



Changing Dynamics of East Asia and China-Japan-South Korea Trilateral Summit Meet: Implications for India

Speaker: Dr. Sandip Kumar Mishra, Assistant Professor, DEAS, University of Delhi

Chair: Dr. Aravind Yelery, Associate Fellow, ICS

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The presentation by Sandip Kumar Mishra sought to analyse the changing dynamics of East Asia in the geo-political and economic arena in view of the China-Japan-South Korea Trilateral Summit Meet that is scheduled to be held in November 2015.

The speaker began by highlighting the scholarly debates surrounding the rise of China and the concomitant decline of Japan as a superpower in the Asian region. The transition could either be peaceful or full of conflicts. In his view, China has a long history of military modernisation and it is definitely going to play an important role in the Asian region. Delving deeper, he explained that there are basically two arguments about the role of China: first, it would be a responsible stakeholder in global governance. Secondly, an assertive China's rise would be a threat to regional stability. He argued that after 2010, China is becoming more and more assertive in the region. China is expediting its agenda of global governance with a host of multilateral initiatives like OBOR (One belt One Road) and AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank). With regard to Japan, the speaker held the view that it is trying to be a normal state and under the leadership of Shinzo Abe, is becoming more unapologetic. He also expounded on 'Abenomics', a mix of policy tools that gave impetus to the Japanese economy during the economic slowdown.

In the next part of the presentation, the speaker drew attention to the role of South Korea amidst the dynamic changes that are taking place in the East Asian region. He noted that South Korea's bilateral trade with China is greater than the combined total trade with Japan and the US. In his view, South Korea believed that China can provide the required mediation on nuclear issues with North Korea. South Korea has also supported AIIB, belying US's expectation of boycotting China-led initiatives. In recent years, South Korea is getting closer to China. The speaker further elaborated on South Korea's relations with Japan and concluded that during the period spanning from 2008 to 2012, both countries shared good relations, to the extent that both signed an intelligence sharing agreement centering on North Korea.

Moving further, the speaker deliberated upon America's interest in Asia and referred to US's pivot to Asia. The speaker contended that US is partnering with Japan and Australia to contain the rise of China. It is also building closer network with Myanmar and other South East Asian nations to this effect. However, he felt that the success of the latter approach is doubtful as China is the most important trading partner for South East Asian countries.

Regarding the economic aspect, the speaker observed that the global financial crisis provided confidence to the Chinese economy. In 2010, the economy of China replaced the Japanese economy as the number two economy in the world after the US. Examining the main theme of the presentation, the speaker noted that combined trilateral trade has reached over US\$ 600 billion. Also, the cultural links between the East Asian nations have grown stronger. South Korean movies are very popular in Japan and they are launched simultaneously in both countries. The speaker further noted that the annual trilateral summits began just after the recession in 2008. In the five summits held so far, economic issues have largely dominated the discussions. However, the speaker saw no optimism in this trilateral cooperation in the near future owing to considerable differences in the bilateral relationships of Japan with both China and South Korea over a number of issues.

Drawing implications for India, in the last part of the presentation, the speaker suggested two options: first, to engage with Indo-Pacific bloc involving India, Japan, US and Australia to contain the rise of China. Secondly, India could engage with China and more countries in Asia. The speaker, however believed that under PM Modi, India would be more comfortable with the first option and suggested that India needs to create disincentives for China to check its assertiveness.

Discussion

In the ensuing discussion, a host of questions were raised about the territorial disputes among the East Asian nations. The speaker clarified that South Korea's territorial dispute with China are not very significant. However, there is a conflict between North Korea and China over Baekdu Mountain (referred to as Changbai Mountain in China). The speaker further informed that South Korea has territorial disputes with Japan over a couple of islands in the East China Sea known by Koreans as Dokdo, and by the Japanese as Takeshima. Replying to a question on South Korea's position vis-à-vis an assertive China and Japan, the speaker explained that South Korea has never been concerned about this issue. However, he believed that South Korea is more comfortable with the rise of China compared to an assertive Japan. Other issues like North Korea's nuclear plan and its economic transition, Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, OBOR, AIIB and RCEP were also discussed in detail. While concluding the discussion, the speaker apprised the audience about South Korea's intent to develop its own nuclear facility in response to the third nuclear test conducted by North Korea in 2013.

Report prepared by Samar Tyagi, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies.

About the Speaker

Dr. Sandip Kumar Mishra is Assistant Professor of Korean Studies in the Department of East Asian Studies at University of Delhi. He is also an Adjunct Fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), Delhi and a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi. He writes a monthly column named *East Asia Compass* at the IPCS website. He completed his Master degree in International Politics from Jawaharlal Nehru University and obtained his M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees from the same university working in the field of Korean Studies. He studied Korean Language in South Korea and has been Visiting Fellow and Visiting Scholar at many South Korean research institutes and universities. He also had a unique opportunity to visit North Korea on a research trip in 2013. The areas of his research interests are Inter-Korea Relations, North Korean Nuclear Issue, International Relations of East Asia and Korea, East Asian Security, and India-Korea Relations.

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