

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

We have clarified the problem for analysis in Chapter One, and identified the gaps in the existing literature of transnational sub-regional cooperation in the East Asia Pacific in Chapter Two. Chapter Three is a continuous study of previous two chapters. The approach utilised to answer the research questions and to fill the gaps in the literature will be presented in this chapter.

It contains two sections in this chapter: methodology and methods. In the first section, the significance of utilising a proper type to examine the selected cases will be addressed. In addition, with the application of comparative methodology, this thesis is expected to construct a conclusion in the end to explain the establishment and transformation of the SREZs, as well as to interpret their relations to the region-building in the East Asia Pacific.

The second section introduces the data-collection strategy. There are mainly two kinds of data utilised for analysis: primary and secondary. A

discussion about the key actors involved in the transnational sub-regional cooperation will be addressed again for the purpose of selecting relevant documents, agreements, as well as economic data. Since quantitative data sometimes serves better in showing the outcome but not in explaining the course, this study undertake qualitative interview in fieldwork research for the purpose of exploring the dynamic progress of the SC SREZ and the meaning behind the scene<sup>1</sup>.

As some economies in the East Asia Pacific are not as open as others in revealing the information, there is also research limitation in terms of data-collection in this thesis. Therefore, the suitability of using the secondary sources will be explained.

## **Methodology**

This thesis aims to explore the dynamics of transnational sub-regional cooperation and the extent to which it relates to shaping the East Asia Pacific region as a whole through examining three selected cases: SIJORI, TRADP, and SC SREZ. The significance of the concepts and theories that sustain this

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<sup>1</sup> The discussion about the SC SREZ's qualification for further fieldwork research can be found in Chapter One.

research has already been addressed in Chapter One and Chapter Two. So the next step is to decide what model and theory would best examine the three cases.

In Neuman's viewpoint (2003:42), almost all research involves some theories. Therefore, the question is less whether you should use theories than how you should use them. As concerning with the selection of the model and the theory, Abrams (1982:78) believes that our target of perception "are selected and constructed out of the infinity of phenomena by being first defined as meaningful within our sense of cultural significance". In other words, we tend to select subjectively about what is important.

In response to the problem mentioned above, the scholars engaged in social studies have, therefore, offered an explanation. Weber (1949:90) asserts that researchers can develop an ideal type for study by bringing together certain relationships and events of historical life into a complex, "which is conceived as an internally consistent system". Such ideal type can help us to "develop our skill in imputation in research: it is no 'hypothesis' but it offers guidance to the construction of hypotheses. It is not a description of reality but it aims to give

unambiguous means of expression to such a description”. Once the ideal type is defined, we can then offer objective explanation to the issue the research is concerned.

Based on the concept of ideal type discussed above, and after reviewing the academic works on East Asian integration in the literature, the “EGPIB” factors were proposed as an ideal type in this research. It is expected that the dynamic transformation of transnational sub-regional cooperation in the East Asia Pacific can be comprehended and explained by considering the influence of the EGPIB factors on SIJORI, TRADP, and SC SREZ<sup>2</sup>.

This thesis aims to take comparative methodology to analyse SIJORI, TRADP and SC SREZ. Before making the analysis, the content of comparative methodology requires a discussion first. The most profound understanding about comparative methodology is in Tilly’s book “Big Structure, Large Processes, Huge Comparison” (Tilly, 1984).

Tilly (*ibid*) points out that there are four types of comparative studies: an

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<sup>2</sup> Given that EGPIB factors have not yet been justified by other scholars as a “model” in the research field of international political economy, I take a conservative stand considering them as five individual factors rather than a model even though they carry the effect a model has in examining the research topic.

individualising comparison, a universalising comparison, a variation-finding comparison, and an encompassing comparison. As for the first type, an individualising comparison is used “to contrast specific instances of a given phenomenon as a means of grasping the particularities of each case” (*ibid*, 82). The second type, a universalising comparison, “aims to establish that every instance of a phenomenon follows essentially the same rule” (*ibid*, 82). And the third type, a variation-finding comparison, “is supposed to establish a principle of variation in the character or intensity of a phenomenon by examining systematic differences among instances” (*ibid*, 82). Finally, the fourth type, an encompassing comparison, “places different instances at various locations within the same system, on the way to explaining their characteristics as a function of their varying relations to the system as a whole” (*ibid*, 83).

These four types of comparative studies enable the researchers engaged in social studies to make effective comparison beyond the strict rationale of scientific comparison. And in this research, the first three comparative methods will be adopted to form an analytical framework. It is anticipated with the application of comparative methodology to analyse SIJORI, TRADP, and SC SREZ, this research could, in the end, draw an integrated understanding of

transnational sub-regional cooperation's establishment and transformation, as well as its relation to the region-building in the East Asia Pacific.

## **Methods**

This thesis is considered as an empirical research based on the application of the comparative methodology on three case studies. The first section of this chapter has dealt with the issue concerning with the ideal type, EGPIB factors, which is the chief analytical framework for exploring SIJORI, TRADP, and SC SREZ.

The second section of this chapter contains two parts. In the first part, several research methods will be introduced to form data-collection strategy. Issues concerning with how data are selected, and analysed, as well as what findings this research seeks to reveal will be discussed. And in the second part, the design of the fieldwork research will be presented.

### *(1) Data-collection Strategy*

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, a clear establishment of the key actors involving in the case studies would entail identifying key documents for collection.

(a) SIJORI.

The key actors are as follows:

1. The central government of Singapore.
2. The Singaporean businesses.
3. The local government of Johor.
4. The local government of Riau.

(b) TRADP.

The key actors are as follows:

1. The UNDP.
2. The local governments of Hunchun and Yanji cities, China.
3. The provincial governments of Jilin Province, China.
4. The central government of China.
5. The local governments of Posyet, Vladivostock, and Nakhodka cities,  
Russia.
6. The central government of Russia.
7. The local governments of Rajin, and Chongjin cities, North Korea.
8. The central government of North Korea.

9. Businesses from South Korea and Japan.

(c) SC SREZ.

The key actors are as follows:

1. The central government of China.
2. The local governments of the Pearl River Delta cities, Guangdong Province, China.
3. The provincial government of Guangdong Province, China.
4. The government of Hong Kong.
5. The Businesses from Hong Kong
6. The Businesses from Taiwan.
7. The Strait Exchange Fund, Taiwan

The actors mentioned above constitute micro-regionalism and micro-regionalisation-- the two main forces that drive the development of SREZs. In order to understand whether these two forces work together or work against each other in the case studies, this research will assess these actors' involvement in each case through studying their policy documents, agreements, as well as the economic data, trade and investment flows over



time for example.

In order to keep a consistent manner in the next three chapters, each chapter will start with a section of historical review. Documents and data will then be analysed with the EGPIB factors. The main expectation is to find out what factor accounts the most for initiating a SREZ and then sustaining its progress. In addition to that, how much do micro-regionalism and micro-regionalisation engage in a SREZ's development? Do they always interact with each other or do they sometimes work alone in transnational sub-regional cooperation?

Historical materials are an important source of information for studying international relations (Yi, 1980: 98). The purpose of studying the past facts is to clarify and explain how and why things have become what they are now. Therefore, by analysing the cause and effect of historical interactions between the economies participating in the transnational sub-regional cooperation, we should be able to take a more perspective view on the trend for integration in the East Asia Pacific. Historical materials cannot only be collected from the literature, but also other sources such as news report, the record of leaders'

speech, and so on.

No history review is complete without official documents. Ye and Ye (2000: 140) recommend documentary research, asserting that with systematic and objective evaluation, such method is particularly helpful in terms of ascertaining the authenticity of the past facts “indirectly”. Denscombe (1998: 159) furthermore points out that documentary research has two facets: “one an essential part of any investigation and the other a specific method of investigation which offers itself as an alternative to questionnaires, interviews or observation as a means for collecting data”.

However, this research does have its limitation on data-collection. It is probably every researcher’s wish to collect primary data to make empirical contribution to the academia. Yet, operational difficulties exist in the course of the research. Firstly, being outside the East Asia Pacific region, the access to the data concerning with the case studies relies heavily on the British libraries. However, the official documents such as agreements, memorandums and policy documents of the case studies may not always be available in the library. The official websites of individual economy participated in the selected cases

have become a possible source for data-collection. Nevertheless, the information openness varies quite differently in these 9 major economies studied in this research. For example, the information published on the website of the National Bureau of Statistics of China, is comparatively more abundant than the information published on the website of the National Bureau of Statistics of North Korea.

Secondly, the language barrier is an obstacle to data-collection especially in studying TRADP. Except SC SREZ, which participants share the same official language that happens to be my mother tongue, the rest 6 major economies all have their individual languages. In this case, even a crucial document regarding to the case studies is found, it would not make contribution to this research if the document is written in language other than English or Chinese. Thus, Secondary data becomes an important source for analysis in this research when primary sources are not available.

There is debate about whether secondary data can constitute a good empirical study like what primary data can do in research. Mann (1994:41) takes historical sociology for example and claims that historical sociologist can

make good use of their broad knowledge and professional training to deal with secondary data without secondary interpretation. I believe such open-minded concern is not limited to historical sociology only to but can be applied to all social science studies including politics. Moreover, if the progress of the cases is considerable slow with little change for observation, the secondary sources could just be as good as the primary data in interpreting the cases.

*(2) The Design of the Fieldwork Research*

Quantitative method is good in generalising a conclusion from a pool of data. However, it may not be as useful as qualitative method in capturing a complicated decision-making process. When it comes to observing and interpreting human's behaviour, the frequency of the action can be measured, yet, the changing of the thought cannot be quantitated. Comparatively, qualitative method offers an integrated account of a dynamic process of social studies. Therefore, I decide to conduct interview, a qualitative research method, as the main data-collection strategy in my fieldwork research. The anticipation is to build up a comprehensive understanding about micro-regionalism and micro-regionalisation's involvement in the course of SC SREZ's establishment and transformation.

Micro-regionalism and micro-regionalisation, represented by officials and businesses, are the key actors in the SC SREZ. However, these two types of people are not the only subjects taking in-depth interview. A detailed introduction of other relevant interviewees will be presented later in this section.

The fieldwork research I undertook in the SC SREZ contains two phases: the pre-probe interview and the in-depth interview. In the first phases I prepare a list of questions for interviewees to fill in. It can and should be considered as the preparation work for the in-depth interview in the second phase of the fieldwork research. The description of how interviews are designed, and conducted, will be presented in the next section.

(a) Pre-probe interview

Questionnaire is a method for data-collection in the qualitative research. In Neuman's words, it is "a process of asking many people the same questions and examine their answers" (Neuman, 2003: 303). Similar to that, the purpose of the list of questions in the pre-probe interview is to generalise a conclusion

from a collection of data. The pre-probe interview aims to survey the statistical association between the different variables in this research. And the findings will be the basis that constructs the in-depth interview in the second phase.

EGPIB factors are the criteria utilised to examine the case studies in this research. In the fieldwork research, same criteria should be applied to construct a systematic analysis. Therefore, the list of questions used in the pre-probe interview was carefully tailored with EGPIB factors spread all over the questions. The design of the questions can be seen as a brief literature review. The issues that scholars are concerned about, or have not answered yet, are blended into the pool of questions. What worth noting is that the pre-probe interview was mainly designed for Taiwanese businessmen. As mentioned in the literature, micro-regionalisation is the main force initiating such informal type of economic cooperation, businessmen's involvement should be well assessed in the SC SREZ.

The rationale of conducting the pre-probe interview is as follows: first, the list of the questions was designed with the purposes to fill the gaps between theory in the literature and the real world; as well as to fill the gaps

between my research and the interviewees. The second purpose is especially important as in the Chinese society, people are connected with various type of “guanxi” which refers to “interpersonal connection”. Well goes the saying, if you have “guanxi”, everything is “meiguanxi”; but if you do not have “guanxi”, everything is “youguanxi”<sup>3</sup>. Such saying well-describes the importance of “interpersonal connection” in the Chinese culture. Most Chinese, including Mainland Chinese, Hong Kong Chinese, and Taiwanese, they are not used to share their real thought with people they are not familiar with. Thus, I started the fieldwork research from where I do have connection with-- my home country. In addition, it is hoped that pre-probe interview can generate snow ball effect which connects me to different types and levels of actors engaged in the SC SREZ.

As just discussed, the list of questions can be seen as a brief literature review with the ideal type EGPIB blended in the questions. The questions are divided into three main parts:

1. An open question with 13 reference options provided for the question takers to give preferences of the reasons why they are willing to invest in the SC

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<sup>3</sup> The saying can be translated as “if you have connections, nothing matters; if you do not have connections, everything matters”.

SREZ: this is the general research question this thesis seeks to answer by using EGPIB factors as the ideal type for analysis-- what factor among the five, accounts for the establishment, and the development of the SC SREZ?

2. 48 questions about their actual operation: this part thoroughly deals with the dynamic involvement of micro-regionalisation in SC SREZ's progress.
  
3. 21 questions about how different policies and laws affect their investment in China: participants can choose from five options: strongly disagree, disagree, no comment, agree, to strongly agree. The purpose of this part is to investigate the interaction between micro-regionalism and micro-regionalisation. Are they working alongside each other in developing the SC SREZ? Or do they clash with each other and project negative affect on SC SREZ?

It is anticipated that pre-probe interview can contribute to not only the profound understanding of SC SREZ's past and the present, but also the establishment of the most important questions that must be answered to fulfil the purpose of gaining a full picture of an on-going SREZ ,which can be the



model for future transnational sub-regional cooperation in the East Asia Pacific.

Followed by the findings revealed from the pre-probe questions, I can start then decided who I shall adopt an in-depth interview with to answer the questions raised in the pre-probe interview.

(b) In-depth Interview

Interviews are a valuable method to gather information for a qualitative research. By making direct contact with actors involved in the transnational sub-regional cooperation, it is more likely to acquire first hand information to answer the research questions proposed in this thesis: What factor accounts for the establishment and the progression of a SREZ? And how can a SREZ be best maintained? Since SC SREZ is already defined as an on-going case of transnational sub-regional cooperation worth studied in Chapter One and Two, it is expected that through making in-depth analysis on this case study, this research would be able to explain a progressing SREZ's relation to East Asian region-building in the end of this research.

In this phase, open ended questions are adopted in the in-depth interview. It is believed such application will better enable the interviewees to express their thoughts on the subject of transnational sub-regional cooperation. Moreover, this may result in an unexpected discovery, which can be so remarkable that it could sometimes reveal relevant information beyond the scopes of existing theories. In other words, the method of in-depth interviews is a supplement to documentary research in terms of filling the loopholes of the current literatures of transnational sub-regional cooperation in East Asia.

As addressed in the beginning of this chapter, qualitative data sometimes serves better than quantitative data in exploring the dynamic progress of the SC SREZ and the meaning behind the scene, interviews are adopted as the main data-collection strategy in the fieldwork research. And followed the findings generalised from the pre-probe interview, a list of interviewees will be designed.

### **Summary**

This chapter introduces the methodology and the data-collection strategy utilised in this research. The key actors involved in the case studies have been

identified for the purpose of collecting relevant documents and data. And the design of the fieldwork research has been explained.

In this thesis, EGPIB factors are proposed as an ideal type. In the next three successive chapters, this ideal type and comparative methodology will be conducted to make systematic analysis.

The fieldwork research is constituted by a pre-probe interview and an in-depth interview. A list of questions utilised in the pre-probe interview serves as an auxiliary to collect general information. Followed by the findings generalised from the pre-probe interview, an in-depth interview will be conducted for further analysis. The application of interviews is to fulfil the purpose of understanding the dynamic forces interacting in the SC SREZ. It is hoped that conversations with these interviewees will help clarify the matrix of multilateral relationships in the cooperation. At the same time, it is also anticipated that by the end of this thesis, the gathered information can become a guide for constructing an on-going SREZ in the East Asia Pacific.

In this thesis, several data-collection methods, including history review,

documentary research and interviews are adopted to work as a form of triangulation. It is important to review individual information obtained and see if they agreed with each other or not. Also, it is necessary to continue zigzagging between theories and data. By doing so, it is more likely to draw a thorough and authentic conclusion in the end of the research.

Finally, it is anticipated that the findings from each SREZ case can draw a significant comparison in the end to interpret the relation between transnational sub-regional cooperation and East Asia region-building, as well as to answer the two main questions in this thesis: what factor accounts for the establishment and transformation of a SREZ? In addition, what force accounts for maintaining a growing SREZ?