

Regional Integration in East Asia ~ Its Road Ahead ~

Forward

As Summer School 2007 was held, students from Korea, China and Japan came together and had an intensive discussion and lecture sessions for three weeks. From that experience, each of us learned new perspectives, different ideas, and each country's unique situation and logic. Although it was discussion among students, it can be said that there were many moments of clash of national interests. Each student is somehow the representative of each country and when discussing any issue over regional matter every one of us could not help but thinking of its own national interests. This is like a projection of real relationship among these three nations. But one thing was different, we were at least frank and honest in speaking out and we never hesitated to express our own minds since we are not diplomats yet. Of course there were so many calculations involved but students gathered in this occasion were all frank, earnest and beyond any entanglement. That was our merit to have a discussion of this kind and under such condition we could talk about any issues freely and frankly. Therefore this Summer School 2007 sessions were personally very productive and meaningful. I am sure that every student broadened his/her mind and realized many unknown ideas and perspectives from each other, and on that ground, this project was really successful and can be the pilot model for the future successions.

From this meaningful experience, I also learned some new and not so new ideas, and here in this paper I would like to summarize some of the ideas discussed in the class and argue the possibility/impossibility of regional integration in this region. This is done in the style of feeding back and there are three main issues to point out: Korean perspective on "Asia(East Asia)", China and Korea's image on Japan, and FTA strategy of Japan.

1. Why do Koreans Think of Only Korea, Japan, and China by “Asia (East Asia)” ?

First, when discussing what “Asia” means in the class, it became surprisingly clear that to Korean students, “Asia” means Korea, Japan and China only. There is no other countries involved. On the other hand, to Japanese and Chinese, Asia is much more broader concept including ASEAN countries, India, and sometimes even Russia. Naturally, therefore, when talking about East Asian Community, for Koreans, it meant Japan-Korea-China community. For Japanese, it could be ASEAN + 6 (Japan, Korea, China, India, Australia, NZ), or for Chinese, it could mean ASEAN + 3 (Japan, Korea, China) or possibly including Russia too. As is seen already in the real international arena, there are calculations involved behind this each countries’ conceptualization on “Asia”, or “East Asia”. For Japan and China, as Chinese national status rises with its economic growth, it is obvious that Japan wants East Asian Community to be more inclusive to eventually hedge Chinese factors, therefore invites India, Australia, and NZ. Whereas, China, big enough for itself in terms of its population and/or area, doesn’t seem to be happy about complicating the community by inviting “irrelevant” countries, and rather fully confident in limiting its membership to the minimum numbers of countries since she is the major actor in this area already.

This similar surmisation is running behind the Korean theorists too. According to the Korean students, for Korean, East Asia (even Asia) means only Korea, Japan, and China and they keep having strong motivation for that and common understanding why it should remain so. One Korean student insisted that those three countries are strongly connected in terms of its history, culture, and social customs. Although she didn’t go further details about what they actually are, I assume that by cultural similarity among these three countries, Confucianism, Chinese character, use of chopsticks etc. can be the candidates. However, in general, the customs, religions, social norms, even history – these are arguably varied among Asians and this recognition is widely beholden by many. Although some argue there is something called “Asian value”, we’d never be sure what it really is. Rather, we should admit and pride that Asia is such a diversified area in any sense — for example its cultures, customs, languages, religions, norms, and even political systems, and that’s why it is so vibrant and energetic place. This diversity in Asia is indeed the source of prosperity economically and dynamism culturally. Without cultural, social homogeneity in this region, people can easily trip to the different world and enjoy the variant life to the full extent while it can also become the moment to realize its own culture and uniqueness of his/her society shoring up redundant nationalism. Therefore if our fundamental recognition on this region is based

on its heterogeneity, not homogeneity, then, the task forwarding the regional integration in the future would become tougher and tougher because integration can be only achievable under the common goal or aim with somehow shared history and social backgrounds. This is clear from the experience of Europe. Europe is widely considered the great union under its Christendom and Christian history. Christian custom and culture have been more or less ingrained in each society and becoming a loose binding force. Further, as Schuman Declaration in 1950 clearly stated, the major aim for creating European Union was to prevent another devastating World War in Europe.ⁱ If this same principle is to be applicable to the East Asia, under what aim should East Asian Community be created? To prevent another atrocious war once taken place in this region? Or to compete with two world major powers – namely U.S. and EU? From the economic point of view, the answer is yes. We surely don't want another financial crisis in this region. But other than that, do the countries in this region have strong enough motivation for creating the regional integration giving up some portion of its sovereignty? From the sessions I participated in, it seemed unlikely and countries look hesitant. Each student either from China or Korea did not also seem willing to give up his/her sovereignty just for the sake of regional integration. Rather, China seemed to some extent reluctant for the regionalism talk as Chinese scholars criticized the first draft of East Asian Community Charter drafted by Japanese scholars as “too early to discuss”. Koreans as well, to them, the talk of East Asian Community is to be done only within the context of how to maximize his own political clout in this region having been suffocated between two major powers – Japan and China. In contrast, Japan himself is also no exception from political calculation. Although the idea East Asian Community itself is proposed by the former PM Koizumi, if Japan limits its core members to Japan, Korea, China only, it would be easily foreseeable that the future super power and Japan's realistic major “rival” - China would take its driving initiative in this region and Japan's political influence would be significantly diminished. Therefore in order not to let it happen, Japan is insisting to include India, Australia and NZ in addition to ASEAN countries. However, there is resounding question remains; what is the aim of creating East Asian Community then? If each country fears with each other and suspicious about them, what is the point of creating such a superficial

ⁱ From the packet provided by Prof. Takeo Suami in the class. Schuman Declaration states the aim of creating community is to safeguard world peace and in order to achieve it, especially in Europe, Germany and France have to come together first. “World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it.” “The coming together with of the nations of Europe requires the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany. Any action taken must in the first place concern these two countries.”

community? For Japan, it should not be the means to shackle the rising China out of the fear of economic as well as political and military regional super power, which China seems to be becoming straight ahead. Surely, due to China's precarious military status and its opaqueness embedded in the one party dominant political system, there exist fears among neighboring countries, not only Japan, about its intention and capability. As a consequence, some policy makers in Japan understandably might try to utilize East Asian Community as a way to bottle-cap China's possible military might. This is mainly because of its still vivid memory of 1989 Tiananmen incident and its top-down political characteristic in the time of contingencies. As long as China remains one-party rule, and ambiguous about her security strategy, this booming worrisome by neighboring countries would not go away anytime soon. Same thing can be said to Japan too, and to which I am going to turn in the next paragraph.

2. China and Korea's Skepticism Toward Japan : Why Is It So Persistent?

Japan invaded Asia. Japan colonized Korea and killed many innocent Chinese people during the war. This is unescapable fact. Japanese people, most of them, have absolutely no intention to deny this fact. This is so needless to adduce even any public survey to demonstrate. However, the skepticism toward Japan or Japanese re-militarism has been so persistent and even became a major source of the teetering relationships among these three countries. Some call it "historical issue". Others say just "history card" in terms of its savvy diplomatic context. Whatever its real characteristic of the problem may be, the question then is, why does this historical issue remain so strong that it can even hamper the future relationship between Japan and Korea, China? Why does bad image on Japanese held by Korean and Chinese remain so persistent and keep impeding the real friendship among them? From the discussion we had, there seems to have three points to be factored in; the domestic situation in Korea and China, Japan's attitude, the lack of supra-national opportunities for the mutual understanding.

First, domestic situation in Korea and China. According to Asia Barometer, a survey done annually by professor Inoguchi, Sonoda and others, Chinese and Korean perceptions on Japan are both over 3.5 in 2006 survey, indicating their public opinion toward Japan's influence is somewhere between "neither good nor bad" to "rather bad". In contrast, Japanese perceptions toward China and Korea are both around 3, which signifies that among Japanese there seems no specific good or bad image against these

two countries. This suggests that Chinese and Korean people have relatively bad image on Japanese than Japanese have on them. Why is it so? One thing that can be thought of is that in Korean case, there is political or national culture that considers everything related to Japan as vicious residues of the time of colonization which was, considered by many, the time of the national shame. Therefore, Korean politicians, if they want to win the election, have to take stance of anti-Japanese posture in terms of his/her foreign policy. Even national media, out of the fear of being labeled as an expatriate, tend to be harsh on Japanese matters. Moreover, it was not so long ago when the official banning of Japanese pop culture to Korea was finally lifted off. In other words, Japanese cultural influence was for a long time considered something to be kept from and therefore should be banned as a national policy. These are the potential Korean domestic factors to keep fostering the bad image on Japan even after 60 years since the war ended. However, there can also remain the never-be-forgotten fact that these political cultures and bad public sentiments toward Japan have been solidly based on Japan's atrocities during the war.

As for China's domestic circumstance, in terms of its bad perception toward Japan, it can have arguably many factors to be thought of. Some claim China's too much nationalistic education is the major source of the public not-so-good image against Japan. Others point out that even after nearly 60 years have passed the war memory is still so vivid that they can not forgive Japanese yet. Then what is the real cause for such a bad and persistent perception toward Japan by Chinese? Although this could be the still remaining mystery, most likely, nationalistic tendency and Japanese atrocious war memory seem to be intertwined and interplaying, thus constantly creating hostile image against Japan. To stop this bad trend, Chinese government may need to make efforts to show not only war time Japan but also afterward peaceful Japan to his public. Despite its technological advancement, under the state-controlled media, it is true that there still remains a question about how much Chinese people can receive information from the independent news source and know the variety of views, not just the propaganda of Chinese Communist Party. Actually the fact that there are still some Chinese people who believe Japan hasn't apologized yet sheds the doubt about the situation of how information is distributed in China. Moreover, freedom in academia seems still under the control. When discussing supra-national history, in order to dig and find the historical truth, and ultimately to share the results, freedom in academia is indispensable and needs to be secured as soon and much as possible. Otherwise there would be no consensus on historical issue between two countries.

Japan, needless to say, himself can be also the possible cause for such a bad

reputation among neighboring countries. During the intensive courses, Korean students, in particular, repeatedly showed emotional suspicion toward Japan even 6 decades passed after the war. To them the recent law which mentions about around Japan contingencies and some ministers' unnecessary remarks look very much evidence that Japan is still dangerous and therefore should remain the target to keep watching carefully. When they showed the strong skepticism to Japan, I often explained 60 years of peaceful Japan's path and existence of article 9 in constitution and thus Japan at present is different from what it used to be 60 years ago. Further, Japan keeps spending only 1% of total GDP on military budget to mainly comply with its self-defense-only policy. In my impression, those who expressed disgust against Japan and its militarism seemed not so aware of these facts. However, Japan can also make further efforts in order not to create misleading message to the neighboring countries especially in the realm of ministers' precautions about utterance and PR strategy of its peaceful intention.

To promote the understanding of Japan's benign intention and win the trust among Korean and Chinese people, it is indispensable to create more opportunities to talk with each other and in so doing contributing to the deeper mutual understanding. The program like this Summer School is one idea and many others like this should be implemented and conducted either by official initiative or private project. This also has to be done through more than two countries' cooperations, it can not be done only by one country. Therefore, in the phase of planning such activities, two countries or three countries' understanding and cooperation have to be realized. To create that cooperative atmosphere in East Asian region, first we need to share the common goal – to promote mutual understanding. The idea of creating East Asian Community might be in too early stage, however, under such ultimate context and vision, it is no harm to promote and further the reciprocal understanding and retrieve mutual trust among Japan, Korea, and China. Therefore we should first aim at scaling up the mutual understanding by creating more opportunities for supra-national communications and events.

3. FTA as a Driving Force for the Regional Integration.

As Urata points out, there are tremendous benefits for Japan to create East Asia FTA.ⁱⁱ By East Asia FTA, it usually means Japan-Korea-China trilateral FTA. However, of course there are also some concerns hampering smooth negotiation. For example, for Japan, some agricultural sectors such as rice, sugar, butter, konnyaku potato are especially under the heavy protectionism and set still high tariffs. If Japan lowered those tariffs and open up those agricultural markets to the international competition, Chinese cheap counterparts would eat up Japanese market and Japan's agriculture as an industry might eventually die out. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, this kind of situation is the worst scenario and therefore must be prevented at any cost, considering his food security, environmental preservation, and stable employment opportunities. It is true that Japan is a country so scarce of natural resources and due to its limitation of land, very weak in producing agricultural products. In terms of its competency, as a result, there would be no way for Japanese agriculture to combat with other foreign countries' cheap products backed by its vast land and big-company-like style of management. Therefore lifting tariffs on these agricultural products completely might be, understandably, of great concern for Japan to secure its steady and safe food supply and self-sufficient system for survival as a nation.

When it comes to the agricultural sector in liberalization talk, Japan is not the only country who has great problem on that. On WTO arena as well, for example, the average tariff-rate for agricultural products for the countries like Norway, Korea, Switzerland and the EU are comparatively high – 124%, 62%, 51%, and 20% respectively – compared with Japan's 12%. (OECD 1999, qtd in. Urata *ibid*).

Furthermore, unfortunately in case of this trilateral FTA picture, there lies non-economical factor such as historical issue stagnating its FTA negotiations. As Chinese economic tenure gains its strength and more steering power to this region, it is likely to exacerbate the rivalry competition with Japan and fierce political or/and economic friction might occur under the circumstance in which the bid for the leading role in terms of political, economic and even military clout in this region is up for grabs

All in all, however, it can be agreed that we surely do not want another financial crisis in this region and every nation now is realizing the urgent need to protect its financial system by creating solid and strong region-wide financial fortification. One challenge for that may be the introduction of common currency. If we missed this

ⁱⁱ Urata Shujiro, "Japan's FTA Strategy and Free Trade Area of Asia-Pacific", in Charles E. Morrison and Eduardo Pedrosa eds., *An APEC Trade Agenda? ; The Political Economy of a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific*, pp.99-126.

opportunity due to the narrow-minded nationalism of each nation, we would never be able to create a stable financial system resilient and strong enough to compete with those of EU and U.S. major big powers. Therefore, by first creating regional FTA, we should gradually but constantly enforce regional economic integration.

Conclusion

In order to achieve the sound, healthy regional integration, we still have many obstacles to tackle. Nevertheless, as a final vision on this region gradually demarcated in terms of its financial or/and security stability, this on-going direction toward more integrated formulation must not be understood as a necessarily wrong way to go. Rather this could be the only, and most effective way, as a region, to survive for the lasting future.

As a major and unique characteristic of the problem lying across this region, historical issue may be singled out. This problem seems so persistent and so complicated, as already mentioned above, that there looks no exit for the complete settlement. This may be so simply because history is always something inevitably complicated and allows many different interpretations by countries or even among individuals. Especially when it comes to the war history, it involves many known and unknown factors, therefore it can not, or should not be defined by just single term or simple view. As Kitaoka, a member of co-study group of Japan-China joint history, states, imposing one single historical view on others by any means is sheerly “totalitarian”.ⁱⁱⁱ Having kept it in mind, I would like to suggest to put historical issues aside to the hands of historians, not politicians, once for all, and let politicians work on what they are supposed to do – building a good relationship with neighbors. As a mature ideal relationship between countries, it is imperative to foster the attitude to “agree to disagree”. Between countries, even if there is unsolvable problem hanging among them, it is important to keep having regular meetings and talks, and thus do not let just a single issue hamper the whole relation between countries.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kitaoka Shin'ichi, “Japan-China Joint History Research Committee Finally Launched”, *Forum on Foreign Affairs*, May 2007, No. 226. pp.14-20.