



Reorganizing East Asian History For the Purpose of Establishing New Concert in Civil Society

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A Trial for Reorganizing East Asian Modern History from the Viewpoint of Intellectual Public Citizenship of its Community: How can we achieve to “rehistorize” compositions and conflicts on the modernization of East Asia, as a basis for establishing new concert in civil society?

I

It is said that the earth is becoming smaller and smaller due to the remarkable development of modern technologies. We understand that there is a trend towards globalization in the contemporary world, in which we are living together more closely and more interdependently. In this context, one purpose of international studies is nothing but those on something connection, relation and exchanging among people. As Gautama Buddha preached more than 2500 years ago, all creatures exist interdependently and have relations something to be. Unfortunately, there are many contradictions and tragedies in the contemporary world such as misery, hunger, conflict, exploitation, and discrimination. We human being should be equal existence and hope to make efforts for overcoming these difficulties together hand in hand for the bet-

ter future. So, I can emphasize that international studies should also be an intellectual peoples' movement aiming at establishing better understanding and better life as global citizens in the principle of coexistence and working together as well as admitting diverse values and pluralistic standpoints of all global citizens

In the era of globalization, interdependence through exchanging materials such as through trade or capital flow has become remarkable in the East Asian region. The countries of the region, Japan, South Korea, China and others including some South East Asian countries, show a strong tendency towards economic integration, and mutual relationships among them are becoming very close. However, emerging economic integration does not necessarily bring the people in the region to foster common or integrated feelings as East

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Asian citizens. In spite of growing interdependence, spiritual or mental feelings within these nations are so different that the gaps on recognitions and perceptions cause conflicts and, in some cases, even severe hostilities between them. One of the hot spots is the different perceptions of modern history taken by each nation. This issue is very troublesome in the meaning that it often leads people to become overrun-nationalists or exclusivists in East Asian nations. The existing gap between the economic, material situation and spiritual, mental feelings of the nations can be seen as a very big sociopolitical hindrance in the contemporary emerging East Asian community.

It may be necessary to define the notion of an East Asian “nation” as one where peoples’ identities are strongly integrated as fostered by each nation state, each of which having been organized in lieu of encountering the Western Powers in the process of their modernization. So, we should distinguish the concept of nation from that of simple peoples’ groups or communities. In a sense, Asian modernization is a very troublesome burden for the people. Present international order has its origin in the formation by the Western Powers that brought the notion of nation or nation state and enforced it with their violent pressures on non-Western worlds between the 18th and 20th centuries. Even now, the restraint of nation state is still so powerful that we cannot be easily liberated from its influence. The teaching of nation-centered history that aims at developing roots of national identity in the nation strongly prescribes its values and ways of thinking. And every nation state has a powerful tendency to see historical matters from their own national viewpoints. It can be recognized by

everyone that the task of freeing one’s perceptions about history from his built-in national values is tremendously difficult.

II

From May 2005 to March 2009, we performed comparative studies of textbooks on modern history from a variety of countries, such as those of Japan, China, South Korea and some Southeast Asian nations. Analyzing them not only from the viewpoint of each nation but also from that of common civilians belonging to the East Asian community, we sought solutions for overcoming the conflicted issues in the time of contemporary deepening interdependence among the nations. The most important work of this project was reviewing each nation’s modern history, which was surly described from a nation-oriented viewpoint, and then re-describing it more synthetically from the viewpoint of East Asian citizens, therefore overcoming the “wall” of nationality. We defined this task as the “rehistorization” or “rehistorizing” of the emerging East Asian community. Through 28 meetings over four years, more than 600 people in sum including Japanese, Chinese, and Korean students on the campus and elderly residents living nearby participated, trying to re-describe the transnational modern history of East Asia and foster a consciousness of beings citizens belonging to the East Asian community. This tremendous but significant task was, at the same time, to establish a new concept of public citizenship for intra-peoples’ communities through reorganizing the national histories of East Asian nations by means of applying the intellectual imaginations of the civilians’ ways of thinking.

The so-called “anti-Japanese” movements in Seoul, Beijing Shanghai and other East Asian cities in 2005 showed us the burdensome problem of contemporary East Asia. The problem of nations’ different perceptions of modern history was so sensitive that it prevented us from holding common values in East Asian society under the principles of coexistence and cooperation. For example, memories of colonial rule and invasion of imperialist powers in the past were so different, especially between Japanese and Chinese or Koreans. Lack of concern and misunderstandings between them that might have been encouraged by nationalistic educations or misinformed by the authorities were doubtlessly one of the main reasons behind the severe conflicts between Japan, which was the imperialist power and China and the Korean peninsula, which were once invaded and colonized by Imperialist Japan. For many Japanese unconcerned with the past painful experiences of other Asian nations, it was for them a mysterious or unpleasant matter that the Chinese and South Korean governments often criticized Japan because conservative politicians visited Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo where the offenders of the Asia-Pacific War, prosecuted at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in 1945, are enshrined. Their accusations were perceptible as their arrogant interventions to Japanese spiritual or religious freedom. In contrast, Chinese and Korean people were frustrated with the selfish attitude of Japan’s government in avoiding taking responsibility for having invaded and exploited them during the former half of the 20th century. Typically, Japan’s government had forced the publishers of history textbooks to rewrite more ambiguous phrases concerning invasion and colonial rule at that time, and didn’t express any sin-

cere apology for the war crimes even though it sometimes said to admit “crimes” by weak dispatch. Thus, the big difference in perceptions between East Asian nations on modern history was nothing but one of the main causes of their conflicts and hostilities.

In modern society framed by each sovereign nation, it might be axiomatic that every nation had its own history. National history is written to create a “story” which enables the people under the sovereignty of nation to foster sympathetic unification or feelings of assimilation with their country. In this process, differences in the “stories” of each nation state may be born and possibly lead its people to be more self-centered or exclusively nationalistic in absence of critical and pluralistic viewpoints. This was the main reason we needed to do comparative historical studies and to establish a “common sense” of the East Asian community. Fortunately, there were very many Chinese and South Korean students concerned on this issue on the campus of Bunkyo University where I was. Our campus was no less than a small “East Asian community” and we could continue our comparative studies for rehistorizing contemporary East Asia.

III

Wisdom needed for being liberated from nation-oriented consciousness calls for making use of our imaginations to convert the established standpoints to those of the others, viz. considering the point of view of the people who were victims or sacrificed in order to overcome our prejudices and stereotyped ideas. For example, if we imagined we were suppressed people of the Korean peninsula in

1919 when the March 1st Bannzai Independent Movement happened, how we could encounter to the cruel oppression by the Japanese military, or if we had been innocent Chinese living in Nanjing on December 1937, how we could endure the atrocities caused by Japanese militants. Making an effort to have common understanding of painful experiences or “memories of sadness” of Asian people is essential and the only approach to establishing objective perceptions on modern history through relative and synthetic assessments.

The study meetings proceeded in the format of arguing among the participants on specified historical themes occurring in East Asia over the past 200 years. Through our studying, we were gradually becoming free from the framework of the nation state we each belonged to, and started looking for the possibility of making new conceptualized public citizenship of the East Asian community. This task was accompanied by the process of de-building values, which meant destroying the established values as the first step, and reorganization of the concept of public citizenship not strongly attached to any one modern nation state as the second. This new conception of it was primitively interpreted into “open space” or “open forum,” which enabled participants to discuss and exchange their opinions freely. By utilizing this public space, we were making an intellectual network between participants belonging to several nationalities and several generations. Thus, the developed public consciousness as citizens of the East Asian community was surly aiming at describing “our history” not that of each nation, that is, East Asian common modern history in relation to the emerging East Asian economic and social integration in the beginning of

the 21st century. In this context, we could learn and understand the essence of the meaningful message paneled at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum as below:

“Internationalization could not been achieved without mutual understanding the history of each nation. It is important for us how we can put its peoples’ painful experiences befallen in past to use for the purpose of establishing better future.”

IV

In the first phase of the meetings held in the year 2005, we discussed several issues on peoples’ movements and wars that happened from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century in East Asia. The first several meetings were focused on the nationwide peoples’ movements for independence and anti-imperialism in 1919. Also, we investigated the massacre of more than 6,400 Korean people living in Japan just after the big earthquake in the Kanto area including Tokyo Metropolitan City in 1923. These events showed us that growing Japanese imperialist power created sociopolitical structure in East Asia in hostilities and discrimination against other Asian nations. The turning point for dividing East Asian nations including Japan into invade/invaded or rule/ruled ones was the period of the end of the 19th century when Japan began its “westernization” and established imperial regime. On the other hand, Chinese and Korean people made efforts to achieve their own “modernization” by resisting, fighting against tyranny and Western Powers’ pressures and orienting to succeed in their revolution. Our description on the Shino-

Japanese War and the Russo - Japanese War, and China's revolution in 1911 were covered in this process of metamorphosis of East Asian nations.

Our arguments became more serious and fierce in the second phase in the year 2006. The themes picked up were colonial rule by the Greater Japan Empire over Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945 and the Japan-China War that started at the incident of blast of Japan's controlled railway in Manchuria or northeast region of China in 1931 and ended by surrender of Japan. Needless to say, these occupied the most important psychological portions on the issue of differences of historical perceptions of East Asian nations. It was quite natural that our meetings were filled with sentiment of antagonism and the arguments were often confused, especially, hostile feelings caused between Korean, Chinese students hearing of the cruelty of invasion or exploitation from their ancestors and Japanese elder citizens those who were once educated "glory" of Imperial Japan's hegemony from the authorities. We could clearly recognize the difficulties for reconstructing our historical sense and perspectives in consideration of the peoples' memories of pain and sadness ruled or invaded by the imperialist powers. From this year, the participant students began to join positively in history descriptions with their own viewpoints and thinking. Through the involvement of younger generations, our study developed and deepened more with the arguments of radical criticisms.

The third phase of discussions in the year 2007 was focused on the issues of the period of so-called the Pacific War and the Cold War in the middle of the 20th century. The former war was noth-

ing but a result of exhausting the Japan-China War in which Japanese armies were stuck mud by the liberation struggles of Chinese peoples. Imperial Japan had to grasp natural resources for continuing the war by occupying Southeast Asian region endowing oil, bauxite or rubber etc. Japan's expansion inevitably caused increased hostilities and frictions with Great Britain, Dutch and the United States that had ruled over that region. However, we tried to describe the history on the Pacific War in 1941-45 not only in terms of the conflicts among imperialist powers but also of the confrontation between the imperialist powers and peoples' movements for independence and liberation in Asia. And the latter war was interpreted into power struggle between the two, i.e. the US and Soviet Union in spite of ideological confrontation superficially. The hegemonic domination by two superpowers in the regime of "Pax Russo-Americana" occupied the central part of international order at the latter half of the 20th century, and then, peoples' movements in the Third World could not break through easily for achieving their liberation and independence under that circumstance. We mentioned to their difficulties and complicated processes, though they had huge influence to convert the Cold War's international order to collapse by describing manifold aspects on the Vietnam War, for example.

The fourth year's study meetings in 2008 came to discuss on the issues of contemporary world's situations. Frankly, our task became more tremendous and tough not only by the reason there were so many materials we could utilize but also by that we had to reconsider our livelihoods or standpoints for ourselves in the world we contemporarily

involved. It meant that our relationships or qualities of life within East Asian community should be also criticized through the efforts for making convergence on historical perceptions. So, we could realize that the intellectual “mountain” we climbed up for four years was surprisingly rugged but, at the same time, we could get so wonderful views from it.

V

We sometimes experienced unforgettable moments of the arguments under whole study meetings. For example, at the time of discussion on Japan’s annexation and colonial rule over Korean Peninsula, one elder Japanese citizen said, “Japan’s rule provided there with railway network and developed their industries as well as prevented it from Russian domination.” To the contrary, a Korean younger student argued against him, “Your opinion seems us to be very chauvinistic and self-centered. Koreans’ future should be depended on the people themselves living there not on any outsiders. Even though Korea had been under the control of Russian Empire not Japan, it must not justify colonial control by Japan’s imperialism.” In the dominant Confucian culture of Korea in which the younger should pay respect to the elder, her protest was very courageous. Or at the time of discussion on the atrocities in Nanjing in 1937, some Japanese people angrily persisted in the vague numbers of killing citizens from Chinese release. But another Japanese citizen did not agree to them, saying that the discussion on “exact numbers” was very nonsense in the context of the doubtless fact that Japanese Imperial armies had invaded China and had caused mass destruction or

massacres, it was more important for us to discuss on how we could achieve to share anti-war feelings together and did not cause that cruel war any more in contemporary East Asian community. Similar situation was seen at the meeting on the theme of the terror of the September 11 and “anti-terrorism wars” to Afghanistan and Iraq afterwards. While some civilians justified the US’s military actions for the reason that they had just revenged on the attack at New York City by the terrorists, the student coming from Hiroshima did not agree with his opinion, saying that any revenge had no justice and they had only brought endless vicious cycle of hostilities among human beings. He emphasized on the importance of actions for the efforts of reconciliation among the people, just as the Hibakusha or victims of Atomic bomb in Hiroshima desired and made actions for establishing nuclear-free world. These were so refreshing moments for the participants those who wished to find out more constructive ways of thinking for promising tomorrow. Our task for writing transnational East Asian modern history with many difficulties was intellectual trial to foster its public citizenship on the principle of creating open space for living close together and cooperation in emerging East Asian Community.

The study meetings were not regular of curriculum of the university and opened at night. That meant they had no contribution to the successes of participants materially. Here, however, we could understand the significance of “Manabi” in Japanese or intellectual activities on genuine quest for truth, i.e. the study as “purpose” itself not as “means” for any career. Passion for study might belong to a part of human identities, because

studying led us to get better understandings and they must be the first step for achieving better life of human being. Now, I think intellectual wandering for itself is better than any hard study for his career up. So, we might conclude our activities as intellectual movement must be a small challenge to the other, especially to the younger generations those who tended not to find out true significances of “Manabi” in Japan.

VI

The project writing transnational East Asian history was a trial to stick out ourselves of the frame of nation state in which confined our perceptions or recognitions, and to create new concept of transnational public citizenship on the basis of peaceful and cooperative East Asian community. Through this task, I could be convinced that the prospect of East Asian civil society will be far from negative, as far as one can continue to make efforts for “rehistorizing” the community he participated in. The comments and opinions of the participants as bellows must be proof of it.

- In the meetings, I was not confident and hesitated to express my opinions. For, I had little knowledge about modern history of East Asia. The opinions of the participants were sometimes so fresh and surprised me. I could be aware of cruelties of invasion or colonial rule by Japan’s imperialism. As Japanese, I must not forget the past and try to study from now on for having better understandings among East Asian nations. (Japanese student)
- As a Korean, I was so sensitive how to evaluate historical issues such as Japan’s annexation to

Korean Empire in 1910 or the Korean War in 1950-53. I could admit most Koreans had strong consciousness as victims and had antipathy against Japanese. I, however, had changed my mind through the meetings because most Japanese students and civilians were so sincere and tried to find out historical truths for the purpose of establishing cooperation and friendship among East Asian nations. They were my happy opportunities for making close relationship with many Japanese friends. (Korean student)

- I think the significance of writing transnational East Asian history project must be great. The role of education is quite a lot, so this cooperative task was very useful especially for the younger generation of East Asian. Many meaningful opinions in the meetings from the young multinational students impressed me. Thanks for their joining and hope to establish better East Asian community together! (Japanese elderly citizen)

Through the activities, we could integrate students into the more active and ambitious academic activities for developing international studies. The most important element for developing international studied was to have multiple standpoints or viewpoints for analyzing contemporary issues. We knew well that the world was diverse and peoples’ values were also pluralistic. By being liberated from stiff or monopolistic values we could make consideration to the people in suffering from hunger or dispersion etc. Imagination was very important for achieving intellectual movement in the basis of coexistence and cooperation as global citizens. Though this might be so small step and immature movement, the project of writing

transnational East Asian modern history in which we had been engaged for four years with the multinational students and civilians was very meaningful and significant effort for establishing the consciousness for identifying ourselves as citizens living in emerging East Asian community. I sincerely would like to appreciate all participants and concerned on that project.

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