

BOOK REVIEWS

Japanese Strategic Thought toward Asia

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This well-constructed work starts from a rather lengthy, detailed ‘Overview’ written by three editors to enable readers to clearly understand the purpose and structure of the volume. This part includes a summary of the four periods of Japanese strategic thinking that comprise the main body of the book: the 1980s, the first half of the 1990s, the second half of the 1990s, and the Koizumi era. The volume, published in 2007, even covers the first few months of Abe Shinzo in office. In Part 1, ‘Chronology’, the afore-mentioned four periods are examined. Part 2, ‘Geography’, focuses on Japan’s strategic thought toward five countries/areas in Asia: China, Taiwan, Korea, Russia, and Central Asia. The final chapter deals with Japan’s strategic thinking on regionalism. The chronological and geographical approaches taken in the book give readers a complete picture of the topic. Editors and contributors consist of ten leading experts in Asian studies residing in the United States and other major Asian countries. Most of the contributors are university professors, but there was also a significant contribution from some people with a background in diplomatic services.

Since there is no space to examine individually all of the chapters, I would like to focus on one of the most important questions directly or indirectly discussed by all of the contributors: do the Japanese have strategic thinking toward Asia?

First of all, there seems to be a consensus among the contributors that the Japanese need to formulate strategic thought toward Asia. It thus becomes pertinent to raise the following questions: what kind of strategy would be

most appropriate for Japan to pursue in Asia? If the Japanese have not been successful in building and implementing such a strategy, what constitute the major causes for this?

For a long time after World War II, Tokyo's close alliance with Washington was sufficient for Japan to defend its security and economic interests. Until very recently, the United States was not only a military protector but also the largest trade partner of Japan. In fact, the principle or approach that has been conveniently termed 'Yoshida doctrine' constituted the nucleus of the Japanese strategic thought. The doctrine advocated that Japan maintain a close security alliance with the United States, so that Japan can exclusively concentrate on its economic recovery. Thanks to this doctrine and its concomitant policies, Japan was in fact able to succeed in achieving not only a miraculous postwar economic recovery but also a level of prosperity that has made Japan an economic superpower second only to the United States. Furthermore, such development of Japan encourages other nations in Asia to follow the Japanese model, which has become known as the 'flying geese model'.

The so-called 'Yoshida doctrine', which emphasized Japan's economic growth and development primarily by means of diplomatic and military alliances with the United States, has been faithfully carried out for three decades without significant modifications by Yoshida's successors. For instance, Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro demonstrated his eagerness to continue, or even revitalize, the close security alliance with the West, particularly with the United States. Scholars and other experts who formed 'the mainstream of Japanese strategic thought' also inherited the 'Yoshida doctrine'. In his best-selling book titled *What is Strategic Thinking?*, Okazaki Hisahiko provided a definite answer to his self-proposed question in the form of the title of his book by simply stating that Japan's best strategy lied in the maintenance of her close alliance with Anglo-Saxon nations, particularly with the United States, in the post-WWII period.

Now, however, neither the 'Yoshida doctrine' nor Okazaki's proposition seems to be appropriate for Japan to pursue without some modification. At least they need to be revised to adjust to changes that have recently been taking place in Asia and in the world. First of all, the US influence in Asia has been declining. The Bush administration's unilateral conduct of foreign relations, illustrated best by its military action against Iraq, has resulted in the United States losing its moral credibility. In the meantime, the importance of countries in Asia and their voices in world and regional affairs have been rapidly increasing. The best example is provided by the rise of China. Successful development of the four dragons (Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong) as well as countries in Southeast Asia has resulted in Japan losing its position as the indisputable leader of Asia's region-wide

development. On the other hand, ominous signs of threat in the form of nuclearization in the DPRK have loomed large over Northeast Asia, a situation that has made it necessary to think seriously about the question of how to cope with North Korea's challenge of brinkmanship.

What kind of strategy, then, does Japan have to formulate, adopt, and implement now that the cold war has ended? Almost all of the contributors to this volume agree that the Japanese should build a comprehensive strategy and implement it in a coherent fashion. They also agree that such a strategy should include a balanced combination of at least the following two factors: preservation of a good relationship with the United States and further development of improved relations with countries in Asia, particularly Japan's neighboring nations, China, Taiwan and South Korea. Put in a slightly different way, it is not only desirable but also necessary for Japan to pursue simultaneously the two-fold strategy of bandwagoning with the United States (but not too excessively) and of balancing with improvement of relations with other nation-states in the Asia-Pacific region against the superpower's unilateralism. In my view, however, fulfilling the two requirements at the same time is easier said than done. Kawato has gone out of his way, half-jokingly, though, saying that the phrase 'Japan's strategy' contains a contradiction in adjectives. Why? Let me give you some reasons.

To begin with, it has generally been difficult recently for any nation-states to build overall strategic thinking and particularly put it consistently into action. Even such superpowers as the United States under Bush or Russia under Putin have not necessarily been successful in coherently pursuing their own strategic thought in practice, due to changing international circumstances and other factors. As a result, their actual conduct of foreign policy behavior has frequently become not only inconsistent but also sometimes appearing to outside observers to be even employing double-standard measures. It is unavoidable for medium-sized powers such as Japan, and naturally much smaller nations, to tend to reveal their inconsistency, reacting on an ad hoc basis, in order to deal with challenges posed by fluid international situations.

Added to this general hardship of pursuing a strategy in a coherent fashion are the special situations Japan has to face in Asia, which may be summarized by the term 'psychological cold war' (Kokubun). The term 'Cold War' is, after all, a metaphor but usually understood as confrontation on a global scale between the Western (non-communist) bloc, headed by the United States, and Eastern (communist) bloc, headed by the Soviet Union. Even if we admit that the Cold War is over in the Asian theater as well as in the European one, it is a cold fact that in Asia there still remain a few communist-oriented states, including China and the DPRK. A more

significant fact is that the end of World War II has not been officially declared between Japan and North Korea. A peace treaty between Japan and Russia, completing the full normalization of bilateral relations, has yet to be concluded. In other words, the negative cloud of remnants left over by the World War II is still hanging over Japan. In this connection, we should not forget that the misconduct by militaristic Japan during World War II was justified by the slogan of 'Great East Asian Co-prosperity'. Bitter memories remain in Asian people as well as in Japanese. Under such circumstances, it is understandable that Japan has become cautious in formulating and advocating a gigantic scheme embracing the entire Asian region. To make things worse, Japan is isolated in the sense that she has relatively few friends and allies to share the same of similar values and beliefs in Asia, where many different races, religions, and political systems exist, which is quite a different situation to that in Europe.

Lastly, it should be noted that despite the various handicaps mentioned above, Japan has been proposing some of its own ideas, designs, visions, and schemes to Asia. Several Japanese prime ministers have come up with schemes or doctrines. The 'Fukuda doctrine' was addressed mainly to ASEAN countries. Ohira's 'Pacific Basin Concept' tried to embrace the Asia-Pacific region. Hashimoto took a bold initiative in addressing to Russia under the banner of 'Eurasian (or Silk Road) diplomacy'. Not only Japanese prime ministers but also governors of prefectures, ambassadors, and bureaucrats have not hesitated in taking similar initiatives. For example, the governors of prefectures facing the Sea of Japan have been promoting the idea of 'Japan Sea Rim Economic Sphere'. Some high government officials in-charge of Central Asia at the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been promoting the idea of 'Central Asia plus Japan'.

In conclusion, Japan's contribution to Asia has not been sufficient. Efforts should be made to encourage Japan to move more actively in the right direction rather than simply criticizing Japan for its lack of an overall strategic thought toward Asia.

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