

*Eurasia Foundation International Lectures, Fall 2020 Semester*  
*The Construction and Transformation of East Asiaology” Lecture Series (4)*  
**Title:** Identity Dilemma and the future of Asian Community

For the fourth lecture of Eurasia foundation International Lectures, we invited Professor Tung-Chieh Tsai, the Dean of College of Law and Politics at National Chung Hsing University (NCHU), to be our guest speaker. Professor Tsai mentions that NCHU also applied and accepted the funding from Eurasia foundation to hold activities from 2015 to 2017. He remarks that Asian Community has been a concept, slogan, yet not much substantial achievement, because there has been many unsolved obstacles and problems. From 1990 to 2010, the trend that countries signed the Free Trade Agreement have increased. However, trade war between the U.S. and China since 2018 and the spreading of COVID-10, resulting the blocking of most international activities, poses huge challenges for the prospects of international cooperation.

Professor Tsai first introduces the basic information about Asia. The word “Asia” is Greek, which means “East.” Asia covers an area about 30% of earth’s total land area and its population constitute roughly two thirds of the world’s population. Both India and China are populous countries. Three Ancient civilizations, Mesopotamia, Ancient India, and Chinese civilization, were in Asia. There are 43 countries and more than one thousand nations. Almost all religions were originated in Asia.

Professor Tsai explains the motivation of Asian integration. In the late twentieth century the East Asian economy developed rapidly. There were the miracles of Japan, the miracles of four dragons, the miracles of new four dragons, and the rise of China. The World Bank even released a report entitled “The East Asian miracle” in 1993. After the outbreak of global financial crisis of 2007-2008, the whole world was suffered by financial crisis. In the post financial crisis era, Asia plays a role of engine keeping the financial system to operate. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has started their cooperation since 1967 and it provided a “ASEAN model,” i.e. ASEAN +1. China was the first country to join the framework and then other countries also joined the framework, like Japan, South Korea, and India, etc. Thus, Asia has been the target area for foreign direct investment (FDI). Asian countries have not started to invest the other continents until the recent ten years. Then other regional integrations developed, like North America (North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA) and West Europe.

Regarding the turning point of Asian integration, Professor Tsai states that the first step was the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). APEC was established in 1989 led by Japan and Australia. The APEC is the most important regional institution that Taiwan can participate in. The APEC is a trans-regional dialogue

platform, across East Asia, Oceania, North America, and Latin America. The APEC tried to transform and began the APEC Economic Leaders meeting. The first meeting was in Seattle and its goal was to sign FTA and establish multilateral free trade area. The ultimate goal was to establish Asia-Pacific free trade area.

Asian countries have started to propose different version of the concept of Asian Community since 2000. The East Asia Summit (EAS) was held in 2005. The EAS has two symbols. First, it represents that the East Asian Community has become an issue on the table. Second, showing the difference between EAS and APEC, the US did not participate in the EAS, though the participants of EAS was then expanded to include the US and Russia in 2011. The multilateral institutions increase in recent years: The establishment of ASEAN Community in 2015, the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2016, Japan-led The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPT) in 2018, and the establishment of China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Regarding the first obstacle of Asian integration is the restriction by the sovereign concept and limited cooperation experience. The second obstacle is that most Asian countries are in the beginning stage of economic cooperation and there is not enough confidence and effect. The third obstacle is that East Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia have less consensus which makes cooperation difficult. The fourth obstacle is that the participation of the great powers results in great power competition dilemma and political and economic problems.

How to reconstruct Asian identity? Professor Tsai thinks that the first step is to urge trans-national dialogues. The definition of Nation is a group of people who share common memory of collective continuity and the common memory constructs identity. The second step is to think about the possibility of religion reconciliation. Moreover, the trade path, "silk road," used to called "silk road trade system," covers the whole Asia. However, when the Europeans brought the era of ocean, "silk road" trade system disappeared. Thus, we may ponder the geographic meaning of "new silk road." The last step is communication. Communication helps to shape consensus and the consensus may construct identity. We may use the technological advantage, including transportation and communication technology, to facilitate exchanges and dialogue.

Professor Tsai said that there are different versions of proposal of "silk road" by different countries. Japan first proposed "silk road diplomacy" in 1989. The United Nations proposed similar idea and hope to help countries to solve difficulties in 2008. South Korean President Lee Myung-bak proposed "New Asia Initiative" and the European Union adopted "Strategy for a New Partnership" on its relationship with Central Asian countries in 2009. The U.S. Secretary of State Hillary

Clinton announced the “new US Silk Road vision” and Russia proposed “The Eurasian Economic Union” in 2011. Then China announced the “The Belt and Road Initiative” in 2013.

In regard to the prospect of Asian Community, Professor Tsai estimates that there still will be a long way to go, but a pin a day is a goat a year. Facing the COVID-19 Crisis, could we come back to the situation and great boom of large-scale foreign exchange among countries? For the future prospect, he suggests to think from four directions.

- (1) to build confidence from sub-regionalism approach.
- (2) opportunities and challenges of the axis flip from the West to the East.
- (3) develop from economic to military, political, cultural dimensions.
- (4) the foundation of regional awareness and new identity

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