

February 17, 2015

Assessing the APT Summits 2014 from the Perspective of Community Building in East Asia

By KIKUCHI Yona

A series of ASEAN related summit meeting was held in Naypyidaw in Myanmar last November. While ASEAN related summit meetings have come to be covered by the Japanese media on a regular basis every year, most of the coverage tends to be negative and fragmentary, focusing only on political antagonism between Japan and China. And details and outcomes of the meetings have barely been reported. However, since its inception, this series of summit meeting including the ASEAN+3 (APT) summit meeting in particular have been convened based on the agreement among heads of states of the countries concerned that the meetings be held as "the main vehicle" with a view to achieving a long-term goal of establishing an East Asia community. If not evaluated from this viewpoint, the significance of the meetings would be overlooked. Therefore, in my capacity as Executive Secretary of CEAC, who has been keeping up on the moves of the APT summit meetings, I would like to make an assessment on the outcomes and the issues of this year's APT summit meeting and to make some comments on how the meeting should be in the future.

Firstly, as for the major outcome of the meetings, as a follow-up to the Report of the East Asia Vision Group II (EAVGII) submitted in 2012, each head of state, based upon the recommendations contained in the Report, made reference to areas of cooperation to be pursued and its desirable direction. From Japan, responding to the recommendation in the Report, Prime Minister ABE proposed to contribute especially to cooperation in the area of higher education and betterment of public health service. EAVGII Report has not so much exerted impact on general public as EAVGI Report, which clearly launched a vision of establishing an East Asian community, but instead devised recommendations with regard to further enhance cooperation in such concrete areas as economy and finance. As exemplified by the above Japan's case, in this series of summit meetings, each state proposed to make concrete actions for regional cooperation in East Asia and this would be a great achievement for the promotion of regional cooperation in the future.

Secondly, on the other hand, it has been revealed that adequate response has not yet been made to the formation of regional order of a new kind pursued by China. For example, as for the issue of the

South China Sea where China has conspicuously been gaining influence, even though solution by "rule of law" has been proposed, there is no sign of implementation. Besides, though not in the major agenda in these summit meetings, a project of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which China is trying to establish as a new type of banking institution in this area raises grave concern. For, in its establishment, almost half of the capital amount is to be invested by China, and there is a concern that this institution would directly reflect intentions of China. However, as every member country of ASEAN has already announced its intention to join in the institution, it is feared that no member country of ASEAN could no more go against the intentions of China, thereby eventually creating negative effect on regional integration. These moves of China in an aim for the formation of regional order would possibly trample on the principle of pursuing universal values to the effect that East Asian integration should "support internationally shared values to achieve peace, stability, democracy and prosperity in the region" as dictated in the "Second Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation" adopted by the APT summit meeting in 2007.

Thus, as described above, in this series of APT summit meetings, while there is a clear sign of progress in regional cooperation and integration, China's move toward the formation of regional order, which are incompatible with universal values to be pursued in the region, has also come to the surface. Then, what should be the way Japan should take to respond to the current state of affairs? One way might be that Japan should again develop a clear vision of regional community based upon the principle of universal values, just as in 2004 when conflicting ideas began to surface among countries concerned during the process of establishing East Asia Summit meeting, Japan prepared "Issue Papers," displaying clearly how an East Asian community should be, which paved the way for enhancing integration in this region. In so doing, we should reaffirm the basic principles to be pursued in community building in this region and at the same time enhance cooperation in specific areas, or so-called functional cooperation and promote integration in tandem with ASEAN, thereby advancing confidence building and integration in this region.

(This is an English translation of the article written by Mr. KIKUCHI Yona, Senior Research Fellow of JFIR, which originally appeared on the e-forum "Hyakka-Somei" of CEAC on December 12, 2014.)