Summary of the NASSS 2008

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The annual theme of the NASSS 2008 was “American Studies from Various Perspectives: Gender and Comparative Approaches.” This year we added a pre-event, that is, a seminar on the evening of July 25, open to the local public, on the Presidential Election of the United States, for which more than 350 people attended. This was followed by the official four-day program. The two-day Professional Conference, consisting of the Plenary Session on July 26 and three-separate Section Discussions on July 27, included approximately 150 participants and consisted of prominent researchers from Japan, the United States, Korea, the Philippines, and Australia. Another two-day International Graduate Student Seminar was held on the 28th and 29th, with 45 participants in total, 12 from the United States, one respectively from Korea, the Philippines, and Australia, and 30 graduate students from the distinguished universities all over Japan.

The three Keynote Speakers were as follows: for the Politics and International Relations section, Dr. Michael Mastanduno, Associate Dean for Social Sciences and Nelson A. Rockefeller Professor of Government, Dartmouth College; for the Social Science section, Dr. Jennifer Lee, an associate professor of sociology, the University of California, Irvine; for the Literature and Culture section, Dr. Rey Chow, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of the Humanities, Brown University.

As for the Pre-event open to the local public with simultaneous interpretation, a newly added program especially for the U. S. Presidential Election year, two of the Keynote Speakers gave the audience very stimulating lectures; Professor Mastanduno explained the differences and similarities between the so-called multilateral and unilateral approaches to foreign policy, Professor Lee talked about the significance of “race” and “ethnicity” in the current US society by focusing on Senator Barack Obama’s pursuit of the nomination as the Democratic candidate for the presidency. The local people filled the largest auditorium. Professor Kubo Fumiaki of the University of Tokyo, a prominent scholar well known for his expertise in US presidential politics, served as the MC. We are sure that every one of participants was very satisfied with the lectures and aftermath discussions.

The first and main event of the official NASSS 2008 program was the Plenary Session. Japanese commentators responding to the three US Keynote Speakers were Professor Takezawa Yasuko of Kyoto University, Professor Takemura...
Kazuko of Ochanomizu University, and Professor Yoshimi Shunya of the University of Tokyo. Professor Nishizaki Fumiko of Seikei University served as the MC of the Plenary Session. Coupled with the genius shown by Professor Nishizaki, comments by the three Japanese commentators contributed much to the extraordinarily active Questions & Answers session from the floor. Their acute criticisms made the three U.S. Speakers all the more serious and enthusiastic, too.

The three Section Conferences were held on the following day. Three distinguished foreign scholars from the Pacific-Asian countries were invited as discussants for the each of the three section conferences: from Korea, Dr. Yi Okyeon of Seoul National University for the Politics and International section; from Australia, Dr. Chris Dixon of the University of Queensland for the Social Sciences section; from the Philippines, Dr. Dinah Roma-Sianturi of De La Salle University for the Literature and Culture section. The presenters, commentators, and MC’s are as follows:

Morning Session
Politics and International Relations
Presenter: Nakayama Toshihiro (Tsuda College)
Commentator: Machidori Satoshi (Kyoto University)
MC: Kubo Fumiaki (University of Tokyo)
Social Science
Presenter: Iwasaki Yoshitaka (Hannan University)
Commentator: Sato Madoka (Otsuma Women’s University)
MC: Kohiyama Rui (Tokyo Woman’s Christian University)
Literature and Culture
Presenter: Uzawa Yoshiko (Keio University)
Commentator: Dinah Roma-Sianturi (La Salle University)
MC: Yoshida Mitsu (Matsuyama University)

Afternoon Session
Politics and International Relations
Presenter: Ito Go (Meiji University)
Commentator: Yi Okyeon (Seoul National University)
MC: Sasaki Takuya (Rikkyo University)
Social Science
Presenter: Yamamoto Akiyo (Nagoya City University)
Commentator: Chris Dixon (University of Queensland)
MC: Nakano Kotaro (Osaka University)
Literature and Culture
Presenter: Senaha Eijun (Hokkaido University)
Commentator: Nitta Keiko (Japan Women’s University)
MC: Takeda Yuichi (Nanzan University)

The two-day International Graduate Student Seminar, which followed the
two-day professional conference, has already become the second pillar of the NASSS project and should be considered a constituent part of the main program. This conference provides a particularly good forum for Japanese graduate students to interact with their counterparts especially from the Asia-Pacific Rim. Our Japanese students in particular performed well, overcoming the communicative disadvantage with their knowledge and extraordinary enthusiasm to discuss their projects with other students and professional researchers in an international forum. The detailed schedule was as follows:

July 27 Evening: Orientation: lecture on the backgrounds and main targets of the NASSS, and the kick-off dinner party, followed by the special lecture by Professor Rey Chow and seeing Kurosawa Akira’s movie “Rhapsody in August.”

July 28 Morning: Excursion to downtown Nagoya (Atsuta Shrine and Osu-Kannon Temple)

Afternoon: Plenary Session: Discussions first on the comparison of the Ph. D. programs of the United States, Japan and other Pacific-Asian countries, and then on the assignments given by the three Keynote Speakers in advance.

Evening: Dinner and Free Discussion Time till midnight.

July 29 Morning and Afternoon: Three-separated Section Conferences on the review of current research projects of the participants.

Evening: Farewell Party and Final Free Discussion Time.

August 30 Morning: Departure

Although we had to overcome a number of organizational difficulties this year, too, our hard work to make event happen has been rewarded by the satisfactory remarks given by many of the participants, especially joyful faces shown by the graduate students.

We cordially ask for your continuing support to the remaining three years of our five-year NASSS project.