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Japan and the Genesis of APEC: A Preliminary Study in the Light of Recently Declassified Documents

di NOEMI LANNA

Abstract – *This paper aims to analyze Japan's role in the making of APEC. Drawing on recently declassified documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the article will investigate the historical conditions that encouraged the establishment of an inclusive organization committed to enhancing economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, focusing on Japan's strategic choices. While the present regional scenario is in many respects different from the 1980s, the case-study proposed could contribute to throwing light on the dilemmas confronting Japanese diplomacy today. In particular, the debate on APEC membership, the evolution of a Japan-Australia partnership, and the development of Tōkyō's policies in support of trade liberalization and open regionalism in the 1980s provide precious insights to better assess Japan's response to US-China tensions as well as Tōkyō's decisive contribution to multilateralism and trade liberalization in an increasingly contested Indo-Pacific.*

Introduction¹

The 1957 edition of the Diplomatic bluebook presented the «three principles of Japanese foreign policy» (*Nihon gaikō no sangensoku*) as follows: assigning central importance to the United Nations; cooperating with the free world; strengthening Japan's position as «a member of Asia»². Whereas the full recognition of Japan as a member of the Western bloc could be considered to have been achieved after gaining General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation

¹ In this article, the Japanese convention for the family name to precede the given name is followed.

² M. Iokibe (ed.), *The Diplomatic History of Postwar Japan*, London and New York, 2010, p. 66.

and Development) membership in 1955 and 1964 respectively as well as hosting the 1964 Olympics, political and economic re-integration in East Asia proved much more laborious. With the burdensome memory of the «Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere», the legacy of colonialism heavily impacted Japan's standing within the region, fostering a sense of suspicion and hostility. National division (in China and Korea), Cold War bipolarity (exacerbated by the outbreak of the Korean and Vietnam wars) and the fragmentation of the regional political economy (resulting not only from the confrontation between the USSR and US centered blocs, but also from the degrees of diversity existing within the blocs themselves) added further constraints to Tōkyō's diplomatic activity³.

Despite this unfavorable background, Japan has been active in strengthening relations with East Asian countries in the postwar era, both at the bilateral and multilateral levels. Since the 1960s, Tōkyō has been at the forefront in proposing regional frameworks that could enhance intraregional cooperation, while consolidating its position in the region. An interesting case in point is Japan's contribution to the creation of APEC, the organization established in 1989 to broaden economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. Although Australia would assume the leadership in public, Japan's diplomatic efforts were decisive in the process leading to the establishment of the organization. The role of Japan in the creation of APEC has been extensively discussed in the literature⁴. However, it is worth reconsidering this case-study for a number of reasons.

³ G. Hook, *et al.*, *Japan's International Relations. Politics, Economics and Security*, London and New York, third edition, 2011, pp. 159-166.

⁴ See for instance, Y. Funabashi, *Asia Pacific Fusion: Japan's Role in APEC*, Washington, D.C., 1995; T. Kikuchi, *APEC: Ajia Taiheiyō mosaku*, Tōkyō, 1995; T. Terada, *The genesis of APEC: Australian-Japan political initiatives*, "Pacific Economic Papers" (Australia-Japan Research Centre, Asia Pacific School of Economics and Management, The Australian National University), no. 298 (December 1999), Canberra, <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/40456> (Accessed on 14.4.2022); P. Korhonen, *Japan and Asia-Pacific Integration. Pacific Romances (1968-1996)*, London and New York, 1998; H. Patrick, *PECC, APEC, and East Asian Economic Cooperation: Prime Minister Obira's Legacy and Issues in the 21st Century*, Discussion paper n. 38, APEC Study Center, Columbia University, 2005; M. Beeson, *Institutions of the Asia-Pacific: ASEAN, APEC and Beyond*, London and New York, 2008.

First, recently declassified documents from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) offer new insights into the background surrounding Japan's involvement in establishing APEC⁵. Second, many of the issues at stake in the debate preceding the launch of the multilateral initiative – the threat of protectionism and the future of the liberal order; the Japan-Australia partnership; the role of China in the Asia-Pacific region – bear striking similarities to the questions associated with the current debate on regional order. Third, the scope and name itself of APEC call into question the issue of conceptualization of 'Asia-Pacific'. The definition of regions – where their boundaries lie, how they reconfigure in response to exogenous influences and changing power relations – is a recurring theme in institutional development. In the Asia-Pacific region, one of the main issues has been whether to take East Asia (excluding the United States) as a point of reference or to use the broader definition of Asia-Pacific⁶. This question was essential in the negotiations preceding the establishment of APEC, which became a locus for discussing the region's role, identity and constituent parts. In this respect, the debate on APEC membership is an illustrative antecedent of the debate emerging in recent years, regarding the definition of the Indo-Pacific region.

This article proceeds as follows. It first reviews the history of Japan's regionalist policy in order to describe the context in which the decision to sponsor the creation of an organization committed to institutionalizing economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region developed. It then surveys the main initiatives taken by Japan, shedding light on the policy-making processes behind them, through a close examination of recently declassified MOFA documents. Lastly, the paper draws some conclusions on the legacy of Japan's role in establishing APEC. Given the limited space, the article will present an introductory analysis of the main issues

⁵ The documents were declassified on December 23, 2020. They consist of three folders: 2020-0558 (1988/10-1989/4), *Ajia Taiheiyō kyōryoku* 1; 2020-0559 (1989/1-1989/4), *Ajia Taiheiyō kyōryoku* 2; 2020-0560 (1989/11-1989/12) *APEC kakuryō kaigi (daiikkai)*. See, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/honsho/shiryō/shozō/pdfs/2020/gaiyo.pdf> (Accessed on 25.4.2022).

⁶ J. Camilleri, *Regionalism in the New Asia-Pacific Order. The Political Economy of the Asia-Pacific Region, Volume II*, Cheltenham (UK), Northampton (USA), 2003, pp. 15-19; Beeson, pp. 4-9.

associated with Japan's role in the genesis of APEC, in the hope of paving the way for further research in the future.

From the «West Pacific Organization» proposal to Ōhira's initiative on the «Pacific Basin Cooperation»

Adopting a historical and evolutionary approach, it is possible to identify three main phases in Japan's postwar regionalist diplomacy⁷. The first phase – covering the twenty years from the early 1960s to the late 1970s – saw Japan retaking a proactive regionalist role, with the Ikeda and Satō administrations advancing several proposals. Japan's remarkable economic growth and decolonization in East Asia contributed to mitigating the constraints that had so far frustrated intraregional cooperation, as most notably shown by the foundation of the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 1966) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, 1967). The second phase – marked by a distinct transpacific approach – was heralded by Prime Minister Ōhira's initiative on «Pacific Basin Cooperation» (1979) and culminated in the establishment of APEC (1989). As we will see, the rapid economic growth of East Asian economies and the emergence of more advanced forms of regionalism in other areas of the world played an important role in shaping Tōkyō's strategic choices at this stage. The third phase began in 1997 with the establishment of ASEAN Plus Three (APT). In a regional environment undermined by the Asian financial crisis – and, as far as Japan was concerned, the unprecedented effects of the «Lost decade» –, Tōkyō's regionalist diplomacy had to face challenges to the country's hitherto unrivaled economic leadership and the need to cope with the rise of a new concept of regionalism centered on East Asia.

The first phase saw significant advances in strengthening Japan's position as «a member of Asia», employing a forward-looking regionalist diplomacy, even though the efforts were not always

⁷ A sketch of this periodization was presented in N. Lanna, *Dall'Asean al dibattito sulla East Asia Community. Vecchie e nuove mappe del regionalismo asiatico*, in F. Mazzei (ed.), *World Politics. Appunti e riflessioni sulla politica mondiale*, Napoli, 2010, pp. 244-258.

matched by tangible results. This was the case, for instance, of the proposal to set up a «West Pacific Organization», which eventually failed due to opposition from the US and Southeast Asian countries. It was then Prime Minister Ikeda, during his state tour in Asia in 1963, to take the initiative with the double aim of promoting regional economic cooperation and contributing to a peaceful solution of Konfrontasi, the military conflict pitting Indonesia against Malaysia between 1963 and 1966. As the name of the proposed organization suggested, the target area would cover not only Asia, but also Oceania with Australia and New Zealand, along with Japan, Indonesia and the Philippines as prospective founding members. The United States and the UK, at the time an influential player in Southeast Asia, were not considered for membership. Three years later, a similar fate awaited the «Asia-Pacific sphere» policy proposal, an initiative advanced by the then Foreign Minister Miki Takeo to foster the awareness of the shared destiny of Asian and Pacific countries. It would promote cooperation among the developed Pacific economies and contribute to the resolution of North–South problems in the Asia Pacific region. Despite its failure, in the long term, the «Asia-Pacific sphere» proved an important one since it created a new concept of «Asia-Pacific» in Japan’s foreign policy as well as an initial opportunity to incorporate the concept of «open regionalism» into Japan’s trade policy. Moreover, the initiative planted the seed for the Australia–Japan partnership which subsequently led to the establishment of APEC⁸.

A good example of a successful Japan-sponsored initiative is the Ministerial Conference for Economic Development in Southeast Asia (MCEDSEA), a framework meant to promote development and cooperation in Southeast Asia. Albeit short-lived (1966–1975), this initiative was particularly significant as it was the first international conference to be launched by Japan

⁸ T. Terada, *The origins of Japan’s APEC policy: Foreign Minister Takeo Miki’s Asia-Pacific policy and current implications*, “The Pacific Review”, vol. 1, no 3 (2008), pp. 337–363; S. Hamanaka, *Asian Regionalism and Japan. The Politics of membership in Regional, Diplomatic and Trade Groups*, London and New York, 2010, Kindle edition, pp. 31–52.

and the first regional forum with Asian-only members⁹. In 1966, Japan took the lead in establishing the Asian Development Bank, while in 1968, Japanese economist Kojima Kiyoshi proposed the creation of the Pacific Trade and Development Conference (PAFTAD), a private driven institution designed to support the idea of a Pacific Free Trade Area. In 1977, the Japanese government took the initiative again, with the Japan-ASEAN summit, whose first meeting was held in 1977. This was complementary to the Fukuda Doctrine committing Japan to contribute to the peace and prosperity of Southeast Asia through stronger relations with the Southeast Asian countries based on «equal partnership» and «heart-to-heart» understanding¹⁰. The Fukuda Doctrine, the «Asia-Pacific sphere» policy proposal and MCEDESEA represented different sides of a regionalist diplomacy seeking to strengthen institutional development, while promoting Japan's overseas trade and commercial interests. As Japan came to establish itself as a global economic power in the 1980s, interest in enhancing intraregional cooperation and encouraging trade liberalization grew. Two important changes in the regional and international economic environment reinforced this trend: East Asia's rapid economic development and the emergence of threats to the GATT-based multilateral trading system.

Between 1965 and 1990 the East Asian economies grew faster than those of any other region in the world, contributing significantly to global growth. In particular, the Highly Performing Asian Economies (HPAES) – including Japan, the «four tigers» (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea), and the three «Newly Industrializing Economies» Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand – grew roughly three times as fast as Latin America and South Asia, and five times faster than Sub-Saharan Africa¹¹. This remarkable development, subsequently referred to as «East Asian miracle» by the World Bank, strengthened interdependence in the region, increasing the need for institutional cooperation channels.

⁹ Participants to the first meeting included Japan, South Vietnam, the Philippines, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Cambodia attended as observers.

¹⁰ Hamanaka, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-46; Beeson, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

¹¹ World Bank, *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy*, Oxford, 1993, p. 2.

Nevertheless, precisely when the East Asian economies were about to reap the benefits of their market-based development strategy – which combined strong export orientation, emphasis on the importation and utilization of foreign technology, rapidly growing investment and savings rates, and focusing on education and training –, changes in the regional and global economic environment posed new challenges to the open trading system underpinning the prosperity of the Asia-Pacific. The Single European Act (1986) and the US-Canada Free Trade Agreement (1988) foreshadowed the emergence of exclusive regional blocks, while the stand-off of the Uruguay Round added a supplementary source of anxiety for the region's economies¹².

These factors acted as a catalyst in the process of regional integration, reinforcing Japan's commitment to regionalist diplomacy. A decisive contribution came from Ōhira's initiative on the «Pacific Basin Cooperation» (1979). Ōhira was a key figure in the development of the concept of «Asia-Pacific» in Japan and a staunch supporter of Tōkyō's proactive role in establishing consultative arrangements on economic matters in the Asia-Pacific. In a policy paper presented in November 1978, a few weeks before taking office as Prime Minister, Ōhira explained his proposal regarding regionalism, stressing that it was time for Japan to be concerned not only about keeping good relations with the US and other countries in the world, but also about paying «special attention to countries in the Pacific region». He concluded that it was important for «pivotal regional States»¹³ to prepare for regional cooperation and, after becoming Prime Minister, he established the «Pacific Basin Cooperation Study Group» (March 1979). The report released by the Study Group in May 1980 reiterated Ōhira's call to set up a regional organization, welcoming the transformation of the Pacific Ocean, long a barrier separating the countries of the region, into «an inland sea crossed by safe, free, and efficient transport lanes»¹⁴. Another important legacy of Ōhira's administra-

¹² Patrick, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

¹³ Quoted in Hamanaka, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁴ Naikaku kanbō (hen), *Kan-Taiheyō rentai no kōsō: Kan-Taiheyō rentai kenkyū gurūupu*, Tōkyō, 1980, reproduced in GRIPS (National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies), «The World and Japan» Database, <https://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/APEC/19800519.O1J.html>; for the English translation, see *Report on*

tion was the creation of PECC (the Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference), a partnership of senior individuals from business and industry, government, academic and other intellectual circles to discuss policy issues in the Asia-Pacific region. Although the Prime Minister passed away before its first meeting (September 1980), his efforts, along with those of Australia's Prime Minister Fraser, were essential for the initiative's success¹⁵.

Ohira's sudden death had an adverse impact on the advancement of the regionalist project. It was not before the second half of the 1980s that negotiations for creating an Asia-Pacific organization resumed. A major turning point occurred in 1988, when several significant proposals were advanced. In March, former Prime Minister Nakasone called for an «economic and cultural forum» in the Asia-Pacific. In July, through former Secretary of State Schultz, the US proposed the establishment of an intergovernmental forum for cooperation in the fields of education, communication, energy etc. Japan followed in September 1988, with another proposal, this time from Tamura Hajime, the head of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI)¹⁶. The idea was to bring together the ministries of trade and industry of the countries in the region to discuss matters of mutual concern. Finally, in December US senator Bill Bradley proposed the creation of a coalition of eight Pacific Rim countries¹⁷.

Japan's initiatives following Hawke's announcement

The proposal to establish an inclusive organization committed to deepening regional integration and discussing issues of mutual concern in the Asia-Pacific was officially advanced by Australia's Prime Minister Hawke on January 31, 1989. The occasion was

the Pacific Basin Cooperation Concept, Y. Nagatomi (ed.), *Masayoshi Ohira's Proposal: To Evolve the Global Society*, Tōkyō, 1988, pp. 91-141, reproduced in GRIPS, <https://worldjpn.grips.ac.jp/documents/texts/APEC/19800519.O1E.html>.

¹⁵ The meeting, which was held in Canberra, was attended by eleven economies (Australia, Canada, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and the United States) and three Pacific Island states (Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Tonga).

¹⁶ Now Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI).

¹⁷ Hamanaka, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-43.

a speech held at the Korean Business Associations luncheon in Seoul. Hawke stressed that Asia-Pacific was «the most dynamically growing region in the world», generating more than one third of the world's trade. He stated that the «open and non-discriminatory international trading system» played a major role in the development of the economies of the region. After a warning concerning the emergence of «serious cracks in the international trading system which have implications for the future health of both our region and the world economy», the Prime Minister reminded the audience that, since countries in the region were essentially interdependent, the time had come to increase «efforts towards building regional co-operation and seriously to investigate what areas it might focus on and what forms it might take». Unlike regional framework already in place such as PECC, the future organization would be more wide-ranging and, accordingly, more effective. This would improve the chances of success of the Uruguay Round and contribute to maintaining the GATT-based trading system¹⁸.

While the United States had not been informed of the announcement¹⁹, Japan was an important partner in Australia's initiative and contributed to its success through intense collaboration with the Australian Prime Minister's office and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. On February 9, 1989, Hawke wrote a letter to Japan's then Prime Minister Takeshita, enclosing a copy of the Seoul speech. The message expressed that Australia «wishes to initiate a process of consultation with your government and our other friends in the region on the desirability of more formal consultative arrangements on economic matters, and the form such arrangements might take formally». The details of the proposal were left for future discussion, but the letter clearly

¹⁸ Speech by the Prime Minister, Luncheon of Korean Business Associations, *Regional Cooperation: Challenges for Korea and Australia*, Korea, 31.1.1989, retrieved at <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00007475.pdf> (Accessed on 3.5.2022).

¹⁹ As Terada notes, when Australia's Foreign Minister Gareth Evans visited the United States in March 1989, James Baker, Secretary of State, castigated him «for failing to consult the United States before the initiative was announced». Indeed, despite subsequent declarations released by the policymakers involved, records show that Australia's original proposal did not include the US. T. Terada, *The Genesis of APEC: Australian-Japan Political Initiatives*, p. 27.

specified that Hawke did not envisage «a regional trading bloc»²⁰. Takeshita's response came one month later (March 9), presenting Japan's position in five points. First, the Japanese Prime Minister concurred with Hawke that «all the members of the Asia-Pacific region share a fundamental interest in the open multilateral international trading system». For this reason, he continued, it was vital to make the utmost efforts for the success of the Uruguay Round and the maintenance and strengthening of the GATT system. Second, he agreed with his counterpart that the proposal launched in Seoul «should not be taken as aimed at a regional trading bloc»²¹. As for the problem of membership, Takeshita suggested that «no concept of Asia-Pacific cooperation can be implemented without the participation of the United States and Canada from the beginning, considering the indispensability of their contribution to the maintenance of peace and prosperity in this region». Special consideration was to be devoted to the countries in the region (and, in particular ASEAN countries), thus obtaining their consensus. Lastly, Takeshita concluded that it was important to be concerned about the «need for political consideration respecting the diversity of this region, in setting a framework for governmental consultation on Asia-Pacific cooperation». This was an implicit call not to take the OECD as a model, as its rigid organization was considered inadequate for the heterogeneous Asia-Pacific region²².

Takeshita's reply to Hawke's letter was the result of a detailed discussion at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in February 1989 relating to the issues associated with Japan's involvement in setting up APEC. It is essential to take a close look at the key documents from the many briefings that preceded the drafting of Takeshita's reply: they provide precious insights into the policy-making process and, most notably, the divergence between MOFA and MITI regarding «the issue of Asia-Pacific cooperation» (*Ajia*

²⁰ Letter to Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru from Prime Minister R.J.L. Hawke, 9.2.1989, 2020-0558 (1988/10-1989/4), *Ajia Taiheiyō kyōryoku* 1.

²¹ A confirm of Tōkyō's concern about avoiding the formation of a regional bloc comes also from the fact that domestic and international articles mentioning this eventuality were carefully collected and analyzed by MOFA officials. See, for instance, *Asia needs world, not a trading bloc*, "The Sydney Morning Herald", 31.1.1989, included in 2020-0559 (1989/1-1989/4), *Ajia Taiheiyō kyōryoku* 2.

²² Letter to Prime Minister Hawke from Prime Minister Takeshita, 9.3.1989, 2020-0558 (1988/10-1989/4), *Ajia Taiheiyō kyōryoku* 1.

Taiheiyō kyōryoku mondai), as they called it. The five points listed in Takeshita's response reproduced an analogous list included in a document to be used as reference point for a briefing between MOFA officials and the Prime Minister. Presenting the opportunity to collaborate in the creation of an Asia-Pacific organization as a «historical necessity», the document mainly emphasized the risks associated with a diplomatic undertaking of this nature, and especially the «political implications» of APEC: the reaction of the USSR; the ASEAN countries' concerns about the initiative and Japan's role in it, and the impact on the relationship between the US and Japan²³. What is more, the note ended with a call for prudence in handling issues regarding membership and leadership. MOFA officials were especially concerned about the potential negative consequences of Japanese leadership. It was also on this ground that they opposed MITI's proposal for a ministerial level conference involving the ministries of industry and trade of the region. MOFA reckoned that the organization should not be confined to industry and trade; instead, it should extend its scope to communications, transport, technology and the environment. Moreover, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned that bringing together the ministries of different countries, as suggested in MITI proposal, would make the membership of China, Taiwan, and possibly USSR extremely problematic. Not to mention Japan's leadership: if Tōkyō took the initiative, it was argued, other countries would react with mistrust and suspicion, perceiving the proposal as «something similar to the Co-prosperity Sphere»²⁴.

²³ On this point, it is also interesting to analyze the comments written by MOFA officials on articles published on Australian newspapers. A telling example is the big question mark running through part of an article vis-à-vis the following comment about Australia's position regarding the issue of US membership in APEC: «They [the countries of the region] are particularly concerned with the problem of how to handle with the US, which is believed to have asked why it has not been included as a potential member. Australia's answer is that while the US is not considered part of the region, and, therefore, has not been included, it is not being specifically excluded either». *PM makes running on Asia-Pacific trade forum*, «The Age», 22.2.1989, reproduced in 2020-0559 (1989/1-1989/4), *Ajia Taiheiyō kyōryoku* 2.

²⁴ See, *Ajia Taiheiyō kyōryoku mondai ni kan suru kibonteki kangaekata* («*Jikan no sōri burifū yō shiryō*»), in 2020-0558 (1988/10-1989/4), *Ajia Taiheiyō kyōryoku* 1.

For its part, MITI was fully committed to supporting the creation of a regional organization dealing with policy issues of the Asia Pacific region. In light of its primary function – to promote Japan’s overseas trade and commercial interests–, the Ministry considered as a priority to cultivate strong ties with the region’s economies. All the more so at a time when US-Japan «trade frictions» (*bōeki masatsu*) were at their apex and the initiatives to mitigate them proved ineffective. As has been noted, it is reasonable to suppose that the Ministry attempted to obtain through multilateralism what it had failed to achieve by means of bilateral negotiations. Since the option of a US-Japan Free Trade Agreement had been abandoned and bilateral negotiations had become frustrating, there was one more incentive to bet on multilateralism and capitalize on the advantages resulting from US involvement in the regionalist project. After all, the US remained not only Japan’s primary security provider and economic partner but was also an indispensable counterpart for other economies of the region that relied heavily on US markets for their exports.²⁵

Hence, in February 1988, MITI set up «The Study Group on Asia Pacific Trade and Development» (*Ajia Taiheiyo bōeki kaihatsu kenkyūkai*). The interim report of the Study Group – released in 1988 and known as the «Sakamoto report», for Sakamoto Yoshio, then Director-General of the International Economic Affairs Department – suggested that the region’s economic and trade structure should move from «development through US dependency» to «development through role-sharing cooperation in the region». It then stated that Japan was bound to play an important role in this transition, by expanding its imports and outward foreign direct investment, concluding with a call to create a new regional forum²⁶. An English version of the «Sakamoto report» was sent to the US and other countries in the region. In October 1988, the activity of the Study Group was paralleled by that of the «Advisory panel for the promotion of cooperation in the Asia-Pacific». These efforts were matched by a diplomatic offensive both at home and abroad to consolidate support for the nascent APEC initiative.

²⁵ Hamanaka, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-43; Hook, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-16.

²⁶ Hamanaka, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

As declassified documents show, unlike MOFA, MITI was eager to appreciate the opportunities, rather than focus on the obstacles to institutionalizing cooperation in the region. The position of the Ministry for International Trade and Industry is well expressed in an April 1989 report. Presenting two sets of motivations, the document makes a case for Japan's proactive engagement in establishing an institution that would «effectively promote intergovernmental cooperation» in Asia-Pacific. The first reason for Japan to play a relevant role is related to Asia-Pacific's prolonged high-growth, characterized by the decisive role of intraregional trade and a high level of interdependence. This growth would continue in the future, transforming the region in a «pulling power» (*keninryoku*) in the global economy. This would benefit not only the economies of the region, but the world at large, with the expansion of supply, the growth in demand, technological innovation and other stimuli. The second circumstance MITI identified as evidencing the need for Japan's proactive engagement was the proliferation of focused proposals. As shown above, 1988 was a particularly fruitful year in this respect, paving the way for the launch of Hawke's proposal in January 1989. In such a favorable regional environment, given its leading economic status, Japan would have to do its part, making sure that the constituting organization focused on three main targets: expanding trade (e.g., the coordination of consultations in light of the Uruguay Round negotiations; the gradual reduction of trade barriers commensurate with economic strength; the promotion of intraregional trade); enhancing the investment environment, and addressing problems associated with high growth, such as energy security and environmental protection. In MITI's understanding, it was important for the organization to preserve a kind of «openness» (*kaihōsei*) that would contribute to the economic growth of the region and the entire world economy. The second point of concern was the «promotion of an incremental and multidimensional cooperation» (*tamentekina kyōryoku no zenshinteki suishin*), encouraging efforts to gradually coordinate initiatives in several fields such as the expansion of trade and energy security, as well as the promotion of investments, environmental protection and the like. Lastly, the report called for compliance with the principle of «mutual respect and equal participation» (*sogō*

sonchō oyobi byōdōna sankā)²⁷. Japan's position regarding Hawke's announcement was made known to the general public through Japanese mass media. The Tōkyō Shinbun newspaper, for instance, published an article titled «Let's refrain from forming economic blocs. Takeshita's reply to Australia's Prime Minister. Let's include the US, Canada and China», in the morning edition of March 14, 1989. Albeit in a somewhat watered-down version, the article reproduced the main points of Takeshita's reply to Hawke's letter. The article explained that Japan's Prime Minister was committed to avoiding the forming of an exclusive economic bloc and was highly concerned about gaining the consensus of the countries in the region (especially ASEAN members). Also, Takeshita felt that the US and Canada should be among the founding members of the prospective organization, while China's membership should be taken into serious consideration. As for the USSR, it was suggested it have the status of «observer»²⁸.

In April, Japan's diplomatic activity entered a new phase. MOFA acknowledged the irreversibility of the process leading to the establishment of APEC, noting that «the chances that Hawke's proposal and MITI's proposal for a Ministerial conference will die a natural death are limited»²⁹. Accordingly, the Ministry urged the government to intensify its efforts to obtain the approval of countries in the region, making the most of the meetings scheduled for the following months³⁰. Hence, Takeshita's visit to the ASEAN countries (April 29-May 7) was an opportunity to publicly reaffirm the critical points of Japan's position: ASEAN views should be

²⁷ Tsūshō sangyōshō, *Ajia Taiheiyo kyōryoku suishin ni tsuite*, April 1989, in 2020-0559 (1989/1-1989/4), *Ajia Taiheiyo kyōryoku* 2.

²⁸ *Keizai burokkuka kaihi. Gō shushō ni Takeshita hensho. Bei, Ka, Chū o fukume*, "Tōkyō Shinbun", reproduced in 2020-0558 (1988/10-1989/4), *Ajia Taiheiyo kyōryoku* 1.

²⁹ *Ajia Taiheiyo kyōryoku mondai (kōgo no torikumikata)*, 10.4.1989, in 2020-0559 (1989/1-1989/4), *Ajia Taiheiyo kyōryoku* 2.

³⁰ The meetings in question were the visit to Japan of Woolcott, the Secretary of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, special envoy appointed by Hawke, scheduled for April 24-26; PECC's meeting in San Francisco (24-7 April); Takeshita's visit to ASEAN countries (April 29-May 7); ASEAN ministerial meeting in Brunei (July 6-8); PECC's plenary session in Wellington (November 12-5). *Ajia Taiheiyo kyōryoku mondai (kōgo no torikumikata)*, April 10, 1989, in 2020-0559 (1989/1-1989/4), *Ajia Taiheiyo kyōryoku* 2.

respected in Asia Pacific economic cooperation; regional economic cooperation should contribute to the reinforcement and maintenance of an open free trade system; cooperation should include environment, transportation, telecommunication, and science and technology³¹. One month later, the official announcement of US participation in APEC (June 1989) definitively laid anxieties concerning the issue of US membership to rest³².

Indeed, the organization established in November 1989 in Canberra well reflected Japan's views on Asia-Pacific cooperation. APEC was set up as a multilateral and inclusive forum, committed to open regionalism. Even though it was conceived as predominantly concerned with trade and economic issues, its cooperative action extended (and still extends) to other areas. As for the founding members, just as Japan had wished, these included US, Canada, ASEAN 6 as it was at the time, and Australia and New Zealand. China's membership was not ruled out, but was postponed until 1991, when People's Republic of China (PRC) joined, along with Hong Kong and «Chinese Taipei», as it was referred to, not to hurt the PRC's sensibilities. The structure of the organization, configured as a gathering of economies rather than of States, and the efforts of the key-actors involved in the process, South Korean foreign affairs officials in particular, made this result possible³³. The dissolution of the Soviet Union neutralized MOFA's concern over the USSR's contribution in the organization. Russia would join APEC in 1998. As for possible adverse reactions to Japan's leadership, the Ministry's preoccupations proved disproportionate. The fact that Australia took the initiative in public – but also the substantial convergence on the need for greater economic cooperation from other Asia-Pacific economies – contributed to a successful outcome.

³¹ T. Terada, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

³² The announcement was made by US Secretary of State James Baker, on the occasion of a conference at the New York Asia Society. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³³ Beeson, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

Conclusion

The drivers behind Japan's engagement in the making of APEC coincided in part with those inspiring Australia's initiative. As transpires from Hawke's speech in Seoul, given the stall of the Uruguay Round negotiations and the signing of the Single Act and US-Canada Free Trade Agreement, Australia feared that the GATT system could collapse and be replaced by exclusive regional trading blocs. Accordingly, it was deemed vital to establish a regional organization committed to strengthening the open trading system. At the same time, in Canberra's view, continuing to sustain the country's integration with the Asia-Pacific economies was the best option available. Indeed, given the growing economic importance of the Asia-Pacific region, the Hawke administration would introduce a policy based on «Asian engagement»³⁴.

Japan was equally concerned about hampering protectionist trends in the world economy and preventing the emergence of inward-looking regionalism. In addition, Tōkyō was even more determined than Canberra to make sure that the rapid growth of the economies in the region would continue and expand as much as possible. This was crucial for a global economic power and development model like Japan relying extensively on regional production networks. More importantly, as shown in the second section of this paper, Japan has had a high stake in regionalist diplomacy, since the 1960s. In light of this historical background, APEC can be understood as the continuation of the East Asia/Asia-Pacific-based initiatives carried on by Tōkyō in the first phase of its regionalist diplomacy. Unlike other proposals, it was successful, despite the many obstacles on the way. These problems were not only structurally associated with the creation of an organization like APEC, but there were also impediments specifically constraining Tōkyō's diplomatic action. First, Japan had to manage the risk of adverse reactions from ASEAN countries. In a risk-benefit assessment, a close and mutually beneficial relationship with Southeast Asian countries was of greater value than the possible advantages resulting from the establishment of an Asia-Pacific

³⁴ M. Beeson - Y. Hidetada, *Asia's Odd Men Out: Australia, Japan, and the Politics of Regionalism*, "International Relations of the Asia-Pacific", vol. 7 (2007), pp. 233-235.

organization. While MITI was flexible and optimistic in this regard, MOFA was rather uncompromising, as the declassified documents show. Second, US membership was a challenging issue. As we have seen, Japan maintained that US and Canada should be founding members of the organization. Nevertheless, making sure that this actually happened was no easy task. To start with, US-Japan trade conflicts increased US sensitivity to Japan's moves, considerably reducing room for maneuver. To make things worse, Australia was not particularly careful in the way it handled the issue of US membership. As we have seen, Canberra ended up irritating Washington, to the detriment of Tōkyō. Third, the problem of history further limited Japan's diplomatic efforts. In the end, MOFA's worries proved to be unfounded. The fact that Australia headed the initiative in public and Asia-Pacific economies' strong interest in enhancing economic cooperation in the region contributed to a successful outcome. Lastly, domestic agency complicated Japan's involvement in the process leading to the establishment of APEC. As shown above, MOFA and MITI held two irreconcilable positions on «the issue of Asia-Pacific cooperation». It could be said that they both had only a partial view of the story. MOFA was almost obsessed with the diplomatic costs of the undertaking (ASEAN countries' reactions; US objections; the history problem). MITI, on the other hand, focused exclusively on the benefits (hampering protectionism; capitalizing on the trend towards regional economic growth; finding another and more effective way to address US-Japan trade conflicts), downplaying other factors.

In the long run, Japan succeeded in overcoming the obstacles and contributed decisively to the establishment of APEC. Its strong interest in preserving the GATT-based multilateral trading system and consolidating the trend of Asia-Pacific's economic growth became predominant with respect to the concerns harbored by MOFA, especially in the first stages of the process. This outcome was perfectly consistent with the prioritization of economic activity (often referred to as economism)³⁵ that characterized Japanese diplomacy, especially during the Cold War years. At the same time, championing the cause of «open regionalism» – a guiding principle of Japan's regionalist policy – was indicative of the very

³⁵ Hook, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

positive value imputed to liberal order. In the 1980s, when negotiations leading to APEC began, the discourse on free and open trade was mainly one of pragmatism aiming to promote Japan's economic interests. In the post-Cold War environment, worries about «the emergence of protectionism, inward-looking trends and economic frictions» remained unchanged, as Japan's reaction to the US-China trade war of 2018–19 confirmed³⁶ Nevertheless, the emphasis on «rules-based economic order» acquired new meanings, becoming a normative and essential element of Japan's foreign policy. The «Arc of freedom and prosperity» – theorized by former Foreign Minister Asō Tarō, attaching importance to the values of democracy, freedom (including freedom of the seas), and the rule of law–, «Asia's democratic security diamond», launched by Abe in 2012, as well as the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy with its emphasis on a «free and open order based on the rule of law», all signaled a shift to a «value diplomacy» (*kachi no gaikō*) with more normative connotations. At the same time, the introduction of these values in the foreign policy discourse was instrumental in drawing a line between the supporters of the international liberal order – most notably the vertices of the Diamond (Japan, Australia, India, United States) – and the actors representing a potential source of its destabilization, such as China³⁷.

The role of Japanese-Australian partnership in founding APEC was crucial. Without the endorsement of the region's most advanced economy and its intense diplomatic activity behind the scenes, Canberra would have failed to make Hawke's proposal come true. On the other hand, Tōkyō's economic power was not enough to carry on the challenging task of establishing an organization that would include many of the countries that had been under Japan's militaristic rule. Since 2007, the bilateral relationship

³⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Diplomatic Bluebook 2021. Japanese Diplomacy and International Situation in 2020*, Tōkyō, p. 17.

³⁷ On the «Arc of freedom and prosperity», see Asō Tarō, *Jiyū to hanei no ko*, Gentōsha, Tōkyō, 2007; on Abe's «Asia's Democratic Security Diamond», see Abe Shinzō, *Asia's Democratic Security Diamond*, “Project Syndicate”, 27.12.2012, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe?barrier=accessreg>. The author has presented these arguments in greater detail in *Le relations nippo-indiennes dans l'ère de l'Indo-Pacifique*, “Outre-terre. Revue Européenne de géopolitique”, no. 54-55 (2018), pp. 273-281.

has been more than ever an important element of Japan's diplomacy, as confirmed by two initiatives essential in Tōkyō's strategic vision, namely the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and FOIP. What has changed considerably is China's role in the regional architecture. In this respect, the debate on APEC membership is rather instructive. From Japan's point of view, US and Canadian membership was beyond discussion. As for China, documents show that Tōkyō considered its inclusion in the nascent organization particularly important. In a context characterized by Japan's unrivaled economic leadership, Australia's reorientation toward the Asia-Pacific and the significant role of US in the security and economy of the region, it was conceivable to envisage the regional space as an area centered on Asia-Pacific and premised on the strong bonds between the two sides of the Pacific Ocean. The situation appears somewhat different today. In a regional environment transformed by the rise of China, severely influenced by US-China confrontation and shaped by the emergence of alternative forms of regionalism (the East-Asia based APT, the ambitious Indo-Pacific vision, mega-FTAs like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), the conceptualization of the Asia-Pacific region underpinning APEC appears obsolete. Above all, the profound implications of the Ukraine crisis cast a dark shadow on the very sustainability of regional and international cooperation as we have known it in the last decades.

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