

Session 4

Beyond the Current Crisis: Regenerating Asia/Building a Better Asia

PANEL PRESENTATIONS

AHN BYUNG-JOON, professor at Yonsei University, South Korea, set the tone of session four by offering concrete ideas on how a vision of the future should be achieved. He suggested that initially we sharpen our concept of human security in all its dimensions through dialogue, and then voiced his agreement with Takemi's idea that evidence-based policy is critical. Ahn cautioned, however, that intellectuals should be more modest in their advocacy of the "Asian way." He also reminded participants that while developing a vision for the future much work remains to be done to manage the consequences of the crisis.

Ahn explained that public awareness of human security issues needs to be heightened, adding that a statement from like-minded intellectuals should be produced to urge the public toward a better appreciation of the need for action. Additionally, he recommended that action programs be developed and implemented and that the media be utilized effectively to highlight key issues. Ahn then suggested that Japan has a unique role to play in the area of human security in East Asia, adding that now is a timely opportunity for it to demonstrate leadership. As the number one creditor nation in the world, Japan has abundant resources and should seek to develop its "civil power" by "advocating public issues and the public good and being creative in its leadership in this area."

Mohammad Sadli, chairman of the Indonesian Forum, was the second speaker in session four. Offering a pragmatic view of Indonesia's future in the coming decade, Sadli pointed out that the country is poor again and that the economic agenda will be heavily determined by donor organizations rather than by the government of the day. He also suggested that the IMF policy will encourage economic restructuring, deregulation, and increased liberalization in the marketplace.

Next, Sadli explained that the political picture is less predictable. While granting that the old regime will retain some influence, he predicted that democracy will increase and that greater autonomy for regional areas within the country is inevitable. In the absence of good management of the political and social situations in the interim period, however, a break-up of the country could result. Sadli added that international and regional infrastructures need to be stronger than that of his own country to ensure the checks and balances needed to keep Indonesia from disintegrating. Expanding on this point, he argued that ASEAN needs to be an interactive and restraining force to stabilize the region, concluding that perhaps in the future Indonesia will contribute to stability in the region as well.

Wang Jisi, director of the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, spoke on the issues confronting China in the near future. Wang first noted that the government will concentrate on maintaining economic growth to provide for necessary social and political development. To maintain economic momentum, the government will increase investment, boost production capacity, and keep inflation rates low. Infrastructure such as roads will be developed, as will export facilities. However, owing to the crisis economic growth is expected to decelerate; trade with Japan and South Korea has already slowed, as has trade with the United States and the European Union.

China faces problems that are similar to those of other East Asian countries, including unemployment, the aging of society, bad loans, environmental degradation, and a widening gap between the rich and poor. In addition, China's government agencies need to be streamlined, its health and education sectors need to be reformed, and the financial system needs to be strengthened. This combination of problems makes reform urgent but difficult, according to Wang.

China is watching the crisis and the responses to it by other East Asian countries, drawing both positive and negative lessons. Along with a heightened sense of identity with Asia, China feels a heavy responsibility to not collapse in a crisis because it would be too formidable and complex a task for other countries to rescue it. In this sense, Wang explained that China believes that the biggest contribution it can make to the region is to concentrate on the successful management of its own problems. Also, he asserted that the government will avoid fundamental policy changes and even seek to make space for civil society. Although acknowledging that no political opposition was allowed in China, Wang expressed his belief in the desirability of a smaller government and a stronger civil society in

China. Also, he observed that the potential for international collaboration by China is likely to increase.

Regarding the future direction of Asia and leadership in the region, Wang commented that it is important for East Asian countries to forge a stronger sense of community and to not be sidetracked by such organizations as the IMF and the Group of Seven or by Bretton Woods-type agreements. Stating that the United States is indispensable to the region, especially in times of crisis, Wang then indicated that China was uncomfortable with the idea that Japan might take a leadership role in the region if this meant its leading "ahead" of the other countries. In conclusion, he observed that at some point in time China and Japan would have to "come together."

Tanaka Akihiko, professor at the Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, presented the final paper of session four. Tanaka began by proposing that to achieve regeneration in Asia, the primary prerequisite is "enhancing the capabilities of the people," as emphasized by Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi. In order to enhance the capabilities of the people, it is essential to "preserve human security," which is facilitated through good governance. He described how a change in attitude is required in the region, recommending Prime Minister Obuchi's five Cs—courage, creativity, compassion, cooperation, and confidence—with which to rebuild the community.

In terms of an action plan, Tanaka made several suggestions. First, he urged that the region reiterate and reconfirm its APEC commitment to open trade by 2010 and 2020, thereby avoiding falling into the trap of protectionism or resistance to liberalization. Second, he observed that there is a need to buttress the weak parts of the APEC region, to consolidate the "core" of APEC, and to strengthen regional interaction to ensure a healthier, stronger APEC. Tanaka defined the core of APEC as the ASEAN nations plus Japan, China, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand.

Concretely, Tanaka observed that increased mutual exchanges of leaders among the weakest parts of APEC are productive and should be encouraged. He prioritized the strengthening of ASEAN plus three, and suggested that Australian and New Zealand leaders also be welcomed to these summit activities. In addition, he felt that the Asia-Europe Meeting may be another way to reinvigorate the region.

Tanaka next discussed the need to transform Asian interaction from elite interaction to people interaction, or more broadly based social interaction. What we need is more interaction among people who make the decisions on the domestic scene, as well as interaction among such

people as university-level academics, NGO staff, and other civil society organization staff, including those who are critical of their own governments. He continued with the suggestion that the region needs to introduce more transparency, more rules, and more institutions in the area of human security. Also, institutions and networks to be forged in coming decades should deal with collecting accurate information on human security-related areas, including the environment, crime, drugs, education, health care, and corporate responsibility. Questioning the capacity of national governments to deal with potential crises alone, Tanaka concluded by agreeing with the idea that problems will increasingly be dealt with on a regional basis and that the role of civil society will continue to expand accordingly.

DISCUSSION

Discussion in the concluding session centered on two points: the importance of regional cooperation and suggestions for future action. An Indonesian participant led off by restating the idea that countries now have to deal with multiple identities and that the state/national identity therefore must be rethought, and also noted that the importance of institutions is increasing. The same participant stressed that even though the region has to play by global rules, it is critical to function as a bloc and to integrate the region's economies to this end. To achieve this, political will and strong leadership will be essential. A Singaporean participant agreed that nation-states are too small to cope with the potential problems of the region in the future and that open cooperation, mutual support, and liberalization are necessary at the regional level. On this theme, a South Korean participant suggested that a concerted effort be made to support the organization of the next APEC meeting in New Zealand to counteract the disappointment of the most recent gathering.

A participant from the Philippines developed the cooperation theme by stating that it is nonsensical for East Asian countries not to join together when the rest of the world is doing exactly that. He pointed out that open intraregional trade had been achieved to some degree and that now the region needs to confront two important issues: a monetary interrelationship and labor mobility. The same participant encouraged the group to create a vision for East Asia, recalling that in Europe it was a group of intellectuals, not governments, who produced the vision of the European Union.

A Japanese participant recommended that more substantial research be undertaken on regional issues and that conferences be held on particular themes to promote dialogue. He then suggested that human security be the topic of the next conference so as to explore the issue more deeply, and that a publication be compiled to stimulate wider interest in the topic. Two participants, American and Thai, both questioned the future vision for the region in terms of a definition of Asia, the level of cooperation actually required, and the practicality of pursuing progress in the areas of least resistance. The U.S. participant pointed out that the genius of the recent achievements in the region lay in the multiple institutions and organizations with diverse interests, concluding that it is inappropriate to try and focus all interaction on one particular institution. In response, an Indonesian participant argued that while this is true, ASEAN is too small and APEC too big to cope with the emerging situation, thus making a new institution desirable.

The same Indonesian participant then suggested that a clearinghouse or an Internet-based institute would be useful to consolidate ideas and help facilitate dialogue. To break the issues down into "actionable visions," he advocated two initiatives: first, a multinational conference on the theme of civil society where countries can learn best practices from each other, and, second, a media conference to enable exchanges of opinion with the press. Finally, a Japanese participant noted that material from this conference will be disseminated through the Internet and thus be available as a basis for future research. He assured participants that the Japanese government is supportive of the idea of facilitating dialogue further, and expressed the hope that further gatherings continue to build momentum and awareness of these critical issues.

Despite the magnitude of the problems discussed, the concluding session of the conference reflected a certain optimism about taking practical steps toward solving pressing problems and creating a positive future vision for the region. There was consensus on the need to accept new directions on and approaches to entrenched problems, and a sharpened awareness of the imperative to undertake the necessary research and analyze and share quality data within the region. Moreover, clear agreement prevailed on the need to restore confidence to the people of East Asia, to develop their capacities, and to cultivate optimism about the region's future potential. It was concluded that these tasks can be tackled best by strengthening regional institutions and cooperation and by prioritizing intellectual dialogue.