



Building Peace and Achieving Prosperity through Environmental Cooperation in Northeast Asia: An Interdisciplinary Analysis

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Recently, Northeast Asia has faced a series of challenges in refiguring out the appropriate political equilibrium. In a situation where Japan has been relatively declining with new attempts of Abe administration to restore its political leadership, China has tried to expand its influences over the region, sometimes by confronting Japan (and United States). In case of Korea, it has been exploring new ways of its contributions to regional peace and prosperity while still struggling with Japan in terms of past history and territorial issues but seemingly developing closer relationship with China. Of course, reunification with North Korea has been a key variable to South Korea in this context. Ideally, there should be closed cooperation among three countries. But political reality seems to be very different.

In this situation, the status of environmental quality, which may not be effectively addressed by any efforts of individual countries due to its transboundary nature, has been seriously deteriorating. Considering the rapid growth of population, heavy economic activities along the coastal lines, increasing use of sea lanes and growing impact of scarce energy resources, there is urgency for collective responses to the regional environmental problems.

In fact, compared to other areas such as security, human rights and trade, the history of development of environmental cooperation in Northeast Asia has been relatively long. This year, for example, UNEP's Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP), where three countries are members, is celebrating its achievements in protecting marine environment in Northeast Asia for the past 20 years. Another cooperative program of UNDP/GEF Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Project has been identified within the so-called Large Marine Ecosystem Projects of UNDP/GEF as one of the most successful case and has plans to become an independent regional organization in year 2017 or so with a possibility of North Korea's joining as a member. Three countries have already formed a ministerial level of meeting among three countries, called, TEMM. Although it remains as a network oriented framework among three ministries of environment which tend to focus more on domestic implementation aspect, it certainly provides a new way of cooperation among three countries. In case of NEASPEC, for which UNESCAP provides secretariat services, not only three countries but also some other countries in Northeast Asia such as Russia, Mongolia and North Korea, are actively participating in

developing cooperative programs on protecting environment and achieving sustainable development.

Recent recognition of the importance of climate change issues, particularly in the context of identifying low carbon development pathway, in addition to the fact that all three countries have been identified as top 10 GHG emitters thereby being pressured on furthering their efforts to curb GHG emissions, has provided a high possibility of developing a cooperative regime among three countries which could lead to facilitating their increasing negotiation power at the global level as well as ensuring low carbon growth of three countries. Developing co-projects through Global Green Growth Institute and/or Green Climate Fund, for instance, could be considered as immediately available opportunities.

However, they also need to address the following issues for bringing more tangible impacts of:

1. It is now necessary to develop approach regional environmental issues with having more political attention from high political levels of three countries. (political aspect)
2. Developing political interface among three countries on the regional environmental issues must include practically available solutions at the functional level by identifying environmentally sustainable growth pathway(s). (economic aspect)
3. Three countries need to focus on areas where there already exists multilateral cooperation possibly within the framework of global/regional program of international organization(s), which can usually act as independent and fair mediators. (governance/institutional aspect)
4. Strengthening cooperation among scientists in the region will be only helpful. (scientific aspect)