

# The Nexus between Traditional and Non-Traditional Security Cooperation in Japan-China Relations: Environmental Security and the Construction of a Northeast Asian Region

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## Abstract

*This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of regional international relations by looking at bilateral and multilateral security cooperation. It focuses on the two major East Asian states, Japan and China. Mostly limited to questions of traditional security, Japan-China relations are often characterized as the result of a power shift, contentions about history or conflicting identities. However, since the 1990s, dynamics of globalization are dramatically changing and complicating the socio-economic and political environment in East Asia. It is thus necessary to analyze regional and bilateral security cooperation comprehensively. This paper therefore seeks to explain the nexus between questions of traditional and non-traditional security in Japan-China relations. It evaluates policy coordination through bilateral and multilateral channels in the areas of environmental security against the background of their overall security-political relationship since the mid-1990s. In this regard, the study analyzes the development of cooperation within the frameworks of the Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (TEMM) and the North-west Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP). Subsequently, it assesses the proposition that cooperation in areas of non-traditional security is politically easier to realize than cooperation in the area of traditional security, and that such functional cooperation is conducive to the improvement of international relations through the building of political trust. Finally, the study aims to contribute to the understanding of how dynamics of globalization transform the nature of international relations and influence the course of future regional cooperation in East Asia.*

## 1. Introduction

Over the past decades, waves of economic development caused a surge in intra-regional trade flows, which led to a certain degree of division of labor between East Asian countries and to the emergence of nascent regional structures. More importantly, the spread of similar patterns of increasing economic production and consumption, as well as other dynamics of globalization such as the accelerating spread of new means of telecommunication and transportation, are rapidly changing socio-economic conditions in Northeast Asia. Subsequently, social, energy, maritime, environmental, and human security issues became part of the political agendas. Given their transnational character, all of these developments foster the expansion of interests and practices beyond established boundaries.<sup>1</sup> Despite steadily growing interdependence, however, regional political cooperation has remained modest. Mutual distrust continues to hinder further integration of communities and prevents effective solutions to transnational security challenges. Most striking is the lack of collective action due to the complicated relations between the two major actors of the region, Japan and China.

By looking at Japan-China security relations, this study shall contribute to the understanding of regional cooperation in Northeast Asia. It analyzes the interplay between the manage-

ment of traditional security policy on the one hand and non-traditional security on the other. While traditional security involves the prevention and defense from attacks by organized, state-controlled armed forces, non-traditional security encompasses a wide range of threats to national and human security as well as the responses to them. Similar to neo-functionalist explanations of regionalism, it is often argued that East Asian regional cooperation in response to non-traditional security concerns is politically easier to achieve than cooperation in traditional security matters.<sup>2</sup> The main argument is that non-traditional security threats create imperatives for states and political communities to work together in order to solve the problems affecting their stability. Moreover, it is argued that cooperation in areas of non-traditional security in functional issues contributes to the building of political trust and therefore leads to enhanced international security-political cooperation. Other reasons might be that relevant issues are not associated with deliberate, targeted, and sudden state action which threatens the core national security interests of another state, that is, territorial and political control.

In the context of globalization and its important impact on East Asian states and societies, an important puzzle arises, involving the interlinking of non-traditional security problems and traditional national security concerns. This problem leads to the following questions: How did Japan-China cooperation in the area of non-traditional security develop since the mid-1990s compared to cooperation in areas of traditional security? Did the nature and quality of cooperation in non-traditional security differ from cooperation in traditional security? If so, what accounts for the differences? And why did cooperation in areas of non-traditional security happen in some cases and not in others?

Rapid industrialization and changing patterns of consumption as hallmarks of East Asian development lead to the increasingly salient depletion of natural resources and are the sources of transboundary air and ocean pollution. Therefore, environmental security—the focus of the present study—is of particular importance to regional cooperation.

This paper argues that, provided a basic political will, environmental security cooperation can serve as a diplomatic tool to develop and improve bilateral relations in the security-political sphere. The analysis of two cooperation mechanisms reveals that inter-governmental cooperation at the working level is fraught with various problems of collective action ranging from questions of financing and transparency to governing capacity. Despite the limited progress of environmental security cooperation at the working level, however, the study concludes that cooperative rhetoric and symbolic action, which put other countries in a positive light, are able to build political trust between states and societies. As a result of the growing awareness of the need for environmental protection, the fact that Northeast Asia is ecologically a region translates into enhanced political regional cooperation.

The argument is presented as follows. The second section of the paper clarifies the concept of security and discusses its application to environmental problems. The third section elaborates on how non-traditional security cooperation may lead to the improvement of political relations. The fourth section outlines the development of the security-political relationship between Tokyo and Beijing to be used as a benchmark. The fifth section explores environmental security cooperation in Japan-China relations at the high diplomatic level. The sixth and seventh sections assess environmental security cooperation at the ministerial and working levels by looking at the cases of the Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (TEMM) and the Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP). The final and concluding section assesses the proposition that environmental security cooperation is conducive to the improvement of bilateral relations and subsequently leads to better regional cooperation in Northeast Asia.

## 2. Security as Stability of Social Order

In order to operationalize the concept of security, it is necessary to answer the questions about the referent of security and the range and nature of threats that are of concern. The conceptualization of security developed by Buzan, Waever, and De Wilde<sup>3</sup> explains how specific issues become objects of security politics and analysis. An actor describes a problem or a phenomenon as something exceptional that is existentially threatening a specific referent object. The argument is that emergency measures that go beyond the common political process will need to be taken. The success of these securitization moves in the form of “speech-acts,” mostly performed by political actors, depends on whether the audience accepts it and adopts the threat perception. According to this definition, security is of a subjective quality and is essentially a product of communicative interaction. Caballero-Anthony et al.<sup>4</sup> point to the importance of closer analysis to determine why securitization occurs and how it takes place. This analysis includes questions about the motives and intentions of securitizing actors as well as the impact of securitization on political outcomes. The fact that certain social groups or individuals are often unable to voice their concerns in political processes means that securitization may not occur, despite the objective presence of existential threats to individuals and communities.

This study raises the question of whether the state as referent object is the appropriate unit of analysis. As Dupont stresses, “[T]he security of states has no real meaning if divorced from its human constituents.”<sup>5</sup> This is even more so when one tries to define the desirable outcome of activities to render human communities secure. Camilleri asserts that the critical issue is the maintenance of a social order that is able to generate sufficient degrees of confidence into the future.<sup>6</sup> Security is therefore a psychosocial condition. In an effort to give the concept explanatory power despite its multidimensional character, Camilleri, in line with McSweeney, conversely defines *insecurity* as “related to the experience of social disruption, the fragility of social relationships, the absence of cognitive control over, or affective empathy with, various forms of human interaction (which obviously include the ecological implications of such interaction).”<sup>7</sup> Camilleri consequently defines insecurity as the “perceived disruption—actual or potential—of the social order.” In this paradigm where insecurity is inextricably linked with the problem of collective identity, nationalism, and the nation-state are modern and far-reaching responses to the experience of insecurity.<sup>8</sup> However, problems such as the lack of capacity and good governance, as well as the increasing salience of transnational phenomena, challenge the conventional notion of states as single providers of security for their citizen. This is especially the case in East Asia, where the distinction between state and government is often blurred, as the latter itself is constituted by the ruling party. Opposing the ruling party therefore means opposing the state.<sup>9</sup> The resulting priority of the preservation of political power by governments has the implication that the safety and welfare of citizens, let alone environmental concerns, are of secondary importance. As a consequence, there can be no reliable analysis of security problems without a close look at the underlying social and institutional conditions.

With the development of new concepts of security after the end of the Cold War, it has become common to speak about environmental security, and globalization is increasingly understood in this context. The main reason is that beginning in the 20th Century, human development is characterized by the enormous expansion of the global population and its movement into urban areas. As a result, systems have been established to move various commodities from rural areas to burgeoning cities.<sup>10</sup> This phenomenon is especially true for Northeast Asia. The question is therefore what meaning environmental security has for the authorities in Tokyo and Beijing and how it influences bilateral relations. Empirical evidence does not support the general argument that environmental security problems lead to interstate conflict. Rather, environmental degradation does affect local communities and may contribute to domestic instability.<sup>11</sup> However,

transnational environmental problems do have high potential to affect the relations between states adversely.<sup>12</sup> In this context, it is useful to look at the securitization of environmental degradation because it shows how issues become part of political agendas and earn a certain level of priority. Securitization triggers two debates: one about the underlying risk assessment and one about the strategic answer to it. Moreover, if the security discourse persists, it will result in community building and institutionalization. De Wilde also notes that in large parts of these discourses, more often than the environment itself, the preservation of existing levels of civilization is the referent object. Ultimately, the debate is therefore about which groups (professions, industries, and countries) need to change their behavior in order to render the patterns of consumption sustainable and reduce the threats to common environmental security.<sup>13</sup> On this background, Deudney opposes the securitization of environmental problems and their linking with national security, as he fears that it would reinforce the “us”-versus-“them” thinking, which he sees as inherent to nations and apt to intensify interstate tensions.<sup>14</sup>

The analysis of official documents and the discourses among opinion leaders in Northeast Asia reveals that, with the exception of climate change and hydrocarbon supplies, environmental concerns are securitized only to a very limited extent. Instead, resource scarcity, pollution, and environmental degradation are widely understood as technical problems. One reason might be that the environmental security agenda, due to its dimensions which require the fundamental change of much of the present global structures in terms of world economy, international system, and cosmopolitan values, is simply unmanageable.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, environmental threats appear in various shapes and affect communities in different, often gradual ways, and to different extents. It is therefore difficult to include these phenomena in a consistent securitizing act. Lastly, those actors who would be in positions to securitize environmental problems, despite their salience in view of social stability, may not be interested in allowing for any social mobilization out of fear they may lose some political control.

Despite these drawbacks, the analytical lens of security studies is applied in this research as it provides a consistent conceptual framework, while also helping to answer the question of social (and political) mobilization with regard to international cooperation. The fact that non-traditional security concerns such as environmental scarcity and pollution are often of transnational character means that transnational and international cooperation is necessary to address these common problems. The strict adherence to norms of non-interference and classical understandings of state sovereignty often hinder pragmatic cooperation and even prevent effective domestic responses. The next section briefly reviews propositions for why and how increasing interdependence among states leads to stronger intergovernmental cooperation and may weaken the “us”-versus-“them” and “inside hierarchic order and security”-versus-“outside anarchy and insecurity” conceptions of the global system.

### **3. Explaining Regional Intergovernmental Cooperation**

In view of the difficulties in substantially improving the relations between Japan and China in the area of traditional security due to the lack of political trust, it is often argued that instead of focusing on the disputed issues only, one should shed more light and devote more effort to areas in which common interests can be identified more easily. It is argued that, by focusing on more technical questions, there are possibilities to build trust through cooperation that will eventually spill over into the security-political realm, and also help alleviate politico-military threat perceptions. At the least, such cooperation in East Asian maritime affairs in particular is seen as an effective confidence and security building measure.<sup>16</sup> This perspective becomes salient when the increasing interdependence of East Asia societies and states is considered.

The question to be explored is how, and under what conditions political communities are able to improve cooperation between them. Deutsch elaborated on several factors that determine political integration, understanding “‘state of mind’ or disposition to be cohesive, to act together, and to be committed to mutual programs.”<sup>17</sup> The argument that is most often invoked with regard to East Asia is that of the importance of shared functional interests. In his transactionalist approach, Deutsch points to the necessity of determining the relevance and extent of shared functional interests according to the belief of the people involved rather than on the basis of reality. Moreover, as functional interests may change, a closer look at the politically dominant interest groups is in order. Haas’ neofunctionalist approach is best known for the argument that cooperation in one sector generates spillover effects and leads to the deepening and the broadening of cooperation in other sectors, and eventually makes political loyalties shift to new institutions.<sup>18</sup> The weaknesses of the seminal works of Deutsch and Haas that make their approaches difficult to apply to Northeast Asia are twofold. First, the diversity of political and economic systems in the region means that the necessary background conditions are partly nonexistent.<sup>19</sup> Second, both approaches, although they do mention ideational factors, neglect the importance of socialization processes, which determine the values and norms held by political communities that consequently affect domestic as well as international integration.<sup>20</sup> With regard to security studies, the second shortcoming means that the interplay between so-called “high-politics” of traditional security and the “low-politics” of non-traditional security can hardly be explained.<sup>21</sup> In view of the salience of history disputes, territorial disputes, and military modernization that characterize international relations in East Asia, however, the discussion of changes in mutual images, norms of non-interference and sovereignty, as well as the construction of threat perceptions, is essential in explaining the lack of collective action.

In order to assess the influence of globalization dynamics on Northeast Asian international relations and the relevance of non-traditional security cooperation, this paper will first explore if and why cooperation in non-traditional security issues may be easier to achieve than cooperation in traditional security issues. Second, it seeks to verify and specify how functional cooperation may increase political trust between two state actors. Functional cooperation, or cooperation in non-traditional security issues, may be easier to realize between Japan and China because:

1. it is suitable for individual politicians to serve as diplomatic tools to bring positive contributions into high-level meetings with their foreign counterparts, and results from their efforts to show their constituencies;
2. it is less publicized in the media and is thus less risky for politicians in weak power positions to undertake; and they can sell compromises to their constituencies;
3. it is less controversial because the concerned issues do not directly affect founding myths (historical understandings) of a social group and a particular state;
4. compromising in functional areas is not perceived as reducing the state's own security in view of a threat from the other party, because non-traditional security threats do not originate from deliberate state action. As a result, structural (geopolitical) constraints are largely nonexistent;
5. it is easier to find non-controversial areas to engage the counterpart, because the possibilities for technical cooperation far outnumber the contentious issues of traditional security issues; and,
6. technical questions allow it to advance cooperation through small steps because they are often more complicated and can be deconstructed.

In short, one could ask whether the distinction between non-traditional security cooperation and traditional security cooperation is one of technical, fact-based action versus symbolic, idea-

tional actions of a state. With regard to the second argument to be assessed in this paper, functional cooperation, or non-traditional security cooperation, may build political trust because:

- A) functional cooperation reinforces the parties' qualities as partners, equal actors, and political subjects instead of making one party an object of international politics;
- B) successful cooperation demonstrates the ability and capacity of a political actor as a common problem-solver, thereby increasing its domestic and international legitimacy;
- C) it helps to de-securitize a relationship through technical dialogues, the exchange and generation of common knowledge, and the dissemination of this knowledge to increase transparency and predictability;
- D) it engages, nurtures, and creates cooperative elements (epistemic communities) of a social group or a state and gives each a bigger role;
- E) it allows for social mobilization and the strengthening of political leadership without the necessity of the "othering" of another social group or state; and,
- F) it increases the amount and the quality of communication between the respective state administrations.

In order to evaluate the similarities and differences between traditional and non-traditional security relations, the development of Japan-China bilateral cooperation in the area of traditional security shall be compared with the area of environmental security as an example of one non-traditional security concern. For the purpose of this research, environmental security is limited to transboundary ocean and air pollution that affects public health and has detrimental effects on farming and fishery in neighboring states.<sup>22</sup>

The sphere of environmental security has been chosen because it is increasing in salience due to the rapid growth of industrial production and consumption, and because of the enlargement of common markets combined with other systemic dynamics such as population growth, the spread of new technologies, and the increasing mobility of people. It is relevant since it is related to the ability of the respective societies to meet their basic needs, to secure and improve their living standards, and ultimately to maintain political stability. As a result, environmental issues are a significant factor in the bilateral relations between Japan and China. Moreover, national governments as regulators are heavily involved and remain important actors. Lastly, environmental cooperation is clearly more technical in nature and is purported, for the reasons outlined above, to offer better opportunities for cooperation between states than issues of traditional security.

In order to strengthen the analytical coherence of the study, the impact of climate change on international security and international cooperation is excluded because it is of global nature. Second, the study will not directly discuss the politics of Japanese official development assistance (ODA) to China. The reason is that ODA, as a term describing the way of funding, is a form of cooperation that is largely motivated by material incentives rather than being based on normative grounds. Thus, such forms of cooperation in which one party is paid for changing its behavior are less suitable for the assessment of understandings that may lead to policy-changes in the long-term. The mechanisms of the Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (TEMM) and the Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP) are chosen as case studies because they make it possible to cover three different levels of interaction between the Japanese and Chinese state administrations: the head of state (diplomatic), the ministerial, and the working level. Moreover, as indicated below, these mechanisms feature prominently on the foreign policy agendas of both Japan and China.<sup>23</sup> The cases do not necessarily provide enough evidence to generalize the conclusions. Nevertheless, the insights help to understand the argument that increasing

interdependence leads to better cooperation.

#### **4. The Evolution of Cooperation in Traditional Security between Japan and China**

In order to make the fields of traditional and non-traditional security comparable, it is not only necessary to outline the general trends, but also to describe the changing patterns of cooperation ranging from the head of state down to the working level. With regard to the general trends since the mid-1990s, two points are most important. First, the Japanese side is worried about the modernization drive of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which is accompanied and financially bolstered by the rapid growth of the Chinese economy. Prime Minister Hashimoto, during his visit to China in September 1997, clearly addressed this concern, which became more and more pronounced with the continued increases in defense spending, especially in the areas of strategic weapons, the air force, and the navy.<sup>24</sup> The Chinese navy's enhanced activities around Japan from spring 2000 on, along with the lack of transparency on matters of national defense, have contributed to rising threat perceptions until today.<sup>25</sup> Second, on the Chinese side, there is a longstanding anxiety over the status of Taiwan. China is equally anxious about the reaction of other East Asian states and the US to the increase of its political and military weight. In this regard, the development of more active Japanese security policies and the continued strengthening of the military alliance with the United States are of importance.<sup>26</sup>

When Prime Minister Hosokawa visited Beijing in March 1994, a series of cooperative projects in various fields were agreed upon. These plans included the resumption of the defense dialogues that had been suspended after the Tian An Men incident. Subsequently, bilateral security dialogues were held annually. These talks continued even through the difficult times when the tensions between Taiwan and the Mainland strongly affected Japan-China relations, the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute escalated, the Guidelines for US-Japanese Defense Cooperation were revised, and Prime Minister Hashimoto visited the Yasukuni Shrine in 1996.

On the occasion of the visit of Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian to Tokyo in February 1998, an agreement on defense exchanges was signed with the intention to give the previous meetings, which were largely symbolic and superficial, more depth and content.<sup>27</sup> During Jiang Zemin's visit to Japan in November 1998, similar to those in 1994 and 1997, a wide range of areas of cooperation were identified. Among the so-called thirty-three points were also new proposals for confidence and security building measures in the military sphere. These included the establishment of a "hotline" between Beijing and Tokyo through which, in case of an unforeseen incident, both governments could immediately clarify a critical situation related to national security with competent authority on the other side. Moreover, mutual port-calls by naval ships were proposed. The promotion of defense exchanges was again a main point on the agenda when the Chief of the Japan Defense Agency visited Beijing in May 1999. When Prime Minister Zhu Rongji visited Tokyo in October 2000 amid intense diplomatic negotiations on various issues—such as increased Chinese naval activities, the flaring up of the East China Sea territorial disputes, tensions between Taiwan and the Mainland, and Japan's UN Security Council bid—the hotline proposal had not yet been implemented, although it had been agreed upon in principle several times before.

Only in 2003, when the Chinese National Defense University and the Japanese National Institute of Defense Studies started to exchange colonel-class personnel, were the limited plans for defense exchanges put into practice.<sup>28</sup> A prior notice system for ocean research around disputed areas in the East China Sea, agreed upon by the foreign ministries in February 2001, could not prevent confrontations around the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. The situation became most critical in 2004 and 2005 when the Japan Coast Guard arrested Mainland activists on one of the

Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, and Beijing dispatched ships of the People's Liberation Army Navy to the island group.<sup>29</sup> Only after Prime Ministers Wen Jiabao and Shinzo Abe again agreed on mutual port calls of naval ships and defense exchanges in April 2007 were the proposals dating back to 1998 partly implemented. On the occasion of President Hu Jintao's visit to Japan in May 2008, there was an understanding that cooperation between Chinese and Japanese defense forces should be enhanced in areas such as disaster relief and peacekeeping operations down to the military unit level. The proposal of hotlines between political and defense authorities of Japan and China, however, has not been implemented until today. Nor does a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on search and rescue at sea between Japan and China exist, although the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) encourages littoral states to create one.<sup>30</sup>

Apparently, cooperation in the area of traditional security is strongly influenced by the changing state of bilateral political relations. While defense dialogues and exchanges became slightly more sophisticated over the years, they did not lead to an alleviation of mutual threat perceptions, and there was no significant progress in the area of security cooperation. When we explore the causes hindering the establishment of basic confidence and security building measures, not to mention political compromises to de-escalate tensions and build trust, several points are worth discussing in order to compare them with obstacles to cooperation in the non-traditional security sphere.

First, given their wartime history, there is a longstanding enmity between the military establishments in both countries, which may in many cases be rooted deeper than those among politicians, directly translating into threat perceptions and strategic calculations.<sup>31</sup> The Cold War and post-Cold War security order in East Asia did not change these perceptions.<sup>32</sup> Second, since military thinking and planning is designed and tasked to prepare the defense of national security interests in any contingency, territorial disputes in the East China Sea put the PLA and the Japan Self Defense Forces (JSDF) automatically in adversarial positions. Third, the prevailing public opinion of each country toward the other, coupled with the weakness of the incumbent political leaders, makes it difficult for politicians to compromise on territorial disputes and other long-standing controversial issues. As a result, there is not much room to improve the situation. The stalling of the cautious attempt of President Hu and Prime Minister Fukuda in 2008 to separate the exploration of natural gas in the East China Sea from territorial claims is a good illustration of this point. Chinese commentators saw the deal as giving in to groundless Japanese claims. An additional reason, however, may have been the change in political leadership with the election of Taro Aso to Prime Minister, and the increasing unpredictability due to the lack of political continuity in Tokyo. Fourth, structural (geopolitical) factors seem to inhibit the establishment of bilateral confidence and security building measures as well. In 2008, hotlines between the Chinese and Korean navies and air forces, as well as relevant Chinese and US authorities were set up. In contrast, different definitions of "hotline" seem to be the obstacle between Tokyo and Beijing. Thus, for the Japanese side, Beijing's desire to include information exchange on JSDF activities conducted under the US-Japan alliance, such as the prior notice of combined US-Japanese exercises, is not acceptable. On the other hand, the Chinese side has the impression that the Japanese authorities, due to their strong desire to not upset US interests and instead strengthen the alliance, show too little flexibility and are thus unable to conclude a reciprocal agreement when it comes to the exchange of information.<sup>33</sup>

In summary, one is compelled to conclude that in the area of traditional security cooperation, very little, if any substantial progress has been made since the mid-1990s, despite the significant improvement of diplomatic relations from September 2006 on. Against this backdrop, the significant cooling down of diplomatic relations around 1996, especially in the period from 2001 to 2006, provides a good frame of reference for a comparison with the evolution of cooperation



concerning non-traditional security matters.

## **5. Environmental Cooperation in High-level Bilateral Diplomatic Relations**

When Prime Minister Hosokawa visited Beijing in March 1994, the first agreement between Japan and China on environmental protection was signed. Its main purpose was to establish the “Japan-China Joint Committee on Environmental Protection and Cooperation,” which serves as a means to exchange views on environmental issues, as well as bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the field. In May 1996, to commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Japan-China peace treaty, the “Sino-Japan Friendship Center for Environmental Protection” and the “Japan-China Comprehensive Forum on Environmental Cooperation” were established.

At the bilateral summit between Prime Minister Hashimoto and President Jiang Zemin in September 1997, the project titled “Japan-China Environmental Cooperation Toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” was proposed. It consisted of two pillars: the “Japan-China Environmental Development Model Cities Plan,” and the “Project for Improvement in Environmental Information Network.” In his analysis of international relations in East Asia and between China and Japan, Prime Minister Hashimoto mentioned environmental issues, including climate change, energy conservation, and trade and investment as particularly important areas for bilateral cooperation.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently, in April 1999, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Joint Experts Meeting selected Guiyang, Chongqing, and Dalian as model cities, and the two governments agreed on the exchange of notes in regard to the portion of the 4<sup>th</sup> ODA Yen Loan that included related projects. During Jiang Zemin’s visit to Japan in November 1998, thirty-three points of cooperation, including environmental protection, were agreed upon. Also, as a positive gesture, Jiang brought with him the declaration of full membership of China in the Japan-sponsored initiative to monitor acid rain deposition in East Asia (EANET).<sup>35</sup> On the occasion of Prime Minister Obuchi’s July 1999 visit to Beijing, the Japanese leader proposed the establishment of a 10 billion yen fund in Japan, encouraging Japanese citizens’ groups and other bodies to engage in greening cooperation in China. The proposal was meant to become a third pillar in Japan-China environmental cooperation, together with the two initiatives undertaken by his predecessors Takeshita and Hashimoto. Japanese assistance to China in environmental protection continued as the priority of the revised ODA policy implemented in 2001.<sup>36</sup> However, environmental cooperation only resurfaced in official statements again, together with other areas, when Prime Minister Abe visited Beijing in October 2006.<sup>37</sup>

The plan to promote bilateral relations with environmental cooperation became more concrete when Wen Jiabao visited Tokyo in April 2007. Now, environmental cooperation was declared as one of the main means, and a significant one, to “construct a mutually beneficial strategic relationship based on common strategic interests.” The “Joint Statement on the Enhancement of Cooperation for Environmental Protection” included a comprehensive and detailed list of areas and projects in which cooperation should be enhanced. Moreover, the statement explicitly mentioned the Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (TEMM), the Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP), the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET), and ASEAN+3 as frameworks to promote regional environmental cooperation. Bilateral mechanisms such as the Japan-China Joint Committee on Environmental Protection and Cooperation, the Japan-China Comprehensive Forum on Environmental Cooperation, and the Sino-Japan Friendship Center for Environmental Protection were included as well.<sup>38</sup> On the occasion of the visit of Hu Jintao to Japan in May 2008, a number of cooperation projects related to environmental protection and management were positively mentioned and enhanced cooperation was agreed upon.<sup>39</sup> Finally, when Communist Party of China’s (CPC) Politburo Standing Committee Member Li Changchun (the head of the CPC’s propaganda department) visited Tokyo in March 2009, the main message

delivered to the public was the call for enhanced environmental cooperation. In addition to those mentioned above, environmental issues were included as items on the agendas of the meetings between China, South Korea and Japan on the sidelines of ASEAN+3. These included the Tripartite Environment Ministers Meetings (TEMM), the Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP), and others.<sup>40</sup>

From the analysis of the official press releases, statements, and declarations associated with the above events, one can conclude the following. First, environmental protection is seen as a common interest and is frequently put forward as a means to strengthen bilateral and regional cooperation. Second, when political relations are most tense, environmental cooperation is not mentioned because there is no will to cooperate, or even communicate. The diplomatic use of environmental cooperation suggests that the impetus required to start major projects presupposes a relatively improved political situation and mutual willingness to advance by changing the basic framework of bilateral relations. This was the case in 1994, 1998, and 2007, but not during the period from 2001 to September 2006. The following sections will look at two cases in order to analyze the nexus between environmental cooperation and traditional security cooperation at the ministerial and working levels.

## **6. The Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (TEMM)**

The TEMM mechanism, established in 1999, is the highest level of intergovernmental cooperation on environment in Northeast Asia. At the annual meetings, the three environment ministers from Japan, China, and South Korea exchange information, views, and concerns about regional problems. They also discuss potential measures to address those problems and further promote environmental cooperation. Additionally, there exists a working group that acts as secretariat and proposal-making body. Recently, an ad hoc working group of the three Directors-General has also been convened to address dust and sandstorm problems. The priority areas of TEMM are: (1) raising the awareness that the three countries belong to the same environmental community; (2) promoting information exchange; (3) strengthening cooperation in environmental research; (4) fostering cooperation in environment-related industries and transfer of environmental technologies; (5) exploring appropriate measures to prevent air pollution and to protect the marine environment; and (6) strengthening cooperation to address global environmental issues such as biodiversity and climate change. In addition, the scope of meetings was expanded to include waste management, chemical pollution, energy, water-related issues, as well as the reconstruction of societies upon sound material cycles and circular economies.<sup>41</sup>

Over the last ten years, annual meetings were hosted and chaired on a rotating basis. Each meeting produced a joint communiqué and identified various projects within the priority areas listed above. Thus, according to those involved, officials of the three countries have been working closely together and built mutual trust.<sup>42</sup> In this respect, personal relationships are explicitly mentioned as being significant to ensure the sustainability of TEMM. As such, it is probably the politically most stable mechanism among the three countries, only comparable to the finance ministers meetings.<sup>43</sup> Despite the fact that the projects implemented by TEMM have been small compared to the environmental problems in the region, its importance for concrete outcomes in the promotion of environmental cooperation in the region is allegedly widely acknowledged.<sup>44</sup>

A closer look at the joint communiqués of the annual meetings shows that there have been discussions on various environmental concerns, as well as approaches and initiatives to address them. Also, the agenda has been expanded to include new and increasingly salient problems such as marine litter and transboundary movement of hazardous wastes. While the joint communiqué of 2004 reveals that there has been discontent because of the lack of output orientation, effective-

ness and efficiency of TEMM projects, the more recent communiqués all convey the message that the cooperation at the ministerial level has been good and that TEMM projects have been output-oriented and effective. The communiqués do acknowledge, however, the need for the promotion of collaborative research, information and data exchange, and the enhancement of specific measures to address environmental degradation in Northeast Asia.<sup>45</sup> In order to make TEMM more efficient and able to contribute more to the management of the regional environment, a recent tripartite report proposed to lay down basic principles and objectives of TEMM, to set up a secretariat, to create a body for proposal-making and implementation supervision, to establish a financial mechanism, and to coordinate project implementation.<sup>46</sup>

Various programmes and projects undertaken at the national and multilateral level are regularly recognized as important and worth supporting by the three ministers. This includes initiatives such as the COOL BIZ campaign which obliges Japanese government officials to work in offices with air-conditioning set at 28°C in summer while being allowed to dress less formally. At the same time, other concerns and programs such as acid deposition, waste management, and ocean pollution have been continuously discussed with little, if any, visible progress over the years. This result suggests that TEMM operates at the lowest common denominator. While the commissioning of a tripartite research report on environmental management in Northeast Asia may be seen as an achievement, better coordination among the various initiatives is urgently needed if substantial progress is to be made.<sup>47</sup> This situation has not changed since the publication of previous research.<sup>48</sup> Apart from the fact that projects implemented under the auspices of TEMM are small-scale and mostly limited to the organization of conferences and workshops, it remains questionable whether TEMM has been able to provide political impetus and support for more substantial projects in priority areas.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, TEMM seems to be a political-diplomatic success as the working atmosphere between the ministers has been good and constructive, despite considerable diplomatic tensions between the countries, like those in 2004 and 2005.

TEMM is arguably the most important mechanism for the promotion of environmental cooperation in Northeast Asia and is an indication of the strong will of the participants to cooperate on matters related to the environment.<sup>50</sup> Thus, it can be seen as an umbrella framework within which other initiatives and projects are conducted. In order to see how the allegedly good cooperation at the ministerial level translates into effective action, it is necessary to analyze the progress of specific projects that have been implemented under the political sponsorship of the three environment ministries. The following section therefore aims to assess the effective output of environmental cooperation by looking at a project repeatedly mentioned in the TEMM joint communiqués, the Northwest Pacific Action Plan.

## **7. The Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP)**

NOWPAP was adopted by the People's Republic of China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia as part of the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Regional Seas Programme in 1994. This form of cooperation dates back to 1991, when national representatives of the four countries met in Vladivostok to discuss an action plan for the environmental management of the Northwest Pacific.<sup>51</sup> The overall goal of NOWPAP is "the wise use and development of the coastal and marine environment so as to obtain the utmost long-term benefits for the human population of the region while protecting human health, ecological integrity, and the region's sustainability for future generations." More precisely, this plan leads to a strategy for wise management of the Northwest Pacific area which consists of five elements: monitoring and assessment of the environmental condition; creation of an efficient and effective information base; integrated coastal area planning; integrated coastal area management; and the establishment of a collabora-

tive and cooperative framework.<sup>52</sup>

The implementation of the action plan is principally to be financed by the member states' contributions to a trust fund of at least 400,000 US Dollars (USD) annually. Initial financial and administrative support was available from UNEP while the littoral states are responsible for the plan's implementation. The annual intergovernmental meetings (IGM) represent the main governing body of NOWPAP. Moreover, UNEP was aiming for the early establishment of a regional coordinating unit (RCU) to be responsible for the execution and coordination of the projects under the action plan.

The following history shows the most important steps in the development of the regional action plan and its implementation. The first IGM in 1994 formally adopted the action plan and included the identification of five priority areas. The second IGM in 1996 approved the geographical scope and a tentative scale of contributions to the trust fund for 1997. The fourth IGM in 1999 led to the agreement on the establishment of four Regional Activity Centres (RAC). The sixth IGM in 2000 agreed in principle to establish a co-hosted regional coordinating unit (RCU) in Toyama, Japan and Busan, South Korea. The seventh IGM in 2002 led to a detailed agreement on a plan for the establishment of the RCU in Toyama and Busan. Moreover, in 2002, the RACs in Beijing (Data & Information Network RAC/DINRAC), Daejeon (Marine Environmental Emergency Preparedness & Response RAC/MERRAC), Toyama (Special Monitoring & Coastal Environmental Assessment RAC/CEARAC), and Vladivostok (Pollution Monitoring RAC/POMRAC) became operational. The technical coordination and information exchange between the four RAC's and the RCU on their respective projects, apart from the IGM, is ensured through so-called national Focal Points Meetings (FPM) held annually by each RAC. The eighth IGM in 2003 adopted the NOWPAP regional oil spill contingency plan. In 2004, the co-hosted RCU was opened in Busan and Toyama and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Regional Cooperation Regarding Preparedness and Response to Oil Spills was signed. The tenth IGM in 2005 approved new directions for RAC's, expanded the geographical coverage of the NOWPAP oil spill contingency plan, and approved a marine litter activity. The twelfth IGM in 2007 approved, in principle, the draft of a regional action plan on marine litter and the draft text of the NOWPAP Regional Oil Spill Contingency Plan, expanded to include noxious substance spills. The latter was formally adopted at the thirteenth IGM in 2008. Most recently, the fourteenth IGM in 2009 agreed on the development of a project on the assessment of the current status of marine and coastal biodiversity in the NOWPAP region.

Looking at the development of the NOWPAP mechanism, we note that steady progress has been made in terms of organizational development and the implementation of projects. The biggest success of NOWPAP is the MOU on a regional contingency plan in the event of oil and noxious substance spills. Subsequently, oil spill exercises were conducted in the Aniva Bay (Sakhalin) in 2006 by Russia and Japan, and in 2008 near Qingdao with participation of South Korea and China. The NOWPAP contingency plan went through a reality check when Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian authorities joined hands to fight "the worst ever oil spill in the Korean history," which happened in December 2007 near the port of Incheon.<sup>53</sup>

A first complication in regional cooperation happened when Japan and South Korea could not agree on where to establish the regional coordinating unit (RCU). Both countries vied for the leadership and control in establishing NOWPAP. Eventually, its functions were split between a branch in Busan and one in Toyama, and UNEP stayed in charge of it. The most pressing concern, however, was financial. NOWPAP started with the goal of establishing an initial trust fund of \$400,000. For the year 2008, the tentative contributions of Japan and South Korea covered the major shares of \$125,000 and \$100,000, respectively, while Russia was ready to commit \$50,000, and China, \$40,000.<sup>54</sup> Here, it is necessary to note that Russia did not contribute for about eight years. Moreover, the operation of the two-site RCU consumes a big proportion of the

small budget.<sup>55</sup> Given the enormous problems with water and air pollution around industrial areas, NOWPAP, focused on environmental protection in coastal areas, is of second or third priority to the Chinese government. This attention may differ from that which Japan and South Korea attach to the protection of their long coastlines. Moreover, there is a general attitude in China that developed countries carry greater responsibility and need to take on a bigger burden in environmental protection, since their earlier economic development caused irreversible environmental damages. As a result, China is willing to increase its contribution proportionately based on the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities," if other countries increase their shares. While Seoul is relatively flexible, Tokyo seems only willing to increase its share if Beijing shoulders a proportionately bigger share.<sup>56</sup>

When it comes to the technical operation of NOWPAP RACs, the diverging national priorities are also reflected. Japan attaches importance to marine litter and coastal environmental assessment whereas South Korea and China want to focus on alien invasive species in the future. While this kind of technical discussion is inherent to multilateral frameworks, the differences grow in salience when the tight budget and unequal cost-sharing are considered. Further, the administrative structures in each state are prone to complicate national and international cooperation. In China, the Ministry of Environmental Protection is responsible for NOWPAP while the effective environmental management of coastal and marine areas is in the realm of the State Ocean Administration, directly subordinate to the State Council and therefore not obliged to report to the Ministry of Environmental Protection. Issues related to sea-traffic, on the other hand, fall into the competence of the Ministry of Transportation's Maritime Safety Administration (MSA), and the ships of the Fishery Bureau of the Ministry of Agriculture patrol the seas as well.<sup>57</sup> In Japan, the Coast Guard, as part of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport is comprehensively responsible for the coastal environment and needs to coordinate with the Ministry of the Environment. The inter-agency coordination problem becomes even more pronounced when considering the important role of local governments in the success of reaching NOWPAP's goals. Despite this fact, NOWPAP does not include local governments. It can thus be concluded that maritime environmental management, which naturally includes coastal areas, is a complex undertaking, as it requires extensive national and international collaboration. A further major obstacle to effective environmental management has been the unwillingness, and partly the inability, of national agencies and the involved researchers to disclose and exchange scientific data within NOWPAP. This shortcoming is very significant as consensual scientific knowledge is the indispensable base for any future strategies and projects. Another political issue that affects the goal of NOWPAP is the absence of North Korea in the framework. Last, but not insignificant, are the difficulties caused by the lack of English language competence among the involved officials.<sup>58</sup> According to one source, this limitation stands in contrast to the UNEP Regional Seas Program covering Southeast Asia, where communication between officials is much easier in this respect.

In summary, one is compelled to conclude that the positive rhetoric at high-level meetings between heads of state, prime ministers, and environment ministers, which have very often stressed the importance of environmental protection and programs such as NOWPAP in particular, has not translated into much action and output at the working level. Although there have been a number of concrete projects implemented, they remain small scale, are insufficiently coordinated, and suffer from basic problems due to the lack of political will to invest resources and cooperate better. Does this mean that the cooperation in environmental security is meaningless for the improvement of the security-political relations between Japan and China?

## **8. Conclusion: The Meaning of Environmental Security Cooperation for Northeast Asia**

The first part of this section determines whether and why cooperation is politically easier to realize in environmental security issues than in traditional security issues. From the analysis of high-level diplomatic meetings since the mid-1990s, it can be concluded that environmental cooperation serves as a diplomatic tool to promote intergovernmental cooperation between Japan and China. This is possible since there is an understanding that the advancement of environmental protection is a win-win situation for all. In this area, both countries have been able to find a role that is acceptable to them. While China can learn from Japan's experience and technological knowledge to alleviate its environmental problems, Japanese firms are able to sell their products and services while reducing the negative effects of environmental degradation originating in China and affecting Japan. This kind of cooperation is therefore seen as mutually beneficial. However, the lack of progress between 2001 and 2006 shows that a basic willingness for cooperation at the top political level is a precondition for the improvement of existing cooperation, as well as for the establishment of new frameworks of intergovernmental cooperation.

Despite the prevailing mistrust, cooperation in environmental protection may be easier to achieve because it is not considered to be politically sensitive. This means that politicians and bureaucrats who cooperate with the other side are far less scrutinized for the engagement with the difficult neighbor. One reason is that environmental security cooperation does not touch upon questions that are linked with the historical understandings that underpin the modern Japanese and Chinese states.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, environmental problems are perceived to be more connected to the lack of governing capacity than to deliberate hostile action of one state against another. Cooperation in this field is therefore not seen as potentially harming national security. This may also be the reason why structural constraints in the form of geopolitical calculations that inhibit confidence building in the traditional security sphere are affecting environmental cooperation much less.

Furthermore, cooperation is most likely facilitated because the area of environmental protection offers a wide range of potential projects such as those seen in the discussions of the three environmental ministers at TEMM. These issues are often very technical in nature. As technicalities are rather complex for the public to understand, and discourses about environmental security are highly fragmented, it is possible to undertake relatively small cooperative projects and advertise them in a positive light without the need to take high financial and political risks. The assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency depends on the small groups of experts involved, and the possibility to gain an overall picture is even more difficult for the general public. Cooperation projects such as TEMM and NOWPAP, once established, continue to run despite diplomatic tensions. Only when frameworks of cooperation are to be upgraded, the political dimension comes into play again. As higher authorities need to commit financial and other resources, and review and establish new procedures and understandings of how to relate to the other side, political concerns start to affect functional cooperation significantly again.

With regard to the question of whether and how environmental security cooperation can build trust in the security-political area, a few conclusions may be drawn. As demonstrated above, the area of environmental security is very useful to engage in cooperative rhetoric and positive (symbolic) action. This tactic may help counter negative images and threat perceptions in the politico-security area. Despite the limited output of the few and rather small-scale environmental protection projects, and the reluctance to exchange scientific data, cooperative action is likely to contribute to the de-securitization of the bilateral relationship. Because security-political frictions also are created and reinforced by symbolic and rhetoric action, they can—and probably even need to—be improved by symbolic and rhetoric action as well. Instead of depicting the other

side as a potential enemy or rival, environmental security cooperation helps politicians who are willing to find a *modus vivendi* engage in positive identification of the other party as a partner.

There are limitations of this effect, however. In view of the relatively small scale of cooperative action and the consequently weak environmental management, the proposition that environmental security cooperation reinforces states' capacity as problem-solvers and allows for social mobilization without the "othering" of one party could not be confirmed by this study. As soon as environmental problems become bigger and threaten bilateral relations more directly, calls for output-oriented action on a bigger scale may become louder. Subsequently, conflicts over priorities and cost-sharing may challenge the cooperative symbolism and limit positive effects on political relations between neighboring countries. The differences in political commitment, willingness to bear costs equally, and ability to improve state capacity may also lead to additional complications. If solutions to new challenges can be found and new roles established, cooperation may be elevated to higher levels, lead to stronger cooperation, and produce positive spill-over effects into the political sphere. However, in order to gain reliable insights into such mechanisms, further research encompassing several case studies in various spheres of functional cooperation should be undertaken.

Last, it should not be forgotten that this study did not assess one of the outstanding strengths of cooperation in environmental security, which is the involvement of stakeholders beyond the national level. Since environmental issues directly concern societies across state boundaries, the engagement in environmental protection has the potential to bring not only politicians and bureaucrats but also provincial and local governments, as well as civil society actors in contact.

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that, given the fact that Northeast Asia is ecologically already a region, the slowly growing awareness of the need to protect the environment is conducive to the political construction of Northeast Asia. First, environmental security cooperation serves as a substitute for the lack of confidence and security building measures in the traditional security sphere and contributes to the improvement of Japanese-Chinese relations which are central to any region-building project. Second, cooperation in environmental management, together with functional cooperation in other areas, can serve as a means to enhance mutual knowledge among Northeast Asian societies; it also has the potential to change negative images and roles based on previous and outdated understandings. Third, environmental security cooperation needs to take into account the imperatives of regional ecological interdependence, after which it may eventually promote political awareness of their common existence in a Northeast Asian region.

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