

Regional Integration Study Group
Long-term Prospects for Regional Integration in the Asia-Pacific Region and
Japanese Diplomacy

October 1, 2010

[Research Overview]

Recent years have seen rising interest in an “East Asia Community” and “East Asian cooperation.” Efforts to form regional regimes in the Asia-Pacific have been diverse, however, and have not converged on “East Asia.” A variety of regional regimes have been formed in the Asia-Pacific region, and the development of new regional regimes is being discussed. Progress is being made in forming a complex and intricate web of regional regimes.

Power relations among Asian states have undergone transformation as their economic interdependence grows. While smoothly maintaining mutual economic interdependence and achieving economic development within regional production and sales networks, all of these states are endeavoring to adapt to the greater fluidity in the region’s international relations on which the change in power relations among states will likely have an impact. The countries of the region are pursuing a range of external strategies – e.g., engagement, containment, balancing and risk hedging – in the midst of changing international relations.

Reflecting this fluidity in international relations, the countries of Asia have favored participating simultaneously in a variety of bilateral and multilateral regimes over closely involving themselves with specific countries or regional regimes, even as they seek to secure their economic interests and prepare themselves for future changes and risks. They are also participating in certain regimes in order to constrain efforts by third countries and other regional regimes, while at the same time participating in regional regimes that include third countries in order to secure their own immediate economic and security interests. Bilateral, trilateral, sub-regional, Asia-Pacific and East Asian regional regimes are being formed in the Asia-Pacific against the backdrop of these political and economic considerations. Moves toward East Asian cooperation and an East Asian Community, too, are closely tied to such diplomatic strategies.

It will more than likely take considerable time for international relations in Asia to stabilize and an established structure to emerge in the region’s international relations. In other

words, intricate regime building in the region is expected to continue for some time. Consequently, Japan needs to make diplomatic efforts to help steer the formation of this web of complex and intricate regional regimes in a direction that promotes Japan's own interests. It is important to Japan that the countries of the Asia-Pacific region transition to political systems that respect democracy and human rights and enhance their political, economic and social systems through greater transparency and accountability. It would also be in Japan's interests for the countries of the region to harmonize their domestic economic systems with international standards. What policies should Japanese diplomacy in Asia adopt toward these ends?

To pursue meaningful diplomatic activities in Asia, Japan must first gain an accurate understanding of the dynamics of regional regimes in Asia. Equipped with such an understanding, it must then determine the approaches to regional regimes in Asia (regional architecture) most desirable for Japan as well as the measures needed to implement these approaches. Realizing Japan's aims will require precise knowledge of the countries with which it should cooperate, the factors to be considered in doing so, the diplomatic assets at Japan's disposal, etc. The diplomatic processes pertaining to regional regimes are dynamic and intricate, and hence multifaceted thinking will be required. The purpose of this project is to bring together leading Japanese researchers in this field to participate in developing and presenting answers on these issues.

[Project Plan]

The first study group meeting was held on July 7, 2010, the second on July 21, and the third on August 18. Outside lecturers were invited to participate in the discussions during the fourth (September 7) and fifth (September 30) meetings. Plans are to hold future study group meetings once or twice each month. The study group will also conduct interviews and overseas surveys on a timely basis as necessary. A report to be broadly disseminated to the general public will be compiled for publication sometime around the end of March 2011.

[Study Group Members]

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