

What's Left for the Right?

Right-wing Activism in Japan and Politics of Futility

Date: Tuesday, 19 March 2013

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Venue: AS4/03-28

Speaker: Dr Nathaniel Michael Smith
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Abstract

Rightist activism in contemporary Japan is characterized by confrontational politics, motivated by religious zeal, and steeped in underworld criminality. These characteristics cohere in a nativist political disposition, what I term the “politics of futility,” that conjures the stoic, often failed sacrifices of national martyrs and allows activists to place themselves among that heroic pantheon. But if their aggressive style of engagement self-referentially confirms their activist lineage, it also ensures their political and social isolation. This talk explores how rightist activists in Japan engage with the dual role of social critic and social outcast in the medium of their public activism. Their self-stigmatization produces a romantic and inspirational futility that both engenders and reaffirms paradoxical relationships the activist has with the state and nation. What the “politics of futility” describes is not a politics of hopelessness, however, but a self-perpetuating horizon for activism.

About the Speaker

Nathaniel M. Smith is a sociocultural anthropologist and the Japan Foundation Faculty Fellow in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Smith's primary research project focuses on right-wing activism in contemporary Japan. He received his PhD in sociocultural anthropology from Yale University in 2011, and additionally holds degrees in East Asian Studies (Yale University, MA), International Relations (Waseda, MA), and Foreign Language (University of California, Riverside, BA). A recipient of a Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) research fellowship and a Fulbright-Hays doctoral dissertation research fellowship, Smith's scholarly interests also include organized crime, migration and ethnicity, the anthropology of sound, international music subcultures, bicycle craftsmanship and cycling cultures, and the history of anthropology.

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