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A Strategic Approach to Promote the Asian Unification

Yao Chao Cheng

Shanxi University of Finance & Economics, P. R. China



RIS
Research and Information System
for Developing Countries

Core 4 B 4th Floor, India Habitat Centre,
Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110 003

Phone: 91-11-2468 2177-80

Fax: 91-11-2468 2173-74

Email: dgoffice@ris.org

Websites: www.ris.org.in / www.newasiaforum.org

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ABSTRACT

Presently, politicians, especially government leaders of the major Asian nations are interested in forming a regional economic cooperation structure, realizing the economic advantage and the political advantage to be created by the collaboration. The several bilateral FTAs and the ongoing “10+1”, the proposed “10+3”, as well as the East Asian Economic Community which might be the proposal from the EAS to be held soon in December, 2005 in Malaysia.

While envisioning the bright prospect, the unification process, however, is destined to encounter some obstacles and difficulties. The integration process in Asia has been lag behind other continents of Europe and North America and fast paces can not be expected in future. Reasons are many. One of the reasons is that, the Asian unification process has mainly been driving top-down by politicians without wide participation of civilians and societies. The author believes that Asian nations, especially China and Japan, could draw on the lessons and experiences of European countries and learn their principle of subsidiarity (Bottom-up approaches), which may serve as the key solution to overcome the impending obstructions and as a strategic approach to promote for a truly integrated Asia .

1. Asian Economic Integration and Asian Unity

The Concurrent Regional Cooperation in Asia is going on in a strong trend, particularly since 2002, when the economic cooperation in eastern Asia began to develop rapidly. On Nov. 4, 2002, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, an FTA agreement had been signed by China and the ASEAN. By 2010, a free trade zone including 10 ASEAN member nations and China, referred to as the 10 + 1, shall be set up. On October 7, 2003, China, Japan, Korea and the ASEAN had made a joint declaration on promoting the 10+3 FTA with a set time of the year of 2020. India, the largest economy in south Asia, is making active efforts to join in the faster regional economic cooperation in eastern Asia. It is quite likely that the set-up will evolve into a JACIK economic community (Japan, ASEAN, China, India, Korea) as proposed by an Indian economist Dr Nagesh Kumar. The JACIK, officially referred as 10+4 by Chinese, will be as large as EU in terms of GDP, bigger than NAFTA in export volume with more than two thirds of the world's foreign exchange reserves. In December 2005, the EAS shall be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, participating by 10 ASEAN Nations, China, Japan, Korea, India, and two non-Asian nations Australia and New Zealand. And likely the EAS shall put forward the scheme of East Asian Economic Community. Theoretically, regional economic integration will certainly entail political integration. Once the East Asian Economic Community scheme is realized, it is likely to expand into the “Pan-Asian Economic Community”. Going further, a unified Asia may take shape.

While envisioning the bright prospect, the unification process, however, is destined to encounter some obstacles and difficulties as Asia is too large with too complicated differences in culture, religion, political systems and economic strengths. Prof. Samuel Huntington, an American scholar from Harvard, believes that the "cultural fault-lines" existing among some Asian nations can hardly be erased. Prof. Huntington even predicts that the 3rd World War may break out in the Southern China Sea one day (Samuel . Huntington: 1996). Recently, Daniel Twining, a British scholar, commented that economically Asian nations may go together, but socially and politically shall still be divided from each other. The third person may look more

clear and fair. Anyway, it is the true situation of today in Asia, particular the situation between China and Japan. The British scholar, just like Prof. Samuel Huntington's paradigm "Clash of Civilizations", must have his reasons.

Comparing with Europe and America, it is indeed that the social cooperation is far from sufficient due to an absence of efficient regional organizational framework, political and economic barriers in Asia. The well-known historical problems or territorial disputes still exist between China and Japan, China and India, and Japan and Korea, the four major nations being positively involved in the JACIK regional cooperation scheme. These problems and disputes, together with others caused by cultural differences, ideological disparity, nationalism, may all act as obstacles to obstruct the Asian unification process.

2. The Social Obstacles Existing in the Asian Unification Process

The regional economic unification must overcome some economic obstacles, such as how to remove the trade and non-trade barriers, how to realize monetary stability in the region, and how to develop a regional market dominated by internal demand. However, in the long run, the social obstacles will be more troublesome than the economic obstacles and can be destructive.

Among the historical problems and disputes that may obstruct the Asian unification process, the Sino-Japan issues are most remarkable, including the disputes over the World War II history and the gas field of East China Sea. The former has been lasting for long and the latter is recently moving up. The Sino-Japan tension has escalated when Japan bids for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and China is strongly opposing. The Sino-Japan disputes may become the largest barrier in building up the regional cooperation structure in Asia.

Between other two big Asian nations, China and India, disputes also exist, such as the border issue and the Tibetan issue. The former disputes had triggered war in 1962 between the two nations. The latter still remains a sensitive topic.

In addition to disputes over WWII, there is also a territorial dispute between Japan and South Korean over the Tsushima Islands in the Sea of Japan, or the Tokdo in East Sea called by South Korea. Historically, both sides have asserted territorial claims and have been at odds over the boundary. The simmering issue, however, flares up only occasionally, as it has recently.

The two nations, India and Pakistan, in the sub-continent of south Asia still have historical problems and disputes unsettled. Since 1947, there have been three wars caused by the Kashmir issue and the confrontations have lasted for 58 years. Although bilateral relation has been improved since 2004, the problems and disputes are not thoroughly resolved yet. The complicated territorial and religious issues are still disturbing the relationship of two neighboring nations.

In Asia, the most dangerous social obstacle is the passion of nationalism. The reason why the book "Clashes of Civilizations" resounds throughout the world is that Prof. Huntington pointed out that the so-called "clashes of civilizations" as a matter of fact refers to the clashes of nationalities or nationalism. When reviewing the conflicts and disputes taking place in Asia, it must be admitted that all are related with passions of nationalism. The Indian-Pakistan conflicts and the recent conflicts that occurred in eastern Asia all reflect strong passions of nationalism. On the one hand the fanatic nationalism can unite a nation into one, but on the

other hand it can result in regional splits or international collisions which may go out of control. In fact, main pressures faced by the disputed Asian nations are from the domestic forces not from the outside. Politicians on the one hand make great efforts to minimize the political bifurcations across nations, and on the other hand have to consider the strong passions of nationalism. Sometimes, the nationalism passions are shamefully used by politicians to gain political advantages.

3 . A Strategic Approach to Remove the Obstacles

The European experience is revealing clearly that Asians have to have a new way of thinking and a looking forward attitude to deal with the non-economic obstacles. To realize the unification Asia must not only build an efficiently integrated economy, but a big Asian family with sustained peace.

3.1 The European Revelation

In the European unification process, a so-called principle of subsidiarity (Horst Rolly: 1999) has played an important role. The principle refers to the wide contacts and exchanges of societies and civilians among the European nations, including families, villages, schools, institutions, churches, charity organizations, and so on. Many film stars, artists and news media had also participated in the activities. The societies and civilians participation had provided support and guidance to politicians promoting the unification. This wide and long lasting social interaction is a foundation for the European unification. Today, in the old member states of the EU, seldom could you find any middle-aged men or women who have not the experience of the inter-nation exchanges. For instance, according to a plan approved on May 25, 1998 by Edith Cresson, Minister of Education of the EU, in the year of 1998-9, 200,000 students and 35,000 teachers had been exchanged by EU nations, covering 1,600 universities of 24 nations, including some East European nations (John · Pendel: 1998). Such exchange program provided opportunities for people in different countries to understand and learn from each other.

The setback of the European unification in France and Netherlands proved that the social civilian exchanges are inadequate between the old member states and new ones. Therefore, the principle of subsidiarity should be applied in a wider scope. Some people argued that a regional structure may weaken the capacity of member states. However, the European experience has shown that regional cooperation does not limit but increases national advantages on a wider platform. People in France and Netherlands saying “NO” to the EU Constitution reflects the principle of subsidiarity which has the function to prevent the international superstructure from leading to a replacement of national power and authorities (China Daily: May 31, 2005). The subsidiarity principle is so important that has been written in EU Treaties, Maastricht treaty and the Amsterdam treaty.

The European experiences and lessons indicate that without wide social interaction and decades of cultural exchanges, the European unification of today can never be achieved. It was the principle of subsidiarity that had freed French and German from the historically accumulated rancor, and converted them from foes to friends, becoming engines of the European unification.

3.2 The Misunderstanding Caused the Sino-Japan Disputes

The recent down-turn going Sino-Japan relation certainly shall obstruct the Asian unification process.

Compared with all other nations of the world, no ones like China and Japan have such long and strong historical and cultural ties. The two nations have so many similarities, i.e. the

oriental culture imbedded philosophy and psychology, the strong nationalism passion, the attitude of “Rather to die, but not to be humiliated” and so on. Today, however, although geographically speaking the two nations are so close, psychologically speaking so far apart as if separated by high mountains. The disputes between China and Japan are not only caused by historical problems and offshore natural resources, but also caused due to the lack of understanding and even misunderstanding to each other. The misunderstanding made the nationalism passions go with prejudice and hostility which sadly become the lever in hands of their politicians.

Following facts show about the misunderstanding resulted in the cultural difference.

In Japan if someone died, his or her guilt, no matter how big the guilt is, shall vanish with the life. In China, however, the bad people shall be regarded as that even death would not expiate all his crimes (www.sina.com: Chinese and Japanese Scholars Debate, August 6, 2005). War brings up enmity between nations and the national animosity causes war. The best way to avoid wars is that the national enmities must be cleared up. In this regards, both Chinese and Japanese should learn from Europeans. Understanding and tolerance with each other are the foundation of co-existence.

Regarding the presently worsening Sino-Japan relationship, a public opinion survey in major cities of China and Japan had been done by China Daily Website, Faculty of International Relations of the Beijing University and NPO, Japan, from May to August, 2005. Thousands of survey questionnaires filled by ordinary civilians and professionals in both nations unveiled the following basic facts (China Daily: August 23, 2005): 90 percent of Chinese civilians and students think that Japan should take the responsibility for the worsening relationship; only 14.4 percent of Japanese civilians feel that the responsibility should be taken by Japan; professionals of both nations take a neutral stand believing that the two nations should share the responsibility half and half.; the “Cultural Revolution” remains in memory of ordinary Japanese as the major event of the Chinese history of the 20th century; 77.8 percent of ordinary Chinese do not know the Japan has made big contribution to China’s economic development by offering ODA.

The questionnaires clearly show that people of the two nations fall short of rational understanding. The surveyed facts clearly tell that between China and Japan there is an urgent need for application of the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. the social and civilian exchanges and contacts.

The facts from China side are not encouraging.

Not long after the Sino-Japan diplomatic relation was resumed, there had been junior middle school and primary school student exchanges in summer camp programs, as well as family exchanges between two nations. People still remember the Friendship Ship carrying Chinese youth to visit Japan in early 1980s. At that time, the social contacts and exchanges had indeed improved bilateral relationship and enhanced mutual understanding (Chang Ying: May 1, 2005). In recent years, however, such social exchange programs are hardly heard of.

In 2004, 104, 281 self-financed students went abroad. Among them, 19, 800 went to US; 25, 600 to UK; and 27, 000 to Australia, taking up about 70% of the total. For Asian nations, the self-financed students mainly went to Japan (about 3,000), South Korea (about 3,000) and Singapore (4,000 – 5,000), taking up only 10% of the total. In the same year, Shanxi, the inland

province of China, had sent 3,992 people abroad for official visits and business inspections, 63.6 per cent of the total went to Europe and US and 15.9 per cent to Asian nations. In 2003, Shanxi Government officially dispatched 59 visiting scholars, 57 of them to Europe and US, one to Russia and one to Japan. Though statistics of only China, they could be referential to the situation of Japan and other Asian nations.

Many people now are wondering about what the Sino-Japan relation in future will be or should be like? The question will have no answer without adequate bilateral social and civilian exchanges and without good mutual understanding.

Not only between China and Japan, but amongst all Asian nations, the social and civilians exchanges are too little. Workers and farmers taking majority of the Asian population have had no opportunities for exchanging. Lack of the mass participating, the ordinary Asians are not clearly aware of the advantages of the regional cooperation and unification. By contrast, the disputes and conflicts occurred in Asia draw strong public attentions due to inadequate mutual understanding. This has amplified the existing cultural differences and caused misunderstanding with each other.

Conclusion

By analyzing the obstacles, we shall be able to make a conclusion that the economic barriers could be removed one by one in the process of economic integration, whereas the social obstacles have to be removed by applying the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. democratic approach. To resolve the disputes needs not only intelligence and consciousness of Asian politicians, but also wide and positive participation of the societies and civilians. A regional unification needs economic activities, also social activities. Deepening the economic integration can push forward social integration. But, only the social integration can enhance the regional unification to a high level.

Asians should be able to discover and solidify their common cultural identity and become united step by step. Asians shall be able to fill and well repair the “cultural fault lines” and manage the internal disputes and conflicts. The subsidiarity principle being applied with the unification process can help to improve the Sino-Japan relation, and can help to remove other social obstacles in Asia. In fact, in an open and democratic regional unification of long course, there will be disputes and conflicts occurring continuously amongst Asian nations. Yet the unification may provide a dynamic platform for democratic exchanges and peaceful negotiations within the framework of international laws for the common good. It is generally agreed that national interests can find higher gratification and fulfillment in international coordination and cooperation and consequently synergetic efficiency of all Asian nations can be increased. The tension between particular interests and regional or universal benefits will keep the unification process open-ended instead of close-ended as a necessary condition for steady improvement. A regional unification even demands continuous incompleteness of any endeavor to keep development in a dialectical state for constructive opposition and consensus building. The disputes can obstruct the regional unification process, but they can be resolved somehow.

However, this has to be understood and supported by majority of Asian civilians, inc. workers and peasants. It is clearly evidenced that the main driving force of the Asian unification is from governments and politicians in a top-down manner and the participation of societies and civilians is too few. Without participation of the societies and civilians, the Asian unification can hardly be achieved. As a strategic approach, governments of the Asian nations should take effective measures to encourage and promote the mass flow of people, inc. scholars,

particularly the younger generation, in order to improve the understanding and minimize the misunderstanding amongst Asian nationalities. My suggestion is that as the first step the EAS should propose for setting up a Foundation Program of Asian Student Exchange do as the same as Europeans.

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