

Special Lecture

Approaches to Japan Social Science Studies: Lessons from American Experience

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I.

Thank you very much for the introduction. It's a great honor and a delight for me to be able to be with you today here in Seoul to commemorate the opening of the Institute for Japanese Studies. I think this does represent a new page in Korean-Japanese relations and I have every expectation that it also represents a new page in international research on Japan. And I'll say at the outset that I'm very much looking forward to having further conversations with the scholars involved with this new Institute here at Seoul to see how we can combine the interests of scholars in the United States at Columbia and elsewhere, the University of Tokyo and elsewhere in Japan, to further international collaboration on research dealing with modern and contemporary Japanese affairs.

I want to take the time I have with you this afternoon to share with you my impressions and my experiences dealing with Japan social science studies in the United States, with the field of Japan studies in the United States. As Professor Park just indicated, I was Director of the East Asian Institute at Columbia

University for many years from the mid-1970s until the early 1990s. And I've been involved with the study of Japan, sometimes it's hard for me to even believe it myself, for now more than forty years. I first visited Japan as a student in 1963 and my life ever since has been involved with the study of Japan. As you may know, in the United States, Japan studies is a big field. If you do a search in Google, which I looked at this morning, under Japan studies in the United States, there are over 17,500 entries about Japan studies in the United States. There are over 1,500 university professors who are Japan specialists. And at universities throughout the United States, courses are offered on the Japanese language, on Japanese history, politics, society, culture, and so on. And as you are aware, several universities in the United States have developed major Japan studies programs. Columbia University is one of them. We have over forty Japan specialists at Columbia University, and in the East Asian Institute where I'm affiliated, we have specialists in every social science discipline working on Japan. And like what I get here is the vision for this Institute at Seoul National University, at Columbia University, it's not only the faculty members who are in the School of International and Public Affairs, which is more or less the equivalent of your graduate school of international affairs here, but all the faculty members at Columbia University who have interest in modern and contemporary Japan gather at the East Asian Institute. So it becomes kind of a focal point for people who are working on Japan to interact, to engage in collaborative research or just to meet, to have public lectures, and so on. So it's a very big field in the United States. We have academic journals like the *Journal of Japanese Studies*, high quality journals dedicated to analysis about modern and contemporary Japan

and there's a steady output of books and journal articles by American scholars dealing with Japan. Indeed, one of the problems with Japan studies in the United States today in training young people about Japan is that there is so much to read in English about Japan that one can spend one's life only reading English written by Americans about Japan and never read what Japanese are writing about themselves. It's a problem that needs to be avoided in the study of Japan.

II.

Now, I want to say something about the history of Japan studies in the United States. How did it become such a big field? The history is not that old. Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, according to one survey, there were only about a dozen American professors in universities throughout the United States in 1941 who taught courses about Japan and who read Japanese. The field virtually didn't exist. And the prewar specialists on Japan were almost, in most cases, the children of missionaries who grew up in Japan. I think there's a similar history by the way of Korean studies in the United States but it's even more pronounced in the case of Japan. So when you think about this so-called first generation of Japan specialists, it's names like Harvard professor and later Ambassador to Japan, Edwin Reischauer that come to mind. Children of missionaries who approach Japan initially from a Chinese cultural sphere perspective, that is the first generation of Japan specialists were almost all trained first as China specialists or what we used to call Sinologists, specialists in Chinese history, culture, language who then looked at the cultural sphere that China extended

through Korea, Japan, and so on. So the first generation of American Japan specialists were not trained as social scientists. They were culturalists, historians. And their approach to Japan was very much in the context of looking at Chinese cultural sphere in East Asia.

The big boom to American studies of Japan came during the Second World War. Every one of my professors about Japan at Columbia University, without exception, had gone to either the Army or the Navy Japanese language school during the Second World War. Here was a curious difference between Japan and the United States' response to the wartime events. In Japan as many of you know during the war, English was prohibited. It wasn't taught. A lot of words that had existed in Japanese as borrowed words from English, were eliminated and Japanese terms created in their stead. And in the subsequent years, I think the generation of Japanese that had the most difficulty internationalizing and learning foreign languages was that generation that was raised, that went to school during that wartime period. The US response to the outbreak of war was to train large numbers of Americans to be able to operate in Japanese language. They later went, many of them went and worked in the American occupation in Japan and after that many of them became professors of Japanese studies. So even in here those of you in Korea familiar with American studies of Japan, names from Columbia University alone, Donald Keene, famous writer on Japanese literature, or Herbert Passin, who was sociologist about Japan, James Morley, the list goes on. Every one of these people were trained during the Second World War. After the war ended, the United States government and private foundations all came to

the view that, in this new post-war world, Americans had to understand more about foreign countries than they had before, especially those countries outside of Europe from where most Americans came. And so a huge amount of resources were poured in, actually, more than by the government, by private foundations, Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation, and others, to create major centers of area studies. So area studies, the study of foreign regions and countries, which was not a major activity in the United States prior to the Second World War now became a very big operation. And at Columbia University in 1947, the East Asian Institute was created. At Harvard, and at Michigan, and at Berkeley, and at Stanford and at elsewhere, similar centers were created.

I represent the third generation of American Japan specialists. This is the generation of Americans who came to the study of Japan neither because we were related to missionary families nor because we had the experience of going to war but because we were attracted by the reality of this country, Japan, growing at double-digit growth rates, becoming a democracy in the 1950s and 1960s and 1970s. When a lot of young people came into the study of Japan, it was this curiosity about how Japan ticks, what makes Japan work that drew us into the field. And in those days, there were a lot of resources made available for those people who were interested in studying Japan, fellowships, research grants and so on. And as someone who has struggled for many years as Director of the East Asian Institute, to raise funds, to keep our activities going, I can't stress enough how important it is that organizations like the Korea Foundation and the Japan Foundation, and other organizations as well as the internal resources of

universities like SNU are committed to support these activities, because as I will go on to talk about in a little more detail in a few minutes, being a good area specialist and having a good area studies program at a university is a very expensive proposition. People have to get to the field, they have to do the research, there needs to be support for collaboration among scholars from different countries. It's all very expensive and support is absolutely essential to make this work.

Let me just say a few more words to bring the situation of American generations of Japan scholars up to date. My so-called third generation, I think what we did, that was new in the field of Japan studies for the United States and in the sense was new actually in the study of Japan among, even among Japanese social scientists, I think, was that our generation went out and did in-depth field research, participant-observation research. I went down to write my dissertation to Kyushu and moved in with a Japanese politician and did a study of how a Japanese politician gets elected to public office.

It would be wonderful to see some Korean scholar do a comparative study of how Korean politicians and Japanese politicians engage in the effort to get public support to get elected to public office. My colleague, my classmate, fellow, who's been teaching at the University of Michigan for many years, John Campbell, came to Tokyo about the same time and basically moved into the Ministry of Finance to do a study of how the Japanese put together their budget, first time that was done. So our generation brought this kind of empirical analysis, field

research to the study of Japan. And I think we were driven by different concerns than our predecessors. Every generation has its own, what we call, problem-consciousness, its own sense of what the issue is. For that second generation of Japan specialists trained during the war, it was ‘how successful is the occupation?’, ‘how democratic is Japan becoming?’, ‘how do we avoid going to war again?’ That was the problem-consciousness of the second generation. I think for the third generation, it was ‘why does Japan work?’, ‘how does this system operate?’ And so it was this sense of kind of wide-eyed curiosity I think which was what drove our generation.

But our succeeding generation of Japan specialists have had a different set of problems on their mind. In the 1980s, the early 1990s, the problem was, ‘how do you deal with this rival to American economic power that looks as though it’s increasing its global economic and potential political power?’ Much to almost everybody’s surprise, that was a shorter generation than a lot of people expected. And fifteen years later, the question that concerns a lot of American Japan specialists, and that people are writing about today, is ‘why has Japan had so much trouble dealing with its problems, with its long economic recession, with adapting its society to the new demands of the globalized economy?’

So the issues change over time, and one of the questions which I’m not qualified to answer but a question which needs to be raised is ‘what is the research agenda for Korean specialists on Japan?’ There are particular issues that will inevitably, invariably, concern Korean scholars in ways that don’t necessarily concern

American scholars, at least not in the same way. So there's a particular history, there are particular set of concerns and there's a particular sort of added value that Korean analysts of Japan can bring to a global dialogue about Japan, its changing society, its politics, economy and its role in the world.

Now, I want to say, something about American social science studies of Japan today that's an issue of major concern to me and to many people who believe that knowing a lot about a country and a region is essential to saying anything significant and important about that region and that country. And that is our growing concern about the increasing narrow specialization that is coming to dominate American social science. And a growing kind of antipathy or animosity towards so-called area studies. In the United States, whether at Columbia University or at Harvard or anywhere else, social science departments are becoming increasingly narrow in their focus and in the kind of training they give their graduate students. And the demands on graduate students to focus on theory and the demands result from the emphasis on trying now to get graduate students through the Ph.D. program as quickly as possible partly as a financial issue. Almost all graduate students at major universities are funded and so universities have an interest in getting these people through in a hurry so that they're not a drag on funding for more than a few years. This creates an environment that's not conducive to the training of area specialists. To train an area specialist takes time. You have to learn the language. There's no short cut to knowledge around learning the language in which people in that country operate.

So my experience at Columbia University and my impressions of the situation at other major schools is that one of the major roles of a Japan Institute is to act as an internal lobbying organization to get the university's departments to support students involved in area studies. Our goal is to train area specialists who are good in their discipline. But you cannot be good in the discipline and be a good area specialist without making the time commitment to become facile in the language, knowledgeable about the country and so on. So it seems to me that one of the important roles of the center institute like the Institute for Japanese Studies at SNU is not only to provide a central location where people interested in Japan can gather but to act as I say as a kind of pressure group within the university to keep the university aware of an understanding of the importance of training people with deep knowledge about Japan or whatever other country that we might be talking about.

Now, what does it take to make a good Japan specialist? What are the keys to being a good scholar on Japan? It seems to me that there are at least six things you want a Japan scholar to have. **The first** I have already referred to. To be a good Japan specialist, you have to know the language. There's no short cut. And one of the things that disturbs me about trends in American studies of Japan today is that partly because of what I mentioned before, there is so much to read in English about Japan that fewer and fewer American scholars of Japan, fewer and fewer American students of Japan, are reading enough in Japanese. So there's a merging of field which is not the study of Japan, but the study of American studies of Japan in which scholars argue with each other about theories

that they're putting forward about Japan but with increasingly less relevance to what's actually going on in Japan. It's very important to avoid this trap. And one of the advantages it seems to me that Korea has in developing a first-rate Japan studies program is that it is easier for Koreans to access the Japanese language than for Americans. The languages are closer. Koreans are generally better at learning foreign languages than Americans are, who may be among the worst in the world in terms of foreign language, a tradition of learning foreign languages. So learning the language, there's no short cut. Korea may have some advantages.

The second element seems to me that goes into making a good Japan scholar is to be trained in an interdisciplinary manner about Japan. An area specialist is exactly that. He's a specialist on the area, on the country. Not just on Japanese politics or not just on the Japanese economy but on Japan. It means he knows or she knows a lot about the history of the country, that she has an understanding of the social structure, of the economic structure, and so on. So that there's a lot of writing about Japan in the United States these days by people who are not Japan specialists and it lacks this kind of interdisciplinary insight that one gets by giving students a broad training about Japan in various different disciplines. So it's really important that Japan institutes not become narrowly focused on some aspect of Japan, whether it be Japanese business practices or international relations, foreign policy but that students are able to see the bigger picture of where Japan is coming from and where it's going.

The third element that goes into making this first-rate Japan specialist is getting

to the field, doing empirical research. You know, academics, scholars, like other people, have different personalities. Some people like to stay in their room and read books and think and write. And that's what a lot of academic research involves. But if you're going to be an area specialist, if you're going to be a Japan specialist in the social sciences concerned with contemporary Japanese life, the society, and economics, and politics, you have to want to go there and do the research and be on the ground. So it requires a commitment of time and energy and without that, it becomes too abstract. Here, too, recent trends in the United States are not encouraging. There's less and less funding available for people to go study in Japan. Maybe not so much less for graduate students, but for young professors, young assistant professors, it's very difficult to get funding to go and live in Tokyo. Now, here, Korea has a real advantage over the United States. Japan is next door. I flew in on what is the equivalent of New York – Washington shuttle now yesterday from Tokyo, the Haneda-Kimpo shuttle. You can go to Japan much more easily from Seoul, let me tell you, than you can from New York City. And so you can make shorter trips. There are ways to engage in this research in the case of Korea that makes Americans envious indeed.

The fourth point I would stress about being a good Japan specialist is to understand the importance of thinking comparatively. The danger of area specialist is that they develop what we call 'tunnel vision'. They only see what's inside the 'tunnel', inside Japan, and lose sight of the fact that maybe what they're looking at, they can also see in Korea, or in Italy or in the United States. In other words, if you don't put Japan in some sort of a comparative context, it's

very hard to figure out what's significant about what you're observing. Japanese, as you know, maybe other people are not all that different, but Japanese in any case, often talk about how unique their country is. And of course, there is a lot of uniqueness. That is why people like myself stay interested for thirty, forty years and never get bored. But the thing that's most unique about Japan is that people think it's so unique. You look at Japanese politics. Is it so unique? Well, people will say there's factionalism. Yeah, there's factionalism, maybe less now than before, but there are factions in other country's politics, in Italy had factions very similar to Japan and so on. There's one-party dominance. There was one-party dominance in many countries for long period of time. Even in the United States, in the post-war United States, in the American Congress, it was essentially a democratic one-party dominant system for many years until quite recently. And that's really one of the interesting changes in American domestic politics which we'll avoid the temptation to talk about, that is the emergence of the Republican Party as the dominant party in the United States. There's corruption. No doubt. But there's corruption elsewhere as well. So the point is, you have to put Japan in a comparative context to understand what's significant, what's like other places, what's not, and why, what accounts for the differences. And here, it seems to me that the opportunities for exciting comparative research involving Japan and Korea are enormous. There's so many commonalities and differences that are so much that are subtle and that can tell us a lot about how political life is organized, how economies operate in this modern world in East Asia. So that doing more here at SNU in developing comparative research on Korea and Japan in the social sciences, it seems to me, is a hugely, would be a hugely fruitful area to develop.

One of the problems with the comparative study of Japan in the social sciences is that so much of it is in an implicit comparative context with the United States. Now if you want to ask what is the most unique country in the world in terms of political structure, economic organization and so on, it's not Korea and it's not Japan, and it's not France, and it's not Germany. It's the United States. In fact, there's a long history in American writing about American exceptionalism. America is the exceptional country. And so much writing about Japan which portrays Japan as unique is actually saying that the United States is unique and if you compare Japan's economic structure with Germany, the role of the bureaucrats versus politicians with France and so on, you'll find that there are many areas of potentially beneficial comparison to be drawn by looking at Japan in a different comparative context. And in that sense, as I've just indicated, it seems to me there is a very exciting range of possibilities for developing comparative work on Japan and Korea.

Fifth point that I think is that a good Japan specialist has to be a good social scientist. You have to be up-to-speed on your discipline whether it be political science or sociology, anthropology, whatever it may be, for two reasons. One is you want to be able to bring the insights from your particular discipline to your analysis so that you can say something that's innovative and new about Japan that you wouldn't get at if you didn't have these tools at your command, the methodologies and the theories that have been developed in Western social science. And the second reason is that you want to be able to counter the Eurocentric nature of Western social science, which is still very much dominated by American and European experiences, which unfortunately many of us tend to

think of as being universal experiences. But it's not universal. So there is a real role for specialists on Japan, on other non-Western societies to enrich our disciplines in the social sciences by bringing the insights that are drawn from doing careful empirical research on Japan and that can only be accomplished if one has the tools of the discipline. So I think being a good Japan specialist means you have to make a commitment and you have to make it possible for students to make a commitment to become a good area specialist and to become a good disciplinarian. You need both. There's no short cut. So it's not easy and you don't expect that, a great many people are going opt for this kind of career but those who do need to be supported in their effort.

And finally, I say this about being a good Japan specialist, here in Korea. I think it's really important to engage with the English language literature about Japan. For better or for worse, English is the language of international academic discourse. I think it would be a shame if Korean research on Japan was locked into Korean language only or to Japanese language only. There is a lot that Korean scholars have to offer to the world community interested in the social science studies of Japan. But how do you make that accessible to the world? I don't think there's any way other than in English. So, the question is how to bring that about. And I think, I would hope, that one of the things that the leadership here at SNU will be thinking about as you develop this Institute is how to create mechanisms of interaction with American and British and other centers of Japan studies. It would seem to me to be ideal if graduate students working in Japan studies here would spend time at the University of Tokyo and

in Japan doing research and at Columbia University working in our graduate program or in other American or British universities and make this truly an international collaborative effort.

III.

So let me conclude by saying something about my overview ‘what are the functions of a Japan Institute in a foreign country in Korea, in the United States, or elsewhere?’ I think there are three. There are three functions. One is to train specialists, to train Japan specialists. And our philosophy at Columbia University has always been that the way to do that is to combine area studies with disciplinary training.

The second is to provide an environment conducive to research and to encourage research. And that means several things, I think. At Columbia East Asian Institute, it provides office facilities and research support for its members so that they can do their own research. It also supports projects for collaborative research with scholars from other universities in the United States and in Japan. And as I said before, I hope that as SNU develops this institute, it will give some thought to how it can encourage collaboration with American research centers and Japanese research centers and so on. Another thing, another element of research support has been to support multinational research projects, dealing with common problems, the common problems of the advanced industrialized societies, the common problems of the demography of aging societies, common problem for Korean and Japan for many Western countries as well are now the growing issue

of the changing structure of international relations in East Asia. So it, seems to me, in this area of research environment, you need to think about how to expand the wings of this Institute so that it involves collaborative and multinational research.

And the third very important function of the Japan Institute, at least this is my experience in the United States, is to contribute to the public policy debate about your country's policy towards that country. And that may be an especially important role for this institute here in Seoul given the particular kinds of emotional and other issues that surround Japanese-Korean relations. You know, it seems to me, that Korea in this regard is a lot more like the United States than it is like Japan in the role that so-called public intellectuals play in their country. It's changing in Japan and we've seen recently a lot more Japanese academics who are playing roles in government as advisory capacity or entering the government and so on, but the tradition in Japan is very different from the tradition in Korea. The tradition in Japan of a professional bureaucracy dominating policy-making is different from the tradition in Korea where you have a long history of Korean academics going into government, speaking out on public policy issues and being listened to. It is very similar to the situation in the United States where academics go in government out back and forth and so on.

And so one of the roles of this new Institute, it seems to me, is to provide opportunities for Korean Japan specialists to speak out on public policy issues from a base of knowledge and objectivity and away from the emotions and

sentiments that drive so much of the public discourse about Japanese-Korean relations. So one important role, I would think, of this Japan institute is to provide an environment that is conducive to scholars speaking out openly and frankly and without apprehension about their views on this relationship with Japan and their view on how Japan is operating whether again in politics, foreign policy, or whatever.

So these are my observations learning about this exciting news of Korea's premier institution of higher education, Seoul National University, creating an Institute for the objective, dispassionate study of contemporary, modern Japan. I think it's very exciting, I think it provides all kinds of interesting new opportunities for collaboration among people from Japan and the United States and elsewhere in the world who all have the same goal in mind, which is to produce objective, important research about Japan to increase our public's understanding about this important country and to contribute to better relations between our countries and Japan. Thank you very much.