

# A New Dimension of “Asia-Pacific Studies”

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## I. Establishment of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University and a New Dimension of “Asia-Pacific Studies.”

Ritsumeikan University has progressively developed with the founding spirit of “liberty and innovativeness,” and the educational philosophy of “peace and democracy,” and shaped under the guiding principles of internationalization, priority to information and accessibility to society.

On the basis of what we have attained from these efforts, we define the ultimate goal of our long-term plan as fostering global citizens capable of contributing to the solution of global human issues and further development of the comprehensive university, who prospective worldwide network is expected to open it up on only to Japan but also the rest of the world.

One of our main tasks at present is to establish Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU), a new university which will be open to the world for the 21st Century, aiming at contributing to sustainable development and peaceful coexistence in the Asia-Pacific region through cultivation of human resources and academic research. It is our desire to advance Ritsumeikan University forward to a higher level in the 21st Century by establishing APU.

As the Asia-Pacific area is experiencing the most striking change and growth in the world, the 21st Century therefore may be referred to as “The Asia-Pacific Age.” The basic goals of APU are continuous, and peaceful progress in the Asia-Pacific area through the training of active people with lofty ideals who are interested in bettering the Asia-Pacific region.

At the same time, APU is expected to become a base of new academic research regarding the Asia-Pacific region. That is why we are developing a new dimension of

“Asia Pacific Studies,” which will become the foundation of the educational system at the new university.

Along with the rapid economic growth and extensive changes in social structures within the Asia-Pacific area since the 1980s, people have become increasingly concerned about issues of the Asia-Pacific region. What new knowledge can the developing and changing Asia-Pacific region provide for sustainable development and peaceful coexistence of human societies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? And what kind of issues should this region attempt to address? The “New Asia-Pacific Studies” are intended to answer these questions.

## II. The Characteristics of the Asia-Pacific Area

### 1. What Is the Asia-Pacific Area?

Because the object of our studies is the Asia-Pacific area, I must first define what the Asia-Pacific area is. The Asia-Pacific area includes, for example, East Asia, Oceania, North America, Central America, South America and all the countries bordering the Pacific Ocean. As I speak of it, the Asia-Pacific area also includes the Southwest and Central Asia region and countries on the Atlantic side of South America. Several countries in this area, such as India, Pakistan and Argentina, hope to join the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Organization (APEC) to reflect this condition. I believe that we need flexibility when thinking about the Asia-Pacific area concept.

Until the mid 1980's, this area was commonly called the Pacific Rim. The word Asia did not play a part. Towards the end of the 1980's, however, this began to change and the area came to be known as the Asia-Pacific area. This was in large part a result of the tremendous growth of the economies in the area. In 1989, APEC was established and became a permanent symbol of the growing strength of the region. The people of the world began to take a closer look at the concept of the “Asia-Pacific area.”

I think it is important to understand that the concept of the Asia-Pacific area remains fluid based on the changing nature of the area economies and social development, such as the network of economies in Central East Asia spread via the mutually interdependent relationship.

## 2. Diversity in the Asia-Pacific Area

Scholars point out that the Asia-Pacific area has great diversity. First, we can speak of the natural and ecological diversity of the area. The Asia-Pacific area includes diverse natural and ecological conditions that reflect every possibility on Earth, from the equator to the poles, and from ocean to mountain area. There is also infinite variety of natural resources among the different territories.

Second, the Asia-Pacific area contains the world's greatest variation in languages, races, religions, sense of values, traditions, social habits, and social structure. Regarding languages, for example, scholars denote five main groups of languages in the Southeast Asia area alone, namely Austronesian, Austro-Asiatic, Tai-Gadai, Sino-Tibetan, and Miao-Yao. These language groups further divide into a great number of other languages and dialects. Regarding race, in Indonesia alone, there are more than 300 different races in the more than 300 lands that compose that country.

Regarding religions, I am sure that I do not need to say much about this, but there are many in the area, with the most influential being the Buddhist, Islamic, Christian and Hindu religions. Confucianism is also extremely influential in Northwest Asia.

The countries in this area also have many different levels of economic development. The United States, Japan and some others, for example, have fairly mature, progressive economies, while other countries in the area are just starting to develop. This is only a small sampling of the great diversity in this area.

Of course, every area has diversity, but none as much as the Asia-Pacific area. We can say that the Asia-Pacific area is a concentration of natural, cultural, social, and economic diversity. It is thus necessary to have a better understanding of the diversity of the area as a foundation for designing the "new "Asia-Pacific Studies."

## 3. Network and Fusion in the Asia-Pacific Area

Another important characteristic of the Asia-Pacific area is the formation of a network of inter-exchange and mutual interdependence. Today, this system is growing through economic activities such as trade, foreign investment, innovative mass transportation, and information technology. From a historical viewpoint, there has been a strong network and fusion between the countries in the Asia-Pacific area for a long time via the oceans and seas.

Although I want to talk mostly about the conditions today, I would like to make

one historical reference. The study of modern history of the Asia-Pacific area makes clear that there was great expansion in trade and the establishment of an international network between the 15th-18th Centuries. This was before the establishment of trade with Europe and America around the 19th Century.

The foundation of the early Asian area network was largely based on the tributes system first established with China as the center. The tribute system required various peoples to send tributes from their countries and provinces to the Chinese Emperor and the Emperor awarded presents in return.

This system formed the basis of the commercial and progressive trade network between China and other countries in the Asian area. In the Asian area, the formation and close relation of the economical and social network and mutually interdependent relationship, was already formed before the modern era. European countries later imitated this system with the intention of getting in on the profits. And it was dismantled under the dominance of European countries in the 19th Century.

I mention this history for one main reason. We should understand the historical context of the Asia-Pacific area in order to comprehend why the network and mutually interdependent relation in the Asia-Pacific area is rapidly progressing today.

We are aware that the dynamic rate of progress today depends largely on the economic relationships of trade, foreign direct investment, innovation in transportation and information exchange. The foundation of such relationships, as evidenced by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and APEC, works positively to deepen the network and mutually interdependent relations among the countries in the Asia-Pacific area. In this regard, the Asia-Pacific area is a growing network and mutually interdependent relationship of various countries.

One of the most important characteristics of the Asia-Pacific area is the fusion and union amidst this diversity. This fusion and union is one of the roots of the dynamism of the development of economy and society in the Asia-Pacific area today.

I think that the present state of the Asia-Pacific area holds the key to the development of a new international social order in the 21st Century. Currently, the world gropes for a new international peace order for the 21st Century. The Cold War is over and the issue now is how to establish an international peace order after the end of the long hegemony that controlled the world throughout the 18th through 20th centuries.

The background of such idea is the promotion of mutually interdependent relationships among countries around the world, especially economic relationships. We will be forming a diverse international governance system with diverse levels of development.

The problem is how to connect the mutually interdependent relationships and the foundation of a new international peace order, amidst the reorganization. On this point, the Asia-Pacific area, which is promoting more mutually interdependent and peaceful relationships than any other area in the world, is burdened with the important task of establishing a new international peace order.

Based on the characteristics of the Asia-Pacific area, the "New Asia-Pacific Studies" must be a system with the foundational idea of a network and mutually interdependent relationship among countries, that progress beyond the "area studies" that have been popular until today.

#### 4. Network and Developing Dynamics in the Asia-Pacific Area

The economic structure of the Asia-Pacific area has been fundamentally changed by trade activities, a network of foreign investment, cultivation of mutually interdependent relationships, and activities regarding information. Production in this area, which was previously stagnant, now shows increased activity. For this reason, the Asia-Pacific area, especially the Asian part of this area, is achieving great economic development.

Some people, however, assert that the economic developments in the Asia-Pacific area are only temporary. P. Krugman, author of 'The Myth of the Asian Miracle,' (*Foreign Affairs*, Nov./Dec., 1994) is one such proponent. Krugman makes three major points in his article. First, Krugman insists that the economy of the Soviet Union collapsed in large part because it made temporary rapid progress based on mere increase in inputs of resources, rather than an increase in the efficiency with which those inputs are used. Second, he asserts that the Asian economies, excluding Japan, will not continue to grow because their growth, like Soviet economic growth, stems largely from mere increases of input of resources. Third, he asserts that the technological levels of most countries in Asia are far behind those of the more advanced nations, and the rate in the growth of efficiency in the Asian countries are no higher than those in many advanced nations.

However, there are fundamental differences between the system of the former Soviet Union and Asia of today, even if the rate of economic growth may be comparable. The cause of the Soviet economic collapse was the lack of a basic enterprise management system providing for such things as equipment depreciation, and the lack of the market mechanism of competition to guarantee increased efficiency. The Asian economies are fundamentally different from the former Soviet economy because their growth is founded on the market system. This is the most important difference regarding the future of

Asian economies; they are equipped with internal self-stimulating mechanisms.

It is clear that the internal self-stimulating mechanism is one of the most important devices for economic growth in Asia. Generally speaking, economic growth depends on the quality of input. The Asian economies, however, still have vast undeveloped resources. Therefore, the growth of Asian economies today inevitably depends on increases of input. I think that the new Asian self-stimulating mechanisms will be established during the economic growth period sustained by input of resources. This is very important.

The most notable point, however, is that Asian economic growth is part of a growing chain reaction mechanism that began with the Japanese economic growth in the 1980's, spread to the NIES countries, the ASEAN countries, and on to China. The sustained chain reaction of growth in the Asian economies spread from the advanced countries to the developing countries. In the future, the chain will stretch even further, considering the economic growth of inland China, India and inland West-Asia. In order to understand the possibility of extending this vast economic chain, we must understand the complexities of the Asian area as fluid and changing described above.

Another important point is that Asian countries in the region have formed an interdependent circulatory economic system based on the promotion of the area network of trade, foreign investment, and mutually interdependent relationships. The Asian economies were previously supported mostly by exports to and investments from the advanced countries, such as the USA and Japan. However, after 1990, trade and investment relations spread throughout the Asian area. Therefore, this area is currently generating a self-circulatory mechanism of trade and foreign investment which will result in self-development.

On due consideration, we can see that the developments in modern Asia are not a temporary event, but are significant to human history and social restructuring. The historical and structural recognition of the development in modern Asia is one of the basic viewpoints of the "New Asia-Pacific Studies."

However, the Asian economies have rapidly fallen into a bad condition since the latter half of 1997. The foreign exchange rate and stock prices fell suddenly in the countries which had led economic growth in Asia so far, such as Japan and Korea. This wave spread in all Asian areas and caused a financial crisis. This financial crisis hit the industries in the Asian countries and the Asian economies are now stagnant.

Judging from this situation, some people think that Krugman is right regarding the economic developments in the Asian area. However, the current situation of the Asian economies is regarded as a big adjustment period after the rapid economic growth.

The restructuring of economic and finance systems, which should have supported the Asian economic growth since the latter half of the 1980s, has been delayed. The growth was too rapid to be overtaken by the restructuring of the system. This is the biggest cause for the confusion of the Asian economies today.

I think that the Asian countries will complete the restructuring of their economic and financial systems soon and will return to growth.

### III. A New Approach to Research on the Asia-Pacific Area

#### 1. The Studies of the Asia-Pacific Area Until Now

Considering the above-mentioned characteristics of the Asia-Pacific area from the ecological, cultural, societal, economic and historical focus, we must ask ourselves what kind of approach, and what type of design to take for Asia-Pacific area studies. I will discuss this next.

Until now, the basis for most area studies was a framework of individual nations, or the peculiarities of individual areas. These area studies focus on the aspect of the diverse characteristics of the Asia-Pacific area with the intention of thoroughly understanding such diversity. In this way, these studies hope to understand the Asia-Pacific area at large on the basis of a conglomeration of diversified characteristics.

The studies based on "ecological" diversity in individual areas is of particular note here. A typical case in such approach is, for example, that of the Southeast Asia Research Center of Kyoto University. This Center aims to construct a new dimension of "Southeast Asia studies." In general, at least, there is a common thread between that Center's plan and our own for a new dimension of "Asia-Pacific Studies." That Center's program greatly aids ours.

The studies program at the Center of Kyoto University is based on socio-ecological units of an area. In short, the Center tries to understand the basic social units that make up the Southeast Asia world through the study of the ecological differences of each area.

The idea of such a socio-ecological unit has been termed the "world unit" in recent studies. Professor Y. Takaya discusses the "World Unit" in the Southeast-Asia area as divided into four parts: the Southeast Asia Sea World, the Java World, the Southeast Continental Mountainous World, and the Thai-Delta World. When combined with the Chinese World and Japanese World, these form the whole East Asia World. Furthermore, Professor Takaya focuses on the individual characteristics of each area.

This approach to area studies focuses on basic units in the Southeast Asia area by dividing it into social units on the basis of the socio-ecological characteristics of the area. The main point of this approach is dividing the world into types of units rather than interpreting the world through a viewpoint of unification.

Undoubtedly, an abundance of accurate research data has been gathered in area studies making clear the diverse characteristics of the Asia Pacific area. This approach has been a great contribution to Asia-Pacific Studies.

However, another major point to notice about the Asia Pacific area is the existence of the network and mutually interdependent relationship that is developing among various countries. This fusion and unification occurring in the area today has not been studied thoroughly yet.

## 2. The New Approach to the Network and Mutually Interdependent Relationship

In order to create a concrete studies program responsive to the dynamism of the modern Asia-Pacific area and to the problems to be solved that this area is now facing, we must take a new approach: one that acknowledges the network and the mutually interdependent relation of the Asia-Pacific area.

One cannot discuss the developing dynamism of the Asia-Pacific area of today without deeply considering the network and the mutual interdependence. Also, historically, the network among countries and regions in the Asia-Pacific area has been formed closely, shaping the social and historical characteristics of the entire area.

It is clear that this area research approach seeks to understand countries and areas that have diverse characteristics from the viewpoint of a network and mutual interdependent relationship. It has become general that a viewpoint of network and mutual interdependent relationship is vital to understand diversity totally.

Furthermore, today, the Asia-Pacific area is facing diverse problems that must be resolved in today's rapidly changing world. Huge problems continue to pile up in the developing Asia-Pacific area. These include the mega-city and environmental problems, promotion of the information society and new media, revolution of the economic and financial systems, development of new business venture enterprises, and new business management styles that fit the customs and culture of the Asia-Pacific area.

These problems cannot be solved by the individual countries or regions alone. Also these problems are growing at the global level beyond each country and regions. Therefore, the understanding and analyzing of how to respond to such problems

necessarily requires an approach to area research that can treat the entire Asia-Pacific area as a whole.

This area research approach should seek to understand countries and regions that have diverse characteristics from the viewpoint of a network and mutually interdependent relationship. A viewpoint of a network and mutual interdependent relationship is vital to understand diversity totally.

But the total research approach of the Asia-Pacific area is still an undeveloped area. We should challenge this undeveloped area for creating a new dimension of "Asia-Pacific Studies."

#### IV. Designing A New Dimension of "Asia-Pacific Studies"

##### 1. Research on Diversity of the Asia-Pacific Area

Based on the characteristics of the Asia-Pacific area explained above, I think that the objects and issues of the "New Asia Pacific Studies" are as follows.

First, it is research on the diversity of the Asia-Pacific area that we should build. I already pointed out that the Asia-Pacific area has more diversity than any other areas in the world. There are three levels: (1) diversity of the natural and ecological conditions; (2) diversity of the social structures such as language, race, religion, sense of values, traditional cultures and social customs; and (3) diversity in economic development.

Of course, every area on the Earth has diversity, but the diversity of the Asia-Pacific area is more remarkable than any other. The "New Asia Pacific Studies" must attempt a concrete understanding and recognition of this diversity. A correct understanding of diversity of the area is the foundation of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence of peoples.

Many research institutions have achieved a great deal on area studies through the use of actual surveys. When we design what we call the "New Asia-Pacific Studies," we should fully utilize the past fruits of area studies yielded by those institutions.

The present research in area studies focuses typically on aspects such as national frameworks and peculiarities of each area so far. Therefore, the main point of those studies is to classify each country and region into individual units and clarify each area's characteristics.

However, characteristics of countries and regions are by no means absolute. To be sure, in some aspects, they remain constant, but some characteristics have changed

over time, while others have merged into new ones harmoniously. Therefore, it is necessary to attach great importance to interdependence when we try to understand the characteristics of various countries and regions. It is also extremely important to further facilitate networking and interdependence in today's economic activities.

## 2. Research on the Interdependent Relationships and the Development of Dynamism in the Asia-Pacific Area

An important feature of this area is its diverse network and the deepening of interdependent relationships, as mentioned above. As economic activities such as trade and foreign investment are becoming brisk and means of transportation and information innovated, fusion among the diversity is rapidly occurring. Historically speaking, the networks and regional exchange in this area have formed along sea routes in particular.

It can be considered that this is one of the roots of the development of dynamism among economic societies in the Asia-Pacific area of today. As many countries in the area are getting on a track of economic growth one after another, the mechanism of an economic chain reaction is attracting the attention of the world. Originating from developed countries, this chain reaction has spread throughout developing countries.

At the same time, an economic mechanism of self-circulation among countries in the area has been formed. Since the 1990s, trade in Asia and investment from Asia has been rapidly expanding, which leads to the formation of both a mechanism of self-circulation and a dynamism of autonomic development. The formation of the mechanisms of chain reaction and self-circulation serves as a basis for facilitating the dynamism of economic development in the Asia-Pacific area.

Such structural and historical features of the Asia-Pacific area can be looked at in the perspective of the history of civilization. Given that the civilizational axis moved from the ancient Eurasian civilization (such as Mesopotamian, Indian, Chinese, and Egyptian) to the Mediterranean civilization (Greek and Roman) and then to the Atlantic civilization (European and American), we can attribute the current economic development and social changes in the Asia-Pacific area to the co-mingling of the millennia-old Asian civilization and the Euro-American civilizations of modern times. It is important that this unique civilizational experience should be elucidated and given a proper place in the history of humanity. At the same time, we should participate actively in current activities which will further contribute to cultural development and human civilization.

The regional unification currently in progress in Europe, the formation of the European Union, can be cited as a prime example of the deepening of trans-national

relationships. However, this is a policy-oriented unification of developed countries. In contrast to what is happening in Europe, the achievement of interaction and networks in the Asia-Pacific area strike us as a spontaneous movement among a great many developing countries and is thus believed to form an open relationship. In this area, as we know, there are several regional organizations, such as ASEAN and APEC. It would be very difficult for them to form a close regional unification such as that of the European Union in the near future. Rather, they are regional collaborative organizations intended to improve the member countries based upon the achievement of networks and interdependence in the Asia-Pacific area.

In the view of this "New Asia-Pacific Studies" should aim to go beyond traditional area studies and study the dynamism of the regional networking and interrelationship from futuristic viewpoints, as well as structural and historical viewpoints.

### 3. Research on Asia-Pacific Societies with Policy-Oriented Methods

As networking is in progress, and interdependent relationships are being promoted in the Asia-Pacific area today, we are facing various issues that should be solved in collaboration. For instance:

- creation of new industries,
- promotion of business activities,
- development of business management and venture activities,
- innovation of economic and financial systems coping with permeation of market mechanisms,
- creation of an information-oriented society suitable for the innovation of information technology,
- establishment of relations between local societies,
- formation of a peace order in the Asia-Pacific, and
- preservation of the environment and sustainable economic development, and so on.

All these are global issues. In order to achieve sustainable development and peaceful coexistence in the Asia-Pacific area in the future, we must foster the ability to solve common issues by transcending various regional features. The "New Asia-Pacific Studies" will not only focus on regional diversity and mechanisms of the development, but also on policy-oriented issues confronting the region today, through synthesizing all

sciences, utilizing social science as a pivot. To recapitulate, the "New Asia-Pacific Studies" should be created with policy-oriented methods.

#### 4. Research on Constructing New Relationships in the Asia-Pacific Area.

We cannot forget the international history of this area up through the 19th Century, including the relation of Japan with other countries in the area. In modern history, until the 20th Century, the relationship between advanced countries and the entire Asia-Pacific area was based on a ruling country-colonized country relationship with few exceptions. This relationship caused great sorrow and enmity in the area.

In order to establish a new relationship for the future of the Asia-Pacific area, we must ensure that the colonizing countries should be conscious of their responsibility to remember and record this past history. This is especially true regarding the advanced European and American countries and Japan. In this way, our "New Asia Pacific Studies" will be truly reliable to the people in the Asia-Pacific area.

#### 5. Creation of the Way of New Intellect in Asia-Pacific Area

I think that the time is right for a new way of creation of intellect in the Asia Pacific area due to the network and mutual interdependence in this area. In addition, this is possible because we are at the intersection of the Asian civilization and modern European and American civilization.

The "New Asia Pacific studies" that we will create, will provide the ability for this new intellect. Generally speaking, we recognize that the interaction between diverse cultures and civilizations creates new intellect. The network of the countries and regions, the development of a mutually interdependent relationship and connection of various civilizations today appearing on the stage of the Asia-Pacific area are the most profound in human experience.

Some scholars have said that the analytical method that the modern Europeans and American have contributed to human civilization during the past few hundred years should be developed into a more abundant, scientific method for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

In this regard, we expect that it is possible to create a new intellect on the basis of combining the analytical method of the modern European and American with the Asian methods of science and culture. This is an important problem for the new dimension of "Asia Pacific Studies" to examine concretely.

Many distinguished social observers, like Professor Peter F. Drucker, say that the characteristics of the 21st century is the coming of the knowledge society. The reality of such social developments will be to advance beyond the modern European and American way of knowledge creation.

Some Japanese researchers are now promoting the management theory of organizational knowledge creation based on the experiences of Japanese enterprise management in the post World War II era.

Professor I. Nonaka, who is a leader of promotion of this theory, said that today we need a new system to create knowledge. We need not only efficiency to manage information, but also a new system to create knowledge. Reviewing the characteristics of the organization theory originated in Europe and America to the present, Professor Nonaka pointed out the following three major themes of these traditional theories as follows: (1) they focus on the limitations of human ability of recognition, not the ability of creation; (2) they focus on humans as a processor of information, not a creator of knowledge; and (3) they focus on passive adaptation to the changing environment, rather than active adaptation. On this reviewing, Professor Nonaka stresses not only the need of efficiency to process information, but also the necessity of dynamic organization in order to create knowledge.

In order to construct a dynamic system of knowledge creation, Professor Nonaka explains that it is necessary to stress the dynamic process of knowledge creation based on the interaction between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. He said that we must understand the role of tacit knowledge more deeply, instead of the European way that, until now, excessively stressed explicit knowledge.

I think that the fusion of culture and civilization currently occurring in the Asia-Pacific area plays an important role in establishing a new system of knowledge creation, one that will surpass that of the Europeans up to this point. I think that examining the ability to create knowledge in the Asia-Pacific area promotes the formation of this new system of development.

## V. Conclusion

This is my own personal opinion about the possibilities of the “New Asia Pacific Studies” that is our aim.

It is indispensable, on the one hand, to understand the diverse characteristics of each country and region in the Asia-Pacific area, and on the other hand, to extract the problems that face the entire area, and to study the way to solve these problems, when we

are promoting the continuous development and coexistence of peoples in the Asia-Pacific area for the 21st century.

We can solve the problems by considering the situations totally, even though it seems that the problems are those of the individual countries and regions. This is so because today the close interdependent relationship and network relation are growing rapidly in the area. Responding to those situations, we should initiate an academic system of recognition concerning our Asia-Pacific area. For these reasons, I pose here an idea of the "New Asia Pacific Studies."

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