

# **On the Historically Significant Agreement on Joint Development of Gas Fields between Japan and China**

By SAKURADA Jun

Taiwan stiffened its attitude towards Japan. When the collision occurred between a Japan Coast Guard patrol boat and a Taiwanese fishing vessel off the Senkaku Islands, the Taiwanese government suggested that it would go to war with Japan. On the other hand, about the conflicting interests in East China Sea, the governments of Japan and China have agreed to jointly develop gas fields, which had been a pending problem between the two countries. Since ancient times, territories and natural resources have been major sources for conflicts among people because they are closely linked with a human's desire to wealth. A conflict has come to the fore again in the relationship with Taiwan whereas it has been overcome in the relationship with China.

If we look back over the history, the Schuman Plan in 1950, which was the origin of European integration, was made for the cooperative management of natural resources such as coals and iron ores in the Alsace-Lorraine (Elsass-Lothringen) region where Germany and France share borders. The history of European integration, leading to the establishment of EU which has 27 member states as of the beginning of 2007, is an experiment in human history. Of course, from the viewpoint of France which was skeptical of the future possibility of Germany to rearm itself, Schuman Plan was a plan to put a hoop on Germany under the framework of Europe.

Taking the European experience into consideration, the joint development of gas fields can become a chance for both Japan and China to promote self-control in the sense that neither country will act selfishly or allow the other to do so. Even though "doing something jointly" sounds like flowery words, what it requires is the patience with each other.

Therefore, I believe that this time agreement between Japan and China is of extreme importance. I have been skeptical about the perspective that Asia would follow the same path of integration as Europe. However, such perspective would never be an empty wish if we succeed in the joint management of natural resources. How to concretely pile up such cooperative measures is one of the vital challenges for the Japanese diplomacy.

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