
The 12th Japan-Korea Dialogue on East Asian Security

Saturday, December 16, 2023, 13:00–17:50

Summary



On December 16, 2023, the University of Tokyo hosted the 12th Japan-Korea Dialogue. Security experts from Japan and South Korea attended the workshop to share their analyses and exchange their views on security in East Asia. Professor Akio Takahara from the University of Tokyo, and Professor Hunjoon Kim from Korea University, opened the afternoon event by inviting all participants to engage in a frank and constructive discussion. Their opening remarks were followed by two sessions on the regional responses to China’s economic security and foreign strategy in the context of U.S.-China strategic competition. Like the 2022 event, this year’s dialogue was supported by grants from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs for Japan and the Republic of Korea (Korea).



Session 1: “The Present and Future Direction of China’s Economic Development: Implications for the Economic and Technological Policies of Japan and Korea”

The first session featured two keynote presentations, given by Professor Takahiro Tsuchiya from the Kyoto University of Advanced Science and Professor Wonho Yeon from the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy. Professor Ryo Sahashi from the University of Tokyo moderated the session.

Prof. Tsuchiya began his presentation, entitled “China’s Economic Security Strategies Regarding ‘Game-Changing’ Technologies and the Japan-U.S.-ROK Cooperation,” by explaining China’s thinking behind its current economic security strategies. According to Prof. Tsuchiya, to realize its national goals of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” and the “China Dream, the Strong Military Dream,” China has striven for a national development strategy that combines the country’s military and civilian industrial and science and technology (S&T) resources. He indicated that by building a shared ecosystem between its military and civilian sectors—as reflected in official slogans such as military-civil fusion (MCF) or civil-military integration (CMI)—China aims to develop advanced and emerging technologies that not only drive its economic growth but also facilitate its military modernization. Prof. Tsuchiya explained that AI, big data, blockchain, and next-generation information and communication technologies such as

5G, 6G, and C4ISR systems are all dual-use technologies with civilian and military applications that China actively pursues.

Prof. Tsuchiya gave a few examples of China's attempts to integrate the country's defense establishment and civilian industry for technological innovation. The plan to develop civil-military integration and defense science and technology was on the agenda of the Central Military Commission Reform Work Conference held in November 2015. China has constructed over 30 MCF national demonstration bases on science and technology. However, he cautioned that China's development of high-tech weapons using "game-changing" technologies such as drones and AIs could affect the security of Japan and the United States.

By referring to U.S. President Eisenhower's address at the UN General Assembly in the 1950s, which emphasized the importance of international control of atomic energy and the peaceful use of nuclear power, Prof. Tsuchiya argued that Japan, the United States, and Korea must work together for the peaceful use of advanced technologies to ensure the peace and stability of the region and the international community. He elaborated on the limitations of current export controls over advanced technologies. For example, he argued that regulating emerging technologies is difficult given the challenges in identifying end-users. Although countries like the United States have export control systems and are expanding their regime's scope, Prof. Tsuchiya argued that the United States cannot achieve effective controls alone. He proposed that while Japan, the United States, and Korea each possess relatively developed export control systems, the trio should lead a "coalition of the willing" to create a shared export control regime with other like-minded partners.

Professor Yeon began his presentation, entitled "U.S.-China Strategic Competition and Economic Security," by explaining the rise of the importance of economic security. According to Yeon, economic security came under the international spotlight as U.S.-China strategic competition increased, with many countries seeking to "protect national survival from external economic threats or risks." Countries have different approaches to managing economic risks. For example, while both the European Union (EU) and the United States claim to want to "de-risk" relations with China—their goal being to relax China's grip on global supply chains but not cut ties, as opposed to the earlier idea of "decoupling"—Prof. Yeon distinguished between their approaches. He argued that while the EU looks to diversify its supply chains, the United States adopts a "small-yard, high-fence" strategy, which is essentially a "selective decoupling."

Prof. Yeon elaborated on how the United States and China consider their strategies regarding critical technologies. For the United States, he highlighted a policy announcement by National

Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in September this year. Calling it the “Sullivan Tech Doctrine,” Prof. Yeon introduced the three technologies that the United States identified as essential to the country’s national security and in which the United States must take the lead: computing-related technologies, biotech, and clean tech. He then indicated that export controls will be used to ensure the U.S. leadership. Prof. Yeon posited that the U.S. policy announcement indicated a shift in U.S. tech strategy from the previous “dynamic control” approach to a “static control” approach. Looking at China, Prof. Yeon drew attention to the “Three Ds” that China aims to use to encourage the country’s innovation-driven economic growth: 1) removing “distortions” through market reforms to allow efficient resource allocation; 2) accelerating the “diffusion” of advanced technologies to improve access to technology through education and openness; and 3) fostering the “discovery” of new innovation and technology. According to Prof. Yeon, the United States targets the second and the third Ds for selective decoupling.

In assessing the global state of geoeconomic fragmentation, Prof. Yeon observed that China is adopting an “asymmetric decoupling” strategy, where it seeks to strategically decouple itself from the rest of the world by investing in its indigenous technology and become more economically self-reliant while making the rest of the world more dependent on China.

Prof. Yeon concluded with proposals for future Japan-Korea cooperation. First, Prof. Yeon argued that as reducing over-dependence on China is becoming essential for both countries, it is an area where they could work together. He also emphasized the importance of trust and shared values in restructuring supply chains: cooperation among like-minded countries, such as within the Korea-Japan-U.S. framework, should play a more significant role in the years ahead. Finally, he anticipated that next year’s U.S. presidential election would be critical in determining the direction of the U.S.-China strategic technology competition, which requires close attention to be paid by both Japan and Korea.

Following the two keynote presentations, the floor was opened to questions from all participants. The discussions centered on the following issues: the practice of China’s MCF, the effectiveness of U.S. export control and its impact on Japan and Korea, China’s indigenous efforts in technological innovations, and potential ways to protect the transfer of critical technologies.



Session 2: “Chinese Foreign Strategy: Implications for Foreign Policy of Japan, Korea, and Taiwan”

In the second session, Professor Hankwon Kim of the Korea National Diplomatic Academy served as moderator, and Professor Dongmin Lee of Dankook University and Professor Madoka Fukuda of Hosei University made keynote presentations.

Prof. Lee’s presentation, entitled “Korea-China Relations in the Era of Uncertainty,” covered three main topics. First, he started with a discussion of the changing nature of U.S.-China relations. Jake Sullivan, who is currently the American National Security Advisor, argues that the changing environment requires a new foreign policy approach and that America’s fate depends on how we define and respond to the notion of competition. It is, therefore, crucial to pay more attention to the domestic political process in the United States to understand the current and future direction of U.S. foreign policy. There has been a shift in U.S. policy toward China from the pursuit of regime change to competitive coexistence since the beginning of the Biden administration. However, there are still elements of instability that are related to China’s domestic political issues. Particularly, its strategic relations with Russia have become a source of issue since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. American analysts including Robert Gates increasingly emphasize the importance of preventing the two states from creating an axis of revisionism.

Second, Prof. Lee posited that stability in East Asia including the Korean Peninsula is a necessary condition for the coexistence of the U.S. and China. When it established diplomatic relations with China in 1992, South Korea had two goals, namely (1) access to a new market and (2) resolution of North Korean issues. However, as of 2022, it has not been able to achieve either of the two, although it is true that it has benefited from economic relations with China. When it comes to Korea-China relations, South Korea currently has two strategic concerns: (1) the overlap of industrial output with China and (2) the limitation of China's role in the issues of North Korea. On the other hand, China is concerned about the securitization of the economy and Korea's position on China's "core interest," most notably the issue of the Taiwan Strait.

Third, Prof. Lee discussed the implications of the current situation in U.S.-China and Korea-China relations. The recent improvement of the former has both positive and negative impacts on the latter. If Korea-China relations continue to deteriorate while the United States and Japan try to improve their relations with China, Korea's strategic options will become much narrower in the coming months and years. He pointed out that to solve Korea's and China's strategic concerns, the former requires an agreement on how to reorganize the industrial supply chain in the future and narrow Korea's trade deficit with China. It would also be important for Korea to find areas in which it can cooperate with China on the issue of denuclearization and stability in the Korean Peninsula.

In the second presentation of Session 2 entitled "Taiwan's 2024 Election and International Relations in the Indo-Pacific," Prof. Fukuda offered an overview of the presidential and legislative council elections in Taiwan scheduled in 2024 and their potential impacts on regional affairs. Although the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) has gained some support, the elections are practically fought between the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) (Lai Ching-te for president and Hsiao Bi-khim for vice president) and the Kuomintang (KMT) (Hou Yu-ih as president and Wu Hsin-ying as vice president). Although Lai's reputation for being a pro-independence figure raised concerns, his choice of Hsiao as the vice-presidential candidate remedies his potential defect as Hsiao was the Taiwanese representative to the United States during the Tsai period, when many citizens in Taiwan appreciated friendly and stable relations with the United States. In contrast to Lai's strategy to nominate a contrasting figure as vice-presidential candidate and gain the support of young and liberal voters, Hou nominated Jaw, a senior figure within KMT who is known for his pro-reunification position, to solidify support from traditional KMT voters. Although these elections are often portrayed as a choice between China and the United States or independence and unification, they are not that simple. There is a broad consensus that it is important to strengthen defense capabilities and maintain good relations with the U.S. The point of contention between the

two parties is the approach toward China. DPP presents the debate as one about democracy or autocracy, emphasizing the need to protect Taiwan from China, while KMT portrays it as a choice between war and peace, emphasizing the need for dialogue and exchanges with China.

As for the implications of the election results, Prof. Fukuda pointed out that if the DPP wins, it would be the first time the same party ruled the government for more than eight years, which would mean that there is broad support for the Tsai government's foreign policy. Lai has repeatedly mentioned that he would follow Tsai's course, emphasizing his "four main pillars for peace" – strengthening deterrence, enhancing economic security, promoting democratic partnerships, and maintaining the status quo across the Taiwan Strait. On the other hand, Hou criticizes Lai's approach arguing that it would create tensions with China, and puts forward his own approach called the "3D" strategy (Deterrence, Dialogue, and De-escalation) emphasizing the need to resume dialogue with China. The two parties particularly disagree on defense policies, economic security, and historical or territorial issues.

Lastly, Prof. Fukuda discussed the potential reaction from China and the potential impact on the broader regional environment. Although it is unlikely that China will try to directly exert military or economic pressure during the election, it may pressure the winner after the election. If Lai wins in a landslide, there would be little China can do, but if he wins by a small margin, it may implement large-scale military exercises or diplomatic campaigns. If Hou wins, China's United Front operations will intensify. China is also paying particular attention to the U.S. presidential election as it has severe implications for cross-strait relations. Prof. Fukuda concluded her presentation by pointing out that the U.S., Japan, and like-minded countries need to continue providing both deterrence and assurance to China as well as to consider countermeasures against China's gray zone operations.

Based on the above two keynote presentations, the participants discussed issues such as Korea's position on Taiwan, China's view on the U.S.-Korea alliance, industrial overlap between Korea and China, and generational gaps among voters in Taiwan, all of which led to a lively exchange of opinions among the presenters and participants.