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## **The promise of neo-functionalism beyond Europe: the case of Japan–South Korea relations**

### **Abstract**

*Northeast Asia accounts for one of the most well-developed regions with the world's three largest economic powers. However, as former South Korean President Park Geun-hye described, it also constitutes a “paradox.” On one hand, states are able to successfully cooperate on the economic basis. On the other hand, there are a number of obstacles, involving primarily unresolved historical issues and security concerns, that impede further regional collaboration. The aim of the article is to analyse the process of regional integration in Northeast Asia, with particular focus on Japan – Republic of Korea relations, through the lenses of neo-functionalism. The essay seeks to determine whether this approach could lead to increasing transnational ties in the region and ultimately improve international relations on bilateral and multilateral basis. Neo-functional theory of regional integration has been mostly applied to research on the European integration process. Consequently, there have been few attempts of testing its assumptions in other regions. Nevertheless, there seems to be substantial evidence to perceive neo-functionalism as a promising theoretical approach beyond Europe. Since neo-functionalists place supranational, transnational and sub-national actors at the centre of the analysis, the article, apart from the economic dimension, will elaborate on the potential of existing international structure, namely the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat.*

**Keywords:** *Northeast Asia, Japan – South Korea Relations, Neo-functionalism, Regional integration*

## 1. Introduction

Northeast Asia constitutes one of the most dynamic political and security environments, with both advanced and vastly developing economies, growing competition and enduring division of the Korean Peninsula. In addition, the region is not immune to the transnational challenges such as terrorism or environmental changes. It seems that those circumstances should allow enhanced cooperation among the states. Yet, the region still lacks such advanced institutionalised mechanisms, and collaboration is often limited to the case to case basis, focusing mostly on the economic issues. Whereas some public officials (Park 2012) and scholars (Duus 2017, p. 11) view the region primarily in terms of historical issues and memory, others provide arguments concentrating on security threats that some states, in particular the People's Republic of China (PRC) pose to others in the region (e.g. Oros 2017), or to the complex alliance structures (Cha 2000, p. 263).

This article analyses the process of regional integration in Northeast Asia, with a particular focus on the case of Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). The essay attempts to answer the questions on what are the biggest challenges for the cooperation mechanism to occur on a structured basis between the two states and subsequently how the relations between Japan and South Korea can be advanced. It is important to note, that despite recognizing the major role of other powers in the region, namely China and the United States, and their partial influence on the Japan – ROK relations, the broader context of affairs in Northeast Asia remains largely beyond the scope of this study.

Based on those research questions three hypotheses have been established. First, it is argued that neo-functional theory of regional integration can be applied outside of the European integration context, including the case of Northeast Asia. Second, the article aims to demonstrate that the controversies rooted in the historical issues still constitute one of the major obstacles in the bilateral relations between Japan and South Korea, effectively impeding advanced collaboration. It should be mentioned however, that while the essay argues for the significance of historical context and its impact on the current relations, presented arguments are based primarily on recent policy developments. Lastly, the article implies that the foundations necessary for the success of integration process, as seen through the lenses of neo-functionalism, are already present in the region. With respect to this assumption, the arguments concerning the role of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) has been examined.

At the theoretical level, the abovementioned neo-functional paradigm is preminent. In terms of specific methods, the main ones include historical analysis, document and text analysis, as well as statistical analysis. The first one was applied in the analysis of the historical issues concerning the Japanese occupation of Korean Peninsula, that still remain critically important when it comes to determining the current relationship between the two states. Document and text analysis was used in order to support the argument relating to the potential of TCS in the context of regional integration. Official reports and joint declarations issued by the organisation were assessed. The statistical analysis based on the data from the World Bank, will be applied to support argumentation relating to the economic relations between Japan and ROK.

With reference to scientific works, the article concerns three separate bodies of literature, namely on (1) neo-functional theory of regional integration, (2) Japan – Republic of Korea relations, and (3) integration efforts in Northeast Asia. Among the publications relating to the theoretical framework, the ones authored by Ernst B. Haas (2001, pp. 22–31) and Thomas Gehring (1996, pp. 225–253) provide insights to early development and evolution of neo-functional arguments. The report by Phillip C. Schmitter and Sunhyuk Kim (2005) demonstrates that the paradigm could be applied to Northeast Asia. With respect to the Japan – South Korea affairs, the body of literature is extensive. The history problem in current relations between the two states is well demonstrated in the volumes edited respectively by Daniel Chiriot, Gi-Wook Shin, Daniel Sneider (2014), Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, Kazuhiko Togo (2008), and the book authored by Brad Glosserman and Scott Snyder (2015), among many others. Lastly, different aspects of integration in Northeast Asia have also been widely analysed, including the economic dimension (e.g. Aggarval & Gyo Koo 2005, pp. 189–216 & 2008, pp. 1–35; Grabowski 2015), as well as the security and politics (Pollack 2016; Wissenbach 2013, pp. 205–221).

The article has been divided into three parts. The first one provides the theoretical basis and summarizes the main assumptions of neo-functional theory of regional integration. The second part concentrates on the current state of relations between Japan and South Korea, as seen both from political and economic perspectives, including the impact of the historical issue. The last section concerns the potential of facilitating the process of integration between those two states, and in Northeast Asia region more broadly, through applying the assumptions of neo-functionalism.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Ne-functional theory of regional integration has originated and been developed mostly with regards to the European integration process, despite the initial attempts to develop the general theory of regional integration (Haas 2001, p. 23). As a consequence, it doesn't account for an obvious choice of a theoretical approach towards integration in Northeast Asia. Despite the sceptical stance of some scholars concerning the application of neo-functionalism beyond Europe, either in terms of different conditions of interdependence and economic development (Börzel 2016, p. 513), or undermining the role of the states in the process (Conzelmann 2014, p. 100), others have underlined such possibility (Rosamond 2005, pp. 245–246) or even treated the EU case as the best example for studying regionalism elsewhere due to its extensive achievements (Schmitter & Kim 2005, p. 1). Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that attempts to test and apply this paradigm in other regions were strengthened by the evolution of the approach itself that occurred in 1980s. Neo-functionalism, struggling with the crisis of integration in Europe, moved away from the efforts of creating a grand theory (Strøby Jensen 2003, p. 83).

The focal point of the neo-functional research concerns the process of regional integration, and more specifically, how it is initiated and further developed. Primarily, the emphasis is placed on the non-state actors, such as political parties, non-governmental or business organizations who create and lead initial demand for undertaking integration efforts. At the same time, neo-functionalists acknowledge the key role of supranational actor, created by the states in the form of regional, international or inter-governmental organisation (Börzel 2016, p. 42). Ultimately, the core idea concerns the notion of political integration through initial economic cooperation that leads to gradual deepening of mutual interests. In that sense, the paradigm is very much progress-oriented (Gehring 1996, p. 229).

The main assumptions of neo-functionalism include the concepts of transnationalism and *spillover*, as well as the role of the secretariat of regional organisation. With respect to the first one, despite strong links to neo-functionalism, it has been identified mostly as a feature within the complex interdependence model developed by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (Risse 2013, p. 429). Initially, those authors also provided a definition of transnational relations as “contacts, coalitions, and interactions across state boundaries that are not controlled by the central foreign policy organs of government” (Nye & Keohane 1971, p. 331). This however

equally applies to the neo-functionalism, where transnationalism constitutes a fundamental feature of the integration process. Such nature of the mechanism is essential for sub-national units to cooperate efficiently across the borders in order to initiate and uphold integration efforts, and for the people-to-people relations to be enforced.

The next of the main assumptions concerns the concept of *spillover* which refers to a mechanism of transferring integration goals – achieving the purpose within one area of cooperation gradually leads to joint initiatives and creating common interests in different ones (Strøby Jensen 2003, p. 81). The idea itself is dimensional, however, as three types of *spillover* have been distinguished within the literature, mostly referring to the process of European integration. As Thomas Conzelmann noted (2014, pp. 94–95), the “functional” *spillover* marks the initial phase as it only concerns the economic cooperation, where results can be achieved relatively quickly without a substantial political capital. The “political” one deals with the cooperation and contacts across the borders and sub-national actors gradually shifting their agenda to the supranational level. Lastly, the “cultivated” type refers to the supranational units and their potential in enhancing both economic and political integration between the states in the region.

Before the analysis moves on to the subsequent arguments, several thoughts concerning neo-functionalism and its application beyond European integration process should be noted. First, as mentioned before, throughout its development, the paradigm has been linked, and almost exclusively attributed to the European Union. Although it does not mean that its assumptions cannot be tested elsewhere. Such attempts should be made carefully, and with the inclusion of specific regional conditions. Second, neo-functionalism not only offers the foundations for analysing the initial phase of the regional integration process concentrated on economic dimensions, but also claims to provide explanations regarding more forward mechanisms, especially at the supranational level. Hence, it is important to determine whether such premises can be applied at this stage of the Japan – South Korea relations, that are still at the initial rather than advanced stage of integration in the eyes of neo-functionalists. Ultimately, this analysis aims to review the current affairs between the two states, and establish the elements of the neo-functional agenda that have the potential of leading to major shift in the relations, both between the two states, and within Northeast Asia in general.

### 3. Japan and ROK relations in the light of the “Asia’s paradox”

Despite the ongoing controversies in bilateral relations, there is no dispute that Japan and South Korea have made substantial progress in both economic, and political areas of cooperation since the formal establishment of diplomatic relations in 1965. Furthermore, the two states, along with others in Northeast Asia region, regardless of the lack of institutionalised form of integration, have managed to equalize the success of the European Union when it comes to peace and well-being of its citizens, though prioritizing their welfare (Wissenbach 2013, pp. 207, 212). With the new reality of the international system after the Cold War, the countries in the region have proposed a number of economic initiatives throughout 1990s (Aggarwal & Gyo Koo 2008, p. 11), though they have not resulted in institutionalisation of cooperation at the regional level. Furthermore, there have also been attempts to establish multilateral forums of security cooperation. For instance, the Six-Party Talks process, designed to deal with the nuclear threat from North Korea, according to Haggard and Noland (2009, pp. 120–124), could have provided a starting point for the future institutional cooperation in Northeast Asia. Then there were also ideas of South Korean presidents, including Kim Dae Jung’s Northeast Asian Security Dialogue, Roo Moo Hyun’s Northeast Asian zone of peace and prosperity (*ibid.*, p. 129), and more recently Park Geun-hye’s Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI). The latter, launched for the purpose of enhancing mutual trust and alter the hostile environment among the states in the region, was a key foreign policy proposal of the Park administration (Kim 2017, p. 4). However, NAPCI, along with the former initiatives have all proved insufficient in overcoming existing barriers. Those difficulties concern historical animosities and territorial matters that continue to impede further cooperation, in spite of common interests. This has become even more evident since 2013 with the change of political leadership in both South Korea and Japan.<sup>1</sup> In 2012, then presidential candidate Park Geun-hye coined the term “Asia’s paradox,” and called it “the single most important obstacle that has to be overcome by the region’s leaders” (Park 2012). She used the phrase to describe contemporary relations in Northeast Asia, characterised, on one

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<sup>1</sup> Shinzō Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party won the general election in December 2012, while Park Geun-hye became president of South Korea in February 2013.

hand, by increasing interconnectedness and global economic relevance, and simultaneous tensions among the states on the other. Nevertheless, acknowledging those issues and subsequent development of NAPCI didn't lead to major breakthrough in bilateral relations between Japan and ROK, partly due to the stance of the leaders themselves. President Park's pre-existing condition of coming to terms with the past (Mukoyama 2016, p. 2) and the reaction from the Abe government of distancing itself from the politics of apology (Pollack 2016, p. 20) have not only sustained, but even deepened the impasse.

The causes explaining the lack of institutionalised form of cooperation between Japan and South Korea are rooted in disputes over territory and history, broadly speaking. With respect to the first one, the issue concerns the islets situated between the two states in the Sea of Japan,<sup>2</sup> called Dokdo in South Korea and Takeshima in Japan. The official position of the South Korean government maintains that "Dokdo is an integral part of Korean territory, historically, geographically and under international law. No territorial dispute exists regarding Dokdo, and therefore Dokdo is not a matter to be dealt with through diplomatic negotiations or judicial settlement" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea 2018). Nevertheless, despite sustaining control over the islets since 1954 (Wiegand 2015, p. 350), the Korean authorities remain fearful of the Japanese threat to this status quo, which has been demonstrated by both authorities' comments and military expenditures in ROK (Wirth 2015, p. 562). Relevant arguments with regards to this issue have been brought by Krista Wiegand (2015), who argues that the case of Dokdo constitutes a major obstacle in establishing a meaningful security cooperation mechanism between the two states. The main reasons for the lack of such agreement concern the symbolic nature of Dokdo/Takeshima dispute for the South Korean nation that illustrates their historical struggle with Japan, as well as inability of ROK's political leaders to overcome the domestic pressure (*ibid.*, p. 356).

Other historical matters that influence the nature of bilateral relationship, include Japanese prime ministers' official visits to the Yasukuni shrine (Saito 2017; Kingston 2004, pp. 237–238), contents of history textbooks (Schneider 2008), and legality of the 1910 Annexation Treaty

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2 With the conflict over the islets it is worth mentioning that the name of the sea is also being disputed by the South Korean part. Although the English translation commonly list the name as the "Sea of Japan", the Korean authorities push for the change to the "East Sea."



(Kinhide 2015). Furthermore, the issue of “comfort women” constitutes a particularly significant factor in bilateral disputes that have also gained international recognition and symbolic reaction in other states, namely the Netherlands, Canada, and the US (Jongdae 2012, p. 191). The essence of the argument refers to the lack of sincere and official apology from the Japanese government and compensation for the victims as well as to the Japanese authorities questioning the authenticity of testimonies of the surviving women and existing research confirming the role of the Japanese Imperial Army (Tanaka 2017, pp. 168–173).

Those problems seem to be reflected within the public opinion. The polls conducted jointly in 2015 by the Japanese non-governmental organisation and the South Korean think-tank, the Genron NPO and East Asia Institute respectively), concerning perceptions of other nation, support this argument. The results demonstrate that for both Japanese and South Korean responders, the issues of Dokdo/Takeshima as well as the comfort women are perceived as main factors restraining further integration. Respectively, 88.8% of Koreans and 62% of Japanese pointed to the islets problem, while the comfort women case was mentioned by 63.5% of responders in ROK and 58% in Japan (*ibid.*). It is also worth noting that “education and recognition of history” is another major obstacle in improving the bilateral relations for both sides, while one-third of the Japanese also noted the “Anti-Japanese sentiment” (*ibid.*, p. 9). Equally troubling is the fact that the interviewees from Japan and South Korea remain pessimistic when asked about further development of bilateral relations. In the same report summarizing the opinion polls, 52.5% of Koreans said that due to unresolved historical issues advancing cooperation will not be possible. While the Japanese public opinion remained more divided on the question of the future of bilateral affairs. 35.1% stated that the historical matters will remain difficult to resolve even if the relations move forward, while 27.1% echoed the majority of responders from ROK (*ibid.*, p. 16).

The significance of historical animosities should not be omitted or diminished in discourse concerning the challenges to improvement of the Japan – South Korea relations since, as the abovementioned arguments illustrate, they are still important for the respective nations. Nevertheless, a brief acknowledgment should be noted for other issues that may uphold the differences between ROK and Japan. First, the two governments maintain different positions towards China. While Tokyo has perceived Beijing as a growing threat to national security (Oros 2017), ROK’s stance has not been as unambiguous due to the China’s increasing economy



and security importance for Seoul (Mukoyama 2016, p. 1). Data from the World Bank for 2016 clearly illustrate that Beijing is the largest trading partner for South Korea with 25.1% shares in export and 21.4% in import (World Bank 2018). The numbers for the second trading partners, the U.S. in terms of export and Japan in the case of import are much smaller, with 13.4% and 11.6% respectively (World Bank 2018).

Another important factor to consider in bilateral relations of South Korea and Japan is the governments' strategy towards dealing with North Korea, especially in the light of the events since the Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang, that seemed to have initially surprised administration in Tokyo (Smith 2018). Ultimately, as Sheila Smith (*ibid.*) analyses, despite promising signals from both president Moon Jae-in and prime minister Abe Shinzō concerning negotiations with North Korea, the two leaders may not share the same vision for the security mechanism in the region, particularly in terms of the U.S. military presence in ROK in the event of peace agreement with Pyongyang.

The aim of this part of the article was to identify the barriers in further development of bilateral relations between Japan and South Korea. The main obstacles are embedded in unresolved historical past. Neither the respective positions on China nor the stance on negotiations and possible scenarios for the future security arrangements in Northeast Asia are strong enough to bring Tokyo and Seoul closer. Yet, there are several relevant factors in mutual relations that carry the potential for overcoming the abovementioned challenges, that are also coherent with the neo-functional agenda. Those will be identified and evaluated in the following section of the essay.

#### **4. Integrational factors – shifting the focus towards neo-functional aspects**

##### *The economic perspective*

When considering the neo-functional aspects, the analysis should encompass the economic data which indicate that the countries have been pursuing deeper relations under the opportunities that the interconnected international system provides. Despite the growing economic significance of China, Japan and South Korea remain important economic partners to each other. As Table 1 illustrates, the Republic of Korea is the third export

partner, and the fourth country from which Japan imports the most of goods. Respectively, as shown in Table 2, Japan is the fifth country in export, and the second in import to ROK. Nevertheless, it is important to note the gap between the top two trade partners for the two countries and the following ones. In the case of Japan, the values for export and import with China and the United States are much higher than the ones for Korea. For ROK, this is also the case in terms of exports. In the case of import, although Japan is the second largest partner, the numbers for China are almost doubled. Hence, it is worth clarifying that although Japan and ROK are still important trade partners, looking at e.g. the geographical proximity it may be somehow surprising that the values aren't even higher.

Table 1. Japan’s top economic trade partners in 2016

Export			Import		
Country	Value (million US dollar)	Share (%)	Country	Value (million US dollar)	Share (%)
United States	130.586	20.25	China	156.553	25.79
China	113.830	17.65	United States	69.222	11.41
Republic of Korea	46.235	7.17	Australia	30.433	5.01
Other Asia, nes	39.297	6.09	Republic of Korea	25.020	4.12
Hong Kong, China	33.624	5.21	Other Asia, nes	22.958	3.78

Source: World Bank 2018.

Table 2. Republic of Korea’s top economic trade partners in 2016

Export			Import		
Country	Value (million US dollar)	Share (%)	Country	Value (million US dollar)	Share (%)
1	2	3	4	5	6
China	124.433	25.12	China	86.979	21.41
United States	66.748	13.47	Japan	47.466	11.69

1	2	3	4	5	6
Hong Kong, China	32.779	6.62	United States	43.398	10.68
Vietnam	32.63	6.59	Germany	18.917	4,66
Japan	24.354	4.92	Other Asia, nes	16.403	4.04

Source: World Bank 2018.

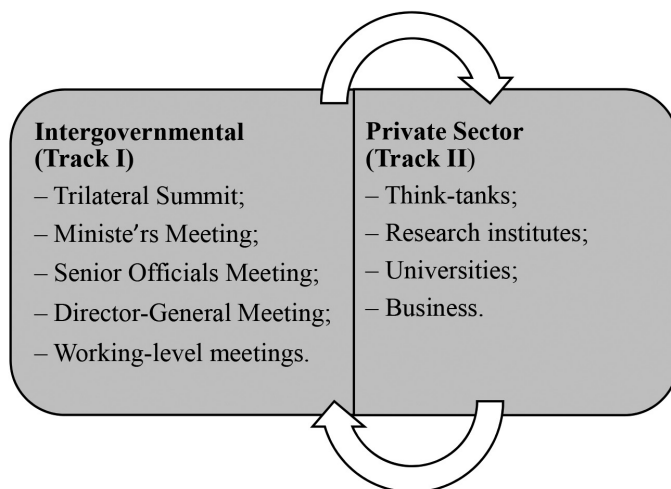
Other relevant factors that should be noted with respect to the potential of improving bilateral relations concern foreign investment and economic agreements. The Ministry of Trade, Industry & Energy of Korea reported that Japan's foreign investment in ROK has risen sharply in 2017, reaching 57-month high in the third quarter of the year, and noting the increase of 347% in comparison with 2016 (Jung 2017). As for the free trade agreement (FTA) between the two states, despite being proposed in 1998 (Chungsoo 2001), has not been concluded, therefore leaving a significant gap in the regional integration project. Instead, the negotiations between China, Japan and South Korea are underway after being launched in 2012 on the occasion of ASEAN Summit (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2012). Since then, there has been no major breakthrough, though the leaders of three countries have recently reaffirmed their commitment to accelerate the negotiations both on the FTA as well as on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), that involves ASEAN countries, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and India (Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat 2018).

Although the governments in Japan and South Korea have not been able to deepen their economic relationship in a bilateral manner, both countries are involved in several initiatives at the regional level that, if concluded, will result in closer and more institutionalised cooperation between them. Within the joint establishments, the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) has so far encompassed the largest number of issues. Thus, the subsequent part of the article is concerned with the organisation's agenda and activities.

*Regional level of cooperation – the potential of Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat*

Recalling key assumptions of neo-functionalism, concerning the notions of transnationalism and the role of non-governmental actors in the process of integration, the TCS, to some extent, embraces these factors. Established in 2011 between China, Japan and South Korea for the purpose of promoting cooperative relations and peace, it functions as an intergovernmental regional organisation with headquarters in Seoul. The structure includes a Consultative Board composed of a Secretary General and two Deputy Secretary Generals as well as the Department that is divided into four separate units concerned with respectively: Political, Socio-Cultural, Economic and Management affairs (TCS 2017, p. 6). The most important meetings are the Trilateral Summits. Apart from that, TCS also formed a Trilateral Cooperation Mechanism that composes of Ministerial Meetings, intergovernmental meetings, cooperative projects and, what is the most important, activities undertaken by a private sector. As presented below, the three countries decided to follow a two-track path. Such structure essentially exemplifies the neo-functional understanding of how the process of regional integration develops and advances. The ongoing flow of information and proposals, as presented in the graph, allows for the Track II parties to put their agenda forward, and work on the issues that ultimately will be decided at Trilateral Summits.

The Secretariat essentially administers all the operations, conducts research and evaluation. Although its activities are restricted by the mandate (TCS 2011, p. 3), the institution itself holds the potential of accelerating integration efforts between the states involved. Some of the researchers have expressed scepticism towards the mechanism, by calling the position of the Secretariat weak (Wissenbach 2013, p. 207). Yet, the cooperation has covered a wide range of issues concerning the economy (e.g. supply chain connectivity and a project on e-commerce), intellectual property rights, agriculture, forestry, tourism, disaster management and education, among others (TCS 2017). Furthermore, perhaps the low-key profile of the organisation has allowed for the collaboration to be more efficient and pragmatic. The TCS has established over 70 consultative mechanisms so far that are contributing to reaching the consensus on different matters at a working-level, and with the inclusion of the private sector. Noticeably though, addressing historical animosities, that appears in bilateral relations between the governments, is not included within the

**Figure 1. Tracks of Trilateral Cooperation Mechanism**

Source: Assembled from Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (2018).

TCS agenda. The Secretariat therefore, aims to advance the collaboration in small steps and selectively. This, in turn, can be perceived both as an advantage, and a disadvantage. Undertaking specific initiatives have resulted in the improvement in relations between Japan, South Korea, and China closer, where possible and within a limited scope. At the same time, however, considering how relevant the historical issues are for both the Koreans and the Japanese, trilateral cooperation may face more serious challenges as it advances its agenda further.

## 5. Conclusions

Despite over 70 years since the end of the Second World War and Japan’s colonization of the Korean Peninsula, the historical issues still linger, undermining the advancement of both bilateral and regional relations. Territorial disputes, the case of comfort women, and history education, among other problems, continue to pose a significant challenge to going beyond “functional multilateralism” (Wissenbach 2013, p. 219). Yet, there are several establishments in the region that allow for a careful optimism in terms of further developments both in terms of Japan – South Korea relations, and within Northeast Asia relations as a whole.

This essay has adopted the perspective of neo-functional theory of regional integration which concentrates on the areas of cooperation that can be advanced at a low political cost. Hence, the analysis has focused on those aspects that are already present and functioning between the two states, out of which the economic relations and the trilateral structure of the TCS, also involving China, seem to be the most promising. The mechanism includes and cooperate closely with non-governmental sector which contributes to a slow change in mutual perception. The flagship initiatives, such as youth and education exchanges, strongly support this objective. Consequently, the TCS embodies the core of neo-functional arguments in the region, concerning shifting the burden of integration efforts both on the sub-national, as well as supranational levels. However, with those improvements and advancements in mind, there are two additional conclusions that need to be noted. First, neo-functional agenda goes much further than that, ultimately evolving from economic to political integration. Clearly, ROK and Japan are not at this stage of their relations and nothing indicates that they will be in the near future. Thus, while this paradigm offers a forward-looking solution to long-term peace in the region, for now it can only be applied in a limited manner. Lastly, from its establishment, the TCS has purposefully excluded the ongoing issues of history from its agenda. Hence, the forum will most probably not contribute directly to resolving those problems. This is not to say that the TCS's role is irrelevant in that sense, or that Japan, South Korea, and China, for that matter, should not pursue efforts at coming to terms with their past. After all, the mechanism's role is to advance the relations between the states involved within other areas of common interests and that can indirectly support other objectives, that are arguably more challenging to achieve.

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