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## Miyagi, Taizo. Japan's Quest for Stability in Southeast Asia: Navigating the Turning Points in Postwar Asia (Hanabusa Midora, Trans.). New York and London: Routledge, 2017.

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**Miyagi, Taizo. *Japan's Quest for Stability in Southeast Asia: Navigating the Turning Points in Postwar Asia* (Hanabusa Midora, Trans.). New York and London: Routledge, 2017.**

It's often been said that the current state of a nation is a function of its ordered past. *Japan's Quest for Stability in Southeast Asia* is a vivid account and an attempt to capture and provide the strategic historical events which took place in Southeastern Asia, events which became responsible for the current changes and state of affairs which propelled an unusual transformation in Asia, a transformation the world believes is still taking place in the region. The text more specifically highlights the critical role played by Japan in the actualization of this feat, a role which appeared to have been undermined by previous authors who attempted to provide classical records and accounts of the events which constitute the compendium of Asia's history in the past. In the light of the rich primary resources of declassified data and information which the text drew references from, researchers and scholars of history and politics in Japan and Asia would discover that the text provides an uncommon edge over previous books written on the history and politics of Southeast Asia and the region.

The general structure of the text is presented in five chapters which individually bear key titles with specific subtitles, except in Chapter 4, all other titles have subtitles for the purpose of clarity and focus. These titles provided the backdrop and the premise for projecting and discussing the chronological account of the main political and historic events that birthed modern Asia and the countries in the region. The separate chapters in the text consists of at least eight-to-12 running subtitles that provide detailed narratives for specific historical events and the politics behind the events. The author began each chapter with a pictorial illustration which largely provided footings for the main issues earmarked for discussion in each chapter. The language of the text is written in simple prose style. A concise forward and an afterward section were provided by the author, thus giving clear insights to the author's mind about the text. The author also provided a rich prologue and epilogue section where closing arguments were made with regards to the direction of events in Southeast Asia. The section also contained the author's projections on what the future holds for Asia's and Japan's relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The text ends with a comprehensive three-page bibliography and a four-page index of terms to facilitate the use of the text by scholars and researchers.

Chapter 1 is titled "The birth of 'Asia:' The Bandung Conference and Japan's Dilemma." It laid out the various plans and processes that were embarked on by some countries and key individuals that led to the emergence of the region that is today known as Southeast Asia, a territory the author considered to be—before the present dispensation—"a major historical region that laid the foundation for modern civilization." The chapter outlined the role of several civil wars that were fought by the major actors in the region, by protectorates seeking independence and liberation from what was conceived as 'an oppressive rule' at the hand of the major actors like Japan, China, India, Malaysia, etc. The chapter discussed issues leading to the Bandung Conference, the establishment of the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence," America's involvement in the region, China's role, and the need for birthing a larger body known as Afro-Asia.

Chapter 2 is titled "Japan's 'southwards advance' and its repercussions: between independence and the Cold War." The chapter discusses matters arising from Japan's southward advancement and the cold war that ensued in the Asian region. It discovered that it had to confront and make reparations for the scars of the war it had earlier inflicted on various protectorates in Southeastern Asian region. The flux scenario created by the neutralist countries and colonies in the region was observed and discussed. The part played by Indonesia in anchoring maritime Asia

was also highlighted. The chapter identified the efforts Japan made towards making reparations between countries like Indonesia, Philippines and Burma. It particularly noted the surprise deal struck between Japanese Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi and Indonesian President Sukarno, a deal which climaxed in the sipping of each other's blood in a vow of brotherhood. The part played by America's covert support for the insurgency and its consequences in the region was also highlighted.

Chapter 3 is titled "Seeking to influence the cause of decolonization." The chapter largely focused on providing detailed discussion on the tug-of-war scenario which took place between the United Kingdom and China, among other things. The failed attempts by the British Empire to rebuild and expand in the area led to the regime of escalated confrontations among countries like Malaysia that severed diplomatic ties with Indonesia and the Philippines. This led to the burning of the British Embassy in Jakarta. These confrontations opened the way for Japan's Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda to step up the country's mediatory role in the conflicts raging in the region, to America's dislike. The quest of Shojiro Kawashima, vice president of the Liberal Democratic Party, to acquire nuclear power in the region was also discussed.

Chapter 4 is titled "The turning point of postwar Asia—1965." This chapter discusses the account of a mysterious failed coup d'état staged against Indonesian President Sukarno's government in 1965, which was later referred to as "the September 30 incident," an incident that left many questions unanswered. Analysts believe that America, Britain and China had direct or indirect involvement in the failed coup. There was, however, more evidence to support the claim that Sukarno himself had used the staged coup as a further reason for subduing the Communist Party. In the bid to exterminate communism, the September 30 event, according to CIA reports, led to one of "the worst mass murders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century," also described as "the greatest shock after Pearl Harbor." The matters arising from this incident further facilitated Japan's mediatory role in the region. Eventually, there was a bloodless coup which forced Sukarno to sign what was to become the March 11 executive order. This event and others similar to it, paved the way for Japan's mediatory talks and plans for development in the region, with the view to quell the campaign plans to further promote revolution by the warring states in the region who saw the idea of 'self-autonomy' as the right way forward to attaining development.

Chapter 5 is titled "The thawing of the Asian Cold War: US-China rapprochement and the emergence of the 'China issue'." This chapter chronicles the account of the China-U.S. efforts at reconciliation after deciding to jettison ideologies like cold war, revolution and independence from Asia and the politics played by all concerned parties to the fulfillment of this goal. The chapter also bears account of Japan's rapprochement efforts with China, to the displeasure of Nixon's administration in the United States. The reasons for the emergence of a trilateral cooperation between Japan, Australia, and Indonesia and matters arising from its establishment were discussed, a cooperation that led to the "Marcos Scandal." Kakuei Tanaka's ascent to the first position in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) over Takeo Fukuda and the politics that ensued before his ascension between communist China, Japan and Indonesia were also discussed in the chapter.

The book emanates from a rich personal experience of the author as a scholar, teacher and researcher of history. It also gleaned insight from special reviews from professors in the field and from close interactions and arguments during lectures with students from various universities at all levels, which went a long way to enhancing the quality of the content and presentation of the subject matter by the author. These factors were responsible for the uncommon depth of knowledge captured in the historical account of events that led to the birthing of Southeast Asia. Hence, readers of this text will find the book more simplified and detailed compared to other

texts I have reviewed on the history of Southeast Asia.

While the author of the text made great efforts to present historical facts in the text as an unbiased researcher, I perceived some notable degree of bias which the author himself alludes to in the concluding section of the *Afterword* written for the text. I presume the need to compile so much detailed historical information and data in one single volume led the publishers of this text to compress the information into only 143 pages (aside the 18 preliminary pages before the start of Chapter 1). However, in doing so, the publishers resorted to reducing the font size of the text to 10 points, which made the readability of the text a herculean task for persons without visual aids. An opinion sampled amongst students and members of faculty on the readability of texts with similar font size revealed that only persons with reading aids could study for long without stress. The font size of the text could be improved in future editions.

In the light of the above strengths and the clear objectives attained by the author in this text, I recommend this book to students of Asian history and policy studies and to all seeking to understand the politics and the intrigues that birthed 21<sup>st</sup> century Southeast Asia.

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