



## A Free and Open Indo-Pacific as a Major Narrative: The Reconstruction of Values in Asia

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### Summary

- As Japan becomes the first country in the world to declare itself as an “Indo-Pacific nation,” it raises interest in how “Asia-Pacific” and “Asia” are talked about against the backdrop of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.
- Although there has been a decreasing number of references to “Asia-Pacific” and “Asia” in the Prime Minister’s speeches at Diet sessions, if we were to take a broader view that includes other speeches, there is at least no decline in the number of references to “Asia.” On the other hand, within Asia, particular emphasis has been placed on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India.
- ASEAN adopted “The Narrative of ASEAN Identity” in November 2020. This document affirms that ASEAN identity is composed of “constructed values” such as democracy and freedom, as well as “inherited values” that include acculturation of religious elements including Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.
- India and Japan have repeatedly affirmed the existence of shared values in Asia that embrace the rule of law and democracy, with the relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism as a starting point.
- **The idea that “there is already a foundation in Asia to accept values such as the rule of law and democracy, and to allow them to take root,” provides a powerful narrative that appeals to psychological and cognitive aspects such as identity and values, for the realization of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.** It can also become a **driving force to attract countries with Western values, including the United States and Australia, without any sense of incongruity.**
- There is a need for Japan to put further effort into making those values in Asia truly rich in diversity and tolerance.

### Introduction: Japan’s world-first declaration as an “Indo-Pacific nation”

On his visit to Viet Nam on October 19, 2020, Prime Minister Suga stated at the Japan-Viet Nam Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc that Japan, as an Indo-Pacific nation, will continue to cooperate and contribute to the peace and prosperity the this region.<sup>1</sup> In his talk with Dr. Nguyen Phu Trong, General Secretary of the Communist Party and President of Viet Nam, Prime Minister Suga similarly stated that Japan, as an Indo-Pacific nation, will continue to actively contribute to the peace and prosperity of the

<sup>1</sup> “Japan-Viet Nam Summit Meeting,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 19, 2020, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s\\_sa/sea1/vn/page1\\_000888.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s_sa/sea1/vn/page1_000888.html).

region in cooperation with Viet Nam.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in his video message for the conference organized by a thinktank on December 5, Prime Minister Suga again expressed that it is most important to bring about the realization of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific based on the rule of law, and that Japan, as an Indo-Pacific nation, will work closely with the countries with which we share this goal.<sup>3</sup> In this way, Japan became the first in the world to declare itself as an “Indo-Pacific nation.”<sup>4</sup>

With regard to the Indo-Pacific, it has so far been pointed out that its concept is ambiguous and polysemic, and discussions related to the Indo-Pacific have been conducted from a wide range of viewpoints.<sup>5</sup> Within Japan, the absence of the word “concept” in relation to the topic of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific in the policy speech delivered in October<sup>6</sup>, as well as the reference to a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific in relation to the topic of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific at the East Asia Summit in November, were widely covered by the Japanese press<sup>7</sup> and raised concerns even among experts.<sup>8</sup> In response, at a press conference held by the Chief Cabinet Secretary, it was affirmed that the Government’s position of strategically promoting initiatives toward the realization of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, remains unchanged.<sup>9</sup> Such reactions also serve as proof to the fact that a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” has been added to the lexicon of the international community<sup>10</sup> and become widespread within and outside Japan, including among the media. On the other hand, it seems strange that the domestic media in Japan, which reacted more sensitively than ever before to these differences in the choice of words and rhetoric, or to the change in narrative, appears indifferent to the Prime Minister’s statement on “Indo-Pacific nation.”

There are certain words that generally receive less attention as the expression or concept of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” becomes more widespread and commonly heard. These words are “Asia-Pacific” and “Asia.” In prior research by YAMAMOTO Yoshinobu, an analysis was conducted based on policy symbols consisting of cognitive and organizing functions, and the Indo-Pacific was taken up as a counter-concept to the Asia-Pacific.<sup>11</sup> However, many of these focused on countries apart from Japan as the subject of

<sup>2</sup> “Meeting with His Excellency Dr. Nguyen Phu Trong, General Secretary of the Communist Party and President of Viet Nam,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19 October 2020, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s\\_sa/sea1/vn/page1\\_000889.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s_sa/sea1/vn/page1_000889.html).

<sup>3</sup> “Special Message from Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga at the Second Asia Pacific Initiative Forum,” Asia Pacific Initiative, 4 December 2020, <https://apinitiative.org/2020/12/04/13794/>. “Prime Minister Suga: Close Cooperation with Other Countries to Realize a Free and Open Indo-Pacific,” NHK NEWS WEB, 4 December 2020, <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20201204/k10012746201000.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Prior to that, “Indo-Pacific nations” was also brought up at the Japan-France Summit Meeting. “Japan-France Summit Meeting,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 26 June 2019, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/we/fr/page6\\_000343.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/we/fr/page6_000343.html). “Japan-France Summit Telephone Talk,” *ibid.*, 5 October 2020, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/we/fr/page6\\_000445.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/we/fr/page6_000445.html).

<sup>5</sup> See the following examples of prior research. NAKAMURA Nagafumi, “The Merits and Demerits of Ambiguity in the Term ‘Indo-Pacific’: From the Perspective of Political Science,” *Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Command and Staff College Review Vol. 9 No. 2 (the 18th issue)* (2019): pp. 20-37. AIZAWA Teruaki, “Sore-zore no Indo-taiheiyo Seisaku to FOIP wo Meguru Saishin no Doko” [The Indo-Pacific Policies of the Respective Countries, and Latest Trends Surrounding FOIP], *Kaiyo Anzen Hoshō Joho Tokuhō* [Ocean Newsletter Special Report], Sasakawa Peace Foundation (24 December 2020). TAMARI Kazutoshi, “The Diffusion of the Concept ‘Indo-Pacific,’” *The Journal of International Security Vol. 43 No. 1* (June 2015). *Indo-taiheiyo Chiiki no Kaiyo Anzen-hoshō to Ho no Shihai no Jittai ni mukete* [Maritime Security of the Indo-Pacific Region, Toward the Realization of the Rule of Law], Japan Institute of International Affairs, 2019. *Japanese Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific Age: Response to Swing States*, 2015. *Japanese Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific Age: Response to Secondary Powers/Swing States*, 2014. *Asia Security and Order (Particularly in the South China Sea/Indian Ocean)*, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> “Suga gaiko, Bei-Chu baransu jyushi – ‘Indo-taiheiyo’ koso hazusu” [Suga’s diplomacy focuses on U.S.-China balance. Departure from the Indo-Pacific concept.], *The Nikkei*, 28 October 2020, <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO65528770X21C20A0PP8000>.

<sup>7</sup> “Tai-Chu senryaku ni funan – Shusho ‘Indo-taiheiyo’ ni genkyu sezu” [Unease about strategy on China – No mention of “Indo-Pacific” by Prime Minister] *THE SANKEI NEWS*, 14 November 2020, <https://www.sankei.com/politics/news/201114/plt2011140021-n1.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Yuichi Hosoya, “Indo-taiheiyo chiiki ni okeru ‘Jiyu’ to ‘Kaihosei’ no owari to naru no ka?” [Is it the end of “freedom” and “openness” in the Indo-Pacific region?], 15 November 2020, <https://note.com/yuichihosoya/n/nf76ee9614414>.

<sup>9</sup> “‘Indo-taiheiyo’ suishin kowarazu: Kato Kanbo Chokan” [Chief Cabinet Secretary Kato: No change to the promotion of “Indo-Pacific”], *Jiji.com*, 16 November 2020, <https://www.jiji.com/jc/article?k=2020111600731&g=pol>.

<sup>10</sup> “Address by Prime Minister Abe at the Seventy-Fourth Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 September 2019, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s\\_sa/sea1/vn/page1\\_000888.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s_sa/sea1/vn/page1_000888.html).

<sup>11</sup> YAMAMOTO Yoshinobu, *Indo-taiheiyo to Umi no Shiruku Rodo – Seisaku Shimboru no Kyoso to Kokusai Chitsujo no Keisei* [The Indo-Pacific and the “Maritime Silk Road” – Competition for Policy Symbols and Creation of International Order] (PHP Soken, May 2016), pp. 7–9 and pp. 61–67.

discussion.

In light of the above, this paper aims to explore, through Japan's own initiatives, the overview of how the words "Asia-Pacific" and "Asia" have been handled against the backdrop of the widespread use of the expression "Free and Open Indo-Pacific." In other words, the purpose of this paper is to consider the implications that a major narrative of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" has on Asia.<sup>12</sup>

## Asia, Asia-Pacific, and Indo-Pacific, as seen from speeches by successive Prime Ministers

Firstly, I will present an overview of the percentages with regard to how often the Prime Ministers touched on Asia, Asia-Pacific, and Indo-Pacific in the policy speeches and statements they delivered, from the Koizumi Cabinet of 2001 to the fourth Abe Cabinet of 2020.

References to Asia in the policy speeches from the Koizumi Cabinet to the Fukuda Cabinet made up about 70% to 80%. References to the Indian Ocean in these two Cabinets were approximately 20%, and were largely in relation to the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law and the Replenishment Support Special Measures Law in the Indian Ocean. As the number of references to the Indo-Pacific was generally low for the Aso Cabinet, references to Asia-Pacific appear significantly higher as a percentage.

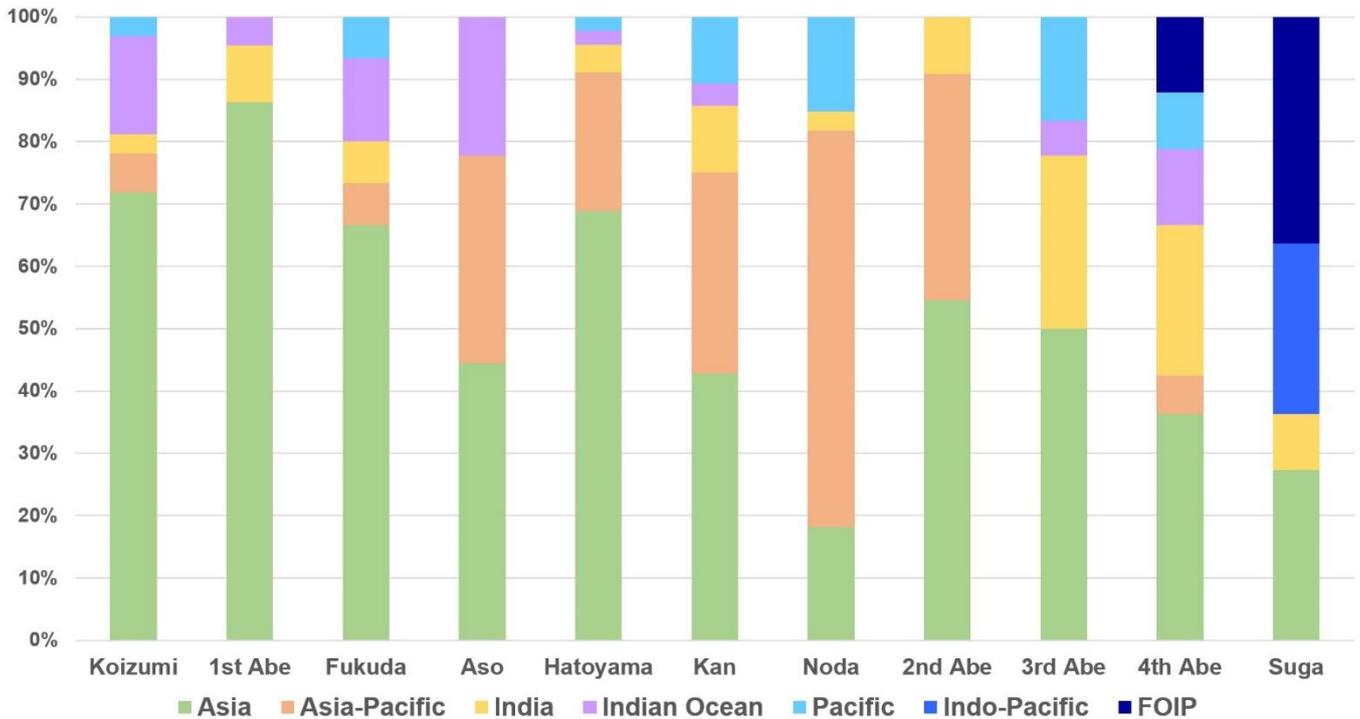
For the Hatoyama and Kan Cabinets, Asia-Pacific was referred to as a "region" between Japan and the international community. On the other hand, the rapid increase in the number of references for the Noda Cabinet was the result not only of economy and trade, but also of an affirmation of the importance of the U.S.-Japan Alliance and awareness of the rise of China. As such, it was based on expectations toward the Asia-Pacific region in aspects such as security, regional order, and the establishment of rules. The increase in the number of references to Asia-Pacific in the Kan and Noda Cabinets was mostly related to the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP).

While the second Abe Cabinet also spoke of the Asia-Pacific as a region, references to India made up approximately 10% in a similar trend to the first Abe Cabinet. This indicates that the concept of a "broader Asia" that includes India, which was proposed by the first Abe Cabinet, was maintained even during and after the second Abe Cabinet.

Based on this, we can see that references to India increased from the third Abe Cabinet, and references to the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, as well as to the Indo-Pacific, also increased simultaneously. In inverse proportion to this, references to Asia decreased from about 50% to about 40%, while there were zero references to Asia-Pacific in the third Abe Cabinet and a little over 5% in the fourth Abe Cabinet (as only two speeches have been delivered by the Suga Cabinet, it will only serve as a reference in this analysis). In the next section, we will look at the percentage of references to Asia and other terms in speeches delivered by the Prime Minister at speeches, conferences and other occasions outside of Diet sessions, from the first to the fourth Abe Cabinet.

<sup>12</sup> The "major narrative" in this paper refers to a narrative that is reconstructed through the accumulation of relatively minor narratives of the main actors in the international relations circles, particularly of individual state actors, and which is inclusive and shared. I wish to state clearly that it is different from the narrative set out in Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, and the narrative as an object for consumption as described by OTSUKA Eiji. Jean-François Lyotard, trans. KOBAYASHI Yasuo, *The Postmodern Condition*. (Suiseisha, 1986). OTSUKA Eiji, *Teihon Monogatari Shohiron* [A Theory of Narrative Consumption]. (Kadokawa Shoten, 2001).

**[Comparison of percentages] References to Asia, Asia-Pacific, Indo-Pacific, etc. in speeches delivered by the Prime Minister at Diet sessions**



(Prepared by the author)

**A disappearing “Asia”? Against the backdrop of the innovation and evolution of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific**

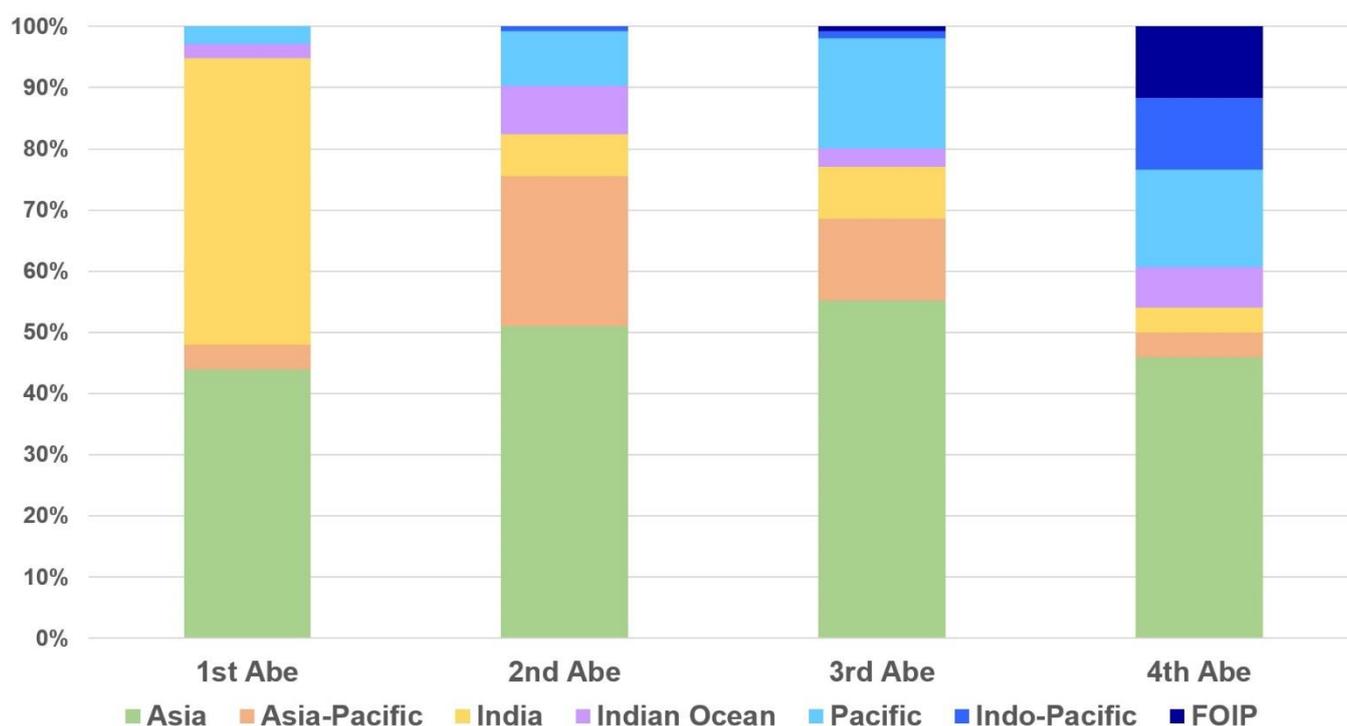
As explained above, in recent years, there has been a rapid decline in the number of opportunities to touch on Asia and the Asia-Pacific in speeches delivered by the Prime Minister at Diet sessions. On the other hand, due to the nature of policy speeches and statements, which are delivered only a few times a year, it is not possible to state definitively that the abovementioned percentages of references are necessarily proof to changes in the mindset toward Asia. In light of that, this section provides an overview of the percentages of references for terms such as Asia, Asia-Pacific, and Indo-Pacific in speeches delivered by the Prime Minister and in press conferences, published on the websites of the Prime Minister’s Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from the first to the fourth Abe Cabinet.

Despite the limited term of office of the first Abe Cabinet, then Prime Minister Abe visited India during his term and presented a speech at the Parliament of India. For this reason, the percentage of references to India exceeded 40%. References to Asia were also approximately 40%. During this visit to India, then Prime Minister Abe presented a speech titled “Confluence of the Two Seas” at the Parliament. In this speech, he stated, “The Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling [...] A “broader Asia” [...] is now beginning to take on a distinct form.”<sup>13</sup> This concept is related to the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” of today.

<sup>13</sup> “‘Confluence of the Two Seas,’ Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 August 2007, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/enzetsu/19/eabe\\_0822.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/enzetsu/19/eabe_0822.html).

Thereafter, while references to Asia-Pacific were prominent during the second Abe administration, then Prime Minister Abe stated in his speech at the American thinktank, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), that “the Asia-Pacific or the Indo-Pacific region becomes more and more prosperous.”<sup>14</sup> References to the Pacific and Indo-Pacific increased gradually during the third Abe administration, alongside a decline in references to Asia-Pacific. Talk of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific began in earnest during the fourth Abe administration. As of the time of the fourth Abe Cabinet, the percentages of references to Asia and Asia-Pacific, and to India and Indo-Pacific, were generally in a fifty-fifty split.

**[Comparison of percentages] References to Asia, Asia-Pacific, Indo-Pacific, etc. in speeches delivered by the Prime Minister, press conferences, etc. during the Abe Cabinet**



(Prepared by the author)

Based on the above, the percentage of references to Asia and Asia-Pacific were falling if we were looking only at speeches delivered in the Diet. However, if we were to look comprehensively at other speeches delivered by the Prime Minister and press conferences, we would see that references to Asia itself were not necessarily on a rapid decline. In fact, as the graph above shows, this percentage had remained generally at about 40% to 50% since the time of the first Abe Cabinet. “Asia” had not necessarily disappeared from the Prime Minister’s speeches.

However, it is impossible to deny that Asia’s presence is gradually fading in relative terms, against the innovation and evolution of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. In the next section, I will identify and compare the characteristic examples of how Asia has been referenced in Prime Minister’s speeches and press conferences in the past.

<sup>14</sup> “Japan is Back,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 22 February 2013, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96\\_abe/statement/2013/0223speech.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96_abe/statement/2013/0223speech.html).

## The realignment of Asia from a geopolitical and geo-economic perspective

As explained above, I have established that it is not necessarily true that the number of references to Asia had decreased in past Prime Minister's speeches and press conferences. On the other hand, even if changes are not observed in the number of references, it is also possible that the contents have changed. With this in mind, I will identify the characteristic examples of references to Asia.

During the first Abe Cabinet, references to East Asia and Northeast Asia were made during the Prime Minister's visit to China and the Republic of Korea, and references to Asia-Pacific, mainly in relation to Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), were made during his visit to Viet Nam. In this sense, Asia was referenced in relation to geographical concepts and international frameworks. During his visit to India, as aforementioned, he presented a speech titled "Confluence of the Two Seas" in Parliament. In this speech, he described India as the "largest democracy in the world" and Japan as "another democracy that is equally representing Asia." He also stated that "By Japan and India coming together in this way, this 'broader Asia' will evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the United States of America and Australia." At the press conference for domestic and foreign journalists held after his visits to Indonesia, India, and Malaysia, the Prime Minister presented a posture that places emphasis on strengthening multilayered cooperative relations with India and the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) in particular among the Asian countries, and across a wide range of fields including politics, economy, culture and education, and environment and energy.<sup>15</sup> We can say that there have been attempts since then to capture Asia from a geopolitical perspective separately from the geographical concept of Asia, or while maintaining the relationship between the two.

This trend was further reinforced during the second Abe Cabinet. The speech titled "The Bounty of the Open Seas," which was scheduled to be presented in Indonesia in January 2013, set out expressions such as "Maritime Asia" and "maritime democracy" in succession.<sup>16</sup> At the Meeting of the Ministry of Defense and Self-Defense Force Senior Personnel held in September the same year, we can confirm that "maritime Asian nations" was used for countries such as Australia, India, and ASEAN member states.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, from the perspective of values, the Prime Minister pointed out at the first International Bar Association (IBA) Annual Conference to be held in East Asia, that the warm and caring human heart lies at the root of the "rule of law," which was developed in Western Civilization, and that these are referred to as "Jin" (benevolence) and "compassion" in the case of East Asia.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, in relation to the geographical concept, he has said that Middle East connects Asia and Europe,<sup>19</sup> and that Turkey and Japan support Asia from East and West.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, he has established that China, along with Japan, are

<sup>15</sup> "Press Conference on the Visit to Indonesia, India, and Malaysia," Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet (via the National Diet Library's Web Archiving Project), 24 August 2007, <https://warp.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11236451/www.kantei.go.jp/jp/abespeech/2007/08/24press.html>.

<sup>16</sup> "The Bounty of the Open Seas: Five New Principles for Japanese Diplomacy," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/enzetsu/25/abe\\_0118j.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/enzetsu/25/abe_0118j.html).

<sup>17</sup> "48th Meeting of the Ministry of Defense and Self-Defense Force Senior Personnel, Instructions from Prime Minister Abe," Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 12 September 2013, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96\\_abe/statement/2013/0912kunji.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96_abe/statement/2013/0912kunji.html).

<sup>18</sup> "Speech by Prime Minister Abe at the 2014 International Bar Association (IBA) Annual Conference in Tokyo," Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 19 October 2014, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96\\_abe/statement/2014/1019iba\\_speech.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96_abe/statement/2014/1019iba_speech.html).

<sup>19</sup> "Japan's Ties with the Middle East in a New Age of Synergy, Mutual Prosperity, and Cooperation," Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe" Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 1 May 2013, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96\\_abe/statement/2013/0501saudi\\_speech.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96_abe/statement/2013/0501saudi_speech.html).

<sup>20</sup> "Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe 'Turkey and Japan are the two wings that will make Asia soar' at the Opening Ceremony of the Marmaray Project," Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 29 October 2013, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96\\_abe/statement/2013/1029speech.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96_abe/statement/2013/1029speech.html).

responsible for the stability and development of Asia and the international community,<sup>21</sup> and positions Russia as a partner of the Asia-Pacific.<sup>22</sup>

During the third Abe Cabinet, “Asia” is used in ways that are imbued with greater inclusivity. For example, he expressed his wish to make the future Japan a country where one can dream dreams, hand in hand with many people from China, the Republic of Korea, and Asia.<sup>23</sup> He also touched on the point of more effectively incorporating the dynamism of East Asia, as a center of growth for the world, into the growth strategies of Japan, China, and the Republic of Korea.<sup>24</sup> The repetitive references to this at this point in time are believed to be largely attributable to consideration of the Japan-China-Republic of Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and an awareness of the economic regional frameworks of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). During his visit to Kazakhstan, Asia continued to be used as a geographical concept, such as the emphasis on friends of Asia.<sup>25</sup>

In the fourth Abe Cabinet, the Prime Minister emphasized the importance of Asia, interlaced with the ideas of economic integration and values such as freedom and fair rules. At the same time, he also brought up the concept of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific for the first time in his speech presented to the UN General Assembly.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, it was revealed for the first time, at a symposium about Asia, that the “broader Asia” concept brought up during the first Abe administration was in fact the “Indo-Pacific” of the present day.<sup>27</sup> At the RCEP Ministerial Meeting, emphasis was also placed on Asia’s economic integration, such as remarks on how Asia can surely become one, and that Asia must become one by looking to the future.<sup>28</sup> Hence, in addition to geopolitics, we can say that attempts have also been made to realign the relationship of the Asian countries from a geo-economic point of view.

Within such an Asia, which countries have been perceived with particular importance? In the next section, I will provide an overview of the percentages of references to Asia in symposiums related to Asia, as well as the context that these references were made in.

### ASEAN’s contributions: Asia’s identity and values re-evaluated

The International Conference on the Future of Asia organized by Nikkei Inc. is an international exchange conference that has been convened 25 times since the inaugural event held in 1995. To date, its attendees have included the leaders of various countries, with a focus on the countries of Southeast Asia. The media partners of this event include major media outlets from Western countries and Southeast Asia, as well as

<sup>21</sup> “Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 10 October 2013, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96\\_abe/statement/2013/1010naigai.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96_abe/statement/2013/1010naigai.html).

<sup>22</sup> “Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 8 February 2014, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96\\_abe/statement/2014/0208naigai.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96_abe/statement/2014/0208naigai.html).

<sup>23</sup> “‘JFK’s Three Legacies and Japan’: Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at ‘The Torch Has Been Passed: JFK’s Legacy Today’, a Symposium Jointly Organized by Waseda University and the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 18 March 2015, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/97\\_abe/statement/2015/0318speech.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/97_abe/statement/2015/0318speech.html).

<sup>24</sup> “Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Korea-Japan-China Business Summit,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 1 November 2015, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/97\\_abe/statement/2015/1101jck\\_business.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/97_abe/statement/2015/1101jck_business.html).

<sup>25</sup> “Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Kazakhstan,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 27 October 2015, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/97\\_abe/statement/2015/1027speech.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/97_abe/statement/2015/1027speech.html).

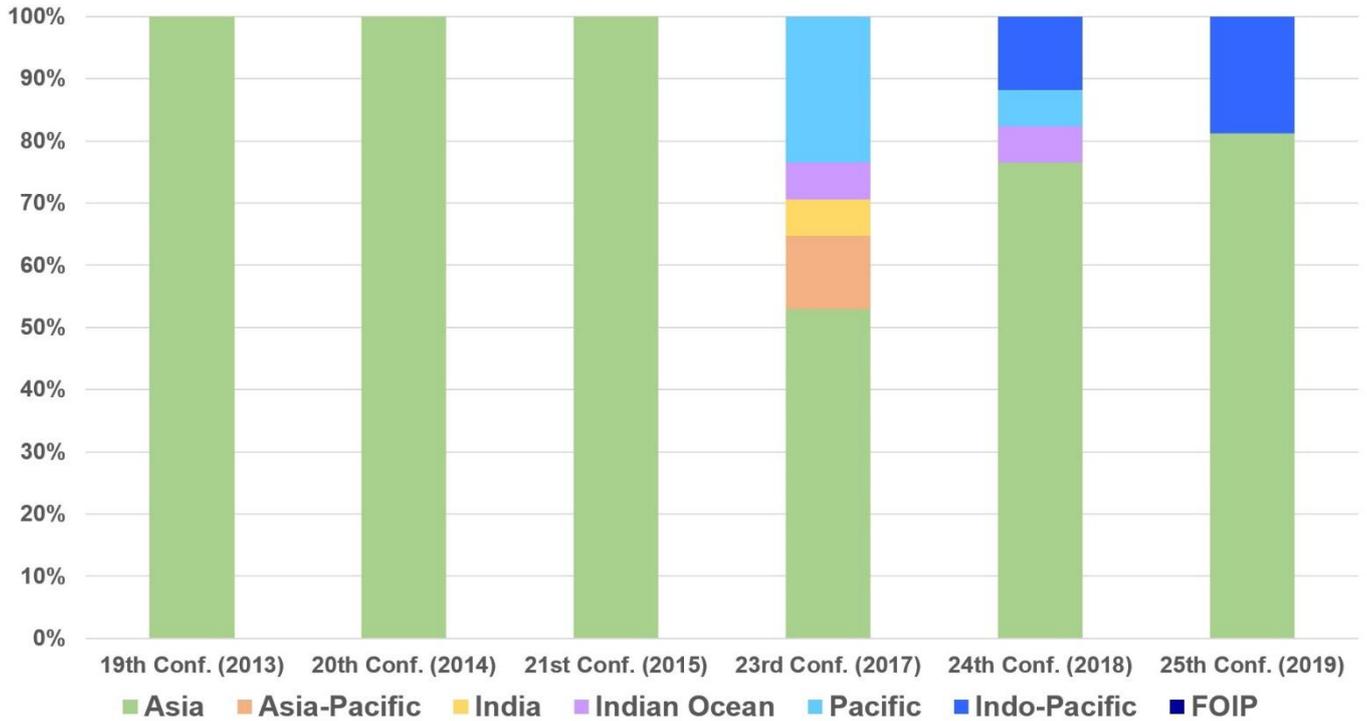
<sup>26</sup> “Address by Prime Minister Abe at the Seventy-Fourth Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/98\\_abe/statement/201909/\\_00002.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/98_abe/statement/201909/_00002.html).

<sup>27</sup> “‘A Japan Moving Forward, and the Future Being Built Together with Asia’ - Speech By Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Banquet of the 25th International Conference on The Future of Asia,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 30 May 2019, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98\\_abe/statement/20190530speech.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98_abe/statement/20190530speech.html).

<sup>28</sup> “Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, at the Fifth Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Intersessional Ministerial Meeting (Tokyo, Japan),” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 1 July 2018, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98\\_abe/statement/2018/0701speech.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98_abe/statement/2018/0701speech.html).

the People’s Daily, which is the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, and JoongAng Ilbo, a South Korean daily paper. As such, it offers a space for wide discussions about the future of Asia, as the title of the event suggests. How are Asia and the Indo-Pacific referenced in speeches delivered by the Prime Minister in a forum such as this?

**[Comparison of percentages] References to Asia, Asia-Pacific, Indo-Pacific, etc. in speeches delivered by the Prime Minister at the International Conference on the Future of Asia**



\*It could not be confirmed if the 22nd Conference (2016) was convened.

(Prepared by the author)

Looking at speeches delivered from the second Abe Cabinet and after, from 2017, there was an increase in the number of references to India, Indian Ocean, and the Pacific, with an increase in the number of references to the Indo-Pacific in 2018 and 2019. In contrast, references to Asia fell to about 50% in 2017, but maintained a level of about 80% in 2018 and 2019. Zero references were made to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

How was Asia expressed, explained, and depicted in the Prime Minister’s speeches? The following table summarizes the key points that were emphasized in speeches from 2013, with a focus on the context of these remarks.

**[Reference] Points of note in speeches delivered by the Prime Minister at the International Conference on the Future of Asia**

Event/Year	Contents
19th Conference (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Invited Myanmar to <a href="#">an “idealists' club” known as Asia.</a></li> <li>● Asia is a place where the pleasures and the dynamism of cities intertwine with each other.</li> </ul>
20th Conference (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Asia as a synonym for “rapid progress” and another name for “the power to advance.” Another name for “great achievers.”</li> </ul>
21st Conference (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <a href="#">The countries of Asia are highly diverse in their political systems, their cultures, their peoples, and their religions. It is surely this diversity that has given birth to Asia’s dynamism.</a></li> </ul>
23rd Conference (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Asia is diverse in its cultures, its peoples, and its religions. We will advance economic integration while respecting diversity, from which our dynamism arises. That is Asia’s historic challenge.</li> <li>● It is precisely because we respect each other that we should uphold common rules and create a free and fair economic zone. Asia's dynamism will link the Pacific and Eurasia. This will become a dream shared in common by all the countries of Asia.</li> </ul>
24th Conference (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <a href="#">By taking steps down the path that fosters peace, the rule of law, and freedom, it becomes possible for North Korea to make a deeply meaningful contribution, specifically of bringing about substantial peace dividends for East Asia.</a></li> <li>● That single “missing link” of North Korea becoming connected will spark rapid advances in the networks connecting the economies and the peoples of countries all around Asia.</li> <li>● North Korea has untouched resources as well as an abundant labor force that is presumably hardworking. There can be no doubt that the effects of North Korea taking steps down the path towards peace, the rule of law, and stability will transcend Asia and extend to the global economy as a whole.</li> </ul>
25th Conference (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Those of us who live in <a href="#">the broader Asia of the Indo-Pacific</a> have made the prosperity of the modern day our own. We were all brought up with the natural environment of the sea and we take <a href="#">a free and open maritime order blessed with the rule of law</a> as a natural premise.</li> <li>● Look to the light ahead and walk on. Turn your face skyward and run in the direction from which the daylight of hope shines. [...] When the 1980’s came around, that spread into the ASEAN region, and now it is a way of life for broader Asia—that is, for the entire Indo-Pacific.</li> </ul>

(Prepared by the author)

For example, citing the region's development and rapid progress, the Prime Minister of Asia highly evaluates Asia as the "idealists' club." At the same time, while respecting the diversity of Asia's political systems, culture, peoples and religions, he emphasizes that this diversity is the source of its dynamism. He also points out clearly that mutual respect based on diversity brings about compliance with common rules.

Bearing in mind that the U.S.-North Korea Summit Meeting was held in 2018, it is very interesting that he pointed to the possibility for even North Korea to make great contributions to East Asia if it could take steps down the path that fosters peace, rule of law, and freedom. At the 2019 Conference, he also touched on the point that the "broader Asia" concept that he had mentioned in the speech delivered in the Indian Parliament during the first Abe Cabinet, was actually the "Indo-Pacific" concept from the second Abe Cabinet and after. Based on the point that Asia's diversity and mutual respect has brought about compliance with common rules, as explained above, we can also say that the rule of law has been interwoven in that process.

Now, which are the countries that particular emphasis was placed on in this International Conference on the Future of Asia? I will compare the percentages of the countries that the Prime Minister made reference to in his speeches. Of course, as references to Japan would naturally be more prominent, percentages were compared only for countries other than Japan.

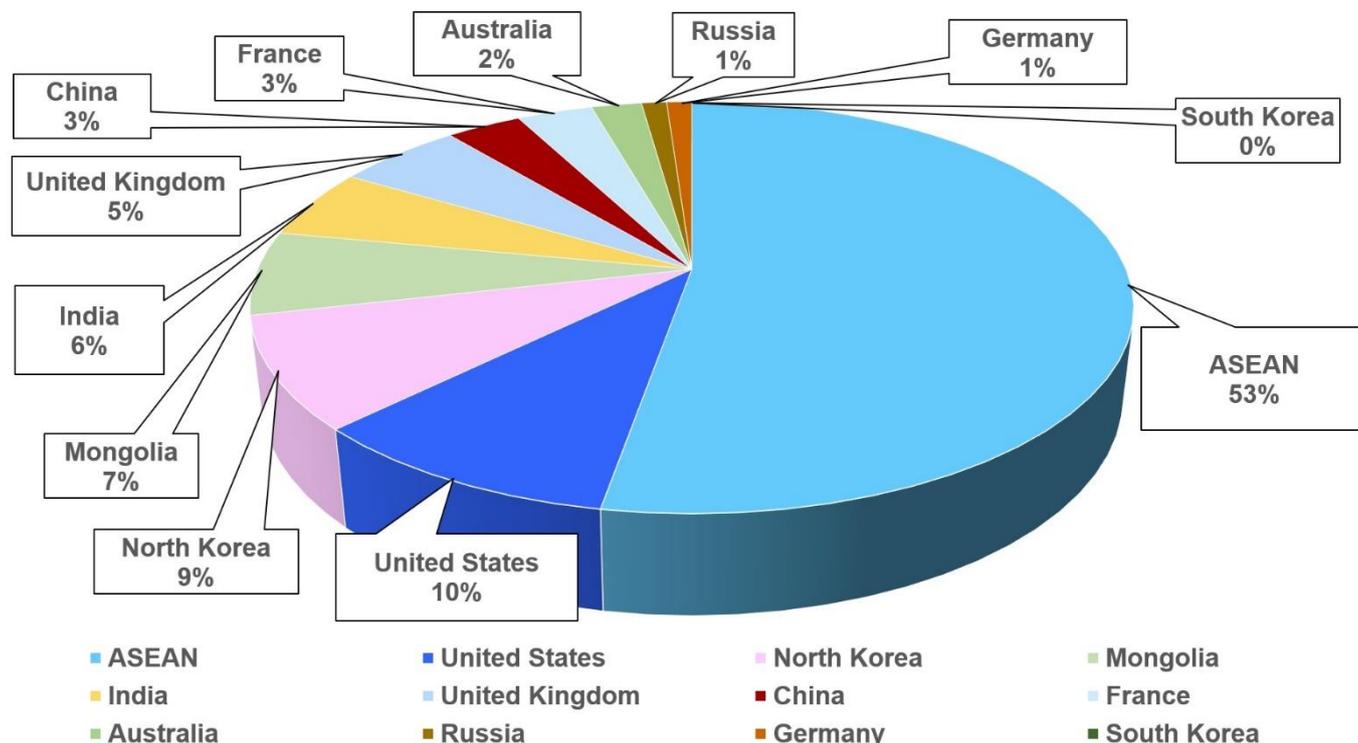
The following graph is a comparison of the percentages of references to the respective countries. More than 50% of the references are to ASEAN countries (including to ASEAN as a community). This is followed by references to the United States and North Korea, due to the impact of the U.S.-North Korea Summit Meeting, as explained earlier. This is then followed by Mongolia and India. References to China were about 3%, while there were zero references to the South Korea. Hence, we can affirm that amidst the progress of the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, ASEAN holds the key in considering the future of Asia.

With regard to ASEAN, the ASEAN Community 2015 was launched at the end of 2015. Comprising Political-Security, Economic, and Socio-Cultural Communities, it has been confirmed that activities will be accelerated in line with the goals set out by each community.<sup>29</sup> The defense authorities would normally be interested in the Political-Security Community, while the Economic Community is important from the perspectives of the economy and trade and commerce. In comparison with these communities, less attention is being paid to the Socio-Cultural Community.

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<sup>29</sup> "Fact Sheet on ASEAN Community," ASEAN, 19 November 2018, [https://asean.org/?static\\_post=fact-sheet-asean-community](https://asean.org/?static_post=fact-sheet-asean-community).

### [Comparison of percentages] References to each country at the International Conference on the Future of Asia



(Prepared by the author)

Against this backdrop, the Narrative of ASEAN Identity was adopted in November 2020 at the 37th ASEAN Summit.<sup>30</sup> This document points out that, “Given its strategic location of being situated between two continents, two ocean and major sea lanes in world trade as well as ASEAN’s growing importance to regional and global trade, Southeast Asia has transformed itself into the economic epicenter of the region,” thereby emphasizing the geopolitical and geo-economic importance of the region.<sup>31</sup> In addition, it establishes that the “ASEAN Identity is a process of social construct defined by balanced combination of ‘Constructed Values’ and ‘Inherited Values’ [...]” “Constructed values” include peace and security, prosperity, adherence to international law and rules of trade, democracy, freedom, promotion and protection of human rights, unity in diversity, inclusivity, and ASEAN Centrality in conducting external relations. On the other hand, “inherited values” include traditions, customs and beliefs, and lifestyles since the prehistoric era, as well as the foreign cultures received from China, India, the Middle East, and Europe, as well as the acculturation of elements formed and shaped by religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam.<sup>32</sup>

Hence, when we turn our focus onto ASEAN, what emerges is the question of how India, which has gained importance in the Indo-Pacific, be positioned within its relationship with Asia? This gives rise to the need to consider India’s “conditions as an Asian nation” and its “Asian-ness.”

<sup>30</sup> “The Narrative of ASEAN Identity,” ASEAN, 12 November 2020, <https://asean.org/narrative-asean-identity/>.

<sup>31</sup> “THE NARRATIVE OF ASEAN IDENTITY,” ASEAN, 12 November 2020, p. 1, [https://asean.org/storage/2020/11/9-The-Narrative-of-ASEAN-Identity\\_Adopted-37th-ASEAN-Summit\\_12Nov2020.pdf](https://asean.org/storage/2020/11/9-The-Narrative-of-ASEAN-Identity_Adopted-37th-ASEAN-Summit_12Nov2020.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 2–3.

In the next section, I will focus on a symposium on Hinduism and Buddhism, proposed by India and actively accepted by Japan, and shed light on how India is attempting to draw near to Asia from the aspects of identity and values.

## India: A rediscovery of Asia's identity

The “Japan and India Vision 2025 Special Strategic and Global Partnership - Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World” was released in December 2015 with then Prime Minister Abe's visit to India.<sup>33</sup> Great importance was placed on this statement for the incorporation of matters aimed at advancing defense cooperation, including the following points: (1) welcomed Japan's regular participation in the India-US Malabar Exercises, as it would help create stronger capabilities to deal with maritime challenges in the Indo-Pacific region; (2) reaffirmed the desire to further develop dialogue and exchanges between the two countries in the security and defense fields, including through the full utilization of the “2+2 Dialogue,” Defense Policy Dialogue, and Military-to-Military Talks; (3) appreciated the decision to begin Air Force-to-Air Force Staff Talks.

In reality, this statement did not generate much interest with regard to the following points raised: “The peoples of Japan and India are guided by common cultural traditions including the heritage of Buddhism, and share commitment to the ideals of democracy, tolerance, pluralism and open society,” and “Sharing the view that the future of Asia needs to build on the positive influence of traditions of non-violence and democracy in Asia, the two Prime Ministers welcomed the Samvad conference held in India in September 2015 and looked forward to Japan hosting the next conference in January 2016.”

This Samvad conference<sup>34</sup>, organized by the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), was held for the first time in September 2015 in India under the title “Samvad: Hindu-Buddhist Initiative on Conflict Avoidance and Environment Consciousness.” It was attended by Prime Minister Modi, while then Prime Minister Abe sent a video message.<sup>35</sup> Based on the fact that it is very rare for Prime Ministers or senior officials from the foreign ministry to participate in an international conference organized by a thinktank, it can be seen that both Japan and India place great importance on this conference. The inaugural event held in September 2015 sought to prevent conflict through cultural exchange and religious dialogue, while placing the focus on Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, and was attended by the State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.<sup>36</sup> At the Japan-India Summit Meeting held in November the same year, the leaders affirmed that Japan and India share the universal values of Buddhist traditions and democracy, and that cooperation between the two countries, which possess the spirit of tolerance, will contribute to peace and stability in the region.<sup>37</sup>

The second event and after have been hosted in Japan and other Buddhist countries. The conference held in Tokyo was organized by Nikkei, Inc. as a symposium on “Shared Values and Democracy in Asia.” During the 2016 conference, then Prime Minister Abe stated, “I have renewed my belief that, within the veins of

<sup>33</sup> “Japan and India Vision 2025 Special Strategic and Global Partnership,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 December 2015, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s\\_sa/sw/in/page3\\_001508.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s_sa/sw/in/page3_001508.html).

<sup>34</sup> “Samvad” is a word derived from “samvadam,” which means “dialogue” in Sanskrit. “ABOUT THE EVENT,” Vivekananda International Foundation, <http://samvad.vifindia.org/>.

<sup>35</sup> “Global Conclave on ‘Hindu-Buddhist Initiative on Conflict Avoidance and Environment Consciousness,’” Vivekananda International Foundation, 10 September 2015, <https://www.vifindia.org/event/report/2015/september/10/global-conclave-on-hindu-buddhist-initiative-on-conflict-avoidance-and-environment-consciousness>.

<sup>36</sup> “Visit by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Kiuchi to India (Outcome),” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7 September 2015, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s\\_sa/sw/in/page3\\_001365.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s_sa/sw/in/page3_001365.html).

<sup>37</sup> “Japan-India Summit Meeting,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 November 2015, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s\\_sa/sw/in/page4\\_001574.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s_sa/sw/in/page4_001574.html).

water that have run continuously since ancient times under the ground upon which we stand, there is endless nourishment fostering democracy and imparting value to freedom and human rights, namely tolerance and loving kindness.” He also emphasized, “Be it loving kindness, benevolence, fraternity, or harmony, I believe that in Asia, there extends an underground rootstock of thinking that supports democracy and values freedom and human rights.”<sup>38</sup> At the 2018 conference, he explained that “democracy is something that has to be tailor-made to the national character if it is to take root, and even then, getting those roots firmly set takes a great long time.” Nevertheless, he pointed out that “ultimately, there is no other system that can replace democracy,” and explained that the symposium had originated with the aim of establishing a space where people from all parts of Asia can bring their knowledge and experience on how to foster democracy, which they have thought and worried about, and where discussions can be held on “Democracy not as a ‘foreign species’ introduced from the West” and “Democracy that is spoken of not in translation, but through our native words and concepts.”<sup>39</sup> He then pointed out that within the roots of ideologies that value “compassion” is the thinking that oneself and others are the same, without any differences in social rank or hierarchy, superiority or inferiority, or a single absolute prominently projecting itself ahead of others, and that all are equal right from the start. At the same time, he emphasized that the lands of Asia contain the nourishing food and the minerals needed to cultivate democracy.

At the conference held in December 2020, Prime Minister Suga established the premise that diverse values have been nurtured in Asia since ancient times, and went on to explain, “Buddhism and Hinduism teach compassion. Confucianism teaches ‘Ren’ or benevolence. Islam teaches tolerance. And in Japan, we have the spirit of ‘Wa’ or harmony. These values have one thing in common: an attitude to cherish and respect diversity and tolerance.” Further, he expressed, “We can say that democracy in Asia have taken root, deeply and widely, and evolved based on such traditional thoughts and beliefs.”<sup>40</sup> The following table provides an overview of the conferences held to date.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “Shared Values and Democracy in Asia Symposium,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 19 January 2016, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/97\\_abe/actions/201601/19asianvalue.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/97_abe/actions/201601/19asianvalue.html).

<sup>39</sup> “Shared Values and Democracy in Asia Symposium,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 5 July 2018, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98\\_abe/actions/201807/05asia.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/98_abe/actions/201807/05asia.html).

<sup>40</sup> “Shared Values and Democracy in Asia Symposium,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 21 December 2020, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/99\\_suga/actions/202012/21asia.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/99_suga/actions/202012/21asia.html).

<sup>41</sup> For details, refer to the website of the Samvad Conference. “SAMVAD: Global Hindu Buddhist Initiative,” Vivekananda International Foundation, <https://samvad-vifindia.org/>.

## [Conferences held] Samvad Conference and “Shared Values and Democracy in Asia” symposium

Date	Title of conference	Venue	Participants	Organizer/Co-host
<b>September 2015</b>	SAMVAD I Sub-title: Conflict Avoidance and Environment Consciousness	New Delhi (India)	Prime Minister Modi Prime Minister Abe (V/M) State Minister for Foreign Affairs Kiuchi	The Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), etc.
<b>January 2016</b>	“Shared Values and Democracy in Asia” symposium	Tokyo	Prime Minister Abe Prime Minister Modi (V/M)	Nikkei, Inc. The Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research Nippon Foundation Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF)
<b>August 2017</b>	SAMVAD II Sub-title: Dialogue for Peace, Harmony, and Security	Yangon (Myanmar)	Prime Minister Modi (V/M) Prime Minister Abe (V/M) State Minister for Foreign Affairs Kishi	Nippon Foundation Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), etc.
<b>July 2018</b>	“Shared Values and Democracy in Asia” symposium	Tokyo	Prime Minister Abe Prime Minister Modi (V/M)	Nikkei, Inc. Nippon Foundation The Nakamura Hajime Eastern Institute Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF)
<b>September 2019</b>	SAMVAD III Sub-title: Peaceful Coexistence, Mutual Understanding Between Religions, Interdependence, and Sustainability	Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia)	Prime Minister Modi (V/M) Prime Minister Abe (written message) Ambassador of Japan to Mongolia, Masato Takaoka	Nippon Foundation Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), etc.
<b>December 2020</b>	“Shared Values and Democracy in Asia” symposium	Tokyo	Prime Minister Suga Prime Minister Modi (V/M)	Nikkei, Inc Nippon Foundation Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), etc.

(Prepared by the author)

\*V/M: Video message

Conservative media covered the series of conferences formally along the lines of “emphasizing the closeness between Japan and India/containing China,”<sup>42</sup> and while there were also reports that the formats of the Prime Minister’s speeches were “incomprehensible,”<sup>43</sup> all of these reports only focused partially on the conference in question without covering the background and overview of the event. Professor Jeff Kingston of Temple University, renowned for various critiques of Japan, stated in a critique of Japan’s values diplomacy while making reference to the title of this symposium, “in terms of promoting shared values and democracy in Asia, Abe achieved little beyond empty gestures.” However, he did not make any mention of the specific values that are being pursued.<sup>44</sup>

India is engaged in diplomacy more actively than Japan, by artfully connecting the series of conferences with the concept of the Indo-Pacific. For example, several weeks after the fifth conference held in September 2019, Prime Minister Modi explained the significance of the Indo-Pacific concept at the summit meeting on his visit to Mongolia, and the two countries affirmed that the Indo-Pacific region contributes to the long-term interests of all countries in the region and the world.<sup>45</sup>

During his visit to Japan in August 2014, Prime Minister Modi presented then Prime Minister Abe with books about a Hindi religious man and a copy of *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the holy Hindu scriptures.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, a program that focused on Hinduism and Buddhism was designed for Prime Minister Modi, including a personal guided tour of Toji Temple in Kyoto from Prime Minister Abe.<sup>47</sup> When then Prime Minister Abe visited India in December 2015, Prime Minister Modi invited him to Varanasi, regarded as a sacred site for Hinduism. There, they participated in the “Ganga Aarti” ritual performed near the Ganges River.<sup>48</sup> The Japan side appeared to be fully aware of the risk that the Indian ruling party’s emphasis on Hinduism may lead to religious conflict, and therefore ensured that then Prime Minister Abe also visited the Sidi Saiyyed Mosque, an Islamic facility, during his visit to India in September 2017.<sup>49</sup>

Buddhism’s impact in this region can be linked to the belief in Tibetan Buddhism<sup>50</sup> in Mongolia and Bhutan, and in Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. One of the things that all of these countries have in common is that they are all currently under the strong influence of China, both politically and economically. Of course, it is widely known that Japan had accepted Buddhism

<sup>42</sup> “Message from Prime Minister Abe at an international religious seminar attended by Prime Minister Modi of India, stresses closeness between Japan and India and containing China,” Sankei News, 3 September 2015, <https://www.sankei.com/world/news/150903/wor1509030060-n1.html>.

<sup>43</sup> “ARIMOTO Kaori: Questions about Prime Minister Suga’s speech at the Shared Values and Democracy in Asia symposium,” NBS NEWS ONLINE, 22 December 2020, <https://news.1242.com/article/264093>.

<sup>44</sup> Jeff Kingston, “The Emptiness of Japan’s Values Diplomacy in Asia,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus*, Vol. 18, Issue 19, No. 1, 01 October 2020, <https://apjff.org/-Jeff-Kingston/5487/article.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> “Joint statement on strengthening the Strategic Partnership between Mongolia and India,” MONTSAME Agency, 23 September 2019, <https://www.montsame.mn/jp/read/201478>.

<sup>46</sup> “Narendra Modi gifts Shinzo Abe books on Vivekananda, copy of Bhagawad Gita,” *The Indian EXPRESS*, 30 August 2014, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/narendra-modi-gifts-shinzo-abe-books-on-vivekananda-copy-of-bhagawad-gita/>.

<sup>47</sup> Toji Temple is the main Dojo of Shingon Esoteric Buddhism, and is also registered as a World Heritage Site. Status of Brahman and Hindu gods are enshrined as a part of the heavenly realm in the Kodo and Kondo. HIRABAYASHI Hiroshi, “Nichi-in Kankei wo Tokubetsu Senryakuteki Patonashippu ni Kakuage sasete Modi Shusho no Ho-nichi” [Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Japan, which elevated the Japan-India relationship to that of a special strategic partnership], *Monthly India Vol. 111 No. 7*. (The Japan-India Association, September 2014): p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> “PM Narendra Modi, Shinzo Abe attend Ganga Aarti at Varanasi,” *The Economic Times*, 12 December 2015, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/pm-narendra-modi-shinzo-abe-attend-ganga-aarti-at-varanasi/articleshow/50153650.cms>.

<sup>49</sup> “Visit to India,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 14 September 2017, [https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/97\\_abe/actions/201709/14india.html](https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/97_abe/actions/201709/14india.html).

<sup>50</sup> The fifth Conference was held in Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia. On this occasion, in addition to the video message from Prime Minister Modi and then Prime Minister Abe’s message relayed by Ambassador Takaoka, the 14th Dalai Lama also sent in a video message. “Third Samvad Conclave Unites Buddhist Leaders Across Asia in Ulaanbaatar,” *buddhistdoor*, 10 September 2019, <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/news/third-samvad-conclave-unites-buddhist-leaders-across-asia-in-ulaanbaatar-mongolia->

that had spread from Tenjiku (India) via Morokoshi (China).

Under these circumstances, India's approach for drawing close to Asia through Hinduism and Buddhism reflects the basic stance of the ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, which places importance on Hinduism within India. Externally, on the other hand, it could be said to be based on a strategic intent with a view to serving as a check against China from the aspect of identity. Japan captures such premises positively, and on top of that, is considered to be supportive of such moves from the perspective of values such as rule of law and democracy. This is demonstrated by the Prime Minister's speech, in which he said "democracy in Asia have taken root, deeply and widely, and evolved based on such traditional thoughts and beliefs" which respect diversity and tolerance. Developments up till now have at least been largely dependent upon the personal relationship between then Prime Minister Abe and Prime Minister Modi, and the key lies in how this will be utilized going forward as Japan and India work on strengthening their structural relationship.<sup>51</sup>

However, the universal values of rule of law, freedom and democracy that we have covered so far tend to be perceived as "Western values" or "values based on Europe as the subject." As such, it also frequently leads to ideological backlash from the countries of Southeast Asia, as well as other Asian countries.

In fact, various debates took place in the 1990s concerning "Asian values." As an example of the development of a theoretical pillar under the so-called "Singapore school" of Asian values,<sup>52</sup> Lee Kuan Yew touched on "Asian values" while rejecting the universality of human rights originating from the West.<sup>53</sup> One of the characteristics of these "Asian values" is collective orientation, and many of these values can be found in Confucian traditions.<sup>54</sup> Mahathir is also attempting to draw Islam closer to Confucianism.<sup>55</sup> "Asian values" emerged in the ideological vacuum after the end of the Cold War, and depending on the country or region, are based upon the need for the relativization of human rights in order to realize stability and economic growth for society as a whole. Hence, they have been used by the leaders of countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and China, as a form of political and strategic discourse to counter the human rights diplomacy and pressures to democratize imposed upon them by Western countries.<sup>56</sup> Ahead of the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action by the World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993, the Bangkok Declaration was adopted at the Regional Meeting for Asia held in March. This Declaration emphasized the relativization of human rights, as exemplified, for example, through its mention of the importance of regional particularities and various historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds.<sup>57</sup>

These "Asian values" have drawn sharp criticism even in Japan.<sup>58</sup> Some examples would be the point that the trump card to the West was sought from the political and moral language of the West itself; the

<sup>51</sup> HORIMOTO Takenori, *Indo Daisan no Taikoku e - <Senryakuteki Jiritsu> Gaiko no Tsuikyū* [India: Becoming the Third Major Power - <Strategic Autonomy> Pursuit of Diplomacy]. (Iwanami Shoten, 2015), pp. 118–126.

<sup>52</sup> KIKUCHI Tsutomu, "Kokusai Kankei no Soten toshite no Jinken Mondai – Ajia no Bunnyaku de" [Human Rights Issue as an International Affairs Issue – In the Context of Asia], WATANABE Akio, ed. *Ajia no Jinken* [Human Rights in Asia], pp. 82–88.

<sup>53</sup> YAMAKAGE Susumu, "Tonan Ajia ni okeru Jinken Mondai no Tayosei" [Diversity of Human Rights Issues in Southeast Asia], WATANABE Akio, ed. *Ajia no Jinken – Kokusai Seiji no Shiten kara* [Human Rights in Asia – From the Perspective of International Politics] (Japan Institute of International Affairs, 1997), pp. 70–71.

<sup>54</sup> INOUCHE Takashi, "Asian Values and Democracy in Asia," *The Memoirs of the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia*, Issue No. 134, (1997): p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Mahathir Mohamad, ISHIHARA Shintaro, "NO" to Jeru Ajia – Tai Obei e no Hosaku [An Asia that can say "NO" – Policy toward the West]. (Kobunsha, 1994).

<sup>56</sup> IGARASHI Seiichi, "Higashi-ajia ni okeru Jinken Kihan no 'Chiiki Tekigoka' to Shimin Shakai" ["Local Adaptation" of Human Rights Norms in East Asia, and Civil Society], *Chiba Journal of Law and Politics Vol. 32 No. 1 and 2* (2017): pp. 59–60.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 61. ABE Kohki, *Jinken no Kokusaika* [The Internationalization of Human Rights] (Gendaijinbunsha, 1998), p. 88.

<sup>58</sup> INOUE Tatsuo, *Fuhen no Saisei* [The Rebirth of Universality]. (Iwanami Shoten, 2003), pp. 73–124.

curse of the dualism of Orientalism, which is the dichotomy of East versus West that developed against the background of criticizing the West for cultural imperialism; the prejudiced mindset that finds Asia's religious and cultural diversity incompatible with the West; and, the unreasonable simplification of the structure of a West based on individualism and an Asia based on collectivism. Thereafter, the ideology of "Asian values" is said to have crumbled along with the collapse of the East Asian miracle, as a result of the Asian currency crisis that hit the region in 1997.<sup>59</sup>

India has been largely neglected in the discussions of these "Asian values" from the past. Although India has consistently advocated respect for democracy and the principle of human rights, there is prior research asserting that in reality, it was impossible to expect India to play a leadership role in developing human rights in Asia as the country faced many serious challenges.<sup>60</sup> There is a need to pay particular attention when India began asserting its presence as a member of Asia based on the religious elements of Hinduism and Buddhism, because it means that Asia's values are gradually being reconstructed through the reinterpretation of existing cultures and way of thinking. It has been pointed out that in the West, too, human rights became firmly established through the reinterpretation of dominant cultures and Christian doctrines when intense debate took place over the assertion and realization of human rights.<sup>61</sup> The reconstruction of values in Asia in the context of the acceptance and establishment of democracy and other universal values, is likely to have a significant impact on regional order.

In other words, the idea that there is already a foundation in Asia to accept values such as the rule of law and democracy, and to allow them to take root, can create a powerful narrative in the psychological and cognitive aspects such as identity and values, for the realization of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. At the same time, it can also become a driving force to attract countries with Western values, including the United States and Australia, without any sense of incongruity.

It took 12 years for the concept of a "broader Asia" which was proposed during the first Abe Cabinet in 2007 to include India, to be reaffirmed as the Indo-Pacific in 2019 at the International Conference on the Future of Asia that was also attended by ASEAN delegates. During this time, while ASEAN took on a leadership role in shaping Asia's identity and values, India sought to be actively involved in those values in Asia based on the religious elements of Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>62</sup>

### Conclusion: The concept of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific as a major narrative

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific is a concept that promotes various forms of cooperation in the areas of security, commerce and trade, primarily among Japan, United States, Australia, and India (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), ASEAN, and the United Kingdom and France. This paper shed light on how India also attempted to reconstruct values in Asia, in addition to the Asia's identity and values that ASEAN has been promoting under this concept.

A Free and Open Indo-Pacific does not advocate freedom and openness only in the areas of security,

<sup>59</sup> Daniel A. Bell, trans. SE Teruhisa, HASUMI Jiro. *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context* (Fukosha, 2006), pp. 5–17.

<sup>60</sup> ONUMA Yasuaki, "Bunsaiteki Jinken wo Mezashite – Fuhenteki Jinkenron Tai Sotaiteki Jinkenron to Nihon no Kokusai Jinken Seisaku" [Toward an Interdisciplinary Human Rights –Universal Human Rights Theory vs Relative Human Rights Theory, and Japan's International Human Rights Policy], WAYANABE Akio, ed. *Ajia no Jinken* [Human Rights in Asia], pp. 273–274.

<sup>61</sup> ONUMA Yasuaki, *Jinken, Kokka, Bunmei* [Human Rights, Nations, Civilizations] (Chikuma Shobo, 1998), p. 314.

<sup>62</sup> The relationship between India's values and India's view of international order is not always clear, and further research is needed. TAMARI Kazutoshi, "Indo no Kokusai Chitsujo-kan" [India's View of International Order], *Kanagawa University Asian Review Vol. 6*, (2019): pp. 59–67.

commerce and trade, but rather, could be said to carry greater significance if aspects such as identity and values are also supported by those values in Asia, which serve as a foundation that allows universal values such as democracy, freedom, and rule of law to take root. In other words, we can conclude that the concept of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific can be a major narrative.

However, India also faces problems of its own. The Indian ruling party, which values Hinduism, revoked a provision in the constitution in August 2019 that had until then recognized the autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir, causing great turmoil.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, in December the same year, it passed a bill granting Indian nationality to illegal immigrants other than Muslims. This led to demonstrations in the northeastern state of Assam, by people who were concerned about an increase in the number of Bangladeshi migrants. This also resulted in the cancellation of then Prime Minister Abe's visit to India.<sup>64</sup> Japanese experts, too, expressed concern over greater oppression of Muslims.<sup>65</sup> It has also been pointed out that even today, Muslims feel a sense of distrust based on the fact that Prime Minister Modi had been the Chief Minister of Gujarat when a large number of residents were killed in a riot there in 2002.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, while Prime Minister Modi had called the 14th Dailai Lama, who is based in Dharamshala in India, in 2019 to convey birthday greetings, the greetings were deferred in 2020 due to the China-India skirmishes and related ongoing diplomatic negotiations. This example demonstrated a consciousness and consideration of India's relationship with China.<sup>67</sup> It would be appropriate to continue paying attention to such developments.

In order to ensure that those values in Asia truly embody diversity and tolerance, which are the areas in which there is room for Japan to contribute actively toward? Tolerance may be a passive virtue, as well as an uninteresting one.<sup>68</sup> However, there is a good chance that values which have long been accepted in Japan can have a positive effect on the regional order of the present day. In *Nihon no Seiji (The Political Dynamics of Japan)*, KYOGOKU Junichi theorized that the cosmos is the "universe of meaning," which is the source of people's actions, and classified it into two: collective entities, and something that defines individuals and all of creation. Particularly with regard to the latter, he establishes that it is an order equipped with an ontological equivalence and tolerance, in which many objects exist as a single entity while retaining various individualities. He points out that this doctrine forms one of the basic chains of ideology for the Buddhist faith that has extended to India, China, and Japan.<sup>69</sup> There is a need to focus on this point once again from the perspectives of diversity and tolerance.

KOSAKA Masataka had previously expounded as follows on the three levels of international politics: "States comprise systems of power, systems of interests, and systems of values. Accordingly, relationships between countries are complex in which relations at these three levels are intertwined."<sup>70</sup> Under the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, ASEAN and India are likely to take on increasingly important roles in all of these three levels. Japan, which has thorough knowledge of both Asia and the West, has much room for offering its active cooperation not only in the systems of power and interests, but also in the system of

<sup>63</sup> "Kashmir dispute: India PM Modi defends lifting special status," BBC, 8 August 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49275789>.

<sup>64</sup> "India in turmoil over granting of nationality to illegal immigrants. Prime Minister Abe's visit cancelled." Nikkei, 13 December 2019, <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO53313030T11C19A2FF8000>.

<sup>65</sup> NAKAMIZO Kazuya, "India in Prime Minister Modi's Second Term, and the Future of Japan-India Relations," nippon.com, 15 August 2019, <https://www.nippon.com/ja/in-depth/d00507/>.

<sup>66</sup> "A mob out for blood: India's protests pit Hindus against Muslims," Reuters, 27 February 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-citizenship-protests-survivor-i-idUSKCN20K2V8>.

<sup>67</sup> "No birthday wishes for the Dalai Lama from PM Modi as China pulls back from Galwan," INDIA TODAY, 7 July 2020, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/no-birthday-wishes-for-the-dalai-lama-from-pm-modi-as-china-pulls-back-from-galwan-1698019-2020-07-07>.

<sup>68</sup> NAKANISHI Hiroshi, *Kokusai Seiji to wa nani ka* [What is International Politics?]. (Chuokoron-Shinsha, 2003), pp. 275–277.

<sup>69</sup> KYOGOKU Junichi, *Nihon no Seiji* [The Political Dynamics of Japan]. (University of Tokyo Press, 1983), pp. 108–138, especially p. 137.

<sup>70</sup> KOSAKA Masataka, *Kokusai Seiji* [International Politics], 40th edition. (Chuokoron Shinsha, 2000), pp. 13–20.

values. In this respect, there is no doubt that Japan should propose diversity and tolerance. As long as every order is underpinned by a specific value system and specific power,<sup>71</sup> Japan will be called upon to put further effort into supporting the Free and Open Indo-Pacific from the aspect of value systems.

### Afterword: Possible courses of action after the *pronunciamento* in Myanmar

On February 1, just before the completion of this paper, the military forces of Myanmar seized control of the government. Edward Luttwak, a world-famous strategist and author of work on coup d'état, pointed out that this was not a coup d'état, which is the sudden seizure of power carried out secretly, but a *pronunciamento*, which is a clear opposition and disobedience by the entire military against the incumbent government.<sup>72</sup>

Putting aside the question of differences in definitions, in response to these recent events, the Global Times, a newspaper covering international issues under the auspices of the Chinese Communist Party's flagship People's Daily, published an article stating that "the Myanmar military detained elected leaders and declared a state of emergency, which is a heavy blow to the much applauded democratization process of Myanmar."<sup>73</sup> This article points out that "So far, there are only a few governance models in the world, and the West is forcefully advocating its electoral system. Smaller countries do not have many options. As they walk toward modernization, most of them have chosen the Western-style electoral system." It goes on to state that "The setbacks and bumpy roads they encountered were interpreted as their 'due costs for democracy.'" Moreover, it states that "The political spectrum in the Southeast Asian region is complex. Traditional practices in the region and pressure from Western systems have long been competing with each other."

This article expresses China's opposition to countries that promote democracy, especially countries of the West, and at the same time, clearly demonstrates its intent to support Myanmar's junta and incorporating it under China's own influence, regardless of any economic sanctions that the West may impose. Domestically, the narrative that China's governance system is superior to Western systems,<sup>74</sup> which had developed in relation to its successful suppression of the novel coronavirus disease, will probably be recycled and applied directly to this situation.

Furthermore, the English edition of the Global Times published an article on February 3 titled "Japan on side of West on Myanmar issues, ignores local benefits."<sup>75</sup> This article states, "Japan is an Asian country just like Myanmar. However, Tokyo has not considered the whole situation from an Asian perspective," "And when there are conflicts between the Western electoral system and Myanmar's national conditions, these democratic nations have not considered the country's domestic situation or the local political and historical factors. In particular, as an Asian country, Japan's mentality is based on Western countries' interests and even took the opportunity to lash at China," and "Japan and some other 'democracies' only want to expand the area dominated by the West." In short, it is developing a narrative based on the structure

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 11–12.

<sup>72</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, "Not a Coup. A Pronunciamento," Twitter, 2 February 2021, <https://twitter.com/ELuttwak/status/1356391763355828224>. "Pronunciamento," Twitter, 2 February 2021, <https://twitter.com/ELuttwak/status/1356398943802953737>.

<sup>73</sup> "Editorial: Why has Myanmar's democratization process suffered such a major setback again?" Global Times. 1 February 2021, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/41ks7jVliVe>.

<sup>74</sup> "Global Column: Democracy in the Coronavirus Pandemic and Crisis," Jiji.com, 19 April 2020, <https://www.jiji.com/jc/article?k=2020041600595>.

<sup>75</sup> "Japan on side of West on Myanmar issues, ignores local benefits," Global Times, 3 February 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1214909.shtml>.

of “Asia = Stability = Led by China (toward success)” versus “Japan and the West = Democracy = Led by the United States (toward failure).” This can also be perceived as the recasting of the abovementioned “Asian values” of the 1990s, and is accompanied by the political incentives and risks that a part of ASEAN may accept. Separately from this, it is also possible that China may utilize Hong Kong politically as a testing ground for the Russian form of “birdcage democracy,” and attempt to export China’s own style of democracy.<sup>76</sup>

The key to resolving this situation lies in those values in Asia set out in this paper, which Japan, India, and ASEAN are promoting. As Western countries condemn the suspension of democracy in Myanmar, China has written off a heavy blow to the democratization process as the costs for democracy. This is set to be the first major test for the Biden administration of the United States since its inauguration.<sup>77</sup> Amidst this situation, while affirming that there is already a foundation in Asia to accept values such as the rule of law and democracy, and to allow them to take root, another proposal could be for the leaders of Japan and India to issue a joint statement to encourage Myanmar to formulate a roadmap for reaccelerating the democratization process that has been slowed down, and for the early release of the detained officials. Of course, Japan could also independently work on providing humanitarian support to Rohingya refugees and communicating closely with Brunei, an Islamic country and the chair of ASEAN for this year.

While some have also pointed out that Japan’s calculations with regard to security have been derailed by these events,<sup>78</sup> if those values in Asia which place the emphasis on diversity and tolerance that this paper touched on have been incorporated, it is likely that there will be no major changes to the realization of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific even if Myanmar’s democratization processes were suspended temporarily. Rather, adversity may instead strengthen the foundations in the medium- to long-term. In any case, there is a need for the prudence, patience, and efforts of the countries concerned, including Japan.

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<sup>76</sup> Simon Shen, “Hong Kong’s Democracy to Become Like Russia’s?” Newsweek Japan, 10 December 2020, <https://www.newsweekjapan.jp/stories/world/2020/12/post-95161.php>.

<sup>77</sup> “Myanmar will test Biden’s commitment to defending global democracy,” CNN, 2 February 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/02/01/world/myanmar-analysis-collinson-meanwhile-intl/index.html>. “Myanmar coup is a test for Biden and the U.S.,” The Washington Post, 2 February 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/biden-myanmar-coup/2021/02/01/c8adead2-64a2-11eb-886d-5264d4ceb46d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/biden-myanmar-coup/2021/02/01/c8adead2-64a2-11eb-886d-5264d4ceb46d_story.html).

<sup>78</sup> “Angle: Miscalculations in Japan’s security, Myanmar’s regression to military government,” Reuters, 1 February 2021, <https://jp.reuters.com/article/japan-myanmar-idJPKBN2A11RK>.