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Six-Year-Old NEAT Scores High

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The Council on East Asian Community (CEAC) organized its 28th Policy Plenary Meeting on 19 September to hear reports about the 6th Annual Conference of the Network of East Asia Think-tanks (NEAT), which was held on 24-25 August in Bali, Indonesia. Having attended that Policy Plenary Meeting and heard reports from Japanese delegates who attended the NEAT Annual Conference, I, as an ex-insider of NEAT, felt fairly encouraged to learn that NEAT has made a steady progress despite some twists and turns on its way. NEAT is a second-track organization which was founded upon the government-level agreement of ASEAN plus Three countries. As one of those regional cooperative frameworks working towards an East Asian Community building, NEAT exhibits an interesting dimension of antiphony with different interests and ideas of the respective ASEAN plus Three countries, as if it were an East Asian Community building put into rehearsal.

The NEAT in its initial period of 2003 to 2004, which was developed by the 1st and 2nd Annual Conferences in Beijing and Bangkok, was shaped by such a strong initiative of NEAT China that it was at first proposed that the organization of NEAT should be governed by a pair of permanent General Coordinators, one from China and another from Thailand, while the secretariat of NEAT should be permanently placed in Beijing. However, this was apparently counter to the common international practice of running an international organization. When this was pointed out, China showed wisdom to agree with Japan that the secretariat should be provided by the incoming host of an Annual Conference and the host should perform the role of the chairperson during the year. The result was the adoption of the Basic Rules and Frameworks of NEAT at the 2nd Annual Conference in Bangkok. Thus, NEAT grew up to a truly international organization operating under the principle of equality of member countries.

The 3rd Annual Conference held in Tokyo in 2005 marked an important juncture. Since then, such NEAT member countries as Japan, Malaysia, China, Singapore, Korea, Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia have, at their own initiatives, organized Working Groups on such topics as investment, trade, environment, energy, non-traditional security, etc. And the achievements reached at those Working Groups have been reported to every Annual Conference thereafter. The Policy Recommendations which Japan drafted as the host country of the 3rd Annual Conference, by compiling the reports of various WGs as well as the fundamental ideas and principles for an East Asian Community building, were unanimously adopted, and later submitted to the ASEAN plus Three Summit held in the same year in Kuala Lumpur. The Chairman's report of the Summit took note of the NEAT recommendations. Since then until

now it has become customary that the ASEAN plus Three Summit annually takes heed of the NEAT Policy Recommendations. I must say that the six-year old NEAT scores high.

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