

The Dialectic Characteristics of Policies for Asia-Pacific Regional Relations⁺

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Abstract

The regional relations within the Asia-Pacific are essentially reflecting a stage for powers to exercise their individual influences. States employ their own strength to echo the themes advocated by the international powers and international organizations in order to introduce their influences for balancing the attempt conducted by the powers for changing the power structure. To establish and shape the regional relations in the Asia-Pacific is basically based on the Asian-Pacific policies of states within or outside the region. All these policies and regional relations as well as the power structure itself is dynamic thus keeping it in development all the time. To well perceive the interest calculation of the Asian-Pacific policies for various states and the principles followed for policy adjustment from this dynamic development process is indeed worthy of further observation. This paper would like to introduce Hegel's dialectic principles of unity of opposites, transition from quantity to quality and negation of the negation as the tools to observe the Asia-Pacific state formulating their regional policies

and by so doing to interpret the rules for them to adjust these policies. As the national interests may extend across various aspects, states therefore need to consider all these factors in order to make the best judgment for the political calculations of their external policies. Precisely based on the plural characteristics of the national interests, there is definitely no absolute friendly or foe relation in dealing with the regional relations. The co-existed competition and cooperation within the framework of the unity of opposites is specifically reflecting such dialectic thinking. By the same token, states adjusting their regional policies must respond to the realities of the power structure accordingly. Yet, the eco-political strength for various states keeps on changing. The commercial activities are gradually evolving and accumulating the variation scales so that eventually overthrowing the previous power structure is fundamentally in line with the rule of transition from quantity to quality. The contradictory movement between the existing norms and the objective realities is more vividly signifying the value of employing dialectic rules to examine and to interpret the power transitions and evolutions of the regional relations in the Asia-Pacific region.

Keywords: *power, regional relations, unity of opposites, transition from quantity to quality, dialectic principles*

1. Introduction

The economic development performances of the Asia-Pacific states are relatively more promising than the global average in recent years. Moreover, many nations within the region have put their efforts into economic development and improving the infrastructure as well as associated software and hardware facilities; thus the competitiveness of their economic systems and private sectors also growing

correspondingly. Consequently, the interactions with neighboring states for all nations in the region are becoming much more intense than ever. Nevertheless, many previously suspended disputes are meanwhile emerging to be the core issue of the international relations within the region.

Considering that the Asia-Pacific states are getting more enthusiastic in managing regional relations, it is naturally worth adopting a suitable framework for further observation. Although the individual value judgment and political calculation will be taken by various nations to deal with the interactions among the neighboring states within the region, and there may inevitably appear a mathematically stochastic character, yet, after appropriate conclusion, it will still eventually follow a set of certain rules to conduct these activities.

There are always rules for tracing issues that have ever occurred in the world. Nevertheless, the animosities created by different understandings and various interpretations can be drastically huge. Based on the observation on the evolutions of the Asia-Pacific states coping with the regional relations, we may conclude that all the states may follow the three logics of “*insisting on differences but engaging pragmatically with the ‘unity of opposites’ principle*”, “*exercising realistic policy adjustments with quantity change to quality change rule*” and “*disregarding history and overturning alliance with negation of negation dialectics*” to handle the regional relations with other states. While the conceptualized value framework on the international affairs for different parties may not be necessarily completely consistent, nonetheless, the three logics just noted above should be a sufficient reference framework to observe the future development in the Asia-Pacific region. The author would like to introduce these three logics in the following paragraphs.

2. Insisting on Differences but Engaging Pragmatically with the “Unity of Opposites” Principle

The differences among neighboring states in the international community are less relevant to whether the people in these nations are homogeneous or heterogeneous in ethnicity. While the Asia-Pacific states are widely scattered in a complicated environment that crosses various geographical sectors with huge differences in climate, hydrograph and terrain, many adjacent nations still possess certain level of homogeneity in many aspects. Nonetheless, such similarities in natural conditions or socio-cultural background may not necessarily guarantee a favorable condition to manage neighborhood relationship.

Although many neighboring states in the Asia-Pacific are extremely similar in life styles and custom, yet, like other corners of the world, they also fail to escape from the geographical curse that the most hated enemies are literally the nearest neighbors. Therefore, Japan and Korea in the Northeast Asian region may still be trapped in an unsolved hatred caused by the historical rivalry though their mentality and *modus operandi* is literally so similar if judged by distant unrelated parties. Comparable conflicting detestation may also exist between other pairs like England and Ireland, Spain and Portugal, or Ecuador and Peru.

Hence, we may conclude that similar natural and socio-cultural conditions in the Asia-Pacific region cannot guarantee the neighboring states' calm and peaceful interactions. Apart from the case between Japan and Korea already noted above, after examining the relationship between Vietnam and Laos, Thailand and Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar as well as Indonesia and Malaysia, we may also discover many territorial disputes and historical disagreements still lingering among these brother-like neighbors. Nevertheless, these differences may not be so significant as to terminate their mutual interactions into an extent of entire separation.

If we compare those neighboring states with much wider gaps in basic social styles, custom and culture, such as Thailand and Malaysia, the Philippines and Malaysia as well as Indonesia and Australia, or even cases like Japan and Russia or Indonesia and East Timor, in fact, there are also numerous territorial disputes and potential tensions. Some are originated from cultural suspicion or religious distrust. Others involve hatred sentiments caused by previous conflicts. However, the mutual interactions among these states have never been totally terminated though the animosities remain in existence.

Why the states in the Asia-Pacific region may follow the “unity of opposites” principle to insist on the differences as the premise while maintaining relations of mutual interaction with other states in the region conducting pragmatic engagement schemes is simply achieved by the following several factors. First, the differences and disputes among these states already exist for a long period of time and the likelihood of solving these issues within the foreseeable future is extremely doubtful. Yet, judging from the content of the disputes and the significance of the objective, their implications may not immediately affect the survival of any state or race.

In other words, viewing from the appearances of these disputes, their postures can be very sensational. All the political figures facing these issues may speak harsh statements and show strong and non-yielding positions. Nonetheless, as we calculate the sphere of relevance or coverage of substantial impacts, it may not essentially touch the core interest that is affecting the survival of any state, not even reaching the level of vital interests that are possibly concerning the daily life of the general public. The reason why states may suspend these disputes is virtually based on the results concluded from political calculations.

Hence, unless states are forced by the demands of their internal political consumption to need to adopt some external issues, these

disputes will not be addressed again. Of course, these issues may be necessarily adopted by the governing authorities of these states. Opposing parties or individual political figures may also use them to gain political leverages by questioning the leadership in power. We therefore must notice that these animosities and disputes sometimes may turn out to be domestic political issues but these may by no means represent the overall true policies of the specific state. Understandably, should any state fail to reach a policy consensus on these matters among ruling authority and opposing parties, it is factually impossible to make any decisive decision immediately on these already long existing disputes.

Second, the mutual interests among various states may also produce alleviation and cooling effects on those animosities and disputes so as to allow them to insist on these differences but meanwhile engage pragmatically and consequently justify the “unity of opposites” dialectic principle. Contents of the relations between nations are very complicated. A sophisticated relationship network is basically composed by connections in various aspects and dimensions. Although the fundamental animosities and disputes should be the core issues in the mutual relationship, yet, for different communities within the states, to maintain a mutually beneficial interaction but avoid challenging the fundamental principles accordingly may still be understandably accommodated and socially accepted.

As there are mutual interests that exist among nations, or alternatively, these states need to consolidate their collective efforts towards more imminent and urgent crisis and challenges, in terms of national interest calculation, it is a quite rational option for these countries to suspend animosities that cannot be immediately solved. During the Cold War era, given the rivalry between east and west blocs, there are many states and political factions that need to comply with the

international agendas settled by the powers by temporarily suppressing their own differentiations and existing uneasiness. Even the powers themselves could be driven by the mutual interests to disregard numerous fundamental animosities or conflicting history and conduct politically reshuffling power games in the international community according to the dialectic “unity of opposites” principle.

The most obvious case in the Asia-Pacific region is the United States helping Japan recover from the war during the Cold War era in order to be a vital chip for containing the Soviet Union. Further, that the United States so eagerly drew Beijing to her side and established diplomatic relationship to balance the Soviet Union is the solid evidence that the mutual interests were significant enough for Washington to suspend the memory of hatred left from the conflicts with the People’s Republic of China on the Korean Peninsula and Indo-China region. The frictions and struggles on the trade issues between the U.S. and Japan coexisted with their military alliance relationship at the same period of time. Moreover, a long-lasting clash on various fundamental values between Beijing and Washington does exist; nevertheless, the substantial economic and commercial interactions and exchange activities on various aspects are practiced in a parallel pace. It again reveals that the mutual interest is the inevitable basis to assure the dialectic “unity of opposites” rule.

The basic animosities of the territorial disputes for the Asia-Pacific states were never alleviated after the Cold War. However, all these states still need to face numerous unconventional threats as the territorial disputes remain in existence; various mutual cooperation schemes are developed to tackle these common challenges. Given the reality of the co-existence of the disputes and cooperation, it literally elaborates that the interests may prevail on the animosities and justify the dialectic “unity of opposites” rule. For instance, the disagreements on the

utilization of the Mekong River water resources do occur among Mainland China, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar, yet, as comparing with the importance of safeguarding the waterway transportation within the Mekong River drainage basin, a routine collective patrol mechanism is still established.¹ This arrangement was driven by an unfortunate incident that happened several years ago. This is the reason why these states are not hindered by the existing disputes but instate, establishing a cooperative mechanism to deal with the common threats.²

As for the case of the Malacca Strait which has a notorious reputation of piracy activities, all its surrounding states including Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia may also surrender their individual persistence and prejudices to establish a collective patrol mechanism in Malacca Strait known as MSP, Malacca Strait Patrol.³ This mechanism is essentially designed for counter-piracy and counter-terrorism activities within the associated waters. It contains several sophisticated operational systems including MSSP, Malacca Strait Sea Patrol, EiS, Eyes-in-the-sky, and IEG, Intelligence Exchange Group. It further proves that states in the Asia-Pacific region managing their mutual relationship follow the dialectic rule governing the nature of existing opposite matters but may still achieve unity.⁴

For the complicated situation containing disputes on territories and waters together with independence movements tangled with various fractions but where collective patrol missions are still achieved, the most significant case should be the joint maritime patrol mission conducted by the Philippines and Malaysia in the Sulu Sea.⁵ Similar case of suspending political differences and cooperating for proceeding with anti-terrorism mission is achieved by Indonesia and Brunei in Sulu-Sulawesi Seas.⁶ Of course, while Mainland China and Vietnam will stalemate for territorial disputes around the Paracel Islands, both states may still conduct joint patrol mission in the waters of the Tonkin Bay at

the same moment.⁷ Although neither side will retract from their individual positions on the South China Sea dispute, yet, they may still sincerely fulfill the associated law enforcement agreement in the waters where the demarcation disagreement is already solved.⁸ Perhaps the most shocking recent example is the Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte personally expressing his expectation to invite Mainland China to patrol international waters though the dispute in the South China Sea was only played down and never firmly settled yet.⁹ We may conclude that the mindset of managing case by case and avoiding tangling them together may suitably support the dialectic "unity of opposites" rule. Should various disputes be mixed up and antagonism insisted on, then the space of adopting the "unity of opposites" mentality for reaching compromise will be considerably squeezed.

This is exactly the same reason why the Republic of China and Japan may suspend the territorial dispute as a premise and successfully signed a fishery agreement around the Diaoyutai waters.¹⁰ As noted by a Foreign Affairs Ministry, ROC, publication – *“Both parties also consented to the inclusion of the ‘without-prejudice clause’ to ensure that the provisions of the agreement do not undermine the ROC’s position on and interpretation of international law regarding its sovereignty and maritime claims, affirming its firm and consistent position on its sovereignty over the Diaoyutai Islands.”*¹¹ – it is obviously indicating that a territorial disputes does exist in the waters near Diaoyutai Islands (釣魚台列嶼). Nonetheless, it is necessary to separate this agreement from the dispute in order to acquire an opportunity to reach a mutually agreed consensus and eventually an agreement, whilst remaining in opposite positions on the territorial dispute for both sides. Likewise, while the political rivalry and disputes across the Taiwan Strait (臺灣海峽) have not been totally settled, both sides nonetheless conduct joint maritime search and rescue exercises.¹²

If viewing from the agreements ever achieved, commercial interactions and cultural exchange across the Taiwan Strait, the characteristics of the unity of opposites is even more obvious.

Last but not least, we should consider the factor of intervention by powers and regional organizations that may effectively condition the crises so as to produce an environment that may accommodate all parties who could insist on their animosities, yet meanwhile engage constructively, thus complying with the dialectic “unity of opposites” principle. As states in the international community manage the corresponding relationship with other nations, they need not only to calculate the gain and loss of interests for both sides but also to consider the response and level of acceptance probably shown by the third parties as well as the possibility of triggering other fractions’ interventions. This is similar to the fact that while the major factor of deciding whether lovers may marry or not should be their own commitment, perspectives and expressions from parents, relatives and peers should also be the factors to be considered. As such, the international powers and regional international organizations may have the privileges to influence and facilitate the interaction relationship among states in the same region.

Since there is neither general and multi-aspect regional international organization in the Asia-Pacific region nor any regional collective security mechanism like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the efficacy of the international organization in managing animosities and antagonism among member states as well as integrating differences and conflicting perspectives is therefore essentially less explicit. However, surveying the influences possessed by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Gulf Cooperation Council, Commonwealth of Independent States and Pacific Islands Forum, it can be seen that they may more or less exercise their influences and effectively contain tension and conflict

among their member states. And for other functional regional international organizations such as Asian Development Bank, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, Eurasian Economic Community and Shanghai Cooperation Organization, they may have the capacity to integrate and to alleviate disputes and differences in specific aspects.

As long as the member states are still willing to participate in the activities within the international organizations though they may not necessarily totally agree with certain resolutions, it may at least prove that these international organizations can exercise appropriate functions to ensure these members to keep engaging with their adversaries in dispute, with a status that even if they may not be completely satisfied with but remain acceptable to them. Comparing with the description of insisting on animosities but engaging pragmatically, an acceptable but not satisfactory situation is essentially elaborating the consequences that the dialectic “unity of opposites” rule may eventually create. In fact, compromise may avoid resulting in conflict. On the other hand, it in essence keeps away from the crisis of a reshuffle on the structure of international relations.

Powers may also effectively contain and reconcile tensions among nations in the Asia-Pacific region. The United States, Mainland China and Indonesia have all played before the role of arbitrator that hope to mediate many cases of conflicts and disagreements between states and their corresponding belligerent groups. Although these efforts might not be necessary to produce substantial institutionalized agreement relationship, it may still promote mutual communication and understanding with positive effectiveness. However, in some cases, intervention by powers may not create leverage but on the contrary may trigger adversaries’ suspicion of other sides intentionally introducing powers to support their positions. This may lead to the hardening of the existing stances, thus squeezing the spaces for negotiation and

reconciliation. Hence, as the powers manage these relations, it is necessary to assess whether their credibility can be respected by those parties concerned; otherwise, it may produce counter-productive results.

Alternatively, powers may also take the act of omission to let those nations concerned understand that certain actions by them will never acquire support and recognition. Further, the final results of these actions will not be accepted by these powers, and hence they may exercise certain level of condition effect. Basically, either actively involving in arbitration and negotiation or expressing objection to stop any side to act unilaterally, it is essentially a tussle of interest between the powers and their alliances and the animosities represented by the adversary states. Should they fail to let the states concerned understand the gain and loss in the process, then they subsequently cannot reach the end of containing and reconciling disputes and differences.

In summery, states in the Asia-Pacific region may follow the dialectic “unity of opposites” rule to manage their mutual relationship. They may engage each other pragmatically with a premise of insisting on animosities. It is caused by various factors noted above. Nevertheless, regarding how it was produced by any specific factor it is hard to find a set of perfectly fair deciphering criteria. After all, the interests presented or possibly produced by alleviating or weakening disputes and animosities, the mutual interests promoted and enhanced by encouraging cooperation and exchange as well as containing frictions by adopting international factors and mechanism at the right timing may further fulfill such relationship structure of unity of opposites. As for the contrast of security structure and economic interest within the Asia-Pacific region generally perceived in recent years, we may not need to address the abovementioned elements, but instead also need to further survey the rule of exercising realistic policy adjustments with “quantity change to quality change” rule in the next section.

3. Exercising Realistic Policy Adjustments with “Quantity Change to Quality Change” Rule

Although the power structure of international relations may superficially appear to be stable in status in certain period of time, it is in essence a dynamically developing structural relationship at all time. The power itself is fundamentally multifaceted and various aspects are intertwined thus creating influences. Although power is categorized into soft power, hard power or even smart power in recent years, yet, regardless of its external features, power eventually needs to influence the thinking and action of the specific objectives. Power is still aimed at the expected target as the final destination which is expected to act to follow our will.

As indicated by the abovementioned “unity of opposites” principle, there is a pragmatic orientation as well as the flexibility to accept the consequence after reconciliations for the Asia-Pacific states in managing their external policies. Given the consideration of the evolving nature of power generally occurred in states employing various powers which may lead to either accumulation or consumption, it is then quite natural for states to adjust their level of relationship and engaging measures with specific actors according to the variations of their positions in the international political market. There is no permanent winner in the international society. It is the general practice for fluctuations to appear in the power relationships generation after generation. Strictly speaking, it is a mandated trend for states to adjust their external policies in line with the realities of the substantial power shifting. Nonetheless, the essential fact is that this trend inevitably follows the rule of “quantity change to quality change” in its operation.

The fact that states in the Asia-Pacific region adjust their external policies necessarily in a step-by-step mode is because the process of

policy alteration is constrained by many factors. Among them, there are three most significant factors. First, the policymakers need to sustain continuity and stability in policy by avoiding unexpected radical overturn and sudden revision. They therefore rely on this process of “quantity change to quality change” by shaping the objective environment in advance to prepare favorable conditions for fulfilling the subjective expectations. After this, their policy adjustment will subsequently be revealed so as to reduce the shock and impact usually associated with the policy alternations. Coming events cast their shadows before them as we always know. Indications always appear before policy alternations. It is impossible to keep anything perfectly concealed in international politics.

Second, the international environment and internal political practices will condition the policy adjustment process to follow certain existing rules. External environment is constrained by both alliances and adversaries. Particularly, as the policy adjustment may possibly affect alliance relationship, it is necessary to conduct the policy step by step and to communicate with alliance states for elaborations. As the timing has eventually matured for shifting the stage of quantity change to quality change, it may precede the significant policy adjustments in regional relationship. The same philosophy may also be applied to the substantial practices in domestic politics. Either prior-programming the policy-associated legislative engineering or communicating to reconcile with various political fractions is essentially excluding the severe political resistances in taking the eventual quality change measures. As for the general public and private sectors, this process may allow them to grasp the coming alternations and to prepare the corresponding adjustments in advance, thus facilitating them to reduce related losses.

Last but not least, objectives targeted by the adjustment of the regional relationship policies may also need to be prepared for matching

with these policy alternations. The process from quantity change to quality change fundamentally facilitates these targeted states to program their own corresponding measures in advance. By so doing, it may reduce the duration needed for both sides to match their new relationship after the policy adjustment moves into the quality change stage. Hence, for many seemingly drastic transformations in relations among the Asia-Pacific countries, all parties have actually already engaged each other behind closed doors. It is necessary to go through the process of communication and reconciliation, and even the economic and commercial engagements and cultural exchanges also become daily practices; eventually, the surprising political or diplomatic breakthrough may superficially occur in the last stage. Before completing the relationship normalization process between Beijing and Washington, both sides had already installed the liaison offices; the establishment of the diplomatic relationship subsequently was only a matter of date and the scale of its impact naturally could be dramatically decreased.

Based on the multifaceted nature of power that is affecting Asia-Pacific states' regional relations policies, therefore, in observing the final quality change in policies regarding political and diplomatic relationship, it needs to expand the scope to cover other power dimensions with the characteristics of quantity change to quality change. Predominantly, the commercial and trade engagements as well as cultural exchanges are the vital driving forces for producing regional relationship policy adjustments. Especially, after the World War II, Japan started its post-war economic recovery, and subsequently, the four newly industrialized states followed a similar track. Later, Mainland China embarked on its economic reform and open policy, and there was the economic boom in India and ASEAN states. The overall economic landscape was reshaped. Accompanied by the rise in economic strength, culture exports of corresponding states also acquired significant growth.

Alternations and transformations of the power structure also appeared in the whole soft power aspect.

Hence, all the Asia-Pacific states and all international powers involved in the regional activities will follow the power landscapes that appeared in various aspects to modify and to adjust their external policies for managing the regional relations. As such, while power structures in various aspects may mutually influence each other, the developments of power structures for specific aspects can be conditioned by external interventions or self-constraints. Consequently, the same paces of development may not necessarily appear in all power aspects at the same time. This is the reason why there are certain mismatches between economic, commercial or military strength and the political positions. For this reason, from a power structure transformation in specific aspect to derive an expectation which may lead to alternations in other aspects is in essence not inevitability. Therefore, nations getting rich may not definitely strengthen their military forces, as it still depends on the objective environments and subjective aspirations to create such demands.

For instance, Japan recovered from the World War II in a very swift pace. Later it became a world-class power in economy, commerce and trade. In the dimensions of technology and culture, Japan is also considerably influential. Nonetheless, given the humiliated historical record of militarism, it is very cautious in military activities including overseas deployment and force employment. All policy adjustments and modifications in this field are conducted with relatively low profile and even quite concealed. However, after many years in the stage of quantity change, in the term of the second Shinzō Abe (安倍晋三) cabinet, many existing policies and restrictions on military activities were abolished. All these policy alternations are aggressively adopted even with the risks of violating constitution. Whether this trend can be defined

as the development into the quality change stage is essentially worthy of further discussion and interpretation.

But in the case of Japan, in its stage of self-constrained military activities, its military force developments and armament establishments still follow the quantity change model of gradual progresses, not a total suspension or comprehensive stagnation. Meanwhile, it has employed massive financial supports as the capital in diplomacy and been actively participating in international conferences as well as initiating many tasks to establish international judiciary mechanisms. Nonetheless, these efforts basically should be elaborated in seeking quantity change in other aspects or corresponding measures for accumulating political capitals and operational energies before the eventual quality change for breaking the restrictions noted by the article nine in its constitution. Again, this tendency is also worthy of further observation to certain extent. Yet, how to prove that all these policy efforts in different dimensions may have the capacity for mutual support and coordination will be the most solemn challenge to political commentators and military observers.

As a matter of fact, the same “quantity change to quality change” model can also be applied to Mainland China, South Korea and ASEAN states. However, certain variances may still occur since the strategic environments encountered by various states and the subjective political aspirations of their individual political masters are quite different. Policies for managing regional relationship in the international community principally value patience and all issues would naturally prevail after all conditions have become mature. We may be aware that the stage transition from quantity change to quality change literally needs to match the conditions that exist in the realistic environments accordingly.

As for the dialectic rule of “quantity change to quality change” on regional policies, it is obligatory to point out that the progress of

developing transformation might not necessarily match the objective realities. Whether policies would be adjusted according to realities is sometimes not decided by the matter of substantial interest scale but by the decision-makers' level of grasping and apprehending the objective situations. The decision-makers may misperceive the reality of the world which is simply hindered by their own subjective prejudices. These discrepancies of perception may produce a situation of favoring the private sectors to lead the policy adjustment far before the government agencies. Private enterprises may take the lead and the governmental policies will follow to match their measures subsequently. Given the character of rigidity of institutions in governmental policy alternations, their operations may not be as flexible as those of private enterprises and any individuals. This is also the general practice of the Asia-Pacific states in handling their regional relationship. It may not be surprising in creating differences in the progress of policy adjustment.

4. Disregarding History and Overturning Alliance with “Negation of Negation” Dialectics

The bloc structure formed by nations adopting alliance scheme in order to secure national interests and safeguard national security is a popular policy alternative in recent history. States in the Asia-Pacific region virtually cannot be excluded from this trend either. Nevertheless, alliance relationship represents a grouping driven by interests. Hence, although from the historical point of view, some states may have certain deep hatreds hard to dissolve among them. On the other hand, certain alliance relationship may still last for a long period of time in history. Regardless of how deep the previous friendship could be or how serious the existing hatred was, in facing the calculus of interest, the pragmatic demands for survival will inevitably override all these historical residual

sentiments. All states dropping their historical linkages and freeing themselves from these entanglements of past passions should be the unavoidable option under the realities of international politics.

Following the insistence on differences but engaging pragmatically with the “unity of opposites” principle noted earlier, integrating it with the concept of exercising realistic policy adjustments with the “quantity change to quality change” rule, together with disregarding history and overturning alliance with the “negation of negation” dialectics is introduced here for adopting as the final norm for interpreting how Asia-Pacific states handling their regional relations policies. Several drastic fluctuations do happen in the Asia-Pacific alliance relationship, and the tracks for these developments and transformations all follow the tracks of “unity of opposites” and “quantity change to quality change” in development. However, the flip-flop of the alliance phenomena discussed and analyzed here may not be the solemn and formal alliance treaties but in the nature much flexible alliance relationship. Likewise, in terms of the history, it only implies the historical transition status within a certain period of time but not the historical long river covering thousands of years; otherwise, no meaningful discussion can be engaged.

In the past one hundred years, several cases of policy alternations of the regional relationship had occurred among the Asia-Pacific states. These include the United States-Japan alliance after the World War II, and the downturn of China’s Communist regime and the Soviet Union from their honeymoon stage to become major rivals who later reached a dramatic reconciliation. United States betrayed its ally in Taipei and turned to embrace Beijing but after the Cold War, based on its strategic calculation, Washington has treated the Communist China as the potential adversary again. United States had fought with the North Vietnamese in the battlefield before. But after many years, as needed by the strategic demands, both sides surrender their ideological differences

and reestablished relationship. The Philippines declined and resisted the U.S. forces stationing in its territory but later considered re-accommodating their deployment. Nonetheless, this attempt was again changed dramatically after the inauguration of President Duterte. Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were involved in conflicts for years but eventually still reached compromise to some extent. Myanmar was isolated for many years but was nevertheless accepted by the ASEAN which became the major supporter for its reentry to the international society. All these events that negated the previous history and changed completely the alliance relationship may vary in scale and depth; however, the facts reveal that there is no permanent alliance in international relations but only the political realities of everlasting interests.

For these developments which appear to be sudden policy turnings but in reality accumulated relationship adjustments, we should have the following awareness. First, we should consider why such a periodical transformation is needed for symbolic declaration, i.e. restarting by formally negating previous relationship structure is essentially necessary in politics. In fact, the political posture for the international regional relations policies is merely an open recognition of existing *fait accompli*. All practices of substantial relationship should be already in order and subsequently to conclude the process and ceremoniously publicize it to the international and domestic society. Meanwhile, all associated legal engineering will also be engaged.

In contrast, many events in the international society without the basis of a gradual political transformation as previously noted but in the category of improvised actions, which would not have the capacity to overthrow any standing power structure, would completely return to the origin points after these events with no shifting effect on the regional relations. For instance, two summits between the two Koreas have no

structural variation effect on the substantial practices of the inter-Korea relations. The framework of interactions between these two sides has never been overturned by these summits but only certain trivial developments were achieved as a consequence. These cases failed to follow the previous rule of “quantity change to quality change” for power structure transformation is the fundamental reason for these results. Neither had they ever unified the conflicting relationship on the opposite dimensions but only forcefully sought for breakthrough with no reason thus reversing the order of the causes and the consequences.

Second, while many would believe that the powers may have higher degree of freedom in choosing policies in handling regional relations, these powers dominating alliance relationship in fact may also be constrained by the same power structure. They therefore need to conclude and to declare future relationship development and regional power structure at specific points in time in order to facilitate all its following alliance states to prepare corresponding arrangements in their individual domestic politics. By so doing, the latter may provide coordinated operations in line with the regional relationship power structure directed by the powers and avoid losing tracks and thus hindering operation. Therefore, Tokyo taking the lead to establish formal diplomatic relations with Beijing before Washington, though not being a total surprise, would still make the United States who generally directed the alliance feel surprise and unpleasant which subsequently became a potential factor to cause frictions in the relationship between these two states.

Last but not least, for those objectives directed by the regional relationship policy adjustments, concluding previous relationship for restart by a formal declaration, though it is merely a recognition of existing facts, as a process through unity of opposites, quantity change to quality change and producing negation of negation is simply a

declaration to admit that both sides are already reaching a certain level of understanding. Therefore, in developing relationship, they would rather mutually compromise to achieve such an eventuality. This political posture may indicate that it is still necessary to take care of the formalities in appearance after grasping tightly the substances. It is indeed not only a necessary operational process for all states related but also a key timing for completing the reshuffling of relationship.

The capability of cutting historical entanglements and reestablishing alliance linkages is literally indicating forgiveness and accommodation as well as the unwillingness of staying at historical settlements. For the political leadership, how to communicate with the general public with accumulated and steady patience in order to let them understand and agree to give in the historical hatreds for supporting the adjustment of alliance relationship is simply a wrestling between political communications and social indoctrinations. Basically, those more authoritarian regimes are much more capable of dealing with these political challenges. In contrast, the democratic societies are fundamentally plural. It is hard to integrated opinions of the general public in appearance. Yet, whether it is as difficult as it seems to be is hard to determine. The possibility for it being smoothly managed may still depend on a case-by-case basis.

However, for the cases in the Asia-Pacific, there are also many homogeneous nations which may have the history of political rivalry but with the communication and exchange channels in their civil societies conducted with no hindrance at all. This may provide relatively wide operational space for suspending animosities and adjusting alliance relationship. For example, territorial disputes do exist between Cambodia and Thailand, and yet, given the fact that both sides are Buddhist societies, the space for improving relationship remains quite vast even though there are political disagreements. Likewise, in the case

of the bilateral relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia, these two countries would have the same leverage since both of them practice Islamic religion.

Nonetheless, on the contrary, in the cases of the two Koreas and two Chinas, the homogeneity of these two pairwise societies is unquestionable. Those who seek political integration will naturally emphasize the common historical heritages. But those who would like to retain their separation status will keep looking for animosities and magnifying the interpretations of these features. All the objective facts after being converted by political propositions will naturally create distortion. Nevertheless, judging from those cases that have appeared in the Asia-Pacific region, all the relationships and features of other dimensions may only be the important factors to decide on whether states may cut the historical entanglements and adjust alliance relationship but they have no position to be the only factors to dominate the decision-making process. The final decision still depend on the political decision derived from measuring interests and calculating gains and losses.

5. Conclusion

This paper focuses specifically on the policy selection by the states in the Asia-Pacific region in handling their regional relations by adopting Hegel's dialectic rules to observe their actual conduct performances and political operations in order to provide references for those who are engaged in regional relations research. The concept elaborated by this paper is very straightforward. These dialectic rules are to be adopted to provide a more convenient reference framework for studying the interactions of various actors in Asia-Pacific regional relations or the overall international society. No matter how authoritarian or dictatorial

the political regime of each state or society is, it may not reveal the plurality of political perspectives in appearance. Nonetheless, by disassembling a society, we will naturally discover other social dimensions that may not be necessarily conditioned by politics as to lose their own logic and motivations in their practices. Simply due to the multi-layered and multi-dimensional structure of the society, states handle their diplomatic relationship chiefly by taking politics as its main theme, and thereby may insist on differences but engage pragmatically with the “unity of opposites” principle.

Likewise, given that the dissimilarities of the interest relations may vary in different layers and various dimensions but may contain the capacity of mutual influence, in comprehensively considering individual interest whilst the national decision-makers are processing regional relationship policies, they virtually adopts the concept of “quantity change to quality change” for complying with realistic conditions to adjust policies in order to safeguard the national interest. Finally, as the conditions become mature and allowed by the environment, they would follow the “negation of negation” dialectic track to terminate history for the purpose of transforming alliance relations.

Notes

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