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Northeast Asia Integration and Japan as a barrier

On July 29th, 2008, I set out to participate in the Waseda Summer School Program on East Asian Integration in hopes that I would learn more about how regional integration in Northeast Asia was progressing. Even as a citizen of the United States, it is my hope that Northeast Asia can put aside its differences and integrate on a number of levels (including but not limited to political, economic, cultural and security). While many theorists point out that a rise in Northeast Asia would probably be accompanied by a decreasing U.S. global influence, I like to think in terms of absolute gains instead of comparative gains – as International Affairs Professor from George Washington Harry Harding put it while giving a guest lecture at Waseda on May 29th, 2008, isn't being *much* better off than before more advantageous than only being *slightly* better off, but still better than your neighbor?

It was in this context that I started the Summer School Program, and it was in this context that I considered what I come to increasingly view as the largest obstacle to regional integration in Northeast Asia – Japan's perceptions, identity and relations with its neighbors.

The problem of Japan's relations with its neighbors extends far back in history, as there have been many periods of contention between Japan and both Korea and China. However, it has only been in the last 100 years which frictions have reached a new level. During Professor Shinohara's history lecture at Waseda, student groups drew up contending versions of Northeast Asian history in the last century, and there was an agreed consensus between the groups that friction between Japan and its neighbors Korea and China rapidly escalated during the period of Japanese imperialism in the early 20th century. It was from roughly 1900 to the end of WWII that the Japanese military engaged on a series of exploits that still negatively resonates in China and Korea today. The matter of what Japan did however, is not so clear cut. As Professor Shinohara later went on to explain, some Japan perceived the actions of imperialist Japan as "an attempt to throw off the shackles of Western imperialism and create an East Asian order". However, many if not all in Korea and China felt that they were being invaded ruthlessly, and did not welcome Japan's "liberating army". This perception difference was to be the catalyst for what was later to be a thorn in Sino-Japanese and Korean-Japanese relations, as several Japanese history books sought to "downplay" Japanese aggressions during World War II.

And while problems between Japan and its relations with its neighbors might have intensified in recent history, they have been drastically exacerbated in the last 20 years. In 1989 the Tiananmen Square massacre caused the affinity that Japanese felt towards China to drop drastically¹, and in 2004 and 2005 during the anti-Japanese riots in China Japanese affinity towards China again took a drop to an all time low of about 32%. Other sources such as the Asia Barometer paint a different picture however, as data gathered from the Asia Barometer shows that Japan has maintained a relative neutral perception towards both Korea and China over the last 5 years².

Ultimately, as shown above, different data can indicate different trends. Therefore, I took it upon myself to discuss various issues with different members that participated in the summer school program to get a personal understanding of the situation. I discussed in detail with different classmates the way that Japan regarded its neighbors, and compared them to my personal experiences in Japan. In doing so, I slowly began to arrive at the conclusion that there is a deep rooted prejudice that exists in Japan towards China. I also observed this prejudice when I was in China, as certain Japanese students in the program acted certain ways towards Chinese people. This didn't come out as

¹ Annex 2 shows a huge drop in Japanese affinity towards China in 1989

² During Professor Sonoda's presentation at Waseda he showed us a graph showing the Japanese perception of foreign countries. Japanese perception towards China and South Korea remained neutral according to the surveys conducted in 2003, 2004 and 2006

directly through contact with other members of the group as it did during occasions when members of the group would interact with the everyday people of the country. Several examples struck me very deeply. The first was in Shanghai when I was accompanying members of the Japanese and Chinese group throughout a town market. I explained to one of the Japanese group members about the working conditions of the Chinese workers, and some general etiquette about how to conduct oneself when bargaining with street vendors. After explaining the rules of bargaining in China, I helped the student bargain down the price of an item. In the very end, the student got the price they wanted but decided they didn't want the item after all. To them the bargaining was like a game, but to the street vendor it was their livelihood. The student walked away smirking and the street vendor was left there in humiliation. My fellow Chinese students and I were stunned. Afterwards I questioned the Japanese student why they had acted the way they had, especially because it had been extremely rude towards the vendor. The student's response was very callous and didn't include any empathy towards the vendor. The second time that I was surprised was during class in China when we were discussing governmental structures and democracy. Some students unabashedly criticized China's government and China in general and heaped praise upon praised democracy. However, the condescending tone of the diatribe seemed to

be a slap in the face to the Chinese students, and I could notice the both the dissonance it created between the groups and the discomfort it created in the Chinese students.

My last experience comes from a presentation that I attended given by a member of the Japanese National Police Agency. The presenter's words reinforced a stereotype believed by Japanese that the growing amount of crime in Japan is linked to the growing number of foreigners in Japan – especially foreigners from China. The presenter made statements such as “an average door in Japan with a lock looks to a Chinese like an ‘open door’”. The presenter also raised the issue that as an increasing number of foreigners enter Japan (especially Chinese), Japan will become a more dangerous and crime ridden country.

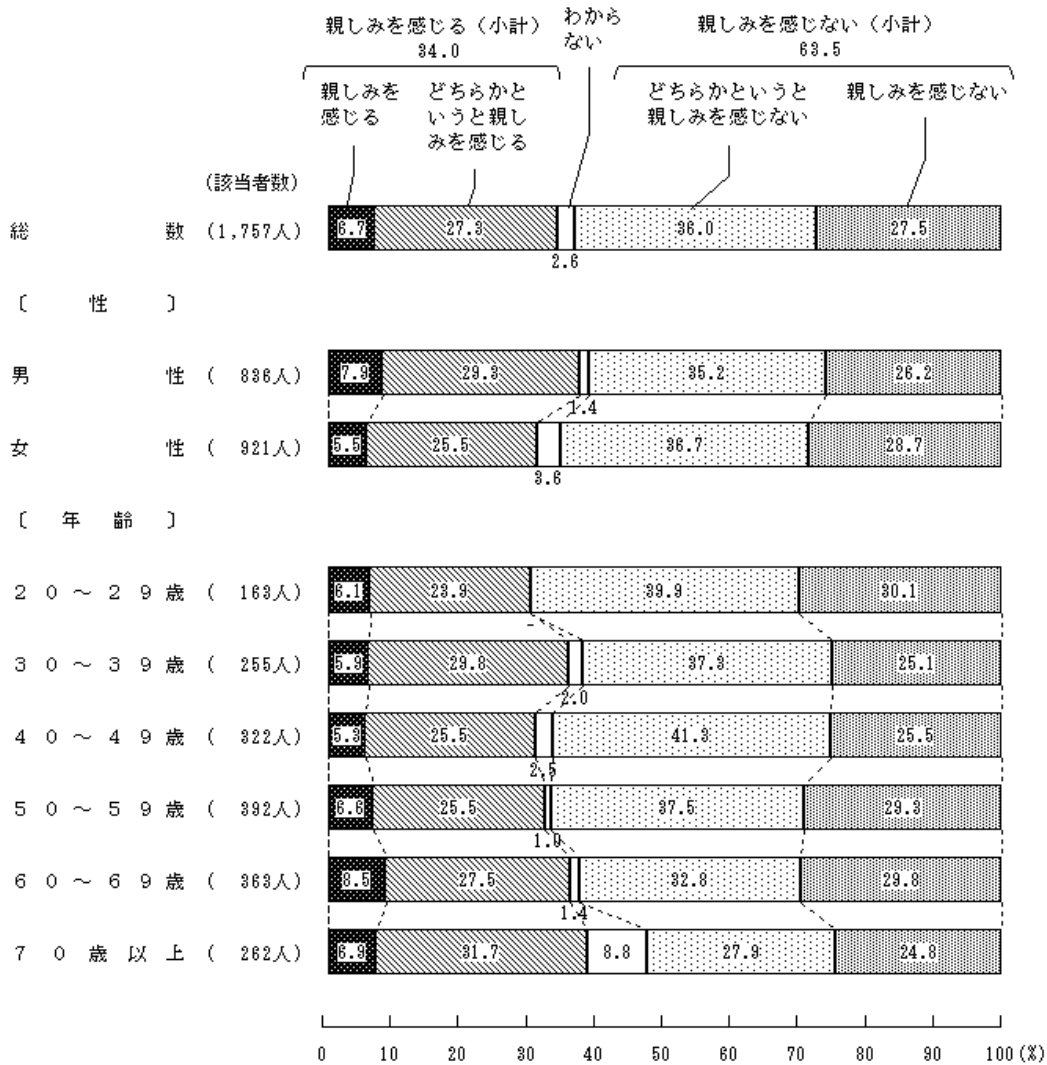
The last and perhaps most discouraging indicator that Japan will be a barrier towards Northeast Asian integration comes from the “Asian Identity” graph from Professor Sonoda's presentation. To have Northeast Asian integration, it is integral that there be some sort of shared sense of community or identity, something which people have termed “Asian Identity”. According to Professor Sonoda's data, 40% of China's population consider themselves to have an “Asian identity”, and 20% consider themselves to have a “transnational identity”. In South Korea 30% of respondents considered themselves to have an Asian identity, while close to 60% considered themselves to have a transnational identity. However, in the case of Japan, only 20% of

respondents considered themselves to have an Asian identity, and another 20% considered themselves to have a transnational identity. In contrast, roughly 50% of Japanese respondents considered themselves to have no transnational identity, something which strongly indicates that Japanese would be more resistant to integrating further with their Asian neighbors.

While I went into the summer school program believing I would learn more about how regional integration was progressing smoothly, I came out of summer school both more informed and with a better sense of the challenges that face integration. Overall “integration” looks very unlikely as can be seen from the information that I presented above, but there are still integration areas that have hope. As Professor Akaha mentioned in his presentation there are different ways which Northeast Asia has the potential to integrate – political, economic, cultural and security. During the lecture it was agreed by generally everyone that economic integration is for the moment the most desirable, possible and likely. However, to what extent will economic integration affect overall regional integration? We will have to wait and see.

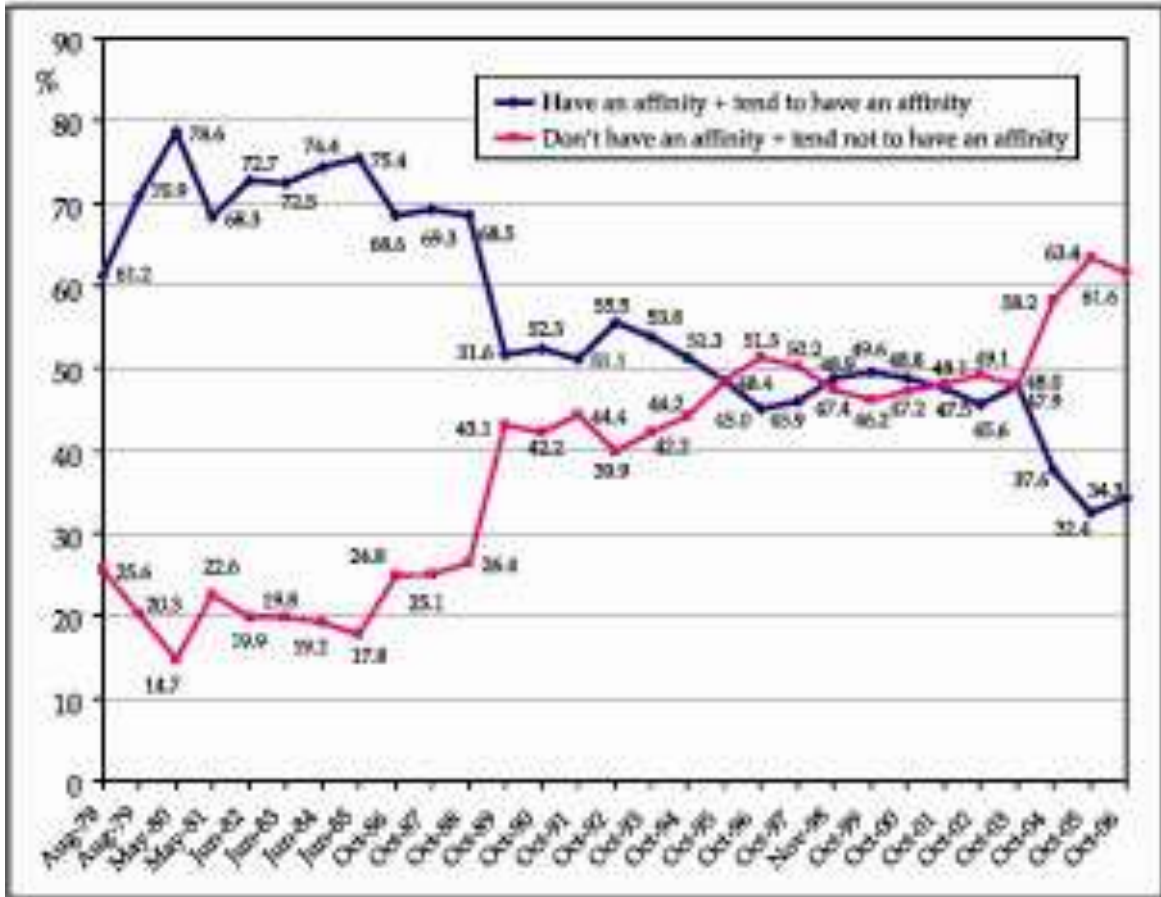
Annex 1 - Source: Cabinet Office, “Gaiko ni kansuru Yoron Chosa (Public Opinion Poll on Foreign Policy & Diplomacy),” annual (2007)

図8 中国に対する親近感



Annex 2 - Source: Cabinet Office, “*Gaiko ni kansuru Yoron Chosa* (Public Opinion Poll on Foreign Policy & Diplomacy),” annual

Chart 1. Japanese Affinity Toward China (1978-2006)



Source: Cabinet Office, “*Gaiko ni kansuru Yoron Chosa* (Public Opinion Poll on Foreign Policy & Diplomacy),” annual.