
The Role of Higher Education in Resolving Conflicts between the Nations of East Asia

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Conflicts between East Asian countries are spreading and growing more serious. Nationalism rooted in history and based on chauvinistic national interests is a factor that continues to generate conflict. There are also conflicts over territorial rights to islands and marine resources in the East and South China Seas. China's recent declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) has made the situation worse. The possibility of a clash occurring on land or sea or in the air between Korea, China, or Japan and ASEAN member countries has even been raised. Such deepening of the situation is inhibiting the security of the region and the integration of these nations' efforts toward economic, social, and cultural cooperation. The elimination of conflict among East Asian countries is a challenge that has come to the fore as a priority for the sake of peace in the region.

In this session, we looked at the role higher education can play in resolving these conflicts peacefully from a variety of different viewpoints.

Moderator

Ko Seong-Joon (Professor,
Jeju National University)

Keynote Speaker

Huh Hyang Jin (President,
Jeju National University)

Presenters

Koide Minoru (Professor,
Soka University)

Zhao Huji (Professor of
Political Science, Party
School of the Central
Committee of C.P.C)

Huh Hyang Jin: pointed out that the “Asia Paradox,” created by the triangle of Korea, China, and Japan, is still predominant in East Asia. These countries still face disputes over rights to the islands and marine resources of the East China Sea and the South China Sea, and China's recent declaration of what it calls an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) has added to the conflicts. Huh emphasized that the proper management of these conflicts is imperative for peace and prosperity in East Asia and for

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world peace as well.

President Huh said that because the conflicts among the nations of East Asia had been in a vicious circle for a long time, creating a delicate situation in which we cannot rule out the possibility of military confrontation, we must urgently seek out ways to resolve these conflicts. Jeju Island calls itself “Jeju Peace Island,” and as a long-term head of Jeju National University, Huh emphasized the importance of higher education and the roles it might play in the peace process. He offered three suggestions.

First, he said, we need to construct an academic discourse about conflict resolution. Asserting that today’s East Asian conflicts are a reflection of ultranationalism or chauvinistic nationalism based on ideology and emotionalism, Huh proposed that we need to reorient ourselves toward a more open or internationalized nationalism.

His second suggestion was that educational content should be directed toward peace. In other words, if rather than focusing on issues of historical conflicts and struggles, university education made historical reconciliations, mutually beneficial exchanges and cooperation a central theme, it would result in redirecting our attention away from conflict toward peace.

Huh’s third proposal was to create a vision of “One Asia,” asserting that such a vision is a must for Asia’s future, and in order to create it, institutions of higher education have to build a borderless international network to form a community that functions on the basis of a beautiful win-win model.

Minoru Koide: spoke about six potential functions that universities in Japan could carry out for resolving East Asian conflicts, basing his proposals on his on-site experience as an administrator and educator.

The first function would be a providing a system of student exchanges to foster a deeper understanding of both one's own homeland and other countries. Such an East Asian exchange program is particularly important for Japan, because it would not only provide opportunities for students to gain cross-cultural experience but also teach them what it's like to exist as part of a minority, in contrast to their situation in Japan, where they are in the vast majority.

The second function would be the adoption of English as a language of education. Communication and instruction in current East Asian college exchange programs tend to be conducted primarily in English. Speaking in English makes the exchange of ideas and opinions fairer for East Asian students than it would be if exchange students used their respective native languages. This would also make the educational network among East Asian universities accessible to students from all over the world.

The third function is teaching and learning other East Asian languages. English can serve as the primary medium of communication, but it is important to learn languages of other East Asian countries for greater mutual understanding. In Japan, as in most other East Asian countries, the university is usually the primary place where students have an opportunity to learn a second foreign language.

The fourth function concerns common social issues and problems. South Korea, China, and Japan increasingly face similar problems domestically and share the same international issues. In order to find ways to solve these problems, universities can serve as ideal places for collective, cooperative efforts.

The fifth function is related to the fact that education in the humanities is on the rise among the nations of East Asia. In the Faculty of International Liberal Arts at Soka University, all or most of the classes are conducted in English. To improve the quality of humanities programs shared by East Asian universities, we need to work harder and standardize the programs so that they can serve as a long-term resource for greater understanding between our countries.

Lastly, Koide strongly emphasized the importance of the ideal of peace in East Asia and beyond. Universities must direct themselves toward ideals that reach beyond

national borders and promote universal ideals in educating students. Soka University's exchange program, which is carried out in cooperation with other East Asian universities, is one specific example of the pursuit of such humanistic values.

Zhao Huji: spoke about his view that a reinterpretation of the political values of North and South Korea and of China and Japan could be a way to arrive at peaceful solutions in Northeast Asia, and he looked at the role that universities could play in this. He said that, as Karl Deutsch pointed out, values held in common, mutual recognition, and the behavior predictability were the three most important factors that made the European Union possible. He contrasted that with the fragmentation of values that exists in Northeast Asia. In China, four different factions exist side by side: the liberals, the New Left, the democratic socialists, and the New Confucianists. In South Korea, traditional Confucianistic and Western values coexist, sometimes in harmony and sometimes in conflict. In Japan, there is a mixture of Shinto, Confucianism, Buddhism, and liberalism. And in North Korea, a black-and-white, extremist dynastic politics prevails.

Zhao said he believes that in spite of this collision and confusion of political values, a revised interpretation of them is possible in Northeast Asia. He pointed out that in China there has recently been a redistribution of powers and rights between the nation and the people, the government and the corporate sector, the central region and the provinces, and this phenomenon is something that also shows up in the differences between the political philosophies of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. He said he sees this phenomenon as a developing trend, observing the rise in criticism of Westernization in South Korea and a regression toward tradition and philosophy among the public in Japan. North Korea differs from other Northeast Asian nations in this regard, however, despite a change in the political leadership, because Kim Jong-un lacks administrative skills and experience and therefore has insufficient power.

He went on to say that although North Korea is an unknown variable, the role of institutions of higher education in the shift in political values in Northeast Asia has gradually become more important. Especially when it comes to the possibility of sharing the values of liberalism, communitarianism, Confucianism, and so on, we can actively work to build networks and exchange research through our universities.

Grant McCall: spoke about ways that Jeju National University, as an important intellectual institution on “Jeju Peace Island,” can use its competencies and many other valuable characteristics to contribute to developments in the region. He made the following specific suggestions.

First, he proposed the establishment of a Jeju Peace Island Tribunal. This would be an independent organization that initializes discussion and reports on places where peace is lacking, and it would have a role finding ways of resolving world disputes. Though it would have no powers beyond making recommendations and persuading, its main goal would be to appeal to public opinion around the world.

Second, he suggested setting up an Environment and Island Institute, which would function as a research center focused on the environment and islands. This institution would bring expertise and relevant experience to bear on the special problems of islands as places of human habitation and culture. In particular, the institute could be given coherence through the concepts of green growth and travelism with a view to reducing carbon emissions and creating a beneficial link between the travel business and the ecology. A meeting on green growth and travelism was held in Belgium in 2013, and there will be another such meeting in Melbourne, Australia, in 2014, he explained, suggesting that such a meeting be held at Jeju National University in the future, connecting its theme with the “Jeju Peace Island” concept.

A third part of the global role that Prof. McCall said Jeju National University should consider taking on is to bring its status as a Peace Island to bear in turning the Six-Culture Exploration idea, involving China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Russia, and the US, into a Seven-Culture Exploration that includes Jeju.

Finally, McCall said that Jeju Peace Island should be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. This would require a campaign that combines the resources of the over half a million people of Jejudo Island and the intellectual and mobilizing resources of Jeju National University. In the course of promoting this nomination, the stature of both Jeju Peace Island and its national university will grow, and there will be further recognition of the special qualities of this beautiful place and its institutions.

Kang Kun-Hyung: said that the most important factors that are raising tensions in Northeast Asia are the rise of China, especially its increasing defense budget and

the augmentation of right-wing nationalism in Japan, and because of these factors, territorial disputes have increased in East Asia, including the dispute between China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, the dispute between South Korea and Japan over Dokdo, the possibility of friction between South Korea and China over the Socotra Rock (called Ieodo by Koreans), China and Vietnam's dispute over the Paracel Islands, and the dispute over the Spratly Islands, which involves China, the Philippines, and some other partial claimants.

Kang proposed several things that could be done at the government level to relieve tensions in East Asia. Mutual economic involvement can lower tensions, so territorial issues and educational and cultural exchange and cooperation must be kept separate from those disputes. We have to find a reasonable way to answer the demands of the victims of the Japanese military's forced sexual labor program during the Second World War (the "Comfort Women"), which will require the Japanese government to properly acknowledge responsibility and tender a genuine apology. Based on the lessons they have learned during unfortunate events of their history, Korea, China, and Japan should conduct a trilateral project that can help them build a future of mutual prosperity. Some possible scenarios that could be carried out, with participation at the private level, are joint compilation and publication of textbooks, the establishment by government and business of foundations for victim compensation, the promotion of education and the establishment of memorial scholarships. We need to create a "dispute mediation center" on Jeju Peace Island to help resolve the conflicts in Northeast Asia. And by furthering cooperation and exchange among the citizenry of Korea, China, and Japan, we need to form overlapping civilian networks.

Lastly, Kang suggested a direction higher education might move in to relieve East Asian tensions. He sees a future in which, from the constructivist viewpoint of Alexander Wendt, through changes in personal or national sense of identity and in culture and systems, a new order is possible, and in the long term, through university education, so is the formation of a regional community based on shared culture and values and shared political and economic destiny.

To accomplish this, he made a few suggestions for the role of liberal arts education at the university level. It should nurture democratic citizens through teaching that emphasizes "good nationalism," that is, nationalism of coexistence. In dealing with

historical issues, it should nurture world citizens with an all-encompassing knowledge of those issues. It is important to spread a culture of peace that has internalized attitudes, habits, and norms that lead to peaceful resolution of conflict. And it should instill in students a sense of being not only citizens of their homeland but citizens of East Asia as well.

Policy Implications and Suggestions

- To resolve conflict in East Asia, universities should institute a discourse on the relieving of tensions, create peace-oriented curriculum content, and pursue a vision of "One Asia."
- Universities should promote peace between Korea, China, and Japan by setting up student exchange programs for better understanding of other countries, adopt English as a language of instruction as well as teaching other languages of East Asia, and improve the quality of curricula.
- Through higher education and a new understanding of the political values of North and South Korea and of China and Japan, universities should build networks and programs to exchange research that leads toward shared East Asian values of liberalism, communitarianism, and Confucianism.
- As a key institution on Jeju Peace Island, Jeju National University should broaden the range of its research and activities, putting its capabilities to best use.
- Liberal arts education should teach coexistential nationalism, nurture citizens of the world who have a broad understanding of history, spread the culture of peace, and promote an inclusive East Asian sense of identity.