

Southeast Asia Seen From Japan

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If there was a single development that stood out among everything that transpired in Asia in 1975 it was the capitulation of South Vietnam to a pro-Communist regime. The "fall" of Vietnam holds implications that extend far beyond contemporary Southeast Asia; it was an event that perfectly symbolized the play-out in Asia of the entire history of postwar politics. Regardless of how one may judge the war in Vietnam itself, or the whole issue of Indochina, for that matter, to overlook the wider significance of what culminated in 1975 is to lose one's grip on any real understanding of what the Vietnam war meant.

Much has been written and said concerning the significance of Vietnam. But it seems to me that the most relevant, and at the same time complex, approach is the analysis of the protracted struggle in its relation to the structure of the cold war in Asia. We often speak of the cold war as growing out of the ruins of the Yalta system, but what did that mean in and for Asia? Any holistic answer to that question requires a return to the events that led up to the Geneva conference, for, in rethinking the process of those events, the historical significance of the radical change that took place in Indochina can be revealed.

The Yalta System and Asia. The so-called Yalta system evolved from a series of discussions held among the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union at the Yalta Conference in February, 1945, discussions that were directed toward conceptualizing a postwar settlement through the creation of an international political system. Although the focus was on the Far East, the talks did cover Asia as a whole. The three powers, deferring to prevailing circumstances, tacitly agreed upon the division of Asia into spheres. The U.S. would bear responsibility for the Pacific area, the USSR would become the caretaker for Northeast Asia, and responsibility for

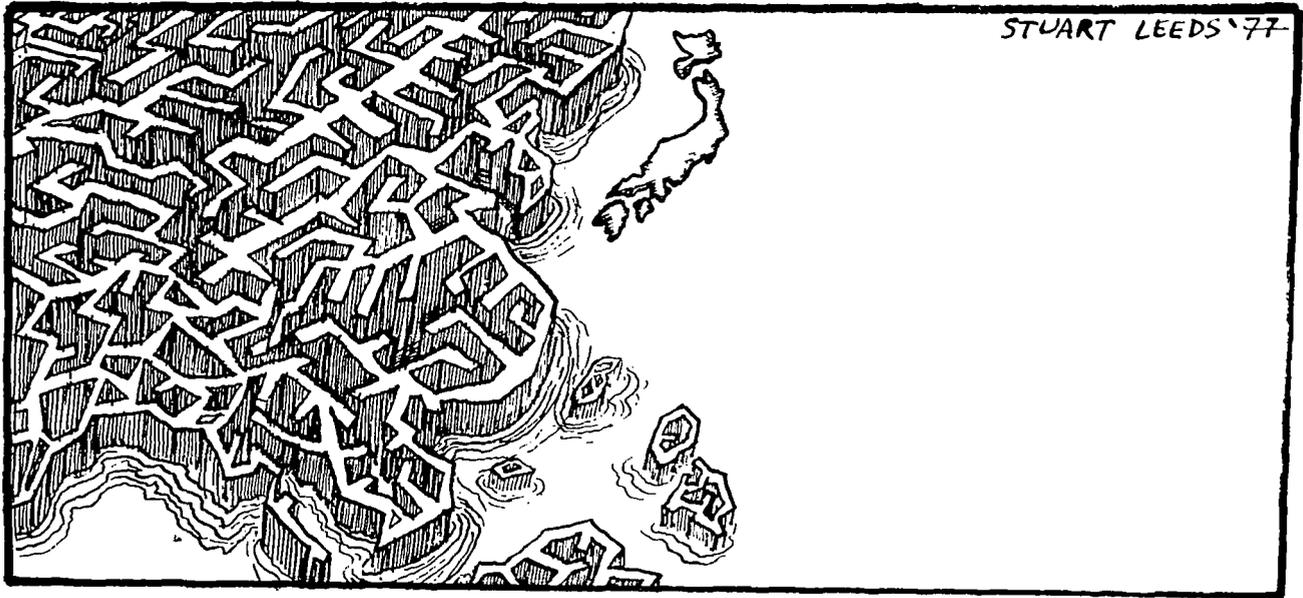
Southeast Asia would fall to Great Britain.

Some historians see a strong isolationist trend early in postwar American history, but President Roosevelt's positive determination to take on the burden of the Pacific area after the inception of the Yalta system seems, rather, to suggest just the opposite. What is important is exactly what place Southeast Asia held in the conceptual structure of the Yalta system and its proportionate weight as a region. Actually, that place was diminutive, and there is little evidence of any sustained, serious discussion on Southeast Asia at Yalta. It is probably fair to assume, however, that Britain, as the dominant colonial power in the region, quite naturally took on the responsibility for Southeast Asia without giving it much thought.

Once the war was over, however, and a settlement imposed, the pattern of thinking at Yalta, which automatically related Britain with Southeast Asia, had become completely bankrupt. In the first place, indigenous movements toward independence among the peoples of Southeast Asia had crystalized, and the struggle was gaining violent momentum. Most of them were forging their way to national sovereignty, and all were plagued by chronic political instability. Their subsequent history has been one of unilateral intervention by the United States in a progression of events that represents a course of action directly counter to the plans and spirit of Yalta.

What can explain the direction taken by the United States after the collapse of the Yalta concept? One important step in the approach to that question is to understand how China fit originally into the overall scheme envisioned at Yalta. At the time—in 1945—the three powers assigned China the status of the "weak fellow," and the Soviet Union took the role of substitute for China. It had been tacitly agreed, furthermore, that northeast China (then Manchuria) also fell within the Soviet sphere of influence. It seemed that China would not move out of the weak semicolonial status it occupied in 1941 unless someone acted to

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support it. There was, therefore, no opposition to the understanding that the Soviet Union would bear that responsibility.

Also established at Yalta was the superficial agreement that the powers would recognize China's sovereignty, uphold the principle of nonintervention in the internal political and economic affairs of China, and recognize Chiang Kai-shek as the representative of the Chinese people. But the Yalta concept as it related to Asia could not possibly have been sustained in the face of conflicting policies toward China by the other powers. The same was true in Europe, and that reality demolished the Yalta idea soon after the war ended.

If one were to choose one word to define the cause of Yalta's collapse it would be "unilateralism." What the world saw after 1945 was not concerted progress toward joint international decisionmaking and mutual agreement based on cooperation, not the spirit of cooperation as outlined at Yalta, but a fast-rising wave of autonomous action by each of the three powers as they moved in directions independent of one another. More concretely, "unilateralism" meant action without prior consultation or negotiation with the other Yalta countries, independent moves that had a huge impact.

From a certain vantage point it may be possible to assign responsibility to the Soviet Union for the emergence of unilateralism among the Yalta powers. Having obtained recognition that Manchuria fell within its own sphere of influence, the USSR began a concentrated effort to plunder the area of its natural resources. Further, despite the agreement that Chiang Kai-shek would be accepted as head of the Chinese Government, Stalin continued to assist the Chinese Red Army. At just about the time the Soviet Union began to move away from the other powers Britain was showing signs of the same tendency. Britain was exhausted and near financial ruin. Prime Minister Churchill was aware that the power position of his country was, in the long run, quite different from that of either the U.S. or the USSR and thus the Britons would have to find their own way to national recovery. We can read Winston Churchill's statements going back to the April, 1945, wartime

cabinet conference. England had three remaining assets, he said: statecraft, experience, and the unity of the British Commonwealth. Those three, and no more; they must be utilized to the maximum.

Britain tended to place priority on economic matters rather than on political or diplomatic ones, and this operated strongly in British behavior after the war's end. For that reason England deliberately abandoned the Yalta concept and swerved off onto a unilateral course. It was left to the United States and the Soviet Union to uphold what remained of the ideal of Yalta. This became an impossible task when the Americans, in response to independent Soviet moves, began to take their own unilateral initiatives.

At this point there emerged in American thinking the idea that a "united China" had to be maintained and that the U.S. bore part of the responsibility for it. And thus, in the process of the collapse of the Yalta system soon after World War II, the U.S. reacted to the wave of unilateralism sweeping the other countries, but at the same time it went off onto its own course. In American thinking there was no other way to proceed. If it did not do so, nothing would be accomplished.

All through American thinking ran the extremely legalistic, moralistic conviction that the Soviet Union, not the United States, was to blame; the USSR had "gone unilateral" first. From this emerged the "'violation of Yalta accord' theory," which America handled with righteous moralism. American unilateralism was perhaps most succinctly stated by the one-time head of the CIA, Allen Dulles. The United States could, he said, without approval from the other countries concerned, make independent judgment and intervene in the internal affairs of others. It seemed as though the significance and importance of the Yalta concept had become a fixation in American thinking. Their moralism and legalism allowed Americans to attach greater importance to the Yalta system than did the other Yalta powers. In addition, because the U.S. was the only country with anything approaching national power or economic viability in the early postwar years, it underestimated the economic needs and anxieties of the others. Americans

had no idea of why the other powers had to suffer what they themselves did not; thus they neither understood nor appreciated the economic motives of Britain and the reasons for the Soviet plunder of Manchuria.

Bound by a set idea of what Yalta demanded, America persisted in the conviction that if only the others would uphold the system, it could be preserved. In Asia, and probably other areas as well, what finally happened was that the Yalta system split into three unilateral thrusts, all completely different, causing the final collapse of the Yalta system.

Thus behind the unmalicious, single-handed venture into Asia by the United States lay this broad and complex historical background. America's unilateralism was further affirmed by its strict polarization of the world into free bloc and Communist—there was nothing in between. The anti-Communist crusade led by John Foster Dulles only pushed the definition into harder lines, and over night American involvement in Indochina intensified. Underlying everything that happened in Indochina is this long, historical drama. Coming to 1975, we can see it was a very meaningful year indeed.

The Historical Significance of the Vietnam War. In discussing the meaning in history of the Vietnam war I will touch on six points. *First* is the interesting dual effect of the war on China. It cannot be questioned that one of the American aims in the war—perhaps the most important—was the containment of China, and in that respect the U.S. succeeded. Now the war is over, and both Hanoi and Saigon are heavily influenced, not by China, but by the Soviet Union. China's weight in Cambodia is also much less than might have been expected. Thus China has left remarkably few traces of power in the Indochina peninsula now that the Vietnam war is over, and on the surface it appears that the containment policy of the United States worked. From another perspective, however, it was a twenty-year war for the USA, and as an Indochinese war it went on for close to thirty years. In the final analysis the result of those years of struggle was to give China the great power status in international affairs once envisioned in a totally different context at Yalta. I cannot avoid concluding that China lost influence in Indochina as a result of the Vietnam war but gained for itself a stronger position in Asia.

The *second* point is that the Soviet Union achieved a new importance in Southeast Asia. The USSR had given little attention to the region previously, as is clear in the Yalta settlement, but came to assume an important role in the international relations of Southeast Asia as a result of the Vietnamese war. *Third*, because of American intervention, the so-called domino effect was avoided. The war was really a holding action that gained time for the countries in the region. During the twenty years that the United States struggled it provided the psychological and economic margin that allowed the surrounding countries to modernize. Whether or not their modernization took the course they wished or planned for is an entirely different question; and even if it did not succeed that was not the fault of the United States. If moderniza-

tion failed, it was for noneconomic reasons—either because the countries made the wrong choices about how to progress, or because their bureaucracies failed to function properly. In neither case, however, was there any direct connection with the U.S. And for all countries in the region the twenty years gained by the American holding action was crucial, also offering some justification for the view that, because of it, the domino theory did not take effect.

The *fourth* point is that the Vietnam war helped to revive the Japanese economy. It stimulated heavy and continuing procurement demand; but more, Japan emerged from it as the foremost power in the region, with a new sobriquet, "Peaceful Economic Power."

Fifth, the war failed to produce a central core in Southeast Asia as a subsystem, which means that stability could be maintained only through some international mechanism. One possibility would be a trilateral balance of power among the U.S., China, and the USSR. Or, order might be secured by means of some kind of neutrality pact among the countries of the region—These are only two of the possible scenarios; another is suggested by Mervin Gurtov in a recent essay in which he posits the best system as a four-way balance of power, including Japan. The view that the stability of Southeast Asia does indeed depend on the establishment of some system in the area would support a return to the classic theory of balance of power.

Sixth, and last, is the significance in history of the Vietnam war in terms of its influence on American policy toward Asia. This is difficult to summarize, but it appears that the U.S. is developing a positive attitude toward both China and Asian nationalism. We must also consider the possibility of steady detachment of the U.S. from Southeast Asia, symbolized so well by the problem of Vietnamese refugees trying to enter and live in America. Another choice for the U.S. may be to modify Asian policy, making Japan central to a new strategic system. To do so the United States will have to increase its confidence in Japan as the only trustworthy ally in Asia.

Looking at the historical significance of the Indochina war in this overall perspective, the sad reality is that despite a long and drawn out conflict, almost none of the conditions necessary for a stable international order in Southeast Asia has been established. Thus, depending on one's viewpoint, Southeast Asia has fallen once more into a "power vacuum," and if that is true, then Southeast Asia is moving out of one state of disturbance and into another.

Escalation of the Sino-Soviet Conflict. The biggest problem in the post-Indochina era is the ever rising conflict between the Soviet Union and China. In light of that new factor the reduction of American influence in Southeast Asia and the economic advance of Japan in the area take on new meaning. Even though the war has been declared ended, tensions in the area have yet to be resolved.

Thus 1975 was a transitional year. Let us examine the simultaneous "overtures to China" and the "tendency to move away from the United States" as an accurate

way to deduce the logic at work in the dynamics of Southeast Asian politics. Very recently the Philippines and Thailand established diplomatic relations with China, leaving Singapore and Indonesia as the only Southeast Asian countries not yet to have done so. Having made no move toward establishing relations with China, they are definitely behind. The agreements made by China with Thailand and the Philippines contained the so-called hegemony clause, indicating that China had the upper hand in the negotiations. Originally, the Philippines developed a policy of restoring relations with both China and the Soviet Union simultaneously, but the fact that China came first represents what must have been a difficult decision for the Marcos Government. There can be no question that the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries are now acutely aware of China's presence as a great Asian power. Many of them even seem to favor China over the Soviet Union. In trying to interpret the motivations for their overtures to China, I do not support the popular view that this is a result of their detachment from the United States.

"Detachment from America" conveys the wrong impression—that the Southeast Asian countries are trying to sever relations with the U.S. altogether. To understand their motivations we must know who are the big powers in Asia today. The biggest difference between the cold war situation and the present is that big power presence in Asia is no longer limited to the United States. Now four powers have a voice in Asian affairs: the U.S., USSR, China, and Japan. Thus the international power structure, as perceived by the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia, has taken on new dimensions; for them big power dominance by one nation has been replaced by four-power dominance, and in that they are only responding to international reality. By no means can their "pro-China" attitudes constitute "detachment from America." If the Filipinos, for example, carried their logic to its natural conclusion, they should eventually seek to establish diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union. They did not choose China out of any sense of hostility to the Soviet Union; hence, they should be eager to start negotiations for establishing relations with the USSR. This is a perfectly natural, commendable course of action.

The perceptions of Singapore and Indonesia, on the other hand, are slightly different. Whereas the other three countries see Asia as having moved from an age of dominance by one to an era of influence by four powers, Singapore and Indonesia see their world as having moved out of the era of American-Chinese confrontation and into a new era of Sino-Soviet conflict. It may appear to be substantially the same image of four-power dominance, but actually it is not. Singapore and Indonesia place much greater weight on the aspect of great power confrontation. Both groups of nations recognize China as a great power, but Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines do not take the Sino-Soviet antagonism as seriously as do Singapore and Indonesia. It is a central concern to the latter two. The effects of that concern explain the efforts they are making to retain their ties with the Soviet Union.

However, at the time Malaysia established relations

with China, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore commented: "The time has come when we have to think hard about getting along with China. Within two or three years, perhaps there will be no country which does not have relations with China." His statement is a clear indication of his own awareness that Singapore will eventually establish ties with China. But there is also the problem of timing: when to decide and how to move without antagonizing the Soviet Union. Those concerns also differentiate the attitude of Singapore from that of Thailand, for example.

In addition to how Japanese-American relations are going to affect the total picture of the Southeast Asian situation, people of the region are now increasingly concerned with the new brand of international confrontation, i.e., the Sino-Soviet conflict. They have just come through the rugged era of the Indochina struggle only to face a new, fierce Chinese-Soviet struggle that promises to envelop them, as is already evident in Indochina. How should they react? Thailand established relations with China on July 1, 1975, but Thai Government leaders were made extremely nervous by, for example, the total failure of the Soviet newspapers to report the normalization of relations between the Philippines and China. A Soviet invitation to the King of Laos to visit Moscow in September, and a speech on collective security on June 25, 1975, by the Soviet ambassador to Bangkok, were just two more of the numerous incidents that raised suspicions and showed how on edge the Sino-Soviet hostility has made the Southeast Asian countries. To feel surrounded by open antagonism between two superpowers has made them all too conscious of the danger in drawing too close to either one.

To prevent the Sino-Soviet conflict from escalating in Southeast Asia, those countries seem to feel they must take a neutral stance, and that the presence of other big powers—America and Japan—is necessary. As one lesson from Indochina they have begun to grope, more intensely than ever before, for an effective way to defend themselves. In all of this I feel that the countries of Southeast Asia are taking the proper course of action and are extremely cautious and calm about the situation they are in.

New Order in Southeast Asia. The loss of Indochina has brought about quite a few new political necessities in the whole region: keener interest in national resilience, reassessment of the effectiveness of an American presence, reconfirmation of the validity of the neutralization of the region, and so forth. However, the most significant consequence was that Southeast Asia has faced a set of options for what might be the patterns of international relations within the region. Perhaps we can count two different basic scenarios. One is an emerging balance of power between the Indochina bloc and the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) bloc. The other is a new, enlarged ASEAN, including even Indochinese countries.

But the most probable scenario seems to be the first one. Southeast Asia is now dichotomized into two sharply different groups of nations. ASEAN seems to be slightly more interested in the status quo in terms of

membership, ideology, or its relations with the rest of Southeast Asia. If this picture is correct, it is logical to assume that regional peace and stability depend on how harmoniously the two blocs can get along. We may have to ask ourselves a new question: What would be the guarantees or conditions for peaceful relations between the two? The answer is not to be formulated by outside powers but is to be resolved by concerned nations in the region.

There is no longer any doubt that Indochina will come increasingly under the influence of communism à la Indochine. Nevertheless, the nations of Indochina will probably never be unified in a monolithic manner, and there is a good possibility that a subtle balance of power will develop and form the basis of relations among these countries. The influence of Vietnam will certainly grow stronger, but further diplomatic initiatives by China and the Soviet Union are likely to complicate the situation.

It seems that a new knot will be added to the tangle of problems concerning Asia, a knot we might call "international relations with Southeast Asia." Right now no one really knows how it will all work out.

ASEAN, whether it be judged good or bad, has rapidly gained international influence. This has been one of the most significant effects of the sudden change in the Indochina situation. Of course ASEAN has been a notable force for some time, but it has only now attained full maturity. This is not to say that the organization is free of difficulties. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that ASEAN's right to be heard in international affairs will henceforth rapidly increase. The organization will surely continue to exist, even without being able to eradicate its shortcomings in the near future—such as, for example, the difficulty of realizing a properly functioning organizational apparatus. But Japan, as well as other countries, is beginning to expect more and more from ASEAN. As an international organization and international symbol, ASEAN is a big fact that cannot be ignored.

Japan's Diplomatic Interests. Directing attention to Japan, we notice that, despite the rapid change that has taken place in Asia since the debacle of Vietnam, Japan has lost nothing in its relations to the area. This testifies to the appropriateness of Japanese foreign policy goals and the skill with which its Asia policy has been structured.

It is essential for Japanese foreign policy to confirm the stance it has taken so far. Most important is for Japan to ensure the stability of its security arrangements with the United States. This in itself will be an extremely effective way of showing the nations of Southeast Asia that we are working actively to prevent a resurgence of Japanese militarism. It will do much to prevent further political instability. It is a psychologically sound position to take. The Japan-U.S. security system has assumed positive connotations in the eyes of China and the Soviet Union as well as Vietnam, a new regional power.

It has become ever more important to maintain a policy of equidistance from China and Russia. With the vacuum created by the American withdrawal from In-

dochina, diplomatic confrontation between the Chinese and the Soviets threatens to become more serious. Related to this is the clause in the proposed friendship treaty between Japan and China concerning "hegemony by a third power." If this treaty is concluded and results in an alliance between Japan and China, there is a new danger that the people of Southeast Asia will see it as a new power threat, a combination of the political-military power of China with the economic might of Japan. There is also a possibility that Southeast Asia will see such an alliance as something that will draw Japan into the dispute over hegemony between the Soviet Union and China. The most urgent concern for our Southeast Asian neighbors is that we clear up the issue of hegemony as involved in the proposed friendship treaty.

On February 25, 1976, Japan's Foreign Minister, Mr. Kiichi Miyazawa, made a noteworthy statement on the Bali meeting. "The Government of Japan welcomes the fact that ASEAN has held its first meeting of Heads of Government since its establishment and reaffirmed its intention to strengthen regional solidarity and cooperation, as this can only contribute to the future prosperity and stability of Asia," he said. "It is noteworthy that the signing at the meeting of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia has increased the role of ASEAN in the promotion of stability in this region." Almost all the important mass media of Japan also applauded the achievement of ASEAN on this particular occasion and without exception agreed to the effect that a new era has arrived in Southeast Asia. In this fashion the jargon "ASEAN Gaiko," which literally means "ASEAN diplomacy," has become a term of greater importance as well as of unusual popularity among Japanese citizens as time goes by.

Because the influence of ASEAN in the international forum is increasing, our Southeast Asia policy must give full consideration to helping strengthen and stabilize the role of ASEAN and to aid in developing a more secure economic future for member countries. Japan, on the other hand, did not delay making arrangements with the new powers of the Indochina region, and it is of especial importance to maintain a cautious posture in regard to the economic aspects of our foreign policy.

The stability and prosperity of the ASEAN region are relevant to national interests of Japan. But this is not the single reason why Japan is again concerned with seeing tight unity in ASEAN. Our basic line of thought is that Asia needs a totally fresh approach for regional security and stability, one that puts less accent on the presence of big powers and more on the stronger sense of self-reliance and of national resilience.

It must be noted, however, that Japan sees a common element of interests in all Southeast Asian countries, including Indochinese nations. As we see it from Tokyo, all countries in Southeast Asia are seriously interested, on the one hand, in freeing themselves from unnecessary involvement with the power struggle among big powers and, on the other hand, in achieving national resilience by force of local initiatives. Japan will remain concerned for years to come with this sincere aspiration on the part of all countries in Southeast Asia and will try to get an idea of how it can contribute its own share to help

achieve those countries' national as well as regional aspirations.

The more ASEAN achieves high priority in Japan's Southeast Asian policy the more the policy orientation on the part of ASEAN will become a matter of serious concern to the Japanese. The following three subjects will pose special problems for consideration by Japan's policymakers.

First of all, it will be a matter of unusual concern if and how the member states of ASEAN strive, individually and collectively, to promote peaceful cooperation among all the nations of Southeast Asia. Japan is positively concerned with future development of Indochinese countries as well as of Burma as an integral part of Southeast Asia, and remains apprehensive about the possibility that there might be created a fatal political discrepancy between ASEAN and the rest of Southeast Asia. In this connection Japan will continue to hope that the member states of ASEAN will expend their utmost to achieve patterns of peaceful coexistence and cooperation with the countries of Indochina.

The second matter of interest to Japan will be what patterns of economic cooperation in the region would be conceptualized and agreed upon by the ASEAN countries. Japan reacts positively to ASEAN trends that enhance its attractiveness as a good partner vis-à-vis advanced nations outside the area and enlarge its economic intercourse with the rest of the world. These trends help the member states consolidate their socio-economic basis for national development. Japan now intends to study all the possibilities for cooperation with ASEAN, including possible commitments in ASEAN's

large-scale industrial projects, never failing to respect the association's own initiative.

Third, Japan is concerned with the issue of "neutralization" of Southeast Asia. Although Japan can appreciate the meaningfulness of ASEAN's favorite slogan, "peace, freedom, and neutrality," we are apprehensive too that, should ASEAN move forward too hastily toward neutralization of the region, this might only lead to aggravated international tensions in Asia.

The so-called "neutralization" may pose a delicate psychological problem to Japan if the term rigidly implies nothing but immediate disposal of all military commitments with the U.S. It goes without saying that the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty is of crucial importance not only to Japan's own national security but to the regional stability of the whole of Asia as well. However, Japan would be totally prepared to recognize the significance of ASEAN's "neutralization" efforts if the term could be read as rejection of all interventive influence of big powers outside the region.

My conclusion is that Japan is far more interested in the new significance of ASEAN than before. To us ASEAN is a symbol of the most authentic pattern of regional "resilience." It is, therefore, positively hoped that ASEAN will make all possible efforts to search for conditions or organizational improvement and resilience, that ASEAN would suggest what kinds of cooperation or attention will be needed from advanced nations like Japan, and also that ASEAN will not fail to be sensitive to the common necessity that binds together all the countries of Southeast Asia.