

Emerging Socio-cultural Approaches to Asian Regional Integration Research¹

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The coming age of Asian regional integration?

Yukio Hatoyama, former Primer of Japan, was a unique politician who claimed the importance of East Asian Community building. After his attendance of APEC leader's summit, that is, on 15th of November, 2009 in Singapore, Primer Hatoyama pointed out the importance of "Asia" in the following way.

"The new government of Japan has declared that it attaches great importance to Asian diplomacy. The main pillar of this policy is the initiative for an 'East Asian community.... In my initiative, I propose that countries sharing a common vision promote cooperation in various fields. This would be based on the principle of "open regional cooperation." Through this, our region would develop a multi-layered network of functional communities. I attach the greatest importance to the promotion of concrete cooperation in a broad range of areas such as trade, investment, finance and education²"

Of course, former Primer Hatoyama is not the first one who referred to East Asian Community. Former Primer Jun'ichiro Koizumi, well-known neo-liberal politician in LDP, advocated the concept of East Asian Community in 2002. Such

¹ This short paper is a revised and renewed version of "Increasing Human Mobility in Asia: A Socio-cultural Approach to Integration Study," presented at the 2nd International Symposium "Human Mobility and Regional Integration in Asia: The Current Situation of Higher Education and Labor Market and Policy Response" on 13th of November, 2008. In revising the paper, the author was strongly inspired by Tosa's (2008) discussion.

² http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/hatoyama/statement/200911/15singapore_e.html, addressed on 12th of September, 2010.

political discourse on Asian regional integration, however, doesn't seem to have evoked academic discussion by sociologists and anthropologists on the topic.

The Global COE Program "Global Institute for Asian Regional Integration" in Waseda University to which the author belonged as one of the founding members of the program manifests itself to approach the theme of Asian regional integration from three angles: politics and security, economies, and society and culture. This idea was strongly inspired by the idea of ASEAN community which will be composed of security community, economic community, and social and cultural community. However, it is not easy to know what "socio-cultural approach" means.

In fact, in 2003, ASEAN adopted the Second Declaration of ASEAN Concord, raising the idea of creating an ASEAN social and cultural community in 2015, but the "society and culture" indicated here referred to promoting social development, fostering human resources, taking measures against infectious diseases, protecting cultural assets, and strengthening cooperation on population increase, unemployment and environmental degradation; this is clearly not fully in alignment with the "society and culture" that is the subject of sociological and anthropological research.

Difficulties of socio-cultural approaches

On reflection, sociologists and anthropologists have given very few remarks on Asian regional integration issue. Although there have been some remarks on how to deal with increasing international immigration and international marriage as well as how to achieve multiculturalism, other than Tamotsu Aoki, who developed a unique Asian middle class cooperation theory and popular culture exchange theory (2005), there have been almost no sociologists or anthropologists at least in Japan who have approached this field from the dimension of regional integration--let alone one that speaks on Asia³.

There used to be lively debates on "Asian values" for a time, first as an idea for explaining unique economic growth in Asia (Berger and Hsiao, 1988), then as a concept standing in contrast to the Euro-American ideas of "democracy" and "human rights" (Aoki and Saeki, 1998), but with a few exceptions like AsiaBarometer, there has been almost no empirical researches on whether Asian values are synchronizing/converging

³ That is why, at the time of Global COE Program hearings, it was not without reason that one member of the examination committee asked, "What research do you intend to do in terms of society and culture?"

or not (Sonoda, 2008c).

Media/cultural studies, on the other hand, have been energetically discussing “multiple modernities,” localization of “global cultures,” spreading consumerism, or cultural imperialism in Asia by focusing on traffic of cultural goods like popular music, anime, movies, and TV programs (Tosa, 2008), but few of them have intensively discussed the relations between increasing cultural traffic and regional integration. In short, many sociologists and anthropologists continue to be mired in their own fields and to shut themselves up into their own research areas (Sonoda, 2008a).

Looking at the current state, there are many difficulties in approaching Asian regional integration from socio-cultural perspectives even though more and more social scientists have come to talk about Asian regional integration from international political-economic perspectives.

Regional integration in classical sociology

However, it doesn't necessary mean that sociology and anthropology did not have any view to consider regional integration. From the middle of the 19th century into the early part of the 20th century, the giants of classical sociology focused on the phenomenon of expansion of the social realm, and they were also interested in the mechanics that lie hidden behind this expansion. A typical example is Ferdinand Tönnies.

In his book “*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*” (1887), Tönnies posits that the social importance shifts from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* with a change from a social combination based on essential will (*Wessenwille*) to a social combination based on rational will (*Kuerwille*). Tönnies suggested a “*Welt* (world)” and “*Gelehrten=Republik* (republic of the learned)” as the ultimate form of *Gesellschaft*. In other words, he felt that the rationalization of the world would cause the enlargement of social spheres. The thesis that the rationalization of the world would cause society to spread over a wide area inspired Georg Simmel's idea that the social realm expands based on the principle of “conservation of energy” and Yasuma Takata's unique theses on a “law of expansion and shrink of fundamental society”, but the important point here is that behind this there is a tendency towards dominance of selective relationship.

Of course, selective relationships appear typically and symbolically in a “market.” However, two conditions are necessary for the “market,” as a place of temporal transactions, to have the character of a “society.” One is the sharing of basic

norms or values to maintain transactions and keep them constant (this corresponds to Émile Durkheim's "non-contractual foundation of contracts"), and the other is the existence and formation of a subject relevant to the emergence and maintenance of these norms (corresponding to Max Weber's concept of authority). These two conditions are critical elements in creating social integration, and to borrow Talcott Parsons's terms, they may be called "latent pattern maintenance (L function)" and "goal attainment (G function)," respectively.

Is increasing human mobility in Asia producing the share of basic norms or values and giving birth to a subject of authority? In other words, what kind of groups or organizations are shepherding in the expansion of the Asian social realm, and what type of values are being shared, and what kind of authority emerging?

Socio-cultural approaches to Asian regional integration must by its nature tackle these fundamental questions.

Increasing human mobility in Asia

Tönnies understood the expansion of the social realm as a dominance of selective relationships, but perhaps there would be no objection to pick up schools and enterprises as the primary carriers of this trend. This is because schools and enterprises created by selective relationships are the chief agents of "secondary socialization," and are the important subject of authority and social control.

In fact, Asian schools, especially institutions of higher education, are rapidly becoming globalized, with students crossing borders to attend school and universities recruiting students from other countries. Asia's enterprises are also becoming multinational, with this wave spreading out from Japan to Korea, Taiwan, and China. Through this process, not only enterprises but also human resources are crossing borders⁴.

What is particularly interesting is that universities and enterprises are moving in the same direction. The act of studying abroad and the act of working abroad are actually closely interrelated⁵, and furthermore this is highly relevant to students'

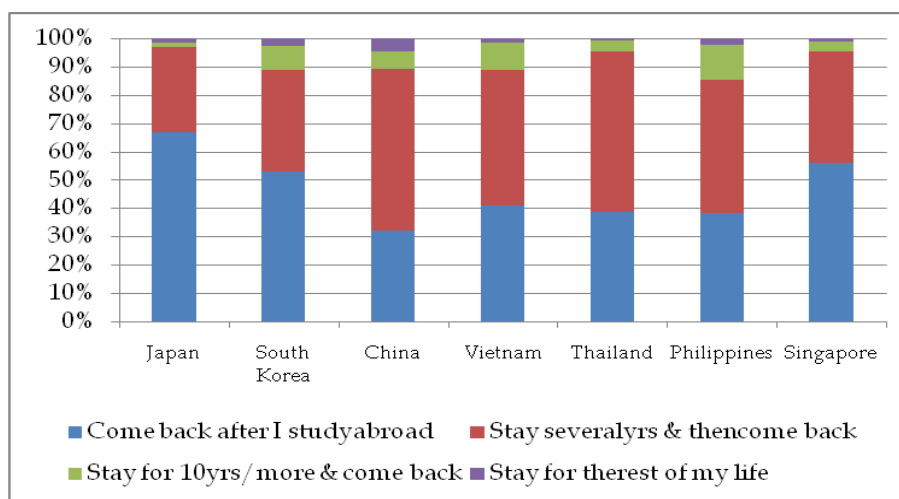
⁴ Kenichiro Hirano (2007: 134) refers to this international movement of people as a "foundation for the formation of regional communities." However, it takes a leap in logic to assume that increased mobility promotes social integration; one must discuss what kind of values are being formed and what type of authorities are emerging.

⁵ For that reason, countries and regions with universities that can bring in many foreign students greatly enhance their national power, and the battle to attract foreign students

motives for studying abroad.

Figure 1 shows results of the 2008 Asian Student Survey by the Global COE Program.⁶ Students wishing to study abroad were asked, “After finishing your studies abroad, how long would you like to stay in your host country?” Nearly half the respondents in each country selected either “I would like to stay a few years before returning home” or “I would like to stay 10 years or more before returning home.” This indicates that in many cases, studying abroad and working abroad are understood as one thing.

Figure 1 Length of stay in the host country after the studies



Source: 2008 Asian Student Survey

Above all, one must be aware that there are several factors behind increasing

begins to take on aspects of a competition between countries. Refer to Florida (2007: 147-8) on this point.

⁶ The survey, using the budget of Global COE Program, was conducted from December 2007 to January 2008. It surveyed about 400 students each in Korea (Seoul National University and Korea University), China (Peking University and Renmin University of China), the Philippines (University of the Philippines and De La Salle University), Vietnam (Vietnam National University, Hanoi and Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Min City), Thailand (Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University) and Singapore (National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University). As to the Japanese part, graduate students of GSAPS of Waseda University took initiative to conduct survey and collected 400 samples from Waseda University and the University of Tokyo. The survey was designed for equality among grade levels, genders and majors (humanities and sciences) and was conducted by quota sampling method.

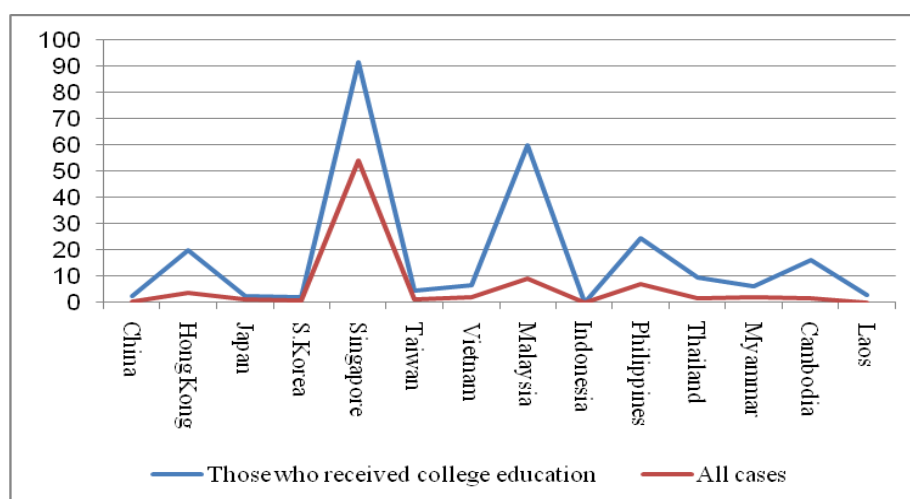
international movement in Asia. These factors are 1) the growing use of English as higher education becomes more common, and the resulting reduction in communication cost; 2) the rise of a sense of values based on merit and the birth of large-scale markets (for higher education and high-level human talent); and 3) survival strategies of institutions of higher education and multinational enterprises (Sonoda, 2008b).

The impact of the growing use of English on higher education

First of all, let's take a glance at the impact that the spread of higher education is having on the growing use of English around Asia.

Using data from AsiaBarometer 2006 and 2007, Figure 2 shows the proportion of respondents in each country and region answering "I can speak English freely" from those who had received university education and from all cases. In former Anglo-American colonies, namely Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines, the improvement in English ability as a result of receiving higher education was remarkable and this is a big factor generating enthusiasm for foreign studies.⁷

Figure 2 Percentage of respondents who can speak English freely (units: %)



Source: AsiaBarometer 2006 and 2007

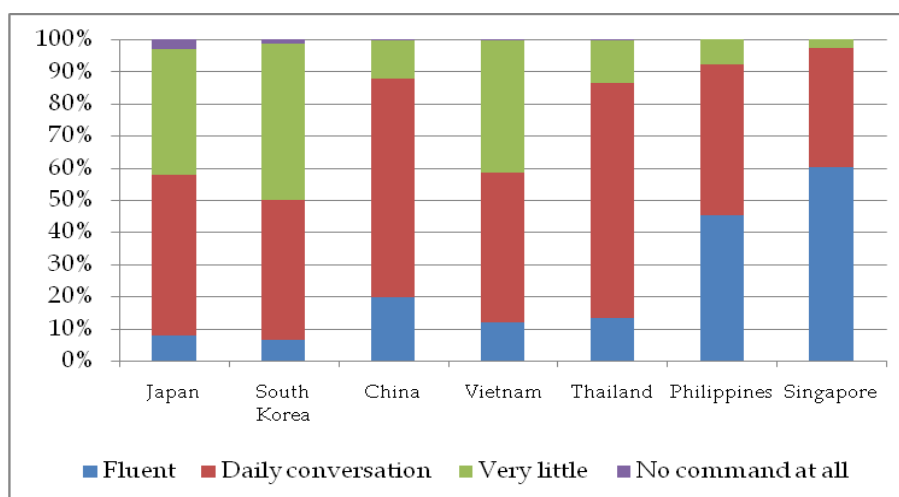
⁷ There are, in fact, negative aspects to the development of the growing use of English. Refer to Sugimura (2007: 188) for negative effects of the prosperity of English education on national integration in Malaysia.

Asian Student Survey shows the similar pattern (see Figure 3). Even in China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam, where English is not used on a daily basis, the percentage of students at elite universities answering “I can speak English freely” was higher than national average. According to the survey, the figures reached 19.7%, 6.4%, 7.8%, and 11.8% respectively, and if those answering “I can make everyday conversation” are included, the percentage reaches from about 50% to 80% of all the respondents.

The growing use of English not only promotes enthusiasm for studying abroad, but also raises student’s desire to work for Euro-American enterprises.

Figure 4 also shows results of 2008 Asian Student Survey, there is a clear trend of Asian students, except Japanese students,⁸ to work for foreign companies, especially American and European ones.⁹

Figure 3 Level of English proficiency of Asian elite university students

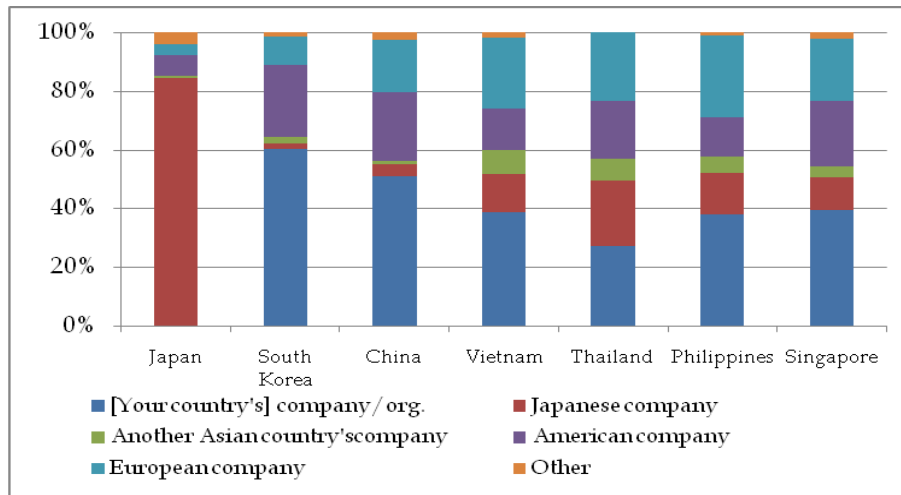


Source: 2008 Asian Student Survey

⁸ Japanese students’ lack of interest in working for foreign companies is exceptional in Asia. Even those who have a good command of English shows little interest in working for foreign multinationals.

⁹ The pattern is slightly different between Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. Whereas few respondents from elite universities in Korea and China wished to work at a Japanese-affiliated enterprise, respondents from elite universities in Southeast Asia (Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam) wishing to do so were nearly 10% to 15% of the total. Considering that only about 0.3% of respondents in Southeast Asian countries answered that they could speak Japanese well, it is hard to believe that one’s choice of Japanese enterprise is guided by linguistic ability. In fact, according to this survey, more than a few respondents are thinking about using their English skills to do study in Japan and would like to find employment there in light of work stability.

Figure 4 Desirable workplace



Source: 2008 Asian Student Survey

The rise of a merit-based sense of values and increasing mobility of highly personnel

Strong desire to work for European and American-affiliated enterprises does not simply reflect the spread of English education. Behind this are changes in expectations for the workplace; in other words, there is a growing expectation that one will be judged by merit—and this is strongly corroborated by the fact that in Japan, Korea and China, which have lower English ability than former Anglo-American colonies, one may discover a common value to praise merit-based occupations among students at elite universities (Kishi, Mizuno, Pantumsinchai and Sonoda, 2008).

This shift to European and American-affiliated enterprises can even be seen among employees of Japanese-affiliated enterprises in Asia, especially in China (Sonoda, 2007).

In 1991-92 and again in 2007, we conducted a questionnaire survey of local workers working in Japanese-affiliated companies in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, China and Taiwan. All in all, the percentage of respondents who answered that “If the conditions were the same, I would like to work for a European or American-affiliated enterprise” rose during the approximately 15-year interval, which is clearly related to differences in work conditions, especially how people judge the speed of promotions

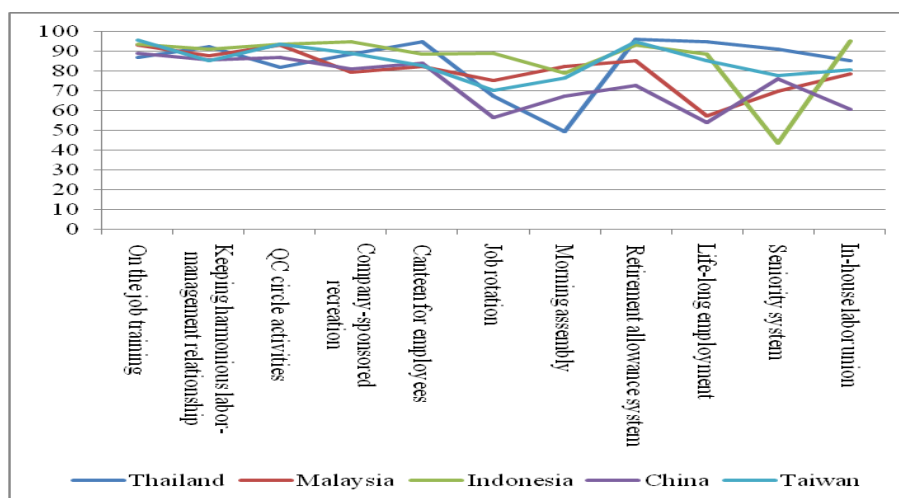
and pay increases.¹⁰

Actually, in these areas, respondents' judgments of seniority system had fallen uniformly during the 15-16 year interval.

Figures 5 and 6 show the responses given by local people employed by Japanese-affiliated enterprises to the question, "Are the following policies beneficial to your own country?" Whereas Japanese-style work and personnel policies, such as on-the-job training, labor-management cooperation, and QC circles, continued to receive relatively high evaluations, respondents' judgments of seniority system fell nearly 20 points, and this was a common characteristic in the areas under study.

The rise of a merit-based sense of values is causing labor markets to become more mobile. This is because while pay based on years of service does not keep employees from leaving, in fact there has been a striking increase in job turnovers, especially in Southeast Asia, between 1991-92 and 2007.

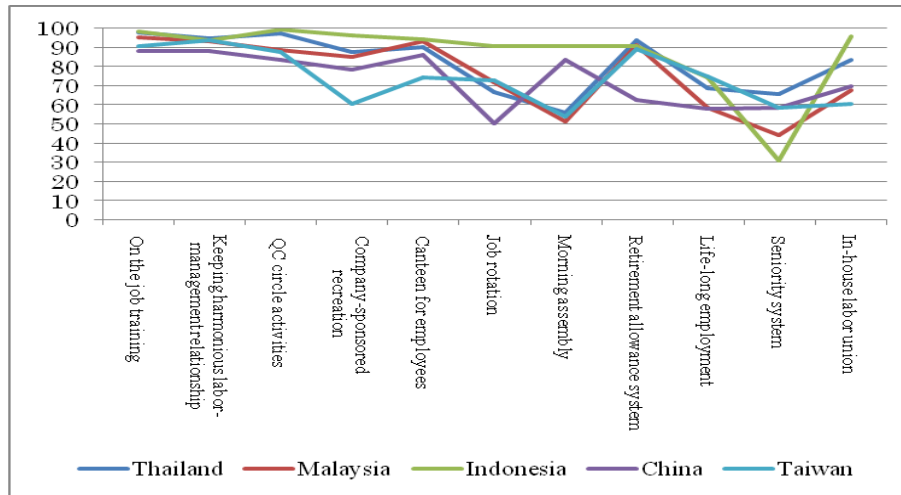
Figure 5 "Are the following policies beneficial to your own country?" : 1991-92
(units: %)



Source: 1991-92 Survey of Japanese-Affiliated Enterprises in Asia

¹⁰ The only exception was Thailand. The percentage of respondents in Thailand who chose European or American-affiliated enterprises in 1991 was 32.5%, whereas 16 years later, in 2007, the number had declined to 24.8%. Through data analysis, we identified the reason that respondents judged Japanese-affiliated enterprises more favorably for employment stability, which had the effect of enhancing their preference for these enterprises. It would appear that the 1997 financial crisis in Thailand had the effect of increasing preference for Japanese-affiliated enterprises, which place a high emphasis on employment stability (Sonoda, 2008d).

Figure 6 “Are the following policies beneficial to your own country?”: 2007 (units: %)



Source: 2007 Survey of Japanese-Affiliated Enterprises in Asia

Under these circumstances, not only Japanese-affiliated enterprises but other multinational enterprises in Asia as well have to reconsider for themselves the way they manage their human resources¹¹.

Discussion: For the fruitful contribution to Asian regional integration research

This short paper limits its focus to universities and enterprises, but there are more than these two organizations/institutions that are contributing to the increase of human mobility in the region. Increasing human mobility is both cause and result of “regionalization” of such groups and organizations as family, local communities, governments, and religious institutions.

In the process by which the social sphere expands in Asia, including these groups and organizations which are not formed only by selective relationships, what type of values are being shared, and what kind of authority is recognized? This paper is titled “Emerging Socio-cultural Approaches to Asian Regional Integration Research” without a question mark in the strong hope that promising young scholars in East Asian

¹¹ The author’s research group’s survey of Korean, Japanese, and Taiwanese companies in Suzhou Area, China in 2001, revealed the fact that more than half of the local staff working for Korean and Japanese multinationals have a strong preference to work for Euro-American companies. See Sonoda (2003).

countries would try to tackle these questions in one way or another¹².

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¹² The author started four-year program called "Frontier of Comparative Studies of Asian Societies" supported by JSPS Asia-Africa Scientific Platform Program from last year. Many sociologists in East Asia will join this program to talk about the past and the future of Asian sociology. The author believes that such an enterprise will contribute to the academic discussion of Asian regional integration from sociological aspects.

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