

A magnificent story from the Orient tells of a man crossing a river in a boat. In midstream he loses his sword overboard. He marks the place where he lost it with chalk on the side of the boat!

We in Canada and in Japan who have witnessed the changes in our world in the last several years know something of what this story means. History is flooding by. The charts of the past are outdated.

We have seen the end of the Cold War and the re-emergence of local and civil conflicts; triumphs for democracy and some devastating failures; economic miracles and areas ravaged by drought and famine.

The complexities of both national and international life have fuelled nostalgia. There are even people who look with regret upon the passing of the certainties of the Cold War.

But there is no going back.

Nowhere has change been more rapid, more full of hope, and in many cases more successful than in the Asia-Pacific region. Already we may speak with confidence of the next era as the Asia-Pacific century.

The facts are indisputable.

- In 1965, the Asian side of the Pacific Rim accounted for 12 per cent of the global economy. By the year 2000 it is likely to exceed about 25 per cent, and Japan is a large part of this success story.
- Following in the footsteps of Japan, one by one Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Korea have crossed the threshold between developing and developed. Now Malaysia, Thailand and others are following suit.
- By the year 2015, China could have a middle class larger than the population of the United States.
- Canada trades as much with Japan today as it does with Britain, France and Germany combined -- and Asia and North America share by far the world's largest intercontinental trading relationship.

Japan, now the second largest economy in the world, is the epicentre. For Japan the twenty-first century is already here.

Change is our world's only constant, and nowhere is it more evident than in Asia. Witness the boom in southern China, the political transformation in Thailand and Taiwan, the nation-building in Cambodia, and a Vietnam poised for a market-driven, export-led decade of unparalleled growth.