

Tumenjiang: the Strategic Center of the Japan Sea Rim

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THE JAPAN SEA RIM

The Northeast Asian region has experienced rapid changes from last year through this year. Last January, negotiations for normalizing Japan—Korea diplomatic relations started, and in April, former Soviet President Gorbachev made an official visit to Japan for the first time as a national leader. In addition, to our surprise, the Soviet Union collapsed in December, and this was followed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter North Korea) signing an agreement on the inspection of nuclear facilities by the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) in January. During this political restructuring, China announced plans to accelerate reform and open its economy at the Seventh National People's Congress. China has also made rapid progress in increasing the volume of trade with North Korea without establishing diplomatic relations. Last July, an initial effort was made to begin direct trade between North Korea and South Korea and further evolving changes are expected in this area. An era of communication and exchange has come to this area, which had been closed completely by the influence of the Cold War between the East and the West.

The idea of a "Japan Sea Rim Economic Zone" for five economic regions (Japan the Far East region of Russia, North and South Korea, and the Northeast region of China) dates back to the 1960s. The rapid changes in this area during the last one to two years have pushed this idea to the front and moved it from being a mere master plan toward realization. An example is the "Tumenjiang Development Master Plan" which now frequently appears in the newspapers. Tumenjiang, Tumangang in Korean, is the international river 516 km in total length, which flows along the border between China and North Korea. Three countries (Russia, China, and North Korea) share the border at the mouth of this river, with the Chinese territory lying about 15 kilometers upstream. Without international navigation rights, China cannot exit to the Japan Sea from its territory. Therefore, Jilin and Heilongjiang in Northeast China do not have an exit to the sea, and the products from both provinces are shipped from Dalian.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR NORTHEAST ASIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Under these circumstances, China initiated the master plan of the Tumenjiang Development Program. During the 7th century, Bohai made a visit across the Japan Sea. China constructed a port upstream at Hunchun during the 17th century. International shipping lines opened during the 1920s and 1930s, and China shipped products to Niigata on the Japan Sea coast, Wonsan, Pusan, and Nagasaki. The trading volume was quite significant, however, because of World War II, the Korean War, and the eventual deterioration of Sino—Soviet relations, the mouth of the river has been kept closed.

In 1989, when President Gorbachev visited Beijing, he offered navigation rights on the Tumenjiang River to the sea. In July of the following year, at the "International Conference for Northeast Asian Development" held in Changchun, Jilin Province, Ding Shicheng, the director of the Science and Technology Committee of Jilin Province, announced the master plan for development.

This development plan intends to construct an international port at Fanchuang in Hunchun, Yanbian Chaoxianzu Zizhizhou, and Jilin Province, and to designate this area as a free trade zone. This plan covers the development of the surrounding areas of the "golden" delta connecting the capital of the prefecture, Yanji, Vladivostok, and Chongjin in North Korea. The golden delta is about 160 kilometers long from north to south and 200 kilometers wide from east to west, with a total area of about 1.5 square kilometers. It lies within 1,200 kilometers of major cities with populations exceeding 100,000, that are located within the Japan Sea Rim Economic Zone.

In this area, there are many good harbors such as Chongjin, Vladivostok, Rajin, Sonbong, Nakhodka, and Vostochny, all in the vicinity of the golden delta.

In other words, the master plan intends to develop this area as the center of the Japan Sea Rim by combining resources in the Far East region, the labor force of China and North Korea, and the capital and technology of Japan and South Korea.

This conference, which was co—organized by the East—West Center of the United States and API (Asia Pacific Institute) of China, involved the participation of seven countries (China, the Soviet Union, North and South Korea, Mongolia, Japan, and the United States). The participation of North Korea in a conference of this kind was epoch—making. Furthermore, the representative of North Korea expressed overall support for the development plan of China by saying, "We support the plan to jointly develop and use the international river Tumenjiang by North Korea, China, and the USSR."

Lee—Jay Cho, a vice president of the East—West Center and chairman of the meeting, indicated in his closing remarks that this conference was epoch—making for the Japan Sea Rim. He concluded as follows: "The Japan Sea bade farewell to the long—strained sea and has started to change to a place of exchange. We marked a historical first step in building a prosperous 'Northeast Asian Economic Zone.'" And the following year, at the second conference held in Changchun, a feasibility study was proposed and more details of the development plan were discussed. Furthermore, the third conference is planned in Vladivostok this August as the "Northeast Asian Economic Forum."

NORTH KOREA'S TUMANGANG DEVELOPMENT PLAN

As mentioned in the previous section, Tumenjiang development was based on the master plan prepared by Jilin Province at the beginning, and discussion of its feasibility has continued. However, early last July, at the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) meeting held in Ulan—Bator, North Korea declared it would open three northern ports in Sonbong, Rajin, and Chongjin.

At the international symposium organized as a part of the "Sea Festival" held in Niigata at the end of July, the North Korean representative revealed detailed information on the three northern ports for the first time in the Western Bloc. Furthermore, at the international conference at Pyongyang organized by UNDP, an agreement was reached to organize a port development plan.

I was fortunate to get a chance to visit these three northern ports in November, during the time when North Korea declared them open and had designated the area as a special economic zone. During my visit, North Korea suggested holding a "Pyongyang International Conference" with the theme of "Tumangang delta" development. This clearly showed a North Korean initiative to open the economy and a strong will to join the international arena.

With this strong initiative from North Korea, the Pyongyang international conference was held from April 28 to May 3, and included an inspection of the Tumangang delta and the three northern ports. There were 159 participants from seven countries (North Korea sent 79 participants, Japan, 51, South Korea, 18, Russia, 4; the United States, 3, China, 3, Mongolia, 1), 5 participants from UNDP, and 43 journalists from the United States, France, Germany, and Japan.

The conference started with the presentation of a "Free Economic Trade Zone Plan" by four North Korean experts. The outline of the plan is as follows: development is concentrated on 195 square kilometers out of 621 square kilometers of the Rajin—Sonbong region; 4.2 billion dollars are expected for infrastructure development. Infrastructure development will include the construction of new ports to increase the cargo service capacity by 0.1 ton a year, electrification with a double—truck line for a northern circuit railroad, and construction of a northern circuit highway, among others. In summary, North Korea plans to develop this area as a base for freight transport between China and Russia by improving port facilities and the transport system.

Russia, the other country that shares the Tumenjiang delta, has also announced a development plan for this area. This plan was developed by UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organization) as the "Great Vladivostok Free Economic Zone Plan." The basic outline of the development is to open the coastal area around Vladivostok and Nakhodka to foreign investment, and to integrate the Russian Far East with the Asian economic zone.

At the conference, Vladivostok was designated as an international trade port, and the Russian delta area at the mouth of Tumenjiang was considered a resort and recreational area utilizing its beautiful coast line. Therefore, development plans for China, which insists on constructing its own port, and those for the Russian coastal area and for North Korea, have all lined up. At present, the plans of these three countries differ in their respective goals. However, it is worth noting that all three

countries have recognized the importance of this area and have started development planning. From now on, those three countries, together with Japan, South Korea, and the United States, must proceed with development planning in a mutually beneficial way. We have to move forward in small steps, starting with the Vladivostok conference in August.

SOLIDARITY OF THE JAPAN SEA RIM AND THE COALITION MOVEMENT

While each country in the Japan Sea Rim is moving forward around Tumenjiang development, what is the response in Japan? To begin with, the starting point of the movement was to realize that a goal of the Japan Sea Rim was to alleviate the economic differences between *omote nihon* (Pacific coast) and *ura nihon* (Japan sea coast). I organized and initiated the "Economic Research Institute for the Japan Sea Rim" 25 years ago. It started as a study group with intellectuals in Tokyo. At that time, the Ikeda cabinet tried to double national income by implementing the Pacific megalopolis policy which resulted in the massive migration of population from villages on the Japan seaside to cities along the Pacific seaside. This phenomenon created words such as *kamitsu* and *kaso* (densely—populated and sparsely—populated), *toshi* and *noson* (city and village), *omote nihon* and *ura nihon* (Pacific side and Japan seaside; literally they mean front and back of Japan). A simple questioning about these expressions, *omote* and *ura*, was the starting point for initiating the Japan Sea Rim movement. It intended to alleviate the differences between *omote* and *ura*, to promote economic exchange with neighboring countries across the sea, to correct the centralization in Tokyo, and to reform the centralized system that has existed since the Meiji period into a decentralized system.

Looking forward to the outcomes of the "Japan Sea Rim Economic Zone" which is about to start, the regions along the Japan Sea must demonstrate solidarity and cooperation. Therefore, domestically this Japan Sea Rim movement is a regional coalition to obtain solidarity along the Japan Sea Rim. Even though the Japan Sea Rim Economic Zone is moving forward, it would be useless if there were a conflict among the regions in allocating surpluses. Also, rapid movement by Niigata or Hokkaido, leaving other prefectures behind, would not be a good idea because this could result in the Japan Sea Rim producing a little Tokyo while trying to correct centralization in Tokyo. Various ways of role sharing should be considered. In order to create consensus, it is necessary for prefectural governments and private organizations to exchange information and ideas. We expect Kyoto, San—in, and Kitakyushu to participate in addition to Hokkaido, Tohoku, Niigata, and Hokuriku. Also, participation from inland areas such as Nagano and Gumma would be appreciated. If it is possible to organize a regular meeting such as a "Japan Sea Rim Cooperation Summit", a mutual coordination mechanism would be created from the information exchange. In the future, a reorganization of the present administrative system might emerge. This is the era of borderless societies with the elimination of the barriers of border, races, and culture. Inside of the country, we have to continue to make an effort to cross the borders of prefectures. The "Japan Sea Rim Cooperation Summit" would play a great role in strengthening the movement in each region to realize borderless exchange.

JAPAN SEA RIM ECONOMIC ZONE AND TUMENJIANG DELTA

In conclusion, for the development of Tumenjiang, which is a strategic center for the Japan Sea Rim, Japanese participation and cooperation are essential. With improvement of the domestic system and the development of the movement mentioned above, Tumenjiang development would make great strides. We should not forget that the Tumenjiang delta is the gateway to the shortest route from Japan to Europe. In other words, this area has the potential to become a bridge between East and West. Therefore, Japan must positively engage in the coordination of development planning at all levels of organization, both public and private, as well as provide financial and technical assistance for this area.