Monday, 27 February 2017, 5.00pm
Faculty of Asian & Middle Eastern Studies, Rooms 8 & 9
Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge CB3 9DA
ALL ARE WELCOME!

‘Shake-up in the Japanese Underworld: The Yakuza on the Road to Extinction?’
Professor Wolfgang Herbert  Tokushima University

On 27 August 2015, the largest gangster syndicate in Japan split into two groups. Thirteen high-ranking bosses declared their secession from the mother organisation, the Yamaguchi-gumi, and established a new gang: the Kobe Yamaguchi-gumi. On 7 March 2016, the police declared that the two gangs were at war.

This schism points to a significant transformation in organised crime in Japan. In 1992, a new anti-Yakuza-bill became effective which has since undergone several revisions. Measures to control and isolate the Yakuza have become stricter than ever and regulations at the local level aim to force the Yakuza out of business. Legal restrictions and concerted police and media campaigns aimed at dismantling the myth of ‘the noble gangster’ and replacing it with labels such as ‘anti-social forces’ have robbed the Yakuza of much of their glamour; hence, for young outsiders, becoming a Yakuza is no longer an attractive prospect. As a result, the Yakuza are experiencing a severe shortage of recruits and many of their existing members are growing old. They have failed to modernise and capitalise on opportunities afforded by information technology. The criminal market on the internet is rife with predatory competition and the Yakuza are on the losing side. I argue that the Yakuza will become increasingly marginalised, clandestine and possibly extinct in their current form and that their replacement by new criminal groups is already underway.

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