

SUEHIRO Akira

Japan / Economics, Area Studies (Thailand)

Forty Years of My Study on Asian Economy: From Catch-up Industrialization to Digital Economy

■ Date: Saturday, Sep. 22, 2018 (11:00-13:00) ■ Participants: 150
 ■ Venue: Science Hall, Fukuoka City Science Museum

Part 1 Keynote Speech

Expanding beyond Thailand to cover all of Asia with a 4-stage Asian economic theory



I knew that I wanted to study Asia even before I started university, and in 1972 when the “Boycott Japanese goods” movement began in Thailand I decided my research topic would be Thailand. The monetary crisis of 1997 was a major turning point. I realized just by looking at what was happening in Thailand that I didn’t know enough about Asia overall, and I

expanded by scope to include it. My theories of Asian economics follow the model of German industrial theory, and are developed in four stages.

Asian economic theory 1.0 begins from the population explosion. The growth in population flattened economic growth, restraining development in Asia.

I am most concerned with stage 2.0, and here the experience of Japan industrializing as a late-developing nation provided some important hints. Economies which develop later enjoy some advantages over the nations which industrialize first, such as being able to introduce developed technology. Certain conditions must exist to utilize these advantages, however, and in the case of East Asia, I believe the rapid development was due to the formation of social capabilities supporting industrialization at the government level, at the corporate level, and at the factory level.

Stage 3.0 was a review of stage 2.0. The architecture was made open and modular so that, for example, the electronics industry in a late-starting economy could surpass one in an already industrialized nation. I must stress here that the catch-up I describe is not by a nation, but rather at the corporate level. Note that the unit has changed from the nation to the company.

Concerning stage 4.0, I’m afraid I also have no idea what is happening. I think whatever it is, it is totally different from the Asian economic theory that has applied thus far.



Part 2 Panel Discussion



Commentator **OIZUMI Keiichiro** Senior Economist, Economics Department, The Japan Research Institute, Limited
 Coordinator **SHIMIZU Kazushi** Professor, Graduate School of Economics, Kyushu University

Understanding nation-states as the shift to digital technology accelerates

In response to a question from Mr. OIZUMI about the role of nations in the era of digital economies, Professor SUEHIRO replied “Japanese economic theory suggests that the nation contributed significantly to industrial development in Japan by improving environmental factors such as regulatory systems and education. Even so, it is generally accepted that industrial development is driven by private enterprises. Japan has a national framework actively supporting innovation and its resulting technical revolution, and the government certainly plays a role, but the degree to which the government may interfere is changing. Providing identical support to both small enterprises and mega-corporations will lead to claims, and government fairness would erode. Direct or indirect, I think government support using the conventional approach will be extremely complicated.”

After the discussion a large number of people from the audience, interested in Professor SUEHIRO’s thoughts, engaged him in a lively and productive Q&A session.

School Visit

■ Date: Friday, Sep. 21 (11:00-12:20)
 ■ Venue: Fukuoka Girls’ High School

His slide talk, entitled “Regional Research: Observations on Gender,” touched on the development of Asian studies, the fuller participation of women in society, and other issues. He explained that many women were not only researching issues of the caste system and social participation, but also carrying out in-depth, on-site research.

When asked about his high school years, he replied that there were no prep schools then, and that he had never studied very seriously for university entrance exams. He also gave some personal anecdotes, such as that when in Thailand he noted that some of the people living on the street were eating better at the street stalls than he was himself, and he deeply felt the differences in vitality and culture.

The students presented him with a bouquet of flowers, and a student representative thanked him for giving them new ways to think of the world and their own lives, hoping that they would strive hard for their goals.

