Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.)

What Holds Asian Societies Together?

Insights from the Social Cohesion Radar

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Foreword

In recent decades, Asia's economic significance and political influence have grown enormously, something which applies, above all, to India and China. Much suggests that this development will continue in the future and that the continent will play a decisive role in shaping the 21st century. Thus, Asia's rise has often been seen as the beginning of an "Asian Century," during which the global balance of power will shift towards the Far East and the West's significance will wane.

Even if this expectation seems extreme, one thing is clear: Realizing solutions to pressing challenges will only be possible if Asian players are involved. The globalized world is marked by constantly growing interdependencies in the areas of business, trade, finance, the climate, the environment, and health, not to mention poverty, migration, food supplies, science, technology, and communication. These are all areas in which Asian actors are playing an ever greater role. Whether the topic is economic development, the ability to innovate, securing resources, or competing for talent, addressing almost all of today's major issues already depends to a critical degree on events taking place and decisions being made in Asia.

Economic and political developments usually predominate when people speak of Asia's growing significance for the rest of the world. What is frequently forgotten, however, is that as globalization progresses, Asia's economic and political rise has often been accompanied by fundamental processes of social transformation. These changes have, on the one hand, given rise to substantial hopes for a better future. In many places, on the other, they have led to tension and conflict – developments that are, in turn, a threat to social cohesion and political stability. In terms of their impact, these far-reaching social shifts are just as important as the region's economic and political dynamism.

Against this background, the cohesiveness of Asia's societies is an issue that continues to gain importance. How is social cohesion developing in Asian nations? Which factors are influencing its development and what impact is cohesion having on other areas of life? How can social cohesion be maintained and/or strengthened? These questions are not primarily academic in nature; they are also extremely

relevant in terms of policy. In order to answer them, however, a theoretical and methodological approach to social cohesion is needed.

With the Social Cohesion Radar (SCR), the Bertelsmann Stiftung has developed and empirically tested such an approach. The SCR model divides the phenomenon of cohesion into nine dimensions, which are grouped according to three aspects: social relations, connectedness to society, and a focus on the common good. The SCR approach was initially applied in an international comparison to 34 Western industrial nations and, in a subsequent analysis, to Germany's 16 federal states. In the current study, it was used for the first time to assess non-Western societies, namely 22 countries in South, Southeast, and East Asia.

This collective volume presents the results of the most recent study, providing for the first time detailed data, analyses, and evaluations of social cohesion in Asia. This empirical appraisal opens new perspectives on the phenomenon of social cohesion; these perspectives, consequently, raise new questions, like, for example, the effect of ethnic and cultural diversity on social cohesion or the relationship between social cohesion and democracy. For some of these questions there are no conclusive answers yet. The contributions to this book suggest initial possibilities for finding answers to those questions.

I would especially like to thank the authors for their contributions to this volume and their assistance in ensuring the study was successfully carried out, as well as for their willingness to participate in this project. I would also like to express my thanks here to Klaus Boehnke and Jan Delhey, whose extensive knowledge of the subject and far-sightedness once again played a critical role as they designed and led the study. Thanks, too, to Georgi Dragolov, Mandi Larsen, and Michael Koch, who as members of the research team conducted and evaluated the empirical analyses. In addition, I would like to thank Joseph Chan, Elaine Chan, and Aurel Croissant for supporting the study by providing extensive comments and valuable ideas, something they do in this publication as well. Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to all those experts who took part in this project during its various development phases by contributing comments, notes, and suggestions in workshops, online surveys, and discussions.

For the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the present analysis expands on the studies previously carried out for the Social Cohesion Radar project. We intend to continue our efforts with the goal of reaching a better understanding of what inherently holds Asian societies together. Future research will focus in particular on the interplay between transformation processes, cultural diversity and social cohesion.

Stephan Vopel
Director
Germany and Asia Program
Bertelsmann Stiftung

1 Introduction: What holds Asian Societies together?

Peter Walkenhorst, Kai Unzicker

Abstract

Social cohesion has become a key policy goal around the globe – not only in the Western Hemisphere, but also in Asia. Asia's economic and political rise is part of far-reaching social transformation processes. In many places, these developments have been accompanied by tensions and conflicts, which have, in turn, challenged social cohesion and political stability. The question of how cohesion fares in a society is therefore becoming a pressing issue in Asia as well. Despite growing interest in the concept among policy makers and researchers, no generally shared understanding of social cohesion exists. Most importantly, empirical findings are lacking. For these reasons, the Bertelsmann Stiftung developed its Social Cohesion Radar, whose findings for the societies of South, Southeast, and East Asia have been collected in this volume.

Keywords *Social cohesion • South, Southeast, and East Asia • Societal transformations • Social indicators*

1.1 Introduction

Asia's economic and political rise is one of the most significant developments of the present age. This world region has become the driver of the global economy. Many Asian economies are expanding rapidly and growing ever more complex. Asian businesses, research institutes, think tanks, and political institutions have now become customary and, to an increasing degree, more self-assertive players in the globalized world. In particular, the reemergence of China and India as economic and political powers is changing the world's power structure. A new multipolar global (dis)order is taking shape, one in which the United States and Europe are

losing their economic, political, and cultural predominance. In short, Asia is changing the world (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2007).

At the same time, however, social problems are also increasing in the region. Virtually all Asian societies find themselves in a state of upheaval, and are being drastically altered by profound transformation processes (Croissant 2016). As a result of expanding economies and populations, urbanization is advancing almost everywhere and a new middle class is emerging. Traditions and values are changing due to increasing mobility, education, and prosperity as well as greater interaction with global information and economic flows. In many places, social inequality has become more prevalent. As a result of these developments, tensions, polarization, and conflicts are now present in numerous Asian nations, threatening social cohesion and political stability. The question of how cohesion develops in a society is therefore of growing importance in Asia as well.

If we are to assess this development and shape it strategically, it is imperative that we gain a better understanding of its preconditions and the factors influencing it. How does social cohesion develop in Asia and which factors determine its strength? The goal of this book is to help answer this question. It presents, for the first time, scientifically sound and comparable empirical data for 22 countries in South, Southeast, and East Asia (SSEA) for the years 2004 to 2015. To that end, a theoretically and empirically robust index was developed allowing social cohesion to be measured in as many SSEA nations as possible. The index shows the degree of togetherness in each country, depicts the development over time and presents each nation's cohesion-related strengths and weaknesses. Social cohesion's determinants and outcomes are also analyzed.

The current study makes use of the Social Cohesion Radar (SCR) as applied in three previous empirical studies. The latter examined Western industrial nations, Germany's federal states, and the neighborhoods in a major German city (Dragolov et al. 2016; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2016a; 2014; 2013). We have availed ourselves of the previous studies' theoretical, conceptual, and methodological foundations, as described in detail in Chapters 2 and 3, and adapted them to examine social cohesion in Asia, more specifically in the SSEA nations.

If baroque titles were still in fashion today, this book might well be called "Prolegomena to an Analysis of Social Cohesion in Asia, 2004–2015, Based on Data Available for International Comparison." Such a title would offer the advantage of being precise, since in many respects this pioneering study makes a foray into unknown territory. Yet its findings give rise to as many questions as they answer. In terms of research, the study therefore marks a starting and not an end point. To that extent, the following sections reiterate why social cohesion is an important topic and discuss why Asia was the second world region for which data were collected and cohesion examined at the national level. Subsequently, each of the contributions to this book is presented.

1.2 Social Cohesion as a Policy Objective and Research Challenge

As a concept, social cohesion is not easily defined. It describes a not yet adequately understood quality of societies – one that makes them robust, sustainable, and livable. Its connotations are usually positive as a result. Moreover, social cohesion is often seen as the prerequisite for economic success and a functioning democracy. In the past two decades, the topic has received increasing attention in both the academic and policy discourse: "'Social cohesion', like 'globalization', has become another buzzword of the day" (Chan et al. 2006: 273; Schiefer & Van der Noll 2016; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2012).

The explicit or implicit assumption is often that social cohesion is or could be weakened by the consequences of modernization and globalization. While in the academic discourse this assumption has been questioned, differentiated, and, at least to some degree for Western industrial nations, refuted (Dragolov et al. 2016; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2014; 2013), the policy discourse is still marked by concerns about diminishing social cohesion and the resulting social and political instability.

An additional aspect must also be noted: Societies with a high degree of social cohesion are considered more adaptable and robust, since they can react more flexibly to external changes. In times of rapid transformation, this ability to amend and adapt is becoming increasingly important. The ability of the political system to ensure that its society remains inherently cohesive is thus seen by many experts as an essential benchmark – perhaps even the most decisive one – for ensuring the system's long-term stability in a globalizing environment (Bagger 2015: 100). In other words, social cohesion strengthens a society's ability to withstand difficulties and regenerate itself. It is a key factor ensuring resilience, i.e., the ability to bear (usually unforeseen) crises and catastrophes without basic structures or processes undergoing change.

For these reasons, social cohesion is seen as an important policy goal by many governments, by supranational and international organizations, such as the EU, OECD, World Bank, and Council of Europe, and by nongovernmental organizations, think tanks, and other actors of civil society. Until now, the policy discourse on maintaining and strengthening social cohesion has taken place mostly in Western nations. With the exception of the government of Hong Kong, political players in Asia have shown little interest in the topic (Chan & Chan 2006). This lack of interest is surprising, since the question of social cohesion is a major challenge for policy makers in numerous Asian countries.

Despite the growing popularity of the concept among researchers and politicians, no standard definition of the term "social cohesion" exists; nor is there a generally accepted series of indicators for measuring it. Policy actors at the national and international level use very different approaches and seek support from what are in some cases competing academic concepts. The result is that, despite the importance of the topic, empirical findings are still sorely needed. The Bertelsmann Stiftung

therefore initiated the Social Cohesion Radar project in order to advance research in this field and stimulate the relevant policy debate. The central objective is to measure social cohesion and to collect empirical data to serve as a basis for the political discussion.

The term "radar" was chosen after considerable deliberation. Radars make things visible that cannot be seen with the naked eye, either because they are hidden or because they are too far away. The Social Cohesion Radar is thus a tool that makes it possible to gain a direct "insight" into a community's social fabric. Ideally, the SCR can even make it possible to identify certain risks and undesirable developments at an early stage.

1.3 What is Social Cohesion?

A project that aspires to measure social cohesion must necessarily present a operationalizable definition of the object of its investigations. According to the British economist Anthony Atkinson (2005), if indicators are to be scientifically sound and policy effective, they must (a) target the core question and facilitate judgments of value, (b) be robust and statistically valid, (c) be comparable internationally, (d) be based on available data while also being receptive to change, and (e) react to targeted policy measures without being susceptible to manipulation. Using these five criteria, the Bertelsmann Stiftung has driven forward social cohesion's empirical conceptualization in recent years in order to give an empirical foundation to the social and policy debate on cohesion. After all, social cohesion has, according to Canadian social scientist Paul Bernard (1999), long been solely what he calls a "quasi-concept." Such quasi-concepts are characterized, on the one hand, by a certain realism, i.e., they indeed reflect in concrete terms empirical research, yet they are, on the other, so open and vague that they can be used in different contexts and for different policy goals.

There is general agreement in the literature that cohesion is a multidimensional and gradual quality evinced by a collective body. This means that cohesion comprises of different, more or less interdependent components which can be present to various degrees (Schiefer & Van der Noll 2016). Cohesion can be understood as a defining characteristic which describes the quality of solidarity within a collective body. Social cohesion is thus the quality of communal "togetherness" exhibited by a community that is (usually) constituted as a state. Yet as much as researchers might agree on these basic principles, there is still a lack of consensus as to which aspects of societal life constitute social cohesion.

We believe that a highly cohesive society is characterized by resilient social relationships, a positive emotional connectedness between its members and the community, and a pronounced focus on the common good. Three core aspects or domains of social cohesion thus distinguish the approach proposed here: social

relations, connectedness, and the focus on the common good. Social relations represent the horizontal network that exists between individuals and social groups. Connectedness refers to the positive ties uniting people and the community as such and its institutions. Focus on the common good describes the actions and attitudes of society's members, through which responsibility for others and the community is expressed.

This multidimensional concept of social cohesion, which is described in detail in Chapter 2, takes as its template a modern, inclusive, cohesive society, one that does not by definition view heterogeneity (e.g. religious or ethnic) as an expression of limited cohesion. In this regard, it is also true that an ethnically homogeneous population and a consensus on values are not defining characteristics of cohesion, something that does, however, apply to the acceptance of differing values and of diversity per se. This reflects the normative belief that social cohesion among the majority cannot exist at the expense of excluded minorities.

A second aspect is also not included in this approach: the distribution of goods within society. It has been repeatedly argued that equality and an equal distribution of wealth is one of cohesion's core elements. We disagree. While we do recognize that, among others, income and wealth inequality are key factors impacting social cohesion, we maintain that they should not also be constituent components: The distribution of material goods can influence social cohesion, but for that to be the case, cohesion and distribution must be separated conceptually.

1.4 Testing the Approach in Western Societies

The multidimensional approach to social cohesion used in this book has been already operationalized and empirically tested in three preceding studies. In the first study, social cohesion and its development were measured and compared in 34 industrial nations for the years 1989 to 2012 (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2013). These countries were the 27 EU member states (prior to the accession of Croatia) and seven other Western industrial nations (United States, Canada, Norway, Switzerland, Israel, Australia, and New Zealand). The second study examined social cohesion in Germany by comparing the country's 16 federal states (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2014). Both of these studies were based on secondary data analysis. In the third study, data were collected using telephone interviews for 78 (out of 88) neighborhoods in the city of Bremen, Germany (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2016a).

In both the international comparison of the 34 OECD and EU member states and the study of Germany's federal states, a clear correlation can be seen between the societies' levels of prosperity and social cohesion: the wealthier the nation or German federal state (measured in per capita GDP), the greater the degree of togetherness. Conversely, the higher the level of poverty or unemployment, the less cohesion there is. It is therefore not surprising that the Nordic nations – Denmark, above all –

exhibit the strongest social cohesion, and that, in the comparison of German federal states, Hamburg and Baden–Württemberg perform particularly well. The lowest levels of cohesion can be found in the Southern and, above all, Southeastern European countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece, and in Germany's eastern federal states (Dragolov et al. 2016: 36 and 98). Owing to the omission of the wealth distribution from the concept of cohesion, we were able to ascertain that, independent of wealth itself, a more equal distribution (measured as a Gini income coefficient) leads to stronger cohesion. It is also clear that countries which are developing into knowledge societies exhibit higher levels of cohesion, as revealed by a comparison based on the World Bank's Knowledge Index. Modernization and technological change thus do not at all lead, as many cultural pessimists presume, to a society's dissolution. The international comparison further shows that the degree of economic, political, and social integration in the process of globalization (as measured by ETH Zurich's KOF Index of Globalization) has no impact on the quality of communal life (Dragolov et al. 2016: 60ff).

In sum, our examinations of social cohesion in the OECD and EU member states show that modernization and social cohesion are not mutually exclusive. Successful modernization bolsters social cohesion. When modernization works, societies hold more strongly together.

One subject that has been discussed at length for quite some time is how immigration and ethnic and cultural diversity affect cohesion. In view of Robert Putnam's research on the US (Putnam 2007), it has been often argued that immigration and cultural diversity reduce solidarity and social capital. Yet the findings for Europe generally tend to be less clear than those for the US (Van der Meer & Tolsma 2014). Our international comparison of Western countries revealed no significant correlation, either negative or positive, between immigration and social cohesion. As to Germany's federal states, the findings revealed that those states with the highest percentage of foreigners also exhibit the greatest cohesion (Dragolov et al. 2016: 103). Thus, diversity per se does not seem to represent a fundamental threat to cohesion; what plays a greater role is how it relates to overall social inequality and physical segregation (cf. Uslaner 2012). Recent developments in Germany resulting from the increased influx of refugees since mid-2015 seem to support this: Rejection and conflict mostly seem to take place in locations with relatively low numbers of immigrants and refugees, while in more diverse regions and federal states, civil society approaches the challenge more proactively and constructively (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2016b).

One finding deserving special mention is that in both the international comparison and the analysis of Germany's federal states, a strong correlation can be seen between social cohesion, on the one hand, and life satisfaction and a personal sense of well-being, on the other (Dragolov et al. 2016: 84ff and 104). This is true regardless of wealth levels or income distribution. Yet it can also be seen that cohesion's positive impact on individual life satisfaction is stronger in richer

countries than in poorer ones, i.e., in a poor country satisfaction with life is more dependent on material well-being and less so on society's cohesion than is the case in a rich country (Dragolov et al 2016: 88). At the same time, the research shows that, on an individual level, cohesion benefits everyone in a society, since when cohesion rises, life satisfaction also rises for all groups (rich and poor, men and women, young and old, educated and uneducated, healthy and infirm) (ibid.: 89).

One last key finding should also be noted. A range of social cohesion "regimes" exists among the previously examined OECD and EU member states; in order of decreasing cohesion these are: a Nordic regime, consisting of egalitarian welfare states; an English-speaking and small Western European regime; a Northwestern European regime; a Mediterranean and Eastern European regime; a Levantine regime; and a Southeastern European regime. Assuming that the first three regimes can be regarded role models of strong cohesion, it becomes evident there is not one sole path to cohesion, but a multitude of possibilities (Dragolov et al. 2016: 51ff).

1.5 Can the Approach Used for the Social Cohesion Radar be Applied to Asian Societies?

The previous Bertelsmann Stiftung studies of social cohesion have almost exclusively examined European or Western-oriented industrial nations. In some cases, the societies in question are former Eastern bloc nations now classified as transformation states. With the exception of Israel, all of the countries studied are Christian-majority nations. All are democracies. (The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) now classifies Hungary, however, as a "defective democracy.") Naturally, these states enjoy various levels of prosperity, but when compared globally the differences tend to be small. According to the Human Development Index (HDI), 32 of the 34 countries examined have attained "very high human development." Romania and Bulgaria, in contrast, have attained "high human development." In terms of gross national income (GNI) per capita, the figures for the 34 nations range from $67,614 in Norway to only $16,261 in Bulgaria. That is, the economically weakest country has GNI that corresponds to 24% of the economically strongest nation (UNDP 2016: 198–201). In other words, despite certain non-negligible differences in history, culture, the political system, and the level of prosperity, the previously analyzed countries have more qualities uniting them than separating them.

This gives rise to a number of key questions: Do the above discussed findings also apply to non-Western nations and those with other cultural orientations? How does social cohesion arise in non-democratic and/or authoritarian political systems? And how cohesive are those societies that not only have low levels of prosperity, but also levels of extreme poverty unknown in Western societies? In order to find answers to these questions, we decided to look at social cohesion in Asia, since Asia is not only the most populous, but also culturally, socio-economically, and politically

the most heterogeneous continent – a patchwork of varying cultures, states, societies, and political systems. This extraordinary diversity promises to reveal new insights about the forms and characteristics of social cohesion, about the factors that influence its genesis, and about its impact on other areas of life.

Another reason for our choice of Asia as the second world region for studying social cohesion, instead of, for example, Africa or Latin America, is its constantly growing economic and political significance. Asia has become a lynchpin of the global economy; politically it is playing an ever greater role as well. Today, almost 60% of the globe's population lives in Asia, and, with the exception of Japan and China, the populations in Asian societies are growing. The economies of many Asian nations are also expanding rapidly. China and India remain two of the fastest growing major economies. Asian companies have now become an integral part of global value chains (Biswas 2016). The economic resurgence of China and India has been accompanied by ever more insistent demands by both countries for being treated as full-fledged political players in the developing multipolar world order.

At the same time, unlike almost any other global region, Asia is home to social and political fragilities and (often violent) conflicts. In recent decades, moreover, these conflicts have increasingly shifted from the inter-state to the intra-state level. In addition, massive, extreme poverty, ethnic and cultural fragmentation, religious fundamentalism, transnational terrorism, and weak or failing states are all making many Asian societies particularly vulnerable to social and political dislocations. Where conflict is present, these weaknesses hinder efforts to successfully manage it (Croissant 2007).

The fragilities and conflicts are increasing the complexity of the economic, social, and political transformation processes that almost all societies in Asia have been undergoing. Above all, this applies to the growth of their economies and populations and, in particular, the ensuing urbanization and emergence of new middle classes (Varma 2014; Li 2010). This often leads to a process of social modernization, which is characterized by growing mobility and education, increasing prosperity, and improved health care. The above described developments, along with the inclusion in global information and economic flows, are prone to alter traditions and values. At the same time, however, social inequality has been on the rise in many locations. Moreover, large parts of the population in many countries have not benefitted from the economic and social progress yet and remain marginalized.

Complex interdependencies exist between these (and other) transformation processes and the way that social cohesion develops. In other words, transformation processes can either strengthen or weaken cohesion and – in conjunction with structural fragilities – exacerbate acute or latent conflicts. At the same time, social cohesion is itself an important factor influencing many transformation processes.

Yet the development of social cohesion in Asia is not only impacting the societies there, but also throughout the world, including Germany and Europe. A lessening of cohesion can impede the ability of Asian societies to develop and carry out reforms.

It can also increase the pressure to migrate and, in combination with other factors, become the catalyst for an outflow of refugees. Due to their political stability and economic prosperity, Germany and Europe are particularly attractive to migrants and refugees from other global regions and they therefore have a strong interest in ensuring that social cohesion in Asian nations can be shaped in a sustainable way.

1.6 Which "Asia" Are We Analyzing?

Every examination of Asia, especially if it undertakes a comparative approach, faces the challenge of defining the object of its analysis, since "Asia" is a term both ambiguous and diffuse. Asia's geographic borders are not unequivocally defined, but contingent upon the relevant context. In the present study, "Asia" is used to denote the three culturally distinct sub-regions of South, Southeast, and East Asia (SSEA). The analysis examines social cohesion in 22 countries located in these sub-regions for the time periods 2004 to 2008 and 2009 to 2015. Among the societies of South Asia, the Social Cohesion Radar comprises the countries Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka; among those of Southeast Asia – Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam; and finally, as to East Asia – China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Mongolia, and Taiwan.

These SSEA societies differ significantly not only from their Western counterparts, but also from each other. SSEA's cultural, socio-economic, and political map is a patchwork whose diversity reflects the regions' complexities. In terms of religious diversity, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian societies can be found there. Many countries are also characterized by great linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and/or religious diversity (e.g. Indonesia and India), while others tend to be more ethnically and culturally homogenous (e.g. Japan and Korea).

In terms of socio-economic diversity, differences between particular SSEA states could also not be greater. Above all, the region evinces four different degrees of development as reflected in the Human Development Index (HDI). Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Japan, for example, rank in the top tier of HDI nations and are classified as having attained "very high human development." Malaysia, China, and Mongolia are described as having attained "high human development," while most of the other states such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Myanmar are characterized by "medium human development." The list of SSEA nations examined here also includes a country – Afghanistan – which, according to the 2016 HDI, has attained only "low human development." The same level of human development was attributed to Pakistan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh in 2015, the last year for which SCR data were calculated (UNDP 2015: 208–211). The gross national income (GNI) per capita ranges from $1,871 in Afghanistan to

Figure 1.1 SSEA countries included in the Social Cohesion Radar

$78,162 in Singapore, indicating that the poorest country has a level of prosperity that corresponds to only 2.4% of the richest (UNDP 2016: 198–201).

SSEA, moreover, is a global region of political extremes. The Asian countries included in the study not only exhibit major differences in terms of their cultural diversity and wealth, but also in terms of their political systems. If one considers the classification used for the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), the spectrum ranges from an "established democracy," such as Japan, and "democracies in consolidation," such as South Korea and Taiwan, to "defective democracies," such as India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and "highly defective democracies," such as Nepal and Bangladesh, to "moderate autocracies," such as Singapore, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, and "hard-line autocracies" such as China, Pakistan, Vietnam, and Thailand (Croissant 2016: 106).