



## **Nationalism and Japan's Strategic Interest in the Present Context**

**Speaker:** Mr. Dinamani

**Chair:** Ashok K. Kantha

**Date:** 12 April, 2017

**Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi**

The presentation was divided into three main subtopics. The first part dealt with the notion of nationalism and Japanese nationalism; the second part was about Japan's strategic interest and the security dilemma it faces due to China, and the third part was about the present context and how nationalism plays a role in Japanese politics, society and economy. It is important to understand nationalism since it has persisted over the years unlike ideologies like communism and is still a relevant topic in the present world, however, it is a contested concept.

The speaker clarified the concept of nationalism by dividing it into three main parts: elements, factors and approaches. The elements of nationalism are psychological, cultural and political and the factors of nationalism are objective and subjective Factors. The objective factors are a close mix of psychological and cultural elements. The subjective factors consist of the political elements of a nation. The speaker proceeded to explain the two approaches to nationalism - primordial and modernist. The primordial approach pronounces that nationalism is evolving through different stages of history and has been present since primitive times. The second approach is the modernist approach which deals with the question of whether nation or nationalism came first. There has been an argument between scholars on this topic, with scholars like Benedict Anderson and A.D. Smith supporting the

argument that nationalism was first present among the people which leads to aspiration for a nation. This follows the Westphalian model where the political aspirations of people led to the creation of a nation. On the other hand, Ernest Gellner, supports the idea that when people from different places come together, they leave their old identity behind to form a new nation, this identity vacuum is filled by nationalism.

The speaker argued that Japan is a distinct country with its distinct form of nationalism which encompasses the above given factors and elements. The geography of Japan has kept it isolated from the world and for centuries the only connection they had was with the Middle Kingdom and Korea. This isolation gave a chance for a national identity to be created among the people. As per Japanese myth, the Japanese people believe they are descendants of the Sun God, Amaterasu. This myth gives the Japanese people a unified national identity as a homogenous population. The Japanese language has gone through transformations over the years and with its 47 alphabet orders, is distinct from the Chinese language or any other language. The political elements of nationalism are reflected in Japanese society by the three Constitutions it has had till now. The first being in 604AD called the 'Seventeen-article constitution' which was a set of rules that unified the country philosophically and religiously. Japan, thus, presents itself to be a central space to study nationalism since all the elements and variables of nationalism are present here. It has been observed that Japan's nationalism relies upon its economic strength especially after WWII. Currently Japan faces many domestic challenges like economic decline, political instability and the declining population. In the past, Japan has used nationalism as a tool to bring people to action and can use it once again to bring change to the country.

Presently, Japan is facing a strategic dilemma and is confronted with the 'Thucydides Trap' with regards to China. The Thucydides Trap is when the rise of a new power, results in the established power taking an offensive stance which leads to war. The speaker believes that in the present time, with the advent of nuclear weapons, chances of an all-out war have drastically reduced. However, cold war is still a possibility between the two powers. China and Japan have various conflicts such as the territorial disputes over the Senkaku Islands in which no country is willing to step back. The tension has further been compounded when China set up an Air Defence Identification Zone over the disputed area. North Korea is also a pugnacious irritant in the region further destabilising the area and the conflict between the two nations. China is also questioning the current World Order which Japan sees as a major threat.

In order to reinforce their strategic interests, 'normalization' of Japan is the present aim of Japan. Japan believes that it is not a 'normal' country since Japan's sovereignty is compromised. This is due to Article 9 in the Japanese Constitution which is a clause that outlaws war as a means to settle international disputes. The right-wing Japanese argue that every sovereign country has a right to military offensive in times of conflict. There are three stances to the amendment of Article 9. The first is the right wing position which supports a complete restructure and renovation of Article 9 with them wanting the Emperor and the military to regain their past status. The progressive stance believes that the present economic development of Japan was only possible because of their peaceful operations. The Constitution was used to divorce Japan from military affairs and concentrate on economic growth. The conservatives do not want complete revision of Article 9. The procedure for Amendment is that the Bill must pass with two-thirds majority in both the chambers of the Diet and then pass through a referendum with simple majority. Nationalism becomes an important aspect to bring the people to action on the referendum. Nationalist sentiments are high during crisis periods like war, conflict and strife and the speaker believes is the opportune time to push forward for an Amendment of Article 9.

In conclusion, the presentation summarised the key points of Japanese society in the present scenario. First, the speaker is of the opinion that the militarisation of Japan will not lead to an aggressive Japan. Civic nationalism is more predominant than military nationalism. There is no possibility of Japan going nuclear since the mentality of the Japanese is no longer aggressive and the crime rates in Japan have considerably reduced. There is also a need to emphasise the pursuit of enlightened interests which means that the individual interests of the nation should merge with the interests of the world. It essentially signifies integrating nationalism with internationalism. The hostility between China and Japan is also an important area to pay attention to, with the Japanese psyche in crisis making it crucial that positive feelings between the people of Japan and China need to be reinforced. There is a requirement for a concerted collected effort between the members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (USA, Japan, India, and Australia) and China. Containment policy in this age is no longer possible with China's power and growing reach. Finally, the need of the hour is a commitment by Japan to the international community that ensures peaceful growth and internationalism.

## **Discussion**

A lively discussion commenced with various questions put forward. An enquiry was made on the stand of the Ainu and Okinawa minorities on Japanese nationalism and whether the homicide rate was a true indicator of a less aggressive Japan since Japanese cultural media has an aggressive streak. The speaker elucidated that the Okinawan minority consider themselves to be Japanese and have no major grievances with Japan other than the military presence on the island. While, the Ainu population have assimilated themselves in other areas of Japan and are too few in number to challenge the homogeneity that's crucial to Japanese nationalism. As for the Japanese aggression in cultural media, the speaker considers this as a catharsis of violence through creative expression which will not translate to definite action. To the enquiry about whether Japan can still go nuclear under the present Constitution containing Article 9, the speaker clarified that there was no possibility of any form of offensive militarisation by Japan at present and the nuclear umbrella of US makes it a non-requirement for Japan's protection. On being questioned on present Japanese President Shinzo Abe's road map to make Japan a 'normal' country, the speaker explained that the revision of the Constitution is crucial to his agenda of making Japan a normal country.

*Report prepared by Niyati Shetty, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies.*

## **About the Speaker**

Mr. Dinamani is a PhD scholar at the Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, India. He also teaches "Cultural History of Japan" as Guest Faculty at the Centre for Japanese Studies, School of Language, Literature and Cultural Studies, JNU. He is a recipient of Junior Research Fellowship (NET) in Japanese by UGC-NET, India. He has presented a paper on the topic "Power and Resistance in East Asia: Changing Dynamics" in the international conference organised by the School of International Studies, JNU. He participated in the Annual Conference of the Association of Asian Studies 2017 in Toronto. He has visited places of cultural and historical importance centred in and around Tokyo and Kamakura in 2012 as part of 'A Cultural Study Tour to Japan'. In 2011, he represented India as a young leader in the Kamenori Earth Youth Summit (KEYS) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. In addition to International Politics, his sphere of interest extends to philosophy, religion and cultural studies. (Mr. Dinamani can be reached at [dnmnkmr@gmail.com](mailto:dnmnkmr@gmail.com))

## **Disclaimer**

The Wednesday Seminar at the ICS is a forum for presentations and discussions on current affairs as well as ongoing research by scholars, experts, diplomats and journalists, among others. This report is a summary produced for purposes of dissemination and for generating wider discussion. All views expressed here should be understood to be those of the speaker(s) and individual participants, and not necessarily of the Institute of Chinese Studies.