

On Launching the *Electronic Journal of Central European Studies in Japan*: Our Definition of Central Europe

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Introduction

The Josai Institute for Central European Studies (JICES) was founded in November of 2013. Although the Slavic-Eurasian Research Center at Hokkaido University¹ and the Association for East European Studies in Tokyo² produce research focusing on their areas of concern, JICES is the first institute devoted solely to Central European Studies in Japan. The launch of JICES follows the conclusion of academic and educational exchange agreements by the Josai University Educational Corporation (JUEC) with 18 universities in the Visegrad 4 countries: nine in Hungary, four in Poland, three in the Czech Republic and two in Slovakia. Josai University (JU) and Josai International University (JIU) offer undergraduate courses in such Central European languages as Hungarian, Polish and Czech. Both universities are active in student exchanges with counterpart institutions in V4 countries. Moreover, at time of writing, JUEC is about to conclude exchange agreements with universities in Slovenia and Bulgaria.

On the occasion of the launch of a journal devoted to the study of Central Europe it seems appropriate to look at the concept of Central Europe and how it differs depending on time and place.

1. East European Studies in Japan

When Japanese scholars began to engage in research on the region, they referred to it as Eastern Europe. Unlike in the United States at the Cold War era³, where Eastern

¹ See; <http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/index-e.html>

² See; <https://www.sites.google.com/site/tououshi>

³ Professor Maria Todorova pointed out a big change of the regional framework of area studies in the United States at Post-Cold War period. According to her, an academic society for Russian and East European Studies, American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS) renamed itself Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) and at the same time most institutes for East European Studies switched allegiance to institutes for European Studies. So it becomes increasingly difficult to find job in Eastern Europe. Maria Todorova, "East

Europe was studied from a strategic or pragmatic perspective, as part of a policy of “knowing one’s enemy,” in Japan the primary focus of scholars was historical. At the time, Eastern Europe was defined as a group of communist countries that came under the influence of the Soviet Union after World War II. Eastern Europe consisted of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, the former Yugoslav states of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Kosovo, progressing from north to south, and Albania (as the country is known today). But the researchers affiliated with the Association for East European Studies, founded in 1975 in Tokyo, had the following common understanding about the concept of Eastern Europe: viewed from a historical perspective, Eastern Europe in modern times has consisted of two regions; one part includes East Central Europe (Central Europe) under the Habsburg Empire, and the Russian Empire and Prussia (the German Empire); the other part is Southeastern Europe (the Balkans) under the Ottoman Empire. Our shared understanding of Eastern Europe was that it was a region characterized by ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural diversity and that it had a modern history differing from that of Western Europe. Moreover, we included Austria and Greece in our framework of Eastern European Studies in striking contrast with East European Studies in the United States and Europe. As a result, after the Cold War, we as historians would be able to make progress in our East European Studies more easily as we were unimpeded by political considerations.

In recent years, however, a trend has emerged in Japan to divide Eastern Europe into Central Europe and the Balkans and to study the specific characteristics of each separately. As a result, on the one hand we gain the advantage of being able to do research in greater detail; on the other hand, however, we run the risk of excessively segmented research. Eastern Europe consisting of various factors was one single region with a given unity in comparison with Western Europe. Dividing Eastern Europe into various segments can cause us to lose sight of the internal diversity of Eastern Europe with the result that only the homogeneity of each separate region is stressed. To begin with, a region is not only based on homogeneity, but also diversity. Moreover, we should not consider regions as static entities but rather as having the capacity to change through historical time. A region can also be redefined according to the changing focus of research.

For example, the work of Ivan T. Berend, a Hungarian historian now living in the

European Studies in the United States; Thematic and Methodological Problems”, in Christian Promitzer, Siegfried Gruber, Herald Heppner(Eds.), *Southeast European Studies in a Globalizing World*, LIT Verlag, Wien and Berlin, 2014, p.62.

United States, has had a major influence on historical studies of Eastern Europe in Japan. During the Cold War Berend referred to the Soviet Bloc as East-Central Europe. Subsequently, however, he came to use the concept of Central and Eastern Europe. In a recently published book, Berend writes that the region concerned is the eastern half of the European continent and that it is called Eastern Europe, Central Europe or Central and Eastern Europe. Recalling that many historians had discussed the concept of this region from Leopold von Ranke to the Hungarian historian Jenő Szücs,⁴ Berend explains that this region had been under the Habsburg Empire, the German Empire, the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire until World War I and that in Germany during the interwar period it had been called 'Zwischen Europa.' This region, between Russia (Soviet Union) and Germany, differed from the western part of Europe in that it remained agricultural, and, due to incomplete nation building, had unstable national boundaries. Berend divides Europe into three parts: Southern Europe or Mediterranean Europe meaning Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain; Western Europe consisting of Austria, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland; and Central and Eastern Europe⁵ being made up of the rest.

After the end of the Cold War, Berend moved away from equating Eastern Europe with the Soviet Bloc redefining it as Central and Eastern Europe. However, he continued to exclude Austria and Greece. In my view, Berend divides the region in this way because, as a socio-economic historian he may wish to stress the importance of the socialist era. By way of contrast, most researchers in Japan continue to accept the validity of the concept of Eastern Europe from a historical and not a political viewpoint.⁶ Scholars specializing in Central Europe or the Balkans include Austria in the former and Greece in the latter.

From a Japanese perspective there does not appear to be a need to stop calling the region Eastern Europe and start calling it Central Europe. However, for scholars of the

⁴ Taku Shinohara, "Constructing Regional Concept: the Structure of Discussions on Central Europe", Osam Ieda (ed.), *Slav-Eurasian Studies 1, Toward the Open Area Studies: Meso-Area and Globalization*, Kodansha, Tokyo, 2008, pp.121-124. According to Shinohara, Szücs divided Europe into three parts- Western Europe, East Central Europe and Eastern Europe in his book, *Die drei historischen Regionen Europas* (Essen: Neue Kritik, 1994) in German version. A modern civil society was created in Western Europe, while the state and society was not separated in Eastern Europe. East Central Europe with same political and social structure as Western Europe came and went between Western Europe and Eastern Europe.

⁵ Ivan T. Berend, *From the Soviet Block to the European Union: The Economic and Social Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe since 1973*, Cambridge U.P., 2009, pp. 3-4.

⁶ See; Nobuhiro Shiba and et al. (eds.), *(New Edition) Encyclopedia of Eastern Europe*, Heibonsha, Tokyo, 2015

V4 countries, the regime changes of 1989 carried great significance, marking a “return to Europe” and with it a return to diversity. Since then there has been a marked trend in the V4 countries to draw a line between their part of Eastern Europe, calling the area Central Europe, and the Balkans, which experienced Ottoman rule for a long period.

Let us explore below some political as well as unclear concepts of Central Europe.

2. Various Concepts of Central Europe

As is commonly known, the regional concept of Central Europe historically has two origins. One emerged as a key concept of modern German history. After the establishment of the German Empire in 1871, the idea of Central Europe was based on Pan-Germanism with the aim of integrating all German people, keeping the region ‘from the Baltic to the Adriatic’ in mind. The typical case of this tendency was *Mitteleuropa*⁷ published by Friedrich Naumann, a member of German Imperial Diet in 1915 during World War I. His book was based on the Great Germanism (Grossdeutschum) which aimed to integrate the German and Habsburg empires. With the changing war situation, Naumann kept the territory from Berlin to Baghdad within range. However, Naumann’s idea came to be seen as an ideology justifying German Imperialism. As his view of Central Europe appeared to lead directly to the Nazi concept of Lebensraum, any reference to Mitteleuropa became taboo after World War II. In fact, the word gradually disappeared from political discussions.

On the other hand, Central Europe also came to be seen as a space or an area for the coexistence of peoples and guaranteeing diversity. This concept of Central Europe was not the same as that based on Great Germanism. This tendency led to a proliferation of transnational frameworks during the interwar period especially in Czechoslovakia⁸.

⁷ About the detailed discussion on *Mitteleuropa* by Naumann, see: Takumi Itabashi, “The Idea of ‘Central Europe’ and German Nationalism(1)(2)”, *The Hokkaido Law Review* (Hokkaido University), vol.55, no.6, 2006, pp.474-429 and vol.56, no.1, 2006, pp.514-468.

⁸ About the discussion of Central Europe by František Palacky, see: Shinohara, *op.cit.*, pp.127-136. About the discussion of Central Europe, see: Tadayuki Hayashi, “Area as a strategy: World War and Understandings of Eastern Europe”, Ieda (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp.99-106. About various ideas of Central European Federation during the interwar period and World War II period from the economical point of view, see: Hiroshi Hukuda, “Nation States and Discussions about Transnational Regional Framework at the Period of Post-Habsburg Empire”, Yoshiro Ikeda (ed.), *World War I and the Legacy of Empires*, Yamakawa-shuppan, Tokyo, 2014, pp.114-129. Fukuda points out that Elemer Hantos, a Hungarian economist, created Mitteleuropa-Institut during 1920s and 1930s in the Successor States of the Habsburg Empire to realize Pan-Europe from

But Europe became politically divided into East and West as a result of the outcome of World War II and the subsequent Cold War and opportunities to discuss Central Europe as an area for guaranteeing diversity were lost. In 1983, when the book, *Three Historical Regions of Europe* by Szücs, was published, Milan Kundera, a writer in exile from Czechoslovakia published an essay, “Un Occident kidnappé ou la tragédie de l’Europe central,”⁹ in a French journal. Kundera considered Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland as Central Europe, describing the tragedy of Central Europe ‘kidnapped’ by Russia (Soviet Union) having a civilization different from that of its captor.

Taking this opportunity, the discussion about Central Europe was restored. These discussions among ‘dissident intellectuals’ in Eastern Europe focused on the control of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union, especially the return from the normalization after ‘the Prague Spring.’¹⁰ But according to Shinohara, what Kundera really meant was not that the tragedy of Central Europe was under control of the Soviet Union, but that Central Europe to form important part of Europe was forgotten from Europe and Europe didn’t become aware of it.¹¹

After the regime changes in Eastern Europe in 1989, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland carried on their regional cooperation in the framework of Central Europe for security and economic reasons. In February of 1991, a summit meeting of the leaders of the three countries was held in the ancient city of Visegrad in Hungary, where they issued a declaration of cooperation. This declaration was called Visegrad Three but it was renamed Visegrad Four after the division of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in January 1993. Initially the V4 countries were unable to reach a common policy on joining NATO which was the ultimate goal of their security policy, so they shelved this aspect of their cooperation and instead sought to work together on economic issues. In 1994, CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Agreement) was concluded among the four countries. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined NATO in 1999, and Slovakia in 2004. That year all V4 countries became members of the European Union. As a result, for a time the significance of V4 cooperation appeared to fade, but since then they have been able to focus on new goals and have strengthened

the economic point of view.

⁹ Milan Kundera, “Un Occident kidnappé ou la tragédie de l’Europe centrale”, *Le Débat*, novembre 1983 (Japanese translation: Tatsuro Satomi(tr.), « Kidnapped Western Europe : or the Tragedy of Central Europe », *Eureka*, vol.2, 1991, pp.62-79)

¹⁰ About the discussion of Central Europe in the Former Yugoslavia, see: Predrag Matvejevitch, “Illusion on Central Europe”, *Le monde* Confessionns, Paris, 1996 (Japanese translation: Ryoji Tsuchiya (tr.), *Ex East European World: Confessions by a citizen having lost own homeland*, Miraisha, Tokyo, 2000), pp.67-82.

¹¹ Shinohara, op.cit., p. 125.

their relationship of cooperation.¹²

The V4 countries regard their mutual cooperation as a sub-regional activity within the EU. It is worth mentioning that the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) which was created to promote academic exchanges and protect the environment has reorganized itself to be able to implement a common foreign policy. For example, the Visegrad scholarship program is not restricted to the countries of Central Europe but extends opportunities to citizens of neighboring countries promoting educational exchanges both within and outside the EU.

3. How do we define Central Europe?

Since V4 countries are eagerly promoting regional cooperation in Central Europe, we are likely to consider only the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia as Central European countries. But Central Europe was a regional concept with strong political meaning, which has been used under various historical backgrounds. How should we consider the regional concept of Central Europe? For the time being, we would like to define Central Europe as a region with diversity which was called 'Zwischen Europa' between Germany and the Soviet Union during the interwar period. To regard just V4 countries as Central Europe is a somewhat narrow definition.

During the period before and after the regime changes of 1989, a series of ten volumes about the history of East Central Europe was published by the University of Washington. Volume 1, *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*,¹³ with detailed maps and extensive explanations, has been highly acclaimed and remains in wide use today. The definition on Central Eastern Europe by Paul Magocsi, the editor of this book, offers much food for thought. According to Magocsi, East Central Europe was defined as the lands between the linguistic frontier of the German-and Italian-speaking peoples to the west and the political boundaries of the former Soviet Union to the east. The

¹² Andrzej Sadecki, "Visegrad Group 1991-2004: Emergence and Development of a New Sub-regional cooperation in Europe" in Natasza Styszynska(ed.), *Towards a Common Education Area in the Visegrad Region: New Modalities of Co-operation within International Relations and European Studies Programmes*, Krakow, 2012, pp.21-26; Jakub Groszkowski, "Current Challenges and Perspectives on the Visegrad Group Co-operation", *ibid.*, pp. 27-32. Groszkowski pointed out the following four common task of V4 countries, ①Stability of eastern side countries and southern side countries of Central Europe, ②Conquering the negative legacy of communism, ③Reduction of the disparity among EU member states, ④Solidarity of V4 countries and their personal exchanges.

¹³ Paul Robert Magocsi, *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe*, University of Washington Press, 1993

north-south parameters are the Baltic and Mediterranean seas. As of 1993, this region was made up of the countries of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, and Greece. But this atlas expanded the geographic scope to include, toward the west, the eastern part of Germany, Bavaria, Austria, and northeastern Italy (Venice), and toward the east, the lands of historic Poland and Lithuania (present-day Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine), Moldova, and western Anatolia in Turkey¹⁴.

Magocsi's concept of East Central Europe is much broader than the concept of Eastern Europe including Austria and Greece which Japanese researchers have continued to maintain. According to Magocsi East Central Europe in a broad sense is located just in the center of Europe (from Gibraltar to the Urals), so to be precise, it should be called Central Europe. But the three part division of Europe into western, eastern and central parts becomes less meaningful because the people living in Eastern Europe have shown the rejection of the regional concept of 'Eastern Europe' with a political meaning after the end of the Cold War. So Magocsi's dividing of Europe into Western Europe and East Central Europe which is more accurate than Central Europe, is entirely appropriate.¹⁵

But perhaps we ought to consider calling the region defined as East Central Europe by Magocsi Central Europe.¹⁶ This region is much broader than the concept of Eastern Europe shared among Japanese researchers. Moreover, it is full of diversity with many centers. Undoubtedly, Vienna is a main center, but Budapest, Prague, Munich and Zurich are also main centers. Neither can we ignore Warsaw, Cracow, Bratislava, L'viv, Venice, Trieste, nor Zagreb, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Bucharest, Sofia and Salonika.

It is my hope that our new Electronic Journal can become a forum through which new research about this large and diverse area can be conducted and its results widely disseminated.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.xi.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.xi.

¹⁶ For example, Atsushi Otsuru also considers Central Europe as a wider regional concept. He argues when we define the region between Russia and Germany as Eastern Europe, Central Europe comprises this Eastern Europe and 'Germany in a wide sense'. 'Germany in a wide sense' doesn't mean 'Volksdeutsche', but territories under the rule by German kings and areas having relationships with German people. Most part of Switzerland, southern part of Denmark and Northern part of Italy are included in Central Europe. Atsushi Otsuru (ed.), *Possibility of Central Europe: Unsettled History and Society*, Showado, Kyoto, 2006, p.2.