

**Presentation by Yongwook RYU, Harvard University, February 1st, 2011:**

**“The History Problem, Identity Distance, and Worsening Sino-Japanese Relations”**

Abstract:

Why do some regions in the world become a zone of conflict, while others develop into a zone of peace? Mr. Ryu tracks and analyzes the frequency of interstate militarized disputes in Northeast and Southeast Asia since 1980. The former has increasingly become conflictual since 1990, while the latter has become peaceful during the same period. Contrary to the existing explanations that focus on the rise of China, regime type, and economic interdependence, he offers an identity-based explanation. He develops the notion of identity distance, a variable that measures perceived psychological differences between groups, and hypothesize that a widening (narrowing) identity distance among regional countries increases (decreases) the frequency and intensity of regional conflict.

Mr. Ryu argues that in Northeast Asia the salience of the so-called "history problem" widened the identity distance among the regional countries, while in Southeast Asia the process of building a regional identity and the ASEAN Community narrowed the regional identity distance. As a result, regional conflict became more frequent and intense in Northeast Asia, while it decreased in frequency and intensity in Southeast Asia. The analysis of the original multi-country surveys of the political elite reveals that identity distance correlates with key variables that would affect interstate conflict such as threat perception, regional security cooperation, and the willingness to settle disputes. Furthermore, the content analysis of major newspapers in the two regions shows how the identity distance evolved in opposite directions in the two regions.

Biography:

Mr. Yongwook RYU is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Government, Harvard University. He is currently a visiting researcher in the School of Economics and Political Science at Waseda University. He specializes in international relations of East Asia, foreign policies of China, Japan, and Korea, international and regional organizations, regionalization in world affairs, and IR theory. His publications have appeared in *Asian Survey* and *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*.