

Review of *Beyond Vietnam*

sub-title: *The United States and Asia*

by Edwin O. Reischauer, Vintage Books, 1967

I have never met Dr. Reischauer but did have two or three telephonic conversations and have also been a guest of the Far East Department of Research at Harvard University. I have felt that the last is the most ideal of all institutions in this land for promoting real knowledge of real Asia without the plethora of opinions of scholars of academia. And meeting a Chinese, a Japanese, a Korean and a Hindu and no European of any kind there, perhaps there is a degree of "prejudice" if it can so be called, or rather to me **Reality** in contradiction to subjective "realisms" which seldom clarify situations.

There is, of course, a danger in finding here a man who has lived Asia with Asians, in certain regions, to extend by implication or dialectics, with the same degree of objectivity and satisfaction stemming from his life and backgrounds in the Far East, to other lands in the same general vicinity.

The book has not many chapters:

One: The Lesson of Vietnam

Two: Our Asian Problem

Three: Section I: Japan Section II: China Section III: The Rest of Asia

Four: Postscript: Preparing for Our Role in Asia.

Chapter I. The material here is not basically different from what one may read in many places, but the conclusions are either the author's, or they stem from humanitarian ethics, and insight.

In discussing **the choices we face**, first the military one is considered. But I have not yet encountered a "dove" or "hawk" who has discussed a much older and successful military policy, based on the removal of generals in height command for operational failures. There is no possibility today for a Sherman or a Grant, although my old friend, retired General Lansdale, is now writing on the subject.

But Reischauer believes we cannot win the war for any military policy including escalation. And I believe we cannot win the war so far as we accept personalities rather than principles. And while he says: "I do not subscribe to the simple 'domino theory,'" he is not irreconcilably opposed to it. He states (p. 13):

"The net results of our withdrawal from the war in Vietnam however skillfully we might try to conceal the withdrawal, would probably be an increase in instability in much of Asia and a decrease in the influence of the United States and in our ability to contribute to the healthy growth of Asia. These adverse consequences might be felt in much of Asia for years to come."

On this point, it seems that Dr. Reischauer is indulging in much of the same form of dialectics, verbalized as "realism" as people of quite opposite opinions. While he does have a section labeled "Historical Background," (pp. 20-28) a critic could say it is selected at random. Later in this chapter he quotes from an earlier work, *Wanted: An Asian Policy*, by Knopf, 1955:

"Indochina is the classic case in which the communists have utilized nationalism effectively against us. There we find a sobering example of the weakness of defending the **status quo** against

the offensive of Communist-dominated nationalism. In Indochina the French empire, the largest remaining traditional colonial power, backed by the financial and military resources of the United States, was pitted in a frustrating and at best indecisive battle against the Communist Vietminh."

Chapter One is concluded (p. 42):

"In discussing the lesson of Vietnam, I have held out no hope for easy solutions to the suffering there. The light of the end of the tunnel seems to me still a long way off. As we try to think through the problems of our basic relationship with Asia, however, it could be that we will gain new insights into our Vietnam dilemma. It is possible that growing understanding of the broader, long-range problem may contribute to a solution of our more immediate crisis."

Chapter Two, "Our Asian Problem" leaves it an open question as to whether "Asian Problem" refers to problems presented by Asians; by the American government; by writers; or by the author himself. For instance, a statement is made on page 57:

"An impoverished, hungry Asia will be continuing drain on the rest of the world."

Why Asia only? There is no doubt to this reviewer that so long as India continues to burn animal manures and will not embark on a suitable tree-planting program to obtain fuel, this problem has a different meaning and a solution could be reached by other means than elsewhere. Much of Burma and even more of Thailand have been able to produce three crops a year, while Bengal, both Indian and Pakistani are able to obtain one at the most. There is something more needed than propaganda or sentiment to correct this. The information is available; the means of operating have not yet always appeared.

Dr. Reischauer speaks and writes on "Communism and Nationalism" but there is little evidence that either of these per as can produce larger crops. Nor has the change of ownership of land always increased the harvests. Land must be dealt with as a living organism and the hiatus between agronomists and conservations on one hand and social philosophers and controllers of channels of communication on the other is still too great to promote suitable remedial measures. Yet one must be cautious in being over-critical. Dr. Reischauer says on page 69:

"Almost all Asians perceive the modern nation-state as the unit through which they can best achieve independence, regulation and international self-respect. Even in areas where political unity has been rare in the past, they have developed the belief in the overriding importance of the national grouping and the deep emotional attachment of it that we call nationalism."

He later adds (p. 71):

"Most Asians have also realized that to build a strong nation they must first have a great deal of economic development. Rapid industrialization has usually been seen as the panacea for this."

This is the statement of a man who has lived in Japan and China and it may hold for these people. But it most certainly does not hold for the world of Islam and there is especially in Pakistan a "pan-Islamic movement," a subjective dialectics presented as an alternative to Marxism and capitalism. In Southeast Asia, the attitudes seem to be between these extremes, with the Thais looking toward industrialization but the Cambodians apparently not looking at all.

On page 73 he states:

“Another reason why democracy has difficulty in taking root in Asia is that the traditional societies tend to be elitist, as in the caste system of India or the domination of a scholar-gentry-bureaucrat class in Confucian China.”

One would agree with the statement but what is the conclusion to be derived therefrom on which to base any foreign policy, any at all? If we are bound by the empty word “democracy” we are little better off than those bound by elitists. In fact he discusses this subject at length and then goes into the speculations of subjective economics, which may or may not be valuable.

The sections on Japan and China need not concern us here. In discussing “The Rest of Asia” he writes:

“We have seen that China is not as great a menace to the rest of Asia as has been commonly assumed and that Japan holds out more hope for the future of Asia than has generally been realized.” (pp. 181-2)

In this course no attention has been paid to Bandung and its sequels, leading to almost complete disunity among the Afro-Asian nations, and the disappearance of so-called **blocs**. On page 183 we read:

“Schemes for the regional economic development, such as for the Mekong River Valley in Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and South Vietnam, may make sense. But on the whole, the economic relations of less developed countries are not basically with one another, but with the advanced nations.” (p. 183)

As far as the newspapers of the last few years are concerned, they certainly bear out Dr. Reischauer’s conclusion this. But later he says:

“Despite these limitations, however, regionalism, I believe, holds out great hope for Asia. It may help to overcome the frictions produced by ardent nationalism. By increasing interest in one another, it also adds, in a sense, to the strength and security of each country, because aggression against any one of them or even blatant attempts at subversion from abroad would arouse the concern of all and thus would be made politically, if not militarily, more costly.” (pp. 183-4)

From this point on Dr. Reischauer has been drawn into the fields of wishing and speculation because the events of the past three years evince quite different results than those presaged. The great difficulty, the great weakness, is the substitution of our subjectivities for even a light skimming over of the actual opinions of Asians, whether sober or emotional. And when he deals with a second look at Vietnam he seems to be considering more a second look at his **opinions** of Vietnam and thus we are drawn into the same questionable arena wherein the Vice-President and leading commentators are at odds over their opinions and wishes.

Chapter Four is entitled: Postscript: Preparing for Our Role in Asia. This chapter begins:

“I have called this final brief chapter a postscript because it is not about our immediate relationship with Asia or the direction in which we should try to guide it. Rather, it concerns the longer-

range need to prepare ourselves better to meet the great challenges posed by Asia and the rest of the less developed world ..." (p. 215)

Too many Americans seem to regard Asia as a unit, a unit of undeveloped peoples. It is rather annoying to point out that skyscrapers were in existence in at least one Asian country long before the West conceived them. It is not comforting to contend that some Asian countries are far ahead in slum-clearance than some European countries. Many point out low standards of living in Asia without comparing them to the actual standards of living in parts of Europe, especially the iron curtain and military-despotisms.

On page 219 we read:

"The need for a better coordinated, more balanced, and more far-seeing approach to foreign policy has been widely recognized, but no solution to the problem has been found."

If we go deep into this sentence we discover that it is not exactly the same persons or groups involved in each phrase here; that the persons or institutions who desire a better coordinated or balance approach are not the same persons or institutions which can be expected to act. And there is to write a question as to whether this is a problem in semantics, or in foreign relations or in some other field of human endeavor.

And the first section of the final chapter points out basic weakness in the so-called Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.), a very controversial and perhaps a very, very ineffective body.

One finds oneself in considerable agreement with Dr. Reischauer as to policies in general. Our differences are those of a quasi-scientist and quasi-humanist. And one commends in no uncertain terms:

"A third general principle is that we should free ourselves from the traditional concepts of diplomacy and adapt our foreign relations to the conditions of the late twentieth century. Most of the roles of diplomacy were standardized in the nineteenth century but reflect even more the conditions of the eighteen-century." (p. 223)

Clemenceau once said: "War and peace are two things too serious to entrust to diplomats and generals." But we have over-reached in exactly the opposite direction and even communists seem to be reactionaries on this point. The repetition of the ballet, "The Green Table" by both Americans and Viet Cong at Paris evinces a need. But how are we going to proceed?

One finds oneself in complete agreement with the final pages where one asks for an overhauling of State Department outlooks and more education to promote world outlooks. In other words, the Vietnam imbroglio is only one item in a forward looking world governed by backward looking power structures.

The rise of youth protests in the last few years may cause us to take more seriously the accomplishments as well as ideas of this important diplomat-professor.