

IDE Research Bulletin

Research project summary based on papers for academic journals
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Leadership and Regional Organizations

Project Leader

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March 2020

IDE-JETRO

Comparative Analysis of Foreign Policies of Cusp States: The Case of Policies on Regionalism

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1. Introduction

This article compares foreign policies of cusp states, which are states as middle-seized power and geographically edge or periphery in the existing region. Their policies on regionalism are often very active at subsystem level. We argue that cusp states' regionalism policy can be classified into three types: equal partnering, self-centered grouping, and bridging existing regional conceptions. Using Japan and Thailand as examples of cusp states. Our goal is to reveal the characteristics of cusp states' regionalism policies by conducting various kinds of comparisons.

2. Cusp state

Cusp state is relatively new concept introduced by Philip Robins which is potentially useful in explaining international relations and foreign policies, yet that concept is still fuzzy. Size of power and geographic condition are two elements for clue about characteristics of cusp state. In terms of size of power, cusp state is basically middle-sized states (not super power nor small power/different from middle power). Cusp state is (physical and human) geographically not fit the existing region/ regionalism and decision makers of cusp state do not satisfied position in the existing region/regionalism. Cusp states are unfitted to existing regionalism and often faced dilemma between two or more regions. Because of its middle-sized of power, some cusp states are not major actors in international system but major actors in sub system.

3. Regionalism Policies of Cusp States: Three Patterns

Regionalism pursued by cusp states can be classified into three patterns: (i) equal partnering; (ii) self-centered grouping (iii) bridging. The classification is conceptual and there is regionalism pursued by cusp states that entails more than one feature. There are two research questions that we try to address in the empirical section. The first question is: Under what circumstances each regionalism policy is pursued by the cusp states? The second question is: What is the relationship among the three types of regionalism policies? At least two factors are associated with the domestic capacity of cusp states. First is the economic capacity. Second is the political leadership such as Prime Ministers

and Presidents. There are also factors associated with external environments. The trend of regionalism in other parts of the world may influence the regionalism policy of any state including the cusp states. Cold war can be a constraint on foreign policies including regionalism policies.

4. Case Studies

4.1. Case 1: Japan (the mid-1960s)

Japan started to have a rapid economic growth in the 1960s. In the 1960s, there was no regional club among developed states around Japan, to which Japan could have joined. Therefore, Japan attempted to create such a club. In 1965, Kojima Kiyoshi, Professor of Economics at Hitotsubashi University proposed Pacific Free Trade Area (PAFTA) among Japan, US, Canada, Australia and NZ. However, this implies that the then Japanese economy was not ready to have fully equal partnership with Western economies including the US, Canada, and Australia.

Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke developed the proposal on Asian Development Fund (ADF). Kishi gave up pursuing ADF, after the US financial support became unlikely. A decade later, Asian Development Bank (ADB), similar to Kishi's ADF, was successfully established under the Japanese initiative.

In December 1966, Miki Takeo became Foreign Minister. He requested Foreign Ministry officials to flesh out his idea of Asia Pacific Sphere policy. There were three options for trade regionalism: (i) no trade regionalism; (ii) trade regionalism with Southeast Asia; (iii) trade regionalism with Pacific developed states, to which Southeast Asian countries could join later. Miki finally outlined the elements of the Asia Pacific Sphere policy. Nevertheless, Miki's Asia Pacific Sphere Policy did not lead to establishment of any concrete new institution.

4.2. Case 2: Thailand (1980s-2000s)

The ASEAN Preferential Trading Arrangements (PTAs) were introduced in 1977 to forge economic cooperation mainly by granting tariff preferences for intra-ASEAN trade. As a means to strengthen the organization, the creation of an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) was recommended in the report submitted by the 1985 ASEAN Task Force appointed by member governments. In 1992, AFTA was signed by six ASEAN members. The Plaza Accord of 1985 generated benefits to the Thai economy, which had moved towards an export-led economy. Economic benefits, thus, were primarily, though not exclusively, behind Thailand's AFTA creation. In addition, regionalism trends in Europe

and North America did have an influence on Thailand's calculation to create AFTA

The Quadrangle Economic Cooperation (QEC) was a sub-regional arrangement, established by Thailand in 1993. It was aimed to function as a coordinating mechanism for development schemes, mostly on cross-border trades and construction of transport links, among Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and China's Yunnan Province. However, Thailand's economic downturn in 1997 caused the QEC losing its gravity, and it was subsequently integrated into the GMS program. In 2003, the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) was established. The objective of establishing ACMECS was to reduce the gap in economic development among member states. Further, the economic development of Indochina countries was expected to enhance the solidarity of ASEAN.

Throughout the 1990s, even with frequent government changes and the boom and bust of the economy, Thailand's role as a bridge between ASEAN and mainland Mekong countries gained prominence. Thailand's role as a bridge was clearly demonstrated when Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, who was in office between 1996 and 1997, maneuvered his Indochina policy to improve ties with neighbors in the Mekong.

5. Conclusion

First, our comparison of the two cusp states' approaches to regionalism revealed sufficient commonalities between them to validate cusp state as a concept. Second, four key driving factors (domestic political leadership, economic capacity, Cold War external environment, and regionalism initiatives in other parts of the world) qualitatively show both whether and how these factors accounted for the two cusp states' policies.