

# **UCLA**

## **UCLA Pacific Basin Law Journal**

### **Title**

*The Japanese Question: Power and Purpose in a New Era* by Kenneth B. Pyle

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/03g2z2cf>

### **Journal**

UCLA Pacific Basin Law Journal, 11(1)

### **Author**

Desmond, David

### **Publication Date**

1992

### **DOI**

10.5070/P81111022038

### **Copyright Information**

Copyright 1992 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

# BOOK REVIEW

**THE JAPANESE QUESTION: POWER AND PURPOSE IN A NEW ERA**  
by Kenneth B. Pyle. The AEI Press, publisher for the American Enterprise Institute, Washington D.C., 1992. 146 pp. (excl. Notes and Index). No price given.

David Desmond†

Since the end of World War II, the relationship between the United States and Japan has been one of codependence. Kenneth B. Pyle, University of Washington Professor of History and Asian Studies, believes the United States encouraged Japanese deference and the Japanese in turn accepted dependence on the United States. *The Japanese Question: Power and Purpose in a New Era* explores how this relationship developed and why it must change.

Japan assumed a subordinate role to the United States during the postwar occupation. Attempting to prevent a resurgence of Japanese militarism, the United States insisted on a new constitution limiting Japan's use of force and provided military protection. Assuming responsibility for Japan's defense, the United States intended to ensure Japanese dependency.

Ironically, the United States enabled Japan to become much more than a military threat: Japan has become an economic superpower. This shift in the balance of power threatens the basis of the relationship, producing uncertainty and instability.

Pyle argues Japan has become an economic superpower at America's expense by refusing to engage in collective security arrangements. He believes Japan has relied on the United States to guarantee Japan's security and maintain the international free trade order.

According to Pyle, Japanese prime minister Shigeru Yoshida exploited American military protection to advance Japan's economic growth. When United States special emissary John Foster Dulles negotiated the postwar United States-Japan peace treaty in June 1950, he urged Yoshida to establish a large Japanese military

---

† J.D. expected 1993, UCLA School of Law.

force. Yoshida opposed Dulles, arguing the Japanese Constitution prohibits the use of force in self-defense. However, the text of Article 9 of the constitution is ambiguous: “[a]spir[ing] sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.”<sup>1</sup>

Broadly interpreted, Article 9 prohibits all collective self-defense; narrowly construed, it renounces war only as “a means of settling international disputes.” Thus, the latter interpretation would not prohibit Japan from using military force in response to an attack, whereas the former might.

Pyle asserts Japan has paid a price for Yoshida’s use of Article 9 as a pretext for evading American pressure to rearm. The post-war United States-Japan security treaty preserved much of the United States’ authority and maintained Japan’s status as a military vassal. Japan relinquished its defense to pursue economic rehabilitation; having attained significant economic power, Japan is increasingly reluctant to defer to the United States. The “Japanese question” asks what type of leadership Japan will exert in Asia and the rest of the world.

Following years of dependency, Japan is ambivalent about taking a leadership role, or even a participatory role, in any military endeavor. During the recent Persian Gulf War, for example, the Japanese avoided resolving an Article 9 controversy over dispatching military forces abroad. Prime Minister Kaifu rejected a narrow interpretation of Article 9, refusing to clarify Japan’s position on self-defense. Instead, Kaifu supported the United Nations Peace Cooperation Bill, which allowed the Japanese military to assist United Nations peacekeeping missions without the use of force. However, the bill was withdrawn after debate, and the issue of whether the constitution categorically prohibits all use of force remained unsettled.

Prime Minister Kaifu’s reluctance to resolve the Article 9 controversy reflects the split between militarism and pacifism in the Japanese psyche. Yoshida forced pacifism upon the country as a means to foster rapid economic growth. Pyle asserts many Japanese fear a revision in Yoshida’s interpretation of Article 9 could lead to Japan once again becoming a military giant. Japan’s leaders realize the national psyche must be changed before the country can assume a larger military role.

Fear of rearmament partly accounts for Japan’s slow reaction to the Persian Gulf War. Promises to send medical specialists and provide transportation on civilian aircraft and ships were largely

---

1. KENPŌ art. 9.

unfulfilled. Preferring a path of least resistance to international leadership, Japan offered financial assistance. However, such assistance caused a national embarrassment when Japan reluctantly increased its contributions in response to American pressure. Not surprisingly, Pyle condemns the inability of Japan's leaders to define the country's future national purpose apart from institutionalized mercantilism.

Pyle proposes a narrow reading of Article 9 which would enable Japan to participate in regional security. Arguably, Pyle underestimates the difficulty of altering the long standing Japanese policy of noninvolvement in overseas wars. In fact, Kaifu's aid pledge during the Gulf War was denounced by opposition leaders and opposed by a majority of the Japanese population.<sup>2</sup> Those in favor of providing economic aid to the allied powers were of the consensus that the funds be limited to nonmilitary aid.<sup>3</sup>

Reinterpreting Article 9 is no small task. If active participation in regional security agreements is equated with rearmament, resistance will undoubtedly arise. For example, in October 1991 Japan vowed to play an active role in peacekeeping efforts following its election as an impermanent member of the United Nations Security Council, but the Japanese Parliament refused to allow Japanese troops to take part in United Nations peacekeeping operations.<sup>4</sup> Such action illustrates the duality of Japanese politics: a desire to lead hindered by a hesitance to rearm.

Pyle insists the relationship between the United States and Japan must change. However, Pyle's proposal for change is remarkably similar to previous attempts by the United States to contain Japanese power after World War II. In outlining a new role for the United States-Japan alliance as the core of an organization of Pacific nations, Pyle suggests containment of Japanese power and aspirations, channeling them into larger cooperation agreements.

Although Pyle's proposal is not radical, his appeal is urgent. As Japan's economic power continues to grow, its national purpose remains unclear. While a codependent relationship between individuals can be severed, a rupture in the United States-Japan relationship is neither possible nor desirable. The two countries must evolve from codependency into a relationship which reflects the changed balance of power.

---

2. *Japan Vows Greater Role in U.N. Peacekeeping*, UPI, Jan. 27, 1991, available in LEXIS, Nexis Library, OMNI File.

3. *Id.*

4. *Japanese P.M. Says Gulf War Funds for Non-Military Use*, Reuters, Oct. 17, 1991, available in LEXIS, Nexis Library, OMNI File.