

2022 JAAS International Symposium - Kashiyama Seminar
Concept Note

“The New Political and Economic Dynamisms in Asia:
Economic Integration and Political Tensions”
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This seminar, sponsored by Kashiyama Scholarship Foundation, will look at the current dynamisms that is transforming the political and economic order in Asia, and aims to (1) identify the key issues that needs to be addressed to understand and evaluate the ongoing structural changes, (2) explore how the interaction of these issues would play out in terms of challenges and opportunities for Asia’s future outlook, and (3) to think of innovative ways to establish a new academic approach where interdisciplinary dialogue could be promoted to adjust and respond to the new realities of Asia.

The politics and economics of Asia has been the subject of research for a long time, and there has been significant research outputs accumulated over the past few decades, both in Japan and abroad. These research typically have strong disciplinary orientation, which has driven the depth and breadth of insights into the specific issues pertinent to the region. While such an approach would, without doubt, remain important in the future, the new dynamisms unfolding in Asia has also become increasingly complex, where different issues are intertwined more than ever, in unprecedented ways. These are due to global or region wide changes that have significantly reshaped Asia’s political and economic landscape, including, for example, the proliferation of global value chains, technological advancements particularly in relation to digitalization, robust economic performance of middle and lower income countries in Asia, demographic changes, and the changing geo-political and geo-economic power balances, all of which interact at different levels. A new inter-disciplinary (or multi-disciplinary) approach is urgently needed to make better sense of Asia in the twenty-first century.

For instance, take the Global Value Chains, which is one of the defining characteristics of the contemporary Asian economy. This has connected the various economic actors in this region across borders, through very complex governance relationships. The long and

vertically integrated production processes have now been sliced-up into smaller production blocks, with different factor intensities. These production blocks have been relocated to countries and regions according to their resource endowments, with the aim of achieving “collective efficiency.” This fragmentation dynamics is the driver that has positioned Asia as the “World’s Factory.” In the 2020s, however, this de-facto based dynamics seems to be at a major crossroads, because the configuration of GVCs now must take into account factors other than costs and service links, such as “values” including human rights, environmental sustainability, and in some cases, democracy. All these are both the underlying factors and the results of, for instance, the US-China tensions, that is posing serious strategic challenges to individual countries in the region. Given this, what would these mean in terms of the regional order? How would the future growth prospects and trajectories of individual countries, industries, and firms, be affected? And what kind of impacts would these have on the domestic politics of the countries in Asia? It is highly likely that these would be all part of a complex dynamism, with significant feedback loops further accelerating interactions that may lead to unpredicted outcomes.

As such, the Kashiwama Seminar of 2022 will attempt to firstly involve a wide range of expertise from different regions to reflect upon such reality, as it should inevitably involve multiple viewpoints. The 2022 Seminar will also be the first of a two-part series, in which the second Seminar will be organized during the 2023 Kashiwama Seminar at the Spring meeting of the Japan Association for Asian Studies (to be held at the University of Tokyo).

The 2022 Seminar will discuss the empirical dimensions of the changes that is happening in Asia, since the end of the Cold War three decades ago, with a focus on the fundamental issues underlying these dynamics.

The 2023 Seminar, as a follow up of the 2022 Seminar, will address how we, as researchers interested in Asia, should reflect upon these changes, in terms of our approach to these new dimensions. Here we will discuss the new issues that we should be highlighting, and the possible academic and policy implications these could have.

Some Relevant Key Words

- Cold War, New Cold War
- Free and Open Indo Pacific
- The emergence of China and India
- Globalizing businesses and the evolution of GVCs
- GVCs and values (human rights, security, democratic values etc.)

- Climate change and other environmental challenges
- Economic security and regional trade agreements
- The changing neo-liberalism (towards protectionism), and the revival of Nation States

Presenters, discussants, and the moderator

The Kashiwama Seminar will invite key experts from the region, including from East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. The following three experts have been invited.

- East Asia: Dr. Michelle Fei-yu Hsieh, Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.
- Southeast Asia: Professor Henry Wai-chung Yeung, National University of Singapore, Singapore.
- South Asia: Professor Prabir De, Research and Information System for Developing Countries, India.

Discussants:

- Professor Kaoru Natsuda, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan
- Discussant Takahiro Sato, Kobe University, Japan

Chair:

- Professor Kenta Goto, Kansai University, Japan.