

Note From An International Seminar on "Japanese Studies in ASEAN : A Survey of Strengths and Weaknesses"

Likhit Dhiravegin

*Dean, Faculty of Political Science
Thammasat University.*

An international seminar on Japanese studies in ASEAN and Australia was organized by the Japanese Studies Institute of Thammasat University with co-operation and financial subsidy from the Japan Foundation. The seminar entitled "Japanese Studies in ASEAN : A Survey of Strengths and Weaknesses," was held at Pattaya, Chonburi, Thailand from January 14-15, 1984.

The seminar, the first of its kind to be held, was represented by scholars from the five ASEAN countries, Australia and Japan. Participants included Prof. Nongyao Chaiseri, Rector, Prof. Phaisith Phipatanakul, Vice Rector of Academic Affairs, Prof. Varakorn Samakoses, Vice Rector for University Development of Thammasat University. Guests of honor were H.E. Masatada Tachibana the Japanese Ambassador to Bangkok and Mr. Toshihisa Tanaka, Director of the Japan Foundation. In addition, there were about 20 Thai and Japanese scholars and observers. Organization of the seminar was made by Prof. Banyat Surakanvit and the staff of the Japanese Studies Center. The seminar was covered by the local and Japanese mass media. Scholars who represented the countries of the region were as follows :

Indonesia	:	Prof. Ade Surachmat Samsu
Malaysia	:	Prof. M. Rajendran
The Philippines	:	Prof. Josefa M. Saniel
Singapore	:	Prof. Lim Hua Sing
Thailand	:	Prof. Banyat Surakanvit Prof. Prasert Chittiwatanapong Prof. Rasdara Khuntigul Prof. Pakatip Skulkru Prof. Artorn Fungtammasan
Australia	:	Prof. Ross E. Mouer Prof. J.V. Neustupny
Japan	:	Prof. Toru Yano

The Rationale given for the organization of the international seminar is put as follow.

Rationale for the Seminar :

Japan, by all accounts, is a very important country in Asia. The role of Japan as an economic and to a certain extent, political power, in Asia and for that matter, in world politics, can hardly be over-emphasized. Because of the significant role of Japan which has a great bearing upon international politics, interest in Japan has recently increased in magnitude. Many academic institutions have offered courses on Japanese language, Japanese history, Japanese politics and the like. In the areas of research, many topics covered Japan and its relations with the Asian countries especially trade and investment. Of late, interest in Japan's culture and society has also gained momentum. Another topic which has become a common theme for discussion is the possibility of adapting the Japanese Management technique to be used in the Asian countries. Topics such as life-time employment, quality control circle, the role of middle-level managers, bottom-up decision-making, etc, are common themes in academic and business seminars. One Asian country, Singapore showed explicitly that it wanted to emulate Japan in its work efficiency. Singapore, as one Thai economist put it, wanted to fuji-xerox-copy Japan.

It is obvious that Asean's interest in Japan has been great. As a result, institutions which emphasize Japanese studies in the form of "Japanese Studies Center", "Japanese Studies Program," and the like have mushroomed. Scholars on Japan have multiplied over the years. However, scholars on Japan in ASEAN are somewhat isolated. Contact among scholars in these countries, if any, is minimal. This situation would call for a closer contact among scholars in the field.

There are three reasons for arranging to have scholars on Japan in ASEAN to come together in a seminar on Japanese studies.

First, There is a great need for scholars on Japan of the region (ASEAN) to come to personal contact with one another. This will lead to academic discourse on the subject. One way to achieve this objective is to hold a seminar in which common on the subject can be discussed.

Second, in order to have a keener analysis of Japan, a commonly agreed upon analytical framework is a necessity. Scholars in the field should hold discussion on the subject focussing on the approaches of the studies of Japan, its political, social and economic structures, cultural and value aspects, etc. By analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches, a better analytical framework would be obtained thus enhancing the understanding of Japan. A seminar such as the one proposed here will serve the above purpose.

Third, some topics on Japan such as Japan's relations with ASEAN or Japan's economic and political roles in Asia, are regional joint project in nature. As a result, collaboration among scholars of the region is imperative. At this stage, ASEAN may be the most

appropriate unit as a start for this kind of collaboration. A seminar which will bring the ASEAN scholars on Japan to come together will be the first step toward such end.

The salient points derived from the two-day seminar :

First, there is an interest in Japan in the ASEAN countries and Australia for a variety of reasons, such as culture, religion, art, etc. But in the main, it could be argued that the most prominent reason for taking interest in Japan lies in its growing economic power and its relations with these countries. Japan's success in economic development especially industrialization and high-level technology has become an appealing subject for academic discussion. Japanese style management, marked by the presence of personal and particularistic relationship and consideration amidst industrialization has become an inspiration for many Asian countries who would like to emulate Japan. The Q.C. Circle has now become a most-quoted subject. In fact, Japan has become a model for Malaysia characterized by the "Look East" policy while Singapore wanted to "Fuji-xerox" copy Japan in its industrial development and business management.

Second, related to Japan's economic success has been the availability of fund for research and fellowship for further studies in Japan. The availability of fund has made possible research and studies on Japan through grants from the Japanese government and private organizations. There is thus a close relationship between funding and Japanese studies. The Japan Foundation, the Toyota Foundation, among others, have made it possible for scholars to undertake research, translation work, etc.

Third, Among the ASEAN countries and Australia, there has not yet been a coherent objective and comprehensive scope in Japanese studies. Interest in Japan is confined to particular area in accordance with the esoteric nature of the particular countries. Singapore, for instance, as an economically growing country is more interested in Japan's industrial capacity, technology, management style while Malaysia may not be dissimilar to Singapore. Thailand has a variety of interests ranging from economic aspect to language, art, etc., but similar to the case of other ASEAN countries, the main focus is on economic development of Japan.

Fourth, it is felt that there is a difference between Japanese studies and Japanology. This difference has not been made clear. It is also felt that the countries in the region did not seem to be conscious of the difference of the two terms either. They have thus been used interchangeably. This issue would probably be taken up for discussion at the next seminar to be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Fifth, it is agreed that a clear objective of Japanese studies has to be spelled out. It must be seriously discussed whether Japanese studies should be based on the principle of "knowledge for knowledge's sake" or should it follow other incentives, i.e., availability of fund which has been diplomatically put as "entrepreneurial motive" by one participant.

While realistically the availability of funding has not been ruled out as an incentive, it is generally agreed that the studies of Japan should aim at understanding Japan in order to be able to use it as a background against which the scholars of individual country can project his country in order to have a better understanding of it. This will enable the researcher to see clearly the underlying factors responsible for the differences in the degree of development. The purpose is to enrich the individual country by learning from Japan's experiences in such areas as economic development, the integration of the traditional values with new and modern technology, etc. It is cautioned that to learn from Japan does not mean to become Japanized, however.

Sixth, it is pointed out by Dr. Toru Yano; the Japanese participant that Japanese studies in Japan has a long history of evolution. Pointing from the chart of development starting from Tokugawa-Meiji-before World War II--and after World War II, Dr. Yano has helped clarify the cloudy and murky areas and has helped streamline conceptually Japanese studies in the countries concerned in order for it to move toward the right direction. Dr. Yano's contribution has buttressed the argument that participation of a native scholar is a useful undertaking and should be continued as a practice for such a seminar.

Seventh, the Australian participant, Dr.J.V. Neustupny, came up with a very stimulating discussion of paradigms in the study of Japan. The paradigms he discussed include : The Japanology Paradigm, the Japanese Studies Paradigm and the Contemporary Paradigm. The Japanology Paradigm included such field of studies as philosophy, older history, religion or ethnography while the Japanese Studies Paradigm include modern history of various types : political, social, economic, cultural, etc. Differences in the language ability, background of scholars, etc., also differed. Then came the third or the Contemporary Paradigm with new features of thought including variation, conflict, process, interdependence, determinants, an explication of which would be out of the scope of this presentation. Another salient feature of the Contemporary Paradigm is the application of knowledge, the economic and industrial deveelopment aspects being the main focus.

Eight, one important impression arising from the seminar is that the papers presented and the subject-matter discussed with a few exceptions are rudimentary and are mostly descriptive. This has probably stemmed from the following reasons. Some paper writers are junior scholars and the time and budget allocated for research are limited. As a result, a solid paper is hard to come by. Second, what has been presented may reflect the state of knowledge in Japanese studies. "This much we have done; this much we have to say", commented one participant. What has come out from this state of affairs is that there are more reasons than ever to have larger funding in order to pursue an intensive study on Japan in various aspcects in order to upgrade the state of knowledge of the subject.

Ninth, it is agreed unanimously that a forum or an association of Japanese studies in Asean and Australia should be formed. This is to serve two major purposes. First, it will serve as an institution in which scholars of various countries on Japanese studies could get together and seek ways and means to improve Japanese studies in their respective institution. Second, it will help bring scholars of the region to meet and know one another which will enable them to exchange ideas and pursue useful intellectual discourse and academic co-operation such as joint research on Japan.

Conclusion :

The seminar has achieved the followings :

First, it has given a picture of the state of knowledge on Japanese studies and the areas which need to be improved and the program to be streamlined. The suggestion given by Japanese participants have been a great contribution.

Second, it has helped create an intellectual community of the region. Scholars on Japanese studies have come to meet one another and henceforth, it is expected, they will keep contact. This is a big boost for the development of a sense of community among scholars on Japan in the region.

Third, the establishment of the Forum for Japanese Studies in ASEAN and Australia is a clear case of institutional development. It has a promising future and it is expected to contribute toward a better prospect for the study on Japan.

Work to be pursued :

The papers presented and the comments expressed will be published. Weaknesses in the areas of the subject-matter and institutional development will be noted and attempts will be made to rectify them. It is agreed at the seminar that the next meeting of the Forum for Japanese Studies in Asean and Australia is to be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The date is yet to be fixed.