

ROK's East Asian Diplomacy during the Détente: Its Effort to Retain ASPAC and Consequent Failure 1972-1973*

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Sino-American rapprochement resulted in detente by breaking the Sino-American Cold War that dominated Asia after World War II. It also had a great impact on sustaining regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific. This article analyzes Korean diplomacy toward Asia under detente in relation to the ASPAC (Asian and Pacific Council). This article explains why ASPAC became obsolete and how the Korean government attempted to preserve the ASPAC in the face of dismantlement while easing of strained relations among the states in the region. There were two reasons for the failure of ASPAC. The main external reason was that Sino-American rapprochement, in conjunction with Sino-Japanese normalization, ended the Cold War in East Asia. As a result, ASPAC was longer needed to resist Communist China. The internal reason of ASPAC was the problem with Taiwan's membership. Some member countries were unwilling to take an active part in ASPAC, which Taiwan joined, while they started to establish diplomatic relations with mainland China. Facing the crisis of the ASPAC dismantling, the Korean government attempted to sustain ASPAC by appealing to the US government and by persuading Taiwan. Nevertheless, the diplomatic efforts of the Korean government failed because of the negative response of the US government and resistance of Taiwan.

Keywords: ASPAC, ASEAN, Sino-American rapprochement, Sino-Japanese Normalization, Détente, East Asian Community

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I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis discusses Republic of Korea (ROK) diplomacy during the period of détente in the context of the collapse of the Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC). The purpose is to identify why ASPAC met its demise by looking at the process of collapse which began as US-China and China-Japan relations started to thaw. It also aims to review the effort the ROK made to prevent the collapse of ASPAC.

ASPAC was established during the time when China successfully conducted a nuclear test and the US probe into Vietnam began in earnest. Its purpose was to solidify the alliance among democratic countries in the Asia region and it was formed under the leadership of the ROK government. At that time, some Asian countries hesitated to become a part of ASPAC since it was led by the anti-communist ROK, which made ASPAC seem like an anti-communist alliance. However, as the US started to side-support the organization and Japan decided to join after normalization of ROK-Japan diplomacy, ASPAC was able to launch through the Seoul ministerial meeting in June 1966. However, it failed to last long. As US-China relations improved, heralding the period of détente, ASPAC participants such as Japan, Australia, and New Zealand began to normalize their relations with communist China and cut ties with Taiwan, another ASPAC member. The seventh Seoul ministerial meeting in June 1972 was the last of ASPAC.

The improvement in US-China relations that began when President Nixon visited Beijing in February 1972 not only thawed the frozen US-China relations, but also ushered in the period of détente. In addition, it had a significant impact on the existence of the regional organization in the Asia region. It was the dismantlement of the Cold War structure in the region that led to the collapse of the Ministerial Conference for the Economic Development of Southeast Asia after the seventh gathering in Singapore was unconditionally delayed. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) launched under the leadership of the US after the first Vietnam War collapsed and the fundamental cause can be found in the betterment of US-China relations. ASPAC, established within the context of the Cold War between US and China, was no exception to this impact.

As the global order was being restructured, the ROK government, as the main founder of ASPAC, put a significant amount of diplomatic effort into preventing the collapse of the organization. The ROK government was the host of the seventh ministerial meeting, and it attempted to strengthen ASPAC by solidifying the alliance with the neutral Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). After Japan normalized its relations with China, the ROK strove to safeguard ASPAC by requesting support from the US and pressuring Taiwan to withdraw its membership. However, China was already soundly on its feet as a valid member of the global society, and any organization that had Taiwan as its member could no longer exist. This thesis reviews the ROK effort to save ASPAC and the subsequent failure in the larger context of changing global order represented by the détente.

ASPAC was the backbone of ROK diplomacy in the East Asia region from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s. ASPAC is also meaningful in that it signified that the ROK was breaking way from total dependence on the US and expanding its diplomatic horizon in the Asia Pacific region. According to Dong-Won Lee (1992, 171), the former minister of foreign affairs who played a major role in establishing ASPAC, the organization had a more dramatic result than the Olympics in terms of its politics and culture. Reflecting this significance, many empirical studies on ASPAC have been produced since 2000, and related diplomatic documents have been disclosed.¹ However, many of these studies focused on the establishment process of the organization and historical empirical studies on its development after the launch and its demise are absent.²

The two implications of this thesis are as follows. First, it focuses on the ROK diplomacy in the East Asia region during the Cold War, a period for which existing studies are almost absent. Many researchers during this period concentrated on ROK-US and ROK-Japan relations (木宮正史 2006, 24). This is somewhat related to the fact that the ROK pursued West-oriented diplomacy that demonstrated pro-US and pro-Japan characteristics.

¹ Kimiya Tadashi (2002), Yanghyeon Jo (2008), Yanghyeon Jo (2009), Mie Oba (2004), Jingu Cho (2007).

² As for the evaluation and general study of ASPAC: Seung Hun Lee (1975), Chi Young Park (1978), Joon Young Park (1985).

As discussed earlier, however, ASPAC provided an opportunity to widen the ROK's diplomatic horizons from pro-US and pro-Japan into East Asia. Therefore, ASPAC is perfect for understanding the ROK diplomacy during the Cold War.

Second, the study helps us understand the ROK response to the changing global environment represented by détente. Détente eased tension in the region and brought stability to the East Asian security order. However, to the ROK, which was confronted with a Cold War of its own, namely, between the North and South, détente posed another threat. Although ASPAC ultimately failed, the ROK effort to save it gives us a perspective from which to understand the ROK diplomacy during the period of détente.

The objective of this thesis lies in viewing the response of the ROK government, which was cornered due to the collapse of ASPAC during the period of détente in the early 1970s. The primary resource of this thesis is a set of diplomatic documents from the ROK, US, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Documents from Australia and New Zealand have never before been used in ASPAC studies and provide rare and high-quality information regarding how the Southeast Asian countries reacted, which was difficult to find in materials from the ROK, US, and Japan. It is especially interesting to view Malaysia's reaction considering it is a commonwealth country.

II. IMPROVEMENT OF US-CHINA RELATIONS AND INITIAL RESPONSE BY THE ROK GOVERNMENT

1. The impact of US-China reconciliation

President Nixon announced that he would visit China on July 15, 1971. This not only resolved the deadlock on the Vietnam War, but also improved the post-war East Asian security environment. The news forecast a great change in the hostile relations between the US and China that had defined the post-war East Asian regional order. In addition, the thaw served as an opportunity to review the necessity of regional organizations established against the Cold War backdrop.

When the news of Nixon's visit was released, the sixth ASPAC ministerial

meeting was being held in Manila, the Philippines, at the Intercontinental Hotel. Reflecting the more relaxed global security environment, many of the keynote speeches displayed a more flexible attitude. Many countries, except for Taiwan and Vietnam, changed their perspective toward China. Taiwan engaged in considerable under-the-table lobbying when writing up the joint communiqué, but the final decision did not reflect any of Taiwan's stances. On the last day, July 16, the joint communiqué was adopted, ending the meeting.

Against this backdrop, President's Nixon's announcement indeed came as a shock to all ASPAC participating countries because it almost evaporated any significance of the Manila meeting. The heated confrontations among participating nations around the China issue lost their meaning in the face of improvement in US-China relations, and the joint communiqué no longer reflected the latest developments. Foreign Minister Yongsik Kim talked about that day as follows:

We had been discussing the East Asia political environment for the past couple of days, and all participating nations were indeed shocked by the rapid and sudden changes. All stakeholders started to imagine what would happen to their own relations with Taiwan and with the People's Republic of China if diplomatic ties were made between the US and China. However, due to Taiwan's attendance at the meeting, no one could say anything. Also due to Vietnam's attendance, no one could say anything about the future of the Vietnam War (Yongsik Kim 1987, 214).

Except for Malaysia, all ASPAC participants were allies of the US. Therefore, the shock of Nixon's diplomacy was felt very strongly. When the improvement of US-China relations became more visible, some participating countries that had hoped for such development started the attempt to change the ASPAC policy. The most active country was Malaysia.

2. ROK policy toward global political changes

1) *Accelerated efforts of Malaysia to secede from ASPAC*

As the host country of the seventh ASPAC ministerial meeting, the ROK felt a great responsibility to save ASPAC in the rapidly changing global

environment.³ What concerned the ROK the most was Malaysia. Since the federated nation was established in 1963, the Malaysian government had continued its non-alliance, neutral stance. Thus, Malaysia was passive in ASPAC activities and worried that the organization would become anti-communist. Malaysia joined ASPAC convinced by its friends Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, but it seriously considered withdrawing from ASPAC before the second ministerial meeting in 1967, which demonstrates Malaysia's persistently passive attitude toward ASPAC.⁴

In the 1960s, the UK and the US indeed began to downsize their defense commitment in Asia, which was evidenced through efforts such as the withdrawal of the UK military from the Suez and the US announcement of the Nixon doctrine. During this time, Malaysia had become more neutral toward Southeast Asia security as Tun Abdul Razak was appointed as the minister in September 1970 following Tunku Abdul Rahman. The non-alliance policy of Razak became visible in how he responded to Chinese representation at the United Nations (UN) in 1971. Malaysia was the only country that supported the Albanian proposal advocating for a People's Republic of China (PRC) presence as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and called for Taiwanese withdrawal. In November of the same year, Razak proposed a neutral ASEAN at the fourth ASEAN ministerial meeting in Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia accelerated the neutralization policy after that and finally, in 1972, Malaysia announced its official withdrawal from the Asia Parliamentary Union (APU).⁵

³ When the government of the Philippines was preparing the Manila ministerial meeting, only Malaysia, Taiwan, and South Vietnam had not hosted the meeting. Taiwan and South Vietnam initially wanted to host the next meeting, but they were immediately met with opposition from Malaysia. The Philippines government, afraid of the halt on ministerial meetings, asked the ROK to hold the next meeting, and the ROK accepted the offer with all participants' agreement.

⁴ Telegram to Kuala Lumpur (482), 5, July 1967, ABHS, 950, W4627, PM 434/11/1 Part 5, Box 4674, National Archives of New Zealand (hereafter cited as NZNA).

⁵ The entire letter from the ROK ambassador in Malaysia to Kim (MAW-0137) 17, January 1972 『ASPAC ministerial meeting, The 7th. Seoul, 14-16, June 1972 (V.3 member negotiation: Malaysia-Vietnam)』 ROK diplomatic document C-0053-04; APU's purpose is to promote economic and cultural exchange and it was established

Neutral stances were visible in ASPAC as well. To realize a neutral ASEAN, securing confidence from other non-alliance neutral countries was necessary. However, staying in ASPAC made that difficult. Additionally, Malaysia wanted to rapidly recover relations with the PRC. Therefore, being in the same league with Taiwan in ASPAC was not the optimal option for Malaysia. Based on these circumstances, Malaysia sent its deputy minister instead of its minister to the Manila ministerial meeting, and at the internal meeting held in November, Malaysia set forth measures to slowly minimize its role in ASPAC to ultimately withdraw itself.⁶

It was the absence of Toh Chor Keat, then the Malaysian ambassador to the ROK, at the third permanent member meeting on January 27, 1972, that led the ROK to detect Malaysia's intention. Minister Yongsik Kim felt the strong implications of this action; thus, he called Ambassador Keat to his office to make sure where Malaysia stood in terms of ASPAC. Ambassador Keat asserted that "Malaysia's foreign policy is not to participate in an international organization which has zero communist countries and only has severe anti-communist countries as its members." He said that Malaysia would continue its passive stance in ASPAC ministerial meetings as an observer and that he would be the one attending the meetings, not the minister.⁷ Kim noticed the seriousness of the situation and paid a visit to Malaysia to convince Razak to change his stance.

2) *Approach to ASEAN*

President Nixon's visit to China posed a great threat to the ROK. The policy that the ROK government chose immediately after the US-China summit to re-solidify ASPAC was to change the characteristics of ASPAC and establish close cooperation with ASEAN. The intention of the ROK government in forming ASPAC was to strengthen the solidarity among free Asian countries

in February 1965 after being proposed by Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Thailand. Malaysia's attendance was from the beginning. (Asian Regional Cooperation Study Group of Foreign Ministry 1972, 18-21).

⁶ Entire above document from Australian ambassador to Kim (700-66) 11, February 1972, above document.

⁷ Meeting minutes [Minister Kim/Toh Chor Keat, Malaysian ambassador to Korea] 2, February 1972, above document.

against communist regimes. At the same time, it intended to establish a regional cooperative body similar to the Organization of American States (OAS) in the Americas and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Africa, rather than to promote anti-communist doctrine. Mindful of these objectives, the ROK government actively pursued charter enactment and established a secretariat to strengthen ASPAC as an organization. At the same time, it strongly opposed forming a military alliance within ASPAC to offset the weaker presence of the UK and the US because of a strong belief that such action would harm the sound development of the organization (Sang Hyun Lee 2010). However, the sudden US-PRC reconciliation forced the ROK government to adjust the direction of ASPAC.

On March 11, 1982, during a press conference, Minister Kim showed the ROK government's commitment to turn ASPAC into an economic cooperative body by stating that continued development of ASPAC was the goal of the ROK government, also asserting that the ROK government would propose measures to strengthen the solidarity among participating nations as well as promote life quality in those nations through modernization and trade promotion (*Dong-A Ilbo* March 11, 1972). In other words, the ROK sensed that political discussion regarding the PRC could result in the withdrawal of ASPAC members who wanted to rapidly recover relations with the PRC; thus, it quickly eliminated the political aspects of ASPAC and promoted economic solidarity instead.

At the same press conference, Kim revealed a plan to visit Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand starting on March 17. In his memoir, Kim recalled what he planned for ASPAC's future as follows: "I thought that a close relationship with ASEAN was the basis to secure the ASPAC's presence under the political atmosphere at the time. My plan was for ASPAC nations to participate in ASEAN as observers and involve ASEAN members, namely, Indonesia and Singapore, to attend ASPAC as observers, which would lay out a solid relationship between the two regional bodies."

In fact, the relationship between ASPAC and ASEAN has been a topic of discussion among the participants since the launch of ASEAN in 1967. The main difference between the two is that ASEAN is a sub-regional body formed by the Southeastern Asian countries whereas ASPAC was broader, formed by free countries in the Northeast, Southeast, and Oceania.

However, no one could deny a common thread running through the two organizations because both aimed to promote economic, cultural, and social cooperation. For this reason, in the initial stage of ASEAN, the idea to combine the two was brought up often (NIKKEI August 8, 1968).⁸ In fact, the joint statement adopted at the third ministerial meeting in Canberra in 1968 included the following paragraph: “The ministers welcomed the idea to have multiple organizations with similar purposes. The overlap in their members will make the cooperation more harmonious and close. The ministers paid close attention that the ASPAC standing committee welcomed the launch of ASEAN.” What this meant with respect to the relationship between the two organizations was cooperation and supplementation, not rivalry, at least on the surface.

However, the trend for a few years after that statement proved that the cooperation existed only on paper. No actions were followed and ASPAC and ASEAN remained two independent organizations separate from each other. Against this backdrop, the ROK government was hopeful that by promoting cooperation between ASPAC and ASEAN, it would be able to stave off ASPAC members from withdrawing their membership and, furthermore, newly add Indonesia and Singapore to ASPAC. Another merit that the ROK government saw was that by appearing to have cooperation with ASEAN, which declared itself neutral in 1971, ASPAC could promote its image as a non-political organization that did not promote any specific ideology.

Therefore, the ROK government attempted individual contact with ASEAN members. The first country that ROK representatives visited was

⁸ For example, the director of Asian affairs in Japan, Ogawa, said that ASPAC and ASEAN would unify at the meeting with the UK in November 1967 and that once the Vietnam War had ended, this would be accelerated. Minister Thanat Khoman of Thailand, at a press conference in July 1968, said that “ASPAC unifying with ASEAN is not completely unlikely. However, although they have a common denominator, ASEAN is <a compact community> while ASPAC covers a wider region with different nationals with different foreign policies.” Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaysia said on August 7, 1968, that “ASPAC and ASEAN’s unification is a good idea.” Memorandum, Tokyo to Laking, “ASPAC and Japan,” 26, December 1967, ABHS, 950, W4627, PM 434/11/1 Part 5, Box 4674, NZNA; Telegram from Saigon (890) 26 July 1968. Diplomatic Document of Japan (2008-00358).

Malaysia. At that time, Malaysia seemed highly likely to withdraw from ASPAC since it had exerted extra diplomatic efforts in Northeast Asia after the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Conference in 1971 while also pursuing better relations with communist regimes such as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Therefore, identifying Malaysia's true intention and convincing it to stay in ASPAC were among the direst challenges for the ROK government.

Minister Yongsik Kim arrived at the Kuala Lumpur airport on March 16, 1972, for talks with Prime Minister Razak the next day. Kim wrote in his memoir (1987, 263): "I continuously emphasized that the objective of ASPAC is to contribute to social and economic development in Northeast and Southeast Asia and not to promote security. (omitted) I also made a strong point that Malaysia's presence in ASPAC is essential to fulfill such objective." Kim, after the talk, recalled the achievement as follows: "Malaysia promised to send a ministerial-level official to the ASPAC general meeting, which eliminated worries that ASPAC may collapse" (*Dong-A Ilbo* March 18, 1972).

The next destination was Indonesia. Indonesia was important since it was a founder of ASEAN. Thus, it was critical that the ROK government convince Indonesia to form cooperation between ASPAC and ASEAN. In his memoir, Kim recalled (1987, 264) that the talks with Foreign Minister Malik on March 20 were the most important in his visit to Southeast Asia. Kim proposed (1987, 265) to exchange observers between ASEAN and ASPAC and Minister Malik responded by asserting that "economic cooperation between ASPAC and ASEAN is feasible; however, it has to be preceded by ASPAC declaring its non-political, non-military, and non-ideological nature."

The last destination was Thailand, which along with the ROK played a pivotal role in establishing ASPAC. Thailand was also a member of both ASPAC and ASEAN; therefore, the ROK had high expectations of the Thai government. According to Kim's memoir (1987, 268), Kim called on Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn; during the talks on March 22, he said that ASPAC needed to act as an organization promoting economic, social, and cultural cooperation along with ASEAN and that Thailand would play the bridging role between the two organization. Minister Thanom agreed to this. Upon returning from his trip on March 24, Kim evaluated his 10 days in Southeast Asia by saying that "no members will leave ASPAC. The ASEAN

members I visited recognized the value of regional cooperation” (*Dong-A Ilbo* March 25, 1972).

Contrary to Kim’s evaluation, however, his trip to Southeast Asia did not yield any substantial results.⁹ The starkest evidence was failure to secure a promise of cooperation from Malaysia. According to the foreign ministry in New Zealand, Kim requested cooperation of the Malaysian government, but Minister Razak did not show any interest in cooperation between ASEAN and ASPAC. In fact, it was barely discussed.¹⁰ Regarding Razak’s promise that he would send a “due representative” to the June ministerial meeting, what he meant was the Malaysian ambassador to Korea, not a ministerial-level representative as KIM understood.¹¹ Kim ultimately failed to persuade the Malaysian government to send a ministerial-level representative. Also, Minister Malik of Indonesia released a statement two days after the talks regarding the cooperation between ASPAC and ASEAN indicating that ASPAC was an anti-communist body similar to SEATO whereas ASEAN was a non-political organization that only promotes economic cooperation; thus, cooperation with ASPAC was impossible unless it completely eliminated its political affiliation (*Dong-A Ilbo* March 24, 1972).

III. THE OPENING OF THE SEOUL MINISTERIAL MEETING AND ITS LIMITATIONS

1. The response by the ROK government

Ten days before the opening of the meeting, the foreign ministry of the ROK announced its basic policy direction. In a document titled “Basic Direction for the 7th ASPAC Ministerial Meeting,” the ROK government laid out three

⁹ The New Zealand ambassador at the fifth committee meeting said that Kim’s trip was without any success since he did not say much. Memorandum, Seoul to Wellington, 4 April 1972, ABHS, 950, W4627, PM 434/11/1 Part 12B, Box 4676, NZNA.

¹⁰ Telegram from Kuala Lumpur (343), 5, April 1972, ABHS, 950, W4727, PM 434/11/1 Part12B, Box 4676, NZNA.

¹¹ Telegram from Tokyo (128), 29, March 1972, ABHS, 950, W4627, PM 434/11/1 Part 12B, Box 4676, NZNA.

basic policy directions:

- (1) Continued emphasis on the ROK effort to maintain regional peace and promote flexible foreign policy to solidify diplomatic foundations in the Asia region
- (2) Emphasis on ASPAC as a regional cooperative body and highlight of the economic, social, and cultural cooperation to strengthen its presence
- (3) Keeping the DPRK in check against intrusion into the Asia region by highlighting the ROK's sovereign effort and commitment to ease tension in the Korean peninsula¹²

The above listed items have several implications. First, the ROK government recognized ASPAC as pivotal in its diplomatic efforts in the Asia region and, second, it strove to change the face of ASPAC by eliminating its political affiliation. Third, it had high hopes for the role ASPAC could play to keep DPRK in check so that it did not spread its influence in the Asia region, which kicked into high gear after Nixon's visit to China.

It also proposed to clearly indicate the exact nature of ASPAC in the joint statement and also to strengthen the functionality of the organization. The document proposed four new functions of ASPAC and it solidified the ROK government's ASPAC policy:

- (1) ASPAC promotes peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region as a regional cooperative body.
- (2) ASPAC is neither a political nor a military body against a third country.
- (3) Going forward, ASPAC will focus on promoting economic, social, and cultural cooperation within the region.
- (4) ASPAC is not a closed organization and is open to all countries in the region.¹³

As previously indicated, Kim wanted to turn ASPAC from a political body to an economic body after the US-China summit. The above listed items more

¹² Division 2, Southeast Asian Affairs "Basic stances on ASPAC ministerial meeting," 1972, 6,3 『ASPAC Ministerial meeting, the 7th. Seoul, 1972.6.14 -16 (V.1 Basic document)』 ROK diplomatic document C-0053-02.

¹³ Div 2, Southeast Asian Affairs, above document.

clearly solidified the ROK government's stance.

Another significant fact to note is that the policy showed where the ROK stood in terms of China. It called on the ROK government to “soften the attitude toward China so as not to provoke and that the ROK government hopes that the US-PRC and the US-USSR reconciliation can lead to the easing of tension in the region.” Considering that the ROK government consistently emphasized the importance of a joint response to the communist threat from the PRC, this new and more flexible policy meant a great switch in policy direction.

2. The Opening of the Seoul Ministerial Meeting

Would the ASPAC continue in this new political climate created by US-PRC reconciliation? Or would it collapse? The Seoul meeting garnered great attention since it provided clues about the continued existence of ASPAC. The foreign press regarded it as significant since it was the first foreign ministerial meeting, except for the participation by Malaysia and Australia, since the US-PRC and US-USSR summit.

The ASPAC ministerial meeting in transition took place on June 14, 1972, at the Central Building in Seoul. President Jeonghee Park, six years after the first meeting in 1966, said in his opening remarks that “ASPAC is not a body to provide either political or military response towards a third country or another region” and “I wish for many more countries in the region, regardless of their ideology and political system, to participate in this effort to promote peace and prosperity in this region.” By asserting such, he emphasized not only the non-political, non-ideological, and non-military nature of ASPAC, but also his commitment to keep ASPAC intact (*Dong-A Ilbo* June 14, 1982). This meant a departure from his previous stance of six years earlier when he claimed that “negotiation is not enough to fight against communism and it sometimes requires force” (*Yomiuri Shimbun* June 14, 1966 (evening paper)).

On June 15, Kim delivered the keynote address during non-official talks at the Chosun Hotel. In that speech, he delivered the basic principles of ASPAC policy: (1) broader exchanges among member nations and more exchanges among scholars, journalists, economists, and athletes, (2) establishment of a standing committee to promote ASEAN-ASPAC cooperation, and

(3) establishment of a special committee to promote economic and trade relations (*Dong-A Ilbo* June 15, 1972). Kim also showed a flexible attitude toward the PRC by asserting that the summit between the US and PRC and the US and USSR eased tension in the Asia region. This was in stark contrast to Taiwanese Foreign Minister Shen Chang-Hwan, who emphasized in his keynote address that “President Nixon’s visit to the PRC has not changed the stance of the Taiwanese government. Our objective is still to prevent PRC and US dominance in Asia.”¹⁴

The joint statement adopted on the last day evaluated the US-PRC and the US-USSR summit. It confirmed that “it was beneficial to ease the tension in the Asia Pacific region” (Clause 3) and it reaffirmed the need to change the trajectory of ASPAC toward the non-military and non-political. Regarding the most sensitive PRC issue, it concluded that Taiwan and other members did not bring up the PRC issue and that the two US-led summits were beneficial for the region. Additionally, regarding the political climate of the Indo-China region where the war was becoming more serious, the only statement made was “we sympathize with Vietnam’s support to sustain independence” as Japan and some other members opposed taking a strong position (*Yomiuri Shimbun* June 16, 1972 (evening paper)).

The seventh ministerial meeting over three days ended with the release of the above mentioned statement and appointing Thailand as the next meeting’s host.

3. Limitations of the Seoul Ministerial Meeting

As the host of the Seoul ministerial meeting, the foreign ministry of the ROK commanded its outcome in three ways: (1) The ROK’s stance was well reflected in the joint statement, (2) it provided an opportunity to clarify the foreign policy direction of the ROK government and to secure a main responsibility in Asia diplomacy through ASPAC, and (3) it secured ASPAC’s

¹⁴ The foreign minister report to the president, “The result of the 7th ministerial meeting,” 18, June 1972, 『ASPAC Ministerial meeting, The 7th. Seoul, 14-16, June 1972 (V.6 Result and joint statement)』, ROK diplomatic document C-0053-07.

presence by scheduling the next meeting in Bangkok.¹⁵

The meeting was indeed a success considering that the collapse of ASPAC was brought up after the US-PRC reconciliation, which was turned around by the Seoul meeting in which the new objective of the organization was promoted, garnering support from the member nations. It was also meaningful in that it lessened the danger of collapse by securing Bangkok as host of the next meeting, which can be seen as an achievement.

However, the Seoul meeting had innate limitations in that it publicly promoted turning ASPAC into an economic cooperative body. One aspect of this is seen in the fact that the Taiwan issue was absent from the discussion. It is not an exaggeration to say that the presence of Taiwan would determine the existence of ASPAC. However, due to its critical nature, the participating nations preferred to stay away from this topic for it would almost immediately bring on the organization's collapse. Many agreed that it was better to keep ASPAC intact until the political atmosphere in Asia stabilized somewhat.

Another limitation came from the fact that its attempt to become an economic body diluted the original mission of ASPAC. Of course, the elimination of political affiliation somewhat eased the tension between Taiwan and nations that wanted to better relations with the PRC. However, from the perspective of nations that wanted the mediocre political affiliation of ASPAC, turning into an economic body would lessen its importance.¹⁶ Also, this switch was a makeshift measure to sustain ASPAC's existence. From the Australian government's perspective, ASPAC as an economic organization would have no merit since it would overlap with ECAFE and the Colombo Plan.¹⁷

¹⁵ Foreign minister report to the president, "The result of the 7th ministerial meeting," 18, June 1972, 『ASPAC Ministerial meeting, The 7th. Seoul, 14-16, June 1972 (V.6 Result and joint statement)』, ROK diplomatic document C-0053-07.

¹⁶ Australia, Japan, and New Zealand wanted to promote an Asian version of the Commonwealth Body to weaken the anti-communist nature of ASPAC. This was a loose body that only promoted a sense of regional solidarity by freely discussing the region's pending issues (Sang Hyun Lee 2012).

¹⁷ Memorandum, D.G. Nutter to the secretary, "ASPAC Ministerial Meeting: Australian Policy," 6 June 1972, A1838, 541/2/7 Part 1, National Archives of Australia [hereafter cited as NAA].

IV. THE SHOCK FROM NORMALIZATION OF PRC-JAPAN RELATIONS

1. PRC-Japan reconciliation

Post-war Japan re-emerged as a member of the free Asian countries by signing the Treaty of San Francisco. The US-Japan Security Treaty laid the foundation for the post-war Japanese foreign policy. It was not unrelated to the US-led Cold War strategy that Japan chose not to form diplomatic ties with PRC, but instead opted to sign a peace treaty with Taiwan. Therefore, the PRC policy of the Japanese government was limited to maintaining an economic relationship (Sadako Ogata 1992, Ch 4).

Japan's PRC policy was significantly influenced by the US government's Asia policy. Therefore, the Japanese government felt an immense amount of shock and betrayal when President Nixon released a statement regarding his visit to China without consulting Japan. This unilateral decision had a great impact on Japanese foreign policy and provided a direct cause for normalization of PRC-Japan relations.

Prime Minister Sato resigned after delivering his promise to take back Okinawa after reigning for the seven years since 1964, and Tanaka followed. As the prime minister, Tanaka announced the normalization of PRC-Japan relations as the utmost important task and showed his commitment by appointing Ohira, who was keen on this task, as a foreign minister (Ryuji Hattori 2011).

Within three months of taking office, Tanaka held talks with Minister Zhou Enlai in Beijing. Four days later, a joint statement was released making the normalization of the inter-relationships official. This marked the end to the awkward relations Japan had had with the PRC since the peace treaty with Taiwan was signed in 1952. Minister Ohira, immediately after the joint statement was released, said that “[this] step indicates that the peace treaty with Taiwan is no longer meaningful and it is practically null (*Asahi Shimbun* September 29, 1972 (evening paper)). Although he did not specifically say “cut ties,” the practical meaning was the cutting of diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

The normalization accelerated the restructuring of order in the Asia region. Needless to say, the most shocked nation was Taiwan. Taiwan was already somewhat isolated from the global community by withdrawal from the UN and Nixon's visit to the PRC; however, the normalization of PRC-Japan relations made it total. In addition, Japan was the first ASPAC country to approve the PRC and was followed by other ASPAC nations. Therefore, the PRC-Japan normalization was a direct cause of the ASPAC collapse.¹⁸ I will describe this further later, but Japan found itself having to care for Taiwan, which became further isolated after the cutting of diplomatic ties by Japan, and this left an impression on Japan's Asia policy, especially its ASPAC policy.

2. The dilemma of the Japanese government

Sparked by the normalization of relations with the PRC, Japan started to thoroughly review its Asia policy. It was during this time that ASPAC became a hurdle for the Japanese government. As of now, no record is available that explains Japan's ASPAC policy in post-normalization of the PRC-Japan relations, but records by close partners Australia and New Zealand indicate that the Japanese government was divided into "remain in" and "withdraw from" ASPAC after ties with the PRC were reestablished.

From the "remain in" perspective, Japan had to stay in ASPAC to provide the minimum care for the Taiwanese government. As previously indicated, Taiwan's further isolation was sparked by its expulsion from the UN in 1971 followed by its withdrawal from other international organizations. ASPAC was one of the few in which Taiwan was still a member. Therefore, Japan had to be careful in withdrawing from ASPAC; causing the body to collapse would only worsen relations with Taiwan. Furthermore, Japan was one of the very first ASPAC members to recover ties with the PRC, which made Japan guilty of endangering ASPAC's existence, which ultimately caused Japan to hesitate to withdraw from the organization.

Meanwhile, others in Japan thought that staying in ASPAC, which promoted "blocking the PRC," would harm Japan, which had made forming

¹⁸ Australia and New Zealand normalized their relations with the PRC in December 1972, followed by Malaysia (1974), Thailand (1975), and the Philippines (1975).

friendly ties with the PRC a priority. They claimed that they now had an opportunity to promote comprehensive diplomacy as exchanges with the communist regimes were to be spurred, and remaining in ASPAC would only be a hindrance. There was also a danger that such decision would provoke the PRC as its possible reaction was completely unknown because ASPAC was not on the agenda during the PRC-Japan summit. In other words, remaining in ASPAC was a sensitive issue for Japan, which normalized its ties with the PRC under the “one China” belief and remaining could have resulted in diplomatic conflict with the PRC.

Thus, Japan was in a dilemma and faced with the danger of provoking either the PRC or Taiwan based on its stance in terms of ASPAC. Consequently, it decided to remain in ASPAC to maintain a working-level relationship with Taiwan. At that time, Japan was in “diplomatic negotiation without diplomatic ties” with Taiwan after the ties were cut and it felt a need to maintain the practical relationship as it had been built over a considerable amount of time (Koeda 2000, 248). On October 4, during a talk with Gordon Freeth, then the Australian ambassador to Japan, the director of the Asian Policy Department, Akiyama, said that the priority of Japanese diplomacy was to sustain friendly relations with Taiwan as much as possible and that Japan would certainly remain in ASPAC in consideration of Taiwan.¹⁹

V. THE RESPONSE AND DISAPPOINTMENT BY THE ROK GOVERNMENT

1. Recognition of the ROK government regarding the future of ASPAC

To the ROK government that was filled with high hopes of securing ASPAC’s existence after successfully holding the Seoul meeting, the PRC-Japan normalization of relations indeed came as a shock. Faced with this new challenge, the ROK government started to seriously review the future of ASPAC. On October 30, a report titled “Administrative Research on the

¹⁹ Record of Conversation, Akiyama and Jones, 4, October 1972, A1838, 541/6/1 Part 3, NAA.

Future of ASPAC” was released.²⁰ If the key policy behind holding the seventh ministerial meeting four months earlier was to find ways to strengthen ASPAC, the aim of this report shows how seriously the ROK government considered the situation since the report thoroughly examines the possible future of ASPAC, including its collapse, the forming of a new organization, integration with other existing regional bodies, and other alternatives.

First, the merit of an ASPAC collapse was identified and it was determined that a collapse would not hurt ROK-Taiwan relations. However, this scenario had several demerits, according to the report. First, the ROK government's basis for its Asia policy was completely destroyed. Second, the solidarity built so far was weakened. Third, it eliminated the regional body that could fight against colonialism. Fourth, the investment and effort made in five joint projects would be void. Fifth, it would be more difficult to prevent the DPRK from entering the Northeast Asia region. Sixth, ASPAC was the only organization that could prevent Japan from being the sole power in the region. This showed that the ROK government saw many more demerits than merits.

If a new body were to be formed, it could resolve the Taiwan issue and it would rightly reflect the new political order in the region. However, it would mean that the ROK would lose the sovereignty it enjoyed within ASPAC, as well as the diplomatic status it garnered through ASPAC, and would be a weaker voice in the new body.

Only demerits were listed in the third scenario, which was integrating with another existing organization. First, if ASPAC were to unify with the Japan-led Northeast Asia Development Ministerial Meeting, then (1) it would increase Japan's voice within the organization and would make it difficult to keep Japan's power in check in this region and (2) the economic development ministerial meeting was based on aid from Japan, which did not allow mutually beneficial relationship such as in ASPAC. If ASEAN and ASPAC were to combine, then (1) it would be difficult to adjust its foreign policy since ASEAN is neutral in the Northeast Asia region, 2) ASEAN had internal disagreements; therefore, it would lessen the efficiency of the

²⁰ Division of Asian affairs, foreign ministry 「Administrative research on the future of ASPAC」30, October 1972, ROK Diplomatic document C-0052-16.

regional cooperation, and (3) it would lessen the ROK's diplomatic voice in this region. Based on the previous stated analysis, the tentative result was as follows:

- (1) The ASPAC collapse would greatly weaken our diplomatic basis in the Southeast Asia region.
- (2) Unification of ASPAC with other regional bodies comes with many hurdles and would lessen our diplomatic voice.
- (3) If a new body is formed, our active participation is a must; however, it would be difficult to stave off the DPRK.
- (4) Japan and other ASPAC members would not suggest the dismantlement voluntarily. Most would prefer to keep the status quo until an agreement is made.
- (5) The dismantlement and the formation of a new organization would be promoted in the future.
- (6) Taiwan would not voluntarily withdraw from ASPAC and PRC interest in ASPAC would not change much.²¹

Based on this analysis, the report concluded that the best policy decision that the ROK could make was to sustain ASPAC's existence. The following were the measures to do so:

- (1) Make discrete efforts to convince 'Free China' to either participate as Taiwan as a regional representative or withdraw from ASPAC membership
- (2) Promote Japan, Malaysia, Australia, and other countries that either cut ties or have no diplomatic relations with Taiwan to host the ninth ministerial meeting, so that an invitation could be issued to Taiwan as 'Free China.'
- (3) (omitted)
- (4) Find measures to increase the member nations and develop diplomatic efforts. (Make efforts to start summit diplomacy with neutral nations, namely, Indonesia, Singapore, and India, to lay the foundation for regional cooperation with neutral nations.)
- (5) Highlight the economic and social cooperation aspects of ASPAC.²²

²¹ Above document.

²² Ibid.

2. The First Standing Committee Meeting in Bangkok (March 13, 1973)

As the host of the eighth ministerial meeting, Thailand's government tried to select the meeting date in close consideration of the political climate in post US-PRC reconciliation. The Thai government announced that it would host the standing committee meeting on March 13 and the ministerial meeting between June and July.²³ Had the Thai government kept delaying the decision, then Thailand might have been held liable for all the aftermath. By holding the standing committee meeting, any delayed items could finally be discussed in depth, and this could solidify the future of ASPAC. In fact, the then deputy foreign minister, Chatchai Choonhavan, stated during talks with the New Zealand ambassador that as long as some members were willing to attend, they would continue the effort to host the meeting.²⁴ He also said during talks with the Korean ambassador that the Thai government would like to regard ASPAC as a club and that the dismantlement could take place when members no longer wanted to participate.²⁵

The ROK government supported the Thai government's decision. Minister Kim wrote in a letter to the ROK ambassador in Thailand that "the 1st standing committee meeting is the most important aspect for the future of ASPAC" and "to concert utmost effort with the host country so that the 8th ministerial meeting takes place as planned."²⁶ On the day of the meeting, Kim sent another directive to the ROK representative that "ASPAC's continued existence" is what the ROK government promotes and to follow the majority opinion regarding the Taiwan issue. Also, if the Taiwan issue

²³ Entire letter from the ROK ambassador to Thailand to Kim (THW-0318) 7, March 1973 'Members' attitude towards the future of ASPAC,' ROK diplomatic document C-0063-02.

²⁴ Telegram 227, Bangkok to Wellington, 5, March, 1973, ABHS, 950, W4627, PM 434/11/1 Part 14, Box 4676, NZNA.

²⁵ Entire letter from the ROK ambassador to Thailand to Kim (THW-0318) 7, March 1973 'Members' attitude towards the future of ASPAC,' ROK diplomatic document C-0063-02.

²⁶ Entire letter from the ROK ambassador to Thailand to Kim (WTH-0225) 9, March 1973, above document.

was not resolved, the directive said “to maintain the ministerial meeting and standing committee without the Taiwanese presence.”²⁷ The ROK government did not want to become another Taiwan and wanted to avoid isolation even if it meant sacrificing relations with Taiwan.²⁸ However, this was met with opposition. The Thai government made it clear that it would not strip any nation of its ASPAC membership and that as the host country it would not opt to un-invite any members.²⁹

The announcement of the standing committee meeting came a week before the scheduled date and the member nations found themselves in a sticky situation. It was foreseeable that some countries would refuse to attend if there was a Taiwanese presence. Malaysia announced its official withdrawal and Australia, which was slowly reducing its presence, notified that it would be absent from the meeting. New Zealand, which formed diplomatic ties with the PRC, only dispatched representatives below the ministerial level.

As scheduled, the standing committee meeting in Bangkok took place

²⁷ Foreign ministry “Directives to ROK representatives to the 1st ASPAC standing committee meeting” 13, March 1973, above document.

²⁸ The improvement of US-PRC relations was made without any preparation or consideration of the US allies, which created isolation and concern for the ROK. It seemed as if the US sacrificed the benefits of the ROK. Park’s administration promoted reformation to strengthen domestic solidarity and defense, even developing a nuclear program in secret (Victor 1999). Furthermore, the ROK even considered improving relations with supporters of the DPRK to ease the fear of abandonment. For example, according to an internal diplomatic document made right after the PRC joined the UN, the ROK recognized Taiwan as the official China. However, now that the PRC had joined the UN, the ROK worried that it would end up in global isolation. Therefore, ROK indicated in several documents that “ROK needed diplomatic flexibility,” and the “PRC cannot be denied. Taiwan is not to be considered when establishing relations with the PRC.” At the same time, the ROK recognition that the relationship with Taiwan could not be deserted completely was shown through statements such as “practical relations need to continue without expanding it further” and “economic relations continue without increasing political ties.” Internal document (information 770-2911) 『Taiwan’s stay in UN』 12, November 1971 『ROK stances on Chinese representation in international organization, 1971』 ROK diplomatic document C-0044-01; 1st division of Southeast Asian affairs 『ROK-PRC relations under the changing climate』 30, October 1972 『PRC policy of ROK, 1972』 ROK diplomatic document C-0051-03.

²⁹ Above document.

on March 13 with only seven nations in attendance. The focal point of this meeting was discussing the next ASPAC ministerial meeting agenda. The ROK, Taiwan, and Vietnam promoted a July meeting to which Japan, New Zealand, and the Philippines responded by opting for an indefinite delay. As a result, the attendees concluded by agreeing to decide in the next standing committee meeting suggested by the Thai government and the discussion around the future of ASPAC was delayed once again.

3. The ROK Diplomacy to ASPAC

As a result of the standing committee meeting on March 13, the ROK government undertook activities to eliminate hurdles in holding the next ministerial meeting by promoting close relationships with the other stakeholders. Specific activities included asking the US for support and convincing Taiwan.

1) Discussion with the US

Two days after the Bangkok meeting, Deputy Minister Seokhyeon Yoon visited the US embassy to talk with Ambassador Francis Underhill, who had temporarily replaced William Porter. This was to explain the ROK's ASPAC policy and to gain an understanding from the US.³⁰ This seemed like preparatory efforts since Minister Kim had a meeting with Ambassador Underhill the next day. Yoon began by saying that "the weak countries in Asia need a regional body to discuss with multiple countries. ASPAC is such a necessary body and it needs to exist until a replacement is created." Yoon also expressed disappointment regarding the withdrawal of Malaysia and soon Australia, but also showed hope for ASPAC's future. Furthermore, Yoon explained that the innate problem was not the presence of Taiwan, but rather a lack of proactive-ness from the member nations. Additionally, the PRC had no interest in ASPAC; therefore, ASPAC membership was no hindrance in efforts to improve relations with the PRC. This was partly a complaint of the

³⁰ Telegram from Seoul (1588), "ROK Views on ASPAC," 15, March 1973, POL 3 ASPAC, SNE, Box 1854, RG59, National Archives at College Park [hereafter cited as NA].

ROK government toward some nations that had attempted to freeze ASPAC with the PRC as an excuse.

On March 16, Minister Kim held a meeting with Underhill.³¹ Kim asserted that the ROK, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, and New Zealand were the core members of ASPAC. With these five members, ASPAC had value and if these five countries could recommit to saving ASPAC, then Japan would follow suit. Kim reminded Underhill that the US had played a large part in establishing ASPAC and inquired whether the same support could be expected to save it. This was the real reason behind Kim's meeting with Underhill. However, the response was negative. Underhill stated his personal opinion that the ASPAC issue could not be resolved with help from the US.

A letter arrived from the US Department of State two days later supporting Underhill's opinion. The letter said that although the US acknowledged the contribution of ASPAC to the regionalism in East Asia, only the absence of the US in this matter would resolve the problem. The letter also asserted that the survival of ASPAC was up to the member nations considering the passive attitude of some of them, including Malaysia. US intervention would be meaningless under such circumstances and the respective diplomatic efforts would be unfair, the letter read. In other words, the US state department promoted the Asianization of Asia under the Nixon doctrine; thus, the resurrection of ASPAC depended on sovereign efforts, especially from the ROK, and US intervention would only create harm.³²

In fact, the US policy toward ASPAC under Nixon was expressed by Marshall Green, creator of the Nixon Doctrine and assistant deputy director of Northeast Asia and Asian Pacific Affairs. In July 1972, Green said the following: "ASPAC is a regional group that was driven by the initiative by the regional countries without US participation or intervention. Based on the Nixon Doctrine, our long-term policy is to stay away from any form of intervention in the Asian efforts. We believe that the rapid political change in the North Asia upon President's visit to the PRC is a testament of our policy's

³¹ Telegram from Seoul (1592), "ROK Effort to Preserve ASPAC," 16, March 1973, POL 3 ASPAC, SNF, Box 1854, RG59, NA.

³² Telegram to Seoul (049778), "Effort to Preserve ASPAC," 17, March 1973, POL 3 ASPAC, SNF, Box 1854, RG59, NA.

effectiveness.”³³

During the process of forming ASPAC, the US government provided side support to ease the global isolation of the ROK and Taiwan, which were keeping the DPRK in check in the North Asia region. The policy to support Asian regionalism shown in President Johnson's promise of aid support for Southeast Asian cooperation during his speech at Johns Hopkins University in April 1965 was another reason behind US side support for ASPAC. However, the US decided that its continuous intervention actually harmed the Asian initiatives; therefore, it started to promote a non-intervention stance in ASPAC matters.

Such policy continued throughout the Nixon administration. The Asian policy of the Nixon administration, represented by the Nixon Doctrine, only meant that the US would decrease its presence in Asia. From the Asian regionalism perspective, the intention was to focus on the relationship with the regional body to avoid direct intervention in Asian affairs and also to respect the sovereignty of each Asian nation (Jong-Won Lee 1993, 220-226). In sum, if the regionalism policy of the Johnson administration was to gain advantage in the Vietnam War, the Nixon administration's Asian diplomacy had its focus on using regional organization to reduce an excessive external defense commitment.

Therefore, as represented by the Nixon Doctrine, the US was consistent in claiming that ASPAC was a regional cooperative body born out of Asian initiatives and that its existence was the responsibility of the relevant countries and the US should not interfere.

2) *Failure to Convince Taiwan*

After the ROK failed to achieve US support, its last hope was to convince Taiwan to secure the ASPAC's existence. Minister Kim called the Taiwanese ambassador to Korea, Lo Yingde, to the Foreign Ministry to convey where the

³³ Airgram to Bangkok (A-7722), Canberra, Djakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Rangoon, Saigon, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei, Tokyo, Wellington, “ECOCEN: GNZ Concern over U.S. Involvement with ASPAC Agency,” 31, July 1972, POL 3 ASPAC, SNF, Box 1854, RG59, NA.

ROK stood.³⁴ Kim laid out the precondition that the Taiwanese government had to make the decision and that, regardless of the decision, the bilateral relations between the ROK and Taiwan would not change. Then, Kim asked whether the maintenance of ASPAC or the formation of a new regional body as promoted by Japan and Australia in which the PRC participates had a closer fit with Taiwan's interests. However, Lo was not convinced that not sending a representative to the next ministerial meeting would prevent ASPAC from collapsing and fight off the Japanese effort to form a new regional body.

On April 7, Minister Kim called Lo back and asked for an answer again.³⁵ Kim asserted that if Taiwan would cooperate, then the ROK would do its utmost to convince the member nations and that this would be the last appeal to Taiwan. What lay underneath this comment was Kim's belief that once Taiwan was convinced not to attend the ministerial meeting, then he would gain leverage to persuade Japan to help sustain ASPAC when he visited Foreign Minister Ohira of Japan on April 13.

On the day before the meeting between Kim and Lo, Taiwanese Foreign Minister Shen Chang-hwan also called Gyewon Kim, the ROK ambassador to Taiwan, to push him regarding the ROK proposal to China to discuss the continental shelf issue. This concerns the March 16 event when the ROK refuted the article by Xinhua that criticized the ROK for using underwater resources in the South Sea and the East China Sea. In this refutation, the ROK used the PRC's official name for the first time, which meant that the ROK was becoming more flexible toward the PRC than before (*Dong-A Ilbo* March 17, 1973). Shen thought this was a populist response and inquired about the real intention behind it. At that time, the ROK government was pursuing the Hallstein policy of its own and becoming more flexible toward communist nations, including the PRC. Therefore, Taiwan's concern was justified. Additionally, Shen asserted that the ROK was promoting activities

³⁴ Meeting minutes [Foreign Minister Kim/ROK Ambassador to China Youngdeok Na] 3, April 1973, 『Meeting minutes with Ambassador Na, 1973-1974』 ROK diplomatic document C-0075-06.

³⁵ Above document.

to make Taiwan withdraw its ASPAC membership by convincing third countries and asked, "Is ROK so desperate to sustain ASPAC that it will harm the friendly relations with Taiwan?"³⁶

Considering these heated circumstances, the Taiwanese government was quite provoked by the April 7 suggestion made by Minister Kim. On April 9, Shen called Ambassador Kim to his office and provided the following memorandum:

- (1) What Minister Kim said to ambassador Na on April 7th regarding ASPAC is a shock to the Taiwanese government and unacceptable as a sovereign nation.
- (2) (omitted)
- (3) It is unrealistic to think that ASPAC's continued existence will prevent the creation of a new regional body. If Japan or Australia identifies the need and sees it as possible, nothing can prevent it.
- (4) (omitted)
- (5) We will consider all suggestion that affect the Taiwanese representation as aggressive. Thus, we call on the ROK government to avoid any action that will adversely affect our vital interest.³⁷

Shen added to the memorandum that the ASPAC issue had to be resolved from the sovereignty perspective and that this should not harm the traditional positive relations that the two countries had.

On April 10, Lo delivered the same memorandum to Minister Kim. Immediately upon reading the note, Kim expressed his uneasiness that the memo was a result of misunderstanding and that the intention of the ROK was falsely received.³⁸ However, the memorandum was sufficient to make the ROK recognize that it reflected the opinion of the Taiwanese public as well as that of the executive branch, and also that Taiwan had no intention of

³⁶ Entire letter from ROK ambassador to Taiwan to Kim (CHW-0409) 3, April 1973 『Member nations attitude towards the future of ASPAC』 ROK diplomatic document C-0063-02.

³⁷ Entire letter from ROK ambassador to Taiwan to Kim (CHW-0409) 1973, above document.

³⁸ Meeting minutes [Foreign Minister Kim/ROK Ambassador to China Youngdeok Na], above document.

voluntarily removing itself from ASPAC.

Thus, the ROK effort to convince Taiwan to voluntarily withdraw its ASPAC membership and save the organization met with failure. Taiwan probably chose the collapse of ASPAC over voluntary resignation only to be replaced by the PRC, which was the worst possible scenario under circumstances in which even a longtime friend, the ROK, chose to better relations with the PRC. Meanwhile, the ROK, which was in a dilemma between maintaining friendly relations with Taiwan and securing ASPAC, had no sufficient reason to choose ASPAC over harming relations with Taiwan. Thus, their bilateral relationship started to seek a remedy.

4. The Second Bangkok Standing Committee Meeting (1973.6.1)

The second meeting was held on June 1, 1973, and again, seven countries attended, except for Malaysia and Australia. It had been two months since the first meeting. The main agenda was clearly divided even before the meeting. Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Taiwan insisted on delaying the meeting. This request was met with agreement by the ROK and Vietnam, and the decision was made to “postpone (the next meeting) until the appropriate time comes.” Therefore, ASPAC met its demise seven years after its beginning in Seoul in 1966.

As ASPAC was announced as nullified, the sub-agencies became an issue of contention, including the Cultural and Social Center (ROK), Registry of Scientific and Technical Services (Australia), Economic Cooperation Center (Thailand), Food and Fertilizer Technology Center (Taiwan), and Food Processing Center (the Philippines), which was under construction. During the meeting, the ROK proposed the creation of a consultative body to sustain these sub-agencies, which many countries did not want to see disappear. Behind such a proposal hid the ROK intention to save ASPAC in case the standing committee lost its authority.³⁹ However, Japan and New Zealand

³⁹ The ROK foreign ministry issued a directive to the ROK representative to ASPAC to form a body to discuss the future of ASPAC. Entire letter from Kim to the ROK ambassador to Thailand (WTH-0575) 30, May 1973 『ASPAC standing committee (1973) 1-2. Bangkok』 ROK diplomatic document C-0063-04.

disagreed. Consequently, the Thai government decided to “discuss with the respective countries the detailed after measures.”⁴⁰

After that, the ROK government set forth a plan to make the aforementioned consultative body into a new regional cooperative body without the membership of Taiwan. However, it failed to realize since Thailand showed no interest in the plan.⁴¹

VI. Conclusion

As the ROK was an exception in détente, the Asian détente of the early 1970s posed another challenge (Victor D. Cha 2004, 178). Faced with the North-South confrontation, the ROK government had to be swift in adapting to changes in the political climate in the nearby countries, and its effort to save ASPAC stemmed from this reaction. To the ROK of the 1970s, ASPAC was a breakwater against the DPRK's influence in Southeast Asia and the only consultative body to keep the Japanese Asian policy in check. Therefore, the collapse of ASPAC could make the ROK's Southeast policy basis significantly weaker, which the ROK has built since the mid-1960s. Additionally, as many countries tried to improve their relations with the PRC, this was the only way for the ROK to avoid the same isolated destiny as Taiwan.

As the US-PRC reconciliation became a reality, the ROK government attempted to change the nature of ASPAC and to survive through cooperation with ASEAN. The ROK understood that by promoting cooperation with the neutral ASEAN, ASPAC could weaken its political affiliation and highlight its nature as an economic organization. By doing so, the ROK believed that ASPAC could survive in the changed global order. However, the normalization of PRC-Japan relations immediately after the Seoul ministerial meeting increased the ROK's concern exponentially. To save ASPAC from the brink, the ROK asked the US for help and asked Taiwan to voluntarily leave

⁴⁰ Foreign ministry report to the president “The result of the 2nd standing committee meeting” 2, June 1973, above document.

⁴¹ Entire letter from Kim to the ROK ambassador to Thailand (WTH-0631) 14, June 1973 『Member nations attitude towards the future of ASPAC』 ROK diplomatic document C-0063-02.

the organization; however, the responses from both were negative. The US saw Asian intervention as meaningless because it promoted the Asianization of Asian issues, and Taiwan saw the ROK as hostile and against its own vital interests.

Despite the ROK effort, ASPAC met its demise. The main reason could be the collapse of the Cold War structure in Asia due to improved relations between the US and the PRC. Of course, ASPAC was continually accompanied by conflicts around its purposes and direction. Also, analysis so far has shown that even faced with the dire situation regarding its existence, ASPAC could not find agreement in terms of its purpose. However, this was attributed to the fact that each member nation was in such a different situation with respect to economic development and political affiliation. It must not be overlooked that shared recognition existed among the member nations regarding ASPAC's purpose that was to enable a dialogue on the regional issues.⁴² From this perspective, the cause of ASPAC's collapse was not internal issues, but rather external changes. The premise of ASPAC was the Cold War global order represented by the confrontation between the US and the PRC. As they improved their relations, ASPAC's meaning became diluted. The improvement in US-PRC relations and the normalization of PRC-Japan relations greatly affected the collapse and these two should not be left out in discussing ASPAC.

The second reason was the premature response to the Taiwan issue. The US, which enjoyed absolute power over East Asia's security, decided to reconcile with the PRC. Under such circumstances, ASPAC could only resort to changing the nature of the organization and becoming more flexible so that it could adapt to the new changes. Against this backdrop, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand swiftly normalized their relations with the PRC and Taiwan became the biggest hurdle in safeguarding ASPAC.

Deciding that the Taiwan issue was the key to sustaining ASPAC, the ROK tried to persuade Taiwan to voluntarily give up its membership. However, this idea was met with severe opposition from Taiwan. As previously stated, the Taiwanese government saw this matter as a global representation issue as

⁴² From this perspective, Hatori's sense (Ryuji Hattori 2010, 207) that the collapse of ASPAC contributed to ease the Cold War tension in East Asia needs to be revised.

well as one of vital national interest. Also, since many friends had decided to improve their relations with the PRC, Taiwan could not possibly leave ASPAC out of concern that the PRC might take its seat. Thus, the ROK attempt failed. There was no room for an organization in which China was represented by Taiwan when the global trend was moving toward reconciliation with the PRC.

Finally, let us look at the present implications by reviewing the international relations surrounding ASPAC's demise. The idea to establish an East Asia community emerged after the Asian financial Crisis of 1997. This idea progressed through ASEAN+3 and the regular holding of the East Asia Summit (EAS) after 2005. Ever since the idea was brought up, the focal issue has been the relationship between such a cooperative body and the US. In this regard, ASPAC provided us with a lot of implications. The US government's Asian policy had a great impact in establishing and dismantling ASPAC. In other words, ASPAC was born during the mid-1960s when the US started to deeply engage in the Vietnam War, and it met its demise when the regional order started to change as a result of improvement in US-PRC relations. The US helped establish ASPAC by side-supporting the ROK in its Asia foreign minister's meeting proposal in 1964. After its establishment, the US maintained its non-intervention stance. ASPAC excluded participation by out-of-region powerhouses, and its membership was only available to the regional countries. Thus, its merit was that free discussion was possible without any intervention from the global powers. However, it was not able to flexibly respond to changes in the US Asian policy. This implies that a regional body with only regional countries as its members, completely void of the US intervention that influenced the region nonetheless, was vulnerable to external factors, namely, the US policy change. This provides an important implication to the latest idea of forming East Asia Community.

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