

South Korean Policy for East Asia: transition and its assessment*

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<요약문>

한국의 동아시아 지역정책은 아태중심에서 시작하여 아세안+3, 동북아중심, 신아시아 구상에 이르기까지 그 지리적 범주와 정책목표에 변천이 있었지만, 동아시아의 지역적 중요성은 점점 더 중요하게 인식되어 왔다. 한국은 동아시아지역주의 정책의 전략적 유용성에 좀 더 자신감을 갖고 일관성 있고 체계적으로 운용할 필요가 있다. 지역주의 전략은 역외국과의 협상에서 레버리지를 제공하여 협상의 입지를 유리하게 하고 공동의 문제를 지역적 협력을 통해 접근하고 해결하는 유익한 수단이 된다. 미국과 서구가 글로벌 경제위기로 어려움을 당하고 있는 가운데 아시아로의 힘의 전이가 일어나고 있으며 아시아는 국제정치에서 그 위상을 높일 절호의 기회를 맞이하였다. 한국은 동아시아 지역주의 정책을 통해 그 위상을 높이고 국가이익을 증대할 기회로 삼아야 한다. 한국의 동아시아정책은 향후 일관성을 유지하고 동아시아공동체의 비전을 계발해야 하며 한국이 중국과 일본 사이에서 중재자 역할을 도모하여 동아시아지역주의의 진전에서 사실상 주도적 역할을 할 수도 있을 것이다.

주제어 : 지역주의, 동아시아지역주의, 아세안+3, 치앙마이 이니셔티브, 신아시아구상, 동북아 중심국가, 동북아균형자, 동아시아공동체, 한국의 외교정책

I . Introduction

South Korea hosted the 5th G-20 Summit and laid the groundwork for the Summit as the G20 chair. The G20 came into the spotlight as the premier forum for leaders of the major twenty countries to discuss and coordinate macro-economic policies to cope with the global economic crisis. Some Asian countries with sizable economy like China, South Korea, Indonesia, in addition to Japan, are included in the G20. Lately Asian countries are counted as principal players in the global arena more often than the past. Not

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only South Korea but also the Asian region itself sees a good opportunity come around to elevate its political status in proportion to its economic weight. The recent global economic crisis, which stemmed from the US and the southern countries of EU (like Greece), set off the relative soundness and importance of Asian economy. The relative soundness of its financial system and Asia's early rebound from the global economic crisis contrasted with the regional collapse during the Asian Crisis in 1997-98.¹⁾

The crisis has strengthened the potential of Asian regionalism. In the midst of the global economic crisis the ASEAN+3 made an impressive appearance by agreeing to make a further progress in building the regional financial self-help system. The existing Chiang Mai Initiative has been transformed from the network of bilateral swaps to a multilateral facility, CMIM (Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation), and is preparing to set up a regional surveillance office, AMRO (Asean+3 Macro-economic Research Office).

The recent global economic crisis provided a stimulus to the progress of CMI. The CMI, created in the aftermath of the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, has developed to CMIM and is approaching to a more solid regional organization. Asian countries have responded to economic crises (Asian crisis, and 2008 global crisis) by enhancing their efforts to establish regional cooperative scheme.

It is widely predicted that the recent global crisis is facilitating a power-shift from the western hemisphere to Asia.²⁾ The Asian countries are facing a chance to gain clout in the global political and economic institutions. It is in this circumstance that policies for Asian regionalism of Asian countries attract attention.

Asia has been under the Western dominance during the most part of the 20th century as a rule-taker, not a rule maker, taking rules imposed from the West. Most of the powerful international institutions have been dominated by the Western states. Now this imbalance between Asia and the West has become more untenable as the dynamics of Asia's economic growth continues. It is the time that Asia needs to establish its political status compatible with its economic and demographic size in the international system. It is widely predicted that the collapse of Cold-war and economic globalization will bring in a new multi-polar system. How the world political system gets shaped and what Asia's share in that system will be considerably depends on how and what Asian countries are going to do from now on. In this context the East Asian regionalism which had been activated by the ASEAN+3 is a good momentum for East Asia to empower itself.

1) *Economist*, 2009 August 15-21, pp 58-60; Finance & Development, IMF, 2010 June 10.

2) The issue of power- shift to Asia was a hot topic discussed in a public session in 2010 Davos Forum. (*Chosun Ilbo* 2010. 1.29); D. Miliband, British Foreign Minister, commented that the 7th ASEM held in Beijing demonstrated that the global economic power is shifting to Asia from the western hemisphere. (YTN, 2008, 10.25)

This paper intends to examine South Korea's foreign policy for the Asian region and assess its achievement and weakness from the perspective of East Asian regionalism. Why is the regionalism an important criterion to evaluate South Korea's foreign policy? Regionalism is an important tool to secure and enhance national interests in the age of globalization. As Moravcsik (1998) argues, under the condition of increasing economic interdependence, international institutions are important to solve problems generated by economic interdependence. European integration resulted from a series of rational choices made by national leaders who consistently pursued economic interests.³⁾

The economic interdependence of Asian countries has been greatly advanced, with the intra-regional trade ratio higher than 50%, exceeding that of NAFTA.⁴⁾ Despite its high economic *regionalization*,⁵⁾ the Asian regionalism itself, as intergovernmental collaboration, has been retarded. The informal Asian regionalism has been led by markets not by governments.⁶⁾ However, a formal institutional regionalism promoted by the ASEAN+3, created in the aftermath of the Asian crisis, provides a new momentum for Asian states. Regionalism in Asia is in the building process.

As Gilpin (2001) argues, as the world economy has become more closely integrated, regionalism has become an important diplomatic tool for states to strengthen their autonomy, increase their bargaining position, and promote other political and economic interests.⁷⁾ It is notable that regionalism is also pursued for the purpose of securing a bargaining tool and increasing diplomatic leverage. For instance, the negotiation of the Treaty of Rome, which established EEC in 1957, was partly motivated by European countries' desires to increase their leverage against the US in the upcoming GATT talks.⁸⁾

From this viewpoint of regionalism, South Korea needs to take an active attitude toward East Asian regionalism and play a leading role. That will greatly help South Korea to increase its national interests: increasing economic interests, enhancing bargaining leverage against extra-regional countries, creating a better environment for the peace of the Korean peninsula.

Lately South Korea is trying to extend its global reach and elevate its status in the global political

3) Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina and Maastricht* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) p.3.

4) Source: IMF 2006, *Directions of Trade Statistics*

5) *Regionalization* refers to regional integration by private actors such as firms and individuals, whereas *regionalism* refers to a formal process of intergovernmental collaboration, such as a process of reaching agreements among governments to manage various regional issues. J. Ravenhill, *Global Political Economy* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p.117.

6) P. Katzenstein, pp.12-44, Katzenstein and Shiraiishi eds., *Network Power: Japan and Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1997)

7) R. Gilpin, p.357, *Global Political Economy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

8) A.S. Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe* (London: Routledge, 1984); *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (London: Routledge).

system. The high expectation of the Korean people on the chairmanship of G20 Summit reflects it. At this moment, it is necessary to evaluate Korea's Asian regional policy and suggest a direction and implications for policy.

II. Review of East Asian Policy: transition of scope and goals

1. Historical Background

The backbone of South Korea's foreign policy had been the US-South Korea alliance, the core of national security system, for the most part of time since the Korean War. It was under changing conditions of the international system that South Korea set out to implement new foreign policies targeting Asia *per se*. There are three momentums that stimulated the changes of Korean foreign policy: the end of Cold War; globalization; and the Asian financial crisis. Each momentum facilitated diversification and extension of the boundary of the foreign policies.

First, the decline of Cold War provided the condition for Korea's 'Northern Diplomacy'. With the cold-war atmosphere declining, South Korea was faced with the challenging need for diversification with the ex-communist countries. At the latter part of 1980s the *perestroika* of the Soviet Union during the Gorbachev era and the succeeding collapse of communist bloc created a favorable condition for diversifying and extending diplomatic relations toward Eastern Europe and the Northern countries, i.e., Soviet Union and China, in particular. South Korea normalized diplomatic relationship with Soviet Union in 1990, with China in 1992.

Secondly, globalization posed another challenge for South Korea. The end of the Cold War accelerated the spread of globalization wave. The "Civilian Government" (1993-1997) of South Korea⁹⁾ quickly absorbed the idea of globalization and the "globalization" became the catchword for the Korean government.

The tide of regionalization also came to be recognized as an ineluctable epochal stream. In Asia the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) was launched in 1989 and the economic regionalism was listed on the diplomatic agenda of most East Asian countries. Also the catchphrase of "the coming of Asia-Pacific era" began to be widely circulated.

During that time the real meaning of globalization was somewhat obscure even though it was on

9) It was named the "Civilian Government", because it was the first civilian government after 31 year of military government from 1961 to 1992, during which ex-generals took the presidency.

everybody's lips. It more or less indicated the general policy goal to enhance the quality of the Korean government and society to the global standard. In fact, the real fulfillment of the globalization policy was done most conspicuously in market-opening. Opening and deregulation was regarded as the way to achieve globalization. Especially, the liberalization of financial market gave rise to numbers of new financial service companies sprouting like mushrooms after rainfalls. The behaviors of bold financial dealings by the new financial service companies were considerably responsible for the outbreak of the 1997 financial crisis of Korea. The ill-performed globalization policy was blamed for forming an underlying cause of the outbreak of financial crisis.

Thirdly, the Asian financial crisis set the momentum for the belated East Asian regionalism by stimulating the regional, anti-West sentiment among Asian nations. The arrogant attitude of the IMF and the hands-off policy of the US at the beginning of the crisis made the Asian people, who were struggling in the turmoil of crisis, indignant. In the aftermath of the crisis the East Asian nations agreed to setting up a regional self-help system of their own. The APEC, the existing regional organization, was of no help in coping with the crisis which wrecked the entire East Asian economy. After the Asian Crisis the ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, Korea) was born as the leading vehicle for East Asian regionalism.

South Korea, one of the hardest-hit countries by the crisis, also actively participated in the movement of regionalism and the formation of ASEAN+3. South Korean president Kim Dae Jung played a principal role at the ASEAN+3 summit for establishing the East Asia Vision Group (EAVG hereafter) and making it to prepare for the EAVG Report, a landmark report for East Asian regional cooperation. ASEAN+3 adopted the EAVG Report in 2001, which introduced the recommendations for cooperation among ASEAN+3 in various fields (economic, financial, political, environmental and social and cultural), and set the goal of building an East Asian Community. South Korean policy toward East Asian regionalism in earnest started with the launching of ASEAN+3.

The three critical factors - end of Cold War, globalization, economic crisis - posed structural conditions to which South Korean foreign policy has tried to adapt. Those factors still constitute the structural environment in which Korea's foreign policies are framed. South Korea is still making its efforts to push its way through the influences of them.

East Asian regionalism is a major foreign policy that three factors are all involved with. This study focuses on the Asian policy of the three administrations - Kim Dae Jung, Roh Moo Hyun, and Lee Myung Bak - because the serious policy of East Asian regionalism was meaningful only during this period.

2. Review of East Asian Policy: transition of scope and goals

– Kim Dae Jung Administration (1998–2002)

The Asian financial crisis shocked Korean people to elect the opposition party candidate as the President, unprecedentedly in the Korean politics since the 1960s. The Asian crisis also pushed South Korea to be awakened to the need of Asian regional cooperation. President Kim made his contribution to East Asian regionalism through his role of setting up the EAVG (East Asia Vision Group). He initiated setting up the EAVG in 1998 and the South Korean representative took the chairmanship at the EAVG committee. South Korea played a major role in producing the EAVG report and contributed to laying the foundation for regional cooperation.

Another epochal policy during his administration was the Sunshine policy toward North Korea. South Korea's Sunshine policy (later renamed as the engagement policy) toward North Korea and the historic summit between the leaders of two Koreas in 2000 was a positive signal for the emerging new order of East Asia. The détente between the two Koreas signified the vanishment of the last legacy of the Cold War and augured well for a new order on the Korean peninsula.

Regarding East Asian regionalism President Kim made another contribution than EAVG. He contributed to the 'Asian value' debates and proposed the vision of democracy for Asia. He argued for the universal value of democracy and its applicability to Asian countries in his article in the *Foreign Affairs* issue, published years before he was elected as President.¹⁰⁾ This article was intended as the counter-argument against the famous Singaporean leader Lee Kwan Yew's interview, published in the earlier issue of the same journal. In this article, Kim argued that the value of democracy is universal and had been growing in the political tradition of Asian states, whereas Lee Kwan Yew argued that Asian culture has its own value system distinguished from the Western type democracy. The hot debates over the so-called 'Asian values' were ignited in the Korean society by the Asian crisis, and yet disappeared as the crisis symptom abated. The supporters defended the Asian value by arguing that Asia's economic success was accredited to the Asian value system, originated from the Confucius culture. The critics argued that those arguments were only the excuses for 'cronyism', or 'crony capitalism'. Attributing the economic development to Asian values or Confucius culture runs the risk of falling into a cultural reductionism.

The supporters of the Asian values did not really succeed in proposing how to apply the value system of a traditional society to democratized and industrialized societies. Kim Dae Jung in his early work

10) Kim Dae Jung, "Is Culture Destiny? The Myth of Asia's Anti-Democratic Values" *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1994)

proposed democracy and human rights as the universal value South Korea and Asian neighbors should aspire. From the viewpoint of Asian regionalism, his argument implies that the value for East Asian Community does not have to be Asian particularism and the universal value of democracy and human rights is applicable to Asian community.

During the Kim government, with the launching of ASEAN+3, South Korea's foreign policy adopted a multilateral approach to address the common issues of East Asia. Likewise East Asian countries, especially China, Korea and Japan joined the regional meetings to address the regional common problems, especially the financial issue, and agreed to regional cooperation.

The most remarkable outcome of the ASEAN+3 was the launching of Chiang Mai Initiative in 2000 whose progress toward a more solid regional institution has been steady up to now. The launching of CMI means that South Korea and other Asian states came to recognize that Asian countries are in the same boat when a crisis occurs; hence it is necessary to employ a multilateral approach to regional common problems. The call for East Asian regionalism was not new, but the earlier calls for Asian regionalism had not found echoes. It was the Asian crisis that made ASEAN+3 get together and deliberate on the regional issue on the same table.

– Roh Moo Hyun Administration (2003–2007)

Under the Roh government the major focus of East Asian policy shifted from ASEAN+3 to Northeast Asia. President Roh stressed 'the autonomy in foreign policy and national defense'. From that perspective, it looked essential that South Korea should pursue more independent power in the issues of Korean Peninsula. Also geopolitically the Northeast Asia looked a critical region where South Korea should expand its power. The Roh government declared the Northeast Asian Cooperation Initiative (NACI hereafter) and launched the Presidential Committee on NACI in 2004. The slogans like "Northeast Asian Era of Peace and Prosperity," "Northeast Asian Hub" were proposed as the goal of new foreign policy.

Whereas the previous Kim government put an emphasis on the East Asian regional cooperation to construct a regional community, the Roh government stressed expanding and strengthening South Korea's role in Northeast Asia.

The most ambitious and provocative part of the Northeast Asian Cooperative Initiative was aspiring to be the "balancer" of Northeast Asia.¹¹⁾ By declaring the role of balancer the priority of South Korea's

11) For an introductory review of the "balancer role of Northeast Asia", see Chosun.com 2005, April 11-12; 김기정, "21세기 한국 외교의 좌표와 과제: 동북아균형자론의 국제정치학적 의미를 중심으로" 『국가전략』 11/4, 2005.

diplomacy seemed to move away from the US and head toward China. In fact, a Chinese ambassador to South Korea expressed the support for South Korea's new diplomatic goal.¹²⁾ The inchoate term of "the balancer of Northeast Asia" caused controversies and skepticism over the Korean government's intention from neighboring countries, most strongly from the US, as well as domestic conservative circles.¹³⁾ A conspicuous argument of the opposition was that South Korea was not strong and heavy enough to be a balancer, like the Great Britain in the 19th century in Europe. Critics also expressed their strong concerns that the immature idea would end up isolating South Korea from its traditional allies of US and Japan.¹⁴⁾ Supporters argued that the Korea-US alliance should be firmly maintained for South Korea's balancer role.¹⁵⁾

The underlying cause of Northeast Asia Cooperation Initiative (NACI), which emphasized South Korea's active role in making a new order in Northeast Asia,¹⁶⁾ was valid, considering South Korea's enhanced economic status and diplomatic potential. However, the goal of NACI could have been pursued more effectively through a quiet and implicit way than by an explicit and bold declaration.

The Roh government's emphasis on the NACI and its ostensibly unyielding political discourse on the Korea-US relations often created uncomfortable brushes with the US. During the President Roh's term, the US and Japan ostentatiously showed off a warm relationship, while there arose deep concerns about the solidarity of the Korea-US relationship especially among in Korea.

The Roh government succeeded the engagement policy toward North Korea, which was an important part of the NACI. However, dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue in close collaboration with the US was not going so harmoniously as during the previous Kim Dae Jung government. The hardliner President Bush of the US was not supportive of the engagement policy toward North Korea. South Korea seemed to be in stuck between the stubborn and volatile North Korea and the skeptical hardliner

12) The Chinese ambassador to South Korea, Lee Bin (2001-2005) said that China would support South Korea's role of balancer in his interview with the Korea Times, but he also expressed concerns about the ambiguity of the term as well. *The Korea Times* 2005, April 7.

13) 김우상, "무모한 탈3국동맹론, 고립만 부른다" *조선일보* 2005. 3.24; 김영호 "동북아균형자론 이렇게 본다" *조선일보* 2005. 4.6.

14) 박영준, "동북아 균형자론과 21세기 한국외교" 『한국정치외교사논총』 28집 1호 p.163.

15) 문정인 "동북아 균형자론, 불가피한 선택이다" *조선일보* 2005. 4.12; 이근 "동북아 균형자에서 동북아 신뢰 구축자로" *서울신문* 4.4.

16) 이수훈 "선진한국을 지향하는 새 외교틀" (대통령자문 정책기획위원회, 참여정부 2년평가와 3년 전망 심포지움, 2005. 3.8.); "적어도 동북아의 미래를 예측하는데 있어 대한민국의 선택은 결코 빼놓을 수 없는 중요변수가 되고 있습니다..." 2004년 대통령 광복절 경축사; 2004년 9월22일 모스크바 대학 연설에서 대통령은 '한국은 100년전 열강의 침략대상이었으나 현재 세계 11위의 경제력, 물류, IT기반을 추고 있으며 주변 어느 나라도 침략한 적이 없는 평화주의 나라로서 동북아의 새로운 질서를 여는데 주도적으로 참여할 준비와 역량을 갖추었다'고 하였다. 대통령비서실 <노무현대통령 연설문집> 2권 (2004.2-2005.1).

Bush government. There did not seem to be much room for playing the role of balancer.

Another essential part of the NACI was the Northeast Asian Business Hub. Though the Roh government tried to push forward the vision of Northeast Asian Hub energetically, it did not produce as much as it originally envisioned. The proposal for Northeast Asian financial hub, the proposal for logistics hub, the proposal for FTA, and so on, followed suit. And yet, all these proposals generated more talks than real outcome. The FTA among Korea-China-Japan, for instance, had been studied by the principal think-tanks of the three countries¹⁷⁾ but was not put on the bargaining table. It has been succeeded by the next Lee government and currently under study. In fact, the plans for Northeast Asian Business Hub were long-term goals which could not be realized in a short span. The debates on the relevance of each plan and how to implement those goals are yet to be carried over to the next administration.

The NACI was limited in the geographical scope by sticking to the geopolitical importance of Northeast Asia. The vision of East Asian Community proposed by the previous government disappeared. Some author pointed out that Northeast Asia was considered only as a part of Asia by China and Japan which South Korea counted as principal partners of its Northeast Asia policy. He continued to ask why Korea's vision should be fragmentary.¹⁸⁾

– Lee Myung Bak Administration (2008–)

When President Lee government was launched, the global economy was in a crisis condition, caused by the subprime mortgage crisis of the US; hence 'the economy' came back onto the center stage. The 'economic diplomacy' was also widely believed as President Lee's specialty. He declared "pragmatism" as the underlying philosophy of his policy. The Lee government adopted the platform of "New Asia Initiative," (NAI hereafter) which was based on the recognition that the rising Asia is a new frontier for realizing Korea's interests. The geographic scope of the Asian policy was extended toward entire Asia, covering India, the Pacific (including Australia and New Zealand), and even the Central Asia.¹⁹⁾ Countries in the Central Asia like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were regarded as important partners for procuring energy resources.²⁰⁾ Compared with the previous governments, economic interests have

17) <한중일 FTA 협동연구 총괄보고>, 대외경제정책연구원, 2004.

18) 박사명, 동아시아공동체의 의의와 과제, <동아시아공동체와 한국의 미래> (서울: 이매진, 2008) p.21.

19) 배공찬, "새정부의 지역협력 외교과제" 한국국제정치학회 별기획 학술회의, 2008, 3; 이대우 "이명박 정부 신아시아 외교구상" 『정세와 정책』 2009. 4; 외교통상부 정책홍보실 "대통령 아태지역 3개국 순방: '신아시아 협력외교'의 첫걸음" 2009. 3. 10.

20) 윤여진. 2009. "'신아시아 구상' 첫 걸음...자원 실질협력 성과."

<http://www.sisafocus.co.kr/news/view.php?n=38445&p=1&s=23>(검색일: 2009.5.15)

obtained the primary importance for East Asian foreign policy, as is prescribed by the “pragmatic diplomacy”.

The NAI discarded the political baggage of the previous NACI (Northeast Asia Cooperation Initiative) and was clearly tuned to pursuing economic interests. The NAI shook off the political inclination toward “the balancer between US and China in the Northeast Asia” of the previous government. Instead the Lee government tightened its relationship with the US and the Korea-US security alliance was reemphasized as the kernel of Korean foreign policy. The new policy tried to wipe out the legacy of NACI and the engagement policy toward North Korea retreated somewhat.

The Lee government also declared the goal of “Global Korea”, and expressed South Korea’s competence as an Asian middle power pursuing to be an advanced industrial economy and speaking for developing countries on the global stage.

The important items of action plans for the new policy are as follows:

- Korea’s participation in the international efforts to solve the urgent global issues, such as financial crisis and global warming.
- The importance of pursuing custom-made economic cooperative relationships, the cooperative exchange between the Korean IT and the energy and mineral resources of Asian partners being proposed as a good example.
- increasing Korea’s role and contribution to the Asian region, by sharing Korea’s experience of economic development.
- establishing Asian caucus in special issue areas, such as global warming, financial crisis, and cooperation for development and so on. 21)

The Lee government defined South Korea as the speaker for developing countries who is able to transmit its experience and knowhow of economic development to developing countries. Lee’s new policy made it clear that it seeks to realize national interests through the networks of cooperation with wide-ranging Asian countries and to promote South Korea to the level of an advanced industrial economy.

The Lee government declared the active foreign policy for the Asian region, but did not resort to the existing Asian cooperative scheme, i.e. CMI (Chiang Mai Initiative), when the Korean won fell into a rapid descending spin in 2008. Instead, Korea went to Washington DC and signed up for a swap agreement with the US, rather than take a chance to test the existing CMI. Perhaps the Korean government might have believed that the US looked more trustworthy to foreign investors than the uncertain (or never tested) CMI.

21) “신아시아 외교구상 주요내용” 연합뉴스 2009.3.8.

III. East Asian Regionalism, reappraisal of a New Horizon

South Korean policy of East Asian region has been shifting its focus from the Asia-Pacific (Civilian government), through ASEAN+3 (Kim Dae Jung), and then Northeast Asia (Roh Moo Hyun) and finally to Asia in the broadest sense (Lee Myung Bak). The major characteristic features of South Korea's East Asian policy have been in transition, yet generally speaking, there have been consistent concerns on the region. ASEAN+3, ASEAN, Korea-China-Japan summit, and EAS (East Asia Summit) received attention as an important diplomatic arena. Asia overall became recognized as a critical terrain for the Korean diplomacy.

South Korea notices that becoming a leading and responsible power in Asia is a *sine qua non* to be an outstanding member in the global community, especially when it is widely said that the power-shift to Asia is occurring. Also Korea became aware of the fact that resolving political and military tensions on the Korean Peninsula and bringing peace and prosperity demands acquiring international supports especially from neighboring countries in the region.

However, at this moment it is necessary to provide some critical comments to develop more productive Asian policies from a long-term perspective. An assessment of South Korea's East Asia policy from the viewpoint of East Asian regionalism helps to open a new horizon for South Korea's foreign policy.

First, South Korea's East Asian regional policy is still weak at consistent principles and underpinning theory. It was mentioned above that three factors - end of Cold War, globalization, economic crisis - constitute environmental structure in which Korean foreign policies have been framed. Asian regionalism is a major policy that South Korea should pursue in response to the pressures from those factors. The end of Cold War and globalization has brought about more and deeper interdependence of national economies. Increasing interdependence not only provides better chance for realizing interests but also causes problems. The contamination effect of an economic crisis, rapidly spreading out to neighboring countries in the region, is a most conspicuous example. Regionalism is a response to cope with those problems in a collective way. If we apply implications of the arguments of Moravcsik (1998) and Gilpin (2001) to Asia, Asian regionalism is a means for South Korea to secure economic interests and to extend national concerns and ambition.

From that perspective the Korean policy of East Asian regionalism needs to have a firm belief in the usefulness of regionalism and more consistency in its pursuit. The transition of geographical scope and goal implies that policies of East Asian regionalism have been made on *ad hoc* basis depending upon

priority and preference of each government.

Second, the policy of East Asian regionalism and the vision of East Asian Community (EAC) have gradually run out of steam. Currently there are multiple and sometimes overlapping circles of the broader East Asian policy: APEC, ASEAN+3, EAS, Korea-China-Japan summit, and bilateral FTA with wide-ranging Asian countries including Australia, India, and so on. It is useful and necessary to extend the diplomatic boundary. But the problem is that at this moment the discourse of the East Asian regionalism seems put aside. South Korea's Asian policy, currently the NAI (New Asia Initiative) of the Lee government extends beyond the East Asia *per se* and the ASEAN+3 framework, the driving vehicle of EAC.

The EAC is not a short-term goal and needs a long-term strategy coordinated by related countries. In order to realize the vision of EAC, the regional countries should work together to set up common agenda and to employ multilateral approaches to the common goals. This is not something that South Korea can do alone. When the countries in the region recognize that national interests in some critical issue areas can be achieved better through multilateral cooperation in the regional context, there is more chance for the vision of EAC to come true. If an EAC in any sense is the ultimate goal, there should be more efforts to set up common agenda and to attempt multilateral cooperation.

Then, we should ask whether the EAC is a desirable goal or not. The EAC does not allow the prediction when it comes true exactly. Yet, the intrinsic value of East Asian regionalism is that the process to establish an East Asian Community itself empowers the Asian leading countries to make their voice heard in the global arena. If East Asian countries work more closely together to establish the EAC, the process itself makes Asia's position united and powerful in dealing with other countries outside the region. As was noted by Ravenhill (2005, 122-123), regional partnership enhances bargaining power with external actors if partners negotiate with one voice. It applies to China, Japan, and other Asian countries as well as South Korea. By having a regional cooperative system work, Asian countries, like China Japan or Korea, have more leverage when they deal with extra-regional strong power, like US.

Third, there should be a strategy for the tripartite cooperative relationship among South Korea, China, and Japan. This is a more realistic strategy that we can draw from the NACI (Northeast Asia Cooperation Initiative). What South Korea can do for the rivalry competition between China and Japan? South Korea needs to play the role of mediator between China and Japan. The cooperative leadership role of Korea-China-Japan needs to be arranged for East Asian regionalism, and in that case South Korea should play a mediator between the two rivals of China and Japan.

Lately China has been positive regarding its position in the East Asian region and actively participated in the ASEAN+3 framework. However, as Chinese scholars themselves like Zhang and Tang pointed

out, ASEAN states are not ready to completely relax their vigilance against China. 22) Japan is not trusted by Asian neighbors either, because of its imperial legacy and its tightrope walking between Asia and US (Maswood 2001). This is a niche that South Korea can take advantage of. South Korea can play the mediator between China and Japan and the initiator of K-C-J cooperation. In that way, South Korea can play a *de facto* leader in the ASEAN+3.

The K-C-J cooperation is fundamentally important to bring stability on the Korean Peninsula and to pursue the regional cooperation within the ASEAN+3 framework. At present the ASEAN is sitting at the driver's seat because of the rivalry and distrust among the big three. Though the ASEAN is sitting at the driver's seat at present, the K-C-J cooperation is of utmost importance to make the ASEAN+3 proceed forward.

There have been controversies and conflicts on the EAC between China and Japan. For instance, lately Japan started insisting that values of democracy and human rights should be introduced in the EAC plan. Democracy and human rights issue may be a detonating cap for China. This issue has caused wordy battles between China and Japan for the past years, for China is skeptical of Japan's intention. South Korea, on the other hand, is entitled to claiming the universal value of democracy with its proud history of democratization and the late Kim DJ's vision of Asian democracy.

In order to coordinate dissonance and conflicts between China and Japan, Korea's role should be a moderator who tries to facilitate communication and coordinate the tune in alliance with ASEAN. Building a community is a process that takes time, vision and imagination, and consistent efforts. South Korea can be an initiator to set up the regional forum for developing the regional identity.

East Asian regionalism is a valuable strategic asset of a great potential that should not be missed. South Korea also needs to have clear and consistent vision of the East Asian regionalism and the consistency in its East Asian policies.

Fourth, from the viewpoint of post-cold war period, South Korean policy toward North Korea has not been completely freed from the Cold War mind. The Sunshine policy or engagement policy of Kim DJ and Roh MH government has been retreated by the hardline containment policy of the Lee government. After ten year's engagement policy was replaced with the containment policy, the tension between the two Koreas has escalated and the divide between the two blocs, i.e. China-North Korea alliance vs. US-South Korea has widened. Rising tension on the Peninsula is not in accordance with the 'pragmatic diplomacy', a motto of the Lee government. The containment policy toward North puts a strain on the enhancement of South Korea's relation with China, and contributes to strengthening the alliance

22) Zhang Yunling and Tang Shiping, "China's Regional Strategy," *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamic*, D. Shambaugh ed. (University of California Press, 2005) pp.58-59.

between North Korea and China.

It is desirable to reopen the communication channel with the North and build up a consensus on the North Korean issue with China, so that South Korea and China can collaborate in leading the North to start reforming its system and opening itself in the near future. Nurturing peace on the Korean Peninsula is an essential part of the East Asian policy of South Korea. Pursuing East Asian regionalism is a long-term process in which North Korea should be included sometime in the future as a 'normal state' participating in the plan of East Asian Community.

IV. Concluding Remarks

South Korea's diplomacy has proceeded, in coping with the challenges from the international system, the end of Cold-War, the pressure of globalization, and the Asian financial Crisis. The importance of East Asia as strategic terrain and the need for deeper multilateral cooperation have been recognized continuously. Lately a new challenge from the global system, that is, global economic crisis and the succeeding power-shift to Asia, has posed another opportunity for Korea. If it had not been for the global economic crisis, the G20 would not have received so much attention, nor has Korea's role as the chair. As East Asia is facing a favorable chance to elevate its status in the global system, so is Korea. Asian leading states, especially China, Japan and South Korea are trying to enhance their status and increase their share in the global institutions. The regional institution provides a leverage in dealing with extra-regional countries and another safety-net when the global system does not operate well. It is the time that East Asia should establish an effective regional system.

The strategic importance of East Asia has been increased in the South Korean foreign policy. However, it still needs to establish a comprehensive and consistent East Asia policy and a clear vision of East Asian Community with accompanied strategies. The policy of East Asian regionalism is the way in which South Korea can promote national interests, not only economic interests but also political and strategic. There is a perception that the national sovereignty is eroded with a regional organization established. On the contrary, in Asia, as Higgott pointed out (1998, 52-53),²³⁾ regionalism is a tool for the consolidation of state power. This is a good point that South Korea's foreign policy of East Asian regionalism should develop.

23) R. Higgott, "The International Political Economy of Regionalism: The Asia-Pacific and Europe Compared" *Regionalism and Global Economic Integration*, W. Coleman and G. Underhill eds. (London: Routledge, 1998) pp. 42-65.

In conclusion, the Korean policy of East Asian regionalism needs a firm belief in the usefulness of regionalism and more consistency in its pursuit. It also needs a strategy of playing the mediator role between China and Japan and the leading role in the ASEAN+3 framework. Also, the engagement policy toward North Korea should be resumed. North Korean problem is not only a national issue but also an international and regional issue that should be dealt with in the multilateral framework. The successful policies of East Asian regionalism will provide a favorable environment for dealing with North Korean issue. North Korean issue may also need to be incorporated in the plan of East Asian regionalism sometime in the future.

There are many other issues and problems that are involved in East Asian regionalism. This paper is content with pointing out the underlying weakness in the East Asian policies of the South Korean government and the usefulness of regionalism as an effective foreign policy tool for enhancing national interests.

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<Abstract>

South Korean Policy for East Asia: transition and its assessment

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South Korea's policy for East Asia has gained more importance in spite of transitions in geographical scope and goals. It still lacks underlying theoretical ground and consistency. East Asian Regionalism needs to be perceived as a useful tool for South Korea to promote national interests. Regionalism provides a bargaining leverage in dealing with external actors and channels to address common problems and solve them in a collective way. East Asia is faced with a good opportunity to enhance its political status in the global system when power shift to Asia is occurring with the global crisis inflicting a heavy blow to US and Western Europe. South Korea needs to be more positive in employing policy of East Asian regionalism. The policy needs more consistency and the vision of East Asian Community needs to be developed. Also more active strategy for playing a mediator role between China and Japan helps the movement of East Asian regionalism to move forward.

Keywords : Regionalism, East Asian Regionalism, ASEAN+3, Chiang Mai Initiative, New Asia Initiative, East Asian Community, Northeast Asia Cooperation Initiative, Foreign policy of South Korea