

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ History & Humanities Study Group



Wednesday, 21 October 2009, 18.30 h

Anja Osiander, Freie Universität Berlin

The Two Bodies of the Tenno – Nation and Politics During the Long 1930's in Japan

On December 27, 1923, Nanba Daisuke, the son of a diet member from Yamaguchi prefecture, pushed through the crowd surrounding the Tora-no-mon (Tiger Gate) at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo and tried to shoot and kill Prince Hirohito while the regent's automobile was passing through the gate. The attempt failed; Nanba was arrested immediately and executed less than a year later. Nevertheless, the near miss in an attack on the specific physical body which at the time incorporated the Japanese empire triggered a new and long-lasting dynamic of anxiety in the political debate in Japan.

The presentation will spell out the details of the assassination attempt and then move on to explore its impact on Japanese politics well through the 1930's. Viewed from the angle of the so-called Toranomon incident, the two decades which followed unfold as an era of increasingly desperate attempts by the political elite in Japan to salvage and maintain the spirit of a monarchy in a modern, even hyper-modern world. Such a perspective offers some coherent and precise explanations for the changes in Japanese government up until the introduction of the "New System" (*shin taisei*) between 1937 and 1941.

If it proves persuasive, it means that Japanese politics during the 1930's followed a rather idiosyncratic logic. They were driven mainly by the specific contradictions of Japanese modernization, and only superficially adopted elements of the fascist tide which at the same time rolled over Europe.

Anja OSIANDER, Ph.D. (Martin-Luther-University, Halle), has done research on Japanese politics at the German Institute for Global Studies (Hamburg), Osaka Daigaku, and the University of Leipzig. Her current research is made possible through a grant from the Thyssen Foundation.

The presentation will be given in English. Everybody is welcome to attend. Registration is appreciated (backhaus@dijtokyo.org).

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)
Jochi Kioizaka Bldg. 2F, 7-1 Kioicho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0094, Phone: 03-3222-5077