



# Opening Remarks

Chiharu Takenaka

Good morning. Thank you very much for joining the workshop “Can We Write History? Between Postmodernism and Coarse Nationalism”, sponsored by Meiji Gakuin University as well as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan. We are very much honored to have three leading scholars from abroad, Dr. Tanika Sarkar, Dr. Reynaldo C. Ileto and Dr. Daqing Yang. This workshop was organized in less than three months, so I would like to express my deep gratitude to the speakers who submitted their papers within such a short time.

I would like now to introduce the topic of the workshop. Its title is “Can We Write History?” In order to explain this question, I borrow a few sentences from the preface to *On History*, written by E. J. Hobsbawm in 1997. He comments: “Theoreticians of all kinds circle round the peaceful herds of historians as they graze on the rich pastures of their primary sources or chew the cud of each other’s publications.’ They were once happy to write history and seldom the subjects of angry attacks. But now, suddenly these same historians find themselves insulted by really aggressive people who want to criticize their basic concepts and methods. As Hobsbawm says, ‘The least philosophically minded historians can hardly avoid general reflections about their subject.’ For as he adds, ‘Some of the most spectacular academic controversies have been fought on their fields of battle.’”

I think this phenomenon has become more common in Japan, China, India and some other countries. Perhaps this kind of situation has arisen elsewhere, too, in different contexts or different situations. But at this time of globalization in the aftermath of the Cold War, we anxiously feel the need to reexamine issues like variations of national history, the progress of history,

historical development, the stages of standard development. Or questions like the end of ideology, the end of evolutionary age, the end of world history, and so on.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we face an upside-down of international society. Even ordinary people say that the world is not the same as it was before the acts of terror on September 11. Where are we going? What kind of history are we going to make in this century? How can we write our past at this moment? These are questions for all concerned intellectuals today.

The speakers and some of the discussants had an informal meeting yesterday in Yokohama in which we shared our interests and our problems. We discussed how we think about our works as historians and social scientists. The way we see the past might be conditioned by the way we see our future. In other words, by remembering the future, we imagine the past. As I indicate in the subtitle of this workshop, “Between Postmodernism and Coarse Nationalism”, historians and social scientists now face a serious challenge from postmodernists who doubt or criticize the basic disciplines of historical studies. There is also more dangerous challenge from some types of coarse nationalists, by which I mean not only ultra-nationalists, but also ideologues of religious fundamentalism or other kinds of chauvinism.

In this workshop, I would like to invite all of you to discuss on these problems in a relaxed atmosphere. No teaching, no politics. I believe that sharing ideas and ways of thinking among us will create other possibilities to begin an alternative study of history in this new century. Thank you.

Let me introduce our staff from the Institute for International Studies, Meiji Gakuin University. The Chief Assistant is Kagohashi-san. She is really our boss. The assistant and designer is Ogawa-san. If you want a copy of this beautiful flowery poster, please ask her. Kimura-san is only one, very brave male in our staff, a computer engineer. Imamura-san is a main administrative organizer of this Academic Frontier Project. Murata-san is a new assistant, and my students, Tanikawa-san, Nagata-san, Hiraoka-san and Suzuki-san,

will help us. Everybody has been working very hard. We are all wearing pink name cards, and if you have any question or if you need help, please ask us.

Lastly, let me introduce Dr. Kei Takeuchi. He is Director for our institute and for this project, and had taken the initiative for this workshop. He is very much concerned with contemporary world affairs, especially recent ascendancy of right-wing nationalism in Asia. He is a leading scholar in the field of statistics and economics in Japan. Now I would like to invite him to give the keynote speech.