An Interconnected East Asia and the Korean Peninsula as a Problematic: 20 years of Discourse and Solidarity Movements

Young-seo BAIK*

Abstract
As one of the primary proponents of the East Asian discourse in Korea since the early 1990s, I attempt in this paper to reexamine major arguments of my own East Asia discourse and to show that it is an outcome of the genealogy of Korean intellectual history as well as East Asian solidarity movements. I also place a particular emphasis on its being a social practice connected with the movement to overcome the Division System of the Korean peninsula. I believe that the actualization of an East Asian Community demands an integration process that transcends national boundaries on the regional level and also structural reforms on the national level that maximize the participation of each nation’s citizens. The changes must take place from both directions so that East Asian people could feel in their everyday lives that an East Asian Community which genuinely improves the quality of their lives is being built. In my view, there are two most important forces that steer the interconnected East Asia toward an East Asian Community rather than a New Cold War: one is the compound state which would emerge as a North-South confederation on the Korean peninsula and the other is a radical transformation of the existing state structure in the rest of East Asia which would lead to the creation of a more open and democratic state.

* Yonsei University
Keywords
interconnected East Asia, East Asian Community, twofold peripheral perspective, division system, third world discourse, compound state, regional solidarity
1. Why (Still) ‘East Asia?’

The year 2010 marked the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War and the 100th anniversary of Korea’s annexation by the Japanese. It also was a year when solidarity movements throughout East Asia sought reconciliation and harmony between the different societies, but a variety of incidents pointing to a far more ominous trend also took place that year. In March, there was the sinking of the Cheonan off the western coast of Korea, and in November, the North Korean artillery bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island, which raised tensions between the two Koreas to a new peak; and the confrontation between China and Japan over the Senkaku / Diaoyu Islands exacerbated the hostility between them; so that these days, a sense of nervous unease has enveloped the entire region. Of course there have been optimistic developments as well: the China-US Summit in Washington on January 19, 2011 discussed the Korean security issue, and there are also signs that the two Koreas may be resuming dialogue. However, South Korea, the US and Japan still remain convinced of credible threats from both North Korea and China. Conversely, there is real concern among the Chinese that they are being encircled by the US, further adding to their fears about a strengthened US-Japan alliance.

Given the current geopolitical situation in East Asia, it is not surprising that the idea of a ‘New Cold War’ on the horizon has gained support while faith in an ‘East Asian Community’ dwindles. With declining American influence in the region, the rapid rise of China appears to be restructuring the status quo, setting the stage for new concerns and frictions to arise. This geopolitical situation means that the tensions on the Korean Peninsula will necessarily strengthen the Japan-Korea-US alliance, while bringing North Korea and China closer together so that the vicious circle
of mistrust in the region will continue. Given such circumstances, we cannot neglect the attempts by various interested parties to use the strains among these countries to recast the situation in terms a clash in ideology and values, seeking to declare or provoke a ‘New Cold War.’ Yet this is an implausible scenario when the US (like South Korea and Japan) is mutually dependent upon China, at the very least economically. Thus a return to the kind of polarized standoff seen during the Cold War era is unlikely. Moreover, there are numerous indications that this interdependence is growing deeper, with increasing efforts being made toward greater cooperation. According to a recent report issued by Japan’s East Asian Community Council, the trend of regional integration advanced consistently between 2005 and 2010. Of course, the analysis of political structures and institutions is insufficient, by itself, to provide a clear picture, but when factors like trade, investment, finance, security guarantees, and cultural exchanges are taken into account, not to mention the shared understanding of values and morals, we can begin to gauge more accurately the degree of integration in East Asia.¹

From drawing on my own personal experiences both inside and outside of Korea, it is clear to me that the ‘East Asia discourse’ and the related solidarity movement have been making steady progress.² East Asia is growing ever more tightly interconnected, and thus the task we have before us is to determine how to steer this ‘Interconnected East Asia’³

---

² For a more detailed discussion of the discourse, see my comments on the fruits of the past 20 years later in this article and the rising trend of East Asian consciousness in China (a country where such feelings of East Asian identity were rare until 2000). For a discussion of solidarity movements, see East Asian Forum Compilation (2006).
³ I use the term ‘yeondong’ [interconnection] to differentiate my analysis from Yamamuro Shinichi’s notion of ‘yeonswae’ [linkage]. As the Korean-Japanese scholar Cho Kyung-dal has remarked, ideological ‘linkage’ in East Asia takes “Japan as the subject and the rest of the continent as the object.” By contrast, ‘interconnection’ is intended to
away from a New Cold War, and toward an East Asian Community.

The careful analysis of this ‘Interconnected East Asia,’ seeking to find the optimal path for human liberation, lies at the core of the East Asia discourse that I (along with the rest of the Changjakgwabipyeong group) have been championing since the 1990s. In the light of recent events, I believe that this type of reflection and discussion has become especially pertinent.

Two decades have passed since the birth of the East Asia discourse, and one critic has commented that, “indeed, its influence as exhibited in the domains of politics, economics and culture may seem to be in touch with the most pressing issues of the times, [but] … while these signs of progress may appear as a ‘rich harvest,’ they may in fact be a bubble.” As part of the Changjakgwabipyeong group, whose members have been the primary proponents of the East Asia discourse in Korea, I feel that the accuracy of such criticism deserves to be challenged. Given the complexity of this multifaceted discourse, I am obliged not only to weight the merits of the criticisms, but also to clearly delineate the tasks that we have ahead of us.

My perspective on East Asia encompasses both political and intellectual aspects, a stance shared by Changjakgwabipyeong, which seeks to directly engage the trends of the times and to assess day-to-day developments within the context of the longer term. Another

emphasize the deep interconnectedness of East Asia, a place where interactions take place in a variety of ways while simultaneously allowing for the existence of autonomous solidarity movements. See Kurushima and Cho (2008), pp.2-3.

4 The majority of scholars who discuss the genealogy of the East Asian discourse consider its starting point to be the special edition of Changjakgwabipyeong 79 (1993). I was personally involved with the planning of this issue as the editor. See Baik (1993); (2000).


7 Multiple categories have been covered in our broader discourse, which presents a critical perspective of regionalism. See Im Woo-Kyung (2007); Park (2008).
goal of ours is to transcend the academic boundaries drawn between the humanities and social sciences. We seek to produce research that is not artificially delineated by discipline, but corresponds instead to actual experiences and to reality. Our current approach is being developed through the medium of what is termed the ‘Social Humanities.’ Such a framework allows us to tackle long-term and short- or medium-term tasks simultaneously, while implementing practical solutions that are the natural products of this structure. I would like to highlight the fact that the intellectual foundations of this framework have been established by the Korean discourse on East Asia.\footnote{For a discussion on ‘Social Humanities,’ see Baik (2010).}

\section{The Intellectual Genealogy of the East Asia Discourse, and Recent Developments}

The ‘discovery’ of East Asia by the intellectual community occurred in the early 1990s against the backdrop of the fall of socialism and the end of the Cold War. The opening-up of China was especially important: the geographical imagination of South Koreans had hitherto failed to surpass the vision of a ‘divided peninsula,’ but the beginning of diplomatic relations with China in 1992 allowed for the broader concept of ‘East Asia’ to take root. Moreover, South Korea’s economic advancement, followed by the victory of democracy, has prompted a reexamination of the national democratization movements of earlier eras; and these factors, too, have played an important role in fostering the imaginational development of East Asia.
Much as I would like to elaborate on the inherent continuities manifest within the genealogy of Korean intellectual history, the main objective of this essay is not a systematic description of Korean views on the notion of East Asia, so I will instead focus upon the two core components that have shaped my stance on the East Asia discourse.

The first draws on historical precedent. Faced with the threat of Western encroachment, Korean intellectuals during the late 19th and early 20th centuries responded by pursuing the idea of ‘the three nations of the East,’ in which context Joseon became a part of a whole called ‘East Asia.’ As Chinese supremacy in the region collapsed after the defeat of the Qing Empire by Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), these intellectuals sought a replacement for the crumbling Chinese world order, and a new way to fit national and ethnic identities into a new East Asian regional order. China came to represent just one country within what was now known as East Asia, and Japan began to play an increasingly important role in this region.

This process has indeed been examined in detail elsewhere, but I would like to add that during this time, the East Asia discourse was premised on a mixture of the prevailing geopolitical realities with far-reaching civilizational agendas; which is also the methodology of my own discourse on East Asia. At that time, the independence of the Korean nation was seen as being indispensable to peace in the region, and this was justified by drawing on universal notions of civilization, be they Confucian or Western. For example, after the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) Korea was reduced to a protectorate, and Ahn Joong-geun responded by interpreting the new balance of power through the lens of international

---

power politics, looking for a practical and specific solution based on the real situation at hand. He formulated an ‘East Asian Peace Doctrine’ that had at its heart a Confucian doctrine of truthfulness. Moreover, Shin Chae-ho, who sought asylum in China, argued on the eve of the March 1st protests of 1919 that it was Joseon’s heavenly mandate to act as a restraining power between the continental power of China and the maritime power of Japan. In his view, the independence of Joseon was vital for peace in East Asia, so that by helping Joseon to achieve independence he was also working for the peace of the whole region. As these examples show, the methodological analysis and the way in which these intellectuals formulated their solutions are closely analogous to the approach taken by myself and my colleagues, which scrutinizes the short-term realities that have unfolded since the 1990s, and attempts to integrate them with medium and long term discourses.

Turning now to the second core component: we cannot ignore the discourse on the ‘Third World’ that flourished from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, and from which the East Asia discourse gathered momentum. During this period we advocated an ethnocentric ideology that was focused on the common people, seeking to move beyond Eurocentric models, and drawing instead on a logic of resistance that grounded the nation and its people in the greater search for a new world view. Thus if we look back at the national democratization movement from the changed circumstances of the 1990s, we can say that concentrating on the region of East Asia is a natural result of trying to overcome the ills of ethnic nationalism and of looking at the regions and cultures near us to absorb and develop the Third World perspective. Choi Won-sik has referred to this outcome as a “fruit of the East Asian application of Third World

“An Interconnected East Asia and the Korean Peninsula as a Problematic” during the early 1980s. It differs, however, from the attention given to the Third World discourses in Japan, which stressed the solidarity with Non-Aligned countries or AALA (Asia, Africa, and Latin America) countries. In Korea, criticism of Eurocentrism and open solidarity with the rest of the Third World were perceived as being crucial to democratize nationalism. A similar awareness is found among Taiwanese radical intellectuals who, influenced by China, connected the Third World discourse with nationalism in the late 1970s. Such interest in the relationship between nationalism and the Third World has, however, declined since the late 1980s, both in Korea and Taiwan; and in the 1990s, the East Asia discourse emerged in Korea as the successor.

Thus, the confluence of the discourse on national literature and the discourse on the Third World, starting in the 1970s, inspired a reevaluation of the role of nationalism within the broader East Asia discourse. In particular, the discourse on the Third World has functioned as a “lever that can successfully curb the nationalist sentiment that is embedded within the discourse on national literature.” Similarly, Kim Chong-cheol expected the discourse on the Third World to yield a perspective “that recognizes both the significance and limitations of nationalism.” And indeed, the discourse on East Asia still plays an important role in curbing the worst excesses of nationalism (and the nation-state).

At the same time, however, while pondering the ways in which the Third World discourse affects the East Asia discourse, we should also consider Paik Nak-chung’s view that the Third World discourse does not arise from any regional perspective, but needs to be understood as a

discourse on history from the perspective of the ‘people’ of the world: “From the position of the people — as in the Korean people, for instance — the suggestion that they are members of a globally integrated Third World highlights the point that the immediate regional problems that they face are in fact parts of broader global problems.” Paik also states that “[the Third World discourse seeks] not to divide the world into three distinct parts, but rather the opposite: to view the world as one interlocked unit.” His approach transforms the scope of the East Asia discourse from ‘closed regionalism’ to ‘critical regionalism,’ which allows the generation of new ideas and fresh perspectives capable of changing the course of world history. Paik’s conceptualization surely merits further evaluation.

Looking back twenty years to the birth of the East Asia discourse in the 1990s, we can detect ongoing trends in the intellectual genealogy of Korea. We can also see how changes in the geopolitical situation have influenced the trajectory of the discourse. Let us now consider the phenomenon of the ‘rise of China’ as illustrated through terms like ‘G2’ and ‘Chimerica.’ The global standing of China has changed significantly since its ‘discovery’ two decades ago, and this issue must perforce be included in the East Asia discourse. Just as China’s fall from power around 100 years ago caused instability in East Asia, its rise to superpower status is now again leading to structural uncertainty in the region. The ideas discussed, particularly within the US, for countering this rise of


16 Space does not permit proper attention to other frameworks which have been proposed for overcoming the division system. Im Hyeong-taek, while discussing the issue of the East Asian viewpoint, writes that the roots of ‘problem consciousness’ lie in the awareness of the division system as well as the ‘desire for reunification.’ See Im Hyeong-taek et al. (2009), pp. 339-340. The foreword to this book states that, in order to overcome the division, “there fundamentally needs to be an autonomous and organic understanding of the East Asian world.”
China are at best a short-term fix. Only some kind of East Asian cooperation can provide a model for a real solution, and this underscores the urgent need for a robust East Asia discourse.

In order to move beyond theoretical discussion and toward actual implementation, the role of the Korean Peninsula is crucial. The North and South must look for ways to equitably resolve their problems without leaning on either the US or China. During the 2000 Inter-Korean Summit, a solution seemed to be within reach after the June 15 Joint Declaration, and the unstable system of division seemed ripe for disentanglement.\footnote{According to Paik Nak-chung who coined the term ‘a shaking division system’ in 2007, it began to be greatly disturbed after the protest of June 1987; and the Inter-Korean Summit of June 2000 is seen as the point at which we set foot on the path toward ‘the end of the division system.’ Paik (2006), pp.45-48.}

And although tensions on the Korean Peninsula have recently reached a new climax, there has been an undeniable shift toward reconciliation which can be detected in the everyday lives of the Korean people. This too cannot be excluded from the East Asia discourse.

There are, moreover, solidarity movements, both inside and outside of Korea, which are steadily gathering momentum, and the East Asia discourse continues to develop, progressively growing in scope and intensity and informing new and important areas of public policy.

3. The Scope of East Asia and an East Asian Community

At this point, I will take a step back to review and reflect upon the fundamental ideas which, in my view, comprise the central narratives within the East Asia discourse. Not surprisingly, these also overlap with some common questions and criticisms that frequently surface in
reference to the notion of East Asia.

First is the issue regarding the use of the term ‘East Asia’ and the geographical scope of the area thus designated. Just as for terms like ‘Asia-Pacific,’ the ‘Orient,’ and the ‘East,’ which have evolved throughout history, the concept of East Asia is also not fixed, but varies depending on the policies and projects of those using it. And these different views of what constitutes East Asia will affect the character of the discussions and the topics included within the discourse. It is this very ambiguity that has fueled heated debates about the definition of ‘East Asia,’ obliging contributors to the discourse to polish their views and those participating in solidarity movements to refine their goals.

My own application of the term ‘East Asia’ includes both Northeast and Southeast Asia, but I have also placed this term at the center of my own personal thought experiment, given its constantly evolving meanings. When ‘East Asia’ is used to connote the vast territory of Northeast and Southeast Asia, the lack of comprehensive unifying traits, such as a universal Confucian philosophy or the use of Chinese characters, implies a less homogeneous community; but there are other factors which still provide a foundation for unity, such as economic and cultural interdependency and shared historical experiences within the Sinocentric order or the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere of the Japanese Empire. The inclusion of Southeast Asia into our category of ‘East Asia’ will allow us to move past the accusations of a ‘northeastern bias,’ and indeed cooperative

---

18 ASEAN+3 (Korea, China, Japan) is in the process of expanding into an ‘East Asian Community’ that includes even India, Australia, and New Zealand. Thus ‘East Asia,’ can be said to stretch as far as South Asia and the Pacific, and is an example of a region that is still being constructed. In the same way, from the perspective of military security, ‘Northeast Asia’ can be said to include the US and Russia, as can be seen from the structure of the six-party talks. Also, at the city level, Kim Seok-chul has proposed the concept of a ‘Yellow Sea Union’ or a ‘Yellow Sea Community’ which traverses national boundaries.
strategies covering this entire region will be pivotal in building solidarity between the people of Korea and Southeast Asia. This might be conceived as the ‘ASEAN way,’ where ASEAN here goes beyond the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to include all of the ASEAN+3 nations.\textsuperscript{19}

This leads us on to examine the region from another perspective, that of the ‘two-fold’ periphery. The first sense of the periphery involves a fresh evaluation of ‘East Asia’ as having been stripped of its own subjectivity in Western historical narratives.\textsuperscript{20} The second sense acknowledges the existence of a hierarchy even within the East Asian region, which has cast some countries as peripheral even within the larger periphery. The application of this twofold peripheral-perspective is essential to carve out an autonomous space through which we can move beyond the trinity of the post-colonial, post-Cold War and post-hegemonic order, both theoretically and practically.\textsuperscript{21} And for this plan to be realized, it is necessary to come to terms with the longstanding reality of domination by the US (and its subordinate ally, Japan) as well as the danger of future domination by China. Moreover, in this space, the sub-peripheral entities comprise not only countries but also “those societies and diasporas that have been cast as ‘peripheral’ in the formation processes of

\textsuperscript{19} Hwang In-won refers to a process that is not simply constituted by a majority vote concept, as is the case of the ‘ASEAN way,’ but rather one that secures the approval of every member nation. Inevitably, however, complete agreement is not always possible, and in that case, “an alternative solution must be sought that accommodates the diverse political and strategic positions of the member nations by drawing on their unique historical ties.” See Hwang (2008), p.59.

\textsuperscript{20} For more on the ‘twofold peripheral perspective’ of the region, see Chung et al. (2004). The notion of twofold peripheral perspective was critical in my own decision to expand my view of East Asia to include Southeast Asia. For more on this issue, see Park (2008), p.11.

\textsuperscript{21} This idea has been slightly revised from the trinity proposed by Chen Kuan-Hsing: ‘post-colonial, post-Cold War, post-imperialist.’ By using ‘post-hegemony’ instead of ‘post-imperialist,’ it also addresses the scenario in which China rises to dominate the region.
their nation-states, because they do not fit into the nation-state model, extending beyond the framework of national boundaries.”22 And so ultimately, this kind of approach will allow us to expand our perspectives and transcend the limitations of nation-based models.

The next issue at hand is that of an East Asian ‘community.’ I have in the past advocated a different concept of an ‘East Asian Perspective’ that looks beyond individual national boundaries. The notion of an Interconnected East Asia, by contrast, views the region as a single unit. Nevertheless, by my emphasizing the ‘East Asian Perspective’ as the key to achieving reconciliation and peace in the region, I have been labeled by some as an advocate of an ‘East Asian Community,’ and so I feel the need to clarify my position. If I were asked whether I supported the ‘East Asian Community’ model, I would answer “both yes and no,” because we need to take account of disciplinary trends. Social scientists tend to approach the term ‘East Asian Community’ rather narrowly, from the angle of policies and institutions. Their theories of regionalization focus on the domains of politics, economics, and culture to support their views of an increasingly interdependent region. On the other hand, scholars in the humanities tend to focus on more intangible phenomena, such as the formation of spontaneous unions and decentralized networks. By drawing on the notion of ‘Social Humanities’ mentioned earlier, however, I seek to avoid this type of partitioning, so that the situation can be appraised holistically.23 Only thus, will we be able to obtain an objective view of the regionalist formations that shape our heartfelt struggle for a more humane society. Only thus, will we be able to critically evaluate whether

22 Chung et al. (2004), p.36.
23 Similar ideas can be found in the work by Amako Satoshi, a Japanese scholar of China. Amako argues that an ‘East Asian regional alliance’ must be filtered and viewed through ‘Asia as method.’ Amako (2010), p.27.
we are moving toward a true East Asian Community, in terms of both institutions and values. The path which leads toward this true East Asian Community comprehends far more than an institutional framework premised upon the nation and capital, and so I must answer both “yes, and no” to the earlier question.

Of course, in reality, there are inconsistencies between regionalization and regionalism. However, in practice, these very differences will motivate some of the people in civil society to work to construct an East Asian Community. Although it is evident that regional integration is already underway, there are significant obstacles to the institutionalization of a ‘community’ or a ‘union’: not only the inevitable conflicts of interest among nations, but also the uniquely dominant position of China within East Asia. The most successful line of approach, therefore, is to likely to involve finessing these potential sources of tension by promoting community-centered cooperative schemes which engage the participation of the people, rather than relying solely upon those which operate at the state level.

But whatever model we choose, whether it be led by the citizens or by the state, the two most important prerequisites for the actualization of an East Asian Community are the process of integration on the regional level and structural reforms on the national level. The changes must take place from both directions, allowing for a regional integration process that transcends national boundaries while maximizing the participation of this region’s inhabitants.
4. The Meeting of the East Asia Discourse and the Division System Theory

At this point, I would like to critically evaluate how practices of those two directions have been performed on the Korean Peninsula. I focus on the Korean Peninsula not only because it is my place of residence: it also serves as an important stronghold in the system of global hegemonic control. A movement here to overcome the ‘division system’ can therefore help to destroy the structures of oppression at the global level and catalyze transformation in the capitalist world-system. But apparently, some find even these reasons insufficient, as I have often been accused of being too focused on the Korean Peninsula.²⁴ I will return to this point at the end of this article, but first I would like to address this matter in terms of *locus* or ‘location.’ Wakabayashi Chiyo has described ‘location’ as a place in which “each individual seeks to find, share, and reconstruct ‘world consciousness’ with the clues from their own ever-changing society and history which is also interlinked with its neighboring societies.”²⁵ The thing is whether the Korean Peninsula functions as a ‘location’ — or a ‘core location’ in the sense defined by theorist Sun Ge²⁶ and provides a concrete base to anchor the progression of a thought project.

To use a concept frequently used in the ‘Changbi discourse,’ I am seeking to bring together “discussions fostered over the long-term on a global scale with ideas based on small to medium regions or small to medium-term projects.”²⁷ And to return the focus to the primary goals of this article: it is essential to analyze how the confrontation of the East Asia

---

²⁵ See Wakabayashi (2008).
²⁷ Baik (2008), p.35.
discourse with the division system will unfold. Ryu Jun-pil has commented that both sides should continue to maintain ‘superficial relations.’ While my approach may be subject to criticism, I firmly believe that the East Asia discourse can be connected with the Division System theory through the catalysis of the Third World perspective (in which the world is viewed as one single unit), and that this synthesis can contribute to the formation of a global alternative.

Having established these points, let us evaluate from a short-, middle-, and long-term perspective how the East Asia discourse and the Division System theory can be applied together to such a complex and multidimensional field of space and time. First, we must assess specifically and practically how the implementation of short-term reform projects in South Korea will affect East Asia. Allow me to draw on personal experience to support my argument. On May 28, 2010, when the governments of the US and Japan announced their intention to relocate the Futenma US Marine base within the Okinawa prefecture, I was among nearly 4,000 residents who rallied in protest. Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama had reneged on his promise to remove the base from Okinawa. He justified this by stating the need for a US military base to serve as a deterrent to North Korea and China. With his support base threatened by the unpopularity of the Futenma move, Hatoyama cited the “North Korean threat,” and claimed that the relocation of the base within Okinawa was unavoidable. As I watched the events unfold, I could not help but lament the failure of the two Koreas to follow through on the June 15 Joint Declaration announced during the North-South Summit of 2000, as this would most likely have spared the Okinawans from such an
imposition. The people I spoke with at the protest responded to these opinions with a mournful sense of regret and sympathy. Six months after this announcement, in November 2010, I traveled to Taiwan to attend the Third Annual East Asian Critical Journals Conference in Kinmen (or Jinmen), where I discovered that the people of Taiwan were also experiencing a great deal of anxiety after the Yeonpyeong Island artillery bombardment. Indeed, Okamoto Yukiko, the editor of Okinawa’s Keshikaji magazine, asked what Okinawans could do to help resolve the tension on the Korean Peninsula; and such incidents serve as clear evidence that East Asia is becoming increasingly interlocked.

Thus for peace to be achieved in East Asia, South and North Korea must continue with the process of reconciliation, cooperation, and reintegration to satisfy the economic demands of their peoples, while still maintaining minimal devices to manage risk factors. This represents the ‘intermediary stage’ toward reunification, as outlined by Item 2 of the June 15 Joint Declaration, and such a strategy should be implemented without further delay. Moreover, the most realistic and rational plan for resolving the crisis on the Korean Peninsula involves drawing North Korea into this framework and guaranteeing the security of its regime, while guiding changes there by encouraging North Korean participation in “comprehensive reforms linked with a gradual South-North integration process.”

The strategy above recalls the mid-term task laid out within the ‘compound state’ theory. In fact, there are numerous occasions,
throughout history, when such a ‘corporate body’ has emerged, in the form of a confederation or a low-level federation. However, the compound state that is envisaged on the Korean Peninsula is unique in that it not only represents a union of states, but also the ‘self-transformation’ of the nation-state itself. This point illustrates how circumstances have changed since the June 15 Joint Declaration: the goal is not a type of reunification in which one side absorbs the other, but rather the creation of a grounded and genuine political community that does away with the division system and thereby preserves the dignity of the people. This strategy is, of course, very different from that proposed by conservative forces looking to absorb a North Korea perceived as being on the verge of collapse. Moreover, reunification will not, as some radicals suggest, result in the domination of South Korean capital in support of a more general global advancement of capitalism. Neither will the outcome be what post-nationalists characterize as a reunification premised on the notion of ethnic homogeneity which represses the diversity and complex identities of the people. In short, my view is quite distinct from either of these two deadlocked positions, and yet it is impossible to predict exactly what type of state-formation will ultimately result.\footnote{Our goal is not merely to overcome the division system nominally, but to uproot it from our everyday lives; and by approaching reunification as a ‘process’ we will be implementing reforms that will lead us toward a more decent society.}

For an East Asian perspective on the creation and implementation of the compound state, it is useful to consider the notion of a ‘compound society’ put forth by the Taiwanese scholar Ning Yin-Pin. Coming from a plural society himself, his main goal is to use the ‘compound society’

\footnote{For criticism of this idea, see Yoo (2002).}
paradigm (which is at the same time transnational) to overcome the reality of division, and thus reconstitute a compound state. In particular, the minority groups of the region (he uses homosexuals as an example in his work) play a significant role in transcending the nation-state system. His distrust in the unit of the nation is related to the previously mentioned ‘twofold periphery’ of the region.\(^{33}\) In this vein, the Korean-Japanese scholar Suh Kyung-sik has presented his ideas about the status of the ‘half citizen, half refugee’ Korean-Japanese whose “transnational identities in East Asia are developed within this condition of political subjectivity.”\(^{34}\) If we are anticipating a reunification process which, instead of revolving around a single nation-state, is modeled upon a compound state, then we must embrace the complexity and ambiguity of identities. The path toward a compound state is illustrated by the transnational subjectivities of the Korean-Japanese and of others such as migrant workers and refugees. Their circumstances allow us to better understand the “process of overcoming the division system which will lead to the disintegration of the existing state structure and generate harmony among the peoples.”\(^{35}\)

This kind of viewpoint has, on the one hand, given rise to worries that the compound state will be “subsumed into the nation-state,”\(^{36}\) while being criticized, on the other hand, for “overlooking the ongoing importance of the nation-state” in the region.\(^{37}\) However, the compound state that I envision allows for the double task of adapting to and

\(^{33}\) In response to the ‘perspective of the two-fold periphery,’ Ning Yin-pin advocates a ‘perspective of the three-fold periphery.’ The third element is ‘the periphery within the people,’ in which, for example, women are considered as being on the periphery of men. Ning (2008), pp.276-279.


\(^{35}\) Paik (2009), p.190.


\(^{37}\) Unsurprisingly, Jang In-sung criticizes Choe Chang-jiip as a post-nationalist for de-emphasizing the importance of the nation-state. See Jang (2005), p.17.
overcoming the nation-state to occur simultaneously. I am not proposing an absolute negation of the state model. Instead, I am advocating a far more realistic short-term ‘state reform’ strategy that will allow us to move beyond statism and toward a compound state.\[38\]

The reunification of Korea must be envisioned as a process that will emerge organically from the formation of a compound state. We are not seeking to establish a conventional nation-state entity, but to create a novel confederation that will facilitate the overcoming of the division system on the Peninsula. It is anticipated that in other areas of East Asia, also, a compound state will emerge as this double task is carried out alongside the reform of independent nation-states, and the compound state discourse (together with the East Asia discourse that is linked to it) cannot therefore be called a ‘Korea-centric’ project.\[39\]

This misconception can be corrected simply by accepting the fact that the Division System theory and the East Asia discourse are already beginning to converge.\[40\] For example, the Taiwanese scholar Chen Kuan-Hsing has proposed that South-North relations, instead of being on equal footing, will more closely resemble the unequal dynamics of the China-Taiwan relationship, and he also concurs with my view that overcoming the division system will not lead to a simple reunification, but rather will yield a new model entirely. In addition, he remarks that the “end of the division system entails thinking outside the existing ideologies of liberalism, democracy and free-market capitalism. Socialism too must be transcended so that a wholly new structure and theory can emerge in

---

\[38\] For a more detailed discussion of this concept, see Paik (2011).

\[39\] Among those who oppose this concept I should mention Ryu Jun-pil and Jeong Seon-tae in Korea, and Sun Xueyan abroad. See Sun Xueyan (2009), p.2.

\[40\] For a report on this specific phenomenon, see “The Taiwanese Interest in Paik Nak-chung’s Division System Theory” in The Hankyoreh, 27 January 2011.
response to the tensions inherent in this differentiated society.”

Moreover, there are many others who plainly refute the accusations of ‘Korea-centrism,’ most notably Paik Nak-chung, who comments that an East Asian Community is a prerequisite for the success of a confederation on the Korean Peninsula, and that the realization of this community is “essential for the advancement of East Asian regional solidarity.” Allow me now to turn to Paik’s work for a clear explication of how the confederation model will lead to the spread of peace in East Asia:

Even if the North and South choose to follow the model of a relatively loose and open compound state, the formation of an ‘East Asian Confederation’ or federalization of China and Japan will not unfold automatically. Yet one result that will ensue shortly is the realization of autonomy in regions such as Tibet, Xinjiang, and Okinawa. Moreover, the Chinese mainland and Taiwan will also nominally adopt the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ policy, presaging future breakthroughs for a North-South confederation.

Paik has also shown the infeasibility of proposals, such as those of Sakamoto Yoshikazu, which suggest the exclusion of North Korea from an East Asian Community. Indeed, he writes that the North-South union is “critical to the paradigm shift” necessary for the creation of such a community. More generally, it is unfortunate that the significance of the North-Korea confederation for East Asia, and even for the world as a whole, has not received due attention by Asian intellectuals. That said,

43 Sakamoto (2009), p.399. Kimiya Tadashi has also argued that the division system is “not limited to Korea, but rather covers Japan, and even all of East Asia.” See Kimiya (2009), p.414.
44 See Baik and Jitsuro (2010).
one constructive outcome arising from the sinking of Cheonan and the Yeonpyeong Island incident in 2010 is that the case for an ‘Interconnected East Asia’ is now even stronger and more widely acknowledged.

Last year marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Korean War, which played a fundamental role in solidifying the world system, as led by the US. The maintenance of the division system on the Korean Peninsula, moreover, has enveloped the rest of the world, becoming the justification *par excellence* for the strengthening of American forces and the unrestrained proliferation of the American military-industrial complex. Surely one can clearly see from all this that the ‘Korean problem’ is significant on a world-historical scale. And in the same way as the Korean Peninsula is a ‘core site’ for the hegemonic global system, it must conversely be considered a critical locus for the dissolution of American dominance and the formation of a new space that will transcend the prevailing American worldview. Actually breaking free from the capitalist world system is unlikely, but this process will serve as a catalyst to transform the structure of world systems over the longer term.

The task which now remains is to evaluate how, when East Asian regional solidarity is established, facilitated by the construction of a compound state on the Korean Peninsula, this will impact the neoliberal consensus in the long run; and, first of all, how will the neoliberal hegemonic world order be affected. Some commentators are, of course, skeptical about any region-based ideas *per se*, not forgetting the neoliberal bloc which proposes a world without borders. Then there are the opponents of neoliberalism and post-nationalists who are also skeptical, but for different reasons, with the latter focused on revealing the power structures embedded in the concept of ‘nation.’ Yoo Jae-keon criticizes all these for oversimplifying the dynamics and principal agents of the world system, and overlooking geopolitical divisions. He writes that the
world functions through the division of three independent geopolitical entities, the US, Europe, and East Asia, so that when the still-evolving East Asian region “succeeds in constructing an alternative community, the potential for a shift in the world system will be greater than we can now imagine.” If East Asia does indeed fulfill this creative role, it will have made an immense contribution to overcoming the hierarchical regional order, as well as undermining the typical authoritarian developmentalist paradigm. While Yoo’s ideas may require further elaboration, I would like to add just one point. At this unprecedented juncture when East Asia is blossoming, and when “dynamic regionalism is making way for the restructuring of power relations” around the world, we must be able to take a step back and reflect on the trends of our times.

In addition, for the long-term plan to move beyond the neoliberal framework which is so deeply embedded within our daily lives, our approach must encompass the highest aspirations of our civilization. In the process of implementing this new paradigm in East Asia, we must draw upon its profound civilizational resources. And yet, I cannot help but wonder whether what we have seen so far has been limited to the level of small state theory.

I have previously analyzed the close ties between the compound state theory and the small state policy. Notions of the small state in Korea, and also in Japan and China, have been distorted throughout history. Choi Won-sik has even proposed the need to graft the core ideas of the

45 Baik (2008), pp.44-45. For more detailed discussion, see Yoo (2006).
46 Also see Seldon (2009). He presents a three-part historical regional model that begins with the Chinese dominance of the ‘Pax Sinica’ in the 16th-19th centuries. The second period, 1840-1970, was defined by the fall of China and the rise of Japan and the US thereafter; and is characterized by colonialism, war, and revolution. The third begins in the 1970s, when Asia emerges through the birth of a dynamic regionalism.
small-state onto the middle-sized state, writing that through the small state theory “we will be able to reflect on the large statism within us and seek reasons to dismantle it.”

This does not, however, imply ‘common poverty’ or dismissing the importance of material conditions. I agree with Paik Nak-chung that by overcoming the division system we can establish “a society where each, having enough, learns thrift and moderation, rather than sharing in poverty; and at the societal level, sufficient material wealth is accumulated to meet various needs of the people and is distributed democratically.”

This describes what Paik has referred to as “life sustaining development,” and represents a strategic outlook on civilization that “sustains and prioritizes life at all costs.”

Paik’s comments evoke the ‘double task of adapting to and overcoming modernity’ mentioned earlier in this paper, but this new outlook on civilization should include not only the civilizational legacies of East Asia, but also real and current experiences: we need a more resolute and creative approach that does not rely on individual origins but on the collective assets of the entire community.

When we survey the region, we can detect active debates on these matters being waged in China and Japan, as well regarding long-term issues. In his analysis of Japan’s grand strategy, Kang Sang-jung has focused on the future, asking whether Japan will try to leverage the US-Japan alliance to achieve superpower status, or abandon its ‘superpower perspective’ and instead function as a non-hegemonic middle-sized country. Will Japan build multipolar systems to network with the neighboring countries to ensure mutual security and prosperity? And he also asks what kind of system should be put in place to maintain domestic

48 Choi (2009), p.29.
order after East Asia becomes interlocked.\textsuperscript{51} In China, the search has begun for a ‘Beijing Consensus’ which uses China’s peculiar socialist experience to re-evaluate the US-led world order.\textsuperscript{52} Basing their ideas upon traditional philosophies such as Confucianism and Taoism, the Chinese are looking for strategies to confront the most pressing problems. So far, Japan seems still committed to a superpower approach, which, although primarily concerned with East Asia, obviously differs considerably from the approach proposed by Kang Sang-jung. In the case of China, most of the momentum seems to be coming from state-led reforms. As yet, is too soon to tell whether these efforts can realistically yield an alternative model that will draw on East Asia’s collective assets.

I shall move on now to other issues, but the critical point to keep in mind is that realistic short-to-medium term strategies are essential to achieving this kind of long-term goal. In particular, the role of the compound state in bridging the long and short-term tasks cannot be overlooked. If the role of this mediating entity is omitted, it will be impossible to move beyond the realm of theoretical abstractions to produce real-world outcomes.

5. The Compound State as a Mediator for Regional Networks

The compound state that will emerge after the overcoming of the division system on the Korean Peninsula will have a much wider impact in


\textsuperscript{52} For criticisms that this Chinese model is bases upon economic determinism, and that it creates a theoretical basis for enlightened dictatorship and a total state system, see Qian (2011).
other areas of East Asia. A wholly new framework will arise from the core work of creating citizen-oriented states through the disintegration of established states. Moreover, East Asians will be able to envision and develop a mid-term strategy while carrying out the short-term reforms necessary to overcome the statism implicit in the nation-state.

For the rest of this section I would like to examine two particular representative sites in some detail. Both exemplify the attempt to create novel methods to solve territorial issues, by changing the perception of locations from national boundaries represented by lines into a space where two faces share common interests.

The first is the Special Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the West Sea (Yellow Sea). It is generally acknowledged that the Northern Limit Line (NLL) has been controversial since it was imposed on August 30, 1953. The UN Command instituted this maritime border in order to stop the superior naval forces of South Korea from launching incursions further north. By the 1970s, North Korea was refusing to accept this policy, but the South argued that, since the North had tacitly accepted the boundary up until this time, the line remained valid. However, on October 4, 2007, at the second North-South Summit, the plan for the Special Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the West Sea (Yellow Sea) was announced. This cooperative project was jointly supported by the North and South, and can be seen as an unprecedented move to eliminate the Northern Limit Line, though unfortunately the hardline stance taken by the South Korean government has halted any further progress on this issue.

A second example is the ‘Tourist Economic Zone,’ a specific type of special economic zone that is being constructed among various cities in Taiwan and Okinawa. On April 15, 2009, a ‘Joint Proclamation of the Tourist Economic Zone for the Exchange of National Boundaries’ was issued. This brings together the three Taiwanese counties of Hualian,
Yilan, and Taitung, with various administrative authorities in the Yaeyama Islands (a part of Okinawa) including Ishigaki city, Taketomi-cho, and Yonagun-cho. These plans are currently being held up by immigration issues, but it is to be hoped that these problems will soon be resolved, and we will be able to witness the birth of a non-state city-community.\footnote{I am grateful to Arasaki Moriteru and Wakabayashi Chiyo for sending me a copy of the Proclamation.}

It is clear that these two projects are intertwined with the broader scheme of reforming the state paradigm. The Yellow Sea Peace and Cooperation Zone cannot be brought to fruition without strenuous efforts to move beyond the division system. And as the distinguished historian Arasaki Moriteru has said at the Kinmen Conference, the smooth implementation of the Tourist Economic Zone will inevitably lead Japan to reform its views on allowing greater autonomy to Okinawa, which is a ‘core site’; and this new formation is also likely to impact the US-Japan alliance, notwithstanding the current plans for enhanced military bases in Okinawa and the neighboring islands to counter China.

Indeed, these two examples represent merely the tip of the iceberg. In spite of the heightened tensions between North and South, there are independent projects still underway which involve multiple countries. For example, there is the Tumen River Development Project, which seeks to bring together the regions of Changchun, Jilin and Tumen. Kinmen also has an important symbolic value, serving as the node of interaction between China and Taiwan in the Taiwanese Strait, and demonstrating the benefits of the free flow of communication, commerce, and navigation, known as *xiaosantong* (the three mini-links). All such examples, whether big or small, represent invaluable progress toward the traversal of national boundaries, and the simultaneous spread of such efforts is strengthening
the foundations for a new regional community in East Asia.

Given the differences in the formative processes of each of the states involved, we cannot expect the East Asia discourse and the proliferation of solidarity movements to proceed equally smoothly, nor to produce uniform results, throughout the region. We must empathize with the struggles of individuals, each in their own specific context, as they confront their own particular situations and internal conflicts. This also implies empathizing with the ‘victims’ and sometimes even with the ‘victimizers’: only thus will we be able to look deeply into ourselves, so that solidarity and reconciliation can become truly attainable goals. Therein lie the roots of a true East Asian Community.
Bibliography


____. 2008a. “Hanjungildaeman ‘Bipanjeok Jabji Hoeui’ui Hyeonjangeseso” (한·중·일·대만 ‘비판적 잡지 회의’의 현장에서) [At the ‘Korea-China-Japan-Taiwan Critical Journals Symposium’]. *The Hankyoreh* 31 May.


Baik, Young-seo and Jitsuro Terashima. 2010. “Segyereul Aneun Him, Dongasiagongdongcheui Gil” (세계를 아는 힘, 동아시아 공동체의 길) [The Power of Knowing the World, the Path of the East Asian Community]. *Changjakgwabipyeong* (창작과비평) [Creation and Criticism] 148.


An Interconnected East Asia and the Korean Peninsula as a Problematic


Neomeoseo” (동아시아 담론, 배반과 상처의 기억을 넘어서) [The East Asia Discourse: Moving beyond Memories of Betrayal and Hurt]. Munhakdongne (문학동네) [Literary Community] 39.


____. 2009. “Geundaehangukui Ijungwajewa Noksaekdamnon” (근대한국의 이중과제와 녹색담론) [The Double Project of Modern Korea and the Green Discourse]. Ijungwajeron (이중과제론) [The Double Project Discourse]. Edited by Yi Nam-ju. Paju: Changbi.


____. 2011. “Gukgajuui Geukbokgwa Hanbandoeseuoi Gukgagaejo Jageop (국
가주의 극복과 한반도에서의 국가개조 작업) [Overcoming Statism and the State Reconstruction Project on the Korean Peninsula]. Changjakgwabipyeong (창작과비평) [Creation and Criticism] 151.


Sun, Ge. 2011. “Minjungsigakgwa Minjungyeondae” (민중시각과 민중연대) [The Viewpoint and Solidarity of the People].” Translated by Im Woo-kyeong. Changjakgwabipyeong (창작과비평) [Creation and Criticism] 151.


Yim, Hyong-taek et al., eds. 1985. *Jeonhwangiui Dongasiamunhak* (전환기의 동아시아문학) [East Asian Literature during the Period of Transition]. Paju: Changbi.


Yoon, Yeo-il. 2010. “Dongasiaran Muleum” (동아시아란 물음) [The Question of East Asia]. *Hwanghaemunhwa* (황해문화) [Culture of the Yellow Sea] 69.