

Seminar: Russian-Japanese Relations and Asian Integration

Introduction

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There is no consensus in Japan on whether Russia should be included in the definition of "Asia". However, there are several reasons why we should consider Russia when we discuss "Asian integration." First, Russia (particularly the Russian Far East) always appears in the discussion of developments in "Northeast Asia" or the "Sea of Japan-Rim Region." If we consider this subregion to be a particularly important part of "Asia," then we need to include Russia in our discussion of Asian integration. Second, "integration" has political, security, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions, and Asian integration is no exception. We cannot deny the importance of Russia to the politics and security of Asia. There is already much discussion about Russia's role as a source of energy for the economic development of Asian countries. As well, we are witnessing today growing cross-border human flows that involve the Russian territory and the Russian people and we cannot ignore Russia's influence in the social and cultural exchanges taking place in Northeast Asia. It is important to properly locate Russia in Northeast Asia where nations with different civilizations and cultures are neighboring each other. Third, Russia plays a big role in the balance of power among the major powers of the region, which also includes Japan, China, and the United States. For these reasons, it is important for us to examine what role Russia should play, can play, or is playing in Asian region.

This seminar is informed with the above understanding. We place particular emphasis on the current situation and future prospects of Russian-Japanese relations and suggest the importance and direction of academic research into this theme.

There is much talk these days about the resurrection of Great Power Russia. We also notice that the conflict in Georgia has given rise to references to a "return to the Cold War." With its national budget boosted by high global energy prices, Russia is actively pursuing energy diplomacy. Russia has resolved its territorial dispute with China and the two countries are advancing their "strategic partnership." The nation is seeking a role for itself in the future prospects of the Korean peninsula. Vis-à-vis Japan, Russia is energizing its economic ties with Japan even though the bilateral territorial dispute continues. On the other hand, Japan is nearing the end of its slow economic recovery. The nation also appears "adrift" in the ocean of world politics. We will examine how the bilateral relations between Russia and Japan will influence Asian integration.