based on the conception of “New Diplomacy” and “New Security Concept”, China began to readjust its attitudes and behavior when involving itself in foreign and security affairs in Northeast Asia. China’s changed view, though subtle but significant, of the U.S.’s role and military presence in Northeast Asia is a case in point.

China used to be very suspicious of, and to some extent hostile to, the U.S. military and its role in Northeast Asia, believing that the U.S. strategic goal in the region was to contain or check China in order to keep it under U.S. influence. For instance, China believed that the two U.S.-led security alliances in Northeast Asia were essentially U.S. instruments that could be used for containing China, and China was especially skeptical about the revised U.S.-Japan security alliance. Until the late 1990s, China had centered on its security efforts to counterbalance mighty America and to break perceived blockades by U.S. military presence in the region.

With the changes in ideas as articulated in the conceptions of “New Diplomacy” and “New Security”, China has begun to take a more pragmatic and rational approach to U.S. military role in Northeast Asia, recognizing that the U.S. has vital and proper interests in Northeast Asia. China gradually realizes that U.S. military presence in Northeast Asia can be understood to be a means to maintaining regional security stability and that it does not necessarily collide with Chinese interests. Since the late 1990s, the theme that both China and the U.S. share “important strategic interests” in the Asia-Pacific and that the two nations should “put aside their differences but seek cooperation” has been frequently articulated in China’s foreign policy discourse. In his speech at the Conference on Security Cooperation in East Asia on December 12, 2003, Wang Yi, Chinese vice minister of foreign affairs in charge of policy planning and Asian affairs, stated that U.S. military presence in Asia is occasioned by a historical process, so China is willing “to see the United States playing a positive and constructive role for peace and stability in the region”.21 The changed views can also be discerned in Chinese elites’ discourses. Some Chinese commentators argue that “the United States in the end has provided, to

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some extent, ‘public goods’, and China has benefited, and is likely to continue to benefit, from the ‘status quo’ of the post-Cold War security arrangement in Asia-Pacific”. As one commentator insists, this is a significant change, for until the late 1990s “withdrawal of all of foreign troops in Asia” had been a “principle” in China’s foreign policy, and indicates that China has altered its attitudes towards U.S. military presence in Asia (especially in Northeast Asia) “from negative to at least pragmatic if not positive”.

Put more concretely, this significant shift has set the backdrop for China’s fundamental rethinking of U.S.-led alliances in Northeast Asia. China began to change its view of the role the U.S. military may play in Northeast Asia, realizing that the U.S.-led alliances may function as balancers against improper ambitions of military build-ups conceived by its allies especially Japan. The commitments to improve security relations with the United States has made China take on more cooperative attitudes as shown in China’s quick response to the “9.11” event by sympathizing with the sufferings of American people and backing the U.S.-led global war against terror, and in China’s playing an increasingly active role as mediator in resolving the North Korea nuclear issue.

China has also adjusted its approaches to U.S. allies in Northeast Asia, adopting a more pragmatic strategy aiming at improving bilateral ties with Japan and South Korea. It is seen that China tends to solve bilateral disagreements it has with Japan or South Korea through interstate talks instead of putting them in the context of the security alliances, and as one commentator observes, China “has quietly stopped criticizing the U.S.-Japan alliance” on troubling issues in Sino-Japan relations. Based on the process of NEASR, all nations in the region are expected to have equal positions and show mutual respect. Struggle for regional dominance and superiority is discouraged and undesirable. Since 1992, China has been nurturing its bilateral relations with South Korea to dilute the perceived threat from the U.S.-ROK military alliance. It can be argued that China and South Korea relations are more comfortable and successful thanks to the two countries’ shared historical memories of their peoples’ sufferings during the World War II and their shared geopolitical and/or geostrategic considerations as shown in the recent case regarding the North Korea nuclear issue.

Besides, China has quietly dropped its support of North Korea’s demand that “all foreign forces must withdraw from Korea”. This seems to reinforce the argument that China tends to see the U.S. military presence there as a stabilizer for peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. The fact that China has joined the international community and condemned North Korea for its underground nuclear test in October 2006, shows that China prefers performing as a responsible nation rather than maintaining the two countries’ conventional party-to-party ideology mentality. It also suggests that China

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
has helped tone down the China-North Korea relations painted during the Cold War further, fading away in subtle but significant ways.

That said, China has its dilemmas. On the one hand China has changed its foreign and security policy views and begun to appreciate and accept U.S. military role and U.S.-led security alliances in Northeast Asia. On the other hand, China remains uncertain about what the U.S. military presence especially the U.S.-Japan alliance may mean to China if Taiwan declares independence.

V. Concluding Remarks

The paper has conducted a tentative study of the subject matter of Northeast Asian regionalism by focusing on the security facet. Several points are now made as concluding remarks.

First, regionalism as a revived concept in the study of international relations contains contesting meanings. The paper tends to believe that regionalism is a process of social, cultural and political construction, a way of thinking, and even a mode of life. If regionalism in Northeast Asia has become thinkable and desirable since the 1990s, the unique characteristic of Northeast Asia as a region and its historical and present context in which regionalism unfolds in 21st century Northeast Asia make the process both encouraging and bumpy. On the two major sources of insecurity and dangers in Northeast Asia, the paper has addressed specific concerns to the soft issues that may constitute hidden but entrenched obstacles in the process of NEASR. It is not realistic for regionalism in Northeast Asia to emulate the regionalism that has been achieved and practiced in other parts of the world, such as in Europe.

Second, NEASR is an integral part of Northeast Asian regionalism, and is culturally and politically more difficult to adopt. It looks like economic regionalism in Northeast Asia may not lead naturally to the realization of security regionalism in the short run. They are not as closely interrelated as they have been seen in Europe. It is imperative for Northeast Asian nations to find ways to cast aside security dilemmas that still remain as major security challenges in the region. NEASR as an alternative pattern of security cooperation is both encouraging and desirable because of its inclusiveness and multilateralism in nature. Both NEASR and the conventional pattern of security cooperation (bilateral military alliances) are instruments that intend to promote peace and stability in the region. In the long run, however, the foundation of lasting peace and stability in Northeast Asia is more likely to rely on a pattern of security cooperation that is of inclusiveness and multilateralism as they are favored by NEASR.

Third, the change in security ideas determines the change of security behaviors. China’s shift in views on U.S. military presence and U.S.-led security alliances in Northeast Asia is a reflection, among others, of China’s adoption of the conception of “New Diplomacy” and “New Security Concept” in the late 1990s. They are also signs indicating that China has been more positive in its involvement with the process of NEASR, and has taken a concrete step toward the social and political construction of security trust-building with the U.S. and its allies in the region.
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