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Regionales Regierungshandeln im Bereich der Öffentlichen Gesundheit
Ostasien in der Covid-19-Krise, die regionale intellektuelle Integration und die chinesisch-japanische Zusammenarbeit

(Text in englischer Sprache.)

Epistemic-Perception Communities Building and Regional Public Health Governance
East Asian in the Covid-19 Crisis, Regional Intellectual Integration and China-Japan Cooperation

The sudden outbreak of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) brings about daunting challenges to East Asia. In the initial stage of the epidemic, several Asian nations like China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Thailand witnessed the most cases of infection. On the one hand, this indicates the unprecedented regional economic and social integration in the recent years. On the other hand, the crisis further reminds the regional countries to double their efforts for enhancing regional governance capacity including regional public health governance and regional preparedness for crisis responses. During this Covid-19 pandemic, most attention has been paid to the efforts on the national level (individual nation) and the global level (the World Health Organization, WHO).¹ The experience in East Asia reminds us the significance of regional integration in addressing the crisis. Actually, East Asian regional integration has originated and developed in the crises, which is clearly reflected in the regional financial governance.² In contrast of the coerciveness-based domestic governance in terms of implementation, international governance depends on the formation of the knowledge authority and perception authority among the regional states.³ The author argues that the efficiency and the sustainability of the regional public health governance need to be guaranteed by two epistemic communities. One is a regional network of the highly recognized and authoritative experts with

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2 For East Asian regionalism, Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraiishi (eds.), *Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). Yun Zhang, *Sino-Japanese Relations in a US-China-Japan Trilateral Context: The Origins of Misperceptions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). M. G. Curley and N. Thomas, *Advancing East Asian Regionalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007). Edward J. Lincoln, *East Asian Economic Regionalism* (Washington D.C., The Brookings Institution, 2004). Yun Zhang, Multilateral Means for Bilateral ends: Japan, Regionalism, and China-Japan-US Trilateral Dynamics, *The Pacific Review*, Vol.27, No.1, March 2014, pp.5-25.

3 For international governance and authority, Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighborhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2-3. Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Martin Griffiths, Terry O'sCallaghan and Steven C. Roach, *International Relations: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge: 2008), 127-128.

relevant scientific expertise. Another is a more general political and social community with a cognizant consensus of addressing the functional problems via regional cooperation. As the second and the third biggest economies in the world, both China and Japan have made great achievements in the field of the public health. They are also intellectually complementary in terms of the public health development experiences. Sino-Japanese cooperation in the public health domain could facilitate the formation of the new international norms deriving from the East Asian wisdom, provide political leadership for nurturing regional community identity, and contribute to the improvement of the global public health governance.

East Asian Regional Efforts in Addressing the Covid-19 Pandemic

By the mid-March, East Asia seemed to have controlled the mass spread of the virus in the region. Despite the concerns and uncertainties of the second wave of the virus, this temporary success could be attributed not only to the stringent national measures of the regional countries but also the coordinated responses on the regional level. From the very beginning of the epidemic, the regional coordination has started. On 3 February 2020, the Special Video Conference of the ASEAN plus Three (APT, ASEAN plus China, Japan and South Korea) Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development was held on 3 February 2020 after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Covid-19 as a “public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC)” on 30 January.⁴ On 20 March 2020, the China-Japan-ROK Foreign Ministers’ Special Video Conference on COVID-19 was convened, in which the ministers not only agreed to explore a joint prevention and control mechanism to contain the epidemic but also seek mutually acceptable solutions to stabilize the supply chain in the region.⁵ On 7 April 2020, the Special Video Conference of the APT Health Ministers in enhancing cooperation on COVID-19 for recommitting regional cooperation in addressing the pandemic.⁶ On 14 April 2020, the Special ASEAN plus Three (APT) Summit on Covid-19 via videoconference was held.⁷ This summit is providing the leadership on the highest level to address the regional crisis.

In line with these governmental leaders’ political commitments toward the regional cooperation, regional financial institutions have timely launched large scale packages in response to their members’ urgent needs. In March, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) announced a \$6.5bn package to help Asian countries⁸ and the China-led Asian Infrastructure Bank Investment Bank (AIIB) unveiled a \$5bn economic package.⁹ In the mid of April, The ADB announced to triple its funding to \$20bn help member states deal with the economic difficulties of the coronavirus pandemic.¹⁰ And the AIIB promised to double its funding to \$10bn on April 17.¹¹ Both banks aim not only the demand side but also supply side to protect the regionally connected supply chain. The disruption of the regional supply chain would threaten employment in each country of the region. Recognizing that countries with fragile infrastructure have less capacity to handle health crisis, The President of the AIIB revealed that the AIIB was working to increase the investment in public health infrastructure in the region.¹² It hinted that the possibility of reorienting more development

4 <https://asean.org/asean-plus-three-senior-health-officials-reaffirm-cooperation-stop-spread-2019-ncov/>

5 https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1758690.shtml

6 https://asean.org/storage/2020/04/Adopted-Joint-Statement_SVCAHMM_COVID-19_20.04.07.pdf

7 <https://asean.org/storage/2020/04/Final-Joint-Statement-of-the-Special-APT-Summit-on-COVID-19.pdf>

8 <https://www.adb.org/news/adb-announces-6-5-billion-initial-response-covid-19-pandemic>

9 <https://www.aiib.org/en/news-events/news/2020/AIIB-Looks-to-Launch-USD5-Billion-COVID-19-Crisis-Recovery-Facility.html>

10 *Financial Times*, April 14, 2020.

11 <https://www.aiib.org/en/news-events/news/2020/AIIB-Doubles-COVID-19-Crisis-Response-to-USD10-Billion.html>

12 <https://www.aiib.org/en/news-events/news/2020/AIIB-To-Scale-Up-Public-Health->

investment to soft infrastructure. In a word, East Asia is proactively taking the advantage of the current crisis to further integrate the region for building a better region in the post-pandemic era.

Past Crises and the Evolution of East Asian Regional Integration

In retrospect, the region building in East Asia and East Asian regional integration has been evolving along with the crises. Due to the colonialism and the Cold War, region building in East Asia has been an extremely difficult enterprise. According to Rodolfo C. Severino, the former Secretary General of ASEAN, Asian people hardly knew one another, having been cut off and kept isolated from one another by the colonial powers.¹³ During the Cold War, Asia was separated again by the ideological and military confrontation when most Asian countries struggled to realize their difficult nation-building. In this sense, the nation-building and region-building in East Asia had to be conducted in tandem. The crises have been critical catalysts for this dual-building process. We could roughly summarize the following three major crises which spurred the regional integration.

Vietnam War: In 1967, five Southeast Asian countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines) established the Association of Southeast Asian (ASEAN) in the peak of the Vietnam War. The main rationale of ASEAN's inception was to gain the regional autonomy during the Cold War to avoid the tragedy in Vietnam.¹⁴

Cambodian Crisis: The expansion of ASEAN to include the Indo-China countries in the 1990s was realized in ASEAN's relentless efforts of resolving the Cambodian Crisis through political and diplomatic ways. The strong commitment of ASEAN's enlargement was based on the belief that a peaceful Southeast Asia could not be realized if the conflict-laden Indo-China countries Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar were not integrated timely.¹⁵

East Asian financial crisis: The East Asian financial crisis in 1997-98 showed the obvious inadequacies of the global financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in addressing the regional economic crisis and ensuing social crisis. The ASEAN plus Three (APT) framework was built in the crisis. In the first decade of the 21st century, regional free trade agreements (FTA) have been flourishing represented by the ASEAN FTA, ASEAN-China FTA, and ASEAN-Japan FTA. Under the auspices of the APT, numerous functional regional cooperation mechanisms have been established. The most important achievement was the institutionalization of East Asia Summit since 2005, which provides the political leadership for regional integration.¹⁶

Soft Dimension of Regional Integration and the Significance of Knowledge

Despite the great progress in the regional integration in the past decades, the regional governance building in East Asia has been largely focused on the hard dimension like the hard infrastructure connectivity and economic regional cooperation. The soft dimension of regional integration has yet to become the policy priority for the decision makers and regional elites. However, the Covid-19 crisis serves as an urgent wake-up call for strengthening the soft side of regional integration in East Asia like the public health regional infrastructure building.

As mentioned in the beginning, the ASEAN Plus Three framework which integrated Northeast Asian and Southeast Asia for the first time in the modern history of Asia occurred in the 1997-98

Infrastructure-in-Wake-of-COVID-19.html

13 Rodolfo C. Severino (2006), *Southeast Asia in Search of An ASEAN Community-Insights from the former ASEAN Secretary-General*, ISEAS Publishing, Singapore, p.8. Interview with Rodolfo C. Severino, December 2014, Singapore.

14 Yun Zhang, *The Logic of Weak in International Relations: ASEAN's External Relations with Major Powers in the Asia-Pacific Region* (Nagoya, V2 Solution Publisher, 2012), 17-36.

15 Ibid., 144-150.

16 Yun Zhang, *Sino-Japanese Relations in a US-China-Japan Trilateral Context: The Origins of Misperceptions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 109-156.

Asian economic crisis. The increasing institutionalization of East Asian regional integration led to the establishment of regional networks and knowledge transmission and reproduction. When the global economic crisis hit the United States and the Eurozone seriously in 2008-09, East Asia avoided the bitter experience in the late 1990s. This success was partially due to the financial safety nets in the region, which were fostered on the regional epistemic and perception communities, in which the knowledge innovation was the key.¹⁷

Building Two Communities: Epistemic Community and Perception Community

In the same vein, the Covid-19 crisis spurred the urgent demand of the regional epistemic community of public health experts. This epistemic community based on the medical expertise is the fundamental source of intellectual authority for East Asian regional public health governance. Because the virus does not respect borders, it is imperative to improve international scientific collaboration and this effort should start from regional collaboration. An East Asian regional epistemic community of scientific and medical experts could bolster the regional confidence for fighting the current Covid-19 and better preparing for the next crisis.¹⁸

At the same time, it is imperative to recognize the significance of the perception community on the political and social levels to reach a broader consensus for transforming the epistemic authority into political and social authority as public health is a comprehensive issue involving medical, public policy, law and international relations. The Covid-19 pandemic *per se* is a public health crisis. However, this is a transnational and multi-dimensional crisis. The regional authority of the public health must be endorsed by the legislation and implementation on the national level and the information feedback from the national level would update the regional institution. Meanwhile, the regional public health governance could supplement the global governance and finally leads to a mutually enhancing and mutually shaping relationship among the three levels, namely national, regional and global levels.

China-Japan Cooperation and East Asian Regional Intellectual Capacity Building

Japan has been providing an intellectual leadership in promoting the regional integration particularly in the economic and financial fields. In the aftermath of the economic crisis, the ADB initiated a regional mechanism for financial information collection and analysis based on the proposal by Japan. This mechanism serves as a *de facto* regional financial early warning system and reflects Japan's increasing regionally based approach in its diplomacy.¹⁹ Actually, Japan has been the primary provider for the East Asian regional intellectual capacity in economic and financial fields, which are different from the intellectual basis derived from the United States.²⁰ Meanwhile, the rapid re-rise of China in the past decade not only brought out the material power redistribution in Asia but also the intellectual structural change. For instance, China proactively proposed to establish ASEAN plus Three Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO) in the aftermath of the global economic crisis in 2008. The AMRO is located in Singapore and its first director of is Wei Benhua, a

17 Emanuel Adler and Steven Bernstein, "Knowledge in power: the epistemic construction of global governance," Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall (ed.), *Power in Global Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 302.

18 For the epistemic communities, Peter M. Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No.1, Knowledge, Power, and International Policy Coordination (Winter, 1992), pp.1-35.

19 Natasha Hamilton-Hart, Creating a Regional Arena: Financial Sector Reconstruction, Globalization, and Region-Making, Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi, *Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), p.127.

20 Natasha Hamilton-Hart, Creating a Regional Arena: Financial Sector Reconstruction, Globalization, and Region-Making, Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi, *Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), p.124.

former high-ranking official in China's central bank.²¹ The AMRO is serving a role as a regional policy think tank for macroeconomic analysis by providing quarterly monitoring report for the regional countries.²² This could be seen as another regional early warning system. With the operation of the Belt and Road Initiative and the AIIB, China could make more intellectual contributions to regional integration. With the combined Japanese and Chinese intellectual wisdoms, East Asian regional integration would benefit from the new ideas and practices from the regional hybrid of intellectual innovation. As the most influential giants, the intellectual collaboration in the regional public policy innovation would gain more knowledge validity and legitimacy among the regional countries. The intellectual product on the East Asian regional level led by China-Japan cooperation is creating new standards suitable for the regional realities, which could enrich the policy dialogue and experience exchange with other regions for better governance on the global level.

More than 20 years ago, Asian countries did not close the door of regionalization in the aftermath of the regional economic crisis, but further enhanced the regional cooperation to better address the challenges. In the same vein, Asian countries would not retreat to protectionism and nurturing the collective awareness of regional community to contain the pandemic and build regional public health governance. We are also witnessing that Europe is addressing the crisis from the regional level. The European Commission is planning to raise funds for an 80-100bn Euro reinsurance scheme for creating a pan-European unemployment reinsurance scheme.²³ This pandemic could be not only be a springboard and catalyst of actions toward the establishment of Asian regional epistemic and perception communities but also transregional ones between Asia and Europe. The trans-regional communities would have potential to be the solid basis for global communities for the future of a more vibrant global governance.

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21 "A rather flimsy firewall," *Economist*, Vol.403 No. 8779, April 7-13, 2012, p.32.

22 <https://www.amro-asia.org/>

23 *Financial Times*, April 1, 2020.

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