

TOWARD A NORTHEAST ASIAN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

For more than 30 years, plans for peace and economic development in Northeast Asia have been studied. The plans envisioned the formation of a Northeast Asian Economic Community, and put more importance on how the physical infrastructure in the region should be developed. In spite of past attempts at economic cooperation in Northeast Asia, one missing link is possible cooperation in tourism development in the region. Tourism can generate both economic benefits and non-economic benefits such as mutual understanding and confidence building. The author argues that there should be a multilateral framework to develop tourism in the region.

KEYWORDS

Tourism, development, economic community, comprehensive security,
cultural communications, regional cooperation

MAIN TEXT

Importance of Cooperation in Tourism Development

For more than 30 years, plans for peace and economic development in Northeast Asia have been studied. The plans envisioned the formation of a Northeast Asian Economic Community, and put more importance on how the physical infrastructure in the region should be developed.

Northeast Asia as a whole can be regarded as one region of communications. One perspective for viewing the region is economics: the region can function as an economic community. The

second viewpoint for the region is comprehensive security: Northeast Asia can be the area of peace and cohabitation. The third aspect for the region is cultural communications: the region shares a common history and tradition. These three elements can be analyzed and developed in studies on tourism industries in the region. Some studies in the past included the aspects of promoting peace, as well as historical and cultural communications. However, there has been no systematic and comprehensive research on tourism development in Northeast Asia.

Multilateral cooperation on tourism in Northeast Asia has been discussed at annual meetings at the tourism working group in the UN-led Tumen River Development Program and at annual meetings of *Kan-Nihonkaiken Kanko Sokushin Kyogikai* (the Council for Around-the-Sea-of-Japan Tourism Development), which was initiated in 1996 in Tottori Prefecture to promote cooperation among Japanese municipalities along the coastline of the Sea of Japan (East Sea). However, neither is a truly regional, multilateral forum for tourism development. The former does not include Japanese participants and the latter is a domestic organization in Japan. Professor Liang, at the Department of Tourism in Toyo University, proposes to establish an international organization for tourism, similar to the ASEAN Tourism Forum, which would include Japan and other countries in the region, considering “the necessity to establish an organization to coordinate tourism development in the region.”

Therefore, it is very timely and ground-breaking that the Seoul Conference of the Northeast Asia Economic Forum has included a session on tourism, for the first time in the annual series of Forum conferences. It is our intention to explore the significance of the development of communications in the new era in Northeast Asia through the perspective of tourism development. The expected goal is to develop the concept of the Northeast Asian Tourism Community. As in other fields, achieving this goal will require continuous, multilateral discussion and networking among experts, academics, and practitioners in the region. I would like to recommend strongly that the concluding statement of this Conference includes the establishment of an organization to foster the Northeast Asian Tourism Community.

For this purpose, I am going to explain the background and necessity of the cooperative approach in tourism development in Northeast Asia: chronological development of economic cooperation, the role of tourism, and the economic impact of tourism.

Chronological development of economic cooperation in Northeast Asia

As mentioned above, plans for peace and economic development in Northeast Asia have been studied for more than 30 years. It is beneficial to review the chronological development of economic cooperation in the region at first.

The first call for such cooperation in the region can be traced back to *Nihonkai Keizaiken no Teisho – Heiwa to Han'ei no Daisan no Michi* (A Proposal for the Around-the-Sea-of-Japan Economic Community: The Third Way for Peace and Prosperity), proposed in 1968 by Mr. Masamitsu Fukushima, who was an adviser to Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira. Another proposal in the early stage was *Tomorrow's Sea of Japan*, which was published by Niigata Nippo in 1970 and won the Kikuchi Kan Prize.

Stimulated by these proposals, academics and officials in local governments around the Sea of Japan became more interested in regional cooperation. In February 1978, the “Sanjian Plain (三江平原) Agricultural Development Plan” was proposed after the meeting between Vice Prime Minister Wang and Sano, Niigata. This plan was a pioneering adventure for the new era of regional cooperation. Sano started directing the activities of the “Around-the-Sea-of-Japan Economic Research Association” in 1985. Their activities were the foundation stone of the “think and do” approach of our research on Northeast Asia.

The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, followed by the fall of communism and the end of the Cold War, changed the political environment in Northeast Asia. The Northeast Asia Economic Development Conference, held in Tianjin in 1990, established the context of the approach for regional cooperation. The concept of the conference was followed both by the Northeast Asia Economic Conference (NAEC) and Northeast Asia Economic Forum (NEAEF). The UNDP announced the Tumen River Basin Development Project in 1991. In 1993, the Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia (ERINA) was established in Niigata, Japan. We observe significant development for the past ten years. It was declared that the Tumen River Basin Development Project “went into the third stage in realizing the plan” at a conference held in Vladivostok in June 2002. Governor Hirayama of Niigata said “if there is significant change in Northeast Asia in the coming decade, it would be only ERINA that can exercise a large influence on the matter in Japan,” at the tenth anniversary symposium of ERINA, referring to the achievements of ERINA, the NAEC, and the NEAEF, in research on multilateral cooperation in energy, environment, development finance, and international logistics.

Tourism: passport to peace – Looking at the history of communications with Bohai

The Northeast Asia Tourism Research Association was established in Japan in 2002, and its research focused on the history of communications with Bohai as a symbol of tourism resources in the region and international communications in the ancient days.

The first reason is that Japan and Bohai established the strongest diplomatic relationship in the

communications history of ancient Japan with Northeast Asia. The exchange of envoys started in 727 and continued through 922. This is the second oldest diplomatic exchange in Japan after Koryo.

The second reason is that the territory of Bohai covered the whole region of Northeast Asia, including the Russian Far East and the Korean Peninsula. Bohai had five major cities and five major transportation routes. One of them, which originated in Mutanjan, went through Fenchung, and ended at the estuary of the Tumen River, was named the “Japan Route”. This ancient line of communications between Bohai and Japan across the Sea of Japan will have a significant impact on possible tourism and future communications, stimulating the imagination on the communications through “the Silk Road on the ocean.”

The third reason is that Bohai presents an indispensable agenda for common and mutual understanding of the history in the region. The history of Bohai was the center of argument, because there was no historical material written by Bohai historians. Without a common understanding of the past, it is impossible to establish foundations for peace, stability, and prosperity in Northeast Asia.

It is true that Northeast Asia has been characterized as an area of conflict, as illustrated by the military confrontation in the Korean Peninsula. However, new international institutions, such as six-party consultation on the nuclear issue, will take over the old structure, and make peace and stability more likely. The slogan “tourism: passport to peace,” which was adopted by the UN in 1967, during the year designated as International Tourism Year, is still valid and effective. Any development plans for Northeast Asia should put significance on the socio-cultural aspects of tourism, such as contributions to international cooperation, confidence building, and promoting peace.

Economic impact of tourism

We are now in the era of “mega competition”. The essence of the competition is not “with whom to compete” but “what to compete,” as suggested by Nukaga. Services become the major subject of competition. In this context, tourism provides large potentials for nations, regions, and individuals.

The size of the tourism industry worldwide, including tourism-related industries and tax revenues, was 3,497 billion US dollars (equivalent to 10.7% of world GDP) in 2001, according to the estimate of the WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council). It is also estimated that the tourism industry will grow at a rate of 3.6% on average until 2011. The tourism-related GDP in

the Asia-Pacific region is expected to grow at a rate of 5.1% annually. The tourism GDP in Northeast Asia is 552 billion dollars with an annual growth rate of 4.8%. Tourism in Northeast Asia is significant, even compared with other Asia-Pacific regions: Southeast Asia (70 billion dollars, growing at 6.6%), South Asia (34.7 billion dollars, growing at 8.5%), and Oceania (53.7 billion dollars, growing at 3.3%).

The Japanese government declared that tourism is one of the most important national strategies, and announced a plan that attempts to double the number of visitors to Japan in 10 years to correct the balance between the Japanese visitors going to other countries and visitors from other countries coming to Japan. The plan aims to have 8 million visitors by 2007, and finally to have 10 million visitors. If the plan is realized, domestic travel expenses will amount to 40 trillion yen (up from 20 trillion yen), and tourism-related employment will increase to 8 million people (up from 4 million). Measures have been taken since 2001 based on the strategy of increasing inbound visitors to Japan.

However, the foundations of the tourism relationships between Japan and Northeast Asia are still immature, and attempts to increase inbound visitors may not be effective. It is first necessary to increase interaction and communications between the peoples of Northeast Asia and the Japanese, and to let them know about the society, culture, history, and physical characteristics of Japan. In this context, increasing outbound tourists from Japan at first will encourage inbound visitors to Japan in the future.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the past attempts of economic cooperation in Northeast Asia, one missing link in the past is the possible cooperation for tourism development in the region. Tourism can generate both economic benefits and non-economic benefits, such as mutual understanding and confidence building. There should be a multilateral framework to develop tourism in the region.