Report of the Network of East Asian Think-Tanks (NEAT) Working Group On "Enhancement of Cultural Exchange in East Asia."

June 13-15, 2008, Seoul, Korea

I. Introduction

1. The future of East Asian Community is contingent on mutual understanding of cultural commonality and diversity as well as the coordination of political economic interests. Countries in East Asia have increasingly identified the importance and necessity of cultural exchange in the process of building East Asian Community. Towards a humanistic regional community, this working group has dealt with general issues of cultural exchange and explored various ways to enhance cultural exchange in East Asia.

2. This working group appreciates the sprit of 1998 ASEAN Plus Three Summit meeting that made a statement on Asian identity, human exchanges, mutual cultural understanding, and so on. Following the spirit, NEAT recognized the importance of building East Asian socio-cultural community in 2004 annual conference and the necessity of building East Asian identity in 2005 annual conference. To implement the recognition, 2006 NEAT annual conference proposed a working group that would discuss the issue of 'enhancement of cultural exchange in East Asia.'

3. The first meeting of the NEAT "Working Group on Enhancement of Cultural Exchange" was held on June 8, 2007 in Jeonju, Jeollabuk-do Province in the Republic of Korea. It was sponsored by the Korean Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (KISEAS), the Country Coordinator of NEAT Korea. A total of 18 participants from all 13 ASEAN Plus Three (APT) countries attended the meeting and engaged in an interactive and productive discussion.

4. As a result, the 2007 NEAT Working Group on Enhancement of Cultural Exchange in East Asia reached an agreement to hold a series of annual meetings for the next 5 years. Each year is supposed to focus on one priority area: the Media (2008); Popular culture and cultural festivities (2009); Education (2010); People-to-people exchange

(2011); and Performing arts and cultural exhibition (2012).

5. In accordance with the agreed schedule, this year's priority area of discussion was the media. The meeting (the second meeting of the NEAT "Working Group on Enhancement of Cultural Exchange") was held on June 13-15, 2008 in Seoul, in the republic of Korea. It was sponsored by the Korean Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (KISEAS), the Country Coordinator of NEAT Korea, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade(MOFAT), (A total of 19 participants from 12 ASEAN Plus Three (APT) countries (a delegate from Brunei was absent) attended the meeting and engaged in an interactive and productive discussion. The meeting aimed to bring up diverse and important issues and ideas on the media as follows.

  A. Identifying the concept and function of the media in East Asia
  B. Examination of medi(ated) cultural exchanges in East Asia
  C. Exploration of agenda and measures for media(ted) cultural exchange in East Asia
  D. Policy implications

II. Key Issues and Suggestions

1. As a general principle, all the participants in this WG

 a. Recognized the importance/necessity of "cultural exchange through media" in East Asian Community(EAC) building process.
 b. Agreed that "media" could be an excellent means of promoting 'regional identity' among East Asian people.
 c. Suggested that "media(ted) cultural exchange/cooperation" should be enhanced in the 2nd decade of APT process.

2. Some participants pointed out the importance of "new media" in media(ted) cultural exchange in East Asia, emphasizing following viewpoints

 a. New media such as online digital media, internet, and mobile phones, need to be fully utilized to promote cultural exchange in East Asia.

b. New media are more appealing to some groups of people such as new and young generations.

3. Some participants expressed the concern of intra-country and inter-country disparities in the utilization of media, especially the digital meida, and addressed the issues such as

   a. How to reduce the gap in the access to the media between developed countries and less developed countries in the region.

   b. How to deal with the uneven access to the media due to economic differentiations and poverty in each country.

   c. How to improve the imbalance in the flow of cultures between countries

   d. How to respond to the domination and challenge of global, above all Western, cultures over regional ones through market forces/logics in media industries

4. Some participants acknowledged that there were various marginalized and under-represented sectors, players, and perspectives in the media of East Asian countries and consequently in East Asian Community building process. Based upon the recognition they made suggestions such as

   a. To find ways to hear and enlarge the voices of the marginalized sectors and people.

   b. To make efforts to allow media to be more affordable by, reachable to, the general public in the region.

   c. To mediate cultural exchanges in the region to be more effective

   d. To recognize variety of media such as radio and local newspapers that's still crucial for people in rural areas and make efforts to support the activities of such media

   e. To be aware of the problems encountered by less developed local areas in terms of cyber or media infrastructure and technology.

5. In addition, participants also addressed various concerns in dealing with media in the region such as

   a. Language barrier and the lack of common media of communication in the region resulting in using English as the dominant medium.

b. Lack of an awareness of the importance of culture among the media practitioners in the region

c. Lack of trust and cooperation among the journalists and media practitioners in the region.

III. Policy Recommendations and Proposals for Specific Measures

Based upon the key issues and suggestions addressed in the meeting, the working group made some policy recommendations and proposals for specific measures and programs as follows.

1. Some specific programs were proposed to promote or enhance the mutual understanding of other cultures in the region such as

    a. Asian Song Contest
        - which is for singing contest of local songs
        - to be held annually and hosted by each Asian Plus Three countries in turn
        - to be televised and broadcasted not only through traditional media but also through internet
    b. TV drama, film, documentary and reality show programs
        - televised by the media of some countries and circulated within the region
        - encouragingly co-produced by media programs in some countries
        - featuring the local-lives and diverse cultures of each country in the region
    c. In addition, there were some suggestions for the programs and networks such as
        - VDO clip contest
        - online social networking connecting local communities
        - productions for performing arts and exhibitions
        - inter-university broadcasting networks in the region

2. Some specific measures were proposed to form a network(s) or organization(s) to coordinate "cultural exchange through media" in the region as follows

    a. Setting up a research network to conduct a preliminary research on media development and media(ted) cultural exchange and cooperation.

b. Opening a social club or forum for ASEAN Plus Three journalists to meet regularly.

c. Forming an organization of collaborative working groups that support activities of media(ted) cultural exchange.

3. More specifically, there was a proposal to establish an official institution for journalists in the region. The institution is for

a. Coordinating and regulating the transnational exchange and cooperation among journalists in the region.

b. Making decisions on concerned issues to promote media(ted) cultural exchange and cooperation.

c. Making decisions to promote the development of media industries in the region.

4. There was a suggestion that it was necessary to recognize the importance of 'old' media such as radio and local newspapers still crucial for people in rural areas and to find ways to improve the quality of such media.

5. There was a suggestion that it was necessary to pay attention to the uneven distribution of media technology in the region and to find a way to improve technological problems encountered by some local areas. It is necessary, for example, to make an effort to synchronize broadcasting signals for facilitating cultural exchanges in the region.

6. Related to this, it was suggested that we should be aware of the lack of media infrastructure in some less developed countries and the necessity of development of cyber-infrastructure

ANNEX

Delegates to the Working Group on
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(in alphabetical order by country)

June 13-15, 2008, Seoul, Korea

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