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## Southeast Asia: Politics and Society

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### **Research before and during World War II**

A review of Japanese research on Southeast Asia reveals first of all that only a limited amount of work was carried out during the prewar and wartime periods. Examples include Enkū Uno (1944) and Seizaburō Shinobu (1943). Shūmei Ōkawa (1941) added a substantial volume of work criticizing European colonialism, but the total output of research was small. However, this should not be interpreted as abnormal and can perhaps be seen as inevitable, given the contemporary situation in Japan which was under the stress of imminent or actual warfare, and where scholars did not even have time to absorb the art and erudition of the advanced Western nations. Added to this was the situation in Southeast Asia where the territories (with the exception of Thailand) were still under colonial rule.

Although it was not until the postwar era that significant research results began to appear, a number of pioneering scholars had begun to take an interest in Southeast Asia during World War II. Two examples were Yoichi Itagaki and Tōichi Mabuchi. During the Pacific War, many scholars in a wide range of fields were mobilized to conduct surveys and research in areas of Southeast Asia occupied by Japanese forces. With Japan's defeat, however, most of these scholars returned to research in fields unrelated to Southeast Asia. The fact that Itagaki and Mabuchi maintained their interest in the region suggests that their involvement resulted not from compulsory research for a wartime government, but from motives that were deeper and more keenly felt.<sup>1</sup>

The Pacific War was a major turning point in the modern history of both Japan and Southeast Asia. In particular, Japan's military occupation appears to have stimulated some unique postwar research work, including studies of Japanese military administration and social and economic change under Japanese military rule. However, for most Japanese researchers the pursuit of such themes has been associated with discomfort and pain because of Japan's involvement in the events. Nevertheless, Japanese researchers have a responsibility to carry out this work, and they are well positioned to carry out this task due to their access to historical documents and other data resources.<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that work on the Japanese military administration of Indonesia was published as early as 1959 by researchers at Waseda University's Institute of Social Sciences (Waseda Daigaku, Ōkumakinen Shakai Kagaku Kenkyūsho), led by Kōichi Kishi and Shigetada Nishijima (Waseda Daigaku 1959). This work also deserves recognition as the first significant research work on Southeast Asia published in the postwar period. A few years later, Tsunetzō Ōta (1967) published research on the Japanese military administration in Burma. During the 1970s, the study of Southeast Asia under Japanese military administration was taken over by researchers of the postwar generation.

## Postwar Research Trends

### 1. *Up to the Early 1960s*

Postwar Southeast Asian studies in Japan can be divided into periods before and after the early 1960s. The years around 1960 saw the establishment of the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE) and the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University (Kyoto Daigaku, Tōnan Ajia Kenkyū Sentā). This was followed by the gradual development of research resources, including data and specialized journals, and by efforts to ensure the continuity of research.

The period following Japan's defeat until the conclusion of the Peace Treaty in 1951 was a virtual vacuum for Japanese research on Southeast Asia. The Institute of Asian Affairs (Ajia Mondai Chōsakai; later to become the Ajia Kyōkai) was founded in 1951 and the Japan Association for Asian Political and Economic Studies (Ajia Seikei Gakkai) in 1953. The journals of these research organizations and societies helped to bring about the resumption of research about Asia (including Southeast Asia) in postwar Japan. However, there was little significant work, at least as far as political and social research about Southeast Asia was concerned. The number of researchers and research

papers was extremely small, and themes were limited mostly to generalized discussions of nationalism and independence movements.

## *2. The Domestic and International Environment after 1960*

Political and social research about Southeast Asia in Japan dates from around 1960. A number of factors led to the emergence of research work from that time.

First, negotiations between Japan and Southeast Asian countries over war reparations and compensation were mostly completed by around 1960. The resulting restoration of formal diplomatic relations and the expansion of economic relations stimulated interest in research concerning the countries in question.

There were also changes in the political circumstances of the Southeast Asian countries themselves. New nations launched in the name of democracy subsequently lapsed into political instability, and in a number of the countries democratic systems were discarded. Hostilities continued in Indochina, which became a front line in the cold war between the Soviet Union and the United States. The fighting quickly escalated into the Vietnam War. These developments were realities that demanded careful analysis of the political and social dynamics in the Southeast Asian countries. The increased diversification and specialization of Southeast Asian studies from the late 1960s onward, appears to have resulted from the impact of these realities which took the level of research beyond generalized discussions of nationalism.

Another factor increasing the depth of Japanese research was the fact that access to the findings of research on Southeast Asia and theoretical research on the politics of developing countries in general began to improve from around this time. This was largely the result of the continuous stream of research publications coming out of the United States.

The influence of U.S. research on Japanese research into Southeast Asian politics and society was overwhelming, but the intensity of this influence varied greatly from one field of study to another. One reason for this was that the depth of American surveys and research varied according to the country studied. Also the impact of U.S. research was greater in those areas where Japanese research was less developed. In the area of political studies, there were many gaps in the data available to Japanese researchers, and the research methods used were also immature. The impact of the United States was therefore very significant. However, the gap appears to have been less significant in the area of rural and anthropological surveys. One reason for

this was that Japan already had a long tradition of rural surveys. In addition, there was a considerable accumulation of findings from various social surveys conducted during the time of colonial rule, such as in Indonesia. Nevertheless, among Japanese researchers, there were only a small number who fully utilized those materials.

Japanese studying the politics of Southeast Asia were deeply impressed by the lead American scholars had taken in the field. At the time researchers in the United States were working energetically to build frameworks and theories for political analyses of developing countries in general. The results of this work include political development theory, the theory of political modernization, and the theory of political institutionalization. These were very difficult areas for Japanese researchers, who needed some time to digest them. Though it may seem an exaggeration to state that in general Japanese research into the politics of Southeast Asia lagged far behind American research until the end of the 1970s, it is difficult to imagine today the size of the gap that then separated American and Japanese researchers.<sup>3</sup>

### **Achievements since the 1960s**

#### *1. The 1960s*

##### *a. Political studies*

Apart from scholars studying Japanese military administration, to whom reference has already been made, the representative works produced in this period were: Yoichi Itagaki's work (1962), which was a multifaceted discussion of modernization in Southeast Asia; Yoshihiko Tanigawa's work (1969), which summed up nationalist movements in Vietnam and the Philippines; and Tōru Yano's work (1968), which provided an overview of the modern political history of Thailand and Burma using vernacular sources. Other researchers produced a considerable number of papers. Political studies during this period essentially covered the whole of Southeast Asia. Initially, the number of researchers was extremely small, but the influx of a new generation of researchers brought the numbers up to a level that was basically satisfactory for an academic field that had made a new start after World War II. While discussion focused on nationalism, the expansion of research to include specific aspects of the dynamics of domestic politics in individual countries can be seen as a significant step forward. Among the aspects studied were communalism, the military, communist parties, and the ideologies of national leaders.

### b. *Social studies*

In contrast with political studies, the United States did not enjoy a particularly large lead in the field of social studies (especially in the area of rural society), and it appears that Japan was able to overcome this gap in a relatively short time. Essentially all that Japanese researchers needed to catch up with their American counterparts was the opportunity to conduct field surveys. The first field survey of the postwar era was conducted by the Southeast Asian rice-farming peoples survey team dispatched by the Japanese Society of Ethnology (*Nihon Minzokugaku Kyōkai*) between 1957 and 1958. Participants in this survey included Keiji Iwata and Tsuneo Ayabe, who would subsequently play a pioneering role in social and cultural surveys in Southeast Asia.

Soon after its establishment in 1963, the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, commenced a long-term survey program in Malaysia and Thailand. The results of this research were published in the center's journal, *Southeast Asian Studies (Tōnan Ajia kenkyū)*, from around 1965 onwards. Work on Malaysia was led by Masuo Kuchiba, Yoshihiro Tsubouchi, and Narifumi Maeda, while Kōichi Mizuno played a central role in work related to Thailand. The surveys focused on social structures.

## 2. *The 1970s*

### a. *Political studies*

Japanese research into the politics of Southeast Asia began to attain a significant level of activity in the 1970s. A number of major works were published including: Atō Masuda's book (1971), which was a collection of papers on modern Indonesian political history; Masashi Nishihara's work (1976), which analyzed the relationship between Japan and Indonesia primarily from the perspective of reparation negotiations; Shin'ichi Nagai's work (1978), which examined Malaysian political history; and the work edited by Tatsumi Okabe (1977), which dealt with international relations. There was a rapid increase in the number of researchers, and the fact that most researchers now belonged to the new generation indicated that the changing of the guard was virtually complete. The number of papers also rose dramatically, while the content of papers showed growing specialization and depth. The emergence of Japan's postwar political relations with Southeast Asian countries as a research theme was also a new development that had not been seen in the 1960s.

### b. *Social studies*

Social research related to Southeast Asia expanded continuously in the 1970s. Work in the field of social anthropology included the compilation of research on Malaysia by Kyoto University's Center for Southeast Asian Studies. Also, new horizons were opened up in the analysis of Malay kinship networks and value system. The range of research related to Thailand was even broader. Works published included the one by Kōichi Mizuno (1971), which hypothesized the existence of dyadically structured interpersonal relations and multi-household compounds under the unique bilateral system of Thai society. The work edited by Yoneo Ishii (1975) provided a comprehensive examination of Thai society as a rice-growing society, and numerous papers were published by other researchers on the relationship between social structures and culture and religion. Yasushi Kikuchi's pioneering work on the Philippines was followed by a variety of field surveys conducted by young researchers.

The extent of social research concerning Indochina, Indonesia, and Burma was still limited during this period. This was because the political situations in these countries made the conduct of long-term surveys impossible. Of particular significance in this context was the publication of Tōichi Mabuchi (1974), a three-volume work covering years of research that included numerous studies pertaining to social structure in Indonesia.

The 1970s brought a moderate increase in surveys related to ethnic Chinese society in Southeast Asia, which has long been a key research theme specific to this region. Representative of such works was Toshio Kawabe (1972). Naosaku Uchida's work (1982) was also important, even though its publication was not completed during the 1970s.

### c. *Historical research*

Japan's tradition of research into the history of Southeast Asia dates back to prewar times, and the standard of research is still regarded as high. However, it is appropriate for the purposes of this paper to limit our scope to modern and contemporary history or general history from the perspective of specific periods or regions. While in this sense the development of studies in Southeast Asian history began in the 1960s, it was the 1970s that saw a significant output of research achievements. Particularly important were Akira Nagazumi's (1977) and Yoneo Ishii's (1977) works, which were general histories covering the insular Southeast Asia and mainland Southeast Asia respectively. These were the first general histories of Southeast Asia to be produced by Japanese scholars. Although they were intended for general

readers, they merit recommendation for the way in which they incorporated the achievements of scholars from the former colonial powers of Western Europe. Nagazumi has also written books dealing with the Dutch East India Company and the Budi Utomo, an early nationalist organization in Indonesia (1972). In addition, various papers on Indonesia, Vietnam, and Burma were written by other researchers. In the broad context of Southeast Asian research, there appears to have been a marked trend in the 1970s to reexamine and reevaluate local and traditional elements, in contrast with the previous tendency of focusing on new and modern factors in history.

### 3. *The 1980s*

#### a. *Political studies*

Studies of Southeast Asian politics were basically a continuation of work carried out in the 1970s, but there was evidence of efforts by Japanese researchers to create theoretical frameworks.

Philippine politics was studied by Yukiho Asano,\* who reviewed the political implications of President Quirino and the Hukbalahap. Yōko Yoshikawa traced the course of the Japan-Philippine reparations talks, while Gō Nakagawa (1983) undertook an interesting inquiry into grassroots notions of law. The Indonesian political situation was examined by Yūji Suzuki (1982) and Hirotsune Kimura (1989), who discussed the development regime led by the authoritarian administration under Suharto. Akio Yasunaka\* (1988) sought to ascertain the position of Suharto's "New Order" within the perspective of comparative history (see also Yasunaka 1978). Kenji Tsuchiya (1987) published a voluminous work on the history of the Taman Siswa movement and its leadership in Java.

The termination of warfare in Vietnam was followed by a flare-up of racial conflicts which stimulated a review of the history of racial interrelations in this region. Motoo Furuta (1984) and Minami Yoshizawa (1982) wrote books on this subject. The Vietnam War was the theme of a book edited by Yoshihiko Tanigawa (1984) and was also studied by Hiroshi Matsuoka (1988) and Arata Onuma (1988). Another work worth mentioning in connection with the Vietnam War is a study by Tōru Yano (1986), which covers extensive subjects, including the cold war and the methodology of American regional studies.

Malaysia was studied by Yoshiyuki Hagiwara\* (1989), who compiled papers on communalism, and by Fujio Hara,\* who achieved solid results through a long-term study of political trends among ethnic Chinese residing in Malaysia.

Previously there had been few studies of Southeast Asian politics from the

perspective of organic interrelations or as an entirety. This began to change in the late 1970s. One such effort was a hypothesis called an “ecological view of political history,” which was proposed by Tōru Yano (1980) on the basis of climatic similarities among Southeast Asian countries. He developed his hypothesis into the concept of the “Southeast Asian world.” Other efforts were reflected in a series of papers edited by Tatsumi Okabe (1987, 1989) and papers written by Susumu Yamakage (1987), which presented the perception that ASEAN is now solidifying into a substantial entity.

b. *Social studies*

In the area of anthropology, many studies on Thailand and the Philippines were compiled in the 1980s, following similar studies on Malaysia in the 1970s. Thailand was taken up by Kōichi Mizuno in his book (1981), and the Philippines in books by Yasushi Kikuchi (1980), Masaru Miyamoto (1986), and Tō Gōda (1989). Indonesia became the subject of delayed but diverse studies by Yoshimichi Someya, Teruo Sekimoto, Shinji Yamashita, Keiji Sugishima, Satoshi Nakagawa, and Yasuyuki Nagase.

Studies of a more sociological nature were conducted by Tsuyoshi Katō (1982), who discussed matriliney in West Sumatra, and Mitsuo Nakamura (1983), who analyzed urban Muslim society in Central Java. A work by Tadaharu Tanaka (1981) can also be included in this category.

c. *Historical studies*

Most of the well-organized works in this area produced by Akira Nagazumi (1980) and others still deal with nationalist movements. They all reflect more in-depth analyses and suggest greater access to official documents and local historical records than was evident in previous works. The same is true of works dealing with the history of Japan-Southeast Asia relations, which include books by Ken'ichi Gotō\* (1986) and Fujio Hara\* (1986), as well as articles in a book edited by Hiroshi Tanaka (1983) and works by Masaya Shiraishi and Aiko Kurasawa. Together with the increasing historical interest in the economic aspects of prewar Japan-Southeast Asia relationships, this area has become very popular as a study subject.

## Evaluation

Japan's studies of Southeast Asian politics and society have made remarkable progress over the past thirty years, and there are several times the number of researchers and students than before. The degree of progress varies with the area of study. The field in which the greatest progress has been achieved is

social studies, followed by historical studies, then political studies. However, as the levels of these studies were low initially, many issues remain to be addressed despite this remarkable progress. Here I would like to make some concluding comments pertinent particularly to the field of political studies.

(1) Japan's studies of Southeast Asian politics have not produced a Fred Riggs, a Lucian Pye, or a Herbert Feith. What is common to most classical works by these scholars is systematic description and analysis based on a distinct conceptual framework. This kind of methodical rigor is still lacking in most Japanese studies.

(2) Japan's studies of developing countries, including Southeast Asian countries, have not produced a Gabriel Almond, a Samuel Huntington, or a Guillermo O'Donnell. It was only from 1976 that the Japanese Political Science Association (Nihon Seiji Gakkai) began to grapple earnestly with the issue of political studies on developing countries. Since then Tōru Yano has made an almost solo effort to theorize and construct hypotheses, though his subjects were limited to Southeast Asia. Even Yano's way of raising questions, however, has lacked theoretical consistency and contains many inadequacies.

(3) In the area of empirical studies, there has been a marked increase in the number of researchers and in the corresponding progress. Regrettably, many of these studies have not passed beyond the stage of borrowing from or reworking Western works in terms of both problems posed and data presented. Since the start of the 1990s, however, a few studies seem to have emerged from this stage and appear to be heading toward becoming more original research.

(4) The progress of Japanese research on Southeast Asian politics has been uneven in its coverage countries and areas studied. In general, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines have figured more prominently than Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar. The Thai royal family and Malaysia's sultan system have been considered important subjects of study and have been examined from the viewpoint of cultural anthropology but not satisfactorily from the viewpoint of political science.

(5) Japanese studies of Southeast Asian politics are so far rarely polemic. There have been few cases of debates such as those between Herbert Feith and Harry Benda, or between Samuel Popkin and James Scott.<sup>4</sup> Book reviews of some studies were expected to develop into meaningful debates, but failed to do so.<sup>5</sup> The number of controversies is not always a criterion of the quality of studies, but a conspicuous absence of polemics is clearly not wholesome.

(6) Some research work has been based on noteworthy joint studies. These have dealt either with one country or with several Southeast Asian countries

(or the entire region). In the latter case, the studies have often been well organized when the main object of study is outside of Southeast Asia, as was the case with such studies as “America’s Southeast Asian strategy” or “China’s Southeast Asian policy.” Whether it is appropriate to treat Southeast Asia as a region is open to question, and it seems that few studies based on such treatment have so far been successful. However, even if joint studies are likely to end up as mere parallel descriptions of the region’s countries, they should be seen as worthwhile at least in the sense of having provided materials for comparison. The fact that joint studies have been carried out suggests that researchers are now drawing an overall picture of Southeast Asian politics, which are interrelated to each other. Time should be given to allow sufficient results to emerge from these joint studies.

(7) Critics of Japanese studies often say that while the average level is not especially low, there have been few outstanding findings. Regrettably, this criticism probably applies to the present state of Japanese studies of Southeast Asian politics. There must be some reasons for this, but the problem can no longer be attributed simply to the insufficient input of time for research. Expectations are now pinned on researchers of younger generations. It is hoped that Japanese studies of Southeast Asian politics will make a contribution to the world’s academic community someday in the not too distant future.

### **Recent Research Trends**

Looking at the social and political research on Southeast Asia that has been done in Japan from the end of the 1980s through the first half of the 1990s, special mention needs to be made of the ten-volume work (plus an appendix volume) edited by Tōru Yano (1990–92), *Kōza Tōnan-Ajia-gaku* [Collected essays on the studies of Southeast Asia]. This substantial work does not take up each country individually; instead it seeks to deal with the region as a whole using a multidirectional approach that looks at Southeast Asia from such aspects as its natural geography, history, politics, society, economics, culture, and intellectual thought. Each volume has been written by Japanese scholars on Southeast Asia who are specialists in their particular fields, and among the great achievements of this work is its assemblage of so many capable scholars and the breadth of its coverage. The substantial content of this ten-volume series offers a good indication of the level that present-day Japanese research on Southeast Asia has achieved.

Turning to research in individual fields, in the area of politics, Southeast Asia since the latter half of the 1980s has experienced continuous changes of

government and political policies starting with the Aquino revolution in the Philippines, then Vietnam's switch to its capitalistic Doi Moi policy line, the crumbling of the Ne Win government in Myanmar, the conclusion of a peace agreement in Cambodia, and finally the revolt of the new middle class in Thailand. The result has been a large amount of political research dealing with these many changes. Representative of this research are: Eiji Murashima's\* paper (1987) on Thai political system; Kiichi Fujiwara's paper (1988) on Philippine democracy; Yukiho Asano's\* book (1991) on Presidents Marcos and Aquino; and one edited by Tatsumi Okabe (1992) on the Southeast Asian political scene after the Cambodian peace settlement. There is also the work by Fujio Hara\* (1993) dealing with the national identity of the overseas Chinese, and another by Hidekuni Takeshita\* (1992) that discussed the territorial dispute in the South China Sea. Osamu Akagi (1989) looked into the particular characteristics of Thai political culture. During the period of these studies the global political environment experienced the dramatic impact of the cold war's end, but to date there still has been no study that deals directly with the impact of this event on the Southeast Asian region.

Regarding research on Southeast Asian society, there has been a notable amount of work done by cultural anthropologists based on long-term fieldwork results. The Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand have been the objects of the bulk of this research, but recently there has been a gradual increase in the studies directed at Myanmar. Significant studies in the social field include Yoshimichi Someya's work (1993) on modern Javanese civilization and Yukio Hayashi's work (1989) on the role of Buddhism in rural Thai society. However, there continues to be very little research directed at urban society, and the reasons for this neglect are unclear. In particular there has been a good deal of talk about the sustained economic growth achieved by developmental authoritarian regimes in the region and the appearance of a middle class in these nations, but the political and social character of these still remain unclear. Hopefully research efforts in these areas will be forthcoming.

Looking at the field of modern history and Japan's relations with Southeast Asia, there are the studies by Takushi Ohno (1986) and Yōko Yoshikawa (1991) that deal with Japanese reparations to the Philippines; there is also the thick volume by Aiko Kurasawa (1992) about rural Javanese society during the time of the Japanese military government. A study dealing with modern Vietnamese history is that by Masaya Shiraishi (1993). Each of these is a highly valuable work based on a long period of solid research.

## Notes

- 1 Itagaki's involvement in Southeast Asia is discussed in depth in his two books: *Ajia to no taiwa* [Dialogue with Asia] (Tokyo: Shinkigensha, 1968) and *Zoku Ajia to no taiwa* [Continued dialogue with Asia] (Tokyo: Ronsōsha, 1978).
- 2 A thorough discussion of the psychological implications of choosing Japanese military administration as a theme can be found in an essay by Akira Nagazumi. See Akira Nagazumi, *Tsuki wa higashi ni, hi wa nishi ni—Tōnan Ajia to Nihon no aida* [The moon in the east, the sun in the west: Between Southeast Asia and Japan] (Tokyo: Dōbunkan, 1987), pp. 153ff.
- 3 In the United States, interest in Southeast Asia began to wane dramatically in the mid-1970s, following the end of the Vietnam War. For an American view of subsequent research, see Benedict Anderson, "Politics and Their Study in Southeast Asia," in *Southeast Asian Studies: Options for the Future*, ed. Ronald A. Morse (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984).
- 4 For the Feith vs. Benda arguments, see the *Journal of Asian Studies* (May 1964) 23, no. 3: 449–56; (February 1965) 24, no. 2: 305–12.
- 5 Two examples are: a book review by Yoshihiko Tanigawa of Atō Masuda's *Indonesia gendaishi* [Modern history of Indonesia] (Masuda 1971), and Hisao Mori's book review of Tōru Yano's *Nihon no nan'yō shikan* [Japanese views on Southeast Asia in historical perspective] (Tokyo: Chūō-kōronsha, 1979). For these book reviews, see *Ajia keizai* (IDE) (February 1972) 13, no. 2: 103–7 and (November 1979) 20, no. 11: 90–93, respectively.

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