

(Comment) Chapter 1.The Framework of Multiple and Multi-Layered Regional Cooperation :
2.Development of Multi-Layered Regional Coopertaion in Southeast Asia and Its Implications

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Comments

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Professor Sudo's paper and presentation we have heard just now, provide very sensible and comprehensive interpretations of historical and recent perspectives of Southeast Asian regionalism. The paper reflects an important views on the essential characteristics of the ASEAN regionalism. Professor Sudo has also pointed out questions on the relations between continuous economic growth and politico-social issues within ASEAN countries, and marginalisation of ASEAN as a regional organisation within the great-power-led Asia Pacific configuration.

It might be useful if, in the limited time available, I pick up some points that, I think, will have relations with the future ASEAN regionalism.

First, I agree with Professor Sudo that the end of the Cold War, or more specifically the end of the Cambodian conflict, has made the watershed for ASEAN in terms of its development as a regional organisation. As he said in his presentation, ASEAN has established norms and rules in the conduct of its external relations and among the member countries during the first phase of its development. Those norms and rules are necessary for any international organisations to be meaningful entities. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia of 1976 was surely a declaration of those norms and rules. However, the basis of regional norms such as the mutual respect for independence, domestic and external sovereignty, equality, pacific settlement of disputes and regional cooperation were not new when TAC included them. The Bangkok Declaration of 1967 that declared the establishment of ASEAN and the ZOPFAN Declaration of 1971 had already stated those norms explicitly. The significance of TAC is that it included those norms in an article of a treaty which is open to non-Southeast Asian countries and it included a dispute settling mechanism. I think that the ASEAN members were fully aware of the importance of those norms from the start, moreover, they were the very point of the creation of ASEAN. I see the first phase of the development of ASEAN as a gradual process of firmly establishing those norms within the ASEAN members and I think this basis of the ASEAN cooperation will be maintained as long as the organisation will last.

Second, Professor Sudo has explained the international situation that led the second phase of the development of ASEAN. In his explanation, three great powers, the United States, Soviet Union (now Russia) and China were taken up. I think that he did not mention Japan intentionally because it has not been a very important factor strategically or politically to influence the international environment in this region. However, the economic considerations has become, and will remain to be,

more crucial than ever before in the second phase which started in 1989 after the end of the Cold War. I believe that the Japanese perspective of regional cooperation, both economic and strategic/political, in the region should be thoroughly discussed.

Third, I agree with Professor Sudo's opinion that it is desirable for ASEAN to have some countervailing forces when dealing with great powers. However, if the dealing is for trade and investment liberalisation, I do not think that EAEC, which include China, Korea and Japan and excludes the United States and others, will be a suitable forum for the purpose. It is not a good choice for ASEAN, for its own sake, to exclude especially the United States. The United States will remain as one of the primary export markets and import sources for the ASEAN countries for foreseeable future. In addition, if ASEAN, as a whole, needs the military presence of the United States in the region at least for a time being, it is necessary to keep an economic rationale for the United States to do so.

Lastly, I would like to express my view on the relations between further economic development of the ASEAN countries and the politico-social issues within them. I have rather an optimistic view on this issue. The recent economic development of ASEAN countries has been underpinned with unilateral deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation by the individual governments to let the market force to dominate their economies. During this process, I believe that the number of people who can participate in the policy decision making process, directly or indirectly, are increasing. Limiting the argument within ASEAN countries, this process of "democratisation" will continue gradually. The process may well be gradual but surely irreversible. The problem may be the external pressure to speed up the process of improving "democracy," human rights protection, labour conditions and environmental protection. The pressure seems inevitable as the United States and some other countries are trying to link those issues with their own trade policies. I myself do not think those should be linked, and the US government's decision to extend the Most Favoured Nation status of China earlier this year might be seen as an omen of the US trade policy change, but to deal with these pressure, at least for a while, the ASEAN countries might have to check the process continuously and assert the gradual improvements from time to time.