

# Prime Minister Noda's Negativism toward an "East Asian Community" Contradicts the National Interest of Japan

By KIKUCHI Yona

In an essay entitled "My Political Philosophy" contributed to a monthly magazine "VOICE" in September, Prime Minister NODA Yoshihiko highlighted the "adherence to the Japan-U.S. alliance" and also mentioned as follows: "Next year will see leadership changes in many countries which may bring political instability. We need not develop a great vision of an East Asian Community now." Considering the reckless behavior of China over the Senkaku Islands issue and that of Russia over the Northern Territories issue, PM Noda may well emphasize the Japan-U.S. alliance as the axis of Japan's foreign policy. Nevertheless, I think it unnecessary to deny the vision of an "East Asian Community." I would like to rebut his negative stance toward an "East Asian Community" by the following two reasons.

Firstly, it is not beneficial for Japan to declare an intention to deny the vision of an "East Asian Community" at this stage: Commencing with the regularization of the ASEAN+3 Summit in 1997, the vision has achieved steady progress along with other state-level agreements in this region. Politically, various multi-layered frameworks as ASEAN+3, EAS and ARF have been established. Economically, AFTA has been launched and other frameworks like CEPEA and EAFTA are also being discussed. In Japan, "East Asian Community" is interpreted as an idea suddenly proposed by then-PM Hatoyama. However, the vision is a fruit of discussions accumulated over more than ten years among the East Asian countries, many of which have been facilitated by Japan's initiative.

Secondly, now that the Asian integration has already started to move forward, if Japan's involvement were weakened the initiative could be taken by China or other countries so that the integration might be promoted in a way Japan does not desire. On top of the political difference, Japan and China hold different attitudes toward the economic integration: Japan prioritizes CEPEA while China does EAFTA. If the integration should be promoted by China's initiative, it will undermine the national interest of Japan in this region.

For those reasons, it is not wise of PM Noda to deny the vision of an “East Asian Community.” Instead, Japan should take this vision and claim her own ideal “East Asian Community” in order to nurture democratic concepts and systems in this region which will fit the national interest of Japan.

**(This is an English translation of an article written by Mr. KIKUCHI Yona, Research Fellow of JFIR, alias IKEBE Akira, which originally appeared on the BBS “Hyakka Somei” of CEAC on September 25, 2011.)**