

Japan's Triple Disaster and East Asia: Reaffirmation of Human and Historical Ties

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中文提要

今（2011）年3月11日，日本宮城縣外海發生規模9.0強震，地震不僅隨即引發海嘯，數日後更造成福島第一核電廠發生氫爆及輻射外洩，多重而嚴重的災情備受國際矚目。本文作者當時正因學術研討會之邀，造訪日本東京，故於文中首先細膩地描述親身的經歷與觀察。其次，作者整理並分析東亞及東南亞各國對此次日本複合式災害的回應，各國一方面透過捐款、弛援等方式表達同情與關懷，另一方面也籌謀與日本未來政經關係的變化，尤其是長期倚重日本官方發展援助（Official Development Aid, ODA）和投資的國家。作者認為，短期間日本對東亞其它國家的貿易、投資甚至 ODA 勢必有所減少，但隨著災後重建將會逐漸回復正常；此外，對於輻射問題恐影響日本本土的農作生產，進而提供周邊鄰國農產品外銷機會之可能性，作者並不樂觀，因為日本主要的農產地不在此次災區，且日本政府也不會輕易採取上述進口政策。

作者還分析了日本核能相關政策的發展，身為東亞區域主要核能技術輸出國，並對核能安全維護累積相當經驗，她從核災後日本政府的態度觀察，日本應不會放棄核能源的使用，但會增進強化核安的議題與宣導。另外，美國在此次複合式災害後對日本的援助使美日關係更加緊密，她預估日本在經濟與國家安全上將更加依賴美國，有可能影響日本向來提倡的「東亞共同體」（East Asian Community）的成員組合，顯示「東亞共同體」對日本的重要性仍無法超越美國。

My Indonesian friend and I had just returned to Sophia University, a Jesuit university in central Tokyo, from a brief visit to Harajuku, where I bought a daruma for a Filipino friend. A daruma is a red paper mache copy of a Buddhist monk's head. My friend asked me to buy it so that she could paint the pupils on both eyes to symbolize the completion of two museum projects (in the first museum, there is already a daruma with one eyed painted). Many Japanese politicians do the same thing, but with just one daruma: they paint one pupil upon announcement of their candidacy, and the other, when they win. Daruma, therefore represents a wish and the fulfillment of the wish. Daruma also represents resilience and perseverance

because no matter how many times you hit this egg-shaped paper mache and make it fall, it always stands up on its own.

I had just put the daruma on my desk at the third floor of the library of Sophia University when the great Tohoku-Kanto (Northeast-North region) earthquake struck. Having experienced several earthquakes in different parts of Japan, I had thought this was just one of those earthquakes. My Indonesian friend experienced an earthquake for the first time, and she was terrified to death. For the first time in my life, I saw how a Muslim prays for her life.

The sight of books that fell out of the swaying shelves and the tremors of several strong aftershocks made me

realize that this was not just one of those earthquakes. It was the biggest I have ever experienced in Japan, as well as in the Philippines, also an earthquake-prone country.

The March 11, 2011 disaster was a triple disaster: earthquake, tsunami, and breakdown of nuclear reactors at Fukushima, causing radiation leakage. Over 10 thousand lives were lost and survivors are still looking for missing relatives. Destroyed industries, agricultural lands, business establishments and private homes add up to by far the costliest in modern Japan's history. The cost of reconstruction and rehabilitation is also predicted to be one of the highest in recent history. Problems about radiation and fear of it, whether justified or not will not easily die down, and will, for a long time, fire anti-nuclear protest movements all over the world.

THE IMMEDIATE IMPACT ON A PERSONAL LEVEL

On the same day, two Filipino public intellectuals in their 80's were on board Philippine Airlines at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport in Manila. They were bound for Tokyo to participate in a conference on memories of World War II. They were supposed to narrate their personal experiences. I and my husband were supposed to give papers too, not as witnesses, but as scholars who do research on Philippines-Japan relations. That was why we were in Tokyo. We arrived a few days ahead of the conference date. The audience was supposed to be mainly Japanese. After three hours on the plane, the passengers were told that the flight had to be cancelled because the plane would not be able to land on Narita Airport. The airport and its vicinity had suffered damage due to the earthquake.

The conference was cancelled not only because the two main speakers could not come, but because of the

general uncertainty prevailing even in central Tokyo, which is several miles away from the epicenter of the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear radiation. The two elderly public intellectuals were disappointed. It would have been their first opportunity to talk about the war to a Japanese audience, right in Japan, which they had not visited since decades ago.

My husband and I were disappointed. With initial hesitation, we cut short by ten days our supposed to be one-month stay. The initial hesitation to leave Tokyo even before the end of our planned stay shortly turned into a strong desire to go home after we saw shelves in the neighborhood supermarkets and stores emptied and not replenished for several days. I was just wondering why potato chips, chocolates, ramen, and bread were the first to disappear. Disappearance of ramen and bread is understandable, but potato chips and chocolates? At home, these are what we call junk food. We also noticed that there were very few people at train stations that used to be always crowded. The streets and corridors of buildings which used to be well lit were dark. Because of the nuclear reactor breakdown in Fukushima, even central Tokyo which was not included in the rolling blackouts had to economize on energy, to prevent the worsening of blackouts. Tokyo was different, we felt. Moreover, the libraries had either closed or reduced their service hours. Because of the numerous aftershocks still expected to come, it was risky for the libraries to hire student volunteers to put the books in order. By relying only on their regular staff, it would take them more than a month to restore the books in their right shelves.

Some forty Filipino families were evacuated from the scene of the disaster to Catholic churches in Tokyo. Two Japanese friends of ours, professors who specialize on Philippine Studies, were there to help. They saw the pain in the faces of the Filipina wives and their children who had

to be separated from their Japanese husbands. The Japanese husbands had to stay behind, else, suffer the risk of losing their jobs. A few overseas workers had no choice but to abandon their jobs.

The bright side of this otherwise pathetic scene was the continuous arrival of food given by Filipino residents in Japan. There was so much food, that after a couple of days, the parish priest had to issue a request to give only oranges, bananas, and apples – fruits that would not spoil at once. There were so many volunteers too, that the priest had to say “too many volunteers already, please do not come without asking me first.”

On our side, the bright side was that our Japanese friend, the organizer of the cancelled conference, took us in his car to Narita. This was an act of kindness and concern we never expected any friend of ours to do for us, and they never did until this time, because it was unnecessary. We have been to Japan often, we know the language, we know our way, and Tokyo to Narita is easy to navigate even for first-timers because of the efficient means of transportation and tourist friendly services. But these were extraordinarily unpredictable times. What, if another big tremor came? What, if our flight was cancelled? What, if the roads between the airport and Tokyo got blocked? Our friend wanted to be sure he would be there to rescue us in case any of these scary things happened.

For the two public intellectuals who did not make it to Tokyo on March 11, the good news was that the conference will be re-scheduled from around summer this year, at the earliest. And they are willing and are sure that they will come. For the organizer of the conference, he was given permission by the sponsor of the conference to use up the budget by September. Moreover, he was given a bigger grant to expand the conference to the following year.

Many graduation ceremonies were cancelled. A former student of mine had rented a hakama, the traditional graduation garb that looks like loose pleated pants worn by samurai of old, but she never wore it. Her parents had arrived to attend the graduation ceremony, but they decided to just go sightseeing. In Sophia University, what would have been spent for the graduation ceremony would be donated to the victims of the earthquake and tsunami.

No doubt, the March 11, 2011 disaster touched the lives of many people. The experiences of the Filipino public intellectuals, the Japanese specialists on Philippine Studies, the Filipinas married to Japanese, the Filipino overseas workers, Filipino students, my husband and I are just small dots in a much larger picture. The triple disasters brought death, destruction, sorrow, pain and radiation fears. But it also occasioned a strong re-affirmation of the ties that bind these Filipinos and Japanese. Such re-affirmation of friendship and concern, I am sure, is echoed and re-echoed several times among many other Japanese and their friends in East Asia.

Moreover, the re-scheduling of the cancelled conference and the promise of a bigger grant and bigger conference is a small affair that indicates a bigger picture: Japan will overcome the impact of the triple disaster and come out of the experience smarter and more purposive in the pursuit of its national interest. Just like a daruma.

IMMEDIATE REACTIONS FROM EAST ASIA

Among the world's developed countries, Japan is the closest to China, Korea, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia. This is speaking geographically and historically. The negative legacy of the Japanese occupation of China, Korea, and most of Southeast is very much alive, although most of Southeast Asia have forgiven (but not forgotten). The

legacy of the Japanese Occupation of Taiwan was not as grim; indeed, many Taiwanese have fond memories of the Occupation. China and Korea remember the most and are most critical of Japanese prime ministers' visits to Yasukuni Shrine and the revisionist textbooks.

Despite East Asian countries' different historical memories vis-à-vis Japan, each one of them had the same immediate reaction to the tragedy that struck their Asian neighbor. Each one offered help and sent messages of sympathy and consolation. China was one of the first to send search and rescue volunteers, as well as cash donations and relief goods. China remembers that when Sichuan was hit by a huge earthquake in 2008, Japan was the first country to send a rescue team, cash, and relief goods. Celebrities in Taiwan held concerts and donated the proceeds to the Japanese victims. It is also reported that more than 300 farmers' associations in Taiwan donated to the Japan Agricultural Cooperatives NT \$26 million (US\$ 881, 500), and that cash donation from Taiwan totals to around US\$ 170 million. Japan's one China policy is not a hindrance to Taiwan's expression of kindness and friendship. From Korea, search and rescue volunteers came, and a total of US\$ 50 million was donated. Of course, the Korean residents in Japan did their own part. The bitter memory of the long Japanese occupation of Korea and the present economic rivalry between Korea and Japan are not enough to stop such expression of consolation and sympathy. School children in remote provinces in the Philippines passed around empty milk cans for coins, and sent their humble collection to the victims. Many of these children have been benefactors of projects of Japanese NGOs. Former scholars of the Japanese government, most of whom are now in important positions in government, business, the academe, and almost all other fields in the Philippines, collected donations and letters of sympathy. This too, is out of gratitude for the support that the

Japanese government has given to their attainment of higher education. The Philippine government sent relief goods and supplies in lieu of its initial offer of search and rescue volunteers, which had been turned down. Indonesia too sent a medical team, instead of the original offer of search and rescue team, which also had been turned down. A Sumatran student on Japanese government scholarship in Kyoto volunteered to work among the evacuees and shared her poetry about the 2004 tsunami in Sumatra. Laos, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam also sent cash and relief goods.

The immediate reaction from Southeast Asia was to help and repay Japan, the source of most of the foreign aid that has helped the region achieve economic development. Moreover, they remember that Japan always extended help to them in times of natural calamities such as typhoons, floods, earthquakes and tsunamis. The feeling of gratitude and paying back is as strong as empathy and sympathy. Notable about the source of cash donations from most of East Asia is that they came not only from the government, but from private industries, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens too, an indication of the strong people-to-people relations between Japan and its neighbors in East Asia.

Prime Minister Naoto Kan made it a point to publicize his government's gratitude to more than a hundred countries who offered help and consolation to Japan.

Indonesia currently chairs ASEAN and it is just fitting that Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono recalls that Japan was quick to give help to Sumatra when it was hit by a massive earthquake and tsunami in 2004. Barely a month after the triple disaster, Jakarta hosted the special Japan-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on April 9. The special meeting was held for the purpose of discussing how best ASEAN and Japan can cooperate in post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation, and how to manage

disasters. The triple disaster in Japan triggered the holding of the special meeting, but its focus was not this specific triple disaster. The focus was disasters in general. And it was a forward-looking meeting, rather than an analysis and reflection over the recent triple disaster.

There was a great amount of sentimentality in this meeting. Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya reportedly said that Thailand owes a lot to Japan for its economic development in the past sixty years. Likewise, Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong was quoted telling Japanese Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto that Cambodia could not have achieved its present state of development without Japanese help.

Expressions of sympathy and sending of volunteer teams, relief goods and cash were mixed with East Asian political and economic leaders' anxiety about the future of trade with Japan and possible cuts on Japanese investments and ODA. Thailand and Indonesia, for example, were worried about shortage of supply for their auto industries.

On the other hand, opportunities also crossed their minds. Perhaps, Japanese need for construction materials during the rehabilitation and reconstruction period would boost exports of lumber and other construction materials from China and Southeast Asian countries? But wait a minute, say the environmentalists: would that not mean more deforestation and environmental destruction? For Taiwan, would this mean increase of Taiwan rice exports to Japan, since the radiated soil in the Tohoku region would no longer be suited for rice cultivation? In the Philippines, the governor of Davao, a province in the southern island of Mindanao, announced that the Japanese evacuees would be welcome to settle in Davao. Back in his mind must have been the thought that in the 1940s Davao held the biggest number of Japanese immigrants in Southeast Asia. There were more than 20,000 of them, just in Davao.

Incidentally, there are not that many permanent Japanese residents in the Philippines anymore, but there are quite a number of them who are here on official assignment. And they too, were affected by the triple disaster. The Japanese Embassy in Manila was affected, at least psychologically. The out-going Japanese ambassador to the Philippines hosted a farewell dinner at his residence on April 12. Enclosed with the invitation card was a letter expressing gratitude to all who extended help to Japan and sent letters or notes of sympathy. He said he could not thank each and everyone individually, and so, this enclosed letter. At the dinner, no wine was served and no toast was offered. But the ambassador gave a brief speech of farewell and reiterated his own personal gratitude and that of his government for the prayers and condolences from the Filipino people.

The Japanese residents who frequented Japanese groceries for their daily needs also did panic buying. The Filipina wife of a Filipino national artist told me that right after the earthquake, she rushed to her favorite Japanese food grocery store to buy her usual stuff – Kikkoman soy sauce, miso, ramen, green tea, curry -- and she noticed that some shelves were empty. Evidently, Japanese residents, as well as Filipino lovers of Japanese food did panic buying.

IMPACT ON JAPAN-EAST ASIA RELATIONS

All these immediate reactions: expressions of sympathy; sending of search and rescue teams, relief goods, and money; anxieties over the future of bilateral trade, Japanese investment and ODA; panic buying; austerity; and Japanese expression of appreciation for the kindness and friendship of foreign countries indicate the close ties between Japan and East Asia. They are proof that Japanese soft power has worked and still does.

It does not mean, however, that they will result in dramatic changes in the relationship between Japan and East Asia. Reduced trade, investment and ODA may be expected in the first couple of years while domestically, Japan is reconstructing and rebuilding. But soon, they will return to normal, and even increase. It must be remembered that Japan is primarily a trading country, and is largely dependent on the buying power of its neighboring countries. Prolonged reduction of ODA and investment would result in slow economic growth of East Asia, and low buying power. This is something the Japanese government would not like to happen.

The hope that as a result of the devastation of lands in Northeast Japan would open more widely the Japanese market to rice and agricultural products is off the mark. In the first place, the main rice growing regions in Japan are not in the Northeast, but rather, farther North in Hokkaido, followed by Niigata Prefecture in the West. Moreover, even if rice shortage occurred, the Japanese farmers would not accept as a solution importation of agricultural products. Instead, they would consider such a policy a betrayal of their interest. The Japanese government would find other sources of agricultural products not from abroad but from other parts of Japan.

There are no signs either that the invitation from the Davao governor to the Japanese evacuees to settle in Davao would be accepted. On the other hand, the hollowing out of Japan, which started in the 1980s primarily because of the appreciation of the yen, might deepen. Japanese manufacturers who could not quickly resume production in the disaster area might consider moving their production outfit to East Asia.

Actually, in the area of Japanese relations with China and Korea, some things have already gone back to the pre March 11 issues. In the preface to the Japan Diplomatic Blue Book of 2011, Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto

wrote that despite the friendship shown by China towards Japan at the time of the triple disaster, Japan is still worried about the growing military strength of China. With regards to the territorial dispute with Korea over Dokto (Takeshima for the Japanese), Japanese textbooks have made it clear that the disputed island belongs to Japan. As a result, it has been reported that a city in South Korea which had collected more than US\$4,000 for the Japanese victims decided against sending the collection to Japan, and to use the money instead for local scholarship.

EAST ASIA AND JAPAN'S EXPORT OF NUCLEAR ENERGY

The nuclear crisis that broke out at the wake of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami seems to attract more attention and fears than the devastation caused by the earthquake and the tsunami. The debate between the anti-nuclear power and the pro-nuclear power groups goes on. Governments that have launched programs of building nuclear power plants are forced to review their energy policy, or at least, to respond to demands to review the policy. The Philippines which has mothballed its one and only nuclear power plant was considering rehabilitating it with the help of Japan, but is now rethinking the idea. Indonesia and Thailand which have plans of building nuclear power plants have to stop and think for a while. Taiwan, which has three operational nuclear power plants, and is planning to have a fourth one, faces the challenge of strengthening the existing ones and seeing to it that the upcoming one, expected to begin operating in 2012 will be strong enough to withstand a strong earthquake. Vietnam is pushing through with its plan to build a nuclear power plant, with the help of Japan.

And it seems that to the Japanese government, promotion of nuclear power plants and its export abroad is

not a matter to be discussed. It has made export of nuclear power plants, described as clean energy and friendly to the environment the cornerstone of its new growth strategy. It is firm in its decision to be the leader in the field of clean energy found in nuclear power.

Since the late 1980s, Japan has been proud of its achievement in the peaceful use of nuclear power. I had a personal experience of this when I joined an educational tour for Chinese and Southeast Asian students in Japanese universities, led by a Japanese physicist who participated in Japan's experiments to produce an atomic bomb during World War II. This Japanese physicist assumed the mission of personally atoning for Japanese aggression during World War II towards China and Southeast Asia by sponsoring this tour. He spent for everything, and the student participants did not have to worry about anything. We visited historical and industrial sites. In the Kansai area, we were toured to one of the nuclear power plants. We had to go through the required procedure of wearing the prescribed anti-radiation uniform. The physicist lectured about his personal experience, and about nuclear power. During the tour, one of the guides proudly said that nuclear power is safe, clean, and cheap. Looking at me, and knowing that I am from the Philippines, he said, it is a pity and a waste that in the Philippines a nuclear power plant was built, but never put to use.

In the late 1990s, when Japan was groping for a proper role for it in the world, on top of being an economic power, to be a leader in environmental protection became one of the possibilities. It seemed a more doable policy than being a military power. It also seemed timely, given the focus on global warming and the Kyoto Protocol. Moreover, being a leader in environmentalism, specifically, fighting global warming through cuts in carbon emission, nicely tied with Japan's expertise in nuclear power plants. By leading the world in the fight for global warming, Japan

could at the same time profit from the sale of nuclear power plants.

Japan, however, had a competitor in East Asia: South Korea, which, in December 2009, won a \$US40 billion contract to construct four nuclear reactors in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Japan, France, the United States, and Russia participated in the bid, but they were all beaten by South Korea.

The Japanese government, in cooperation with the private sector, decided to reorganize and strengthen its competitive power. On October 22, 2010, just around five months prior to the earthquake and tsunami that triggered the nuclear crisis in Fukushima, Japan launched a company that would promote the export of nuclear energy. The company is owned by nine EPCOs (Electric Power Companies), with the following geographical names placed before "epco": Tokyo (thus, TEPCO, or Tokyo Electric Power Company), Kansai, Chubu, Hokkaido, Tohoku, Hokuriku, Chugoku, Shikoku, and Kyushu. Their total ownership is 75 percent. Fifteen percent belongs to Toshiba, Hitachi, and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. The remaining 10 percent belongs to Innovation Network of Japan (INCJ), a joint venture of government and industry.

The creation of the company had the support and encouragement of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), which, earlier on, had been considering a public-private scheme to secure nuclear power plant orders from Vietnam. METI would be the leading ministry in the inter-governmental talks. It would facilitate the conclusion of the government – to- government bilateral agreements on nuclear energy cooperation, and it would give aid to prospective country-buyers so that they could lay the ground for nuclear power generation, including enhancing the risk compensation capability of the government or public agencies.

The breakdown and leakage of radiation from the nuclear reactors in Fukushima and the criticisms hurled against TEPCO both in and outside of Japan do not seem to deter Japan from pursuing this goal of exporting nuclear power plants.

Japanese perseverance is clearly seen in the special Japan-ASEAN ministerial meeting held in Jakarta on April 9, 2011, less than a month after the triple disaster struck. Amidst expression of sympathy from the Southeast Asian foreign ministers, and nostalgia about the kindness and generosity of Japan, Japanese Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto was straightforward in asking for ASEAN's support for Japan's efforts to improve the safety of nuclear power plants. In other words, whether to continue or discontinue the use of nuclear power for energy was not the issue. The point was to continue using it, and the issue was merely how to ensure its safe use. The official report issued by the Chair of ASEAN underscores ASEAN's acquiescence to Foreign Minister Matsumoto's request. To quote, ASEAN supports "Japan's resolve to take a leadership role in the international undertakings to improve the safety of nuclear power plants, and its willingness to share experiences learned from the accident with ASEAN Member States."

Similar statements were issued on 22 May at the end of the Fourth Trilateral Summit held in Tokyo (China, Korea and Japan have been holding annual trilateral summit since 2008). On the occasion of the summit the Chinese and the Korean prime ministers visited Fukushima, and had themselves photographed eating fruits harvested in Fukushima, in support of Japan's efforts to show that farm products from Fukushima are safe to eat. Of the three documents issued at the end of the summit, one was on Cooperation on Nuclear Safety. The document opens with this statement: "We, the leaders of Japan, the People's Republic of China, and the Republic of Korea, discussed

the recent tragic earthquake and tsunami and the nuclear accident which hit Japan. We now reaffirmed the utmost importance of strengthening nuclear safety and continue to safely operate nuclear facilities with the maximum level of transparency. "

It further states:

We decided to promote discussions among our experts on the strengthening of safety of nuclear power generation against natural disasters. Their discussions will be made on safety regulations, emergency preparedness, emergency response measures and other safety related issues in the trilateral and bilateral frameworks such as the Top Regulators' Meeting on Nuclear Safety, established in September 2008, among the three countries, and other fora. Therefore, the three countries will make full use of the Top Regulators' Meeting as a practical and tangible framework of cooperation.

WHITHER EAST ASIAN COMMUNITY?

The history of Japan's disasters has shown that Japan is like a daruma. It never stays down. It always gets back to its feet. As it rose from its ashes after World War II, Japan, like a phoenix, will rise again. As it flipped back to normalcy after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995, and the worst air pollution in the world in the 1970s, Japan will flip back to normalcy and move on to greatness from the triple disaster of 2011. After the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, Japanese engineers were able to lecture in Philippine universities about earthquake-proof construction materials. After the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995, Japan learned how to welcome foreign volunteers and aid during disasters. After being the world's most polluted city in the 1970s, Japan became a leader in monitoring and

minimizing air pollution. After the 2011 triple disaster, Japan is looking forward to teach East Asia about how to make nuclear power plants safe and how to manage big disasters.

History has also shown that Japanese discipline, diligence, strong and purposive governance enabled Japan to cope with catastrophe and become a great economy despite those natural and man-made disasters. But the history of Japan's foreign relations since the end of World War II also shows that Japan has been able to sustain its economic development and quickly recover from disasters because of the Japanese government's ability to pursue its national interests through its foreign policy. At the end of World War II and through the Cold War era, Japan made the right decision to ally with the United States. It also made the right decision to use war reparations to regain its former enemies' trust. A large portion of these war reparations consisted of Japanese government scholarships to East Asia's future leaders, who now assume important positions in the societies of East Asia. Moreover, as Japan itself admits, war reparations assured Japan of trade with East Asia.

The triple disaster has made the relationship between the United States and Japan much closer than ever. Japanese twitters are reported as saying, "US, good!" "JSDF, good." This was because of the visible search and rescue operations that the United States military, in cooperation with the Japan Self Defense Forces, did in the disaster area, accompanied by modern apparatuses and paraphernalia.

Moreover, when US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton visited Japan on April 17, she and Foreign Minister Matsumoto agreed to cooperate in preventing harmful rumors about Japan's farm products from spreading. They also agreed on a bilateral public-private initiative for the reconstruction of the disaster area. In other

words, the US would help Japan to recover, just like what it did at the end of World War II.

The agreement between Japan and the United States, being bilateral, is more concrete than the ASEAN's statement at the end of the special Japan-ASEAN ministerial meeting of April 9. With the ASEAN way, it remains to be seen how individual Southeast Asian countries will implement the ASEAN statement. The statements at the end of the Fourth Trilateral Summit, on the other hand, are between Japan on one side and China and Korea on the other. Such cooperative stance exists side by side with Japan's territorial conflict with Korea, Japan's anxiety about the state of China's military, and the lingering Chinese and Japanese dissatisfaction with Japan's failure to face up with its World War II records.

The dream of an East Asian community is in danger of becoming one of the victims of the triple disaster, together with the lives and properties washed away by the great tsunami. Even before the disaster, such a community was already problematic due to Japan's insistence of including in the community the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and India, making the boundary of the community untrue to its name. Japan's dependence on the US-Japan security treaty for its territorial defense is one of the reasons why Japan could not just leave the US out in the construction of an East Asian community. After the triple disaster, Japan needs the US not only for military reasons but for economic reasons as well. Just like what happened after the end of World War II, the United States will play a big role in the policies that Japan would make, and will remain Japan's most important trading partner. East Asia will remain only secondary in importance.

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