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Toru Takanarita entered into the Asahi Shimbun in 1971. Following assignments as Economics Correspondent in the American General Bureau, commentator for "News Station" on TV-ASAHI, and Bureau Chief of the American General Bureau, he became an Editorial Writer in the Editorial Board in 2002. In addition, he has served as Guest Professor of Senshu University and Maebashi International College.

Projects Evaluated:

Field Survey: June 2005

Uzbekistan

- Three Local Airports Modernization Project (1) (2)
- Senior Secondary Education Project
- Railway Passenger Transport Improvement Project

Azerbaijan

- Severnaya Gas Combined Cycle Power Plant Project (1) (2)

Strategic Assistance for Central Asia and the Caucasus, a Geopolitically Vital Region

I observed and evaluated the Three Local Airports Modernization Project, Senior Secondary Education Project, and Railway Passenger Transport Improvement Project in Uzbekistan as well as the Severnaya Gas Combined Cycle Power Plant Project in Azerbaijan.

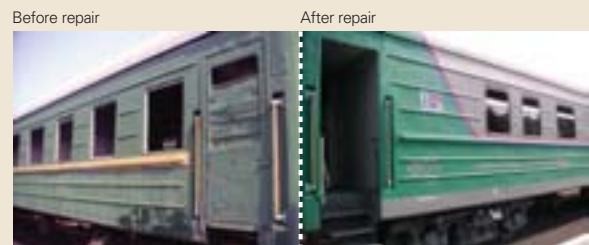
The plan for assistance in each project is suited to each country's actual condition, with the Three Local Airports Modernization Project providing infrastructure for the tourism industry along the Silk Road, including Samarkand, the Senior Secondary Education Project boosting the level of agriculture, which forms the social and economic base of the country, and the Railway Passenger Transport Improvement Project securing foreign currency in a new industrial sector. This was not a case of one-size-fits-all assistance, but rather I could see that research on the needs in each case had been done.

In particular, the education project is one that is worth paying attention to because it sheds light on what ODA could be in the future, with its assistance for the hardware aspect of infrastructure installation and its assistance for the software aspect of human resources training. I must say that, overall, this project functions well, including the teacher training in Japan. Henceforth, I suggest that assistance for both components, people and things, be expanded to other developing countries through deepening cooperation with JICA, etc.



An agricultural mechanical engineering class (left) and a veterinary science teacher (right) in the schools which received educational equipments from the Senior Secondary Education Project. After receiving training at an agricultural school in Japan, this teacher began teaching classes, mainly through practical exercises.

The railway project, which mainly involved the construction of a repair shop for passenger cars, may appear to be modest assistance. However, I understand that, as there are many antiquated railcars all over the former Soviet Union and the demand for recycling railcars is high, the project is achieving steady results.



A passenger car refitted by the Railway Passenger Transport Improvement Project. Whereas the purchase cost of one new passenger car is \$800,000 (with a durable life of 25 years), the cost of refitting a passenger car at the repair shop is approximately \$100,000 (with a durable life of 15 years thereafter).

The improvement of the local airports that meet international standards was completed, and the safety of take-off and landing was improved. However, growth in the number of tourists was lower than expected due to fear of terror following 9-11, and it is regretful that the expanded airports are not being utilized to their full capacities. With incidents of terrorism and unrest occurring in the country, growth in tourism is lagging. To more fully utilize the airports, political efforts to ensure public security are vital.

The construction phase of the Severnaya Gas Combined Cycle Power Plant Project in Azerbaijan is already completed, and the second phase of the project is underway. While the project itself is progressing satisfactorily, it should be paid attention to that the project has political risks because it is under pressure of raising rate, which may incur dissatisfaction among the people if the rates for ordinary households are raised too far.

Since the Central Asia/Caucasus region is important both geopolitically and for its energy resources, assistance to this region should be provided strategically from a comprehensive viewpoint. What must be taken into consideration are the problems in the political systems of the countries concerned. In the case of either Uzbekistan or Azerbaijan, if they are measured by the standards of "freedom and democracy," there are areas in which they do not pass. However, it is not rational, from a humanitarian or from a strategic standpoint, to withhold assistance until they fully pass these standards. Such being the case, the government also need to actively make efforts so that the assistance leads to increased freedom and democracy in these countries as well as agencies providing assistance.