

# The Alliance of Civilizations: Political Perspective of Regional Integration

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## **Diversity of APR**

When we deliberate on today's topic, "The Alliance of Civilizations in the Asian and Pacific Region", we have to start with this region's outstanding feature, diversity.

The diversity means, first of all, a cultural diversity. The APR embraces five major civilizations, namely Hindu, Chinese, Islam, Japanese and Western Christianity, out of total eight civilizations of the world as listed by Prof. Samuel Huntington in his work, "The Clash of Civilizations". Quite different from Europe or North America, no single civilization is predominant in this region. Instead, in the APR several civilizations coexist basically in a harmonious manner.

In the second place, an absence of shared historical memories among countries in the region has intensified the diversity. There were, of course, some exceptions such as the expansion of Mongolian Empire in the 13th century or the invasion of western colonial powers in the 19th century which affected more or less almost every countries of the region. Otherwise we can very hardly recognize Asian-wide common historical background.

Thirdly, even during the Cold War period, political regimes of countries in the region were so diversified among the Democratic Camp, the Socialist Camp and also the Nonalignment. A sizable presence of non-alignment countries such as India and Indonesia features APR political scene, which is different from Europe and North America.

## **Latest developments toward the restructuring of a new Asian order**

Despite such a vast diversity, the APR has been experiencing over last decade a couple of new developments which require the restructuring of a new regional order.

The first development is merger of socialist countries in the AP regional cooperation after the end of the cold war. China has transformed its economic policy into a market oriented economy, which lead an opening of its market to the world. Former Indochina socialist countries LCV have acceded to ASEAN, leading to ASEAN 10. A shift of Indian diplomacy from a leader of Non-alignment to more pragmatic and business oriented diplomacy has also accelerated a regional integration process.

Secondly, an emergence of China and India is changing a total picture of the region. This also contributes to the creation of new powerful engines toward a regional integration.

In the third place, we have witnessed remarkable development of de facto economic regional integration, starting from so-called flying wild geese development headed by Japan as well as the integration of former socialist countries into APR economy and now leading to very extensive networking of FTAs.

### **The architecture of APR in the 21th Century**

Facing with such a rapid change of paradigm, what should we do now? Europe has been forging a new post-cold war order with EU as its core institution. A structure of North America is always rather simple, namely relations between one Super Power and two junior partners.

In contrast, APR has yet no clear picture for the 21th century order. Thus, the reality is that we have to start with very preliminary stage to form a common platform to architect a new APR blue print. A current state of affairs is that the following three major players are taking an initiative respectively to build a platform of consultation and dialogue. Though APEC is already well established forum, this forum will not be discussed here because of its Pan-Pacific wide geographic coverage rather than APR.

The first group is ASEAN which initiated "ASEAN plus 3", the "East Asia Summit" as well as ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). China is also initiating such fora as the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization" and the "Tripartite Foreign Ministers Dialogue" with India and Russia. Japan and US are taking an initiative to form the "Tripartite FMs' Dialogue" with Australia. PM Mr. Abe proposed a new Quadripartite FMs' Dialogue including US, Australia and India which is not yet realized. In the second truck other than G-to-G level, the Tripartite dialogue among Japan, US and India have been successfully undertaken more than twice.

### **Divergent stance on some core issues detected through architectural exercise**

Thus several dialogue fora are already operating parallel. Through these exercises, certain numbers of obstacles for architectural work are identified. Likewise, divergence of respective country's stance upon principle matters for a regional integration is also interestingly manifested to the public. This may demonstrate again the cultural and philosophical diversity of the region.

As for obstacles for architectural work, three points should be underlined. First, uncertainty of China's future direction makes our work difficult. For instance, China's democratization scenario is still unpredictable. Her defense policy bolstered by huge increase of its defense budget, two digit percentage annual increase over last 21 years, is not transparent to the outside world.

Secondly, the legacy of the Cold War still remains in such hot spots as the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan and Kashmir. These unsettled conflicting issues constitute an obstacle for architecting the regional future picture.

In the third place, an absence of a consolidated regional security dialogue is delaying the future projection. Though ASEAN's initiative to host the ARF is highly appreciated as a place for an informal exchange of information, this forum is not institutionalized enough to create a security framework for confidence building.

Now I wish to turn to another topic, "Divergence of stance". First, regarding the human rights and democracy, there are two schools of thoughts among member countries. One group including Japan and Australia has a firm belief that these are universal values which everyone should respect and protect. Other is of the view that there should be some Asian way of democracy other than the "western style".

Secondly, as for a basic philosophy of the regional integration, one school supports the concept of an "Open Regionalism" extensive over the geographical boundary, while other has a strong preference to confine membership to the countries of the region. This difference of approach among countries concerned was manifestly observed in the preparatory stage for establishing the "East Asia Summit".

Thirdly, a thought how to keep a distance with US differs from one country to another. Those countries, which are US allies such as Japan, Australia and Korea, are of the firm view that US presence in the region is indispensable for the stability of the entire region. On the other hand, there exist countries which have some reservation with the US presence in the region and prefer to a multi-polar world rather than an uni-polar structure.

### **Regional cooperation**

As shown in my rough sketch above, the process of the region's architecture is still going on. However, any attempts of regional cooperation should not wait for the

accomplishment of architecture exercise. Conversely, we have already a rich stock of fruits resulted from intensive regional cooperation. The most outstanding example may be various kind of cooperation within the "ASEAN plus 3" framework. Marking its first summit level meeting in 1997, this forum has 12 year history. The number of regional cooperation projects under this banner already reaches 48 across 17 fields. Chiang-Mai Initiative creating a regional financial safety network is one of its most visible achievements. The deepening of discussions about a proposed East Asia FTA idea can be considered as another example. It was also agreed at the 3rd EAS in 2007 to establish ERIA, the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, which was proposed by Japan as an Asian version of OECD.