Feature Review and Discussion

For A Regional History of East Asia: Comments on the Article by Professor Fujii

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I. Is it ‘A History of East Asia’ or ‘A History Textbook Common to East Asia’?

Having read Professor Fujii’s article, I now understand why he has decided now to write ‘A history textbook common to East Asia.’ Having reflected on the latest controversy over the Japanese history textbooks, they have arrived at a conclusion that for a fundamental solution beyond simple glossing over they need ‘a history text book common to East Asia’ instead of textbook for each separate country. I also regard it necessary to overcome the historical view particular to one nation and develop a perspective to grasp East Asia as a whole and write a ‘history of East Asia’ based on it.

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Just as local histories and a national history may be found within the history of a nation, within a national history a regional history is an intermediate unit reaching to the world history. Especially the pre-existing view of the world history reinforced to develop in the framework of regional civilizations making both as composite units of the world history which itself has shifted from the nation to regional civilization. In the past history was understood from the national or inter-national point of view, now we are to understand history from a regional or inter-regional angle. When in this way we try to understand the history of East Asia as a regional history with ‘a unique civilization,’ we can grasp the similarities and diversities of the history of East Asia in a better way, which have been overlooked in national history, by putting main emphasis on the national history. Only then, we can also understand better the mutual relations between East Asia and other regions. And when we do have a regional history with a different perspective, can we prevent leaning on Euro-centrism view of the world history, and rationally understand national history without falling into national-centrism.

A history textbook common to Europe has been written following the integration of Europe. The probable reason why the writers of this textbook have not negated the national history is that the national history, the regional history, and the world history are complementary to each other. From such a viewpoint I see the regional history of East Asia is extremely useful and necessary. Although I agree to pursue such a regional history, but I am skeptical that it would serve as a means of fundamentally resolving the issues raised by the controversies over the problem of history textbooks in Japan, which have caused the turbulence among the intellectuals. The causes are very much can be found within Japan. What attracts more among the causes is the ‘postwar democratic system.’ This system in the process of the postwar management placed the responsibility of war to a small number of ‘individual leaders’ instead of the state, and exonerated the emperor who was the ‘national polity’ (Kokutai) itself. As it well known that the decision was a collusion of the