Promoting the Identify of East Asia and its Regional Identity in Korean Social Studies

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1. Introduction
Led by the first President of Indonesia, Haji Mohammad Sukarno, in 1955, there was a meeting of Asia and African to stand against the colonialism bloc driven by the world power in Bandung; with the stance of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the President appealed the newly independent nations to be united. Since then, the effort to unify Asia and to be one has sustained.

Over the last 20 years, “Asia,” or more precisely “East Asia,” has been one of the hottest debating issues in Korea. The reason is that, on the one hand, there has been attempts to explain the causation and uniqueness of the economic growth that East Asia has accomplished in 1980s where it attracted much attention from the world; on the other hand, it started to discuss diversely to come up with a community for regional economy or national security at the East Asian level; hence, started wondering about what is “East Asia” to Korea? Of course, such debates have not only been occurred in Korea but also revealed in Japan, China, and Southeast Asia as a whole, including Indonesia and Malaysia.

According to Park (2011, 91) in the context of macroscopic change in politics and economy, the motivation that East Asia began to attract global attention so it is regarded as one region is such that: first, due to a series of changes, such as reformation and open of China and Vietnam, dissolution of the Cold War, and driven by the dissolution market economy has prevailed in Socialist East Asian countries. Motivated by such changes, the regional concept of East Asia was initiated as opposed to the one which used to be the main axis of the United States foreign policy called “Western Pacific” in the era of the Cold War. This also indicates the domination of the United States has decreased in East Asia. That is, the emerging discourse of East Asia with
respect to political security, the dissolution of the Cold War, a rise of China’s economy and military power, and a change in foreign policies between the United States and Japan played an important role. In addition to this, led by ASEAN the movement of “ASEAN + 3” mechanism of regionalism influenced it as well.

Second, the spread of economic development in East Asia, ranging from Northeast Asia, while Japan, Korea, and China are centered, towards Southeast Asia, including Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc., and economic exchanges and expansion of mutual dependence among these countries during the spreading process, have destroyed the barrier between Northeast and Southeast Asia, converting these regions to one united economy bloc. Especially, economic development of Japan and newly industrialized countries (i.e., Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore—the Four Dragons) in 1970s-1980s and Southeast Asia’s economic growth, exchanges within the region, and expansion of economic mutual dependence have affect the birth of the discourse of East Asia. In the end of 1990, the financial crisis in East Asia also motivated for Asia to be one to find its own way and the tendency has prevailed since then.

Thirdly, even in our microscopic daily lives, population movement within East Asia has increased drastically thus consistently creating a new “East Asia.” Especially, exchanges within the bloc triggered by the economic development of East Asia are transforming the East Asia as a whole. In each East Asian country, different purpose of moving, such as tourism, business, studying abroad, language, immigration, etc., are not limited to Northeast Asia, e.g., Korea, China, and Japan, and increasing drastically. In the case of Korea, the fact that more than 80% of annual outward passengers and inflowing foreigners are East Asians exemplifies East Asia is in fact becoming one bloc.

Regionalism of East Asia, including both Southeast and Northeast Asia, for the first time challenges the regional identity of East Asia. Starting from the proposal made by the Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed of Indonesia in 1990 to establish the East Asia Economic Group (EAEG), through Korea’s, China’s, and Japan’s joining the ARF(Asian Regional Forum)of the three countries in 1994, initiation of ASEM in 1996, ASEAN plus three Summit in 1997, selected reports of East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) and East Asia Study Group (EASG), to East Asia Summit (EAS). Particularly, according to the report of EAVG, preventing conflicts within the bloc in terms of politics and national security, promoting peace, stabilizing trade, investment in terms of economy and finance, enhancing personnel development and human security in terms of society, and establishing regional identity of the community of East Asia in
terms of culture, are the major assignments.

It is uncertain that Korea’s response towards such dynamic shifts in East Asian society. For example, looking into the debates in 1990s occurred in Korea was extremely limited to only Korea, China, and Japan compared to the real dynamic East Asia, where the debates played the major role. If it is to be expanded a bit further, the viewpoint of Korea might include Taiwan, Singapore, and Vietnam as they were under the Confucianism culture region or traditional Chinese character culture region. Fortunately, while East Asia was considered equivalent to Northeast Asia in the past, recently there is a huge trend to develop East Asia as a broader term than before so that it can include both Northeast and Southeast Asia. At the broadest level, it has become frequently discussed in the frame of the discourse of Asia or that of Orient where the scope of the frame covers Asia or Orient as a whole. Moreover, China’s market opening, economic success, its return to Northeast Asia, and the elevated pride against the West supported by the economic development of East Asia including China have functioned as a background to promote the emergence of East Asia’s identity discourse. In fact, East Asia is often defined as a broader region that covers both Northeast and Southeast Asia, but in Korea it is unique of the country as it treats Northeast Asia as one region, while China and Japan prefer to use the concept of East Asia that includes Northeast and Southeast Asia than Northeast Asia itself (Park, 2011, 93). At the moment, East Asia is searching for a way to derive and promote regional identity in pursuit of a true community. East Asia’s regional identity is not always fixed and in fact it has changed over time; thus, it is crucial to derive the regional identity as policy (Bae, 2003, 283).

The present manuscript attempts to comprehend how Korea has responded to such dynamic shift of East Asia, particularly the educational response. That says, it is to briefly point out how Korea’s social studies has educated East Asian region, and how it has explained the regional identity of East Asia.

2. Perception and Identity of East Asia in Korean Social Studies:
   A Historical Overview

Interests in East Asia have been well exemplified in Korean Social Studies, particularly in Geography as the field often compares different geographical regions, where such comparisons have facilitated processes of regional perception. According to Kang (2010), the concept was first occurred in Korea education systems and textbooks, right after the Korean Independence in 1945. It appeared in the Period of Syllabus as “Northeast Asia” and “East Asia” where the terms were not clearly distinct.
Nonetheless, the Korea’s perspective on Asia in general was well demonstrated through a textbook of the Period of Syllabus for 5th grade elementary students; the perspective embedded the country’s colonized experience by Japan. The 4th chapter, entitled “Life of Other Countries,” was about Asia, and its content is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(4) Asia and Its People</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How big is the area and population of Asia?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Which countries are part of Asia?</td>
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<td>3. What is unique about Asia and its climate?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. What is the relationship between Manchuria and the Republic of Korea?</td>
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<td>5. What are the fundamentals of People’s Republic of China (국민정, Taoism, Confucianism)?</td>
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<td>6. What is the relationship between the country’s industry and its nature?</td>
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<td>7. How is Mongolia like and its people’s livelihood?</td>
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<td>8. What is the condition of western mountainous region of People’s Republic of China?</td>
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<td>9. How is the climate and location of India?</td>
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<td>...</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. How the culture of India and that of China differ, and how does the difference mean to the rest of Asia?</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. What are the important industries in Indochina Peninsula, and how is the people’s livelihood?</td>
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<td>...</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. How come Asia does not have many independent countries?</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
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</table>

To roughly categorize the 26 questionnaires, 5 of them are China (including Manchuria) related, while another 5 of them are India related. The rest includes
4, 2, and 3 for Indochina Peninsula (including 2 of Malay Peninsula's and 1 of the Philippines'), Japan, and East and Southwest Asia, respectively. Particularly, the fact that India and China takes the most weight implies that they are cultural origins of the Asian region. Further, by emphasizing the fact there were not many independent countries due to the colonization by Europeans from an international politics viewpoint, it aims to characterize the identity of Asia by comparing its regional uniqueness with the West.

Based on Kang (2010)'s finding, in the 1st National Curriculum of the Republic of Korea (1955-1962), Southeast Asia includes Korea, Japan, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, and China, where Southeast Asia is interchangeably used with Eastern Asia while their geographical locations and boundaries were not clearly specified.

Such confusion was somewhat mitigated by inventing a new course, entitled "World Geography." That is to say, in the 2nd National Curriculum (1963-1972), Asia, for the first time, was divided by 4 sub-regions with respect to biophysical and cultural distinctions. Monsoon Asia was considered Eastern Asia; Indian cultural region was categorized as South Asia; the in-between region of Chinese and Indian cultural regions was regarded as Southeast Asia; and Dry Asia was classified as Southwest Asia (Figure 1). Eastern Asia included Korea, China, Japan, and Mongolia where biophysically they were under the influence of Monsoon climate and culturally they were under the realms of Confucianism and Buddhism. Such classification aimed to characterize the regional uniqueness based on the common foundation of climatic and religious conditions by regarding Northeast Asia as Eastern Asia or East Asia. However, the terms Northeast Asia and Eastern Asia were used interchangeably1). For instance, within the cultural realm of Southeast Asia were described as "... includes Korea, China, and Japan, and the countries started agriculture early. They mainly produce rice where the major labors are provided by small holders in an intensive manner. The people in general believed in Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, but their Mental Cultural was at a lower level compared to European culture. The people are working hard to civilize their countries." That being said, Korea, China, and Japan were considered under the same region, while Eastern Asia referred to the region. The three countries were grouped together with respect to their cultural and religious similarity. In terms of geographical region Eastern Asia was limited to Northeast Asia. To somewhat overcome such biased view, a textbook also included Mongolia and Taiwan in addition to Korea, China and Japan by grouping them as East Asia cultural region.
Fig. 1. Regional classification of Asia shown in a Geography textbook of Social Studies in the 2nd National Curriculum

In the 3rd National Curriculum (1973-1980), the classification of world cultural region by cultural geographers, namely Russel or Kniffen, were borrowed to categorize Asia to Dry region and Oriental region, centering China and India. In addition to those, the classification method, used in the 2nd National Curriculum (i.e., grouping similar regions with respect to their human and nature phenomena), was employed to further categorize Eastern Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Moreover, Korea, China, and Japan were grouped as East Asia cultural region; likewise, India and Islam cultural regions were also determined by the religion-centric cultural classification regime. The Asian countries’ regional identities were understood by religious characteristics.

The kind of classification scheme was maintained in the 4th National Curriculum; hence, Asia was classified as Eastern Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Southwest Asia. Some textbooks used the term, Chinese cultural region, to refer to Eastern Asia, including Korea, China, Mongolia, Japan, and Taiwan. Nonetheless, the geographical boundary of Eastern Asia was still unclear back then. In the 5th National Curriculum, Asia was divided to 6 categories: North Asia, Central Asia, Southwest Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Asia with respect to their nature and human environments. South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Asia as a whole were regarded as Monsoon Asia, and this imply biophysical characteristics were factored in to determine regional characteristics. In a way, it was an attempt to find the countries’ regional similarities from climatic condition and food culture as their cultures of food, clothing, and housing were determined by the Asian Monsoon climate. Eating rice as the main cereal grain showed the common characteristics of the region. Besides, if industrious working style that was synchronized with the seasonality, indispensable co-working, and patriarchal
culture were connected, that could explain how climate had affected the people, while the influenced by the food culture was considered based on the same assumption.

As Korea, China, and Japan have used the same character and shared the similar religions, they were considered Eastern Asia because was described “Although each country uses different languages but they share traditional Chinese characters and the life styles of Buddhism and Confucianism; therefore, culturally integrated;” in other words, finding the countries’ identities through text and religion. For the first time, the term “East Asia” was started to be used in textbooks although it was interchangeably used with Eastern Asia; it was written “ranges from Inner-Mongolia and Manchuria (i.e., the East part of China) to Korea and Japan” and referred to as “East Asia cultural region.”

The 6th National Curriculum culturally categorized as: China cultural region, India cultural region, Southeast Asia cultural region. Eastern Asia still included Korea, China, and Japan, where it was in fact Northeast Asia. Culturally speaking it was China cultural region, but in terms of industry and economy, it was depicted as “West Pacific coastal region.” Especially, China was expressed as it was considered having huge potential of economic growth, while Japan was described as sustaining super power economy; Southeast Asia was phrased as “the region showing rapidly growing economy,” hence focusing much on the economic growths of Asia-Pacific region. Having a closer look into the middle school geography portion of the 6th National Curriculum, it was written “understanding the characteristics of different regions in Eastern Asia and Southeast Asia, and thus, comprehending the interrelationships between those countries and Korea and among those countries. As these regions are transforming a global center area, there is a need to actively adapt to such transformation (Ministry of Education, 1992a, 66).” This indicates not only both Eastern Asia and Southeast Asia are treated as a whole but also we need to pay more attention to the region due to their economic growth.

Furthermore, in order to defend cultural identities of Asia against the West-centered cultural superiority, it was portrayed “a fundamental element of globalization is to understand different traditions and life styles of different regions (Middle school social studies I textbook, 258).” So far, there was a tendency to contrast European industrialized countries and Asian developing countries/regions. However, by gradually emphasizing the cultural context of each region, it is now mandated to escape from a West-centric cultural viewpoint, which was biased. It is a striking development that both the economic developmental perspective is coupled with the cultural relativism to better understand and characterize the regions.
Moreover, the 7th National Curriculum still use the East Asia cultural region in order to indicate Korea, North China, Japan, and Taiwan by momentarily embracing the economic and cultural criteria of the 6th National Curriculum. However, the regional identity was emphasized by describing “each country shares life styles of Buddhism and Confucianism although each uses a distinct language they share traditional Chinese characters, so the cultures are integrated; momentarily, it was less influenced by the European culture.” Some other textbooks still use Eastern Asia to indicate Korea, China, and Japan, and their economic growths as the countries are historically intertwined and share similar cultures of rice production, traditional Chinese character, and Confucianism to create an unified cultural region; it is described as East Asia Economy Block.

In high school curriculums, Asia is covered by three chapters. China and Japan are now part of West Pacific coastal countries, where they used to be Eastern Asia. Southeast and South Asia are treated together, while Southwest Asia is grouped with Africa. Such manner is pretty much identical in middle school, especially China and Japan are considered to take the lead of the economic growth in the Pacific coastal region (as it was in the 6th National Curriculum) by emphasizing the unity of the region. While on the other hand, through renewing economic/developmental cooperation and industrialization in Southeast Asia, it is mandating to pay extra attentions on these regions.

Table 1. Class units related to Asia in the middle school curriculum (Seo, 2012)

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geography of Other Country</td>
<td>1. Several Areas of Asia</td>
<td>1st Grade in Social Studies</td>
<td>2nd Grade in Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. East Asia</td>
<td>1. East and Southern Asia</td>
<td>4. Life in each region of the world</td>
<td>2. Life of Each Region of Asia and Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Southeast Asia</td>
<td>2. Japan and China</td>
<td>(1) Natural and life of Asia</td>
<td>(1) Regional classification of world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Southwest Asia</td>
<td>2. Southeast Asia and Africa</td>
<td>(2) Natural and life of Africa</td>
<td>(2) East Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Southwest Asia and Northern Africa</td>
<td>(3) Natural and life of Europe</td>
<td>(3) Southeast and Southern Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Central and Southern Africa</td>
<td>(4) Natural and life of America</td>
<td>(4) Southwest Asia and Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(5) Natural and life of Oceania</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies 1 in middle school 4. Life in Asia and Africa (1) Several regions of world (2) Life of East Asia region (3) Life of Southeast and Southern Asia region (4) Life of Southwest Asia and Northern Africa region (5) Life of Central and Southern Africa region</td>
<td>Social Studies 1 in middle school 8. Life of East and Southeast Asia (1) China Developing on the basis of population and resource (2) Japan growing into economic superpower (3) rapidly developing Southeast Asia 9. Southern and Southwest Asia and Africa (1) Southern Asia embracing religious and population problem (2) Southwest Asia Islam culture and Northern Africa (3) Central and Southern Africa expected for growth</td>
<td>Social Studies 1 in middle school 5. Life of Asia and Africa (1) East Asia with growing economy (2) Southeast and Southern Asia with diverse culture (3) Southwest Asia and Northern Africa with abundance of petroleum resources (4) Central and Southern Africa with expected development</td>
<td>world regional geography was not included</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meanwhile, after 2009 a series of amendments made on the National Curriculums and that resulted in suddenly having a new course entitled “East Asia” in history part of social studies. Especially, “History of East Asia” was originated due to distortion of history by other adjacent countries, so there was a need to enforce the history education. The new course not only dealt with histories of Korea, China, and Japan but also included Vietnam as the country also use traditional Chinese characters. Further, the promotion of mutual understanding and cooperation were reflected through the communication between Korea and Japan by utilizing textbooks as medium. However, although the course was designed to strengthen the history education in Korea, it is still criticized because the vague concept of “East Asia” since the term in fact referred to Northeast Asia.

Accordingly, although the range of East Asia’s History is still uncertain,
the fact that the course may be able to provide a motivation to learn about the world of East Asia and its cooperation appears to be a valuable advance. Moreover, if the subject could cover Southeast Asia then the educational merit will be maximized as it will facilitate the understanding of East Asia as a whole and building up a community in order to further expand the mutual understanding and their cooperation. The subject of “History of East Asia” is constituted by 6 modules, where they present the starting point in understanding Northeast Asian region; the contents are as follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(2) Constructing the World of East Asia</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Even though East Asian countries have experienced much political tensions and sometime even wars, they have sustained their international relationships in addition to their cultural exchange. Each country acknowledges the fact that they share governance systems that are based on laws[율령] and Confucianism, and Buddhism; they explore how such cultural components were embraced by each country. The temporal range is specified from Before Christ to A.D. 10 century.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Understand the processes of political groups’ splitting and regathering through population movement and wars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Comprehend the diverse international relations, including tributes and installations, from the countries’ mutual necessity viewpoint.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Understand their governance mechanisms are based on laws] and Confucianism and compare how countries embraced those.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Explore how Buddhism was distributed to each region and comprehend the role and influence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Course subjects of History of East Asia by module

When Korea’s social studies have been amended since 2009, the contents does not only emphasize understanding in Northeast Asia but also in East Asia (However still, the terms, East Asia and Southeast Asia are used interchangeably which is problematic thus interfering the specification of conceptual range). That is, through out in elementary, middle, and high schools, the contents of East Asia are more vigorously dealt in Geography, History, and General Social Studies to promote a direct understanding or at least as case studies. Moreover, from a cultural relativism’s point of view, East Asia, including Southeast Asia, is not viewed inferior than the West in particular regarding their economies or thoughts; it attempts to understand their uniqueness in an objective manner. The contents of East Asia as part of the amended educational curriculum, representative examples are illustrated in the following table:
### Social Study of Elementary 5-6th Grades

5) Neighboring countries environments and livelihoods  
(3) Able to tell cultural similarities and differences among Korea, China, Japan, and Russia.  
(4) Able to explain why those countries have cooperated with each other and had troubles by exploring cases.

### Social Study (History) of Middle School

8) Creation and advancement of regional world  
Explore the creation and advancement of each regional world in East Asia, India and Southeast Asia, West Asia, and Europe based on their historical experience and culture after the collapse of the ancient unified empire. Grasp politics and cultural uniqueness for each regional world[지역 세계] to compare similarities and differences and be willing to embrace different culture.  
(2) Explore processes of creation of a monotonous regional world[지역 세계] when the common cultural components were distributed to each part of East Asia; understand the development of Japanese ancient nations.  
(3) Explore political transitions in India(Gupta Dynasty) and Southeast Asia and understand the influx of Islam power.

### Social Study (History II) of Middle School

5) Changing world of Asia and Africa and people’s movement  
Understand the reformation movement of Asians and Africans who fought against the invasion of imperialism to construct the foundation of modern nation. Explore the patterns of imperialism and reformation movement with its development occurred in East Asia, Southeast Asia, India, West Asia, and Africa.  
(3) Comprehend the fact that there were consistent fighting against invasion of imperialism in India and Southeast Asia.

### World Geography of High School

3) Cultural diversity in different regions of the world  
Understand cultural diversities in Asian region using religious landscape as case studies. Asian region is the largest and most populous continent yet it is the origins of ancient civilizations and religions. Further, due to its widely spread mountainous areas and diverse climatic conditions, the continent shows frequent geographical isolation, regional uniqueness, and cultural diversity.

### World Geography of High School (Commentary)

6) World of tension and coexistence  
(A) Chapter overview  
Diverse opinion exists about currently ongoing globalization and the future of global village, respecting and understanding other culture has become important; likewise, global issues that are not limited to a certain region or country have occurred thus international cooperation have become more important than before.  
(1) Understanding the dynamic global economy environment, such as economy bloc and Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and tension and coexistence among nations, regions, and people. Explore diverse economic bloc, such as EU, NAFTA, ASEAN, etc. and attempt to understand the pros and cons.

### World History of High School (Commentary)

4) Development of regional economy and expansion of exchange  
(1) Understand economic growths of East Asia, West Asia, and Europe, etc.  
(2) Compare each characteristic of trade blocs, such as East Asian, Indian Oceanic, Mediterranean, Saharan trade blocs, etc.

Table 3. East Asia related contents of 2009 amended curriculum in social studies
3. Survey on the Perception of Asia’s & East Asia’s Identity and its Implication

Every year, Asian Economic Cooperation Forum (AECF) has published the results of Asia value survey, where it investigates general factors of politics, economy, society, and culture that are necessary to create and institutionalize the Asian regional community. In its 2011 investigation, there were two important foci: what are the perception of college students, who are considered potential leaders of the future, in terms of geographical range of Asia? Is it necessary to have a regional unification in Asia? More than 700 college students were asked in the capital cities in Korea, China, and Japan, and the survey results are as follow.

In conclusion, the perception of the college students in Korea, China, and Japan were in fact vague and diverse (e-daily news, 2011.10.13). They pointed out geographical location (54.1%) and cultural similarity (16.3%) as the main criteria. However, Japan thought ethnicity is important, while China and Korea argued “whichever country they want” and “Asia’s identity share” are important, respectively; thus, the perception has national variation. Figure 2 reflects such tendency; i.e., as only 4 countries were regarded as Asia by more than 90% respondents in Korea, China, Japan, North Korea, Taiwan, etc. Whereas only 20-30% considered the countries under the Islam cultural region, namely Iran or Iraq, as part of Asia; therefore, it is required to have education on Asia’s history, culture, and geography. In terms of necessity of integration of regional Asia and its possibility, a significant difference between academics and college students was found. According to the survey conducted in 2009 on academics, the majority of them positively evaluated such necessity and possibility; whereas only 48% of the college students in Korea, China, and Japan were positive about the Asian integration is necessary, while only 23.5% of them thought the integration is possible. The necessity of Asian integration was even more negatively evaluated compared to the possibility of the integration. Most of college students in Korea (55.3%) and Japan (62.6%) thought the possibility is unlikely, which is relatively more negative than the opinions of Chinese college students. They all argue the most urgent issues are disagreements about historical facts and territorial dispute.

Based on the findings of the survey, the students are not very well aware of the range of Asia; therefore, it is urgently necessary to educate them to promote mutual understanding through history and culture, especially from a geographical point of view. Additionally, the finding demonstrates that it is necessary to overcome such difference through active exchanges among East Asian regions.
Fig. 2. Perception of what is Asia, in ratio (%)

4. Conclusion: In Pursuit of Promoting the Identity of East Asia

Asia, as well as Orient, is not defined independently yet it is defined by Europeans. Nowadays, East Asia too is not actively determined; although it is originated by the determination of the West, East Asia is now speaking up since 1950s to establish its regional identity. East Asia is a vast region including Northeast and Southeast Asia. Through the economic development in 1980s and its own momentum, it has not only positioned as part of the global society but also been becoming more unified than before as the life stage of East Asians. Now, East Asia is approaching to our lives not as a discourse but as a tangible reality. There is even a tendency in our lives that the discourse of East Asia community regarding diverse situations, such as politics, national security, economy, etc., is becoming realized.

However still, East Asia is requesting Koreans to go beyond the scope of Northeast and Southeast Asia and to reorganize the identity of East Asia in the context of geopolitics and geo-cultural space. Not until recently have Northeast Asia, e.g., Korea, China, and Japan, and Southeast Asia, centered by ASEAN, started perceived as a unit of geopolitical boundary.

It is necessary to have social studies education that is broad enough to cover topics of geography, history, culture, politics, and economy to produce
the culture of mutual understanding and respect in order for the middle class of East Asia to expand sharing of regional identity. That is to say, we have to simply go beyond a certain country’s hegemonic thoughts of international politics, cultural hegemonic dominance, extremely few political elite, or exchanges of certain classes, to finally constitute a healthy society (where it is a more thorough term than “community”) of East Asia via “East Asia’s democratic citizenship;” required also “East Asia’s education for understanding each other” accompanied by education, freedom, autonomy, and mutual respect. It is desperate to have a common education to enhance the “historical discernment” not arbitrary debates that are simply too obsessed about the past but ones that are based on regional uniqueness and world historical generality.

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