

U.S. professor honored for Japan studies

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The Japan News
Kevin Doak

11:50 pm, July 14, 2014

By Rie Tagawa / Japan News Staff Writer

A professor of Georgetown University in Washington has been selected for his study of nationalism in modern Japan as the first recipient of a private award established to promote research on Japan by foreign scholars.

“It truly is a privilege and gives me the great confidence to continue my study,” said Prof. Kevin Doak at a July 8 ceremony in Tokyo to announce recipients of the first Terada Mari Japan Study Award established by the Japan Institute for National Fundamentals, a Tokyo-based think tank.

Doak, 54, received the Japan Study Award, top prize, for his 2009 book “A History of Nationalism in Modern Japan” (published in Japanese under the title “Ogoe de Utae ‘Kimigayo’ o”) and other works on Japan. In the book, he says English-language media do not necessarily provide correct explanations about nationalism in Japan. For instance, the book discusses a growing trend of “civic nationalism” in modern-day Japan, a concept

opposite to ethnic nationalism. Civic nationalism, Doak writes, is based not on ethnic roots but on civic engagement such as having a sense of belonging to the Japanese community.

Doak further explained this trend in his commemorative speech delivered on the day following the award ceremony, saying that civic nationalism should be attributed to “the lost decade” of the 1990s following an earlier obsession with economic growth as it allowed the Japanese people an opportunity to look for deeper meaning in their lives than merely acquiring material goods.

“Ethnic nationalism was coming into conflict with the reality of a multiethnic, cosmopolitan Heisei Japan,” he said, referring to Japan’s current era.

The Japan Study Special Award, second prize, was granted to Liu Anwei, a 57-year-old Chinese professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, for his research on the life of Zhou Zuoren, a Chinese writer and younger brother of the famous writer Lu Xun, who lived in a turbulent period of relations between Japan and China.

Brandon Palmer, 44, an associate professor at Coastal Carolina University in the United States, was given the Japan Study Encouragement Award for his research on Japan’s annexation of Korea, and Vassili Molodiakov, 46, a professor at Takushoku University in Tokyo, received the same prize for his study on the history of relations between Japan and Russia.

In the pamphlet explaining the award, Yoshiko Sakurai, president of the think tank and a journalist, wrote the award was created to honor foreign researchers specializing in Japan’s politics, history, culture and other areas.

“Japan remains misunderstood on many accounts,” she wrote. “The best way to dispel such misperceptions is to help people abroad increase their knowledge of Japan.”