

***Japan's Asia Policy: Regional Security and Global Interests.* By Wolf Mendl.** London, New York: Routledge, 1995. 234 pp.

The year 1997 has unfolded cataclysmic changes in East Asia. Financial catastrophes struck the East Asian economies one after another. The speed at which the financial contagion spread across these economies gave even greater credence to the reality that as cross-border flows of capital increase, so too the interdependence between these market economies. It matters less now where the trigger event was. Fears of higher U.S. interest rates, weakness in the Japanese economy, tension in the Indian sub-continent, all reverberate globally. Clearly, when the backdrop is unsettled, security, among other fundamentals, is rattled. These events have accentuated the need to understand policy-making and, at the same time, for policy-makers to understand the sea change that is sweeping through the region. Given Japan's role as a key economic player and great power in the region, it is crucial to understand Japanese policy motivations and outcomes.

Wolf Mendl's masterly treatise, *Japan's Asia Policy*, provides a scholarly analysis of the evolution of Japan's Asia policy as the country attempts to address new issues brought upon by the forces of globalization, in addition to coming to terms with the burden of its chequered past. Each of the seven chapters in this book examines a specific dimension of Japan's foreign policy. The discussion in Chapter 7 draws the reader back to the enduring contemporary focus of Japan's foreign policy — the country's political and security dependence on the United States. Nonetheless, Mendl also argues that "the policies of Japan will reflect changes in the international environment, but Japanese response to those changes will have an important influence in shaping it". (p. 165).

Mendl's analysis is rich in historical details and he makes effective use of history to explain the evolution of Japan's foreign policy in general, and its Asia policy more specifically. By locating his analysis of Japan's Asia policy in the history of Japan's relations with its neighbours, Mendl is able to weave for his readers a rich tapestry of the enormous influence of Chinese civilization on the cultural history of Japan. Yet, acknowledgement of this influence was suppressed after the Japanese defeat and its subsequent occupation by the United States, marking the end of World War II in the Pacific. As Mendl rightly argues, "the United States dominated Japanese foreign policy to the extent that American policy became the principal point of reference in the conduct of Japan's external relations" (p. 28). American influence was not, of course, confined to policy alone. "It permeated all aspects of social and economic life and created a network of close personal relationships which influenced the thinking and attitudes of the

dominant social groups" (p. 29). As a consequence, most Asian countries saw Japan as little more than an American vassal in the region.

Despite the return of full sovereignty to Japan in 1952, Mendl underlines how the heavy reliance on the United States for its security led Japan to believe that it was in a position to separate its economic fortunes from politics. This approach, promulgated in the "Yoshida Doctrine", marked the conscious de-linking from China as a result of American pressure and fear of the communist threat, and heightened by the outbreak of the war in Korea. This neglect of Asia, particularly China and India, led to the debate whether Japan is an insider or outsider in Asia (p. 49). However, in spite of the dominance of American influence on its foreign policy, Mendl also points out that Japan showed signs of greater independence. To cite two examples: firstly, in its policy towards the Middle East because of its dependence on Middle East oil (p. 32), and later in 1989, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square incident in China, during which Japan stressed that "there is more to be gained in terms of reform from an open-door policy towards China" (p. 85).

Through his account of Japan's relations with China after 1989, Mendl gives a convincing illustration of how Japan resorted to the use of its economic primacy in order to increase its political status and power in international politics. The strategic calculation of Japan's policy-makers is that "the more the Chinese economy becomes dependent on Japanese capital, technology and managerial skills, the greater the influence Japan hopes to exercise over the general direction of its neighbour's policy" (p. 86). Improving Sino-Japanese relations is, arguably, marred only by the revision to the guidelines of the U.S.-Japan security treaty which both the United States and Japan stressed are calls for co-operation during both war and peace and which does not target China and its row with Taiwan.

Japan's relations with Russia, Mendl argues, are weighed down by considerations of the balance of power in Northeast Asia. Mendl articulates well the Japanese concern when he highlights the new Sino-Russian *entente* as well as the possibility of growing Russian influence in Korea. However, it is also true that Japan has been engaging in a general policy of using economic means as the chief instrument of deterrence or persuasion. This approach is also evident in Japan's relations with countries in Southeast Asia, particularly in Japanese contributions to, and participation in UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) in helping to resolve the Cambodian crisis in 1992.

While Mendl posited that the end of the Cold War placed a question mark over the future of the security treaty with the United States,

we know now that the security treaty between that country and Japan had not only been revitalized, but was also expanded to include co-operation between the two in times of war and peace. In the final analysis, despite changes in the global environment, Japan's current foreign policy *vis-à-vis* Asia, and in particular the big Asian powers of China, Russia and India are still very much coloured by the American policy stance with regard to these powers. This harks back to the *Soogoo Anzen Hoshoo*, or the doctrine of "Comprehensive Security" — "an all-embracing policy based on economic power, information, diplomacy and a defensive posture closely linked to the American military presence in the region" (p. 134).

This book should prove to be of great interest to readers of Japan's foreign policy, although it presumes prior knowledge of its particular policy machinery, including elements such as the *zoku* (policy "tribes"). The book's comprehensive bibliography of English language as well as Japanese sources would be useful for further readings.

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