



Introduction

Can We Write History? Between Postmodernism and Coarse Nationalism

The end of the Cold War has transformed the older political, economic and social settings which used to be constructed under the two superpowers' rivalry. Along with this change came a process of liberalization, democratization and globalization in Asia, as elsewhere in the world, in the 1980s and '90s. It was good to bid farewell to military dictatorship or state-controlled economy, but it also meant giving up the once ambitious human endeavor to realize a new society through state power and rational plans. At the same time, national autonomy, to whatever extent, yields to the hegemony of the United States and the global market.

In academic discourse, too, new tendencies have grown influential during these two decades. One is the postmodern critique which situates the bias of the modern, especially post-enlightenment, intellectual framework as western-centric, capitalistic, imperialistic, and patriarchal. The other consists of various types of right-wing nationalism or religious fundamentalism which cause tensions in many societies. Interestingly, both tendencies have aggressively confronted with the well-established disciplines of historical studies. Postmodernists question the historian as a 'subject' who easily gives reasonable interpretation; while ultra-nationalists and religious extremists attack the 'objectivity' of positivistic data-analysis based on historical materials.

To a greater or lesser extent, all post-WWII and postcolonial societies in Asia share this kind of situation. Today a historian should fight on two fronts: to prove that one's own concepts and methods are still relevant in the age of postmodernism, and to take the risk of being accused of being

anti-national/anti-religious. We have invited three such brave and brilliant scholars to this workshop. Dr. Tanika Sarkar, Dr. Reynaldo Ileto and Dr. Daqing Yang will talk on historiography in India, the Philippines, Japan and China. Through provocative presentations and discussion from a comparative perspective, we believe that this meeting will offer a unique opportunity for all participants to rethink the dilemma and possibility of historical studies: 'Can we write history?'

From the Editor

This workshop was the first international conference for the Academic Frontier Project, 'Social Change in Asia and the Pacific', funded by the Meiji Gakuin University and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan. As an editor, I hope that the proceedings have recorded the great contribution of speakers, discussants and other participants at the workshop for further studies. I am very grateful to all of them for helping us in preparing this publication. It would have been impossible to edit this in English without the generous assistance of my colleague Professor Michael G. Watson. Most of all, Dr. Kei Takeuchi, with his keen academic interest, is the founding father of this project and of the workshop itself. I am also very grateful for the support of Professor Masahiko Ebashi and Professor Shiro Amano, the Dean and Associate Dean of the Faculty of International Studies, Meiji Gakuin University. Lastly, I would like to thank all the staff of the Institute for International Studies (IISM), Meiji Gakuin University, who worked so hard: Etsuko Kagohashi, Maki Imamura, Masae Ogawa, Yuko Murata, and Masashi Kimura.

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