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Japan's Southeast Asian Policy in the Post-Vietnam War

The Jakarta Conference, Economic Aid to Indochina Countries,
and Diplomatic Normalization with North Vietnam

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Abstract

This paper seeks to illustrate Japan's new Southeast Asian policy in the post-Vietnam War period with particular focus on its efforts in the May 1970 Jakarta Conference on the Cambodian problem, her aid policy toward Indochina countries after 1970, and diplomatic normalization with North Vietnam in September 1973. What are the motives behind these decisions made by Japan to play a political role in the Southeast Asian region in the early 1970s? What made this Japanese initiative possible? This paper attempts to answer these questions from the following three different perspectives: (1) Japan's aspiration to play an active role in policymaking in the post-Vietnam War era; (2) the changing U.S. policy toward Asia; and (3) increase in the self-confidence among the Asian nations with regard to their own development efforts, coupled with a growing sense of regionalism. The paper concludes that in the post-Vietnam War era, Japan's Southeast Asian policy was entering a new phase in the late 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, wherein it attempted to play an active role in the political field.

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to illustrate Japan's new Southeast Asian policy in the post-Vietnam War period with particular focus on its efforts in the May 1970 Jakarta Conference on the Cambodian problem, her aid policy toward Indochinese countries after 1970, and diplomatic normalization with North Vietnam in September 1973.

A highly experienced diplomat in Asia, Kenneth T. Young, wrote, "The years 1969–1970 were a major watershed in contemporary Asian history. The old era of Western supremacy was ended. The American presence began slowly to recede. A new era of Asian primacy in Asia had begun—an era in which Japan is emerging as the preeminent power in the region."¹

Indeed, in 1970, Japan significantly increased her political role in the region: the Japanese government shifted from providing humanitarian aid to providing developmental aid to South Vietnam and expressed its willingness to assist in the peacekeeping efforts in Indochina. Another conspicuous attempt was Japan's initiative in the Jakarta Conference on Cambodia.

What are the motives behind these decisions made by Japan to play a political role in the Southeast Asian region in the early 1970s? What made this Japanese initiative possible? By analyzing the details of Japan's decision-making process of holding the conference on Cambodia, her aid policy toward Indochina, and diplomatic normalization with Hanoi, this paper attempts to answer these questions from the following three different but interrelated perspectives: (1) Japan's aspiration to play an active role in policymaking in the post-Vietnam War era; (2) the changing U.S. policy toward Asia and U.S.-Japan relations; and (3) increase in the self-confidence among the Asian nations with regard to their own development efforts, coupled with a growing sense of regionalism.

In the study of Japan's postwar diplomatic history, Southeast Asian region did

¹ Kenneth T. Young, "The Involvement in Southeast Asia", in James William Morley ed., *Prospect for Japan: Security in the 1970's* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), p.169.

not attract so much attention as the United States or China. Among a few existing literature, Chaiwat and Sudo respectively explored new dimensions in the area by closely analyzing the process of Japan's Southeast Asian policy in the post-Vietnam era, and argued that the period of mid-1970s was a departure from traditional economic diplomacy.² Soeya considered the significance of the American factor for Japanese policy toward Southeast Asia and argued that structural changes in the regional order as well as in the United States at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s encouraged Japan to take on larger regional roles.³

The author's view is similar to that of Soeya's, while stressing the consistency of Japanese policy orientation throughout the 1960s and 1970s. To put it another words, in Japan's postwar Southeast Asian policy, there has been always a desire to commit itself to the entire region beyond the difference of domestic political system and ideology of each country.

The primary goal of Japan's Southeast Asian policy has been to reduce tensions and threat and maintain stability in Asia by the means of providing humanitarian assistance or by giving developmental aid which would improve the livelihood of the people. There is no questions that Tokyo contributed to Washington's strategy to contain China by these means. Japanese Government, at the same time, attempted to keep certain distance from the U.S. Cold War thinking.

This characteristic in Japan's policy toward Southeast Asia became more conspicuous in the détente period. In speaking of the governments whom they help, the Japanese leaders preferred to describe them as being "neutral" and to portray Tokyo's efforts as being on behalf of their "independence and neutrality." While these phrases were meant for domestic consumption, they reflected the government's sincere desire to

²Khamchoo Chaiwat, "Japan's Southeast Asian Policy in the Post-Vietnam Era: 1975-1985," (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Washington, 1986); Sudo Sudo, *The Fukuda Doctrine and ASEAN: New Dimensions in Japanese Foreign Policy* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1992).

³ Yoshihide Soeya, "Japan's Policy towards Southeast Asia: Anatomy of 'Autonomous Diplomacy' and the American Factor," in Chandran Jeshurun ed., *China, India, Japan and the Security of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), pp.93-94.

encourage détente in Southeast Asia.⁴

The paper concludes that Japan's Southeast Asian policy was entering a new phase in the late 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, wherein it attempted to play an active role in the political as well as economic field, with a view to contributing to restore order in post-Vietnam War era.

1. Japan's response to Cambodian problem

The Japanese government had maintained a cordial relationship with Cambodia even though its relationship with the Free World, including the U.S., worsened in the 1960s. A paper prepared by the Southeast Asian Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in 1968 stated that they believed it was in the interest of the Free World for Japan to hold a friendly relation with Cambodia as one of few pipelines between Phnom Penh and the Western countries. The same paper suggested Japan should consider the possibility of using Cambodia to promote peace in Vietnam⁵.

By early 1969, the importance of Cambodia as a sanctuary and as a transit point for supplies for the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the North Vietnamese increased significantly. The Nixon administration made a decision to resume diplomatic relations with Cambodia in July 1969 and dispatched a Charge d'affaires to Phnom Penh in September in the same year. On March 18, 1970, General Lon Nol and Sisowath Sirik Matak ousted Sihanouk while the Prince was in Paris. From the outset, the United States sought to bolster the new regime and sought for international support for the new Cambodian government.

⁴ Airgram from Embassy Tokyo to Department of State, Subject: Japan's Evolving Role in Southeast Asia, May 18, 1971, Box 2401, National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter, NA).

⁵ Nantou ajia ka "Kanbodia mondai (nichiei teiki kyougi shiryo)" [First Southeast Asia Division, "Cambodian problems (Paper for regular consultation between Japan and the UK)"] January 6, 1968, *Nihon eikokukan gaiko kankei nichiei teikikyouti kankei dairokukaikankei kaidan kankei*, [Files related to Japan-UK diplomatic relations, Regular consultation between Japan and the UK, the 6th Meeting], Copies of documents obtained through Freedom of Information Act, collection of Diplomatic Record Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo, (hereafter, FOIA, Diplomatic Record Office).

Two days after the “coup,” the Japanese government expressed its view that the new government of Cambodia was considered to be established through a legitimate procedure based on its constitution; thus, it was not required to renew her recognition of Cambodia.⁶

The turmoil in Cambodia and infiltration by NLF and North Vietnamese into its territory were an issue of serious concern for the Southeast Asian leaders. At the 26th ECAFE (Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East) Meeting held in Bangkok on April 14 1970, the topic of the restoration of peace in Indochina, including Cambodia, was brought up. At this meeting, foreign Ministers Aichi Kiichi of Japan, Adam Malik of Indonesia, and Thanat Khoman of Thailand agreed to make efforts toward restoring peace in the region.

At that moment, there were two possible means to realize this effort by Asian nations.⁷ One was the Indonesian proposal for convening a meeting inviting a large number of Asian countries to rally for peace in Cambodia; the other was the Japanese proposal for having an ambassadorial consultation among five nations including Indonesia, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan with an issuance of the appeal for peaceful settlement of conflicts in whole Indochina region. Both the Japanese and Indonesian governments did not have the intention of competing for this initiative. From the beginning, Tokyo asked Jakarta to take the initiative and host the consultation meeting in Jakarta.

Later, the Japanese government decided to set aside its initial plans for smaller five-nation consultations, and began to devote herself to supporting Malik’s idea and expressing Japan’s views through that conference. This decision was made because Malik’s plan had developed faster than was expected, and Tokyo sought to avoid projecting an image that Japan and Indonesia were competing with each other for an

⁶ *Asahi Shimbun*, March 21, 1970.

⁷ In addition, France and New Zealand made a proposal for international conference respectively, neither of which elicited limited support.

initiative to resolve the Indochina problem.⁸

On May 9, the First Southeast Asian Division of the MOFA completed a paper titled “Our Basic Attitude for the Conference.” The paper stated the following: (1) the conference should reflect the views of the Asian countries as a whole, including those of the nonparticipants; (2) it should emphasize the need for realistic and steady efforts for peaceful settlement; (3) participants should make efforts to avoid projecting themselves as confronting the communists and forming a group based on a particular political position. Regarding the concrete problems, the paper pointed out that the participants should ensure that the conference would not result in the endorsement of any collective military action, including the right to collective self-defense. It also suggested that they should not condemn or support the action of any specific country or administration, including the Lon Nol administration, North Vietnam, NLF, or the U.S.⁹

The Jakarta Conference was held on May 16 and 17, 1970. The participants included foreign ministers or their deputies, from Australia, Indonesia, South Korea, Laos, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, South Vietnam, and Japan. In his speech, Foreign Minister Aichi stated, “it is the first time that the countries of Asia have gathered together in this way in the face of the danger to peace in Asia. The common aspiration of the Asian peoples, namely, ‘Asian problems to be solved by Asians’ has come to fruition in this memorable meeting.” He stressed that the meeting was “one that should not seek to form a grouping based on a particular political position much less a forum for criticism or confrontations.”¹⁰

The conference ended on May 17 with the communiqué that made the

⁸ Saitou taishi hatsu gaimu daijin ate koden “Indoshina mondai ni kansuru apiru” [Telegram from Ambassador Saito to Foreign Minister, Joint Appeal for Indochina problems (Offering my opinion)] April 25, 1970, FOIA, Diplomatic Record Office.

⁹ Nanto ajia daiichi ka “Kaigi ni nozomu waga kuni no kihonteki taido” [First Southeast Division, “Our country’s basic attitude toward the Conference”] May 9, 1970, a document obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Freedom of Information Act (hereafter, FOIA, MOFA); Nanto ajia daiichi ka “Ajia kaigi” [First Southeast Asia Division, “Asian Meeting”, February 3, 1970], FOIA, Diplomatic Record Office, Tokyo..

¹⁰ Statement by Foreign Minister Kiichi Aichi at the Jakarta Conference, FOIA, MOFA.

following appeals: (1) all foreign forces be withdrawn from the territory of Cambodia; (2) all parties respect the sovereignty, independence, neutrality, and territorial integrity of Cambodia and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of that country; (3) the International Control Commission (ICC) be reactivated; (4) the participants of the 1954 Geneva Conference and all other interested parties come together to consult each other in order to arrive at a consensus about the early convening of an international conference.

This was almost in line with Japan's moderate position vis-à-vis the Cambodian problem despite some differences in the attitudes of the participants. Initially, countries such as Thailand, South Vietnam, and South Korea hold hard line positions, and they condemned the communists in their speeches. The drafts of communiqué submitted by Australia, New Zealand, and Thailand included the establishment of a standing committee. This was unacceptable for Japan, who feared that this would be perceived as an act of confronting the communists and forming a political bloc.¹¹ Due to the joint efforts by Japan, Indonesia, and Malaysia, the participants arrived at the consensus that the conference should moderately call for peaceful settlement of the Cambodian problem and not directly condemn the communist.

The consequence of the Conference was successful from the Japanese point of view. Aichi said that "I am 100% satisfied with the result of the Conference. I am pleased that the principles which Japan has initially proposed were reflected to the Communiqué" at the press conference after the ending ceremony.¹² At the Japanese chiefs of mission conference on Indochina held on May 27 in Hong Kong, Aichi briefed Japanese Ambassadors in Southeast Asian nations on the Conference and added that the

¹¹ Nanto ajia daiichi ka "Ajia kaigi ni okeru kankeikoku tononokokukan kyougi shiryō" [Papers for bilateral consultation with countries concerned for the Asian conference], May 13, 1970, FOIA, MOFA.

¹² *Asahi Simbun*, May 18, 1970.

Japanese Government was pleased with her role at the Conference and viewed it as “Japan’s post-war debut on world political stage.”¹³

The summary report of the Conference evaluated the result as successful because Japan’s basic attitude vis-à-vis the Conference was fully carried out. It also stressed that taking opportunity of this successful experience in the Conference; Japan should depart from her traditional defensive stance and to take more active initiative in Southeast Asian policy.¹⁴

(2) Japanese aid to Indochina

In 1969 and 1970, the Japanese Government clarified its intention to increase its economic aid substantially. At the OECD Cabinet Meeting in May 1970, Minister of Trade and Industry announced Tokyo prepared to devote 1% of its GNP—amounted in excess of \$3 billion—to foreign assistance by 1975. One Japanese official has referred to this move as “The beginning of the beginning.”¹⁵ This decision has enhanced Japan’s economic contribution to Indochina countries.

1. Vietnams

Both Johnson and Nixon Administrations repeatedly urged Japan should give bilateral economic aid to the government of South Vietnam. To this, Tokyo had emphasized that they preferred aid to Asia in general and within a regional cooperative framework comprising all the countries in Southeast Asia, which would eventually include North Vietnam after a peaceful settlement was realized. A former chief of the First Southeast Division of the MOFA, Miyake Wasuke recalled that Japan limited its

¹³ Telegram from Consulate Hong Kong to Secretary of State, #2991, June 1, 1970, RG 59, SNF, 1970-1973, POL 7, Box 2401, NA.

¹⁴ Nanto ajia daiichi ka “Ajia kaigi” [First Southeast Asia Division, “Asian Meeting”, February 3, 1970] FOIA, Diplomatic Record Office.

¹⁵ Briefing Book for the Secretary’s visit to Japan, July, 1970, Ishii Osamu, Gabe Masaaki, Miyasato Seigen eds., *America gasshukoku tainichi seisaku bunsho shusei dai15ki nichibei gaiko mondai 1970 nen dai110 kan* (Tokyo: Kashiwa-shobo, 2004) [Documents on United States Policy toward Japan, XI Documents Related to Diplomatic and Military Matters 1970 Vol.10], p.326.

economic aid to humanitarian aid in spite of strong pressure from the US Government so as to avoid projecting any image that Japan was cooperating with U.S. war efforts in Vietnam. Thus, Japanese aid to South Vietnam after the start of American bombing to North Vietnam in 1965 was only given in the form of humanitarian and emergency grant aid in a small amount.

After the President Johnson's announcement of his decision to reduce air attacks against North Vietnam, to attempt direct negotiations with the Communist side, and not to seek reelection in March 1968, the MOFA prepared the following policy options in the event of a realization of peaceful settlement: (1) the Japanese government would actively support post-war reconstruction of both South and North Vietnam without discrimination; (2) the Japanese government would participate in an international conference on the Vietnam War settlement; and (3) the Japanese government would send civilians to international truce supervision organization if established. In March 1970, Japanese Ambassador to South Vietnam remarked that aid to Vietnam had to be considered in the context of economic development of whole Indochina region.¹⁶

With the Nixon Doctrine and progress in the Paris peace talks, Tokyo made a decision to resume yen loans to Saigon in the late 1970 for the first time since 1960. Since then, the Japanese Government offered yen loan to South Vietnam in September 1971, in February and November 1972. Between 1968 and 1970, Japan's assistance to South Vietnam averaged about \$2 million per year, mainly for humanitarian purposes. In 1971, assistance increased to \$42 million: \$16.8 million in grants and \$25.2 million in loans. In addition to the increase in size, the scope of the program now includes development projects such as generating facilities, telephone system, etc.¹⁷

The decision to provide aid with South Vietnam was not only a response to Nixon's request, but also made in the context of Japan's prospect for future contribution

¹⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, Ambassador Kitahara, Japanese Ambassador to South Vietnam and Mr. Ray Cline, Director INR, March 24, 1970, Box 2401, NA.

¹⁷ Background Paper, August, 1972, NSC Files, VIP visits, Box 926, NA.

to reconstruction and rehabilitation of whole Indochina region at the time of peaceful settlement.

2. Cambodia

In addition to its efforts in the Jakarta Conference which was examined earlier in this paper, Tokyo made a decision to provide some aid to Cambodia. As early as April 2, Sirik Matak contacted the Japanese Ambassador to Cambodia and requested the Japanese government's aid. The initial reaction of the Government of Japan was favorable but cautious due to the strong Japanese feeling against intervening in the internal affairs of Cambodia. Before arriving at a decision, the Japanese government requested the U.S. Government to share its views on this issue.¹⁸ In response to the Tokyo's inquiry, Washington strongly encouraged Tokyo to respond favorably to the Cambodian approach. A day after the Japanese foreign official approached U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, the Department of State (DOS) instructed the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo to convey a message to the Japanese government that the continuance and expansion of Japanese aid to Cambodia was desirable. The DOS hoped that Japan would also constructively influence other selected Asian countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Ceylon with respect to extending their political support and aid.¹⁹

At the June 2 meeting, the cabinet approved in principle a contribution of \$2 million from a contingency fund to the Japan Red Cross (JRC) for purchasing commodities to be supplied to the Cambodian Red Cross as "humanitarian assistance."²⁰ The decision of second round aid to Phnom Penh was approved by the Cabinet in the form of the grant of humanitarian assistance on November 20. This time, the aid totaling \$2 million consisted of two parts: (1) \$1.7 million would be provided through JRC

¹⁸ Telegram from AmEmbassy Tokyo to Secretary of State, #2395, Subject: Cambodians ask GOJ for aid, April 7, 1970, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973, Box 515, folder AID (JAPAN) CAMB, NA.

¹⁹ Telegram from DOS, #51990, April 9, 1970, Subject: Cambodian Approach for Japanese aid, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973, Box 515, folder AID (JAPAN) CAMB, NA.

²⁰ Telegram from AmEmbassy Tokyo to Secretary of State, #4012, June 3, 1970, Subject: Japan aid to Cambodia, G 59, SNF 1970-1973, Box 515, folder AID (JAPAN) CAMB, NA.

using funds from the contingency fund, which is primarily intended for domestic disaster relief; (2) \$0.28 million would be provided on a government-to-government basis with funds from previous aid allocations to Cambodia.²¹

(3) Japan's Normalization with North Vietnam

At the San Francisco Peace Conference of September 1951, the Japanese government normalized relations with the Bao Dai government of Saigon, while neglecting the existence of the Ho Chi Minh government of Hanoi. Consequently, the settlement for wartime reparations was made only with the South Vietnamese government. Just after the Johnson's announcement in March 1968, the Foreign Ministry began to seek a way to contact North Vietnam for future diplomatic normalization²². In April this year, the Japanese Government permitted the entry of citizens of DRV for the first time since 1965. In April 1970, the MOFA's First Southeast Asian Division completed a paper entitled "Our Country's Basic Policy toward North Vietnam" which stated "it is natural for us to expand our exchange and relations with North Vietnam, paying careful attention to the positions of the U.S. and South Vietnam. By doing so, we can prepare the ground for effective policies at the time of peace in Vietnam, at which we will need to discuss with North Vietnam."²³ The same paper suggested the Japanese Government should make it clear its intention to give economic aid to North Vietnam as soon as peace was achieved in Indochina. It clarified Japan's view that economically stable North Vietnam which can co-exist and cooperate with other Southeast Asian countries is extremely desirable to peace and stability of Asia. The Japanese Government gave humanitarian aid through Japan Red Cross to North

²¹ Telegram from AmEmbassy Tokyo to Secretary of State, November 5, 1970, #8958, Subject: Japanese aid to Cambodia, RG 59 Subject Numeric files 1970-73 Box 515, NA.

²² From the mid-1960s, the Japanese Government had attempted to contact with North Vietnamese government officials in several cities such as Moscow, Vientiane and Paris to seek her role as peace broker between Washington and Hanoi.

²³ Nanto ajia daiichika "Kita betonamu ni taisuru wagakuni no kihonteki sisaku (shiron)" [First Southeast Asian Division, "Our Country's Basic Policy toward North Vietnam"] (undated), FOIA, MOFA.

Vietnam in 1971 and 1972 respectively.

Thus, the medium level foreign officials had taken the initiative in opening communication channels between Japan and North Vietnam by early 1971. At that time, however, there was no consensus in Foreign Ministry as to whether Tokyo should initiate an official contact with Hanoi. Majority of officials insisted the time was not ripe yet.

The turn of the tide came when President Nixon announced his trip to China in July 1971.²⁴ The President's trip seriously undermined the basic principles on which Japan's Asia policy had been grounded since the San Francisco Peace Conference in 1952. Consequently, the "Nixon Shock" accelerated Japanese desire for conducting "autonomous diplomacy" generally, and reconsidering its Southeast Asia policy. The "Nixon Shock" changed the attitude of high-level foreign officials such as Chief of Asian Affairs Bureau and Vice Minister toward Japan's initiation of official contacts with North Vietnam.

In November 1971, the Foreign Ministry made a proposal for establishing permanent trade offices in Tokyo and Hanoi, and investigated the North Vietnamese response through Consulate General of Hong Kong.²⁵ At the same time, Tokyo looked into the possibility of dispatching one or two foreign officials to exchange views on promoting the economic relationship. The North Vietnamese government responded to this proposal through the Japanese Embassy in Paris on January 5, 1972. The North Vietnamese government basically agreed to exchange permanent trade representatives and permitted Japanese foreign ministry officials' entry into Hanoi.

From the Japanese Government's perspective, opening windows to North

²⁴ Ito Go analyzed the normalization process as an autonomous aspect of Japanese foreign policy after the "Nixon Shocks." Go Ito, *Alliance in Anxiety: Détente and the Sino- American-Japanese Triangle*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp.122-130. I agree to Professor Ito's analysis, while stressing the continuity in Japan's contact with North Vietnam from 1960s to the post-"Nixon Shock" period.

²⁵ The Secret Memorandum, for the President, January 14, 1972, General Records of Department of State 1970-73, Box 2402,NA.

Vietnam would serve Japan in six different ways, by:²⁶

- (a) Improving the Japanese Government's ability to deal with both South and North Vietnamese in bringing peace to Indochina;
- (b) Establishing a cornerstone for future governmental relations when peace has been achieved;
- (c) Providing an opportunity to discuss trade relations;
- (d) Providing an opportunity to impress upon North Vietnamese representatives a more realistic assessment of the situation in Indochina and Asia;
- (e) Providing a device to counter domestic criticism that Japan's policy toward Indochina was one-sided (Tokyo believed that by broadening its approach and expressing interest in North Vietnam it would also be able to cooperate more for South Vietnam);
- (f) Enhancing Japan's leverage in the post-war reconstruction program.

Two foreign officials visited Hanoi on February 8, 1972 by the invitation by the Chamber of Commerce. Although it was ostensibly private, this was the first *de facto* official visit to North Vietnam from Japan in the post-war era. The only agreement reached in Hanoi was to continue exchange of visits in future.

After the peace agreement was signed in Paris between the U.S. and North Vietnam in January 1973, the Japanese government decided to provide ¥1 million emergency aid for refugees in Indochina, including North Vietnam. Tokyo also announced that it would dispatch officials to Hanoi to exchange views for rehabilitation aid.

The additional impetus for normalization came on February 2, when Foreign Minister Ohira made the following points at the Diet:

- (a) The Japanese government recognizes that there is a government in Northern Vietnam.
- (b) The Japanese government admits that it was problematic that a former Cabinet had arranged the wartime reparation agreement only with the South Vietnamese government that did not represent the entire country.

²⁶ Secret Telegram, January 13, 1972, General Records of Department of State 1970-1973, Box 2402, NA.

(c) Hereafter, the Japanese government articulates its policy towards South Vietnam with the recognition that it does not control the whole country.

This was the first time since 1951 that Tokyo changed its official position that the government of South Vietnam was the only legitimate government representing the entire Vietnam.

The Japanese government dispatched the second mission to Hanoi in April 1973. This time, normalization was the central topic of the negotiations, along with economic cooperation and exchange of personnel. Now there was no obstacle on the road to establishing diplomatic relations between Japan and North Vietnam. However, due to the continued skirmishes between the South and North Vietnam, the U.S. asked Japan to wait until late July before starting normalization talks, because it could have a negative impact on North Vietnamese compliance with the ceasefire. The U.S. also asked Japan to delay substantial economic aid to North Vietnam until after diplomatic relations were established.²⁷

The Japanese government had to wait until the U.S. and North Vietnam issued a joint declaration for completion of a Paris peace agreement in mid June. Substantive negotiations for establishing diplomatic relations took place on July 25 and August 14 at the North Vietnamese Embassy in Paris. Both parties confirmed at these meetings that they did not have any serious problem in establishing diplomatic ties. After having several working-level meetings, both countries reached agreement on September 18. Three days later, Japanese Ambassador and the North Vietnamese Charge d'affaires to France exchanged notes for the establishment of diplomatic relations at the North Vietnamese Embassy in Paris.

²⁷ Secret Memorandum from Kissinger, July, 1973, Nixon Presidential Materials, National Security Council Files, VIP Files, Box.927, NA.

2. Japan's aspiration to play an active role in policymaking in the post-Vietnam War era

The Japanese decision for the Jakarta Conference, aid to Indochina, and normalization with Hanoi was attributed to Japan's postwar policy toward Southeast Asia. Japan's policy or role in Southeast Asia in the early 1970s can be understood and appreciated after a brief review of it.

Japan has had a considerable interest in promoting stability and security in Southeast Asia because the stability and prosperity of this region are clearly related to Japan.²⁸ First, on the economic front, Southeast Asia is a major source of essential raw material for Japan and a substantial market for Japanese manufactured goods, next to the U.S. Second, the peace and stability of the sea-lanes in Southeast Asia is very important for Japan's economic security, because more than 80% of Japan's oil imports are from the Middle East and the transportation of 40% of its foreign trade occurs via the Strait of Malacca and Lombok.

In terms of international politics, Southeast Asian countries play a crucial role in enhancing Japan's influence on the international society. Japan's engagement in this region is welcomed not only by the Southeast Asian countries but also by the U.S. and European countries. Thus, a strong relationship with Southeast Asian countries based on Japan's contribution by means of Official Development Assistance (ODA) is a foundation of Japan's international status. The talking points prepared for Japanese prime minister's visit to Southeast Asia in 1974 clearly stated, "Securing a foothold in Southeast Asia is one factor to underpin the international reputation of our country, and our prestige will be lowered if the image that neighboring countries are turning their back on us prevails."²⁹ Moreover, Japanese foreign officials stated that in many cases,

²⁸ Chaiwat, "Japan's Southeast Policy in the Post-Vietnam Era," p.2.

²⁹ Ajia-Kyoku, "Souri no Tounan Ajia Shokoku Houmonyoku Hatsugen Shiryo" [Talking Points for Prime Minister's Visit to Southeast Asia], Postwar Diplomatic Records, *Prime Minister Tanaka's Visit to Southeast Asia (1974.1)* (A'1-5-1-16), Postwar Diplomatic Records, Diplomatic Record Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo.

for Japan, Southeast Asia is like an “electoral district” for carrying out activities in the international society.³⁰

In the wake of the war in Vietnam, Japan’s policy toward Southeast Asia was riddled with difficulty. The then Sato Cabinet was under pressure to show its firm support for U.S. efforts in Vietnam for the sake of Okinawa Reversion. However, the war in Asia provoked more anxiety than confidence over the bilateral relationship among the Japanese general public.³¹ Foreign officials of the Asian Bureau shared the view that the conflict in Vietnam was essentially a fight for national independence, and that Ho Chi Minh was not so much a communist as a nationalist. A paper prepared by the Asian Bureau immediately after the incidents in the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin proposed that the Japanese government support Vietnam in so far as it would develop as a state led by nationalist leaders even if it had a left-leaning government. The paper also suggested that Japan play a significant role in maintaining a stable equilibrium in Southeast Asia under the power vacuum after the U.S. withdrawal.³²

Foreign Minister Miki Takeo, known as a liberal and a rival of Sato, also advocated the idea that Japan would play a role as a mediator. In May 1967, Miki said at the Foreign Policy Committee of the House of Representatives, “The Japanese government doesn’t have diplomatic ties with Hanoi, but there are still ways to work toward ending the War, such as contacting it through third countries.” In his foreign policy address to the Diet in January 1968, Miki made his idea clearer by saying:

Japan is now being expected to contribute to the settlement of the Vietnam War in two ways. First, as an U.S. ally that remains outside of military commitment,

³⁰ Ajia kyoku chiiki seisakuka, *Showa 49 nendo ajia taiheiyō chiiki kaigi gijiroku* [Asian Bureau, Regional Policy Section, FY 1974, *Minutes of the Conference of Ambassadors to Asia-Pacific Region*] October 1974, FOIA, MOFA.

³¹ By 1973, only 18 percent of those polled listed America as their favorite foreign country, which was the lowest point since 1945. See, Thomas Haven, *Fire Across the Sea: The Vietnam War and Japan 1965-1975*, (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1987), p.4.

³² Nanto ajia ichika “Indoshina mondai ni taisuru waga kuni no taido” [Our country’s position vis-à-vis Indochina problems] September 9, 1964, FOIA, Diplomatic Record Office.

Japan can frankly advise the U.S. regarding its policy to Vietnam. Second, as an Asian country, Japan is in a position to be able to help both North Vietnam and National Liberation Front (NLF) understand the real intention of the U.S. I am not reluctant to consider contacting with the North Vietnamese Government for the purpose of meeting these expectations.³³

Against this background, Japanese foreign officials recognized that the Jakarta Conference would provide a good opportunity for Japan to play an active role in the post- Vietnam War era. Japanese Ambassador to Thailand and former chief of Asian Bureau, wrote in April 1970 that although Japan has occasionally declared its readiness to participate in any effort for resolving Indochina issues, it did not receive an opportunity to do so, except for dispatching special envoys overseas. He stated that Japan's participation in the Jakarta Conference was significant to assure its influence on future Indochina problems; further, it corresponded with Japan's new mission which would accord with the Nixon Doctrine.³⁴

3. Changing U.S. policy toward Asia and Japan

The Nixon administration strongly encouraged and fully supported the initiative taken by the Japanese and Indonesian government in terms of Cambodian turmoil and Japan's decision to provide aid to South Vietnam. Under the "Nixon Doctrine", Washington promoted self-sufficiency among U.S. allies in Asia, Latin America, and Europe. Thus, from American perspective, Jakarta Conference was regarded as a test case of "Asian problems solved by the Asians."

Among Asian states, Washington expected Japanese to assume more responsibilities in world affairs as one of the five poles along with the U.S., Western

³³ Hosoya Chihiro ed. *Nichibei Kankei Shiryoshu*, (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku-Shuppankai, 1992), p.738 (Reference Material for U.S.-Japan Relations).

³⁴ Ushiroku taishi hatsu gaimu daijin ate koden, "Indoshina mondai ni kansuru Ajia Kaigi" April 21, 1970 [Telegram from Ambassador Ushiroku to Foreign Minister, Subject: Asian Conference on Indochinese problems, Telegram from Thailand No.720], FOIA, Diplomatic Record Office.

Europe, Soviet Union, and China. The NSSM 5 stated that “if Japan is going to limit its defense spending to one or at most two per cent of GNP, and if it is going to continue to amass large surpluses in its foreign trade, especially with the US. Then it becomes a matter of major concern that Japan takes a more helpful position in assisting the nations of non-communist Asia with their economic development.”³⁵ Japan’s contribution to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Southeast Asian region in the post-Vietnam War era was considered to be extremely significant and was given considerable weight as a response to the U.S. request in the context of the Nixon Doctrine.

Japanese leaders fully understood America’s expectation and clearly stated their intention to respond to it. Then Foreign Minister Aichi Kiichi wrote in the article published in *Foreign Affairs*, that “clearly Japan can no longer be a passive agent in international affairs, particularly since economic power has become, in the eyes of the world, political power. The United States, for example, which objects to what it considers continuing restrictions on foreign access to Japanese markets, has raised this matter to the proportions of a major political issue.”³⁶ He also said that in the context of Nixon Doctrine, “Japan seems now to have become highly visible to Americans as an Asian power with the potential for contributing to the security of the region.”³⁷

(1) America’s reaction to the Jakarta Conference

Thus, from the American point of view, Japan’s contribution to the Jakarta Conference and aid to Cambodia were praised as a good example of following the Nixon Doctrine.

³⁵ Memorandum for Office of the Vice President, Office of the Secretary of State, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and Office of the Director of Emergency Preparedness, Subject: NSSM 5: Japan Policy, April 28, 1969, *Japan and the United States: Diplomatic, Security and Economic Relations, 1960-1976* [microfiche] Document 1061 (Bell & Howell Information and Learning; National Security Archive, 2000), (hereafter, NSA).

³⁶ Kiichi Aichi, “Japan’s legacy and destiny of change,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 48 Issue 1, October 1969, p.30.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.31.

On April 22, the DOS sent telegram to Ambassador Meyer in Japan that said “you should follow up at high level approach, presenting our view that prompt and encouraging Japanese response may be vital to continued maintenance Cambodian neutrality and territorial integrity. Recent activity in Tokyo, Djakarta, Bangkok concerning possible high-level Asian meeting to seek Indo-China solution may be useful as immediate morale booster to Lon-Nol government.”³⁸ Subsequently, at the meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG) on April 24th, Kissinger stressed that Nixon “wants a major diplomatic effort to get others to do something—Japanese, Indonesia,” and added that “he (Nixon) wants a proposal within 24 hours for the maximum encouragement to other countries.” Based on the Washington’s instruction, Ambassador Meyer met with Prime Minister Sato on the same day and stressed need for urgent action regarding Cambodia.³⁹ Meyer noted Sato’s call for “Pacific Age” in last November in Washington and said this would be a good test case. He asked expeditious action regarding Asian conference.

The United States did not expect the projected conference to bring peace to Cambodia immediately. But it saw two important benefits that might emerge from it: the creation of a neutral observer group to replace the defunct ICC in Cambodia, and a follow-up mechanism for continuing consultation among the conference participants. Not wanting to be seen as influencing this conference of Asian nations, the United States nevertheless made its views known behind the scenes.⁴⁰

After the Conference, President Nixon highly evaluated the Japanese and Indonesian initiative for the Jakarta Conference by stating that the Conference was “an effective effort made collectively to maintain Cambodian independence and neutrality”. He went on to say that the Conference was one of the best things which had occurred

³⁸ Telegram from DOS to Embassy Tokyo #599905, Subject: Japanese Aid to Cambodia, April 22, 1970, RG 59 Subject Numeric files 1970-73, (AID JAPAN CAMB) Box 515, NA.

³⁹ Telegram from AmEmbassy Tokyo to Secretary of State, # 2933, April 24, 1970, Subject: Sato’s help requested re Cambodia, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973, Box 515, folder AID (JAPAN) CAMB, NA.

⁴⁰ Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1969-2000: a troubled relationship* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), p.35.

recently. Nixon expressed his view that conceivably, the diplomatic impact of this conference might also have a restraining influence on the North Vietnamese and on the Soviets, who in contrast to the Chinese appeared to want an international conference on Indochina.⁴¹

At the Chiefs of Mission Conference held in Tokyo in July 1969, Secretary Rogers and other diplomats discussed that “While Japan’s political influence has not kept pace with its economic growth, there are signs that this is beginning to change as a result of the changing national mood. Japan’s Jakarta Conference role is illustrative.... We must work out a division of labor with Japan for our mutual goal of a stable and developing East Asia. We cannot twist Japan’s arm as much as before. Project must commend themselves to the Japanese, and preferably be of Japanese inspiration”.⁴²

With regard to Japanese initiative, an Embassy officer in Tokyo wrote in the telegram sent to the DOS that “Japan’s initiative with the Thais, Indonesians-and others in bringing about the recent Jakarta Conference concerned with Cambodia, and subsequent follow-up efforts may have been a watershed in Japan’s own view of its political role and acceptability in the region, going beyond the forcefully defended but essentially moderate attitudes displayed at Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC) gathering.”⁴³ The same telegram stated that “during the Occupation and immediate post-Occupation period, Japan did not participate in most international gatherings including those of a specifically Asian nature, e.g., the Geneva Conferences on Korea and Southeast Asian problems. Thereafter, the Japanese attended with varying degree of passivity international and regional gatherings, usually without leaving much specific Japanese imprint on the activities or conclusions of these efforts. The Jakarta Conference signaled a third phase wherein the Japanese are now prepared to take

⁴¹ Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting. Washington, June 15, 1970, *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976, Volume VI*, p. 1060.

⁴² Airgram from Department of State to all East Asian Embassies, ConGen Hong Kong, CA-3861, July 20, 1970, Subject: Chiefs of Mission Conference Report, Document 1302, NSA.

⁴³ Airgram from AmEmbassy Tokyo to DOS, A-659, Subject: Japan and the Region in the Future, June 26, 1970, Document 1290, NSA.

initiatives and assume leadership with others in efforts to achieve and defend a consensus on Asian problems.”

From American point of view, the cooperation between Japan and Indonesia was a kind of ideal form to solve Asian problems by the Asians. President Nixon saw Indonesia as a key country in Southeast Asia, not just because of its size, but because it could serve as a counterweight to Chinese influence in the area.⁴⁴

(2) American Reaction to Japanese aid to Indochinese countries

Japan’s contribution to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Southeast Asian region in the post-Vietnam War era was considered as a major area where Japan could contribute to as a response to America’s request in the context of Nixon Doctrine. Actually, President Nixon and Secretary of State Rogers urged Sato and Aichi that Japan should contribute in this field. For example, talking points prepared for Nixon’s meeting with Sato in November 1969 stated that “without a much greater degree of Japanese participation, it will be difficult to get aid appropriations through Congress” and in this connection, the same paper suggested that Nixon should stress to Sato that he hopes and expects Japan to increase its assistance to Asia particularly for post-war reconstruction of Vietnam through direct government aid.⁴⁵

The Japanese decision to provide economic aid with South Vietnam and Cambodia were partly motivated by the America’s request at the summit meeting with Sato and Nixon in 1969 and 1970.

(3) American Reaction to Japan’s Normalization with North Vietnam

The Johnson Administration allowed or even encouraged Japan to develop a channel with neutral and communist countries in pursuit of peace in Vietnam. However,

⁴⁴ Summary, *Foreign Relations*, 1969–1976, Volume XX, Southeast Asia, 1969–1972 online version.

⁴⁵ Memorandum for Kissinger from John Holdridge, November 16, 1960, Document 1164, NSA.

Washington had made it clear that any settlement must be based on “America’s position of strength.”⁴⁶ Therefore, after the direct channel was opened in the form of secret talks between Henry A. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho in 1970, the U.S. attitude towards Japan-North Vietnam ties became cautious. Recognizing American uneasiness, the Japanese Foreign Ministry immediately began consulting with Washington at both middle and high levels after receiving Hanoi’s response of accepting Japanese foreign officials in January 1972.

The reaction from the U.S. government was generally very negative to Japan’s decision of initiating contacts with North Vietnam. Under Secretary U. Alexis Johnson expressed two concerns. First, wouldn’t Hanoi take Japan’s overture as a sign of North Vietnam’s growing international prestige at this crucial stage of the war? The Japanese mission in Hanoi, however carefully launched, would give propaganda advantages to the North Vietnam. This could negatively affect the development of talks in Paris. Second, the timing of Miyake’s visit to Hanoi was awkward, since it overlapped with Nixon’s visit to Beijing. From their perspective, this Japanese gesture was most likely to have negative impact on the U.S. position at the bilateral meeting.

Eventually, the date of the visit was changed lest it should conflict with the timing of Nixon’s visit to Beijing. The only agreement reached in Hanoi was to continue exchange of visits in future. Just after this visit, Japanese Foreign Minister assured the U.S. that Japan would not stray far from the U.S. foreign policy objectives. The reaction of the U.S., however, remained negative towards Japan’s efforts to improve relations with North Vietnam. The briefing paper and scope paper prepared for Kissinger’s trip to Japan in June 1972 clearly stated as follows:

While North Vietnam continues its aggressions in Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam, we would strongly prefer that Japan keep its economic and official

⁴⁶ Michael Schaller, *Altered States: The United States and Japan Since the Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.194.

relations at minimum. We hope that the Japanese Government will not allow Hanoi to establish a permanent trade mission in Japan while hostilities continue. We remain actively interested in the question of Japanese credits to North Vietnam and in what channels will be used for payment of trade balances. The Japanese Government has been willing to express views to the North Vietnamese that parallel our own on such matters as POWs, a peaceful settlement, and the situation in South Vietnam, but we should make clear that we can do without this Japanese middle-man tactic aimed at improving Japan's relations with Hanoi for other ends.⁴⁷

It was obvious that the U.S. government did not want Japan to take a role of mediator between itself and North Vietnam, which was not the case before 1968 when Paris peace talks started. As to the improvement of bilateral relations between Tokyo and Hanoi, Washington had never encouraged it, and that position was made clearer here.

4. The growth in self-confidence and the sense of regionalism among Asian nations

The Jakarta Conference was considered as a significant event in terms of the development of regionalism because it marked the first time that the noncommunist governments of East Asia, from Japan to Australia and New Zealand, met together to discuss and adopt recommendations on Asian security problem without the presence of the U.S., Great Britain, France, or the Soviet Union.⁴⁸ Kenneth T. Young argued that this participation reflected a growing convergence of views between the Japanese and the Southeast Asians on certain political questions. They had come to share, for example, a similar emphasis on nonmilitary growth and balanced modernization throughout

⁴⁷ Memorandum for Mr. Henry A. Kissinger, The White House, April 10, 1972, National Security Council Files; Henry A. Kissinger Office File, Box 21, National Archives, College Park, MD; Memorandum for NSC Secretariat, The White House, May 27, 1972, National Security Council Files; Henry A. Kissinger Office File, Box 21, NA.

Scope Paper, Visits of Henry A. Kissinger to Japan, June 1972, NSC Files: Henry A. Kissinger Office Files: Box 22, NA.

⁴⁸ Young, "The Involvement in Southeast Asia", p. 176.

Asia.⁴⁹

Just before the Jakarta Conference, Ambassador Ushiroku, argued that the notion of the Southeast Asian or Asia-Pacific region had taken root as a subregion beyond the difference in domestic political system and political ideology, due to the developments of regional frameworks such as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASPAC, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), and the Ministerial Conference for the Economic Development of Southeast Asia.⁵⁰ He stated that this subregion is economically and geographically the most reasonable and substantial rather than those of the non-aligned groups, which had lost their influence. He also remarked that it was natural for the subregion to raise its own voice with regard to political problems that solicit its interest.

The fact that the Conference was conducted through cooperation between Japan and Indonesia illustrated that Tokyo's will to become more politically involved in Asian problems was accepted and welcomed by the regional countries. The MOFA paper attributed the success of the Jakarta Conference to the fact that Asian countries welcomed and expected Japan's initiative in political matters. The paper also stated that Japan's effort in the conference was highly evaluated by Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines.⁵¹ Particularly, Japanese fully supported the position of Indonesian as a chairman of the Conference and worked jointly to moderate the hard-lining position of some countries.

Thai foreign minister Thanat Khoman had stressed that Japan should raise its voice in the field of international politics, let alone economics, and welcomed Japanese

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ushiroku taishi hatsu gaimu daijin ate koden, "Indoshina mondai" May 13, 1970 [Telegram from Ambassador Ushiroku to Foreign Minister, Subject: international conference on Indochinese problems, Telegram from Thailand to Foreign Minister, No. 784], Diplomatic Record Office, Tokyo.

⁵¹ Nanto ajia daiichi ka "Ajia kaigi" [First Southeast Asia Division, "Asian Meeting", February 3, 1970], FOIA, Diplomatic Record Office.

initiative.⁵² Foreign Minister Malik said to Secretary Rogers that the Indonesian Government is a sincere supporter of regional cooperation, active in ADB, ECAFE, SEAMEC and ASEAN. The GOI is proud that it has been able to achieve some progress in this area. It is hoped that Japan will play a more prominent role in regional affairs as time goes on.⁵³

Conclusion

The Japan's decisions in the Jakarta Conference, increased aid to Indochinese countries, and diplomatic normalization with North Vietnam were the cases that existing Japan's aspiration for active policy in Southeast Asia was realized in the form of policy due to changing U.S. policy toward Asia and the growth among Asia nations of confidence and sense of regionalism.⁵⁴

The pursuit of peaceful settlement of the Indochina problems was made within a new framework of Japan's policy toward Southeast Asia. It was not Japan's withdrawal from its compliance with the U.S. policy. Washington encouraged Tokyo to contribute to peaceful efforts of the War, and the shift of America's Asian policy moved Japan to promote its willingness to take a role in political issue in Southeast Asian region. However, without their own desire for taking an active role in the region, combined with growing nationalism and increasing domestic anti-Vietnam War sentiment, the Japanese government would not attempt to conduct vigorous policies toward Southeast Asia.

⁵² Ushiroku taishi hatsu gaimu daijin ate koden, "Indoshina mondai" April 21, 1970 [Telegram from Ambassador Ushiroku to Foreign Minister, Subject: Indochinese problems, Telegram from Thailand No. 658]; Ushiroku taishi hatsu gaimu daijin ate koden, "Indoshina mondai ni kansuru Ajia Kaigi" April 21, 1970 [Telegram from Ambassador Ushiroku to Foreign Minister, Subject: Asian Conference on Indochinese problems, Telegram from Thailand No.720], FOIA, Diplomatic Record Office.

⁵³ Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, Jakarta, July 29, 1969, *Foreign Relations, 1969-1976, Volume XX, Southeast Asia, 1969-1972*, p.576.

⁵⁴ Aichi, "Japan's Legacy and Destiny of Change," p.29.

During the period of the Vietnam War, Japan's Southeast Asian policy clearly evolved from the previous policy toward the region based upon the economic assistance and the strong American security commitments, to the one of playing a political role in securing stability of the region. This also means Japan's desire for "autonomous diplomacy" which had existed throughout the post-war period, was eventually formed as a policy. Japanese policymakers recognized that Nixon's new policy in Asia created a favorable environment for Japan in which they could diplomatically articulate a thought that was rather "autonomous" from if not "independent" of the American Cold War thought.

The Japanese Government made clear that they had a desire to articulate "bridge-building diplomacy", which was to mediate Asia and the West as well as Free Southeast Asian countries and communist Southeast Asian countries.

This policy lines survived the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and were formalized in the Fukuda Doctrine of 1977. The Fukuda Doctrine made clear that Japan would do its best to consolidate relationships of mutual confidence and trust with Southeast countries based on "heart-to-heart" understandings, and that Japan would become an equal partner of ASEAN while aiming at fostering mutual understanding with the nations of Indochina.

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