

**Facing history, resolving disputes, working towards peace in East Asia:
A Statement by Minjian East Asia Forum**

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The recent disputes over the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands among mainland China, Taiwan and Japan, and over Dokdo (Takeshima) between Korea and Japan have drastically changed the mood of an open and mutual exchanges, slowly achieved over the past decade in East Asia. It is regretful to see that in all places, nationalist sentiment has reached to a point where friendly interactions within the region have become difficult. With the US strengthening its military muscle in East Asia, conditions of competition over military might has also intensified. We cannot but feel that the region is now on the the edge falling into a war. Since the arrival of the later stage of the Cold War, the tension has never been so great in East Asia. It proves that war memory and Cold War structure will not be automatically dissolved as history moves on. Without a sincere attempt to clear up the issue of war responsibility as a regional collectivity, the deep pain and anger produced by the modern histories of colonialism and imperialism will never be consoled, and the basis for peace in East Asia will remain fragile.

Living in East Asia, with long term concerns for, commitments to, and participation in the minjian society, we see the current disputes to be a yet-to-be resolved problem of colonial history since the late 19th Century, further entangled with the imperial conquests and formation of the Cold War structure in the postwar eras. National(ist) mode of thought on territorial sovereignty has made negative impact on the attempts to seek solidarity, exchange and dialogue, mutual cooperation and peace in East Asia; moreover, contestations over land and resources are harmful to both the environment and the safety of those living in the border. Moreover, the development of global capitalism in the past fifty years has intensified the struggle for resources and power in the world and reduced our ability to imagine an alternative future. Long-term national memories and the Cold War Division System in the last half of the 20th century have made it impossible for East Asian countries to trust each other, and China's rise to a regional power, however peaceful, caused the anxiety of neighboring countries, and is now used as a pretext by the United States to strengthen its military deployment in East Asia, thereby resulting in a new Cold War structure of hegemonic rivalry. In this structural context, if we allow politicians to take the painful and popular memory of war as the fertile soil, or using regional rivalry as an excuse, to drum up nationalist sentiment (such as "nationalizing" the disputed islands by purchasing them from private ownership or

staging military exercises) to escalate tension in the region, peace will become a rootless idea in East Asia and people there will continue to be haunted by the specter of war. If East Asian countries remain reluctant to collectively confront the history of imperialism, to shoulder war responsibilities, and to clean up colonial wounds, these structural elements of instability will remain in place, triggering a war to come.

We hold the view that pursuit of peace and development in East Asia and candid minjian interactions are not only the common will of East Asian people but also the irrefutable responsibilities of all governments. When regional peace is on the verge of being destroyed, when people's lives are under threat, as engaging subjects of minjian Asia concerned with peace in East Asia, we feel a strong sense of responsibility to face the current crisis as a translocal endeavor, because participating in public affairs with the voice of reason is not only the solemn right of a responsible citizen but also the foundation for democratic practices and interaction in the region. Facing the dire situation in the region today, we, as minjian communities based on the vision of a peaceful East Asia, thus feel compelled to make the following call for support:

1. We should transform these disputed islands into “sphere of border interaction,” “subsistence sphere for neighboring communities,” and “demilitarized zones” of East Asia.

We believe that the insistence on sovereignty alone will not resolve the dispute. East Asian countries and minjian societies must first acknowledge and face the existence of territorial disputes, insist on the principles of peace and avoid military conflict, and seek other collective values and principles to overcome territorial concerns. In this sense, we believe that transforming the disputed islands into “sphere of border interaction” (where people can freely interact and move around), “subsistence sphere for neighboring communities” (where people share the space and resources for their daily subsistence) and “demilitarized zones” of East Asia will help resolve territorial disputes and enhance mutual understanding and coexistence in the region.

2. We demand our respective governments soothe nationalist sentiment within its borders and check its militaristic tendencies when facing territorial disputes.

On the basis of historical understanding, we believe that each country's national sentiment needs to be fully respected; at the same time, through facing historical controversies (such as the comfort women issue and the textbook issue) and the impact made by postwar treaties pertaining the legality of sovereignty and rights of governance as

a collectivity, the minjian societies should also dedicate themselves to opening up dialogues across borders so as to understand each other's emotions and sentiments as conditioned by history. We insist that each government must strive to sooth nationalist sentiment within its borders and to prevent violent and disorderly behavior from hurting the peaceful communications within the region. Affirming the principles of solidarity, dialogue and exchange, mutual help and collaboration, we expect respective minjian societies to monitor their governments' behaviors and to check their militaristic tendencies to avoid war by all means. We believe that the pursuit of peace in East Asia depends on the continuous dialogue and interaction across borders.

3. We support the Okinawan's, Japanese's, and Korean's struggles against US military bases, and promote the idea of demanding each government to sign a pact for regional peace and security, so as to establish a regional mechanism for trust and peace. At the same time, we encourage the US government to remove its overseas military bases and treat East Asia countries in equal and friendly terms, to create a demilitarized East Asia, so as to fully resolve the problem of US bases in the region

For the pursuit of peace in the region, minjian communications must be based upon mutual respect and understanding. Military conflict will only threaten the lives and security of the poeple (especially for those living on the boders); it will also become an excuse for the United States to maintain the Cold War structure and to pursue its national interest by means of the US-ROK-Japan Security Pacts. Thus, we fully support the courageous struggles of Okinawans, Japanese (in Iwakuni and Yokosuka for instance), and Koreans against the US military bases in their lands, firmly oppose any transnational military expansion and collaboration in the name of "security," and strongly refute any attempt for military competition. Military conflict does not help the development of peace in the region, and the deployment of bases can only lead to the risk of a regional war. We believe that the movement against military bases and to overcome the Cold War will provide an important direction to resolve the island disputes in the future. We call on peace-loving sectors of East Asian minjian societies to move towards demanding their respective governments to jointly sign a pact for regional peace and security. We expect the United States to renounce its Cold War thinking and respect the will to peace in East Asia by treating East Asian countries with respect, equality, and mutual benefits. Only by creating a regional mechanism for peace and mutual trust can we overcome the system of US-ROK-Japan Security Pacts and eradicate the problems caused by the US military bases in East Asia.

4. We must face historical wounds and island disputes so as to work toward peace in the region.

Island disputes are historical problems and thus must be approached through history. We sincerely request each government and minjian society in East Asia to face the historical wounds of war together to deliberate on issues of responsibility, compensation, and justice. East Asian countries will need to tone down their assumed positions and start a candid dialogue so as to properly study and understand all the conflicts and controversies produced by the region's history since the 19th century, including such historically difficult problems as Okinawa-Japanese relations, the relations of the two Koreas, and the cross-Strait relations. Only by doing so can we realize that the current crisis in the region is overdetermined by Japanese imperialism before the end of World War II, postwar American neo-colonialism, and the development of global capitalism and Cold War structure in the past fifty years, which had been complexly related to the competing political forces with a nation, in collaboration with outside forces, to struggle for power. We believe that only by resituating these problems in larger historical contexts and insisting on the need for continuous minjian exchanges can we fully grasp and handle the current disputes, and thereby establish a solid foundation for peace in East Asia.

In closing, we must affirm again that peace in East Asia relies on minjian solidarities and communications, mutual understanding and trust, respect and self-discipline. In this sense, whether based in big or small countries, in peripheral and central areas, minjian societies must continue to cross borders to listen to and help each other. Only by respecting each other's sentiments and needs can we locate and create the alternative values and ethics to overcome national self-interest. Only then will we not find ourselves buried in the alley of war and lament the passing of peace in tears.

Initiators/Drafters:

individual/group