

China – Korea – Japan International Summer School 2008

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This summer school gave me an opportunity to rethink about interactions between State and Nationals. I as Japanese, had faced the differences among the others through traveling or living in foreign counties for certain years in my life, and had thought about how I should represent Japan as a Japanese citizen. I constantly ask myself how I should react about the responsibility of Japanese involvement in the wartime, especially in Asian countries. Through these experiences, I had strengthened my identity as a Japanese national and I realized that the relation between state and nationals become stronger when we are under unfamiliar circumstances and surrounded by foreign people and cultures. As one of the Japanese nationals, I could not be ignorant about the past residue from the 20th century, but at the same time, I felt awkward to the framework which tied us to the borders.

In this Summer School, I stayed with other participants for 3 weeks, and it was thought-provoking the whole time. The most interesting lectures which were

held during the program are about Korean Unification and Taiwan Strait issue. These issues are in fact controversial and sensitive issues which we can see the various perspectives depending on nationalities and generations. We enjoyed discussing about these issues because everyone seemed to be stakeholders regarding to these issues. For Japanese participants, these issues may not be as relatively important when compared with other participants since they seem to not pose great effect on Japanese identity at all; however, these are crucial concerns for Chinese and Korean students. Personally, I had huge interests toward Taiwan and Korea, when I look at the frame of nations; Taiwan is one of the special countries which do not get international approval as a nation even though it seems to establish its own democracy and civilized society after 1990's. Regarding to South Korea, I was working in Seoul for 2 years as a lecturer of Social Science and Japanese language at prep-school where the Korean students prepare for the examinations for entering universities in Japan. After returning to Japan, I still worked in the same school at Japanese branch; therefore, I am confident to say that I am more familiar to the Korean's mindset than an average Japanese.

Regarding to Taiwan strait issue, one professor from Beijing University gave us a lecture about Chinese security issue, and in that lecture he stated Taiwan issue as an international security issue which concerns Chinese national sovereignty. He

mentioned that Chinese people had been historically humiliated by the invasions and occupation conducted by foreign countries. As the professor represented, Chinese government faces the political dissident; therefore, saving political ownership and legitimacy of the communist party will be the most important concern about Taiwan straits issue.

Secondly, one of the Korean professors from Seoul National University gave us a lecture about Inter-Korean relations. In this lecture, we discussed about the future unification between South and North Korea. The question I got was why unification will be the precise measure to the inter-Korean relationship and what the main reason or motivation for current Korean people's desire toward unification. I understand the strong feeling towards unification, especially among older generations; it also stimulated Korean nationals' emotions especially when touching documentaries, such as divided family, are broadcasted in South Korea. However, when we look at the younger generations, such as students whom I teach at school, have more doubt about unification because there are many difficulties that they need to overcome and South Korea has not desire to observe decline in its economic power inclining by the unification. If they do not rush for the preparation to unification, perhaps some decades later, believe and desire towards unification will be weaker and weaker. Regarding to my question, professor answered as that

National Identity is quite important to Korean people; therefore, unification is crucial to maintain their national identity. Still, I strongly doubt about the Korean national identity, because as professor mentioned, their national identity is mainly relying on “ethnicity”, which is such a vague notion at this globalized society.

Through these lectures and discussions in and outside of classes, I became to think that sentiment in other countries toward their own nations is stronger than the ordinary Japanese. National sovereignty and national identity may not be the issues posing first degree threat, however, to some extent, it contradict with international interest and identity.

Some participants said, the state issues and personal issues are different, if we can stimulate our interaction in personal level, East Asian Integration will not be just a dream. However, I strongly doubt about this thinking. Even we can have “good relationship” on the personal level, without solving problems such as historical dispute or territorial conflict, I do not think that we can establish stable relationship in the region even at personal level in the long run. It is not an easy task to integrate in Asian countries before overcoming the conflicts. On the other hand, I strongly believe that interaction at personal level can stimulate mutual-learning and cooperation among nations, and bottom-up action led by citizens has potential to provoke new governance.

So, what will be the bottom-up approach to stimulate the interaction among nations? One thing we can focus on is to educate people to have plural identity, not only national identity, and to maintain well-balanced viewpoints. Well-balanced means deep understanding about their national history, culture and interests, and also about their neighborhood nations' standpoints. I will not deny patriotism but we need to broaden our perspective not only on national interest but also on regional and international interest.

For achieving above purpose for future Asian Integration, the most important and practical step is increasing people's mobility. I think that internationalization on higher education is one of the good examples. Experience in foreign country can bring new understanding toward this region. At the same time, I also stress the importance of language policy in each country. English is obviously an important language as a common language, but learning our own languages may be more beneficial in our region. Since we shared similar derivation and cultures, we can understand each other much deeper by learning each other's language besides English.