

From Going Beyond the “Nation-State” to the Construction of the “East Asia Community”? Myths About “East Asia New Regionalism”

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With the deepening of globalization, geographically speaking, East Asian countries have proceeded from their respective realist positions and tried to promote the successful practice of economic cooperation between countries after the Cold War into a discussion of new regionalism in East Asia and Asia-Pacificism. Although the prototype of the “East Asia Community” led by Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) gradually emerged, the successful practice of the East Asia Summit proved that the low-binding regional integration model led by ASEAN has a high probability of becoming a classic sample of the “East Asia Community”. It not only maintains regional stability, promotes regional cooperation, shapes regional norms, but also builds a collective identity within the region. However, in today’s world, isolationism which takes the supremacy of national interests as the supremacy has risen. It is difficult to internalize the value identity into a super-national model that breaks through the principles of realism, breakthroughs in interests, and the power framework. The thorny issues pose various challenges to the nation-states in the region trying to integrate into regional integration. The openness of East Asian regionalism has led to the persistent illness of its generalization. In the context of insufficient political mutual trust among regional countries, intensified competition among major powers, and continued weakening of ASEAN leadership, it is often prone to controversy and doubt when proposing new cooperation initiatives or ideas. The idea of the “East Asia Community” that once guided East Asian cooperation and was temporarily ignored now is still the most realistic choice. Although the theoretical construction and practical roads of East Asian regionalism are full of thorns, difficulties coexist with opportunities. With the extensive participation of countries in the region, the optimization and reconstruction of the East Asian cooperation model will be worth looking forward to.

Keywords: nation-state dilemma pattern, East Asia Community, regionalism

Like globalism, regionalism is a normative concept that refers to shared values, norms, recognition, and aspirations. It is a government-led cooperation project that stems from intergovernmental dialogue and consistency and is a concept of cooperation among governments in the region. Regionalism is constructing a new “regional identity”, in other words, each country has acquired a new collective identity within the region, but it does not mean to replace or weaken other identities. Regionalism is a politics that is greater than that of

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nation-states, and is more likely to adapt to the politics of a globalized economy. Then, the more globalized, the more likely regionalism will develop (Pang, 2001, p. 30).

In traditional international relations, the study of new regionalism is often marginalized, and “national centralism” has long dominated. As many scholars have said, the new regionalism in East Asia is still an imaginary community under construction, and it is easily affected by the outside world. Chinese scholar Qin Yaqing (2016, pp. 1-2) sharply pointed out that there have been three counter-attacks or “resurgences” in the field of international relations thought, namely “resurgence of power politics, resurgence of national centralism, and resurgence of nationalism”. East Asia has also become more regionalized in the last 30 years but has no regionalism. There are many regional governance mechanisms in the East Asia region, such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), East Asia Summit, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN-China-Japan-Korea “10 + 3” Summit, “10 + 1” Summit, China-Japan-ROK Summit, etc., forming a situation of “institutional excess”; these institutional competition carried out by the regional mechanisms has prevented the development of “a strong and unified institutional framework” in East Asia, which has led to a long-term difficulty in achieving substantial progress in East Asian economic regionalism, so it is questioned as “end”.

About the Proposal and Practice of Several Versions of “East Asia New Regionalism”

Geographically, East Asia has never established a highly institutional community due to its historical complexity. In the historical process of independent statehood, all countries have centered on their own to construct a historical writing paradigm and a history of diplomatic exchange path. In order to maintain the surrounding security environment, seek the asylum of the big powers, and combine the strong and powerful ways to resist the pressure of the third party, there have been some vertical and horizontal thoughts and there are also exclusive thoughts, and harmony thoughts. So far, there are mainly three types of regionalism in competition and expression in East Asia: Chinese regionalism, Japanese regionalism, and ASEAN’s regionalism.

The East Asia New Regionalism of Japan originated from Japan’s “Asianism” theory in the early days. However, this design is not from the original intention. The Japanese have a strong sense of “Departure from Asia for Europe”. In 2002, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi proposed the concept of “East Asian Community”. Since then, several Japanese Prime Ministers, such as Shinzo Abe, Taro Aso, Yukio Hatoyama, and Naoto Kan have repeatedly mentioned the “East Asian Community” in their inaugural speeches or policy speeches. The “versions” all condensed the Japanese elite’s typical vision of East Asia’s international order in the future. The “East Asian Community Concept” proposed by Japanese leaders aims to achieve a higher degree of cooperation and common prosperity in the East Asian world and promote Japan’s “third founding of the country”. Regarding the East Asia Community, at the series of Leaders’ Meetings on East Asian cooperation held in 2009, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama vigorously promoted the ideas of “Asia-Pacific Community” and “East Asia Community” respectively. Rudd’s pan-Asian concept is even more advanced, and he hopes to build an “Asia-Pacific community” like the EU by 2020 to coordinate various issues, such as economics, security, and politics. The community can include 10 ASEAN countries, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, India, New Zealand, and open the door for the United States to join. Japan believes that the East Asian Community includes Japan, China, Republic of Korea, the 10 ASEAN countries, India, Australia, and New Zealand. According to Okada,

the former foreign minister of Japan, members of the “East Asian Community” should also include India and the United States, but next day the Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirano said that he had not heard from Okada about whether to exclude the United States, which denied Okada’s claim is on behalf of the government’s policy. Thus Japan’s East Asian regionalism implies a tangled mentality. Although for different purposes, a thinking of East Asian order has been formed at the academic and political level in Japan, and Japan has also “returned to Asia” in practical actions, but in the depth of the ideological awareness of neighboring East Asian countries, Japan is still an alternative Asian country.

The East Asia New Regionalism with Chinese style is not directly expressed. It is jointly promoted in the form of academia, the folk activists, and supplemented by the government. Its embryonic form began from Northeast Asia cooperation and then integrated into the path of the China ASEAN 10 + 1 mechanism. The Chinese version pays more attention to considering the cost of policy coordination and prefers to choose a moderate scale and neighboring geographical countries. “10 + 1” and “10 + 3” mechanism include the China-Japan-Republic of Korea (ROK) Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to a certain extent, which has become an operable path for China’s preferred regionalist construction, and also includes the Lancang-Mekong cooperation mechanism adhering to the vision of “One River, One Destiny”. The East Asia new regionalism with Chinese style is more manifested in non-interference, inclusiveness of multilateralism, and win-win cooperation. It does not advocate the establishment of a supranational political community, like the European Union. China’s construction about concept of regionalism in East Asia focuses on cooperation in thoughts and does not care about integration in the physical sense. The regional integration of China is considered in the framework of the overall global view. Instead of proposing a cooperative mechanism or initiative, it follows the developing trend of international affairs and is not limited to official international organizations. It is mainly promoted by non-profit international organizations. Frame was proposed first, and then described in details which were supplemented by the mechanism of cultural exchange and dialogue, from the regional cooperation in Northeast Asia, the Boao Forum for Asia to the Dialogue of Asian Civilizations. The idealistic paradigm of regionalism in China is not limited to a region and a binding mechanism of cooperation, but is placed in a broader perspective to explore the flexible cooperation mechanism. Its realization path is considered comprehensively, interlocking the community of destiny bilaterally with the country, to the community of destiny within the region, ultimately constitutes the community of human destiny. In 2012, China clearly put forward the opinion “to advocate the consciousness of the community of human destiny and to take into account the legitimate concerns of other countries when pursuing the interests of the country”, which marks the proposition of the global value of the community of human destiny. Because the East Asia New Regionalism with Chinese style advocates the interdependent view of international power, common interests, sustainable development and global governance, which has laid a constructive foundation for building a “community of human destiny”. China’s original intention to explore the new East Asian regionalism model was to obtain more opportunities for peaceful development from global governance. Therefore, since 2014, China’s nationalism, regionalism, and globalism have been mutually supporting and cooperating with each other, adhering to the global view of mutual consultation, joint construction and sharing, actively participating in the reform and construction of the global governance system, and firmly maintaining the purpose and principles of the UN Charter are the core of the international order and international system, promote the democratization of international relations, support the United Nations to play an active role, support the representation and voice of developing countries, participate constructively in global affairs at international or regional level. The process

of solving hotspot issues actively responds to various global challenges and maintains international and regional peace and stability.

ASEAN led new regionalism in East Asia began with the ASEAN 10 + 3 cooperation mechanism established in December 1997. As Zheng Yongnian (2009) said, the East Asia Community is an economic community whose core is the free trade mechanism and economic regionalism. Most countries in the East Asian region pursue an open regionalist line that is not exclusive and highly inclusive, which has laid the foundation for the emergence of the East Asia Summit. The mechanism design of the East Asia Summit adopts the methods of joint review, exchange of views, and formation of consensus. Its presidential statement is not binding as an informal agreement. This non-binding system setting model is deeply rooted in geopolitics and economics. At a high level, great powers compete for the history and reality of ASEAN. ASEAN put forward and promoted the concept of "East Asia regionalism" in a transitional manner, that is to say, the various versions of East Asian economic cooperation proposed by Japan-Malaysia became a reality in the early 1990s, and ASEAN was eager to strengthen its cooperation and relations with "Northeast Asian" countries, take the initiative to regard themselves as part of "East Asia", instead of highlighting the integrity of Southeast Asia as before. As early as 1990, Mahathir put forward the idea of building an "East Asian Economic Group (EAEG)", which opened the forefront of a new concept of cooperation in East Asia. In 1992, Mahathir also proposed the idea of establishing an "East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC)" including ASEAN, China, Japan, and Republic of Korea, laying out the original outline of today's East Asia Summit. The "10 + 3" Conference in Manila in 1999 was an important milestone. The conference issued a "Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation". As the concept of "East Asia" of economic and political significance, it was first described in particular. The 10 + 3 Conference was more called "ASEAN + 3" by Southeast Asian countries. In 2000, Mahathir formally proposed the concept of the East Asia Summit and tried to build an East Asia Community based on "10 + 3". In 2005, ASEAN led the convening of the first East Asia Summit. During the previous summits, the foreign ministers and senior officials met to review the summit cooperation and exchange views on the future development direction. The summit identified cooperation in the key areas of energy and environment, education, finance, public health, disaster management as well as ASEAN connectivity, and initially formed a regular meeting mechanism for ministers of economy, trade, energy, environment, and education. ASEAN has created a mode of which "Big powers are leveraged by small states to focus on the issues concerned by these small states" and discusses regional security issues in order to balance strategies among the major powers, such as the United States, Japan, and China. The ASEAN version of East Asian regionalism exhibits distinctive diversity and diversification. This is not a coincidence. The design concept of this cooperative mechanism is derived from the many flexible principles of the original intra-ASEAN cooperation. During the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1999, ASEAN Secretary-General Rodolfo C. Severino (1999) once expressed his opinion with a speech in Australia, he said:

ASEAN's founders in 1967 intended ASEAN to be an association of all the states of Southeast Asia cooperating voluntarily for the common good, with peace and economic, social and cultural development its primary purposes. ASEAN is not and was not meant to be a supranational entity acting independently of its members. It has no regional parliament or council of ministers with law-making powers, no power of enforcement, no judicial system. (pp. 83-89)

Due to its diversity and complexity, within the ASEAN organization, there are far more informal understandings and voluntary agreements than formal laws that are strongly binding. Although on December 31, 2015, the ASEAN Community, which includes the three pillars of the ASEAN Economic Community, the

ASEAN Political Security Community, and the ASEAN Social and Cultural Community were officially established, the ASEAN Community is still far from the same vision, the same identity and the goal of a community difference. The construction levels of the three pillars of the ASEAN Community are also uneven. In addition to the rapid construction of the economic community, the construction of the other two political communities and social and cultural communities has been slow down. What's more, East Asia Summit led by ASEAN is a strategic dialogue forum composed of countries with different systems, different cultural backgrounds, and different levels of economic development. Relying on this dialogue platform, the so-called East Asia Community has been trying to construct operability goals. The geographic attributes of the East Asia Community will no longer be important, the coordination of interests among different member states will face greater challenges, the specific construction model and coordination mechanism of the Community will be subjected to more complicated tests.

However, the initial Japan-China-ROK Trilateral Summit all supported East Asian regionalism which ASEAN led and all supported multilateralism and a flexible negotiation structure. This also coincided with the psychological needs of ASEAN countries to balance the interests of major powers. The 10 + 6 mechanism evolved into the “10 + 8” mechanism in 2011¹. The East Asia Summit is committed to creating an open, inclusive, transparent, and forward-looking forum. ASEAN will play a leading role in the East Asia Summit and East Asia cooperation process. In the 14 years since the establishment of the East Asia Summit, it has adhered to the nature of a strategic forum led by the annual meeting mechanism of leaders, adhered to ASEAN as the leading, “10 + 1” and “10 + 3” as the main channels of cooperation. There are two possibilities for the future members of the East Asia Community, one is limited to the 10 + 3 mechanism, and the other is to continue to generalize, and has to take the second best to become the vision of an expanded Asia-Pacific community. This community is a community of destiny, not a simple economic integration organization advocates inclusiveness and pluralism instead of pursuing social and cultural identity. Political integration is even more impossible to talk about. In the era of the interconnection of all things and the outbreak of the virtual economy, as a flexible strategic dialogue mechanism, the East Asia Summit will become a testing platform to realize the democratization of international relations and win-win cooperation. From the perspective of reality and future development trends, whether it is East Asia new regionalism led by Japanese, Chinese, or ASEAN, in the development process of East Asian regionalism, in addition to the state or the central government, there are at least three types of behaviors subjects: local governments, enterprises and the track II², and these three categories are the real driving forces behind the development of regionalism. Among them, the integration of enterprises as market players is no small matter. Local governments are political actors with a pivotal position, promoting platforms for political, economic, and cultural exchanges. Multinational companies can take advantage of the facilitation and liberalization of investment and trade agreements to bring regional economic

¹ The 10 + 8 mechanism identified by ASEAN appears to China to be a 13 + 5 mechanism. China hopes that the East Asia Summit will be limited to the East Asian countries in the geographical sense, covering the three countries of Northeast Asia, China, Japan and South Korea and the 10 ASEAN countries. It also includes five observers, namely five Countries outside the territory (the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, and India), as well as potential member countries Mongolia, East Timor and potential observers, namely Pakistan and the European Union.

² The term “track II” was coined by Joseph Montville, who distinguished traditional diplomatic activities (track I diplomacy) from “unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversarial groups or nations with the goals of developing strategies, influencing public opinions and organizing human and material resources in ways that might help resolve the conflict”. “Track II” in East Asia is a special kind of unofficial diplomacy through the exchange of scholars and retired officials. It can play a role that is difficult for official channels.

ties closer. The ongoing Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is an economic integration mechanism to establish the world's largest unified market.

The Realistic Dilemma and Causes of Different Models of East Asia Regionalism

Regionalism is actually a complex process of general compromise between various national interests that are in mutual demand but conflict is everywhere. Compromise means concession, which represents cooperation, success, and progress. Conversely, without compromise, there may be suspicion, conflict, failure, and regression. On the one hand, regionalism shapes regional identity. Regional identity is an important measure of the level of regionalism. The close exchanges and active policy coordination of various countries in the economy, politics, culture, and other fields have accelerated the integration between countries and shaped the country. The recognition of the region and the overall sense of the region, on the other hand, regional identity directly affects the thinking orientation, self-positioning, policy choices, and benefit distribution of the countries in the region, as well as the development level and trend of regionalism.

The East Asia New Regionalism with Japanese style has developed from "10 + 6" to "10 + 8", is largely a product of Japan's own regionalist logic. Before participating in the Fifth East Asia Summit, Japan talked about how Japan can play the role of "experienced leader" in Asia, and at the same time strive to bring together countries outside the East Asian region to falsify the "10 + 3" mechanism and the intention to lead the East Asia Summit. From the perspective of historical and practical factors, unilateral domination by Japan is unlikely, although Hatoyama has made it clear that China, Japan, and Republic of Korea are the core of the "East Asian Community", because the Japanese government's attitude towards historical issues is not frank, and it cannot dispel the concerns of neighboring neighbors. The new regionalism of East Asia advocated by China only includes 10 + 3. It should not question ideological differences and should respect the subjectivity of each country. The Chinese version of the East Asia Community with Common Destiny concept is also not very restrictive. It is more like the "imaginary community" written by Anderson. And often enlarge or dwarf the image of neighboring countries as the "other" to stimulate their own growth and enhance self-identity. The advantage of a nation-state is that it has strong internal cohesion under the instigation of blood thicker than water. However, its problem lies precisely in this exclusive, absolute internal and external distinction. Regionalism emphasizes the internal and external identity, which is a little out of place with the original intention of nationalism. The East Asia New Regionalism with ASEAN style is the 10 + 3 framework of ASEAN and the practice of the East Asia Summit. Not only does it reveal that the trend of regional integration is unstoppable, but ASEAN does not want to be a passive responder to regionalism and is eager to play a leading role. ASEAN is a place where multiple civilizations converge and merge, and has the natural advantage of leading the "East Asia Community". The ASEAN Community, which is arranged on the basis of the rotating presidency, is a construction model led by economy, security and social culture. At the end of 2015, the 10 ASEAN countries established the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and established a single market for free circulation of goods, services, investment, and labor in the ASEAN region. ASEAN is now the regional organization with the largest number of free trade agreements. Against the backdrop of anti-globalization and trade protectionism trends in the world, ASEAN continues to pursue an open regional policy. Based on a variety of factors, on the issue of who will dominate, regional powers invariably assume that the East Asia Summit should be dominated by ASEAN and that they need to contribute for the concept of the East Asia Community according to the model of ASEAN + 3, ASEAN + 6, or ASEAN + 8.

This new East Asian regionalism still suffers from different predicament at the level of multiple civilization reconstruction, “Asian Identity”, uncertainty caused by internal and external shocks, and economic integration. There are five reasons below:

First, the “Asian Identity” with a sense of regional identity shows the characteristics of conflict and adjustment in the process of integrating different civilizations and cultures. International organizations with strong vitality are often the result of the fusion of different civilizations or the integration of different cultures. “Asian Identity” refers to a concept of a regional community that has gradually formed and evolved in the history of Asia. It includes the concept of geographical common location, cultural common value, economic coexistence, common prosperity, political Destiny and communion (Geng, 2019, pp. 60-78). Is the reshaping of “Asian Identity” taking the ASEAN path, the Japanese path or the Chinese path? The “Asian Identity” in the future will be a complex of contradictions and unity, which has both regional and national states. All countries have a central-marginal consciousness based on self-identity, and the East Asia Community with modern East Asian regionalism, regional history and global history concepts constantly encounters impacts from territory, national identity and national interests in the modern international order. Historical official ideologies of China, Korea, Vietnam, and other dynasties have used the Huayi³ concept as a source of thought to measure civilization and backwardness, and thus refined the universal value standard, which has influenced Asian people today.

Second, Asia has been and will always be a multivariate and diverse Asia. New regionalism does not advocate the formation of a “single Asia” in the future, and the future of the Asian Community does not mean the birth of a “collective actor”. There are different forms of civilization within the region constructed by the East Asia Community. The tolerance and exchange between civilizations are not insurmountable. The cultural appearance under civilizations cannot destroy the individuality of the country. On the contrary, it will highlight the diversity and vitality between national cultures and civilization identity. It does not mean existence beyond national interests. The idea of imagining a single regional entity or “regional state” is very illusory and cannot be accommodated by the new regionalist theory. Indeed, the Asian Identity cannot but pursue the internal coherence or “cohesion” of Asia as a region. This is the unique identity that distinguishes it from the “others” or other regions, but this does not mean that the future will move towards a single sovereignty and common Constitutional is similar to the “sovereign Asia” of sovereign countries today. Although the “Asian Identity” is of cultural significance, it does not constitute any ideal “cultural type”, but profoundly reflects the changes and interactions of the political and economic structural power of this particular region. The reason why the East Asian world could not form a unified imperial order in history is also related to the coexistence of various forms of civilization in East Asia. The mainstream of China and Republic of Korea is the mainland farming civilization, which pursues Confucian culture and Mahayana Buddhism; Mongolia and the Mongolian-Tibetan-Hui region of China are the nomadic civilizations of Inner Asia, and they believe in Islam and Lamaism; while the island country, Japan, which has its own Shintoism is closer to the marine civilization in western countries. Southeast Asia is the place where Indian civilization, Islamic civilization collides and intersects with Chinese civilization and Western civilization. Former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew did not think that geographically speaking Southeast Asia is subordinate to East Asia. He once said,

³ Huayi is the standard for judging civilization in ancient China, and it strongly embodies the self-centered world view.

But Asian societies are unlike Western ones. The fundamental difference between Western concepts of society and government and East Asian concepts? when I say East Asians, I mean Korea, Japan, China, Vietnam, as distinct from Southeast Asia, which is a mix between the Sinic and the Indian. (Zakaria, 1994, p. 113)

Third, internal and external shocks also bring uncertainty to the new regionalism in East Asia. Since East Asia is a region where national nationalism is strong, this kind of nationalism is not only outdated in East Asia, but still has basic value. This is very different from the situation in Europe, so East Asia is still in the era of nationalism. The power of national nationalism has limited regionalism in a sense. The trust deficit caused by differences in values and political systems may exist for a period of time (Pang, 2000). In the eyes of small regional powers, regionalism can serve as a joint initiative of small powers to improve regional well-being, because it can resist the risks of globalization. Well, in the strategic vision of big powers, the greatest value of regionalism may be that it can be a useful tool for competition among big powers, because the larger the scale of regional cooperation is, the higher the economic profit becomes, the stronger the practicality, adaptability and universality of its rules will be (Han, 2015, p. 77). For various reasons, the narrow stances, complicated historical disputes, nationalism and territorial disputes of Southeast Asian countries are accustomed to recognizing “China’s development” with a solidified mind of concern. Most countries in East Asia still fully rely on the United States in terms of market, capital, technology, and security (military presence). From Obama’s “Return to the Asia-Pacific Region” to Trump’s Indo-Pacific strategy, the United States is not willing to see East Asia moving towards a monolithic community in the political, economic, and cultural fields.

Fourth, the process of East Asian economic integration is affected by various factors. The foundation of East Asian regionalism lies in regional economic integration. Singaporean scholar Zheng Yongnian believes that in East Asian countries economic integration⁴ in fact is conducive to increasing the viscosity of division and collaboration among countries in the region. The China-Japan-ROK FTA was proposed in 2002 and on December 24, 2019, the three countries released the Trilateral Cooperation Vision for the next decade and the Trilateral + X Cooperation Early Harvest Projects, vowing to enhance their cooperation in multiple areas. The three countries promise they will speed up the negotiations on the Trilateral Free Trade Agreement, aiming to realize a comprehensive, high-quality and mutually beneficial Trilateral Free Trade Agreement with its own value, according to the statement. Besides, China has a positive and open attitude towards Comprehensive Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) which Japan and Republic of Korea have joined. In recent years, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP), a regional economic integration cooperation mechanism based on East Asian regionalism, is a cooperative mechanism for regional economic integration. The region’s participation in the largest number of members and the largest trade agreement negotiations is the integration of the existing mature free trade zone, showing strong tolerance, striving to break through the geographical scope of East Asia, and even inviting countries such as India to join. The goal of RCEP is to eliminate internal trade barriers, create and improve a free investment environment, expand service trade, and will also involve many fields, such as intellectual property protection and competition policy. The degree of liberalization will be higher than the ASEAN and these six countries have reached trade agreement. RCEP has about half of the world’s total population, and its GDP accounts for one-third of the world’s annual GDP. If India joins in, the tension of the Indian civilization and the vague “Act East Policy” will face unacceptable situation. At the end of the RCEP negotiations, India was finally opted out because of fear of

⁴ As Zheng Yongnian said, Asian economic integration is more focused on the fact level rather than the institutional level.

competition, and the free trade agreement that broke through the geographical scope of East Asia was temporarily resisted. In a sense, the expansion of regionalism in East Asia cannot use economic integration to melt interregional cultural and political differences.

Fifth, there are many loopholes in the existing multilateral cooperation mechanism in East Asia, and they are also faced with the situation of Feudal lords vying for the throne. The ministerial cooperation mechanism under the framework of the 10 + 3 mechanism in East Asia is ultimately led by regional countries. In essence, it is still a simple expansion of the path of national centralism. The social nature of the cooperation issue has not changed the inherent dynamic pattern of regionalism driven by the government. The social forces of regionalism have not been effectively mobilized within the framework of the ministerial cooperation mechanism.

Contribution of the China Cooperation Initiative to the East Asia New Regionalism

Whether it is realism, liberalism, or constructivism, international relations theory has its own limitations. China has designed and proposed the “Belt and Road” initiative. This is an imagination of the East Asia Community and the community of human destiny. It contains spiritual connotations, such as peace, openness, tolerance, and mutual recognition. It is also China’s rational thinking about how humanity will develop in the future. In view of China’s growing comprehensive strength, the view of justice and benefit promoted by China will determine the bond of the new regionalism in East Asia.

Chinese scholar Geng Xiefeng pointed out clearly that the Chinese government’s “Belt and Road” initiative has innovated the concept of “interconnection” proposed by ASEAN, making it a “synonym” for regional cooperation in Asia. Therefore, “interconnection as a summary of regional cooperation experience in Asia and refining should become the core concept of the Asian regional cooperation theory. In the new stage of globalization, China’s “Belt and Road” initiative, to a large extent, has the color of new regionalism, and its interconnected thinking may be a new kind of catalyst for the revival of regionalism. He further pointed out that although interconnection is not the first concept proposed by China, China has successfully interpreted it as the “five links” (policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds) of the “Belt and Road” initiative, and has grasped the crucial point of the current construction of the Asian regional community (Geng, 2018, p. 31).

The “Belt and Road” Initiative launched by China is to integrate the ubiquitous value identity of the region into the historical and cultural factors of the countries along the route, and use it as a conceptual resource that transcends the country and thus maintains the “Community of Shared Future for Mankind”. The formation of China itself is a realistic course of continuous integration into the surroundings and the return from the ideal “Tian-Xia doctrine⁵” center to the coexistence of “all nations”. The East Asian countries represented by China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam emerged from the world doctrine complex, dismantled the realist “fence” that embraced national interests, embraced the ubiquitous free and competitive market subjects, and undoubtedly will be the only way to construct the “East Asia Community”. In the process of establishing this “building”, economic support, political support, security support, and popular support are very important.

⁵ Tian-Xia doctrine here refers to the existence of the tributary system of East Asia in history.

Conclusion

In the current world which is mixed with proposals against globalization and the resurgence of nationalism, there is neither clear common power structure nor clear common conceptual system in East Asia, but regionalism has always achieved hard-earned and tortuous development in a group of low institutionalization. ASEAN, the earliest designer of East Asia New Regionalism, civil society forces within East Asian countries, and regional international organizations continue to promote, strengthen autonomy, and establish a neutral image that is not influenced and constrained by the powers outside the region.

The sense of regional identity spawned by the “Asian Identity” is more vague and uncertain. Regardless of the theoretical position, if we understand the new “Asian Identity”, it is necessary to consider the “regional identity” consciousness contained in it, and at the same time fully understand the new concept of “regional community construction”. Regional Identity is a prerequisite, and there is no “Asian Identity” without Asian identity. But at the same time, with the “Asian Identity”, people can continue to produce new concepts, the essence of which is to carry out “regional community building” and create closer cooperation between relevant countries, people, institutions, and other entities in a region. The ultimate goal of the relationship is to strengthen regional economic, political, and social coherence, but such coherence cannot completely obliterate conflicts and adjustments at the national interest level, and ultimately becomes a bridge connecting nationalism and globalism.

With regard to the choice of regionalism and nationalism, there is no ready-made model to follow. Although the institutional arrangements after Brexit are not clear, and the practice of EU integration is far from over, this tangled tension needs to be observed. Non-alignment, the establishment of a unified market and investment system through economic networks and value chains, and a rule-based relationship model will reshape the regional order, and the “East Asian” fate community will be re-mentioned on the agenda. Consultation, fairness, and reciprocity will be the design principle of this institutional framework. National interests and community interests should be balanced with each other. Economic, political, diplomatic, and cultural interests should be balanced.

In today’s world where multi-polarization continues to develop, globalization has undergone complex evolution, and populism has encountered resistance, the trend of East Asian regionalism based on the value of the community of destiny will not retreat with high probability. Instead, in the face of emergencies, it will increase the awareness of closer economic linkages and synergy among the people in the region. The brilliance of collectivism embedded in the bottom of human nature will also encourage people of all countries to help each other and share the results of win-win cooperation in the Global Value Chain, rather than splitting each other, seeking economic decoupling, returning to the old way of self-sufficiency isolationism and driving history backwards.

Nowadays, when the global public health crisis is severely tested, regional integration mechanisms, such as the East Asia Summit are facing new opportunities and challenges. The opportunity lies in the fact that the international community will realize the importance of which we must jointly face the fundamental problems of human development, not merely geopolitics and national interests. The principle is that its challenge lies in the difficulty of reconciling the existing international governance system with universal values that transcend civilization. In the post-epidemic era, the world landscape is facing profound adjustments. The detached island mode and isolated development will not work. The flowing track of international capital will show whether

entrepreneurs make the right choices according to the Global value chain distribution or not, which may lead to the possibility of decentralization of the international financial system. Human being's life-style may also change. However, the trends of democratization of international relations, economic integration, and economic globalization are unstoppable, and the ideal of building an East Asia Community remains the direction of the East Asian people's pursuit of a better life. Although the threat of the new cold war has made it possible for Asia-Pacific countries to make reluctant choices, as Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said, “Asian countries do not want to be forced to choose between the two.”⁶ The practice process of the East Asia Summit led by ASEAN will receive much attention as a model for advancing East Asian regionalism.

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⁶ See <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2020-06-04/lee-hsien-loong-endangered-asian-century>, 03/06/2020.