

**Waseda University Global COE Program,  
'Global Institute for Asian Regional Integration'  
Investigative Research Assistance Achievement Report**

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**Itinerary**      09 / 08 / 2008 / ~ 09 / 16 / 2008 /      (Month/Date/Year)

**Destination (Name of city and country)**

Birmingham, United Kingdom

**Research objectives**

- Presenting a paper on "China's Commitment in the Creation of an East Asian Free Trade Agreement: An ASEAN+3 FTA or/and an ASEAN+6 FTA?" in an international conference on "Still the Asian Century" which was held by the Department of Political Sciences and International Studies, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom.
- Finding literatures and doing literature studies in the library of the University of Birmingham.
- Meeting with and having discussion with professors from the University of Birmingham.

**Research project**

Title:

ASEAN AND EAST ASIAN ECONOMIC INTEGRATION:

ASEAN's Political Economic Position in the Establishment of an ASEAN-China FTA, an ASEAN-Korea FTA and an ASEAN-Japan FTA

The three ASEAN+1 FTAs (an ASEAN-China FTA, an ASEAN-Korea FTA and an ASEAN-Japan FTA) that have been concluded in 2007 adopt different memberships, scopes and rules of origin. Despite many believes that ASEAN is the driver of regionalism processes in East Asia, different characteristics of ASEAN+1 FTAs merely reflect the opposite. It does not only mean that ASEAN did not consistently conclude FTAs with its Northeast Asian counterparts, but also that ASEAN could not drive the FTA establishment processes and could not play as an FTA hub. Instead, it is an indicator that ASEAN disposed to follow its counterparts in deciding the characteristics of FTAs they established. This problem raises a question: What political economic position did ASEAN have in the establishment of an ASEAN-China FTA, an ASEAN-Korea FTA and an ASEAN-Japan FTA? This question will indirectly answers what role ASEAN actually plays in the economic regionalism processes in Asia.

## Achievement

- The conference on “Still the Asian Century” run successfully. Professors and doctoral students from many universities and researchers from various research institutes made presentations and had discussion on political and political economic issues related to Asia.
- My paper presentation got positive responses from some scholars and I had discussions with them about the prospect of Asian regionalism. We discussed why regionalism in Asia has slowly progressed and whether we can expect a regional-wide FTA in East Asia. Some scholars were pessimistic about its prospect because after a decade of regionalism processes Asian states are still reluctant to sacrifice their sovereignties in order to achieve a regional-wide integration. Moreover, as they argued, the absence of leadership and the deep leadership rivalry between China and Japan has been disturbing the regionalism process.

It is right that regionalism processes in Asia goes slowly. However, such slow progress does not necessarily lead to pessimism. Even in Europe, if Westphalian peace treaties of 1648 and the nation-states building were considered as the starting points, European states in fact took a long history of peaces and conflicts before beginning to work on regionalism processes after the end of the World War II. Such pessimism also reflects an Orientalistic view of Western scholars who want to see immediately the results of regionalism processes in Asia: processes that 'naturally' took a long history.

On the other side, most of Asian states just got their independences after the end of the World War II. It is thus understandable that states in Asia still want to maintain the sovereignties they achieved in more or less a half-century ago. As long as Asian states can maintain peaceful cooperation among them and keep the bicycle of regionalism processes running, regional integration is still imaginable in Asia. As independent communities had ever been the 'imagined communities', borrowing Benedict Anderson's term, in Asia during the colonial era, it is the era when Asian people imagine regional-wide communities.

- Many scholars presented papers on ASEAN. They share understanding that despite four decades of ASEAN cooperation, ASEAN states still have different views on various issues, such as political governance, human rights, regional arrangement, economic policy. ASEAN states are not homogenous; they celebrate their own independences and sovereignties; they prefer consensus-based decision-making process than rule-binding agreement.

Such understanding is, in fact, inconsistent with the dominant understanding of regionalism processes in Asia, which posits ASEAN as the driver. Considering ASEAN as the driver or the hub of the processes imply ASEAN as a solid international organization and no longer a collection of ten states in Southeast Asia region. This also tacitly implies that ASEAN states do not perform themselves as an individual state when coordinating or negotiating with its counterparts. Consequently, these contradictory understandings raise a puzzling problem of the meaning of ASEAN for ASEAN states: does ASEAN really have its independent existence, as Neoliberals understands, or is it merely a political vehicle of ASEAN states, as Neorealists understands?

The papers presented in the conference unfortunately did not answer these puzzling questions. It is because they discuss ASEAN and Asian regionalism as separate problems. A study on ASEAN position and role in the regionalism processes will indirectly answer those puzzling questions, because the study will have to understand how ASEAN states involve themselves and work on the processes. My ongoing research project will answer those questions.

**Confirmed by person in charge of project promotion (signature and seal)**

Academic Adviser: **Prof. Lim Hua Sing**



Sub Adviser:

(Note: please write within a length of two A4 pages. Space for each item can be changed to suit.)