

Does the globalization have a positive or negative impact on democracy? : The case of East Asia

The general characteristics of our time

If you ask an East Asian to come up with a word which describes today, the most likely answer will be “Globalization”.

This is because the socio economic impact of globalization is huge in East Asia. The increasing personal contact and information flows (socio) as well as the increasing actual flows such as Trade or FDI (economic), is evident in many countries. At the same time, the region is becoming more important than ever. De facto regionalization especially in the field of economy is taking place in East Asia. This can be seen in “the expansion of intra-regional trade and the establishment of regional production networks by multinational corporations: formation of foreign trade & FDI nexus”ⁱ.

To put it simply, globalization and regionalization are simultaneously taking place in East Asia.

The meaning of globalization and regionalization

There are two important implications for globalization. 1. Globalization means modernization in developing countries. Modernization in developing countries is characterized by high growth rate and the GDP composed largely of industry sector. Countries like China, Indonesia, and Vietnam are examples. 2. Globalization means post-modernization in developed countries. Post-modernization in developed countries is characterized by low growth rate and the GDP composed largely of service sector. Japan and Singapore are examples. The developed post-modern countries have other interesting characteristics. As has been said by Robert Cooper, “the main characteristics of the post-modern world are as follows”ⁱⁱ:

- The breaking down of the distinction between domestic and foreign affairs.= (mutual interference in traditional domestic affairs and mutual surveillance.

- The rejection of force for resolving disputes and the conquest codification of self-enforced rules of behavior.
- The growing irrelevance of borders.
- Security based on transparency, mutual openness, interdependence and mutual vulnerability.

It is fair to say that the main characteristics of the modern world are the opposite of the characteristics above. In East Asia, almost none of the post-modern characteristics are evident. Perhaps with the notable exception of historical issues among some North East Asian countries. This shows geographical complexity of East Asia: there is a mixture of the developing modern countries and the developed post-modern countries.

Regionalization in East Asia is the process to bridge these two different worlds. The bridge is formed under the name of “the distribution of labor”ⁱⁱⁱ. The distribution of labor in East Asia is due to “1) geographical proximity, 2) heterogeneity of the Asian economies, and 3) liberalization of efficiency-seeking FDI in contrast to market-seeking FDI”^{iv}. In East Asia, the developing modern countries and the developed post-modern countries are pursuing their own goals side by side.

The meaning of democracy

What are the necessary conditions for democracy? The necessary conditions are the followings: “1.government based on majority rule and the consent of the governed 2.the existence of free and fair elections 3.the protection of minorities and respect for basic human rights”^v. Why is democracy important in our time? Democracy is important because the globalization brings unpredictability. This unpredictability is caused by unprecedented technological advances and increasing mobility of goods, money, and ideas which are no longer controllable by the single state. The unpredictable social changes undermine the ability of the single state to plan for the future. This will inevitably undermine the legitimacy of the authoritarian state whose job is to plan for the future. Thus, in order for the state to maintain its legitimacy, it is essential to let people decide. The message of democracy is: Take care of yourself!

Democracy and the regionalization in East Asia

Democracy strengthens legitimacy by giving power to the people. As has been mentioned above, democracy is important because democracy is flexible when it comes to dealing with new problems in the era of increasing unpredictability. There are some cases in which democratic states suffer from instability. Many authoritarian states are reluctant to democratize thinking the democratization causes the instability. However, the source of instability is not in democracy, it is either in the lacking of social capital or state's legitimacy. Democracy in Thailand is unstable and often cited as an example of the democracy causing instability. 2006 Thai coup illustrates the instability of Thai democracy. However, it is not democracy which directly caused the coup. "The growing gap between haves and have-nots, and the loss of the state's legitimacy through numerous corruption cases were the direct causes of the coup"^{vi}.

Promoting regionalization beyond de facto economic cooperation is indeed difficult. In order for the regionalization beyond the economic cooperation, each member state has to have the capacity to take care of itself. In order for the state to take care of itself, the state has to have sufficient legitimacy. In order for the state to maintain its legitimacy in the era of increasing unpredictability, it has to be democratic.

Democracy gains legitimacy by comparing itself with non-democracy. Non-democracy is a source of democracy's legitimacy. This is one of the factors in which hinders the regionalization in many fields such as security or politics in East Asia.

Does globalization have a positive or negative impact on democracy in East Asia?

Globalization indeed has a positive impact on democracy in East Asia. For the sake of its own survival, the states have to be flexible enough to counter unpredictability caused by globalization. Globalization brings both chances and risks to many countries in East Asia. The state has mold itself into the changing environment, if it wants to make use of the

chances brought by globalization.

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 - ii COOPER Robert (2002) The new liberal imperialism
 - iii URATA, Shujiro (2008) A Shift from Market-driven to Institution-driven Regionalization in East Asia
 - iv KIM Chong Sup (2008) Global Production Network in East Asia
 - v KEKIC Laza (2007) The Economist Intelligence Unit's index of democracy
 - vi http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Thai_coup_d'%C3%A9tat#Causes_of_the_coup