

China and Japan

- Panel:** Session 1 (Lilac & Tulip Room)
Date/Time: Tuesday, December 11, 2012 / 12:45–14:00
Speakers: Ralph A. Cossa, Pacific Forum CSIS (Moderator)
Alexander Bukh, Victoria University of Wellington
Seo Jungmin, Yonsei University
Togo Kazuhiko, Kyoto Sangyo University
Wang Dong, Peking University
Rapporteur: Huaiyuan Chen, National University of Singapore

Panel Short Summary

Ralph Cossa starts off by noting that the topic on China and Japan relations at the juncture of major leadership transitions in China, Korea, and Japan, is timely and important. He sets the stage by saying that when we look at the dispute between China and Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, it is also more broadly a matter of international expectations and perceptions of a rising China. One might conceive of the new leaderships' dealing with the island disputes as a first test of the new administrations. For example, a recent Time Magazine headline read: "Japan moves to the right." This is a moment when leaders can prove or disprove that they are in fact going in an ultra-right direction.

Following Mr. Cossa, Alexander Bukh explains the need for caution when it comes to putting the "rise of China" alongside the "decline of Japan" and the "decline of the US." Instead of simply declaring a rising China vis-à-vis a declining Japan and United States, he urges us to ask the how and what of that which is "rising" and "declining." He cautions against the tendency to which some directions of debates on foreign policy in Japan link, incautiously, China-blaming in terms of expansionism and jingoism, within the context of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. In a more objective fashion, he presents three theoretical ways of looking at China and Japan relations: through the prisms of realism, liberalism, and constructivism.

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Starting from an intervention into the term “being normal” in Japanese discourse of a normal state, Seo Jungmin asks to what normal state of being Japan (or China) wishes to return. Is there such a historical point that is “normal”? This question points to a deeper historical perspective to which, he argues, the very foundation of state power in East Asian countries hinges, on the history of Japanese colonial expansion, and, consequently, the “mirror image” of a state legitimacy built on anti-Japanese movements. He points out that the implication of his view, which is similar to Bukh’s, is that there is no simple short-term solution that will dissolve this interlinking ideological structure of conflict.

Togo Kazuhiko tries to concentrate on a single issue, which divided China and Japan: the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute. After explaining that there is no any incident in postwar Japanese foreign policy that impacted China/Japan relations so much, he thinks, at this point in time, it has been “a total diplomatic defeat on the Japanese side” because 1) after September 11, China has demonstrated flexibility in entering the disputed territorial waters at any time and it seems Japan has no way to stop it; 2) China has successfully converted the issue into a symbol of national unity; 3) despite differences, China and Taiwan have a common ground on this issue; and 4) Japanese businesses have been hurting more than Chinese businesses. But looking forward to what can be done, he proposes that deterrence is not the only option for Japan to take despite its inevitability. Dialogue is another. On Japan’s side, he thinks that Japan should continue militarily with the three laws of not entering, not researching, and not building with regards to actions on the islands. He strongly recommends that China does not enter the territorial waters.

Finally, going beyond specific disputes, look at broader China Japan relations, Professor Wang Dong warns of a spilling over of political disputes into the economic arena given the deep economic relationship between China and Japan. He also mentions what previous speakers have mentioned: the misperceptions from both sides—especially those that arose in the context of irrational nationalism.

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