Mending relations between South Korea and Japan, resuming the East Asian Community initiative

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(The original article is Japanese and translated provisionally to English)

1. Introduction—What does a slowdown of the East Asian Community initiative mean?

There have been several points where the efforts to establish an East Asian Community (EAC) and bilateral relations between South Korea and Japan crossed. The year of 1998 was epoch-making for the two processes. In this year, then South Korean President Kim Dae-jung proposed an “East Asia Vision Group” for economic cooperation. His proposal gave the EAC initiative the first opportunity to move in discussions in the political arena, out of the arena of scholars. In the 21st century, at the 5th ASEAN+3 meeting held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in November 2001, the Vision Group issued a report entitled, “TOWARDS AN EAST ASIAN COMMUNITY----Region of Peace, Prosperity and Progress.” The report states, “We, the people of East Asia, aspire to create an East Asian community of peace, prosperity and progress based on the full development of all peoples in the region.” As a short-term goal, the Vision Group aims to establish an economic community covering Southeast Asian countries, Japan, China and South Korea. It also recommends the formation of an East Asia Free Trade Area (EAFTA) and an East Asian Monetary Fund. The group supports the idea of setting up the East Asia Summit (EAS) for political and security cooperation.

In South Korea, this ideal of creating an EAC was passed on to President Roh Moo-hyun after President Kim left office. In his inaugural speech on February 25, 2003 President Roh announced proudly “the Age of Northeast Asia,” making clear that what should be achieved is “a regional community of peace and co-prosperity in Northeast Asia.” The president also stated, “The Korean Peninsula is located at the heart of the region. It is a big bridge linking China and Japan, the continent and the ocean.” “For a long time, I have a dream of seeing a regional community of peace and co-prosperity in Northeast Asia like the European Union.”

China responded to the initiative President Kim began. In 2003, a meeting to establish the Network of East Asian Think-Tanks (NEAT) was held in Beijing, setting up its secretariat at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Inspired by this move, the
Council on East Asia Community (CEAC) was established in Japan in May 2004 led by Kenichi Ito, President of the Japan Forum on International Relations supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan.

In his general policy speech in the Diet in January 2005, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi promised, “The Government will play an active role in the creation of an East Asian community.” However, there was an angry reaction to this announcement from the United States. U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage publicly expressed doubts in regard to the EAC initiative. In parallel with his remark, Japan’s supporters of the Japan-U.S. alliance began to oppose the EAC initiative, saying that it would be shaped by the intentions of China. In this atmosphere, the report published by CEAC, “The Present State of East Asian Community Building, Background, and Japan’s National Strategy” was not adopted. At the time, Japan-China and Japan-Korea relations were strained by the visits of Prime Minister Koizumi to Yasukuni Shrine. In addition, in February shortly after Koizumi’s general policy speech, the move of Shimane Prefecture to establish Takeshima Day created tensions leading to a “diplomatic war” between Japan and South Korea.

The discussions to establish an East Asia Community slowed down and Japan-South Korea relations became soured. This showed that the first crossing of the two processes came to a negative end. Still, an international academic conference held in Seoul to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the normalization of Japan-Korea relations set its overall theme as “Japan-Korea relations in the 21st century and a vision from Northeast Asia,” and in an optimistic atmosphere, participants argued that Japan-Korea relations would enter a mature stage and develop further as the initiative to create an East Asia Community takes shape. However, now 10 years after the conference their optimistic expectations are unfulfilled.

Although building peace on the Korean Peninsula and a community in East Asia began taking form shortly after entering the 21st century, supporters of the Japan-U.S. alliance struck back and Japan-South Korea relations began deteriorating. We should pay attention to this process. We can consider these ten years as the period when the EAC initiative lost momentum and Japan-South Korea relations worsened. In hindsight, the year of 2005 was the start of the present crisis in East Asia.

2. Causes of the slowdown of the EAC initiative
First, look at the causes of the slowdown of the efforts to create an EAC from Japan’s side. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in Singapore in January 2002 proposed the initiative for a Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Economic Partnership and at the Japan-ASEAN Summit meeting in December of 2003, the prime minister supported building an East Asian Community and then in 2005, he assured Japan’s active participation in the creation of an EAC. The EAC initiative promoted by Koizumi at the time covered the ASEAN countries, Japan, China, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, and then adding India as a member and the East Asia Summit was inaugurated in 2005.

However, in parallel with the creation of the East Asia Summit, the EAC initiative began to lose momentum. Although one of the main causes was the opposition from the United States, there were various other causal factors. One of them was that Japan’s “value diplomacy” clashed with the ASEAN Way valuing a pragmatic approach. Originally, Japan’s attempt to have a closer relationship with the ASEAN intended to counter China. In addition, value diplomacy upheld by the first government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe created concerns Japan trying to contain China in this region. Meanwhile, rapidly rising China, as if in reaction to Japan’s move, decreased its interest in the framework of cooperation in East Asia and prioritized participating actively in the formation of a new order in the region based on the concept of introducing a G2 era (shared leadership between China and the United States).

After the Democratic Party of Japan took power in 2009, the EAC initiative again stepped into the spotlight in Japan. Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, unhesitatingly sticking to his own views, attempted to promote the EAC initiative. This, however, caused U.S. resentment and after the two countries had a conflict over the issue of relocating the U.S. Futenma air base in Okinawa, the EAC initiative failed. As a result, the governments of Prime Minister Naoto Kan and Yoshihiko Noda shifted toward a policy to repair the Japan-U.S. alliance, and since then it seemed as if the discussion on the issue of creating an EAC had never taken place in Japan. At the time of the Noda government, Japan’s nationalization of the Senkaku islands deteriorated Japan-China relations, while South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, irritated over the issue of Japanese military’s ‘comfort women’, visited Dokudo/Takeshima Island, making Japan-South Korea relations strained. In this context, efforts to establish an EAC slowed down. Japan’s behavior, which has worsened its relations with neighboring courtiers such as China and South Korea, undeniably constitutes a major cause of the stalled momentum
to build an EAC.

Meanwhile, as a Korean citizen, I would like to think about our responsibility. As described before, South Korea led the discussion on the efforts to establish an EAC under the initiative of President Kim Dae-jung. However, the first change to the concept was made by his successor, President Roh Moo-hyun. President Roh replaced “East Asia” with “Northeast Asia.” This is not unrelated to the move of South Korea to seek new opportunities in China and Russia. Based on this new concept, the original EAC initiative that put ASEAN countries at the center and then ASEAN+3 countries, trying to expand around them shifted to the Northeast Asia Community initiative that placed South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia at the core, putting ASEAN countries together with the United States and Mongolia outside the core countries. In this new concept, they said South Korea would play a balancer role in Northeast Asia. The EAC initiative by President Kim put more emphasis on “peace” than “unification,” whereas the Northeast Asia Community initiative by President Roh boldly moved its center of gravity toward “unification.” However, excluding ASEAN countries that played the role of cornerstone in President Kim’s concept of an EAC from the core members weakened the position of South Korea as a mediator at the time of conflict between Japan and China. South Korea, trying to be a balancer, was displaced from the role. In addition, President Roh couldn’t overcome doubts by the United States that was placed outside the core countries. As a result, a sense that the Korea-U.S. alliance was shaken was created and this frustrated conservatives in South Korea. President Lee Myung-bak, having come to power in this atmosphere, turned to repairing the bilateral alliance and abandoned the East (Northeast) Asia Community initiative by promoting his slogan “Global Korea.”

However, the reality was that international community overall called for cooperation in East Asia. This was revealed in the 2008 global financial crisis which reaffirmed the need of the three countries (Japan, China, and South Korea) to talk together and work in cooperation. At the Asia-Europe (ASEM) Summit meeting in Beijing on October 24, 2008, with the participation of leaders of the ASEAN countries and Japan, China, and South Korea, President Lee proposed holding a China-Japan-South Korea trilateral summit meeting and the three leaders agreed to meet in December. This started an annual trilateral summit meeting and at the first meeting in Fukuoka, Japan, the leaders decided to create a currency swap arrangement among the three countries. President Lee, however, narrowed down regional cooperation in East Asia to an economic
one and thus the concept of regional cooperation in South Korea has not surfaced as a framework to establish a vision of how East Asia will ensure peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula.

As I mentioned before, the slogan of President Lee was “Global Korea.” This was translated in Korean as a “mature global state,” which, they say, actively participates in the international scene and pursues a pragmatic diplomacy based on national interests rather than ideology. Specifically, it aims to be an advanced middle-power state that facilitates agreements and cooperation between developing countries and developed countries by playing the role of mediator. To achieve this goal, they adopted the so-called “concentric circle diplomacy.” This diplomatic approach was explained as the strategy which, based on the Korea-U.S. alliance, rebuilds relations with neighboring countries such as China, Japan, and Russia and then widens diplomatic relations to countries in Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Europe, Middle East and Africa.

There was a hierarchy in diplomacy visible in this concept. It prioritized the Korea-U.S. alliance followed by cooperation of Japan, China, and South Korea, and then cooperation with ASEAN countries. This meant that East Asia as a region disappeared from South Korea’s diplomatic initiative. This tendency continues to appear in the “Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI)” promoted by President Park Geun-hye. The concept of Northeast Asia in this initiative only covers the Korean Peninsula, the United States, Japan, China, and Russia. Regarding South East Asia, the NAPCI only mentions the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) for reference, not considering South East Asian countries as partners for cooperation. This is not unrelated to its diplomatic blunder. South Korea sent its Minister of Education, someone unfamiliar with diplomacy, to attend the meeting to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Bandung Conference. I think, however, the lack of imagination of South Korea concerning “East Asia as a region” is something deeper, stemming from its history after the liberation of Korea.

3. South Korea and Regionalism in East Asia

Through the 1950’s, South Korea viewed the rest of Asia suspiciously. It saw the region as a source of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and was wary of its policy of neutrality. As a united Korea overcoming communism was the national priority, the nation considered the neutralism as something against its national interest. The
government did not send a delegation to the 1955 Bandung Conference since it saw the conference as a reckless attempt to search for coexistence with the Communist Camp. North Korea, on the other hand, took the approach of reaching out to the NAM while hoping to gain international support for its North-led unification policy which entailed expelling the U.S. military presence from South Korea. North Korea set its national goal to increase the “potential to support an international revolution” and “potential for success of its own anti-imperialist revolution.”

Against the backdrop of North Korea’s move, South Korea characterized the conference as an opportunity for Communist China and the Soviet Union to undermine the U.S.-led containment policy exerted in unison by the West against communist expansion. Yet, South Korea did recognize the Bandung Conference as a consequence of the political attempt of former colonized nations to counter the influence of former colonizing powers. South Korea noted that the conference was a collective action driven by the political atmosphere among nations that did not want to be involved in the U.S.-led anti-communist containment policy. With the anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist Third World movement growing, North Korea officially joined the NAM and its entry was approved at the 1975 NAM foreign ministerial meeting in Lima, which alarmed South Korea. Nevertheless, South Korea expected the NAM movement would face internal division which would put additional difficulty on North Korea’s NAM-oriented diplomacy. This is the general perspective of South Korea on the Asian situation by 1980.

Years into the 1980’s, South Korea saw that the status of North Korea’s Nam-oriented diplomacy was being eclipsed by an economically successful and newly self-confident South Korea taking an active and pragmatic engagement with the Nam-centered international movement. As the ROK normalized its relations with the Soviet Union and China while the Cold War tensions were declining, the loss in momentum of the NAM stirred a sense of alienation in North Korea. This, South Korea viewed, motivated the North to accelerate its nuclear program as a tool for a new bilateral deal directly with the United States in order to break through the seeming impasse.

South Korea then saw the mainstream of the NAM as a magnet for an international movement of nations seeking more independence from the West and thus sought an active engagement with it. South Korea viewed as favorable the situation where the NAM was divided on issues such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran-Iraq
war while the major players in the NAM were becoming diverse, though it thought North Korea would still have some influence in the NAM since it was one of the 36 NAM Coordinating Committee members. Thus, the ROK tried to take advantage of the situation to counter the influence of North Korea with carefully tailored approaches to the NAM members in non-political and economic areas.

This shift in the ROK diplomacy regarding the NAM was precipitated by the change in its understanding of the nature of the NAM itself. Years into the 1980’s, a new tolerant view on the NAM was growing in South Korea. That saw the NAM as an attempt for the Third World nations to collectively protect their political independence against the hegemonism exerted by major powers; coordinate their economic diplomacy and cooperation vis-a-vis advanced countries; and enhance their economic independence through integration among members. This view cast a new light on the economic aspect in regard to the NAM. From this perspective, the ASEAN was appreciated as a successful practice in the NAM with greater achievement than any other region in the Third World over the previous 15 years.

It was in the 1990’s that South Korea began to see Asian cooperation positively. The backdrop to this change was the democratization of South Korea which unleashed a flood of cries for peace and human rights from the general public once suppressed under the nation’s “Wartime Regime”. Among such public demands was one regarding Japan which was once kept gagged under the 1965 ROK-Japan basic relations treaty and the most symbolic issue was the so-called “comfort women” issue. This issue was raised by South Korean organizations created through the persevering pro-democracy movement in the country. These organizations sought to cooperate with other organizations beyond its borders, which resulted in the establishment of the Asian Solidarity Conference to work for the solution of the issue. On the issue of state violence and democracy was founded the East Asia Symposium for Peace and Human Rights. This was a new way of thinking to try to meet challenges such as peace and human rights at the entire East Asia level with an understating that history of suffering of the people in this region was deeply related to the Cold War structure built in the region since the Korean War. Other issues such as the need for environmental protection and other new transnational challenges also helped expand solidarity among the general public in East Asia. One of the results of this new trend is the creation of the Citizen’s Environmental Conference in East Asia.
As we see here, it is clear that President Kim Dae-jung’s perspective on Asia was exceptional in South Korea’s post-liberation history and an outcome of the philosophical struggle through its liberation movement.

4. Kim Policy of Embracing Japan and his Initiative of Creating an East Asia Community

When we look back at the diplomatic course of President Kim Dae-jung after he came to office in 1998, it becomes apparent that he tried hard to promote an initiative for an East Asia Community based upon the framework of regional cooperation to overcome the economic crisis, then to utilize it for peace-building efforts on the Korean Peninsula. An important factor in this was his new orientation for ROK-Japan relations.

Kim Dae-jung was said to be a politician who choreographed the most promising era of ROK-Japan relations. Mr. Kim clearly understood the very important role Japan could play to establish peace on the Korean Peninsula. He had already proposed “the security by 4 major powers” concept in October 16, 1970 as his campaign pledge in the presidential election to be held the following year. He had argued that the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan and Communist China should collectively ensure the prevention of war on the Korean Peninsula while the ROK should enhance its diplomacy based on a policy of neutrality instead of a policy of seclusion.

Immediately after taking office, President Kim began to put his ideas into action. His first presidential foreign trip was to the United States, in accordance with South Korea’s diplomatic tradition. His trip was from June 6 to 14, 1998 including giving a speech in the U.S. Congress in June 10. In the speech, he presented an upgraded status to the ROK-U.S. relationship as a partnership sharing the value of democracy and support for a market-oriented economy. It was aimed at motivating North Korea to further open itself up induced by the attractiveness of the enhanced power of South Korea's democracy and its alliance with the United States.

His next move was his trip to Japan. Before the trip was scheduled to begin on October 7, he decided not to raise the issue of the incident of his abduction from Tokyo in 1973. He also asked the people of South Korea to accept South Korea’s government stance to respectfully refer to Japan’s emperor “TEN-NOU”. These moves by Mr. Kim created a welcoming atmosphere in Japan. On October 8, he had an official meeting with Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi. The two leaders agreed to cooperate to create a new
future-oriented partnership toward the 21st century by solving unfortunate issues of the 20th century within the century. Mr. Kim reiterated the same theme in his speech in Japan’s Diet. It was reported that Mr. Kim also discussed North Korea’s issue with Mr. Obuchi. The two governments jointly issued a declaration on a new ROK-Japan partnership for the 21st century. In the declaration, Japan expressed deep remorse on its colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula. This was the first declaration as such since the diplomatic normalization between the two nations in 1965. It was also the first time that South Korea gave appreciation to Japan’s peaceful development since the end of WWII. This was based on Mr. Kim’s policy to include Japan as part of his broader policy toward North Korea called “the Sunshine Policy” while expecting that a pacifist Japan would play an important role in contributing to peace and prosperity in East Asia by engaging with the opening and reform of North Korea.

Then, he visited China from November 11 to 15 to meet President Jiang Zemin. In the meeting, the two leaders shared the significance of promoting a cooperative ROK-China relationship for the 21st century. Mr. Kim explained his policy vis-à-vis North Korea and Mr. Jiang evaluated it highly. Mr. Kim also mentioned the need to create a multilateral security consultation body in Northeast Asia and proposed a forum of dialogue and cooperation involving six countries in the region.

Having done the preparatory work with the United States, Japan and China, President Kim then went on to seek his original agenda: moving forward to establish an East Asia Community. He initiated his multilateral diplomacy. He went to Malaysia to attend the APEC summit meeting on November 15, and then returned to his country to meet U.S. President Clinton on the 20th of the month. Just before the meeting, the U.S. envoy to North Korea Charles Kartman finished his visit to North Korea and raised its nuclear program issue while South Koreans began to be allowed to visit Mt. Kumugang-san in North Korea for tourism. Under these circumstances, the leaders of South Korea and the U.S. shared the understanding of Mr. Kim's “Sunshine Policy” while they recognized the need to address the nuclear issue properly.

Then, Mr. Kim turned to the ASEAN. He went to Vietnam on December 15 to attend the ASEAN plus 3 (South Korea, Japan and China) summit meeting. On the sidelines, he met President Luong of Vietnam and offered his apology in regard to “the unfortunate era in relations between the two nations”. President Luong expressed his appreciation for Mr. Kim's initiative for peace on the Korean Peninsula. At the summit meeting,
President Kim proposed to set up “a vision group working for cooperation in East Asia”. This marked the beginning of multilateral discussions on the initiative for an East Asian Community.

Through 1999, Mr. Kim continued his two-pronged diplomacy. One was his bilateral diplomacy with Japan, the U.S., and Russia with the aim to encourage North Korea to further open up. The other was his multilateral diplomacy to create a regional framework to ensure the peace on the Korean Peninsula. In March 1999, he met Prime Minister Obuchi of Japan in Seoul and agreed on the need for close cooperation among South Korea, Japan and the U.S. on North Korea-related issues. Mr. Obuchi expressed his support for Mr. Kim’s “Sunshine Policy”. Mr. Kim then visited Russia from May 27 to 30 as a state guest and met President Yeltsin. Mr. Kim explained his policy and asked support on it. Mr. Yeltsin supported it and emphasized the need for the steadfast advancement of “the Sunshine Policy”. However, the battle of the Western Sea between the ROK and DPRK put his “Sunshine Policy” in crisis. And yet, President Kim visited the U.S. and met President Clinton on July 2 to ask him to support the continuation of his policy. He also visited Canada as a state guest from July 4 to 6 and expressed his hope for a diplomatic normalization between Canada and North Korea.

On September 11, President Kim visited New Zealand to attend the APEC summit meeting. He proposed measures to prevent an economic crisis and succeeded in having his proposal included in the final communiqué with support by Japan and the United States. He also had his presence felt when he addressed the deteriorating situation in East Timor. This trip was also his official visit to New Zealand as a state guest and he gained support here again for his “Sunshine Policy” from the host government. Then, he visited Australia as a state guest and met with Prime Minister Howard to explain his policy. Mr. Howard supported Mr. Kim’s initiative and expressed his will to continue financial assistance to the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO).

On November 27, President Kim visited the Philippines as a state guest and attended the ASEAN plus 3 summit meeting there. On the sidelines, the first trilateral summit meeting among South Korea, Japan and China was held with the attendance of President Kim, Prime Minister Obuchi and Premier Zhu Rongji. It was Prime Minister Obuchi who proposed holding the meeting, and the three leaders agreed to hold the meetings regularly. Since then, the trilateral meetings have been held regularly. However, Prime Minister Abe, President Park and President Xi have yet to hold one.
5. From North-South Summit to Japan-North Korea Summit

In the third year of his term, when the country was considered to be emerging from the economic crisis, President Kim Dae-jung started a full-fledged effort to improve relations between the two Koreas. As I mentioned above, the first two years of his diplomacy had been laying the groundwork for it. In 2000, the first year of the new millennium, Kim Dae-jung wrote “New Millennium, New Hope” as his calligraphy message for the new year. On January 5, he convened a National Security Council meeting where he set the tone of the policy towards North Korea for the year as “improvement of the North-South relations.” Setting out four agendas for this purpose, namely, holding a North-South official meeting without preconditions, diversifying North-South exchange programs, enhancing North-South joint economic construction, and promoting inter-Korean family reunions separated during the Korean War, he expressed his hope to make a fresh start in “seriously promoting a process of bringing down the Cold War structure in the Korean Peninsula to establish stable peace.”

He kicked off his diplomacy in the year 2000 by visiting four European countries. Beginning on March 2, he visited Italy, the Vatican, France, and Germany. The so-called Berlin Declaration was announced in his speech at the Free University of Berlin. Its four main pillars were as follows: first, South Korea was ready to help North Korea to overcome its economic hardship, and for that purpose, would positively consider Pyongyang’s requests, if any, concerning needed cooperation between the two governments; second, South Korea hoped North Korea would accept its goodwill without any reservation and respond to its offer for cooperation and reconciliation; third, North Korea should respond to South Korea’s call for solving the problem of separated families; and, fourth, North Korea should agree to exchange special envoys as proposed by him in his inaugural address. The South Korean government had given North Korea the summary of his speech beforehand through its Minister of Unification. And then, on April 10, the South Korean government announced a historic inter-Korean summit meeting to be held from June 12 to 14.

Japanese Prime Minister Mori visited South Korea from May 28 to 29, and met with President Kim. In the meeting, Mori requested him that he convey to North Korea the Japanese government’s readiness to reopen the suspended negotiations with North Korea. President Kim attended the funeral of late Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi on June
8 even though an inter-Korean summit meeting scheduled for June 12 was imminent. After the funeral, he met U.S. President Clinton to explain Seoul’s position towards an inter-Korean summit and sought U.S. support.

And President Kim went to the Inter-Korean Summit to issue a historic North-South Joint Declaration on June 15. At the meeting of the State Council (cabinet) on June 16 held at the Blue House, President Kim summed up the achievements of the Inter-Korean Summit. The most important achievement, President Kim stated, was that similarity was found between a confederation proposed by the South and a federation proposed by the North as referred in Paragraph 2 of the Joint Declaration. He also stated that he fully transmitted the South’s opinion on the question of nuclear weapons and missiles and exchanged views on the U.S. Forces stationed in Korea. Stating that being self-reliant (juche) meant having good terms with all four neighboring countries and not denouncing any foreign nations, he reported that he conveyed Prime Minister Mori’s message in favor of improved relations with North Korea. Chairman Kim Jong-il said that he wanted President Kim to tell Prime Minister Mori that he received his message. President Kim later talked over the phone with President Clinton, Prime Minister Mori, and President Putin, and explained the results of the Inter-Korean Summit and asked for their support.

On the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum in Bangkok at the end of July 2000, the first ever U.S.-North Korea foreign ministerial meeting was held. U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met North Korean Foreign Minister Paek Nam-sun and she proposed a visit to the U.S. by a special envoy of North Korea. North Korea accepted her offer and sent Jo Myong-rok, First Vice-Chairman of the National Defence Commission, to the U.S. from October 9 to 12. Jo paid a courtesy visit to President Clinton, handing over a personal letter from Kim Jong-il. In the meantime, both sides issued a joint communiqué which stated that Secretary Albright would visit North Korea to prepare a visit by President Clinton and the two countries would take steps to fundamentally improve bilateral relations. In addition, both sides agreed that there were a variety of available means, including the Four Party talks, to reduce tensions on the Korean Peninsula and formally end the Korean War by replacing the 1953 Armistice Agreement with permanent peace agreements.

Secretary Albright went to Pyongyang on October 23. She visited Seoul on October 25 and reported on what she discussed in North Korea. Clinton’s planned visit to North
Korea was postponed and never materialized. With his visit becoming difficult to arrange, Clinton requested that Chairman Kim visit the U.S. However, Kim refused and U.S.-North Korea relations deteriorated.

On the other hand, the 3rd Summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was hosted by Seoul on October 20 and 21. It proposed a blueprint for a cooperative framework between Asia and Europe, adopting the Seoul Declaration for Peace on the Korean Peninsula. President Kim visited Brunei from November 11 to 17 to attend the APEC Leaders' Meeting. He argued before the world leaders attending for patient and active diplomatic engagement with North Korea. Through his efforts, the Chairman's statement mentioned the APEC's support for reconciliation efforts by North Korea and South Korea and for North Korea's participation in a task force of APEC at the official level as an invited member.

In November 23, 2000, in Singapore, the ASEAN-plus 3 Summit meeting was held, followed by the 2nd China-South Korea-Japan Summit on November 24. The leaders of the three countries issued a joint declaration that included the intent to hold a tripartite summit regularly and to begin joint studies to promote economic cooperation. At the meeting, President Kim made a 3-point proposal to further develop East Asia. Among his proposals was one to promote an entity for East Asian economic cooperation overarching Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, and to establish an East Asia Study Group to discuss concrete steps to achieve this.

However, as the U.S. administration was taken over by George W. Bush, who openly displayed distrust of North Korea, U.S.-North Korea relations started to suffer and North Korean attitudes hardened. This in turn made the U.S. policy towards North Korea even more hard-line. Then the 9/11 terrorist attack happened. President Bush declared North Korea as one of the countries that constituted his so-called Axis of Evil, which infuriated Pyongyang. The Sunshine policy was also faced with crisis. At this point, a helping hand was extended by Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to North Korea. Thanks to the Japan-North Korea Summit meeting, the momentum to build an East Asia community appeared to continue. However, negotiations between Japan and North Korea were hindered by the abduction issue. At the end of 2004, Japan announced the result of a DNA examination which showed that the remains that had been handed over to Japan by North Korea at an official level meeting was not that of Yokota Megumi, an abductee, as claimed by Pyongyang. Japan-North Korea negotiations then collapsed. At
the same time, the momentum to build an East Asian community was lost.

6. Conclusion – East Asia in Crisis and the Way to Revive Community Building Efforts

Now that Sino-U.S. relations has an important bearing on building a new regional order, at the center of regional cooperation in East Asia are peace and cooperation pursued through three bilateral relations, namely, South Korea and Japan, North Korea and South Korea, and North Korea and Japan. Among others, the South Korea-Japan relation is at the core. It was Kim Dae-jung who best understood that the bilateral relation with Japan was the centerpiece in building a peaceful and prosperous future in the East Asian region. In 1998, South Korea and Japan reached a new stage in their relationship. In 2000, North-South relations entered a new phase. In 2002, Japan and North Korea were about to enter a new stage in bilateral relations. Over the 4-year period through the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, a core triangle of a possible East Asian community was taking form. In my opinion, it was then when the concept of an East Asian community was closest to realization. The three sides of this triangle started to fall apart in 2005. The Japan-North Korea relation was brought to a halt, the South Korea-Japan relation was exposed to structural instability, and, the North-South rapprochement, which barely continued, was dealt a severe blow when North Korea formally declared its possession of nuclear weapons. Since then East Asia entered a critical period where confrontation and disputes could not be contained. And in Northeast Asia, the so-called “Abe Period”, where disputes between China and Japan or between South Korea and Japan continue on a day-to-day basis, has been ongoing.

Why should I call it the Abe Period to describe the present critical situation? It is because I want to emphasize that the situation since Prime Minister Abe took office is leading to a “northeast Asia upside-down” situation and reiterate the need for efforts to avoid the unraveling of the progress that had been made to establish a peaceful and cooperative regional order in Northeast Asia. At present in East Asia, China and Japan are in a “security dilemma” where each side makes an effort to enhance its security, which in turn increases mistrust of each other. With South Korea sucked into this security dilemma, a downward spiral towards instability is acquiring a structural nature. This is an upside-down situation. East Asia is faced with the absurd choice whether we should set off on a dangerous march into a future nobody wants or put up with a status quo that satisfies nobody.
To overcome such a dire situation, first and foremost we should normalize South Korea-Japan relations, moving next to normalize North-South relations, and lastly normalize the Japan-North Korea relations. We should put an East Asian community concept back onto the political agenda through these three processes toward normalization. What is really necessary is mending relations between South Korea and Japan. It is because both countries will only lose from being left in this structural downward spiral of instability. Only through developing their bilateral relations can South Korea and Japan surmount the limitations imposed by the confrontational situation in international politics.

At present, international political relations in Northeast Asia consists of a dual layer structure made up of Sino-U.S. relations and South Korea-Japan relations. The development of Sino-U.S. relations forms the upper layer of a new international order while the South Korea-Japan relations form the lower layer. These two layers of the international order either overlap each other or exclude each other in the course of development. The upper layer reflects a shift from the G2 to a “new Cold War.” The lower layer reflects another shift from alignment of “Japan as military bases and South Korea as a war theater” to “cooperation between Japan and South Korea as two middle powers.” If these two transformational processes intersect once again, the following two scenarios will emerge as realistic possibilities. One scenario is that South Korea-Japan cooperation is promoted as alignment of military bases and a war theater, which would compel the regional international order to a new Cold War-like situation. Such a reality would force Japan and South Korea to take on the attributes of military bases and a war theater respectively. Another scenario is that Japan and South Korea cooperate as middle powers, preventing an outbreak of a new Cold War, while inducing cooperation between China and the United States. With the ensuing Sino-U.S. cooperation, the South Korea-Japan cooperation would further become rock-solid.

In considering these hypothetical scenarios, it is clear what diplomatic agendas Japan and South Korea should take up. First, both countries need to renew their understanding of the position and the role that South Korea-Japan relations assume in international politics in East Asia. South Korea-Japan relations, acting as a link between South Korea-U.S.-Japan relations and South Korea-China-Japan relations, will offer South Korea an opportunity to augment its position as a lower layer player to that of an upper layer player by cooperating with Japan. Second, they should recognize that
the present situation where the understanding of history defines bilateral, if not tripartite, relations, is an aberration, not a norm.

When all is said and done, the most important task in overcoming the crisis in East Asia is mending the worsened ties between South Korea and Japan. As a starting point, we should look back to the bilateral relations in 1998 which was built by President Kim Dae-jung and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi based on the ROK-Japan joint declaration: A New ROK-Japan Partnership towards the 21st Century. Let me stress once again. A series of joint declarations issued every 2 years from the end of the last century to the beginning of this century in East Asia, namely the 1998 ROK-Japan Joint Declaration, the 2000 South-North Joint Declaration, and the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration of Japan and North Korea, are at the basis of the efforts to stabilize international relations in East Asia. Both South Korea and Japan should recognize this fact. This process was proceeding along with the goal of establishing an East Asian Community.

These joint declarations constitute a foundation to overcome the Cold War legacy in East Asia and rebuild an East Asia of peace and prosperity. Normalizing Japan-North Korea relations and stabilizing inter-Korean relations are the last remaining tasks in eliminating the Armistice regime that has been a hindrance to peace in East Asia and proceeding to a peace regime. South Korea-Japan relations are at the center in this effort.