

GSI Caravan

Project Title: "Public Sphere and Diversifying Views of History: Memories and Reconciliation in Europe and Asia"

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Project Overview

Post–Cold War Europe has witnessed the emergence of a new perspective of history, with the memories of World War II superimposed on those of a communist dictatorship, a development that led to international reconciliation in tandem with the progress of European integration. On the other hand, the spread of rightwing populism in recent years has cast doubt on the narrative of international reconciliation and national unification, with the result being that a consensus on the recollection of public memories is becoming increasingly difficult. The master narrative of history is also being transformed into museums of history in each nation as well as media platforms such as television programs, movies, history games, and history apps that present differing portrayals of the past. Under such circumstances, the question is how to resolve the disagreement and conflict among nations regarding their view of history.

The Center for German and European Studies (DESK), the primary research institution for this project, has been studying the history and memories portrayed and recalled in the public sphere, mainly from the viewpoint of modern German history. The project will enhance this endeavor and discuss public memories in Asia, in addition to Europe, in an attempt to determine whether there could be any consensus toward international reconciliation. For this purpose, the project will establish collaboration with those specializing in Japanese history, the history of South Korea and North Korea, Southeast Asian history, Chinese history, museology, and folklore, among others.

Many prior studies have been conducted on public memories and reconciliation. However, few of them cover both subjects in a unified fashion. This project is intended to serve as a bridge between the two topics from the standpoint of memories and recollection for the achievement of reconciliation in the public sphere. The research methodology is based on theoretical foundations encompassing memory theory, public sphere, history of concepts, public history, and so on. For case studies, examples of both Europe and Asia will be cited, compared, and examined to determine if there is any linkage among them. Thus, the discussion regarding public memories and civil society, which has long been Eurocentric, will be addressed from an Asian perspective with a view to creating a new memory theory and a civil society theory based on the historical experience of Asia.

This project will partner with German universities in line with the research and teaching domains of DESK with an emphasis on accessing the current academic debate in Germany as well as on transmitting research results and exchanging views through research trips to the country. DESK is part of an international network of German and European studies operated by the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst), which maintains “DAAD Centers” worldwide. The use of this network, along with academic tours of Germany, will allow researchers to engage in discussions from a global perspective and transmit their work internationally. In addition, DESK has close ties with the Center for German Studies at Peking University in China and the Centre for German and European Studies at Chung-Ang University in South Korea. DESK seeks to contribute to the building of an academic network to address various issues related to the history and memories of East Asia, where tensions still persist, by sharing interests and concerns within the framework of regular academic exchange with the two centers. The outcome of the project is scheduled to be published in English in fiscal year 2023, entitled “International Reconciliation and Public History: Memories and Reconciliation in Europe and Asia.”