

COOPERATION FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHEAST ASIA: FUNCTIONALIST APPROACHES

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With the end of the Cold War, world politics has entered a new phase. We can easily find two major phenomena in the post Cold War era: many countries joined the free market economy; peripheral areas and cities are developing exchange relationships with each other beyond national borders. In Northeast Europe, for instance, peripheral regions are creating new cooperative relationships. Although the Baltic Sea region, historically, had strong economic ties, a new epoch of cooperation among ten states, including Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, has begun in the 1990s. In Asia, too, Thailand attempts to create the Indochinese Economic Zone (Baht Economic Zone) with Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar across different economic systems. China wants to maintain socialism firmly but is open to foreign investment. The South China Economic Zone is formed by China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The Yellow Sea Rim Economic Zone consists mainly of China, South Korea, and North Korea.

This paper will consider the basic concept and framework for cooperation in the Japan Sea Rim Economic Sphere, which is also called the Japan Sea Rim Cooperative Sphere or the Sea of Japan Economic Zone. The Northeast Asian Region (NEAR) is considered to be one of the Asian subregional cooperative zones. Since the end of the Cold War, the Sea of Japan has turned from the "sea of conflict" to the "sea of peace and exchange," and cities around the Japan Sea Rim have built exchange relationships in various fields such as public administration, culture, business, security, and sciences. The paper will examine cooperation in these fields in the context of promoting peace and development.

Post-Cold War Observations

The Japan Sea Rim Region is geographically composed of three Northeast provinces of China, the Eastern coasts of both Koreas, Siberia, and the Northern coastlines of Japan. As Japanese economist, Kanamori Hisao, recently mentioned, however, this region can refer to a wider economic sphere consisting of six nations around the Japan Sea: Mongolia, Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning in Northern China as well as North Korea, South Korea, and Japan, Russian Far East (Hisao, 1994: 21). The total population in this region is approximately 300 million.

The characteristics of this region, as an economic zone, are a little different from that of the European Union (EU), including countries which share the same fiscal and monetary policies and enjoy similar levels of economic development. In contrast with the EU, we can easily identify four major characteristics in Northeast Asia.

First, provinces and prefectures around the Japan Sea Rim are underdeveloped or left behind compared to other areas in each country. Even in Japan, the Northern coastal areas had long been called "Uranihon," which means the backward side of Japan compared to the Pacific side of Japan, "Omotenihon." From the 19th century, the government has paid more attention to the modernization of the Pacific side. Thus, the coastal side on the sea of Japan has remained an underdeveloped area with the "heavy snow image," and slow development was also affected by the Cold War. Coastal areas in other countries have also played minor roles in the process of rapid economic growth. Interestingly, these peripheral areas are geographically remote from national centers like Moscow, Beijing, Pyongyang, Seoul, and Tokyo.

Second, the insufficient development of infrastructure for transportation and communication has led to the relative isolation of the regional peripheries. Travel to a city on the opposite coasts in Japan and Korea may take longer time than flying to big cities like Vladivostok, Seoul, Niigata, and Beijing. In addition, people in the peripheral areas have difficulty in communication with other parts of the region.

Third, people in East Asia do not have any common culture, civilization, and lingua franca. As Robert A. Scalapino mentioned, "Yet Asia is not a monolithic entity. On the contrary, scarcely any region of the world has as many cultural, political, and economic variations: variations existing within as well as among many Asian states" (Scalapino, 1994: 27). According to Samuel P. Huntington, the world will be shaped, in a large measure, by the interactions among eight major civilizations (Huntington, 1993: 25). If his opinion refers to civilizations around the Japan Sea, we have three major civilizations such as Slavic-Orthodox, Confucian, and Japanese civilization. It is interesting to distinguish Japanese civilization from a Confucian one. Furthermore, if we regard Russia as part of Western civilization, we have four major civilizations. Contrary to Huntington's arguments, people in the region are more interested in the "harmony of civilization" rather than the "clash of civilizations."

Finally, the reality of security issues in this region needs to be pointed out. During more than four decades of Cold War history, the Sea of Japan had been recognized as one of the frontlines of East-West confrontation. After the end of the Cold War, however, people still live with the legacy of a divided age. The Korean peninsula, for example, is still divided into two parts, and the Japanese government still continues to claim the so-called Northern Territory which now belongs to Russia.

In spite of the old Cold War legacy, the situation in this region is rapidly changing. We see more enthusiastic advocates of the Japan Sea Rim Economic Sphere than over the last twenty years. Many efforts toward the formation of this economic zone were recently initiated. In 1988, the Japan Sea Symposium, in which China and the Soviet Union participated, was held in Niigata, Japan. This symposium was seen as the first step toward regional integration. In terms of economic development, it is obvious that regional cooperation can benefit everyone involved, because six countries in the region have different advantages in their resources, capital, and technology. Russia, for instance, has abundant natural resources, including petroleum, minerals, forests, and fisheries. China and North Korea have strong labor forces. South Korea and Japan have rich capital and superior technology. Therefore, each country can be better off through the satisfaction of each other's economic needs.

Experiences of Building Functional Cooperation

Cooperation takes place not only in economic but also in other functional areas. Since 1970, Russo-Japan Mayor's Conferences have been held in this region every two years. Recently, more than thirty mayors from various cities in Far East Russia and the West coast of Japan got together to discuss regional economic cooperation, cultural exchange, tourism, environmental problems, and so forth. Niigata appears to be the most advanced city in terms of building ties to other parts of the region. The Niigata international airport provides regularly scheduled flights to Khabarovsk (since 1973), Harbin (since 1989), Seoul (since 1979), and Irkutsk (since 1991). Japan has only three regular flight routes connected to Russia. Two of them start from Niigata, and the other one is between Narita and Moscow. Since the "sister city" agreement was made between Otaru and Nakhodka in 1966, more than forty cities and prefectures in Japan have been involved in establishing this kind of relationships.

In the academic field, there exist more active exchange relationships. The Niigata University Society for Japan Sea Rim Studies was established in 1989 in order to organize academic activities in this region. The Society has promoted studies of socio-economic development of Far East Asia under interdisciplinary, international, and futuristic principles. It has about 150 members, including scholars, journalists, and businessmen. The membership is spread from Hokkaido to Kyushu. Roughly 150 speakers have made reports in regular meetings, and one third of them are non-Japanese speakers. Scholarly missions were sent to Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Harbin, Changchun, Shenyang, and Dalian in December 1990. They visited more than twenty institutes in these cities, including universities, colleges, academies of social and natural sciences, and research centers in order to propose international agreements concerning the promotion of academic exchanges. The agreement is called the Japan Sea Rim International Academic Exchange Declaration, which is expected to be an effective tool to develop an academic network among scholars in this region (Hidetoshi, 1993: 137-38).

The mass media, including newspapers, radio, and TV, have played a very important role in raising the consciousness of the regional community among diverse national groups. Frameworks for cooperation have been built between mass media in Niigata and those in Russia and China. NHK Niigata branch has already concluded exchange agreements with several TV stations in Far East Russia. TNN, TV Niigata Network, has developed a similar friendship agreement with Heilongjiang TV station (April 1986), Maritime Klai TV Radio Committee (August 1990), Khabarovsk Klai TV Radio Committee (September 1990), Sakhalin TV Radio Committee (July 1991), and Irkutsk TV Radio Committee (April 1991). They worked successfully together to make the program "Japan-China-Russia TV Summit" in September 1991. In February 1994, three Russian, three Chinese, and two Japanese editors of local newspapers in this region met at the International Press Symposium on the Japan Sea Rim in Niigata in order to promote grass-roots exchange programs and build cooperative networks along the borders of China, Russia, and Japan.

Future Prospects for Cooperation

Far East Asia will experience more interaction in the 21st century. First, local governments, small size enterprises, NGOs, and grass-roots people will continue to play a major role in building cooperative relations for promoting social and economic development in the region. Second, the need for functional cooperation can lead to building a common identity beyond different cultures and civilizations. Such words as "Japansearimese" may be able to generate the emergence of a new identity for people living in the peripheral part of their country. Third, an academic network for exchange and cooperation is needed in order to discuss problems in such areas as socio-economic development, the environment, natural resources, ethnic conflict, and human rights.

The establishment of so-called Baltic University in 1991 would be a useful example for East Asia. "The Baltic University Program" offers cooperative systems for more than eighty universities around the Baltic Sea. They have many courses concerning the environment, people's identity, culture, history, and human rights (Toshiyasu, 1994: 71-72). Fortunately, the academic network around the Japan Sea is now growing. It is possible to introduce "the Baltic method" to our region. We are now participating in the experiment of crossing beyond national borders toward the future.

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