

Growing Japan's Role in Regional Economic Integration in the Asia-Pacific Region without US Engagement (Summary)

URATA Shujiro

Professor Emeritus, Waseda University

Confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic and US-China trade war, the world is witnessing rising protectionism, limiting the opportunity to expand international trade. The World Trade Organization (WTO), whose mandate is to promote trade by setting trade rules and liberalizing trade policies, is floundering in its expected role because of the conflicting opinions of its members on trade policies. Many countries saw fit to form free trade agreements (FTAs) with like-minded countries to promote trade and achieve economic growth. FTAs became an instrument to promote regional economic integration by incorporating many countries. Moves toward the establishment of regional economic integration frameworks have been active in the Asia-Pacific region. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement are two important mega-free trade agreements (FTAs). FTAs are basically trade policy, but they include the elements of international relations or international politics. TPP and RCEP have been regarded as frameworks that have steered by the United States and China, respectively, because these countries participated in only one of these two mega-FTAs: the US in the TPP and China in the RCEP. The US subsequently withdrew from the TPP in 2017. Japan, a signatory of both frameworks, and therefore is expected to play a leading role in achieving regional economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region.

Keywords: Asia-Pacific, Regional economic integration, TPP, RCEP

JEL Classification Codes : F13, F15, F53