

Does Identity Matter in Helping or Hindering Regional Cooperation in East Asia?

By Inoguchi Takashi

SOME recent book titles, *Who Are We?* (Huntington, 2003) and *At Home Abroad* (Nau, 1997), clearly show that identity is a focus in the global discussion on foreign policy direction. By identity I mean something with which one's heart is at ease and something for which one is ready to sacrifice a lot. In determining a country's foreign policy direction, identity often matters. In this article, I would like to discuss the identity and foreign policy of Japan, South Korea and China on the basis of an international survey which I executed in 18 countries of Asia and Europe in 2000 (Inoguchi, 2003). The survey contained the following questions.

(1) Many people think of themselves as being part of a particular nationality, for example French or American or Japanese or whatever. Do you think of yourself as _____ or as belonging to another nationality or do you not think of yourself in this way? (Circle one answer)

1. I think of myself as _____.
2. I think of myself as another nationality.
3. No, I do not think of myself in this way.

(2) Some people also think of themselves as being part of a larger group that includes people from other countries, for example, as European, Asian, Chinese, Islamic etc. Do you think of yourself in this way? (Circle one answer)

1. European
2. Asian
3. Chinese
4. Islamic
5. Other supranational identity (SPECIFY: _____)
6. No, I do not think of myself in this way.

Only two thirds of the Japanese respondents chose "Japanese" when

answering the first question. One third chose the response, "I don't care," "I have never thought about it." Ten percent of them chose postmodern kinds of identity like "my family," "my company" and "my senior club." For the second question, 26% of the Japanese respondents selected "Asian" as their answer. The rest answered "I don't know." Clearly, the Japanese national identity is not overwhelmingly strong. Furthermore, the Japanese regional identity is weak at best.

South Koreans showed a vehemently nationalistic response. Eighty-eight percent of them chose "Korean." For the second question, 88% of the South Korean respondents selected "Asian" as their answer. They are clearly vehement nationalists and regionalists at the same time.

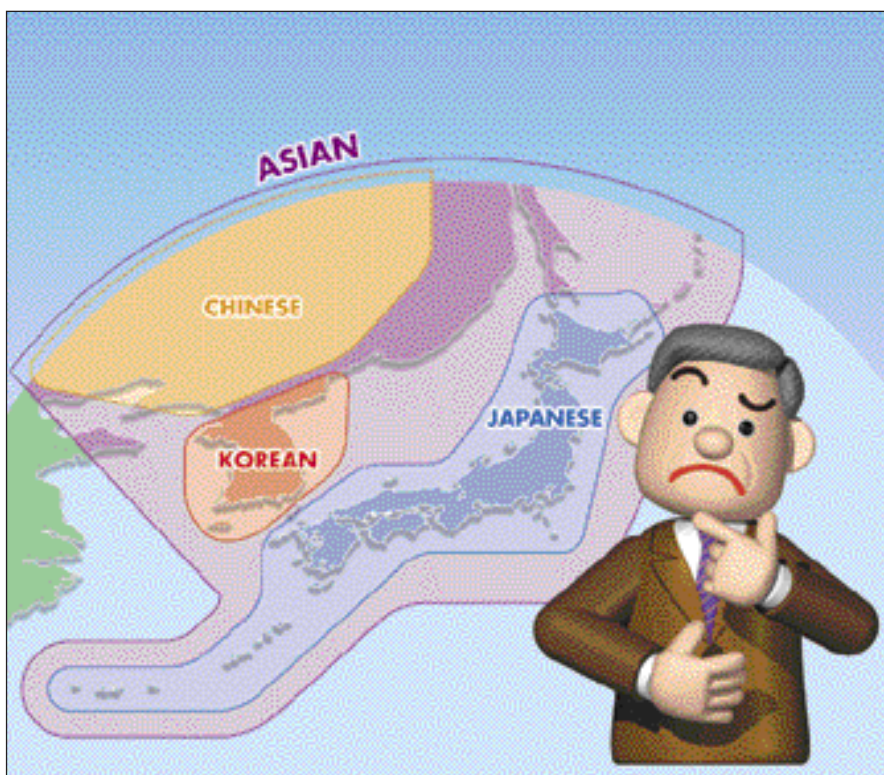
In strong contrast to the Japanese and South Koreans, Chinese are nationalist by some 80%. But unlike South Koreans they are not Asianist. For the second question, 30% answered "Chinese" and 30% selected "Asian." The Chinese cognitive map seems to be shaped by a single dimension: Chinese versus the rest. Asia does not sit well with the Chinese.

I would like to give a little historical background to the above. Traditionally the Japanese Asian identity has been weak. Japan is very much like Britain vis-à-vis their respective Continent. Keeping an arm's length is the best phrase to characterize their relationship with the Asian Continent. To them, the Continent is a potentially troublesome place; but you must keep engaged with them from some distance; you must discourage them from attempting awful things. Japanese are a maritime and globally trading nation linked strongly with all free traders. Many Japanese felt relieved to find that Huntington (1997) identified Japanese civilization as being quite different from Chinese civilization. Yet Japanese cannot help but be influ-

enced by developments on the Continent.

Sandwiched between two giants, China and Japan, Koreans seek to enhance their regional ties and framework. That is why South Korea has been vigorous and ingenious in forging or consolidating ties with such international organizations as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) plus Three and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Also South Koreans like to imagine a greater Korea like President Roh Moo Hyun's slogan, "*TongA jongsim kukka*," translated as "Korea is at the heart of East Asia" or even "Korea is the hub of East Asia." Their popular wild imagination sometimes leads them to envisage a Korean-led greater East Asian confederation: Deng Xiaoping's one country-two systems framework should be further stretched to one country-25 systems, like Sichuan, Zhejiang and Shandong for China; Japan should be encouraged to create five region-states, like Kansai, Kanto, Kyushu, Hokkaido and Shikoku, following Ohmae Ken-ichi (1995). On the other hand, Korea is bound to reunify itself, though in a nebulous future. The confederal capital should be located naturally at Seoul.

Chinese are strong cultural nationalists and tend to be fuzzy about their place in Asia regarding other Asians are some mix of semi-Chinese, quasi-Chinese and non-Chinese. With a good number of cultural Chinese capitalists dominating most of the Southeast Asian economies, the China-ASEAN free trade agreement merely validates their cultural theory of trade. A group of Chinese graduate students seeking a social science Ph.D. in universities in Japan has a journal named *Dongying Qiusuo*, meaning "Seeking to Study on Bubbles Floating on the Eastern Sea." *Dongying* is an archaic name for Japan in China. Are they trying to compensate their



complex feeling about studying in Japan when Japan should be merely bubbles on the sea?

How can one envisage East Asian economic integration moving forward when regional identity is at such a disparate mix? My quick answer to the question posed at the outset is: It does matter. But do not worry too much about such a disparate state of affairs hindering regional integration. Identity is merely one of the factors influencing economic cooperation and regional integration. Three major factors facilitating East Asian economic cooperation and regional integration are as follows: they are vitamin T, vitamin M and vitamin A. Vitamin T, trust, has been on the steady rise among the three, however from a much lower level than the French, Germans and Britons had among themselves at Maastricht. A possible indicator pointing to the growing trust between Japanese and Chinese is the fact that Japanese manufacturers do not use

insurance for their direct investment in China very much. Of the ¥215 billion of Japanese investment in China in 2002, merely 5%, or ¥11 million was insured. (Konno, 2003) Vitamin M, money, has been coming back to Asia from the nadir of the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998. Most importantly, "Japan is Back." The exceedingly slow Japanese decision is lamented by Henry Kissinger (2001) who observed in his latest book that it takes normally at least 15 years for Japanese to make a decision, like from Matthew Perry's visit in 1853 to the Meiji Restoration of 1868, from the convincing defeat in World War II in 1945 to the convincing start of the announcement of the pro-alliance and economic prosperity policy line in 1960, and from the collapse of the bubble economy in 1991 to an eventual recovery that began to emerge in 2003. Japan has started to rise at long last. And vitamin A, America. American activism, under such names as globalism, interna-

tionalism, multilateralism, unilateralism, militarism, Bushism, hegemonism or imperialism, will continue to help the East Asians to forge their own identity in a form not dissonant with American activism. **JS**

(To be continued)

Note: The article is based on my presentation at the Wilton Park Conference, Gotemba, Shizuoka, Japan, Sept.28-Oct.1, 2003.

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