Maritime Asia and the Future of a Northeast Asia Community

Wada Haruki

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Translated by Kyoko Selden

I Transcending National Boundaries

We are now facing a critical situation. Not just Japan, but the world as a whole is in crisis. With America at the center, globalization is racing ahead, but there are also strong countercurrents with nationalism becoming stronger in various places. In the midst of war and terror, the threat of global warming is becoming clear to all. In this world, I believe that we should advance toward regionalism. In 2003 I hoisted this flag in a book entitled The Common House of Northeast Asia — Declaration of a New Regionalism published by Heibonsha.

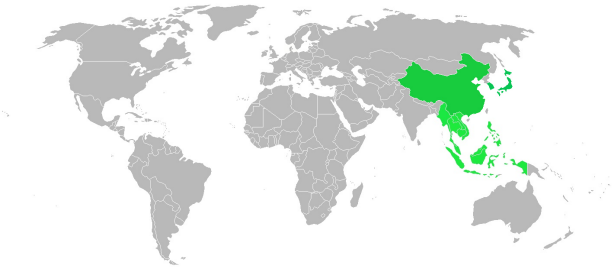
We cannot live by denying the existence of states However, it is necessary to relativize the nation state and to transcend state boundaries. This means that even as we belong to a state, we belong to a region and to the world. In 2006 Karatani Kojin wrote a book called Toward the World Republic (Iwanami Shinsho). But this proposal to go beyond states and aim toward a world republic is more dangerous than promising. If we think about the socialist Soviet Russia that came to an end, it was precisely aiming at a single world state. To turn humanity into a single state would require colossal violence. Moreover, the goal is unachievable. I think of the future of humanity as a league of regional communities (chiiki kyodotai). It can be said that regionalism is our utopia.

The idea of regionalism existed in the past. Japan has a failed history of trying to put regionalism into practice. The Greater East Union of Nations (Daitogappo ron) of Tarui Tokichi, who proposed a great united nation of the countries of Asian yellow peoples (Ajia ojin-koku no ichidai renpo), ended in Japan's annexation of Korea. Out of the Manchurian Incident, Ishihara Kanji's idea of an East Asian League (To-A Renmei) was created. Amidst the Sino-Japanese War, the theory of an East Asia Community (To-A Kyodotai) (1938) was proposed by Royama Masamichi, who called for a regional economy of Japan, China and Manchuria. When these ideas reached a dead end, the concept of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (Dai-To-A Kyoeiken) was born. This was one with the Greater East Asia War. The practice of regionalism was a billboard that covered aggression. So, with Japan's surrender, regionalism too came to be forgotten.

After experiencing the nation's defeat and the Korean War, Japanese people came to oppose the military. But at the same time, they depended on the United States. After the Asia Pacific War, Asian peoples embarked on wars between communists and anti-communists. So in that period, regionalism could exist only as an anti-communist alliance and a military bloc of Northeast Asia. From that perspective, too, the Japanese people rejected regionalism.

However, in the late 1980s, the Cold War and state socialism ended, and in the 1990s new conditions were created in East Asia: China's economic development and South Korea's democratization were remarkable, while North Korea experienced a crisis. At this point, interest in regionalism emerged afresh.

ASEAN in 1997 invited China, South Korea and Japan to join a summit conference of ASEAN +3 out of which was born an East Asia Vision group. In 2001 it submitted a report called "We hope to create an East Asian Community (Kyodotai) for peace, prosperity and progress." ASEAN leaders supported that dream-like concept and in 2005 an East Asia Summit was held. However, Japan and China were in conflict about who should participate. The US, which was not invited, was dissatisfied, so the process has not been proceeding smoothly.



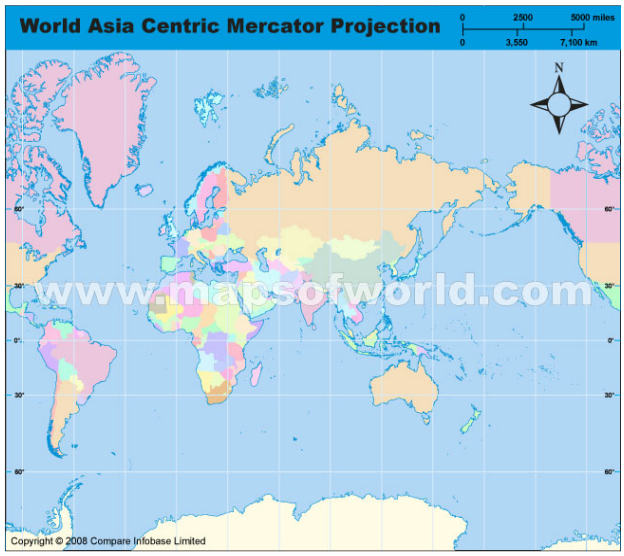
Map of ASEAN +3

On the other hand, Northeast Asia has been strongly coming to the fore. In February 2003 South Korean Pres. Roh Moo-hyun, in his inaugural speech, talked about the advent of a new era of Northeast Asia and stated that a community of regional peace and prosperity is his dream, surprising the Korean people. However, in August of that year, the Six-Party Talks for halting North Korean nuclear development began and, after much agonizing, in September 2005, the fourth round of talks issued a joint communiqué. In that communiqué, along with a solution to nuclear problems, "the six parties pledged to make joint efforts for long lasting peace and stability in the Northeast Asia region" and "agreed to continue to support measures to promote cooperative security throughout Northeast Asia".

The six parties referred to China, South Korea, North Korea, Russia, the United States and Japan. In fact, in 1990, when I proposed in Seoul the construction of the Northeast Asian People's House of Cohabitation (Tohoku Ajia jinrui kyosei no ie), I called for the participation of these six countries.

Wada's map outlining his conception of Northeast Asia: Hawaii (left) and Alaska (below)

Since 1995 I have been calling this the Common House of Northeast Asia (Tohoku Ajia kyodo no ie). The concept in which steps toward regional community begin from cooperation in peace and security is no longer a mere dream. It is a goal that the governments of the six countries pledge.



An Asia-centered Mercator projection of the world

II Without Reconciliation There Can Be No Communal Life (Kyosei)

Those who think seriously about Northeast Asia Community (kyodotai) have no choice but to directly confront the area's special character. Its character is one of successive wars for 80 years from 1894 to 1975.

No area anywhere in the world is so smeared with war (senso mamire). Thus it won't suffice that this area is simply at peace. In the absence of reconciliation, the area cannot live together.

The first fifty years of the eighty-year period was characterized by Japanese wars. The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5, from the perspective of the issues contested and the battlefield can be called the first Korean War. Japan launched the Russo-Japanese War that followed in 1905 in order to force Russia to recognize Japanese rule of Korea. As a result of the war, Japan succeeded in making Korea a protectorate, then annexed it, and finally colonized it. In China, from the Manchurian Incident of 1931, Japan made war in China and elsewhere for fifteen years. Japan fought Russia in the Siberian War of 1918 with the dispatch of soldiers, again in the Nomonhon Incident of 1939, and then in the Russo-Japanese War in August 1945. With the US, Japan fought the 'Greater East Asia War.'

The First Sino-Japanese War fought in Korea in a contemporary Japanese woodblock print

Indeed, for half a century, Japan fought once or more than once with all neighboring countries to the West, North and East. Japan was always the attacker, and in the majority of cases, Japan was the aggressor. Those who were attacked and invaded were left with ineradicable scars and indelible pain. The murder of empress Myeonseong, the Port Arthur Incident and Tsushima Incident, and the Eulsa Treaty of 1905 making Korea a Japanese protectorate, Japan's repression of the March 1, 1919 Korean movement, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in China in 1937, the Nanjing Massacre, and the Comfort Women, Pearl Harbor—these can never be forgotten.

The Geoncheonggung Residence in the Gyeongbok Palace, the site of the murder of Empress Myeonseong, was reopened in 2007 for the first time in 98 years

Of course, on the Japanese side, too, there are indelible memories such as the Tokyo air raids, the Battle of Okinawa, and the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings.

When the war ended on August 15, 1945, the Japanese military was dismantled, the emperor was stripped of military command, and Japan came to live under Article 9. However, the fact that Japan's war ended did not mean that the era of war in the area came to an end. Immediately,

civil war began in China between Guomindang and Communist forces and this lasted until 1949. In Indochina, too, the Vietminh of Ho Chi Minh fought the French.

In 1950 the Korean War began. The two states born in the South and the North, occupied separately by the United States and the Soviet Union, fought to achieve unification. But both sides failed to achieve reunification. The war became a US-China war fought on Korean soil. The Korean War achieved a moratorium in 1953, but did not go beyond that to sign a peace treaty. The Indochina War ended, but in 1960 Vietnam became anew the main theatre in the struggle between Communists and US-supported anti-Communists.

South Korea participated in this war and continued to fight for ten years. North Korea, too, dispatched air force pilots. The US conducted the most cruel operations, producing large numbers of deformed children through the use of Agent Orange.

Japan did not fight in these wars, but it supported the US and profited from them. The thirty-year war in Japan's neighborhood, involving national communism versus anti-communists and the US, ended for the US in Vietnam in 1975.

Dreadful memories of the eighty-year war and pains that continue today still tear apart the peoples of these areas. Assailants have to apologize, and the sorrow and pain of the victims have to be healed. Damages that can be rectified should be compensated, hatred must be conquered, and forgiveness given.

Throughout the thirty-year war, Japan was unable to criticize itself and apologize for its own wars. In 1972, the 27th year after the war, Japan expressed self-reflection (hansei) to the Chinese people over the damage it had wrought by the war.

In 1995 the fiftieth year since the war, Japan's Prime Minister Murayama spoke of self-reflection and apology for the fact that Japan had inflicted damage and pain by colonial rule and aggression. Concerning comfort women issues, in 1993, Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono expressed reflection and apology.

In this, I think Japan made the minimum apologies that could become the basis for seeking reconciliation with the various countries in the area.

Of course, it is necessary to deepen and put soul into this. In 2007, debate over whether to really hew to the Murayama and Kõno statements became the moment for Prime Minister Abe Shinzo to resign. The anger of the Okinawan people shattered the attempt to erase the truth of the Okinawan War from Japanese textbooks.

On the other hand, the US has not yet apologized thirty-two years after the Vietnam War. Naturally, no compensation is being given to the victims of Agent Orange.

As for the Korean War, whether the moratorium can shift to a peaceful order (heiwa taisei) has become an issue in the Six-Party Talks.

The people of this region that was at war for eighty years aspire to total reconciliation. Only when everyone begins to walk in this direction will progress toward a common house for Northeast Asia be possible. The passion for reconciliation is an identity that unites this area.

III Toward a Cooperative Body (kyoryoku tai) Through Joining Hands (renkei) in the Islands

Northeast Asian countries are extremely diverse and heterogeneous historically, politically, economically and culturally. Three countries have become parliamentary democracies (gikaisei) (Japan, South Korea and Taiwan), two are former communist countries (Russia and

Mongolia), and in two (China and North Korea) the Communist Party still rules. It is difficult for such diverse countries of Northeast Asia to become a cooperative body. However, should that be realized, this would have epochal significance for overcoming the divisions of humankind. Something that binds Northeast Asia is the presence of Koreans who live in far-flung countries, notably Japan, China, Sakhalin, and the former Soviet Union, as diaspora as a result of an unfortunate history.

There are 2,400,000 Koreans in China, making possible the formation of a Korean autonomous region in Yanbian, where the largest number reside. The US has 2,050,000 immigrants from Korea. In Japan, including people from North and South, there are said to be 870,000 Korean residents, but if you add those who obtained Japanese citizenship, the number is at least one million. In the former Soviet Union, in and around Central Asia, there are 480,000 Koreans. As Southeast Asia is the world of the overseas Chinese (with smaller numbers in Northeast Asia), Northeast Asia is the world of the overseas Koreans.

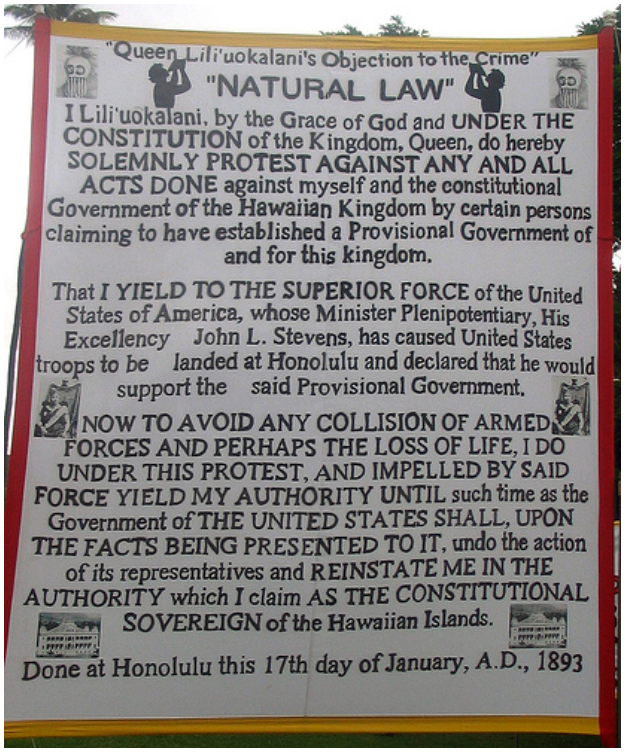
Without neglecting their ethnic origins (minzokuteki sokoku), thinking about the nations in which they currently live, they are a presence that shapes all Northeast Asia. They are Northeast Asians. In particular, more than 90% of Korean residents in Japan come from South Korea and they are members of Japanese society. They have relatives who migrated to North Korea, so they have body and heart split into three elements. Kang Sangjung, a Korean resident intellectual in Japan, proposes a common house of Northeast Asia in the Japanese parliament committee. That, one can say, demonstrates the potential of Koreans as Northeast Asians.

Another thing that unifies the area is the network of large islands throughout Northeast Asia. What is important for Northeast Asian peace, along with Korean issues, is resolution of the Taiwan problem. Taiwan has taken steps toward claiming statehood, but it has not been recognized as a state. Therefore, it is impossible for Taiwan to participate in Northeast Asian activities as a state. To break through this, we can consider Taiwan as one island and create a union of Northeast Asian islands in which Taiwan participates.

The population of Taiwan is 20,700,000, making it the largest island in Northeast Asia (excluding Japan's main islands). Next to Taiwan comes Okinawa with a population of 1,340,000. Hawaii has a population of 1,210,000. Then there is Cheju with 550,000, and Sakhalin with 540,000. In thinking of the US as a member of Northeast Asia, I think of the presence of American residents in Japan and Korea, of American Army people throughout the area, and the populations of Hawaii and Alaska should be included.

Many of these islands have a history of having been independent states. They were often the targets of competition for plunder by powerful countries, and had frequent changes of masters. And in war, fierce battles took place. Pearl Harbor, Okinawa, and the battle in Sakhalin are not yet forgotten. Cheju Island, which could have become a second Okinawa, was guarded tightly by Japan. In Taiwan and Cheju, the most tragic repression occurred after Japan's war ended. These were the February 28 Incident in Taipei (1947) and the April 3 Uprising in Cheju (1948). As a result, all islanders sincerely hope for peace. Cheju was formally named the Island of Peace by the ROK government. However, apart from Cheju, all these islands are armed. They are islands of military bases. For this very reason, it is hoped that these islands will join hands to protect peace and link those states that constitute Northeast Asia. They should play that role. These islands, because of this history, comprise a world in which the most diverse ethnicities and cultures live together. They have a vision that is open to all.

What is noticed here is that the apology (shazai) resolution adopted by both houses of the US Congress on Nov. 23, 1993 states that despite the fact that the US and Hawaiian Kingdom had diplomatic relations for 67 years, in 1893 the American ambassador conspired to overthrow the kingdom and declare Hawaii an American protectorate. It quotes the protest by Queen Liliuokalani, which said that she gives up her political power in order to avoid bloodshed before the landing of US Marines. Further, the apology records that President Cleveland, when informed of this, did not approve the overthrow of the kingdom and demanded that the Queen be restored to her position despite the fact that those who supported the overthrow of the government had declared a Republic of Hawaii. Finally in 1898, President McKinley annexed Hawaii.



Liliuokalani proclamation

The US Congress, on the 100th anniversary of the illegitimate overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom recognized that the sovereignty of the indigenous Hawaiians had been crushed and resolved that the US apologize and turn this apology into a basis for reconciliation with indigenous Hawaiians. President Clinton signed the resolution. Behind the President's signing the resolution stood the congressmen from Hawaii. Two of them were Hawaiian natives, and two were Japanese Hawaiians.

This is the America which has not taken the important action of apologizing for the Vietnam War. This makes us reflect on what attitude Japan should take toward its incorporation of the Ryukyu Kingdom and the annexation of Korea. The 100th anniversary of Korean annexation is coming in 2010.

Wada Haruki is professor emeritus, Institute of Social Science, Tokyo University and a specialist on Russia, Korea, and the Korean War.

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Wada Haruki (/authors/view/8433)

Wada Haruki is Emeritus Professor of Tokyo University and author of Kin Nissei to Manshu Konichi Senso (Kim Il Sung and the Manchurian Anti-Japanese War, 1993), Chosen Senso zenshi (A Complete History of the Korean War, 2002), Kita Chosen – Yugekitai kokka no genzai (North

Korea–Partisan State Today, 1998), Chosen yuji o nozomu no ka (Do we Want a Korean Emergency? 2002), Dojidai hihan – Nitcho kankei to rachi mondai (Critique of Our Own Times – Japan-North Korea Relations and the Abduction Problem, 2005) and Kaikoku:Nichi-Ro kokkyo kosho (Opening the Country: Japan-Russia Border Relations, 2008). He is Secretary-General of the National Association for Normalization of Japan-North Korea Relations. A list of his past works is available at his personal home page (http://www.wadaharuki.com/) (in Japanese).