

EPILOGUE

Southeast Asia and ASEM after 2008

As a social construction, Asian identity has not yet appeared as a solid single collective intention, but the process of interactive construction of identity has taken place among Asian elites and people in ASEM from 1996 up to 2008. ASEM took part in this process as a social arena for socialization among Asian participants. Nevertheless, since 2008 ASEM has experienced the second and third enlargements¹ which change the Asian group in ASEM. In 2008, India, Pakistan, and Mongolia became new partners of ASEM, followed by Russia, Australia, and New Zealand in 2010 (see Map 2). These developments brought some consequences not only to ASEM as an inter-regional institution but also to the Asian group in ASEM and to the Southeast Asian countries.

First, the accession of India, another rising state in Asia, can provide another source and power to the Asian group in ASEM. Accordingly, the Asians' bargaining power vis-à-vis the European counterparts could increase. Nevertheless, the involvement of India also creates challenges for the Southeast Asian countries since India has been perceived as a competitor to China and because the country has had strained relations with Pakistan. The Southeast Asian countries have to manage their relations with India in such a way in order not to jeopardize their relations with China and Pakistan. The consolidation of the Asian group in ASEM and the enhancement of their regional identity in ASEM are arguably even more complex and harder as the group now includes more countries and two distinctive cultures, China and India.

Second, the ASEM enlargement in 2010 that accepted the accession of Russia, Australia, and New Zealand also brings some other challenges. The challenges can be referred back to the research question in this thesis: Will ASEM still work for Asian countries after the 2010 enlargement? The challenges arise from two facts that Russia becomes the first non-EU country in ASEM and Australia has sometimes tried to identify itself as an Asian country, but the position of this country in the Asian group has been frequently questioned, not only by some Asian countries but also within its own domestic political debates. The three newcomers have been categorized as “others” due to confusion — and rejection — to place them in either Asian or European group. This third category creates a question in regard to the ASEM inter-regional arrangement as to where to place them in pre-summit coordinator meeting. More substantially, the last accession can also influence the solidarity in the Asian side of ASEM. There are at least two factors that can indicate that Australia may not add to the strength of the Asian group in ASEM. Australia shared more values with the European countries than with the Asians. These values include support for liberal democracy and environment protection. The second is that since 31 October 2011, EU-Australia has embarked a negotiation for a treaty-level framework agreement as the two parties aim to establish free trade agreements. This new development shows that EU and Australia has had special relations that they may bring to ASEM.

It will be interesting to observe whether the findings of this research, that address the utility of ASEM from the (Southeast) Asian perspectives, still apply if the ASEM’s Asian group includes the new accessed countries. This will be a topic for future research, together with an inquiry to investigate how ASEM has worked for the European countries.

Note

1. The first enlargement was in 2004 with the accession of three Asian and ten European countries. See Chapter 1.