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Is It True That Nobody Could Predict the Fall of the Soviet Union?

By YAMAMOTO Yuichi

According to Mr. IJIMA Kazutaka's October 31 post on the BBS "Giron-Hyakushutu" of GFJ, a conference was organized by experts of Russian and East European affairs in Japan to the effect of concluding that no Japanese experts in the field could predict the fall of the Soviet Union. Certainly, self-reflection and self-criticism therefore are necessary and worthy of evaluation. However, if it is just a disguise for those experts to defend themselves and self-justify themselves, I should say that the real problem lies further deep. Which of these two points of view does reveal the real nature of the conference concerned?

At this conference, Professor ITO Takayuki of Waseda University is quoted to have said, "Then among the Japanese experts prevailed a view that in socialist states there existed a social system that is utopian-oriented, highly integrated and functioning for better or worse, and they were sympathetic to the socialism." The professor continued to say, "Although there were recurrences of events leading to the decline of the authority of the party, most of them did not believe the decline of the Soviet Union." In conclusion, Professor ITO is said to have admitted, "Experts in Russian and East European affairs are also children of the times. They had a utopian longing for advanced countries as did people of the developing country. They also had a positive image of the victors as did the losers."

In my opinion, Professor ITO's acknowledgement of his own misjudgment and that of his fellow experts is a progress and worth evaluating. However, I must suspect that his conclusion which sounds as if "all the Japanese experts" of the time committed the same mistake is another attempt for "self-vindication and self-justification in disguise"? In fact, there had already been heard here and there voices to predict the stagnation and fall of the Soviet Union more than 20 years before it actually happened (since the late Brezhnev era) on the basis of multi-faceted, positive study.

A good example of such studies is *After Brezhnev: Sources of Soviet Conduct in the 1980s*, which is the classical work of 35 top-level Soviet experts organized by Center for

Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in the United States for over one and a half years from 1981. Needless to say, you may add *The Grand Failure* by Zbigniew Brzezinski, which became a best seller across the United States for its forecast of the fall of the Soviet Union one year before the fall of the Berlin Wall. You cannot make excuses by claiming, "It's what occurred in the United States," because the entire translation of these two books were published by ITO Kenichi in Japan immediately after their publication in the U.S. In addition, I would like to point out the fact that Mr. ITO Kenichi raised the likelihood of the Soviet fall several times in journals, such as *Bungei Shunju* and *Shokun*, before it became real.

(This is the English translation of an article written by YAMAMOTO Yuichi, former Lecturer of university, which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on November 5, 2011.)