

Declaration of Universal Asianism of the 21st Century (A Proposal)

We adopted the ‘Declaration for the Era of Asia’ at the 1st Asia Economic Community Forum in 2009 and declared the three basic principles as follows: all nations will participate in the Asia Economic Community voluntarily and in equal capacity. (Voluntariness and equality); Asia’s identity will be established and an open community will be formed to make contributions to the peace and prosperity of both Asia and the rest of the world. (Openness and co-existence and co-prosperity); the Becoming-one Asia will pursue the universal values of mankind, thereby making contributions to improving the quality of human life. (Universality)

Asia is not a concept defined geographically nor religious or culturally. Asia should be defined in terms of the coming future, not of the past; that is, as a new project. Asia must be a new concept as well as a new project to be worked out and created by us, not given by others. Therefore, Asia should be opened and be defined by voluntariness. The specific goal of such Asia Project will be to form the Asia Economic Community, as expressed in “Creating One Asia together” which is the topic of the AEC Forum.

What role should this large and diverse continent play in the 21st century in the context of world history? Asia should become the central player in bringing greater peace and prosperity to mankind and put behind the history of poverty and humiliation suffered as colonies, which subject the whole continent to invasion and exploitation by the western power since the 16th century. Asia should be united into a single community to better play such a role. Some may argue that Asia as a gigantic single entity could be a source of threat to other continents but the regional integration in the 21st century shall not be and needs not be exclusive or imperial as it was in the past. Instead, building the Asian community is critical in addressing disputes and conflicts in the region. The terrestrial friction between China and Japan is a striking case in point that makes establishing the Asian community more urgent than ever.

Many are still skeptical about the viability of building Asia community even though they share its rationale. Making Asian community a reality requires a more strategic approach that includes studies on the philosophical and theoretical foundation, i.e. roadmap on Asian integration. It should include fundamental questions over Asia’s identity, groups/areas/countries that will initiate regional integration, factors that encourage or discourage Asian community, and the right sequences of steps and concrete strategies.

Groups to initiate regional integration

Conceptualizing works including philosophical, theoretical approach to the rationale and necessity behind Asia's regional integration in the context of world history are the first steps needed to be taken at infancy mainly by Intellectuals and scholars. They should give preliminary studies such as Asia values survey and Asian regional integration indices to measure the current conditions and the progress of integration and also to examine Asians' values and their level of awareness.

Business men, who are engines behind FTA, single currency and other new initiatives, should aggressively tap into new markets and invest in new businesses to create a common market in Asia. Business men deserve credit for the considerable functional integration achieved in Asia.

Civil organizations should serve as contributors to regional integration by building socio-cultural consensus, psychological affinity and sense of community.

Local governments should lay the foundation for regional collaboration and integration by pushing projects that require collaboration among different cities, both big and small, across the region.

Politicians should contribute to institutionalization of regional integration by signing agreements and establishing new organizations. At times of regional crisis, both economic and security, they should drive the entire region with insightful political leadership and take crisis as an opportunity to turn barriers into facilitators.

Areas driving regional integration

The European integration was driven by the economy and market. The economic sector goes the same for Asia, too, but politics and state are weak areas for regional integration in Asia.. Socio-cultural area also stands in the way of integration due to conflicts over textbooks and history. The earlier stages should put spotlight on the mutual economic benefits that economic and market integration will bring. Socio-cultural area should be given a mid-to-long-term approach focusing on building mutual trust and sense of community. The area of politics and state should start by addressing crisis facing economies and security in the region via multilateral and inter-governmental meetings that focus on establishing long-term transnational collaboration and integrated body.

Countries to drive regional integration

In Asia, the potential lies in China, Japan, and India. Yet, none of the three has all the qualities and qualification to take the initiative. Japan is not totally free from the past of its invasion

and colonization. China is a source of intimidation by its neighbors who fear the giant may have an eye on hegemony. India is absent of a firm leadership. The power struggle between China and Japan or China and India also discourages any of the three to stand at the frontline of regional integration. This is where the middle power countries like ASEAN, Korea or other Asian countries come into play. At present, ASEAN is the central axis in the regional collaboration like ASEAN+3. Korea should enhance its role as a mediator among Northeast Asian regional cooperation mechanism including China, Japan and Korea framework. This can be facilitated by building a new regional system that designates Korea and ASEAN as two mediators and U.S., Russia and EU as external advocates.

U.S. should be involved as a stakeholder by expanding APEC's function in the economic side and hold a presence in Northeast Asia via Northeast Asia Security Cooperation System, an organization evolved from the Six-Party Talks and in Southeast Asia via ARF. Its participation in ASEAN + 6 should be directed towards promoting regional integration.

Sequences by sub-region

Asia is divided into five main sub-regions of Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, South Asia and West Asia. Since regional integration of all countries covering such a vast size is neither realistic nor desirable, ASEAN+3 or ASEAN+6 frameworks should be tapped into in seeking phased-in integration. Given the strong presence of Korea, China and Japan in Asia, progress in Northeast Asia integration is the condition for making integration across Asia a reality. In that sense, the decision by Korea, China and Japan to regularly hold summit talks and to open a permanent secretariat are significant. We need a driving mechanism for Asian regional integration with two subsystems where one is the Northeast Asian system with Korea as the mediator and the other is ASEAN+ system with ASEAN as the mediator.

Phases of regional integration

Phase 1 – awareness on its need

This is the phase which there is considerable spread on the need for regional integration in Asia

The survey done among college students in Korea, China and Japan found that only 50% of the population shares the need

Phase 2 – dissemination of the consensus for regional integration

This is the phase in which efforts from all corners take place to materialize regional integration based on the awareness for its need, in which the sense of community starts to root down

Next 5 ~ 10 years

Phase 3 – institutionalization

This is the phase in which efforts for integration from all sectors materialize into concrete plans and system

Cases in point are FTA or single currency in economic front and multilateral security cooperation body for regional security

Next 10 ~ 20 years

If so, what form should the Asian community take? First, it should be an open community that does not pose threat to other regions or communities. Second, it should be a democratic and an equal community that gives ears to voices of smaller countries. Third, the Asian community should be founded on paying respect for and building on the indigenous culture and tradition of each country or region as opposed to other communities founded on the economy. The Asian community should pursue a harmonized and balanced economy based on economic values of cooperation and equality rather than one sided competition and efficiency. Such should set a departure from the 20th century Asianism that justified Japan's invasion or worked as an ideology of colonies' cry for national liberation, and should serve as the basis for a universal Asianism of the 21st century in search for Asian identity on top of such values as freedom and democracy.