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JAPAN'S QUEST FOR STABILITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

**NAVIGATING THE TURNING POINTS IN POSTWAR
ASIA**

Taizo Miyagi

Translated by Hanabusa Midori



Japan's Quest for Stability in Southeast Asia

More than any other region in the world, Asia has witnessed tremendous change in the post-war era. A continent once engulfed by independence and revolution, and later by the Cold War and civil war, has now been transformed into the world's most economically dynamic region. What caused this change in Asia? The key to answering this question lies in the post-war history of maritime Asia and, in particular, the path taken by the maritime nation of Japan.

Analyzing the importance of Japan's relationship with Southeast Asia, this book aims to illustrate the hidden trail left by Japan during the period of upheaval that has shaped Asia today—an era marked by the American Cold War strategy, the dissolution of the British Empire in Asia, and the rise of China. It provides a comprehensive account of post-war maritime Asia, making use of internationally sourced primary materials as well as declassified Japanese government papers. As such, *Japan's Quest for Stability in Southeast Asia* will be useful to students and scholars of Japanese Politics, Asian Politics and Asian History.

Taizo Miyagi is Professor in the Faculty of Global Studies at Sophia University, Japan. His recent publications include *Gendai Nihon gaiko-shi* (History of Contemporary Japanese Diplomacy, 2016).

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Foreword to the English edition

This book was written with the purpose of bridging several gaps in the history of international politics in Asia after World War II. One of them is the gap that exists between the perception of Asia in the early postwar years—from the end of the war to the mid-1960s—as a region enveloped by conflicts and wars of independence, wallowing in economic poverty and stagnation, and the perception of Asia since the 1970s, as a region characterized by development and economic growth. Once a political battlefield at the intersection of decolonization and the Cold War, Asia has since undergone rapid economic growth, dubbed the “East Asian miracle,” to become the global center of growth today. No other region has experienced such dramatic change over the past seven decades since World War II. This postwar transformation can be understood as a process in which Asia shifted from decolonization to development.

The “decade of transition”—from 1965 to 1975—is crucial to any study of postwar Asia’s transition from decolonization to development. This is the decade that began in 1965 with an aborted coup in President Sukarno’s Indonesia known as the “September 30 Incident,” a decade in which the rapprochement between the United States and China took place between 1971 and 1972 and lasted until the fall of Saigon in 1975 that ended the Vietnam War. On the eve of the September 30 Incident, Sukarno, who was supportive of the Communist Party of Indonesia—the largest Communist group in the non-Communist bloc—formed the “Beijing-Jakarta Axis” with China, which was pursuing a diplomacy of radicalism. The Axis threatened to engulf the region from the north to the south. Had Saigon fallen under these circumstances, it could have lent more credibility to the “domino theory,” which predicted a successive spread of Communism from one country to another.

However, the September 30 Incident led to Sukarno’s downfall. He was replaced by President Suharto, who sought to forge closer ties with Japan and the United States to build a system of economic development and moved towards the formation of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Having lost Sukarno as a partner in promoting radical diplomacy, China turned to the United States as a counterweight to the Soviet

Union. And by 1975, when the fall of Saigon brought an end to the Vietnam War, there were no longer any battles seeking independence from foreign rule being fought in Asia. It was the end of decolonization that set the stage for the subsequent tide of development and economic growth that spread to all corners of Asia. In this book, I have attempted to reveal the dynamics that governed the “decade of transition” and its historic background by focusing on Indonesia, which played a pivotal role in the development of postwar order in Asia.

This book also addresses another gap that existed between postwar Japan and the rest of Asia. Today, Japan enjoys intricate economic ties throughout Asia, to the extent that a virtual economic union is underway. Yet, Asia during the early postwar period was fraught with war and confusion—a region that felt so near, yet so far away for Japan, which had been the first to embark on a path to economic growth and had forged ahead towards becoming a developed nation. It was as though Japan had forgotten its past ambition of creating a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. As major events in international politics unfolded in postwar Asia, such as the Vietnam War and the US-China rapprochement, Japan played only a supportive role. However, once we reconstruct the axis that served as the basis for the historic transformation from decolonization to development that shaped the Asia of today, we are able to understand the significance of the role played by Japan. This book sheds light on the process through which postwar Japan re-entered Asia, and maritime Asia in particular, with a focus on Indonesia and the important role it eventually played during the “decade of transition.”

I would be more than happy if the issues I raise and the framework of study I propose in this book are shared by a broader readership through the publication of this English edition.

Taizo Miyagi

About the author

Taizo Miyagi was born in Tokyo in 1968. He graduated from the Faculty of Law and Politics at Rikkyo University in 1992 and worked as a reporter at NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) until 1996. In 2001, he received a PhD from the Graduate School of Law and International Relations at Hitotsubashi University. His previous posts include Adjunct Instructor in the Faculty of Law and Politics at Rikkyo University, Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Law at Hokkaido University, Associate Professor at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, and Associate Professor in the Department of International Relations at Sophia University. He is currently Professor in the Faculty of Global Studies at Sophia University. He has also written *Bandon Kaigi to Nihon no Ajia fukki* (The Bandung Conference and Japan's Return to Asia, Soshisha, 2001); *Sengo Ajia chitsujo no mosaku to Nihon* (Exploration of Postwar Asian Order and Japan, Sobunsha, 2004), which won the Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities; and *Gendai Nihon gaiko-shi* (History of Contemporary Japanese Diplomacy, Chuokoron-shinsha, 2016). He co-authored *Sengo Nihon no Ajia gaiko* (Japan's Postwar Diplomacy in Asia, Minerva Shobo, 2015), which won the Okita Memorial Prize for International Development Research in 2016. He has also received the Yasuhiro Nakasone Award for Excellence (2005) in recognition of his academic studies.

Prologue

If one were to write a history of international relations in Asia since World War II, how would Japan be positioned in such a narrative?

When the topic turns to Japan's past relationship with Asia, the so-called history issue—caused by different historical perspectives between Japan on the one hand and China and Korea on the other—might be the first thing that comes to mind for many. Given that the history issue consists of friction over interpretations and perceptions of incidents before and during World War II, however, it alone does not adequately explain the events that have unfolded over more than sixty years since the war.

In any attempt at identifying important issues in international politics in postwar Asia, the Korean War and the Vietnam War would no doubt figure prominently. Although economic ties among countries in the region have become so strong today that we even talk about forming an Asian community, postwar Asia has long been synonymous with turmoil and confusion more than anything else. And throughout this period, when Asia was characterized by war and turmoil, Japan appeared to devote all its energies to achieving economic growth for itself, showing little interest in international politics.

Japan regarded the Korean and Vietnam wars as somebody else's problem. Then, as the 1970s began, Japan was stunned by the sudden rapprochement between China and the United States, which had been the main adversaries of the Cold War in Asia. It was a cataclysmic event that took place behind Japan's back. Given such a track record of passivity, it seems almost futile to explore what Japan, a political weakling, means to Asia. Has Japan always been an insignificant player in the international politics of postwar Asia, a presence that is only relevant in the economic realm after all?

To answer the question about what Japan has been to postwar Asia, one must first consider what postwar Asia has been. Only after a blueprint of postwar Asia has been drawn can we assess with any accuracy the significance of Japan as its member.

The Cold War in Asia was an ideological conflict between Communists and non-Communists that manifested itself in the Korean and Vietnam wars. While it might have been a "cold war" for the leaders of the two conflicting camps—the United States, the Soviet Union, and China—a tremendous number of human lives were lost in the fierce "hot" wars on the Korean

and Indochinese peninsulas, and tense diplomatic battles were fought to settle the conflicts. It should be obvious to anyone that the postwar history of Asia evolved around the Cold War.

Darkness fell like fate on Saigon on April 29, 1975. By 6:30 p.m. a power cut had blacked out the city, but in a way, this was almost a blessing because it cloaked the shame of defeat. I stood on the terrace of the Hotel Caravelle under a fine drizzle, watching Saigon's last night...

Below, a darkened and silent metropolis, known as both the Jewel of the Orient and the Whore City, awaited its conquerors. Its tall buildings were silhouetted against the flashes of rockets exploding over the horizon and the dull, orange glow of burning ammunition dumps at the Tan Son Nhut air base.¹

On April 30, one day after the events described in the quote above, Saigon fell when the Communist forces rushed into the city. In this way, the Republic of Vietnam, or South Vietnam, perished from the earth. It was also the moment when the decades-long Vietnam War finally ended. Nayan Chanda writes, "I was dazed by the onrush of events, finding it hard to believe that the Vietnam War, a war that I had almost grown up with, had ended."² I suspect this sentiment was shared by many who belonged to the same generation as Chanda. The war in Vietnam, which had been fought incessantly since the end of World War II—first as the Indochinese War mainly against France and, subsequently, as the Vietnam War against the United States—had constantly remained at the center of the Asian political situation. Such as it was, when the war finally ended, it was with the swift, one-sided collapse of South Vietnam, an outcome that betrayed general expectations.

The end of the Vietnam War following the fall of Saigon could be viewed as the climax of the Cold War in Asia. Seen from this angle, we must question the impact and influence this climax has had on Asia in the decades since.

The United States, having predicted that the fall of South Vietnam would result in a fatal situation, not only for Vietnam and other Indochinese countries but for the entire Asian region as a whole, had continued to pour a tremendous number of troops as well as an enormous amount of funds into this remote area beyond the Pacific Ocean. The fear was that failure to suppress the Communist forces in Vietnam would trigger a domino-like phenomenon that would swallow its neighboring countries and, eventually, all of Asia in a sea of Communism. In actuality, however, the fall of Saigon signified the end of an era more than the beginning of a new situation long feared by the United States.

At the outset of his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, a modern classic on nationalism, Benedict Anderson refers to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia only a few years after the fall of Saigon and subsequent eruption of the Sino-Vietnamese War. Anderson states: