

---

# *The Foreign Policy of Japan*

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

PRESENTED TO A  
NORWEGIAN AUDIENCE

PROCEEDINGS FROM A SEMINAR AT  
THE NORWEGIAN INSTITUTE OF  
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS,  
SEPTEMBER 6, 1994

---

---

## C O N T E N T S

### Foreword

By DIRECTOR OLAV F. KNUDSEN ..... 3

### The Japanese-Norwegian Relationship in a European Context

By AMBASSADOR MASAKI SEO ..... 5

### Political and Economic Relations between Norway and Japan

By AMBASSADOR TERJE JOHANNESSEN ..... 17

### Japan, The United States and The Soviet Union 1945-1991

By PROFESSOR CHIHIRO HOSOYA ..... 23

### Japan's Relations with other Asian States

By DR. STEIN TØNNESSON ..... 39

### The Japanese Understanding of Scandinavian Culture and Nordic Cooperation

By PROFESSOR TOSHIYASU ISHIWATARI ..... 47

---

---

# Japan's Relations with other Asian States

By Stein Tønnesson

## Introduction

From a non-Japanese Asian perspective, there are two opposite ways of seeing Japan:

The first is as an exception, aberration, a kind of Western state in the sea close to the Asian coast, allied with Britain in the first decades of the century, with Nazi Germany later, and then, during the Cold War, a stooge of American imperialism, the imperialist country that colonized Taiwan and Korea at the turn of the century, invaded China in the 1930s and occupied much of Southeast Asia during the Second World War, committing a number of crimes. This way of seeing Japan has its more positive equivalent in admiration for the Japanese industrial "miracle", a term that also holds out Japan as an exception from the general trend in Asia. Japanese are admired from a thousand miles of cultural distance, the same way that one does with Europeans. Many Asians even find that Europeans are easier to talk to than Japanese.

The second way of seeing Japan is as a modernizing model, a source of inspiration, technology, investments, the Asian country that beat Russia in 1904–05 thus proving that the "yellow race" could beat the "white", the country that provided exile to many Asian nationalist leaders between the two world wars, the country that struck history's most devastating blow against the arrogant British imperialists when Singapore fell in 1942, the country that learned from its mistakes in the war, reconstructed its economy and became the first of the "flying geese" in Asian economic development. In this view, Japan is understood as the pioneer of Asian growth. Without Japan as a motor, there would not be a strong

East Asia today with a realistic hope of catching up with the West.

These two Asian views of Japan are reflected also in Japan's ambivalent understanding of its own international role. During the Cold War this was not really a problem, since Japan could simply abstain from an international role in any other area than finance, trade and technology. But since the late 1980s, Japan has had to tackle the problem of defining a proper international role. Is Japan mainly a global power, a member of the G7 with a legitimate claim to become a member of the UN Security Council, the main partner of the United States in the Pacific, an investor around the globe, a technological resource base for the world market, a key but discrete actor in the world of finance, an exceptional country with a special role to play in maintaining world peace and stability? Or is she Asian, with a special responsibility for the East and Southeast Asian growth zone, a "yen zone" which will be one of the three corner stones, even possibly trading blocs, of the world economy? In short, should Japan primarily play global balls with a declining West and continue to be seen by Asians as an aberration, or should she concentrate her attention on the rising, enormous China and her already anxious neighbours, thus becoming a part of an unstable state system in a zone where Asian cultural and political assertiveness is growing every day? This latter course is the one that former prime minister Kiichi Miyazawa put forward in January 1993—during a visit to Thailand—under the slogan "re-Asianization".

I'll return to this difficult choice towards the end. But first I'll try to paint with some quick strokes the Asian political and historical landscape, my main aim being to demonstrate that the record of Japan's relations with other Asian states varies greatly from one state to the other.

---

I would like to thank Geir Helgesen, Marie Söderberg and Odd Arne Westad for their helpful comments on the manuscript for this paper.

Some have strong historical reasons for resenting Japan, while others have a good deal to thank Japan for. I'll start in the north and move southwards.

This means that we begin in East Asia, the Confucian world, the chopstick world, the civilization to which Japan may itself belong, but where it also has its main historical rivals and enemies: Korea and China.

## East Asia

*Korea* is Japan's closest neighbour. In the Meiji period from 1868 the Japanese government saw the Korean peninsula as a "dagger pointing at the heart of Japan". The conservative Yi dynasty (Korea's last) did not feel like a dagger, but found itself squeezed between three contending great powers: China, Russia and Japan. Japan destroyed the new Chinese navy in 1894. Korea thus lost its support from the Middle Kingdom and came under joint domination by barbarious Russia and Japan. Then Russia was beaten by Japan in 1904–05, and in 1910 the country became a fully fledged Japanese colony. Liberation—and partition—came in 1945. In 1950–53 Korea was the hottest of all spots in the Cold War, with Japan profiting from the war boom to vigorously reconstruct its economy. South Korea normalized its relations with its former colonial master in 1965 and subsequently became one of the two most successful newly industrialized countries, to some extent with Japanese capital and technology. North Korea started formal negotiations in 1991 for normalization of its relations with Japan. The relationship between Japan and Korea today is a typical post-colonial one, with a sense of admiration and humiliated suspicion for Japan among Koreans and, on the side of Japan, a sense sometimes of shame, but most often of disappointment—and a little bit contempt—for the lack of Korean gratitude for all that Japan has done. It is a kind of sentiment that is well known to students of the post-colonial relationship between Europeans and their former subject peoples in Africa and Asia. The issue that has come to symbolize the colonial

relationship between Korea and Japan is the question of the "comfort women", Korean women recruited during the Second World War to comfort Japanese soldiers. Koreans are still waiting for an adequate official Japanese apology and for the issue to be mentioned in Japanese schoolbooks. This is a mutual concern of North and South Korea, but for the moment, the nuclear issue and the question of whether or not Kim Il-sung's succession will lead to any change in Pyongyang dominate the Japanese-Korean relationship. It is by no means easy for Japan to find a good approach to the two Koreas. Japan cannot of course try to prevent Korean reunification, but a united Korea is likely to be more, not less, assertive in its relations with Japan than the two present regimes are today. The possibility of a Korean-Japanese conflict in the future should thus not be excluded.

The other most successful East Asian NIC is *Taiwan*, which was also a Japanese colony from 1895 to 1945, and then only briefly part of a united China until it became the refuge for the defeated Guomintang regime. Its relationship with Japan is not as full of decolonized resentment as that of the two Koreas. Taiwan's diplomatic isolation, the permanent threat of being incorporated in the People's Republic of China, and the difficult relations between the island's original population and the Guomintang newcomers have been such important problems that resentment against Japan has been less accentuated than otherwise would have been the case; indeed Taiwan remains strongly attached to Japan. Taiwan's greatest public wish is that Japan will reopen the diplomatic relations that were severed in 1972, and the secret wish is that Japan will help Taiwan negotiate an acceptable agreement with China.

The contemporary history of *China* is full of humiliation and contempt for Japan. China was beaten in 1895. During the First World War, Japan quickly joined the powers of the entente in order to take over Germany's possessions in the Pacific and in China. The Chinese May 4th movement, which played such an enormous role in the formulation of Chinese national sentiment, was

primarily directed against the Japanese prerogatives in China. Then came the occupation of Manchuria in 1931, the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 with the massacre in Nanjing, and after the war Japan's accommodation with American imperialism. While Chinese youth died in Korea from 1950 to 1954, Japan profited from the war boom. And Japan managed to sustain decades of astounding economic growth in the years when China suffered from Mao's disastrous leaps, communes and revolutions. China has much to seek revenge for. But it is not sure she will. Since the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations in 1972, there has been a growing partnership between the two foremost East Asian powers. For a period of 17 years they found common ground in their fear of Soviet expansionism, and Japan provided China with investments and loans that were instrumental in allowing rapid growth throughout the 1980s also in China. After China's repression of the pro-democracy movement in 1989, Japan did not protest very strongly and provided a third significant yen loan already in 1990, despite protests from Washington. In the negotiations for the 1991 peace agreement on Cambodia, Japan was instrumental in persuading China to abandon its support for the Khmer Rouge. China and Japan stood together behind the move to achieve separate UN membership for North and South Korea, and in the crisis over the North Korean nuclear programme, both of them have been threading carefully, leaving the blowing of the trumpets to Washington. Japan, in short, has not only become a country that can say "no" to the United States, but also a country that can say "yes" to China. It would, on the other hand, be unacceptable to the Japanese business and foreign policy elite to let their country be seen as an ally of Beijing in its conflicts with Washington. Tokyo will look for a place somewhere between the two giants, and closer to the USA than China.

## Southeast Asia

If we move on to Southeast Asia, we will meet countries that have a much shorter and less tortuous historical experience with Japanese imperialism. Until the Second World War, the Southeast Asian peoples generally admired the Japanese as the only Asian people that could effectively stand up against Europeans. In Southeast Asia, the only to really fear Japan were the European colonial regimes and the overseas Chinese, who naturally sided with China in its resistance against the Japanese from 1937 onwards. The Europeans and the Chinese were also the two groups who were most immediately repressed and brutalized by the Japanese after the occupation of Southeast Asia in early 1942. The Singapore Chinese remember it with terror.

Most other people at first welcomed the Japanese as liberators from colonial rule, and the only non-colonized state in Southeast Asia, Thailand, allied itself with Japan and used the occasion to annex the western parts of French Indochina. Among the Indians in Southeast Asia, the nationalist leader Subhadra Bose, who organized a pro-Japanese Indian army, was immensely popular. In relation to Islam, moreover, the Japanese were not only tolerant, but actively encouraged religious political activities with a hope of stirring up Indian and Middle Eastern Muslims against the Allies. Most people who were subjected to Japanese military administration were, however, soon disappointed. Japanese rule was harsher and more brutal than European administration had been, and the necessities of war led Japan to recruit enormous quantities of forced labour to build railways and roads under appalling conditions. Millions died. The Australian historian Robert Cribb has summed up the Indonesian war experience in the following way:

Japanese military government was a time of trial for all Indonesians: the new rulers were a largely unknown quantity with a style of operation very different from that of the Dutch. Gone were the meticulous legalists and slow but capable bureaucrats of the colonial era; in their place were military men in a hurry, ignorant of the country, dangerous when crossed, aware that in order to

win the war Japan had to win quickly, and above all convinced that energy and spirit could overcome all obstacles. New political, economic and social initiatives flashed on the scene; the glittering but indistinct prospect of independence was held before the Indonesian people, never quite defined, never quite promised, but never dismissed with the resounding finality which the nationalists had been accustomed to hear from the Dutch.

What Cribb says about Indonesia is valid for other Southeast Asian countries as well: the Japanese were harsh and impatient, but at least they hold out the prospect of independence. The initial enthusiasm after the invasion lasted only a couple of weeks. The real deliverance came with the Japanese surrender in 1945. By then the majority of politically conscious Southeast Asians were determined that they would never allow a return to European rule.

When the order for surrender had been received at his headquarters in Singapore, Lieut.-General Teizo Ishiguro, Supreme Commander of the Japanese Army in Malaya, issued the following message to the people of Malaya:

Dear people of Malai, by the august command of Tenno Heika of Dai Nippon, we were ordered to cease hostilities as on Aug. 14, 2605 [1945]. The occupation of Malai by the Nippon Army was based upon the ideal of establishing peace in Dai Toa [Greater Asia], the co-prosperity of Dai Toa races, and consequently the peace and security of the whole world ... We were quite ready to fight to the last soul and were waiting for the enemy's attack prior to the receipt of the Imperial Command, which is absolute and irrevocable. Now and without hesitation, we shall obey the Imperial Command. ... We firmly believe that some day we will visit Malai on a goodwill mission of peace and also as peace-time industrialists and work hand in hand with you. Our friendship will remain unchanged eternally, as comrades of Dai Toa.

Teizo Ishiguro's belief that Japan would return was certainly fulfilled. The Japanese surrender in 1945 interrupted Japanese influence in Southeast Asia for only a couple of decades. In the 1960s, the Japanese started to come back in earnest, as importers of timber and oil, as investors, as providers of official development aid

(ODA), supporters of the effort by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to contain communism in Indochina, and eventually as peace-maker in Cambodia. Today there is a general hope among Southeast Asian governments that Japan will help them to counterbalance the growing power of China. And in the 1980s, when Malaysia's Islamic prime minister Mahathir Mohammad launched his "vision 2020" for rapid economic growth, his main model was Japan.

I would have liked to paint the Southeast Asian landscape in much more detail and show how the experience with Japan differs from one country to the other, but then there would be no space for the conclusions. Let me just recommend a little book edited by the Filipino scholar Renato Constantino, published in both Japanese and English: *Southeast Asian Perceptions of Japan* (1991). In that book authors from six Southeast Asian countries recount their experiences and perceptions of Japan. The contributors are all in awe of Japanese economic power, but are reluctant to accept the Japanese as Asians. In the preface, Constantino challenges the Japanese to break out of their isolation and retrace their Asian roots: "For only by reclaiming its Asian identity can Japan legitimately aspire to a leading position in this part of the world."

## Conclusions

Four conclusions may be drawn from this survey of Japanese relations with other Asian states:

The first is the continued importance of the Second World War, or "the Greater East Asian War", as it is called by those in Japan who see no reason for feeling ashamed. We are just now living through the discussions of the 50 year anniversaries. In 1995 it is 50 years since Hiroshima and Nagasaki and since the Japanese surrender that paved the way for the independence of Burma, India, Indonesia and Vietnam, and also for the victory of the Chinese Red Army four years later. It would definitely be in the Japanese national interest to undertake what Takashi Shiraiishi recently proposed in an article published by the Singapore newspaper *Business Times*: "An international re-examination of Japan's war his-

tory, involving not merely Japanese historians, but also Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Thai, Malaysian, Singaporean, Indonesian, Burmese and other non-Japanese Asian scholars..." It is time to move the war from the sphere of diplomacy to free, international scholarship. Initiatives taken by the government of Tomiichi Murayama in the autumn of 1994 seem to augur well in this domain, but the problem is that previous governments have taken similar initiatives without much effect on the attitudes within the Japanese political elite. They still do not think they have anything to excuse themselves for. When excuses are expressed, it is mainly for diplomatic and economic reasons, not because the Japanese themselves have had a serious debate about their role in World War 2. Although half a century has passed since the end of the war, Japan still has a long way to go before it can cope with its heritage of military aggression in a morally and politically acceptable way.

The second conclusion is the great variation in the Japanese relations with other Asian states. Korea and the Chinese states (China, Taiwan and Singapore) have long-standing geopolitical and historical reasons for hostility to Japan, but in Southeast Asia there are countries with much less reason for animosity, not to speak of South Asia and the Islamic world. Even in Japan's immediate neighbourhood there will be countries that are likely to accept the Japanese lead, simply because they fear to be absorbed or become too heavily influenced by China. This is not only the case for Vietnam and Laos, but also for the Chinese states outside China: Taiwan and Singapore.

The third conclusion is that the key both to Japanese security and to the "asianization" of Japan resides primarily in its relations with China. For peace researchers and other students of international relations it will be crucial to follow developments in the Sino-Japanese relationship and to analyze the triangles USA-China-Japan and Russia-China-Japan. In both of these triangles, North Korea is at this moment the principal source of tension. In power triangles, both rising and declining powers can be dangerous. In our triangles China is the rising power, Russia and the United States the declining ones, and Japan the resourceful and most likely stabilizer. At the

moment the most significant development may be the emergence of a Sino-Japanese partnership. If this partnership continues to grow, it will be one where China leads and Japan tries to moderate. Most other Asian states are then likely to woo Japan, provided it keeps a sufficient distance from the United States.

The fourth conclusion is not really a conclusion, but a prediction, a guess about Japan's future conduct. My guess is that the current state of ambivalence in Japanese foreign policy will prevail. Tokyo will not be able to make a choice between the World and Asia, or between China and the United States. She will choose to wait and see, leave initiatives to China and the smaller states of Asia, and allow the United States to react first when China or North Korea does something the West cannot accept. Then Japan will try to accommodate herself as best she can and talk—or pay—all parties to their senses. Instead of using her economic strength to conspicuously lead the way for Asia or the world, Japan will allow herself to be eclipsed on the Asian scene by China and concentrate on discretely preventing crises or clashes that could jeopardise the flow of oil or the intricate system of transportation that the well-being of all Japanese relies on.

Why do I think Japan will continue to abstain from a leading role in international affairs? There are two main reasons. The first is the Japanese combination of an immensely powerful bureaucracy and political corruption, which is good for stability, but not for political creativity or risk-taking leadership. If a leading politician successfully avoids to be encapsulated by the bureaucracy, some damaging scandal is sure to emerge. The fate of the 'renewer' Morihiro Hosokawa should be enough to demonstrate this point. And even if we imagined that the leader of the neo-conservative New Frontier Party, Ichiro Ozawa, should become Prime Minister, he would be restrained by his bureaucracy, his fellow politicians, his own pendant for intrigues, and also by his good senses and concern for the Japanese national interest. The second reason for my belief that Japan will continue to be a prudent actor on the

world scene is exactly that this is her interest. It is simply the best Japan can do. Any other course would be too risky, and the Japanese have so enormously much to lose. Japan combines fabulous prosperity and tremendous financial influence with extreme vulnerability in the field of security. Her army leaders took great risks once before—from Manchuria 1931 to Pearl Harbor 1941—and the Japanese government is unlikely to allow anything only remotely similar to such risk-taking again (unless her import of essential raw materials is seriously threatened). Japan depends on a good relationship with both China and the United States, and will try to be a tranquilizer. The current foreign policy of Japan gives other Asians little reason to worry, she will be more and more acceptable to all of those who want to provide their own leadership, and will continue to disappoint such countries as Vietnam, who want help to stand up against China.

The big questions in Asia today are not about Japan. They are about China: Can China maintain a unified and stable state after the death of Deng Xiaoping? If yes, will China be able to control her ambitions? What is China going to do with its rapidly growing navy? These are the questions that give the greatest reason for worry—in Japan, in Asia, in the World.

## Bibliography

- Arase, David, 'Japan, and Asean security', *Business Times* (Singapore), 30–31 July 1994.
- Bartu, Friedman, *The Ugly Japanese: Nippon's Economic Empire in Asia*, Singapore: Longman, 1992.
- Brown, Eugene, 'Japanese Security Policy in the Post-Cold War Era: Threat Perceptions and Strategic Options,' *Asian Survey*, vol. XXXIV, no. 5, May 1994, pp. 430–446.
- Constantino, Renato (ed.), *Southeast Asian Perceptions of Japan*, Tokyo: Zensei, 1991.
- Chaiwat Khamchoo, 'Japan's Role in Southeast Asian Security: "Plus ça change ..."', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 64, no. 1, Spring 1991, pp. 7–22.
- Cribb, Robert, 'The Indonesian Revolution', in Colin Mackerras (ed.), *Eastern Asia: An Introductory History*, Melbourne: Longman, 1992.
- Curtis, Gerald L. (ed.), *Japan's Foreign Policy After the Cold War: Coping with Change*. Armonk NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993.
- Dover, John W., 'Peace and Democracy in Two Systems: External Policy and Internal Conflict', in Andrew Gordon (ed.), *Postwar Japan as History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Ensign, Margee, *Doing Good or Doing Well? Japan's Foreign Aid Program*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.
- Fagerberg, Jan, 'En japansk utviklingsmodell?', *Hvor hender det?* no. 31, 1993/94; 'Den japanske utviklingsmodellen—for eksport?', *Hvor hender det?* no. 32, 1993/94.
- Gordon, Andrew (ed.), *Postwar Japan as History*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1993.
- Horsley, William and Roger Buckley, *Nippon: New Superpower, Japan since 1945*, London: BBC Books, 1990.
- Kimio Fujita, 'China and its Asian Neighbors: A Japanese Perspective', in Michael Ying, Mao Kau and Susan H. Marsh (eds.), *China in the Era of Deng Xiaoping*, Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993, pp. 452–469.
- Koppel, Bruce M. and Robert M. Orr, Jr. (eds.), *Japan's Foreign Aid: Power and Policy in a New Era*, Boulder: Westview, 1993.
- Lincoln, Edward J., *Japan's New Global Role*, Washington DC: Brookings, 1993.
- Nish, Ian, *Japan's Struggle with Internationalism*, London: Kegan Paul, 1993.
- Qingxin Ken Wang, 'Toward Political Partnership: Japan's China Policy', *The Pacific Review*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1994, pp.171–182.
- Seiichiro Takagi, 'China as an "Economic Superpower": Its Foreign Relations in 1993', *Japan Review of International Affairs*, Spring 1994, pp. 93–117.
- Seki Tomoda, 'Japan's Search for a Political Role in Asia: The Cambodian Peace Settlement', *Japan Review of International Affairs*, Spring 1992, pp. 43–60.
- Shigeo Hiramatsu, 'China's Naval Advance: Objectives and Capabilities', *Japan Review of International Affairs*, Spring 1994, pp. 118–132.
- Shimizu-Niquet, Valérie, 'Japan's New Strategy: A New Menace?', *The Pacific Review*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1994, pp. 163–170.
- Smith, Charles, 'War and Remembrance', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 August 1994.
- Sueo Sudo, 'Japan and the Security of Southeast Asia', *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 4, no. 4, 1991, pp. 333–344.
- Takafusa Nakamura, 'The Legacy of Japan's High-Growth Years', *Japan Review of International Affairs*, Spring 1994, pp. 153–167.
- Takashi Inoguchi, *Japan's International Relations*, London, Pinter, 1991.
- Takashi Shiraishi, 'Time now to internationalise Japan's wartime record', *Business Times* (Singapore), 30–31.7.94.