

East Asian Peace Community and the Role of Jeju Civil Society

Jeju 제주국제협의회

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— **YOON Yea YI** “East Asia” is a proper geographic term, but we should not be limited by it, for it is more than just the designation of a region. Since the end of the Cold War, the prospects of the region have been restored, and it has become part of the regional strategies of all the most powerful nations, from the United States on down. It has overcome colonialism and hegemonism and become a place of regional solidarity for the implementation of systems of peace. The end of the Cold War was the most important event from which discourse regarding East Asia sprang forth. The breakup of the Soviet Union, the dismantling of the socialistic systems of Eastern Europe, and the fall of the Berlin Wall brought about tremendous changes. In East Asia, Cold War institutions were shaken up and China began to open up more quickly to the outside world, creating fissures in the wall separating continental powers from maritime ones. Political, economic, and cultural exchanges increased by leaps and bounds. Thus, it was the end of the Cold War that restored East Asia’s prospects for the future.

During the Cold War, the countries of East Asia maintained an uneasy stability under the dominance of the United States and the Soviet Union. Eventu-

ally, the Cold War state of affairs came undone, but even as it did, remnants of its influence could still be seen in East Asia. The transition from the Cold War to the Post-Cold War order was shaky in East Asia and characterized by complicated entanglements involving the United States’ strategic flexibility, Japan’s security policies, rapid development in China, North Korea’s nuclear program, Taiwanese issues, territorial disputes over various islands, and so on. Regional security problems motivated countries to strengthen their national security, which generated further tensions in the region which threatened each nation’s security. This in turn created a vicious circle that leads to a greater American presence in East Asia. There are differences in our understanding of where the boundaries of the East Asian community lie, with each country’s concept of the boundaries asymmetrically overlapping that of all the others. The idea of an East Asian Community as an organization of states came to be considered realistic because of China’s rapid development, but at the same time, China’s scale is also the reason the actual formation of an East Asian Community as an economic bloc, or along the lines of the European Union, looks

improbable.

Ideas such as building an East Asian Community or regionally working together toward greater prosperity are often talked about, but there are always conflicts and tensions among these regional entities. Their rush to modernize has become a rivalry that breeds hostility, and the division of Korea, Taiwanese issues, and territorial disputes make matters worse. Each of the countries involved sees these problems in a different light and gives them different weight, making solutions hard to come by. Developing a constructive viewpoint on East Asia demands introspection, understanding of others, overcoming prejudices about the superiority of Far Eastern culture and customs, eliminating nationalism, resolving nationalistic confrontations, coexistence, exchange, reconciliation, cooperation, solidarity, consolidation, balance, harmonious relations, soft power, the promotion of civil society, and liaisons between civil societies.

— **YANG Gil Hyun** When we talk about the discourse on East Asia, we should not just limit ourselves to South Korea. We have to include the North if we are to overcome regional imbalances and stand on an equal footing with China.

— **JEONG Young Sin** When it comes to the overall evaluation of the Peace Island project, the organizers themselves are very positive about it, but most researchers are critical of it or have evaluated it negatively. The current reality is that the project lacks coherence and the power to push forward, and I think this is because of policies that focus on civil engineering work and avoiding issues related to, or just going along with, the militarization of Jeju. It is urgent that we rethink this and find ways to do something about it.

The April 3 Incident taught us lessons about violence committed by the state and generated criticism of the divided system that caused it, setting for us the task of overcoming those causes. Because of the geopolitics of Jeju, we have realized the need to make it a demilitarized zone and counteract its militarization. We have learned the various values and concepts of peaceful coexistence with nature and others, rather

just pushing blindly ahead with development. All of these factors, when brought together, indicate that the Peace Island project needs to be reworked.

In the 1990s, in the Post-Cold War atmosphere of democratization, the Jeju April 3 Special Law was put in place with the hope of narrowing the gap between Jeju and the mainland. Jeju was lagging behind, so there was a strong feeling that its designation as an Island of Peace would lead to progress in this regard. However, the project moved away from the idea of a demilitarized province as it was carried forward and the term “Peace Island” came to be used simply to mean progress, ignoring the true meaning of peace, which needs to be clearly reinstated in any related special laws. In 2018 we will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the April 3 Incident. I hope this will be an occasion to reconsider Jeju’s future.

In order to spread the concepts of the Island of Peace and the meaning of the April 3 Incident, we have to expand exchanges with people who come from places of conflict so that a new paradigm of peace, as a realistic solution to strife, will take hold across the region. We need to spread the peaceful values of citizens’ rights and duties, and carry out active programs of social exchange.



Policy Implications

- East Asia is still in the crossroads of the Cold War and the Post-Cold War situation. The reason for this is that compared to the full economic exchange and cooperation that exists in the region, the level of military confrontation and conflict is high. We need to approach this problem from an economic and military standpoint and the viewpoint of civil society.
- The citizens of Jeju must figure out what direction they will take and what role they will play in promoting exchanges and cooperation in East Asia, as well as in building peace in the region.
- By doing some deep thinking about Jeju as an Island of Peace, we need to come up with a new vision for how Jeju should play that role. We need to spread peaceful values as the right and duty of the citizenry, and devise ways for citizens to express their thoughts and opinions on how they can participate in many different ways in creating a new Island of Peace.