

Regional Integration is Easier in Europe and Harder in East Asia

On September 8 of 2010, Taiwan Brain Trust, Japan's Hokkaido University, and the European Community Studies Association, co-organized the International Forum on "Regional Integration in East Asia: With the European Historical Experience as a Reference Point". Panelists from Japan, South Korea, Europe and Taiwan applied European Union experiences on the issue of whether East Asia is likely to be integrated and what the potential challenges are.

Assessing the Feasibility of East Asian Integration Based on the EU Experience

While the world is generally not optimistic about the integration of East Asia, Dr. Ken Endo, Professor of International Politics at Hokkaido University, holds the view that an integrated East Asia will not challenge the United States or harm Taiwan. In its integration process, the European Union had US military and economic support, so their relations were friendly rather than confrontational. The European Union accepted the involvement of Germany as a way to prevent the country's aggressive rise. Likewise, Taiwan and East Asia are threatened by the rise of China, and if China can be

integrated into a regional system, Taiwan can be better protected.

Professor Wu Chih-chung, Secretary-General of the European Union Study Association, commented that the EU is more than an economic integration mechanism. For those European countries that had lived through war after war, Germany and France in particular, the EU successfully brought about peace and required its member states and potential member states to uphold democracy and human rights. The EU model can inspire East Asian countries, but East Asia is not as qualified as Europe in terms of integration, and that is the challenge for East Asia in the future.

Is East Asian Community Possible?

Several scholars agree that East Asian countries have distinct differences so integrating as rapidly and profoundly as Europe did will be difficult. Dr. Kazuto Suzuki, Professor of International Politics at Hokkaido University, said that each East Asian country has different regulations for economics, finance, communications, environmental protection and intellectual property rights and this has made the birth of an East Asian Community even more difficult.

In the discussion about institutions, Dr. Tamio Nakamura, Professor of Law at Waseda University, focused on the importance of a shared legal mindset in East Asia, which will facilitate an effective and profound integration. Professor Nakamura therefore suggested that courses on the comparison of legal systems across East Asia should be provided by universities to help form a collective framework for the region.

Dr. Wu Rong-yi, Vice Chairman of the Taiwan Brain Trust, and Dr. Hong Tsai-lung, Associate Professor of China Studies at National Tsing Hua University, pointed out that East Asian countries are diverse and that if East Asia Community is established it may resemble a looser NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement).

Ohn Daewon, Associate Dean of the Graduate School of International and Area Studies at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in South Korea, said that historical disputes in Northeast Asia might hinder integration. Given such a conflictive and imbalanced structure, to say that integration is difficult is an understatement. On the other hand, Ohn believes that East Asian countries can start from bilateral cooperation and progress to multilateral cooperation after friendship and trust are built. **B**