

International Symposium
Where is Japan Headed? — What Constitutes Japan's Conservatism?

Intent of Symposium

In which direction is this nation steering its course? Uncertainty about the future pervades society: individuals, the family, one's company, and the nation itself seem to share a sense of uneasiness. The majority of people in Japan are confronted by a market-oriented economy and a widening income gap explained in the name of globalization. Safety is threatened in the least expected ways. Even the slight tinge of security that exists is in danger of falling apart. One cannot help but brood over the future of this nation.

The Center for Asian and Pacific Studies (CAPS) at Seikei University has launched a mid- and long-term joint research project entitled "Where is Japan Headed?" As part of this project, CAPS will examine the topic of "Conservatism in Japan" during the year 2007.

"Conservatism," a definition which used to be self-evident, is now an ambiguous concept. Above all, the advent of the Koizumi administration, in spite of its political base in the Liberal Democratic Party, by using the campaign slogan "Let us transform Japan" aggravated the confusion to such an extent that no one is certain any longer how to define "Conservative" and "Progressive." This is understandable when one considers that Koizumi labeled the "Conservatives" as "Old-guard Cronies" or "Anti-reformers," in spite of their support base in the LDP.

While it is possible to brush aside the former prime minister's remarks as "verbal juggling" designed to cover up his own conservatism, based on the media's opinion polls Koizumi's political statements clearly gained substantial support from the public. Moreover, further exacerbating the concept of "Conservatism" is that the "Open Conservatism" adhered to by Prime Minister Abe does not clarify what elements of the Koizumi administration's policies Abe intends to keep intact, or how his plan differs from Koizumi's Conservatism. This leads to the question of how Prime Minister Abe intends to implement his own agenda

One of the major factors complicating the definition of "Conservatism" is the structural collapse of the so-called Capitalist Camp vis a vis the Communist Camp, which in the past was simply classified as "Conservative" and "Progressive." Contributing to this

confusion is America's "New Conservatism," widely known as Neocon, which launched a scathing attack against what was considered traditional "Conservatism" and "Liberalism," while maintaining freedom, democracy and market principles as integral components of their policy.

In the case of Japan, a simplistic formula that equates being "pro-America" with "Conservative" and "anti-America" with "Progressive" is getting murky. In other words, the polarizing axis, which was taken for granted before, has been distorted. This phenomenon has led some experts to question whether or not Japan's "Conservatism" predominant for over sixty years in the post World War II era was actually "Conservatism" in the true sense of the word.

Our International Symposium will attempt to grasp the definition of "Conservatism" in today's Japan from a different perspective by sorting out and analyzing the concept of "Conservatism" through history. Using "Japan's Conservatism" as our key word, we will look beyond Japan. We will lay out a distinct description of "Japan's Conservatism" in the past, present, and future by comparing, discussing, and observing from multiple standpoints the trends "Conservatism" has followed in the United States, China and South Korea, as well as in Japan.

The symposium panelists will include Sasaki Tsuyoshi, a Professor at Gakushuin University and one of Japan's leading scholars on conservatism; Gerald Curtis, Burgess Professor at Columbia University in New York City and an expert on US-Japan Relations; Choi Sang-Yong, a Professor at Korea University and the former ROK Ambassador to Japan, who worked closely with the Mori and Koizumi administrations during his term of office; and Gui Yongtao, Associate Professor at Peking University, who studied in Japan. Florian Coulmas, Duisburg University Professor and Director of the German Institute for Japanese Studies in Tokyo, who is well-versed in Japan, will act as the commentator for the discussion.

The Symposium will be made up of three parts; During Session One the panelists will give presentations. This will be followed in Session Two by the commentator's remarks. Session Three will consist of free discussion between the five panelists. The aim of the Symposium is to break down "Japan's Conservatism" and help clarify "Where is Japan Headed?"