

World Knowledge Forum 2013

Thaksin Shinawatra, Why One Asia Metamorphosis

One of the key topics at the 14th World Knowledge Forum thus far has been the rise of Asia as a major power in the global system. In his speech on Tuesday, Thaksin Shinawara explained that, as a result of the economic crises in the West, "Asia has been elected by default to assume the mantle as the new agent of growth for the world."

Mr. Shinawatra, the former Prime Minister of Thailand, spoke directly on the Forum's theme of "One Asia Metamorphosis," presenting his vision of 'One Asia' and what actions need to be taken to reach the goal of a pan-Asian economy.

Mr. Shinawatra expanded on the necessity for a strong, united Asia in the current world economy, citing the recent financial crisis of 2007-2009 and the Eurozone Crisis as evidence for the failure of the 20th century growth patterns. In his own words, he stated, "The economic landscape has clearly changed, and the center of world's economic dynamism has clearly shifted to Asia."

As the new center of the global economy, Mr. Shinawatra emphasized the need for Asian integration. "Now more than ever, Asia is poised to play a leadership role in the global economy," he said, "leading the way towards growth and shared prosperity. Now more than ever it is incumbent upon us to join together and strengthen the foundation for pan-Asian incorporation."

Part of Asia's leadership role in the coming century will be to develop a new economic model for growth. Over the past century, Mr. Shinawatra explained, "Asian countries have been deeply influenced by and overly dependent on our relationship to the West. Thus the Asian road to modernity has been bound to the phenomenal growth of consumption in the West."

The crisis of Western economies will force Eastern countries to alter their economic model in order to sustain growth. "In the 20th century," Mr. Shinawatra said, "we in Asia did not have so much economic interaction within our own region, but instead relied heavily on stimulating growth through increasing manufacturing exports for our major customers in the West. To be 'One Asia' is to lesson over-dependence on Western import capacity and to enhance our own trade interlinkage within Asia."

In order to create the 'One Asia' that Mr. Shinawatra envisions, establishing an integrated network of transport infrastructure is something he insists must be done. "It is crucial for the prosperity of our region," he said. "With a view to create greater market to market connections, I propose that we

should give priority to developing transport corridors, especially high-speed transport within mainland Asia.”

Once such a transportation infrastructure is created, “We will no longer be prisoners of geography,” Mr. Shinawatra emphasized. “In this endeavor, thankfully, we are not starting from scratch. Currently, several pieces of the jigsaw for such a mega project already exist,” he continued, citing the high-speed rail systems in China, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand.

Mr. Shinawatra noted e-commerce as another area needed for the development of a pan-Asian economy.

He expounded on the advantages of this new economic development, saying, “The e-commerce platform has allowed more and more local production and businesses to enjoy direct participation in new markets across countries.” Given the clear benefits, Mr. Shinawatra said, “I propose we should vigorously promote these methods, since all Asian countries will gain competitive advantages from such developments.”

Mr. Shinawatra concluded his speech by stressing the need for an environment of political stability in order to achieve the goal of ‘One Asia.’ “I want to emphasize,” he said, “that in order to be successful in creating ‘One Asia,’ there needs to be a conducive climate of peace and stability. We must settle disputes among us, whether political, territorial, trade, or otherwise, if we truly aspire to a common, prosperous future.”