

**Some Reflections on the Pattaya Seminar
on
Japanese Studies in the ASEAN Nations**

by
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The International Seminar on Japanese Studies in ASEAN was held 14-15 January 1984 at Pattaya, near Bangkok in Thailand. It was organized by the Japanese Studies Centre at Thammasat University with a grant from the Japan Foundation as part of the University's celebrations for its fiftieth anniversary. The seminar was attended by about sixty persons, including persons from each of the five ASEAN countries and Professor Yano Toru from the Institute for the Study Southeast Asia at Kyoto University and Professor Jiri Neustupny (Monash University) and myself from Australia. The bulk of the Participants (consisting of Japanese and Thais) came from Bangkok region.

As the attached table shows, there were five papers on Japanese studies in Thailand (examining the state of the Thai scholarship concerning Japanese politics, economics, literature, language and general affairs) and one report each from the other countries in ASEAN and from Australia. Many of the papers simply surveyed the situation; although they were criticized by some for being minutely descriptive, for simply listing programmes and publications, and for lacking a more analytical thrust, on behalf of the authors a number of participants commented on the difficulties of beginning from scratch and reminded the critics that the more descriptive papers had in fact performed a valuable service by taking the first step forward in documenting the state of Japanese studies in Southeast Asia.

The perspective of Japanese studies as a social product was advocated by two stimulating overviews which were not accompanied by papers. One was by Professor Yano Toru (from the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University) who spoke about Japanese studies in Japan as images closely related to the social changes accompanying Japan's modernization and its search for a national identity. His discussion was relevant to the discussion of Orientalism currently being conducted in Australia and elsewhere in the English speaking world. The concern with Orientalism is largely concerned with the need to develop a more reflexive tradition in Japanese studies. In lamenting our ethnocentrism there is, perhaps, another form of ethnocentrism in which we see our images of the Orient (and

of Japan) as something we ourselves control. However, in considering our images of Asia as a reflection of our concern with our own self-identity, we need to be more sensitive to the fact that the images the Japanese have of themselves are largely a product of their concern with their national identity. Because the Japanese intellectual community is so active and developed, it could be argued that it is important to consider how our images are also shaped by our interaction with Japan. If that proposition is true, a reflexive position will need to consider not only the direct impact of Western "Orientalism" or "Japanism" on our intellectual traditions but also the indirect impact of Japanese "Occidentalism" which comes through the images we have imported or refined as a result of contact and interaction with the Japanese intellectual community.

In discussing the aims in Japanese studies, Professor Yano suggested three general categories. One was for research aimed at correcting the power balance with Japan, a defensive concern with blocking Japanese economic inroads and with utilizing "lessons from Japan" to promote economic development in one's own country. The second was for research arising out of an interest in Japan simply because the phenomena in Japan were in themselves interesting. The third category was proposed for research developed in cooperation with Japanese for the mutual benefit of Japanese and people abroad. It was with a view to promoting international and comparative perspectives that Professor Yano encouraged the participants to consider the prospects of developing Japanese studies in ASEAN which might fit into the third category.

Professor Neustupny (from Monash University in Australia) spoke about the idea of changing paradigms in Japanese studies, elaborating on his article in a special issue of *Social Analysis* on Japanese society (December 1980). In dealing with the question of disciplines in the Japanese studies paradigm, he discussed the way narrow disciplinarity segments Japan into "discrete" compartments so that Japan as the core concept disappears or loses its meaning as designating a holistic entity. If the existence of some entity called "Japan" is the core element in Japanese studies, then there is a need, he argued to consider more carefully the meaning of "Japan" as an analytical concept. While touching upon the three paradigms already present in Japanese studies (as discussed in his article in *Social Analysis*), Professor Neustupny also explored some likely components of the next paradigm: an increased emphasis on the Japanese language, the more conscious development of Japanese studies as a discipline in its own right (with Japanese studies departments and more explicitly defined structures for people becoming Japan experts), more interest in the "contact situations" between Japan and one's own society, and a greater concern with applied knowledge. A number of exciting prospects were mentioned, and one looks forward to Professor Neustupny spelling these out in more detail.

The papers on Japanese studies in the ASEAN nations also underlined the continuing importance of translation. In Thailand, for example, not only has an active programme of translation made it possible for the informed citizen to read substantial and up-to-date writings by Japanese on Japan, it has also served as a good means for training researchers in the language and for bringing them beyond the decoding stage. At the same time, it should be noted that a good deal of translation is of Western scholarship or from English translations of Japanese originals. One wonders about the extent to which the benefit of having two language sources for information is offset by a dependence on a literature written (or chosen) with another nation's concerns in mind.

Although the seminar's immediate aim was to obtain an assessment of the state of Japanese studies in the region and in Australia, some large issues about the nature of Japanese studies as an academic and social enterprise were raised. In the discussion on how Japanese studies were defined, attention shifted (i) from looking at listings of books and articles on Japan written in the past and (ii) from presenting records of people and institutions currently involved in studies of things Japanese (iii) to assessing the goals of Japanese studies. On the abstract level were (a) questions about paradigms and about the evolution of Japanese studies as seen from a global perspective and (b) comments on the difficulties of learning from the Japanese experience within a developmental framework while also seeking to maintain one's own national identity and protecting oneself from Japanese academic and/or cultural imperialism (the experience with American inspired modernization theories still being fresh in the minds of many participants). There was also focused debate about who *actually* sets and who *should ideally* set the agenda for Japanese studies in Southeast Asia. Reference to the "Look East Policy" in Malaysia and Lee Kuan Yew's enthusiasm for Japan stimulated debate about the wisdom of developing a narrowly focused perspective where, for example, management strategies of Japan's elite would be studied in order to supply information to the managerial elites of Southeast Asia. Is there a need or room, it was asked, for some in Japanese studies to devote their energies to studying Japan's militant trade unions, the anti-pollution movement or problems in Japan's welfare programmes in order to better inform militant unionists, environmentalists and the poor in Asia.

In this connection one can see in Thailand a budding concern among some scholars for "subaltern history", the feeling that Japan's successes and the perspective of Japan from above may need to be balanced by paying more attention to Japan's failures and to the views of those who, often on the bottom of society, are most affected by the failures such as pollution, by the compulsory study of English in secondary schools, and by various structures in the labour market. Some Thai scholars are engaged in exchange programmes involving under-privileged children and non-elites. In Malaysia the Institute for Social Analysis

recently published *The Sun Also Sets : Lessons in Looking East*, a collection of articles questioning the "Japan-as-number-one mentality". In evaluating Japanese studies and the pronounced role of some of the governments in artificially promoting Japanese studies in Southeast Asia, this other consciousness needs to be considered.

Attention was also given to the practical or logistical difficulties of developing academic programmes in Japanese studies. One issue concerned the extent to which Japanese studies should be broadly based (see Figure 1). Our impression is that many of the countries in Southeast Asia have a fairly large pool of well trained Japan specialists, individuals who have studied in Japan for 7-10 years and who had a solid, nearly native fluency in the language, as evidenced in part by the active programmes in translation. However, none of those countries seemed to have a broadly based programme of Japanese studies involving the teaching of Japanese at the secondary level (as is done in Australia, China and South Korea). The more "elitist" structuring of Japanese studies in some of the countries of Southeast Asia may be closer to the situation in Europe and in the Soviet Union perhaps, with the United States being an intermediate case. There is a need to reexamine the implications of differently structured programmes for democracy in Japanese studies and for the efficient use of scarce resources in an expensive undertaking where the attrition rates are high. In this trade-off, there would seem to be a fundamental and dynamic relationship between the secondary and tertiary sectors in the system of education which deserves the most careful and thoughtful scrutiny.

The question of funding was touched upon from a variety of perspectives. Although there was a reluctance to confront the issue head-on, there seemed to be both (i) an awareness of the importance of additional outside funding given present political realities and (ii) a wariness of letting such funding determine the direction of Japanese studies. It was obvious that more research on the various aspects of funding would be required before an informed discussion of this highly sensitive and potentially explosive issue could occur.

Time was also devoted to the structuring of the curriculum in teaching Japanese studies. What disciplinary skills are most relevant to learning about Japan? Should disciplinary training precede or follow immersion in the area study? Should the area studies core consists of a general introduction (i) to the land, people and culture, (ii) to current topics and fundamental issues in the country's bilateral relationship with Japan, and/or (iii) to specific systematic bodies of knowledge on Japan such as its history, its philosophical and religious traditions and its major social, economic and political institutions? Should the study of language come before, after or with the core studies? What need was there for specialized language courses? To what extent is language training in an artificial setting at home counter-

productive when such study could be easily organized in Japan where the language is actually spoke? The questions are central to any programme of teaching area studies. That there were few answers perhaps reflects the fact that Japanese studies are still in their very formative stages even in countries where Japanese studies seem to be very advanced. It may also reflect the fact that area studies in general have developed without their aims and methodologies being fully discussed.

Present plans call for the seminar papers to be published by Thammasat's Japanese Studies Center in Thai and in English. Those wishing further information on the publication should write to Professor Banyat Surakanvit, Acting Director of the Center.

Mr M. Rajendran from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Malaysia offered his University as a venue for another seminar in Kuala Lumpur in April or May 1985. Given that the 1984 Seminar focused on assessing the current state of Japanese studies in the ASEAN countries, tentative thinking is that the next gathering would focus more on the directions Japanese studies in the ASEAN nations ought to be following. By then the "Look East policy" may be more concretely defined and one can speculate that its potential ramifications will receive more attention at that time.

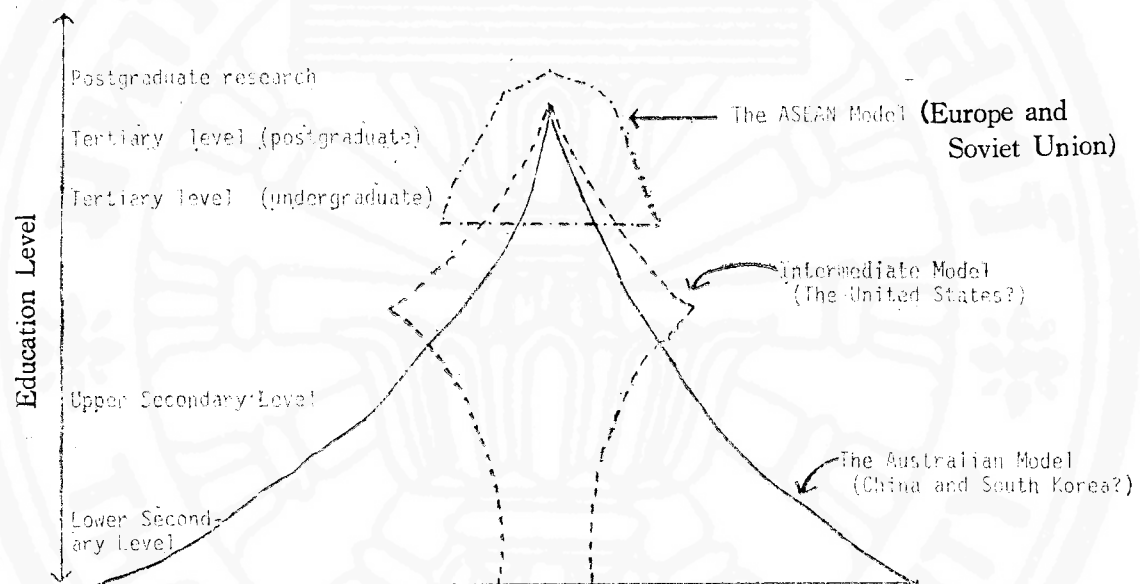
Although there is not yet a Japanese studies organization in the ASEAN area (either for the region or for a specific country), it is not too early for persons interested in Japan to begin thinking about Japanese studies in Asia and about the tremendous benefits to be derived from the cross-fertilization of ideas and from the broader comparative perspective which might be derived from active and continued exchange with the region's Japanese studies community. One of the lessons from the recent discussions of "Orientalism" seems, at least to us, to be patently clear: our images of Japan are very much (though not wholly) a product of our cultural heritage. The opportunity to develop a more cosmopolitan or comparative perspective by referring to Japanese studies in the various countries of Southeast Asia and Japan might serve as one means of projecting our research beyond the narrow confines in each of our own nation's limited heritage in Japanese studies.

TABLE 1
List of Presentations to the Pattaya Seminar

Paper Presentator	Paper Title
Artorn Fungtammasan	A Short Survey of Japanese Literature in Thailand
Rasdara Khantigul	Japanese Studies in Economics in Thailand
Pakatip Skulkru	Japanese Language Education in Thailand
Prasert Chittiwatanapong	Japanese Studies in Thailand Political Science
Banyat Surakanvit	Japanese Studies in Thailand : An Overview
Josefa M. Sanieel	Japan Studies in the Philippines : Development and Prospects
M. Rajendran	The Development of Japanese Studies in Malaysia : A Survey of Weaknesses and Strengths
Ade Surachmat Samsu	Japanese Studies in Indonesia
Lim Hua Sing	Japanese Studies in Singapore Strengths and Weaknesses
Ross E. Mouer	Japanese Studies As An Australian Choice
Yano Toru	Japanese Studies in Japan*
Jii Neustupny	Paradigms in Japanese Studies*

*Presentation without a paper

Figure 1
Elitist and Populist Traditions in Japanese Studies



Number of citizens involved in
 "Japanese Studies" and the study of the Japanese language



