

# The Development of Regional Cooperation in Asia

EIAS Briefing Seminar

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ASEAN+1, ASEAN+3, ASEAN+6, ARF, APEC, East Asia Summit, APEC, etc. - there are so many regional integration/cooperation schemes existing in the so-called spaghetti bowl of East Asia. This event organised in collaboration between EIAS, the Confucius Institute at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), the Brussels Academy for China and European Studies (BACES), the United Nations University or Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) brought together experts from all over Asia and Europe to discuss the ongoing development of regional cooperation in Asia. The event's first panel addressed the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the various examples of regional cooperation that have stemmed from this organisation, whilst the second provided assessment of regional cooperation in Northeast Asia.

## **Welcome remarks by**

### ***Axel Goethals, CEO, European Institute for Asian Studies***

After welcoming the guests, Mr Goethals began his speech by recognising the many regional forums that have been established in Asia, such as ASEAN, ASEAN+3, ASEAN+6, OPEC, East Asia Summit, and so on. He then briefly introduced the institutions involved in the organisation of the event: The Confucius Institute at Vrije University of Brussels (VUB), the Brussels Academy for China and European Studies (BACES), the United Nations University on Comparative Regional Studies, and the European Institute for Asian Studies.

Mr Goethals then introduced H.E. Dato' Hasnudin bin Hamzah, the Ambassador of Malaysia to the Kingdom of Belgium, Head of the Malaysian Mission to the European Union and Chair of ASEAN Brussels Committee to provide the introductory remarks.

## **Introduction by**

### ***H.E. Dato' Hasnudin bin Hamzah, Ambassador of Malaysia to the Kingdom of Belgium, Head of Malaysian Mission to the European Union, Head of ASEAN Brussels Committee***

H.E. Dato' Hasnudin bin Hamzah first expressed his gratitude to the audience and the panelists, whom he identified as experts that would greatly contribute to the conversation about regionalism in Asia. Ambassador Hamzah mentioned how cooperation has formed the backbone of the development of ASEAN as an organisation. Looking at the past decades, it is clear that the epicenter of geopolitics and economic development has been shifting towards Asia. Indeed, the international geopolitical focus is changing, and such a shift creates both opportunities and challenges. Speaking as a representative of ASEAN, the Ambassador emphasised the fact that cooperation should be an integral part of the strategy to continue the positive relations among the ASEAN countries.

Since its establishment in 1967, ASEAN has not only brought together Southeast Asian countries, but also those in the wider region. The organisation was founded to overcome contentious and sensitive issues, but with time it became a platform for a wider range of issues. Absolutely, ASEAN has contributed to the stability, peace and prosperity of the region, while also enhancing the member countries' relations with their external partners. To cite an example of ASEAN's contribution to regional cooperation, the Ambassador indicated the establishment of the ASEAN Regional

Forum in 1994, which to this day offers a platform of consultation on security issues and issues of common interest and concern.

The most important achievement of ASEAN is the strength that it has given to its member countries and the opportunity it has provided to have their voices heard - both within and outside of the organisation. Under the mechanisms that have been established and developed within ASEAN, cooperation with countries outside the region has also improved, resulting in strong, mutually beneficial relationships with countries such as China, India and the United States. Ambassador Hamzah recognises that, within the context of cooperation, economics constitutes the most important factor in shaping the role of ASEAN in the region. Being members of the international community, ASEAN member countries need to address the global issues and challenges that affect them and their people.

Alongside ASEAN, Asia has recently witnessed the growth of other sub-regional and intra-regional forums. Nowadays, such organisations are thriving, especially those with the goal of enhancing regional cooperation on various levels. Within this context, it is important to ensure that ASEAN remains intact and meets the objectives and the expectations of its citizens.

Lastly, Ambassador Hamzah pointed out how Malaysia has always been a peaceful and neutral country that connected East and West Asia. Malaysia has “regionalism in its genes” because it is always at the forefront in developing regional groupings and cooperation. The Ambassador then concluded his speech by expressing his wish for ASEAN to continue to be a growing, stable and peaceful community that will prosper long into the future.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Panel Discussion - Regionalism in Asia: ASEAN+**

***Moderator : Dr David Camroux, Senior Researcher within the Centre de Recherches Internationales (CERI), and Associate Professor at Science Po***

Following Ambassador Hamzah’s comprehensive introduction and after once again welcoming the guests and the audience, Dr. David Camroux briefly introduced the Competing Regional Integrations in Southeast Asia ([CRISEA](#)) project. This is an interdisciplinary research project funded by the European Union which touches areas such as the environment, economy, socio-cultural aspects, and geopolitics of the Southeast Asian region.

Dr Camroux then introduced the rest of the panel of experts composed of Dr Shaofeng Chen, professor at the School of International Studies at Peking University, Mr Jan-Willem Blankert, Senior Associate at the EU-Asia Centre Dr Shaun Breslin, Professor at the University of Warwick, and Dr William Callahan, Professor at the London School of Economics and Political Sciences.

***Dr Shaofeng Chen, Professor at Peking University***

Professor Shaofeng Chen opened the discussion by stating that regional integration in East Asia is very different from that of Western Europe and, thus, the institutions developed to deal with cooperation are inherently distinct from the European Union. Regional cooperation in Asia is manifest in various integration schemes and pan-regional (ARF, APEC, NEACD, CICA), trans-regional (ex: ASEM, SCO), sub-regional (ex: China-Japan-ROK Summit), and intraregional (ex: ASEAN, EAS) organisations.

Such differences have roots in history, and manifest themselves in many different ways. Firstly, Asian regionalism is inclusive and “soft”, which is distinctly different from the approach of Western Europe, which is quite exclusive. Secondly, in Asia, institutionalism is quite weak: in fact, the ASEAN’s body is comprised of less than 50 people and it is operated in slow consensus. Professor Chen proceeded to explain that the “Asian Way” of establishing regional cooperation is based on discreteness, informality, consensus building and non-confrontational bargaining styles.

In this regard, cooperation is dealt with following two tracks: economic integration and security cooperation. Some countries are more dependent economically on China but are reliant on the US concerning security issues. In fact, the US hub-and-spoke system permeates East and Southeast Asia and its surrounding waters, but many of the countries that receive security guarantees from the US have China as their largest trading partner. The increased dependence of some countries on China is creating tensions in the continent, because those same countries depend on the US on security affairs. When it comes to these types of issues, unlike in Western Europe, which has a top-down approach, ASEAN and Asian cooperation has a bottom-up approach.

Private companies are at the heart of the push for increased regional cooperation. Today, the People’s Republic of China is at the heart of the regional production network, and products it produces often go on to be sold in the EU and US markets. It shares trade deficits with, for example, South Korea and Japan, while it has trading surplus with the US and the EU.

Dr Chen proceeded to identify the obstacles to regional integration, namely historical and territorial disputes, which remain sensitive topics. The Professor particularly emphasised the tensions created by Japan's recognition (or lack thereof) its past role as an aggressive power. Other factors include sharp differences in economic systems, political systems, religions, cultures and traditions.

In the last part of his presentation, Dr Chen pointed out how Asian countries are sensitive about sovereignty and that they dislike the notion of sovereign transfer. This process is reminiscent of experiences under the colonial rule and reminds Asian nations of their fight for freedom and sovereignty. Furthermore, the US' promotion of regional integration in Europe as a means of containing communism was not replicated in Asia, where the US even opposed it – as did the Japanese. Lastly, Germany and Japan played different roles in promoting regional integration: Germany had to be forgiven to export their products and in turn apologised sincerely. Japan however, did not, partly due to its unique alliance with the US - a fact that has led to ongoing tensions with its neighbors. The US eventually tolerated militarism in Japan to prevent communism because Japan exports to EU and USA, thus Japan does not have an incentive to apologise to the regional neighbors.

***Dr Jan Willem Blankert, EU-Asia Centre***

Dr Jan Willem Blanker begun his speech by recalling an article he wrote in 2007: in that article he concluded that if people think that regionalism in ASEAN is too little too late, some think that the EU may be too much too soon. When ASEAN was established in 1967, the peace in Southeast Asia that we now take for granted was not a guarantee at that time. The current peace and stability is the result of efforts made by institutions and governments. ASEAN is helping its member countries develop step-by-step, slowly but steadily. One area in which the region could see more progress is the one pertaining to human rights and democracy. Mr Bankert asserted that ASEAN is clearly a force for the positive and an excellent example of how to deal with big and powerful neighbors – an example which the EU could learn from.

The institutions that emerged in Asia to foster regional cooperation have achieved their goals in a 'quiet' manner, with an approach that did not immediately change the status quo of the region: confidence-building, mutual interests, and mutual trust are just some of the different techniques used to deal with big and sometimes threatening powers. China is a good example of a country that has been managed using this approach, and the European Union could learn a thing or two from ASEAN.

The institutions that make up the intricate web of international organisations dedicated to cooperation in Asia did lack clear plans, designs and money to be able to carry many concrete projects. Ever since China proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, this has changed. Although at the beginning the BRI was met with suspicion, it was eventually welcomed by the majority of Asian countries. Dr Blankert believes the BRI to be – in principle – a good thing. Although there is lots of talk about debt-traps surrounding the BRI, the Malaysian Prime Minister has recently shown that it is possible to re-negotiate the terms of borrowing. Dr Blankert suggested that other countries can and should follow this example.

ASEAN is currently facing three main challenges. The first of these is the completion of the negotiations for and the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP, or ASEAN+10). Second is the issue of maximising the synergy within ASEAN with through a common connectivity plan and adhering to China's BRI. This is the perfect way for China to show its peaceful and cooperative intentions. Lastly, is the establishment of a code of conduct for the South China Sea, which will take some time.

Dr Blankert concluded his speech by reaffirming the importance of regional governance. He also questioned the value of comparing regionalism elsewhere in the world to that experienced with Europe. The processes and experiences of regionalism are sure to differ for numerous reasons including geographical location as well as time in history. As such, scholars and policy makers should focus their attentions on observable and emerging patterns of regionalism and regional integration, rather than applying distinctly Eurocentric lens.

***Dr Shaun Breslin, Professor at the University of Warwick, UK***

Dr Shaun Breslin started his speech with a strong statement: studies on comparative regionalism between Europe and Asia have revealed that crises are good because they act to spur real cooperation. Dr Breslin cited the Asian financial crisis as an example, which helped solidify relations between ASEAN+3. He also cited the global financial crisis, which led to the emergence of forums and platforms of discussion and confrontation. When crises happen, ideological values are often put aside in favour of looking for a solution to the problem. However, when a crisis starts to fade, tensions can reemerge.

Looking at the creation of the European Union, there was a period when the the regional economic space and the regional geopolitical and security space more or

less coincided. Especially during the Cold War, nations took clear-cut stances on the international stage, with nonaligned nations forced into firm and fixed relations and positions of some sort. However today, especially in Asia - as stated by the previous speakers - this stability and clear division of allegiances is no longer present. Today in Asia there is something that is increasingly looking like a regional economic space, with countries coming together to maximise their political efforts towards what can be considered common goals.

The same is not true when it comes to the geostrategic space in Asia. Dr Breslin argues that contemporary capitalism forces countries to be promiscuous in their relations with other states. In the old days, it was impossible for the countries of the Western block to have relations with the Soviet Union. However today, especially in Asia, capitalism insists that countries have economic ties with both China and the US, a balance that does not exist when it comes to security issues. Dr Breslin best describes the role that China serves in Asia by comparing it to the one collectively played by Russia and Germany in Europe. It is difficult to build effective holistic regional governance mechanisms when the main economic partner is also the main security challenge – at least for some countries. This is the issue at the heart of the processes that are taking place in Asia Today.

By the same token, there are three different potential processes taking place at the same time in Asia. The first one is an attempt – and competition – to define the regional space that should be governed and to build the institutions around that definition. Not only is there an attempt to build regional institutions, but also to build a region. It is critical to create a shared understanding of the region that needs to be governed. This process can create a push for the formation of regions and of anti-regions. In this case, APEC is an anti-region, and anti-regions develop because they are opposed to the regions that are being proposed – in this case, to block the emergence of an 'Asian Asia'. The East Asia Summit was also an anti-region, made to prevent the creation of a China-dominated continent, and now it has been expanded to become a regional organisation. The second process taking place is the search to pursue transactional solutions to collective issues. The Trans Pacific Partnership was a real attempt to find solutions to transnational problems on economic and geostrategic issues through the exclusion of China and other countries from it. Most of the time, the process of building regionalism happens at a much slower pace. The last issue is the Chinese strategy of pushing for partnerships instead of alliances, which sees the creation of new hub and spoke relationships with other countries - depending on the area of commonality that they have with China. This has been a very effective instrument in Chinese diplomacy for the last decade

or so. This really pushes against a holistic solution to many of the transnational problems the region faces.

Dr Breslin concluded by asserting that maybe the keen focus on regionalism in Asia is not necessarily a constructive one, as scholars and policy experts are focusing their attention on the wrong thing. Scholars instead should focus not on what looks like Europe or replicates the European experience in other parts of the world, but rather concentrate on identifying where real signs of regionalism are emerging, how, and why.

***Dr William Callahan, Professor at London School of Economics and Political Sciences, UK***

With respect to the issues raised by the previous speakers, Dr William Callahan took a different approach, focusing more on China and its relationship with Southeast Asia. He sees China “grasping Southeast Asia with two hands” (from Deng Xiaoping’s slogan). With one hand China is grasping economic development, with the other, political stability. In fact, China is both building military and navy capacity, while proposing economic partnerships.

The world is in a time of change, with a rising – or already risen – China and a retrenching US. This has left Southeast Asian countries wondering what to do, scrambling between economics and security. There has also been a significant shift in how China and the Chinese people see themselves and the world. This has impacted how China works with other countries, especially ASEAN. In this context, the concepts of identity, security and development are all intertwined. Chinese foreign policy is better understood as coming in cycles. China’s peripheral diplomacy basically works on a carrot and sticks principle. China on the one hand is involved in institution building (for example the AIDB), but on the other China is island-building in the South China Sea, provoking security competition with its neighbors as well as the US

Dr Callahan identified the BRI as a manifestation of the economic partnerships that China is trying to establish, and identifies the carrot and stick approach in the examination of its evolution. At first, Beijing made generous promises and lots of countries and leaders signed up to it. Then, over the past 18 months, there have been problems with BRI - either because expectations and promises were not met and kept, or because they came with very expensive strings attached. China is accused of ‘debt trap diplomacy’ and of being involved with credit imperialism,

almost a 'One Debt One Road (ODOR)' initiative. This prompted the Prime Minister of Malaysia to invite his Chinese counterpart not to make China a neocolonial power. This episode allowed the revision of the agreement between Malaysia and China, reducing the Malaysian debt.

## **Q&A**

After a compelling discussion between the panelists, the floor was opened to the participants. During the first round of questions, a comment was made observing that the basis of any type of regionalism and cooperation has to be trust. Then, the audience asked about the role of European colonialism in Asia in shaping regionalism on the continent. The panelists responded by affirming that regional and regular governments can coexist, and that we are living in an era of transformation in which bipolarity is no longer the main driving force in international relations. Also, it was stated that the concept of the 'nation' was introduced by the Europeans, and that Asian countries cherish very dearly their right of self-determination.

In the second round, questions were raised about what role China should play in ASEAN, the role of "compromise" in multilateralism in Asia, and a request to expand on the comparison between the EU and ASEAN. The panelists replied that there has been a shift in the past decade of how scholars and academics talk about Chinese foreign policy. It was suggested that China does not have nationalism, but rather 'civilisationism'. There are some currents of thoughts in Chinese society that believe in an almost quiasi 'superiority' of the Chinese civilisation compared to others, with some observers believing that this notion dictates Chinese foreign policy. Finally, it was noted how the EU is usually taken more seriously than ASEAN, although the situation is slowly changing.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Panel Discussion - Regional Cooperation in Northeast Asia**

***Moderator : Xavier Nuttin, Senior Associate, EIAS***

To get the discussion underway, Mr Xavier Nuttin, Senior Associate at EIAS, provided an overview of the role played by Northeast Asia on the global stage. He pointed out that the three major countries in the region – China, Japan, and South Korea – together make up about 21% of the world population and 23% of the global GDP. They play a very decisive role in Asia's security and prosperity as well as in the shifting world order. Additionally, Mr Nuttin highlighted the important influence of the US in the region. More specifically, the

three countries' respective relations with the US are crucial for us to comprehend the changes happening in the region.

Following on from this, Mr Nuttin provided a closer observation of the trilateral relations. He argued that relations among the three major countries in the region have not been easy. The level of cooperation between Japan, Korea and China is limited, and is likely to remain this way. Various factors have contributed to this, such as competing historical narratives, nationalist sentiments, and territorial disputes. In short, low levels of trust hinder the development of regional cooperation. Mr Nuttin maintained that these trilateral relations are best characterised as 'strategic competition'.

There is also a bright side of the story. "The economic interdependence between the three is significant and can play a positive role and have a stabilising effect," said Mr Nuttin. Whether economic interests are able to overcome political and historical sensitivities remains to be seen. After that, the floor was given to Prof. Sheng Qin from Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

### **Prof. Sheng Qin, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences**

Prof. Qin examined the cooperation among China, Japan, and South Korea (CJK) from an economic perspective. He first provided a detailed description of the global context. The US, the world's largest economy, perceives the current multilateral trade system as inefficient and has lost its faith in it. Also, the US believes it can enjoy a greater advantage through prioritising bilateral and regional negotiations over multilateral ones. Partly due to these reasons, the US is changing its trade policy. In Prof. Qin's opinion, this change has greatly undermined the basic value of multilateralism and global economic cooperation, and has a significant impact on Northeast Asia.

Prof. Qin argued that US protectionism puts a lot of pressure on Japan and South Korea, which might benefit from the further promotion of regional cooperation between China, Japan, and South Korea (CJK). The idea of a higher level of CJK cooperation has also become more appealing due to the slow-down of the world economy. Despite this however, Prof. Qin admitted that obstacles for deeper CJK cooperation exist as well. For example, the three powers are competing fiercely in the field of cutting-edge technology. Besides, the risk of the US spoiling prospects of improved trilateral relations cannot be overlooked. It is very likely that the US does not want to see its two regional allies becoming too closely connected with its main strategic rival, China. In short, throughout Northeast Asia, opportunities and risks coexist. Against this backdrop, Prof. Qin concluded his presentation by calling for win-win cooperation and rational competition among China, Japan and South Korea.

## **Prof. Kiyomitsu Yui, Kobe University, Japan**

Prof. Yui studied regional cooperation in Northeast Asia from a historical and cultural perspective. More specifically, he addressed how Japan has actively learned from and/or was influenced by different civilisations throughout history. Prof. Yui introduced three similar pairs of civilisational competitions: great vs. minor; central vs. peripheral; axis vs. others. He claimed that "Japan has been a minor civilisation set against great civilisations such as China, and Europe, America." Throughout its history, Japan has continued to gaze at these great civilisations and feel their influence.

According to Prof. Yui, Japan went through four patterns of "gaze and influence" in its history. The first one was that Japan gazed at and was influenced by China. It was a period when Japan had a national strategy of sending students to study abroad in China, building a special ship for this purpose. The students' lives were at stake throughout this period, and they either managed to bring the knowledge they learned back to Japan or ended up perishing in the journey. In this period, Japan developed its tradition of accumulating the knowledge of Asian Studies.

Throughout the second pattern of "gaze and influence", Japan's focus was oriented towards the "West", especially Europe. The governmental strategy back then was "Away from Asia and Enter to Europe". During this period, Japan intentionally imported many modern ideas and institutions from Europe, combined them with Japanese characteristics, and then introduced them to the public. This practice was expressed in the slogan "Japanese Spirit and the Western Technology".

Prof. Yui argued that Japan was a factory that processed ideas from the West and adjusted them in certain ways so that the rest of Asia could digest them. He also noted that while Japan was importing western ideas, it also tried to export Asian ideas and values to the West. That is, there was a two-way flow of ideas, and Japan was the focus of the interface. Japan used this position to its advantage. After WWII, the focus was shifted from Europe to the US, which became the third pattern of Japan's "gaze and influence".

From Prof. Yui's perspective, the fourth pattern is emerging, in which Japan is increasingly orienting its gaze towards Asia, with a strong emphasis on China. This is the case mainly because in comparison to previous years, nowadays, the US seems to have a far looser grip on Japan. This leaves Japan to face its neighbours more directly. The interaction between Japan and other countries in Asia has become more frequent. One specific example for this fourth pattern of "gaze and influence" is that one institute of Japanese Studies in Japan has changed its name into the "Institute of 'Japan in Asia' Studies". This and other similar cases together indicate that Japan is shifting its focus from Japan's role

in the world to its role in Asia. However, this shift of focus also creates a problem, according to Prof. Yui. That is, Japan might lose its advantage as the focus of the interface between “western” civilisation and Asian civilisation.

In his conclusion, Prof. Yui reminded the audiences that in academic and cultural terms, relations between Japan and its neighbouring states in Northeast Asia should be based around cooperation rather than competition, differing from regional economic relations.

### **Prof. Tongfi Kim, Head of International Affairs Department, Vesalius College**

Prof. Kim analysed regional cooperation in Northeast Asia through the lens of security. He started with briefly introducing the security relations among CJK. One important characteristic of these trilateral security relations is that China repeatedly claims that it has no territorial dispute with South Korea, which stands in contrast to its relations with Japan. Also, Japan and South Korea’s respective military alliances with the US have a huge influence on Northeast Asia.

Following this, Prof. Kim used North Korea’s nuclearisation as a case study to further elaborate the security relations among CJK, particularly how the three major countries hold different stances towards North Korea. Prof. Kim emphasized that a nucleated North Korea would be a huge threat to all the countries in the region, including China. This implies that it should be simple for CJK to combine their efforts and deal with the problem trilaterally; however, in reality, this is not the case. The trilateral cooperation in security is rather limited, if not non-existent. Each of the three countries has its own priority, which are divergent concerning approaching North Korea.

For South Korea, denuclearisation is not its first priority. Its biggest concern when it comes to security is the conventional forces of North Korea. Prof. Kim pointed out that even though South Korea has a military advantage in terms of quality. North Korea, with its conventional military forces, is still able to cause a catastrophic damage to South Korea. Against this backdrop, there is consensus across South Korea’s political spectrum that they need to do what is necessary to avoid a second Korean war.

As for Japan, due to its geographic position, it is much less concerned with North Korea’s conventional forces. Being protected by the sea, Japan is far more concerned about North Korea’s ability to develop nuclear warheads or master short or medium-range missiles.

In the eyes of China, to denuclearise North Korea is not its priority. Prof. Kim mentioned that North Korea is the only country that China has signed a mutual defence treaty with. China does not feel as equally threatened by North Korea as South Korea and Japan do. Prof. Kim maintained that China might in fact consider North Korea a useful problem,

especially when it comes to broader US-China relations. To be more specific, North Korea can be seen as a buffer zone between China and the US. However, Prof. Kim also emphasised that this does not mean that North Korea will not cause a problem to China. If an armed conflict does take place on the peninsula, China will find itself involved in a really messy situation.

In his conclusion, Prof. Kim argued that even though CJK hold different stances over this issue, they do share significant common interests. That is, they all hope to limit (or eliminate) North Korea's nuclear threat and prevent another military conflict on the Korean Peninsula. To realise these common interests, CJK should work trilaterally. On the one hand, they need to keep putting pressure on Pyongyang. On the other hand, they need to restrain Washington. Coming up with a trilateral approach is very important for CJK as having just two of the three countries' cooperating will be politically problematic or ineffective.

### **Dr Uwe Wissenbach, European External Action Service**

Dr Wissenbach discussed regional cooperation in Northeast Asia, providing a European perspective. According to Dr Wissenbach, CJK shared much more cultural commonalities than many European countries did historically. However, these commonalities were undermined by the idea of nationalism and the construction of national histories. At the beginning of this process of construction, decentralising China was a key step. Dr Wissenbach argued that before China was humiliated and defeated by western powers, it functioned as the cultural reference point of many other regional countries, not just Japan and Korea. This corresponds to the point made by Prof. Yui previously. Given that there was a high degree of shared culture in the past, Dr Wissenbach stated that the potential for CJK to co-construct a common history is huge. This common history can create more benefits than national histories do, which usually leads one to be against the other two.

Then, Dr Wissenbach assessed the role of the US in the region. Even though he admitted that the US has a significant impact, he disagrees with Prof. Qin that it is the external dynamics of the USA that impede the further development of regional cooperation among CJK. The key issue for the three countries is that they have failed to come together to deal with the tragedies of the past. In comparison to what happened in Europe after WWII, no real settlement or reconciliation has been made in Northeast Asia, and the three countries do not know how to coexist with one another in a peaceful way.

From Dr Wissenbach's point of view, one main reason why there is no reconciliation is that China and South Korea do not think Japan has officially apologised for its crimes. Japan's rhetoric usually stops short of any official apology, saying instead that "we regret what

happened". This careful and considered wording and the omission of an apology is not enough to heal the trauma experienced by the Koreans and Chinese. Also, Dr Wissenbach suggested that the window of opportunity for full reconciliation may now be closed. An apology is most effective when a country is still strong, and Japan's power and influence in the region has been decreasing for many years now. Even if it makes an official apology now, it would seem more like yielding to a stronger power than a sincere apology.

## **Q&A**

After Dr Wissenbach's presentation, the floor was open to questions from the audience. One audience member questioned which issue or "hot spot" might cause the most severe geo-strategic competition. In Prof. Qin's opinion, whether an environment of severe geo-strategic competition will break out depends largely on the trend of US-China relations, instead of China's relations with Japan or Korea. Dr Wissenbach agrees with Prof. Qin. Most ongoing conflicts in the region mainly resulted from the fact that the US wants to step into Northeast Asia, but China is pushing it out. Prof. Kim added that for South Korea, its geo-strategy needs to shift according to the changing inter-Korea relations. It needs to find a balance point between China and the US. When asked about whether CJK can publish a common history textbook, Prof. Yui reckoned that it would be very difficult. Even though some Japanese scholars support this position, they are not influential enough in the policy-making process.

*Report written by Yang Qiu and Beatrice Visconti.*

