

Waseda University Doctoral Student Network (WUDSN)

Thematic Panel on the Concept of Regional Identity in Asian Integration Research

Panel Objective (Presentation abstracts follow)

The concept of identity has recently gained considerable currency in the social sciences. Within Asia, the concept of an Asian regional identity has been stressed as a component essential to the process of Asian integration and the formation of an Asian community. This has partly been because the commonalities among countries that would be emphasized through identity construction are also seen as means by which integration can be deepened and by which a regional community can be built. It has even been suggested that the lack of an Asian identity is the central problem for the region to solve, a goal that is evidenced by the clear embedding of the future role of identity in some regional institutions. This vision of identity as a functional tool of Asian integration requires researchers to both fully characterize this identity as well as make an account of how it is constructed and represented. In doing so, it is important to recognize the dynamic existent in Asia when regional and national perspectives clash. This dynamic exists outside the region as well, as countries outside Asia grapple with the idea of engaging an integrated Asian region. Thus, it is also important for researchers to recognize that identity is a question of standpoint; to capture the complexity of the Asian region's identity requires consideration of a multiple number of standpoints, including those from outside the region. This forum addresses the necessity to discern how the concept of an Asian regional identity is being and can be defined internally and externally. Three presenters will address these issues theoretically and empirically from standpoints within, as well as outside, Asia.

Date : Saturday, December 19th, 2009

Time : 13:00 ~ 15:00

Venue : Waseda University, Building No.19, Room 309

Discussant : Shigeto Sonoda, Professor of Sociology at the
Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo

Presenter 1: Aminuddin Baki

Title: Conceptualization of Collective Identity in South East Asian Integration

Abstract

“Identity” has become the one of the popular buzzwords for scholars of social science and International Relations (IR) as well as politicians and bureaucrats alike. Integration studies have also embraced the concept of identity by studying the factors and process of “collective identity” construction. This presentation represents the starting point of Mr. Aminuddin’s dissertation research on the conceptualization of collective identity in integration. Focusing on the Southeast Asian region, the study aims to provide an empirical contribution by applying existing analytical frameworks on identity to the ASEAN example, and to provide a theoretical contribution by testing the explanatory power and limitations of existing conceptual frameworks of collective identity. This presentation represents a basic literature review of the various concepts and frameworks of identity available to IR scholars. From the literature review, Mr. Aminuddin seeks to gauge whether such concepts are sufficient in explaining collective identity formation for integration between nation-states. Works on collective identity have largely been developed within the context of nation-building, in other words, the formation of national identity. The units being “collected” are the different racial, social and cultural groups within the boundaries of a nation-state. Mr. Aminuddin argues that for integration studies where nation-states are the units, we need to expand the concept of collective identity and adjust the analytical framework we use. With that in mind, Mr. Aminuddin introduces a model – the “Border-Unity” model, which essentially emphasizes two major functions of identity – its differentiating and relational utility (between in-group and out-group), and its unifying and solidifying utility (for in-group units). An analytical framework based on these two functions would promote a more focused and better understanding of collective identity construction, and not render “identity” as a mere buzzword, lost in ambiguity and taken for granted.

Presenter 2: Akiko Ishioka

Title: The Significance of Cultural Heritage for an East Asian Community: The Case of University Students at Beijing, Renmin, Fudan, and Shanghai Jiaotong Universities in China

Abstract

In the "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage" adopted by UNESCO, it is shown that cultural and natural heritage form the identity of humanity, crossing national and racial boundaries. Nevertheless, within the discussion concerning regional integration, debate about cultural heritage protection equates to nothing. The current study poses the following research question: Is the protection of cultural heritage

a significant aspect of elite university students' conception of an East Asian Community? Using data from a questionnaire in which no questions were featured with the term *cultural heritage*, this research proceeded from questions asked about *culture*, a broader concept to which the term cultural heritage belongs. From the data analysis, correlations between the importance of identity construction and the encouragement of cultural exchange, as well as the desire to increase government expenditures concerning culture, are seen to be in accordance. Consequently, it might be thought that the construction of an Asian identity can be facilitated through protection activities of cultural heritage.

Presenter 3: Troy Knudson

Title: Asian Integration's Low Visibility in the United States Elite Press: External Reflections and Asian Regional Identity Construction

Abstract

The focus of the analysis in this presentation is the Asian regional identity from an external standpoint: namely, that of the globalized news media. If external imagery is an important reflecting tool for reaffirming the internal legitimacy of the concept of an Asian regional identity, then major actors within the globalized news media become key sources of data for characterizing and accounting for how this identity is being represented. The *New York Times* is used here to exemplify how Asian integration is perceived within the United States, which is one country trying to reconcile the concept of an integrated Asia with its current Asia policy. Furthermore, the *New York Times* has a large internet presence and owns the *International Herald Tribune*, which allows its influential reporting to be disseminated to members of the elite in countries all over the world. A simple research question was asked: Is Asian integration being represented in this news outlet's reporting about the Asian region? A content analysis of reporting from the last decade reveals that Asian integration is hardly visible in *New York Times* coverage about Asia. Rather, articles tend to portray issues in the region as relevant to only one country. This precludes any discussion of how this particular source of globalized news media can help legitimize an Asian identity internally through its representation of the region. It is recommended that the Asian region pay more attention to promoting the reality of its integration to regions outside of Asia since doing so would only further its internal goals for constructing a regional identity.