

Mapping the Future of Asia

By Shoichi Akazawa

From January 21 to 23, the Japan Economic Foundation, of which I am chair, held the first JEF Conference on Asia-Pacific Issues in Shimoda, a port-town located on the southern edge of Izu peninsula slightly more than two hours from Tokyo by train. Reflecting the current international situation, especially that of the Pacific region, the conference was attended by distinguished opinion leaders from 13 countries. Participating countries were Japan, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, representatives from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with the exception of Singapore and Brunei, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea. Attendants included representatives from governmental organizations, research institution heads, university professors and private corporate managers.

I prepared three themes to be discussed during the conference. The first was "Deterrents and Solutions in Asian-Pacific Development." To date, the economies of this region have grown at remarkable speed, yet many problems still remain to be solved to sustain this high growth.

The second theme was "Transition to a Market Economy in the Asian Socialist Countries Including China and Vietnam." The transition to a market economy in the former East European countries and the ex-USSR is not proceeding as smoothly as had been hoped. In comparison, the transition has been carried out relatively smoothly in Asian socialist countries which have started to attract global investments. In conjunction with this, China will continue to be closely watched. Thus, this seemed a good opportunity to ask the Chinese delegates directly what the "market socialist economy" proposed at last year's National People's Congress means.

The third topic was "Formation of Sub-Regional Economic Blocs and Future Tasks." Within Southeast Asia, several localized economic blocs are forming spontaneously, yet others are still only potential candidates. The question raised here was how to evaluate such sub-regional economic blocs and how to incorporate them into a bigger Asian economic bloc.

Almost all the conference participants

contributed during the one-and-a-half day conference. Many were meeting each other for the first time, yet we saw them sharing opinions and information during coffee or lunch breaks.

Shimoda is a memorial place in Japanese history. The U.S. fleet led by Commodore Perry visited here in 1854 and broke the more than 200 years of self-imposed isolation. In other words, this city is the door which was knocked to wake Japan from her deep sleep, prompting a transformation to the modern world. Documents concerning these events are kept in the city's memorial house. We thought the site was ideal for the attendants to contemplate Japan's past, present and future.

At the end of the conference, I presented the following remarks: "The remarkable growth in the Asian-Pacific economy seems to have stepped into the next stage: from a wedge flying to a multi-layered growth. The diversity and economic gaps within the region have certainly accelerated trade and investment, but the basic contributor to the economic development has been a free and open trade environment. At present, an important development is that traditionally export-oriented countries, especially newly industrialized economies (NIEs), are approaching the point where they must look at their domestic industrial structure.

"Also, important points were made regarding the relation between security and economy and Japan-U.S. policy coordination. Regarding China, much was discussed about the future. But it should be noted that Chinese influence sometimes exceeds its real power. Evaluating the Chinese transition to a market economy, we should avoid short-term optimism or pessimism. The important thing is that the market economy itself has been the leading force toward growth. I personally agree with the often expressed expectations to Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the 3T project (the adjustment and expansion plan for transportation, telecommunications and tourism). Concerning security questions, the establishment of a regional forum was proposed."

The *Journal* welcomes letters of opinion or comment from its readers. Letters, including the writer's name and address, should be sent to: Editor, Japan Economic Foundation, 11th Floor, Fukoku Seimei Bldg., 2-2 Uchisaiwai-cho 2-chome, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, 100 Japan. Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity.

APEC and Global Trade

The three articles comprising your February/March cover theme "The Asia-Pacific Community," encapsulate both the promise and the danger of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) trade pact.

What is so compelling to me is the perspectives of the two Japanese contributors vis-à-vis the perspective of the American contributor.

Mr. Nakanishi ("APEC: A Force for Trade Expansion") takes the view that the infusion of Japanese capital in the economies of Southeast Asian and other Asia-Pacific countries beginning in the early- to mid-1980s "spontaneously and coincidentally" led to a flowering of the economies of Asia "... (U)nlike the moves for regional solidarity in Europe and North America..." The tone of the rest of his article is a thinly-disguised diatribe in which he decries the European Community (EC) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) while at the same time denying that economic cooperation among Asian nations (namely, APEC) is the same thing—emerging regionalism and the specter of trade protectionism as one method of responding to trade developments in Europe and North America.

Mr. Fukushima ("APEC Assuming Increasingly Important Role") elevates the discussion to wishful thinking by noting that Asia comprises "...countries coexisting in mutual trust and being complementary to each other," leading to the "dynamic growth" achieved since the 1970s and particularly in the 1980s. The political, economic, and social dynamics at work among Asian nations has not, in my research, been marked by either mutual trust or complementary policies—historically or in the present day.

From that point, Mr. Fukushima (who, as a deputy director in the Ministry of International Trade & Industry, should know better) raises the problem of "APEC's overdependence on the United States and lack of skilled people and technology." AT THE SAME TIME he believes APEC is "an example of regional cooperation to help enhance the soundness and openness of such cooperation elsewhere in the whole world." As though Japan's wholehearted commitment to an "America-free" free trade pact in Asia weren't already abundantly



clear, Mr. Fukushima slams the door in North America's face when he writes, "it [APEC] needs to consider Mexico's membership in connection with its membership of NAFTA, which links it, as a member of the North American economic sphere, to the Pacific economy."

Mr. Clark ("A Stronger Sense of Community") sees the need for regional trade liberalization "that will enhance Asia-Pacific integration" in the same way that both NAFTA and the EC pacts promote balanced regional and global trade, not shut out some nations in favor of some others as Mr. Fukushima would have us believe they do.

Finally, Mr. Clark sees the U.S.-Japan trade and security relationship for what it is: the fundamental underpinning of stability in Asia. That is the promise of APEC, stability and global trade interdependence. The danger is an APEC pulling back into itself. It must not happen, and Messrs. Nakanishi and Fukushima must not let it happen.

Terry Dean Ragan
Tokyo

COMING UP

Since the beginning of mankind, food has been a major issue, often leading to armed conflicts between different groups of people. Today the U.S. and European Community are demanding that Japan accept tariffication of rice imports with the eventual goal of opening the rice market entirely. Meanwhile, the fact that Japan is the largest food importer and that it has the lowest food self-sufficiency rate among developed nations is scarcely known. In the next issue, our cover story will focus on the facts and issues of food supply in Japan.

Also, the *Journal* will take up the much heralded story of the transport of plutonium for the high-speed nuclear breeder being developed in Japan.

Miyazawa Unveils New Initiative in Asian Tour

Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa's tour of four ASEAN countries—Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Brunei—from January 11 to 18 was highlighted by his speech in Bangkok which outlined Japan's new Asian diplomatic initiative.

In his speech, Miyazawa showed Japan's keen interest in security affairs in Southeast Asia, and expressed the nation's readiness to play a more assertive political role.

The prime minister also committed himself to stepping up Japan's investment in and technological transfers to ASEAN countries.

Taking note of growing moves among Southeast Asian countries to enhance interregional partnership, Miyazawa said Indochina is a region where Japan should offer assistance.

Saying that improvement of infrastructure and human resources development are the most important problems to be addressed in the region, he proposed the creation of a Forum for the Comprehensive Development of Indochina to formulate "a harmonious development strategy" by combining the experience and wisdom of experts from interested countries and international organizations.

The Japanese leader said he hoped to host an international meeting in Tokyo in the autumn to prepare for the forum.



Prime Minister Miyazawa meets President Suharto in Indonesia during his tour of ASEAN nations.

Photo: Kyodo News Service

American Makes History in Sumo's Highest Rank

Hawaiian-born Chad Rowan's promotion to *yokozuna* (grand champion) is an epoch-making event in the world of sumo, Japanese traditional wrestling.

By clinching the 1993 New Year tournament, his second consecutive tourney victory, the 23-year-old 212-kilogram Rowan, whose sumo name is Akebono (meaning dawn), was promoted from the position of *ozeki* (champion) to the 2,000-year-old sport's highest rank, a feat never

before achieved by a non-Japanese.

Akebono's ascent has finally put an end to the long-standing controversy over whether a foreigner should assume the top position in the ancient Japanese sport, which requires not only athletic excellence but also a certain kind of "dignity." Some sumo critics had openly objected to the idea of conceding this "sacred" position to a foreign wrestler.

The event was hailed by the foreign community in Japan as a sign of Japan becoming an open society. Testifying to this, legions of foreign reporters con-



Photo: Kyoto News Service

Akebono participates in a ritual ceremony at Meiji Jingu Shrine after being promoted to yokozuna.

verged on Akebono's stable as soon as the Japan Sumo Association formally approved the Hawaiian-born wrestler's promotion to *yokozuna*, to interview the new grand champion. U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Michael Armacost, sent a congratulatory message to Akebono praising his accomplishment.

He achieved the distinction in record time: only five years after he left Hawaii's Oahu Island to join the stable of fellow Hawaiian Azumazeki, or Jesse Kuhaulua, who reached the sumo rank of *sekiwake*, one below *ozeki*, and became the first foreign-born stable master.

To reach the top, Akebono experienced tough challenges, including constant rigorous training, fitting into the rigid tradition-shackled world of sumo, and learning the Japanese language.

Akebono owes much of his success to his stable master Azumazeki who pioneered foreigners' participation in sumo.

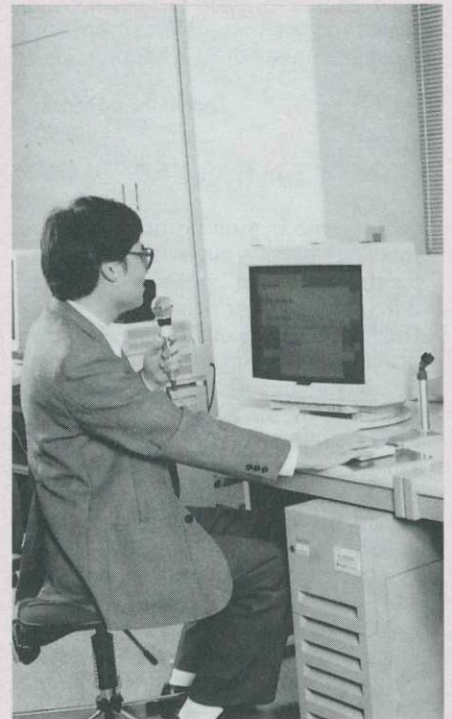
Azumazeki came to Japan from Hawaii's Maui Island in 1964 to enter sumo with the name of Takamiyama. He became the first foreign wrestler to reach the senior rank of *makunouchi* and win a tournament, but failed to make it to the position of champion. Azumazeki has made great contributions to the "internationalization" of sumo by teaching and training foreign novices.

Since Takamiyama, 87 foreigners have come to Japan to be sumo wrestlers, of whom 30 are now active. The second-highest ranked foreigner is Konishiki, an *ozeki*, also from Hawaii, who at 261 kilograms is the heaviest ever sumo wrestler. He has won two tournaments, but due to his erratic record, has failed to make *yokozuna*. He was once at the center of a controversy when a newspaper quoted him as saying that his failure to be promoted to *yokozuna* was due to racial discrimination.

What Language Are You Speaking In, Please?

Recently Japan's Advanced Telecommunications Research Institute International, in cooperation with research institutes in Germany and the United States, successfully carried out an international test of its automatic translating telephone system, in which computers serve as interpreters. The two-day experiment, which started on January 26, linked the Japanese research institute in Kyoto with researchers at Siemens AG in Germany and Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pa. for 15 minutes each.

When a researcher spoke into a microphone, a computer heard the words, translated the message, and relayed it textually to a receiving computer which then synthesized the message. Although the computer paused for several seconds to access some sentences and misheard the speaker on one occasion, the test showed that the system could play a role in certain situations. Japanese researchers believe that the system will come into practical use, for example in making hotel and train reservations, in about a decade.



An ATR researcher speaks with a U.S. collaborator via the experimental automatic translating telephone system.