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BOOK REVIEW

Southeast Asia in a Changing World. Edited by S. Matsumoto. Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 1980. Pp. 242.

This volume consists of the papers and proceedings of a symposium held in Tokyo in March 1978.

Looking at the list of contributors of papers we find a minority from Japan — three out of eleven. On the other hand, of the participants listed, eighteen are Japanese out of a total of twenty-eight. There are few publications in English on Southeast Asia emanating from Japan, and so the reader is left with the feeling that both he and the volume could have benefited from a more extensive Japanese contribution. Since the volume purports to be on Southeast Asia there is an obvious gap in that only two Southeast Asians were there to contribute.

The papers are revealing and show interesting differences in the ways conference papers are presented. The papers by Robert O. Keohane, Franklin B. Weinstein and Gregory Clark deal in a direct way with their chosen topics and their arguments are put forward candidly. The two essays from Southeast Asia are useful in that they tend to reflect in many ways the views of influential circles in their respective countries at that time. One notices a certain reticence, and even humility, in some other papers. Shin'ichi Nagai, writing on Southeast Asia and Japan, quotes copiously from Herbert Feith on neo-colonialism and dependency and ends up by agreeing with Feith.

Gregory Clark, writing on Australia in relation to Southeast Asia and Japan, manages to present in an illuminating way and within a short space the main issues in politics, security, trade and investment, and reviews of these in a wider world context. Weinstein's balanced contribution on national security in Southeast Asia discusses the problems of internal and external threat, the then Indochina situation and Southeast Asian relations with the bigger powers. Many of his observations and conclusions remain valid after four years. Lie Tek Tjeng's paper is useful in the same way, giving the reader a firm feel of some of the attitudes which appear to have underlain and still underlie Indonesian reactions to external events. Somsakdi Xuto's piece on Thailand and international relations in Southeast Asia, although balanced and carefully, even sensitively, written, has unfortunately been overtaken by

events, chiefly the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea. James C. Scott writes provocatively on the nature of the peasantry and its role as the mass base for revolutionary change.

Philippe Devillers' essay on the present and future of the socialist bloc of Indochina is a presentation by an observer who has seen conditions on the ground and gives what would seem to be a Vietnam-centric explanation of the difficulties encountered then. He points out that in the case of Vietnam the economic, social and political problems must not be seen in the short-term view but in the longer perspective and in the context of "the type of society they want to build" (p. 96). It is curious that the role of the Soviet Union, of significance even at that stage, is scarcely mentioned, while attention is given to Vietnam's desire for aid from, and links with, democratic, non-communist nations such as Sweden and France. His effort is flawed by his perception, reiterated more insistently in the subsequent discussions, of Vietnam's peaceful role in the reconstruction of Indochina.

Peter Lyon's effort on ASEAN's prospects after its first ten years is very useful to those not entirely familiar with the growth of ASEAN. Unfortunately, the figures on which he based his arguments would have been out of date even in 1978. While putting some emphasis on the political advances of ASEAN, Lyon appears to have missed the significance of the early moves to economic co-operation. Do they appear to be as insignificant as the first early stirrings towards political co-operation? He is evidently a firm believer in the efficacy of institutions and stresses the importance of having "a strong institutional personality" (p. 117) which he states, ASEAN lacks. In so doing, he also misses the point that much of ASEAN's achievements even then had been the result of a highly personalized type of meeting, often the private "four-eyes" only meeting, between the various national leaders. The motives behind the formation of ASEAN can often elude even the keenest of observers. Lyon's otherwise knowledgeable paper is marred when he mentions Hong Kong (alongside Papua New Guinea, Brunei and Burma) as a "potential associate" for inclusion in ASEAN.

It is a sign of its quality that this volume has few of the platitudes that one has come to expect of many a conference report. Indeed, there are some very thought-provoking passages embedded in the lengthy and rather rambling text of the discussions. Some of the commentaries are very well-informed.

Tetsusaburo Kimura's analysis of the 1978 situation in Vietnam and Cambodia is perspicacious, even masterly, especially in the projecting of likely scenarios (p. 195). His "most likely scenario" has turned out to be the encapsulated history of Vietnamese intervention in Indochina.

As it is, because of the meandering discussions, the reader has to unravel the treasures from the generalities and the bits of trivia. However, Tadashi

Kawata's meticulous summary is helpful in this connection and should be just as carefully read.

Despite the rather restricted Japanese input, some of what was said is of considerable value to analysts of the region. Thus, Shizekazu Matsumoto's perceptive reminder of one important aspect of the Japanese willingness to adapt and the long-term nature of Japanese thinking is worth noting. In his overview paper on structural changes in global politics and new challenges to Asia, he writes, "Whether Japan's Southeast Asian policy will be successful or not also depends on training the younger generation in Japan for overseas activities and administrative reform of Japan's external economic cooperation" (p. xvii). Similarly, Tadashi Kawata's paper should be read for his comments on the need for a thorough reformulation of Japanese policy to take in domestic needs, trade, investment and the assistance given overseas.

Considering the nature of its content, the publication would have been more welcome had it appeared earlier. Its usefulness now lies in its composition as a record of the views of a group of prominent scholars commenting on Southeast Asian problems in the period before the Vietnamese intervention in Kampuchea. For this alone, it should find a place in all libraries with a collection on contemporary Southeast Asia. Japanese publications appearing in English on Southeast Asia are few and far between and so it is hoped that this will be the forerunner of many more IDE publications on Southeast Asia. After all, the Japanese have been willing, even eager, to listen to the views of others. Southeast Asians and all those interested in Southeast Asia are now equally anxious to know more about the trends in Japanese thinking on the region.

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