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## A revisionist looks ahead - Chalmers Johnson and 'to the end of the Japanese American alliance'.

### **Abstract**

#### Extract:

In November 1994, Professor Chalmers Johnson was on an extended Australian tour, organised as part of the ACAS (Australian Centre for American Studies) 'Visiting American Program'. On that tour he gave lectures in Sydney University and the Australian National University, addressed business groups in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, as well as meeting government leaders including Senator Gareth Evans, the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

### **Keywords**

Professor Chalmers Johnson, Japan, East and Southeast Asia

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**SEMINAR REPORT**

***A Revisionist Looks Ahead - Chalmers Johnson and "To the End of the Japanese American Alliance".***

*A Seminar Report by R. James Ferguson*

In November 1994, Professor Chalmers Johnson was on an extended Australian tour, organised as part of the ACAS (*Australian Centre for American Studies*) "Visiting American Program". On that tour he gave lectures in Sydney University and the Australian National University, addressed business groups in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, as well as meeting government leaders including Senator Gareth Evans, the Minister for Foreign Affairs<sup>1</sup>. Chalmers Johnson is an Emeritus Professor from the University of California, San Diego, and is also the President of the Japan Policy Research Institute, which closely monitors changes in opinion and policy within Japan.

Professor Chalmers Johnson gave a fascinating public seminar in November 1994 at the University of Queensland. Attended by academics, students, and members of the public, the seminar addressed the issue of the special relationship between the United States and Japan, and whether this relationship would change in the next decade. This is a brief report on some of the main points of the seminar and its following discussion period, augmented by the reporter with some general footnotes to allow the reader to follow up some of these issues.

Chalmers Johnson is a noted academic who has written widely on Communist China and on contemporary Japan. He has written a definitive study on people's war: *Autopsy on People's War*, and range of books on Japan including *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* and most recently *Japan - Who Governs?: The Rise of the Developmental State*. One of the main themes of the seminar in Brisbane was that Japan's role in the world, and its foreign policy stance, has already begun to change, and that within a decade, the special US-Japan alliance may have ended. This is part of a broader analysis of Asia which suggests that there will be a major shift of power towards Asia, with Japan, China and ASEAN being the most powerful groupings, but with Korea and Vietnam playing crucial buffer and strategic roles<sup>2</sup>. Here, it would be in the interest of the US to ensure the vitality of both South Korea and Vietnam, with the latter relationship entailing a serious shift in US foreign policy. These views were quite widely reported in the print media in Australia, and have also been broadcast through radio interviews<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>. For the report from ACAS, see "US Expert on Japan Analyses Empowerment of Asia", *The Catalyst*, December 1994, p1, pp4-5.

<sup>2</sup>. JOHNSON, Chalmers "The Empowerment of Asia", Research Paper, (advance copy, available from ACAS, Sydney University), 1994, available from ACAS, Sydney University.

<sup>3</sup>. A 'Communication Report' by the Primary Communication Pty. Ltd. notes the following print coverage of Chalmers Johnson's ideas: "APEC Showdown", *Business Review Weekly*, 7-11-94; "Free Trade Nice Idea But Won't Work", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14-11-94; "Good Policy' for Australia But not US", *Australian Financial Review*, 14-11-94; "US Authority Says Forum

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In the Brisbane seminar Chalmers Johnson noted a large number of indicators which suggested subtle shifts in Japan's perceptions. First of all, Japan seems to be turning more to East and Southeast Asia for its future trading partners and markets, perhaps partly in order to counter the recently formed NAFTA free trading area in North America. Furthermore, this seems to be part of a willingness to 'swing' towards a revitalised role in Asia, perhaps in conjunction with mainland China. In particular, Japan is trying to adjust to the reality of the rising power of China. A range of factors has helped try to smooth the Japan-China relationship; from an imperial visit to China, apologies over aspects of World War II, as well as massive loans, aid, technological transfers, large investment programmes and a generally soft stance on human rights. Here Japan has developed a policy of 'economism', i.e. it hopes it can influence China by developing this economic closeness. However, China will not necessarily place economic interests over major political concerns, e.g. its views on Hong Kong. Although China is unlikely 'to kill the goose that lays the golden egg', it is wise to remember that Chinese history is filled 'with dead geese'. In this context, 1997 will be a key period for observing Chinese ability to manage Hong Kong.

Although tensions still exist between Japan and China, these frictions cannot be relied upon too heavily by those who fear that China and Japan will not ally together. Samuel Huntington places Japan and China in different civilization groupings, which is erroneous<sup>4</sup>. This as much as anything reflects US hopes that these two countries will not get too close. In fact it is likely that in the future China and Japan will draw closer, since it is in their mutual interest to do so. Here the US seems to fear a shift in the 'balance of power' in Asia, and wishes to play the role of an external balancer, interacting with major players including China, Japan and ASEAN. Chalmers Johnson stressed, however, that if the US is to do such balancing, it must be based on a real stake in Asian growth.

Japan is beginning to see that it can have an economic and technological role in helping to integrate East Asia. At the practical level, for Japan to maintain its high level of prosperity, it must find a new primary market. It is in this context that regional groupings such as APEC could become significant. Furthermore, in the long run, Japan will itself need to become a market for commodity goods produced elsewhere in Asia in order to maintain regional growth and economic stability.

In part these swings might be part of a deeper search for an international role in Japan. This is related to a lingering but still current Japanese 'identity crisis', in which Japan emulates the West, but still searches for unique elements within Japanese culture and within its 'soul'. In question time Chalmers Johnson also noted that extensive research is being done in Japan on Asian value systems. These emerging relationships may fit into a six-fold 'Asian restoration' conception which has the following phases: Asia seen as backward and then needs to emulate the West; nationalists criticize this emulation; 'Japanese uniqueness' answers this accusation; revisionist

is a Political Gimmick", *The Australian*, 15-11-94; "APEC's Goal 'Unlikely'", *The Courier-Mail*, 19-11-94; "Tigers by the Tail", *The Australian*, 25-11-94.

<sup>4</sup>. HUNTINGTON, Samuel P. "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, pp22-49.

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Westerners begin to agree with the Japanese; the 'restoration of Asia' concept emerges; and lastly, there is an attempt to genuinely return to Asia. Japan seems to be arriving at the 'restoration of Asia' phase, but if it does not find itself welcome in this role, the question is whether it will be forced back to the start of the cycle, i.e. to a closer relationship with the West.

On the other side of the Pacific, Chalmers Johnson argued that US foreign policy is becoming more out of touch with the current changes in the world. In particular, it over-emphasizes the importance of its strategic and military strength, generating a kind of 'armed impotence' which in fact is geostrategically irrelevant<sup>5</sup>. There is a very real danger that the US could follow the USSR's decline in world power because of overexpenditure in this area. It was in this context that Chalmers Johnson argued that the US should withdraw its ground forces from Korea, while maintaining its nuclear umbrella over the region. The US can do this because it is unlikely that they would need to intervene in a future Korean War to ensure a victory for the South. South Korea has twice the population and 10 times the productive capability of the North, already indicating a distinct shift to the advantage of the South. Furthermore, these ground troops remain 'hostages to fate' if indeed a conflict of some sort does break out.

In relation to the special US-Japan relationship, Chalmers Johnson noted that there were already signs of 'disengagement and ideolization' in this relationship, which was a bad trend. The security role played by the US and their sense of being a senior partner sometimes led to US pretences of playing a 'Roman' imperial role, which occasionally irritates Japan. In fact, the Japanese were better informed about the process of Western governments than vice-versa. With current tensions and pressures on the relationship, it was not possible to project this unique relationship too far in the future. Chalmers Johnson felt that it was possible that within ten years Japan would be a 'normal nation' looking after most of its own self-defense needs<sup>6</sup>. This would entail some modifications to the Japanese constitution to accommodate these changes. In particular, if Japan did receive a permanent seat on the UN security council, this would help the largely pacifist elements in the Japanese public to accept greater self-armament. Indeed, the main supporter for the US-Japan defense treaty is the US Department of Defense, whose ideas may be out of step with foreign affairs and economic aspects of US policy.

<sup>5</sup>. For some of the contentious debates on a the future structure of US strategy, and whether this needs serious revision, see ASPIN, Les "National Security in the 1990's: Defining a New Basis for U.S. Military Forces", Speech given before the Atlantic Council of the United States, January 6, 1992; POLLACK, Jonathan D. "The United States in East Asia: Holding the Ring", *Adelphi Paper 275*, Conference Papers: Asia's International Role in the Post-Cold War Era, Part I, (Papers from the 34th Annual Conference of the IISS held in Seoul, South Korea, from 9-12 September 1992), March 1993, pp69-82; LAYNE, Christopher & SCHWARZ, Benjamin "American Hegemony - Without an Enemy", *Foreign Policy*, no. 92, Fall 1993, pp5-23.

<sup>6</sup>. On the particular significance of the word 'normal' in this context, see INOBUCHI, Takashi "Japan in Search of a Normal Role", *Adelphi Paper 275*, Conference Papers: Asia's International Role in the Post-Cold War Era, Part I, (Papers from the 34th Annual Conference of the IISS held in Seoul, South Korea, from 9-12 September 1992), March 1993, pp58-68; IVANOV, Vladimir "Japan's Normal Role in the World", *Adelphi Paper 275*, Conference Papers: Asia's International Role in the Post-Cold War Era, Part I, (Papers from the 34th Annual Conference of the IISS held in Seoul, South Korea, from 9-12 September 1992), March 1993, pp107-117).

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All these trends suggest that the direction of Japanese foreign and economic policy is worth monitoring closely. The current "political chaos" in Japan, with leaders and governments changing rapidly, is really part of the building towards a new consensus on the future direction of Japan. They have already achieved economic power. Now the issue of whether they should try to take a leadership role in Asia is being debated. There is a serious debate, involving discussion and research on alternatives to straightforward military power, e.g. technonationalism, which could help fulfil this aim without a large emphasis on military issues<sup>7</sup>.

There were some mixed comments on Australia's role in Asia. Chalmers Johnson argued that Japan feels that Australia will become culturally accepted in Asia eventually. However, APEC might not be as significant for Japan or the US as it is to Australia. The APEC 'batik conference' held in Indonesia, for example, gained very little coverage in the US media. Throughout his visit, Chalmers Johnson seems to have downplayed the prospects of serious outcomes from the APEC agenda<sup>8</sup>, perhaps because he finds that the free-trade aspirations of APEC are in conflict with what he sees as the US's need to manage trade with Japan. Here Chalmers Johnson suggests that both Japan and the US would have problems with a serious commitment to APEC goals. From the point of view provided by the seminar, a true free trade agenda in the Asia-Pacific region would seriously limit the US's ability to retain enough power to act as a major external balancer in East Asia. Here, Chalmers Johnson seems to have a role as a participant in the public debate on policy formation, alongside his academic role as a disinterested commentator. In fact, it is possible that an APEC agenda which moved towards a true free trade regime, including the issue of effective penetration into internal markets, would lead to increased mutual penetration of the US and Japanese markets. However, this would not necessarily shift the current trade imbalance to a marked degree. Bearing in mind the serious impact of the current US trade deficit with Japan on the US economy as a whole, this suggests that the APEC agenda might not correlate with the American attempt to retain its strategic leadership of the Asia-Pacific region.

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<sup>7</sup>. On technonationalism, JOHNSON, Chalmers "The Empowerment of Asia", Research Paper, (advance copy, available from ACAS, Sydney University), 1994, p16, following SAMUELS, Richard J. *Rich Nation, Strong Army: National Security and the Technological Transformation of Japan*, Ithaca, Cornell university Press, 1994.

<sup>8</sup>. See "Free Trade Nice Idea But Won't Work", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14-11-94; "Good Policy' for Australia But not US", *Australian Financial Review*, 14-11-94; "US Authority Says Forum is a Political Gimmick", *The Australian*, 15-11-94; "APEC's Goal 'Unlikely'", *The Courier-Mail*, 19-11-94; JOHNSON, Chalmers "The Empowerment of Asia", Research Paper, (advance copy, available from ACAS, Sydney University), 1994, pp19-20. Similar themes were also developed in radio interviews with Chalmers Johnson on ABC Radio National *Indian Pacific*, 7:39 am, 19-11-94, and Melbourne Metropolitan 3LO *Ronald MacDonald*, 8:40 am, 21-11-94 (information provided by the Primary Communication Pty. Ltd. report).