

Summary of Discussion

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“American Studies from Various Perspectives: Gender and Comparative Approaches” was the theme of 2008 Nagoya American Studies Seminar held at Nanzan University on July 26 and 27. These two days were extremely hot in Nagoya—and inside the air-conditioned auditorium of the university, the panelists, commentators and audience members exchanged heated discussions on a wide range of topics on American Studies.

The panelists and commentators, as befitting the theme, came from diverse academic disciplines—political science, sociology, anthropology and literature—and strikingly, many of them did not identify their primary field as American Studies. Another striking thing was that “gender” did not come into play until the comment and discussion session. On the surface, therefore, it would have been difficult to fathom that this seminar would lead to a coherent intellectual undertaking.

But by the end of the day, the audience seemed to have been enthralled by the thought-provoking papers and comments presented by scholars leading their respective fields. And as a moderator, I was fascinated by the stimulating intellectual dialogue exchanged among them in many challenging ways. Although some in the audience may have wanted more focused discussions, the very diversity of concepts, approaches and terminology, together with the common intellectual curiosity shared among the panelists seemed to teach us the importance of open-mindedness, especially in approaching the field of American Studies.

Our first panelist was Professor Michael Mastanduno of Dartmouth University. Specialist in the field of American politics and foreign policy, he gave a paper entitled “After Bush: A Return to Multilateralism in U. S. Foreign Policy?” In this paper, Professor Mastanduno pointed out that the upcoming presidential election was exceptional in that foreign policy was a key electoral issue and that a central concern among the voters was whether the United States would divert from the “unilateral” direction that it has taken under the Bush administration. In other words, he argued, there was a need to examine whether multilateralism was the norm and unilateralism an aberration in American foreign policy.

In order to probe into the question whether or not the United States will retain its unilateral course in foreign policy, Professor Mastanduno first gave an

overview of the historical background of American foreign policy. From George Washington's farewell address until 1945, he argued, one of the enduring themes of American foreign policy was its ambivalence toward the world outside and its multilateralism. The Jeffersonian tradition, for example, counseled the United States to be minimally engaged internationally in order to protect democracy at home. The Jacksonian tradition, on the other hand, had been strong on nationalism and espoused the idea that the United States wished to be left alone, yet if provoked would respond ferociously. The Wilsonian tradition of engagement and multilateralism, in other words, was not the only foreign policy tradition of the United States.

The Cold War years, according to Professor Mastanduno, were an era of global engagement and multilateralism. The United States played a pivotal role in creating the United Nations and NATO, and supported European multilateralism. In the realm of economics, the United States promoted the Bretton Woods system and created the GATT, IMF and World Bank. Yet the United States has at times adopted approaches other than multilateralism. In East Asia and the Middle East, the United States preferred bilateralism rather than multilateralism. In Latin America, the United States continued to support anticommunist, authoritarian leaders, thus thwarting the budding of multilateralism. And throughout the Cold War years, US leaders did not hesitate to use unilateral means when they thought it necessary.

In light of history, in other words, the unilateral turn in foreign policy during the Bush administration was not necessarily an aberration. According to Professor Mastanduno, it was reasonable to expect a change in rhetoric after the Bush administration and a genuine effort to enhance its multilateral image. The change, however, might be limited, since the new administration would have to take into account public opinion which was becoming more skeptical of multilateralism especially in terms of economic policy; the commitment inherited from the previous administration; and the extraordinary power of the United States, which induced the leaders to act "above" world rules if they deemed it necessary or preferable.

The second paper was presented by Dr. Jennifer Lee, a sociology professor at the University of California, Irvine. In a paper entitled "The Question of the Color Line in the 21st Century: Race and Multiracial Identification in American Studies," she tried to gauge the placement of today's color line in the United States. The demographic changes in recent years had made the United States far more diverse racially and ethnically, she argued, and the 2000 Census, which allowed Americans to mark more than one race to identify themselves, made this highly visible. Against such background, social scientists had started to investigate whether the country's traditional black-white color line was moving toward a white-nonwhite or a black-nonblack divide. In the former case, she surmised, Asians and Latinos would fall on the nonwhite side of the color line, thereby making them closer to blacks; in the latter case, they would fall on the

nonblack side of the color line, making them closer to whites than to blacks.

Professor Lee's project was to adjudicate between the two positions currently in place, one that emphasized the emergence of the white-nonwhite divide and the other, black-nonblack divide. In order to do so, she drew on analyses of 2000 Census data as well as in-depth interviews with multiracial adults with Asian, Latino or black ancestry. From those interviews, she pointed out two significant findings. Her first finding was that there was a notable difference between Asians and Latinos on the one hand and blacks on the other, in that multiracial Asians and Latinos had much more flexibility in their choice of racial and ethnic identities compared to multiracial blacks. This was, in large part, because of the sheer force of outsiders' ascription, which constrained the racial options of multiracial blacks. In other words, Americans in general were not as attuned to identifying and committed to constraining Asians and Latino ancestries in the same manner that Americans identified and constrained black ancestries.

Her second finding was that the Asians and Latinos were more likely to report their multiracial identifications, but the multiracials were more likely to describe their Asian and Latino identities as voluntary, optional, and situational rather than ascribed, instrumental and consequential, suggesting that the Asian and Latino identities were adopting the symbolic character of white ethnicity. By contrast, black multiracials did not equate their black or African American identity as a racial or ethnic option, which suggested that black remained a relatively fixed racial category.

In conclusion, Professor Lee pointed out that the findings indicated that racial group boundaries were fading more rapidly for Latinos and Asians than for blacks, and a black-nonblack divide was taking place, in which Asians and Latinos were closer to whites than to blacks at this point in time. Along with patterns of multiracial identification, she further suggested, trends in intermarriage—that a growing number of Asians and Latinos were marrying spouses from different racial backgrounds—tended to cement the new divide between blacks and nonblacks in the United States.

Our third keynote speaker, Professor Rey Chow of Brown University, introduced a challenging concept of "heterolingual address" in her paper entitled "American Studies in Japan; Japan in American Studies: Challenges of the Heterolingual Address." In the first part of her talk, she introduced Naoki Sakai's conception of "heterolingual address, a type of speech act in which the otherness of the audience... [was] never repressed but acknowledged," and argued that such form of address "[made] it possible for us to seriously confront rather than simply assimilate or neutralize 'foreigners' in our act of enunciation, including especially those who [might] not be prepared to understand us or agree with us." After exploring how such a form of address would enable us to understand the practice of American Studies in a way that led to "the conscious adoption of an ethical attitude—the attitude of the widest possible inclusion," Professor Chow moved on to explore what some constituents of such a heterolingual address about America

and Japan might be “in a context in which the audience [was] bound to have different expectations and ideas about nationhood, culture, and globalization.”

Professor Chow chose two films by Akira Kurosawa in order to probe how the specifics of film language could be “an occasion, indeed a medium” of the heterolingual address. The first film was *No Regrets of Our Youth* (1946), which, based on the Takigawa Incident, narrated the transition of Yukie, a female main character, from a Westernized, bourgeois university student to a sympathizer with the peasants’ and women’s movements in postwar Japan. What Professor Chow found “mind-boggling,” was that Yukie’s choice of leaving Westernized modernity and “returning to the roots” in an agrarian environment seemed to be presented as the viable way of moving on to the future after the end of the war. Viewed as an attempt at heterolingual address, Professor Chow argued, the narrative transition might be “grasped as the enunciation of a certain redefined geotemporal politics in relation to America.” And to the postwar international public, “the address [enunciated] America... as a kind of thinking/language... whose effects [were] felt precisely in the ontological rupture” between the global present and the time of the peasant and of country life.

The second film discussed by Professor Chow was *Rhapsody in August* (1991), a film that centered on a grandmother, Kane, whose husband was among the civilians killed in Nagasaki by the second atomic bomb. Kane has a brother who married a white American woman and his son, Clark, decides to visit his aunt just before the commemoration of the bombing. What takes place in the film, thereafter, is the recollection and mourning of the tragic past and the three generations of the family and Clark struggling to relate the past into the complex present. According to Professor Chow, the compassion Kurosawa bestowed on the victims of Nagasaki and the film’s conspicuous silence on Japan’s war crimes in China and elsewhere inevitably would arouse antagonistic, rather than comfortable or harmonious, reaction among the members of the film’s audience, thus highlighting the importance of the heterolingual address. On the other hand, the exchanges between Clark and Kane, in which Clark said, “I’m really sorry,” and Kane responds, “That’s all right,” turns the film into “examples of profound heterolinguality.” In the end, Professor Chow suggested, Kane’s speech acts were “enunciated filmically as the potentiality of a heterolingual address, in which we [heard] a different kind of ‘we’ emerging, hailing a collective form of life that is yet to come.”

The task of commenting on these three diverse and illuminating papers fell upon three scholars, Professors Kazuko Takemura, Yasuko Takezawa and Shunya Yoshimi.

Professor Takemura, who specializes in literary studies from feminist perspective, sought to respond to the three papers using the concepts of foreignness, friendship, and gender. She focused on the two films analyzed by Professor Chow, and argued that when gender was brought into the picture, the film would give rise to a set of new questions. For example, *No Regrets for Our*

Youth, while casting Yukie, a woman, as the leading character resisting the given order, also depicted her as following the paths of her liberal father and non-conformist husband, not necessarily that of her own.

Regarding the film *Rhapsody in August*, Professor Takemura also raised the question what would have happened if the immigrant uncle and his son had been cast as a woman and her daughter. Woman, Professor Takemura suggested by citing Jacques Derrida, “[was] not yet fraternal enough, not friend enough.” Thus, women, in the “friend-foe” relationships, often appeared as the destabilizing factor in the fraternal democracy. Professor Takemura concluded by suggesting that Professor Mastunduno’s paper, which dealt with international relationships, and Professor Lee’s paper, which discussed racial relations in the United States, could be also reconstructed from such “gendered” perspectives.

Professor Takezawa started her comments by asking specific questions to each speaker. To Professor Mastanduno’s paper, she raised three questions: one, on the concept of unilateralism, two, whether the binary between unilateralism and multilateralism would remain in the future, and three, how other countries would react if the United States continued its unilateralist foreign policy. Regarding Professor Chow’s paper, she suggested the importance of distinguishing between the question of how the United States and Japan involved themselves in constructing the discourse of war and peace, and the question of how people in each society reacted to such discourse about war and peace. She then presented her reading of some important scenes from the two films, and argued that Kurosawa’s aim was to present scenes that transcended conventional and confined discourse in Japan regarding America and war, and also, to respond to the anticipated reactions to such scenes overseas, in order to raise a more fundamental and universal question regarding acts of war and the sorrow of the survivors. To Professor Lee’s paper, Professor Takezawa raised questions regarding her data and her analyses of the present state of race relations in the United States. Professor Takezawa went on to present her own research findings from one of her projects, which investigated the nature of Asian American identity as observed from the art works of Asian American artists.

Our third commentator, Professor Yoshimi, made an extensive comment on the nature of United States-Japanese relationships, starting from the occupation period through the postwar years, and explained the significance of the United States bases in Japan, the characteristics of American culture disseminated under the security alliance system, and how those issues related to the premises presented by Professors Chow, Mastanduno and Lee. Especially illuminating was his suggestion that the United States presence in Japan over the years has become “invisible and ubiquitous.” He explained that this was programmed from the very beginning of the occupation, symbolized by General Douglas MacArthur’s general absence from the public eye, despite his enormous influence in the occupied Japan.

Thanks to the succinct presentations of the panelists, sufficient time was left

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to questions and answers before adjourning to the next sessions.