

Epistemic Community and the Role of Second Track Diplomacy in East Asia Economic Cooperation

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Abstract: This paper discusses the profile and roles of Network of East Asian Think-tanks (NEAT) as an epistemic community in East Asia that encourages economic cooperation in the region. As a medium of “second track diplomacy”, NEAT has been complementing “first track diplomacy” and other tracks that were utilized by Japan and China to defend their interests. The two countries sought to integrate the first and second track diplomacy in creating economic cooperation in East Asia.

Key words: Epistemic community • Second track diplomacy • NEAT • East Asia • Economic cooperation

INTRODUCTION

The progress of East Asian cooperation is often only seen from First Track Diplomacy (also known as Track one) activities. In fact, the role of an epistemic group is no less important. Moreover, an epistemic group often plays specific roles that are closely related to the policy-making concerning specific cases. The roles of an epistemic group can be observed from the history of the development of East Asian cooperation, the meetings held and the implementation of international cooperation especially those among East Asian and ASEAN countries.

Thus, an epistemic community complements first track diplomacy which is officially carried out by the governments of ASEAN+3 countries (10 ASEAN member countries plus Japan, China and South Korea). It is interesting to see how the countries made use of an epistemic community as Second Track Diplomacy to gather feedback on the ideas that they were going to formally rollover through the country’s official track. The intellectuals from these countries often test their ideas whether they would get a positive feedback or otherwise.

The systematic of this writing is as follows. The first section describes an epistemic community and Second Track Diplomacy, followed by an explanation on the background of the formation of Network of East Asian Think-Tanks (NEAT) including a discussion on the structure and mechanism of NEAT. The final section presents the mapping of East Asian economic cooperation during the period of 2007-2010 along with a brief recommendation. The description in the final section provides an overview of the performance that has been carried out.

Theoretical Overview:

Epistemic Community and Second Track Diplomacy: The concept of an epistemic community was made popular by [1] more than twenty years ago. [2] stated that an epistemic community was a community of professionals from various disciplines having the ability to produce relevant knowledge for policy-making on specific technical issues. He also added four important elements unique to an epistemic community, i.e.: (1) a set of shared principal and normative beliefs which provided the basis for the behaviors of its members; (2) a shared belief about causality which provided a basis of

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interconnectedness between different channels of policy and the expected results; (3) a shared belief about validity which was used as a criterion to measure validity of knowledge which its members were expertise in; and (4) a set of policy's common practices related to the expertise and competence of its members to solve problems.

According to [3], a diplomacy which was conducted by states was not necessarily carried out by government to government. As it was practiced in the East Asian cooperation, the process of diplomacy also involved Track Two (T2), which was also known as "private-citizen diplomacy". Furthermore, Kim also argued that T2 continued to foster every regional dialogue and expanded it to eventually be presented to the government with the aim of helping the government to make decisions or policies ranging from economic issues to peace building and conflict prevention.

The mechanism of T2 and its institution was to provide feedback to policies to Track One (T1), which was the official government agency. They organized regional meetings, workshops, conferences, seminars and other activities and sometimes presented government representatives. They prepared a policy draft to be discussed in national or regional meetings and submit the results to T1. They also specifically enriched policies for the government representatives and lobbied the key actors in T1 at national and international levels.

As quoted from [4], in 1982 Joseph Monteville described T2 as a diplomacy methodology outside the government's official system. He added that what it was meant by outside the government's official system were those who were residents or other non-formal groups. The activities of T2 were: (1) Reducing conflicts between groups or nations by means of improving communication and friendship; (2) Minimizing threats and misunderstanding when enemy threats arose; and (3) Influencing T1 thoughts by proposing the best practices which were supposed to be taken through diplomacy.

T2 concept referred to the unofficial activities, including academics, think tanks, researches and relationship of former officials as well as the in-service officials. Track 2 was different from T1, which was defined as an official diplomacy in which the government played a role in international organizations and its process. Examples were ASEAN, ARF, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and defense cooperation. Although T2 had different characteristics from T1, both were related in terms of the participation of government's official

representatives and the institutionalization of the activities. Exemplified relationships, among others, were those in ARF and CSCAP.

There were three main essences in T2 diplomacy [5]. The *first* main essence was the existence of non-governmental councils or agencies that involved government representatives in their capacity as individuals. The council or agency needed to be independent because this situation would help gain intellectual advantages that the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) had especially in the process of T2 diplomacy. The involvement of government representatives was also required to attract support and resources from the government and to ensure the value and involvement of NGOs to obtain support from the government.

The *second* essence was the experiences of NGOs. NGOs contributed to the process of regional economic cooperation through different ways. They started by developing and disseminating ideas and encouraging discussion that led to the discourse development. They facilitated technical studies concerning economics and then proceeded with the analysis to show the benefits of liberalization in the region through formal *free trade* rules or concept of '*open regionalism*'. They presented to the government representatives the possibility of engaging a productive and meaningful dialogue for complex and important policy issues. With the availability of forums for government representatives and non government-representatives to dialogue, the NGOs contributed to the interaction and enhancement of mutual confidence, as well as building a foundation for intergovernmental cooperation.

The *third* essence was the need to develop cooperation from a relationship that had been established rather than starting anew. In practice, the cooperation was based on the relationship and processes which were established from other T2 interactions.

Based on the above thoughts, NEAT can be classified as one of the forms of *second track diplomacy* in East Asia since its formation in 2002. Accompanying the idea of East Asian community, NEAT has played its role in providing feedback to T1 and identifying the needs and efforts that have been and should be done for the integration process of Asia. NEAT has also become a medium for T1 in demonstrating and solidifying their policies to advance their countries through regional cooperation.

In this paper, the concept of an epistemic community is associated with *second track diplomacy* (the second circle of diplomacy track). We believe that the epistemic community gives their contributions through the second circle of diplomacy track. Experts and professionals help diplomats to become actors of the first circle of diplomacy that represent the state. Epistemic community plays a role in identifying variety of issues, formulating alternative solutions and materializing them in the form of foreign policies. Considering that this paper focuses the role of NEAT, thus, the epistemic community refers to NEAT representatives from each of ASEAN+3 countries.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper utilizes qualitative approach particularly we emphasize on document study. One of the authors has deeply involved in the NEAT process in the last six years. Therefore, this paper combines between participatory observation and literature/document studies. Based on [6], this is part of triangulation process that search for the convergence of information.

Neat: Profile, Goals and Mechanisms: In accordance with the recommendation of the *East Asian Vision Group* (EAVG) and the need to deepen the integration of East Asian community, on 29 September 2003 Network of East Asian Think-tanks (NEAT) was formed and was marked by the first NEAT congress. The idea of NEAT formation was to unite the thoughts among academics and intellectuals in shaping and building East Asian region.

Before the first NEAT Congress was held, on the East Asian Summit VIII in Phnom Penh, 4-5 November 2002, the member countries of the Summit officially recognized and supported the existence of NEAT as a medium for intellectual circles (NEAT, Network of East Asian Think-Tanks (NEAT), 2004). Every East Asian country has a representative in NEAT network, i.e.: (Mursitama, 2012) (1) *Brunei Darussalam Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies, Brunei*; (2) *General Department of ASEAN, Cambodia*; (3) *Center for East Asian Studies, China*; (4) *Center for East Asian Cooperation Studies, Indonesia*; (5) *The Japan Forum on International Relations, Japan*; (6) *Korean Institute of South East Asian Studies (KISEAS), South Korea*; (7) *Institute of Foreign Affairs, Laos*; (8) *Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Malaysia*; (9) *Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS),*

Myanmar; (10) *Philippines Institute for Development Studies, Philippine*; (11) *East Asian Institute, Singapore*; (12) *Institute of East Asian Studies, Thailand*; and (13) *Institutes for International Relations, Vietnam*.

Institutions that represent each country in NEAT serve as the coordinators for the intellectual and academic circles in their countries and are in charge of providing reports on activities that support NEAT. Each member of NEAT network is in charge of designing research which will then be reported to the coordinators in their countries. Shortly after, it is forwarded to the country's coordinator to be disseminated to the coordinators from other countries to gather feedback. The mechanism of NEAT membership is open with no permanent membership.

The Goals of NEAT: The first goal of NEAT is to become a medium for researchers and academics from East Asian countries to provide encouragement or views for the progress of East Asian cooperation. NEAT also aims to provide recommendations to the policies made by the East Asian cooperation and examine or evaluate the implementation of such policies. Its utmost goal is to maintain the relationship with T1 and organizations and institutions outside NEAT.

The Structure and Mechanism of NEAT: There are 3 main bodies that play important roles in NEAT, namely: *Country Coordinator Meetings (CCM)*, *Working Group (WG)* and *Annual Conference (AC)*.

Country Coordinator Meetings: Country Coordinator Meetings (CCM) is the highest mechanism in NEAT. Those who are allowed to present and given voting rights in CCM are the ASEAN+3 coordinating countries with a total of 13 people. This is the significance of CCM as the highest decision-making mechanism. What often happens in CCM are debates among the member countries defending their opinions and principles. Members of official delegations other than the country coordinators may be present to accompany the country coordinators but they do not have voting rights. Typically, such members provide assistance to the country coordinators. There are 1 to 3 people.

The functions of CCM are to set the annual agenda, to approve *Working Group* plans proposed by member countries or a group of member countries, to approve Working Group outcomes and to set out policy recommendations (Policy Memorandum) as well as to

select the chairman of NEAT for the following year. CCM is held twice in a year. The first CCM is typically held between January – April (the time depends on the readiness of the host country) to discuss the activity agenda that has to be implemented by NEAT in that year. The first CCM also determines which Work Groups should be executed, or merged, or eliminated.

The second CCM is typically held between August-November to discuss the outcomes of WGs that were initiated by each proposing NEAT member countries. Member countries or a group of NEAT members who agree to host WGs will present the outcomes in the *Annual Conference* (AC) event which is also called NEAT Annual Conference with larger and more open audiences apart from NEAT delegations of each country. In the AC, the WGs outcomes are discussed and criticized in a greater depth by the participants. AC outcomes are summarized to be further discussed and refined on the second CCM and then are put together in a form of policy recommendations which will be presented to APT leaders.

Therefore, the number of delegations from NEAT members attending the second CCM is typically more than the first CCM. The second CCM also has strategic values because the country coordinators are present to formulate and agree upon the policy recommendations for T1, who are the ASEAN+3 leaders (APT leaders). The results are generally discussed or monitored by APT leaders in ASEAN+3 leader summit. The policy recommendations become an important issue as these are concerning the problems being encountered by the NEAT member countries or ASEAN+3 on the whole. The policy recommendations are a reflection of the battle of interests among the NEAT members.

In the second CCM, the discussion is outlined in *minutes*, a written report about the debate dynamics among NEAT members. The ideas, proposals, dissents and agreement are reflected on the written report. Therefore, *minutes* become important sources of this paper. *Minutes* created in CCM are then disseminated to every NEAT member through electronic mail to gather feedback or corrections. In one month time after having been sent out, whether with or without comments, the minutes would automatically be approved. Then the *minutes* are passed in the next CCM.

Working Group: A Working Group (WG) is an activity where each country is free to host a working group meeting in accordance to its national interests and in order to contribute to the progress of East Asian cooperation. The so called WG is an initiative of NEAT

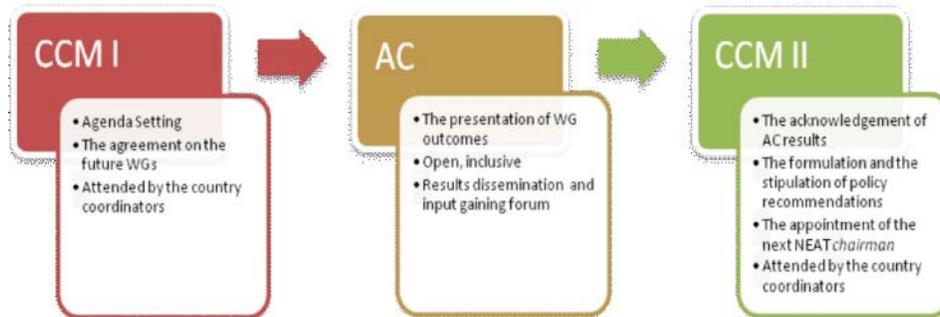
member countries. Each topic brought forward in a WG is a result of recommendations from NEAT member countries, both individually or in a group. Once approved, a WG can be implemented in the first CCM. The WG' outcomes are reported in the second CCM after being disseminated through AC.

A WG can be carried out solely by a proposing country or by cooperation of some countries, as was shown by the cooperation between Malaysia and Philippines concerning Migrant Workers WG, NEAT Institutionalization between Indonesia and Thailand or Singapore and Japan in Energy and Environmental Security WG. Each WG is a reflection of national interests of the proposing countries, therefore, the funding to cover activity costs will be provided by the proposing countries. The costs include transportation from the country of origins to the WG host country and accommodation during WG for one expert representative of each NEAT country member. Representatives sent by each of NEAT members are those who possess reputation, expertise and capacity in accordance with the topic discussed in a WG. The funding responsibility is different from that of CCM and AC in which all the costs are fully covered by each NEAT member country.

In WGs, the debate is more scientific and practical. As WGs are attended by experts in the respective fields from each country, in general, they deliver the debate in a scientific and rational manner. When it comes to sensitive matters, a biased view from certain countries may arise. However, rarely in a WG are debates going over political issues, showing the battle of political power among NEAT country members. In WGs, academic climate as an epistemic community is strong. It can be said that the debate is more of conceptual and experience-sharing in nature.

A WG does not only become a medium to exchange ideas, but also an effort to build network of experts and professionals in certain fields from different countries. This is the main benefit that can strengthen the cooperation in East Asia and bridge the differences or even put aside the on-going conflicts. From this networking meeting, other academic activities could be carried out in the form of joint researches, conferences and scientific papers writing.

Annual Conferences: The third main mechanism is the Annual Conference which is held in conjunction with the implementation of the second CCM in the same year. The main AC agenda is to present the outcomes of WG activities in a year by the chairman or coordinators.



Source: Author's elaborations

Fig. 1: NEAT Working Mechanisms as an Epistemic Community

WG outcomes are expected to improve the relationship of stakeholders in NEAT network as well as providing the views beneficial to the establishment of East Asian cooperation. Despite its function to accept views for the development of East Asian cooperation, AC does not provide recommendations for T1. The formulation of recommendations is carried out by the country coordinator in the second CCM as described in the previous section.

On the AC event, NEAT invites all elements of the society, apart from the NEAT members, namely, policy makers from T1, academics from outside NEAT network, civil society, businessmen and others. The aim is to disseminate the WG study outcomes as well as trying to capture evolving topics and feedbacks from all elements of the society.

Figure 1 shows NEAT annual working mechanism, starting from the first country coordinator meeting, the annual conference to the second country coordinator meeting. Each of these stages has important significance.

The first country coordinator meeting discusses important agenda in a year. On this occasion, the atmosphere among the member countries is generally more relaxed. The WG proposals, both previously prepared and newly evolving ones, are delivered in the meeting. The country coordinators might be able to predict the direction of the proposal and its purposes as well as the intention of a particular country when it tries to propose a WG.

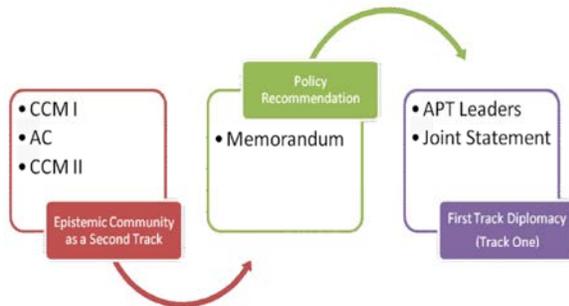
Based on experience, a heated debate in the process of determining a WG and its implementing parties rarely happens. The debate may happen, not on the discussed topics, but rather on the timeframe of WG implementation where it might not be suitable for some of NEAT member countries or coincide with other WGs. One of the debates that ever occurred in this stage was when NEAT of South Korea proposed a WG topic on Cultural Exchange that

coincided with WG about Environmental Cooperation conducted by NEAT of Japan and NEAT of Singapore in June 2008. Because no one was willing to compromise with the timeframe, finally the WG was organized according to each country's proposal.

On the other hand, AC or the Annual Conference is a scientific meeting between NEAT members and wider scope of participants. The debate on this event is more on the conceptual and theoretical level of the discussed topics. The AC is always attended by prominent academics from NEAT member countries and NEAT country coordinators itself who are reputable academics as well. AC has a higher level of quality.

In the country coordinator meeting, it is often the case that a heated debate among member countries occurs in the second meeting. The root of the debates is not only at the substance level but also often at the technical level, for instance in determining word choice in policy recommendations. An example of such debate is when NEAT of Japan disagreed with the word choice, leading to a delay of the meeting as a result of the negotiation between Japan and the majority of country coordinators who had different views. In the end, Japan decided to agree and follow the view of majority of country coordinators which in essence was not different with Japan's intention.

Figure 2 above shows NEAT's potential as an epistemic community as well as its function as second track diplomacy, which is closely related to first track of diplomacy - also known as track one. The fundamental difference between NEAT and other epistemic communities is that NEAT was established as the official mandate from APT leaders, which gave NEAT the full mandate and support from the government of NEAT members. Other epistemic communities do not have this special and unique position.



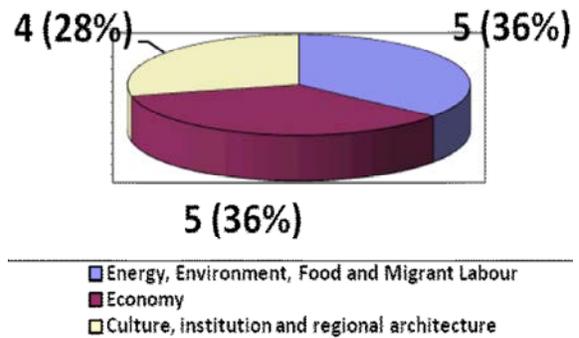
Source: Author's elaborations

Fig. 2: NEAT as an Epistemic Community, Second Track and First Track Diplomacy

NEAT Epistemic Community Cooperation Mapping: The second section of this paper focuses on the discussion of economic cooperation mapping and evolving topics in T2 which took place at different levels such as CCM, AC and WG. The main importance was the one that reflected the APT member countries' national interests during the period of 2005 to 2010.

Since 2005, NEAT had held CCM meetings for 13 times and AC meetings for 8 times and during the period, there were 14 topics discussed at WG level. The topics were : (1) *East Asian Financial Cooperation (In response to Post-Crisis Challenges: 2010)*; (2) *Inter-Regional Exchange Rate Stability Prevention of Financial Crisis in East Asia*; (3) *Concepts, Ideas and Empowering Guidelines*; (4) *Energy Security Cooperation in East Asia*; (5) *Overall Architecture of Community Building in East Asia (regional Architecture for Non-Traditional Security Issues)*; (6) *Evolving regional Architecture*; (7) *Resolving New Global Imbalances in an Era of Asian Economic Integration*; (8) *East Asian Investment Cooperation (Trade and Investment Facilitation)*; (9) *Trade-FDI-Technology Linkages in Asia*; (10) *Regional Cooperation Framework for Migrant Labour*; (11) *Enhancement of Cultural Exchange in East Asia*; (12) *East Asian Environmental Cooperation*; (13) *The Future Direction of NEAT*; (14) *East Asian Food Security*; (15) *Water Resource Management* [8, 9].

The fourteen topics on the above list were the main topics in WGs which were held during the period of 2005-2010. It is important to note that during the period the topics proposed by NEAT members had gone through some changes such as the change of proposing members, the host of WG and, most importantly, the changes of the discussion topics. Take one topic as an illustration. *Overall Architecture of Community Building in East Asia (Regional Architecture for Non-Traditional Security*



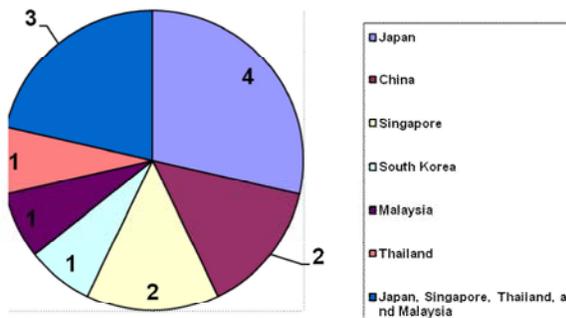
Source: Author's elaboration from some WGs' Recommendations

Fig. 3: Numbers of Working Groups' Recommendations

Issues), *Evolving regional Architecture WG* had a topic change from East Asia Community Development to non-traditional security issue and finally evolved to regional architecture changes issue. The proposing country changed as well, as well. In 2005-2006, Japan acted as the host country, but in 2008-2009 the WG was not held or continued. In 2010, WG had a name change to *Evolving Regional Architecture WG* and it was held in Bangkok, Thailand. At this WG illustration we can see the development / evolution of topics and the change of proposing country from Japan to Thailand.

Out of 14 WGs that were organized by NEAT during 2005-2010, there were 5 WGs which focused on economy. There were other 5 WGs which discussed topics on non-traditional securities (energy, environment, food and migrant workers). The rest of 4 WGs discussed cultures and institutions strengthening and the regional architecture. If we observe the composition of WGs, the focus of East Asia epistemic community in that period of five years showed a balance between economic, non-traditional and regional architecture issues. It can be concluded that the priority of East Asian countries was to balance issues by observing the situation and condition, or evolving contexts as well as opportunities and challenges they were facing during that period of time. We can see this on Figure 3 below.

Based on the countries which individually initiated to become WGs' sponsors during the period of 2005-2010, the first rank goes to Japan, the second place is China and the last one is Singapore. Japan initiated four WGs, followed by China and Singapore which initiated two WGs each. It is clearly seen on the following diagram (Figure 4):



Source: Author's elaboration from some WG documents
 Fig. 4: Sponsoring Countries of WG Meetings

As we can see, China and Singapore were always on the front line in using second track diplomacy in East Asia region. The individual initiative in organizing WGs showed how each country had an agenda and national interest priority they were struggling for. Their seriousness in struggling for their national interest was also shown by their initiative to become the WG's organizers, which financed the events. WG organizing countries had to fund all of the accommodation and transportation of the experts who were invited from all ASEAN+3 member countries. Therefore, this seriousness was not just a discourse. It was concrete and financially supported by the WG organizers.

A more interesting thing to notice is the difference in strategies performed by Japan and China in introducing their foreign politics policies in NEAT forums. In introducing their foreign policies, they were trying to involve their counterparts from ASEAN members, which were in this case Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia, while China was trying to take a lead in WG discussion, especially in economic topic.

Economic Cooperation Mapping in East Asia: During the period of 2005-2010, NEAT organized 13 CCM meetings and every August during that period it organized CCMs which formulated and acknowledged the recommendations that had been previously discussed in WG meetings. During the same period of time, NEAT consistently gave recommendations, which were useful for the development of East Asia region, to governments (track 1). As a proof of this consistency, NEAT has periodically given recommendations in the field of economics. NEAT recommendations in the field of economics have been running since its formation in 2002 until now.

This section describes the dynamics of economic-themed discussions at the level of WG, the substance of which is discussed as well as the specificity of growing subthemes. The growing subthemes in the field of economics during the period of 2005-2010 were East Asia financial cooperation and post monetary crisis management in 2008, investment cooperation in East Asia, Asia's exchange rate stability, the strengthening of technology-trade-FDI networks in East Asia, as well as trade and investment facilitation in East Asia subtheme. The five subthemes were the foundations of the recommendations composed by NEAT for the leaders of ASEAN+3 countries.

Out of fourteen WGs that were organized by NEAT, there were four WGs which discussed economic topic and resulted in 16 recommendations suggested to T1. The 16 recommendations can be seen in Table 1 below:

In economic topic, the discussion on NEAT network focused on the strengthening of cooperation through Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI), the expansion of Asian Bond Markets, a study on Asian Currency Unit and policy harmonization at national and international levels. NEAT also focused on the development of investment in East Asia. In this context, NEAT suggested the need of bigger investment in infrastructure, UKM, farming and energy in order to promote economic development in East Asia.

China and Japan were the two NEAT member countries which were always able to compete in economic cooperation in East Asia during the period of 2005-2010. Both in first and second tracks, the two countries always tried to become the main movers in East Asian Economy by performing initiations systematically. Their consistency and seriousness were shown in the topics of WGs they were sponsoring.

China consistently focused on WGs with finance and investment cooperation topic. Altogether, China sponsored 11 WGs, both as an individual organizer and one of the joined sponsors with other countries for 5-6 consecutive years. Meanwhile, Japan sponsored 3 WGs which had different names but they all had the same theme; East Asia economy. If we see the development of finance theme in NEAT WG, China actually took advantage of NEAT networks as a way to promote its government policies as well as taking advices and reaction on its economic policy from other East Asian countries.

What is important to note is China's consistency in proposing policy on Asian Currency Unit and Asian Bond Markets. Since the implementation of financial

Table 1: NEAT Recommendations in the Field of Economics

Field of Cooperation	Recommendations
Economy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To expand the scope of Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI), to expand the Asian Bond Markets and to intensify dialogues on the policy coordination of exchange rates in East Asia 2. To do a study on East Asian Monetary System and the expansion of Asian Bond Markets 3. To expand the scope of Asian Finance Ministers meeting to become the meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors 4. To do a study on Asian Currency Unit or Asian Currency Unit Index 5. To form a special body to supervise and control the implementation of CMI and Economic Review and Policy Dialogue (ERPD) mechanism 6. To form East Asian Investment Fund for Infrastructure Development in APT cooperation framework 7. APT countries to prepare fund and facilitation for Small and Medium Businesses (UKM) 8. To institutionalize CMIM and to form East Asian Monetary Fund 9. To cooperate in exchange rate policy 10. To form a dispute resolution body 11. To build East Asian Investment Cooperation fund in order to provide a guarantee for UKM and farming investment 12. To focus on investment cooperation priorities such as energy security and environment protection, infrastructure, UKM development and farming 13. To accelerate FTA development 14. To strengthen the cooperation on green and sustainable development 15. To form "Task Force for The Promotion of Infrastructure Investment in East Asia" 16. To harmonize the principles of Rules of Origin (ROO), customs procedures, domestic standards with international standards and rules in trading in each of APT member country

Source: Author's elaboration from some WGs' Recommendations

cooperation WG, China continues to promote the need for East Asia to have a shared currency and capital market in order to improve economic resilience and progress in East Asia. The message that China wants to deliver is that its currency, Renminbi, is ready to replace the role of USD in sustaining capital flows in East Asia. This is a brave policy to change economic pattern in East Asia.

On economic theme, Japan also gave a serious attention by organizing several WGs. In contrast to China, which was consistent with financial and investment cooperation, Japan decided to organize WGs which were in the context of economic development in East Asia. Japan that formerly fostered relationship with ASEAN countries put more emphasis on how to overcome the problems that impeded East Asian economy.

The fact that Japan chose to pay attention to economic issues affecting East Asia and predicted that the issues would occur in East Asia had a strong basis. As a country that was badly affected by the Asian crisis in 1997-1998, Japan did not want to go through the similar experience of suffering from economic slowdown due to the interruption of economic growth in ASEAN. Japan also argued that the economic cooperation had to be supported by other sectors such as energy, environment

and food and so on. Therefore, despite having serious concerns towards topic of economics, Japan chose to associate it with that of other than economics.

Japan's attempt to associate economics with non-economic topics was visible through a series of organized WGs. For example, Japan also initiated energy, environment and food security subthemes. This was the strategy difference between China and Japan that was manifested through their epistemic communities. Japan focused more on economic issues which were overlaid by the anticipation of problems that might arise in the future such as environment, food security and water resources. In other words, Japan looked forward by anticipating sustainability-related issues. Japan was very observant in looking at the possibility of future conflicts which could emerge in the East Asian region. At the same time, China seemed to put more emphasis on the present economic issues and doing it in a serious and systematic way.

CONCLUSION

In the end, NEAT network as a part of epistemic community has been playing a series of its roles through second track diplomacy. This was intelligently utilized by China and Japan. The government of the two countries

were fully aware that the epistemic community was very important to support the success of their foreign policies through track one. On the other hand, ASEAN countries have not been able to maximize the potential of the epistemic community in contributing to the success of their foreign policies.

The position of ASEAN countries in a series of WGs is being a complement or partner for +3 countries. This might be due to the obscurity of which national interests that were being struggled for by each of the ASEAN countries or the lack of technical supports from governments, such as funding. Although not always the case, Mursitama (2012) expressed that Indonesia had an important role in the process of institutionalization of NEAT, from a rather loose epistemic community to become a more organized one. However, it must be acknowledged that such contribution could not stand on its own because it was supported by NEAT of Thailand and NEAT of South Korea as NEAT's co-chair when Indonesia served as the chairman.

Certainly, ASEAN countries in the future would need to have more assertive stance. This is including Indonesia. If the country wishes to reap more benefits from the epistemic community and second track diplomacy, the epistemic community - one of which is through NEAT - should be reinforced. One of the possible efforts is to reinforce the domestic stakeholders. International Relations Studies Association of Indonesia (*Asosiasi Ilmu Hubungan Internasional Indonesia*, AIHII) could be the driving force for such epistemic community to provide more benefits for Indonesia.

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