

Symposium
**“Influence of Asia’s Colonization:
Debating the Past, Present, and Future of Territorial Issues” (Overview)**

On February 23, 2018, The Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA), in collaboration with the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), organized a symposium “Influence of Asia’s Colonization: Debating the Past, Present, and Future of Territorial Issues” in New Delhi, India. The following is a brief overview of the symposium.

1. Keynote address

The keynote address discussed the historic significance of the Meiji Restoration, the 150th anniversary of which is being observed this year.

- The Meiji Restoration, a rare example in the world history of successful transformation achieved without the shedding of much blood, deserves to be called a revolution. It could even be called a miracle in that it 1) successfully replaced a system of feudal domains by centralized government and administration and 2) caused mobility of social status to the extent Ito Hirobumi, born a member of low-ranking samurai class, was able to rise to the primiership.
- The achievements of the Meiji Restoration did not suddenly come about by virtue of political change. They were made possible by gradual changes that occurred during the preceding Edo period, such as increase in population, advancements in agriculture and commerce, high literacy rate, the rise of popular culture, and the development of a national consciousness.
- The victory of Japan over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War awakened nationalism in Asia and Africa. Unfortunately, Japan did not exercise leadership to the benefit of those oppressed peoples but instead proceeded to acquire overseas territories of its own and joined the ranks of the oppressors.
- Japan later erred and headed down the road toward the Pacific War. The concept of Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere proved a failure because the concept did not have a set of shared basic principles such as non-intervention in domestic matters or peaceful resolution of conflicts and because it did not envisage equality among its constituent states.
- On the other hand, it is also certain that the Pacific War did contribute to the rise of nationalism in Asia.

2. Session I. History of Asia's Colonization: The Territorial and Boundary Issues

The first session addressed the origins of territorial and border issues across Asia and the history of its colonization, and the panelists spelt out the following points broadly.

- The widely accepted view of modern international law is that it developed out of the European system of international law, just one of many different systems that existed around the world. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of present territorial conflicts, it is important to approach such conflicts from historical perspectives, encompassing period prior to the acceptance of modern international law.
- There were distinctive territorial concepts of “hanto” (版図; territory) and “kegai no chi” (化外の地; lands outside imperial influence) in Japan before acceptance of modern international law. After the opening of the country to the West and the Meiji Restoration, Japan actively adopted Western “imperialist” international law and expanded its territories overseas.
- It is interesting that there were difference in interpretation between China and Japan about the of the concept “hodo” (封土; domain) as it appeared in Article 1 of the Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty, whether it referred to a territory as defined by modern international law, or it included the tributary states.
- French colonial history is barely covered in the French educational curriculum. While it cannot be denied that various types of inequalities and discrimination were associated with the French colonial rule over Indochina, it needs to be noted that French rule exerted a certain degree of positive influence on the territories in question.
- For example, colonization brought about changes in material spheres such as progress in agriculture, mining and infrastructure. Colonialization also brought along with it: 1) Acceptance of a modern legal system 2) Demarcation of borders based on topographic maps 3) The creation of national consciousness in Indochinese countries through movements aimed at denying the suzerainties of China and Thailand.
- When it comes to the issue of the Paracel and Spratly Islands, Vietnam is attempting to justify its claim on the basis of international law, with the backdrop of the modern legal system, which it inherited from France. On the other hand, China has been limited to invoking vague concepts of “historical rights” over the islands with the exercise of force and balance-of-power concepts in the background. China is attempting to justify territorial rights over the islands by invoking even its past suzerainty over Annam.

- On the Paracel and Spratly Islands issue, France has refrained from taking specific positions, confining itself to making expressions of general legal principles. As the former suzerain of Vietnam with historical involvement to some degree in that country, France should reconsider the positions it takes.
- India has had land disputes with almost all of the six countries with which it shares borders. The roots of these territorial disputes can be found in the decisions taken by the British government based on 19th century colonial strategy.
- Behind the British decision to partition India and Pakistan were 1) its obligations to the Muslim League 2) The old British policy of divide and rule 3) Desire for an access to Central Asia 4) Desire to contain the Soviet Union. A British writer accurately predicted in 1944 that the separation of Muslims would result in their impoverishment and radicalization.
- The end of the Cold War diminished the strategic value of Pakistan and gave rise to a desire for peace between India and Pakistan. While this continued for a time after 9/11, Pakistan's strategic value (for the U.S.) increased again amid the Global War on Terror because of the country's proximity to Afghanistan. This put a damper on attempts to bring about peace between India and Pakistan.
- The land and maritime boundary problems between India and Bangladesh were just as complicated as those with Pakistan, but have been resolved with the establishment of democratic governments in Bangladesh.
- Session II. Asia's Geopolitical and Geostrategic Future in the Backdrop of its Colonial Past
- The second session analyzed and discussed the geopolitical implications of the legacies left behind by history in Asia, the strategic importance of which is increasing. The panelists made the following points broadly.
 - While experiencing significant economic growth, Asia today is a major hotspot on the global landscape where numerous conflicts and tensions are clustered, with China being involved in many of them.
 - China attempts to justify its "creeping expansionism" in its border with India, in the South China, and East China Seas by invoking various historical narratives.
 - The baggage of history often weighs down Asia's strategic environment. In contrast to Europe, more and more attention has been paid to the past problems of Asia. Countries that have gained confidence because of their economic successes have been playing the history card.

- Efforts to change the territorial and maritime status quo are and will remain the biggest threats to security in Asia. History is being invoked in attempts to justify the geostrategic imperative of using force to change the status quo in the East China Sea, South China Sea, and on the Indian-Chinese border. This is the most destabilizing factor in Asia.
- Several Asian countries including China selectively interpret history and blend these interpretations with fiction to reconstruct their own version of history. They do this to glorify their past, to whitewash their transgressions, and to reinforce the victimhood narratives that they might have created. A good example is Xi Jinping's attempt to legitimize Sino-centrism by pursuing what he calls the Chinese Dream.
- The two biggest attempts in the 21st century to change the status quo by force were the annexation of Crimea by Russia and China's construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea. Russia is facing sanctions from the international community for its actions in Crimea, while China got off with no sanctions at all. This sent an unfortunate message to China and encourages China to escalate its moves along its border with India and in the East China Sea.
- There are two ways to conquer a country. One is by the sword, and the other is by debt. China has adopted the second path, of getting nations to borrow heavily, to exert control over small and medium-sized countries.
- China re-interprets history to suit its national interest.
- When discussing the pros and cons of colonialism, the cons obviously outweigh the pros. China, where revisionism is gaining strength, is the only country that has a victimization mentality with respect to territorial issues.
- With the exception of the South China Sea, territorial disputes among Southeast Asian states have been manageable and have not led to major confrontations. The reasons for this include: 1) Lack of involvement of major powers 2) The existence of ASEAN as a confidence-building mechanism 3) The moderate nature of nationalism in these countries 4) The respect for international law held by these countries.
- China has been playing the history card to expand its sphere of influence. It has invoked history in its attempts to tarnish Japan's image in countries such as South Korea and the Philippines.
- In the context of shrinking disparities in the military capabilities of the U.S. and China, Japan has several security options available: 1) Forge a multilateral security framework led by the U.S. 2) A multilateral security framework without a strong U.S. commitment 3) An independent and isolationist policy of homeland security 4)

Pursuit of a Sino-Japanese entente.

3. Closing address

Two recent good examples of nations displaying respect for the rule of law are India, in how it accepted the decision handed down by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) about its maritime boundary with Bangladesh; and Japan, in how it responded to the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) ruling about whaling off the Antarctic.