

# Creating a New Style of Asia Pacific Studies

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The concept of a new style of Asia Pacific studies was originally developed by those involved in the planning and preparation for the establishment of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University. We were convinced that a new style of Asia Pacific studies would be essential as the academic foundation of the new University.

It will take some time for the new Asia Pacific studies to reach maturity as an academic discipline. Its conceptual framework, however, has been reflected in the composition of the colleges and curricula of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University. In a nutshell, we consider Asia Pacific studies to be more than just another form of regional studies. It should incorporate elements of political science in the sense that it should serve the practical purpose of solving various socio-cultural problems arising in the Asia Pacific region

We are fully aware that Asia Pacific studies has a long way to go before reaching perfection. We are still in the process of trial and error. We understand that this task cannot be achieved by the staff of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University alone, and that cooperation from many other scholars in related fields is essential, so that we can jointly build on the achievement of Asia Pacific studies as it has been developed so far. This essay is based on my personal views, but I hope that it will be helpful to those in related fields, from inside and outside Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, in establishing a new style of Asia Pacific studies, which will be referred to simply as the “New Asia Pacific Studies”.

Before moving on to the main topic, I should say that I believe that the new Asia Pacific studies will have a strong bearing on the Asia Pacific civilization that is expected to emerge in the Asia Pacific region in the 21st century.

## **The 21st Century: The Century of the Asia Pacific Region.**

This part will focus on the characteristics of the new Asia Pacific studies, and why it is important in this era. First, I should begin by emphasizing that the 21st century will be the century of the Asia Pacific region. Since the 1980s, the Asia Pacific region has experienced rapid economic growth and resulting social transformation, bringing about significant change in many people’s perception of Asia. Until then, there had been a long-standing perception of Asia as “stagnant.” This was how Asia had been perceived by European countries and the United States, which had achieved rapid economic development triggered by the industrial revolution in the 18th century. However, Asia was not entirely to blame for that. There had been a strong correlation between Asia’s stagnant economy and the West’s remarkable economic expansion. In other words, the success of the West was achieved at the expense of Asian countries,

and the prolonged stagnation in Asia was a consequence of the economic prosperity of western countries. It is a fact that Asia had been the world's most advanced region, on both the economic and cultural fronts, until the western colonization of Asian countries.

Although many Asian countries became independent from western countries after World War II, they were plagued by a stagnant economy. With the rapid postwar growth of the Japanese economy as a turning point, however, the economy of the Asian countries turned upward. Especially from the 1980s onward, Asian economies enjoyed rapid economic growth, making the Asian region the growth center of the world. Accordingly, the 21st century came to be called the century of the Asia Pacific region.

The rapid economic growth of the Asian region had a great impact on the foreign policy of the United States. There was a significant shift in the focus of U.S. global strategies, from the transatlantic countries to the Asia Pacific region, strengthening the perception that the next century would belong to the Asia Pacific region. Thus, in the 1990s Asia became prominent on the global stage, bringing the advent of the century of the Asia Pacific region to the world.

### **Is Asian Economic Growth Just an Illusion?**

However, one economist ran counter to such a view. In 1994, Paul Krugman, a prominent economist and professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States, published an article entitled "The Myth of Asia's Miracle" in the magazine *Foreign Affairs*. In that article, he stated that Asia was enjoying illusory economic growth that did not involve the improvement of productivity, and this would be short-lived. Krugman also claimed that, just as with the former Soviet Union, Asian economic growth depended totally on the commitment of resources, and would be destined to fail.

In 1997, not long after this article caused controversy, the collapse of the Thai currency triggered the financial crisis in Asian countries, resulting in economic and social chaos across the entire Asian region. Such a serious economic crisis gave the impression that what had been predicted by Krugman in 1994 had come true. In fact, some economic analysts, who had been very optimistic about the rapid economic growth of Asian countries, suddenly began to take a pessimistic view of Asia's economic future. Some said that the days of rapid economic growth in Asia had come to an end; others said that economic recovery would be quite difficult. A widely held view in those days was that it would take at least five years to recover.

At that time the Ritsumeikan Trust, in which I was involved as a member of the management, had just launched a project to open Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) in Oita Prefecture in April 2000, as Japan's first full-fledged international university, with the cooperation of Mr. Morihiko Hiramatsu, Governor of Oita Prefecture. At APU, we planned to accept half the students, or 400 of 800 students every academic year, from various countries around the world, mainly in the Asian Pacific region. Coincidentally, however, this serious economic crisis that struck Asian countries caused deep concern about the future of APU. Some advised postponing the opening until the Asian economies could recover, or to downsize the

project. Others were very pessimistic, saying that this project was interesting but there was little hope of success.

However, those of us who were involved in the project, such as the Ritsumeikan Trust, Oita Prefecture, and Beppu City, shared the optimistic view that it would not take long for the Asian economics to recover, although the Asian economic crisis was historically unprecedented. We believed that the Asian economy would get back on track in about three years, or by the year 2000, when we planned to open Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University.

Being responsible for achievement of the large-scale project, we had to stick to this optimistic view. What encouraged us was the huge potential of the Asian economies. It is true that the Asian economies were thrown into a serious crisis. However, this was not because the Asian region had exhausted all its energies to achieve economic growth. There were certain signs that productivity had improved steadily due to human resource development.

The recent economic failure is rather attributable to poor economic and legal systems in the Asian economy. Improvement of these systems could not keep pace with rapid economic growth. Therefore, we were convinced that when Asian countries overcame the crisis, they could show further growth by developing their full potential. We also believed that the Asian economy would be put on a new development path by 2000, the inaugural year of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University.

Although I am not an economic expert, my prediction seems to have come true. In mid-1999, two years after the Asian economic crisis, there were indications of improvement in economic conditions in the region. As the year 2000 approached, many people had come to agree with this view. I understand that economic ups and downs are inevitable. We must therefore be aware that even if the Asian economy resumes growing, such a situation cannot continue in perpetuity. From a broader perspective, however, I believe that, despite such economic disturbances, the Asian economy will be able to sustain an upward trend over the long run. Moreover, Asian economies will strengthen their economic structure through their experience of the economic crisis in the late 1990s, and enter a new phase of growth. I firmly believe that the 21st century will still belong to the Asia Pacific region, with these events as a backdrop.

### **The Emergence of an Asia Pacific Civilization and Asia Pacific Studies**

In the coming Asia Pacific era, the Asia Pacific region will not only play a central role in the global economy; it will also be of great historic significance. In short, it will make great contributions to creating an Asia Pacific civilization, a new phase in the history of human civilization. This perspective constitutes a very important factor in the positive forecast for economic growth in the Asia Pacific region in the next century, as I mentioned above.

The history of human civilization dates back to about 5,000 years ago, when the Mesopotamian, Indus, Egyptian, and Chinese civilizations took seed and flowered one after another. Since the birth of these four ancient civilizations, the center of human civilization has gradually moved to the west from a macroscopic point of view. Following the prosperity of the four great civilizations in Asia and the Middle East, the Greek, Roman and Arabian civilizations developed. After the 15th century, a

modern civilization arose in Europe and the Atlantic region, eventually reaching the American continent. In the last five centuries, the modern civilization developed by European nations and the United States has played the leading role in the global setting.

From the 1980s onwards, however, the Asia Pacific region began to play an important role on the global stage, against the backdrop of its rapid economic growth. On the other hand, the modern civilization led by the West will reach a crucial turning point in the 21st century. In light of this situation, there is a possibility that the Asia Pacific region will become a venue for the development of a new human civilization. In fact, there are growing calls for the new development of such a civilization. Thus, the potential for the next century's becoming the century of the Asian Pacific region is closely linked to the development of a new phase of civilization.

The anticipated emergence of Asia Pacific civilization will be clearly distinguishable from other civilizations; for it will be a blending of eastern and western civilizations. Five thousand year's accumulation of Asian civilization, and the relatively new civilization dating back to the 15th century in Europe and America, will merge for the first time in history. We do not know yet what kind of civilization will be created. However, we can see significant possibilities in the new civilization.

Civilization and culture are not exactly the same thing, and so I would like to explain briefly what I think are the main differences. Culture reflects the development of human history, the natural evolution of human history represented by a region's traditions and beliefs. Included are various aspects, such as language and religion, at the point at which we and culture have arrived today. In contrast, civilization is something that humans have consciously created, a sort of a social apparatus, a lifestyle system for various individuals and cultures. In using the word "civilization" in this paper today, I am not talking simply about a mix of various cultures, but rather something much more complex. When I talk about a blend or fusion between eastern and western civilization I am referring to a rather conscious effort to take the essence of each civilization and apply that to the society of the 21st century. Civilization is reflected most of all in technological innovations. So I view the various technologies which affect the lifestyles of human beings as indications of changing civilization.

What I should emphasize here is that the creation of Asia Pacific civilization will not be realized if people of the Asia Pacific region look on with folded arms. If we wish to develop a new civilization that will be valued highly by future generations, years of collaborative efforts are essential.

As we stand on the threshold of the new century of Asia Pacific civilization, we should launch a new academic discipline. We face the task of exploring what the Asia Pacific civilization which is expected to emerge in the 21st century will be like; and what roles we should play in its development, as members of the Asia Pacific region.

From these standpoints, we believe that studies of Asia Pacific civilization are indispensable to education for the 21st century. In other words, strategy and policy studies for the development of an Asia Pacific civilization will be needed. As I mentioned earlier, I am convinced that Asia Pacific studies are essential if the new civilization is to flourish in the next century.

This blending of western and eastern civilizations will be the key concept in the development of an Asia Pacific studies that will serve as the academic foundation for an Asia Pacific civilization.

### **Challenges for Asia Pacific Civilization and Asia Pacific Studies**

*The most significant challenge is to tackle global environmental issues*

As I mentioned earlier, we need to realize that an Asia Pacific civilization cannot be developed without the active involvement of those in the Asia Pacific region. To win the praise of future generations, an immense amount of effort will be indispensable. The very objective of developing Asia Pacific studies is to address the challenges confronting us.

Let us look more closely at those challenges. What are the obstacles to developing an Asia Pacific civilization that will be rated highly by future generations? The answer is that such evaluation will depend on how much we can contribute to reducing the serious threats currently facing human beings. It also depends on the development of innovative technologies and industries, as well as new cultures.

The fact is that there is a mountain of problems to be solved, including deterioration of the global environment, diminishing resources and energy, rapidly expanding population and resulting poverty, sustainability of economic growth, peace and order, and the transition to the information society. These issues can no longer be addressed by individual countries or regions. Cooperation at the global level is essential for their solution.

Among them, environmental problems, such as global warming, air, soil and water pollution, and endocrine disruptors are the most crucial issues. The natural environment has been rapidly deteriorating since industrialization and urbanization began in the 19th century. Now the common understanding is that prompt action is urgently needed to solve environmental problems that pose serious threats to human beings. It is no exaggeration to say that an Asia Pacific civilization will not be highly valued by future generations without bringing about a satisfactory solution to these difficult problems, which have their origin in the development of modern civilization.

Most important in resolving these environmental problems is that the Asia Pacific region is now facing a more serious crisis than any other region on the globe. Therefore, it is the historic mission of those in the region to take the initiative in tackling these difficulties.

To resolve environmental issues, efforts have been made at various levels, including the United Nations, corporations, organizations and private nonprofit organizations around the world.

Moreover, significant progress has been made in researching and developing technologies that can help preserve the global environment, recycle resources, and improve energy efficiency. At the everyday-life level, efforts have been directed toward resource and energy savings.

Unfortunately, however, such efforts have been outpaced by the destruction of the natural environment. Are there any effective measures to reverse the current course? The answer to this question is very clear: the creation of a resource-recycling

society. The challenge for us is to come up with a clear vision and workable measures for realizing such a society. In this respect, we are still in the trial and error phase.

I believe it is necessary for companies around the world to take the lead in presenting a clear vision and developing strategies, tasks that can only be achieved by individual companies. Companies have played a pivotal role in linking the global environment to the consumption activities of human beings, through the provision of goods and services. In view of these facts, the international community expects individual companies to take the initiative in resolving environmental problems.

As the 21st century is expected to see more fiercely competitive global markets, the solution of this issue is the key to company survival. In other words, companies around the world are being tested on their ability to develop strategies for the conservation of the global environment. Noteworthy in the process of manufacturing is the growing trend in recent years toward developing new resource recycling production systems. This is underway on numerous levels, and is an activity of great significance. However, there is a limit, since this is only a reactive measure dealing with products at the end of their lives.

Thus far, I have discussed roles for companies. However, it is not only companies that are responsible for environmental problems. Central and local governments, various nonprofit organizations and consumers should also share the burden by playing their own parts. It would be difficult for companies to employ aggressive strategies for environmental conservation without active support from governmental and private organizations, as well as consumers. To resolve environmental problems, close cooperation among companies, central and local governments, and various nonprofit organizations and consumers, is essential.

The emergence of environmental problems that are global in scope has forced people to change their values regarding the relation between nature and human beings. This means that there has been a significant shift in basic values from a human-centered worldview to one focused on harmony between nature and human beings. In this respect, Asia Pacific civilization has an advantage. One belief underlying Asia's traditional values is that human beings are a part of nature. It will be necessary for us to reexamine Asian traditional values, which have been undervalued in the process of modernization. I believe that these values will also be effective in addressing global environmental issues.

In any case, preserving the global environment is the greatest challenge in the new century for human beings. If there is any possibility of developing an Asia Pacific civilization in the Asia Pacific region in the 21st century, it will be essential for such a civilization to take on the difficult task of resolving global environmental issues. History's evaluation of an Asia Pacific civilization will depend on how that civilization approaches problem solving.

As I have said, I understand that the new Asia Pacific studies will serve as the academic foundation for an Asia Pacific civilization. In other words, the new Asia Pacific studies will help provide strategies and policies for an Asia Pacific civilization. In view of this, it can be said that Asia Pacific studies will have the same tasks as the Asia Pacific civilization. I also believe that Asia Pacific studies should cover a much wider scope than mere regional studies.

## **The Research Tasks of Asia Pacific Studies**

I will now take a closer look at Asia Pacific studies. To state my conclusion first, the new discipline of Asia Pacific studies as has been explained above has two research tasks at two different levels as follows:

### *(1) Substantive studies of the Asia Pacific Region*

The first task of Asia Pacific studies relates to substantive studies of the Asia Pacific region, focusing on its characteristics and the history and mechanisms of its development and change. It is common knowledge that the Asia Pacific region is of great diversity in ecological, social, and cultural terms, sharply distinguishing it from other regions on the globe. Without understanding such diversity, there is no way to deepen our knowledge of the Asia Pacific region. Since ancient times, a variety of personal and physical networks have been developed within the region. The creation of these networks was facilitated by economic growth and the development of transportation and communications systems in the 19th century. Now it is expected that in the 21st century the region will enter a new phase resulting from the globalization of the economy and the revolution in communications technologies.

Despite its sheer diversity, the Asia Pacific region enjoys highly developed networks. This has enabled the region to develop into an advanced world entity in terms of culture, technology, and manufacturing, providing a solid foundation for the dynamic economic activities in Asia from the 1980s onwards. In developing Asia Pacific studies as the academic foundation for Asia Pacific civilization, we need to clarify the basic characteristics and actual conditions of the region. In concrete terms, our research tasks are as follows:

- Diversity of the Asia Pacific region
- Highly developed and close-knit networks at various levels and increasing mutual dependence in the Asia Pacific region
- Dynamism in growth and transformation of the Asia Pacific region
- Fusion of various aspects of western and eastern civilizations
- Studies of policy and strategies for the sustainable development of the Asia Pacific Region

In addition to the deepening knowledge of the characteristics and historical development of the Asia Pacific region, the second research task focuses on strategies and policies for sustainable development of the region in the next century. Moreover, this will provide an opportunity to examine requirements for realizing an Asia Pacific civilization.

As I mentioned earlier, the primary challenge is to tackle environmental problems that have posed especially serious threats to the Asia Pacific region. Other problems to be resolved include resource and energy depletion, population explosion and food shortages, all closely related to environmental problems. Furthermore, it is essential to establish systems that allow sustainable economic growth and development and that ensure peace, order, and security in the Asia Pacific region.

It is also necessary to enhance corporate awareness of ecological issues and develop new industries for sustainable development of the Asia Pacific region in the 21st century. Moreover, we have to establish a new corporate management style characteristic of the Asia Pacific region, while making full use of American styles.

At any rate, to achieve sustainable development of the Asia Pacific region in the 21st century, various issues must be addressed by working out better strategies and policies. To summarize our research tasks:

- Environmental conservation through the establishment of macroscopic resource-recycling social systems and the development of microscopic resource-recycling production systems
- The development of systems that enable sustainable economic growth, including new systems for trade, finance, and currency management
- Development of corporate management systems blending western and eastern philosophies and practice
- Establishment of regional security systems
- Development of governance that goes beyond individual countries and regions
- Development of a close-knit network between local governments or entities
- Creation of human resource development systems in the Asia Pacific region.