

# The Politics of Imagining Asia: Empires, Nations, Regional and Global Orders

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Following the recent trends of globalization and regionalization, the idea of Asia has been revived in political, economic, and cultural fields. This essay examines some of the multiple uses of the idea of Asia in modern East Asian and especially Chinese history. It consists of four parts. Part One discusses how the idea of Asia developed from modern European history, especially the nineteenth century European narrative of "World History," and points out how the early modern Japanese "theory of shedding Asia" derived from this narrative. Part Two studies the relationship between the idea of Asia and two forms of Narodism against the background of the Chinese and Russian revolutions. One, exemplified by Russian Narodism, attempted to use Asian particularity to challenge modern capitalism; the other, represented by Sun Yat-sen, attempted to construct a nation-state on the basis of a socialist revolutionary program, and to develop agricultural capitalism under the particular social conditions of Asia. Part Three considers the

differences and tensions between the "Great Asianism" of Chinese revolutionaries such as Sun and the Japanese idea of Toyoda (East Asia), and discusses the need to overcome the categories of nation-state and international relations in order to understand the question of Asia. Part Four discusses the need to go beyond early modern maritime-centered accounts, nationalist frameworks, and Eurocentrism in reexamining the question of Asia through historical research by focusing on the particular legacies of Asia (such as the tributary system) and the problems of early modernity."

The "new empire" that has re-emerged in the "war on terror" follows naturally upon the heels of neoliberal globalization. The latter seeks to restructure various social traditions according to neoliberal market principles such as the legal protection of private property, the state's withdrawal from the economic sphere, and the transnationalization of productive, commercial, and financial systems. The former uses the violence, crises, and social disintegration caused by the processes of neoliberal globalization as a pretense to reconstruct a military and political "new empire". These two apparently different

discourses cooperate to knit together military alliances, economic associations, and international political institutions in the construction of a total order at all levels—political, economic, cultural, and military. That new order may, therefore, be called a “neoliberal empire/ imperialism”.

In his article “Why Europe Needs a Constitution,” Habermas argues that it is necessary to organize nation-states into a unified political community in order to uphold the European social model and its modern achievements (Habermas 2001). In order to defend the European way of life in terms of welfare, security, democracy and freedom, Habermas proposes three major tasks in the construction of a “post-national democracy”: to form a European civil society, to build a Europe-wide political public sphere, and to create a political culture which all citizens of the European Union would be able to share. He recommends that Europe apply to itself “as a whole, ‘the logic of the circular creation of state and society that shaped the modern history of European countries’ ” so as to establish a unified constitution by popular referendum. A Europe formed according to these three main tasks resembles a super state or empire: its component societies retain their own characteristics and autonomy to a certain degree, but on the other hand it has unified institutions that carry out governmental functions, including a unified

parliamentary and legal system, and it is supported and safeguarded by a historically formed civil political culture and social system.

Mirroring the progress and crisis of Europe’s unification is a two-fold process taking place in Asia. On the one hand is the concentration and expansion of a new kind of power network with the USA as its center. For instance, in the Afghanistan War, many Asian countries actively participated in the US-centered war alliance for their own particular economic or political reasons. On the other hand consider the advance of Asian regional cooperation following the 1997 financial crisis. In June 2001, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan founded the “Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” and in November 2001 China reached an agreement with the ten countries of ASEAN sign a free trade agreement in ten years. This plan rapidly expanded from “10 plus 1” to “10 plus 3” (ASEAN plus China, Japan and Korea), eventually to “10 plus 6” (ASEAN plus China, Japan, Korea, India, Australia, and New Zealand). A Japanese news agency published an article saying that “If the unification of Asia accelerates [...] the sense of distance between Japan and China will disappear naturally in the process of regional unification; eventually, based on the first occasion of regional negotiation excluding the United States --a conference that joins ASEAN and the summit of Japan, China, and Korea, [...] Japan and China may achieve an

‘Asian version of the reconciliation between France and Germany’” (Nishikyo 2002). Since the views of China, Japan, and the ASEAN countries on regional progress are not entirely consistent, the expansion of this regional plan (the addition of India, Australia and New Zealand bring the membership to sixteen) indicates not so much the spread of the idea of Asia as the product of the power dynamics among the region’s various nation-states.



### ASEAN + 3

The course of Asian regional integration includes many complex, contradictory features. On the one hand, in the name of the region or “Asia” it appeals to supra-national interests, but on the other hand, it incorporates nation-states into a larger, protective community. On the one hand, this regionalism includes the intent to challenge global hegemony through constructing regional autonomy, but on the other hand, it is the product of global market relations under “new imperial” dominance. From a historical perspective, the discussion of “Asia” is not an

entirely new phenomenon. In the early modern wave of nationalism we encountered two sharply opposed visions of Asia: the colonialist vision developed from Japan’s “continental policy,” and the Asian social revolution vision centered on national liberation and socialist movements. The former constructed the idea of Asia (Yazhou or Toyo) based on the binary between East and West, whereas the latter discussed the issue of nation from an internationalist perspective. Discussion of Asia, therefore, cannot avoid reviewing the early modern colonialist and nationalist movements.

### I Asia and Toyo: Questions of Derivation

Historically speaking, the idea of Asia is not Asian but, rather, European. In 1948, Takeuchi Yoshimi wrote in an article called “What is modernity?”: “[If we want to] understand East Asia (Toyo), [we must appreciate that] what constitutes Asia are European factors existing in Europe. Asia is Asia by dint of its European context” (Takeuchi 2005:188). This view can also help us to explain Fukuzawa Yukichi’s negative way of defining Asia, i.e. through his call to “shed Asia” [datsu-a] (Maruyama 1997:9-11). Scholars have various opinions about the role of “On Shedding Asia” (datsu-a ron) (published March 16th, 1885) in the development of Fukuzawa’s thought. As I see it, however, the important question is why the slogan developed from this article, “shed Asia and join Europe” (datsu-a nyu ou) (although Fukuzawa never

actually used the words “join Europe”), became a recurring theme of modern Japanese thought. In the framework of “On Shedding Asia,” the notion of Asia included two levels. First, Asia referred to a region with a high degree of cultural homogenization, i.e. Confucian Asia. Second, the political meaning of “shedding Confucianism” was dissociation from China-centered imperial relations and construction of a European-style nation-state oriented towards “freedom,” “human rights,” “national sovereignty,” “civilization,” and “independent spirit.” In the context of the continuous expansion of “the state,” this new political form and its power relations, “Asia” was fundamentally negated as a cultural and political model opposed to the nationalist vision of modernization. According to the logic of Takeuchi’s comment that “Asia is Asia by dint of its European context,” the notion of Asia’s essence implied by Fukuzawa’s proposal to “shed Asia,” e.g. Confucianism and its social system, is actually internal to European thought. If “what constitute Asia are European factors existing in Europe,” the birth of “Asia” must result from Asia’s negation of itself. In this sense, Fukuzawa’s proposal to “shed Asia” and Takeuchi’s proposal both derive from the nineteenth century European conception of “world history.”



Fukuzawa on Japan's 10,000 yen banknote

Just as European self-consciousness required knowledge of its “outside,” “shedding Asia” was a way of forming self-consciousness based on differentiating Japan from Asia. From the perspective of “shedding Asia,” this proposal of early modern Japanese particularism, in fact derived from early modern European historical consciousness. In other words, Japanese particularism derived from European universalism. In the words of Karl Jaspers, “Dissociation from Asia was part of a universal historical process, not a particularist European gesture towards Asia. It took place within Asia itself. It was the path of humanity and the true path of history.” He continues:

Greek culture seems to be a phenomenon of the Asian periphery. Europe disengaged from its Asian mother when it was not yet mature. A problem emerges: at which step, which time, and which place did this rupture occur? Could Europe get lost in Asia again? Is there a lack of consciousness in the depths of Asia? Does its degradation equal a lack of consciousness?

If the West emerged from the Asian

matrix, its emergence appears to be a bold movement in the liberation of human potential. This movement entails two risks: first, Europe could lose its spiritual basis; second, as soon as the West becomes conscious, it continually risks falling back into Asia.

However, if the risk of falling back into Asia were actualized today, this risk would be actualized under the conditions of new industrial technology that would transform and destroy Asia. Western freedom, individualism, many Western categories, and enlightened consciousness would be abandoned, and they would be replaced by Asia's eternal characteristics: its existing forms of despotism, its fatalistic tranquility, its lack of history or volition. Asia would be the enduring world influencing the totality. It is older than Europe and, moreover, it includes Europe. All that derives from Asia and must return to Asia is temporary. [...]

Asia has become a principle of depth. When we objectively analyze it as a historical phenomenon, it disintegrates. We cannot treat its opposing term, Europe, as a transcendental entity, so Eurasia becomes a dreadful specter. Only when we treat them as the epitome of certain historically specific, ideationally

coherent things, rather than as a perception of the whole, then they become a determinate language of depth, and a code representing truth. Eurasia, however, is a code coexisting with the whole of Western history [Jaspers 1989:82-3].

If “shedding Asia” is not the premise for Japanese particularism but rather a particular step in Europe's universal progress, what kind of European thought gave rise to this “universal progress”?



Eurasia relief map

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the European Enlightenment and colonial expansion provided conditions for the development of a new system of knowledge. Historical linguistics, race theory, modern geography, political economy, theories of state, legal philosophy, the study of religion, and historiography all rapidly developed hand in hand with the natural

sciences and constructed a new worldview in every aspect. The notions of Europe and Asia were both products of this process of knowledge construction. In the works of European writers such as Montesquieu, Adam Smith, Hegel, and Marx, [1] the core of the construction of this European notion of Asia had the following characteristics: multi-national empires as opposed to European modern or monarchical states; political despotism as opposed to European modern legal and political systems; and nomadic and agrarian modes of production completely different from European urban and commercial life. Since the European nation-state and the expansion of the capitalist market system were considered an advanced stage or *telos* of world history, Asia and its aforementioned characteristics were consequently relegated to a lower stage. In this context, Asia was not only a geographic category, but also a form of civilization: Asia represented a political form defined in opposition to the European nation-state, a social form defined in opposition to European capitalism, and a transitional stage between prehistory and history proper. Throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, discourse on Asia was embedded within a universalist narrative about European modernity that defined the apparently opposed historical blueprints of both colonists and revolutionaries. The three central themes and keywords of this narrative were empire, nation-state and capitalism (or market economy).

In many nineteenth century European texts on history, philosophy, law, state, and religion, Asia was presented as the “center” of all nations in the world and the “starting point” of world history. But in the framework of “shedding Asia”, the Confucianism of China was regarded as the “source of history”. This view of “source” or “starting point” arose from a double need that required both connection and breaking away. From the discovery by historical linguists of the connection between European languages and Sanskrit, we could examine how a political economist like Hegel would connect this linguistic discovery with nineteenth-century European racial theories and state theories so as to define “Asia as the starting point of history”:

It is a great discovery in history—as of a new world—which has been made within rather more than the last twenty years, respecting the Sanskrit and the connection of the European languages with it. In particular, the connection of the German and Indian peoples has been demonstrated, with as much certainty as such subjects allow of. Even at the present time we know of peoples which scarcely form a society, much less a State, but that have been long known as existing.... In the connection just referred to, between the languages of nations so widely separated, we have a result before us, which proves the diffusion of those

nations from Asia as a center, and the so dissimilar development of what had been originally related, as an incontestable fact [Hegel 1899:60].

Asia must, therefore, meet two conditions in order to constitute the “starting point” of world history. First, Asia and Europe must be two correlated organic parts of the same historical process. Second, Asia and Europe must occupy two drastically different stages of this historical continuum, and the main standard for evaluating these stages must be “the state.” The reason Asia marked the “starting point” or prehistorical stage in Hegel’s view was that it still lacked states and had not yet formed historical subjects. In this sense, when Asian regions complete the transition from traditional empires to “states,” from agrarian or pastoral to industrial or commercial modes of production, from village to urban or “civil society” forms of organization, then Asia would no longer be Asia.

Because his account of civil society, market, and commerce derives from the Scottish school of political economy, Hegel’s notion of a despotic Asia is linked to a certain economic system. If we contrast Hegel’s historical philosophical account of the four stages—the Orient, Greece, Rome and the Teutonic peoples, with Adam Smith’s delineation, from the perspective of economic history, of four historical stages—hunting, pastoral, agricultural, and commercial, it is not difficult to discover internal relations between

Hegel’s historical description centered on political forms and Smith’s historical stages centered on productive forms. Smith treats the development from agricultural society to commercial society as the transition from European feudal society to modern market society. Thereby he internally connects the ideas of modern era, commercial era and European society in the form of a historical narrative. The model of market movement that he describes is an abstract process: the discovery of the Americas, colonialism and class differentiation are all presented as an economic process of endless market expansion, labor division, technology advancement, rise of tax and wealth. A kind of narrative on the circulative movement of the world market is thus established through this formalist narrative method. This method regards the market mode as both the result of historical development and the inner law of history; here the concrete spatial relationship of colonialism and social differentiation is transformed into a temporal process of production, circulation, and consumption. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith’s division of four historical stages corresponds to a taxonomy of specific regions and peoples. When describing the “nations of hunters, the lowest and rudest state of society,” for example, he mentions “the native tribes of North America;” when discussing “nations of shepherds, a more advanced state of society,” he names his contemporary Tartars and Arabs as examples; when describing “[nations of

husbandmen,] a yet more advanced state of society," he turns backwards to ancient Greece and Rome (in a previous chapter he also mentions Chinese agriculture). As for commercial society, he refers to Europe which he calls "civilized states." (Smith 1976:689-92). In Hegel's vision, all these issues were incorporated into a political framework focusing on the state. The reason "nations of hunters" were "the lowest and rudest" form of society was that the scale of their communities was too small to produce the political division of labor necessary for state formation. In Gellner's words, "for them, the question of the state, of a stable specialized order-enforcing institution, does not really arise" (Gellner 1983:5). Hegel's narrative of world history therefore explicitly excludes North America (characterized by hunting and gathering) and situates the Orient at the starting point of history. If Smith divides history into various economic or productive modes, then Hegel nominates historical stages according to region, civilization, and state structure, but both correlate mode of production or political form with specific places (Asia, the Americas, Africa, and Europe), and both organize these places within a chronological narrative.

The notions of Asia or China articulated by Montesquieu, Hegel, Marx, and recently Fukuyama, all developed through comparative description of civilizations. In order to construct Asia as this particular type of civilization in

contrast with European civilization, it was necessary to elide its internal development and change; even the history of conflicts between northern and southern Chinese ethnic groups (i.e. what European writers called the conquering of China by the "Tartars" and vice versa) was not regarded as changes in "historical forms". In the words of Montesquieu: "[T]he laws of China are not destroyed by conquest. Their customs, manners, laws, and religion [were] the same thing" (Montesquieu 1914). In this culturalist horizon, Asia does not have history or the historical conditions or impetus for producing modernity. The heart of this modernity is the "state" and its legal system, its urban and commercial way of life, or its mechanism for economic and military competition based on nation-states. Perry Anderson wrote In critiquing European notions of the "Asiatic mode of production" and its "despotism", Perry Anderson pointed out that the concept of "despotism", from its origins was an outsider's appraisal of "the Orient." As far back as ancient Greece, Aristotle had claimed that by their very nature barbarians are more servile than Greeks, and Asians are more servile than Europeans; hence they endure despotic rule without protest [Anderson 1974:463]. [2]

Early modern European notions of Asian state structures were produced through the long history of the conflict of European states with the Ottoman Empire. Machiavelli's *The Prince* first



pitted the Ottoman state against European monarchies, arguing that the Ottoman monarchical bureaucratic system was categorically different from all European state systems. Similarly, Bodin, often regarded as the first European theorist of sovereignty, also contrasted European “royal sovereignty” with Ottoman “lordly power” (Anderson 1974:397). With the nineteenth century expansion of European colonialism, this contrast eventually mutated into the contrast between European nation-states and Asian empires, to such an extent that today it is difficult to recognize that the “despotism” or “absolutism” we associate with Asia in fact derives from European generalizations about the Ottoman Empire (1974:493). In this perspective, early modern capitalism is the product of Western Europe’s unique social structure, and there is a necessary or natural relation between capitalist development and the system of nation-states, with feudal states as their historical precondition. Under the influence of this conception of history, imperial systems (vast, multi-ethnic empires such as the Ottoman, Chinese, Mughal, and Russian systems) are viewed as the political form of Oriental despotism incapable of producing the political structure necessary for the development of capitalism (1974:400, 412). It was this notion of despotism derived from descriptions of empire that made it possible for later generations to contrast Europe with Asia in terms of political categories (democratic Europe vs. authoritarian

Asia), and that made it possible for Fukuzawa and his successors to contrast Japan with Confucian China through the theory of “shedding Asia.”

The idea of Asia in early modern European thought was always closely connected with the vast territory and the complex ethnicity of an empire, as contrasted with the republican system of Greece and European monarchy—in the wave of nationalist movements in the nineteenth century, republican system or feudal monarchy existed both as predecessors of the nation-state and as political forms distinct from that of any other region. In other words, despotism became closely associated with the idea of vast empire in the transition from feudal state to nation-state. The category of “state”, opposed to empire, therefore acquired its superiority in value and in history. European thinkers such as Montesquieu firmly negated some relatively positive description of politics, law, customs, and culture in China by some priests (such description had been the base of the European Enlightenment views of China, particularly those by Voltaire and Leibniz). They proceeded to summarize the political culture of China as “despotism” and “empire”. According to the classic description since Montesquieu, the major characteristics of an empire are: the sovereign monopolizes the distribution of property with his military power, thereby eliminates aristocracy that could balance the sovereign’s power and blocks the growth of

the nation-state. [Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*: 126-9]. If we analyze this European notion of despotic empire of mixed ethnicity and vast territory by contextualizing it in the self-understanding of early modern Japan, we discern the foundation of two ideas—the contrast between a Japan with a single ethnicity, mutating from feudalism to a modern state, and a multi-ethnic China, trapped in Confucian empire systems; and the proposition of so-called “turning down the friends of Asia”.

The early modern Japanese idea of “Asia” was also founded on this sort of European-style culturalism. In Maruyama Masao’s words, “it reflected Japan’s rapid process of westernization following the Meiji period, for the cultural and political path formed through the confluence of statism and post-Meiji westernization was so obviously different from those of all the other Asian countries” (Maruyama 1998:8). In explaining the formation of early modern Japanese “state rationality” Maruyama points out that the sovereign states of early modern Europe were born through the disintegration of the Christian world-community symbolized by the [Holy] Roman Empire, and their international society was an agglomeration of all independent states, whereas “Japan was the opposite; it began to develop a nation-state only after it had been forced into this international society” (Maruyama 1997:146). This is why the early modern Japanese notion of “equality among states” developed

through a struggle against the hierarchical Confucian notions of “differentiating between barbarian and civilized” (*yi xia zhi ban*) and “expelling barbarians” (*rangxia lun*). According to this contrast between the principle of formal equality in European international law and the Confucian idea of “expelling barbarians,” early modern Japanese expansionism can be explained as a result of lacking European-style “state rationality” or as a product of Confucianist “expelling barbarians”. Maruyama argues that in Fukuzawa:

Internal liberation and external independence were understood as a single problem. According to this logic, individualism and statism, statism and internationalism achieved a splendid balance – this was indeed a fortunate moment. However, the harsh realities of the international context soon shattered this balance [Maruyama 1997:157].

The notion of “expelling barbarians” paved the way for the modern state’s expansion and exclusion, but if that is all, then the tragedy of early modern Japan is a tragedy of “incomplete westernization” or “incomplete modernization” rather than a tragedy of Japanese modernity itself.

In a later article explaining the notion of “state rationality,” Maruyama wrote:

“State rationality” goes beyond the stage

of absolute sovereignty to an age of coexistence among all modern sovereign states. According to the principles of international law, these modern sovereign states establish diplomatic relations and pursue their state interests through means such as treaties, alliances, and war. This sort of “international community” seems to have already taken shape in seventeenth century Europe, where it was called the Western State System. “State rationality” developed under the twin pillars of the principle of equality among sovereign states and the balance of powers [1997:160].

Japan’s 1874 invasion of Taiwan, however, and its 1894 invasion of Korea both appealed to European international law and its notion of formal equality among sovereign states. Should we interpret these actions within a framework of “the decadence of state rationality,” or should we interpret them within a process of seeking or forming this European “state rationality”? There is no real contradiction between such imperialist actions and the embrace of the notion of sovereign equality in order to cast off the imperial Chinese tribute system or hierarchical relations. Rather than explaining this problem through a binary opposition between tradition and modernity or xenophobia [“barbarian-expulsionism”] and international equality, we would do better to consider the derivativeness of

Japan’s early modern nationalism, colonialism, and Asianism. That is, we should examine early modern Japanese expansionism within its “European context.”

According to the classic model of nationalism forged in the French Revolution, the nation-state is the basic precondition for the individual as unit of power (i.e. the citizen). Without this political community, without the precondition of national uniformity, it would be impossible to establish the individual as a juridical subject. As European writers have asked over and again:

Will a free Europe take the place of monarchical Europe? The wars against other monarchies undertaken to defend the fruits of the [French] Revolution quickly became a liberatory mission involving annexation of other countries’ territories. [...] The revolution and the empire tried to incite other nations to overthrow their monarchs in the name of liberty, but this expansionism eventually drove these peoples to unite with their traditional monarchies in opposition to France [Gerbet 1989:12].

Here the key issue is that, on the one hand, the bourgeois nation-state and its individualist notion of citizenship were political paths to abandon the hierarchy of aristocratic systems and ancient empires, but, on the other hand, they were the best political forms for the expansion of

capitalism (especially the formation of national markets, the expansion of overseas markets, and the system of private property), and this expansion was never limited to borders of nation-states. So even if they could have actualized the system of “rights” awaited by Fukuzawa, there was not necessarily any guarantee that this “system” would not possess expansive or invasive features. In this sense, there is no real contradiction between his theory of “shedding Asia” and the reality of “invading Asia” – both can find grounds in the “European context” from which they derive. Pointing this out does not mean denying the historical connection between early modern Japanese imperialist expansion and the political tradition of “respecting the emperor and expelling the barbarians”; my aim is to highlight how the use of this political tradition was produced under new historical conditions and relations, and to show that reflections on this political tradition should therefore become an organic part of reconsidering such new historical conditions and relations.

## II Populism and the Dual Meaning of “ Asia”

Twenty-six years after Fukuzawa published “On Shedding Asia,” the Chinese Revolution of 1911 broke out. Shortly after the Provisional Government of the Republic of China was founded, Lenin published a series of articles applauding the fact that “[today] China is a land of seething political activity, the scene of a virile

social movement and of a democratic upsurge,” and condemning the civilized and advanced Europe, which, “with its highly developed machine industry, its rich multiform culture and its constitutions,” had nevertheless remained “in support of everything backward, moribund, and medieval” under the command of the bourgeoisie (Lenin 1977, 1977a). These observations constitute part of Lenin’s theory of imperialism and proletarian revolution, where he argued that, as capitalism entered the imperialist phase, the various social struggles of oppressed peoples around the world would be integrated into the category of world proletarian revolution. This method of connecting European and Asian revolutions can be traced back to Marx’s article “Revolution in China and in Europe,” written for the *New York Daily Tribune* 1853 (Marx 1853). Lenin and Fukuzawa’s opposing views are based on a common basic understanding, that is, that Asian modernity was the outcome of European modernity, and regardless of Asia’s status and fate, the significance of its modernity manifested itself only in its relationship with the more advanced Europe. Lenin regards Russia as an Asian country, but this orientation is defined not from the perspective of geography but from the degree of capitalist development and the process of Russian history. In “Democracy and Narodism in China,” he wrote that “Russia is undoubtedly an Asian country and, what is more, one of the most benighted, medieval, and shamefully backward of Asian countries” (Lenin 1975).

Although he was warmly sympathetic to the Chinese revolution, Lenin's position was "Western European" when the issue switched from Asian revolution to the changes within Russian society. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Russian intellectuals regarded the spirit of Russia as the struggle and collision of two forces: the Eastern and the Western, the Asian and the European. In the quotation above, Asia is a category connected with notions such as barbarity, medievalness and backwardness. It is for this reason that the Russian revolution had a prominently Asian character – that is, because it was directed against Russia's benighted, medieval, and shamefully backward social relations—and at the same time, had a global significance. [3]

The special position of Asia in the rhetoric of world history determined how the socialists understood the task and direction of modern revolution in Asia. After reading Sun Yat-sen's "The Significance of Chinese Revolution", Lenin criticized the democratic and socialist programs proposed by this Chinese revolutionary that transcended capitalism. He noted that they were utopian and populist. Lenin observed, "The chief representative, or the chief social bulwark, of this Asian bourgeoisie that is still capable of supporting a historically progressive cause, is the peasant" (Lenin 1975). Before the Asian bourgeoisie accomplished the revolutionary task that the European bourgeoisie had accomplished,

therefore, socialism was out of the question. He adroitly used historical dialectics to assert that Sun Yat-sen's "Land Reform Outline" was "reactionary" because it went against or beyond the present historical stage. He also pointed out that because of the "Asian" character of Chinese society, it was exactly this "reactionary outline" that could accomplish the task of capitalism in China: "[populism], under the disguise of 'combating capitalism' in agriculture, champions an agrarian program that, if fully carried out, would mean the *most* rapid development of capitalism in agriculture."

Lenin's impressions of the Chinese revolution were based on his reflection on the Russian reforms of 1861, and especially the failure of the 1905 revolution. In 1861, after the failure of the Crimean War with Great Britain and France over control of the Balkans and the Black Sea, Alexander II initiated reforms to abolish serfdom. Two points about these reforms should be highlighted. First, they originated from pressures external to Russian society. Second, the "Decree of Emancipation" announced on 19 February 1861 was carried out under the premise of full protection of landlord interests, and the Russian peasants paid a heavy cost for Russia's top-down process of industrialization. This is why Lenin argued that 1861 led to 1905 (Lenin 1973). From the reforms of 1861 to the revolution of 1905, the concentration of land did not give rise to capitalist agriculture; instead it led peasant

members of agrarian communes to demand vehemently the appropriation and redistribution of landlord lands (Lü 2004). [3] It was against this background that Lenin linked his thoughts on the 1905 revolution to Russia's land question. In "The Agrarian Program of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905-1907," focusing on the Russian land question, Lenin described two models of agricultural capitalism as "the Prussian path" and "the American path": in the former case state and feudal landlords allied to deprive the peasants of communes and their land ownerships with violence, turning feudal economy into Junker bourgeois economy; the latter might be preferable for the peasants to a small number of landlords. It took all land into state ownership in order to abolish the serf system in countryside. It was exactly such economic necessity that led the Russian peasants to support the nationalization of land. In considering the relation between the Russian land reform and the failure of the 1905 revolution, Lenin concludes that under Russia's social conditions, "Nationalization of land is not only the only way to thoroughly abolish the medieval agricultural system, it is also the best land system possible under capitalism" (Lenin, 1972).



Poster, Russian Revolution of 1905

Lenin believed that the Russian Populist (Narodnik) agrarian program was bound to lead Russia to return to a small peasant economy in which village land was divided up into small plots, and this kind of economic system could not provide the impetus for capitalist development. He endorsed the "American path" first because only abolition of medieval agrarian relations through nationalization of land could provide the possibility to develop agricultural capitalism, and second because Russia had large areas of virgin land and other conditions for the American path as opposed to the paths of European countries. The development of capitalist agriculture must involve the coercive reshaping of earlier social relations, but this could happen in various ways:

In England this reshaping proceeded in a revolutionary, violent way; but the violence was practised for the benefit of the landlords, it was practised on the masses of the peasants, who were taxed to exhaustion, driven from the villages,

evicted, and who died out, or emigrated. In America this reshaping went on in a violent way as regards the slave farms in the Southern States. There violence was applied against the slaveowning landlords. Their estates were broken up, and the large feudal estates were transformed into small bourgeois farms. As regards the mass of “unappropriated” American lands, this role of creating the new agrarian relationships to suit the new mode of production (i.e., capitalism) was played by the “American General Redistribution”, by the Anti-Rent movement [...] of the forties, the Homestead Act, etc. [Lenin 1972].

It was from this perspective that Lenin saw the truly revolutionary potential of Sun Yat-sen’s program. He marveled at this “advanced Chinese democrat” who knew nothing of Russia but still argued like a Russian and posed “purely Russian questions”:

Land nationalisation makes it possible to abolish absolute rent, leaving only differential rent. According to Marx’s theory, land nationalisation means a maximum elimination of medieval monopolies and medieval relations in agriculture, maximum freedom in buying and selling land, and maximum facilities for agriculture to adapt itself to the market [Lenin 1975].

In contrast, “Our vulgar Marxists, however, in criticising ‘equalised redistribution,’ ‘socialisation of the land,’ and ‘equal right to the land,’ confine themselves to repudiating the doctrine, and thus reveal their own obtuse doctrinairism, which prevents them from seeing the vital life of the peasant revolution beneath the lifeless doctrine of Narodnik theory.” Through examining Sun Yat-sen’s revolutionary program against Russia’s particular historical background, Lenin concluded that “The Russian revolution can succeed only as a peasants’ agrarian revolution, and the agrarian revolution cannot complete its historical mission without carrying out nationalization.” If the main characteristic defining the “American path” in contrast to the Prussian and English paths was the nationalization of land, the “Chinese path” represented a bottom-up “peasants’ agrarian revolution.”

The Russian reforms took place against the background of the Crimean War, the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, and the First World War, so Lenin’s reflections on the path of Russia’s reforms could not avoid addressing the international relations created by European imperialism. If Russia’s land question must be solved through “nationalization” [i.e. transferring ownership to the state], what kind of “state” could bear this responsibility? Lenin wrote that:

[T]he national state is the rule and the

“norm” of capitalism; the multi-national state represents backwardness, or is an exception. [...] This does not mean, of course, that such a state, which is based on bourgeois relations, can eliminate the exploitation and oppression of nations. It only means that Marxists cannot lose sight of the powerful economic factors that give rise to the urge to create national states. It means that “self-determination of nations” in the Marxists’ Programme cannot, from a historico-economic point of view, have any other meaning than political self-determination, state independence, and the formation of a national state [Lenin 1972a].

So when Lenin discussed “the awakening of Asia,” his concern was not with socialism but with how to create the political conditions for the development of capitalism, that is, the question of national self-determination. Two points are worth noting here. First, the “national state” and the “multi-national state” (i.e. “empire”) are opposed, the former being the “norm” of capitalist development, the latter forming its antithesis. Secondly, national self-determination is “political self-determination,” and under the conditions of Russia and China, the necessary form of “political self-determination” was to use socialist methods to form the political conditions for capitalist development, i.e. the political

structures of the nation-state: “[C]apitalism, having awakened Asia, has called forth national movements everywhere in that continent, too; [...] the tendency of these movements is towards the creation of national states in Asia; [...] it is such states that ensure the best conditions for the development of capitalism.” Under the particular conditions of “Asia,” only peasant-led agrarian revolution and socialist state-building could create the preconditions for capitalist development, so all reform programs opposed to peasant liberation and redistribution of land must be rejected.

There is no need to exaggerate the influence of the 1911 Revolution in China on Lenin or on the Russian Revolution. In contrast, the October Revolution in 1917 arose against the background of European wars and influenced the Chinese Revolution profoundly. Lenin paid special attention to the 1911 Revolution in the context of his prolonged reflection on the problems of state, socialist movement, and people’s democratic dictatorship. Yet two facts are seldom remembered. First, the October Revolution took place after China’s Republican Revolution of 1911. The method of socialist construction after the October Revolution can to a great extent be regarded as a response to the revolutionary situation in Asia. Lenin’s theory of national self-determination and his interpretation of the significance of revolution in backward countries in the era of imperialism were both introduced



after the Chinese Revolution and were theoretically connected with his analysis of this revolution. Second, the Russian Revolution greatly shocked and profoundly influenced Europe, and can be regarded as the historical event that separated Russia from Europe. There is no fundamental difference between Lenin's revolutionary assessment and the notions of Asia in the writings of Smith or Hegel. All perceived the history of capitalism as an evolutionary process beginning in the ancient Orient and flowering in modern Europe, and moving through the stages of hunting and agriculture to modern industry and commerce. For Lenin, however, this world-historical framework had two meanings from the start. First, the global expansion of capitalism and the Russian uprising of 1905 that it stimulated were the main forces that would awaken Asia—a land that had been “standing still for centuries” and had no history (Lenin 1977). Second, since the Chinese Revolution represented the most advanced power in world history, it clearly indicated the point at which the imperialist world system would be broken through. In the protracted debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers among Russian intellectuals and revolutionaries, Lenin developed a new sort of logic that could be called “shed Europe and join Asia” (datsu-ou nyu a or tuo ou ru ya). It was within this logic that the Chinese revolution provided a unique path combining national liberation with socialism. This unique path provided the

precondition for a new kind of revolutionary subject: the alliance between workers and peasants with the Chinese peasant as the principal component.

### III “Great Asianism” in the Perspective of Social Revolution

Lenin's theory gives us a clue for understanding the relation between early modern Chinese nationalism and the question of Asia. It is worth noting that early modern Japanese Asianism was first directed at “reviving” or “stimulating” Asia, but soon it became intertwined with expansionist “continental policy” and the imperialist vision of “Greater East Asia.” Beneath this shadow, the intellectuals and revolutionaries of China, Korea, and other Asian countries could not express interest in any variations of such an “Asianism.”

A few limited writings on this topic by Chinese revolutionaries such as Zhang Taiyan, Li Dazhao, and Sun Yat-sen were produced in a context associated with Japan. For them, the question of Asia was directly related to the Chinese revolution, social movement, and national self-determination. At the end of 1901, Sun Yat-sen published “On the Theories of Preserving and Partitioning China” in the *Toho Society Journal*. Addressing two theories then prevalent in Japan—that of preserving China and that of partitioning China, Sun pointed out that “From the perspective of state power (guoshi), there is no reason to preserve [China]; from the

perspective of national sentiment (minqing), there is no need to partition [China].” There was no reason to “preserve” China because, from the perspective of revolutionary politics, the Qing state and the people stood opposed to one another, and there was no need to “partition” China because one of the aims of the revolution was precisely to implement national self-determination (Wang 2004:65-7).

In 1924, during his last visit to Kobe, Sun again articulated his views on the Asia question in a speech, which was his famous “Great Asianism” (da yazhou zhuyi) (Sun 1986). He delineated two visions of Asia with ambiguity: One was the “birthplace of the most ancient culture,” but which lacked “a completely independent state”; the other was the Asia about to be rejuvenated. The former had inherent connections with the “multi-national states” in Lenin’s account, but what was the starting point of this Asian rejuvenation or rejuvenated Asia? Sun said that the starting point was Japan, since Japan had abolished a number of unequal treaties and become the first independent state in Asia. In other words, we could say this starting point is the nation-state rather than Japan in particular. He also applauded the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904:

The Japanese triumph over Russia was the first triumph of an Asian over a European nation in the past several centuries. [...] All Asian nations are

exhilarated and start to hold a great hope. [...] They therefore hope to defeat Europe and start movements for independence. [...] The great hope of national independence in Asia is born [Sun 1986:402].

Sun called attention to a subtle notion—“all Asian nations.” This notion is not only Asia as the origin of the most ancient civilization, but also an Asia that contains independent nation-states; it is not only East Asia within the Confucian cultural sphere, but also a multicultural Asia. The unity of Asia was based on the independence of sovereign states. “All Asian nations” is the outcome of national independence movements and not an awkward imitation of European nation-states. Sun insisted that Asia had its own culture and principles—what he called “the culture of the kingly way (wang dao)” as opposed to “the culture of the hegemonic way (ba dao)” of European nation-states. He titled his speech “Great Asianism” partly because he connected the idea of Asia with the notion of “the kingly way.” If we compare his speech with the imperialist idea of Asia, it becomes clear that although it preserves its association with Confucian ideas such “the kingly way” or “virtue and morality” (renyi daode), Sun’s notion of Asia is not an Asia with a core of cultural homogeneity. It is instead an Asia consisting of equal nation-states. According to this notion of

Asia, the inherent unity of Asia is not Confucianism or any other homogeneous culture, but a political culture that accommodates different religions, beliefs, nations, and societies. Within this category of political culture, Sun discussed China, Japan, India, Persia, Afghanistan, Arabia, Turkey, Bhutan, and Nepal, and the tributary system of the Chinese empire. Cultural heterogeneity was one of the main characteristics of this idea of Asia, and the category of nation provides the vehicle for the heterogeneity inherent in the idea of Asia. In Sun Yat-sen's usage, cultural heterogeneity was the historical basis for a nation-state's internal unity and resistance against external interference. [4]



Sun Yat-sen (seated) and Chiang Kai-shek

Although Sun's speech mentioned the tributary system of China, he did not intend to affirm the hegemonic or central status of China in relation to surrounding areas. It was used to prove the necessity of the kingly way. In the context of "Great Asianism", Sun's idea of the "kingly way" was opposed to the "hegemonic" logic of colonialism. He believed that the tributary model

contained mutual recognition of the multiplicity of culture, ethnicity and religion, in which modern states would be able to discover the cultural resource for surpassing imperialist politics. When he referred to the tribute paid by Nepal to China, he did not intend to relive the dream of great China. It was because he firmly believed the tributary relation contained equality based on mutual recognition and mutual respect. Sun supported the national liberation and independence movements in Southeast Asia. His ideas of Asia and national independence deeply influenced this region. [5] He hoped that the pluralism of empire culture could be united with new relations among nation-states so as to obviate imperialist colonization and the tendency toward high cultural homogenization. His vision of Asia consisted of Japan in the East, Turkey in the West, and nation-states founded on Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, and other cultures in the inner areas. He said, "We must insist on Great Asianism and recover the status of Asian nations. If we use only virtue and morality (renyi daode) as the basis to unite all nations, all nations of Asia, [when united,] will become powerful" (Sun 1986:408-9). According to Sun, the culture of the kingly way defends the oppressed nations, rebels against the hegemonic way, and pursues the equality and liberation of all peoples. Sun discerned the relationship between nationalism and the concept of race, and recognized that nationalism's logic of resistance also contained a logic that could lead to its

opposite, that is, the logic of oppression and hegemony. When he appealed to the notion of race to legitimize national independence, therefore, he proposed “Great Asianism.” Great Asianism, or “Pan-Asianism” (fanyazhou zhuyi), is antithetical to the Japanese proposal of “Greater East Asianism” (da dongya zhuyi). As a form of multiculturalism, it criticizes the Japanese notion of “East Asia” (toyo) which is highly homogenized. This notion is therefore not only a vision to transcend imperialism through self-determination, but also a multi-nationalism that surpasses the homogeneity of ethnicity, culture, religion and belief.

This self-deconstructive logic is the very basis of the close connection between “Great Asianism” and internationalism. Sun on the one hand defined Asia from an ethnic perspective, but on the other hand defined the Russian liberation movement as allied with Great Asianism and providing a means to surpass the demarcations of ethnicity. He said:

There is a new state in Europe which is discriminated against by all white Europeans. The European regards it as a venomous snake or a violent beast and dares not approach it. Some people in Asia hold the same view. Which state is this? Russia. Russia is parting ways with the white Europeans. Why does it do so? Because Russia advocates the kingly way and not the hegemonic way; it insists on

virtue and morality rather than talking about right and might. It upholds justice to the utmost, and objects to the oppression of the majority by the few. Hence the new culture of Russia is entirely compatible with the old culture of the East. Russia will therefore come to join hands with the East, and part ways with the West [Sun 1986:409].

Here skin color is not the yardstick but rather the socialist “new culture” after the “October Revolution,” with which “Great Asianism,” as a “mass liberation movement” of oppressed nations, resonates. If we compare Sun’s words with Li Dazhao’s “Great Asianism and New Asianism” and “New Asianism Revisited,” both published in 1919, we notice that all of these texts describe a vision of Asia centered on national self-determination and internationalism, defined in reaction to Japan’s “Twenty-one Demands” on China, and catalyzed by Russia’s October Revolution. Li regards Japan’s “Great Asianism” as a “Great Japanism” understood as a form of “Asian Monroe Doctrine”. Its substance is “not peace, but invasion; not national self-determination, but imperialist annexation of weaker nations; not Asian democracy, but Japanese militarism; not organization befitting the world’s organization, but organization deleterious to the world’s organization” (Li 1919). His “New Asianism” involved two points: “One is that, before Japan’s Great Asianism has

[been] destroyed, we weaker Asian nations should unite to destroy this Great Asianism; the other is that, after Japan's Great Asianism has [been] destroyed, the Asian masses as a whole should unite and join the organization of the world – [only] then will it be possible to join the organization of the world" (Li 1919a). What he valued was not alliance among states but rather an alliance among "the masses as a whole" (*quantu minzhong*); regional or world organization must be a "great alliance of the masses" premised on social revolution and social movements.

The understandings of "Asia" by Lenin, Sun Yat-sen, and Li Dazhao were closely related to their understandings of the task and direction of China's revolution. As for Lenin's Asia, we can clearly see a synthesis between revolution logic and the special definition of Asia in Hegel's conception of world history (a medieval, barbarous, ahistorical Asia). This Hegelian revolutionary conception of Asia not only includes ancient (feudal), medieval (capitalist), and modern (socialist) modes of historical development; it also stresses the unique position defined for "Asia" (especially Russia and China) in the age of world capitalism and imperialism, emphasizing the unique path of capitalist development within a society with peasant economy as its main component. The state question is addressed in a double sense: on the one hand, national self-determination is sought

within an imperialist international order; on the other hand, the state and its violence must be directed toward peasant interests and capitalist development. These two aspects together comprise a revolutionary perspective on Asia's social characteristics. In this perspective, what makes Asia is not any cultural essence abstracted from Confucianism or any other type of civilization, but rather the special position of Asian countries in the capitalist world-system. This special position is not produced by a structural narrative of world capitalism, but by a dynamic analysis of the class composition and historical traditions internal to Asian society.

It is for this reason that there are extreme differences between the "Asia" defined by social revolutionary perspectives, on the one hand, and by the various culturalisms, statisms, and theories of civilization that emerged from early modern history. The former focuses on investigating social forces and their relations. The question pursued by social revolutionaries is: taking agrarian relations as the center, what kinds of relations exist among the peasantry, the gentry, the emerging bourgeoisie, warlords, and urban workers? As Mao Zedong demonstrated in his "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" and "Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society," these analyses of class composition are not structural, but rather political analyses made from the perspective of social revolution and social movements. These

participants in revolutionary movements are not seeking to document the usual ownership ratios of determinate social groups, but rather to grasp the attitudes and potentials of various groups for social revolution and social movements. So this sort of “class analysis” is really more of a dynamic political analysis within the framework of class analysis. Political analysis is characterized by attention to the agency of subjects. Ignoring this, it is impossible to understand why, in the class transformations of early modern China, members from the middle and upper social strata could become the main forces of revolutionary movements, or why intellectuals from imperialist countries could become steadfast friends and comrades of the oppressed nations. If we analyze “Asia” from this kind of social revolutionary perspective, those generalized and static descriptions of “Asia” or “toyo” lose their validity, because the perspective of “political analysis” requires a dynamic grasp of international relations and relations internal to different societies. From the perspective of social revolution it asks: in this historical movement, who are our enemies, and who are our friends? And this question of friendship or enmity pertains to relations both among and internal to nations.

According to Machiavelli’s ancient explanation, “politics” is related to an active subjectivity or a subjective agency. A political perspective requires both the placement of conscious subjects

within this perspective and the discernment of various active subjects – discernment of friends and enemies, and assessment of the direction of social movements. A “political perspective” is always an “internal” perspective, a perspective that places oneself in dynamic relations of friend and enemy, a perspective that puts the political actions of thinkers or revolutionaries into intimate relations with the recognition of Asia, China, Japan, and Russia. The strongest part of this perspective is that it can overcome the framework of statism and international relations among nation-states by discerning different political forces within and among societies. In this perspective, questions of opposition or alliance are founded not on stable frameworks of relations among states or nations, but on forces internal to each society and their possible dynamic relations. In order to illustrate the characteristics of this kind of political perspective or analysis, we may contrast it with the notion of “state rationality” (perhaps including its opposite, “state irrationality”) that Maruyama Masao used to discuss Fukuzawa Yukichi. According to Maruyama, one of Fukuzawa’s contributions to the history of thought was that he articulated a “state rationality” appropriate to the needs of his day. From the perspective of this rationality, modern Japan’s exclusionism and expansionism can be seen as results of lacking or betraying this state rationality. In other words, for Fukuzawa no politics is more important than the establishment of “state rationality.”

Carl Schmitt opened his now widely quoted *The Concept of the Political* with the words “The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political.” “[P]olitical’ is usually juxtaposed to ‘state,’ or at least brought in relation to it,” but “equating the state with the political” cannot represent the true form of the political: “The equation state = political becomes erroneous and deceptive at exactly the moment when the state and society penetrate each other” (Schmitt 1996:19, 20, 22). His purpose was to illustrate that this situation “must necessarily occur in a democratically organized unit.” My purpose here in differentiating the political and the state is not to delineate the characteristics of a “democratically organized unit,” but to understand political practice during the era of the Russian and Chinese revolutions. In the context of social revolution, “the political” exists among various active subjects and in the self-conscious will of classes, class fractions, and political parties. These forces attempt to influence, dominate, transform, or control state power, but the state does not have an absolute capacity to encapsulate “the political” within its “structural-functional” operations. From this perspective, the equation state = political (i.e. active subjects having already become “structural-functional” factors of state power) describes not the normal situation but rather the result of a process of depoliticization.

In contrast to the analytical perspective of “state

rationality,” “political recognition” during a period of social revolution is not the mode of action of political subjects (e.g. states) in a normative sense, but rather the reality and direction of carrying out a historical movement from the perspective of “active political subjects and their mutual movement.” This requires those with consciousness to transform themselves into “active subjects,” that is, to place themselves or the interests they represent within a field of political analysis, giving rise to a political summons. Lenin perceived in Sun Yat-sen’s program a link between the Chinese revolution and “purely Russian questions,” so he proposed a program of national self-determination, launching an inquiry into on whom revolutionary forces must rely, whom they must oppose, and which kind of state must be established in order for capitalism to develop in “Asia.” The political decision to combine socialism with the state was the product of this political analysis. Similarly, Japanese intellectuals such as Miyazaki Toten and Kita Ikki, based on their recognition that China’s independence and liberation was a necessary step in the liberation of Asia, and even in the liberation of humankind, either took part in the practice of China’s revolution or undertook direct investigation into the movements of Chinese society, and in this way they produced profound political analyses and energies. After the 1911 Revolution, “What Kita Ikki saw was the wretched obeisance to Great Britain in Japan’s foreign policy.” His

analysis of the “theory of preserving China” (Shina hozen ron) was truly political: If Japan entered the group of six lending countries, “learning from the European countries’ [methods] of economic partitioning,” would that not be “to play the running dog, [helping to] partition [China] in the name of preserving [China]”? If one really wanted to “preserve” China, one must work towards China’s independence and national awakening, and that required drawing clear lines between traitorous warlords and the “emerging revolutionary classes.” The lending of money to warlords in the name of “preserving China” in fact demonstrated the relationship between state politics and the expansive aspirations of Japanese plutocrats (Nomura 1999:32-7). Kita supported and participated in Sun Yat-sen’s revolution, but he sharply criticized Sun’s acceptance of loans from Japanese plutocrats and his excessive reliance on foreign aid, saying that Sun failed to discriminate between “war and revolution” (Wang 2004:174-5). Here the ideal of “liberating Asia” (Sun’s “Great Asianism”) and the problems of “Chinese revolution” and “remaking Japan” generated intimate ties, and in this political perspective, not only did the abstractness of the idea of “Asia” disappear, but China and Japan were no longer monolithic, unanalyzable concepts.

Another example is Yoshino’s June 1919 article published in *Chuo Koron* “Do Not Vituperate the

Activities of Beijing Student Groups,” where he cut through the superficial appearance of the “pro-Japan faction” (Cao Rulin, Zhang Zongxiang, et al.) and the “anti-Japanese voices” of the student movement, proposing that: “If we want to get rid of the jinx of anti-Japanese [sentiment], the way is not to fund unrest among the people by supporting messieurs Cao and Zhang, but to [address] our own government’s policy of supporting [Chinese] warlords and plutocrats” (Nomura 1999:68-9). As I see it, this is a “political perspective.” During the second year of the War of Resistance against Japan, when the Nanjing government was forced to move to Chongqing, Ozaki Hotsumi perceived the deepening of the Communist Party’s influence and the weakening of the influence of the Zhejiang plutocrats, and he concluded that: “This has accelerated the desire for national liberation, and the national liberation movement has already become a force that is difficult for the Republican Government to control”; “China’s ‘reddening’ is determined by China’s particular complexities and its complex content; I think it should be understood as something quite different from the situation in Russia” (Nomura 1999:176, 184; Ozaki a:197; b:323). As I see it, this is a “political interpretation”. After the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, Tachibana Shiraki questioned his own recognition of China, saying: “My vision has been fixed on China’s objective aspects in an effort scientifically to grasp its various conditions, but my consideration of the



crucial subjective conditions has been too shallow. How could this relation be established under these conditions? I must begin anew” (Nomura 1999:206). As I see it, this way of recognizing China through going back to “subjective conditions” is also a “political mode of recognition.

In terms of the history of thought, these recognitions of China or conceptions of Asia eventually strayed from their initial course in various ways and to various degrees. This was mainly because, in the face of powerful state politics, they could not fully implement these modes of analysis. That is, in the face of “the state,” the “active subject,” the heart of the political perspective, disappeared. This recalls a thesis proposed by a European historian: If we want to determine a central theme of world history since the nineteenth century, that theme would have to be the nation-state. While reading Professor Nomura on the thought and activities of Miyazaki Toten, I noticed that his analysis began with “Miyazaki’s two major regrets”: “First, why did he take part in this revolution as a Japanese person and not as a Chinese person?” And “Second, before devoting his life to the Chinese revolution, why did he not commit himself to bettering Japan?” Nomura then insightfully observes: “We can say that these two questions of Miyazaki’s regret were deeply influenced by the political situation during the Meiji and Taisho periods. [...] [T]he basic source

of this regret was the tragic sense of being ‘torn in two’ by the relations between the countries” (Nomura 1999:117). After quoting Miyazaki’s words in honor of the Japanese emperor and state, Nomura comments: “As a man of the Meiji era, Miyazaki never managed to break free from the shackles of this curse: the state’s emperor system (tennosei kokka)” (1999:165).

Kita Ikki went much further than Miyazaki: On the one hand he regarded Japan’s internal revolutionary transformation as a precondition to the liberation of Asia, but, on the other hand, he also claimed that “Our seven hundred million compatriots in China and India could not stand up on their own without our support. [...] While the authorities of Euro-American revolutionary theory all take this superficial philosophical position and cannot grasp the ‘gospel of the sword,’ the farseeing Greece of Asian civilization had already constructed its own spirit. [...] People who eschew armed states have the views of children” (Kita 292). Here, rather than carrying his political ideas about “remaking Japan” over into Sino-Japanese relations during the imperialist period, Kita instead uncritically imagined Japan as the armed liberator of Asia. As in his 1903 description of the Russo-Japanese War as a “decisive battle between the Yellow and White races” (Kita 78-96), notions such as “state” and “race” prevent him from making a political analysis of his own society, so that today it is easy to notice “an immense inconsistency

between his ideal image of Japan as a ‘proletarian,’ ‘revolutionary’ state and its colonialist reality” (Wang 2004:171).

When Ozaki Hotsumi trumpeted an “East Asian Cooperative Community” in the late 1930s against the background of Japanese invasions throughout Asia, or when Tachibana Shiraki applied his analysis of Chinese society to his construction of Manchukuo as a “decentralized autonomous state,” what we see in their mode of analysis is precisely the equation “state = political,” and the deviation from the political mode of analysis that they had long insisted on. Political analysis halted at the gate of the Japanese Empire for different reasons. From a perspective of social revolution, this is “the statification (kokka ka) of politics,” a moment in which the shadows of thinkers overlap with that of the very object—the “Japanese Empire” that they had earlier sought to transform.

In the visions of Lenin and Sun Yat-sen, national self-determination is a synthesis of nationalism and socialism. On the one hand, it requires the establishment of nation-states as the predetermined condition for capitalist development. On the other hand, it emphasizes that this process of state-building at the same time transforms traditional imperial relations through social revolution. Socialists believe that weaker nations’ demands for self-determination always include demands for a certain degree of democracy, and, moreover, their support for

national independence movements is always linked to support for democratic forces. In this synthesis of internationalism and national self-determination, not much room is left for a category like “Asia” – Asia is only a marginalized part of the capitalist system, a geographical region that can enter the world capitalist system and the struggle against the world capitalist system only through national revolution. If we want to discuss how socialist thought relates to Great Asianism, then [we should recognize that], in the early modern context, they both have historical ties to certain forms of nationalism. The socialist idea of national self-determination is founded on the early modern European binary between “empire” and “state.” Those efforts to found “colonialist autonomous governments” such as Manchukuo under the banner of “Great Asianism” similarly employ the ideas of sovereignty, independence, and autonomy in order to incorporate Japan’s imperialist policies into a narrative of progress. The Japanese intellectuals mentioned above expressed sincere sympathy for China’s revolution and profound insight into China’s social movements, so why did even someone as insightful as Kita Ikki eventually convert to the very state system he had once criticized, even to the point of supporting policies of imperialist invasion? I cannot discuss these issues in greater detail, but two factors may provide certain explanatory possibilities: First, early modern Japan lacked the conditions for social revolution, so these keen

intellectuals could not bring to fruition within Japanese society the political perspective they had developed through their observation of China's revolution. Second, lacking these social conditions, socialist thought could not constitute the forces necessary to overcome nationalism and statism.

With the ebb of Asia's national liberation movements and the Chinese revolution, that political perspective of social revolution and movement, that political mode of analysis capable of linking the social movements of Russia, China, Japan, and other Asian countries, eventually receded from consciousness as well. Since the late 1970s, following the decline of the 1960s social movements and the end of the national liberation movements, we entered an era of "depoliticization," a process in which state mechanisms have gradually appropriated active subjectivity or subjective agency into "state rationality" and the tracks of the global market. As the question of "Asia" again becomes a concern of many intellectuals, we seem incapable of finding the political mode of analysis through linking different societies that last century's revolutionaries adeptly developed through placing themselves within revolutionary history. In the present era, discussions of the question of Asia center on regional markets and alliances against terrorism, and are linked by financial security, and such factors.

#### **IV Asia in Narratives of Modernity: Land and**

#### **Sea, State and Network**

Today intellectual discussions of "Asia" take place under conditions of neoliberal globalization. Above I mentioned two discourses of "empire." One is the discourse of global empire with the US as its center and global organizations such as the World Bank, the WTO, and the IMF as its mechanism. According to Sebastian Mallaby, the formation of this global empire "would not amount to an imperial revival. But it would fill the security void that empires left – much as the system of mandates did after World War I ended the Ottoman Empire" (Mallaby 2002). The other is the discourse of regional empires, with the European Union as model, aimed at resisting the monopolized domination of the global empire. UK Prime Minister Blair's foreign policy advisor Robert Cooper calls this "cooperative empire." In his classification, the two types of "postmodern states" are the EU as a "cooperative empire," and the International Monetary Fund and World Bank as [agents of] "voluntary global economic imperialism." Both types operate according to laws and regulations, as opposed to traditional empires' reliance on centralized power. Cooper's vision of "cooperative empire" and "the imperialism of neighbors" were proposed in the shadow of the Balkan and Afghanistan wars. He associated "humanitarian intervention" with this new kind of imperialism, making "humanitarianism" the theoretical premise for

“empire” (Cooper 2002, 2002a).

Against the background of colonialism and imperialist wars, Asian intellectuals have generally taken the East/ West binary for granted in their conceptions of history. Early modern ideas of Asia, moreover, often had strong culturalist overtones, inevitably tending toward essentialist perspectives in understanding and constructing “Asian” identity. Not only are ideas of Asia formed in this way unconvincing in practice; even if successful, do we really want to establish the kind of “cooperative empire” or “imperialism of neighbors” that can carry out violent intervention in the name of humanitarianism? How can such a politically, economically, and culturally complex Asian society form a “linking mechanism” to provide a form of regional organization different from both the early modern nationalist state model and the two “imperial” models described above? Having experienced both the cruel history of colonialism and powerful movements for national liberation, can we find a flexible mechanism that can avoid the traps of both “imperial” and statist models?

Let us begin our search with the various historical narratives of an “East Asian world.” The construction of such a world as a relatively self-sufficient “cultural sphere” is the invention of early modern Japanese thought, but there are different ways in which this world has been sketched. Nishijima Sadao described “the East Asian world” as a self-contained cultural sphere:

geographically, China formed a center surrounded by Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and the area between the Mongolian and the Tibetan plateaus. Culturally, it was characterized by the Chinese writing system, Confucianism, Buddhism, and a system of laws and decrees (Nishijima 1983:89). The effort to establish a connection between geographic region and culture aimed to construct East Asia as an organic whole, but how did this idea of “Asian Organism” come into being? According to Maeda Naonori, Japanese scholars previously did not include Japan in their conception of the East Asian world:

It is generally believed that before modern times, before the history of different regions in the world attained commonality, China was a world, and India was yet another world. From the perspective of cultural history, the world of China can be regarded as the world of East Asia, including Manchuria, Korea, Annam, etc. This is what people used to believe. Although we considered the possibility, we were hesitant to include Japan in this world. But this is only a question of cultural history. We know almost nothing about whether the inner development of Korean or Manchurian societies, not to mention Japan, were connected or parallel to China. We know that in the European world, for instance,

the developments of British society were parallel to and interrelated with those of the European continent. But whether a similar phenomenon existed in East Asia, especially between Japan and China, was still not clear until modern times. Moreover, the question itself has not yet been taken seriously. The received idea has been that the development of Japan's social structure, from ancient times to the medieval and modern periods, has been completely unrelated to those on the continent [Maeda 1993:135].

The view that set Japan apart from Asia was closely associated with the unique historical circumstances before Japan opened its ports and with the notion of Japan's particularity that arose after the ports were opened. Connection and distinction, shedding Asia and joining Asia: these antitheses formed the opposing and coordinated characteristics of the early modern Japanese nationalist narrative of Asia.

The impetus for constructing the organic wholeness or self-containment of the East Asian world has always been the challenge of a nationalistic, industrial, and capitalistic "West". The notion of a "sphere of East Asian civilization" was an organic constituent of early modern Asian nationalist knowledge, and people sought behind it not only cultural particularity but also an "inherent" and "universal" dynamic of nationalism, industrialism, and capitalism

appropriate to this cultural particularity. Hence the effort to search for modernity in Asia deconstructed the Hegelian framework of world history, but the inherent standards of the Hegelian world order were not questioned but reproduced: nationalism, capitalism (industry and trade etc.), and theories of state organized a meta-historical narrative about East Asian history.

Miyazaki Ichisada, a representative historian of the Kyoto school, proposed a new definition of "East Asia" (*toyo*) (Miyazaki 1993). On the one hand, this account no longer regarded the "East Asian world" as part of the "Chinese world," instead locating China and its history within a category of "East Asian history (*toyo shi*). On the other hand, through analyzing changes in transportation and commerce during the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties period [581-960 CE], Miyazaki concluded that "one could perceive in Song society obviously capitalistic tendencies and phenomena that differed drastically from those of medieval society." From this basis he developed a set of narratives about an East Asian modernity comparable to Western modernity (Miyazaki 1993:168). Miyazaki wove together the history of various regions through the analysis of communication, transportation, and trade, and from this perspective he elaborated on "Song Dynasty capitalism," "East Asian early modernity" and "nationalism". In a chapter on "nationalism in early modern East Asia," he

analyzed ethnic relations from the Qin unification all the way to the Qing Dynasty. He argued that during the Song Dynasty, “nationalist upsurges” appeared, national contacts went beyond tributary relations, and the Dayue and Dali kingdoms, although nominally tributaries to the Song court, actually were “independent and unrestrained nation-states” (1993:195-211). Although the [Mongolian] Yuan Dynasty interrupted this process, it later stimulated “Han-Chinese-centered nationalism.” In this sense, the development of nationalism in Asia is treated as parallel to that in the West. Miyazaki boldly employs various European concepts. His understanding of the Tang-Song transition and especially of the Song Dynasty is based on notions of capitalism and the nation-state. Such a search for history in East Asia is inevitably characterized by teleology. We can perceive the European binary of “state” vs. “empire” in the link of “East Asian modernity” and the nation-state.

In this regard, Hamashita Takeshi’s discussion of the Asian tributary system is a criticism of both “shedding Asia” and particularism. In the field of economic history, he reconstructs an East Asian world order centered in China and woven together through a tributary system, and in this way he affirms a set of historical ties within Asia (including those between Japan and China). Although he similarly emphasizes the modern forces internal to Asia, unlike Miyazaki, whose

notion of “East Asian early modernity” is based on European-style nationalism, Hamashita locates the inner organicity of Asia in this distinctive tributary-trade network (Hamashita 1999). At the center of his theory are three hypotheses: First, Asia forms an organic whole, not only culturally but also economically and politically. Second, this organism is centered in Chinese civilization and organized according to the trans-state tributary-trade network. Third, coupled with this tributary network is a set of “center/ periphery” relations constituted through practices of tribute and imperial bestowal, to be distinguished from European-style relations among “states.” If Miyazaki’s account is grounded in Eurocentric assumptions, then Hamashita deconstructs the link between the nation-state and modernity, constructing an alternative narrative of regional and world history. In his view, moreover, the Asian tributary network was not completely destroyed by Western capitalist expansion; “Asia as world-system” continues to exist in the early modern age.

Hamashita’s account is inspiring. He discovers an inner theme to connect Asian states and uses it as a starting point for envisioning the contemporary world. He also uses a “peripheral” perspective to expose continent-centrism and the principles of dynastic orthodoxy in official Chinese historiography. This is a forceful criticism of advocates of particularism who

refuse to recognize the historical relations between Japan and the rest of Asia. For Chinese scholars who are accustomed to considering China from within, this theory provides a perspective for viewing China from its periphery. This effort to search for East Asian modernity based on a tributary imperial system also challenges the Eurocentric binaries of empire vs. state and tribute vs. commerce.

The so-called “unity of East Asia” is a construct premised on the category of Asia, while Hamashita’s approach to the “unity of Asia” stresses commercial aspects of the tributary system, especially maritime commercial relations. Here I attempt to supplement, modify and develop Hamashita’s work. *First*, the practice of tribute was a historical result of the interaction among agents participating in this system and not a self-contained or complete structure. In this sense, the tributary system was a constantly shifting process linking and defining the relations among multiple centers of power. Whenever a new power took shape or entered the picture, the internal power relations changed. Hamashita defined six types of tributary relations: 1) tribute from local chiefs and local officials; 2) tribute under relations of vassalage; 3) tribute involving states with the closest ties to the imperial court; 4) tributary states with two-way relationships with the imperial court; 5) tributary states on the outer edge of the periphery; 6) states in primarily commercial relations with the court (Hamashita

1999:35-6). But this narrative relies excessively on the static “center/ periphery” framework, so it cannot account for the constant changes in historical tributary practices.

From a strictly economic perspective, Miyazaki had already divided Chinese history into periods based on major routes of transportation and communication: from ancient to medieval times was the inland-centered period; from the Song to the Qing Dynasty was the Grand-Canal-centered period; and with the late Qing began the coast-centered period—a new circumstance that took place under European influence (Miyazaki 1993:168, 170). If center/ periphery relations within China were constantly shifting, so was the tributary system. For example, the tributary relations that the Song court established under conditions of war with northern peoples could not at all be described by Hamashita’s framework of “center/ periphery” relations, nor could the Qing court’s relations with Russia since the seventeenth century.

The instability of center/ periphery relations is one of the most important characteristics that distinguish the modern capitalist world. The theory of center/ periphery relations with China as the center, therefore, cannot entirely explain the changes in power relations within Asia since the nineteenth century. As Hamashita pointed out in an essay written early in his career, the intensification of the Western capitalist powers’ financial penetration into Asia and especially

China was closely related to the international financial market's expansion following the discovery of gold in the USA and Australia (Hamashita 1995). Financially speaking, the history of modern Chinese economy can be regarded as the process through which Chinese economy was woven into the fabric of a unified international accounting structure centered in London. In this sense, the modern age in Asia is the process of gradual economic incorporation into modern world history, one characterized by relations of financial subordination-domination. If we apply the framework of center/ periphery to nineteenth and twentieth century power relations within Asia, it will inevitably conceal the actually central status in the new world-system of traditionally peripheral categories. For example, if Japan's shedding Asia and its modernization (including the first invasion of Taiwan and the first Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5) is explained within the framework of "shaking off the status of a tributary state" (i. e. the center-periphery framework), great changes in the center/periphery relations that have been taking place since the Opium Wars will be obscured. The binaries of "center-periphery" and the empire of China vs. the tributary state actually reproduces the binary of empire-state in modern European thought. As Maruyama says, European state rationality came into being in the struggle against trans-state authorities such as the Sacred Roman Empire and the Roman pope, and in the struggle against the request for autonomy by

Medieval social powers such as feudal lords, autonomous cities, local churches (Maruyama 1997: 160). This framework cannot explain the role of Japan in early modern Asia, or exactly why the periphery (Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, etc.) became the center or sub-center of nineteenth and twentieth century Asian capitalism, while continental areas such as mainland China, India, and Inner Asia declined and became "peripheral" or colonized.

Hamashita's innovative research also makes it possible for a regional study that is not centered on states but on networks, but it is exactly in the widened perspective of networks that the excessively static structure of tributary trade or center/periphery relations is challenged. As Hamashita himself has noticed, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the overseas Chinese private trade network successfully transformed the official tribute system into a private trade system, and this was the result of long-term processes. Xu Baoqing argues:

When the Europeans arrived in East Asia at the beginning of the sixteenth century, they tried to connect with the official tribute system so as to promote the development of trade. But they realized that they increasingly relied on the extensive overseas Chinese trade networks. Especially since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the official tribute system centered in China was



merely a fantasy of the government concerning control that had never been actualized because China was confronted with the growing hegemony and invasion of imperialist powers. To a large degree, therefore, it was not the official tribute system but private overseas Chinese trade networks that integrated the East Asian regions into a single system. [6]

According to Xu, it was not tribute but rather private overseas trade, including smuggling, which constructed a more important connection between the East and Southeast Asian trade networks. Under the conditions of European imperialism in the nineteenth century, the development of the Southeast Asian market was less a result of tributary commerce than a result of breaking out of that system. The important characteristics of the commercial form in Southeast Asia from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century were smuggling, arms trafficking, and European monopolies. [7] Here, the historical development of networks is precisely the result of shifts in the existing relations between center and periphery.

*Second*, in the vision of “maritime East Asia” woven together by the tributary network, historical routes of communication and transportation within the Asian continent and their changes over time were reduced to a subordinate and marginal status. If we compare

Nishijima’s “East Asian world” with Hamashita’s, the latter centered on the east coast, peninsulas and islands of the Eurasia continent, including Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, is approximately the same as the category of the “maritime world” in which the contemporary Japanese academy is interested. Hamashita developed his idea of Asia in opposition to Eurocentrism. His description focused on aspects such as commerce and the circulation of silver and stressed the historical communications between China and East and Southeast Asia – i.e. exchanges enabled mainly through marine transportation. This narrative, therefore, responded to the economic logic and framework of maritime theory in the European narrative of capitalism. In his account, maritime theory, as a theory of modernity, became central to grasping the question of Asia, because it dealt with politico-economic relations that corresponded with the modern treaty system. While using the tribute system as his narrative framework, he specifically pointed out that the basic rules of this world system need to be modified. The modification should aim to establish a new East Asia system that is centered on the sea and different from the western commercial system. For the same reason, this “historical world with its own inner unity” is centered on East and Southeast Asia. Hamashita stresses the importance of culture, political structure, and the sea in the formation of regional relations, especially regional trade relations. But

this idea of Asia that emphasizes unity lacks a thorough analysis of continental transportation and communication—between China and Inner, West, and South Asia, and Russia—that dominated the tribute system for many centuries, and it seldom address the relation between the formation of maritime trade spheres and continental dynamics. Nor does it sufficiently examine the role of the West in these processes. The so-called maritime age came into being under conditions of European industrialization, development in maritime military technology, and the formation of the nation-state system in Europe. It undermined the historical connections and social relations within the Asian continent and subordinated continental Asia to maritime hegemonies and economic relations connected by maritime passages.

Throughout Chinese history, the relations among the Northwest, the Northeast, and the Central Plains has been fundamental in driving changes in China's social system, population, and mode of production. Even in the so-called maritime age, inland transportation routes and relations played a vital role. Chen Yinke has traced the origins of Sui and Tang policies and regulations to, first, the Northern Wei Dynasty, and, second, the Northern Qi, Liang, and Chen dynasties, and third, the Western Wei and Northern Zhou dynasties. He points out: "Sui and Tang artifacts and systems spread widely to the desert in the North, Hanoi in the South, Japan in the East, and

Inner Asia in the West, but monographs on their origins and transformations are rare; it is a regrettable lacuna in Chinese historiography" (Chen 1992:515). His studies on Tang political and military history show that Chinese policies, population, and culture since the Sui and Tang dynasties were already the product of multiple Eurasian cultures, policies, and regulations.

Owen Lattimore similarly describes an "Asian continent" with the Great Wall as its center, which transcended political and ethnic borders. This idea of a "center" meant that on both sides of the Great Wall were two parallel social formations, agricultural and pastoral. These two social formations maintained long-lasting contacts along the Great Wall, and their interaction deeply affected both societies. Lattimore's alternative account of a "center" counterbalances the previous insistence on the central status of agriculture in the South and draws our attention to how China's frontiers and frontier peoples took shape. The Central Plains pastoral society and the southern agricultural society developed at the same time, and the area in between developed a "frontier condition" (Lattimore 1962:55). The Great Wall-centered, Yellow River-centered, and Grand Canal-centered narratives of Chinese history contrast sharply with one another. The shifting of the center of historical narratives was related to the shifting of the "heartland" from dynasty to dynasty. Moreover, it was also related to how

one observes historical change, and especially the forces driving historical change. According to Lattimore, the internal route of expansion in Chinese history was originally from North to South. The pressures of European colonialism and industrialization forced the center of expansion to move from southern to northern China. He therefore uses the terms pre- and post-West to describe the transformation of internal relations on the Asian continent.

The differentiation between pre- and post-West, however, also becomes too simplistic when we study inland movements. Once the Manchus controlled the central plain, large scale migration of population, economy, commerce and other cultural relations from the central plain to the north became important. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this South-to-North movement originated mainly in the internal dynamics of the Qing Empire, and had little to do with the Western powers. In 1857, when Marx considered Chinese attitudes toward maritime hegemonies, he noticed that while Western states used military force to expand their trade with China, Russia spent less but gained more than any of the belligerent states (Marx 1857). Although Russia had no maritime trade with China, it enjoyed an overland trade centered in Kiakhta. The value of goods bought and sold in 1852 amounted to 150 million American dollars, and, since the goods were relatively inexpensive, the quantity of goods involved was striking.

Because of this increase in trade, Kiakhta grew from a fortress and marketplace into a major city, and direct and regular postal communication was established between it and Beijing, which is about nine hundred miles away. Marx and Engels both pointed out how the Sino-British and Sino-French coastal conflicts created the possibility for Russia to obtain vast territory and great profit in the inland Amur River basin (Marx 1980, 1980a; Engels 1980). Engels predicted that Russia was “fast coming to be the first Asiatic Power, and putting England into the shade very rapidly on that continent,” and he criticized British media and the British Ministry for suppressing information on how Russia gained greater profit in China, Afghanistan, and other Inner Asian regions when they publicized the Anglo-Chinese treaty. If we understand the 1905 Russo-Japanese War’s impact on the course of Japanese modernization, or China’s later alliance and subsequent split with the Soviet Union within a dialectic of continental and maritime relations, then it becomes clear that continental relations between Asia and Europe have indeed played a large role in shaping East Asian modernity.

Theories of Asia centered on the tributary system tend to emphasize economic relations (especially maritime commercial networks) at the expense of events such as wars and revolutions. Sun Yat-sen’s description of overseas Chinese as “mothers of the Chinese revolution” illustrates the

influence of overseas networks (especially in Japan and Southeast Asia) on China's modern revolutionary history, networks which overlapped with tributary routes. After the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898, Japan became not only a refuge for exiled reformers and the first generation of Chinese revolutionaries, but also the cradle of the Chinese Enlightenment. It was at this time that a number of Japanese intellectuals became direct participants in China's revolutionary and reform movements. Chinese communities in Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Malaya, the Philippines, and Myanmar not only provided material resources for China's reform and revolution; they also injected a special vitality into the wave of nationalism that eventually swept the entire region, forming a transnational network of social movements. Following the 1911 Revolution, this revolutionary movement based in overseas coastal areas took root on the Chinese mainland and provided the initial impetus for the political revolution, the agrarian revolution, and the military struggles that soon developed. The interaction between coastal networks and inland areas thus manifested itself during the revolution era.

Similarly, the ties and differences between land and sea also influenced the characteristics of Asian wars to a certain extent. In an appendix to *The Concept of the Political* titled "Theory of the Partisan," Carl Schmitt puts the guerrilla or

"partisan" of "irregular warfare" at the center of political thought, regarding the partisan as an "irregular force" in contrast with "this regularity of the state and the military":

There is no place in the classical martial law of the existing European international law for the partisan, in the modern sense of the word. He is either [...] a sort of light, especially mobile, but regular troop; or he represents an especially abhorrent criminal, who stands outside the law [...]. The partisan is [...] different not only from the pirate, but also from the corsair in the way that land and sea are distinguished as (two different) elemental spaces of human activity and martial engagement between peoples. Land and sea have developed not only different vehicles of warfare, and not only distinctive theaters of war, but they have also developed separate concepts of war, peace, and spoils. The partisan will present a specifically terrestrial type of active fighter for at least as long as anticolonial wars are possible on our planet [Schmitt 2005:3, 6, 13-14].

"Through comparison with typical figures of maritime law and a discussion of the aspect of space", Schmitt further elaborated on the "tellurian character of the partisan". Beginning with the Opium Wars, the external pressures

facing China switched from inland to coastal areas, and the traditional forms of warfare likewise changed. During the First Sino-Japanese War (1894), the Japanese navy thoroughly destroyed the Qing's Northern Navy and took control of the East Asian waters. But from the invasion of northeastern China in 1931 to the full-scale outbreak of the War of Resistance in 1937, Japan's mighty army nevertheless failed to subjugate poor and militarily-backward China. Of course the war's outcome was determined by many complex political, economic, and military factors, but the failure of Japan to victory in the war is clearly related to the interweaving of regular and partisan warfare, and of inter-state and "people's war." Acting in concert with the regular army were the flexible, irregular partisan forces dependent upon the character of the land and the general population's support, political consciousness, and clear recognition of friend and enemy.

In this ethnically complex, geographically vast inland region mainly populated by peasants, China's revolutionaries synthesized military and revolutionary mobilization, using unique military forms to break through the concepts of regular warfare (war among states) as defined by European international law, and laying a foundation for postwar political and military forms completely different from those prior to the war. China's revolution unfolded throughout China's inland mountain ranges, waterways,

jungles, and prairies, and through the intensification of agrarian revolution, modern China's political forces, especially the revolutionary party, turned several generations of peasants and their descendants into revolutionary and military subjects. Through military experience and revolutionary mobilization, that agrarian society which, from a European perspective, was the symbol of backwardness and conservatism, could become an active political force. The forging of revolutionary state-building, industrial planning, urban development, and new urban-rural relations was intimately linked to the emergence of this new political subject. Reviewing from this perspective Mao Zedong's concept of guerrilla strategy, his theory of protracted war and the question of the role of peasants and villages in warfare, and his concept of New Democracy, we can perhaps develop a new understanding of China's revolution.

From these perspectives, how to relate Asia's continental and maritime eras and how to relate Asia's organic unity with its internal cultural and historical complexity are questions that await further research. Simple maritime theory cannot explain the profound polarization currently underway between China's coastal and interior (especially northwestern) areas, and the coastal economy's domination over the inland economy. Nor can it explain the forces driving China's (and Russia's) modern revolution centered on agrarian

revolution, or the special characteristics of the Second Sino-Japanese War. More importantly, the tributary system is not simply a matter of economic relations; it encompasses ritual and political relations among various social groups with differing cultures and beliefs. In the course of long historical processes, networks formed through tribute, commerce, and migration still provide the means for revolutions, wars, and other social interactions. In this sense, the complex meanings and uses of tributary relations, and especially their points of overlap or conflict with modern capitalist relations, merit further exploration.

The theory of the tributary system is defined in opposition to European nation-states and their treaty system. It overcame the earlier idea that the nation-state was the only force capable of propelling modernization, but the dichotomy between tributary and treaty systems is also derived from that between empire and state. As early as the seventeenth century, the Qing state was already using the treaty form to define borders in certain frontier regions (such as the Sino-Russian border), to create regular frontier patrols, to determine custom-duty rates and trade mechanisms, to exert sovereign rights over residents within its administrative sphere, and to establish tributary and treaty relations with European countries. Hence the Qing was not only an empire of mixed national and ethnic composition, but also a political entity with

advanced state systems as well. Its well developed tributary network included treaty relations. If we interpret Qing society through the simple opposition between state and empire, treaty and tribute, we will not be able to see how empire construction and state construction were overlapping processes, and we will not be able to understand the basic characteristics of modern Chinese nationalism. The complex relations between the tributary and state systems prevent us from describing the tributary system simply as a hierarchical relation between center and periphery. [8] Here the question of whether East Asia or China is state-centered or tributary is not significant. The pivotal question is to clarify various notions and types of political bodies, and various notions of state, so as not to obscure the notion of state with the history of modern capitalism and nation-state. Research on the tribute system and network emphasizes economy and commerce, which is an alternative type of study of the forms of capitalism. But it should not be ignored that the tribute system is linked with ritual, politics, culture, internal and external relations and economics, embodying a peculiar political culture.

If the tributary system is a product of a different type of state than modern European sovereign states, then we need to reinterpret the relationships between tribute and states by comparing different types of both categories. In Chinese history, tributary and treaty relations are

not completely opposite categories. For example, when the Qing government began to develop commercial, political, and military relations with European countries, tributary relations were a form of inter-state relations. The Qing court's relations with countries such as Russia, Portugal, Spain, Holland, and Great Britain were called tributary relations, but they were also in fact diplomatic and treaty relations. Hamashita, in classifying types of tribute, points out that one he calls "mutual market" relations is very similar to what would later be called "diplomatic" or "foreign trade" relations. Within the tributary sphere, there also existed a relation involving tribute and exchange of gifts. Sometimes the two gifts were of equal value, and sometime the return gift was worth more than the tribute. Tributary relations, therefore, involved both economic and ritual forms of interaction. The ritual inequality and actual reciprocity, the ritual character of the tributary relation and the actual substance of tributary trade, overlapped. If it is an inherent characteristic of tributary practice that state and tributary relations overlapped, why not consider European states' domestic and international relations from another perspective, that is, why not regard the treaty system not as a structural form but as a product of historical interactions among various forms and forces? For example, we can ask: Was Great Britain's nineteenth century commercial relationship with India and North America defined by treaty or tributary relations? Was the US's (or the USSR's)

twentieth century relationship with its "strategic partners" in the Cold War a relation among sovereign states or between center and periphery, or lord and vassal? During the Opium Wars, the Qing scholar and official Wei Yuan already recognized that the main difference between China and Britain in commercial affairs was not a difference between a system based on tribute and a system based on treaties, but rather another kind of difference: Tribute was not the mainstay of China's economy, so there was no internal impetus for linking the imperial government and military directly to foreign trade, whereas Britain's domestic economy relied on tributary and commercial relations with its colonies. This forced the British state to take an active role in supporting overseas commercial activities, including with military force.

If, as Wang Gungwu argues, China's overseas commerce was a "commerce without empire," then British commerce was the opposite: an organized alliance of military and business under state auspices (Wang 1990). It was only in order to force China to sign unequal treaties that the Western powers recognized the Qing state as a formally equal legal subject, thus applying to a non-European entity the notion of sovereignty previously reserved for international law among Christian or "civilized" states. If one explains the Qing conflicts with Japan over the Korean peninsula and the First Sino-Japanese War according to a normative framework of either

“tributary” or “treaty” relations (i.e. sovereignty based on formal equality), then the major changes in Asian power relations during the nineteenth century are obscured. It will thereby lead to the justification of the expansionism of European international law with a universalist “rationality”. If one bases one’s argument on a binary of tribute vs. treaty, or empire vs. state, and then attacks such Eurocentric ideas by inverting the relations between the two terms, the complexity of historical relations within Asia will probably be oversimplified. We need to consider carefully how to define the relationship between Asia’s “center/ periphery” mechanisms and Europe’s “state” mechanisms, which have both overlapping and oppositional aspects.

The question of Asia’s modernity must eventually deal with the relationship between Asia, on the one hand, and European colonialism and modern capitalism, on the other. As early as the 1940s, Miyazaki began to explore the “beginning of Song capitalism” by studying the history of wide-ranging communication and transportation among various regions. He argued that those “who regard history since the Song as the growth of modernity have arrived at the time to reflect on Western modern history in light of the developments in early modern East Asian history” (Miyazaki 1993:240). That his theory of “East Asian early modernity” overlapped with the Japanese idea of a “Greater East Asian Sphere” does not obscure Miyazaki’s insightful

observations. He observed that in a kind of world-historical framework, the digging of the Grand Canal, migration to metropolises, and the circulation of commodities such as spices and tea connected the European and Asian trade networks, and the expansion of the Mongolian Empire promoted artistic and cultural exchange between Europe and Asia, not only changing the internal relations in Chinese and Asian societies, but also connecting Europe and Asia by land and sea. If the political, economic, and cultural features of “Asian modernity” appeared as early as the tenth to eleventh century, was the historical development of these two worlds parallel or associated? Andre Gunder Frank responded to this question by demonstrating that Asia and Europe had already established important ties by the thirteenth or fourteenth century, and moreover that any discussion of the birth of modernity must begin with an appreciation of a world-system composed of such long-standing relations (Frank 1998). [9] The significance of communication and transportation is not the stiff bundling together of two worlds; it is more like two gears connected with a belt: when one turns, the other must turn as well. So a logical conclusion is that:

The European Industrial Revolution was definitely not an independent European historical sequence, because it was not only a problem of machinery but also an issue of the whole social structure. For



the Industrial Revolution to take place, the prosperity of the bourgeoisie was necessary, and moreover, the capital accumulation from trading with East Asia was indispensable. To make the machines work required not only power but also cotton as raw material. East Asia provided the necessary raw materials and markets. If there had not been interaction with East Asia, the Industrial Revolution might not have taken place [Miyazaki 1993:236-8].

Miyazaki's research mainly focuses on China's internal history; his writings on the interactions between Asia and Europe are thin. Frank's research, on the other hand, is economic and commerce-centered; he seems to have little to say about historical forces internal to European society and their relation to the birth of capitalism. In their structuralist narratives, war, contingent events, and other historical factors are pushed into the background. But these narratives, from different perspectives, provide important tools to help us re-narrate "world history."

Hence in such an interactive narrative of history, the validity of the idea of Asia diminishes, since it is neither a self-contained entity nor a set of self-contained relations. It is neither the beginning of a linear world history nor its end. This idea of Asia, which is neither starting point nor end, neither self-sufficient subject nor

subordinate object, provides an opportunity to reconstruct "world history." If we need to rectify mistakes in the theories of Asia, we must reexamine the notion of Europe too. As we correct the errors in the idea of Asia, we must also reexamine the idea of Europe. In Lenin's style, we should ask: Where does this advanced Europe come from, after all? What sort of historical relations have resulted in Asia's backwardness? Historical relations internal to societies are also important, but in the long run, how should we appraise the effects of continually extending inter-regional relations on a society's internal situation? If theories of Asia continue to be based on taken-for-granted notions of Europe, and the forces that gave rise to the concept of Europe are not thoroughly reexamined in the context of European historical development, these theories will not be able to overcome their ambiguity.

### **Conclusion: A Problem of "World History"—Asia, Empire, and Nation-state**

The accounts of Asia that we have discussed above reveal not so much Asia's autonomy as the ambiguity and contradictions in the idea of Asia. This idea is at the same time colonialist and anti-colonialist, conservative and revolutionary, nationalist and internationalist, originating in Europe and shaping Europe's image of itself, closely related to visions of both nation-state and empire, a notion of non-European civilization, and a geographic category established through

geopolitical relations. We must take seriously the derivativeness, ambiguity, and inconsistency of how the idea of Asia emerged as we explore the political, economic, and cultural independence of Asia. The keys to transcend or overcome such derivativeness, ambiguity, and inconsistency can be discovered only in the specific historical relations that gave rise to them.

First, the idea of Asia was created in close relation to the issues of modernity and capitalism, and the core of the modernity issue was the development of the relationship between nation-state and market. The tension between nationalism and supra-nationalism is closely related to the dual reliance of capitalist markets on state and inter-state relations. Such discussions often focus on issues such as nation-state and capitalism, the diverse historical relations, policies and governance, customs, and cultural structure of Asian societies nested in the narrative of modernity. Values, policies, and rituals independent of this narrative of modernity have been suppressed or marginalized. One important step in reflecting on the role of Europe in “world history” is to challenge Eurocentric historical narratives and to redefine such suppressed historical legacies as values, policies, rituals, and economic relations.

Second, at this point, the nation-state is still the main force behind regional relations within Asia. Its main manifestations are that: 1) Regional relations are the extension of state relations:

whether we are talking about the Asian Forum promoted by Malaysia, or the East Asian Network advocated by South Korea, or regional organizations such as ASEAN or the Shanghai Six, all are predicated on inter-state relationships formed to develop economic relations or state security collaboration. 2) The construction of Asian sovereignty has never been complete: the standoffs on the Korean peninsula and the Taiwan Strait and the incomplete sovereignty of postwar Japan all illustrate that nationalist processes took shape in the nineteenth century still play a major role in shaping relations in East Asia. 3) Since the new discourse on Asia is directed at forming protective and constructive regional networks against the domination and turbulence caused by globalization, the question of the state still occupies a central place in the question of Asia. The imagining of Asia often appeals to a sort of ambiguous Asian identity, but if we pursue the preconditions for this idea’s system and principles, then the nation-state will emerge as the political structure trying to be overcome. So, however we deal with the legacy of national liberation movements (respect for sovereignty, equality and mutual trust etc.) and historical regional relations under present conditions, this is still an important question.

Third, the dominance of the nation-state in Asian imaginaries arose from the binary of empire/nation-state created in modern Europe. The historical implication of this binary is that the

nation-state has become the single modern political form and the principal precondition for the development of capitalism. This binary, however, underestimates the diversity of political and economic relations that were summarized as belonging to the category of empire, and underestimated the diversity of internal relations within nation-states. Modern Asian imaginaries are based mainly on inter-state relations, seldom dealing with Asia's complex ethnicity, regions and modes of interaction that are overshadowed by the category of empire—e.g. trans-state tribute system, migration network etc. The question is: As the nation-state has become the dominant political structure, will historical patterns of communication, coexistence, and policies and regulations in Asia suggest ways and opportunities to overcome the internal and external dilemmas brought about by the nation-state system?

Fourth, the unity of Asia as a category was established in opposition to Europe. It encompasses heterogeneous cultures, religions, and other social elements. Whether we base our judgment on historical traditions or current policies, one does not see the possibility or conditions in Asia for creating a European Union-style super-state. Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Daoism, and Confucianism all originated in this continent we call Asia, on which three-fifths of the world's landmass lies

and over half of the world's population live. Any attempt to summarize the characteristics of Asia with one unitary culture will fail. The idea of Confucian Asia cannot fully represent the characteristics of even China alone. Even if the idea of Asia is reduced to the idea East Asia, its own internal cultural heterogeneity cannot be escaped. New imaginings of Asia must combine cultural and political plurality with regional political and economic structures. A high degree of cultural heterogeneity does not mean that Asia cannot form certain regional structures; it merely reminds us that this kind of structure must have a high degree of flexibility and plurality. So two possible directions for imagining Asia are: 1) glean from the institutional experiences common to Asian cultures to develop new models allowing different cultures, religions, and peoples to interact on equal terms within and among states; and 2) form multilayered, open social organizations and networks linked through regional connections to coordinate economic development, mitigate conflicts of interest, and alleviate the dangers posed by the nation-state system.

Fifth, Asia has a multiplicity of longstanding religious, commercial, cultural, military, and political ties to Europe, Africa, and the Americas, so it is inappropriate to describe Asia as something like an enlarged nation-state. The idea of Asia has never been purely self-defined; it is the product of relations among these various

regions. The critique of Eurocentrism is not an affirmation of Asiacentrism, but rather a rejection of that sort of egocentric, exclusivist, and expansionist logic of domination. In this sense, revealing the disorder and plurality within the “new empire,” breaking open the taken-for-granted notion of Europe, is not only one of the preconditions for reconstructing the ideas of Asia and Europe, but also the necessary path for breaking out of the “new imperial logic.”

Sixth, if the excavation of Asia’s cultural potential is also the critique of West-centrism, then the reconstruction of the idea of Asia is also resistance against the colonial and hegemonic forces dividing Asia. The commonality of Asian imaginaries partly derives from the imaginers’ common subordinate status under Euro-American colonialism, the Cold War, and the present global order, and the trends of national self-determination, socialist, and democratization movements. We will not be able to understand the modern significance of Asia or the origin of disunion and war in Asia if we forget these historical conditions and movements. Many regard the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist bloc as the end of the Cold War, but in Asia, the Cold War has to a large extent continued, as illustrated by a divided China and a divided Korea, indeed the Cold War in Asia has developed new forms under new historical conditions. Today’s discussions of the

question of Asia, however, are carried out either by intellectual elites, or by states, and the various social movements in Asia – workers movements, student movements, farmers movements, women’s movements, etc. – are indifferent to this question. This phenomenon contrasts sharply with the powerful wave of Asian national liberation in the twentieth century. If the national liberation and socialist movements of the twentieth century have ended, at least their remains are still an important source for the stimulation of new ways of imagining Asia.

By way of conclusion, let me emphasize again what I have conveyed: the issue of Asia is not simply an issue in Asia, but an issue of “world history.” To reconsider “Asian history” is to attempt to reconstruct nineteenth century European “world history,” and to attempt to break out of the twenty-first century “new imperial” order and its logic.

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**Notes:**

[1] Here a note on Marx's theory should be added. In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, he described the "Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production" as "epochs marking progress in the economic development of society" (Marx 1977). After 1859, however, this preface was never reprinted during Marx's lifetime. In 1877, Russian scholar Nicolai K. Mikhailovski used Marxism to argue that Russia should establish capitalism in order to abolish feudalism. Marx commented that his work merely attempted to describe the path that Western capitalism developed from within feudalism, and that one should not "transform his historical sketch of the development of Western European capitalism into historical-philosophical theory of universal development predetermined by fate for all nations, whatever their historic circumstances in which they find themselves may be. [... that view] does me at the same time too much honor and too much insult" (Pandover 1979:321).

[2] Russian intellectuals' ideas of Europe and Asia were obviously influenced by political developments in Western Europe and the Enlightenment conception of history. On the debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers, see Berdyaev 1995:1-70.

[3] I am grateful to Professor Lü Xinyu for

introducing me to the Russian debate on agrarian reform and Lenin's theory of "Prussian" and "American" paths. My discussion here is largely based on her research (Lü 2004).

[4] Sun said in his conversation with journalists in Kobe: "Unification is the hope of all Chinese citizens. If China is unified, people all over the country can live in ease and comfort, and if not, they will suffer. If the Japanese people cannot do business in China, they will also suffer indirectly. We Chinese believe that the Japanese people sincerely hope China be united. But the possibility of China's unification is not determined by China's domestic affairs. Since the outbreak of the Chinese revolution, violent upheavals have continued to arise for years. China cannot be unified not because of Chinese forces but completely because of foreign forces. Why can't China unify? The foreigners are the sole cause. The reason is that China and foreign countries have signed unequal treaties, and every foreigner uses those treaties to enjoy special privileges in China. Recent people from the West are not only using unequal treaties to enjoy special privileges but also to abuse those treaties in outrageous ways" (Sun 1986a:373-4). Because Asia had not undergone a complete transition to the nation-state form, "Great Asianism" could not design a complete

apparatus for such regional groups. Sun's idea of Asia is closely related to his respect for the sovereignty of nation-states. His "Great Asianism" is somewhat analogous to what Coudenhove-Kalergi proposed in *Pan-Europe* (the thesis of a Pan-Europe based on the sovereignty of nation-states), and to the Pan-American organizations that came into existence earlier. This type of regional construction can be regarded as a regional organization within the League of Nations, whose function was to adjudicate over conflicts between regional groups such as "Pan-Europe," "Pan-America," North America, South America, the UK, the USSR, and the Far East (Gerbet 1983:34; Coudenhove-Kalergi 1926).

[5] For instance, Sun participated in the Philippines Revolution from 1908 to 1900, sending two batches of weapons to Philippines revolutionaries. He believed that the Philippines revolution would help the Chinese revolution to succeed. The revolutions of Indonesia and a number of other Southeast Asian countries were influenced by Sun's nationalism and by the Chinese revolution, but tended to emphasize the nationalist quality of Sun and the Chinese revolution, while eliding their socialist characteristics.

[6] The quotation is from Xu Baoqiang's Ph.D.

dissertation. I appreciate Mr. Xu's kindness in letting me read and cite his manuscript.

[7] Such unofficial connections between China and Southeast Asia, particularly the Southeast Asian Chinese communities, formed through smuggling, trading and migration, provided an overseas base for late Qing Chinese revolutions. The connections linking contemporary China and overseas Chinese economies are based on earlier connections. In other words, unofficial connections between China and Southeast Asia provided modern Chinese revolutions with a particular Asian dynamic.

[8] For example, the Russian and Qing courts established tributary relations, but, to a certain extent, neither ever placed itself lower than the other to define a hierarchical relation. Each regarded the other as its own tributary state. Tributary ritual practice itself is the product of interaction among complex forces, and hierarchical ritual includes principles of equality and possibilities for various interpretations from different perspectives. Fletcher (1995) addresses this in his research on the history of Chinese imperial relations with Central Asian polities.

[9] Frank points out that that European capitalism has steadily grown in the worldwide economy and population since

1400, and that this process is consistent with the East's decline since around 1800. European countries used the silver they acquired from their colonies in the Americas to buy their way into Asian markets that just happened to be expanding at that time. For Europe, the commercial and political mechanisms for this Asian market were unique and effective for the worldwide economy. Just as Asia entered decline, the Western countries became industrial economies through the mechanisms of import and export. In this sense, modern European capitalism is the result both of changes in productive relations within European societies, and of relations with Asia (Frank 1998).

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