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IS JAPAN ON ITS WAY TO BEING RE-ASIANISED? THE CHANGED DETERMINANTS OF THE POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Claudia Derichs, Duisburg

With the "Pacific Century" just around the corner, it may surprise some people that the term is older than generally acknowledged, having in fact been anticipated by Gottfried W. Leibniz in the seventeenth century. However, in recent years Asians in particular have been eager to draw attention to it, and not simply because the next century is fast approaching. As the countries of East and South-East Asia are gaining in self-confidence and experiencing enormous economic growth, they not only wish to be *seen* as "global players", but also wish to *have this fact* internationally *acknowledged*.

The "Western World" has been slow in giving its acknowledgement in this respect, for it would inevitably mean the doubting of all values and paradigms hitherto claimed to be universally true and applicable as of right to the rest of the world. While Japan is by nature an Asian country, she can be said to be also very westernised in many ways. That being so, the question arises, of how she is reacting to the propagation of "Asian values"¹ and "Asian regionalism".

This paper deals with the question of how the current discussion about values and world order is influencing the direction and decision-making processes of Japanese politics. How far can we detect a stronger orientation in Japan towards Asia and how far does her government in organisations such as APEC² try to take over the position of "mediator" between "West" and "Asia", and how far are the Japanese political decision-makers under pressure, both at home and abroad, to commit themselves one way or the other?

- 1 For a discussion of this concept see HEBERER, Thomas: "Globalisierung heißt nicht Verwestlichung". In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10. October 1996, p. 13.
- 2 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation: Asian-Pacific economic forum founded in 1989, current members (18): Australia, Brunei, Chile, China, Hongkong, Indonesia, Japan, Canada, Malaysia, Mexico, Newsealand, Papua Neuguinea, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, USA. There is an intention to accept new members in 1997.

I have examined the subject from three central viewpoints (historical, economic, societal), which I think in this case are more relevant than in examination of routine domestic or foreign policy decisions. The conclusion to be drawn, if at all, will be that a change in Japanese policy can indeed be detected, but her turning towards Asia cannot be interpreted as being achieved at the expense of Japan's relationship with the West. Japan's turning towards Asia is taking place in carefully measured doses.

The Historical Dimension

It would be inadequate to just base the discussion of the possible re-asianisation issue on current events, as historical developments are still decisively influencing Japan's relationship with her Asian neighbours. Despite the fact that the various changes in government since 1993 have meant that some of Japan's Prime Ministers not belonging to the LDP (Prime Ministers belonging to the LDP have not been so forthcoming) have admitted to the other Asian countries a feeling of guilt and regret regarding Japan's aggression in the Second World War, (i.e. Hosokawa Morihiro in his inaugural speech in 1993 or Murayama Tomiichi in his speech commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the war in 1995), to this day the burden of the past overshadows diplomatic relations between the former colonial power and the people she colonised.

Relations between Japan and South Korea, for example, are still marked by tensions, although a *Treaty on Basic Relations* (*Nikkan kihon jōyaku*)³ between the two states was signed in 1965, with the aim of reconciling the two sides. Unfair remarks by Japanese politicians about the good the annexation of Korea (1910) did to the Korean peninsula have regularly put a freeze on relations. A summit meeting between the Japanese Prime Minister Murayama and his Korean colleague Kim Young Sam in November 1995 almost failed had it not been for the resignation of the then head of the *Management and Coordination Agency*, Etō Takami,

3 The Korea-Japan Treaty of 1965, usually known as the *Treaty on Basic Relations* or the *Nikkan Treaty* between Japan and the Republic of Korea, restored diplomatic and consular relations. With the treaty, Japan officially regards the Republic of Korea as the only lawful government of Korea. Protests against the treaty took place as well. See DERICHs, Claudia: *Japans Neue Linke*. Hamburg: OAG, 1995, pp. 109-111.

who had made an off-the-record remark about there having been 'some positive sides to the Japanese occupation of Korea'.⁴ His resignation calmed the situation down somewhat.

By making reparations to the countries of South East Asia occupied by Japan during the Second World War, Japan has been able to restore a status of peaceful coexistence. In any case, most of Japan's foreign aid goes to the region of South East Asia and since the middle of the eighties particularly to the ASEAN-States.⁵ Such aid, of course, does not necessarily mean a consolidation of bi-lateral trust that could put a stop to the ex-colonies being afraid of Japan militarising again. Discreet comments about the past and the fear of Japan re-militarising are still an effective instrument against the unpleasant Japanese craving for imperial power.⁶

The detachment shown by the other Asian states towards Japan is, on the one hand, based on their experience of actual Japanese aggression during World War II and, on the other hand, on their not wishing Japan to become politically as influential and dominant in the region as she has in economic terms. In short, it is felt that there is a need for preventing a hegemony in the political, economic and social areas, for the idea not only conjures up the concept of the "Greater East Asia Coprosperity Sphere" (*Dai Tōa Kyōeiken*) of pre-war days, but it is also a reminder of the mental climate that prepared the way to this pre-war Asianism.

Asianism (*ajiashugi*) raised its head in the late nineteenth century and prepared Japan for "her role as an active member of Japanese expansionist

- 4 It is a remarkable fact that this off-the-record remark was only reported on by the foreign press after it had been published by a Japanese monthly. The events that followed point to the instrumentalization of the "past" for political purposes as mentioned further down.
- 5 For more detailed information see Igarashi Takeshi (ed.): *Nihon no ODA to kokusai chitsujo* [Japan's ODA and the international order]. Tōkyō: Nihon kokusai mondai kenkyūjo, 1990; statistical charts, *ibid*, p. 250f, 260. Also see: KEVENHÖRSTER, Paul: "Japan als internationaler Akteur: das Instrument der multilateralen Entwicklungshilfe". In: DRIFTE, Reinhard/Hartwig HUMMEL (eds.): *Pax Nipponica? Die Japanisierung der Welt 50 Jahre nach dem Untergang des japanischen Reiches*. Bad Boll: Evangelische Akademie Bad Boll, 1995, pp. 73-87.
- 6 China, for example, expressed its displeasure about the decision by the World Heritage Committee in 1996 to honour the Atomic Bomb Dome at Hiroshima as a world heritage, for it did not take account of the atrocities committed by Japan during the Second World War. The objection was in effect tantamount to a veto.

politics vis-à-vis her Asian neighbours”⁷. Taking Nohara Shirō’s interpretation as a basis, Wolfgang Seifert summarises Asianism as follows:

Asianism involves the aim to unite the Asian peoples under the leadership of Japan, in order to resist the aggression of the Western states in Asia. The idea of Asian solidarity is closely connected to the problem of Japan’s own independence, which had been expressed since the first years of the Meiji period and which, despite differences in the protagonists’ argumentation for freedom and sovereignty, nevertheless gained ground ... Tarui Tōkichi and Ōi Kentarō thought the joining together of the Asian states a necessity, in order to resist the Western powers, while at the same time pursuing democratisation at home.⁸

Asianism was the basis for the idea of Greater Asianism:

Greater Asianism calls for the solidarity with the other Asian peoples, pretending Japan to be just as oppressed as these. The uniting elements are race and script and the fact that the mission of Eastern civilisation is cultural, while that of the West is material, i.e. economic. In reality, by advocating Greater Asianism the Meiji government was gradually trying to cover up its politics of aggression on that continent.⁹

There are two points here worth taking note of. Firstly, the then protagonists of the (Greater) Asianism point to the peoples of Asia being of the same race and having the same script, – an argument which in the whirl of *Nihon(jin)ron* of the post-war years, i.e. the stress on the “uniqueness of being Japanese”, was sadly missing.¹⁰ And secondly, the idea of Asianism was not produced and propagated exclusively by Japanese “right-wing conservatives” during the late nineteenth century. On the contrary, a large part of the advocates were to be found in what was

7 SEIFERT, Wolfgang: *Nationalismus im Nachkriegs-Japan*. Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1977, p. 94.

8 Ibid, p. 94f

9 Ibid, p. 95.

10 See DALE, Peter N.: *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*. London/N.Y.: Routledge, 1995 or London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986; AOKI Tamotsu: *Der Japandiskurs im historischen Wandel: Zur Kultur und Identität einer Nation*. München: Iudicium, 1996. (Monographien aus dem Deutschen Institut für Japanstudien der Philipp-Franz-von-Siebold-Stiftung; 14) – *Nihonron* literally means the “Japan-debate”; it reached a kind of climax in the 1980s, when it almost turned into a cultural nationalism.

generally regarded as the “leftist” camp of the representatives of freedom, peoples’ rights and sovereignty.

This convergence of “right” and “left”, which must necessarily seem somewhat strange, is to be found again during the post-war period, as verified by Mishima Ken’ichi who quotes the late philosopher Hiromatsu Wataru (he died in the spring of 1994) as follows:

Approximately 10 weeks ago one of the most famous of Japanese philosophers, Wataru Hiromatsu, wrote an article in the *Asahi* newspaper.¹¹ We may regard his article as a sort of “last will”, for shortly afterwards Hiromatsu died of cancer. Facing death, he maintained the following three points to be important:

1) that euro-centric industrialism had finally come to an end and that there would never be a time again when the West would play a central role in the history of the world – implying in effect that a return to the old ways was not desirable.

2) that a re-orientation was necessary and that it was Asia that would be most competent in creating a new world order.

3) that within the framework of this re-orientation, it was vital to do away with the Europe-based thinking of substance and subject-orientation. Instead, there should be a focusing on the East Asian tradition of cultivating relations, in order to overcome the ecological crisis which was also a crisis of capitalism run amok. At the end, Hiromatsu coined the slogan: “We must create a new order in East Asia on the basis of a Japanese-Chinese axis. We must on that basis create a new world order”.¹²

Hiromatsu was close to Japan’s leftist intellectuals and in particular to a party faction (*tōha*) of the radical left, which is why some of his readers will have been surprised at his writing in this vein. Even though such statements should not have been quoted out of context, i.e. his entire work, and looked at in isolation – which becomes clear when reading Hiromatsu’s writings¹³, he examines the paradigm of Western philosophy

11 Mishima is here quoting from the article “Tōhoku Ajia ga rekishi no shuyaku ni – Ōbei chūshin no sekaikan wa hōkai e” [Northeast Asia on its path to head history – breakdown of the Euro-American-centristic worldview], *Asahi shinbun*, 16. 03. 1994.

12 MISHIMA Ken’ichi et al.: “Wie sehen die Japaner Europa?” In: *Der japanische Erfolg*. [Proceedings of a symposium held by the Breuninger Kolleg, June 17-18, 1994]. Stuttgart: Breuninger Kolleg, 1995, pp. 195-218, here: 195f.

13 A collection of his work has been published since 1996 by Iwanami Publishers (13 volumes so far): *Hiromatsu Wataru chōsakushū*. Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten, 1996-. A collection of six volumes was published in 1995 by Jōkyō-Press, to which

unquestionably from a critical point of view. Indeed, Hiromatsu assumes that human consciousness has more or less been structured by the typical Western dichotomy pattern of “subjective – objective”, and demands a change from this subjectivistic conception of the world, which is furthermore based on bourgeois values.¹⁴ Mishima on his part, interprets this as being the continual ideologising of a relationship (between East and West; C.D.) which can be detected “with respect to its mutual relations of seeing and being seen” and goes on to interpret Hiromatsu’s statements in the newspaper as a reflection of the pre-war pattern:

Apart from his dubious regional classification, which is scarcely credible for a leftist philosopher, it is interesting to note that the old pattern still prevails, i.e. a declared belief in supposedly autonomous values – after a long and intensive study of Western thinking and society.

In addition, this belief – and that makes it especially interesting – is expressed with the claim that the Japanese and/or the other East Asian peoples are at the moment at the top of a historical process whereby the world has essentially been shaped by Hegelian, single-track thinking, as viewed by the grands récits. Within Japanese intellectual thinking, this pattern is described as a return to the old Japaneseness [Japanertum]. The old pattern of the pre-war days has just been presented as if reflected in a mirror – back to front, so-to-speak – an interesting phenomenon of a radical, leftist ethno-centrism.¹⁵

With patriots and nationalists of the right – who support a return to Japaneseness in any case – as well as leftist intellectuals calling for a Japanese-Asian offensive against the dominant West, there may be grounds for the supposition that pre-war Asianism is still in the minds of people and now raising its ugly head again. However, there is a great difference between this and pre-war Asianism, at least as far as the “leftist” arguments are concerned. The “new” Asianism is an idea a-priori based on what the Asian people have in common and the way in which they are cooperating here and now, without there having been a japanisation of the Asian peoples. Whether the position of Japan will nevertheless be a dominant one, may indeed be a question addressed to the “Left”, for joint

Hiromatsu himself felt closely affiliated. See *Hiromatsu Wataru korekushon*. Tōkyō: Jōkyō shuppan, 1995.

14 See HIROMATSU Wataru: *Seikai no kyōdō shukan-teki sonzai kōzō*. [The common (gemeinschaftlich)-subjective existence structure of the world]. Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten, 1996 (= Hiromatsu chosakushū, 1).

15 MISHIMA Ken’ichi: “Wie sehen die Japaner Europa?”, p. 195f.

actions could well be undertaken by guidance (see *flying geese pattern* further down the text).

Of course, the representatives of Japan's political right, too, want to reap the rewards from their cultural affinity with the other states of East and South-east Asia. Some of them have joined together with other Asian leaders in showing the West that "Asia can say no", as in the publication *No to ieru Ajia* by Japanese LDP politician Ishihara Shintarō and Malaysian Prime Minister Mohammed Mahatir.¹⁶

Being the second of three books of the "say no"-variety (Japan, Asia, China)¹⁷ that have meanwhile appeared, it makes clear that besides the common message of all three books, Asia with its concentration of economic and cultural strength is (and should be) well suited to take its stand against the West and the USA. The authors of the book also give an indication of who is basically behind the debate about Asian values and the Pacific Century, for it is not the "common people" that are participating in the discussion, but parts of the political, economic and intellectual elite of the rapidly developing states of East and South-east Asia, who – according to the slogan of "Look East!" (Mahatir) – want to have their own, Asian version of a modernisation model to show off against the West.¹⁸

There are signs that within the framework of orientation towards the future the subject of the past will fade out. A rather piquant example of this

16 MAHATIR bin Mohamad/ISHIHARA Shintarō: *'No' to ieru Ajia*. Tōkyō: Kōbunsha, 1994. English version: *Voice of Asia. Two Leaders Discuss the Coming Century*. Tokyo/ N.Y./ London: Kodansha International, 1995.

17 MORITA Akio/ISHIHARA Shintarō came up first with *No to ieru Nihon: Shin Nichi-bei kankei kâdo*. [Japan that can say 'No': A course for new Japanese-American relations]. Tōkyō: Kōbunsha, 1989. German edition: ISHIHARA Shintarō: *Wir sind die Weltmacht: Warum Japan die Zukunft gehört*. Bergisch Gladbach: Lübbe, 1992. MAHATIR bin Mohammad/ISHIHARA Shintarō followed with: *No to ieru Ajia*. English edition: *The Voice of Asia* [see previous bookmark]. Finally, China showed up with a volume, too. German version: ZHAN Xiaobo: *China kann auch Nein sagen*. Peking: China United Industrial and Commercial Press, 1996 – For a critical Japanese statement to Ishihara and others' attitudes. See also KOMORI Yoshihisa: "A Critique of Japan's Neonationalists". In: *Japan Echo*, Vol. XVII, No. 2 (1990), pp. 39-47.

18 See MOLS, Manfred/DERICHS, Claudia: "Das Ende der Geschichte oder ein Zusammenstoß der Zivilisationen?" In: *Zeitschrift für Politik*, Vol. 3 (Sept. 1995), pp. 225-249.

tendency was given by the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahatir when he encouraged Japanese Prime Minister Murayama in 1994 not to keep on apologising for past actions. This was not received well everywhere in the region.¹⁹ His idea of an *East Asian Economic Caucus* (EAEC), in which all the Asian nations would be joined together, in order to meet the challenges of North America and Europe, was, however, received rather positively. Since 1993, the EAEC (then the EAEG)-idea (*East Asian Economic Group*) “has become officially the suggestion of ASEAN, being supported by South Korea and China, while the USA are very much against the suggestion as it excludes North America and Oceania, with Japan being caught in the middle as mediator”.²⁰ Professor Soeya Yoshide, while still sending out reminders about the legacy of history, nevertheless admits that the idea of a common Asian identity as supported by structures such as EAEC will gain a foothold in influential circles in the future. After all, so Soeya, the USA themselves for their own national reasons were busy in fanning the flames of the debate on Asianism by trying to put pressure on the states of Asia:

From an Asian perspective, the politics, economics, and societies of modern day Asia were built upon the legacies of Japanese militarism and imperialism. In order to bring an end to the history of Japan-centered 'Asianism', Japan must come to terms with its past in the region. ... At a time when economic interdependence has become global and such values as democracy and human rights are more pervasive than at any other time in history, a comprehensive 'Asian identity' exists only in the imagination. Nonetheless, the US continues to fuel such notions by imposing judgements and applying overt pressure to achieve its goal in the region. This is one of the main reasons why ideas like the EAEC are becoming more popular among Japanese politicians, opinion leaders, and the public.²¹

Japanese politicians are for historical reasons performing a balancing act between making concessions to their neighbouring countries and at the

19 See SMITH, Charles: “Forgive and Forget”. In: *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 157, No. 36 (8. Sept. 1994), p. 14f.

20 WALLRAF, Wolfram: “Does Theory Matter? Zur Leistungsfähigkeit intergrations-theoretischer Ansätze bei der Untersuchung asiatisch-pazifischer Realität”. In: *Welt Trends*, No. 7 (1995), pp. 8-24, here: 13.

21 SOEYA Yoshihide: “The ‘Re-Asianization’ of Japan”. In: *Look Japan*, March 1995, p. 17.

same time taking on the political role in the region that is commensurate with Japan's economic power. It is not so much that tensions exist because of the non-convergence of domestic and foreign policy, but rather because there are people inside and outside of Japan who either follow a policy of "Forget the past, look to the future" or show a "Big Japan never again" attitude. A similar situation can be observed at the economic level.

The Economic Dimension

Internationally there have been two magic words in the 90s: "regionalisation" and "globalisation". The exponential growth of transnational and multinational enterprises, a virtually no-limit mobility (it takes 24 hours to reach any place in the world from anywhere) together with the total availability of information and the transmission thereof through the use of sophisticated technical equipment and the constant improvement in media infrastructure, have meant a change in the conditions under which national politics are conducted. In foreign policy decisions domestic determinants are losing their influence as international and global conditions are receiving increased attention. As the political (the end of the Cold War) as well as the economic (the globalisation of markets) situations are changing, so international organisation, such as UNO or WTO, now see themselves as regulators whose scope of action is increased in proportion as more is expected of them.

Japan, too, will have to react to the changed parameters within the structure of the "global village", especially since she as a "global player" is challenged to do so. The various organisations and fora in which the decisions about free-trade zones and security issues are made are obvious fields for action. While for decades Japan has relied on the USA for her security, economic changes have prompted the USA in recent years to threaten to withdraw her military presence in the region or – and that would be of greater consequence still to Japan – to cancel the Japanese-American security pact, if Japan and/or the other Asian states continue to hurt the US economy.

The conflicts arising from trade deficits and the potential establishment of economic blocks in the Asian-Pacific region will unintentionally force Japan into the role of a mediator, not only between the American continent (USA, Canada, Latin America) and Asia (East and

South East Asia), but in the end also between East and West generally as discussed above. Let us take as an example the case of APEC: When Japan was host to the APEC-meeting in November 1995, the crux of the matter was essentially to somehow make the wishes of the USA compatible with those of the Asian members. An editorial in the Japanese newspaper *Nikkei Weekly* hit the nail on the head when it described the event as follows:

As host of this year's summit, to be held in Osaka, Japan's mission is to lead APEC nations toward a constructive agreement while bridging the growing gap between the U.S. and Asia and working around the problems of different stages of economic development among member nations. This calls for Japan to forge its own vision for the Asia-Pacific region – one that is clear and concrete.²²

The authors of the article are asking Japan to take over the “intellectual leadership”, which should be strong enough to create a “new philosophy of trade”, or even a “particularly ‘Asian’ way of doing things”. “With Asia starting to assume global economic leadership, demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach is probably of major importance”.²³

The reason for why the “particularly ‘Asian’ way of doing things” was invoked in Osaka was possibly due to the fact that the *Action Agenda* for the APEC members which was formulated there, did indeed show some very “Asian characteristics”.²⁴ Yamazawa Ippei, one of the intellectual advisers in the *Eminent Persons’ Group* (EPG) of APEC, described these characteristics in three keywords:

When discussing APEC in Europe, I cannot avoid to compare its characteristics with that of the European Union. I would like to suggest three keywords describing its major characteristics in comparison with the EU. They are

- diversity among its members
- high growth potential
- informal structure.²⁵

22 TSURUTA Takuhiko et al.: “Japan’s Job at APEC Summit is to Inject ‘Asian Way’ of Doing Things”. In: *Nikkei Weekly*, 7. Aug. 1995, p. 4.

23 Ibid, p. 4.

24 APEC: *The Osaka Action Agenda. Implementing the Bogor Declaration*. Osaka, 1995.

25 YAMAZAWA Ippei: “Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation: Its Unique Modality and Japan’s Role”. In: JAPANISCH-DEUTSCHES ZENTRUM BERLIN (ed.): *Symposium*

Especially the new modality of a “concerted unilateral liberalisation” shows, according to Yamazawa, the particularly Asian way of negotiating within APEC, which unfortunately is often misunderstood in the West:

Its new modality, the way to implement liberalization and facilitation programs, is the ‘concerted unilateral liberalization.’ ... This modality may be regarded as unasserted in comparison with the western approach of negotiating as in GATT and WTO, a liberalization agreement which is legally binding so that the signatories will be punished and sanctioned if they fail to implement their commitments. At this initial stage [of APEC; C.D.] this legalistic approach can not be accepted by Asian members. However, this should not be understood as hesitancy by Asian members to commit liberalization.²⁶

Indeed, the Asian countries are well aware of the fact that their economic growth is based on an open economic policy as well as the continual efforts to liberalise trade and investment *unilaterally*. This being so, it is clear to the APEC members that the way of unilateral liberalisation “in a concerted manner within the Osaka Action Agenda” is best suited to achieve that goal. Interestingly, the author nevertheless has reservations about Japan fully belonging to Asia and goes on to say: “We hesitate to claim Japan as a part of dynamic Asia, but the Japanese firms have contributed to the Asian dynamic growth through their active investment in East and Southeast Asia”.²⁷

This view was confirmed in a study on the achievements of the Asian states regarding integration which was completed by a research team around Yamazawa and which recommended the *Open Economic Association* (OEA) as the best concept.²⁸ Since recommendations are taken seriously in Japan and the study had a “significant influence on the position of the Japanese Government on regional cooperation”, even the ASEAN must now realise that Japan prefers to have two strings to her bow instead

Germany, Japan and the United States, 30. 05.- 01. 06. 1996. Berlin: JDZB, 1996, pp. 51-59, here: 51.

26 Ibid, p. 54.

27 Ibid, p. 54.

28 See YAMAZAWA Ippei: “Wirtschaftliche Integration im asiatisch-pazifischen Raum: Gegenwart und Zukunft”. In: *Welt Trends*, No. 7 (1995), pp. 33-41. Idem: “Sub-Regional Economic Zones in East Asia: Development and Prospects”. In: *International Economic Outlook*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (June 1993).

of one. "The OEA concept should shatter any illusion that Japan is ready to 'Asianise' itself and to join an Asian trade bloc".²⁹

Vague and acting in the *aimai* tradition³⁰ as usual, the political decision-makers in Japan have shown through their conduct within APEC that they are neither prepared to commit themselves to Asia nor to distance themselves from the region. If Japan's commitment to Asia were more definite, the establishment of an *East Asian Economic Caucus* would no longer be a problem, but the best way to declare herself.

That Japan prefers to have two strings to her bow can be seen in the regional trade statistics of recent years. While they show that the tendency towards increased cooperation within the Asian region is here to stay, it does not necessarily follow from this that Japan is turning away from the markets in the US and Europe, as the following example makes clear:

Comparing the average annual trade between Asia, Europe and USA, W. Flüchter found that regarding the total volume of foreign trade between Japan and the US and between Japan and Asia in the years 1985-89 and 1990-94 (unit: US\$), there was a considerable shift in emphasis in favour of trade with Asia. "The most important region for Japan in terms of trade is now Asia".³¹ Japan's trade with the US has dropped to second place and with Europe to third place as a result; nevertheless, trade with both partners increased during the period 1990-1994.

29 VILLACORTA, Wilfrido V.: "Japan's Asian Identity: Concerns for ASEAN-Japan Relations". In: *ASEAN Economic Bulletin*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (July 1994), pp. 79-92, here: 88.

30 *Amai* literally means vagueness, ambiguity, obscurity, nebulosity. The Japanese are often characterized as taking an uncertain or noncommittal attitude towards topics which rather demand a clear position. The novelist Ōe Kenzaburō referred to this kind of "*amai*-ness" as a distinctive Japanese feature in comparison to Western behaviour.

31 FLÜCHTER, Winfried: "Bedeutung und Einfluß Japans in Ost- und Südostasien". In: *Geographische Rundschau* 48 (1996) 12, pp. 702-709, here: 703f. "Asia" stands for the four Asian Newly Industrializing Countries Singapore, Hongkong, Taiwan, South Korea, the remaining ASEAN-countries without Brunei and Vietnam as well as the People's Republic of China and South Asia. Vgl. *ibid.*, p. 703. See also LINCOLN, Edward J.: "A Focus on the Asia-Pacific Region". In: *idem: Japan's New Global Role*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1993, pp. 160-200.

If we compare the difference between the export balances, the sum of exports from Japan to Asia was 64 billion US\$ in 1985-89 and 122 billion US\$ in 1990-94; exports from Japan to the US was 84 billion US\$ and 101 billion US\$ for the same period.³² The difference between the sums of exports to Asia and those to the US is therefore almost exactly 20 billion US\$ for the years in question, i.e. exports to Asia increased by the amount that exports to the US fell. Japan's tendency to focus much more on Asia could well be proved by these figures, but they should not lead to the conclusion that North America is no longer considered a viable market by Japan.

Quite the contrary: the figures show that Japan is anxious to secure the markets of both the US as well as those of the newly industrializing states of Asia – especially during recent years. The same is true for Japanese direct investment and industrial plant.³³

Japan's increased economic involvement in Asia reflects how much importance Japan attaches to this new and fast growing economic centre of East and South East Asia. "The Asian features" of the APEC-communiqué described by Yamazawa seem to confirm that the affinities are effectively creating an identity at the negotiation and action level as well as influencing behaviour, thus fostering a willingness towards regional mergers. The idea of an "Asian identity" however is not sufficiently attractive to make the countries of the region want to give up their national sovereignty in order to support regional cooperation. In contrast to the European Union, no country in the region wishes to attain supranational status at the expense of its own national sovereignty. Nationalism is still a dominant force and the only thing the statistics about growing economic cooperation tell us is that within the Asian structure there is a *bottom-up* process, a cooperation process whose dynamism came about through economic activity and not, as in Europe, through political activity.³⁴

32 FLÜCHTER, Winfried: "Bedeutung und Einfluß Japans in Ost- und Südostasien", p. 704 (Graph 4).

33 FLÜCHTER, p. 704.

34 See WALLRAF, W.: "Does Theory Matter?", p. 23f; OBERWEIS, Birgit: "Pazifische Kooperationsversuche vor der APEC". In: GARDILL, Jutta (ed.): *Kooperation im Pazifischen Raum*. Mainz: Universität Mainz, Institut für Politikwissenschaften, 1994, pp. 1-18 (=Dokumente und Materialien, 20); GARDILL, Jutta: "Pazifische Kooperation am Beispiel der APEC". In: *ibid*, pp. 19-32.

However, the dynamism that has emerged could be made use of politically and socially, in order to strengthen Japan's integration into the region, to accept and recognise her as a member of that community. The acceptance of an orientation towards Asia on the part of Japan would hardly have fallen on fertile ground, had she not recognised the advantages such integration would bring to Japan's economy. Her economy would be able to secure markets and the supply of raw materials, while the Asian newly industrialising economies would be provided with Japanese technology. All these are advantages that both sides have come to recognise, encouraging regional cooperation.

The Social Dimension

According to the *two-track* system of the economic fora, political and social support "oils the wheels" of Asian regionalism. Here the question arises, whether Japanese society is indeed inclined to consider itself "Asian".

Though possibly not representative in the empirical academic sense, I think the statement of a Japanese student colleague of mine a few years ago is worth mentioning here to illustrate the "particular nature" of Japan. Having spent some time in Asian as well as non-Asian societies, she was able to get first-hand experience of other cultures. When travelling back to Japan from a stay in Australia, this young Japanese lady spent a few days in South Korea and wrote me a letter from there, telling me that after a long absence from Japan, she at last had a feeling of being again in Asia. She could not explain how this feeling came about, but she felt undoubtedly that Japan and Korea had something in common, i.e. something "Asian". It is possible to speculate, whether this person would have made the same statement, had she stopped over in Thailand or Singapore instead of in South Korea; however that may be, what is interesting in the context of this paper is surely the fact that she perceived Japan as an Asian rather than a Western country. I thought of her lines when Edward J. Lincoln, quoting from a survey carried through in Japan in 1989, wrote three years ago:

Differences in the level of economic development, continued political conflict, and economic problems in the region meant that even in the late 1980s the

Japanese people maintained a relatively strong inclination to view their nation as Western rather than as Asian.³⁵

However, economic development in the NIEs (New Industrial Economies = South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore) and the ASEAN states has altered the way in which these countries are viewed, and they are now considered worth being reported on positively in the Japanese media and to be paid attention to in the formation of new institutions and policies. Since the early 90s the Japanese have become positively proud of being an Asian nation, not least because they regard themselves as the initiators of the grandiose Asian modernisation process.³⁶

The Japanese student mentioned above could well serve as an example for the statements about that “new feeling of solidarity”. Nevertheless, as the author’s explanation of the background to Japan’s focusing on Asia amply illustrates, this “new solidarity” is still tainted by the taste of Japanese cultural superiority. When we imagine Japan looking in a *flying geese pattern* at East and South East Asia’s economic development³⁷, we will see her doing so from the perspective of being the head goose, so-to-speak. In cultural terms, via the geese pattern formation, more things Japanese find their way to the countries of East and South East Asia than the other way round. The “increasing popularisation of Japanese mass culture in East and South East Asia” is not necessarily the outcome of a “concerted action by Japanese industry to penetrate the region culturally”, but the result of Japan functioning as a “relay station for the dissemination

35 LINCOLN, E. J.: *Japan’s New Global Role*, p. 165, 293. Results of survey from: SANADA Chikayoshi/OKURA Genki/WADA Yasuhiro: *90-nendai Nihon wa dō ogoku ka: Saishin seron chōsa, ankēto dēta kara yomu* [How will Japan move in the 1990s: Reading from the latest surveys and opinions polls]. Tōkyō: Jiyū koku-minsha, 1990.

36 LINCOLN, E.J.: *Japan’s New Global Role*, p. 165.

37 This model was developed in the 1930s by Akamatsu Kaname and since the 1980s has been used to describe the economic interaction in the Asia-Pacific Region, which is supposed to lead to horizontal integration. However, until this has been reached (all states to have the same economic and technological level of development), the kind of catching up to be done will in pictorial terms be similar to a formation of flying geese. See KORHONEN, Pekka: “The Theory of the Flying Geese Pattern of Development and its Interpretations”. In: *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1994), pp. 93-108. For a short description of this pattern see Wallraf, W.: “Does Theory Matter?” p. 18.

of US popular culture in Japanese guise”³⁸. Many Japanese take this as the basis for their own perception of being the forerunners in imparting social and cultural values, norms and behaviour patterns.

Seeing that their country is appealing also at another, non-economic level, Japan’s intellectual elite have entered the arena, introducing concepts about Japan’s potential power effectiveness, as the following two examples illustrate:

Hasekawa Michiko, a female professor at the University of Saitama, recently wrote a critical article about Western-dominated democratic theory in a Japanese magazine. She criticised that in 1945 the US did not understand what the Japanese emperor really meant to the Japanese people. Calling upon the missionary zeal of the *kokutai*³⁹ that supported the *Tennō* system in pre-war days, she pleads for a reform of the Western paradigm of democracy on the basis of remembering “traditional Eastern political thought”, i.e. “benevolent rule” (*jinsei*) and “virtue of the sovereign” (*kuntoku*). Trust between the sovereign and the people, as it existed between the *Tennō* and the Japanese people in the pre-war era, is to be preferred to the tradition of mistrust that formed the background of the bourgeois revolution in the West. Her appeal was that *democracy as such* should be reformed (*minshushugi sono mono no kaikaku*), that *jinsei* and *kuntoku* should once again be made the ideals to strive for.⁴⁰

Itō Ken’ichi, Professor at the University of Hitotsubashi, sees Japan in a different role. His model about Japan’s positive appeal in the near future is not one of orientation towards values, but one of integration in the region, of custodian of the balance between the US and China. This role

38 HOHMANN, Uwe: “Japans Einfluß in Ost- und Südostasien am Beispiel populär-kultureller Elemente”. In: DRIFTE/HUMMEL: *Pax Nipponica*, pp. 62-72, here: 70.

39 *Kokutai*, best understood as “national essence” or “national entity”, referred “for what was seen as the uniquely Japanese polity, the most important elements of which were rule by an unbroken imperial line and the concept of the state as a family, in which the relationship between the emperor and his subjects is like that between a father and his children.” KODANSHA (ed.): *Japan. An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1993, Vol. 1, p. 819. For a detailed analysis see ANTONI, Klaus: “Kokutai – Das ‘Nationalwesen’ als japanische Utopie.” In: ANTONI, Klaus: *Der himmlische Herrscher und sein Staat*. Iudicium Press. Munich, 1991, pp. 31-59.

40 HASEKAWA Michiko: “Kokutai toshite no minshūshugi” [*Kokutai* as Democracy]. In: *Voice*, Nov. 1996, pp. 108-127.

would be especially relevant since the two attempts at Asian integration (Pax China and *dai-Tōa kyōeiken*) failed. The dynamism that can be seen unfolding in the Asian-Pacific region is, according to Itō, comparable to the dynamism that once laid the foundation for Europe's modern age.

With Asia being in the process of a "recovery of its selfhood" (*shutaisei no kaifuku*), an appropriate presence of the US, combined with the dynamism of China, could lead to a new phase in world history, to the "super modern age". Without including the US to a certain extent in this, the future of Asia cannot be organised; it could well be that Japan could act as mediator between the US and China, thus avoiding a collision of interests between the two powers.⁴¹

Summary

Let us assume then that Peter Dale's characterisation of the Japanese is not so far off the mark: "The Japanese are as the clerks choose to define them: *cogiter ergo sum* (I am thought therefore I am)"⁴². According to this dictum, a re-asianisation of Japan would largely depend on whether there is a concept and an intention for this tendency or not and, above all, who thinks up such a concept and intention. The 1951 decision, when Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru succeeded in integrating Japan into the West by the Japanese-American Peace Treaty, could not be made so easily under the current national and international conditions. For historical, economic and social reasons a complete re-asianisation together with a gradual turning away from the West would not be in the national interest of Japan. That is why this is not a realistic goal for Japan's decision-makers. Japan's greater focusing on Asia, which is undoubtedly recognisable, is the result of the higher status the nations of the region have attained in the world economy. As self-assertion has grown, so has in proportion Japan's regard for an "Asian identity", whatever its shape and form. Within the polarisation scenario of "West versus East", Japan sees herself as a mediator between the two poles, as "The West of the East or the East of

41 ITŌ Ken'ichi: "Ajia o sai-kangaeru" [Rethinking Asia]. In: *Shokun*, Oct. 1995, pp. 98-106. Interesting in this article is also the discussion of the genesis of the word "Asia".

42 DALE, P.: *Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* [Routledge ed.], p. 21.

the West" (W. Wallraf), thus justifying her future role in the interplay of the competing paradigm.

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