

Ethnic Problem and Community Building

By TAKITA Kenji

The Tibet issue which remained under seal for a long time has flared up. Since the "Liberation of Tibet" by People's Republic of China in the beginning of 1950s, Tibet had been a relatively "stable" region as riots which sometimes broke up in conjunction with Sino-Indo border dispute were suppressed. Especially after the inauguration of President HU Jintao, China and India has entered the détente process based on the "peaceful rise" policy, though it was reported by some media that the Indian government took a wait-and-see attitude towards the violation by the Chinese army of the disputed border between these two countries. At the same time, China's high speed railway to Tibet has contributed to the rapid increase of the number of domestic and foreign tourists. Nevertheless, riots happened this time under such a circumstance. Therefore it was a shock to the whole world. Coincidentally Kosovo declared its independence unilaterally and gained the support from the US and EU member countries excepting Spain, Cyprus and Romania which have separatist campaign within their own countries.

By observing this situation, we have realized again that ethnic problem which can be called as "historical chronic disease" is still a problem of today even in the 21st century when regionalism and community building have been increasing their roles in global governance. It was loudly proclaimed in the "Decree of Peace" by Vladimir LENIN and Woodrow WILSON's "Fourteen Points" peace principles that ethnic self determination should be a principle for the formation of new world order. But it failed to be adopted on the occasion of the establishment of the United Nations after World War II. It is said that there exists some 7,000 to 10,000 ethnic groups or races in the whole world. Therefore, if the principle of ethnic self determination were applied to everywhere, we would have no end of conflict and confusion. MAO Zedong did not accept the principle of ethnic self determination either at the birth of New China. Or rather, it was impossible for him to do so.

The Declaration of Helsinki of 1975 has stressed peaceful resolutions between the parties concerned of territorial and border problems which arose after the end of World War II in Europe. If ethnic self determination reflects the impulse which is difficult for each ethnic group to suppress, the key to peaceful resolutions is nowhere except in the flexible thinking of sovereignty. As long as a predominant ethnic group in "nation state" sticks to the classical notion of sovereignty, "nation" as "imagined community" held in their minds is never formed. Then we will see an "empire"

which rules different ethnic groups under the name of “nation state.” The 14th Dalai Lama tried to compromise with the Chinese government by the request of “greater autonomy” while he faced opposition from some parties of the government in exile. But it is for sure that the rapid Sinicization of Tibet is the background of the recent riots.

In East Asia, not only China and Indonesia but also many other nation states have their own ethnic problems. The transformation of classical sovereignty, such as greater autonomy, federal system, shared sovereignty or dual sovereignty, through which the identity of each ethnic group is respected, is indispensable for the suppression of the impulse of ethnic self determination and for the creation of stable space for co-existence in this region.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. TAKITA Kenji, Professor of Chuo University, which originally appeared on the BBS “Hyakka-Somei” of CEAC on March 26, 2008.)