

**Waseda University Doctoral Student Network (WUDSN)**

# **THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS AND NORTHEAST ASIAN POLITICS**

**May 28<sup>th</sup> 2010, Waseda University Sodai-Nishiwaseda Building Room 711  
Discussant: Dr. Hiro Katsumata, Assistant Professor WIAPS, Waseda University**

## **PRESENTATION 1**

### **RETHINKING THE 'HISTORY PROBLEM' IN SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS**

**Karl Gustafsson, Stockholm University**

#### **Abstract**

The research project aims to provide a new perspective on the 'history problem' in Sino-Japanese relations. The first step has involved an analysis of the academic and media discourse on this issue. This overview identifies a number of problems in the existing discourse. The most salient of these involves a propensity to focus on the behaviour of political leaders, especially Japanese leaders. The way the problem is defined suggests that changes in the behaviour of Japanese leaders would more or less solve the problem. While such a behavioural change is likely to lead to improvements, I argue that it is necessary to probe deeper into the narratives about the war period that can be found in both societies. While there are several insightful studies dealing with, on the one hand, Japanese war memories and, on the other, Chinese narratives about the war, the two are seldom systematically analyzed and compared together in much detail. This study, in contrast, adopts a comparative approach that pays attention to the role of narratives, arguably central to domestic identity politics in both countries, in bilateral relations.

Narratives about war can be found in several different media and the kinds of stories found in one are also usually present in other media. One of the most elaborate and evocative kinds of narratives is arguably to be found at museums dealing with the war. For the purposes of this research project material has been gathered at about 20 Chinese and 30 Japanese peace and war museums. Despite the existence of large numbers of museums that receive many visitors, many of them school children, in both, Japan and China these institutions have received relatively scarce attention, especially from scholars dealing with Sino-Japanese relations. These exhibitions can be seen as statements concerning what it should mean to be Japanese and Chinese, respectively. Put differently, they are closely related to the political agendas of different groups engaged in a discursive struggle. To understand this struggle and the role of these narratives an account of the contexts in which they appear is provided. The narratives analyzed contain lessons and stories not just about the in-group, the 'self', but also about the 'other'. To the extent that narratives are internalized or subscribed to, they contribute to the construction of the frameworks, or models, through which the actions of both the 'self' and the 'other' are interpreted. For this reason, it is imperative to have a firm grasp of what kinds of narratives dominate in both societies and how these narratives depict 'self' and 'other'.

Karl Gustafsson is a 4<sup>th</sup> year Ph. D. Candidate in Political Science at Stockholm University. He is currently a Japan Foundation Japanese Studies Fellow based at the University of Tokyo.

## **PRESENTATION 2**

### **OCEAN GOVERNANCE, MARITIME SECURITY, AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF MODERNITY IN NORTHEAST ASIA**

**Christian Wirth, Waseda University**

#### **Abstract**

High economic growth rates, the revolution in telecommunication, and the end of the Cold War have brought about rapid and profound changes to the domestic as well as regional environments of Northeast Asian governments. The maritime sphere, in which increasingly militarized state boundaries delineate political authority while at the same time economic activities link increasingly interdependent communities therein, bears high significance for the study of regional integration. This paper looks at how the maritime sphere of Northeast Asia is represented in common political and academic discourses of regional politics. After the critical examination of several arguments about maritime security, the study finds that maritime affairs are strongly cast in the language of national security, and that empirical evidence which stands against such perceived imperatives is often neglected, if not completely ignored. The paper argues that the maritime space, due to its special character, has become the stage on which the consequences of modernity appear particularly strong, and in various guises. The relentless quest to develop and control the ocean clashes with the notion of the sea as space of global trade and communication flow. At the same time, the ocean as an ecological entity itself is excluded from the discourse, as it falls in between the spaces defined by the modern conception of territorial sovereignty. As a result, the maritime sphere is seen as a dividing element between nations rather than a connecting element, and salient environmental problems remain off the political and academic agendas. This is also a consequence of mainstream methods of political science which continue to reproduce hegemonic discourses of territorial, social and economic division through the failure to apply alternative approaches suitable for the study of contemporary Northeast Asian politics.

Christian Wirth is a Research Fellow at the Global Institute for Asian Regional Integration (GIARI) and a 3<sup>rd</sup> year PhD Candidate in international studies at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies (GSAPS) of Waseda University. Before coming to Tokyo he was working for the Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs of Switzerland. He graduated with a Master of International Affairs from the Australian National University in 2005, and obtained a Master of Law from the University of St. Gallen in 2001.