Japan and Subregionalism: Constructing the Japan Sea Rim Zone*

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Introduction

The ending of the cold war has stimulated scholarly interest in the transition from ideology to region as a concept around which states and nations are organizing. As in the process of building a sense of the nation state, the nation, or the state, a sense of region only emerges out of contested socio-political processes, which transform relations in space and time into conceptual structures of understanding and identity (On the importance of space and time, see Ngai-ling Sum, 1996). The process of producing and reproducing a region implies a contest over demarcation: as a socio-political construct, certain aspects of a region are highlighted or obfuscated in a process of imputing meaning to economic, political, security and cultural relations in different time and space, thereby demarcating boundaries to a region. The question of inclusion and exclusion is integral to this process, with the boundaries being subject to contestation as insiders, peripherals, and outsiders produce, reproduce and shape space as region. The 'imagined region' (See Anderson, 1991 on 'imagined communities') to emerge from this process is a composite of the objective relations imputed with meaning and their subjective representation by the agents at the heart of building a regional or subregional identity.

The region-building process at the state level involves new institutional frameworks, as with the nascent Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF); concepts and proposals for competing frameworks of co-operation, as with the East Asian Economic Caucus (EARC); and, as part of this process, agents seeking to demarcate the regional boundaries of 'Asia Pacific' or 'East Asia'. It is clear from the burgeoning activities of East Asian nations and states in the post-cold war era that, irrespective of the political shade of government in power, agents in Japan

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are set to play an increasingly important role in defining regional and subregional identities. Interest in Japan as a regional player, as well as in regional issues more generally, is a hallmark of the post-cold war era. True, scholarship analysing regional level economic links abounds, but much of this work is by economists with little interest in the complex socio-political processes at the heart of region building (e.g. Garnaut and Drysdale 1994). Other work has gone beyond the focus on regions as emerging economic regions, which may perhaps turn into ‘economic blocs’, by addressing region-building in Asia as a contested political process generating competitive attempts to construct regions as ‘Asia Pacific’ or ‘East Asia’ (e.g. Higgott and Stubbs, 1995; Hook 1996; Hook 1996a).

In the case of subregions, however, the extant literature is less plentiful, especially in regard to Japan’s role in the emergence of subnational regions embracing parts of more than one national polity, which are linked across national political boundaries and natural sea boundaries (Taga 1992; Hokuriku Kokusai Mondai Gakkai 1993; Postel-Vinay 1996). With the importance of Japan as a locomotive for the economic development of both ‘Asia Pacific’ and ‘East Asia’ widely acknowledged, whether within the framework of Japan as the lead goose in the ‘flying geese model’ of economic growth (Yamazawa 1990. For a critique, see Korhonen 1994, pp. 49–63), or as part of the reorganized mode of production within the global political economy (Bernard and Ravenhill, 1995), the role within Japan of subnational regions in promoting relations with subnational regions in other parts of East Asia, deserves closer attention. In short, much more needs to be learned about the Japanese role in promoting subregionalism. Here subregionalism is addressed as a question of constructing a subregion, both objectively and subjectively. ‘Subregion’ is understood as a region embracing more than two subnational regions of a national polity. The focus is on the construction of the ‘Japan Sea Rim Zone’, with the concept of the Yellow Sea Rim Zone, being touched on parenthetically.

**Background to emerging subregionalism**

This surge of Japanese interest in developing subnational links across the sea to other parts of Asia has arisen at a specific historical juncture, where longer-term and shorter-term processes have brought the idea of promoting subregionalism to the fore. During the half century since the failure of the empire’s attempt to build the Greater East Asia Coprosperity Sphere, Japan has been transformed into an economic superpower, with Tokyo now an ‘overdeveloped world city’ at the heart of the Japanese political economy. The nation clearly remains an economic superpower today, but the worst recession for many years, the need to respond to fluctuations of the yen, the maturing of the economy, the need to decentralize, and so on, are forcing
profound changes in the structure of the Japanese political economy. One well known consequence of this is the non-stop movement of Japanese capital and manufacturing industry to other parts of East Asia, first primarily to the Newly Industrialising Economies (NIES) of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan; next to members of ASEAN, especially Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand; now increasingly to China and to a lesser extent Vietnam. Less well known is the effect this overseas movement of Japanese industry is exerting on the domestic economy, especially on the less developed parts of the 'back of Japan' (ura Nihon); that is, the prefectures and cities located on the Japan Sea coastal side of the nation, which have tended to be left behind in the postwar scramble for growth centring on Tokyo and the Pacific seaboard. Indeed, 'ura Nihon' connotes the pejorative, 'backward'. For when looked at internally, Japan's post-war growth has been disparate growth, with the Pacific coastal region, rather than the Japan Sea coastal region, the home to many of the nation's strategic industries. In a real sense, Japan's post-1945 economic development has been Pacific seaboard development, not Japan Sea seaboard development. The burgeoning attempts to promote decentralization away from Tokyo and to stimulate growth in ura Nihon are taking place at precisely the time that the ending of the cold war offers new opportunities to look to Asia as well as to the Pacific.

This lopsided economic development of Japan is rooted in the Meiji period, but more recently in the post-war settlement, which sought to integrate Japan into the Western camp in the bi-polar cold war confrontation between East and West. The ending of the cold war has thawed what was largely a frozen sea in so far as political, economic and cultural exchange is concerned. Now, instead of the sea being viewed as a frozen, cold war sea—that is, as a barrier, a front-line, or a possible battle site—the post-cold war sea appears as a lake linking the Japan Sea coastal prefectures to different subnational regions in other parts of Asia. In place of a conception of the Japan Sea as a central element in a security discourse, therefore, the same natural barrier now appears as a seaway for crossing national boundaries, with new potential markets, resources, and business opportunities just a short distance away from the Japan Sea seaboard. The seaboard prefectures and cities now increasingly view the sea as a lake linking the underdeveloped, less developed or 'hollowing out' parts of Japan to those parts of Asia once frozen inside the cold war political and security structures, as with North Korea and the Russian Far East; to other parts of Asia seen as belonging in some way to an emerging region, as with parts of China and Mongolia, which are on their way to embracing more fully the market economy; and the successful showcase of East Asian economic development, as with South Korea. The break-down, if not complete disappearance of the cold war ideological divide, has given rise to a reconceptualization of Japan's spatial location in
the region, with the Japan Sea coastal side of the nation now exerting a powerful pull on the subjective representation of Japan as a 'Pacific power'. This contested process has gained momentum in the wake of the ending of the cold war, with agents in the prefectures and cities on the Japan Sea seaboard reconceptualizing their location as the 'core' of the newly emerging subregions within 'East Asia', rather than the 'periphery' of the Pacific-oriented post-1945 development of Japan as part of 'Asia Pacific'.

The meaning of the cold war's ending for the development of subregionalism has been magnified by the passage of a half a century since the end of the empire's attempt to restructure the region through violence. Without doubt, the legacy of imperialism remains an issue of contention between Japan and the victims of its aggression. Nationally, this has led to the periodic souring of relations on the political level, as results from the whitewashing of the war in school textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education, comments by leading politicians approving of the war as well as the 'benefits' of Japanese colonization, and the reluctance of the government to accept responsibility for war-time evils, such as the recent case of the women who served the empire's soldiers as 'sex slaves' (For details, see Yoshimi, 1995). Despite the continuing affect of this legacy, the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the war's ending in 1995, which took place within the overall context of the cold war's ending, has created a more positive environment for the development of relations between Japan and East Asia. The greater willingness to accept 'war responsibility' on the part of key political leaders who have headed the government after the end of thirty-eight years of Liberal-Democratic Party rule has been significant in this regard. Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro, for instance, apologized to the Korean people for Japanese actions during colonial days. Similarly, socialist prime minister Murayama Tomiichi went so far as to express 'heartfelt apologies' for Japanese actions, which was welcomed by Asian leaders (Far Eastern Economic Review 24 August 1995, p. 18). This warming of relations facilitates the efforts being made by economic, political and intellectual elites to promote links at the subregional level between the Japan Sea coastal prefectures and cities, on the one hand, and parts of the Korean peninsula, China, and so on, on the other.

### Developing subregional links

#### Naming and representation

The subregional concept now emerging at the centre of the Japanese discourse on subregionalism is the 'Japan Sea Rim Zone' (*Kan Nihon Kai Ken* or *Kan Nihon Kai Keizai Ken*, Japan Sea Rim Economic Zone) (See map. From Postel-Vinay, 1996, p. 491.). Although the concept goes back to the 1960s, the ending of the cold war, in particular, has stirred renewed interest in its
realization. In seeking to regionalize the concept, however, the name of the sea at the heart of the zone, the 'Japan Sea', has evoked controversy between Japan and the victims of Japanese imperialist aggression, especially South Korea. The central concern is with employing the name 'Japan Sea' in order to designate the sea stretching between Japan and the Korean peninsula. For historically the name is implicated deeply in the expansion of the Japanese empire into other parts of Asia, with the sea being referred to as the 'Japan Sea' in the wake of the colonization of the Korean peninsula in 1910 (Hook 1996a, pp. 22-3. Also see, Asahi Shinbun, 30 November 1991). The legacy of Japanese imperial expansion into East Asia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries still precludes a consensus on a name
for a subregion which embraces subnational parts of modern-day Japan and the victims of old-style Japanese aggression. As a name functions as a key form of symbolic representation which serves to link together the objective and the subjective into a regional meaning for the included, excluded and peripherals, this controversy over naming highlights indirectly the significance of the emerging links between the Japan Sea coastal side of the nation and the Korean peninsula.

The situation in regard to the 'Japan Sea' is in sharp contrast to that of the Yellow Sea Rim Zone. The use of a colour in the naming of the sea between Japan, China and the Korean peninsula avoids the problem experienced in regionalizing the concept of the 'Japan Sea' zone. Far from stirring controversy, the 'Yellow Sea' at the core of the name is being used to promote a concept of East Asian economic links creating a zone centring on Kyushu. As an illustration, take the name used by a group of business leaders from different types of small- and medium-sized enterprises in Kyushu, 'Yellow Sea Rim Exchange Summit for Different Types of Business'. The group hopes the links the members have formed with a similarly diverse group of South Korean enterprises will lead to new products and technology being developed, first with South Korea and then later with China. On the level of sub-national governments, moreover, a grouping of eight cities, Kitakyushu and Shimo no Seki in Japan, together with six cities in China and South Korea, is seeking to give an identity to the 'Yellow Sea' as the 'East Asian Sea' by coining the name the 'East Asia (Yellow Sea Rim) City Council'. In this sense, the Japan Sea coastal and Yellow Sea coastal regions of Japan can be said to be contesting the core of the East Asian region as centring on the 'Japan Sea' or the 'Yellow Sea'.

Despite difficulty over naming, subnational regionalism is emerging most saliently centring on the Japan Sea coastal side of Japan. In many ways, as subregionalism is emerging, rather than established in an institutional form, the agents at the heart of the process are at the early stages of subregion-building in a dual sense: first, in terms of promoting the economic, political, and cultural relations between Japan and neighbouring East Asia, thereby giving the subregion objective meaning; and second, in terms of the representation of these links as regional links, thereby imputing subjective meaning to space as region. The institutionalization of the subregion involves both processes, and the routinization of subregional symbols, as through the use of a name by business groups, organizations, the media, and so on, serves to constitute the region in symbolic space. In seeking to demarcate the boundaries as well as the core of the region, agents with vested interests in constructing or undermining the 'Japan Sea' region, generating centripetal forces towards integration and union or centrifugal forces towards disintegration and fragmentation, are embroiled in a struggle over symbolic
space and legitimacy. History and geography are crucial to this process.

In the case of both the Japan Sea Rim Zone and the Yellow Sea Rim Zone, the social construction of a subregion in the Japanese information environment (subjective representation) is as much a part of subregion building as the objective links giving meaning to the subregion as region. It is a process of appealing to the legacies of history and geography, space and time, within a certain framework of reference and identity. As a director of the Kita Kyushu Chamber of Commerce phrased it: 'In order to promote links between Japan and the East Asian region, with which we have a deep relationship historically and geographically, I wish to make a reality of the concept of the Yellow Sea Economic Zone' (22 July 1995, Asahi Shinbun, seibu edition). This same appeal to history and geography as a means to enhance the legitimacy of the claim to be a part of one of these newly emerging subregions also can be seen in the case of the Japan Sea Rim Matsue International Exchange Council. It recently held a conference on the historical links between Japan and China on the sub-regional level, going back centuries. What is interesting about the approach to subregionalism frequently taken is that the history of imperial expansion and geographic reconfiguration at the heart of the Greater East Asia Coprosperity sphere is ignored in favour of digging deeper into history. In a fundamental sense the approach embodies a transcendental appeal to space and time as concepts for reconfiguring Japan-East Asian relations within a shared framework of identity, blotting out the image of aggression at the very core of Japanese imperial expansion into East Asia. This selective use of history and geography is an effective tool in developing a 'Japan Sea Rim' or 'Yellow Sea Rim' identity embracing the prefecture, city or subnational region of Japan within an East Asia made up of former victims of Japanese imperialism.

Agents

A variety of agents are engaged in creating the objective links between the Japan Sea coastal region and other subnational parts of East Asia as well as in imputing these links with subjective meaning as the 'Japan Sea Rim Zone'. As most work to date has concentrated on the economic links at the heart of subregionalism, this brief overview will focus on national and subnational governments, and academic and business groups. This approach should demonstrate how, in the post-cold war era, these agents are playing a key role in producing subregionalism in East Asia.

National and Subnational Governments: The national government in Tokyo has offered support to the emergent drive amongst the prefectures, cities and businesses of the Japan Sea seaboard to develop subregional relations. The promotion of political links, transportation links, and technical links are at the heart of the government's efforts. A number of examples
should suffice to demonstrate how the central government, often in cooperation with subnational governments (prefectural, city, town, and so on) as well as business, has become engaged in promoting subregional activities. On the political level, the central government established a consular office in Khabarovsk in 1993, and granted permission for Russia to set up a consulate in Niigata. These consulars on the Japan Sea coastal side of Japan and in the Russian Far East are playing a crucial role in facilitating the development of political and especially commercial subregional links.

Transportation links are essential to this process. Here the central government authorizes air links and sea links as well as provides funds and expertise to facilitate communication. Given the Pacific-oriented economic development of Japan, on the one hand, and the cold war legacy, on the other, improving communication between the Japan Sea coastal regions and other parts of East Asia is crucial. Take the case of the Russian Far East during the cold war as an example. With the Soviet Union as part of the 'East' and Japan as part of the 'West', transportation links were limited between the Japan Sea seaboard and the Russian Far East, with only one direct flight. The central government approved the first air route in 1973 between Niigata, the largest of the Japan Sea seaboard cities, and Khabarovsk, the administrative centre of the Soviet Far East (For details, see Taga 1995). This enabled Niigata to act as a bridge between East and West in promoting links with the Soviet Far East, as this air route proved the most convenient for others in East Asia as well as for the Japanese. As a result of direct links between Niigata and South Korea, the Seoul-Niigata-Khabarovsk air route could be used by South Koreans to reach a destination in the Russian Far East. The government later also approved an air route between Niigata and Vladivostok. In a similar way to the emergence of 'world cities' as hubs (Knox and Taylor, 1995), therefore, the ending of the cold war has presented Niigata with the opportunity to try to develop as a 'subregional hub' at the heart of the emerging Japan Sea Rim Zone.

As far as shipping is concerned, the government is co-operating in the development of Foreign Access Zones (FAZ), as in the case of the ports of Maizu in Kyoto Prefecture and Sakai in Tottori prefecture. The FAZ is based on legislation passed in 1992 in order to promote Japanese imports and domestic investment, with the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Ministry of Home Affairs working together with the private sector in carrying out FAZ projects. This 'third sector' development of Maizu and Sakai seeks to contribute to the future realization of the economic potential of the Japan Sea Rim Zone. As in the case of the Sakai Port Trade Centre, storage facilities, exhibition space, information on trade promotion, and so on, are provided as a way to develop the port as a gateway
to East Asia (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 15 September 1995). In this endeavour the two ports are in competition, as with Niigata.

Niigata prefecture is seeking to establish Niigata port as a gateway to Northeast Asia, especially to Changchun in China. Still, even in the early 1990s, approximately ninety per cent of shipments from the prefecture were directed through the main Pacific ports, such as Yokohama and Kobe (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 15 September 1995). The prefecture is attempting to promote the use of Niigata’s port by businesses in Niigata and other Japan Sea side prefectures and increase the number of services to the port. In contrast to say Yokohama, where the Southeast Asian service calls two or three times a week on the Yokohama, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore route, this takes place only on average three times a month in the case of Niigata. On top of that, with more port calls on the Niigata route than on the Yokohama route, it takes more than twice as long to reach Singapore.

Not only Japanese ports but also other ports in the region are being developed, as in the case of the Russo-Japanese agreement of 1995 to move towards work on a port in the coastal region of the Russian Far East. The national and the prefectural governments of Niigata and Yamagata have been active in conducting feasibility studies and providing information and intellectual support in order to develop the port (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 13 September 1995). In this case, the governor of Niigata prefecture sees the port’s development as ‘a major contribution to the promotion of exchange in the Japan Sea Rim Economic Zone, which Niigata prefecture has been promoting’ (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 4 October 1995).

The aid provided by the prefectures includes technical training in the form of book-keeping and accountancy at the Japan Centre in one of Russia’s business schools, which forms part of the assistance provided by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to promote economic reform in Russia (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 4 September 1995). This is a different form of aid to the humanitarian aid offered as a sister city, as with Niigata’s provision of buses to its sister city, Khabarovsk, after a fire destroyed the city’s bus depot in 1992. In essence, the subnational government is carrying out aid on behalf of the central government.

Along with Khabarovsk, Niigata has established city sister agreements with Vladivostok and Harbin in China. Other cities and prefectures have sought to promote links in this way. In 1992, for instance, both Toyama Prefecture and Osaka Metropolitan government signed friendship agreements with subnational governments in the Russian Far East. Niigata has played a central role in developing links between the cities on the Japan Sea seaboard and other parts of East Asia, as with the inauguration of a meeting of seaboard mayors in 1970. Similarly, links have been promoted by the institutionalisation of meetings between the mayors and governors of Japan
and the Russian Far East. At the third meeting in 1995 the participants discussed cultural and technical exchange and other issues related to promoting links between the Japan Sea seaboard prefectures and the Russian Far East.

Japanese subnational governments also have played a role in setting up think tanks in order to conduct research on subregional economic zones. This is the case with the Kan Nihon Kai Keizai Kenkyujo (a direct translation would be 'Japan Sea Rim Economic Research Institute', but given the sensitivity over the use of 'Japan Sea', known in English as the Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia) which is sponsored by Niigata Prefecture. Prefectures like Tottori, Aomori, Akita, and others also have set up think tanks. With the coastal prefectures often in competition with one another to establish their own prefecture as the 'gateway' to the Japan Sea, however, collaboration between the different think tanks remains weak.

**Academic and Business Groups:** The construction of a subregional identity is facilitated by the activities of academic and business, and others involved in a variety of seminars and symposiums which have been held over the past few years. A sample of recent events illustrates how various sectors of Japanese society are developing vested interests in subnationalism, on the one hand, and how regional membership is perceived, on the other. In 1992 the Japan Sea Information and Communication Symposium was held for the first time with participants from Russia, China, South Korea and Japan. In the same year, the Osaka Chamber of Commerce sponsored a symposium on 'The Concept of the Japan Sea Rim Economic Zone and Japan's Role'. In 1993 the first international symposium on medical exchange in Japan, Russia and Northeast Asia was held in Niigata, with medics from Russia, Mongolia, South Korea, China and the United States participating. In 1994 the Japan Sea Rim Learned Society was inaugurated with several hundred members. In 1995 the Japan Sea Rim Academic Forum was set up with a membership of over two hundred and fifty. This is a network of members from the world of business, government, and academia, which seeks to establish an economic zone in the future through the promotion of academic and cultural exchange as well as research. The forum is similar to the Pacific Economic Co-operation Council (PECC), which also draws members from business, bureaucracy and academia. The main point of difference is the level of government participation, with the forum's membership being drawn largely from twenty-two prefectures. As it stands, therefore, the identity of the region remains in flux, with participants drawn from a variety of nations, including in the case of medicine, the United States. Over time, however, the groups and individuals involved in these different associations will no doubt gradually develop vested interests in promoting their own version of the 'Japan Sea Rim Zone'.

Motivations

The motivations for promoting subregionalism, both at the national and subnational levels in Japan, differ according to the agents involved, but crucially important is economics. At the national level, the central government is seeking to revitalize the economies of the Japan Sea region, with 'Japan Sea Rim' functioning as a new identity in the inter and intra bureaucratic rivalry over budgetary resources. With the end of the Japanese economic 'bubble', the relentless consolidation of economic, political and cultural power in an over-centralized Tokyo has slowed somewhat, with calls for 'decentralization' now being heard more loudly. As one commentator put it: 'The end of over-concentration in Tokyo as a result of the bursting of the bubble is a plus for Kyushu. In China the regional development of the North East is expected from now on. If exchange deepens in the Yellow Sea Rim Economic Zone, the possibility for the development of these two regions can be expected to heighten' (*Asahi Shinbun*, 15 December 1994, Seibu edition).

At the subnational level, moreover, competition amongst the coastal prefectures and cities is part and parcel of subregionalism. In the case of the Japan Sea coastal ports, for instance, a 'port war' has broken out between prefectures seeking to establish their own ports as the trade gateway to East Asia (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 26 September 1994). This suggests that, in pushing ahead with cross border subregionalism, the prefectures and cities are seeking to develop links with other parts of the region as a way to revitalize their own prefectural economies, whereas the central government is concerned more generally with promoting subregional links as a way to revive the national economy. Needless to say, the prefectures seek to lobby the central government to promote their own position as the 'gateway' to East Asia.

On another level, the prefectures and cities on the Japan seaboard are seeking to promote cross cultural relations, regional peace and global peace, as well as the overall prosperity of the region. Whereas the cold war hindered the development of relations between the Japan Sea seaboard region and especially the Soviet Far East, the post cold war has created new opportunities for cross-cultural contact. In the case of Niigata and Khabarovsk, for instance, the sister-city relationship has been strengthened, building on the earlier cultural and educational interaction which took place, as with the exchange of students, dance groups, film, and so on. The relationship has built up a high degree of awareness and understanding between the two cities, with enough Russian speakers in Niigata to enable the city in the post-cold war era to host product exhibitions and to promote Russo-Japanese relations in a wide variety of areas.
Conclusion

As we have seen, the construction of the Japan Sea Rim Zone is faced with the burden of history, as even the name ‘Japan Sea’ evokes memories of Japanese imperialism. The attempts now being made to create a new form of subregionalism centring on the subnational coastal parts of Japan and subnational parts at the other side of the sea to Japan are integral to the ongoing process of the nation redefining its relations with Asia. In this process, the problem of naming will undoubtedly be replaced by the emergence of subregional interests which, with time, will gradually link the Japan Sea coastal regions with other parts of East Asia. As a result, a new name and identity, or the use of different names in different languages, as with the Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia, can be expected to emerge. The burgeoning power of APEC in comparison with EAEC suggests that, whereas on the national level the government will continue to prioritize APEC, new relations with East Asia will creep ahead on the subnational level. In the transformation of the regional order in post-cold war East Asia, these new subnational linkages, which are creating gradually objective and subjective links between Japan and other parts of East Asia, can be expected to take on increasingly important meaning in the redefinition of Japan’s regional role and identity.

It is important to recall that subregionalism is moving forward at a time when both the national and prefectural governments are seeking to stimulate the economy along the Japan Sea coastal region of Japan. This is occurring in the context of the restructuring of the regional order after the ending of the cold war, on the one hand, and the Japanese government’s more proactive attempts to address the question of war responsibility, on the other. The changing political economy of Japan suggests that, with the move towards decentralization, efforts to promote subregionalism will grow. The nature of this form of regionalism nevertheless remains contested. It is unclear as to which city along the Japan Sea coast will become the subregional hub linking Japan to continental East Asia in the twenty-first century. In seeking to promote their own interests, the prefectural governments are competing with each other for national resources, as in the attempt to locate FAZ in their own prefectures. This competition is likely to intensify, although the prefectures may be able to co-operate in areas of joint interest.

The competition to establish transportation links has grown sharper with the ending of the cold war. In the case of Tottori prefecture, for instance, success in moving forward with the development of the port of Sakai as the gateway port for East Asia, with the start of a container service between Pusan and Sakai in August 1995, on top of the already existing links
between Sakai and China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and ports in South Korea, is a challenge to Niigata prefecture's attempt to establish the gateway port in Niigata. Similar competition has opened up in terms of air links, with Shimane prefecture also seeking to establish the local airport as the gateway to East Asia. As the spate of developments in both sea and air links in the post-cold war era testifies, the Pacific-oriented transportation system centring on the air hubs of Tokyo and Osaka and the sea hubs of Kobe and Yokohama, remains the core of the regional transportation system, with the new subregional links emerging gradually as an essential part of the construction of the Japan Sea Rim Zone. The further development of transportation links remains as a key issue facing the Japan Sea coastal prefectures.

It is too early to suggest the implications of these emerging links for the restructuring of the regional order. What is clear, however, is the increasingly important role being played by subnational agents as international agents. This is illustrated by how the prefectural and city governments of the Japan Sea coastal region are becoming central to the promotion of international links. It involves promoting economic links as well as cultural and educational links amongst the cities and prefectures of the coastal region and the Russian Far East, China, South Korea, and so on. In this process, subnational governments are emerging as agents for the national government in Tokyo, as in the case of Niigata acting on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in promoting Russia's economic reforms. More significantly, this level of government is increasingly acting in its own right, as with Niigata's survey of ports in the Russian Far East, and the prefecture's proposed involvement in the port's development. In other words, these subnational governments are taking on some of the functions of a national government, with a 'foreign policy' of their own. This is not to suggest this level of government will in any sense replace the national government, but rather that, in the emerging regional order, the pluralization of international agents is occurring, and these agents are complementing, not replacing, the role of the national government. In this process, subregional identities and interests are starting to emerge. The role of political, economic and academic elites is here crucial. In what form these emerging identities and interests are shaped by time, space, and a variety of agents will help to determine the future development of the Japan Sea Rim Zone. This no doubt will have a significant influence in determining the meaning of subregionalism for regional peace and order in East Asia in the twenty first century.

References

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