

## Discussions

### TANAKA Akihiko:

The conference was extremely enlightening as all three panelists draw on their years of research to present a clear picture of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), an organization which is not particularly well known in Japan, even among specialists in international affairs.

I am quite grateful to the three panelists for their contributions in shedding light on the nature of the SCO. Having listened to their presentations, I have gained three levels of understanding. The first level of understanding is a global view; the second level of understanding is a regional view, especially in terms of regional institutions; and the third level of understanding concerns Japan's diplomacy toward the SCO.

First, globally, I get the impression after listening to the presentations that we are now at a stage of understanding that is more nuanced, and thus more suitable for trying to make sense of the SCO. To put it differently, the age of the Neocon (i.e., Neoconservatism) is over. The black and white distinction between friends and foes is now a thing of the past. In the past, the SCO was either regarded as an unfriendly organization or friendly organization. So which is it? But thankfully, the characterizations made by both Dr. Katz and Dr. Antonenko go beyond the past mischaracterizations of the SCO. I also want to add that Dr. Iwashita's distinction between what I might call "borderful" relations and "borderless" relations is a very interesting and fresh way of looking at geopolitical realities nowadays. "Borderful" relations between two countries are tied to the existence of the border area while "borderless relations" would give the concerned countries a kind of freehand for diplomacy: The latter case is true for US foreign relations with Central Asia or Uzbekistan relations with China, Russia and the US.

The second part of my response deals with the characterization of the SCO as a regional institution. And it is at this point that I now realize some of the similarities the SCO has with other regional organizations that we now have in Asia. As Dr. Antonenko pointed out, Central Asian countries are still in the midst of nation building and are relatively weak vis-à-vis their neighbors. Other problems exist as well. For example, Central Asia and its neighbors do not have supranational institutions and then there is the potential rivalry between China and Russia. There are also a lot of problems in terms of the spread of democracy and human rights.

Taking a closer look at ASEAN, over the last 30 years ASEAN had been characterized as an organization whose members are very weak, and often in the midst of nation building. Furthermore, ASEAN has yet to develop any suprana-

tional institutions. Maybe in this respect "ASEAN plus Three" is somewhat reminiscent of the SCO. "ASEAN plus Three," which was created in 1997, has often been characterized by the rivalry between Japan and China. Within either ASEAN or "ASEAN plus Three" there remains problematic countries in terms of democracy building or human rights. Just to name one, Myanmar has always been counted as a member. It may be useful to compare the development of the SCO with the developments of other regional organizations that are emerging in East Asia.

I would now like to make some comments on Dr. Katz's presentation. I am quite impressed with Dr. Katz's summary of Putin's vision of the SCO. He also pointed out the limitations of Putin's vision, highlighting some of the reservations some have expressed about its viability. But what concerns me is that still I have the impression that some Americans are overly influenced by what Dr. Katz refers to as "Putin's vision" of the SCO when Americans consider the regional and global role of the SCO.

I understand his viewpoint and it's very persuasive, but what I would like to know is his sense of America's views on the SCO. In particular, what does he think about the future direction of America's approach to the SCO following the ongoing presidential campaign as well as after the next presidential election?

And finally, I would like to make some comments about the SCO in terms of Japan's diplomacy. In my understanding, Central Asia was a relatively neglected area of Japan's diplomacy in the Koizumi Junichiro administration. It was during the time of the Hashimoto Ryutaro administration that the Japanese government created the phrase "Eurasian diplomacy" and promoted some ties with Central Asian countries. And from my vantage point, former Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo had paid fairly consistent attention to what was going on in the region. But unfortunately, the succeeding governments had paid scant attention to Central Asia, most particularly the SCO.

It is true that the Japanese government created what is called the Central Asia plus One — "Central Asia plus Japan" approach. And it is true that Koizumi in the final months of his administration paid visits to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to broaden Japan's Central Asian diplomacy. But I have the impression that past recent efforts in Tokyo have not resulted in the sort of systematic attention to Central Asia necessary to broaden its policy. Anyway, we need to ask our government to focus more on establishing a more integrated Asian policy, including Central Asia. Unfortunately, it is fragmented and not very coherent.

And I think now of what Dr. Iwashita mentioned has a ring of truth. Japan has an advantage in dealing with Central Asian countries and I think by Japan acting as a dialogue partner within the SCO, Japan could play a more constructive role in stabilizing the region. If you remember what I said about the similarities between "ASEAN plus Three" and the SCO, the concept of dialogue partner has

been utilized by ASEAN for many years. The ASEAN created this concept in the late 1970s and early 1980s, while Japan was one of the first dialogue partners of ASEAN. Following this trend, the EU became a dialogue partner and the Post-Ministerial Conference, usually held in late July, was established. This sort of similar evolution could be possible with respect to the SCO. And towards those ends, the government should take heed of Dr. Iwashita's research, and then Japan could start to play a more constructive role in the coming months and years ahead. Thank you very much.

### **SHIMUZU Manabu:**

I would like to raise some issues concerning the SCO. I have been following the development of the SCO for the last 10 years as a specialist in South Asian Studies, not as a specialist in Russian Studies.

The first point I want to raise is that the SCO is not a regional organization with any fixed objectives and agenda. Since the creation of the "Shanghai Five" in 1996, the main purposes of the organization have always been in flux. The first of which was a sort of confidence building agenda among the related countries, Russia, China and Central Asia (the former republics of the Soviet Union) to resolve border issues. Another, formulated in 1999, was the formation of a sort of common front in the fight against "international terrorism," "separatism," and "religious extremism." Finally, I would like to address the concerns following the acceptance of new countries as observer nations within the SCO – Mongolia, India, Pakistan, and Iran. Particularly Iran's acceptance as an observer nation has been a cause of great concern for the US and other western nations, thus adding a new implication to the role of the SCO.

The SCO is, so to speak, always transforming itself vis-à-vis external circumstances and also among member countries, including the observer states. When we look at the SCO, it's best not to have any pre-conceived notions of the role of the SCO. This is the first point.

The second point is that actors in the SCO are also undergoing changes. Although Uzbekistan was accepted as a member state of the SCO, Uzbekistan itself or President Islam Karimov himself, has pragmatically altered Uzbekistan's attitude towards external factors. After Uzbekistan tried to reconcile its differences with the Taliban, President Karimov then tried to have cordial relations with the United States. After a change of heart, he rejected the United States after the violence in Andijan in May, 2005. It suggests that the attitudes of the actors within the SCO are protean as well.

The third point is the principle on which the SCO was founded. As Dr. Tanaka has pointed out, the basic principle of the SCO as a kind of regional corpora-

tion mechanism seems to be different from the principle on which the United States or the EU base their understanding of the SCO. In short, Asian countries all have their own different regional characteristics. Asia does not have any "common value" or "common standard" which could be applied across the board. For example, the ASEAN is composed of countries that ascribe to a variety of religious beliefs and values. While some maintain a strong Christian presence, some countries have a Buddhist background while others are under Islamic values. Countries with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds share one regional organization together there.

The principles of this type of organization must be practical and independent of "value evaluations." When we take up the example of the SCO, it appears to contain a mixture of both Asian and European values. Under the current conditions the SCO raises the need to have dialogue with the US and EU. The West might as well understand first the background for this kind of regional cooperation.

The fourth point is the Iranian issue. The observer status given to Iran within the SCO constitutes a sensitive element when outsiders evaluate the orientations of the SCO. In this case, it is important to note difference of perceptions of the Islamic "radical movements" among the countries concerned. All of the Central Asian republics, particularly Uzbekistan, keenly worry about Hizbul Tahrir. However, the attitude of the United States is vague in this respect. The US Department of State has yet to include Hizbul Tahrir on its list of international terrorist organizations. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why Uzbekistan does not fully trust American attitudes towards Central Asia.

The fifth point is Japan's relations with Central Asia. Japan's approach to Central Asia is now more active than before, placing Central Asia in the total framework of the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity." Central Asia has become much more important than before for Japan, not only from a strategic perspective, but also from an economic perspective. This is because Japan faces not only energy problems but also the difficulty of finding a reliable supplier of raw materials such as rare metals and uranium to fuel its nuclear energy plants for the Japanese industry. Japan depends on China for various kinds of rare metals, even though China cannot afford to export those rare metals anymore. Japan has to find alternative sources. Central Asia, in particular, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, is expected to be an important source of raw materials including rare metals.

In the end, I again support the major proposal of Dr. Iwashita that Japan can and should play a sort of intermediary role between the SCO and western countries including the United States. As I mentioned, the SCO is always changing itself to adjust to the circumstances within and outside, thus showing its flexibility. If admitted as a dialogue partner, Japan could have an impact also on the process of the SCO. Indeed, it may not be enough, but the status of dialogue counterpart

or partnership could prove useful to develop mutual understanding among them and could impact the transformation of the SCO in a positive way.