

**Panel:** Back to History? (RR)

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, April 22, 2014 / 10:15-11:30

**Speakers:** Hahm Chaibong, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Moderator)  
James Steinberg, Syracuse University  
Yan Xuetong, Tsinghua University

**Rapporteur:** Dylan Stent, Yonsei University

Dr Hahm Chaibong of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies opened the 1<sup>st</sup> Plenary Session on a somber note with a moment of silence commemorating the Sewol tragedy. After this he let both presenters give their opinion on the whether we are going back to history?

Professor James Steinberg, Dean of the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, began proceedings by explaining the importance of history. History is “the only laboratory” where we can test society. Understanding tacit knowledge of another state allows better foreign policy articulation. Professor Steinberg suggested we need to “understand two historical narratives” that provide the backdrop to Sino-US relations. The first is the century of humiliation narrative in China. This proposes that China must never show weakness that led to the signing of unequal treaties. Concurrently the US narrative is one where Americans feel they are an “indispensable nation,” and if they did not have a presence in regions around the world power vacuums would develop.

The desired version of history is one where both sides pursue national interest and cooperate in the security realm. Recently US and Chinese leaders met and agreed to commit to China’s peaceful rise and the US promised they would not contain China geopolitically. However, Professor Steinberg reiterated that in many observers show “terministic pessimism” towards this relationship.

Professor Yan Xuetong of Tsinghua University began by suggesting history will not change in the foreseeable future. The US will still be the hegemonic great power, the rise of China will continue, and other powers will not challenge the status quo. China’s GDP, population, and so on, may increase, but this does not change the current projection of history.

The Cold War had two defining features that cannot be found in the contemporary world: ideological conflict; and a nuclear arms race. Professor Yan proposed Abe’s call for an ideological alliance falling on deaf ears was a signal of ideological decline. Similarly, the US and China agreeing to reduce and/or not proliferate nuclear weaponry highlights the lost vigor for an arms race.

Professor Steinberg contested Professor Yan’s idea that nuclear reduction is leading to peace. Nuclear proliferation has ceased, but proliferation of other technologies and non-nuclear weaponry has increased, including the fields of cyber-security and geospatial technology.

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\* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

## Session Sketch

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This leads to a new era of security dilemmas.

The question-and-answer session focused on nationalism. Positive national pride and patriotism are baked in the cake of nation building. But the bigger question is when and how nationalism becomes xenophobic and insecure. Professor Steinberg suggested that insecurity in the East Asian region dives this “negative” nationalism. Professor Yan proposed that nationalism is much like religion. Moderate nationalism is tolerable and acceptable to most, while fundamental nationalism can lead to conflict.

When asked if Chinese policy should be different towards Japan, Professor Yan provocatively stated that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is “anti-humanist” not nationalist. Abe is anti-humanist as he creates self-serving policy that is weakening relations with China. The only way to remedy relations between China and Japan would be to “isolate the Abe administration” and wait to deal diplomatically with future Japanese leaders. Professor Steinberg responded by reiterating candid dialogues are needed as “the stakes are too big to isolate Abe and the government.”

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