

[JAPAN]

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Europe-Japan Relations and the ASEM Process: Personal Reflections on Multilateralism and Global Governance

Preface

It may be a presumptuous claim, but those involved in track-two diplomacy, including myself, may be more sensitive to shifting winds in relationships between and among nations than many others, including government officials in charge of external affairs. This may be so since international nonprofit and non-governmental professionals must identify broad emerging issues and explore possible responses in order to be effective and relevant. Accordingly, they have a comparative advantage as opposed to government officials, who normally deal with relations with specific countries or functional issues in the short-term. Moreover, NGO professionals remain in close contact with their counterparts in other countries, and they engage in a continual exchange of information and ideas not bound by national interest.

Needless to say, such professionals must also remain in close contact with government officials in their home countries and in other countries in order to cultivate their own perspectives as public diplomacy professionals. In my own experience, those government officials who are more open to working with civil society professionals are cognizant that their ministries need to improve their capacities to collect information from sources beyond government. They understand that this capacity is necessary to develop a broadly-gauged foreign policy direction not constrained solely by national interest or by the priorities of individual departments and sections in their ministries. These government officials are confident of the central role that government efforts play in diplomacy, but they are also conscious of the growing role that public diplomacy plays in the increasingly pluralistic and interdependent international and domestic environments.

In fact, there have been cases where government officials visiting our institution, the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE), sought our help to organize such fora for exchange including the so-called “wisemen’s groups.” There have been cases where government officials felt that a joint exploration of future bilateral or multilateral

relationships should be coordinated by civil society organizations in order to provide an appropriate base for the government to promote policy.

This brief paper reviewing the evolution of the relationship between Europe and Japan rests on JCIE's involvement in track-two activities. An analysis of our expanding involvement in international affairs reflects the significant changes that have taken place over the years in European-Japanese relations. In addition, there is a primary need to examine track-two processes that promote the Asia-Europe relationship as discussion of the future role of ASEM is underway. What can examining track two-processes in Japan teach us about European-Japanese relations within the context of ASEM? Can ASEM strengthen interregional relations and global governance as track-two processes have done? We should remind ourselves that at the inaugural ASEM meeting in February 1996, leaders called for enhanced intellectual exchange between Asia and Europe through seminars and symposia on international and regional issues and through the establishment of networks among private think tanks from both regions. As ASEM enters its second decade, a look at track-two relations between Japan and Europe can help us understand how to deepen relations and how the ASEM process can play a role.

Evolution of the Japan-Europe Relationship in the Immediate Post-war Era

It is well-known that Europe played a significant role in Japan's modernization. The Dutch and Portuguese established contact with the Japanese centuries before Commodore Perry's arrival, and Europe's colonial presence in East Asia during the nineteenth century meant that Japan has had contact with Europe for several centuries. Japan looked to Europe's political and social institutions and infrastructure as a model for its own during the Meiji Restoration. European contributions to Japan in terms of art and culture were well-appreciated and acknowledged, and many Japanese viewed Western Europe as one important aspect of the Japanese intellectual tradition.

Nevertheless, in post-World War II Japan, these two allies paid scarce attention to each other. This largely reflected the predominant presence of the United States in every aspect of Japanese life in the immediate postwar period, including during the Occupation years when Japanese virtually lived with the American military and were

exposed to the American culture and lifestyle. Many Japanese students went to the United States under the Fulbright and many other scholarship programs. In terms of Japan's foreign policy, Japanese horizons were limited primarily to the trans-Pacific relationship with the United States and relations with the rest of East Asia. Europeans, for their part, were more focused on internal affairs, their alliance relationship with the United States, and their adversarial relationship with the Soviet Union. Europe and Japan did not cultivate deeper relations with each other.

Japan's spectacular economic development and the market opening of the European Union paved the way for a blossoming of trade between Japan and Europe in the beginning of the 1960s. Relations remained determinedly economic in focus, however, and they were plagued by disputes over a bilateral trade imbalance, a closed Japanese market, and "torrential" Japanese exports in key European industries such as automobiles. Some government officials and public intellectuals in Japan and Europe expressed concern about the absence of a political context similar to the American-European Atlantic partnership within which to settle these disputes.

Then, the political shocks from 1971 to 1974 known as the "Nixon Shocks" demonstrated both the interdependence of the global economy and the key role of United States policy. The interdependence of European and Japanese security concerns was dramatically observed in subsequent developments in the Gulf region such as the fall of the Shah in Iran and the emerging threat of long-range "theatre" nuclear weapons. These events helped catalyze the genesis of a political relationship between Japan and Europe in the years to come.

Emergence of a Political Relationship Between Japan and Europe

The 1970s were witness to an increasingly challenging agenda before the international community. Is it interesting to note that during this time, track-two initiatives to involve Japan in greater international cooperation preceded government initiatives. In 1972, David Rockefeller, then chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations, along with Zbigniew Brzezinski of Columbia University, Robert Bowie of Harvard University and Henry Owen of the Brookings Institution started discussing the critical need to involve Japan in international policy studies and dialogues that had been traditionally promoted

in the United States and Europe by major think tanks and private policy-study groups. After a series of consultations among governmental and non-governmental leaders in the United States, Europe, and Japan, the Trilateral Commission was inaugurated in Tokyo in July 1973 in order to promote joint policy study and dialogue among the three “advanced industrial democracies.” The official seven-nation Economic Summit was subsequently established in 1975.

I have been personally involved in the Trilateral Commission as secretary of the Japanese Group since its inception, and as soon as the Commission was launched it became quite obvious that the Japan-Europe dimension of the trilateral relationship was quite fragile in comparison with its two other dimensions. The level of contact between Japanese think tanks and policy specialists and their European counterparts was far lower than American-European and American-Japanese organizations and specialists. JCIE had been intensely involved in United States-Japan policy research and dialogue activities since the inauguration of the Shimoda Conference (the American-Japanese Assembly) in 1967 at the initiative of Cliff Nelson of the American Assembly and Herbert Passin of the Ford Foundation. It is embarrassing for me, however, to admit that it was only in early 1970s that I first visited Europe to attend an international conference in Italy. At that conference, I had an opportunity to have a drink with the late Andrew Shonfield, then the director of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), to exchange views on how to bridge the seeming absence of intellectual dialogue between Japan and Europe. When Gert Brandt of the Thyssen Foundation joined us for a drink, Shonfield and I asked if he would be willing to fund an intellectual dialogue forum between Japan and Europe. He responded by saying, “why not?”

Thus, the Europe-Japan intellectual dialogue, nicknamed the “Hakone Conferences” in reference to the name of the venue of the first meeting, was launched in 1975. Despite the fact that the Hakone Conferences were organized in parallel to the Trilateral Commission meetings, European participation at the first and second Hakone Conferences was impressive and meaningful. Participants included representatives from the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the Research Institute of the German Society for Foreign Policy, the Italian Institute for International Affairs, the French Institute of International Affairs (IFRI), and other European institutions. Their participation seemed

to reflect the growing attention given to Japan and Asia by senior European researchers and research institutions.

On the Japanese side, there had been a growing consciousness of the need for Japan, by then considered to be a major economic power, to define its international role more clearly. In the foreword to the report of the Second Hakone Conference, it was stated that “[i]n efforts to define its proper role in the global community, Japan should be engaged in more extensive dialogue with various regions of the world; for in this interdependent world, a one-sided international posture is obviously untenable. A lack of dialogue between Europe and Japan has been felt keenly as cooperation among highly-industrialized nations has become even more important in a world seeking a new international order.” There had been a growing consciousness among Japanese that the role of the United States as guardian of Japan’s pursuit of economic interests was ceasing to be the case. Accordingly, Japan was beginning to reach out to Europe. Japan’s political consultations with outside countries had been limited to those with the United States, but policy issues started appearing on the track-two agenda, and eventually on the agenda of government consultations as well.

The emergence of the trilateral relationship strengthened the Japan-Europe relationship not only in economic, but also in political and security terms. Informal consultations between Japan’s Foreign Ministry staff and their counterparts from major European nations were initiated between 1975 and 1980. The shocks of 1978-81 led to the creation of a formal structure for consultations. Informal efforts for dialogue were expanded. For example, the growing interest of emerging political leaders of the United Kingdom residing in Japan led to the creation, in 1984, of the UK-Japan 2000 Group, an informal dialogue group that was dubbed the “Wisemen’s Group.” A critical facilitating role in this group was fulfilled by a political counselor of the Japanese Embassy in the United Kingdom, Yukio Satoh. I was made director of the Japanese side of the group, with JCIE acting as its secretariat. A similar Japanese-German Dialogue Forum was created upon the joint initiative of Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1993.

These bilateral consultative groups have started to discuss Japanese-European or Asian-European relations in recent years, indicating a growing Japanese consciousness about relationships with European countries.

Japanese Public Opinion on Japan-Europe Relations

Popular opinion holds an important influence on Japan's foreign policy, and in this respect a brief examination of trends in the public's feelings toward Europe since the end of the Cold War can shed light on the evolution of the interregional relationship. Polls of Japanese people's feelings toward Europe is one key indicator, especially when examined comparatively with Japanese attitudes toward other nations and regions. Public polls conducted by the Japanese Cabinet Office over the past fifteen years reveal a gradual but increasing "sense of closeness" toward Western Europe, from slightly under half responding yes in the beginning of the 1990s to more than half responding similarly over the past few years. The average affirmative response over the past fifteen years is just over fifty percent. In comparison, almost three-fourths of those who responded they felt a sense of closeness towards the United States, less than half for China and Korea, and just above one-third for Southeast Asia. Figures detailing respondents' understanding of relations with these nations and regions reveal a similar trend. When asked annually whether relations with Europe were "good" over the past fifteen years, an average of just over half of the respondents believe so, as compared to seven out of ten for the United States, just under half for China and Korea, and only four in ten for Southeast Asia.

These figures bear similarity to the intensity of Japan's economic, political, and security relationships with the countries and regions in question. Feelings toward the United States, the strongest partner in the trilateral relationship and security guarantor for Japan, are by far the most robust. In contrast, feelings towards China, Korea and especially Southeast Asia are markedly more muted. Positive sentiment toward Europe is in-between, and this may be indicative of the fact that although Japan does not have historical issues to sort out with Europe, as it does with much of East Asia, the dearth of strong, U.S.-style institutionalized links affects the amount of contact with the region and the intensity of Japanese people's feelings toward the region. Gradually increasing positive public opinion toward Europe parallels the historically increasing level of European-Japanese contact over the past decade. At the same time, however, the level of support for Europe, when viewed in comparison with support for the United States, suggests that while the depth and range of opportunities for cooperation has expanded

since the close of the Cold War, collaboration within the weakest link of the trilateral triangle has yet to reach its full potential.

Media coverage in Japanese newspapers over the past fifteen years provides additional insight into public perception of Europe. Feature articles focusing on Japan-Europe relations in the six major print news sources in Japan, Asahi, Yomiuri, Mainichi, Nippon Keizai, Tokyo newspapers and the Kyodo News Service are few: fifteen articles on average per year among all six news sources. Coverage focusing more broadly on Asia-Europe relations, including coverage of ASEM meetings, meanwhile, is greater: an average of seventy articles per annum from 1996, the date of the establishment of ASEM, to 2004.

Editorials in the major Japanese dailies on Japan-Europe relations provide insight into public sentiment toward Europe. The number of published editorial articles are relatively few in number: only a couple per year between all the major print news sources. In these articles, Japan is repeatedly called on to act as Asia's liaison with Europe; to take a more assertive leadership role with Europe in the ASEM forum; and to advance political and security cooperation with Europe. Editorials published at the time of the Asian financial crisis repeatedly expressed Japanese dismay with the weak European response to requests for assistance by affected Asian countries.

Measurements of public perception suggest that while the Japanese popular perception of Europe is positive, it is not particularly strong; Europe is not on the Japanese national consciousness to the same degree as the United States, for example. Newspaper coverage, in particular coverage calling for increased cooperation and Japan's role as facilitator between Europe and Asia, however, suggests that Japan may view itself as having a special and worthwhile relationship with Europe. In sum, the gradual upward swing in positive public sentiment toward Europe may suggest that the two partners have the potential to achieve much more as major world players sharing common values and desiring a stable, multipolar world grounded in cooperation and engagement.

Emergence of the East Asia Community Concept in Japan As a New Impetus for ASEM

While recognizing that the Trilateral Commission has been a catalyst for enhancing Japan's relations with Europe, it should be noted that the Commission itself has undergone significant change in recent years. Recognizing the remarkable growth of the Asia-Pacific region, it was decided in 2000 that the Japanese Group would be joined by other countries in this region including the original six ASEAN countries, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand to create a Pacific Asia Group that would represent the third leg of the Commission. In November 2005, the Pacific Asia Group held its annual regional meeting in Beijing to bring in a number of Chinese leaders in non-governmental fields into the Trilateral dialogue. The successful Trilateral Beijing meeting, which promises to bring greater Chinese participation in the Pacific Asia Group in the coming years, has reinforced our belief in the viability of the East Asia Community building process.

Though the "East Asia regional community" certainly is not at a stage of development comparable to the European Community's, growing economic interdependence and recognition of a need for functional cooperation on challenges such as environmental degradation and communicable diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria have begun to foster a sense of community among the nations and peoples of East Asia.

A common feeling is emerging among political and intellectual leaders in East Asia, including China, that they all share a common interest and joint responsibility for the creation of a more stable and constructive regional order in the coming years. There is a growing consensus among a critical group of leaders, both private and government, that they are at the threshold of building an East Asia regional community.

Benefits from East Asia regional community building will be multi-faceted. First, community building will force each "member" country to consider its political and economic activities in a multilateral context. If any country in the region, particularly those considered to be economically and/or politically powerful such as Japan and China, were to engage in unilateral action, they would undermine the chances of building community and hurt their own interests in the process. Second, developing regional community would help ease bilateral confrontations or tensions such as the

ones that currently exist between Japan and China. As was the case with the aforementioned Trilateral Commission meeting in Beijing, Chinese and Japanese participants can sit side-by-side to discuss common regional and global challenges in a constructive atmosphere which may not be possible in a bilateral forum.

Furthermore, East Asia regional community building will unquestionably have a constructive impact on the future course of ASEM. One major shortcoming of ASEM has been a lack of regional solidarity in East Asia in comparison with a comparatively well-coordinated Europe. The lack of an Asian coordination mechanism for ASEM is one indication of this weakness. East Asia community building will result in greater intraregional coordination in many contexts, including ASEM.

Related to the above point, it should be emphatically noted that ASEM's activities in the coming years could provide a new impetus for consolidating East Asia as a viable counterpart to the well-developed European community. A convincing case needs to be made for ASEM as an important element in strengthening global governance. The three major regions of North America, Europe, and East Asia need to work together toward the same goals, seek solutions to common global problems, and fully take advantage of the dynamic forces of economic interdependence and integration. ASEM can, indeed, be an effective catalyst for East Asian regional community building efforts in the coming years.

Supporting Multilateralism and Global Governance: Suggestions to Strengthen ASEM

ASEM, then, can further two important goals: multilateralism in East Asia and global governance. First, the ASEM process supports East Asian community building efforts. ASEM enables East Asian countries to collaborate as a unified group vis-a-vis their European counterparts. East Asian nations' participation as a group can encourage greater cooperation, dialogue, and the development of shared perspectives as they work with Europe.

Second, ASEM fosters emerging global governance. Other initiatives such as the Trilateral Commission and Hakone Conferences are parts of a general movement toward global governance over the past thirty years. ASEM can be an important forum

for strengthening ties between Europe and East Asia, and in the process, not leave the burden of global power with the United States alone.

How do Europe-Japan relations fit into this equation? Japan has a key role to play in developing multilateralism and global governance through the ASEM process. In terms of multilateralism, Japan's participation in ASEM along with China and Korea allows all three countries to meet in a multilateral setting and to work together to form common positions vis-a-vis Europe. Working together on common issues in a shared institutional setting like ASEM can help improve relations between these countries.

In terms of global governance, Japan's close diplomatic and intellectual ties with Europe, its economic resources, and its status as an East Asian democracy put it in a unique position to help work toward these goals. For example, Japan can take advantage of its shared tradition of democracy with Europe to act as an interlocutor between the two regions. Japan has a strong interest in rules-based global governance supported by fora like ASEM, and it should strengthen its capacity to support the ASEM process toward this end.

How can the ASEM process itself be strengthened in a way that supports multilateralism and global governance? One important step would be the establishment of an ASEM Secretariat to coordinate interregional ASEM activities and communication. The Secretariat would be dedicated to facilitating region-to-region communication, organizing biannual summits and other official meetings, and perhaps most importantly, serving as the "institutional memory" for the forum. It is important that a permanent body like a Secretariat serve as an institutional warehouse for information and lessons learned if ASEM is to successfully redefine itself and grow over the next decade.

Another key step would be the creation of a permanent Asian Secretariat to coordinate East Asian activities and common positions on important issues. Europe has the European Commission as a coordinating mechanism for its policy on ASEM. East Asia, meanwhile, does not have a parallel mechanism. East Asia needs a space to develop common perspectives before meeting with Europe. An Asian Secretariat would foster communication, coordination, and help Asian members coordinate policy positions on important issues.

Strengthening the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) or establishing a second organization dedicated to promoting interregional cooperation is necessary as well if ASEM is to contribute to global governance. ASEF is charged with promoting cultural, intellectual, and people-to-people exchange. Strengthening interregional ties, however, also requires more joint political and economic projects and exchange. The plethora of wide-ranging but short-term projects and initiatives that ASEM has sponsored to date—from roundtables on globalization to workshops on urban forestry and community healthcare initiatives—indicate a lack of focus in the ASEM process. A set of rules that identifies clear standards and goals for ASEM initiatives needs to be created, and a coordinating body like ASEF needs to oversee and help execute projects that meet these standards.

Perhaps most importantly, ASEM needs to redefine itself with a sharp and focused vision and goals for the next decade. This vision should mold ASEM as a forum that promotes multilateralism and global governance by promoting interregional cooperation within a system of rules-based relationships. ASEM members should look to academics and policy analysts in both regions to reexamine its past history and accomplishments and lay out a clear path for the process as it enters its next ten years.