

Envisioning an East Asian Community

By Inoguchi Takashi

AS an academic writer on East Asia for 40 years, I can recall how history pushes itself from one stage to another without really enabling people to understand which stage they are at and which stage they are about to enter.

It is only when concerted efforts like this project on community building in East Asia are held one after another that people start to feel something is changing in a qualitatively different fashion from the past.

Rabindranath Tagore expressed a century ago that after all freedom is the basis of strength whether it is about individuals, countries or regional communities. In *Gitanjali*, he expresses himself as follows:

*Where the mind is without fear and the
head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;*

.....
.....

*Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action—
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father,
let my country awake.*

At the time of Tagore, East Asia, or Asia in general, was placed in darkness from Tagore's point of view. Two predominant images of Asia were so pervasive throughout the world, and not just in the West. They are the images of stagnant Asia and autocratic Asia.

Stagnant Asia was propounded by many pundits, most famously by Marx and Wittfogel. Autocratic Asia was propounded by many philosophers, most famously by Montaigne and Hegel. Stagnant Asia and autocratic Asia went hand in hand in the minds of many persons, not just among pundits and philosophers. These two Asias were effectively broken down one by one on the course of history. Three developments are most noteworthy in bringing about the reorientation of Asia.

The first is the decreasing importance

of major state wars often associated with colonialism and imperialism. World War II defeated and critically weakened such forces. In the past quarter of the last century, the frequency of major wars has dramatically decreased. Also strategic nuclear war potentials had been steadily reduced by the end of the Cold War.

The second is the resilient momentum for economic development. *The Economist* magazine famously heralded the advent of prosperous Asia in its article, "Consider Japan," in 1960. Its message was that stagnant Asia awakened. In the third quarter of the last century, dynamic Asia was born, liberating itself from stagnant Asia. Newly industrializing Asia sprang up and spearheaded regional dynamism. In the last quarter of the last century, China joined the regional leap for economic development.

The third is the robust force of democratization. The *Third Wave* of democratization, as so called, had a dramatic impact in Asia as well in the last quarter of the last century. One by one autocratic Asia has been undermined by democratic Asia. It looks as if the process knew no bounds. The latest events in South Korea, Taiwan and elsewhere attest this. *The Economist* magazine called this the second miracle of Asia, following the economic one.

Instead of zero growth as perpetuated by Marx and Wittfogel, Asia thrives by leaps and bounds. Instead of freedom for one person, as characterized by Montaigne and Hegel, Asia has exemplified increasingly robust democracy.

So far the developmental and democratizing trends of Asia have been noted to break out from stagnant Asia and autocratic Asia. Once a developmentally and democratically thriving Asia has come about, the next trend to come along will be regionalizing Asia. Instead of a stagnant and autocratic Asia sitting separately among its sub-units and interacting more frequently between Asian

sub-units and their former suzerains, Asian countries are now socializing among themselves as well. A glance at the frequency and density of political leaders' meeting over the last decade attests to this. Another glance at the volume of transactions among Asia, especially East and Southeast Asia, in terms of trade flows, direct investment, and capital flows is sufficient to convince one of a newly regionalizing Asia. An increasingly prosperous, democratizing and interacting Asia is emerging.

Out of the increasingly dense interactions among Asian sub-units emerges an ideationalizing Asia – Asia, which is to pride itself on being the power of ideas. Instead of bemoaning the power of power, a new Asia aims at excelling itself as an ocean of ideas. Instead of following the past path of some major powers, a new Asia aims at aspiring to become the power of ideas.

In this context, I may be allowed to touch briefly on my own involvement in such community-building efforts. On June 5, 2004, a number of academics assembled at Seoul National University to launch what is to be called the Asian Consortium for Political Research (ACPR). The idea of the ACPR emerged in the context of the above: i.e., we aim at becoming the power of ideas on the basis of freedom.

The ACPR aims above all at fostering scholarly interactions among Asian political scientists. It aims at creating the best forum for Asian political scientists. It is more ambitious than creating an excellent scholarly forum for Asian political scientists. It aims at helping Asian political scientists to come up with useful ideas to materialize good governance in this rapidly developing region, thus helping the peoples and governments to construct a new Asia as a region of peace, prosperity and creativity. One cannot overemphasize the painful adjustments that one has to make in an era of epochal changes.

Surely one can be proud of Asian dynamism. But dynamism also means a large degree of uncertainty intermittently lurking on the horizon. One needs to see that such change will neither poison developmental momentum nor jeopardize a democratizing trend. All this strengthens our belief that the ACPR should avail itself for the admirable task of addressing the challenges of the day.

In my own address to the constitutional meeting of the ACPR, I said:

A new Asia is being created. Surely it cannot be created *de novo*. But it can avoid mistakes committed in the past. The ACPR should become a driving force of fostering dense interactions among scholars who, by professional socialization processes, believe in the power of ideas rather than power of power. A new Asia, peaceful, prosperous and creative, is to be spearheaded by the millions of parallel efforts undertaken by the peoples and governments of Asia. We are witnessing the historic moment of the birth of a new entity, called the Asian Consortium for Political Research. We firmly believe in its future. From now on we will join our forces to enable the ACPR to achieve its missions.

Through my own involvement in the launch of the ACPR, which has just started, I have realized that small ideas can become reality through action. From Universiti Sains Malaysia to the University of Hong Kong, from the University of Gadjah Mada to the University of Tokyo, from Chulalongkorn University to Academia Sinica, from Fudan University to the University of the Philippines, from the National University of Singapore to Huazhong Shifan University, from Seoul National University to Kobe University, from Peking University to Yonsei University, from Korea University to Keio University – academics have joined forces to build an academic community that functions on a regional scale.

We have adopted the interim Constitution. We have started to build



Photo: Inoguchi Takashi

The author at an academic symposium

a community of scholars on a regional scale that functions with three principles upheld:

- Decentralization
- Transparency
- Democracy

The kinds of tasks we have started to carry out include: Annual joint workshops; a summer school; special conferences; a youth scholar conference; a website; newsletters; data archives; working papers; an East Asia book series and a journal.

We have already embarked on all this. We are all already on board. We are about to complete the stage of conceptualization. We are now jointly entering the stage of operationalization.

Through these and other kinds of tasks, we are building a community in East Asia in a tangible fashion. Everyone is welcomed as long as the Constitution and the organizing norms and principles are adhered to and as long as membership fees are paid.

I have touched on the ACPR with the spirit of conveying my belief shared by

all of you present here that small ideas make reality through action. Even academics who are sometimes ridiculed as a NATO type, meaning someone who has a penchant for no action, talks only, has taken steps toward community building.

I am convinced that since academics take action, virtually everyone, can take similar action toward building an East Asian community with little difficulties. Your efforts, as well as my efforts, may look small and marginal at the beginning. But may I remind you that virtually millions of efforts undertaken by people and governments, business persons and journalists, educators and engineers are bound to create reality. Let us all join our forces to move one step further toward an East Asian community. **JS**

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