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A Feedback to the Trilateral Dialogue of China, Japan and South Korea

By IKEO Aiko

I attended the CJK (China, Japan, and Korea) Dialogue on the afternoon of September 21, which was held in Tokyo under the auspices of the Global Forum of Japan (GFJ) and the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) of China, Japan, and South Korea. The TCS is an intergovernmental organization which was founded in September 2011, whose headquarters is located in Seoul. Trilateral cooperation among CJK began with the breakfast meeting of their leaders during ASEAN+3 summit in 1999, as one of the pillars of regional cooperation in North East Asia, and the CJK summit was held independently of ASEAN+3 in 2008 (See "CJK Together 2016" by TCS). With a view to institutionalizing mutual cooperation among the three nations permanently, the TCS processes various data such as those on the three economies and releases research reports, and its mission includes cooperation with other international organizations including the ASEAN, the APEC, the UN, and the EU.

The trilateral dialogue began with the speeches by experts from member nations and the Deputy Secretary General of the TCS in the opening session. The agendas are "Seeking Possibilities of Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Cooperation amid the Turbulence of the Global Politics" in the first session, and "Prospects of Japan-China-ROK Cooperation in the Global Economy" in the second session. The conference minutes will appear on the GFJ's website, and therefore, I would just like to give my own feedback. Quite noticeably, diplomats outside East Asia, particularly from Europe, attended this dialogue. While globalization advances furthermore, each region faces its own challenges.

In the course of the first session, it appears that regionally characteristic challenges that North East Asia faces have become clear. Experts on East Asia outside the region tend to focus on China when they talk about this area. However, they should not overlook the fact that North Korea (DPRK) is located between China and South Korea. I would like to call an attention to this point when we talk about East Asia. While people focus on the reunification of Korean Peninsula, they expect China to prevent nuclear proliferation to North Korea. But China has little incentive to stop North Korea's nuclear project and

military buildup, and rather, it seems that they embrace the status quo. They worry that the suspension of aid to North Korea would cause a huge refugee influx into China. Nevertheless, they believe that trilateral cooperation is necessary to prepare for contingency.

In the second session, it was stated that the trilateral cooperation had institutionalized 60 areas since the foundation of the TCS. Meanwhile, the negotiation for the CJK-FTA (China-Japan-Korea Free Trade Agreement) has been suspended. South Korea is keenly interested in the TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership), following the FTAs with the EU and the United States. Japan must see what happens after TPP talks are concluded, and think of an FTA with the EU. Regarding the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), China joins the talk. Indeed, international trade has spectacularly favorable effects on us. This is typically seen in the changes through China's open up policy reform. Not just goods, but services, information, and knowledge have been brought from overseas. We can hardly imagine a world without trade, but we should not deteriorate working conditions and natural environments. That is why the ILO was established in 1919 to improve working conditions through international policy coordination; the GATT was found to reduce tariff and non-tariff trade barriers, which has developed into the WTO; and the Paris Agreement was reached in late 2015 to improve natural environments and prevent global warming. Also, it is hardly conceivable that the world stays unchanged despite technological progress. Patent and intellectual property rights were established, in order to protect individual or corporate invention, and creativity. If poorly managed large state owned enterprises expand their export by subsidies, laborers working for efficient private companies abroad will lose their jobs. Ever since world trade began to grow rapidly, intergovernmental talks have set common rules in trade and economic activities. I hope the CJK-FTA talk will resume as early as possible, and South Korea will play a vital role to advance the trilateral negotiations, since it hosts TCS headquarters.

(This is the English translation of an article written by IKEO Aiko, Professor of Waseda University, which originally appeared on the e-Forum "Giron-Hyakushutsu (Hundred Views in Full Perspective)" of GFJ on September 22, 2016.)