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My View of “East Asia Community”

By HAKAMADA Shigeki

I was invited to join a research project for “East Asia Community” as a specialist on Russian affairs, but I thought hard about how I should approach the offer. There are attempts for economic and political integrations of former Soviet Union’s republics, such as Customs Unions involving Russia, Kazakhstan and other countries and Putin’s “Eurasia Alliance.” These attempts can be compared with European integration and East Asia Community. It was probably such comparative analysis that I was expected to conduct as a collaborative researcher of the project.

In all honesty, however, I fundamentally have critical views of the concept of “East Asia Community.” When European integration rapidly progressed and was envisaged and welcomed as a future model for humanity in both Western countries and Japan with great euphoria, I thought it more difficult to overcome the limitations of sovereign states, international conflicts and nationalism than they seemed.

Of course, I introduced both affirmative propositions and skepticism about European integration in detail in my class of “general guidance on the European sphere” in university. However, I more actively explained skepticism about European integration with a particular focus on views of some experts in finance and economics who were skeptic about the future of integrated Europe from the beginning.

Today, Greek financial issues and Euro crisis have caused people to discuss the negative aspect of European integration rather than optimistic outlooks on it. I got the impression that many of the joint researchers in the aforementioned project I was invited to participate in embraced considerably favorable views of “East Asia Community,” as opposed to my case. That is why I had to think hard about how I should approach the project from the beginning. When the time came when joint publications would be compiled as a collection of papers, I decided to take that as the opportunity to honestly express my critical views of “East Asia Community,” and I did so.

The most significant critical point I had with regard to “East Asia Community theories” was about state sovereignty. As long as it is called “community,” not just a cooperation organization and economic cooperative of East Asian countries, it is meaningless if it does not delegate a significant part of state sovereignty to an upper organization. The point is whether such possibility is there in East Asia. I do not think that there are any conditions for that in East Asia. Conflicts over state sovereignty are far from being alleviated even after the collapse of the Cold War structure; they are becoming increasingly severe. The biggest weak point of “East Asia Community theories” lies in the neglect of sovereignty issues.

We organized a symposium as part of our project. At this symposium, I acted as the facilitator and honestly spoke about my questions to Satoshi Amako, who was a joint project researcher and a discussant at the symposium. Amako, who is my former colleague and also a close friend, wrote favorably about East Asia Community in his recent book. However, I pointed out that the book ignored or neglected state sovereignty issues.

In the era after World War II or Cold War, people temporarily had the idealistic expectation that the modern world in which sovereign states conflicted with each other and repeated wars would be overcome and a stable peaceful world of de-modernization would be constructed. From the perspective of economic interests as well, drives for regional integration beyond national borders spread as real phenomena. In this way, the idea that regional integration promotion is more reasonable in terms of both politics and economy emerged in East Asia as well. It is true that several organizations of regional integration that were established in line with this trend raised results that could not be ignored.

However, it is also true that the post-Cold War world became more unstable than in the Cold War era despite such regional integration attempts and that racial, religious, territorial and sovereign conflicts intensified. Conditions for regional integration for overcoming state sovereignty still have not been put in place. It is because I think sovereignty issues still cannot be ignored in international relations that I have critical views of “East Asia Community.” In *East Asia Community from the Perspective of International Politics*, a collection of papers that I recently published

from Minerva Publisher, I honestly discussed my personal views that can be thought of as dissenting opinions in the project. I sincerely hope that my approach will contribute to making discussions about this issue colorful and deeply engraved.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Prof. HAKAMADA Shigeki, Professor, University of Niigata Prefecture, which originally appeared on the BBS "Hyakka-Somei" of CEAC on September 8, 2012.)