



JAPAN'S ROLE IN THE REGIONALISM AND REGIONALISATION OF EAST ASIA THAT MADE POSSIBLE THE CREATION OF ASEAN+3

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Abstract. ASEAN+3 is a major institution in East Asia that plays one of the most important roles in the integration, security, regional peace, stability, prosperity, sustainable development, economic development, cultural dialogue and political development of the region. This article examines the role of Japan in the establishment, development and evolution of regional cooperation in East Asia, namely within the ASEAN+3 framework. It also answers the questions of why previous attempts at regionalism failed, why ASEAN+3 was finally established, and what formed the background of the constraints on the development of regional cooperation in East Asia. The article likewise describes Japanese foreign policy within ASEAN+3, including the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation, the various track-two channels for dialogue on economic, political, security, environmental and other transnational issues, the East Asia Study Group, the East Asia Vision Group and East Asian think tanks.

Keywords: ASEAN+3, regionalism, regionalisation, East Asia, Japan, "ASEAN Way", East Asia Vision Group, Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation, intra-regional trade, institutionalisation.

INTRODUCTION

After the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the USSR, the process of integration and regionalisation of the European states could be observed, which finally made possible the creation of a new regional institution, the European Union; and East Asia was no exception. Attempts at regional integration and cooperation were made in 1990 by the former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, who proposed the idea of an East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC), or East Asia Economic Group (EAEG), which was supposed to be a regional free trade zone encompassing the

ASEAN members, Japan, South Korea and China. Japan, however, refused to participate because of the exclusion of the Western nations, which were already members of APEC and of many other notable regional organisations in East Asia. That is why the East Asia Economic Caucus finally failed and never became an official organisation. In this sense the considerable role of Japan in East Asian regionalism can be seen.

After the Asian financial crisis of 1997, however, for the first time in the history of East Asia an Asian regional institution was created that excluded any Western countries, including the United States of America (Terada, 2011:2), namely ASEAN+3, which might be called the successor of the EAEC. In 1997, during the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of ASEAN, the leaders of ASEAN invited the three leaders of North-East Asia, namely Prime Minister of Japan Ryutaro Hashimoto, President of the Republic of Korea Kim Dae-jung and President of the People's Republic of China Jiang Zemin; and it was a historical moment for East Asian regionalism, because Japan, the Republic of Korea and China agreed to and supported the foundation of ASEAN+3 (Kondo, 2005:33). Since that time the political, economic and financial cooperation between South-East Asia and North-East Asia has received a new and strong impulse towards regionalism. As See Seng Tan argues, ASEAN+3 cooperation shared a common interest in the material forces of firm-driven trade, investment and production that were deepening economic integration in proximate parts of continental and maritime Asia (Tan, n.d.:15).

MAIN PART

Since 1997 the process of regionalisation between South-East Asia and North-East Asia has increased significantly, and the evidence of that regionalisation can be seen in the increased number of ASEAN+3 summits, ASEAN+3 foreign ministers' meetings and ASEAN+3 finance ministers' meetings. The peculiarity of ASEAN+3, as See Seng Tan argues, was that the process of integration within it was a process of state-led institution building from the top down (Tan, n.d.:15).

Today ASEAN+3 regionalism has developed in three layers. The first consists of formal governmental organisations, such as the ASEAN+3 summits, the ASEAN+3 foreign ministers' meetings, the ASEAN+3 finance ministers' meetings, the East Asia Vision Group and the ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office. The second consists of various track-two channels for dialogue on economic, political, security,

environmental and other transnational issues, in the form of the East Asia Study Group, the East Asia Vision Group and East Asian think tanks. The third consists of civil-society-based activities involving actors such as non-governmental organisations, regional advocacy groups and professional and business associations.

Munakata Naoko holds the same opinion, arguing that in the past the East Asian governments had distanced themselves from preferential trade agreements such as free trade agreements and had not actively pursued other formal institutions for regional integration, which she calls “regionalism” (Munakata, 2004:2). Since the latter half of the 1980s the region had boasted of dynamic growth and de facto economic integration through the market process, which Munakata Naoko refers to as “regionalisation”, without such formal institutions. In the wake of the Asian financial crisis, however, the landscape changed drastically. The East Asian capitals are now actively exploring bilateral free trade agreements and even contemplating a vision for an East Asian community in order to promote peace, prosperity and progress through cooperation in the economic, political, security, environmental, social, cultural and educational arenas (Munakata, 2004:2).

Kiki Fukushima emphasises the great role of regionalisation in East Asia, which further advanced towards regionalism in the form of ASEAN+3; and regionalism within the ASEAN+3 framework directly influenced regionalism in North-East Asia, namely among Japan, the Republic of Korea and China. In her argument, the progress of regionalisation has led to regionalism in Asia, and this holds true for regionalism in East Asia. Regionalisation, particularly in trade, foreign direct investment and the financial market, has progressed in East Asia, leading to the formation of ASEAN+3 in 1997 and the holding of the East Asia Summit since 2005. Regionalisation has been most apparent in the economic field, particularly in the areas of trade and investment. Despite the Asian monetary crisis of 1997, the GDP of East Asia grew 4.7-fold between 1980 and 2003, led by a 6.9-fold growth in exports and a 16.3-fold growth in foreign direct investment; trade growth has been most notable in China, where exports grew 24-fold and imports 21-fold between 1980 and 2003 (Fukushima, 2006:2).

Kiki Fukushima argues that regionalism in East Asia depends greatly on the Plus Three countries, namely Japan, the Republic of Korea and China, and that economic regionalism among those three countries is very high. For instance, intra-regional trade

in East Asia showed a tenfold growth owing to an increase in trade in components and intermediate goods in the electrical and electronic machinery and apparel industries in the region. Multinational companies have established subsidiaries in East Asia and use intra-regional production and distribution networks to manufacture finished products for export outside the region. For example, in the manufacture of personal computers, semiconductors, LCD display panels and other high-technology components are produced in Japan and South Korea, while low-technology components such as keyboards and mice are produced and assembled in China (Fukushima, 2006:2).

The regionalisation of industry in the ASEAN+3 region by Japan and the Republic of Korea has made a large contribution to regionalism in East Asia. As Kiki Fukushima argues, ASEAN+3 regionalism has even exceeded regionalism in NAFTA and is close to regionalism in the European Union in terms of intra-regional trade; moreover, in contrast with the NAFTA region, which imports components and intermediate goods from outside the region and produces finished goods for export, the ASEAN+3 region imports components and intermediate goods from within the region and produces finished goods for export (Fukushima, 2006:4).

Indicator	East Asia	NAFTA	EU
Import, 1980	33.9	33.6	61.0
Import, 2003	49.4	55.4	61.4
Export, 1980	34.8	32.6	56.9
Export, 2003	58.6	39.9	63.5

Table 1. *Regionalisation of trade (intra-regional trade ratio, %)*

Source: Urata, S. "Trade and investment-driven economic growth and regional integration", in: K. Ito & A. Tanaka (eds.), East Asian Community and Japan's Future Path. NHK Shuppan, 2005, p. 127, cited in Fukushima (2006:4).

As Kiki Fukushima considers, it is precisely the regionalisation of production by Japan and the Republic of Korea that has been one of the factors behind the conclusion of numerous free trade agreements and economic partnership agreements in East Asia and behind the subsequent discussion on building an East Asian Community.

ASEAN+3 cooperation is deepening and developing in the political, economic, financial and cultural spheres with the strong support of the governments of ASEAN+3.

According to See Seng Tan, however, the prevailing opinion inside and outside Asia is that regionalism in Asia is more talked about than acted upon and that the major intergovernmental institutions have lost momentum or stagnated (Tan, n.d.:15). The advocates of regionalism in Asia argue, on the contrary, that the nature of international politics in Asia is unique and that the best approach for East Asian regionalism is the so-called “ASEAN Way”, one of whose main components is non-interference in the domestic politics of the member states and the solution of problems through peaceful governmental negotiations and arbitration, such as the summit meetings of the leaders of ASEAN+3 and various intergovernmental institutional meetings, including the ASEAN+3 ministerial meetings, as well as through such bodies as academic institutions, think tanks and civil society organisations, which make it possible to have high levels of cooperation and regionalisation with low levels of institutionalisation. One of the advocates of the “ASEAN Way” is Amitav Acharya, who argues that step-by-step incremental progress, a comfort level for all, consensus and peer pressure were portrayed as superior to strong intergovernmental organisations with independent staff and special expertise, rules and enforcement mechanisms (Acharya, 1997a:319–346).

According to Amitav Acharya, it is very important to take into account the specific features of East Asia, and the European model of regionalism cannot be well suited to the unique conditions of East Asia. For instance, while analysing regionalism and multilateral institutions in East Asia, Acharya argues that the fundamental goals and core organising principles of multilateral institutions in the Asia-Pacific are not peculiar to the East Asian region, and that the origins of such notions as the “ASEAN Way”, the “Asian Way” or the “Asia-Pacific Way” of multilateralism are most appropriately to be found in the conscious rejection by Asian leaders and policy elites – now echoed by many of the Western participants as well – of imported models of multilateralism, and in their call for multilateralism to conform to local realities and practices (Acharya, 1997b:10–11).

The Asian security specialist Paul Evans argues in a similar vein that institution building in the Asia-Pacific region, rather than following the pattern established in Europe and North America, is instead emerging from unique historical circumstances and will probably evolve in its own particular way (Evans, 1994:303).

In addition, Yukio Satoh, a senior Japanese Foreign Ministry official closely involved in regional security dialogues, argues that European concepts and processes

would not fit the conditions of the Asian and Pacific region well, and gives four reasons: during the Cold War, Asia lacked the strict bipolarity of Europe because of the role of China and because many Asian states adopted a non-aligned foreign policy; military conditions in the respective regions were quite different, since perceived threats were more diverse, the structure of Asia's alliances was more or less bilateral, and United States and Soviet force postures in the region were more asymmetric; Asia had a larger number of unresolved conflicts and disputes; and while Europe during the Cold War was preoccupied with the threat of nuclear war, Asia's main concern was with economic development (Sato, 1991:5–6).

There are many debates in the academic field about how to define the process of cooperation in ASEAN+3, that is, whether it is regionalism or regionalisation. According to T. J. Pempel, regionalisation is the de facto movement of regional integration, specifically the movement of people, goods, capital, technology and information that develops dynamically within a region, whereas regionalism is a formal movement of integration accompanied by institutionalisation (Amako, Matsuoka & Horiuchi, 2013:110–111). According to See Seng Tan, regionalisation is the expression of increased commercial and human transactions in a defined geographical space, while regionalism is the expression of a common sense of identity and destiny combined with the creation of institutions that express that identity and shape collective action (Tan, n.d.:15).

Consequently, regionalism is a process involving governmental levels that can create institutions for a common sense of identity, shape collective actions and promote cooperation within a region, whereas regionalisation is a process that may not include the governmental levels but may involve increased commercial and human transactions in a certain region. That is why ASEAN+3 regionalism is very complicated: this process moves between the aspiration to build multilateral cooperation and the political realities constraining it, and in this sense ASEAN+3 regionalism often takes hybrid forms that frequently blur the distinction between governmental and non-governmental cooperation. In this process the multiple forms of track-two dialogue have a special meaning.

Anthony Milner has called this “a relentless conversation”, which plays an essential role in providing the rationale for regionalism, finding a consensus among

policy elites for moving regionalism forward and shaping the governmental institutions that aim to make regionalism effective (Tan, n.d.:16). That is why the East Asia Vision Group, which consists of academic and formal governmental elites, and the East Asia Study Group play a very important role in terms of policy recommendations that help to develop and shape regionalism within the ASEAN+3 framework. The importance of ASEAN+3 cooperation is that ASEAN+3 is in fact the only regional governmental institution with the potential to promote East Asian regionalism, because without such considerable economic powers as Japan, the Republic of Korea and China, regionalism in East Asia would not have been possible. For instance, if one looks at the portions of contribution to ASEAN+3 regional cooperation, namely to the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation, which amounts to 240 billion United States dollars, the proportion of contributions is twenty to eighty, that is, 20 per cent by ASEAN and 80 per cent by the Plus Three countries (ASEAN+3 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, 2012).

On the basis of the factors mentioned above, without Japan, the Republic of Korea and China the process of regionalism and regionalisation in East Asia would not have been possible. In this sense the role of Japan in East Asian regionalism is essential, because without Japan the fate of ASEAN+3 would have been the same as that of the East Asia Economic Caucus, which failed when Japan refused to participate. ASEAN+3 is the only regional organisation capable of promoting regionalism in East Asia, and the strong desire of the ASEAN+3 countries to build regionalism within this framework, together with the existing political realities constraining it, has led ASEAN+3 cooperation to take a path that combines the processes of regionalism and regionalisation using the so-called “ASEAN Way”. The governmental levels of cooperation, such as the summit meetings of the leaders of ASEAN+3, the ASEAN+3 foreign ministers’ meetings and the ASEAN+3 finance ministers’ meetings, together with the non-governmental levels of cooperation, such as the East Asia Vision Group, the East Asia Study Group and the think tanks of ASEAN+3 – in other words, the combination of regionalism and regionalisation in ASEAN+3 – have made it possible to have high levels of cooperation with a low level of institutionalisation. In this sense it is pertinent to say that regionalism in ASEAN+3 would not be possible without the participation of Japan in this process.

CONCLUSION

The study leads to the following conclusions. First, the regionalisation of industries by Japan and the Republic of Korea in East Asia made it possible to sign numerous free trade agreements and economic partnership agreements in East Asia and to hold the subsequent discussion on building an East Asian Community, thereby transforming regionalisation into regionalism.

Second, the specific nature of East Asia was unique, with its constraints and the political realities of the Cold War: strict bipolarity, the role of China, which led many Asian states to adopt a non-aligned foreign policy, military conditions in East Asia that were more or less bilateral, and asymmetric United States and Soviet force postures in the region, together with a larger number of unresolved conflicts and disputes. The peculiarity of East Asian regionalism is therefore a high level of cooperation with a low level of institutionalisation, and the “ASEAN Way”, which provides comfortable conditions through non-interference and the peaceful resolution of conflicts through various governmental levels, such as summit meetings and ministerial meetings, and various track-two levels, such as the East Asia Vision Group, the East Asia Study Group and East Asian think tanks.

Third, Japan and South Korea, as among the most advanced technological, industrial and high-technology countries of the world, played a crucial role in the regionalisation of East Asia by regionalising their production in the region. This reinforced regional trade between the South-East Asian and North-East Asian countries, made it possible to produce all the necessary components for complete production within the East Asian region, and enabled the region to overtake NAFTA and to come closer to the European Union in terms of intra-regional trade.

Fourth, Japan’s policy of the regionalisation of East Asia made possible the policy of the Japanese prime ministers of promoting further regionalism within the ASEAN+3 framework.

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