

The Science Council of Japan Conference
on Sustainability 2005

“DYNAMISM AND UNCERTAINTY IN ASIA”

9-10 September 2005, at Kyoto International Conference Hall

Chairman's Statement: The Challenge for Scientists

The 2005 Science Council of Japan conference considered a range of pressing challenges in the areas of development, regional security and international order. There is little doubt that we live in an uncertain age. One of the roots of this uncertainty lies in the rapid pace of change in the technologies that surround us, the values that shape our lifestyles, the economic factors that shape our livelihoods, the social structures that support our communities, and the governance systems that order our societies. Another root cause is the threat of catastrophic events, such as terrorism, epidemics, environmental degradation and disasters both natural and man-made.

We explored the ‘core values’ which exist and upon which regional cooperation can be strengthened, and also the fundamental diversity that exists in Asia. Of overriding importance, discussions stressed the significance of developing cooperative arrangements and institutions that build upon a sense of regional identities whilst also maintaining global ties and responsibilities.

In this endeavor, it is essential that progress is made in bridging the gap between research and policy. Scientists have a special role to play by having an input into policy discourse. It is an obligation for scientists and scholars to support, question and critique policy issues, offer policy alternatives, consistent with the spirit of the Millennium Development Goals, and consider the long-term implications of policy options.

I Establishing Order: Sharing Norms, Shaping the System

Evolving norms, rules and values shape regional order in Asia in a number of ways. Our challenge is to balance a number of forces and values – such as the natural environment, economic development, market principles and globalization, culture, and identity. In the economic realm, there needs to be greater thinking on how to understand the social and political change, environmental problems, and demographic challenges that result from economic activity.

Democracy is conducive to creating long-term order. However, democratic transition can be de-stabilizing, especially when societies are experiencing political and social change. Therefore, political leaders must give due consideration to providing a social safety net to cushion the more vulnerable sections of society from the negative social changes inherent in globalization, and preventing discontent from exacerbating anti-social political forces.

Democracy can be expressed in a number of different forces and values. Asian societies are distinct from each other and also from Western societies. Democracy does not have a single, universally applicable model. Therefore, Asian countries must embrace democratic values and institutions which are home-grown and which are in tune with their culture, values, and economic development.

In terms of military security and the regional balance of power, changes ahead demand that greater attention is given to multilateral forms for managing peaceful change.

In addition, our approach to order must go beyond traditional state and military thinking: non-traditional security challenges – such as trafficking in narcotics and humans, and terrorism – require new and innovative regional responses, and most importantly they require regional cooperation.

Further, we recognize that cooperation among Asian civil societies complements efforts by governments in the region to build a people-centric order. We aim at strengthening the institutional bases for civil society development.

Development, too, is central to the building of a prosperous and stable order. But it must be seen in the wider context of a balance between the market, culture and nature. Deregulation, privatization, a free market for both goods and services: these hold potential for further growth and stability, but they also hold challenges and the potential for instability which is already being felt. Social change, unemployment, and vulnerability to economic downturns and slumps represent enormous challenges for governments throughout the region.

Therefore, it is important that economic growth be achieved in a manner consistent with environmental and social commitments, to ensure that globalization has benefits for all members of society and that economic growth is not achieved at the cost of the natural environment or without regard to the cultures of Asia's societies.

The functions of the Science Council of Asia should be strengthened and the SCA should focus on the ways in which science and technology cooperation can promote sustainable development.

In terms of security, Asia faces many serious challenges, including the rise of certain states, the threat of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and instability on the Korean peninsula. Whilst the bilateral and alliance approaches to security management have achieved much success in the past, sustainable order requires more long term and institutionalized multilateral approaches.

The US has been, and will continue to be, fundamentally important to Asian order. However, it is necessary for political leaders and scientists in the region to envisage a future in which the US is less prominent and in which issues of order may need to be addressed regionally.

There is some foreboding regarding the changing balance of power. However, it is important that political leaders and analysts stop approaching this issue in terms of worst case scenarios. Regional power changes need not result in instability or conflicts of interest; peaceful change is absolutely viable, and requires that regional actors anticipate a changing balance of power and build institutions which can manage order/security and ensure confidence.

In terms of all the principal challenges which currently exist – development, order and security – the prospects for multilateral mechanisms to improve collective action must be explored and exploited more in the future. Bilateralism and alliance politics have served us well, and will continue to play their role, but a more comprehensive framework for dealing with common challenges must be built and maintained. At the very least, there must be a direct channel for communication between the principal actors in the region to make relations as harmonious as possible, to build confidence, and to avoid misunderstanding.

In the face of uncertainty, the nations of East Asia, in concert with other nations most actively involved in the area, should pursue regionalism within the context of globalization. Starting with a functional approach and clear-minded recognition of the existing barriers, they should plan for at least a decade of transition toward an East Asian community. A series of East Asian summits could act as landmarks towards the institutionalization of regionalism and a shared acceptance of community. At the first East Asian Summit it would be sufficient to elaborate the goals, set in motion a process, and finally acknowledge challenges to be addressed.

Values that bind the region should be jointly identified, and factors interfering with regional identity, many linked to nationalism, deliberately reduced. History is proving divisive, and it must be faced directly in order to neutralize its impact as well as to find alternative themes with promise for regional identity. Universal values must be given more prominence, offering reassurance for linking regionalism to globalization. The variety of religious and philosophical traditions can be defined in ways suitable for cooperation across cultural divides.

II National and Regional Security: Building Confidence, Inducing Cooperation

National and regional security can best be ensured when seen in the context of the holistic security picture from domestic, national, regional and global perspectives. International terrorism, transnational organized crime, and piracy often feed upon insurgencies and a general lack of security at the national and local levels. Increasingly, it has become clear that security as we know it is ever more intertwined with non-traditional security issues. These various levels and security challenges pose complex cause-effect relationships. Therefore, regional and national security can only be ensured when we approach them in a comprehensive and multi-faceted manner, embracing both traditional and non-traditional security.

Stability and peace have been at the core of Asia's dynamism and prosperity, especially in the last decades. We must think in terms of multiple and overlapping modes of governance, including at one end internal national developments, and at the other global mechanisms that apply to or may assist regional and sub-regional efforts. There is no reason why bilateral and multilateral arrangements cannot co-exist. Indeed, they have co-existed for years. Moreover, the US is supportive of regional arrangements. An overlapping bilateral alliance architecture has served as an effective mechanism for deterrence, peace and stability in East Asia over the past six decades. Given uncertainty and flash-points in regional security, this web of bilateral alliances will remain a stabilizing factor for the foreseeable future.

Given the security dynamics and evolving transnational challenges, it is time to consider the development and further evolution of an overarching multilateral security mechanism in the future, that builds upon the existing bilateral and limited multilateral arrangements. Meanwhile, Asia has to maintain peace and stability by effectively managing its own interrelationships, even as it promotes further multilateral security cooperation.

Similarly, there is not necessarily a tension between "Asian" regional cooperation, and forms of cooperation which involve actors – such as the EU or the US – from outside the region. The key is whether such mechanisms are mutually supportive and share common goals.

Regional functional cooperation can help us to develop/conceive our regional vision for future cooperation, build regional identity, and offer opportunities to ease bilateral tensions.

East Asia's multilateral security mechanisms should be viewed more as confidence building measures aimed at avoiding or dampening the possibilities of, rather than reacting to, crises or aggression. Peacekeeping and disaster relief operations and non-traditional security issues (such as refugee problems, maritime safety, pollution, and other environmental issues) are also well-suited to a multilateral approach. In many instances, the process is as important to the product.

'Functional' approaches may not work well in the case of Northeast Asia where geopolitical complications and urgency prevail. Indeed, intensifying economic and social interdependence and trans-frontier environmental problems alone have not generated the necessary conditions for a regional community. Therefore, consolidating confidence building measures in more 'traditional' political and military sectors seem to be more crucial at least in advancing Northeast Asian security cooperation. For this, the role of political leaders with a strong commitment to make a political breakthrough is critically important. Still, the efforts of institutionalizing multilateral cooperation on the issue of non-traditional security should not be disregarded. Indeed, they should be continued as an important process of increasing habits of dialogue and thus strengthening confidence building.

The relationships between and among the major players in Asia – China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the US – are critical to future security and stability on the continent, as is a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear crisis. The bilateral relationship between China and Japan has come under strain recently and, therefore, is the focus of concern. But the relations between and amongst the principal players are equally important from a long term security perspective, as is the Taiwan issue. Nonetheless, the relationship between China and Japan is a pressing issue and concrete steps – such as enhancing Track II dialog – should be taken to improve that relationship.

Science and technology have important contributions to make to peace and security in Asia. In the first place they must explain better, on the basis of facts, the substantive elements of international security issues. In this sense, science has a major contribution to make in clarifying the nature and scale of various challenges, such as weapons of mass destruction (WMD), non-traditional security threats, and the impact of energy issues upon domestic and regional security. For example, the provision of confidence in WMD verification is fundamentally important. Secondly, experts in science and technology from various Asian countries can show the benefits of cooperation by jointly engaging in large-scale projects.

Examples include the design and operation of Asian public utility satellite monitoring and warning systems. Thirdly, there is a need to be creative and imaginative, to anticipate future challenges, in addressing these issues early in order to suggest possible solutions, or even to minimize those challenges before they turn into direct threats.

III Economic and Social Development: Creating a Breakthrough on Human Development

Economic development is a process. At various stages of industrialization and modernization there may be destabilizing periods. We must be aware of these possibilities and prepare for their implications.

In order to alleviate the destabilization and negative consequences of industrialization at the initial stages, we must pay attention to certain policies, such as reducing income inequality, increasing social mobility and improving political participation. In addition, "human development" and international cooperation are desirable in an Asian context. In doing this, it is vital that we draw upon the knowledge and traditions of local societies rather than merely importing Western ideas and practices.

Demographic challenges require special attention. In addressing them, as well as the full array of economic and development challenges presented by overpopulation and ageing populations, Asia must retain its competitive edge and innovative proclivity by investing in the sciences.

A variety of Free Trade Agreements have been proposed and negotiated for East Asia, but an East Asian Community is still a remote goal. The role of scientists is to monitor closely ongoing moves, identify correctly their benefits and impediments and guide them to be consistent with multilateral rules.

It may be necessary to question conventional wisdom on development. To deal with the uncertainties of dynamism in Asia today we need to: (1) Re-evaluate the scientific principles that underlie sustainability; (2) Work towards the development and diffusion of earth and human-friendly technologies, and (3) Review how we should pursue human development, broadly defined. The scientific community can contribute toward seeking new ways of rewarding innovations contributing to the commons as a major component of our economic system, rather than letting economic activity be exclusively driven by consumption. Given the cultural diversity of the Asian region, such an economic system could contribute to a more creative and sustainable age.

Asia must address its human development strategies by taking into account its own specificities and values as well as the successes and failure of other developed and developing societies.

Scientists must deal with the multiple challenges of providing affordable and secure energy, water and health resources to all Asian populations. Scientific cooperation within Asia and globally is therefore essential to the development and deployment of clean, efficient and sustainable energy resources and environmental systems, and meeting rapidly evolving health risks.

Education at all levels from primary to “life-long learning” is essential for social and economic development. Education has been a cornerstone of Asian successes, and remains a key challenge for all Asian countries. Of particular importance is universal primary education (especially for girls) and also achieving breakthroughs in higher and continuing education by using new information and communication technologies (ICT). The science community has expanded its role in achieving effective education, developing indigenous scientific capacity, essential both to profit from global advances and to build on and protect local knowledge resources.

Scientific organizations adopted the Ubuntu Declaration at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) 2002. It highlighted the need to pay more attention to education and the role of the scientific community, as has the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development.