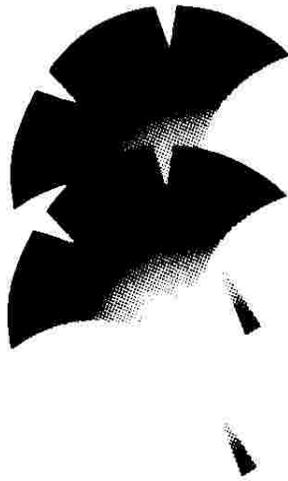


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**Pan-Asianism in Meiji and Taishô Japan –
A Preliminary Framework**

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction	4
2. Definitions: “Asia”, “Asianism”, “Pan-Asianism”	6
3. Historical Roots and Contents of pan-Asian ideology	10
4. Pan-Asianism in Japanese Politics During the Late Meiji and Taishô Periods	16
5. Conclusion	24
6. Bibliography	27

1. INTRODUCTION

Pan-Asianism in Japanese history has not received much scholarly attention so far. Indeed, as some scholars have pointed out (Beasley 1987a), it is questionable whether the notion of an ideology that only existed as a loose set of ideas and, moreover, had its foundations in European concepts, makes any sense within the framework of Asian and Japanese history (the ideas of a “pan-movement”, “regionalism” and the concept of “Asia” are all European concepts). However, speaking in terms of historical continuity, the importance of Pan-Asianism, or Asianism in Japanese intellectual discourse as well as in politics cannot be underestimated and extends until the present day.

Pan-Asianism in Japan first developed during the Meiji period (1868–1912) as an idealist-culturalist movement with only few political connotations. It was a reaction against the spread of European imperialism to East Asia, and it made Japanese – as well as Chinese, Korean, and others – feel, for the first time, “Asian” (Hazama 2001a). In Japan, Pan-Asianism soon became a major topic within discussions about the crucial question “whether [Japan’s] future should be ‘Asian’ or ‘Western’” (Pempel 1997: 50). As such, it also was an important dimension of nation-building and the quest for a national identity. Was Japan to “leave Asia and turn to the West”, as Fukuzawa Yukichi demanded with his famous slogan *Datsu-A nyû-Ô* (脱亜入欧), or should it put more emphasis on its place in Asia, which could not be denied – at least in geographic and, to a certain degree, in cultural and racial terms? Should Japan secure its own independence by modernising and westernising or should it become the leader of Asia in the struggle against “white” Western colonialism and imperialism? Although Pan-Asianism also shares similarities with Fukuzawa’s thought, it mainly developed as a reaction against the *Datsu-A nyû-Ô*-slogan (Yamamoto 2001: 94; Duus 2001: 245f).

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In present Japan, Asianist thought is still an influential current, not only in discourse on Japan's role in Asia, but also in Japanese foreign policy (Tanaka 2000; Duus 2001; Koschmann 1997: 87, 109f; Blechinger 1998: 92–94; Mishima 1996: 110–122; Reynolds 1996: 272; Nishiwaki 2000). Moreover, it stands at the centre of the main topic of Japan's recent history textbook debate, in which one of the central questions is whether Japan waged war in order to “liberate” Asia or subdue the continent to establish a Japanese regional hegemony (Wakamiya 1995: 13; Nakamura et al. 1997; Kimijima 2001).

However, Pan-Asianism has been neglected in scholarly research, both in Japan and abroad, because of the “de-Asianisation” of Japan after 1945, which also took place in the field of historical research. Japanese history tended to be approached from the perspective of “the West”; research focused on the historical relations of Japan to Western nations and did not pay much attention to Japan's long-standing relations with its Asian neighbours or to Japan's place in Asia. The little research that considers Pan-Asianism usually analyses it within the framework of Japanese colonial policy or merely as a tool for legitimising the infamous “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere” (*Daitôa kyôeiken*, 大東亜共栄圏) (Iriye 1991; Derichs 1997: 74).

Being an “apolitical sentiment” (Seifert 1977: 235) and a rather isolated intellectual discourse during the Meiji period, Pan-Asianism became increasingly influential in politics during late Meiji and the Taishô era (1912–1926). The ideology of Pan-Asianism was initially connected to the political opposition in Meiji Japan (*jiyû minken undô*) around Nakae Chômin (1847–1901), Ueki Emori (1857–1892), Ôi Kentarô (1843–1922) or writers such as Tarui Tôkichi (1850–1922), author of “Discussion of the Greater East Asian Union” (*Daitôa gappô-ron*, 大東亜合邦論). It was not before the late 1930s that the ideology developed into something like an official policy or even Japan's major foreign policy guideline.

In this paper, I shall explore the process of the application of pan-Asian ideology and intellectual discourse in politics. Historical research has lately focussed on discourse analysis (Wehler 2001: 64–66; 103f), while neglecting structurally based analysis of political history. In this paper, I want to focus on the utilisation of intellectual discourse in the political decision-making process and find the connections between intellectual discourse and the world of actual politics. First, the terms “Asia” as well as the notion of a “pan-movement”, which both developed in a European framework, have to be addressed. Does the Asianist ideology and movement share similarities with European pan-movements, such as Pan-Slavism, Pan-Germanism, or Pan-Europeanism? Or did it develop mainly from within Asian thought, thus representing traditional notions of an East Asian “region” and a regional identity? Next, I shall address the roots of pan-Asian discourse in Japanese politics and thought. What were the main contents of the ideology, and how was a regional “Asian” identity constructed? Finally, I will address the question of how Asianist discourse and pan-Asian ideology were utilised in politics. Most of the detailed results of empirical research on this question have to be omitted in this paper, but the main players that functioned as a transmitter of Asianist thought into politics will be identified in the last section.

2. DEFINITIONS: “ASIA”, “ASIANISM”, “PAN-ASIANISM”

Let me start with some explanations regarding the terminology. All three components of the term *Pan-Asianism* (*Han-Ajia-shugi*, 汎アジア主義): the idea of a “pan-movement”; the concept of “Asia”; and the “ism” itself, all stem from European history and politics. Therefore, some scholars have doubted the utility of the term *Pan-Asianism*

in the context of Asian or Japanese history (e.g. Beasley 1987a)¹. Evidently, Japanese historians and political scientists also do not feel happy when using the term *Han-Ajia-shugi*. However, using exclusively the terms “Asianism” (*Ajia-shugi*, アジア主義) or “Greater Asianism” (*Dai-Ajia-shugi*, 大アジア主義, 大亜細亜主義, *Dai-A-shugi*, 大亜主義), as most Japanese works do, hardly solves the issue of terminology². In this paper, I shall use the term *Pan-Asianism* (*Han-Ajia-shugi*) synonymously with the term *Asianism* (*Ajia-shugi*), but distinguish these terms from the terms for “Greater Asianism” (*Dai-Ajia-shugi*, *Dai-A-shugi*), thus following different uses (and meanings) of these terms in different periods of modern Japanese history (Hazama 2001a). While Pan-Asianism and Asianism were the terms that were in widest use until the late 1920s, indicating a more regionalist version of pan-Asian ideology, the term Greater Asianism gained popularity in the 1920s and 1930s, thus indicating a tendency towards expansionism and imperialism in Japanese Asianism – a development that eventually led to a utilisation of the ideology for government purposes in the 1930s and 1940s. However, the usage of the different terms was never unequivocal, a situation that still makes a clear definition of Pan-Asianism difficult, as will be shown later in this paper (see also Takeuchi 1963; Hazama 2001a).

What all of the above-mentioned terms have in common is the component “Asia”. This is, in the first place, a European concept (Hazama 2001a; Itô 2000; Ishii 2000: 4–18; Ogura 1993; Ôaku 1998; Koschmann 1997: 83). In Europe, “Asia” meant the counterpart of “Europe” – a more precise definition did neither seem necessary nor

¹ However, the term *Pan-Asianism* can be often found in research on Japan in English, e.g. Jansen 1954; Jansen 1995; Dickinson 1999; Shimazu 1998; Duus 2001 etc.

² Previous research often uses the terms Pan-Asianism and Asianism synonymously (e.g. Shimazu 1998: 92; 253); in some studies, however, there is no distinction made at all between Asianism, Pan-Asianism and Greater Asianism; e.g. in Takeuchi 1963: 7f or in the encyclopedia *Nihon Dai-hyakka zensho*, vol. 19, of the publishing house Shôgakukan (Sôga 1988), in which the entry “Pan-Asianismus” (*Han-Ajia-shugi*) merely gives a reference to “Greater Asianism” (*Dai-Ajia-shugi*). Interestingly, there is an entry “Pan-Asianism” (*Han-Ajia-shugi*) in the dictionary *Kôjien* (Shinmura 1998: 2199.), but no entry for “Asianism”, “Great-Asianism” etc.

possible. In Asia, “Asia” hardly had any meaning at all, because it was too large and too heterogeneous a region. Hence, still today, the concept of an “Asian identity” causes its advocates headaches, for it does not simply exist but must be gathered, combined and sometimes constructed: “Definitions of collective regional identity do not exist to be discovered. They are political constructs that are contested and which evolve over time.” (Katzenstein 1997: 11) When in this paper “Asia” is mentioned, it must be kept in mind that the concept of “Asia” in geographical terms in pan-Asian discourse usually meant East Asia or Northeast Asia. Thus it comprised Japan, Korea and China, and sometimes Manchuria, Mongolia, the Russian Far East and Eastern Siberia. Apart from a few exceptions, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, India or even Western Asia did not play a role in pan-Asian conceptions during the Meiji or the Taishô period³; and even within concepts regarding the notorious “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere” (*Daitôa kyôeiken*), one can speak of a “conceptual priority” of Northeast Asia (Koschmann 1997: 99; see also Beasley 1987b: 220; Szpilman 2002: 478f).

Restricting the “Asia” of “Pan-Asianism” to East Asia, pan-Asian ideologues assumed a minimum of homogeneity, which could serve as the base for an “Asian” identity and for the emergence of regionalism. These consisted of Chinese characters (*kanji*), the religious traditions of Buddhism and Confucianism and the established system of international relations in East Asia with China in the centre (“Sino-centric world order”) (Mitani and Yamaguchi 2001; Fairbank 1968). In this context, some authors talk of a “region of *kanji* culture” (*kanji-bunka-ken*, 漢字文化圈) (Mitani 2001: 217–222; Hazama 2001a). In so doing they emphasise that the adoption of the Chinese characters by other Asian nations had further implications in cultural and political respects, which gave the region a certain uniformity. The ideology of Pan-Asianism, aiming at regional integration and Asian self-assertion against the West, made use of such common ground

³ Exceptions were the Near East in the thought of Ôkawa Shûmei, India in the thought of Okakura Tenshin and central Asia, Afghanistan above all, in the thought of Tanabe Yasunosuke.

in order to fill the originally Western concept of “Asia” with contents and meaning, and to use it in intellectual discourse as well as in political agitation.

Finally, another component of the term “Pan-Asianism”, namely that of a pan-movement, is a concept that derives from European history and has its origins in European politics. At first sight, it does not seem to be useful in the framework of international relations in Asia. However, a closer look at the different types of pan-movements in Europe in the 19th and 20th century⁴ shows that Pan-Asianism had similarities with European pan-movements, which have to be kept in mind during the further analysis. In the framework of European international relations, we can distinguish the following types of pan-movements:

- the *irredentist pan-movement* (e.g. Pan-Hellenism, Serbian Pan-Slavism), a movement (based on its supporting ideology) which aims for the national independence of a people that are ruled by a country of an ethnically different people, or at the annexation (“liberation”) of territory that is inhabited by a majority of members of one’s own nation or “people”.
- the *regionalist pan-movement* (e.g. Czech Pan-Slavism) which proclaims the existence of a transnational or regional identity due to common features such as language, race, religion, and history, and which calls for an overcoming of the national state within a regional framework.
- the *hegemonic pan-movement* (Pan-Germanism, Russian Pan-Slavism), which – disregarding all inherent contradictions – is utilised to legitimise the regional hegemony of a single national state or to legitimise colonial activities (e.g. “Alldeutscher Verein” in Imperial Germany) and has therefore been called “continental imperialism” (Arendt 1986: 472ff; 478).

⁴ A profound investigation into the various pan-movements of the 19th and 20th century still is not available. Certainly, there are a few useful works about Pan-Arabism/Pan-Islamism, Pan-Africanism and Pan-Americanism, but the only comprehensive investigation into the history of pan-movements in general by Louis Snyder (1984) merely provides a historical synopsis without establishing a precise typology (his “classification” [pp. 6–8] only represents the contents of the pan-movements).

- Besides these European pan-movements, the type of an *anti-colonial pan-movement* (Pan-Americanism, Pan-Arabism/Pan-Islamism, Pan-Africanism) can be found in other continents in the colonial and postcolonial stage. This type of movement has in common with the irredentist pan-movement the struggle for political independence – in this case independence from imperialist Western powers; it shares the claim for the existence and sometimes the construction of a regional identity with the regionalist pan-movement; and, with the hegemonic pan-movement, it shares the tendency for the emergence of an hegemonic power, mostly a national state which has already gained independence (e.g. the US in Pan-Americanism or, subsequently, Egypt, Iraq/Syria, Iran and Libya in Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism, respectively, Ghana and Nigeria in Pan-Africanism).

Where Pan-Asianism has to be located within this scheme will be shown later in this paper. For the moment, it can be stated that the term *Pan-Asianism* was used consciously within the rhetoric of Japanese politics, following the existence of such movements in Europe and other parts of the world⁵.

3. HISTORICAL ROOTS AND CONTENTS OF PAN-ASIAN IDEOLOGY

During the Meiji period (1868–1912), the ideology of Pan-Asianism, or Asianism, became an influential force in intellectual discourse, in media and later in politics. Pan-Asianism was and still is a phenomenon difficult to grasp, because it did not represent a consistent ideology but rather a tendency in intellectual and political discourse (Hiraishi 1994), which could be found with authors of the most varied political shades and which constantly adopted new forms. Other pan-movements share this lack of distinguishable

⁵ See for example Kodera Kenkichi in his work “Dai-Ajia-shugi-ron”, Kodera 1916: 3.

and clearly identifiable contents with Pan-Asianism (Snyder 1984: 5, 17, 37, 43, 92). Takeuchi Yoshimi (1963) describes Asianism as a

“claim that demands a union of Asian peoples (*sho-minzoku*) under the leadership of Japan to resist to the aggression (*shinryaku*) of European and American powers. The idea of a union of Asia is itself closely linked to the question of Japan’s independence and has been propagated since the beginning of the Meiji period. It received special attention within the framework of the ‘Freedom and People’s Rights Movement’ (*jiyû minken undô*), within which different tendencies began to develop.” (Takeuchi 1963: 9)

And Takeuchi adds:

“Asianism, however, was not an ideology with distinguishable and clearly identifiable contents but, instead must be described as a tendency [in politics and discourse]. Sometimes it manifested itself as right-wing extremism, sometimes it manifested itself as left-wing extremism and within all these manifestations one could categorize Asianist and non-Asianist traits. In the following, I want to stick to this preliminary and vague definition of Asianism. [...] Asianism must not be seen as completely identical with expansionism or aggression; neither with nationalism (*minzokushugi*, *kokkashugi*, *kokuminshugi*, *kokusuishugi*)⁶ or with leftist internationalism. Asianism is probably closest to expansionism (*bôchôshugi*).” (Takeuchi 1963: 12)

Takeuchi draws the conclusion that:

“Asianism is not an independently existing ideology. However, in any form it strives for a union (*rentai*) of Asian nations, irrespective of whether aggression (*shinryaku*) would be necessary as a means for reaching its aims or not.” (Takeuchi 1963: 14)

This definition shows the difficulties of identifying what Pan-Asianism stands for and against whom it is directed. The basic prerequisite for the emergence of pan-Asian discourse was the expansion of European imperialism to East Asia, which deprived numerous countries and peoples of their political, economic and cultural independence. Apparently Asian nations had to resist this menace – in political, economic, cultural, and

⁶ At this point, Takeuchi uses the word *nashonarizumu* in the text and then adds, in brackets, four further terms, which also have to be translated as nationalism, but have slightly different nuances: *minzokushugi* (ethnic nationalism), *kokkashugi* (etatist nationalism), *kokuminshugi* (people’s nationalism), *kokusuishugi* (ultra-nationalism).

particularly in military respects. For that, a union of the colonised peoples, ethnicities, and nations of Asia seemed to be necessary. In Japan, Pan-Asianists urged to support Asian peoples (*kô-A*), but at the same time claimed leadership in East Asia. In the course of events China, the traditional and generally recognised regional hegemonic power and the centre of the East Asian international system (“Sino-centric world order”) had to stand back. For this development, there were several reasons. On the one hand, Japan was one of the few states in Asia – even in the whole world – which was able to secure independence and resist Western imperialist expansion⁷. On the other hand, as an “almost colonised” country or “a country which only narrowly escaped colonisation”, Japan also shared the role of the victim – the “coloured” victim of “white” imperialism (Kidô 2001: 39) – with its Asian “brothers”, and also the victim conscience that comes with it⁸.

Under Japanese leadership, it was thus assumed, Asia had to gather against Western imperialism and strive for “liberation” from colonial rule. The leadership role for Japan was confirmed by Japanese progress in terms of modernisation and industrialisation, which was, above all, demonstrated in the war against Russia (1904/05). Henceforth, Japanese leadership was widely acknowledged in most of Asia (Koschmann 1997: 100; Yamamoto 2001: 179; Jansen 1954: 210f; Chi 1980: 140) – until the annexation of Korea in 1910 manifested the dilemma of using the pan-Asian ideology to legitimise Japanese colonial rule over parts of Asia, while the same ideology claimed they needed “liberation” from European colonialism.

⁷ The process of securing independence with military means culminated in the Russo-Japanese War (1904/05). However, this was not the first case of military “self-assertion” of a non-European nation against an imperialistic power, as it is often maintained in research – above all in Japan. As early as in 1896, Ethiopia had beaten a considerable Italian army in the battle of Adowa and had thus secured its own independence. This, too, put the whole of Europe into a state of shock at that time, even though Italy was considered as one of the weaker colonial powers. Lauren 1988, 65f.

⁸ This victim conscience was handed down until postwar times, Saaler 2002a; Kidô 2001: 60f (remarks of Emperor Shôwa about the most important reasons for the war in East Asia, the racist discrimination of Japan by the “white” West).

However, although Pan-Asianism was a “Japanese revolt against the West” (Najita and Harootunian 1988), it also represented, from an early stage, an attempt by Japan to establish a claim for leadership in Asia *vis-à-vis* China, a claim that had existed for centuries. Resorting to concepts of the Edo period (1603–1868), a Japanese hegemony in East Asia was claimed to challenge the traditional role of the “Middle Kingdom” – China (*Chûgoku*, 中国). It is generally accepted that China was the centre of the Sino-centric world-order, an order that had been the recognised international order in East Asia for centuries (Mitani 2000: chapter 2; Mitani 2001; Fairbank 1968; Hamashita 1997). This order divided the world into civilised peoples and barbarians (*ka’i shisô*, 華夷思想), with China at the centre, and Japan being only temporarily a part of this order. However, since the Edo period, Japanese writers such as Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843), Aizawa Seishisai (1782–1863) and Yoshida Shôin (1830–1859) started identifying Japan with the “Middle Kingdom” (*Nihon chûka-ron*, 日本中華論, Mitani 1997: 21f; 46; 64–66; Wakabayashi 1991; Ishii 2000: 20f; Arano 1988), giving evidence for a latent feeling of superiority on the Japanese side. “China”, after all, was ruled by “Tatars” for a long period of time (Toby 2001: 31) whereas Japan, as was emphasised by Japanese writers, could look back to an “unbroken imperial line” (*bansei ikkei*, 万世一系). Only this mixture of Western thought with a traditional feeling of Japanese superiority in East Asia can help to explain the change from a regionalist Pan-Asianism, which prevailed during the Meiji period (1868–1912), to hegemonic Pan-Asianism, a change that can be dated back to the late Meiji and the Taishô period (1912–1926), as will be shown later⁹.

The need to bring to mind pre-modern concepts of a world-order centred around a hegemonic power can be seen clearly at the climax of Japanese expansion, when

⁹ Most authors, however, consider the Japanese urge for expansion on the mainland merely to be a reflex to the menace by the West and the forced “opening” of the country 1853/54; e.g. Wakamiya 1995: 61.

Japanese politics again took up a hierarchical system of nations, now centred around *Japan*. In various wartime documents concerning the “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere”, a regional order is designed with Japan in the centre as the leader of East Asian nations, surrounded, usually, by four zones: a zone of “independent” states, China (Nanking-China), Manchukuo and Thailand; a zone of semi-independent protectorates (*dokuritsu hogo-koku*, 独立保護国), Burma, the Philippines and Java; a zone of areas directly administered by Japan (*chokkatsuryô*, 直轄領), which should contain “key areas for the defence of Greater East Asia”¹⁰; and a zone of colonies which should remain under the rule of European powers, such as Portuguese Timor or French-Indochina (IMTFE No. 2229; see also Koschmann 1997: 102, who quotes a different document)¹¹. Whereas the pan-ideology served as the foundation for the necessity of the regional union, the “tradition” of the centralist-hierarchical order of states – with *Japan* in its centre – seemed to legitimise – or even to call for – a Japanese leadership in the region. Thus Japanese Pan-Asianism was ambiguous and not exclusively directed against “the West”, but also against the powerful neighbour and regional hegemonic power – China. In the Japanese worldview, China had become the counterpart of “Asia” in the traditional European worldview: China as “Japan’s Orient” (Tanaka 1993; Koschmann 1997: 85; Keene 1971: 121f).

As mentioned above, like other pan-movements of the 19th and 20th century (Snyder 1984), Pan-Asianism was never clearly structured and defined; it rather took vague and frequently changing forms. At its basis there was the assumption that Japan and other “Asian” nations and peoples were bound by common features which established

¹⁰ Among them were, besides the areas already under Japanese colonial rule such as Korea, Taiwan, Kwantung, also parts of Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam as well as China.

¹¹ The fact that such formations of thinking still exist even today was shown by John Lie in his study “Multiethnic Japan” (Lie 2001), in which he points out that the informal hierarchy among workers in Japan shows a structure similar to the “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere” of the 1940s, with Japanese workers at the top, followed by Korean workers and the group of the *burakumin*, while at the bottom of the hierarchy we can find workers who have recently come to Japan from other Asian countries.

something like an “Asian” identity. The common features usually referred to the following three areas:

1. The *cultural* unity of peoples and nations of East Asia, which all used the Chinese characters (*dôbun*, 同文)¹² and, moreover, believed in mostly the same religions (*dôkyô*, 同教)¹³;
2. The “racial” kinship of East Asian peoples and ethnicities (*dôshu*, 同種) which, in Western categorisation of “races”, all belonged to the so-called “yellow race” (*ôshoku jinshu*, 黄色人種¹⁴), which had become obvious with the proclamation of the “yellow peril” (*kôka*, 黄禍) by German Emperor Wilhelm II at the end of the 19th century (Saaler 2002b); and
3. The *geographical* proximity and the political unity of the East Asian nations, which had co-existed for centuries within the framework of the above-mentioned Sino-centric order of international relations.

Before pan-Asian ideology was utilised for political means, it was mainly the first two categories that stood at the centre of Pan-Asianism and they were fused in the slogan *dôbun dôshu* (同文同種) – same “script/culture, same race”. However, it was the third point that led to the politicisation of Pan-Asianism and served as a legitimisation for the Japanese claim for leadership in East Asia after identifying Japan as the centre of the international system in East Asia.

¹² The use of the Chinese characters (*kanji*) in East Asia was a bond that should not be underestimated, and indeed the pan-Asian movement made active use of it. Journals of pan-Asian societies such as the Kôakai, the Tôa-Dôbunkai or the Kokuryûkai, to which will be referred later, were published in classic Chinese (*kanbun*) in order to find readers in Korea and China, in the first place.

¹³ Most interestingly, Confucianism – one of the main pillars of the so-called “Asian values” propagated during the 1990s – only plays only a minor role in historical Pan-Asianism; it was rather Buddhism that played an important role (Kuroki 1984: 43; Yamamoto 2001: 95–102; Aihara 2000: 195).

¹⁴ The concept of race (*jinshu*) which is used here – in contrast to the concept of *minzoku* or “ethnic race” (Doak 2001a; Doak 2002a; Oguma 1995) which became the more influential concept after World War I – demonstrates that Pan-Asianism in its initial stages aimed particularly aimed at transcending national boundaries and create some kind of unity amongst Asian, “yellow” peoples.

4. PAN-ASIANISM IN JAPANESE POLITICS DURING THE LATE MEIJI AND TAISHŌ PERIODS

Pan-Asian ideology since the Meiji period, and also Japanese foreign policy when making use of pan-Asian ideology, tended to be extremely ambivalent. This was due, on the one hand, to a need to construct a regional Asian identity as a counterpart to the Western claim for universality and, on the other hand, to a tendency for Japan to claim leadership and *supremacy* in Asia. This was not consistent with the call for union and the proclamation of the existence of a common Asian identity. This, by the way, was a situation that can also be found in other pan-movements (e.g. the Polish question in Pan-Slavism; Snyder 1984: 31f).

The solution of this dilemma seemed impossible even for the most progressive thinkers of their days. The dilemma of a defensive ideology aiming at a regional unity, which at the same time was the basis for expansionism against countries within the proclaimed region of unity, divided not only politics but also intellectual discourse – and this division sometimes also existed within the heads of individual intellectuals and politicians, as illustrated in the renowned story *San-suijin keirin mondō* (三酔人経綸問答, “A discourse by Three Drunkards on Government”, 1887) by Nakae Chōmin (1847–1901). Nakae, who is considered one of the most progressive liberal intellectuals of Meiji Japan and an outspoken critic of government politics, who translated Rousseau and Schopenhauer into Japanese, presents three personalities in his *San-suijin keirin mondō*, discussing the current political development while drinking enormous amounts of sake. The fact that the three discuss politics while drunk has not only the objective to deprive the work, which was originally written in classic Chinese (*kanbun*), of the necessity of a clear structure, but also has an autobiographic aspect, for Nakae was a heavy drinker¹⁵. But, as the saying goes, *in vino veritas* – in wine lies truth – and thus it

¹⁵ He made no secret of that, but rather took his alcohol addiction as a reason to resign his seat in the diet (*kinjitsu arukōru chūdoku byōshō hasshi, [...], yotte jishoku tsukamatsuru-sōrō*). In reality, this

was much easier for Nakae to speak, like a court jester, with impunity. In *San-suijin keirin mondô*, Nakae presents three people whom he calls Nankai-sensei (南海先生), Gôketsu-kun (豪傑君) and Seiyô-shinshi (西洋紳士) – the *master Nankai*; the *champion of the East*; and the *Gentleman of Western Learning* (Nakae 1984: 25). At first sight, these three personalities represent the three tendencies of Meiji Japan's foreign policy: the representatives of expansion and adaptation to the Western imperialist power politics (*Machtpolitik*) who also advocate expansion in Asia (*Gôketsu-kun*); the representatives of a defensive policy and of a "Little Japan" (*Shô-Nihon-shugi*, 小日本主義) who advocate development towards democracy and modernisation, but without expansion and armament (*Seiyô-shinshi*)¹⁶; and the representatives of the middle way who principally appreciate the idealism of *Seiyô-shinshi* but who, in reality, must frequently make use of the means of the expansionists (*Nankai-sensei*).

Nakae's work, comprising 138 pages, has generally been interpreted in the way that the author wanted to represent himself as *Nankai-sensei*, a vacillating man of the middle way. Recent research, however, suggested that the three tendencies shown in Nakae's work can not only be found in Japanese politics and in intellectual discourse, but also within the thinking of most of the intellectuals whose writings made up this discourse. This was true of Nakae as well: as an outspoken critic of the Meiji government (Matsunaga 2001: 9), Nakae was undoubtedly one of the most radical representatives of democratisation of Japan in the Meiji period. But this did not make him automatically an advocate of a peaceful foreign policy. On the contrary: many supporters of the 'Freedom and People's Rights Movement' (*jiyû minken undô* or *minken undô*) belonged to the most vociferous advocates of expansion in Asia (Katô 2002: 54ff). During this turbulent

was only a pretext, for Nakae then brought to an end his political career because he disapproved the cooperation between the Tosa faction in the diet, to which he also belonged, and the government.

¹⁶ Ishibashi Tanzan would later become the most famous representative of this tendency – a man who called for a renunciation of colonial possession as early as during the Taishô period and who had a comeback in postwar Japan, when, in 1956/57, he shortly held the position as Prime Minister. Masuda 1995: 61–64; Handô 2001: 27–37; Wakamiya 1995: 77.

time, it was obviously hardly possible for anyone to resolve or to avoid the contradiction between the Japanese fight for securing independence, which could include a Japanese leadership, and, on the other hand, the drive for a Japanese hegemony and the temptation of an aggressive and expansionistic foreign policy on the Asian continent. The question: “how can the nation [Japan] assume a role as a pioneer of Asian nationalism without becoming a follower of European imperialism?” (Nakae 1984: 25) could not be satisfactorily answered even by intellectuals such as Nakae.

Certain biographical data hints at the fact that Nakae also wanted to represent part of himself in the character of *Gôketsu-kun* – and something similar can also be said for the other leaders of the *minken undô*. In the case of Nakae, the relationship to expansionist circles became evident by, for example, his membership of the expansionist society Kokumin Dômeikai (国民同盟会) (Matsumoto 1975: 94). This society, under the leadership of the pan-Asian ideologue Prince Konoe Atsumaro (for Konoe see Yamamoto 2001; Aihara 2000; Jansen 1980), advocated expansion to the Asian mainland, and Nakae had close relations with Konoe. Once he said to Kôtoku Shûsui, one of the most renowned personalities of the early socialist and anarchist movement in Meiji Japan and a disciple of Nakae: “If we defeat Russia, we expand to the continent and bring peace to Asia.” (Nakae 1984: 11; also Matsumoto 1975: 94) One could hardly express more clearly in one sentence the contradiction inherent in pan-Asian ideology.

With this in mind, we now come to the links between intellectual discourse and politics. Early pan-Asian writers and agitators, e.g. amongst the political opposition of Meiji Japan, such as Nakae Chômin, Tokutomi Sohô (1863–1957) or Ôi Kentarô (1843–1922) or amongst idealists and culturalists such as Miyazaki Tôten (1871–1922), Tarui Tôkichi or Okakura Tenshin (Kakuzô) (1862–1913) (Takeuchi 1963; Yonehara 2002; Nakamura 1991; Seifert 1977) – all of them had only little influence on actual politics. Usually, they did not even strive for influence and, as a rule, did not call themselves Asianists (Takeuchi 1963: 13f). Most of the time the Meiji government opposed Pan-Asianism

because it was considered too radical to be implemented as foreign policy. How was it possible, therefore, that pan-Asian ideology came to influence politics and, in the 1930s, to become Japan's foreign policy doctrine?

The turning point in the development of Pan-Asianism is to be found in the late Meiji and the Taishô period, when a new kind of informal political society became more and more influential in Japanese politics, namely small political organisations (*seiji kessha*, 政治結社 or *seisha*, 政社) below the level of the party, most of them with a certain orientation towards right-wing extremism – in whatever sense. Even though these organisations are in the first place considered a phenomenon of the 1930s (e.g. Storry 1957: 9 and *passim*), some of them had already launched political activities in the Meiji and Taishô periods. In English-speaking research, these organisations are called “patriotic societies” after the pioneer study by E. Herbert Norman (1944)¹⁷. However, the societies active already during the Meiji and Taishô periods were not so much “patriotic” but rather pan-Asian. The “prototypes” of these organisations were the Kôakai (興亜会) founded in 1880 (Kuroki 1984, Hazama 2001a), the Gen'yôsha (“Black Ocean Society”, 玄洋社), founded in 1881 (Norman 1944); the Tôa-Dôbunkai (“Society for Common East Asian Culture”; 東亜同文会) and the Kokuryûkai (“Amur Society”, 黒龍会¹⁸). These societies will be dealt with in detail later in this chapter.

Besides numerous publications, these organisations used informal, personal channels in order to campaign for their objectives amongst politicians, the military and financial and

¹⁷ Norman comments on the problem of naming: “It is difficult to find an adjective or phrase which accurately describes them. They are sometimes termed secret societies but this is misleading since secret societies scarcely publish their own official histories or the biographies of their leading members. Reactionary is at once too broad and negative a term for such dynamic groups [...]” Norman 1944: 261. The “political societies” have much in common with similar societies in Germany, such as the “Pan-German League” (*Alldeutscher Verband*). See Arendt 1968: 504ff.

¹⁸ Occasionally, the Kokuryûkai is also called “Black Dragon Society”. As it time and again refers in its writings to the river Amur, which is, in Chinese characters written as *kokuryû* (literally: black dragon), it seems to make little sense to translate literally the name of the river which represents the geographical axis of the political program of the society (just as it makes little sense to translate Tôkyô into “Eastern Capital” or Kanazawa into “Much Gold”).

economic circles, where financial support came from¹⁹. Such organisations were mostly formed spontaneously to exert influence on a certain political question and were subsequently dissolved. Others continued to exist, or were formed as a long-term project, to propagate a certain ideology which was not considered to find enough consideration by the oligarchy and the established parties. To give their political claims a foundation, intellectuals, politicians and, due to reasons of prestige, members of the nobility who had hitherto been rather politically passive, were courted as members of such societies. The driving forces behind them, however, were mostly members of the former samurai class (*shizoku*), especially from prefectures in Kyûshû, Shikoku and Chûgoku.

In the course of late Meiji and Taishô events, numerous spontaneous political organisations were founded; some were short-lived, such as the Kôwa Mondai Yûshikai (講和問題有志会) or the Kokumin Gaikô Dômeikai (国民外交同盟会) of 1918/19. Others had lasting influence; for example the Tôa-Dôbunkai, founded in 1898 and its successor organisation, the Kokumin Dômeikai (国民同盟会), both under the leadership of Konoe Atsumaro, or the Kokuryûkai, founded in 1901 under the leadership of Uchida Ryôhei, the Tai-Ro Dôshikai (対露同志会) founded in 1903, and numerous others such as the Butôkai, the Yurinkai and the Rôninkai.

Some of these societies formed the core of the pan-Asian movement, but, in the first place, they functioned as a link between intellectual discourse and politics, which can most clearly be seen in the case of two organisations, the Tôa-Dôbunkai and the Kokuryûkai. Both are generally well known, but detailed research about them is still astonishingly rare. The Kokuryûkai is presumably neglected since it always stood in the shadow of its mother organisation, the Gen'yôsha, and the leader of the Kokuryûkai, Uchida Ryôhei, always stood in the shadow of his mentor and idol, Tôyama Mitsuru. Only the studies by Hatsuse Ryûhei (1980) concerning Uchida Ryôhei give weight to the role of the Kokuryûkai as a political organisation. With regard to Konoe Atsumaro,

¹⁹ See Szpilman 2002 for the example of Kita Ikki and his “politics of coercion”.

only the recent studies by Yamamoto (Aihara) Shigeki (Yamamoto 2001; Aihara 2000) are based on a broad range of primary resources and are thus helpful as a first insight. Konoe Atsumaro (1863–1904), head of the oldest of the five main branches (*go-sekke*, 五摂家) of the Japanese court nobility (*kuge*, 公卿), the family Konoe, was an influential member of the political elite by birth. Like the heads of the other four *sekke*, he held the hereditary title of a prince (*kôshaku*, 公爵), which made him a member of the House of Peers (*kizoku-in*, 貴族院), one of the two legislative chambers of the Imperial Diet established in 1889 by the Constitution (Yamamoto 2001: chapter 3; Jansen 1980: 107f). Despite his critical attitude towards the ruling Meiji oligarchy, which was essentially drawn from the clans of Satsuma and Chôshû, Konoe became president of the House of Peers in 1896, after having studied in Germany for five years (Jansen 1980: 109). Konoe, however, is much better known for his activities outside of the Diet: as an outspoken opponent of the westernisation of Japan and of Western imperialism, he made efforts for a rapprochement between Japan and China, cooperation with other Asian nations and an increase of cultural exchange with Japan's neighbours. At the same time, however, he also favoured an expansion of Japan to the Asian continent (Yamamoto 2001: chapter 5) – again, the contradiction between pan-Asian rhetoric and political reality becomes clearly visible. In Konoe's long-term planning, the conflict between the “white race” and the “yellow race” was of central concern. A racial war “Yellow” – Asia under Japan's leadership – against “White” seemed inevitable for Konoe, as he emphasised in several writings, e.g. in the widely read journal *Taiyô* (太陽, The Sun) (Yamamoto 2001: 31–33, 91–94, 218–220; Aihara 2000: 189f). Following US-president Monroe, Konoe postulated his version of an “Asian Monroe doctrine”: “The orient is the orient of the orient” (*Tôyô wa tôyô no tôyô nari*, 東洋は東洋の東洋なり). And further: “The responsibility for the solution of the problems of the orient is a matter for the inhabitants of the orient” (quoted in Aihara 2000: 189).

To promote exchange with China and for rapprochement with China, Konoe founded the “Society for Common Culture” (Dôbunkai, 同文会) in 1898, which would soon merge with the “East Asian Society” (Tôa-kai, 東亜会) to become the “Society for Common East Asian Culture” (Tôa-Dôbunkai, 東亜同文会) (Yamamoto 2001: 102–108; Aihara 2000: 198f; Hazama 2002a). The Tôa-Dôbunkai, which was financially massively supported by the government (i.e. by the Foreign Ministry’s – now famous – secret funds, *kimitsuhi*) as well as the military and business circles (Jansen 1980: 115–118; Hazama 2002b) had its program contained in its name: the proclamation of the existence of an East Asian identity based on culture and script, e.g. Chinese characters, which were in use in China, Korea, and Japan. The Tôa-Dôbunkai organised an intensive study of China and of Chinese, above all Confucian classics and engaged in an active cultural diplomacy in all of Asia. In Shanghai, the organisation ran an academy, named Academy for East Asian Common Culture (Tôa Dôbun Shoin, 東亜同文書院), the students of which had to get acquainted with the moral doctrines of Confucius to find in the “classic East Asia” an antithesis to the modern, industrialised and “material” society of the West (Yamamoto 2001: 116–118; Aihara 2000: 191).

Like most pan-movements (Snyder 1984), Pan-Asianism had neither a mass base nor mass-support. However, the activities of the Tôa-Dôbunkai and other societies provided the movement with a core of influential ideologues and agitators as well as a certain organisational skill that enabled it to influence political circles and the process of political decision-making. With their publications, in the case of the Tôa-Dôbunkai for example the magazine *Tôyô* (東洋, The Orient), pan-Asian societies reached a high degree of publicity, especially in intellectual circles. Their members published also in other magazines, such as in *Taiyô*, where Konoe’s writings appeared on a regular basis. In many cities, lectures (*kôenkai*) were organised by Tôa-Dôbunkai members (Yamamoto 2001: chapter 5). The most important success for the pan-Asian movement as regards the “recruitment” of Konoe, however, was the fact that it had, for the first

time, found a direct and influential voice in Japanese politics. In 1902, the Tōa-Dōbunkai merged with Enomoto Takeaki's "Asia Society" (Aija Kyōkai, 亜細亞協會) to form the Kokumin Dōmeikai (国民同盟会) (Yamamoto 2001: 127–129; regarding the Asia Society see Hazama 2001b) and thus the Pan-Asianists' pressure on the government with regards to questions of foreign policy even increased. Together with the so-called "seven doctors", the Kokumin Dōmeikai, for example, pleaded for an early opening of the war against Russia as early as in 1903 (Yamamoto 2001: 129f and chapter 5, *passim*; Hatsuse 1980: 82).

Konoe was, however, rather an exceptional case. Only rarely had the pan-Asian societies such an influential advocate in politics within their own ranks. They normally had to work hard to be heard at all by politicians. Another example of a society, which propagated pan-Asian ideology in politics with less success, but vociferously anyway, was the Kokuryūkai. Founded in 1901 (Hatsuse 1980: chapter 3) by Uchida Ryōhei (1874–1937) (concerning Uchida in general see Hatsuse 1980: *passim*), a disciple and follower of Tōyama Mitsuru, the Kokuryūkai is described as "primarily anti-Russian" in character (Norman 1944: 282). Characteristic of the Kokuryūkai is a vigorous and active publication policy. In its journals and memoranda, the Kokuryūkai (and Uchida) articulated its beliefs and promoted them in politics. In the Kokuryūkai's, i.e. mostly Uchida's, writings, one can finally recognise the change in pan-Asian agitation, as Uchida proposed aggressive expansionism on the mainland and openly demanded, amongst others, the annexation of Korea and parts of China. The Kokuryūkai published several journals, some of which were censored regularly and banned occasionally due to extremist views. Among the journals published by the Kokuryūkai were *Kokuryū* (黒龍), *Aija Jiron* (亜細亞時論), *Kaihō* (解放, banned in 1903 due to extremist views), the *Tōa Geppō* (東亞月報, successor of *Kokuryū*, published in classic Chinese (*kanbun*) since 1908 and also sold in Korea and China), and the English-speaking *The Asian Review*. These journals received financial support from the Mitsui Bank Ltd., the Mitsubishi

Bank Ltd., the trading houses Mitsui Bussan Kaisha Ltd. and Suzuki Shôten, the Bank of Korea and the Bank of Taiwan, the shipping company Nippon Yûsen Kaisha Ltd. as well as the South Manchurian Railway Company (Minami Manshû Tetsudô KK) and others.

The Kokuryûkai, at least at times, worked hand in hand, not only with industry and commerce, but also with the government, and, in doing so, the ideology of the society naturally gained influence in government circles. Before the Russo-Japanese War in 1904/05, members of the Kokuryûkai were active as spies in the Far Eastern territory of Czarist Russia and provided the government and the imperial army with detailed information (Norman 1944: 282)²⁰. At this moment, the society had found its most important partner in politics – the Japanese military, the “national institution *par excellence*” (Arendt 1968: 545); the most influential palladium of radical and xenophobic nationalism; the driving force of Japanese expansionism; and the willing absorber of ideologies that could serve as legitimisation for an expansion on the Asian continent.

5. CONCLUSION

Pan-Asian ideology has played a significant role not only in intellectual discourse of Meiji Japan but also in Japan’s foreign policy since the late 19th century, when the westernisation of Japan triggered calls for a “return to Asia” (*Ajia kaiki*, アジア回帰, 亜細亜回帰), a romantic recourse to “lost” cultural traditions. While early Pan-Asianism thus developed as a rather “apolitical sentiment” in intellectual discourse, it was gradually transmitted into politics, and during that process, its contents were changed

²⁰ In a similar way, the Gen’yôsha had already cooperated with the General Staff during the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894/95 to facilitate the Japanese expansion to China and Manchuria (Norman 1944: 280f).

and adapted. In the first place, it was small political organisations with mostly right-wing political tendencies, which made use of pan-Asian thought; for example the Tōa-Dōbunkai and the Kokuryūkai.

While early Pan-Asianism has to be seen as an idealistic and mostly cultural regionalism, which was based on vague cultural common features, the ideology also became utilised for the aims of the Japanese nation state. Connections of the pan-Asian movement also with advocates of cultural folk (*völkisch*) nationalism and “Yamatoism” – similar to the connections of Pan-Germanism with German folk nationalism and that of Pan-Slavism with Russian folk nationalists (Arendt 1968: 483) – accelerated this development. However, while the ideologies of Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism were never adopted by any German, Austrian or Russian/Soviet government as an official policy and remained antistatist ideologies (Arendt 1986: 482), Pan-Asianism was more and more utilised by Japanese politics for the means of the legitimisation of national (colonial) expansion since the 1930s and finally became the official foreign policy doctrine, manifest in the proclamation of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. Pan-Asianism at this point had become closely related with the concept of a Japanese hegemony in East Asia. This concept had been latent since the late Edo period, when Japanese writers had claimed the role of the “Middle Kingdom” (*Chūgoku*, 中国) for *Japan* and thus a regional leadership for Japan instead of China, the traditional regional hegemonic power in the Sino-centric world-order. Thus, the “return to Asia” (*Ajia kaiki*) soon became a “return to Japan” (*Nihon kaiki*, 日本回帰) and, therefore, the ideology of Pan-Asianism as an ideology that contained elements of a regional integration could become a tool of nationalistic-imperialist expansion.

This dilemma is inherent in pan-Asian thought and has survived until present-day Japan in the form of the debate about the interpretation of modern Japanese history. Still today, Pan-Asianism is, in retrospect, interpreted as an ideology that claimed (or claims) the liberation of “coloured” Asian peoples from European, i.e. “white” colonialism or

imperialism, and Japan's "Greater East Asian War" (*Daitôa sensô*) is, therefore, presented as a "war to liberate Asia" (*Ajia kaihô sensô*, アジア解放戦争). This is not only done in treatises such as the infamous *Daitôa sensô kôtei-ron* ("Approval of the Greater East Asian War") of a Hayashi Fusao (1963²¹), but also stands in the centre of the recent history textbook debate, when the so-called "New History Textbook" by the *Atarashii rekishi kyôkasho o tsukuru-kai* (Society for the Creation of New History Textbooks) claims the "Greater East Asian War" to be a war of liberation (Nishio et al. 2001: 277; 280–282). Also, we can find this interpretation of history sanctioned by the Japanese state, when a memorial to remember the "Greater East Asian Holy [sic] War" (*Daitôa seisen taihi*, 大東亜聖戦大碑) was erected in a Japanese prefectural capital in 2000 (Saaler 2002a). Remarks by various politicians also show similar tendencies:

"The white race has colonised Asia. [...] Who is the aggressor? The white race! Where in the world is Japan an aggressor or militaristic?" (quoted in Wakamiya 1995: 9²²)

「白色人種がアジアを植民地にしていた。(中略)だれが侵略者か。白色人種だ。何が日本が侵略国家か、軍国主義か。」

This quotation from the year 1988 comes from Okuno Seisuke, then Minister for Land, on the occasion of his visit to the Yasukuni shrine. The vocabulary and the rhetoric with which the Japanese expansion to the Asian mainland, the colonisation of Korea and parts of China were justified, brings to mind prewar pan-Asian rhetoric.

"Who says that the yellow race is an aggressive race? If any race of the world must be called aggressive, is it then not most likely the white race?" (quoted in Hashikawa 2000: 1)

「誰かいう、黄色人種は侵略的人種なりと。世もし侵略人種と称すべきものあらば、彼等白人はその最たるものにあらずや。」

This statement is attributed to Nagai Ryûtarô (1881–1944), who warned of a "white peril" as early as in the late Meiji and the Taishô period (Duus 1971) and who advocated

²¹ Seifert 1977: 244–251. The "Daitôa Kôtei-ron" was first published as a *book* in 1964; in September 2002, *Natsume Shobô* published a new edition of the work.

²² For similar remarks by other Japanese politicians see Wakamiya 1995: 10–13.

the Japanese colonisation of East Asia. Despite the hardly disputable fact that European imperialism in East Asia had pursued an aggressive colonial policy since the second half of the 19th century, these remarks clearly show how still today pan-Asian ideology is used, in retrospect, to legitimise Japanese expansion as a purely defensive act to defend the country against “the West” or to “liberate Asia”. That the Japanese wars were not inevitable and, as a means of political realism, unavoidable, is demonstrated by the example of Thailand. Starting its successful, although somewhat slower modernisation in 1868, as did Japan, Thailand did not resort to expansionism despite expansionist thought did exist and had historic precedents (Wyatt 1982: 191ff). Above all, the “historical view of the liberation of Asia” (*Ajia kaihô shikan* アジア解放史観, Wakamiya 1995: 13; Nakamura et al. 1997; Kimijima 2001), which gains more and more popularity in present Japan, overlooks the fact that the “liberation of Asia” from Western colonialism, required large parts of the Asian continent to be turned into a battlefield, and Asian nations to come under *Japanese* colonial rule, whether the “liberated people” agreed or not.

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