

Panel: (Post)-Modern Japan? (GB1)

Date/Time: Tuesday, April 22, 2014 / 14:30-15:45

Speakers: Martin Fackler, The New York Times (Moderator)
Brad Glosserman, Pacific Forum CSIS
Miyake Kuni, Foreign Policy Institute
Park Cheol-Hee, Seoul National University
Yamaguchi Noboru, National Defense Academy of Japan

Rapporteur: Brian Reams

Martin Fackler, Tokyo Bureau Chief for the New York Times, began the panel discussion entitled, "(Post)-Modern Japan" by citing the re-emergence of nationalism in Japan and asking whether this is really a change to be feared by its neighbors.

Brad Glosserman, Executive Director of Pacific Forum CSIS, argued that Japan is, on the whole, not nationalist at all and harbors no great-power ambitions. In light of the economic stagnation of the last two decades, Japanese youth have rejected laissez-faire competition and would prefer to evolve into a "small" country that integrates organically with the rest of Asia and benignly exports its model of green growth and efficiency.

Miyake Kuni, President of the Foreign Policy Institute in Tokyo, disagreed with the idea that there is no nationalism in Japan, but insisted it is part of a larger global resurgence similar to what has been experienced across Europe and other parts of the developed world. Nationalism is not a problem to be condemned, but managed. The universal values of freedom, human rights, and the rule of law allow Japan to manage its nationalist elements just as every other liberal democracy does. Finally, he explained that Japan's future is benign as it is no longer led by the young and reckless, and that modern Japan would prefer to "age gracefully."

Park Cheol-hee, Director of the Institute for Japanese Studies at Seoul National University, presented an argument that Abe's Japan is fundamentally different from previous administrations and that it has given voice to a new "premodern," chauvinistic nationalism. While not all conservatives are ultra-rightists, there is a troubling trend that gives neighbors such as South Korea pause. In order to improve the regional dialogue, he suggests Japan should be more modest, China should be more prudent, and Korea should be more flexible. Japan should also focus on the glory of its postwar history, rather than its prewar excesses, and that the silent majority must do more and speak up against hate-speech.

Yamaguchi Noboru of the National Defense Academy of Japan suggested one of the key obstacles to resolving Japan's differences is its understanding of history. He explained the education system in Japan is broken, and anyone wishing to learn of Japan's history must do so on its own. Hate speech, he argued, is unforgivable and not at all compatible with an

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Session Sketch

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appropriate definition of nationalism. Hate speech acts directly contrary to Japan's national interest. He also made a compelling argument for including national dignity as a key component of the definition of "nationalism," and the panel readily agreed with this idea.

The panel concluded with a lively question-and-answer session during which the panelists discussed the risk of marginalizing Japanese moderates and enabling the growth of "something even worse" than the current modest nationalist trend.