

AIS General Research Fund (GRF) and Early Career Scheme (ECS) Success Round 2019-20

Project Title:

Cultivating Conservatives, Clandestinely: The Role of US Covert Action in Building Friendly Regimes in Japan and South Korea

Brief Abstract:

This project examines the role of the US intelligence community (IC) in establishing and perpetuating allied, conservative regimes in Japan and South Korea during the Cold War. It is commonly held that the US played an important role in nurturing key regional allies, Japan and South Korea, through overt support mechanisms centring on security protection and market access in return for cooperating with Washington's regional geostrategic policies. However, scholars have paid relatively little attention to the contribution of US covert action to nurturing friendly, conservative regimes in both countries. The study compares and contrasts the modalities of the US IC's involvement in the Japanese and South Korean political processes and evaluates the effectiveness and consequences of this intervention. The timing of the most intense phase of the US intelligence intervention in the Japanese and South Korean political processes is important, occurring during the tumultuous first two decades of the Cold War when conservative dominance was uncertain. The project's central argument is that, when considered in connection with domestic political actors, among other endogenous factors, the US IC contributed to establishing and stabilising conservative rule. It is therefore necessary to explore the role of conservative elites who actively and eagerly engaged with the US IC in pursuit of their own political and economic interests. The clandestine relationships between the US IC and Japanese and South Korean conservatives helped reinforce both countries' status as friendly, junior allies of Washington.

Investigator: Dr Bradley WILLIAMS

Biography:

Brad Williams was educated in Australia and Japan and taught in Australia and Singapore before taking up his current position. Brad's research concentrates on East Asian international relations and comparative politics, with a particular focus on Japan. Much of his work to date has examined the various roles of subnational governments as international actors and their impact on foreign policy. Brad's first book explored subnational government diplomacy in the context of Japan-Russia relations. Subsequent studies of subnational governments have expanded the analytical focus to include military bases in Okinawa and Japan's relations with Taiwan and China. Brad has also published on a diverse range of issues in Japanese politics and foreign policy such as arms procurement, civil society, humanitarian assistance, human security, North Korean abductions, nuclear proliferation, and secrecy laws. He is currently working on a project about Japan's evolving foreign intelligence system. Brad has also published a number English translations of Japanese books and appears regularly in the local and international media.