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Human Security Cooperation as a Building Block for East Asia Community

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The process of building an East Asia community is well underway, despite the continuing debate over the nature and the feasibility of such an undertaking. This started in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis with the convening of the ASEAN+3 process, which promised closer ties and cooperation between Southeast and Northeast Asian states. The idea for an East Asia community was clarified through the vision set out by the East Asia Vision Group (EAVG), which was endorsed by the leaders of the ASEAN+3 countries at their fifth summit, held in Brunei in November 2001. The idea received further encouragement in November 2002, when the East Asia Study Group (EASG), which was proposed by President Kim Dae-jung to assess the recommendations of the EAVG, endorsed many of the EAVG's proposals. More importantly, the East Asia community-building process appeared to have gained further momentum when the leaders of 16 countries—the ASEAN+3 countries together with Australia, India, and New Zealand—gathered in Kuala Lumpur in December 2005 for the inaugural East Asia Summit

and declared that “the East Asia Summit could play a significant role in community building in [East Asia].”¹

Despite the enthusiasm about the prospects for regional community building in East Asia, the eventual nature of this community and the way in which the process should proceed remain subject to debate. Some critics have even expressed doubts as to whether the idea can ever really take off and become a reality. This chapter is not intended to revisit the pros and cons of the debate; rather it seeks to explore how cooperation in East Asia can contribute to and facilitate the long-term project of regional community building.

More specifically, this chapter examines how cooperation in areas related to human security could facilitate East Asia’s regional community-building process. Cooperation on human security can provide a new impetus for states in the region to work together in managing common problems, which in turn could strengthen the basis for the further institutionalization of cooperation. The institutionalization of human security cooperation among East Asian states—either through ASEAN+3 or the East Asia Summit—would contribute to international efforts at building global governance regimes in areas related to human security. However, within the context of the East Asia community-building process, there is still the need for *mainstreaming* human security concerns, *securitizing* the issues, and *institutionalizing* cooperation, particularly among civil society organizations (CSOs), epistemic communities, and governments.

HUMAN SECURITY AND THE EAST ASIA COMMUNITY-BUILDING PROJECT

The concept of human security is emphasized in the three guiding documents of the East Asia community-building process. The final report of the EAVG clearly stated that one of the goals of an East Asia community would be “to advance human security and wellbeing.”² Echoing the EAVG Report, the EASG maintained that it “is of the opinion that East Asian countries should intensify consultation and cooperation on transnational

1. ASEAN, “Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the East Asia Summit” (Kuala Lumpur, December 14, 2005).

2. EAVG, “Towards an East Asian Community: Region of Peace, Prosperity and Progress” (November 2001).

issues that affect human security and regional stability.”³ Then, in the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the East Asia Summit, issued in December 2005, leaders of the participating states also promised to foster “cooperation in uplifting the lives and wellbeing of our peoples.” The emphasis on human security in these three documents clearly demonstrates the recognition on the part of states in the region of the importance of human security as an area of regional cooperation.

Human security, as understood within the East Asian context, could provide the basis for interstate cooperation and facilitate the regional community-building process. While some East Asian countries and analysts recognize the importance of both human needs and human rights as the twin core of human security, many regional states, however, still emphasize the “human needs” dimension of the concept. Despite the absence of a consensus on the meaning of human security, the emphasis on the protection of human beings from everything that threatens human life, such as water shortages, poverty, natural disasters, environmental degradation, and diseases, could provide the basis for cooperation among East Asian states.

The inclusion of human security cooperation in the regional community-building project is more than just rhetorical. It fits well with the daunting challenges facing any experiment in building a “community” in a region as diverse as East Asia. At the same time, it also reflects a deep awareness about the complexity of regional dynamics and the nature of East Asia as a region still in flux, in both an economic sense and a security sense. The inclusion of human security as one of the goals of regional community building also provides an important platform from which the limits of the regional community-building process can be addressed. In other words, human security cooperation would not be hampered by the numerous problems and constraints that have characterized the process of East Asia community building.

The most salient obstacle to East Asia community building has been the experience gap between Southeast and Northeast Asia in terms of regional institution building. Unlike Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia has been characterized by the absence of any regional institution comparable to ASEAN. Various proposals to create a formal multilateral institution in the region have not really gotten off the ground. As a subregion, Northeast Asia certainly has unique characteristics and is faced with its own set of political,

3. EASG, “Final Report of the East Asia Study Group” (November 2002).

economic, and security problems and challenges. Even though the countries in the region have in fact been engaged in a Track II dialogue process since 1993 through the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue, the complexity of the region's problems has not yet permitted this forum to become the precursor for the establishment of a formal regional institution.⁴

Second, of all the reasons underlying the absence of a multilateral security institution in the region, the problem of trust and cooperation is of particular importance. Multilateral cooperation is difficult due to the presence of complex historical memories that still influence contemporary mutual perceptions among regional states. These historical memories clearly sustain the animosity and suspicion among the states in the region.⁵ As a result, there is still an insufficient accumulation of trust among regional players, such as between Japan on the one hand and China, South Korea, and North Korea on the other, or between the two Koreas. However, the ASEAN experience shows that it is through cooperation that trust is built, not the other way around. In other words, cooperation—despite a lack of initial trust—can create trust over time. And, within the ASEAN context, the process of trust building has been made possible by the fact that cooperation—which led to trust building—was carried out within a multilateral institution.

The third challenge to East Asia-wide cooperation and community building is the nature of the region as a theater for an ongoing power shift among its major powers. The rise of China has led to uneasy relations among the major powers within the grouping, and especially between China and Japan. Indeed, the first East Asia Summit itself was already overshadowed by growing tension in Sino-Japanese bilateral relations. The current dynamics of the US-China-Japan triangular relationship clearly demonstrate the emergence of a new regional order in the Asia Pacific region. The relationship among these three major

4. For discussions on the constraints to the creation of a regional institution in Northeast Asia, see, among others, Frank Umbach, "The Future of Multilateralism in Asia," *IRI-Review* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2003/Spring 2004): 180; Jack Pritchard, "Beyond Six Party Talks: An Opportunity to Establish a Framework for Multilateral Cooperation in the North Pacific" (conference paper, NORPAC Hokkaido Conference for North Pacific Issues, October 7, 2004); Kongdan Oh, "Northeast Asia: Changes and the Potential for a Cooperative Future," *NIRA Policy Research* (January 2003); and Chung Ok-nim, "Solving the Security Puzzle in Northeast Asia: A Multilateral Security Regime," *CNAPS Working Paper* (September 1, 2000).

5. See Tsuneo Akaha, "Non-Traditional Security Issues in Northeast Asia and Prospects for International Cooperation" (conference paper, Thinking Outside the Security Box Conference, United Nations University Seminar, New York, March 15, 2002).

powers will continue to be a complex one. While the three countries are seeking to establish cooperative relations among themselves, the signs of emerging competition are also evident. China, clearly a rising power with its own interests, seems to see Japan and the United States as the two powers that might limit its regional preeminence. Japan is anxious about China's future policy direction, a feeling shared by some ASEAN countries. Meanwhile, the United States is clearly opposed to the rise of a new power that might pose a challenge to its regional preeminence. The uncertainties associated with this power shift will serve as a major challenge to the East Asia community-building process in the years to come.

The fourth challenge is the elusive role of ASEAN in managing and driving the East Asia community-building process. Despite the positive role played by ASEAN in promoting regional cooperation beyond Southeast Asia, there have been continuing doubts about the ability of ASEAN to function effectively as the "driving force" of the East Asia community-building process. For example, within the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which is often seen as an extension of ASEAN's model of regional security,⁶ ASEAN's leadership "can do little to promote security [because] Northeast Asia and not Southeast Asia is the locus of regional strategic tension."⁷ ASEAN's emphasis on a gradual process and consensus building is also seen as a problem that could prevent meaningful regional cooperation. Moreover, as ASEAN itself is seen as having difficulties in addressing its own problems, its ability to play a role beyond Southeast Asia has therefore been questioned.⁸

Despite such challenges and constraints to cooperation, it would be misleading to claim that Northeast Asian states, and for that matter all of the East Asian nations, are immune to more institutionalized mechanisms for regional cooperation. There have been a number

6. See Michael Leifer, "The Extension of ASEAN's Model of Regional Security," in *Nation, Region, and Context*, ed. Coral Bell (Canberra: Australian National University, 1995), 73–90.

7. Robyn Lim, "The ASEAN Regional Forum: Building on Sand," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 20, no. 2 (August 1998): 115.

8. For an analysis of ASEAN's problems since 1997, see Rizal Sukma, "The Declining Role of ASEAN as a Manager of Regional Order" (conference paper, NIDS Workshop on Regional Security Order in Asia, Tokyo, October 23–24, 2000); and Rizal Sukma, "Assessing ASEAN Vision 2020: The Political and Security Dimension" (conference paper, First ASEAN's People Assembly, Batam, Indonesia, November 24–26, 2000).

of opportunities for such an undertaking to succeed in the longer term. The most important opportunity for broader cooperation in East Asia has been presented by the capacity for ASEAN to play a pivotal role in extending its model of regional cooperation to the wider East Asian region. Despite its limitations, it was, and still is, the ASEAN-driven multilateralism that has paved the way for greater regional cooperation between countries in Southeast and Northeast Asia. In the aftermath of the 1997 financial crisis, ASEAN managed to reinvent and redefine its role as a “manager” of the regional order that would be acceptable to all major powers, thus making it possible for it to serve as a “hub” linking all of the East Asian states in a web of functional cooperation.

Second, ASEAN’s management of cooperative interactions has helped build a growing habit of security dialogue (within the ARF) and cooperation (through the ASEAN+3 process) in the region. For its part, the ARF facilitates the regional learning process by providing a venue where every member state can become more comfortable with the idea and the merits of multilateral cooperation in the area of security. Such an undertaking, if sustained, will contribute to creating a habit of dialogue. As demonstrated in the 40-year experience of ASEAN, the institutionalization of a habit of dialogue and a culture of consultation contributed significantly to the institutionalization of an attitude of self-restraint and mutual respect among member states. Similarly, ASEAN+3 also helps create a habit of cooperation. This began modestly as an informal meeting among the foreign ministers of Southeast and Northeast Asian countries. The process, however, accelerated with the institutionalization of the ASEAN+3 Summit, which now provides a framework for cooperation not only between the ASEAN states and Japan, China, and South Korea but also among the three Northeast Asian states themselves.

Third, the emergence of common problems—especially the nontraditional security challenges that pose serious threats to human security—provides an opportunity for regional states to work together to address them. Both subregions—Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia—have recognized the threats posed by nontraditional security challenges to human security, and both have recognized the imperative of advocating and preserving human security as an essential element in the attainment of national security. In Northeast Asia itself, at least six major nontraditional security challenges can be identified: environmental degradation,

resource scarcity, energy supply and distribution, migration, economic gaps, and illicit trafficking in drugs, weapons, and humans.⁹ Similar problems are also shared by Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, East Asian countries, as well as Australia, India, and New Zealand, indeed share a common concern and agenda that should bind them together in a common endeavor to address these problems and to promote human security in the region.

The ability of East Asian states to overcome the problems of regional community building would be greatly strengthened if human security cooperation were to serve as the starting point during the formative years of the institution-building phase. For this purpose, it is imperative that human security be elevated to a higher priority in the regional community-building process. Such a focus would contribute not only to the creation of an East Asia community itself but also to international efforts to build global governance regimes in areas related to human security.

EAST ASIA'S GROWING RECEPTIVITY TO HUMAN SECURITY

Cooperation among East Asian states on human security has become more feasible due to the presence of a number of facilitating factors in the region. First, there is a growing domestic constituency for the promotion of human security in most East Asian states.¹⁰ Human security approaches require collaboration among various sectors of society, and civil society—which has historically been one weak link in East Asia—has increasingly become an important player in promoting this agenda. The region has witnessed the emergence of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other CSOs in various countries, including in China, that are beginning to address the problems of human security. Indeed, as “human security concentrates on justice and emancipation,”¹¹ the role of NGOs and other CSOs becomes an indispensable element in the process of ensuring and promoting human

9. See Tsuneo Akaha, “Non-Traditional Security Issues in Northeast Asia.”

10. Paul M. Evans, “Human Security and East Asia: In the Beginning,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 4 (2004): 277–278.

11. Lee Shin-hwa, *Promoting Human Security: Ethical, Normative and Educational Frameworks in East Asia* (Seoul: Korean National Commission and UNESCO, 2004), 31.

security. In addition to serving as important societal forces that advocate and promote human security agendas within national boundaries, NGOs and CSOs “can be invaluable when it comes to coordinating and mounting the types of international operation[s] that the human security approach embraces.”¹²

The recognition by East Asia’s governments of the important role of NGOs and CSOs clearly provides a greater opportunity for regional cooperation. As the EAVG Report stresses, it is important for the governments in the region “to work closely with NGOs in policy consultation and coordination to encourage civic participation and responsibility and to promote state–civil society partnership in tackling social problems.”¹³ The EASG Report also called for the establishment of an East Asia Forum “consisting of the region’s governmental and nongovernmental representatives from various sectors, with the aim to serve as an institutional mechanism for broad-based social exchanges and, ultimately, regional cooperation.”¹⁴

Second, the prospects for institutionalizing the promotion of human security and deepening cooperation in this area are far greater now than before due to the changing conception of national security in the region. None of the East Asian states now sees security only in its narrow military sense. ASEAN, for example, has long championed the broad notion of security as encompassing both military and nonmilitary aspects, including the security of “the people.” Japan and South Korea have been at the forefront in advocating and promoting human security approaches in the region and beyond. China, which was initially reluctant to embrace the concept, has also begun to see the value of defining security in this context, as reflected in its enunciation of the “New Security Concept.” In other words, a human security approach is now more acceptable to states in the East Asia region.¹⁵

Third, there is also the effect of the institution building (through ASEAN, ASEAN+3, the ARF, and the East Asia Summit) that has already advanced in the East Asia region, which has helped give rise

12. Withaya Sucharithanarugse, “The Concept of ‘Human Security’ Extended: ‘Asianizing’ the Paradigm,” in *Asia’s Emerging Regional Order: Reconciling Traditional and Human Security*, ed. William T. Tow, Ramesh Thakur, and In-Taek Hyun (Tokyo: UNU, 2000), 59.

13. EAVG, “Towards an East Asian Community,” 24.

14. EASG, “Final Report of the East Asia Study Group,” 32.

15. For a discussion on the changing views of East Asian governments, see Evans, “Human Security and East Asia.”

to a growing desire and commitment to institutionalize cooperation. As mentioned above, through their previous experience with various regional cooperation initiatives, states in East Asia have come to value multilateral cooperation as an important way to achieve peace and prosperity. The ASEAN+3 process, for example, has clearly emerged as an institutionalized vehicle for member states to cooperate in functional areas. More importantly, governments in the region have also benefited from regional cooperation to ensure the security of their people. The effective regional response in addressing severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), for example, clearly demonstrated the value of regional cooperation in the area of human security. Consequently, states in the region have become more comfortable with regional cooperation because of the ways in which it has enhanced their wellbeing.

Fourth, the prospects for greater cooperation in the area of human security have also been enhanced by the growing interdependence of states in the region. This, among other developments, has been perpetuated by the growing number of transnational threats to the security of individual states in the region. Within Southeast Asia, for example, problems such as human trafficking, marine pollution, infectious disease, haze, piracy, illegal logging, and transnational crime are all transboundary in nature and require greater regional efforts in combating them. Similarly, in Northeast Asia, as mentioned above, efforts to address the problems of environmental degradation, resource scarcity, energy supply and distribution, migration, economic gaps, and trafficking in drugs, weapons, and humans also require close coordination among regional states. None of these problems can be tackled effectively through unilateral action by individual states. In other words, the recognition by governments in the region of the interdependent nature of the problems they face could serve as an important facilitating factor for closer regional cooperation, which in turn can contribute to the regional community-building process.

HUMAN SECURITY COOPERATION IN EAST ASIA: PROSPECTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

The focus on human security would benefit not only the region; it also has significant implications for the capacity of global governance to

address global problems. First, it would create and consolidate regional regimes for addressing and tackling global problems. The experience of the region in dealing with the problem of infectious disease is a case in point. For example, the ability of states in the region to cooperate closely among themselves and also with the World Health Organization in preventing the spread of SARS clearly helped in maintaining global health security. If human security cooperation could be further institutionalized within the East Asia community-building project, the efficacy of regional initiatives to address regional and global health problems would be greatly enhanced. The establishment of regional mechanisms to address human security problems would also facilitate greater international coordination in addressing and tackling problems with global implications such as climate change, water scarcity, natural disasters, and infectious diseases.

Second, from a strategic point of view, the East Asia community-building process could also serve as a mechanism for managing the regional and global implications of the power shift underway now in East Asia. As mentioned above, this process is still fluid, and its consequences for regional relations are still unpredictable.¹⁶ This particular issue therefore requires careful management that regulates major power relations in the region. Competition among the major powers can be avoided if they see each other as partners rather than competitors. Indeed, the need to cooperate in promoting human security would make it imperative for states to see each other as partners instead of competitors. In other words, addressing human security problems, which require collaborative and joint efforts, clearly serves as an incentive to cooperate. And this incentive to cooperate would contribute to the reduction of incentives for the kind of competition among the major powers that would affect global security.

Third, regional cooperation in addressing human security concerns would strengthen existing global norms and rules. Two particular global norms are of paramount importance in this regard. First, as the problems facing the global community have increasingly become more complex, it is imperative for states to engage in global cooperation to overcome them. Cooperation, then, should become a norm, not an exception in contemporary international relations. Second, human

16. For an excellent discussion on the power shift and its possible consequences in East Asia, see David Shambaugh, ed., *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

security cooperation in East Asia, regardless of the extent to which it can be carried out, would also contribute to the socialization of regional states and greater acceptance of “the responsibility to protect.” To a degree, states engaging in human security cooperation are in effect also engaged in an exercise to advance the norm of the “responsibility to protect.” However, it is important to note that the possibility for a greater acceptance of “the responsibility to protect” does not necessarily mean the abandonment of the principle of noninterference. Unless democracy becomes a common regional norm, the participation of East Asian states in undertaking “the responsibility to protect” would be carried out in a manner that would not compromise national sovereignty.

Indeed, the value of the East Asia community-building project does not lie only in the promotion of good interstate relations at the regional level. The project would also have positive implications for global governance. For East Asian states, especially in light of the challenges to regional community building discussed above, human security cooperation would serve as a more promising platform for increasing the incentives to cooperate. In other words, the success of the East Asia community-building project would, to a degree, depend on the institutionalization of habits of cooperation, which could be conveniently facilitated by pooling common resources to resolve human security problems in the region.

CONCLUSION: MAINSTREAMING, SECURITIZATION, AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

For East Asia, cooperation on human security issues could provide a platform for developing the habit of cooperating within a formal multilateral setting. Within this setting, states could institutionalize the notion of “security with” rather than “security against” as the dominant paradigm for interstate relations. In the formative years, such multilateral cooperation should not concern itself excessively with results. Again, as ASEAN’s experience has shown, the process is also important, especially for institutions to mature and to induce a level of comfort among the participating states. And, in the wider East Asia region, there are vast numbers of human security issues on which countries in the region could cooperate. The East Asia community-building project, therefore, should begin the process of institutionalization by focusing

its agenda on cooperation in these areas first before it moves to traditional security areas.

However, the promotion of human security cooperation within the East Asia community-building project still requires a synergy of multiple strategies linking together governments, epistemic communities, and CSOs. This synergy requires the *mainstreaming* of human security concerns, the *securitizing* of the issues, and the *institutionalizing* of cooperation. First, a mainstreaming strategy is needed to further promote the human security agenda as an important element of multilateral cooperation in the region. There is always the risk that traditional security problems in East Asia, such as the territorial dispute between China and Japan and the problem of nuclear proliferation on the Korean Peninsula, might distract East Asian states from focusing on human security cooperation. More importantly, a focus on human security also requires the governments in the region to recognize the importance of bringing “the people” back to the center of the security discourse and practice. In this context, the mainstreaming of human security issues would be greatly facilitated by and requires the active role of CSOs and regional networks among them.

Second, the mainstreaming of human security concerns requires a degree of securitization of the issues.¹⁷ Here again, governments can be easily distracted by the imperative to address traditional security problems, and in East Asia there is no shortage of such problems. Within the Northeast Asian context, the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, the possible rivalry between China and Japan, the potentially unstable nature of Sino-US relations, and a number of unresolved territorial disputes continue to form core national security concerns for states in the region. Concerns about protecting human beings from threats no less deadly than war could be easily lost in the face of overriding concerns about traditional security. The primacy of state sovereignty also remains a major obstacle to human security cooperation. Within this context, human security issues need to be securitized so that they will attract more attention from governments. In this regard, the strategy of securitization requires the active role of the epistemic community, especially policy analysts. More importantly, the epistemic community can remind states to change their understanding of security “from an

17. For the meaning and strategy of securitization, see Ralf Emmers, “The Securitization of Transnational Crime in ASEAN,” *IDSS Working Paper No. 39* (November 2002).

exclusive stress on territorial security to a much greater stress on people's security; and from security through armaments to security through sustainable development."¹⁸

Third, there is a need for the institutionalization of cooperation that requires the political will of governments. As mentioned earlier, regional cooperation in addressing human security problems is more effective if it is carried out within a multilateral setting. The imperative of institutionalization would take two forms. First, as most human security problems originate from within the domestic domain of states, it is absolutely critical for individual states to strengthen their national capacity to address these problems. Second, in order for human security responses to be effective, greater institutionalization of regional cooperation is required to build capacity at the national and regional levels to address human security threats. Southeast and Northeast Asian countries have made much progress in this area within the ASEAN+3 process. Now, it is time to broaden and deepen this undertaking within the wider East Asia community-building project, which involves Australia, New Zealand, and India, by taking up a focus on human security as a key item for the community-building agenda.

18. UNDP, "Human Development Report 1994," as reprinted in *Current History* (May 1995): 230.