Research Report

0. Name/Affiliation

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1. Research Objective

The purpose of my research was to measure and compare the mutual perceptions held by five East Asian countries of their neighboring states. The five countries are Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, South Korea, and Japan. I sought to measure the perceptions through conducting a survey to national politicians in these five countries. Accordingly, the grant was used mainly to carry out the survey. The surveys in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia were carried out in June and July 2009. The same survey was conducted in Korea in August 2009. And finally, in January 2010, I conducted the same survey in Japan.

In addition, I used a portion of the grant to collect newspaper editorials from 1980 to 2008 in the same five countries. Here the goal is to see if the same perceptions exist in the media. The analysis of the newspaper editorials would supplant the survey findings.

2. Outcome

A survey instrument was drawn up measuring the mutual identity perceptions of the regional countries. To improve the response rate, a website was also created where the respondent could complete the same survey. The url of the website is www.harvardsurvey.com. The survey questionnaire was distributed to as many politicians as possible by either/both fax or/and in person.
Not surprisingly, the response rate varied from country to country. In Korea, it was about 28%; in Singapore 13%; Malaysia 20%; Indonesia 22% (still in progress in Japan). Although the response rate is not as high as one would hope for, it is sufficient enough to allow for statistical analysis, which I hope to do once all responses are collected from Japan. The analysis of the survey data will become a key empirical chapter of my dissertation.

The collection of newspaper editorials proved to be more time-consuming than the survey, mainly because in the three Southeast Asian countries the newspapers were not digitalized, so I had to hire research assistants to go through the microfilms to select the relevant editorials. I focused on editorials, partly because it is the editorial that contains a clear opinion on issues, and partly because of manageability issue. I selected editorials that contain in their titles any of the following words: country names (Singapore, China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, and Indonesia); ASEAN; international relations/politics; regionalism; and ethnicity).

There were numerous editorials containing those words, and I plan to do a content analysis of the editorials. I am currently in the process of digitalizing the editorials, so that I could use a computer software to analyze the editorials.

3. Future Plans

With the gathered data, I plan to write two chapters of my dissertation based on the analysis of the data. The chapters will test the key hypothesis of my dissertation, that is, that identity perceptions affect the level of threat perception and willingness to settle disputes. I also plan to compare whether or not the identity perceptions existing in Northeast and Southeast Asia are different from one another.