

Asia's Leadership in Regional and Global Affairs

By HIRABAYASHI Hiroshi

The center of the gravity of the world has been shifting from the Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific. This was one of the observations of Dr. Kissinger in one of his recent interviews on Japanese TV channels. I endorse this opinion.

If this is the case, leaders of the Asia should be more assertive and forth-coming in not only regional but also in global affairs, in a positive way as a matter of course. They deserve it and the international community expects it.

Asia is the success story in development. ASEAN celebrates the fortieth anniversary of its existence. Japan feels rewarded to be at the spearhead of the development formation of the so-called "flying geese": Japan developed first, to be followed Taiwan and the South Korea, which in return were followed by the countries of the ASEAN. Since several years, China not only joins the formation, but is going to outpace all the rest and is expected to catch up the economic leader of the region-Japan. India follows China, though a little belatedly but with confidence.

Since 1980's, the region has enjoyed peace except for sporadic internal conflicts in some countries, which have never affected to disrupt the process of development.

In short, in terms of development and a relative stability, the excellent track record of Asia as a whole is unmatched by any other region. Asian voice, however, has not resonated in world affairs. Asian countries have taken a series of Asia-Pacific initiatives, but they have been of immediate concerns of the region.

Therefore, I would advocate for more assertive engagement and, wherever possible, leadership role by leaders of Asia. One of the time-honored adages in Asia is "Silence is gold". However, when it comes to development and peace, Asia can and must be bold enough to speak out and share its successful experience with the world community.

Japan has taken one initiative for more structured dialogue and interactions between Asia and Africa. Together with the United Nations, the UNDP, the Global Conference for Africa and the World Bank, Japan started the process of TICAD (Tokyo International Conference for African Development) in 1993 to encourage and engage the international community, especially the donor countries and the international aid agencies to help African countries build their nations. One of the novelties of the initiative was to ask Asian countries to participate in the process so that Asia's success stories are shared to Africa in their interactions. In fact, the idea was blessed by Africans and endorsed by many Asian leaders. The successive summit meetings in Tokyo in

1998 and 2003 saw the impressive presence of Asian countries' representatives in addition to African leaders. Furthermore, follow-up meetings named Africa-Asia Business Forum were organized by both Asian and African countries in 1999, 2001, 2004 and 2007, to discuss how to promote trade and investment in Africa based on Asian experience. This forum, welcomed with enthusiasm by both African and Asian participants, have offered many clues for successive and sustainable development for African countries. In turn, the success of the initiatives has increased self-confidence on the part of Asian counterparts.

East Asian countries have tried to bring sustainability in their development strategies.

We, Asians, have huge stakes in sustainable development and possess enough tools, financial and technical, to harmonize development and environment. Furthermore, if global warming progresses without being appropriately dealt with, many parts of our shores would risk to be inundated and eventually disappear. Already natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons and hurricanes in and around our area have changed their nature and magnitude and brought unprecedented calamities. At the time of the Conference of the Contracting Parties in Kyoto, in which I attended as foreign policy adviser of Prime Minister Hashimoto, I witnessed with sadness a non-cooperative attitude of China and India, who argued that the actual global warming is the result of industrial activities of the developed world-which is true, and that they have no obligation to reduce CO₂s- which is not true any more. Ten years passed, these countries have become the victims of their own CO₂ emitting activities of their industries. In consequence, Asian countries are expected to more positively engage themselves to combat global warming and actively participate in the actual and post-Kyoto process as responsible stake-holders.

More Asian countries accelerate their development, more their needs for energy increase. Fossil fuels will not last long, though. Human-beings have to outlive long after oil and gas will be exhausted. Asian countries should participate more actively not only in regional but also in global fora on energy. They are to be welcomed to participate in the work of the International Energy Agency in Paris in one way or other. They can even take initiatives, regionally and internationally, on energy problems. Why not proposing more intensified dialogue between Asia and the IEA, for example? Why not proposing for structured cooperation among the nations to develop and share the technologies of renewable and alternative energy resources? The same can be said about other natural and increasingly rare resources.

On the security front, we are faced with a variety of risks and threats such as piracy, terrorism, drug trafficking,, illegal financial transactions and even the possibility of the proliferation of mass-destruction weapons.

These issues are, by definition, of international or cross-border nature. ASEAN itself and ASEAN centered institutions like ASEAN-plus meetings and ARF have dealt with them. I would, however, advocate for enlarging the horizon of our cooperation to cope with them in much broader perspectives. Why not proposing for a creation of framework between the countries of the western Pacific and the rim-Indian Ocean countries to deal with certain issues of common

interests, piracy for example?

Political leaders of Asia should not hesitate to lead discussions and actions, whenever and wherever possible.

One foot-note is to be added, however. In this ever-globalizing and participatory international politics, politicians and bureaucrats cannot and should not monopolize ideas and actions. In every aspect of international relations, we witness active engagements by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-profit think-tanks such as this Asia Economic Forum. In order to get fresh ideas and make the implementation of governmental actions more relevant and effective, interactions and cooperation between political and bureaucratic leaders and non-governmental bodies are to be promoted.

In Japan, for example, since the mid-1990s, the government of Japan has adopted the policy of closer cooperation between the government agencies and NGOs in both the policy formulation and implementation. As Director-General of Economic Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign affairs of Japan in mid-nineties, I used to advocate for the ODANGO formula of cooperation to better promote Japan's aid policy. ODA stands for the official development assistance and NGO for non-governmental organizations. ODANGO is the combination of the two. Odango is one of classic Japanese delicacies consisting of a brochette of three pieces of round sweets of different colors and taste. In my view, any meaningful and acceptable aid policy would require cooperation among three actors of the aid community namely governments, NGOs and international or regional aid organizations. That was my concept of ODANGO policy of Japan's aid policy and continues to be one of the leading philosophies in this field.

In almost all the areas which I have mentioned above, whether in socio-economic domains or security matters, the role of non-governmental organizations is not only useful in providing ideas and financial resources, but sometimes indispensable for effective implementation and propagation of ideas and prescriptions.

Therefore, when Asian leaders speak out or take initiatives on regional or international agenda, especially on such issues that concern peoples directly, they are expected to listen to, and cooperate with, non-governmental organizations. At the same time, leaders of such organizations should facilitate official leaders' initiatives and try to bring in constructive suggestions and cooperation rather than to obstruct.

Very recently, in the Antarctic, a Japanese research vessel for whales activities was attacked physically by Green Peace boats and incapacitated in freezing waters. Japanese ship was forced to give up its mission.

Maturity is the key word for non-governmental organizations if they expect to be consulted and invited for policy implementation.

If this sort of spirit of cooperation spreads among Asian leaders, their voice and weight will be more convincing and reckoned with in the international community.

(This is the text of Keynote delivered by HIRABAYASHI Hiroshi, former Ambassador to the French Republic and currently Councilor of the Japan Forum on International

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