

Towards an East Asian Community:

What kind of lessons should we learn from Europe?

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First of all, allow me to discuss Prime Minister Hatoyama's proposal for an "East Asian community".

Just before the national election, he mentioned in an article for monthly magazine "Voice" that an East Asian community is a national goal and clearly stated that he would aim for the creation of a common Asian currency.

In an article for the New York Times, he wrote, "We should aspire to move toward regional currency integration; We must spare no effort to build the permanent security frameworks essential to underpinning currency integration"

I am sure that Prime Minister Hatoyama wants to learn lessons from Europe. In the article for Voice magazine, he mentioned that his grandfather translated the book written by Coudenhove-Kalergi, founder of the first popular movement for a united Europe.

At the East Asia Summit in Thailand in October, Prime Minister Hatoyama proposed his idea to build an East Asian community

Please allow me to tell you two things I think about his proposal.

First, the prime minister did not explain how to achieve the goal of an East Asian community. In his party's manifesto, there is no explanation about it.

Second, he is not the first to propose this idea. In the beginning of the 21st century, there was a lot of discussion about creating an East Asian community. I remember China was very positive on this idea at that time.

I would like to remind you that former Prime Minister Nakasone wrote in an article for another monthly magazine last April that we should cooperate for the establishment of

a common Asian currency. He even proposed the scenario for how it could happen, mentioning the establishment of an Asian Currency Unit (ACU) in the 2020s and the introduction of a common currency in the 2030s at the earliest.

What lessons can we learn from Europe about regional integration?

First, I would like to note the importance of political will. The political leaders of Europe at the early stage of regional integration had a strong desire to unify the people, economic activity and security to avoid a disastrous world war.

Second, I would like to point out the importance of engagement with the United States. Although the U.S. is not a member of the European Union, it plays a great roll in maintaining regional security through NATO.

Third, I believe that mutual understanding of the leaders of France and Germany was particularly important for European integration.

What are the implications for Asia, especially Japan?

First, it is important to have strong political will for all Asian countries to achieve the goal of an East Asian community.

Second, we should engage the U.S. in the process of Asian regional integration. Because we do not have a NATO-type organization, we should consider having some kind of mechanism for enabling the U.S. to engage with Asia.

Third, I would like to mention that China and Japan should make every effort to improve their mutual relations. In some sense, China and Japan are in a similar position to France and Germany. Both countries fought wars against each other, and there is still some mutual resentment.

Regarding Japan-China relations, I would like to explain some historical facts, if I may.

Needless to say, healthy relations between Japan and China are crucial for the stability and prosperity of East Asia. Frankly speaking, however, this relationship is very difficult to manage. Japan invaded China in the 1930s and fought a disastrous conflict

there for nearly a decade, which eventually led to war with the U.S. There is still resentment among Chinese people, and that is certainly understandable, at least to me.

There is growing nationalism in China, and it is often targeted at Japan, its former enemy. The same kind of nationalism can be seen in Japan, especially among the younger generation, and this causes concern for older people, including myself. There have been a lot of people on both sides who understand each other fairly well and have a strong desire to solve these problems. Unfortunately, they have been retiring or dying off, meaning there are fewer people on both sides who are making serious efforts to resolve the problems between the countries and enhance the bilateral relationship.

Chinese leaders and policymakers are now looking toward the U.S., not Japan, meaning that for the Chinese intelligentsia, relations with the U.S. are primary and those with Japan are secondary. The Chinese government does not have a strong enough incentive to deal with issues related to Japan.

The fundamental problem between us is that each country has difficulty treating the other normally. For Japan, especially, it has been hard to regard China as an equal partner. If we look at history, we can see that the Japanese perception of China has changed dramatically through the centuries.

We learn in school that during the Tang dynasty, from 618 A.D. to 907 A.D., Japan sent 15 delegations to China, the most advanced country in the world at that time, to learn from it. Now, let us think of modern history. During the imperialist era, the great Western powers sought to expand their empires, and they looked to China as a place to establish colonies. Japan, which in theory advocated the liberation of Asia from colonial rule, actually took the same path as the other imperialist powers. After World War II, China became a major socialist country. Because the Japanese intelligentsia had left-leaning tendencies, China came to be viewed as a great country and once again became a possible role model. Now, Japanese view China as a potential superpower.

If you look back at history, one thing I can say for certain is that there has never been a time where the relationship between Japan and China has been one of equality. For Japanese people in particular, China tends to be regarded either as inferior or superior.

At this time in history, it is extremely important for people in both Japan and China to

look at each other as equal partners and try to carefully manage the bilateral relationship. As a scholar, I greatly respect Dr. Akira Irie, a Harvard professor who once wrote that diplomatic relations are not only between governments but also between people at the grass-roots level. We must increase contact between the Japanese and Chinese people, especially between the youth of the two countries.

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