

Regionalism in the Asia-Pacific and U. S. Interests

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Introduction

The orientation toward East Asian regionalism emerged in the early 1990s, in the midst of “East Asian Miracle” era. The first proposal for regional cooperation in East Asia, which would include not only Northeast Asian but Southeast Asian countries, was East Asian Economic Group (EAEG), put forward in December 1990 by Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad.

Compared with the past, the image of “Asia” has been much altered. During the Cold War era, the region was the symbol of “poverty.” The United States and the Soviet Union vied to control mainland China, the Korean peninsula, Indochina, and other areas since Japan’s surrender had created a political vacuum, and sway over any of these areas would affect the rivalry of both superpowers.

Half a century later, Asia has become much richer. It has become a symbol of “global factories” where a significant portion of manufactured goods are produced. In the Cold War period, Asia was a target to be controlled either by the United States or the Soviet Union, while today’s Asia has become a significant player in the global economy. Although government-government relations are based on distrust, interdependent economies have led the region to a more “integrated” one with an eye to developing an “East Asian community.”

The significance of an “integrated” East Asia was rapidly advanced after the 1997 crisis that destroyed the “East Asian Miracle.” In the midst of the crisis, the first ASEAN+3 Summit was held to lessen the shock inflicted by the crisis. Then East Asian regionalism led to the institutionalization of “ASEAN+3” in a very short period. The formation and development of ASEAN+3 embodies a growing East Asian regionalism. Various sorts of regional cooperation and coordination have been promoted within the ASEAN+3 framework.

Although policy makers and intellectuals in the region have recognized the ASEAN+3 as a valid regional group, the future of East Asian regionalism is uncertain. The ASEAN+3 is remarkable because it is the first example of the institutionalization of regionalism among East Asian countries, but it is intrinsically part of ASEAN regime, which constitutes numerous frameworks and dialogues constructed among and ARF and ASEAN countries. Moreover, the ASEAN+3 is not the only regional organization there is. The Asia Pacific

Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Asian-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and others function alongside ASEAN.

With these points in mind, this paper seeks to depict the growing regionalism in the East Asia-Pacific region, and also how the U. S. government has addressed Asian regionalism. In that process several options regarding the future configuration of the East Asia-Pacific region will be delineated.

I. The Emergence and Development of Regionalism in East Asia

The Cold War history of East Asian security had two distinctive characteristics not found in Western Europe. First, unlike Western Europe, in which all states regarded the Soviet Union as their threat, no common adversary existed among East Asian countries. Second, state leaders' memories of Japan's aggression before and during World War II made it difficult to build multilateral or collective security institutions. For East Asian countries, only the U. S. government had been a reliable security partner. Successive U. S. administrations made bilateral security treaties with Japan (1951), the Philippines (1952), and South Korea (1954), but no further relationship among the allies beyond the resumption of normal diplomatic relations had been established.

Given the absence of multilateral security institutions, the unilateral U. S. pursuit of containment in East Asia contributed to American preponderance. Not by fighting directly but rather by exploiting the relations of enmity in the region the U. S. government made use of a "disintegrated Asia" to maintain its leverage over the region.

The logic of the Cold War started to change slightly when Mahathir pursued the establishment of the EAEG in 1990. Although he did not specify the members of EAEG, the area of "East Asia" was supposed to cover a part of Asia that had experienced rapid economic growth and deepening economic interdependence. That is, it was supposed to be composed of Japan, China, the Asian NIEs, ASEAN and other Southeast Asian countries. The EAEG proposal aimed to form a regional framework for discussion of common issues among member countries and to form trade and economic links, which would stimulate trade, investment and other economic interactions in the proposed region.

Mahathir's suggestion was criticized, or least quite passively recognized by the U. S. government and other East Asian countries. However, the idea of establishing a regional forum of "East Asia" itself did not disappear. Incipient regional consciousness that led to a virtual "East Asia" was formed during preparatory meetings of Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Several senior officials' meetings and economic/foreign ministerial meetings were held before the first ASEM Summit was held in March 1996. It is important to note that the leaders of Japan, China, South Korea and ASEAN countries had the meeting under the name of prior consultations to the ASEM Summit. Some of the press reported that it was the "virtual realization of EAEC" while none of governments formally

announced it that way. It was a significant event that leaders of Japan, China, Korea and ASEAN countries gathered together for the first time and showed an embryonic “East Asian” regionalism.

The emergence of East Asian regionalism reflected shared anxiety about growing protectionism and the rise of regionalism, especially NAFTA and the European Union. At the same time, the confidence shared by “East Asia” countries in economic prosperity and economic interdependence, called the “East Asian Miracle”, contributed to the formation of regional identity.

Then came the Asian economic crisis in 1997. The significance of “East Asia” had been rapidly advancing after the crisis destroyed the “East Asian Miracle.” Financial crisis broke out in Thailand in July 1997, and quickly spread other East Asian countries. “East Asian melt-down” replaced the “East Asian Miracle.” In the midst of the crisis, the ASEAN+3 advanced rapidly so as to enhance regional cooperation to remedy the damage caused by financial crisis and to show regional solidarity to overcome the crisis.

II. U. S. Strategies toward the “New Asia”

The strategic ambiguity of the United States took root under the Taiwan Relations Act. The significance of this had been guaranteed by the U. S. security commitment toward Taiwan against imminent injustices. Because U. S. containment of the Soviet Union was strategically paramount during the Cold War, the Taiwan issue necessarily took a back seat to the “China card,” but this changed during the 1990s.

First, the democratization of Taiwan attracted international attention. After the death of Jiang Jinguo, Lee Teng-hui became president, whereupon Taiwan began making gradual progress toward democratization, beginning with the resignation of long-time national legislators and a series of conventions of prominent figures from politics, business and academia to discuss broad national policy. And the United States has been seeking from China a peaceful resolution of the China-Taiwan relationship based on the Taiwan Relations Act. But at the same time it has clearly stated its concern over human rights of the residents of Taiwan. In that sense, Taiwanese democratization is a residual issue that the United States has left behind. Taiwan has handled the process skillfully, and even enhanced its reputation with the United States as a result.

Second, domestic Chinese politics have affected U. S. policy toward Taiwan. At precisely the time that Lee Teng-hui was conducting a policy of democratization, the incident at Tiananmen Square occurred, bringing down on the Chinese government more international criticism than it had anticipated. This led to an announcement by the U. S. government that it would support the accession of Taiwan and Hong Kong to APEC and sell F-16 fighter jets to Taiwan. Thus, the 1990s began with an ongoing hard-line U. S. stance toward China, which resulted in the conclusion of accords and agreements responsive to

numerous serious demands, such as the elimination of non-tariff trade barriers, respect of intellectual property rights and the non-proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

Both characteristics that exacerbated the Taiwan problem have changed as follows. First, throughout the 1990's the United States, deprived of the "China card," has found itself in strategic opposition to China while at the same time involving itself economically because of the new factor of Chinese economic growth. In addition to this economic involvement, the 9/11 attacks provided another opportunity for U. S. -Chinese cooperation. From a domestic standpoint, China, with its problems in Xinjiang, Uighur province and Tibet, has its own need to contain criminal activity it regards as terrorism. In that sense, the 9/11 attacks provided a new mold for U. S. -Chinese cooperation in the security field.

Second, the democratization stipulated in the Taiwan Relations Act after the 2000 change of government was accomplished without military force, is diminishing as an issue for the United States. In the first place, maintaining the status of human rights in Taiwan under the Taiwan Relations Act and China's refraining from a military attack were like two sides of the same coin. As long as Taiwan's political destiny could be determined by its people in peace, it would be meaningless for the United States to intervene in China-Taiwan relations.

The third factor relates to the potential use of military force against Taiwan accompanying democratization within China itself. Whatever the underlying motivation may be, the diplomatic behavior of the Chinese government, with an accommodating style characterized by its "New Security Concept" and "New Thinking on the Relationship with Japan," has created a climate in which it is becoming difficult for the United States to criticize China. One could even say that the "New Security Concept" and "New Thinking" presented a situation which made it more difficult for the U. S. and Japanese governments to strategically oppose China.

Combining these factors, a situation has now arisen in which the United States has no choice but to alter the presupposed conditions in the Taiwan Relations Act stipulated as a means of stabilizing the China-Taiwan relationship. And these alterations will have their origin in Chinese diplomacy toward the United States and the development of codependency between China and Taiwan more than in any change in U. S. policy. To put it another way, the China-Taiwan problem has moved beyond U. S. control.

III. "Military Necessity" versus "Political Necessity"

The possibility of an armed clash in East Asia has become smaller in the immediate future. This is because on the one hand democratization has gained momentum with the emergence of the Chen Shui-bian government in Taiwan and peaceful transition to the Ma Yingjiu government, rendering such an act less legitimate. On the other hand, meanwhile, the reduced perception of a worldwide

threat has given rise to the possibility that the problem may be handled by non-military means.

However, policies aimed at forming a secure environment through non-military means entail a dilemma because they must take into consideration military responses to the possibility, however slight, that military action could erupt. Also, non-military coping strategies require quite nuanced, multidimensional capabilities to produce economic and other measures to prevent outbreaks of conflict, management of the causes of conflict to prevent it from developing into armed action, maintenance and enforcement of post-conflict peace, and logistical support. While a military security policy was extremely simple and easy-to-understand, responding to force with force, foreign policy based on dialogue must be carried out through diverse channels including dialogue and negotiations with a country that may represent a latent threat.

According to this line of thought, one must maintain consideration of the potential for an outbreak of armed conflict, which can never be eliminated entirely, while also pursuing a security policy that depends upon non-military measures. Together with military measures such as the Japan-U. S. Guidelines for Defense Cooperation and legislation responding to contingencies in areas surrounding Japan, then, non-military measures such as government development aid and individual visits become quite necessary during peacetime.

Since the end of the Cold War, shortly after which it was still unable to dispatch personnel to the Gulf War, Japan began to make progress toward greater international contributions in the military field. More recently it has sent Self-Defense Forces personnel overseas. But since the Cold War, the level of worldwide threat has diminished. And in the Taiwan Straits, the establishment of the new Japan-U. S. guidelines, TMD deployment and other military-based measures form the cornerstone of the Japan-U. S. alliance. But amid a diminished potential for an outbreak of armed conflict in Asia, there must be a need to do more than is being done at present to seek out other, non-military ways of exerting influence. Such an effort can be expected to contribute to the future of Japan-Taiwan relations.

IV. Regional Order-making in East Asia

A. China's Behavior: China's Hierarchy versus China among Equals

China has an intrinsic presence in the East Asian regional order. Geographically speaking, China is the only country in the region that has a tremendous impact on its neighbors. For neighboring countries, there seems a hierarchy centered around China, and those who have learned Chinese history tend to emphasize this point. China has gained stability along its borders and has relinquished the upper hand vis-à-vis its domestic contenders because it has monopolized legitimacy and benefits from trade/tribute relations.

The opposite notion is that China has acted like France, that is it has been

always mindful of power games vis-à-vis an emerging and threatening power within China and its adjacent areas. It has thus been one among equals. From this perspective, the stability based on Chinese hierarchy should be fragile and temporary. China's potentially massive military forces are prone to intervene, especially when a new political leader finds it necessary to demonstrate superior aptitude in exercising leadership.

B. Japan's (and America's) Behavior: Balancing versus Bandwagoning

In response to the economic and political rise of China, there have been two different approaches in the realist school. One is to counterbalance the rise of China,¹ and the other is to join forces and lend support to (if not arm) the rise of China.² The former argues that given the overwhelming potential and actual threat China has been posing, it is natural that countries join forces to counter the prospect of the emergence of an overwhelming regional hegemon. The latter predicts that, given the defensive realist nature of the Chinese strategy for the foreseeable future, lending support to China is a safe bet.

For Japan, the choice depends on U. S. influence. Its globally hegemonic character makes the latter bandwagoning idea sound less convincing as China's adjacent countries are often part of the American hegemonic umbrella. At least, China perceives U. S. -Japan security cooperation as an action aimed at itself.

However, not to be dismissed is the bandwagon-like interpretation of economic interdependence. As if lured by the ever-expanding Chinese market, a huge number of business firms, especially from neighboring countries, pour direct investment into China. It is important here to distinguish between the language of business and that of power. Business uniformly bespeaks itself whereas power involves uniquely characteristic expressions of meaning each time it is exercised. Sometimes business speak is convergent with power speak, but not always. Rather, the flow of foreign trade and direct investment into China might not be interpreted directly and singularly as leaning to the growth of a regional hegemon.³

C. American Commitment: Alignment versus Distance

As stated above, the U. S. hegemonic character makes the bandwagon school sound slightly strange as China's adjacent countries are often part of the American hegemonic umbrella. Similarly, its globally hegemonic character makes the balancing school sound slightly strange as the act of balancing vis-à-vis China is bound to be conducted along with the United States. That is, China may say that the U. S. ally's action is jumping on the U. S. bandwagon, an action triggered by the emergence of the Chinese threat. On the other hand, its maritime orientation often leads the United States to adopt the policy of offshore balancing, not deeply involved or engaged with continental power politics too much. Thus when the United States leans toward an isolationist stance it temporarily ceases to be a power that counts.

In sum, the United States is able to gain advantage through distance from Japan and China by detaching its own commitment to East Asian security. Along with the above policy options of balancing and bandwagoning, the U. S. provision of a security umbrella will be a source of U. S. leverage despite its isolationist tendencies.

Distance	Alignment	
Off-shore Balancing	Containment (Balancing)	Engagement (Bandwagoning)

D. Preferred Cooperation: Formal Institutions versus Informal Networks

There have been two different kinds of methods toward regional order-making in East Asia. One is concerned with formal institutional building, and the other emphasizes informal networking in the region. Although both agree that Asia lacks the formal institutional mechanisms that will go so far as to integrate the region, each method offers different approaches to integration.

The former tends to be statist or institutionalist, and there is an emphasis on envisioning the capacity of potential members. For advocates of this approach, what is called a loose open regionalism has effectively prevented the region from integrating itself. They often suggest that East and Southeast Asia should learn from Western Europe in the latter half of the 20th century in order to establish formal institutional mechanisms of integration.⁴

The other argues that the excessive focus on formal institutions misses the point. Rather, informal networks function powerfully as adjusting mechanisms when formal institutions cannot be established.⁵ Examples include Chinese cultural networks, Japanese *keiretsu* networks and American PhDs. Given the strongly self-guarding nature of state institutions, and given the dynamic economies of the region, informal arrangements based on networks among actors equipped with cohesion and flexibility do make a difference in adjusting to fast-changing market environments.

In this approach, ad hoc pragmatic adaptation to changes would be more important. As long as market dynamism (given demographic size, developmental momentum and high educational level) and the American military presence (given the U. S. commitment with hegemony and non-isolationism) are associated with the region, pragmatic management rather than architectural construction should be given higher priority.

Conclusion

The posture of the United States towards East Asian regionalism has significantly affected and will continue to affect East Asian regionalism. The American attitude toward developing East Asian regionalism at present is, at least

on the surface, not as antagonistic as it was in the past, as demonstrated in such cases as EAEG/EAEC and an Asian Monetary Fund (AMF).

East Asia now faces market-driven regionalism, but economic issues are not the only ones for the region. Asia is a region with various natural disasters, serious piracy crimes, human trafficking and smuggling, and so forth. It needs various kinds of cooperation that will go beyond functional, economic issues. As a scholar from Japan, I consider that serious efforts should be made by the Japanese government to address the region-wide problems.

Notes

- 1 Avery Goldstein, *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century: China, Britain, France, and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- 2 Robert Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation: The United States and China, 1969-1989* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
- 3 Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "If Taiwan Chooses Unification, Should the United States Care?" *Washington Quarterly*, 25-3 (Summer, 2002).
- 4 Andrew Mack and John Ravenhill, *Pacific Cooperation: Building Economic and Security Regimes in the Asia-Pacific Region* (Boulder: Westview, 1995).
- 5 Peter Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi, *Network Power: Japan and Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).