

**Panel:** Reordering East Asia

**Date/Time:** Wednesday, April 29, 2015 / 10:45-12:00

**Moderator:** Simon Long, The Economist

**Speakers:** Eric John, Boeing Korea

Kikuchi Tsutomu, Aoyama Gakuin University

Charles Morrison, East-West Center

Ren Xiao, Fudan University

Sohn Yul, Yonsei University

The session entitled “Reordering East Asia” began with an introduction by Mr. Long from The Economist. Starting with a brief review of East Asia’s path towards modernity and its visions in the present and future, Mr. Long asked each speaker to comment freely on the topic.

Mr. John, the president of Boeing Korea, distinguished the two categories of diplomatic and economic engagement to measure change and shift in East Asia. Remarking that the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is “huge”, he noted that the current trend towards moving from a network of bilateral relations to a comprehensive, multilateral agreement was the most important paradigm shift in the East Asian order. In the same vein, other multilateral frameworks such as APEC and the Six Party Talks are also meaningful with an East Asia that is increasingly interdependent and weaved together. In regards to U.S. engagement with China, Mr. John warned that media coverage of the relation focuses on matters of confrontation, but largely ignores the sheer breadth of engagement and cooperation that actually takes place between the two nations at all levels of government and society.

Dr. Kikuchi of Aoyama Gakuin University, too, agreed that what is occurring in contemporary East Asia is a paradigm shift rather than a power shift. He noted that ‘power’ is more complex than a U.S.- China dichotomy, and that there are regional middle powers such as ASEAN (‘small countries, one great player’) and South Korea who hold ‘substantial bargaining power’. Support from Asian nations is crucial for either China or the United States to have legitimacy in their regional dominance, Dr. Kikuchi argued. With regards to regional institutions, he commented upon the difficulties of the time frames for establishment and success; strategies take time to unfold, but anxious allies demand quick results. He was also of the opinion that the most important immediate challenge in East Asia was the rapid conclusion of the TPP. This would change the perception of Asian nations towards the United States.

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Dr. Morrison from the East-West Center stressed the importance of having a security community. Is it possible, and if so, how could we have a region where war becomes ‘unimaginable’ within the next few decades? Dr. Morrison argued that economic integration is an essential part of this process and that multilateral institutions matter even when they fail to make great strides economically; the role of providing a space for leaders to mingle is meaningful in itself. Echoing the words of Mr. Stephens from Plenary Session 3, he argued that the United States is ‘indispensable’ but ‘insufficient’ in this process. Further cooperation is key to solving three key issue areas: territorial disputes, North Korea and interpretations of WWII history.

Next, Dr. Ren of Fudan University provided the audience and panel with a Chinese perspective. Giving the example of how IMF reforms (further integration of developing countries) were blocked in Congress five years ago, he stated that the United States is ‘not constructive’. The AIIB is merely China’s alternative to ‘meet the demands of the developing countries in the region’. Dr. Ren criticized Obama for misreading the establishment of the AIIB as a threat and pressuring allies in the region not to join. He argued that existing institutions need reform, and that the G20 needs to be revitalized. Dr. Ren advised that the United States can do better by working with China rather than seeing China as a challenge to its hegemony and power in Asia.

The last speaker, Professor Sohn from Yonsei University, examined the role of Prime Minister Abe and Japan’s policies in influencing the region. As Japan increasingly takes a more proactive role in security, it has contributed in both positive and negative ways to the region. Professor Sohn voiced concerns over ‘securitizing issues that should not be ‘over-securitized’. For example, he explained that Chinese concerns over the TPP were virtually non-existent before 2012, until Japan began considerations for joining. It was only then that China became more assertive about ‘undoing’ the TPP. Professor Sohn also stated that as an important middle power in the region, Korea must do more to improve relations with Japan. The unholy ‘anti-history alliance’ of Korea and China that seems to be forming in recent years is driving a wedge between the triangle of the United States, Japan and Korea. Nevertheless, Professor Sohn was also critical of Prime Minister Abe’s somewhat ‘reluctant’ stance to support the Kono and Murayama Statements.

The Q&A session focused on further exploration of the capacities of both the TPP and the AIIB, as well as reflecting upon the roles of other multinational institutions, such as the CICA and the SCO.

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