

# The Despair of Southeast Asia

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**S**outheast Asia is now being stripped naked. Bewildered by the toxicants of modernization and buffeted by the gales of international politics, Southeast Asia has lost its sense of direction and suffers unfathomable despair. In this context Japan has become a strong target of criticism. This criticism is not wholly superficial, and if Japan is both to further its own interest and to contribute to this area of the world it must understand and cope with that criticism.

The most important feature of the anti-Japanese criticism in Southeast Asia is that it is based on "despair," which is the core of current mentality of the region. In this sense Japan is called to account primarily for its lack of awareness of the mentality of current Southeast Asia rather than for its economic expansion or the manners of Japanese tourists. In other words, Japan is called to account for its intellectual negligence in assessing the situation. Policies to improve relations with Southeast Asia must be sensitive to the irrational yet powerful feelings that are behind the frequent outbursts. Concretely, policies must be geared not to refuting economic facts and theories but to respecting and satisfying national feelings, to recognizing political and social differences and working with them. With all this, the reason Japan cannot satisfy peoples in Southeast Asia has yet to be clarified.

The first reason Japan makes the Southeast Asian peoples feel so bad is that Japan does not play the role they expect and desire of it. I think it fair to say that the problem is not one of seeing Japan as some kind of threat, colonial or imperial. The problem is one of wanting Japan to play a more constructive role in their region but finding that Japan is not clearly committed to such a role.

Many people think Southeast Asian peoples view the

Japanese primarily as cruel and egoistic and that this is basically the cause of their bad feelings toward the Japanese. But while this is a factor, since the Pacific war was fought on the state of Southeast Asia, it is not the image most indelibly imprinted on their minds. I would say without hesitation that the war served rather to imprint on their minds the idea that Japan is a part of the system of Asia, an impression or conviction that has been further strengthened by postwar Japan's huge economic intervention in Southeast Asia. No reasoning seems capable of negating this image. And yet, because Japan's economic commitment abroad has increased its national power and expanded its international relationships, Japan seems to have begun conducting itself as a global nation rather than as an Asian one. The huge gap between Japan's role as envisioned by the Southeast Asian countries and as it has actually been played out by Japan itself has produced a strong sense of incongruity about Japan's actions. This has been a second serious cause of bad feelings toward Japan.

The intentions of Japan seem slippery and vague. The Japanese do not talk clearly and meaningfully about what they intend to do in Southeast Asia. This is precisely why the people of Southeast Asia are at times so belligerent toward Japan. They are trying to goad Japan into revealing its real motives. Japan has never shown how much or how little it is willing to do in the area. This is maddening to many in Southeast Asia.

The Japanese are undiplomatic and careless about their economic activities in Southeast Asia. When the Japanese institute some economic measures in Southeast Asia, they are not careful enough to make necessary adjustments. They don't make doubly sure that all is going to work out well; they are unconcerned about future effects of their projects on the environment; they make no provision for countermeasures against harmful results; and they pay little attention to their own words and actions. Furthermore, to say that Japan is setting up joint companies in Southeast Asia in order

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to take advantage of the low wages there may be true. But is it difficult to see how such insensitive utterances, made by staff members of Japanese trading companies, could excite the nationalists of the region?

Another problem a Thai official mentioned to me is that underneath much fine Japanese rhetoric is more of a concern for Japan than for what it might contribute to the Southeast Asian countries.

In any case, the cause of friction is an imbalance the Southeast Asians see in Japan's Southeast Asian policy: top-heavy on the economic side and almost weightless in noneconomic factors like social, cultural, and diplomatic efforts. What makes the situation especially inflammable is the tacit premise of Japan's Southeast Asian policy: that the status quo of political and social relations in the area be frozen.

As a matter of principle there are two things that must be done if our dealings with Southeast Asia are to become successful. For one thing, Japan must take a new look at the conditions for its freedom of action. For another, we must seek conditions that would enable us to hold a dialogue with Southeast Asia as a cultural sphere alien to our own, but highly worthy.

We may be able to take a few steps along that line. For instance, we can reexamine from the Japanese point of view the theories of modernization and the moral obligations of the developed countries of the North to assist the developing countries of the South. The "North-South problem," which has been seriously poisoned by the East-West problem, will have to be fundamentally reviewed in terms of the aptitude of Southeast Asian countries. To revive the irreplaceable national characteristics of each nation it will be necessary to link the "North-South problem" with thinking along the lines of "cultural relativism."

It would be helpful concurrently to study the norms governing the way the Japanese perceive Southeast Asia. Perhaps the Japanese people are more responsible for creation of present barriers than the local peoples. For the Japanese people the world of *kotowari* implies a social ethos or, in some cases, even legitimacy principles. And the Japanese tend to consider other peoples as living in a world of *kotowari* or no *kotowari*. The world of no *kotowari*, of no reason, means a world of extraordinary and eccentric culture. So long as Japan meets a country with this measure, it cannot refrain from intervening. It will indiscriminately justify its acts of intellectual or cultural challenge against nations of this sort. Thus, when we compare Japanese policies toward Southeast Asia with policies toward countries in other regions of Asia, they have distinctively degenerated. Southeast Asia, unfortunately, is viewed as an area of no *kotowari*.

On the other hand, Japan has manifested a unique syndrome of diplomatic behaviors vis-à-vis Southeast Asia that I may term the "Nanshin" (Southward Drive) phenomenon. The arguments in favor of "Nan-

shin" were advanced in different styles in three different stages of Japan's modern history. The postwar "Nanshin," which emerged through the economic advances made since the end of World War II, has had an almost intolerable audacity and insolence hidden under the guise of pacifism. What is the reason for this?

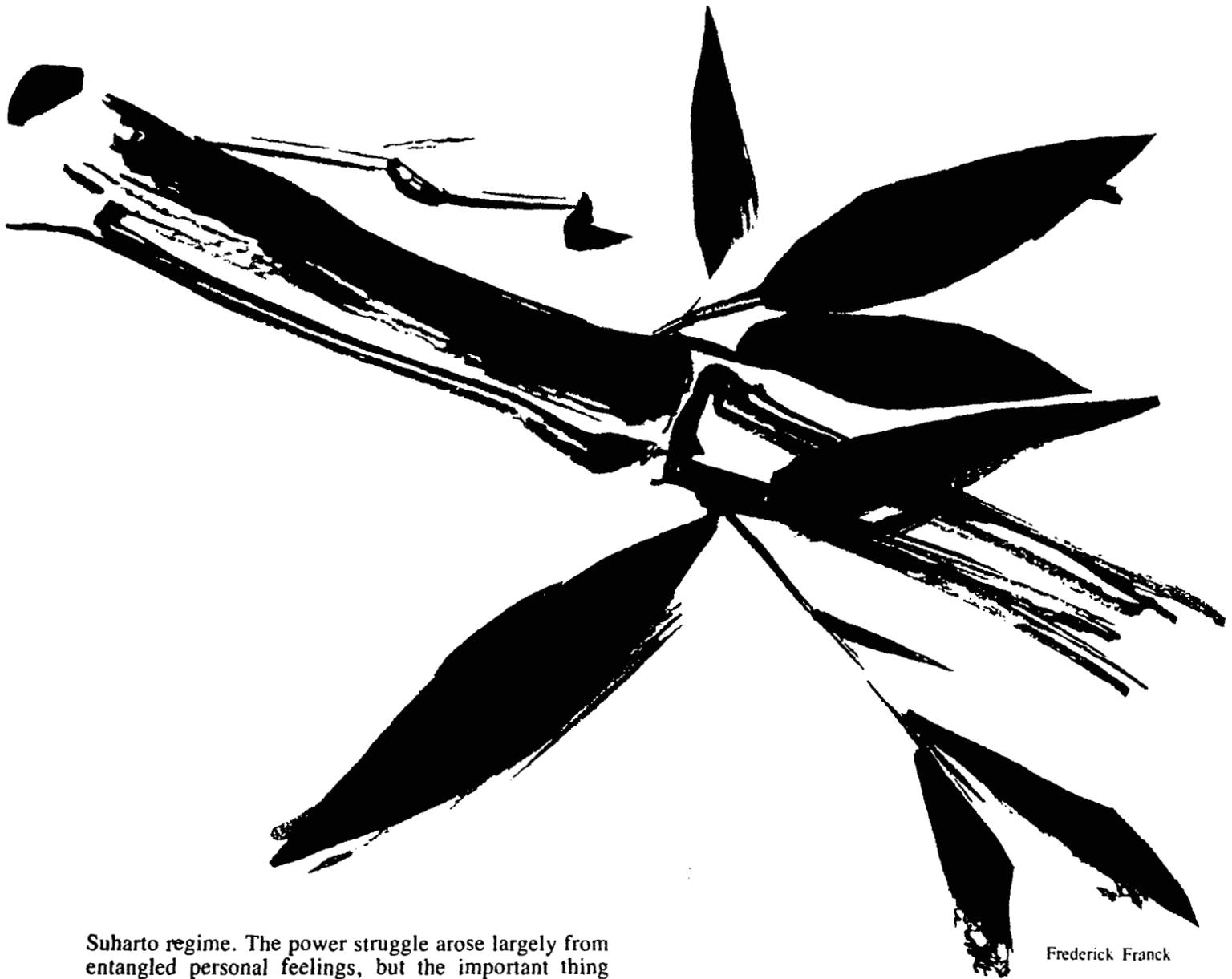
In considering the problem we must give thought to its strange development. How could Japan enjoy freedom of action to advance into Southeast Asia immediately after a war that was fought precisely in the same region and that ended in Japan's defeat? The freedom of action Japan was given in Southeast Asia after the end of the war was not acquired by her own efforts, but was a windfall. The cold war that developed in Asia, in which the United States intervened excessively, was the decisive factor that gave Japan a kind of absolution and freedom in the region despite its record in the Pacific war. It was a good fortune Japan had not even dreamed of. At the same time, however, it was the beginning of Japan's negligence and indulgence in altruistic dependence on others. As a beneficiary of the cold war, Japan was able to advance deep into Southeast Asia, paying the relatively inexpensive price of a Japan-U.S. Security Treaty.

One should not forget another bit of historical good fortune: The postwar international tendency to provide a theoretical-institutional framework for a "South-North problem" unconditionally linked the advanced nations with the developing countries. Japan was given a certain type of freedom within that framework. The "North-South problem," or the theory of "modernization," has turned out to be an invaluable condition of self-indulgence, which granted legality and propriety to Japan's postwar "Nanshin."

The issue boils down to this: We should always think of two different rationales, irrespective of the differences in historical backgrounds, in considering the problem of Japan's "Nanshin." One is that, because of geographic and other settings, Japan will necessarily take the "Nanshin" course so long as it is given freedom of action. In this sense, Japan is destined to be bound by the rationale of "Nanshin." The other is that "Nanshin" is always accompanied by a lack of proper attention to local conditions, so that it can seldom be conducted as a just action. What is more, all "Nanshin" courses have an overriding similarity to each other, surpassing the differences of their respective historical backgrounds.

As I see it, the riots that erupted in Jakarta in January, 1974, substantiated the "failure" of postwar Japan's "Nanshin." It marked the moment when postwar "Nanshin" with a pseudojustification turned into a "Nanshin" with no justification. Though the Jakarta riots may not have been directly "anti-Japanese," there is no denying that "Japan" was still at their center.

As is well known, the January riots in Indonesia were staged by a faction of the military headed by General Sumitro as part of its challenge against the



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Suharto regime. The power struggle arose largely from entangled personal feelings, but the important thing was that it had the aspect of a challenge against the political legitimacy of a *pro-Japanese* regime. Since Japan's advance into the Korean Peninsula in the Meiji Era (1868-1912) Japanese diplomacy has pursued the policy of digging up "pro-Japanese" groups and placing them in power in order that Japan might gain freedom of action. However, one may more clearly learn an historical lesson from the fact that the "pro-Japanese" regimes that have so far been formed in Asia have generally been unable to gain political legitimacy for various reasons. The Suharto regime, for instance, turned "pro-Japanese" less than ten years after its coming to power and thus became the target of popular fury. This was the consequence of another tragic precedent, i.e., that a "pro-Japanese" regime cannot have political legitimacy.

**T**he blind spot in Japan's postwar "Nanshin" lies in its ignorance concerning the social structure of Southeast Asia. All Southeast Asian

societies have a dual structure, characterized by a sharp contrast between the rich and the poor. In advancing into the region Japan concerns itself only with the upper stratum of the dual structure. For this reason Japan's advance is a priori *antirevolutionary* and remains in favor of the status quo. In some cases it is even accompanied by oppressive interference in internal affairs. Such economic advances are apt to perform a political function rather than playing a purely economic role. It must be pointed out that one reason for the failure of postwar "Nanshin" has been Japan's unawareness of the political overtones of economic functions in a society of dual structure.

The postwar "Nanshin," condemned by the Jakarta riots, has had a basic character of insincerity and utilitarianism, featuring a lack of attention to the

philosophy of economic advance, which might be called a "philosophy of relationship." The wartime "Nanshin" of the second period was more consistent than the postwar "Nanshin" in at least two respects, although it was admittedly based upon militarism. The one is that it had the sense of self-reliance, feeling that Japan should seek freedom of action in the region by its own efforts. The other is that it had a "philosophy of relationship," for good or for bad. In these two respects the "Nanshin" of the second period had a convincing logical consistency. In contrast, postwar "Nanshin" has been highly undeveloped and unrestrained.

In this respect the power struggle in Jakarta will teach Japan many lessons, even if it ended in the victory of the "pro-Japanese" group. It is absolutely necessary for us to regard the riots as a danger signal against Japan's postwar "Nanshin." Postwar Japanese may have been clinging to a fallacy about the terms for Japanese freedom of action in Southeast Asia. At the bottom of the fallacy may have lain their confidence in the transformation of Japan after the end of World War II. It seems to me we need to examine more closely the extent of the freedom of action given by our "peace-keeping" Constitution, the nature of the freedom of action that was not given to Japan *despite* the "peace-keeping" Constitution, and other problems concerning the relation between postwar pacifism and "Nanshin." We should never repeat the miscalculation, exposed by the Jakarta riots, of taking the good will of only a handful of "pro-Japanese" politicians as the green light for freedom of action and of continuing economic advance blindly on that basis. In short, the divergent factors that have supported postwar "Nanshin" have been more vulnerable than we thought, so that it was only natural that it has broken down.

The extent and depth of the anti-Japanese feelings, however, make clear that they will not go away overnight. Japan-Southeast Asia relations will be difficult for some time to come. Much can be done, though, to avoid the situation's becoming more violent.

First of all, Japan will have to do a lot more homework on the effects her economic power will have, not only on the economy but on the politics of the region as well. Since class struggle is so violent in Southeast Asia, Japan will have to be better prepared for complicated political entanglements in the area. Japan's naive advance into the region has had more political than economic meaning, and could be very dangerous. Japan will have to think a lot more deeply about the problems involved in relationships with countries that have as yet an immature concept of their national interests.

Second, Japan will have to avoid any sudden changes in its Asian policy. It will not be easy to rectify past mistakes, but for any quick and easy change of attitude there could be very unexpected

political consequences. Japan's foreign ministry will need good sense and great discretion.

Third, Japan will have to give more weight to cultural factors in its foreign policy toward Southeast Asia. A foreign policy that concentrates on economics alone is extremely dangerous. The people of Japan will have to deepen their understanding of the history, culture, society, and feelings of the people of Southeast Asia and know well the conditions and circumstances of the countries there.

None of the above efforts will be easy, and they may turn out to be unsuccessful. Southeast Asia has an extremely heterogeneous culture. It will be beyond the comprehension of many Japanese, whose own culture is so homogeneous. Dreams of easy success in the area would be not only foolish but dangerous. If the Jakarta demonstrations in January, 1974, showed anything, it was that the Japanese had better think more seriously about the area. The failure of "Nanshin" poses such complex intellectual and policy problems that it should lead to a fundamental reconsideration of Southeast Asia as a whole. One part of this reconsideration must cope with the basic question on a philosophical basis of *what Southeast Asia means to Japan*.

There appears to be a certain bias in the measures we Japanese have worked out in the face of policy failures in our relations with Southeast Asia. The bias is nothing but a Japanese bias and may not be new at all from the historical standpoint. On this basis, however, we can conceive a few solutions that some Japanese might propose. For the sake of convenience I shall limit this analysis to four possible solutions.

One solution would be to try to minimize the relative importance of Southeast Asia in Japan's diplomatic relations. To put it differently, this would attempt to erase the rationale of "Nanshin" from the foundation of Japanese diplomacy as far as practicable. Needless to say, this idea is predicated upon the decision to abandon Southeast Asia as a desperately difficult area to handle in relation to the present diplomatic environment of Japan. Such erasure of the rationale of "Nanshin" is a variation of the argument that Japan should free itself from Asia. The fact that this is the same idea as the one conceived during the first ten years following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, and that it still finds support in modern Japan, shows that the intellectual activity of building a bridge between Japan and Asia is extremely difficult.

This way of thinking may be highly acceptable to those people who are familiar with rationalism. The question, however, is if it is really feasible. The argument in favor of freeing oneself from Asia may represent the escapism, laziness, or incompetence of the Japanese people, since it means that Japan is giving up its responsibility to contribute actively in Southeast Asia. The concept of freeing oneself from Asia con-

tains a tinge of national arrogance characteristic of Japan. So long as Japan continues its active involvement in Asia, such a concept may seem to be deceitful. At any rate, arguing in favor of freeing itself from Asia when Japan is already deeply involved is nothing but an overbearing dogmatism.

The *second* solution, which at first glance resembles the first solution in favor of minimizing the relative importance of the rationale for "Nanshin," is in reality entirely different in nature. It presupposes Southeast Asia as an "antiworld" for Japan, a world where the rules of the game differ markedly from what is considered normal, and prepares fully for the difficulty of holding dialogue. This concept appears not inconsiderably attractive to me. It is a policy stratagem in which all of Southeast Asia is put in a single group of "antiworld." It is used, for one thing, as an antidote to the mental attitude of the Japanese who tend to look at the "point of contact" between Southeast Asia and Japan in an easygoing or optimistic way, and, for another, as an expression of irritation of the Japanese people who cannot look objectively at the desperate agony of the Southeast Asian region.

However, the concept of Southeast Asia as the "antiworld" of Japan can be substantiated to a considerable extent scientifically, apart from the appropriateness of the terminology. It is by no means a mere poetic idea. Southeast Asian society is entirely different in nature from Japanese society, in terms of historical background, the process of state formation, social structure, or cultural character. The difference is so great that it cannot be appreciated merely through the common sense of the Japanese. At any rate, it would seem desirable to regard Southeast Asia as the "antiworld" for Japan and prepare for desperate difficulty in mutual communication and understanding.

The *third* solution favors revolutionary changes in Japan through the intermediary of the "Asian" issue. On the basis of the judgment that there are many factors latent in Japan's internal system that inhibit effective relations with Asia, it is quite logical to assert there should be a certain type of political revolution in Japan. This may be the terminal stage reached by those people who have considered the Asian problem from many different angles. In fact, we cannot say there have not been precedents for this way of thinking. It is doubtful, however, if it is appropriate for present-day Japan to conceive a revolution through the intermediary of Asia alone. More important, one should not overlook the fact that this concept is nothing

but a new edition of Asianism, which asserts that "Asia is everything for us."

It seems to me that the foregoing three solutions have respective merits and demerits but that each contains too many problems to be the choice upon which Japan is to place her destiny. For this reason we must seriously seek a fourth solution. It must be the "right argument" for Japan, so to speak, which is not in favor of timeworn arguments for freeing oneself from Asia or for entering Asia. It must be based on a different point of view.

The primary aim of the *fourth* solution is to give to Southeast Asia its proper relative importance. How much importance should be given to Southeast Asia in the whole of Japan's international relations is an important question facing Japan at present. If one takes the viewpoint that the sound development of countries in the region should be furthered by taking into consideration their irreplaceable regional and national life, then Southeast Asian policy may assume a very large relative importance for Japan. However, whether that is the right weight or not is another question. In other words, it cannot be said to be appropriate to let the Southeast Asian problem impose a burden upon Japan to an extent exceeding its capacity to deal with and contribute to the area.

The second aim will be to deepen our real understanding of Southeast Asia and grope for a "political theory of relations" on the basis of that understanding. To deepen such an understanding it will be necessary to regard research on Southeast Asia as a national task of Japan. So long as research on Southeast Asia remains in a poor state or is not raised to a higher scientific level there will be no way to establish the right "political theory of relations." A desirable theory will never be born out of superficial intellectualism. The wisdom of the Japanese people will be assessed by the way in which it accomplishes these two aims.

It may be more troublesome than expected to translate into practice the fourth solution, which has the aforementioned features. The key to the future of Japan's "Nanshin" will be whether the Japanese can continue to endure the troublesomeness without a guarantee of success. This will also test the cultural level of the Japanese people, who want to be accepted as international people. In short, Japan cannot afford to continue to bungle over the question of "Nanshin."