

## Ulasan Buku / *Book Review*

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China's Rise and Japan's Malaysia Policy

by Kazuyuki Katayama, University of Malaya Press, 2013 ISBN: 978-983-100-568-2

When it comes to Malaysia's foreign policy studies, a few scholarly studies received excellent reviews about the subject matter and became significant reference in the study of Malaysia's foreign policy. Among the noticeable scholars in the field are Chandran Jeshurun who wrote *Malaysia: Fifty Years of Diplomacy, 1957-2007* (Talisman 2008), Karminder Singh Dhillon and his book *Malaysian Foreign Policy in the Mahathir Era, 1981-2003: Dilemmas of Development* (National University of Singapore, 2009), and Johan Saravanamuttu works on *Malaysia's Foreign Policy, The First Fifty Years: Alignment, Neutralism, Islamism* (ISEAS 2010).

Majority of these publications refers to Malaysia's top-down power structures led by the country's Prime Minister as the main source of guidance of its foreign policy direction. Whereas Jeshurun's and Dhillon's work revolves around Tun Mahathir's first reign as the Prime Minister for twenty-two years which saw Malaysia become a strong voice of developing world, Saravanamuttu works focus on the historical narratives and trends of the country's foreign policy during the previous six Prime Minister including early first year of Prime Minister Najib administration.

What make Kazuyuki Katayama's work distinct from the above is the focus on specific country studies i.e. Japan and China, which based on historical narratives and the evolution of Malaysia's foreign policy on these countries, derived from the leadership factor. The way the book is organized based on theme then to be followed by chronological sequence in each theme makes it easy for reader to understand on the flow of the story as it involves on two different countries' historical features and consequences of such on Malaysia's foreign policy direction. It begins with how both Japan and China's image were portrayed through the lens of history of Malaysia and its evolution at country and regional level (Chapter 1 and 2). It then compares how these two countries' influences across sectors nationally and regionally (Chapter 4) and then how the two begins competing with each other in regional and international platforms (Chapter 5) and the two countries interactions with each other especially at political level (Chapter 6). What makes Katayama's work more interesting is the fact that he is a practitioner working (still) with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan and offers his idea in this book through the practitioner perspective more than theoretical.

When talk about the substance of the book, from the paradigm of Malaysian education system's, it offers refreshing view of how certain course of Malaysian history were perceived from a foreign perspective. Claim such as the Japanese treated the Malays better than the Chinese ethnic based on the memoir of Tunku Abdullah, a Negeri Sembilan royalty does not represent the majority situation experienced by the Malays, which according to the historical context of Malaysian education system received the same harsh treatment (page 6). The best way to describe this situation is when the Malays were happy when British came back to Malaya after Japan ended their occupation in Malaya after being defeated in the World War II. I also believe that is also the reason why the Malayan Communist Party was also participated by the Malay people which retaliating the harsh treatment received from the Japanese occupation forces and the locals who had been supporting them.

Moving on to the period after independence, the book evidently illustrate how Japan had been proactively participating in the rebuilding of the Southeast Asian economy especially throughout the 60s until 80s as part of it reconciliation and reparation of the war crime committed by its occupation forces in the region. This is the period where Malaysia deemed as appreciating the Japanese presence diplomatically and economically as the latter came with various economic incentive to uplift the economic growth of Malaysia from the Fukuda Doctrine introduced by Japan in 1977 to Malaysia's Look East Policy introduced by Prime Minister Mahathir in 1981 (Page 8-21). This is the period when Japan was perceived as a major economic power in the region without competition especially in terms of geopolitical influence. At the same time, China was still rebuilding its economy and went through difficult period such as the great leap forward tragedy and perceived as a weak country.

The period beginning 1990s however, marks the significant change in China's growth, and raise the question of the rise of China and how it will change the geopolitical landscape of East Asia. In Southeast Asia, this is the period when China began to show its interest in political and economic affairs of the region. Chinese supported Malaysia's idea of forming the East Asia Economic Group (EAEG) when it was not well-received by other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and Japan given the opposition from the United States. But the most important turning point in this development was definitely the Asian Financial Crisis 1997-1998 when it contributed to the stability of the region by maintaining the RMB value which was appreciated by its Asian neighbours. While at the same time Japan experienced the "lost decade" which setbacks its economic growth and sustainability of its economic-driven influence over the ASEAN region.

The later chapter reflects how Japan and China as the region's two great powers are capable of playing a leadership role in managing regional affairs, including institution-building. Even Japan has not recovered to the level prior to the lost-decade, it still maintained the status of the region's economic superpower and the main contributor to the region's economic growth in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and still retains sufficient power to lead other states to regional cooperation. Whereas China has maintained a strong political presence with its strong economic growth, increasing military power as well as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. It has developed as a preponderant economic power superseding Japan as the world's second largest economy in 2010 and challenging Japan's patronage over the region. The only unbecoming to its raise of power was its increase of assertiveness in the territorial dispute in the South China Sea.

While Katayama's work is deemed as comprehensive, much of the work are mainly comes from the historical and documented narratives which do not explicitly address security studies debates, or is folded into historical narratives that eschew theory in favour of interpretation based on loosely stated and mostly ad hoc causal claims advanced in the course of narrative. Most studies of East Asian international relations and security are in fact frequently riddled with references to the role of memory, ethnicity and religion – but almost always in the form of unscrutinised assertions made in the course of a larger narrative, not as part of a theorized argument put forward for explicit testing. Argument such as China's attitude towards Japan during its rise as the second largest economy and growing military clout from the perspective of international relations theory such as balance of power theory could be beneficial to address the unbalanced relations of *seireikeinetsu* between the two countries and at the same time could reduce the bias perception towards the author.

The author could also explore further the concept of hedging in justifying Malaysia's and other Southeast Asia weak states reaction towards Japanese economic incentive towards the region for the past 40 years, which at times contradicting the expectation from Japanese Government. Best example in this situation was when Japan failed to get endorsement form the majority of ASEAN member states for its proposal to expand the membership of the United Nations' Security Council including Malaysia which could be seen as hedging its position between China's apparent objection on the proposal as well as having another United States' junior in the platform.

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