



Environmental cooperation from a perspective of the East Asian integration

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In East Asia, there still lacks of an EU-like supranational agency of environmental governance. The question arisen from this fact is that, if any, where and when such a kind of institutional actor may come from? And which role will it play in the process of creating a regional community in this area?

Regional integration and the Neo-functionalism Theory

Undoubtedly, the most developed regional community in contemporary world is the European Union (EU)—in terms of the institutional structure, it is very much like a federal state at the supranational level. And, a commonly recognized theory explaining the evolution of EU/European integration is the Neo-functionalism.

The main idea of Neo-functionalism:

- 1) Functional necessity will result in the establishment of trans-national agency of governance (from low to high politics fields).
- 2) Following with the establishment and its operation of trans-national agency, citizens' identity/loyalty will also gradually transfer from national to super-national level ("spill-over effects").

As for the latter, there are still lots of controversies over to what extent the European people have so far developed an EU identity/loyalty. However, over the past more than half century, the EU has indeed transformed itself from an economic organization (EC/EEC/ECSC) to a state-like entity.

What is the relevance of Neo-functionalism Theory for us to think about the future of East Asia as a regional community? In my point of view, an appropriate starting-point should also be the economic issues such as FTA and/or other "low-politics" issues such as environmental governance.

Trans-boundary environmental issues and their potentials as a "catalyzer"

How to identify/define the trans-boundary environmental issues in the East Asia? In my own understanding, there are two ways to do so: In a narrow sense and in a broad sense.

In the narrow sense, it should refer to the environmental problems which bring about some regional (physically trans-boundary) and/or comprehensive (economic, social and ecological) negative effects. The examples for the former are the sandstorm problem and the fog and haze problem in China, the nuclear power plant accident(2012) in Japan, and for the latter are the high amount of warm gas emission in China(1), Japan(5) and Korea(9), as well as the reduction of biological diversity in this region. Therefore, at the beginning, the CJK should focus on the “real” trans-boundary environmental issues, and the trans-boundary environmental issues which have been covered by the international treaties / laws, to target at the improvement of regional problems and the implementation of international agreements at the regional level.

Possibilities and prospects: Institutional environmental cooperation at the East Asian level

1) TEMM (Tripartite EM Meeting since 1999)–A policy dialogue mechanism. According to its action plan in 2012, they will focus on: environmental education and public participation, climate change, biodiversity protection, sandstorm, pollution control, environmentally-friendly society, trans- boundary transfer of e-waste, environmental management in East Asia, and environmental industry and technology.

In addition:

- a) NEASPEC (东北亚次区域环境合作计划): established in 1993, it holds annual meetings attended by the high environmental officials of the six member countries (CJK+MRNK).
- b) NEAC (东北亚环境合作会议): another inter-governmental mechanism for policy dialogue established in 1992 (without NK).

And, the issue-focused mechanisms:

- a) NOW-PAP (西北太平洋行动计划): founded in 1994 as a regional sub-project of the UNEP-led program (CJK+R).
- b) EANET (东亚酸沉降监测网): initiated by Japan in 1988.
- c) DSS-RETA (区域沙尘技术支持计划): initiated by CJKM and started to work in 2003.
- d) YSLME (黄海大海洋生态系统战略行动项目): a CK-supported project started in 2005.

The major problems or defects of these mechanisms:

- a) Lacking of coordination among the different cooperative mechanisms
- b) Lacking of a stable financial resources for the different cooperative mechanisms
- c) With government as the major player, lacking of participation of other actors in the cooperative mechanism.
- d) Lacking of policy/envision consensus of regional governance among the CJK.

2) ASENA+3

Formally established in 1997 targeting at a East Asia Community, and environmental issue became one of the eight key policy areas in 1999 which is further recognized by the EASG report in 2002. In November 2002, the first EMM meeting held in Vientiane. However, "ASENA+3" is mainly a policy forum for information exchange, rather than policy negotiation and policy implementation.

3) APEC

It was established in 1989 and since then it has been enlarging its members and cooperative fields. It has 21 full members at the moment, and has incorporated the environmental issue into its agenda since 1996 (the APEC Beijing Center for EP). However, it is mainly an economic policy forum, and the annual summit is its major decision-making body or mechanism.

Major policy suggestions:

- 1) To establish/strengthen an independent office/secretariat as well as regular working groups implementing the action plan or decisions made by the CJK ministers;
- 2) To create a higher level dialogue among the CJK leaders within the summit framework;
- 3) To establish a regional agency capable of issuing annual report with policy suggestions (like EEA).