



Session 3: Commentary

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Thank you chairperson and thank you Prof. Yang for a very illuminating and inspiring paper. I would like to raise the point, which comes out with me in reading Prof. Yang's paper.

Firstly, international events, in particular, concerning aggressions and wars have often become the most controversial issue beyond the national boundaries. The issue involves not just historians, but also politicians and the general public. This is not just the case between China and Japan, and Nanjing Massacre. I can cite examples, the controversy over the atomic bomb between the United States and Japan, Japanese colonial rule in Korea between Korea and Japan, or the Holocaust between Jews and Germans. In this kind of international issues, historians have to be more careful. Historians, above all, should locate themselves in neutral and detached viewpoints. Because in these matters politicians and general public often get involved, their debate becomes occasionally heated and emotional. So, historians should have their own standpoints based on their methodology and discipline, and should count on their own belief and value in history. Historians should take bicultural or multicultural approach, not just one-sided views. Prof. Yang has command in Japanese and has good knowledge of Japanese history, society and political system. Although he is a Chinese origin and is fully acquainted with Chinese language and culture, his professional position reflects with multicultural training and background.

Second point I would like to raise is the relationship between history and nationalism. It seems to me that it is so natural that each nation, each local group, or any type of society has some kind of nationalism or sense of self-identity. It is not a bad thing at all any ethnic group embraces self-identity

or ethno-nationalism. Nobody would deny to having a national flag or national anthem. It can be said that there are certain forms of sound nationalism. I was wondering when that kind of sound nationalism has become radical, excessive and bad nationalism. Also, can history contribute to promote sound and healthy nationalism? I was thinking of the example of Japanese-Americans. Japanese-Americans have their history with emphasis on their experience during World War II. I believe their history helped them to establish their self-identity, and hence sound ethno-nationalism. Their unity based on ethno-nationalism is definitely formed by the efforts to probe their past. On the other hand, the excess of nationalism can also be made of reading the history. After September 11 last year, we often heard the excessive utterance to history in order to unite the country in the United States. The American memory of World War II, specifically Pearl Harbor and a Good War myth, was a tool to arouse nationalism more than necessary.

Finally, this is the point Prof. Yang talked about, namely, the possibility or the difficulty to write trans-national, cross-national or international history. Is it possible to write a single cross-national history among countries? Prof. Yang sounded somewhat optimistic in the end. I would like to be optimistic, too. However, when and how can we write truly universal and global history between nations, whose historical interpretations sometimes contradict? Prof. Yang discussed “two regimes of truth.” In the case of Nanjing Massacre, while Chinese historians tend to present these issues under the context of the Japanese aggression, the historians in Japan more talk about details. I was wondering if you write a history of Nanjing Massacre, what kind of bi-cultural and trans-national history should it be? Thank you.