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## AJISS-Commentary

# Toward a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region: Japan's G

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\*Series: Trajectory of Heisei, way forward to Reiwa (Special Contribution)

We are now living in the free world where human rights are protected and human dignit is equal regardless of skin color, ethnicity, religion or political creed and everybody is free happiness for self-realization. The liberal international order is based upon these ideals, up earned this after the tremendous bloodshed of the last century.

All of us in the free world share the same principles. Power is not absolute. There is som than power. That is the people's will. That is what power must serve. Therefore, democra

Many might think that this is the essence of only the American Constitution or European But there are other cases.

□ Asian political thought had nurtured the same idea for a long time. Mencius, a Chinese more than 2300 years ago, said that Heaven listens through people's ears and sees throug Heaven's will is the people's will. He continued that the rulers who go against Heaven's wi must perish.

Kukai, a Japanese high Buddhist priest from the ninth century said that statehood's purp

or ministers, but to serve the happiness of the people.

The essence of politics does not differ from the East to the West. It is time to engage our responsible partners to maintain and to strengthen this liberal international world order. First, to create a Free and Open Indo-Pacific region. This is the greatest challenge of this century.

In this regard, let me highlight several points.

The first is the importance of Asia to the world. The entirety of the Asian economy has long attracted serious attention. Japan, China, Korea, India and ASEAN nations represented 125 percent of the world economy in 2016. China experienced immense growth at the beginning of this century. Asia is now around 4.5 billion in 2018, 59 percent of the global population of 7.6 billion. That number is still growing.

Asia is the central piece in the strategic global framework of this century. This is the result of the industrial revolution. We are witnessing the old Asian empires like China and India are rising to their original position through industrialization.

The second point to make is that since the late 1980s, Asian nations have become democracies. Before that time, Japan and India were democracies, but not many others were. The Philippines became a democracy in 1986. Korea followed in 1987, and then other Asian nations like Indonesia and Thailand followed. Taiwan also became a democracy.

Many of these Asian nations were once European colonies. These Asian people were terribly discriminated against. Slave-like plantation labor and agricultural mono-cultures of sugar, rubber, and other commodities, and their hopes for early industrialization and prosperity.

After the Second World War, Americans granted independence as early as in 1947 to the Philippines. Indonesia became independent. But the British came back to Malay. The Dutch came back and fought against those who aspired for independence. The French tried to take back Indochina and Americans were involved in the Vietnam War in the context of the Cold War. The Vietnam War cost three million lives of the Vietnamese.

The self-determination of Asians was an inevitable denouement of history. The colonial powers were pushed back. The aspiration of Asians for human dignity and independence burned strongly. Mahatma Gandhi rose from British colonial rule with the conviction that colonial rule is against the human truth. Eventually, European colonial powers were forced to retreat from Asia. The final coup de grace was the return of Hong Kong to China and the independence of central Asian nations from Russia in the 1990s.

After achieving independence in the 1950s, Asians did not immediately believe in the values of the colonial powers were democracies and only limited Western values were applied to Asia. They looked at Western democracies in the beginning. And they erroneously thought that dictatorship, like military juntas, was a more effective, expedient way towards development.

But in the 1990s, disillusionment with communism, the end of the Cold War, and rise of democratic societies convinced them finally that the liberal world was the world which they had dreamed of.

Human beings are equal. Everyone possesses dignity. Everyone has the right to pursue happiness. Trade is free. They have conviction in these ideas and they are now all proud of their democracies. We should engage them now for the success of the liberal international order of this century.

In this connection, I should like to say that we cannot overemphasize the importance of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s in the United States led by Reverend King. Martin Luther King Junior was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi said he was inspired and struck by Tolstoy's "God's Kingdom is Within You;" Tolstoy was a Russian writer. And Tolstoy was inspired by a famous American abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison who fought against the slavery system in the 19th century. In the beginning of his book, Tolstoy quoted in length the Declaration of Sentiments adopted by the Peace Convention in Boston in September, 1838. We can see a

inspirations here.

After Reverend King, the universal values enshrined in the American Constitution became but also universal values around which Asian nations could rally. Then the United States became the world, not only the West. The Japan-U.S. alliance was imbued with new spirit and the history enhancing universal values in Asia. Since then, it has become the backbone to sustain a free region.

Now Asia is ready to contribute its efforts to sustain our liberal international order. There are military, political and economic resources in Asia.

In this regard, let me touch upon the importance of India. India would be the last superpower creation of Gandhi and a democracy since its birth. By 2050, its population will reach 1.6 billion. Its population will stagnate at around 1.4 billion, according to UN estimations of 2019. The Indian subcontinent would become the last major piece in the transformation of global geopolitics since the British Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century.

In addition, civilization-wise, many nations in South East Asia are more influenced by Indian civilization. Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia are such examples. We should start talking about a strategic framework. Now it is time to think of a strategic framework in terms of the Indo-Pacific, rather than the Asia-Pacific.

Most importantly, India's strategic direction is slowly changing under Prime Minister Modi's strategic alignment policy after achieving independence. During the Cold War, in particular after Nixon's visit, India saw an axis being formed by Washington, Tokyo, Beijing, Islamabad and Riyadh. They had a large-scale purchase of arms. But after the Cold War ended and China became the United States' strategic competitor, India had been moving slowly to engage itself more with the U.S. and Japan.

There are challenges to the liberal world order. The rise of China is the most important challenge of the 21st century.

In China in 1989, in Tiananmen Square, thousands of students were killed by tanks of the Chinese Liberation Army. The door to democratization was violently shut. China pursued an open policy of economic development under the Chinese Communist dictatorship.

Many wanted to believe that China would become a democracy after its economic development was proven wrong. After achieving miraculous economic success, their leaders became a one-party regime, and are now expanding their military and economic influence all over the world.

Communist China is still reluctant to accept the values that we cherish. Rather, they fear that the Chinese people for democracy will jeopardize the legitimacy of the communist regime.

They are trying to revise the world system so that they are respected and feared as a great imperial powers of the 19th century. There is a hint of historical retribution here. China may be the first country they think they lost during the Age of Imperialism in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Their worldview is not egalitarian like ours, based on common rules and consensus. To them, everyone has dignity. There is a common sense of justice for all, on the basis of ethics and morality to agree and achieve consensus. Every government must be accountable for its people. This is the liberal world order.

If they join our world in a responsible manner, we should welcome them. But if they want to change our open system in order to undermine it, or to replace it with their own, we should join them to resist them.

The Chinese population will increase during the coming 30 years only by 20 million people. The Chinese population might barely surpass 1.4 billion, with 35 percent of them above the age of 60. The number of senior people living in China by that time. China may lose steam because of their population aging.

meantime, we have to face the rise of China. It may require major efforts on our side.

China's economy is now more than three times as large as Japan's, and getting steadily U.S. with each passing year. China's military expenditure is now two hundred fifty billion c increase. It became around three times bigger than 10 years ago.

Japan's military budget is less than 50 billion dollars, like those of Great Britain and Frar budget is as big as that of Japan, the UK, France, Germany, Canada and Spain combined ; around forty percent of the United States' defense budget.

China has been expanding its influence regionally and globally with its newly acquired m its claim with the United Nations for the whole South China Sea. The South China Sea aloi Mediterranean Sea and historically has never been under Chinese control. It has been the for international sailors and merchants for centuries.

In the South China Sea, China pushed the militarization of reefs and islets like the Subi, Reefs of the Spratly Islands. Three-thousand-meter landing strips were constructed on the and artilleries were built upon or brought to them. For the U.S. navy, this may seem rathe alarming enough for the small neighboring nations who have laid claims to the Spratly Isl; to intimidate the regional nations, not to fight a war against the U.S.

Powers like Japan and the United States should state clearly and publicly that the high s that freedom of navigation should never be hampered, and that any dispute must be reso

China even started to encroach upon the territories of U.S. allies in 2012: the Scarborough and the Senkaku Islands of Japan.

China has carefully avoided using its navy but has instead used its law enforcement ves: quo unilaterally, so as not to provoke the Americans. But the Chinese coast guard became part of the PLA navy and some of its coast guard vessels are 12,000 tons large and carry They even paint naval frigates white to make them appear to be coast guard vessels.

Seeing Chinese unhidden ambition to squeeze the freedom of Hong Kong and their dete go free calling the island its core interests, the waters of East Asia seem rough in the twer

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