

Environmental Research, Epistemic Community and International Relations

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One of the peculiar characteristics of global environmental issues is that, the research of earth science is closely related with countries' diplomatic negotiations and domestic policies. Negotiations of climate change, the leading issue of all, have surpassed the limits of 2009 Copenhagen Summit, transforming the issue from being CO₂ reduction problem of the developed countries to mitigation and adaptation policies of global warming adopted by assertive initiatives of the developing countries. Hence, importance of cooperation at regional level has become more recognized. According to the perspective focusing on cooperation for regional environmental problems, Asia has a unique character of having broad spectrum of countries in terms of their political and economic systems when compared to those of Europe.

For example in Europe, the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution was signed in 1979 and then detailed scientific data were gathered on air pollutants. Simulations based on computer modeling of emission, transfer, precipitation, damage and reduction measurements were developed and the ceiling for amount of air pollutants to be emitted was set for the member countries. Furthermore, Europe has already benefited from its prominent community based on economic policies and this led to realization of a need for common energy and environmental policy. Significance of the European region is that, almost all countries are developed and even the ones, who became the EU members in the beginning of the 21st century and belong to the Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean regions, are given the liability to observe the terms of the common European environmental policy and accomplish the requirements. In a region like this, regular scientific evaluation takes place on the effectiveness of common policies on transboundary issues. Then, it has become a standard norm to directly use the results of research and information drawn out of these evaluations for betterment of policy-making mechanisms.

In comparison, there are a great variety of country systems and regimes in Asian region. On the one hand, there is China that represents all G66+China of developing countries group on the issues like global warming negotiations. China, with its awakening economic growth of more than 30 years, its CO₂ emission surpassed that of the US in 2007 and it became a global player. On the other hand, there is Japan, a developed country that has almost completed its investment on prevention of environmental degradation and been focusing on activities like energy conservation, just on the eastern side of the East China Sea. Japan has already experienced the stress of its long-term but floundering economic growth; and more than that, the country is going through a critical experience after the Great East Japan earthquake and nuclear accident. Keeping in mind the discussions of global climate change, there is no other region in which two countries with this contrasting characteristics and experiences are also neighbors at the same time. Indeed, it is difficult to list

but to mention a few like India, South Korea, Indonesia and others that this region has a broad range of countries.

In a region that has this diversity of country characteristics and stances, in order to promote regional cooperation with a target of sustainable development, it is in the best interest of all to advance international joint research in multiple frameworks. Having different regimes means looking for different interest for each country. There is an experience of South Pole where scientific research led countries put their prior national interest aside and a whole area could be taken as an object of independent research activity. This achievement presents a progressive model for the North Pole where a potential of exploitation due to global warming has become an issue. Indeed, achievements of international environmental research in this scale can build trust among the states engaged with the North Pole.

In general, when there is a specific issue like environment, international consensus is established and in order to functionally precede this consensus, it is necessary to create a researcher community that can go beyond original boundaries and focus on research of specific topics. P. Haas, a scholar of international politics, has named this as “Epistemic Community” in his work of 1992. This sort of research activity and research question led by researchers reveals an objective and balanced integrity in terms of its results. These results could even affect policy-making mechanisms within domestic circles as they can also lead to formation of a space for international dialog and consensus. Reaching this mutual agreement, in fact, fosters the means of functional sustainability.

Any researcher or research project possessing this crucial function should be able to lead to configuration of fair and profound research question and clarify any question on meticulous aspects of the research by providing transparency and accountability for all stakeholders on overall process of the research activity. This particular way is, in fact, the main principle for the results of international joint research to be utilized as global public goods. Academic research looking for real clarification and solutions on the issues that particularly include societal features like food problem, management of water resources, conservation of biological diversity and problems of urbanization, should strongly stick with the rule of being value-independent and endeavor to broach the subject with an inclusive approach. Focusing on the issues, which are considered as unapproachable due to political reasons, with an academic perspective can induce a unique chance to build new international relations.

