

CONCLUSION OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC PANEL

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Presentation of the keynote (Iriyama) and four case studies including Japan (Oyama), Bangladesh (Khan), China (Xu) and Singapore (Ho) stimulated interesting comments from several experts who are outside the region of Asia Pacific. While it is agreeably difficult to define Asia Pacific as one region due to its heterogeneity (so is Africa, or Europe, after all), participants from other regions expressed more interest in the success stories of a small number of countries of this region known as an Asian Miracle during the past decade, of which success was generally attributed to the excellence of government and public administration institutions, rather than the performance of governance.

The Panel was originally concerned with finding out the nature (commonality) of the reform efforts of these four Asian countries organized in the midst of the recovery of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Many participants of the Panel took interest in arguing positively the pre-1997 features of the strong mandarin and paternalistic government bureaucracy as evidenced in those case countries such as bureaucratic interventions by the well trained policy technocrats and their close partnership networks with the private businesses that led strong market economy but “encouraged in a long run cronyism and corruption “(Ho).

The 1997 Asian financial crisis under shadowed such Asian success stories and government reform movements flourished in these case countries. Accountability and transparency in both government and the private sector institutions are thus being sought; decentralization and deregulation are vigorously pursued, if not realized. In Japan, 1998 NPO Act was epoch making for increased civil society participation in public goods delivery, but NGOs and the community based organizations or NPOs are yet to be further created to serve the public good. And their transparency, accountability or legitimacy are not yet questioned due to their marginal nature in their society, (Oyama). In short, none of these countries in question are sharing their government powers with NGOs or the civil society. It is still the government, which is dominant and which decided when, how and how much the power can be delegated to non-government organizations.

In these countries, are the reforms meant from government to

governance? Is such slogan appropriate in the Asia Pacific scene? Whether it was the United Nations system of organizations including the World Bank, which originally advocated in mid-1980s the governance approach to the developing countries (Siedentopf) or not, unless a document is addressed to the international or UN communities, those hitherto successful East Asian countries were not keen to use the term governance at least in the official reform documents. (In fact it was only early 2000 when the Japanese government for the first time used the term governance in its government reform document, although still the approach is not adopted in its term, even if the components of the concept such as accountability, transparency, decentralization, participation and strengthening of NPOs, etc are frequently addressed).

Discussant Gabr is very decisive that governance is a mere slogan of the many 3rd world countries before the foreign forums or “used to embellish their images domestically”. Another discussant Siedentopf argues that functioning control mechanisms together with the rule of law, accountability inside and outside of public administration are central to the reforms, and thus he is cautioning independent rowers are not always compatible with the public good. He argues, and no one in the Panel disagreed that the governance concept is useful in recognizing the many dimensions and complexity of government-environment relations that go beyond the ideas of New Public Management. Moreover, governance concept helps us grasp the picture that the governments and civil society are connected to one another in the globalized society in which international accountability (Iriyama) should also be questioned for global public good.

So, governance concept is useful in our reviewing if the government, private sector, or civil society is really functioning for the public good and goodness. While there is discourse in approaches to reforms and governance concept, (from government to governance, or from bad government to good government or from governance to government,) it is clear that scrutinizing the reform efforts through the various components of the governance concepts provokes us as it really did in this Panel, and provides us pragmatic and analytical indicators in evaluating the ongoing public administration, government, and governance reforms.

We are once again reminded that the post 1997 Asian financial crisis brought about clear recognition among the Asian leaders of the necessity of the economic interdependence of Asian countries and that the revitalization of one economy is contingent to the recovery of the neighboring economies. To the international business community each government must show that their own government is efficient, effective, transparent and accountable, and possesses strong deregulated legal framework so that the government can be trusted in their business and investment.

So, government and public administration reforms will continue in Asia Pacific scenes. It is legitimate to seek many more cases of reforms and review these cases through the governance concept. If the policy makers and researchers can identify certain commonality in reform approaches and public management techniques adopted, though vigorous exchange and networking, we practitioners and researchers in public administration may be able contribute to better regional cooperation in the Asia Pacific, if not integration. In doing so, this Panel indeed proved the need for including colleagues from other regions as well as working together in the international forum such as IIAS.

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