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Pursuing Intellectual Entrepreneurship at University

By Japan SPOTLIGHT Editorial Section

Q: Could you tell us how your project to found an Asian University Institute (AUI) came about and what its outline is, and also your future plans?

Matsuoka: As is well known, regional cooperation in the East Asia or Asia-Pacific area has been attracting growing attention and this trend reached a peak in the 1990s. Waseda University's Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies was also founded in 1998 as the first independent graduate school in Waseda against the backdrop of the country's growth into an economic superpower.

Even before that, many universities such as Nagoya University, Kobe University and Hiroshima University started in earnest expanding studies such as international development and research on international cooperation.

In the same context, around 2005 Prof. Takayasu Okushima, former rector of Waseda University, and Prof. Tamotsu Aoki, former secretary of Japan's Cultural Affairs Agency and visiting professor at Waseda, strongly advocated the idea of an AUI at graduate or undergraduate level. This suggests that the original idea of an AUI at graduate or undergraduate level emerged from the end of the 1990s as a step toward pursuing a wide range of Asia-Pacific cooperation.

I believe that cooperation among universities on a nation-state basis is one thing, but having an international university on a regional basis is the other.

In the case of Europe, in 1974 the European University Institute (EUI) focusing on PhD courses was founded in Florence, Italy, on the basis of the European Treaty, a new international treaty. In Europe, there are a number of highly competitive universities on a nation-state level such as Oxford, Cambridge, and the Sorbonne. This new region-based university was founded independently from these nation-state universities and started its main activities in earnest after 1980.

However, after that, as is well known, European nation-state level universities started a great exchange among their students in aiming to enhance mobility among their graduate as well as undergraduate students. They even involved university teachers and staff in these great exchange programs. This process was called the Erasmus



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program or Bologna process.

Europeans were enlightened enough to know that the process represented by the EUI was necessary to realize a Higher Education Area as well as a Higher Research Area.

In this light, the same logic can be applied to Asia. If we believe it is necessary to develop human resources engaged in cooperation among the Asia-Pacific nations to advance the region's interests, we should try to achieve not only in-depth relations among the nation-state universities similar to the Erasmus program but also create a region-based (not nation-state based) graduate school to pursue cooperative research and studies. This would be a very important step towards regional cooperation.

I also believe that we need not only a regional university but also a regional think tank, since there seem to be a wide

range of emerging socioeconomic issues, such as growing income inequality, environmental problems and human rights concerns, as Asia advances towards being the growth center of the world, and we need a transdisciplinary research institute concentrating on regional interests to examine and study these issues. Such a think tank should create new ideas based upon Asian diversity.

This is basically what we are now thinking about our planned school. This is a big challenge for a diversified Asia that goes beyond the nation state. We are aiming to create an intellectual platform or think tank to take full advantage of Asian diversity.

We plan to expand this idea in the future to include India and other South Asian countries.

Q: As you said, Asia consists of very diverse countries, more diverse than Europe perhaps. So I guess it would be more practical to start a cooperative framework among nation-state level universities and then gradually advance towards the more challenging task of building up a framework beyond the nation state. What do you think about this idea?

Matsuoka: I understand your view, which is shared by many

economists, that most Asian nations are still in the process of building up a nation state and it is premature to think about a regional organization beyond the nation states in Asia.

However, it is necessary to ask whether Asia needs to follow in the footsteps of 17th century Europe, when the Treaty of Westphalia brought to an end the Thirty Years' War and paved the way toward the creation of new sovereign states and a system of governance in continental Europe. We should not forget that we are living in an age of globalization and under such circumstances it may be necessary to think about a development process beyond nation states as well as a conventional development process based on them.

In the case of Asia, in contrast to the development process of European countries in the 18th and 19th centuries, reinforcing regional cooperation could enhance the consciousness of each nation state. The European way of achieving development based on the nation state and then considering cooperation among the established nation states may not work in Asia at present, and could even end up retarding the development process in the least developed nations in the region.

To state it paradoxically: in Asia we should strengthen our efforts to promote regional cooperation in terms of a transnational organization simply because the nation-state construction process is far behind the global level.

In this light, I believe that regional cooperation and prompting the foundation of nation states would not be inconsistent with each other. More importantly, the modern world is obviously made up of not only Asia but also other regions. Therefore, for example, a step by step approach proposing to start with a smaller version of the European Erasmus program for student exchanges among Japan, China and South Korea, expanding it gradually to ASEAN and other nations in Asia, would fail to catch up with the trend of globalization given the extremely rapid progress of today.

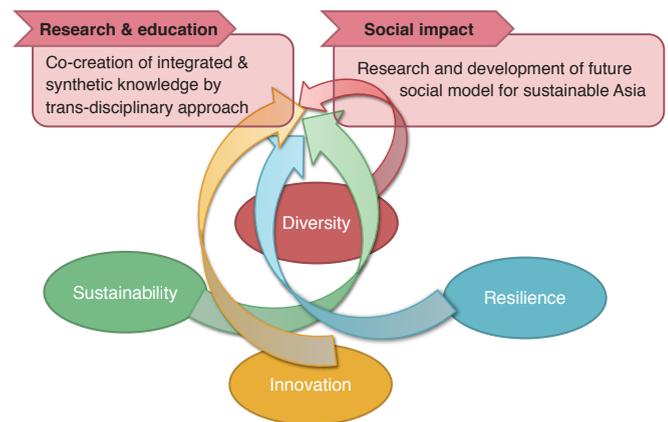
According to Prof. Aoki, since the second half of the 20th century, US universities, including graduate schools, have been overwhelmingly the most competitive in the world and have thus achieved the most efficiently developed human resources. It would be extremely difficult for any Asian university to enter the list of the top 10 universities in the world under such circumstances.

But Asia now has considerable economic power, and even though it will take a few more decades to create a cultural power comparable to that of the US, taking advantage of such economic power now would be the right step for Asia as a whole to try to strengthen its soft power and catch up with the US in terms of cultural influence.

Our proposal for an AUI can be considered as one such effort. Japanese universities, I believe, can take the lead in this attempt

CHART

Concept of AUI



Source: AUI

since, unlike many other Asian universities, they enjoy freedom of research and freedom of opinion and our universities also have strength in interdisciplinary studies such as the global environment and disaster relief.

We can take advantage of these merits and lead the process of creating an AUI in Asia. Given a possible decline in the power of Japan in the future, today may be the last chance for Japan to take the initiative in strengthening the soft power of Asia by such an effort in the universities.

Q: Asia is different from Europe. We would need a new concept to achieve the process of Asian regional integration, making it distinct from EU integration. In your proposal to found an AUI, do you have such an idea?

Matsuoka: Yes, and it would be very important. We would like to create a new concept on “out of the box” and not build on ready-made ones (*Chart*). The cultural diversity of Asia will not necessarily lead to innovation. Innovation cannot be so simply achieved. The question is how we can achieve in Asia the kind of innovation that would make all Asians equally happy.

Asia is certainly now facing the question of expanding income inequality and also of environmental pollution from its rapidly growing economies. In its achievement of economic growth, Asia has sacrificed many social values. We would need in this regard a new direction of development in Asia that makes everybody happy and can lead to global stability. We should exhaust money and

resources to achieve it while Asia still has its power over the coming decades. Unless we do this, we cannot realize sustainable growth in Asia.

I think the universities should propose a future social system. This could be considered their major role. For example, Stanford University has contributed to the creation of social innovation in Silicon Valley. We should pursue such a contribution to society rather than piecemeal academic achievements. In particular, Asian nations are facing rapidly aging societies. This could be a common agenda in Asia and it will be very important to achieve sustainability in such rapidly aging societies.

As distinct from the EUI that focuses on social sciences such as law, political science, economics and history, our AUI should pursue collaboration between social sciences, natural science and civil society. We can realize social values only with such programs in which academic theories can be proved to be valuable to society. This would be an Asian contribution to the world.

Q: If the Asian regional integration model is not to be an imitation of the European one, what would be the common goals of Asian integration? It is certainly an appropriate approach to aim at resolving socioeconomic issues stemming from income inequality and aging, and the European model does not seem to be working very well in resolving such issues. Do you believe that an AUI can truly create a concept that will be practically useful in achieving such common goals among members of the Asian regional community?

Matsuoka: Asia is very different from Europe, which consists of

nation states with their own distinctive histories and concerns itself with how they cooperate with each other. Asian diversity in terms of economic development and political systems would often bring chaos. For example, on the question of the environment, there are countries like Singapore, China and South Korea that largely share a conceptual framework on the issue, whereas countries like Cambodia and Laos fail to understand what this agenda item really means. However, I believe it would still be invaluable for those countries to join this learning process, assuming that academic discussions at an AUI would be a learning process not only regarding specific socioeconomic challenges but also Asian diversity. In this process, what would be most important is that each country could recognize its differences from other countries as clearly as possible. This should be a good starting point for regional cooperation. I hope that an AUI will be an entrepreneurial and intellectual challenge to create a new common goal of development and progress and even evolution while respecting the diversity of the region.

Q: Will your project be specializing in Asia and at this stage are you not thinking about expanding it to other regions?

Matsuoka: Asian regionalism, as is often mentioned, is largely an open regionalism and not a close-knit one such as European regionalism. Community consciousness in Asia can be created by American or European emergence in this region. I think we should regard this open regionalism as a dynamic and productive one.

Q: If you are then planning to expand your idea to cooperation with other regions, are you also planning to pursue alliances between Waseda University and other Japanese universities?

Matsuoka: Yes. We are now asking for cooperation from other Japanese universities, such as the University of Tokyo, Nippon University, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Saitama University, Hokkaido University, Shiga University and Aoyama-Gakuin University. We are also asking for collaboration from research institutes. We would like to make this project a project of all Japan and not one just limited to Waseda University.

We are also thinking about expanding this throughout Asia, not limiting it to East Asia, by seeking collaboration with South Asian universities such as those in India.

We would like to work with the governments of other Asian countries and create a venue for discussing our project at the earliest



opportunity in forums such as the East Asian Summit or ASEAN+3.

We are very keen on creating an organization of individual volunteers which would be a central agency seeking support from various governments, including the Japanese government.

As I said earlier, I would like to create new social values through our efforts, such as the compatibility of efficiency and equity based upon Asian diversity.

This would be a magnificent social experiment in creating the future. We are not only aiming to create a small graduate school of 1,000 or 2,000 students but also to pursue social evolution with some potential spin-offs or industrial clusters to be produced from this graduate school.

We are not aiming to be a graduate school whose founders believe their work is finished and has achieved its original purpose at the moment of its foundation, and then cease to pursue any managerial innovation, as is the case with many Japanese graduate schools. But we are trying to create a school that will continue to make challenging experiments to provoke social evolution.

In order to achieve this, we need to devise a framework at the school that encourages permanent evolutionary changes in terms of management and organization. We are spending lots of time and energy now in trying to realize this.

Q: Are you also thinking about collaboration with Japanese companies?

Matsuoka: Yes. That would be very important. We would certainly need strong support from Keidanren (Japanese Business Federation) and other private corporations. Some are interested in collaboration, but some are not.

Q: A project like yours could be useful in modifying political conflicts, such as border disputes, that have become detrimental within Asian international relations. Even a simple exchange of students between Asian countries similar to the Erasmus program could have worked well to improve relations among Asian nations by creating better human relations.

Matsuoka: I do not think an Asian version of the Erasmus program would have been so effective in modifying such political conflicts. Such a project could be affected by politics, since it is a cooperative arrangement among the individual nation states. Once a political conflict like a border dispute occurs, student exchanges among the

countries concerned would be stopped or discouraged.

But our project would be far more effective than this, because each Asian nation is supposed to make a financial as well as human resources contribution to the AUI. An AUI founded on the basis of each country's contributions which cannot be cancelled would continue its activities regardless of any political conflicts. This is certainly one merit of our project.



Q: I think exchanges of entrepreneurs among Asian nations could also have a good impact on foreign relations by creating many business partners and associates. What do you think?

Matsuoka: I think we should make a distinction between individual friendships and international conflicts. No personal friendship would be able to control international friction. I believe it would be best to establish a regional organization or regional system in order to control political disputes. We should have a system or an organization going beyond nation states, just as with an AUI.

Even now, we have many students from Asia at Waseda and other Japanese universities. But such exchanges of students cannot answer political questions. Student exchange programs would prove to be weak in terms of creating a system to ensure political stability or economic sustainability in Asia. Even though our school (AUI) is small, if Asian countries create it by sharing its founding cost, this would impact on Asian politics itself.

The Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) is often referred to as the Asian version of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and is doing very well in achieving some of the goals already mentioned. Our school would certainly be expected to play a similar role to ERIA's. Though ERIA is doing well, I do not think it is good enough to achieve the particular goals I have mentioned here. An AUI including not only East Asia but also other parts of Asia, will be absolutely necessary to create a common conceptual framework for Asian regional integration and to try to realize the goals of political stability and economic sustainability.

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