East Asian Regional Integration: Diaspora and Impact

Volume I

Editors

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East Asian regional integration; diaspora and impact/editors
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ISBN 978-967-5148-63-7(v. 1)
304, 8095
Introduction

Following the rapid development of the process of East Asian regional economic integration, its impacts on the political and economic development as well as social and cultural changes in the East Asian nations have been attracting the close attention of the academia. The continuous expansion of the wave of transnational migration in East Asia represents not only an apparent feature and manifestation of the region’s economic integration, but also a crucial element driving the integration itself. Hence, transnational migration has become an issue that cannot be neglected in the East Asian regional integration process.

On 19 - 20 October 2009, over 40 experts and researchers from England, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Bangladesh and China gathered at Xiamen University to participate in the international conference on “East Asian Regional Integration: Diaspora and Impact” jointly organized by Xiamen University’s Saw Center for Southeast Asian Studies and Institute of Malaysian Studies, University of Malaya’s Institute of China Studies and Chonnam University’s Research Group for Global Korean Business and Culture. Fusing the historical and the contemporary, the conference participants studied East Asian regional integration and transnational migration and the impacts from perspectives ranging from the political, economic and cul-
tural to those of social change and ethnic relations.

The conference’s special guest, Professor John Wong from the National University of Singapore’s East Asian Institute, gave the keynote address on “Some Thoughts on the Emerging ‘New Huaqiao’”, focusing on the influence on Overseas Chinese (huaqiao) from the increasing national strength of China since the beginning of its Open and Reform policy. He opined that China’s rise not only drove a new wave of Chinese migration overseas, but also greatly motivated the revival of Overseas Chinese culture and its “return to origin”. Such cultural “return to origin” and the phenomenon of resinicization are creating a large number of “cultural new huaqiao”, and the status and role of these “cultural new huaqiao” are becoming an issue worth studying in China in the domain of research on Overseas Chinese and ethnic Chinese.

As the engine and participant of East Asian regional economic integration, China’s status and role within such integration naturally became an important topic of discussion during the conference. Five papers presented in the conference’s first session “The Rise of China and Regional Impact” looked into the political influence of China’s rise on Indochina, Malaysia, North Korea and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Among the presenters, Professor Fumio GOTO from Japan’s University of Shizuoka in his paper “The Expanding Influence of China in Indochina in the Eyes of Vietnam: Expectation and Anxiety” discussed from the perspective of geo-political economy the increasing influence of China in the Indo-Chinese region and Vietnam’s dual response which reflected the benefits and challenges facing East Asian countries brought about by the rise of China. Professor Hong LIU from the Centre of Chinese Studies, Univer-sity of Manchester, England, on the other hand, in his paper “Chinese Overseas and a Rising China; The Limits of a Diplomatic ‘Diaspora Option’” investigated from the perspective of international relations theory the “diaspora option” dilemma of Overseas Chinese against the backdrop of a rising China. Suggesting the incorporation of the issue of Overseas Chinese into the building and practice of China’s international relations theory, Professor Liu had deeply enlightened the conference participants with his interdisciplinary approach and distinctive research perspective.

Under “East Asian Integration and Migration”, the second theme of the conference, the participants focused on economic integration and transnational migration in the East Asian region, in particular the issue of cross-nation migrant labour. Among them were LIN Mei, HE Jingsong and DAI Fan whose papers investigated the issues of China’s labour in Singapore, Myanmar labour in Thailand and Chinese new migrants in the Philippines. The participants emphasized the urgency of the issue of transnational migrant labour and the problems faced by these migrants within the context of the East Asian regional integration process. Hence, strengthening the study of the question of cross-national labour is beneficial to the rational and efficient allocation and development of human resources of this region, as well as having crucial implications for enhancing the socioeconomic development of the East Asian region.

Presentations on the third theme of the conference, “Malaysian Chinese Studies; Political, Cultural and Economic Perspectives”, featured scholars from various academic institutions in Malaysia. These speakers discussed the development and chan-
ges of the Malaysian Chinese society from the various perspectives of Chinese education, politics and cultural transformation. Papers that attracted much attention of the scholars included that of Dr THOCK Ker Pong, "Political Participation and Evolution of Overseas Chinese: An Analysis of the Malaysian Chinese Association's Dilemma after the 308 Political Tsunami", which analyzed the political dilemma facing the Malaysian Chinese Association, its ethnic Chinese component party in Malaysia's ruling National Front coalition, and examined using the case of Malaysia the multiple layers of challenges encountered in the Malaysian Chinese political participation in the multiethnic political environment.

Under the fourth theme of the conference, "East Asian Migration from the Multidisciplinary Perspective", various scholars investigated the multiple influences of transnational migration from the angles of history, politics and sociology. Among them were Professor Yoon Hwan SHIN, director of Sogang University's Institute of East Asian Studies, South Korea, who presented the paper "The Ethnic Chinese Business in Post-Suharto Indonesia" that surveyed the history and changes of the Indonesian Chinese businesses, and Associate Professor SHI Xueqin from Xiamen University who presented the paper "Globalization, Women's Migration and the Civil Society: Rights of Female Migrant Labor and the Development of the Philippine NGOs" which, from the perspective of female migrants, investigated the interrelations between women's migration and the Asian civil society, focusing on the rights protection of female migrant labour in the Philippines and the development of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Dr SHEN Huilen, also from Xiamen U-

niversity, on the other hand, surveyed from the perspective of historical sociology the role played by huaqiao marriage in maintaining the contact between huaqiao and qiaoxiang (i.e., "home town of Chinese migrants"), and explored the influence of female huaqiao spouse on the overseas contact of qiaoxiang. Such perspective and approach of studying migrant societies from women's angle has been gradually gaining importance in recent years among scholars working on migrant studies.

The fifth theme of the conference, "Diaspora in East Asia: Politics, Economy and Culture", featured scholars who explored the influence of migration from the various perspectives of migrant economy and ethnic relations, migrant business model, migrant network as well as multiculturalism. These included Associate Professor Emile Kok Kheng YEOH, director of University of Malaya's Institute of China Studies, who presented the paper "Diasporic Dilemma and Economic Exigencies: Socioracial Relations and the State in an Ethnic Democracy" which explored the political economy of state and ethnicity from the angles of ethnic politics and the politics of ethnicity.

Next, under the themes "Chinese Diaspora and Ethnic Studies in Southeast Asia" and "Chinese Diaspora in East Asia: History, Economy and Culture", papers were presented exploring the Chinese cultural identity and ethnic relations in East Asia from the perspectives of history, politics, economy and culture. Among them were the paper "The Transnational Roles and Features of Chinese Community in South Korea" by South Korea's Professor LIM Chae-wan, director of Chonnam University's Research Group for Global Korean Business and Culture, and "Study on Ethnic and National Identity of Old Overseas Chinese
in Pusan” by Assistant Professor LI Dan and YIN Ning that explored the social characteristics, ethnic identity and national identity of ethnic Chinese in South Korea with overall and case study approaches. UTPALA Rahman from Bangladesh, on the other hand, analyzed political participation and socioeconomic condition of the Overseas Chinese in Kolkata since World War II. These studies on ethnic Chinese in South Korea and India not only remedied the inadequacy of China’s academia in the field of Overseas Chinese studies, but also became a bright spot in this conference as regards Overseas Chinese and ethnic Chinese studies.

Keeping close to the overall theme “East Asian Regional Integration and Diaspora”, this conference has explored transnational migration and its impact under the process of East Asian regional integration. To sum up, this international conference manifests several distinguishing features:

Firstly, multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary studies on migrants and transnational migration have become a bright spot of this conference. The papers presented show that migration studies are gradually being integrated with various fields like international relations, ethnic politics, civil society and gender studies. In terms of approach, research methodologies of history, political science, economics and sociology have become the important tools of migration studies.

Secondly, field survey is gradually gaining importance among more and more researchers on migration. Papers presented in this conference showed that research results of many of these scholars came from field survey. It is such empirical approach that makes their research more convincing.

Thirdly, East Asia being discussed in this conference refers not only to China, Japan and South Korea in traditional geopolitics, but also includes the whole of the Southeast Asian region. Such a change not only reflects the transformation of the concept of geopolitics to the concept of geo-economy under the process of regional economic integration, but together also realizes the transformation of the East Asian regional cultural identity. Taking hold of such characteristics and opportunities of economic and cultural transformation to propel forward the formation and development of the “East Asian Community” represents both an opportunity and a challenge that the academia and the rest of the society are facing together.

Finally, this conference has taken the interrelations between economic integration and migration as the major theme of research, which further reveals the inherent property of migration as a kind of economic activity that brings influence far beyond the scope of economics. In other words, the impact of transnational migration became so comprehensive as to have deeply penetrated into the domains of politics, society and culture. We should be seeing the increasingly frequent and expanding transnational migration driven by globalization and the process of regional integration. Hence, under the “East Asian Community” discourse of the framework and conception of East Asian regional integration, more positive attention should be paid by the academia to the issues of regional integration and transnational migration, in order to promote hand in hand the socioeconomic prosperity and development of the East Asian region.

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