The Alliance of Civilisations: diversity and creativity of Southeast Asia

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Ⅰ． Introduction

In the global age, we are exposed to economic, political and environmental threats as well as opportunities, regardless of the differences in nationality, language, and civilisation. Provided that the opportunities and risks of globalization are allocated unequally and unfairly, dynamic interactions in the world-wide struggle over wealth and powers are inclined to cause frictions or disputes among nations, classes, races, regional habitants and so on.

Those contradictions and frictions among peoples are often reduced into the difference in race, religion, and culture/civilisation. Such a cultural/civilisation reductionist approach to the international and domestic conflicts easily is applied to produce a divided world view of "We-self" and "They-other" with different identity of religion, race, and culture.

We have to go beyond separatism driven by a specific symbol such as religion, culture, and ethnicity/nation. In particular, the dichotomous separatism or reductionism takes a concrete example in the view on the divided world by Christianity and Islam. The concept of the "Dialogue of Civilisations" and the "Alliance of Civilisations" is a reflection of the effort to exceed the idea of the confrontation and friction among civilizations, races, and religions, and rather to construct a bridge of dialogue and mutual understanding between different

civilisations.

The paper will be focused on some lessons and suggestions which the experiences of Southeast Asia can provide for the "Alliance of Civilisations" in Asia-Pacific.

Why is Southeast Asia significant and relevant in considering the Alliance of Civilisations? Southeast Asia is a region of diversity and uniqueness, particularly in terms of culture, religion, ethnicity, language, and historical experience. Because of its coherent complexity and diversity, Southeast Asia has been keeping orientation and making efforts towards coexistence and coordination of different cultures, religions, ethnicities and languages in both national and region-wide level. Southeast Asia is regarded as an epitome of Asia-Pacific and the world characterized by resonance and friction of civilisations.

Ⅱ. Cultural diversity and complexity of Southeast Asia

The region is geographically composed of the islands part and continent part, and just located between the two historical great powers and civilisations, China and India, and linking the two oceans, Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean. Before the Western colonization, in the period during from the 15th to 17th Century, Southeast Asia formed the nucleus in the Asian trading sphere, which was a most prosperous and active trading zone in the world economy (Reid 1988).

This geographical location and external civilisation environments naturally make Southeast Asia a place of encountering where various kinds of peoples, cultures and religions meet together. The region is continuously and ceaselessly exposed to external influences and impacts as well as intra-regional interactions, which leads Southeast Asia to the region with a unique mixture of colorful cultures and religions.

The region, where various kinds of animism basically has been developed, accepts most of world religions, that is, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity and the external ethnic religions like Hinduism and Confucianism. Southeast Asian cultural structure is a multi-layered and diversified one (see Table 1).

Base-layered cultures are characterized by religiously animism and a way of life adjusting to ecological and natural environments. Around the 2nd century Southeast Asia accepted Indian civilisation and partly Chinese civilisation, and since the 13th century Islamic civilization in the islands part of Southeast has started. From the 16th and intensely in the 19th century Western powers colonized the

Table 1   Cultural structure of Southeast Asia

region. In the latter half of the 20th century decolonization and the era of modern nation-states building are experienced.

The ten countries consist of the region. In the continent part, there are Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. In the islands part, there are Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Brunei. All Southeast Asian countries except Thailand were colonized by the Western powers. Every Western colonial power carved each cultural and civilisation influence for each country of Southeast Asia.

Table 2 shows schematically diversity and complexity of Southeast Asian civilisation. Every Southeast Asian country has historically a complex and diverse civilisation/cultural background and experience of colonization by Western powers.
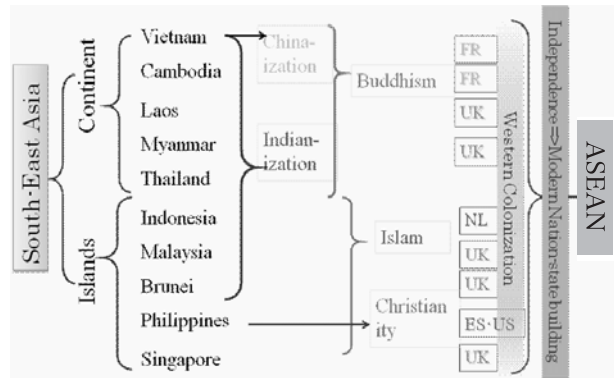

Table 2　External Civilisations, Colonization, and Modern nation-state building and ASEAN formation

*FR: France, UK: United Kingdom, NL: Netherlands, ES: Spain, US: United States of America

Ⅲ. ASEAN formation and intra-regional and external threats and opportunities

Every developing country generally, since its independence from the colonized system, has been facing a difficulty of defining national borders and settling border conflicts, as well as a dilemma between achieving national integration and securing tolerance and coordination among different races, religions and languages. A process of modern nation-state building is apt to reinforce its exclusive tendency and forces to unify various cultures and languages into one nation and one culture forcefully, which consequently causes serious domestic frictions and conflicts with neighbor countries.

To form a western-style nation-state is to demarcate the national border, thereby making a "geo-body" of sovereign nation-state. Thus the region decides its own geographical territory, within which national sovereignty is effective and invasion will not be tolerated. However, this most concrete aspect of forming a national geo-body inevitably creates the concomitant task of delineating a cultural and racial border, or making a "We-self" and "They-other"(Winichakul 1996: 84-5). After World War II, in the decolonization and independence process, Southeast Asia was inevitably placed in the unstable and liquid political situation caused by nation-state building efforts. This came alongside the direct and indirect effect of the external political environment, including the antagonistic ideological and political regimes

represented by the superpowers, Europe, and China.

The formation process of the Federation of Malaysia sharply illustrates the above example. It is noteworthy that the birth of ASEAN was directly brought about in the controversial and settlement process of political reorganization in maritime Southeast Asia, which was triggered by the formation of the Federation of Malaysia (Yamakage 1991: 22-122; Anwar 1994: 17-58; Chalmers 1996: 18-9).

As being shown in the case of establishing process of Malaysia in the early 1960s, Southeast Asian countries also have been straggling with the difficulties of how to establish a modern nation-state while coordinating intra-regional relationships and coping with external threats. The region countries have forged out consequently a unique "regional nation-states system", that is, ASEAN.[i] ASEAN formation had given Southeast Asian countries an initial and indispensable condition for seeking to build a "nation-state" for the one hand and enabling to coexist with intra-regional neighbors for the other hand.

The intra-regional diplomatic negotiations and exchanges between the government leaders were frequently held to settle the conflicts and disputes around the new Federation formation, as well as the subsequent Indonesian confrontation policy. This established the ground to discuss and settle regional problems by the region's own efforts, and ultimately grouped government leaders for the new regional organization.[ii] These regional and diplomatic functional networks among governments can be regarded as a "proto-ASEAN regime" in terms of the ASEAN nation-states system (Takagi 1997:9-10).

ASEAN's function and system of avoiding armed conflict and adopting pacific settlement between member-states was realized gradually, bringing about ASEAN political and security cooperation as reflected in the Bangkok Declaration in 1967, the ZOPFAN Declaration in 1971 and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia in 1976.

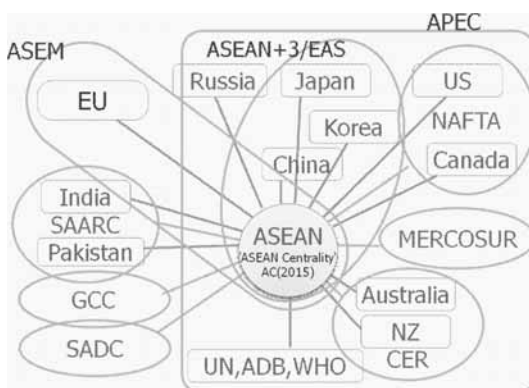Externally ASEAN formation had changed Southeast Asia as a geographical concept into as a political existence and enabled the region countries to make regional interests reflect in international arenas and negotiations. We should note that this most complex and diverse Southeast Asia is the most active in Asia in making an effort to coordinate and cooperate together. ASEAN has interwoven unique external dialogue and cooperation networks with Australia, New Zealand, the US, Canada, Japan, Korea and China, Russia, the EU, and, of course, India and Pakistan, and, moreover, International

Table 3　ASEAN's Multi-regional and Institutional Dialogue networks

organizations like UNDP, ADB, and so on (see Table 3).

Those international dialogue and cooperation networks enable ASEAN countries to create economically and politically favorable circumstances for ASEAN and to positive participation in world economic negotiations in the Global age.

"ASEANization" of Southeast Asia can be understood as an achievement from the desire and will for coexistence, independence and prosperity commonly shared by the diverse and relatively smaller region countries.

Ⅳ. ASEAN Community formation and its socio-cultural dimension

At the 12th ASEAN Summit in January 2007, the ASEAN leaders signed the Cebu Declaration on the Acceleration of the Establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015.

ASEAN Community should be supported by the three integral pillars as shown in Table 4, that is, the ASEAN Economic Community, the ASEAN Security Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

ASEAN has also launched to work for the establishment of the ASEAN Charter, which would provide a solid legal and institutional foundation for ASEAN to be a more rules-based, effective and people-centered organization. The Charter would be indispensable for the realization of ASEAN Community among the member-countries and all the peoples in the region as well. ASEAN celebrated the entry into force of the ASEAN Charter at the 14th Summit meeting on 15 December 2008.

Facing the opportunities and risks of global political economy, ASEAN, comprising relatively small and medium scale countries, has no way but accelerating its economic integration process for economic prosperity, that is, the formation of ASEAN Economic Community, as well as securing regional peace and political stability, that is, the establishment of the ASEAN Security Community. Those economic integration and specifically security cooperation have been receiving a lot of efforts and interests of the member-countries. However, the dimension of socio-cultural cooperation, which was called as "functional cooperation" formerly,
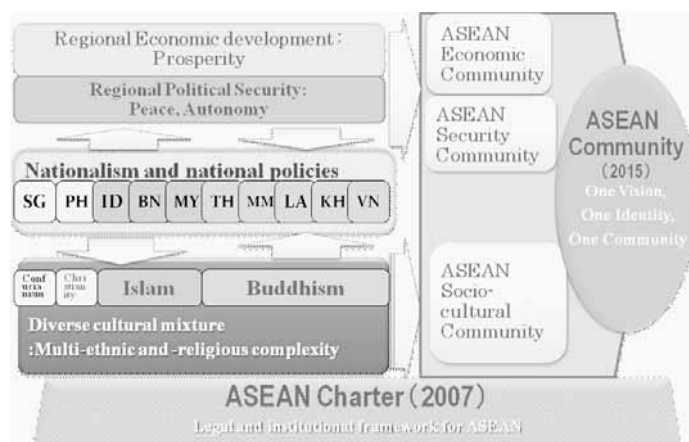

Table 4   ASEAN Community formation and ASEAN Diversity
*SG: Singapore, PH: the Philippines, ID: Indonesia, BN: Brunei, MY: Malaysia, TH: Thailand
  MM: Myanmar, LA: Laos, KH: Cambodia, VN: Vietnam

has not been receiving a higher priority than the other two areas. It could be said that ASEAN still remains an organization not for the peoples but for the member-state governments and bureaucrats.

In the ASEAN Charter, ASEAN noted as its one of purposes to promote "a people-oriented ASEAN in which all sectors of society are encouraged to participate in, and benefit from" the ASEAN Community building, and to promote "ASEAN identity through the fostering of greater awareness of the diverse culture and heritage of the region" (ASEAN Secretariat 2007). The Charter also declares as one of the fundamental principles "respect for the different cultures, languages and religions of the people of ASEAN, while emphasizing their common values in the spirit of unity in diversity" (ASEAN Secretariat 2007). Moreover, ASEAN also takes as ASEAN Charter's motto "One Vision, One Identity, One Community" (ASEAN Secretariat 2007).

These purposes and principles of the ASEAN Charter would be ultimately realized by cooperative efforts in the socio-political dimension of ASEAN Community idea (see Table 4).

Ⅴ．Conclusion: the idea of "harmonized diversity"

ASEAN should keep itself as a tolerant container in which various civilisations coexist like a mosaic and a unique mixture of civilizations is brought up. Otherwise, diversity ASEAN could not be effective and significant for the member-countries and peoples. ASEAN governments and peoples need to nurture and forge a philosophy and an attitude to enable them to accommodate ethnic identity, national identity, and ASEAN identity together.

Put it briefly, it is an idea of "harmonized diversity" or "harmony of diversity"

Let me introduce the following humanistic approach and attitude advocated by Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, SGI president and Soka University Founder (Ikeda 2005).

> "Recognizing that all is change within a framework of interdependence, we of course see harmony and oneness as expressions of our interconnectedness. But we can even appreciate contradiction and conflict in the same way. Thus the struggle against evil—a struggle that issues from the inner effort to master our own contradictions and conflicts—should be seen as a difficult yet unavoidable trial that we must undergo in the effort to create a greater and deeper sense of connection."

His humanistic philosophy is characterized by the view on the world as a dynamic interconnected relationship which is created by every all existence and all phenomenon and simultaneously creates every all existence and all phenomenon. Even contradiction and conflict as well as unity and harmony could be seen "as

expressions of our interconnectedness", and should be understood as "a difficult yet unavoidable trial that we must undergo in the effort to create a greater and deeper sense of connection."

This philosophy of interdependence and interconnectedness will be helpful and indispensable for ASEAN leaders and peoples in working together for establishing ASEAN Community.

Lastly let me close this paper by sharing a excerpt of the poetry which Dr. Ikeda, World People's Poet, presented to the peoples of Malaysia, a multi-racial country and one of Southeast Asian countries (Ikeda 1988a)

> The "harmony of diversity" ―
> This guideline of yours
> Is the source of creative energy,
> Whether in nature or in human society.
>
> Imagine a seven-colored child's top
> ― red, blue, yellow, green ... even purple ―
> Spinning faster and faster;
> These colors blend and merge,
> Approaching one single,
> Yet infinitely beautiful tone.
>
> The colors of the spinning top
> Are the diversity of nature and society,
> And the final single tint
> Is the mystic beauty
> Of harmonized diversity.
>
> And the top's rapid spin —
> This, my dear Malaysian friends,
> Is your spirit of construction;
> Your resolve to win;
> Your untiring, devoted effort;
> Continuous from yesterday to today,
> From today toward tomorrow.

Notes

ⅰ）The emergence and development of European nation-states has been accompanied with the creation of a "European nation-states system", which enables them to coexist and balance one another. The European nation-state model, called "classical nationalism" by Murakami, is constituted by two indispensable factors, that is (1) nation-state itself and (2) nation-states system (Murakami 1992: 82-5; Murakami 1996: 31-3). These two requisites are

interdependent and indispensable to each other. The reason why European classical nation-states have been sustainable is that nation-states system has been operating as an international system which not only allowed but also restricted individual nation-states' claims to enable them to coexist. However, when the western nation-state model is transferred into non-western areas, the other crucial factor of "nation-states system" has been overlooked or ignored. Without a nation-states system, a nation-state could not be restricted or settled in a coexistent environment. Murakami calls the nationalism without nation-states system "ingenuous nationalism" (or "naïve nationalism"), while the nationalism with a nation-states system he calls "systematized nationalism" or "systemic nationalism." In the case of Southeast Asia, ASEAN can be regarded as a "Southeast Asian nation-states system"(Takagi 1997:2-5).

ⅱ）We should not take a view that ASEAN was formed as an anticommunist organization in the antagonistic power politics between capitalism and communism. It would be partially right that, as many studies pointed out, the threat of internal and external communist invasion was the main driving force bringing about ASEAN. However, this view overly-simplifies the regional and national political, economic and social situations under which the Southeast Asian countries were placed. At the same time by this viewpoint there is no consideration of the subjective and internal logic and ideas of Southeast Asian nationalism in and of itself.

The communist movement, effected and supported by Communist China, was, to be sure, one of the upheaval factors in the Southeast Asian nation-building process. However, in the same way or even in a more crucial one, the domestic fears of racial disputes, the uncertainty of governing legitimacy caused by political separatism and economic failures, and the conflicts over territorial disputes with emerging neighbor states were also pressing threats. Managerial capabilities over such difficulties were required for modern nationalist governments of all the regional states. Setting the communist threat in the above context of nation-state building, it is understandable why ASEAN governments cooperated together after the formation of ASEAN towards the elimination of the communist movement as one of the common threats all of them faced.

We should pay more attention to the historical relationships and background between Southeast Asian nationalisms and ASEAN formation. The most positive driving force and structure compelling the regional states to explore the formation of regional political frameworks stems from two trends. First were the intra-regional conflicts and territorial decisions among the nation-states, that is, deciding territoriality or "geo-body" of the state, which is an indispensable and inherent element of the western nation-state model. Second was the external vulnerability or domestic disintegration, both of which easily invited the possibility of neighbors' and extra-regional interventions (Takagi 1997:5-12).

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